

Featuring 391 Industry-First Reviews of Fiction, Nonfiction, Children's and YA books

KIRKUS

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REVIEWS

special



issue

Our fourth annual issue highlights the outstanding indie books being published today

Also in the issue:

Tananarive Due, Claire Dederer, M.T. Anderson, and Ruchira Gupta

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK | Karen Schechner

AN INDIELAND SAMPLER



IN THE FOURTH ANNUAL Indie Issue, we let the books speak for themselves in these excerpts from a trio of starred Indieland picks: a memoir by two sisters who survived the Holocaust; another memoir about a teen's coming-of-age on a sailing-school ship; and a collection of short stories from a renowned Bengali author.

In Daniel Seymour's *From Auschwitz With Love*, sisters Manci Grunberger Beran and Ruth Grunberger Mermelstein describe their arrival at the concentration camp:

Father realized that we didn't have much time together. So, he said to us, "No matter what happens, I want you to remember three things."

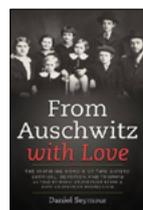
"First," he said, "if anyone asks whether you have a trade, say yes, and they will put you to work. If you don't have a trade here and you don't know how to work, they have no use for you and they will probably shoot you. I was a wholesale grocer. That's not considered a trade here." He knew a little something about being a locksmith, so if anybody asked him, he would tell them he was an expert locksmith....

He [said] Mother had taught us how to sew and cook. "If they need somebody to sew something, you know how to sew. If they are looking for a cook, you're a cook. Whatever they're looking for, that's what you are."

The second thing he told us was to eat whatever they would give us to eat. Our family had always kept strictly kosher, but we understood that he was talking about our survival.

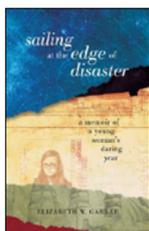
"Finally," he said, "I want you to make sure that you are mindful of the company you keep." I now realize that he was warning us, because you would be shot for the slightest infraction. So if we were going to stay out of trouble, we would have to be extremely careful of what we said and to whom we said it.

There were many things I wished we could have said to each other, but the soldiers returned and ordered us away from the fence. My sister and I did not know then that we would never see Father again.



In *Sailing at the Edge of Disaster*, Elizabeth W. Garber recounts learning how to climb the rigging of the 360-foot *Sea Cloud*:

"I can't." My legs wobble on the rope rung digging into my sneakers. I hold on to cables running up along the mast over one hundred feet above the ship's deck. I close my eyes for a second but that makes everything worse; my chest thuds, my body trembles. I try to speak up; me, the pitiful teenager frozen in the rigging, "I can't do this." I don't care how pathetic I sound... The mast moves, a slow sickening sway. I glance down at the docks, boat yards, and the causeway to Miami, when nausea catches in my throat.



We're lucky to have *Brahma's Weapon*—award-winning short stories by Ashapura Debi, translated by Prasenjit Gupta. (Read an interview with Gupta on Page 4.) Jhumpa Lahiri provides the introduction: "To read Ashapura Debi is to cross the thresholds of Calcutta's inhabitants, to witness intimately their private scenes and struggles, and to encounter life in the city from a distinctly interior perspective." Here, a protagonist plots a triumphant return to her home village:

How astonished the residents of Shonapolashi will be when they see "Podi," the daughter of the Brahmin cook at Jodu Lahiri's house, manifest herself as Poddolota! For seven years, day and night, seed by seed, Poddolota has fondly tended the mischievous desire to see that astonishment, indulged it in dreams of happiness. She's pictured those few days in colours and moods luminous, dazzling.



Karen Schechner is the president of Kirkus Indie.

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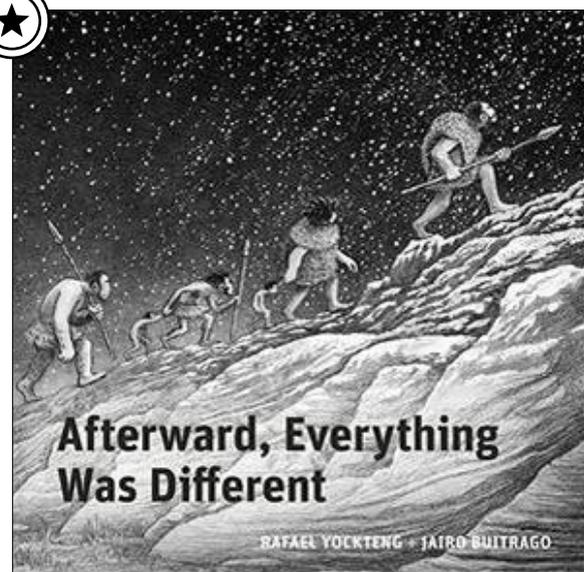
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Longtime collaborators **Jairo Buitrago** and **Rafael Yockteng** team up again for a spell-binding wordless picture book that charts the trials and tribulations of a Pleistocene-era family. Read the review on P. 104.

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BEHIND THE BOOK

BRAHMA'S WEAPON

A self-published translation brings the stories of Bengali writer Ashapurna Debi to a wider audience

BY ANJALI ENJETI



IN THE MID-1990S, Prasenjit Gupta came across a story by award-winning author Ashapurna Debi in an anthology of short fiction by Bengali writers. Gupta was mesmerized by Debi's prose and knew he eventually wanted to bring her stories to a wider audience. The result is *Brahma's Weapon*, a dazzling collection of 21 stories that Gupta translated into English.

Born in 1909, Debi was a novelist, poet, and short story writer who penned intimate narratives about family life in Calcutta (now Kolkata), the capital city in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal. To say Debi was prolific is an understatement. In a literary

career that spanned over half a century, she penned some 100 novels and countless stories. Her spare, intense, and economical writing provides a snapshot of interior spaces to reveal provocative truths about humanity. Though Debi grew up in an ultraconservative family, her work challenges the social conventions that constrict women's education, autonomy, and freedom. "Her stories are often brief and deceptively simple," says Gupta over email, "but they mine the depths of their characters, revealing the sharp edges and secret desires that make us all who we are."

This is one reason why Jhumpa Lahiri, a Bengali American, has such a great appreciation for her work. Lahiri completed her master's thesis on Debi's stories in 1995, the same year Debi passed away at the age of 86. An excerpt from Lahiri's thesis, which provides the social and literary context in which Debi worked, serves as a stirring introduction to *Brahma's Weapon*. Among other things, Lahiri praises her fiction as "conspicuously stamped with an inimitable voice and vision" in a "laconic, concentrated, yet whimsical style."

Too few of Debi's stories have been translated into English, says Gupta, because critics and translators assume that the stories' subject matter and setting, the trials and tribulations of day-to-day life in Bengali households, would be of limited interest to readers. But the themes the author meticulously parses—oppression, struggle, heartache, victory, and defeat—are universal, says Gupta. One favorite story of his, "Neejer Jonno Shok," or "Grieving for Oneself," illus-

trates these themes to perfection. It's about Obinash, an elderly man who is immobilized in bed with chest pain. He receives the attention of his self-absorbed family members only when death seems to be knocking on his door. But after they conclude that what ails him is only heartburn, they abandon Obinash to his shoe box-sized room. He concludes, reluctantly, that only death would deem him relevant to his loved ones. "In one brief scene, Ashapura fully demonstrates this character's sense of his entire worth," says Gupta. "It's an unforgettable story."

Gupta, a native Bengali speaker, was born in Calcutta and grew up in Delhi. His work in translation found its footing at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where he also penned his own short stories. Gupta went on to complete his Ph.D, and for his dissertation, he translated Hindi author Nirmal Verma's stories. His passion for the process has continued to blossom. "You get to think about every sentence, every word choice, and you realize how much care the author has taken to make the story what it is," he says. "Translation helps me understand how the masters practice their craft, the shape and slant they give to a story, and in closely watching these masters at work, so to speak, I hope to learn what makes their writing so truly profound."

In *Brahma's Weapon*, Gupta painstakingly preserves idioms and metaphors in Bengali culture and stays as close to the authentic meaning in the language as possible. In the story "Shadowsun," the phrase "matha kata jaoa"—literally, to have one's head be cut off—means to be greatly ashamed or disgraced. Gupta captures the literal rendering of the phrase and then adds a brief explanation: "Her rudeness leaves me headless, the shame of it." He also plays with tense in English in order to more accurately reflect the tone and nature of the Bengali narrative.

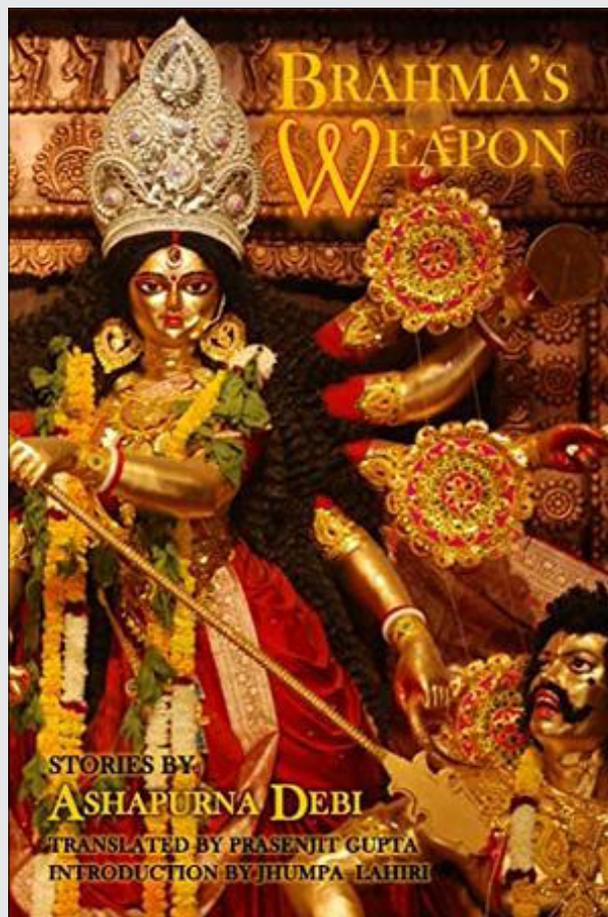
Gupta's decision to self-publish was deliberate. "Getting a book of translated stories published here in the U.S., especially by an author who writes in a little-known language, was almost impossible at the time," he says. "We still seem to lag behind other

countries in making literature in translation available to readers here."

The tide seems to be slowly turning, though. In January, Parabaas, a small New Jersey press for Bengali literature, published Gupta's translation of Rabindranath Tagore's renowned poetry collection, *Gitanjali*. "Tagore's English can sometimes sound dated to the modern ear," says Gupta. "There have been other translations, but I wanted to translate the poems myself as a native speaker of Bengali."

Translation is something he hopes to pursue long term. "For me, it is a source of great joy, the closest form of reading. It always delights me to think that in my small way," Gupta says, "I've helped this wonderful work find a few more readers."

Anjali Enjeti is the author of a novel, The Parted Earth, and an essay collection, Southbound. Brahma's Weapon received a starred review in the Jan. 15, 2023, issue.



SAM D. KIM TALKS ABOUT A HOLY HAUNTING

[SPONSORED]

Please tell us a little about yourself and your work.

I'm a Harvard-trained ethicist and New York minister. I was appointed as a research fellow at the Center for Bioethics at Harvard Medical School and was part of Harvard Catalyst [a center for science and training], where I explored the inequities surrounding health, immigration, and social policies. I wrote *A Holy Haunting* aiming to close the ever growing gap between faith and science.

How did you develop your subject?

When I saw a book that put forth the notion that God is a delusion. In *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins mocks prayer, equating it with a "sky fairy." For many in the broader culture today, this polemical assertion simply rings true.

Many believe faith is a leap into the dark armed with nothing but a whim. At best, faith is a placebo; at worst, it is a delusion.

Clearly, faith is deeply misunderstood. What if the real problem is that we've been looking at faith the wrong way? What if faith is not essentially a set of beliefs but is instead who we are in the deepest ontological sense?

What if we are beings forged in the corridors of eternity pre-dating the primordial universe and the Big Bang? What if the rise of spiritual consciousness is not a mere byproduct of cultural factors as many assume but rather an echo resounding from eternity?

How did you research *A Holy Haunting*?

I pulled from my own experiences while also referencing and critically evaluating research from theological, cultural, and scientific sources. As depression and anxiety reach epidemic levels and suicide rates skyrocket, the need for a recentering of the sacred has never been clearer. This secular-sacred di-

vide is obstructing our society's ability to process our collective ailments apart from the power of the liturgy. The holy sacraments, such as baptisms, weddings, and wakes, symbolize that our births, deaths, and those hallowed moments in between are sacred and not trivial. They are gifts from above. The sacraments blow off the collective dust of our humdrum lives and give us a sacred purpose.

How did you create/acquire the cover art?

The cover was inspired by a confluence of childhood nostalgia and inspiration from an iconic painting. I remember the first time I saw fireflies. I stood gazing in wonder at an incandescent beam that seemed to radiate from a distance one beautiful summer night in Central Park. For a moment, it was as if Van Gogh's *The Starry Night*—which is on display at the Museum of Modern Art just a few miles from where I was standing—literally came to life right before my eyes. I always found it fascinating that Van Gogh painted that masterpiece from the balcony of an insane asylum in a former monastery in France. On nights like these, it would have been lunacy not to believe something greater lay beyond the horizon of the well-lit skyline. Most consider *The Starry Night* to be Van Gogh's magnum opus, and as a child, I thought God condensed the stars into fireflies the way his painting did.

How did you develop your characters?

Like the iconic song by the Beatles, the journey of faith is like a long and winding road. My book, in short, is a memoir about the many complexities intertwined in our faith journey. I pulled inspiration primarily from my own life and those in my own dear faith community. Honestly, without them, there is no book. They were my muse and the living letters on these pages.

Portions of this Q&A were edited for clarity.



CARLOS ALVARADO TALKS ABOUT NEVER TO FORGET

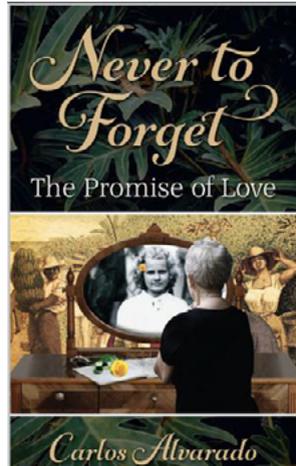
[SPONSORED]

Please tell us a little about yourself and your work.

Never to Forget is based on my mother's life story, and so it can be said I was born into the storyline. But it was my sister's devotion to caring for my mother, whose life was draining away because of Alzheimer's, that inspired me to fill in the drama within the outline of my mother's life that my sister recorded.

How did you research *Never to Forget*?

I would say the research began late at night when I was 7. Having recently arrived in the U.S., my siblings and I slept in the same room with my mother. We enjoyed listening to stories of her adventurous life in Costa Rica. As the book was written after my mother's death, there was much intimate information I was never privy to. I incorporated what I knew of my parents' emotions and passions to create intimate scenes that I only witnessed the consequences of. I did traditional research using books and visual resources on the Costa Rican civil war of 1948 and on other historical events that took place during those years.



Any advice for others starting the process of independent publishing?

Writing has been an inexplicable passion for me since the fifth grade. I thought one day I would extend a short story into a novel. When I managed that feat in the middle of my medical career, I felt the need to share it with anyone who would listen. But I've learned that's not so easy. To be a writer

one must, as the cliché cautions, begin by writing for yourself. But when love of your art requires you share it with the public, my advice is to take marketing classes. I say this because marketing your book will be vital to making self-publishing a viable career.

What are you working on now?

I have enjoyed traveling around the world. On a trip to Turkey once, I wrote on a postcard a fictional scene I imagined while shopping for a rug at the bazaar near the Blue Mosque. After reading what I'd written on the card, I was inspired to make this scene the basis of an adventure novel. It is a recounting of the Old Testament integrated with Greek mythology but also historical fiction in the style of Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose*.

What can readers expect that might be different from your previous body of work?

As in my previous novels, here the female protagonist is someone whose feminine strength directs the course of the adventure, while her male companion resolves the story's emotional conflict. But unlike my previous works, this novel promotes an alternative view of certain accepted historical facts.

Portions of this Q&A were edited for clarity.

INDIE SPOTLIGHT

CARA REESE

The author/illustrator introduces young readers to Black cultural figures and their legacies

BY COSTA B. PAPPAS



Michael Reese Studios

Reese on the phone about the power of children's stories and the importance of Black history within schools; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

I read that you studied children's lit at Columbia University. What draws you toward the children's genre?

My background is hybrid. I studied humanities for my Bachelor's at the University of Texas at Austin. I was interested in the evolution of beauty and its history. My Master's was in developmental psychology, and I was interested in children's racial attitude development. I ended up teaching in the classroom and felt really fulfilled. Once I started teaching, I realized that all of these factors connect—the idea that representation matters, that children's understanding of race is affected by what they see, and the power of a children's book specifically to teach history. I kind of got hooked in graduate school.

Why did now feel like the best time for you to share your children's story?

I had been a closet collector of African American picture books. Back in the '90s there were two books called *I Love My Hair* and *Happy To Be Nappy* that impacted me. I realized that you can teach children these complex issues about identity in an inviting and immersive way, and so *Black Artists Rock!* was a Covid-era project. I was teaching, and when Covid hit I had the time to reflect. I challenged myself to write five children's books—five is my magic num-

CARA REESE'S DEBUT children's book, *Black Artists Rock!: The Cool Kids' Guide A-Z*, celebrates the accomplishments of Black artists throughout history. Reese's lyrical, rhythmic prose intertwines with her bright, vivid drawings and pays homage to Black artists across various disciplines. She highlights both household names and lesser-known figures, from Maya Angelou and Ella Fitzgerald to James Vanderzee and Zora Neale Hurston, whose contributions shaped the arts as they are today.

Kirkus calls *Black Artists Rock!* "a dynamic celebration with all-ages appeal." We spoke with

ber—and address the gap that I felt existed in the representation of African Americans in children’s literature, specifically around biographies and African American history.

I noticed your poetry background shines through in the lyrical nature of each artist’s profile. How did you formulate this specific rhythm?

I think it was really intuitive. I always felt very much like a creative Black girl who had eclectic tastes in music and art. This is a love letter to myself but also to children who aspire to be creative. I made a list of the artists whom I really, really love. These are artists that I felt children should know and artists that aren’t always represented. In a public school they have a really important but very limited list of African American historical figures that they want children to know about. I was thinking, *I am obsessed with Alice Coltrane, and I wish children knew about these people, too.* I researched each of these individuals, pulled the most important facts about them, and then put them into poetry, really thinking about how to create a rhythm.

Is there a specific Black artist that played a large role in your childhood?

I would say my parents’ record collection. I would listen to Stevie Wonder on vinyl in the house, Aretha Franklin, and these are artists I love so much and think everyone should know about. I was also surrounded by books. My mother’s library had James Baldwin, Maya Angelou, and Dr. King. The staples of any Black American household at that time were magazines like *Ebony*. I wanted this book to feel as authentic as possible, and I picked people whom I love, and this is my offering to children of this generation.

How did being immersed in various forms of art at a young age shape you?

It widened my understanding of the Black experience. It’s really important to teach topics that are challenging, like slavery—this is not just history book information, this is what my family lived—but

I also want to lean into the joy of the Black experience and show that Black people do everything—going to museums, listening to music, reading books. I wanted to remind people and show children that Black people have always created. We’ve always traveled. We do things like surfing and designing. All to really expand the understanding of what the Black experience is.

Any words of advice for young readers?

I’m in Panama right now with my students, and there’s a motto from the school: “All of life’s a journey, therefore pack lightly and travel broadly.” I just love that idea of not being so burdened with expectations and limitations but to treat yourself and lean into everything—that’s love.

Costa B. Pappas is an editorial intern. Black Artists Rock! was reviewed in the March 1, 2023, issue.



ANN PUTNAM TALKS ABOUT HER NOVEL CUBAN QUARTERMOON

[SPONSORED]

Please tell us about your work.

I'm a Hemingway scholar who went to Cuba to give a conference paper on Ernest Hemingway. I came back with the beginning of *Cuban Quartermoon*. I fell in love with Cuba, and then it broke my heart. I told everyone I met about Cuban deprivation and how our embargo was responsible. Most didn't know what I was talking about. What else was there to do but write about it? But I had to return six more times to try and see what was really there. So I created a main character who is continually upended by events she can only begin to interpret. She's told, "Believe only half of what you see and none of what you hear."

How did you develop your characters?

My characters are both completely real and wholly imagined. They came from people I'd known and some who came to me in dreams. All carried dark and compelling stories that needed to be told. In the end, they came from that mysterious alchemy that takes place when memory and imagination meet completely outside of words. There were some characters whose stories were too disturbing to tell, yet their emotional

weight became the impetus for the stories that took shape right before my very eyes.

How did you research your book?

How do you learn about a country that's not your own? I didn't learn what I most needed to know from the dozens of books I read. Or from guided tours sitting comfortably in an air-conditioned bus. The deepest, most meaningful research came from im-

mersion. This meant having meals in the homes of new Cuban friends, standing in line with them for the day's rations, walking the streets holding a new friend's hand tightly. Or how could I write about Santeria, which became such an important element in the book, without immersion? At a reading, where I described a Santeria ceremony that ends with a blood sacrifice, someone asked if I'd really experienced this. Yes, of course, I had. If you fall in love with people for whom Santeria is a real thing, and not just a story but a source of meaning and comfort in a comfortless world, it becomes real for you too.

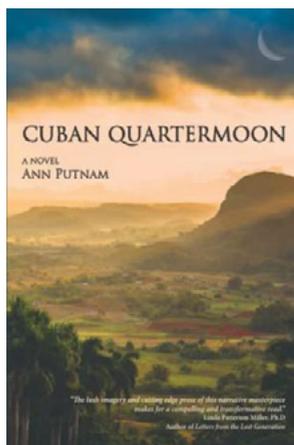
Did your storyline change as you wrote?

Yes! The mother of my main character suffered from manic depression, as did Hemingway himself. Both were given electroshock in the early 1960s. I needed to know what that was like, so I interviewed a psychiatrist who said, "You must find out what happened in Montreal before you go any further." What I learned changed everything. The mind-control experiments imposed upon innocent people, part of the CIA's Project MKUltra, couldn't help but become part of my own urgent narrative.

How will your next works be different?

My second novel, *I Will Leave You Never*, will be published in May. It's about an arsonist, children, pets, mortality, laughter, heartbreak, and love. And my most recent novel is set in Georgia in 1939 and features a mysterious drowning, a snake handler, and Virginia Woolf. The book asks: What can I believe in if everything I have loved is lost? It's called *The World in Woe and Splendor*.

Portions of this Q&A were edited for clarity.



MARK LAVINE DISCUSSES WINDEKIND

[SPONSORED]

How did you create/acquire the cover art?

I knew I didn't want the typical "thriller" cover. You know, big, bold font, action figures chasing each other with guns, and the White House looming in the background. *Windekind* is a thriller, but it's not that kind of thriller. I also knew that I wanted to portray some aspect of the Vermont wilderness since this setting plays an important role in the story. Finally, I wanted the cover to provoke just a touch of curiosity—to pose a question searching for an answer. A few small diamonds scattered over a forest floor seemed right to me, and it was also consistent with the storyline. I tried to design the cover image myself using some of the wonderful tools now available, but I wasn't pleased with the result, so I hired a pro. Editing and cover design are two things you should leave to the pros.



Was your storyline something that you envisioned from the beginning, or did you build/change it as you were writing your novel?

My storylines had always evolved as I wrote, and this book was no exception. I'm not proud of that, although in the end somehow the stories did maintain direction and found resolution. Who knows? Maybe my subconscious has it all planned out from the beginning but just won't let me in on it.

What was your editing process like?

In some respects, my toughest editor has always been my dad; I send him partial drafts as I write them. His input helped me to see flaws in the *Windekind* storyline as it developed. Once I had a complete first draft, I went

through it myself, sentence by sentence. At that point, I found a professional editor in Great Britain who did a line edit that helped tremendously. Then I went through it myself several more times. Every time I look at it, I come across something else I want to change, but at some point you just have to draw a line and publish.

Is there anything you would do differently in your next book?

I want to be much more organized before I start writing. I'm working on a sequel to *Windekind*, but I'm taking much more time to understand the motivation and development of each character before I start pounding away on the keyboard. I'm trying to resist the usual temptation to dive right in before I have a good idea of the characters and the storyline.

What can readers expect that might be different from your previous work?

The one book that is quite different from my others is the science-fiction novel *ForeverChild*. I've taken a fresh look at it and just recently released a second edition. It addresses some issues that are quite thought-provoking and, to some, controversial. It's not by any means a "safe" book, and as such there will always be those who take offense where none was intended. Some reviewers loved it, and others—including *Kirkus Reviews*—took issue with some of the ideas. What I found most interesting was that although I had originally written *ForeverChild* for an adult readership, my 13-year-old nephew asked for a copy. And a week later he called to say he loved it and had stayed up late several nights in a row to finish it. Other teens had similar reactions, so now I'm considering the possibility of directing it more toward the YA market.

Portions of this Q&A were edited for clarity.

INDIE SPOTLIGHT

KENDRA PRESTON LEONARD

A poet and librettist reimagines the myth of Medusa as a tale of rape culture and women's solidarity

BY MCKENZI THI MURPHY



Karl Rutener

KENDRA PRESTON LEONARD'S creative works run the gamut. From opera libretti to poetry to lyrics, the musicologist skillfully combines her background in music theory and her research into women and music of the 20th and 21st centuries. Her latest work, a novella in verse entitled *Protectress*, reimagines the classical tale of Medusa and her Gorgon sisters in a modern world where Medusa is now a humanities professor and guardian of women, and Athena is a "slut-shaming bitch." Leonard uses their story to explore rape culture and the concept of the "heroic." A starred Kirkus review says, "This book urges women to care for one another and reconsider the ways their perceptions of female identity are shaped." Leonard answered our

questions by email; the exchange has been edited for length and clarity.

Several of your works have been inspired by, or are retellings of, classic stories. In addition to *Protectress*, there's the poem "Re-Writing *King Lear* in a time of Pandemic" and the song "Gilgamesh Weeps," just to name a few. What first drew you to the classics and inspired you to bring these works into the present day?

When I was little, I had a children's encyclopedia, and I loved the *Myths and Legends* volume. Now I realize how incomplete it was, but the stories and characters stuck with me—I was Medusa for Halloween when I was 6. It was the same with Shakespeare and other writers. My dad gave me *Macbeth* to read when I was about 8, telling me, "You'll like it: It's got witches in it." My family was what my mom called "omnivorous, indiscriminate readers."

What is it about Medusa's story and her sisterhood that continues to resonate with readers today?

Medusa is a priestess of Athena when she is raped by a god, and Athena, instead of defending or healing her or helping her find justice, blames Medusa for her rape, curses her, and sends Perseus to kill her. This is the same victim-blaming and victim-shaming that occur in today's rape culture. It's hard to fight alone, which is why the Gorgons gather their allies—sisters literal and

metaphorical—together to address it.

Protectress is about relationships between women, so it was important for Stheno and Euryale [Medusa's sisters] to be complete and distinct characters from the beginning. I push back against society's desire for women to be rivals and jealous of one another. The relationships in *Protectress* show what's possible when we're guided by compassion and sympathy and raising each other up.

Do you go into writing with a concrete plan on how to get from point A to B, or do you start with a vague concept you flesh out and discover as you go?

I begin with research and then I start to put ideas together, often letting my subconscious work on things in the background. As I write, I'm often thinking of a specific motif or idea, and I love finding just the right words as I go. Often poems and lyrics just come out, whole and complete.

You're in the process of adapting *Protectress* into a full opera. Please tell us more.

Adapting it into an opera libretto means saying goodbye to some of my favorite lines in the book, but that's OK, because what I change and add has its own beauty and power. Excerpts from the first act have already been performed in New York, and composer Jessica Rudman and I are looking for an opera company interested in producing the premiere.

How did the collaboration with Jessica Rudman begin? What about her style or experience makes her the best partner for this piece?

Jessica and I have worked together a lot, and she was interested in adapting *Protectress* as an opera before the book was even finished. She and I work together really well, in part because we have a large body of shared knowledge and interests. Jessica sets my words with care and panache and crafts music that perfectly expresses what's happening in each scene.

What can you tell us about the benefits and challenges you've found in indie publishing?

Protectress is published by Unsolicited Press, which is a nonprofit, volunteer-run press based in Portland, Oregon. *Protectress* is unusual in that it's a novella in verse and can be classified as several different genres, so I sought out potential publishers who were willing to take risks and published nontraditional writing. Unsolicited's editors and production staff have been great.

McKenzi Thi Murphy is an editorial intern. Protectress received a starred review in the Jan. 1, 2023, issue.



FICTION



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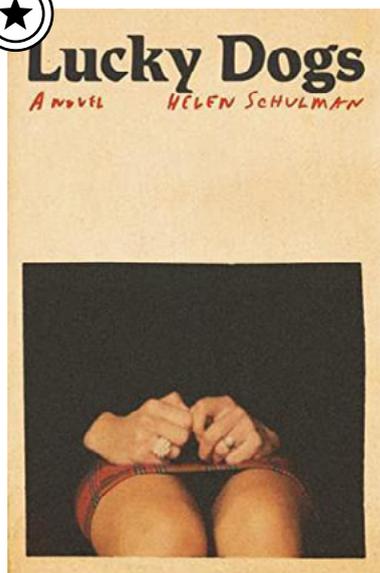
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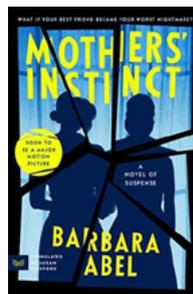
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LUCKY DOGS
Schulman, Helen
Knopf (336 pp.)
\$29.00 | June 6, 2023
9780593536230



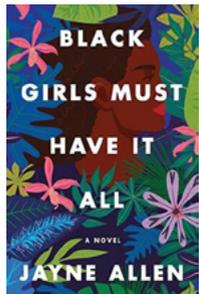
MOTHERS' INSTINCT

Abel, Barbara
Trans. by Susan Pickford
HarperVia (304 pp.)
\$18.99 paper | May 16, 2023
9780063306318

A relationship between two close couples is tested after a tragedy derails their friendship.

Next-door neighbors in a quiet French suburb, David and Laetitia Brunelle and Sylvain and Tiphaine Geniot are also inseparable friends. Both couples find out they are expecting within a few months of each other, and their children, Milo and Maxime, become best friends, too. Then, years later, a tragedy occurs and entirely destroys their lives and friendship. Maxime dies in an accident, causing resentment and tension between the families. When Milo begins to suffer from a series of mysterious accidents, like an inadvertent poisoning at the Geniots' house that brings him to death's door, things begin to escalate, with each couple blaming the other for their misfortunes. Author Abel does a lot of summarizing about the couples and their relationships to each other rather than bringing the relationships to life on the page, and none of the characters come across as three-dimensional. The point of view jumps around among all four parents, so much so that you never get a real feel for any of the characters, and they start to blend together. There is a lot of yelling and a lot of crying and dialogue that extends for paragraphs at a time. Not much happens, and much of what does is implausible. The chapters are short and the book's a fast read, yet it's hard to care about what happens to any of the characters because they're all so awful to each other and have few redeeming qualities.

Though the premise is intriguing, the book lacks the tension and character development to hold a reader's interest.



BLACK GIRLS MUST HAVE IT ALL

Allen, Jayne
 Harper Perennial/HarperCollins
 (288 pp.)
 \$18.99 paper | April 11, 2023
 9780063137943

In the final installment of Allen's Black Girls Must Die Exhausted series, Tabitha Walker embarks on a journey of motherhood, friendship, and

self-confidence.

It's been three weeks since Tabitha welcomed little Tabitha Evelyn Walker Brown into the world, and motherhood is fixing to be her most daunting job yet. She's spent the better part of a month cleaning up diaper blowouts and soaking in precious moments with Evie while on maternity leave from her weekend anchor gig at Los Angeles' KVTU news station. Tabby left the station in a bit of uproar after conducting an unsanctioned live segment, and she's worried that her job may be on the line. That's not the only thing worrying her: Three weeks have passed since she refused a marriage proposal from Evie's father, Marc Brown. Tabby knows he wants to provide for her and their child, but she can't help having a few reservations about him. Even worse, Marc invited his judgmental mother to stay for a few weeks without consulting Tabby. Luckily, Tabitha's friends Alexis and Laila always have her back, although Laila's new business has made her go MIA lately. While Tabby is juggling a newborn, breastfeeding issues, one pushy mother-in-law, a BFF crisis, and a looming engagement, one more giant serving is heaped onto her plate: There's an opening at the news station for a prime-time slot. Tabitha begins to wonder if it's possible for her to really have it all or if she will crumble under the pressure. In the last book about Tabitha's journey, she's introduced to several stressors that would make anyone sweat, much less the mother of a newborn. Yet Tabitha is surrounded by positive reinforcement and remarkable women, both of which help make Allen's trilogy a must-read. It's refreshing to see Tabitha gain confidence over the course of the novel as she navigates being a mother, a friend, a daughter, and a career woman who's faced with life-changing decisions, and while it's not seamless, it sure is powerful.

An inspiring finale about the strength of women and the bonds of sisterhood.



**FAT TIME
 And Other Stories**

Allen, Jeffery Renard
 Graywolf (288 pp.)
 \$15.99 paper | June 20, 2023
 9781644452394



A collection of wildly inventive and intensely realized stories provide electrifying jolts to the very notion of "Black Experience."

Allen is both a poet and novelist whose prose reverberates with colorful imagery and crystalline lyricism. In his new story collection, he shows greater assurance with plotting and characterization, which only bolsters his agile imagination. In a few pages at a time, Allen can endow even the ghosts of dead children, as in "Four Girls," with vibrant, combustible, and poignant personalities. In similar fashion, he can persuasively envision real-life personages from the recent past, as in "Heads," which has rock god Jimi Hendrix hanging out with British painter Francis Bacon somewhere around the disquieting hinge of the 1960s and '70s, each man reaching for his own transcendence through distortions of time and space. And speaking of space: In "Orbits," Allen reimagines the near conclusion of Muhammad Ali's boxing career on a planet Earth with émigrés from the moon helping him prepare for his 1980 bout against Larry Holmes. Other prominent Black men include Jack Johnson, the Ali of his era, who's tearing through Australia ("Fat Time"), and Miles Davis, gloomily huddled in his Manhattan apartment ("Pinocchio"). Not all of Allen's characters are famous; "Big Ugly Baby" chronicles the yearslong erotic intimacies between two at-risk teen boys, while in "Fornication Camp," couples gather at an Illinois religious retreat in a villa moved from Italy and reconstructed piece by piece by Abraham Lincoln. The range of subject matter and the ingenuity of the storylines draw readers in, but it's Allen's intricately poetic language that keeps them there, as when he describes Hendrix noodling on his guitar and how he "knows how to worry chords into the black shape of time. Knows how to anchor weight on a string and sink a barbed note into the muddy depths below, then bend that string and yank up a struggling catfish." The whole collection hums and throbs with such startling craft.

A potentially transformative exhibition of visionary storytelling.



THE WIND KNOWS MY NAME

Allende, Isabel
 Trans. by Frances Riddle
 Ballantine (272 pp.)
 \$28.00 | June 6, 2023
 9780593598108

A novel about all sorts of characters crossing all sorts of borders.

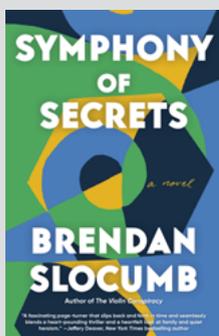
Allende's latest begins in Vienna on Kristallnacht, when Samuel Adler's

WORDS AND MUSIC



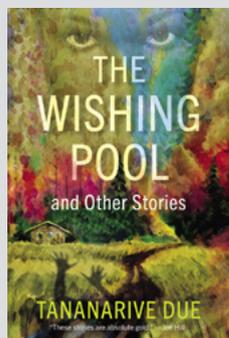
I RECENTLY RETURNED to the Metropolitan Opera to see *The Hours*, based on Michael Cunningham's novel. It was wonderful to be back in the glittering hall, after three long pandemic years, listening to Renee Fleming, Joyce DiDonato, and Kelli O'Hara bring Virginia Woolf and Cunningham's other characters to life. That experience sent me looking for novels about

music, and I was thrilled to see that Brendan Slocumb has a new one coming out only a year after his bestselling debut, *The Violin Conspiracy*. In *Symphony of Secrets* (Anchor, April 18), Bern Hendricks, a musicology professor, is asked to authenticate the manuscript of a long-lost opera by Frederick Delaney, the composer he's devoted his career to studying. But when he delves into the score, he discovers that Delaney, who was White, may have been working with a Black woman named Josephine Reed, who wrote jazz as well as classical music.



Delaney's descendants, of course, are not happy. Our starred review says Slocumb seems to be "having much more fun" with this novel than with *The Violin Conspiracy*, "writing with a refreshing looseness and well-earned confidence. This is a superb novel that will appeal to any thriller fan, not just readers with an ear for classical music." The kicker: "Sophomore novels don't get much better than this."

There's so much other promising fiction out this month. I'm excited to read *The Wishing Pool and Other Stories* by Tananarive Due (Akashic, April 18)—but I might have to wait for a sunny day at the beach, since our starred review says these stories "might scare even the most dauntless horror fans to death." Due's book nods to Octavia Butler, Stephen King, and even *The Twilight Zone*, according to our reviewer, who says that Due's "command of the Black horror aesthetic rivals Jordan



Peele's in originality and sheer bravado." (Read an interview with Due on Page 24.)

Korean novelist Han Kang is best known for *The Vegetarian*; her latest book, *Greek Lessons*, translated by Deborah Smith and Emily Yae Won (Hogarth, April 18), made me think of José Saramago's brilliant 1998 novel, *Blindness*. Here, the unnamed protagonist is teaching a literature class when she suddenly finds herself unable to speak, lacking all language. She begins taking a class in ancient Greek, hoping it will help; her teacher, whose story we also learn, has slowly been losing his eyesight for decades. "A stunning exploration of language, memory, and beauty," says our starred review.



A.B. Yehoshua died last year, but he left behind an unusual novel, *The Only Daughter*, translated by Stuart Schoffman (HarperVia, April 11), set in northern Italy rather than his native Israel. Like Han's protagonist, 12-year-old Rachele Luzzatto is taking language lessons, hers in Hebrew with a rabbi her parents imported for the purpose. As her bat mitzvah approaches and she's asked to play the Virgin Mary in a school play, she grapples with her identity as a Jewish girl with Catholic grandparents—her mother converted—in a country where her Jewish grandfather had to disguise himself as a priest to survive WWII. Our starred review calls this "a wise, masterfully understated work by one of Israel's towering literary figures."

The narrator of Joe Milan Jr.'s *The All-American* (Norton, April 4) is also a teenager struggling with his identity and language. Bucky's parents were born in South Korea, but his mother is dead, and his father deserted him and his White stepmother in rural Washington state, where Bucky is one of only three Asian Americans in his school. Then it turns out that Bucky's father bungled his immigration paperwork, and Bucky finds himself deported to South Korea, a country where he's never been and doesn't speak the language. "It's dark stuff," says our starred review, "but Milan sustains in his narrator an amusingly bewildered, blundering, bumpy voice along with a leavening sense of absurdity [with] echoes of Heller's Yossarian."

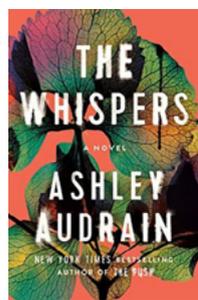
Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.

father is beaten so badly he eventually dies from his injuries. But Samuel doesn't find that out until years have passed: After Samuel's mother places him on a Kindertransport train to England, he loses touch with both parents. Then Allende jumps to the United States, where Leticia Cordero has ended up (illegally) after narrowly surviving the El Mozote massacre in El Salvador. In alternating chapters, Allende also describes Anita Díaz, a 7-year-old girl separated from her mother in a detention facility after crossing illegally into Arizona; Selena, a social worker trying to help Anita; and Frank, a hotshot lawyer who joins Anita's case because he has the hots for Selena. Eventually—predictably—all these storylines intersect. Unfortunately, the two-dimensional characters never come to life. Neither does their dialogue, which is overstuffed with exposition. Allende uses her characters shamelessly as political mouthpieces. Hapless Frank, for example, complains: "But we can't just open the floodgates and let millions of immigrants and refugees in. What's the solution, Selena?" Selena, as you can imagine, tells him. This tactic appears throughout the book, which leans heavily on blatant exposition and draws heavy-handed parallels between Hitler's Europe and Trump's America. "Hitler used terror as a political tactic," Allende writes, "taking advantage of discontent over economic woes." This habit might have been more tolerable if Allende's conclusions weren't so trite. On Kristallnacht, she writes, a "sense of misfortune hung in the air." There is little here that is original and even less that is genuinely moving.

Allende is too caught up in drawing historical and political parallels to imbue her characters with life.

although their situations vary. Devoting herself to her daughter, who happened to bully Xavier at school the day he fell, Whitney's friend Blair has given up her career and now feels trapped in a comatose marriage to a man she doesn't like, yet she panics when she suspects he may be cheating on her. Elderly Mara quietly nurses private anguish over the death of her emotionally delicate son and silently hates her husband for being cruel to him. As the novel's central force, Whitney is problematic. Not because she is unlikable, has anger issues, or even because she might have hurt her child, but because she is a caricature of the striving careerist with no redeeming characteristics, a bad mother, bad friend, bad wife, serial adulterer, and liar with a pathological lack of empathy.

The whodunit twists are fun, at least for a while; the heavy-handed treatment of motherhood not so much.



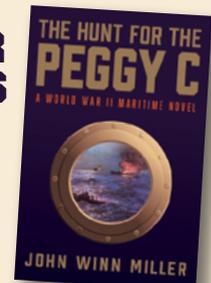
THE WHISPERS

Audrain, Ashley
Pamela Dorman/Viking (336 pp.)
\$25.20 | June 6, 2023
9781984881694

Women don't stand a chance in Audrain's pessimistic suspense novel concerning a child's mysterious fall from his bedroom window.

Ten-year-old Xavier lies in a coma from which he may not recover. His mother, Whitney, sits silently distraught by his hospital bedside. Months earlier, at a garden party Whitney hosted for her neighbors, guests overheard her berating Xavier through the same open window he's fallen from. Emergency room doctor Rebecca lives across the street, in a gentrified neighborhood of an unnamed city, and was at that party with her husband. Now Rebecca can't help asking herself the obvious question: Was it an accident, or did Xavier jump, or was Whitney somehow responsible? As other women from the block come into focus, it becomes clear that Whitney is not the only woman with guilty secrets. (Forget the men, who are given no inner lives.) This is Audrain's second novel about troubled children and their troubled mothers, following *The Push* (2021). These mothers, whom childless Rebecca envies—after multiple failures she is desperately, secretly trying again to get pregnant—are all miserable,

WW2 MARITIME THRILLER THAT'S WINNING AWARDS & RAVE REVIEWS



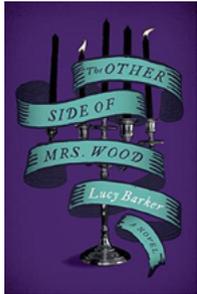
"...electrifying...the author's knowledge of the relevant historical material...is extraordinary...A captivating, action-packed thriller that's historically astute."
—*Kirkus Reviews*

"This superior maritime thriller finds an American captain smuggling Jewish refugees as Nazis prowl."
—*BookLife Reviews at Publishers Weekly, Editor's Pick*

"Library collections on the lookout for vivid World War II accounts and lively plots will find *The Hunt for the Peggy C* a winning attraction."
—*Midwest Book Review*

The Hunt for the Peggy C by John Winn Miller

Published by Bancroft Press
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THE OTHER SIDE OF MRS. WOOD

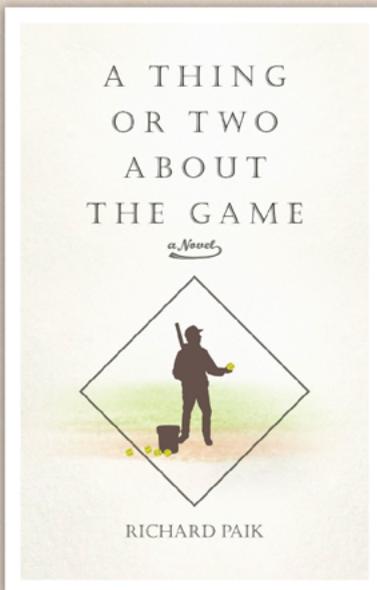
Barker, Lucy
Harper/HarperCollins (400 pp.)
\$30.00 | June 27, 2023
9780063317314

In Barker's witty debut, two mediums engage in a battle of wits in 1873 London.

Violet Wood, pushing 40 and trying to keep a grip on the lifestyle her late husband afforded her following a hardscrabble childhood, is precariously holding onto her position as one of the most reputable mediums in the upper levels of London society. With the aid of her beleaguered assistant, Sarah Newman, who's showing signs of abandoning the unappreciative Mrs. Wood for a more rewarding life within the women's suffrage movement, the medium conducts increasingly predictable "grand séances" at her home as well as private meetings with some of her patrons.

Mrs. Wood realizes that her fickle fans have begun to abandon her for younger, hotter talents, but she sees an opportunity to turn things around when pretty young Emmeline Finch begs to become her protégé. As Emmie increasingly inserts her own voice and presence into the séances, drawing attention away from her mentor, the stage is set for crafty confrontations between the two women. Barker—who doesn't stint on revealing the tricks of the supernatural trade—balances a comic sensibility with a real concern for the weight of her characters' secrets and problems so that Violet, a figure of fun at the beginning, becomes a character deserving of the reader's concern as the novel proceeds. The novel is set in a sumptuous—and sometimes sumptuously ridiculous—world full of colorful characters, where rooms are "crammed with taxidermied animals and silent clocks," crumbs cascade "from mouths to bosoms to carpets," and "illusion is everything." The plot unfolds at a leisurely but satisfying pace, and a twist at the end should tickle readers.

A sly literary sleight of hand.



ISBN: 978-1-63988-240-3

"...the novel features rich character work as well as the earnest questions about trivial pursuits that maybe aren't so trivial, after all...An unpretentious story of community and finding one's purpose."

—Kirkus Reviews

"Paik's inspiring debut novel is an assured look at how and why it's imperative to change traditional definitions of failure and success..."

This rich character study of a man dealing with a mid-life crisis through coaching is full of small, resonant details."

—BookLife Reviews

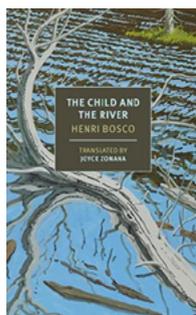
"Its ability to teach and inspire about life's progression and challenges makes for an involving book... that is ultimately about a quest for purpose, meaning, and achievement..."

—Midwest Book Review

For Agent Representation or Information on Publishing and Film Rights,
Email richarda_paik@yahoo.com • richardpaik.com

“A small town in northern Maine is shaken by a young mother’s death.”

THE ROAD TO DALTON



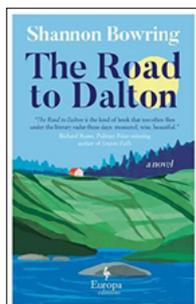
THE CHILD AND THE RIVER

Bosco, Henri
Trans. by Joyce Zonana
 NYRB Classics (144 pp.)
 \$14.95 paper | June 27, 2023
 9781681377421

French writer Bosco’s classic 1953 story is a charming ode to childhood and the joys of getting lost in the lush Provençal countryside.

“Now, all this took place a long, long time ago, and today I am very nearly an old man,” says Pascalet, the narrator. “But for the rest of my life, however long I may live, I will never forget those early days when I lived on the water. Those beautiful days are still with me in all their freshness.” Despite his parents’ warnings and his inability to swim, young Pascalet can’t help himself: The beauty of the river and the surrounding woods and flowers beckons, and he can’t resist. He sneaks away from the crabby old aunt who’s watching him while his parents are away, takes a rickety boat out on the water, and soon befriends a young boy named Gatz, who’s also a runaway. Together they explore the shoreline, play games, hunt imaginary beasts, fish, sleep under the stars, and discover the ruined chapel of Our Lady of Still Waters hidden among the reeds. Their idyll doesn’t last; when they meet a young girl who says people are looking for them, Gatz—who was in trouble when Pascalet met him—flees, and Pascalet is heartbroken at the loss of a new friend. But the two meet again because of a strange marionette show in a riverside village, later forming a strong brotherly bond. A small gem from Bosco (1888–1976), this book has been described as a French *Huckleberry Finn* even though a comparison with Thoreau’s *Walden* might make more sense. Pascalet’s seven precious days on the river result in a spiritual awakening that gives him a deeper connection to the natural world. “I did not know what a soul was,” he thinks. “At that age you do not. But I clearly sensed that this joy was more than my body.”

Bosco’s story carries readers into an innocent childhood world as easily as the current carries the boys on their adventures.



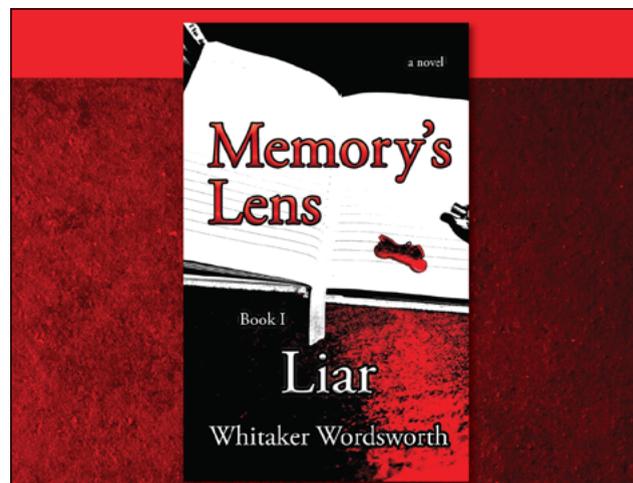
THE ROAD TO DALTON

Bowring, Shannon
 Europa Editions (250 pp.)
 \$18.00 paper | June 6, 2023
 9781609459260

A small town in northern Maine is shaken by a young mother’s death.

Bowring’s first novel centers on three couples—two middle-aged and one in their 20s with a new baby—in the fictional town of Dalton in 1990. There’s a lumber mill, library, dive bar, grocery store, and diner. Bowring offers endless, rich details about life in Dalton, making a

satisfying story of each chapter, expanding the emotional history of the place, yielding great depths of pain behind small, daily gestures of human connection. This gives the novel the feel of a local lovingly revealing all, carefully charting the tension the characters endure, young and old: “the silent, constant, compulsive guarding of one’s biggest feelings, regrets, and desires.” The town doctor Richard Haskell’s marriage has long been essentially over, and, like a priest, he bears “the weight of other people’s fears and secrets” yet “continues his slow art of healing what can never be healed.” His wife, Trudy, the library director, is in love with Bev Theroux, who’s also married to a man; their husbands know of their love and keep the secret to keep the peace between them and their neighbors, who they know would ostracize the families if the truth were out. Bev’s son, Nate, is an earnest good cop whose wife, Bridget, stopped painting when she became pregnant and feels forced to hide her postpartum depression. Bowring’s prose is alive with careful observation and reminiscent of Bonnie Jo Campbell’s work, though with less edge and a more expansive feel and intimate care for the characters. When Bridget’s sudden death sends



ISBN: 979-8986771007

“Many readers will find this thriller gripping from beginning to end; the slow revelations will keep them connected to the story, and the author’s facility at creating suspense will make them invested in what happens next.”

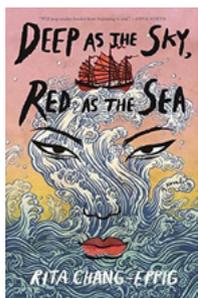
—Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation, Email whit@whitakerwordsworth.com
whitakerwordsworth.com



grief rippling through everyone's lives, Bowring creates a portrait of their dignity and their unflinching, if cold, dedication to each other.

An impressive debut bursting with detail and love for the town it brings to life.



**DEEP AS THE SKY,
RED AS THE SEA**

Chang-Eppig, Rita
Bloomsbury (304 pp.)
\$28.99 | June 6, 2023
9781639730377

A debut novel inspired by the legendary career of one of history's most successful pirates.

This story begins with the heroine watching her husband die during a failed attack on a Portuguese ship. Cheng Yat's death is both

a personal and professional problem for Shek Yeung. He freed her from her life as a sex slave to make her a pirate, and upon his death she's surprised to realize she loves him. Her more pressing concern, though, is that Cheng Yat has left his ships to his male protégé, Cheung Po. She commands her own junks and her own men, but the Red Banner Fleet cannot survive divided. The character Shek Yeung is based on a real historical figure, a woman who survived sea battles with both the Qing Empire and the East India Company during the early 19th century. In making Shek Yeung her heroine, Chang-Eppig didn't have to commit herself to writing a story that conforms with the basic contours of this real-life pirate queen's life, but that's what she's chosen. At the same time, it seems like the author doesn't want to commit to writing historical fiction. Chang-Eppig is a serious writer, and there are many moments of real lyrical beauty in this novel. While it might be anachronistic to expect a pirate queen to spend a lot of time in introspection, Shek Yeung never quite emerges as a fully formed character—and, given that the story is told from her point of view, the other characters are flat and opaque, as well. It's no surprise that the author devotes a lot of this book to sea battles, political machinations, and the logistics of running a vast criminal enterprise, but any reader primarily interested in those elements of the story may be best served by nonfiction, while those looking for a rich story may have trouble caring about these details without a three-dimensional, compelling protagonist.

Shek Yeung is a fascinating figure, but Chang-Eppig doesn't quite know what to do with her.



"An enjoyable family tale with a tough and memorable hero."
—Kirkus Reviews

"A compelling, raw read."
—BookView Review

ISBN-13: 978-1088054192

"...will leave readers thoroughly satisfied."
—The Prairies Book Review

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THE FAREWELL TOUR
Clifford, Stephanie
Harper/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
\$24.89 | March 7, 2023
9780063251137

From a hardscrabble Washington farm to the stage of the Grand Old Opry, this lyrical novel showcases one woman's hunger for stardom as she tries to outrun her past.

Fans of the TV series *Nashville* will fall under the spell of Lillian Waters, a washed-up country star who drinks and misbehaves while fans prefer the wholesome charms of Dolly Parton and Loretta Lynn. Born Lena Thorsell in the 1920s, the daughter of impoverished Swedish immigrants, she leaves home at the improbable age of 10 to make her way in the world. As time passes, her musical talents are revealed, but her simmering anger thwarts career opportunities and healthy relationships and becomes the "repetitive melody" of her life. Yet after decades of touring, her voice damaged, her body wrecked by alcohol, she stages a comeback in the 1980s. Told against the backdrop of history, including job opportunities that opened for women during World War II and the issue of sexism in the music industry in the mid-20th century, Lillian's operatic story highlights how unresolved childhood trauma can permanently alter one's life. Clifford writes with authority

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"The political and social struggles that unfold, and the moral and ethical questions that arise, offer countless discussion topics for book clubs . . . Under Conhaim's hand, *Memoirs of Spurius* is lively, timely, and holds so many possibilities for debate that it earns top recommendation for libraries and readers alike." —*Midwest Book Review*

" . . . grippingly dramatized . . . keenly imaginative . . . A fine amalgam of historical scholarship and literary invention." —*Kirkus Reviews*

Memoirs of **Spurius**

who crushed the
cult of Bacchus,
Rome, 186 BCE

a novel

D. László Conhaim

ISBN: 978-0-9843175-4-7

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on conspiracy
theories and power?
Or does he
"save the state"?**

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MYSTERIES ARE
FINALLY REVEALED**

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rigorous research...
and powerfully
dramatic writing."**

**"Spurius is an able narrator whose political judgements
are remarkably sensitive and whose devotion to a
Rome spiraling into decay is heartbreaking."**

—*Kirkus Reviews*

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about life on the road and the challenges faced by women struggling to make it as singers and musicians. Country music fans will love the name-dropping as Clifford slides Dolly, Loretta, Buck Owens, Charley Pride, and others into this hard-knocks tale. This character-driven novel is sometimes bogged down by a narrative style that frequently recounts events rather than dropping readers into the action. Still, the story shines like a rhinestone-bedazzled costume fit for a country queen.

A break-your-heart, toe-tapping story that deserves a song of its own.



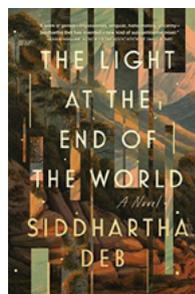
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED

Cosby, S.A.
Flatiron Books (352 pp.)
\$27.99 | June 6, 2023
9781250831910

A gripping cat-and-mouse game between a twisted White religious killer and the first Black sheriff of a small Virginia community.

Welcome to Charon County, a “teardrop-shaped peninsula” on the Chesapeake Bay with a cursed name and a blood-soaked history, where “equality’s surest foothold was found on the autopsy table.” The latest tragedy is a school shooting, terrible enough on its own but only the beginning of the fresh hell descending on Charon: Both the shooter and the lone victim are connected to a string of unthinkable abuses targeting Black children. And there is a mysterious killer still at large, his gruesome crimes steeped in Scripture and religious iconography. Recently elected Sheriff Titus Crown—organized, decisive, and conflicted between justice and vengeance—is on the case, using his FBI training to profile a madman. As in any good noir, everyone is an enemy and a suspect; Titus is hounded by bigots of all stripes: biased officers, casually racist locals, and venom-spitting White supremacists. Titus is basically the only three-dimensional character, though this isn’t a major hindrance. The novel crackles along with each new clue and obstacle; scenes and dozens of characters are sketched with efficiency. The diffuse subjects of Titus’ wrath are treated solemnly if unsubtly—institutional Christianity in particular takes it in the teeth. Tight pacing mostly keeps the contrivances at bay, though there may be the occasional eye roll at Titus’ pithy *True Detective*-style platitudes about how broken the world is. Nevertheless, readers will cheer at Titus’ brutal screeds against those who push him past the point of patience. “Evil is rarely complicated,” Titus explains. “It’s just fucking bold.” Cosby’s previous works, *Blacktop Wasteland* (2020) and *Razorblade Tears* (2021), have both been optioned for film adaptations, and his latest seems destined for the same treatment.

Another provocative and page-turning entry in the Southern noir genre.



THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE WORLD

Deb, Siddhartha
Soho (458 pp.)
\$27.00 | May 30, 2023
9781641294669

An epic exploration of India’s tumultuous history at four pivotal moments.

Deb’s ambitious third novel opens in a near-future India on the verge of collapse. The country’s technological advances have led to the creation of a “superweapon,” the threat of which has sparked violence across the country. Amid the chaos, a former

“In Rowan’s short novel, a young logger recalls a past murder and a search for answers.”

“He immerses readers in the logger vocabulary... and each chapter begins with an uncredited pen-and-ink sketch showing a scene from the logging life.”

ISBN: 979-8654912404

“A generally engaging labor of love with details that truly immerse readers in its characters’ work.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*

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ASIN: B0BNPHNSK4

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—*Kirkus Reviews*

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WORDS WITH...

TANANARIVE DUE

With a new story collection, *The Wishing Pool*, coming out, the writer reflects on the explosion of Black horror

BY LISA KENNEDY



Chanté Bockwinkel

OF COURSE, TANANARIVE DUE would be conducting an interview from her car. A luminary in the Black horror lit revival, Due has been ridiculously busy over the last few years. She teaches at UCLA. A while back, Jordan Peele showed up to her course “Sunken Place: Racism, Survival, and Black Horror Aesthetic,” to the rapt surprise of her students. She executive produced the engaging and timely documentary *Horror Noire: A History of Black Horror*. Due and Steven Barnes, her husband, ace collaborator, and a fellow horror head and SF author, have a podcast, *Lifewriting: Write for Your Life!* which takes on questions of craft and life balance with verve and generosity.

On a recent episode, the duo sounded giddy as they spoke about participating in television writer and showrunner Bryan Fuller’s writerly think tank for a prequel series called *Crystal Lake*. (Yes, Jason Vorhees trackers, *that* Crystal Lake.) The two met in 1997 at a Black science fiction, fantasy and horror conference at Clark Atlanta University.

The daughter of Florida civil rights activists, Due co-wrote the memoir *Freedom in the Family* with her mother, who died in 2012. (“I consider it the most important book I’ve ever

written,” she says.) Many of her stories and novels unfold in Florida.

“These tales of fright are both intellectually keen and psychologically bloodcurdling,” begins our starred review of Due’s new story collection, *The Wishing Pool and Other Stories* (Akashic, April 18). Later this year, her novel *The Reformatory* will be published. We caught up with her as she was headed to a movie her *Crystal Lake* cohort were interested in: the sixth installment of the *Scream* franchise. Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

In the *Wishing Pool* preface you confess your love for the short story form. Why?

It’s the form I first embraced when I became serious about learning how to be a professional writer. I had novels in progress in high school and in college, but it seems to me that I only started really learning the lessons I needed to create consistently professional level work, to conjure scenes and characters, through short stories. After my first collection, *Ghost Summer*, was published [in 2015], my short story writing just accelerated. I was writing fewer novels because I was learning screenwriting.

What’s going on in film and television horror that excites you?

What am I *not* excited about? The word *renaissance* gets over-used, but we are absolutely in the thick of a Black horror renaissance. And it’s not that Black horror didn’t exist before Jordan Peele and *Get Out* in 2017, but on the cinema side, that was so clarifying for the film industry. It just opened all kinds of doors. *Horror Noire* got the green light the same day Jordan Peele won an Oscar [for best original screenplay]. It’s not just that Black horror got more recognition after *Get Out*. I’ve seen more Indigenous horror. I’ve seen more queer horror. We just watched a movie with two Asian American women as the leads. Everybody’s having more of a turn in the sun right now. And on the literary side, don’t get me started.

But I must get you started.

Oh, my gosh. I mean, you have Alma Katsu and Stephen Graham Jones and Silvia Moreno-Garcia. But Black horror literature? Holy cow. I've never seen anything like it. I just read *Jackal* by Erin Adams, who, for me, came out of nowhere. Then I jumped right into *Spite House* by Johnny Compton. Any day now, I get to start Victor LaValle's *Lone Women*. Three in a row, barely waiting in between for them. For Black horror readers, I don't know that we've ever had a time that was so rich.

What's going on?

Part of it is destigmatizing genre. When I went to Northwestern University, I had very fine creative writing instructors. No creative writing instructor ever told me not to write horror. Very early in one of the workshops, we were asked to name our favorite authors. I said, "Toni Morrison." Everybody nodded and smiled. And then I said, "And Stephen King." And everybody just gaped. They didn't know you were allowed to mention a commercial writer. And I got the not-so-subtle message that genre was not going to be appreciated in that workshop.

In the collection there's this great tension between haint and abomination. Florida seems to be both.

Exactly. The horror stories in Florida write themselves. What to me is just so—*disappointing* isn't a big enough word, but I'll use it right now. What's so disappointing about what I see happening politically in Florida is that so much of it is about erasure. Let's pretend this isn't happening, i.e. Covid, and let's pretend this didn't happen in terms of racial history.

So that's Florida as abomination. What about it is haunted?

My parents moved to Quincy, Florida, which was where my mother was from. In visiting them, I got a taste of my mother's childhood. She would drive me around and say, "This is the courthouse. This is the hanging tree. This is this land. This is that land." And every time I visited her, it just spoke to me as such a rich setting that I came up with this idea of a fictitious town called Gracetown. It was very much based on Quincy, and in some way, it's based on Marianna, Florida, which is where the Dozier School for Boys [a reform school where Black boys were brutally beaten and killed] was.

In *Horror Noire* you say, "Black history is Black horror," which is painfully insightful.

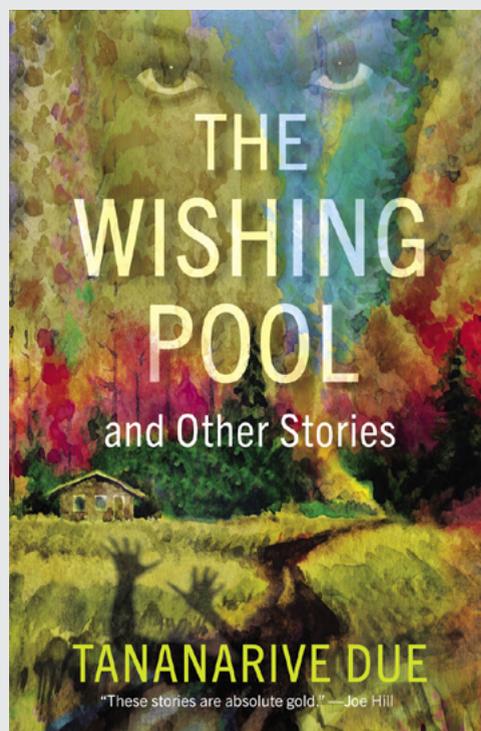
My interest in horror was sparked by my mother's interest. My late mother, Patricia Stevens Due, and father, John Due, were civil rights activists. The kind of activists that when I was in college, I could look in the index of my history book and there they were. She was watching those old creature features mov-

ies. I was raised on *The Mummy*, *The Fly*, *The Wolfman*, *The Mole People*. You name it—if it had a "The" in the title, I got to love it like a child loves horror: because it's slightly forbidden, because it might give you nightmares. It's like a roller coaster. For years, I assumed that that was my mother's relationship with horror, too. But about the time we were shooting *Horror Noire*, I started to realize that my mother's attraction to horror had more to do with racial trauma than with feeling like it was a fun roller-coaster ride.

Did you get to discuss that with her?

I never got the chance to talk to her about this, unfortunately. She passed away in 2012. But for someone who had been tear-gassed at the age of 20 and wore dark glasses the entire time I knew her, even indoors, she has this very visible scar from the civil rights era and some other invisible trauma from the era. All kinds of fears of the clock turning back. Which has come to pass, so I'm not saying it was unfounded. But she had a lot of fear locked inside of her body. And I really believe that horror helps vent that fear. Like watching a vampire or watching a ghost story or zombies can be so healing because it looks the way fear feels without retraumatizing you, because you are not probably going to be attacked by a zombie, your grandchildren are not going to be attacked by a zombie, right?

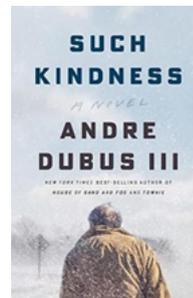
Lisa Kennedy writes for the New York Times, Variety, the Denver Post, and other publications. The Wishing Pool received a starred review in the March 1, 2023, issue.



journalist has been tasked with finding a former colleague who might be in possession of troubling government secrets. Flash backward to 1984, as a mercenary strives to track down a man who might be involved in a plot leading to the real-life Union Carbide disaster. Then further back to 1947, the year of Partition, as a veterinary student is on a search for a Vimana, a mythical airship. And finally back to 1859, as a British army officer is on an expedition to the Himalayan home of the White Mughal, leader of a rogue anti-colonial compound. There are common themes across the sections: a quest narrative, questions of how mysticism and the supernatural intersect with colonial and post-colonial realities, how “small wars stitch together the fabric of the future.” Within each section, there’s a lot to like, particularly in the 1984 section, which ably captures the sectarian divides following Indira Gandhi’s assassination and the American imperialism of Union Carbide’s presence, all wrapped around a pitch-black noir narrative. The near-future sections that bookend the novel are engagingly dystopian, blending cyberpunk’s techno-skepticism with Pynchon-ian intrigue. And overall, Deb has accessed the omnivorous, madcap spirit of

Midnight’s Children–era Salman Rushdie. Still, there’s little overt connective narrative tissue across the novel’s four sections; Deb is aspiring for the kaleidoscopic, but the overall feel is of loosely related novellas. It’s a visionary novel for sure but not a tight and cohesive one.

A whip-smart if sprawling exploration of history and mythology.



SUCH KINDNESS

Dubus III, Andre

Norton (336 pp.)

\$29.95 | June 6, 2023

9781324000464

A disabled laborer at the edge of despair learns to find himself.

Tom, the hero of this cloying novel by the veteran Dubus, has lost just about everything. A fall from a roof while on the job led to a painkiller addiction, a foreclosed house, a failed marriage, and an estranged son. Living in subsidized housing in northeast Massachusetts, he’s shaken the painkillers but keeps plenty of vodka handy; his neighbors are loud, sometimes violent products (and creators) of broken homes. He wants to get his car out of hock to visit his son on his 20th birthday, but after his last valuable possessions—his tools—are stolen, he’s financially ruined. Early on, a sunken and understandably vengeful Tom (last name: Lowe) ropes his neighbors into driving his creaky body to the home of the agent who trapped him in a disastrous subprime loan; there, he plans to steal his trash, which he hopes contains blank credit-company checks he can fraudulently cash. This goes poorly, so Tom hits on another idea: What if he just approached the world with a spirit of love and forgiveness? Soon, doors creak open for this “broken-boned dog”: Needed car rides are proffered, moral support is delivered, and he appreciates every small favor as a miracle of human generosity. Dubus remains a keen observer of the working class, but this cast of hard-luck types serves a sentimental yarn that unsubtly elevates Tom to the level of a Christ figure. (Asked what he once did for a living, he replies “carpenter.”) Maybe Dubus aspired to infuse working-class fiction with a rare optimistic vibe; perhaps he wished to deliver a Dickensian parable on the virtues of generosity to a hard-hearted America. Regardless, this ode to the myth of bootstrapping is unpersuasive.

Dirty realism at its most mawkish.

HIT & SPLIT
Simon Green

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“Stunning debut, totally immersive thriller...up there with the best while genuinely outclassing plenty of major household names.”
—Warren Pole, Former Features & Investigations Writer for *The Times*

“...an intriguing...well-paced page-turner... dramatic...appealing...humorous and emotional...”

“An engaging tale...surprisingly endearing...”
—Kirkus Reviews

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THE WOMAN INSIDE

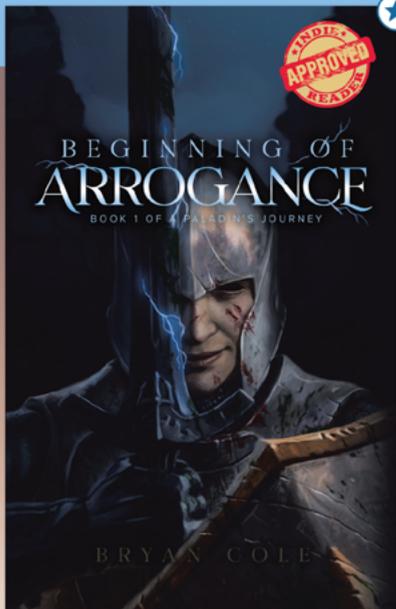
Edvardsson, M.T.
Trans. by Rachel Willson-Broyles
 Celadon Books (384 pp.)
 \$28.99 | June 13, 2023
 9781250204622

When a wealthy heiress and her husband are found dead in their mansion in the city of Lund, Sweden, a web of deception is discovered to underlie not only their lives, but those of the people whose fates intersect with theirs.

This dark, claustrophobic novel opens with a matter-of-fact police report: “The blinds are down, and all lights are off. Against the wall is a bed with a headboard. On the bed is another dead body.” The woman downstairs has died of a head injury, the man upstairs, of a drug overdose. Could this be a double murder, staged to look like murder-suicide? The truth emerges incrementally and obliquely in a sinuous narrative that

focuses mainly on two young women whose distinctive voices lend the novel some badly needed credibility. Both are students; Karla Larsson makes money cleaning houses, while Jennica Jungstedt moonlights as a psychic adviser. “Does it make you feel less alone to call it something else?” Jennica is asked by Steven Rytter, a charming older man she meets on Tinder. She insists on using the term *living solo*. But such distinctions dissolve when that first date turns into a storybook romance rich in champagne and roses. Karla, meanwhile, happens to be the person employed to clean Steven’s already immaculate house. “Steven’s a doctor and works almost all the time,” she learns. “His wife just lies around sleeping, totally zonked on drugs.” That’s not the story Steven tells Jennica, of course. Then again, he is just one liar among many here—as the novel’s intersecting narratives and brief transcripts of police interrogations attest. The suspense introduced in the early chapters, however, wears thin as the author introduces one too many subplots and fails to stage a convincing denouement.

An angst-ridden but finally weak thriller.



**PALADINS WERE MADE FOR SHARP CONFLICT,
 NOT SKULKING AROUND IN THE SHADOWS.**

“...a promising start to a series that will be enjoyed by high-fantasy fans.”
 —*LoveReading UK*

“A fast-paced high fantasy quest in the tradition of Dungeons & Dragons with bloody, action-packed battle sequences aplenty...solid world building, a strong protagonist, and a spirited cast of familiar fantasy characters.”
 —*IndieReader*

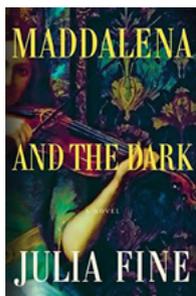
“...an impressive scope. Although there is a complete story arc with a satisfying ending, this volume is just the start of a much larger saga.”
 —*Kirkus Reviews (starred review)* ★

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“A meditation on what it means to step into your authentic self—with all the subsequent confusion and pain laid bare.”

THE ADULT



MADDALENA AND THE DARK

Fine, Julia
Flatiron Books (304 pp.)
\$28.99 | June 13, 2023
9781250867872

Two girls in an 18th-century Venetian music school are drawn together in a story of love, ambition, and dark magic.

In 1717 Venice, the noble Grimani family—reeling from a recent scandal—decides to send 15-year-old Maddalena to the prestigious all-girls music school Ospedale della Pietà, hoping to preserve her chances at marriage. As she learns her fate, while riding a gondola on a “vast lagoon,” the discontented and recalcitrant Maddalena sees an otherworldly creature approach her in the water. “And the thing asks Maddalena, without speaking: *What do you want?* And the thing asks: *What will you pay for it?*” Later, at the Pietà, Maddalena finds herself drawn to violinist Luisa, and the two develop an intimate relationship. When

Maddalena learns that the reserved and modest Luisa is more ambitious than she lets on, the two begin making wagers with the mysterious forces that lurk in the canals and lagoon. Moody and sumptuous, the novel has many delights in store for lovers of beautiful sentences and lush scene building. The relationship between Luisa and Maddalena is seductive, exciting, and suspenseful—especially as jealousy begins to color the quality of Maddalena’s wishes. However, this suspense doesn’t quite carry through the entire novel, which suffers from uneven and often frustratingly slow pacing. The grim conclusion, which feels unsatisfying and overwritten (“Now is nothing. Now is exploding, exponential stars; the water and the water and the water”), also falls disappointingly into bury-your-gays tropes. Still, with its enchanting gothic tone, the novel does manage to pull the reader into a subtly mystical world and makes for an unsettling and sometimes haunting experience.

An unevenly paced, atmospheric story with a supernatural twist and queer undertones.

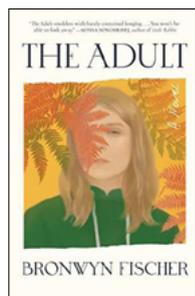
ALL THINGS UNDER AND OVER THE SUN AND STARS:
ENIGMAS IN VARIOUS STAGES
Maurice James Blair

ISBN: 979-8-9859094-7-0

“The author starts his time-leaping, dimension-folding epic ‘a few hundred years into the fourth millennium of the common era.’”

“...Blair acknowledges a wide spectrum of intriguing influences, ranging from classic SF author Arthur C. Clarke to director Alfred Hitchcock...”

“At the heart of this storm of concepts is what appears to be a loving homage to literary creativity and imagination itself.”
—Kirkus Reviews



THE ADULT

Fischer, Bronwyn
Algonquin (312 pp.)
\$27.00 | May 23, 2023
9781643752723

New college student Natalie falls in love with Nora, a woman nearly twice her age, in Fischer’s debut novel.

With college looming, Natalie stewes about moving to Toronto, and Fischer captures teenage uncertainty brilliantly: “I wondered if I should buy a more specific jacket. One that could quickly show the core elements of my character.” As well as a new city, Natalie is navigating her hitherto unexplored sexuality. When she meets Nora, a grant writer in her 30s who quickly captivates her, she’s prompted to reappraise her self-image: “Who was I, if she was curious about me? Not the person I’d expected myself to be.” Their physical relationship is revelatory for Natalie: “Didn’t I like being dipped into, the breaking surface of myself that still rippled from the afterthought of her touch?” Alongside Natalie’s romantic relationship run a platonic one she has with her dorm-mate Clara and one she witnesses unfold between her poetry professor and an obsessive classmate. She struggles to reconcile her seemingly disparate selves—embarrassed when she finds out that Nora has seen her playing a game of Assassin with her college friends, not knowing how to tell Clara she’s a lesbian, mortified by the dichotomy between her thoughts and the poetry she produces (“Such a slim margin between saying something meaningful and exposing the fallibility of your mind”)—Natalie becomes increasingly fraught with self-doubt. What runs consistently through the novel is the unease of the age and power disparities between Natalie and Nora. While the denouement is in no way shocking, it’s satisfyingly dramatic, and Fischer encourages the reader to remember their own first heartbreak. As Natalie looks back on the relationship, she sees her own innocence clearly: “I had

been much younger then, hadn't I?" This insightful novel is alive with vibrant prose, emotional acuity, and complex female characters.

A meditation on what it means to step into your authentic self—with all the subsequent confusion and pain laid bare.



COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

Fuentes, Javier

Pantheon (304 pp.)

\$27.00 | June 6, 2023

9780593317587

A young pastry chef returning to Madrid after years in the U.S. becomes entangled with a wealthy Spanish NYU student in this debut novel.

Demetrio has lived in New York City with no documents since he was 8 years old and has spent his entire adult life working at the same

restaurant. But when, at 24, he finally pursues a more prestigious pastry chef position, his fears about his lack of papers come to fruition, and he finds himself on a plane back to a country he hardly remembers. On that trans-Atlantic flight, he connects with Jacobo, the charming scion of a right-wing businessman. A Jane Austen-esque illness strands Demetrio with Jacobo and his family once they disembark, and before long, the two are inseparable and inching toward a romance. If only the many points of tension set up along the way—Demetrio's increasing financial dependence on Jacobo, Jacobo's father's conservatism, Demetrio's uneasy position as a stranger in his nominal homeland, and the two men's growing attraction to each other—could be felt by the reader. Fuentes has an unfortunate tendency to stretch credulity on multiple fronts. The glimpses into Demetrio's artistry as a chef are surprisingly few and often unrealized, with our protagonist pursuing unlikely activities like making ganache on a beach. Jacobo never emerges as a complete human being with specific ambitions and foibles, and the novel seems uninterested in what it means for him to accept money and support from his fascist family. Demetrio's

"The offbeat second daughter of a French mother and a Montana-born Marine recounts her struggles and romances in this contemporary novel."

"This novel is a rather rollicking melodrama of 'what's going to happen next?' to Johanna, with her ending up having wide-ranging and exciting experiences, including romances with a struggling but soon-to-be famous Irish singer and a rich Swiss banker."

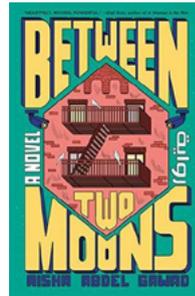
"A richly detailed...tale of a spirited hero's adventures."
—*Kirkus Reviews*

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ISBN-13: 979-8764360027

narration occasionally sparkles, but the dialogue is stilted and sometimes dated beyond the novel's 2007 setting. Opportunities for conflict arise only to disappear a handful of pages later, and by the time a surprise inclusion in a will is introduced, it has become clear that the characters are immune to meaningful consequences to their actions.

What should be a thoughtfully constructed, sensuous confection falls flat.



BETWEEN TWO MOONS

Gawad, Aisha Abdel
Doubleday (336 pp.)
\$28.00 | June 6, 2023
9780385548618

A Muslim family living in Brooklyn works to reconnect through the month of Ramadan.

Amira and her twin sister, Lina, are graduating from high school in Bay Ridge at the same time their older brother, Sami, is returning home after six years in prison. Reunited for the first time as young adults, the siblings struggle to relate even as they all have secrets. Lina is partying too much with a new boyfriend who promises to help her become a model, while “good sister” Amira, who plans to go to college, is trying to take care of Lina while venturing into dating. Meanwhile, Sami keeps sneaking away from the house, their parents are trying to figure out how best to support their increasingly distant children, and the neighborhood’s Muslim community is dealing with the arrest of a Libyan cafe owner, a violent attack on an imam, and the degrading vandalism of the mosque. Gawad’s excellent debut novel illuminates one family’s story through the holy month of fasting against the backdrop of NYPD surveillance of a Muslim neighborhood and larger fears of detainment and deportation. Amira narrates most of the book with an engaging voice, while the perspective sometimes changes to a close third-person to peer into experiences of the detained cafe owner, the imam who was attacked, Lina, Sami, and others. These small inserts help to weave a complex portrayal of the whole community into Amira’s and Lina’s stories as their lives are on the precipice of change, caught between devotion and rebellion, culminating in startling consequences for all.

A vibrant achievement.

“A METAPHOR?
QUITE POSSIBLY.
AN EXCELLENT READ?
OH, YES.
DEFINITELY.”
—REEDSY DISCOVERY

“A CAUTIONARY TALE OF A CRUEL, AUTHORITARIAN
AMERICA OF THE FUTURE THAT’S LEAVENED BY
BARBED WIT AND IRREVERENCE.”
—KIRKUS REVIEWS

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ISBN: 978-1-958840-02-3 [eBOOK]



THE DISSIDENT

Goldberg, Paul
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (432 pp.)
\$28.00 | June 6, 2023
9781250208590

Viktor Moroz, an engineer and well-known Jewish refusenik in mid-1970s Moscow, is offered a Faustian bargain by the KGB after he is seen fleeing a murder scene.

Viktor has discovered the dead bodies of his friend Albert Schwartz, a gay human rights activist and provider of goods and services, and a U.S. official with suspected ties to the CIA. They have both been killed with an ax. If he finds the murderer, Viktor will be allowed to leave the USSR along with his new wife, Oksana, a teacher and clandestine publisher. If he refuses to collaborate with the KGB, he will be put on trial for the murder himself—not a look the state wants with U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger soon arriving for

“Set in the Ballroom scene, Govinden’s novel chronicles a silent protest.”

THIS BRUTAL HOUSE

nuclear talks. Viktor knows that the better naysayers like him are known in the West, the less likely it is they will be arrested. But he also is familiar with the documented theory that people who are threatened with prosecution in an antisemitic case like his “will eventually prevail.” The book is populated by spies, intellectuals, dissidents, diplomats, and others with secret lives including Madison “Mad Dog” Dymshitz, the shifty young Moscow bureau chief of an American newspaper, and Mikhail Kiselenko, a Russian Orthodox priest of Jewish descent. *The Master and Margarita*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and the samizdat literary movement play major roles here, as does *The Laws of Jewish Life*, a Canadian do-it-yourself guide to Judaism. The book sometimes bogs down in dialectics and broadsides: “Kissinger is about Kissinger. Kissinger would not have stood in the way of the Nazis throwing Jews in concentration camps, his own grandparents included.” But this is another strong performance by Goldberg—after *The Yid* (2016) and *The Chateau* (2018)—a master at dissecting divided souls.

A smart, satirically streaked novel.



THIS BRUTAL HOUSE

Govinden, Niven
 Deep Vellum (320 pp.)
 \$17.95 paper | May 9, 2023
 9781646052677

Set in the Ballroom scene, Govinden’s novel chronicles a silent protest.

This multifaceted novel recounts a series of fraught interpersonal dynamics and politicized conflicts. Sections of it are narrated by the Mothers, leaders in the Ballroom community, who have gathered to protest a number of disappearances from within their scene. The language used is appropriately stark and formal: “Five apostles sitting atop City Hall steps day after day; the strength of our line, the amplification of our silence.” The use of the first person plural for sections of the novel makes for some resonant moments, as the Mothers compare themselves to the police officers at their protest: “We could each buy a donut and stand on a street

Some
A FEW
Murders

in the MY
neighborhood

a novel

HENRY OLEK

if you can figure out this one... go on, get your MENSA application.

“In this novel, a man and a woman team up to solve seemingly unrelated crimes, both hoping to leave behind their ruts and find new directions for their lives.”

“In this charming mystery, veteran screenwriter Olek has created a memorable pair in April and Preston.”

“Olek’s engaging narrative flies along with April and Preston as they careen from one false lead to another, unbothered by failure. They’re a winning combination, hopefully one that the author will bring back for another case.”

“This delightful mystery succeeds in uniting two kindred souls in need of a change.”

—Kirkus Reviews

ISBN: 979-8838416575

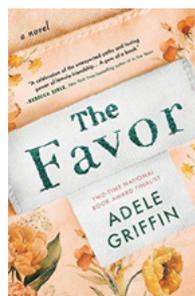
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“The tragic history of Hawai‘i is told through the lives of several generations of women in a Native family.”

HULA

corner to eat it, but if one of us disappeared on leaving that street corner—the wrong us—there would be no investigation as to why.” Later, the novel’s focus shifts to Teddy, who came to stay with the Mothers as a young man and now works a government job. His feelings of frustration at different points in his life are brought into acute focus by Govinden’s prose: “Just standing in Chanel brings about a quiet revolution, an understanding that he and those he loves are good enough for these things, and how he’ll work hard to obtain them.” From there, the novel circles back around to explain the reasons for the Mothers’ protest. “Sherry is not the first child to disappear, but the first that he knows of, whose flesh-and-blood presence still lingers in the apartment,” and Teddy’s guilt over her disappearance causes him further stress. Govinden emphasizes the queer characters’ treatment by often callous officials and establishes a world where both elation and danger aren’t far away.

A structurally bold, emotionally draining novel.



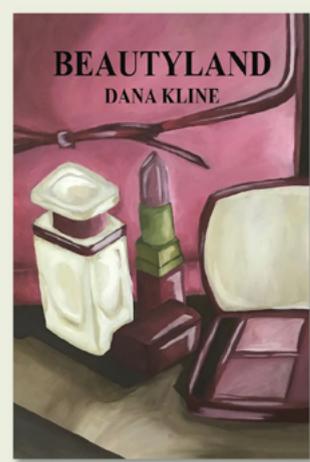
THE FAVOR

Griffin, Adele
Sourcebooks Landmark (352 pp.)
\$27.99 | June 13, 2023
9781728264059

When a woman in need of a surrogate meets a happy-go-lucky socialite, she receives an offer she can’t refuse.

Nora Hammond has gotten used to her life. She works at the high-end Manhattan vintage boutique I’ll Have Seconds, spends lazy Sunday mornings with her husband, Jacob, and FaceTimes her best friend, Meg, to discuss the dream homes they find on Zillow. Nora is content with what she has, though she’s gone through years of failed IVF treatments that left her with nothing but bills. Just when Nora and Jacob embrace the fact that they may never have a baby, their carefully curated acceptance ends on one fateful day—the day Evelyn Elliot strolls into I’ll Have Seconds. A “Kentucky Elle Woods,” Evelyn is lavish, stylish, and delightfully over-the-top, and she’s a breath of fresh air blown into Nora’s dreary life. Evelyn saunters around the boutique, dropping thousands on blouses, gowns, and the rare books Nora loves. Baffled by the sudden commission windfall, Nora can’t help but feel enamored with her new customer. Not only did Evelyn breezily provide I’ll Have Seconds with its largest sale in months, but she later sent Nora a special gift for her styling assistance: a one-of-a-kind Dior cloak designed for her mother’s favorite poet, currently worth upward of \$15,000. Evelyn begins asking Nora to complete a few personal assistant-type favors, sprinkling in cash and extravagant gifts, until she unveils her biggest thank-you yet: She offers to be Nora and Jacob’s surrogate for their final embryo. Nora is hard-pressed to refuse Evelyn’s offer, but soon enough, Evelyn’s lackadaisical approach to pregnancy and the Hammonds’ financial burdens threaten to ruin the unlikely friendship. Griffin’s novel weaves a tale of hope in the advent of unexpected change. Nora and Evelyn couldn’t be more different, and yet they connect through their cause as mothers, almost as if they are long-lost sisters. As the two are brought even closer together by the baby they share, Griffin deftly portrays how, despite that fact that motherhood looks different for all women, the love remains the same.

A touching novel about the power of female friendship, forgiveness, and honesty.



THE MAD MEN OF THE BEAUTY BIZ

“...hard to put down, engaging the reader from the first word, a riveting story of a woman who knows her destiny and never gives up. Dana Kline’s writing makes you feel every emotion deeply... You will truly love this book.”

—Tracey Bregman, American Actress & Producer

“Your project is well done and there should be a place for it in this streaming world.”

—Mel Damski, American Director & Producer

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HULA

Hakes, Jasmin `Iolani
HarperVia (400 pp.)
\$32.00 | May 2, 2023
978-0-06327698-7

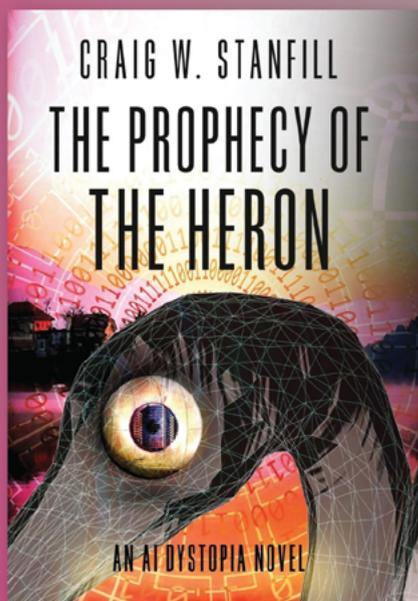
The tragic history of Hawai‘i is told through the lives of several generations of women in a Native family.

When Laka Naupaka is named Miss Aloha Hula in the 1960s, she is continuing

a proud family tradition. The Naupakas have lived in Hilo, on the Big Island, for many generations, and Laka's foremothers have danced and taught the hula—not the denatured version performed in tourist traps but the intricate, difficult dance that embodies history, religion, and tradition for the islands' Native people. Part of the history told in those dances is the forcible annexation of Hawai'i by the United States. In 1887, the so-called Bayonet Constitution, written by a White businessman, stripped control of the islands from King Kalākaua and gave power and land—1.8 million acres of it—to White U.S. outsiders, evicting countless Native families. Laka's grandmother Ulu was witness to that history, and her anger has been passed down. Her daughter, Hulali, and Hulali's daughter, Laka, are fierce defenders of Hawaiian culture. But their fierceness can also make them unforgiving with one another. When, after being named Miss Aloha Hula, Laka leaves Hilo for a job on another island, her family is shocked. When she returns with a young daughter, Hi'i, who has pale skin, red hair, and green eyes, Hulali cuts Laka off completely, refusing even to recognize Hi'i as her grandchild. Hulali will become more involved in politics in the 1970s and '80s, moving away from her family to Honolulu.

As Hi'i grows up, she tries to fit into the Naupaka family, undertaking rigorous training to learn hula, but her efforts often go awry. The novel moves back and forth in time to tell the stories of its characters and their home, most often focusing on Hi'i as the main character. Although its pace can sometimes slow, lush descriptions of the natural environment and warm depictions of family events enrich the novel.

A grandmother, mother, and daughter are shaped by the continuing trauma of Hawaiian history.



ISBN: 978-1638778363

THE AI DYSTOPIA
WHAT REALLY HAPPENED IN THE AI WAR?
WHO CONTROLS THE AIs? WHAT SECRETS LURK
IN THE DARK CORNERS OF THE VIRTUAL WORLD?

“An ex-office worker, banished to a treacherous apartment district, fights to survive thugs and a rogue artificial intelligence in this SF sequel.”

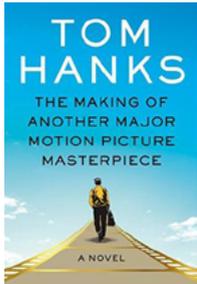
“Stanfill delivers a faster-paced follow-up to series opener *Terms of Service*...”

“Stanfill, as in his earlier book, animates the pages with lucid details...”

“A smashing, energetic installment in this futuristic series that keeps getting better.”

—Kirkus Reviews

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THE MAKING OF ANOTHER MAJOR MOTION PICTURE MASTERPIECE

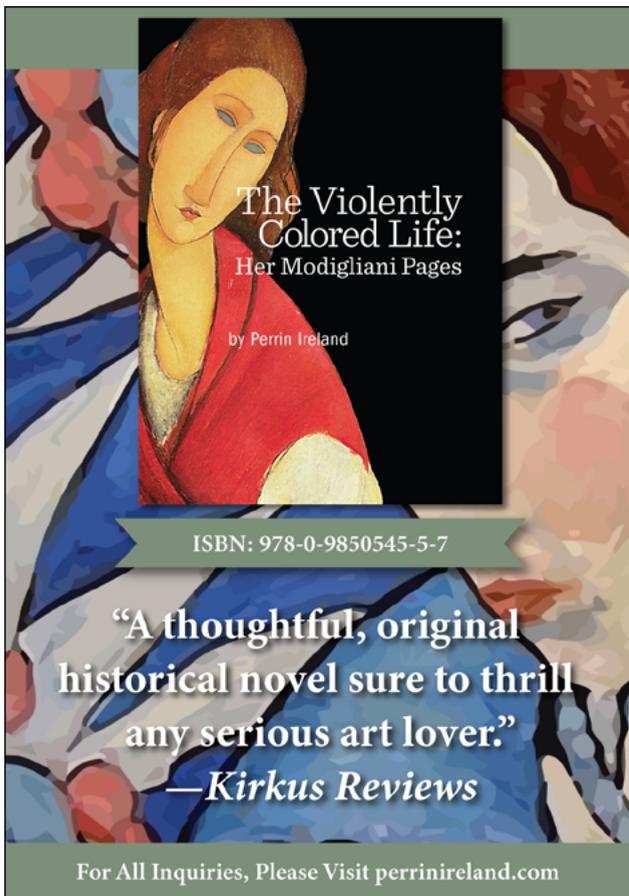
Hanks, Tom
Illus. by R. Sikoryak
Knopf (448 pp.)
\$26.99 | May 9, 2023
9780525655596

A fictional account of the agony and ecstasy of making a movie, from someone who'd know.

For his sprightly debut novel, actor/writer/national treasure Hanks—author of the story collection *Uncommon Type*, 2017—imagines the making of *Knightsbade: The Lathe of Firefall*, a mashup of Marvel-esque superhero fare, war story, and artsy melodrama. The movie's concept seems like an unworkable, even bad idea, which is part of the point—Hanks stresses the notion that successful movies aren't just a matter of story but the people who make them. So he's assembled an engrossing cast of characters: Bob Falls, the World

War II vet who served as a flamethrower in the Pacific theater and became a PTSD-struck biker; Robby Andersen, the nephew who turned him into alternative-comix antihero Firefall; Bill Johnson, the well-decorated Spielberg-ian director who acquires the Firefall property and writes the script; and the small army of actors, assistants, and technicians charged with shooting the film in the Northern California town of Lone Butte—on time, lest morale collapse and the budget inflate. Hanks ably depicts how easily things derail. The male lead's ego wrecks the shooting schedule. A stray social media post complicates security. On-set flirtations threaten a marriage. But the novel reflects the sunny stick-to-it-iveness of many of Hanks' roles, and his central thesis is that every movie's true hero is anybody who reduces friction. To that end, his most enchanting and best-drawn characters are the director's assistant, Al Mac-Teer (full name Allicia), and Ynez Gonzalez-Cruz, a ride-share driver with no movie experience but a knack for problem-solving. "Most of the film business is done by meeting folks," one character says, and Hanks suggests that meeting the right people—and being kind to them—is half the battle of successful moviemaking. Overly romantic? Consider the source. Regardless, it's a well-turned tale of a Hollywood (maybe) success. (Sikoryak illustrates some comic-book pages related to the Firefall backstory and film.)

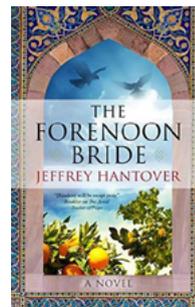
A loose-limbed, bighearted Hollywood yarn.



ISBN: 978-0-9850545-5-7

"A thoughtful, original historical novel sure to thrill any serious art lover."
—Kirkus Reviews

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THE FORENOON BRIDE

Hantover, Jeffrey
Severn House (192 pp.)
\$31.99 | June 6, 2023
9781448310272

Elizabethan ingenue loves dashing adventurer; complications ensue.

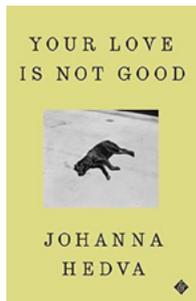
The year is 1591. An elliptical prologue, written by "the one who disappeared like chimney smoke on a windy day," describes "a heartbroken maid" who throws herself into the Thames. This might well be a spoiler but for the fact that Hantover's historical novel has two potentially heartbroken maids. Has one of them taken this fatal plunge? Fourteen-year-old Elizabeth Hilliard pledges her heart to Lord William Bateman, 19. But her swain is infected with wanderlust and sets sail in search of adventure. She remains chaste and faithful, writing him encouraging and heartfelt letters. William, meanwhile, travels by sea from Venice to Rhodes, where he is imprisoned by a Turkish governor, whose daughter, Safiye, engineers his escape and, unbeknownst to the older but not necessarily wiser young traveler, follows him back to England with faithful protector Zahir, a towering Moor, in tow. Her steely determination provides a contrast to William's more seemingly heedless gallivant. "She could hold a dagger steady in her hand and didn't shudder at the thought of using it to protect her honor." William does at last propose to Elizabeth, in a letter. Hantover's prose is both economical and poetic, suspense simmering subtly beneath top notes of romance and adventure. The story rotates among three perspectives, from Elizabeth to Safiye (called "The Turkish Lady" in chapter titles) to William. Only the seemingly guileless Elizabeth narrates in first person. This gives

“A resplendent and fearless book.”

YOUR LOVE IS NOT GOOD

the reader welcome space to form opinions about the characters and the mores during this epoch. The second half of the story is considerably enlivened by the appearance of Will Kemp, a former actor in Shakespeare’s troupe who aligns himself with Safiye.

A crisp and lyrical romance with a protofeminist subtext and authentic period flavor.



YOUR LOVE IS NOT GOOD

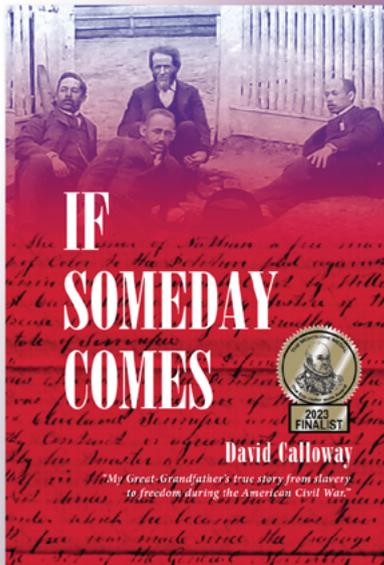
Hedva, Johanna
And Other Stories (320 pp.)
\$26.95 | May 23, 2023
9781913505660



A queer Korean American artist interrogates the legacy and aftermath of Whiteness in the form of beauty, suffering, desire, and the complex interchange of power in this autofictive roman à clef.

The narrator of this lush and brutal novel is a study in dualities. Her father is Korean and abandons the family when she is around 10; her mother is White and loves her in a narcissistic, abusive way. Moreover, the narrator is a painter whose career centers in both the sweltering sunshine of Los Angeles and the eternal nocturne of Berlin, a figurative artist whose work underscores the complex interdependence of beauty, race, and power even as it nods to Western art’s tradition of “painting beautiful white women, the kind who always had more money, beauty and power than the painter”; and she is a queer woman with a submission kink whose “fetish for giving away...power [is] actually about controlling it.” After a period of relative stasis in her career, the narrator has two important solo shows lined up but finds herself without inspiration. Her search for a muse leads to Hanne, an LA art-world siren who initially attracts her with the proud, heedless power of her beauty and quickly becomes the focal point not only for the narrator’s art, but also for the dynamic conflict between the narrator’s own ideas about Whiteness—how it is “hard to paint precisely because it’s everywhere and in everything....It’s the image of the world. And yet no one can see it for

2023 FINALIST FOR THE ERIC HOFFER/MONTAIGNE MEDAL



ISBN: 979-8986501406

“Calloway’s elegant prose effectively captures the tension and textures of the period...he shows himself to be such a talented writer of historical fiction that the biographical element of the work barely registers.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“This book uses stunning and gripping prose to take readers on an unforgettable experience into a time and place that we must never forget...”

—Readers’ Favorite, 5 stars

“...an essential read...a more accurate view of true history.”

—San Francisco Book Review, 4/5 stars

“...a powerful and moving story...His writing style draws the reader in from the very first page...not easily forgotten.”

—Manhattan Book Review, 4.5 stars

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itself because there's no such thing as an ipseity of white..."—and desire, where it comes from and who controls both its expression and its repercussions. The paintings of Hanne result in the narrator's first sold-out show, but just as she is poised to capitalize on that success, an influential Black performance artist publishes a petition calling for all artists of color to boycott museums and galleries with operating budgets over \$1 million for their imperialist and racist exploitation of those artists, with the narrator's upcoming venues among them. Conflicted over the opposing impulses of her desire for recognition *and* solidarity, economic success *and* artistic authenticity, excellence *and* anonymity, the narrator spends a long, dark night of the soul spiraling around the splendor of self-destruction like a moth to a singular flame. Impassioned, wry, compassionate, and hell-raising, this novel illuminates its frangible but resilient world the way a painter uses color on canvas to illuminate the focal point of her vision—building layer after layer of meaning until the image appears as if it has always been there for us to see.

A resplendent and fearless book. Must read.



A LITTLE RAY OF SUNSHINE

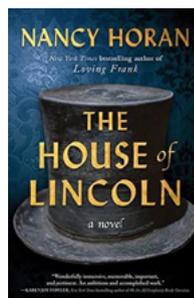
Higgins, Kristan
Berkley (512 pp.)
\$18.00 paper | June 6, 2023
9780593547618

A 35-year-old Cape Cod bookstore owner is contacted by the son she gave up for adoption, and in being found by him, she finds herself.

When Harlow Smith was 17 and in her first year of college, within the span of a month she started dating her first boyfriend, lost her virginity, and got pregnant. She made the extremely tough decision to have the baby—she dubbed him Matthew, her “little pal”—and give him up for adoption to Sanjay and Monica Patel when he was just a few minutes old. And she kept the entire thing a secret from her parents, siblings, and grandparents. Fast-forward almost 18 years, and a teenager who looks exactly like her brother comes into her bookstore. Harlow faints, much commotion ensues, and it turns out that Matthew has not only found her, but he's convinced his parents to rent a house on Cape Cod for their summer vacation without their knowing he'd tracked down his birth mother. What follows is a story about incredibly complicated emotions: Monica's love and anger and fear for her son as he tries to learn everything he can about his birth mother and her love for her daughter, Meena, with whom she unexpectedly became pregnant when Matthew was very young. Harlow's love for the son she gave away but thought about every day. Her parents' love for her, and their utter confusion about how she could have gone through something so incredibly hard entirely alone. Her 90-year-old Grandpop's unwavering love and support of her even as he sees the extreme pressure she puts on herself. And her friend Rosie's unquestioning love for her, and hers for Rosie. And, not to be left out among the multitude of other family members who are part of this story, Harlow's

childhood friend Grady's love for his 4-year-old daughter, Luna, and Harlow's growing feelings for him.

An uplifting story of love and gratitude—not to mention frustration, fear, and failure—in all forms of family.



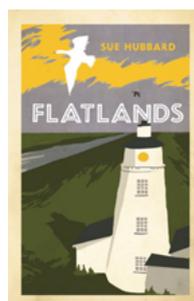
THE HOUSE OF LINCOLN

Horan, Nancy
Sourcebooks Landmark (352 pp.)
\$27.99 | June 6, 2023
9781728260549

Horan explores the worlds of Abraham Lincoln and the United States before, during, and after the Civil War through the eyes of an immigrant girl who becomes entwined with the soon-to-be-president's family.

Ana Ferreira's family, who are Presbyterians, flee religious persecution in Catholic Portugal in the mid-1800s, arriving in Springfield, Illinois, as tensions are rising between the North and South. Fourteen-year-old Ana secures a job in the Lincoln household, helping Mary Todd Lincoln with the household duties as her husband's political power grows. The novel charts the experiences of Ana; her Black friend, Cal, whom she met at the street market where her mother is a vendor; and other characters in the period covering Lincoln's election, the Civil War, the president's assassination, Mary Lincoln's death, and into the 20th century. While it's interesting to witness the evolution of Lincoln's views on slavery, the book's greatest strength is its unexpected examination of racism in central Illinois, a state long associated with both the Underground Railroad and the Union. Beginning with Ana's discovery that the Donnegan brothers, two free Black men, are part of the Underground Railroad and continuing through the violence of the 1908 Springfield race riot, Horan explores the often racist history of the state, including the power of the Ku Klux Klan and other White supremacist groups and the codification of legislation barring formerly enslaved people from settling there. This complicated narrative is far more engaging and less familiar than the Lincolns' story, and the shifts in focus between the two threads don't always work. But nonetheless, Horan has succeeded in illuminating an underconsidered segment of American history.

By adding nuance to the history of Illinois in the years surrounding the Civil War, Horan foregrounds the era's complexity.



FLATLANDS

Hubbard, Sue
Pushkin Press (269 pp.)
\$16.95 | June 13, 2023
9781911590743

Two lonely souls in a remote corner of England bond over an injured white goose during World War II.

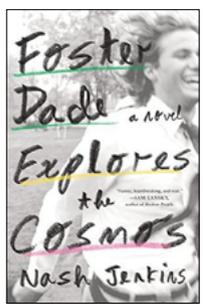
Freda is 12 in 1939, living in the East End of London when war begins, soon

“This ambitious debut covers 15 months of a teenage boy’s prep school yearnings and traumas.”

FOSTER DADE EXPLORES THE COSMOS

becoming one of the many children evacuated from the danger zone of the city to somewhere less likely to be bombed. In Freda’s case, it’s the Fens, a flat landscape of sea and marsh, where she is billeted with Mr. and Mrs. Willock on a sad, muddy farm where she will endure an isolated existence of work, not much food, and the sexual abuse of the farmer. Belonging to a different class, Philip Rhayader, the son of a World War I hero, attends prep school and then Oxford University but is mentally fragile, suffers a breakdown, and declares himself a conscientious objector. He too ends up in the Fens, living in an abandoned lighthouse, finding peace in isolation and agricultural labor, relishing the natural world and the wide landscape that engenders his urge to paint. British author Hubbard’s novel derives from Paul Gallico’s *The Snow Goose*, a famous 1940s novella set in Essex, which Hubbard has returned to Lincolnshire, the location of the lighthouse that inspired Gallico’s story. Heavily descriptive, the book works hard to evoke place, time, and mood, sometimes repetitively, and can become bogged down in nostalgic minutiae; at other times it successfully evokes the aching beauty of the bleak, watery landscape alive with bird life. Narrated by Freda in her old age, the story reveals how she and Philip meet over an injured albino goose which they name Fritha, a name Freda adopts, too. The story’s climax arrives at a peak of chaos and danger for both characters, as the horrific events of the Dunkirk beaches chime with Freda’s extremis and acknowledgment of Philip’s legacy.

Alternately vivid and research-heavy, a curious tribute to a wartime parable of friendship and connection.



FOSTER DADE EXPLORES THE COSMOS

Jenkins, Nash
 Overlook (544 pp.)
 \$30.00 | May 16, 2023
 9781419764769

This ambitious debut covers 15 months of a teenage boy’s prep school yearnings and traumas.

The novel’s Kennedy School is a costly coed facility modeled on Lawrenceville, also in New Jersey, from which Jenkins graduated in 2011. His narrator is a Kennedy alumnus who decides to trace the rise and fall 10 years earlier of Foster Dade, who became a school legend mainly for his expulsion for dealing Adderall and other stimulating “study drugs.” Foster is a smart, sensitive kid who’s having panic attacks about not fitting in at Kennedy. He starts selling drugs, initially prescribed by his therapist, to classmates seeking to improve their academic and athletic performance or just to supplement the buzz they usually get from booze and cocaine. (Yes, they’re only 15 and 16, but make allowances for big allowances.) Eventually he acquires a major supplier and customers on 17 campuses. He also finds friendship and affection, but several epic binges reveal a darker side of coolness, hookups, and chemically induced euphoria. Jenkins weaves through his disjointed narrative a finely observed

account of teen angst and awkward sex in an academically demanding environment marked by privilege and cliques and the cruelty they breed. The disjointedness stems from a pre-tense of reportage set up in the alumnus narrator’s almost comically overwritten preface (“the loose nebula of half-truths has unfurled under the myth-making tendencies of time”). His intrusive commentary often interrupts the story as he explains how he knows what he knows, expanding on interviews, citing medical records. Then there are the textual jolts of age-appropriate, social media-savvy elements: Facebook threads, iChats, phone texts, iTunes playlists, and Foster’s online diary. It’s possible that Jenkins—who refers several times to coverage by *Vanity Fair* and other media—is aiming for a pastiche of the exposés such periodicals trot out in the wake of an eminent school’s scandal. If so, his novel suggests that fiction has a better chance of getting at more of the truth.

A complex, sometimes confusing work by a talented writer.

When our hero sails to 15th-century London, he acquires the first books ever printed in the English Language. Worth millions, he hopes to transport these back to the 21st century along with an ancient manuscript encompassing the wisdom of the ages.

ISBN: 978-1-736-62712-9 [paperback]
 ISBN: 978-1-736-62713-6 [eBook]

“A creative fantasy rendition of past-meets-present.”
 —Kirkus Reviews

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MILD VERTIGO

Kanai, Mieko
Trans. by Polly Barton
New Directions (192 pp.)
\$16.95 paper | May 2, 2023
9780811232289



Consumed by the minutiae of caring for a family, a Tokyo housewife ekes out a perfectly ordinary but profoundly unfulfilling existence.

Newly translated by Barton, this brief but piercing stream-of-consciousness novel manages to feel topical more than 25 years after it was published in Japan in 1997. Its eight chapters and 190-odd pages are linked not so much by plot as by tone and theme. Thirty-something wife and mother Natsumi spends her days doing chores, running errands, gossiping with neighbors, and tending to her husband and their two young sons, all the while fighting a vague, nagging sense of ennui. Natsumi resigned from her “easy-but-tedious job” after she’d had her first child and has not worked outside the home since. Her inner monologue, a vivid mishmash of memories and observations, mingles with the events of the book to provide a window into her perspective. While Natsumi acknowledges that her life is not bad per se, she is nevertheless frustrated by its monotony and mundanity. She has visited the nearby supermarket so many times that she has the layout of the store memorized. When she finds an old shopping list in a jacket pocket one day, she’s “utterly sickened” to discover that it’s nearly identical to the one she wrote on a memo pad moments before. “There was,” she thinks at one point, “something Sisyphean in the nature of the roster of simple domestic tasks that she had to get through day in day out, a sense that however much she did there was never any end in sight.” Laden with descriptions of objects and locations, Kanai’s detail-rich sentences offer a specificity of time and place that make the story feel grounded in reality. In portraying Natsumi’s conflicted relationship to her roles as wife, mother, and housekeeper, Kanai considers the potentially reductive effects of marriage, motherhood, and domesticity on personal identity.

A subtle, thoughtful portrait of a woman chafing at the demands and constraints of domestic life.



WILD THINGS

Kay, Laura
Vintage (320 pp.)
\$17.00 paper | May 23, 2023
9780593470053

Eleanor Evans’ so-called Wild Year is in full swing, but her enthusiasm for doing something wild every month is waning. Perhaps creating a queer commune with a bunch of friends will add intrigue to an otherwise conventional life.

Leaving London was never part of El’s plan. Neither was falling in love with Ray, her co-worker and best friend, who

looks very good in a blazer. But El is determined to make some sweeping changes in her life. So when her token straight friend, Will, lures El and Ray and their fourth pal, the flamboyant Jamie, into the country to see a house he wants to buy and renovate and proposes that they all do it together, El and the others are ready to go for it. And luckily (or perhaps torturously for El), Ray is good with tools. The group soon starts a popular home renovation Instagram account, becomes parents to a group of chickens named after Twilight characters, learns the challenges of a long commute, and joins their adopted village’s WhatsApp group to be privy to the local drama. All the while, El continues to pursue her Wild Year, though the only motivation that seems to keep her going is her affection for the otherwise occupied Ray. Predictably, though, El can’t keep her feelings to herself, and the novel’s biggest conflict resolves rather quickly. El’s wildness, or maybe her lack of wildness, has led her to take risks to gain a happy life, which is perhaps the most out-there wish any Millennial can have. Kay has a sharp eye for Millennial culture, and her humorous dialogue and fully fleshed-out characters make for a satisfying novel.

A queer coming-of-adulthood tale with enough cheekiness to make growing up seem not so bad.



YOU CAN'T STAY HERE FOREVER

Lin, Katherine
Harper/HarperCollins (304 pp.)
\$28.99 | June 13, 2023
9780063241435

After her husband is killed in a car crash, a recently married lawyer learns he was involved with another woman for years.

And it’s someone she works with! This disgusting detail is just one piece of an avalanche of bad news that tumbles down on poor Ellie Huang in the first chapters of Lin’s debut. By the time she learns that her husband, Ian Anderson, a lawyer of less skill and brains but significantly more social elbow grease than she, was screwing this other woman even before he proposed marriage, she’s reeling. It’s then that a piece of somewhat better news arrives—Ian had life insurance based on a forecast of his future earnings, and Ellie is the sole beneficiary. In addition, her supervisor at work really thinks she needs to take some time off, as her sentences have stopped making sense. Her best friend, Mable Chou, who has been staying over at Ellie’s house every night since the accident, strongly recommends therapy. She could pay off the house, but does she even want to live there anymore? Ellie decides to put her windfall to use flying Mable and herself first class to Nice, and then on to the ultra-luxurious Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc in Antibes. This premise sounds like fun, but Lin’s protagonist is no merry widow, and her narrative takes things in a more serious direction. At the resort, Ellie and Mable make friends with a somewhat mysterious couple—the man Asian like them, the woman White. Long-standing flaws in the friendship are exposed

“This well-told tale with rich prose and relatable characters is a good primer on Ukraine.”

IVAN AND PHOEBE

by their differing reactions to Robbie and Fauna as well as by Ellie’s choppy processing of her complicated grief and rage. (Mable’s right—she really does need therapy.) Lin’s treatment of the glamorous, decadent setting, with its stream of gourmet meals and artisanal cocktails, is far from escapist wealth porn—she has complicated things to say about privilege and its intersection with race, ambition, and identity.

A probing, astute portrayal of a fraught and late-blooming coming-of-age.



THE FRIDAY NIGHT CLUB

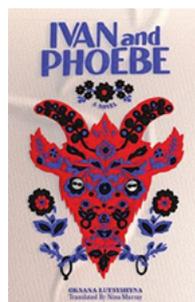
Lundberg, Sofia, Alyson Richman & M.J. Rose

Berkley (336 pp.)
\$17.00 paper | May 16, 2023
9780593200490

A group of gifted women refused to break under the limitations of the early-20th-century art world.

When most people think about the artists responsible for the earliest abstract paintings, Kandinsky and Mondrian come to mind. But in the early 20th century, Swedish artist Hilma af Klint was actually the first to paint in an abstract, nonobjective style, and in this cinematic reimagining of her life we meet a woman of incredible talent who found a way to preserve her creations for posterity and garner the respect she deserved. After creating more than a thousand paintings with the help of four indomitable friends—together they called themselves De Fem, or The Five—af Klint decided her creations would not be made public until 20 years after her death. Shunned by the male art establishment, she hoped society would eventually evolve to appreciate her talents. In this bracing novel of female empowerment, the story of af Klint and her contemporaries is told over the decades they helped and supported each other and describes how their fervent belief in mysticism led to the creation of artworks of enormous impact and influence. In a present-day subplot, a curator at the Guggenheim Museum unearths new information about De Fem and truths that some would prefer to remain hidden. Using lively dialogue and an engaging narrative voice, authors Lundberg, Richman, and Rose paint an intriguing and feminist-centric portrayal of af Klint and her circle, women who were ahead of their time and unafraid to channel the voices of spirits they believed were guiding af Klint’s work.

A lively and illuminating reimagining of an artist whose name we shouldn’t forget.



IVAN AND PHOEBE

Lutsyshyna, Oksana
Trans. by Nina Murray
Deep Vellum (425 pp.)
\$26.95 | June 6, 2023
9781646052622

Two Ukrainians struggle against the backdrop of the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.

Even after the USSR craters, Ivan fears that spies lurk behind him. “Don’t look for shadows behind your back,” a friend likes to say. Ivan and Phoebe fall briefly in love, if that’s what you can call it, and marry. Ivan is reluctant about the match to start with, but he gives in to family and social pressures. It’s a mistake from the get-go. Phoebe’s real name is Maria, but her chosen name alludes to Phoebus, the Greek god of poetry. Before the marriage, she’d lent Ivan a floppy disk with all her poems, which he neither cares about nor ever returns. Perhaps he sees in her poetry the key to Phoebe’s developing into her own person, which would endanger his dreams. He will provide for them—he has a plan. Phoebe becomes pregnant with Emilia, whom they both love, but Ivan refuses to allow her to do anything but stay home with in-laws who can’t stand her. She gets clear second billing both in this novel and in life—Ivan dreams of a better future for himself but prohibits Phoebe from pursuing her love of poetry. In the story’s most telling line, “he shared his parenthood with Phoebe—Phoebe about whom he could not imagine talking to anyone at all.” So while she’s stuck at home, Ivan goes out into the local world trying to find a decent job. Meanwhile, Ivan laments his lack of control over life after communism. He and Phoebe played bit parts in the political upheaval and struggle for democracy but remain far removed from influence over Ukraine’s future. Yes, they’d once been part of history, two people among thousands protesting in the Maidan, Lviv’s main square. Ivan feels that but for the protests by him and his comrades in arms, the Soviet Union would still be “alive and well.” But now what? Both husband and wife are trapped in a societal collapse and its painful rebirth, and they don’t even have each other for solace.

This well-told tale with rich prose and relatable characters is a good primer on Ukraine.



THE WIFE APP

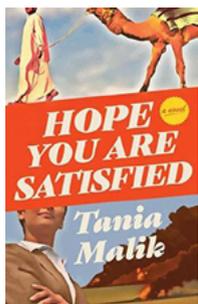
Mackler, Carolyn
Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)
\$27.99 | June 27, 2023
978-1-9821-5879-8

Three divorced mothers in Manhattan join forces to create an app “to right marital inequalities” in this breezy look at gender imbalance.

Independently wealthy business school dropout Madeline Wallace, who has been

happily divorced since her ex-husband transferred to London shortly after their daughter was born 14 years ago, borders on obsessive in how much she loves single motherhood. Lauren Zuckerman loves her 12-year-old twin daughters, too, but having recently gotten divorced after learning her ex-husband was having sex with prostitutes, she now regrets that she gave up a high-powered tech career to freelance and carry more of the parenting load. Literacy teacher Sophie Smart, who doesn't talk much about her bisexuality, struggles to support her sons, 12 and 7, with minimal help from her ex-husband, who has married and had a baby with a successful lawyer Sophie can't help both envying and liking. During a dinner celebrating Lauren's divorce, Madeline half-seriously suggests that Lauren should develop an app to help women monetize the chores and, more importantly, the "mental load" of being a wife. Lauren takes Madeline's idea and runs with it. The viewpoints shift among the three as the app develops, grows, and suddenly catches fire. Lauren handles the tech, Madeline the finance, and Sophie client relations. What starts as a socially conscious novel about the plight of women becomes an increasingly lightweight romp. Although "mental load" remains the main reference point throughout the book, the emphasis shifts to romance (plus sex) and relatively minor, ultimately solvable child-rearing crises, what Madeline acknowledges are "first-world problems." There is surprisingly little social texture; these likable-enough women live in a world without racial tension or political anxiety. Although Mackler's protagonists are around 40 and would have been barely 20 at the turn of the 21st century, they could easily populate an updated *Sex and the City*.

Mackler knows how to shape scenes and characters but offers an oddly dated, privileged version of feminism lite.



HOPE YOU ARE SATISFIED

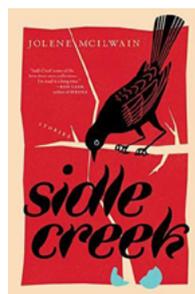
Malik, Tania
 Unnamed Press (225 pp.)
 \$28.00 | May 2, 2023
 9781951213695

In the months between Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and the war that might end life as she knows it, a young Indian woman attempts to build a future.

Dubai's Discover Arabia Tours has been low on bookings since the nearby invasion. Even so, Riya shepherds her few remaining guests from pristine beaches to desert safaris, pointing out the camel caravans without mentioning that their young riders are indentured servants. Riya herself is stuck in the "paradise" she spends her time shilling. At home in India, Riya's struggling family eagerly awaits each remittance. A visit home would cost Riya her job and her visa, so she stays, working for paychecks she wires away as soon as she earns them, building a life in a country where citizenship is unachievable. As Riya puts it: "Forever was an impossibility here." When César Rodríguez, a dodgy import/export magnate, selects Riya for a dangerous job, she must decide whether to risk everything for a chance at more. Riya

and her colleagues, a pack of young international professionals, dream of faraway futures while George H.W. Bush's ultimatum ticks closer and closer to war. They inhabit a kind of hyperpresent in their brand new city whose future is as uncertain as their own. In December, when rumor spreads that charcoal might prove useful in the event of chemical warfare, the group manages to scrounge up enough to fuel their beach barbecue. Leaving the war to the epilogue, Malik's novel tautly occupies the in between. Dubai itself pulls many of the strings, with a dark glamour that outshines the protagonist's nebulous inner life. Riya's understanding of and involvement in international affairs prove more interesting than her personal conflicts, which are resolved in a rush. Despite an uneven plot, Malik manages to propel the reader forward while conveying the stagnation of Riya's circumstances.

A suspenseful story stowed in the moment before a major historical event.



SIDLE CREEK

McIlwain, Jolene
 Melville House (256 pp.)
 \$17.99 paper | May 16, 2023
 9781685890414

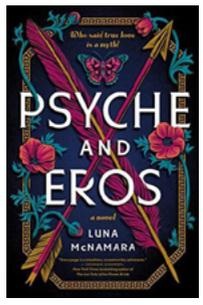
A debut story collection set in the Appalachian Mountains.

Like fictional Sidle Creek, wandering through rural western Pennsylvania, McIlwain's stories wind through the same country, touching down in the lives of locals. Here is the new widower in "The Fractal Geometry of Grief," besotted with a fawn who appears in his yard one day, trying to save her as he could not save his wife. Here's Tiller, the protagonist of "Shell," who can read the future in the natural world and one day discovers news on a red-winged blackbird egg that he doesn't want to know. Here's the closeted gay cafe owner in "Those Red Boots" who inadvertently puts his waitresses at risk by making them wear old cheerleading uniforms and sexy boots. Here, nature is restorative and healing. In the title story, a teenage girl tries to cure her endometriosis by placing stones from Sidle Creek on her belly: "I could feel the Sidle's love walking deep inside. It made me want to live." While fracking and mining are alluded to, the book seems blissfully (or foolishly?) disengaged from the climate crisis, as though there are still pockets of nature untouched by human activity. Still, McIlwain writes beautifully of the work that people do: the sawmill owner who knows "the type of the wood or how wet it is by the sound it makes when it meets the blade"; the farmer who "could handle overripened tomatoes without bruising them"; and the four tween girls who spend their summer caring for a woman with a high-risk pregnancy. At the same time, a few stories get invested in extending metaphors at the expense of illuminating human heartache. And while the conflict between amoral city men and vigilante country folk may flare up sometimes in real life, it feels tired here.

Stories about a timeless rural America.

“An effective, heartfelt novelization of a famous Greek myth.”

PSYCHE AND EROS

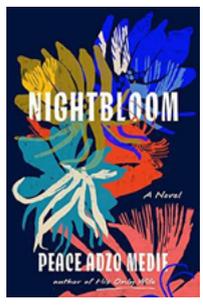


PSYCHE AND EROS
McNamara, Luna
 Morrow/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
 \$30.00 | June 13, 2023
 9780063295070

The myth of Eros and Psyche comes to life in McNamara’s debut.

The princess Psyche was literally born to greatness. Before her birth, her father, King Alkaios of Mycenae, heard from the Oracle of Delphi that his child would grow up to “conquer a monster feared by the gods themselves.” When Psyche arrives, surprising everyone by being born a girl, Alkaios decides to train her to be a strong hero just as he would have if she’d been born a boy. As Psyche grows up and is taught by the legendary female hero Atalanta, she grows eager for the chance to fulfill that prophecy. One day, she’s summoned to the top of a mountain to finally meet the monster that will make her a hero. Ready for battle, she waits on the mountain only to be swept away by a gust of wind, landing at the magical home of a mysterious god who claims to be her husband. Psyche is frightened and confused, not least of all because her divine husband cannot show her his face, lest she be burned alive from a terrible curse. Psyche is correct that this curse of burning isn’t actually real, but little does she know that her husband told her this lie to protect her from the true curse: that the moment the two lovers set eyes on each other, they will be torn apart forever. McNamara’s creative take on Eros and Psyche is a thoughtful reflection on the meaning of love in all its forms. Her narrative foundation is set on real versions of the myth, and any changes she makes or gaps she fills in (for example, including characters like Atalanta as Psyche’s mentor) place her tale within the wider context of women’s lives and place in society during the Trojan War. Trained to be a fighter and destined to be a lover, Psyche also learns to consider whether violence is truly heroic or if there are other ways to be brave.

An effective, heartfelt novelization of a famous Greek myth.



NIGHTBLOOM
Medie, Peace Adzo
 Algonquin (352 pp.)
 \$22.99 | June 13, 2023
 9781643752846

When a childhood friendship sours, two young Ghanaian women are filled with confusion and spite.

Cousins Akorfa and Selasi were inseparable as children, and the friendship between their mothers guaranteed they spent lots of time together. But according to Akorfa, who tells the first half of the story, her mother always knew “that my cousin would grow up to break all that she touched, even the people who loved her.” Akorfa’s family has more money,

and Akorfa is a better student than Selasi; this puts the friends on an unequal basis from the start, and Akorfa’s mean-spirited mother makes sure no one forgets it. Then Selasi’s mother dies in childbirth when the girls are 11. Her father sends her to live with her grandmother and moves on to start a new family; not long after, Akorfa’s family moves to Accra. By the time Selasi comes to visit, things have changed between them. Akorfa goes to college in the U.S., then moves there permanently. She’s married, in her 30s, and returning home for her father’s memorial when she next sees Selasi, who is ice cold. “I turned to my mother. ‘What did we do to her? I want to know. What have we done to Selasi?’ ” The next half of the book answers that question by starting the whole story over from Selasi’s point of view—not the wisest narrative choice—and following her into adulthood. A brief final section is told in third person. Following the success of *His Only Wife* (2020), Medie seems to have bitten off more than she can chew, with themes of sexual predation, Black life in the U.S., and Ghanaian political corruption elbowing their ways into what is already an ungainly structure for the story of a broken friendship. The resolution feels forced, with a deus ex machina introduced to inspire Akorfa and Selasi to reveal the secrets that have warped their lives.

This sophomore effort is likely to disappoint fans of Medie’s fine debut.



SAME TIME NEXT SUMMER
Monaghan, Annabel
 Putnam (320 pp.)
 \$17.00 paper | June 6, 2023
 9780593544969

On the eve of her wedding, a woman runs into the teenage love who broke her heart.

Sam has her life all figured out. She’s got Jack, her perfect doctor fiancé; a nice Manhattan apartment; and a job she’s good at (even if she might have just messed it up). Now she’s headed out to her family’s Long Island beach house to tour a potential wedding venue and finally introduce Jack to the kind of summers she grew up with, even though they might be a little less straight-laced than he’s used to. What she wasn’t anticipating was that Wyatt—the boy next door she was in love with all through her childhood and whom she hasn’t seen since she was 17, when he broke her heart—would be there, cheerfully enmeshed back in her family. Long-forgotten feelings bubble under the surface as Sam must figure out if the life she’s created is the one she really wants. The book jumps back and forth in time, starting in the present and flashing back chronologically through Sam and Wyatt’s growing-up years, relationship, and breakup. This means there’s a lot of buildup for the inevitable split, and it’s impossible for the breakup not to feel like a letdown. The story also feels lopsided in that the modern-day sections (with one small exception) are narrated by Sam while the flashback sections alternate between Sam’s and Wyatt’s points of view. While that structure does let the reader understand why Wyatt did what he did as a teen, it’s an odd contrast with the mysterious Wyatt of the

present. The book would have been stronger if it had either fully stayed with Sam's journey or followed both leads. Interesting side characters are left disappointingly half-baked to focus on fairly standard protagonists.

A love story with a lot of bark but little bite.



DROWNING

Newman, T.J.

Avid Reader Press (304 pp.)

\$25.20 | May 30, 2023

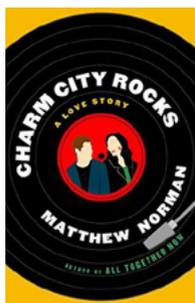
978-1-982177-91-1

A spectacular aviation thriller that readers will be relieved to know is fiction.

Just off the coast of Hawaii, Flight 1421's engine explodes minutes after take-off with 99 souls aboard. With no controls, "the plane was dead in the air," and

the pilot makes an emergency landing into the Pacific Ocean, with inevitable but disastrous results. Although some people perish on impact, "the worst was yet to come." The survivors are left with a Hobson's choice: escape the airplane and hope the burning jet fuel on the ocean's surface doesn't kill them or stay in the fuselage and probably drown when it sinks and is crushed by the depths. Twelve passengers and crew remain alive in the Airbus, including Will Kent and his 11-year-old daughter, Shannon. On a nearby island, Will's soon-to-be-ex-wife Chris learns about the crash and decides to help in the rescue efforts. By an amazing coincidence, she just happens to have all the engineering, scuba diving, and spot-welding chops to complement her fierce Mama Bear personality. Meanwhile, Will convinces a few passengers to stay inside the sinking fuselage as they desperately look for ways to keep the structure watertight. In an important subplot, Will and Chris separately reflect on what had gone so terribly wrong in their family: Their older daughter, Annie, had died years before, and neither parent knows how to cope with that pain. Now Chris faces still more losses: her family, the remaining passengers and crew, and perhaps her own life. The wrecked Airbus is balanced on the precipice of a cliff 200 feet below the surface, close to the limits of where anyone can come to help. If it falls off the edge, all hope is lost. If readers can get past a few hair-raising and cringeworthy early scenes, they'll find themselves engrossed in this darned good thriller.

A taut, gripping yarn. Not for the weak-kneed.



CHARM CITY ROCKS

Norman, Matthew

Dell (368 pp.)

\$17.00 paper | June 6, 2023

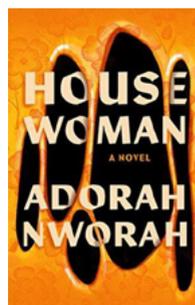
9780593499832

An average Joe gets a chance to date the rock star he used to crush on as a teenager, and it's nothing like he would have expected.

Billy Perkins is the most likable guy. Everybody thinks so, including Billy's

18-year-old son, Caleb; Caleb's mom, Robyn; and even Robyn's husband, Aaron. Billy is a piano teacher who lives above a record store in Baltimore, and on nights when Caleb stays with him, Billy tries to impart wisdom on the topics of "Art and Manhood." One such night, when they're watching a documentary about the all-female rock band Billy loved as a teenager, Billy confesses how he used to pine over the drummer, Margot Hammer. That's when Caleb concocts a plan. If he could somehow get Margot to meet his dad, she would love him, just like everybody else does. Too bad Margot has turned into a recluse in the years since the band broke up. Luckily, Caleb is a pretty smart kid, and he lures Margot out of hiding through a cockamamie scheme that he conceives while accidentally high on gummy bears laced with weed. Once Margot gets over being duped, she does actually fall for Billy's charm. They start spending time together, and it's only a hot second before pictures of them begin circulating on the internet. Suddenly, everyone remembers how much they once adored Margot, from fans to former band mates to her movie-star ex-husband. As people from her old life reappear, Margot has to choose between new possibilities with Billy or the world she lost so many years before. The story follows the characters as they navigate the messy emotions of growing up, growing closer, and growing apart. Full of tongue-in-cheek adoration for the city of Baltimore, from its beers to its obsession with crabs, the story is also packed with witticisms and nostalgic rock references that will be best appreciated by Gen Xers. With clever dialogue, unpredictable twists, laugh-out-loud moments, and heartwarming joy, this is really a book about nice guys.

Pure fun.



HOUSE WOMAN

Nworah, Adorah

Unnamed Press (276 pp.)

\$28.00 | June 6, 2023

9781951213565

A young Nigerian American man is offered a "wife" against her will in this domestic thriller.

A successful lawyer in Philadelphia, Nnaemeka returns to Texas to visit his parents and finds a strange woman in the kitchen. He's immediately attracted to her "musical" voice, her shape, her cooking—and doesn't care much about her story. To him, Ikemefuna is "simplicity itself." Their parents knew each other in Lagos many years ago, and now she has come to America to be his wife. As the novel offers different perspectives from chapter to chapter, switching not only between Nna and Ikemefuna, but also their mothers and the next-door neighbor, it is quickly revealed that this is not just an arranged marriage story. Ikemefuna seems trapped in the house; Nna's parents have taken (and eaten) her passport. They force her to cook, to please and obey all of them, and to sleep with Nna so that she might become pregnant as soon as possible. Nna refuses to believe what she tells him about

“Another love letter to Appalachia with a high body count. Another bloody delight.”

CODE OF THE HILLS

his parents, and soon he, too, is part of the abuse. The novel teems with menace, and at a time when Black horror is thriving in Hollywood, there are early hints that there might be supernatural elements to the conflict. Ikemefuna sometimes blacks out and commits acts of violence, and then there is the strange fact that Nna looks eerily like her mother. There is no escaping, however, the real truth at the heart of the horror: This is a novel about crime, crimes committed in the name of male supremacy. It is even more so, though, a novel that interrogates the American dream and the idea that leaving home truly allows one greater opportunity to thrive. It's about how the sins of the past cannot be outrun and how everyone has a breaking point.

A modern successor to *Gaslight*: disorienting and disturbing.



THE RACHEL INCIDENT

O'Donoghue, Caroline
Knopf (304 pp.)
\$28.00 | June 27, 2023
9780593535707

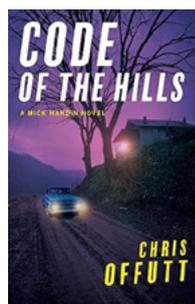


A college student gets caught in the middle of a friend's romance in this delightful Irish novel.

It's 2009, the height of the economic recession, and as the end of Rachel Murray's college degree looms,

she can't help feeling worried about having chosen to study English given the lack of job prospects. But then she develops a crush on Fred Byrne, her Victorian literature professor, a "huge" and "passionate" man whose most alluring quality is that his "wife had been a student." Rachel's new friend James Devlin—who insists he isn't gay despite Rachel's strong suspicions to the contrary—pushes her to pursue her crush by arranging for Dr. Byrne to have an event for his new book at the bookshop where they both work. At the reading, though, Dr. Byrne shows no interest in Rachel; instead, she walks in on him and James making out in the stockroom. This turns Rachel's life on its head, but not in the ways she expected: Her friendship with James becomes more intimate, and now she has to keep secrets for Dr. Byrne, which becomes more complicated when she starts working for his wife, Aideen. This deliciously complex set of entanglements lays the groundwork for the novel, O'Donoghue's first for adults to be published in the United States, and brings to mind the gossipy 19th-century novels Dr. Byrne might teach in class. But its true joys lie in the tremendously witty characters and their relationships: The real love story of this novel is not between James and Dr. Byrne, or Rachel and her own paramour, but between Rachel and James, whose codependent glee in each other's company will remind many readers of their own college friendships, especially those between women and queer men.

A sensational new entry in the burgeoning millennial-novel genre.



CODE OF THE HILLS

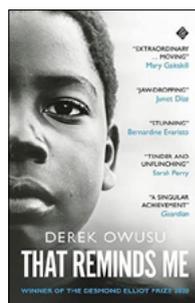
Offutt, Chris
Grove (288 pp.)
\$27.00 | June 13, 2023
9780802161918



Excellent Kentucky noir—Offutt's third Mick Hardin novel is the best yet.

Mick, a veteran Army investigator, has finally mustered out after 20 years of service, and he's headed home to Rocksalt for a quick last look and goodbye before he retires (or exiles himself) to Corsica. Just as he arrives home, though, a body is discovered—a crusty old race-car mechanic has been killed, and Mick's sister, Linda, the sheriff, begins investigating. Mick agrees to help her deputy, Johnny Boy, with a tricky eviction order—a father is trying to boot his son and the son's wife from the deluxe chicken house in which they've been squatting—and before long the two lawmen have found not only a link to the mechanic's murder, but a second corpse. Immediately thereafter, Linda gets into harm's way...and with her out of action, Mick is sucked back into investigative work and given a field promotion to temporary deputy. What ensues involves cockfighting, rattlesnake-milking, a perilous trip to Detroit (and to "Ypsitucky" beyond it), and in the end Mick once again has to negotiate both the code of the hills (a reference in this case to the tradition of honor- or vengeance-killing) and the murky and tangled ethics that come into play when a law enforcer values justice above the letter of the law. Offutt once again beautifully captures both the roughness and the generosity of the inhabitants of Rocksalt, both the menace and the beauty of the eastern Kentucky landscape. The dialogue is a highlight, consistently sharp, quick, and funny; in that, Offutt is rapidly becoming a rural-noir rival to greats like Elmore Leonard.

Another love letter to Appalachia with a high body count. Another bloody delight.



THAT REMINDS ME

Owusu, Derek
And Other Stories (120 pp.)
\$16.95 paper | June 27, 2023
978-1-91350-555-4

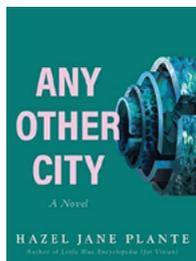


A young London man navigates depression in this hypnotic book.

There's a life packed inside the pages of this slim novel. One of Owusu's most impressive achievements here is creating the space of a much larger life—both for the novel's narrator, K, and for K's family—through elliptical references. The prose is often stunning: "So now I breathe British air with airs akin to royal heirs—my mum thought she was making a dark life fair." The first half is told in short vignettes, each a page or less, and even in the second half, the chapters remain brief. K spends several early years in a

foster home before reconnecting with his parents. His observations balance quotidian details—like the way he watched movies on TV in his youth—with more wrenching evocations of the crueler parts of childhood. At one point, for example, a friend of K’s comes to visit and is struck by his family’s poverty. “When we bickered in school, my living conditions were his weapon of choice,” Owusu writes. K’s family ties to Ghana are a constant; a reference to “suitcases longing for their promised flight to Ghana” makes for another powerful image. As he grows older, K deals with depression; a stint in therapy ends when his therapist asks him, “Who taught you to hate yourself, K?” Even as Owusu writes about unsettling experiences, like the way K gains weight from taking medication for his mental health, his prose remains deft: “We call it uncle belly. I call it antidepressants causing more problems than solving.” By novel’s end, the reader is left feeling as though they’ve experienced another person’s life, both the ecstatic heights and harrowing depths.

Owusu reckons movingly with complex personal and familial dynamics.



ANY OTHER CITY

Plante, Hazel Jane
Arsenal Pulp Press (352 pp.)
\$19.95 paper | April 18, 2023
9781551529110

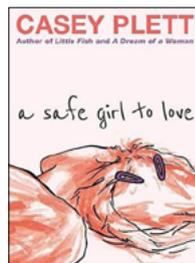
Tracy St. Cyr is a 40-something semi-famous rock musician whose memoir focuses on two distinct periods, 1993 and 2019, excavating the trauma of relationships and transitions—first girlfriend to

worst girlfriend, aspiring artist to legit indie star, passive adolescent to riotous trans girl.

Lead singer and guitarist of Static Saints, Tracy has divided her two personal epochs into Sides A and B, locating her firmly on a wry, lo-fi, then-and-now Gen X axis where reality can bite. Or as she says, “I felt like a hot aging punk dyke and realized that maybe I was a hot aging punk dyke.” Side A has an un-deadnamed Tracy chronicling first love and loss with Astrid while living in an unnamed city, alone until falling in with a dazzling coven of trans artists. In Side B she’s back in the same city, alone again and recovering from a devastating relationship with suicidal butch barkeep Johnny. And the transformations she once again finds here are restorative, generative, and very, very hot. As Tracy slips seamlessly into an eloquent and extremely explicit erogenous zone, Plante convincingly makes the case that there is in fact a difference between erotica and porn. The reader will also learn: how to eat an oyster, how to fist, how to muff. If only Plante had let Tracy keep exploring and explaining herself (on her “slutty” grad school years: “I drew the line at business and criminology students. I mean, we all need standards”). Instead, relentless inside-baseball musical references feel less like scene-setting and more like name-checking to establish music-geek bona fides. Mary Timony, Redd Kross, Langley Schools Music Project....Okaaay. Not least, it’s difficult

to imagine many readers having enough particular knowledge or patience to stick with it. Similarly, Tracy’s protracted creative sessions can be pedantic at best, more likely just plain dull (“I put a capo on the second fret of my guitar and fumbled around with chords, finally locating a simple chord progression: Bm D A E”). And curiously, rather than just writing a first-person novel, Plante has inserted herself into the story as “co-author” of St. Cyr’s memoirs. She hits the conceit hard in a giddy foreword but abandons it entirely until a second foreword, this time from Tracy opening the 2019 section. The premise, which adds exactly nothing, is one darling that should have been killed.

Eye-glazing esoterica notwithstanding, this dreamy, erotic “memoir” is a smart, sexy affair.



A SAFE GIRL TO LOVE

Plett, Casey
Arsenal Pulp Press (280 pp.)
\$18.95 paper | April 4, 2023
9781551529134

A new edition of Plett’s debut collection resurfaces 11 thoughtful stories exploring the lives of young trans women as they attempt to carve out space for themselves, set often in Canada and the

Pacific Northwest.

Sophie returns to Winnipeg to spend the holidays with family. Lizzy and Annie wake up in bed together and begin a new relationship. Zoe helps her mother pack up her childhood home in Eugene, Oregon. These snippets of everyday life include friends with blue hair and blue hoodies that make them look like “an angry drunken Skittle” or text messages from parents that read, “Your room is a shithole. I love you!” They also come with an ever present tension, a feeling that the other shoe could drop at any moment. Many of Plett’s characters seem to sense this for themselves. In ways ranging from fun to awkward, from endearing to heartbreaking, they grapple with what it might mean for their physical or emotional safety. This subtle foreboding is particularly well served by the use of second-person narration, as deployed in stories like “How to Stay Friends.” Here, the narrator walks you through a dinner between exes and outlines what “you” should do next. It’s an exercise that becomes blisteringly painful when “you” recount the stalking and harassment you’ve experienced post-transition and then have to wait to see how your ex-girlfriend will respond. Will she commiserate? Attribute it to life as a woman? Offer advice about how to protect yourself? Blame it on your choices? It’s one of many scenes that evoke the feeling of holding your breath and that seem to hang in the air for a long while after rather than fully or easily resolving. In these cases, the focus is less on what happens than on what *could*.

A collection driven by deeply human, sometimes humorous, but always exquisitely rendered details.

“This unsparing version of the modern American tragedy is more fun to read than can possibly be right.”

FIREWORKS EVERY NIGHT

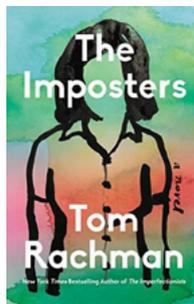


YOU WERE ALWAYS MINE
Pride, Christine & Jo Piazza
 Atria (336 pp.)
 \$28.00 | June 13, 2023
 9781668005507

Long-hidden secrets and trauma threaten two women’s plans for their lives.

Pride and Piazza, the duo behind *We Are Not Like Them* (2021), a thought-provoking and popular-with-book-clubs treatment of race and interracial friendships, advance that conversation with a contemporary story about race and mothering. Cinnamon Haynes, a 34-year-old community college counselor, lives with her (unsuccessful) entrepreneur husband, Jayson. Cinnamon survived for years as a Black child in the foster care system and still deals with its painful legacy. One coping mechanism she employs is to avoid revealing her background to most people, including her best friend, Lucia, and Jayson. When Cinnamon strikes up a casual but genuine friendship with Daisy, a 19-year-old White woman she’s taken to meeting every Friday in a local park for lunch, the stakes are raised dramatically in Cinnamon’s game of escaping her past. Daisy, who carries several secrets of her own, upends Cinnamon’s carefully constructed facade when she designs a plan for Cinnamon to “accidentally” find and then raise the baby daughter she’s given birth to after a concealed pregnancy (and her flight from the area). Reluctant to subject anyone else to the conditions and experiences she suffered in the care system, Cinnamon struggles to balance her increasing affection for the blue-eyed baby—whom she refers to as Bluebell—against the social and personal factors weighing against her becoming Bluebell’s adoptive mother. Pride and Piazza’s narrative offers myriad opportunities for reflections on interracial adoption, the loss of cultural and racial legacy in those adoptions, and what is truly in the best interest of the child. The slow reveal of Cinnamon’s journey allows for varying points of view to be shared, including those of friends, spouses, mothers-in-laws, and social workers, as well as the motivations of both Cinnamon and Daisy.

Pride and Piazza ask hard questions about race and what it means to be a mother.



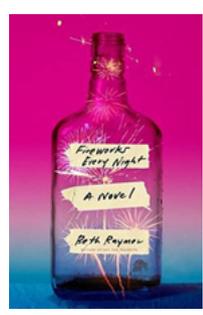
THE IMPOSTERS
Rachman, Tom
 Little, Brown (352 pp.)
 \$29.00 | June 27, 2023
 9780316552851

The final manuscript by an elderly novelist whose memory is failing is the springboard for a meditation on the creative process and the loneliness of the writer’s life.

Dora Frenhofer was never a bestselling author, and over the years her “succession of small novels about small men in small crises” have sold fewer and fewer copies

for smaller and smaller publishers. Now, 73 years old and isolated in her London home by the pandemic lockdown, she works desultorily on a new novel written in her own voice (“not pretending to be anyone else for a change”), with each chapter centered on a different character. These chapters alternate with diary entries that describe Dora’s experiences during the lockdown and end with various crossed-out sentences that eventually lead to the opening of the next chapter. Each chapter’s protagonist is someone connected to Dora: her estranged daughter, her brother, an immigrant hired to clear out her house, a fellow participant in a literary festival, a bicycle deliveryman, a former lover, and a long-time friend. She invents stories for them—an unrequited love, imprisonment and torture, the murders of two children—that are slowly revealed to be Dora’s embroidery of events from her own history. Or are they? Nothing is for certain in an intricately braided narrative that constantly suggests new possibilities about the factual underpinnings of fiction. The characters are viewed through Dora’s uncharitable eyes; the compassion for damaged souls that suffused such earlier Rachman novels as *The Rise & Fall of the Great Powers* and *The Italian Teacher* is still in evidence here, but it’s muffled by Dora’s brutally blunt judgments of their personal failings and professional failures—and her own. The interplay among various versions of the characters’ links to Dora is fascinating, and Rachman’s prose is lucid and elegant, as always. But the bleak tone throughout, culminating in an appropriately grim conclusion, makes this austere novel difficult to engage with emotionally.

Fine, uncompromising work likely to prompt admiration more than wholehearted appreciation.



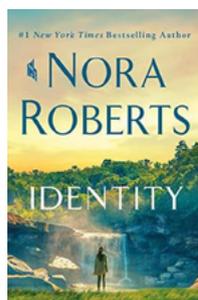
FIREWORKS EVERY NIGHT
Raymer, Beth
 Random House (240 pp.)
 \$26.00 | June 27, 2023
 9780812993165

A family of South Florida transplants has a shining moment of promise, then the hard times start rolling in.

As the book opens, C.C. Borkoski is at an engagement party being thrown by her wealthy future in-laws, the Wellmans, whose Connecticut home commands a view of Long Island Sound. She is surprised to learn that her mother has been invited—because the guest list was so “lopsided,” her fiancé explains. “Your side was basically blank.” “There’s a reason for that!” says C.C., shocked to learn her mother even has email, much less that she has RSVP’d that she will be attending. The remainder of this novel will explain what happened to C.C.’s family, people who live in a very different America than the Wellmans. From the engagement party, we flash back to C.C. at 12, at a Florida rest stop eating sliced orange samples. Since her family’s used car lot and home in Ohio burned to the ground, they are on their way to a new life. And as it turns out, “Loxahatchee was the best life my childhood self could conceive of.” For a while. But while C.C.

gets her first boyfriend and becomes a regional basketball phenom, her big sister, Lorraine, turns into someone she can't even recognize, and let's not even start on what happens to her parents or to C.C.'s marriage into the upper crust. The same evocative language and crackerjack storytelling Raymer displayed in her debut memoir, *Lay the Favorite* (2010), make her debut fiction a richly entertaining read even as the betrayals and misfortunes come raining down. The mythic level of the difficulties that confront the humans in the book are highlighted by C.C.'s job as a marketing writer at a Florida zoo full of animals in desperate straits due to changes in the environment—a homeless shelter, as she thinks of it. As Raymer's readers, we are like the manatees in the last image of the novel, having a fine old time playing in the warm-water discharge of a power plant at sunset.

This unsparing version of the modern American tragedy is more fun to read than can possibly be right.



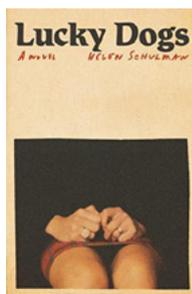
IDENTITY

Roberts, Nora
St. Martin's (448 pp.)
\$21.00 | May 23, 2023
9781250284112

After escaping from a serial killer, a woman tries to reclaim her life.

After a childhood as an Army brat, Morgan Albright is determined to put down roots. She bought a small house in the perfect neighborhood outside of Baltimore, living with a friend and working two jobs to make ends meet. Morgan's life is happy and fulfilling, and she is making progress on her financial and career goals. Her perfect world is shattered when someone breaks into her home and murders her roommate. At first, the police assume it was a random act of violence, but after discovering the killer stole Morgan's identity and her entire savings, they realize the crime fits the profile of a serial killer named Gavin Rozwell. The police inform Morgan that her roommate was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time; she was the real intended target. Morgan's grief, coupled with the financial devastation from the identity theft, leaves her no choice but to return home to Vermont to live with her mother and grandmother. Morgan reconnects with her family and rebuilds her life, including landing the perfect job and falling in love. The police and FBI pursue Gavin, who continues to stalk and kill women, each time leaving a reminder at the crime scene that shows he's fixated on Morgan as the one who got away. Roberts shows Gavin's slow descent into obsession and madness as the inverse of Morgan's healing journey back to herself and her community. The novel highlights Morgan's preparations for the inevitable final countdown with Gavin, but the lack of immediacy and urgency of the threat makes for a subdued, restrained thriller.

Roberts revisits a favorite theme: The power of community can defeat a great evil.



LUCKY DOGS

Schulman, Helen
Knopf (336 pp.)
\$29.00 | June 6, 2023
9780593536230



Two women—between them, survivors of the Bosnian genocide, a Hollywood rape, the American media, and a career with the Mossad—face off.

You might think that a book inspired by the role of Rose McGowan in the fall of Harvey Weinstein would have a fairly predictable story arc, but this barn burner of a novel handily incinerates that assumption. With an ambitious story structure recalling the work of Anthony Marra, Schulman has engineered a series of breathtaking aha moments, set to go off like timed explosives located in Paris, Sarajevo, Tel Aviv, Los Angeles, and a retirement community in Florida. It begins on the Boulevard Saint-Germain, where a violet-eyed 24-year-old fugitive named Meredith Montgomery has come to hide from a media shitstorm and career implosion she incited by complaining on Twitter about her rape by a Hollywood mega-creep she calls the Rug—to hide from it, but also to write a memoir about it, nondisclosure agreement be damned. Schulman's creation of Meredith is perfect. For example, describing her flight to Europe: "For exercise and to prevent blood clots, occasionally I'd prop up on an elbow to flag down a flight attendant so I could order additional minibottles of whiskey—waving an arm in the air burns more calories than not waving an arm in the air—and when I actually stood, I swayed (that does, too). Whether the oscillation was from an inborn sense of rhythm, turbulence, or a history of drug abuse, it's hard to tell—time is running out now, and I have more existential problems than the fact that maybe I shouldn't have done so much ayahuasca." When a lawyer tells her she can't bring charges against the Rug—"Way too late for that. His word against yours, you lose. Forget about it"—her first thought is: a haiku! Before we meet her counterpart, a woman of many names and careers (including a humorously evoked stint with Birthright), the second section opens with an extended guessing game, a bravura tactic introducing a city and a character whose relevance is not immediately clear. It's like Meredith, the novice memoirist, says: "That's what I like about book writing, you can play around with time, find its most meaningful iteration." Schulman has certainly done that here, in her finest work to date.

In a word: Wow.

“Raw thriller meets darkly funny coming-of-age for an enjoyable, unsettling debut.”

BERLIN



BERLIN

Setton, Bea

Penguin (256 pp.)

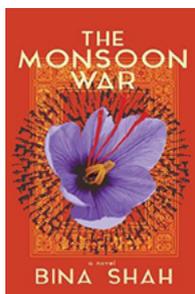
\$17.00 paper | May 16, 2023

9780143137627

In this dark and twisty debut, Setton crafts a clever thriller-cum-expat narrative for fans of Ottessa Moshfegh’s *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, Antoine Wilson’s *Mouth to Mouth*, and Ben Lerner’s *Leaving the Atocha Station*.

Daphne, a directionless 26-year-old American, lands in Berlin with little plan for her time there. Living off her parents’ money, Daphne expects to make friends, find love, and discover her real life, the one she keeps expecting to appear and replace her bleak and circumscribed existence. A strange and violent event one night at her subleased flat leads to her gradual paranoid spiraling and the transformation of the city in her eyes. Berlin devolves from a hipster mecca into a nightmarish hellscape as Daphne struggles to hold on to her tenuous sanity. Setton’s sentences are the real draw here. She peppers Daphne’s speech with sharp observations about modern life, youth, and the burdens of contemporary womanhood. As Daphne’s time in Berlin drags on, marked by her waning body mass and increased running mileage, she encounters many colorful characters, including internet dates, local Berliners, fellow expats, one ex-boyfriend, and a possible stalker. Daphne’s unreliability—her tendency to double back, correct the record, and manipulate the reader—creates a sense of disorientation that only enhances the slippery plot. Setton expertly portrays the wily, seductive nature of addictions and dysfunctions, and her novel’s humorous voice belies horrors both small and large. While most of the book eschews thriller genre conventions, replacing usual plot beats with rumination and drifting (and the occasional footnote), the novel never lags. Daphne’s youthful despair and loneliness are horror stories in and of themselves—ones from which it is hard to look away, especially when coupled with the evocative German setting.

Raw thriller meets darkly funny coming-of-age for an enjoyable, unsettling debut.



THE MONSOON WAR

Shah, Bina

Delphinium (288 pp.)

\$28.95 | May 16, 2023

9781953002235

A women’s fighting force becomes embroiled in a war to liberate their country from an oppressive patriarchal regime.

In this sequel to Shah’s *Before She Sleeps* (2018), readers return to Mazun, a Middle Eastern country formed after a nuclear war between Pakistan and India. In the long aftermath of that “Final

War”—due partly to fallout and partly to “the Virus,” a cancer mutation that killed only women—society was left with a surplus of men. Thus, the women in Mazun are forced to take multiple husbands and bear as many children as possible. Some women take refuge in the Panah, an urban underground network of companions to wealthy men, as told in Shah’s first Mazun novel. Here, Shah offers a wider view of collective resistances. There is Alia, a rural wife in a rugged mountain village who appears a dutiful member of the system but who resists by raising her daughters as boys (lest they be plucked up by “Collectors” and married away) and by serving as an Ababeel: “a secret spy and helper of the Hamiyat”—a band of female insurgents that has existed since the time of the war. Alia’s contact in the Hamiyat is Katy Azadeh, a young fighter currently being nursed back to health in Semitria, a utopian neighboring country, after an attack. Katy herself is under the command of Fatima Kara, though she soon discovers that Kara, and the entire Hamiyat, is in the hands of powers larger than she could have ever guessed. Shah moves through multiple women’s perspectives, each playing different roles as resisters, and though the story may contain familiar tropes, the result is a cinematic mashup of spy tale, geopolitical SF, and war epic.

Shah ups the action and the stakes in this second foray into a feminist dystopia.



WATCH US DANCE

Slimani, Leila

Trans. by Sam Taylor

Viking (336 pp.)

\$27.00 | June 20, 2023

9780593493304

Growing pains plague an interracial family and its recently decolonized nation.

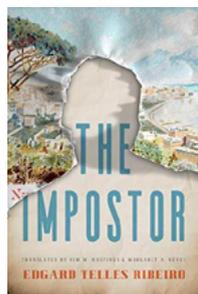
Second in a trilogy inspired by her own ancestry, following *In the Country of Others* (2021), Franco-Moroccan author Slimani’s latest begins in 1968, during Morocco’s violent, tumultuous “years of lead.” The rocky Meknes acreage where Amine Belhaj and his Alsatian-born wife, Mathilde, began their life together has become a thriving farm, but their marriage is far from happy; Amine cheats flagrantly and with abandon, while Mathilde worries she’s wasted her youth thanklessly caring for others. The couple now routinely socializes with the region’s remaining French bourgeoisie, who are eager to prove that “colonization had never been anything more than a misunderstanding,” though Amine and Mathilde privately gripe about the foreigners’ hypocrisy. Their daughter, Aïcha, is initially too focused on studying medicine in Strasbourg, France, to pay attention to the counterculture or the rising civil unrest in that country, but then she meets Mehdi Daoud, an outspoken economics major who convinces her to open herself up to the world so she can better understand what patients are going through. Back home, Selim, Aïcha’s easygoing, academically challenged younger brother, is already chafing against cultural expectations when he encounters a

“Long-held secrets haunt the lives of three generations of Vietnamese women.”

BANYAN MOON

hashish-smoking Danish girl en route to the “famous hippie hotbed” of Essaouira. The book’s free-wheeling third-person-present narrative unfolds over the course of several years, pinballing from character to character to paint a comprehensive picture of a family and a country in the grips of an identity crisis. Slimani manages to acknowledge the oppression and brutality inherent to the era while suffusing her younger protagonists’ stories with optimism and a hint of what’s to come.

An illuminating intergenerational drama.



THE IMPOSTOR

Telles Ribeiro, Edgard

Trans. by Kim M. Hastings &

Margaret A. Neves

Bellevue Literary Press (192 pp.)

\$17.99 paper | June 13, 2023

9781954276154

Two novellas that challenge the chronological conventions of narrative.

This slim volume from a veteran Brazilian novelist (and film critic and

diplomat) pairs two works from different eras: the 2020 title novella, translated by Hastings, followed by *Blue Butterflies of the Amazon* from 1996, translated by Neves. They are very different, though both feature a character who has suffered a stroke, and each concerns some interplay of chance and fate. *The Impostor* offers a first-person narrative by a veteran translator taking a trip to Italy with his wife. His impetus for the journey is to visit Vesuvius, where his great-granduncle fell into the volcano. Or jumped—accident or suicide? It was long ago and long forgotten, but the incident has fresh resonance for the protagonist, who had recently suffered what he insists on calling “a neurological issue. A minor one,” in which he “disappeared someplace” for 20 days. The narrative flows across time and space, from descriptions of the Italian vacation to visits with the therapist who is trying to help him account for that lost time to bonding with his 16-year-old grandson. (The two of them smoke a joint and play video games, providing additional narrative confusion.) He also conjures characters, perhaps in dreams, who seem to know him, though he doesn’t know them. Are they impostors? Or is he? By the end it appears that the trip he has been recounting is one he is still anticipating. The second, earlier novella focuses on sexual transgression across a couple of generations. An award-winning young scientist and his wife have returned to his family home to help his father after his mother suffered a stroke that has left her almost comatose. But she observes way more than she can communicate and more than her oblivious son does. Each of the four characters alternate narrating from their very different perspectives, with surprising results.

These inventive novellas are like literary puzzles for the reader to tease out.



BANYAN MOON

Thai, Thao

Mariner Books (336 pp.)

\$28.99 | June 27, 2023

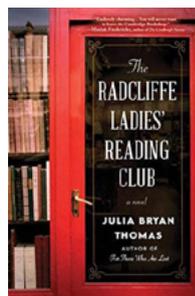
9780063267107

Long-held secrets haunt the lives of three generations of Vietnamese women.

Ann Tran, an illustrator who lives in Michigan with her boyfriend, Noah Winthorpe, a college professor from a wealthy White family of country club-

bers, gradually becomes aware of the disconnect between the life she thought she wanted with Noah and the life she actually would have chosen on her own. The realization is prompted by an unplanned pregnancy, but Ann takes time to think things over once she returns “home” to the Gulf Coast of Florida to mourn the death of her beloved and revered grandmother Minh, who had fled Vietnam as a single mother with her children during the “American War.” Ann and her mother, Hương, who have long been at odds, must grapple with creating a relationship in the absence of Minh’s overwhelming influence. Hương raised Ann as a single mother—though Ann was closer to her grandmother—and never told her the identity of her father. In the shadow of Minh’s death, the two women move into the sprawling but deteriorated Gothic mansion—the Banyan House—they have jointly inherited and work to overcome the legacy of lies and misunderstandings that has permeated their family for generations. As Ann seeks to form a plan for her future, she becomes aware of complicated truths about her grandmother’s life through explorations of the jam-packed rooms of the Banyan House and candid revelations from her high school friends about the woman she thought she knew so well. Thai deftly dissects the touchiness of strained mother-daughter relationships in a surprise-filled narrative that ranges from 1960s Vietnam to present-day Florida.

Thai has created three strong, unique women determined to find their own paths despite daunting circumstances.



THE RADCLIFFE LADIES' READING CLUB

Thomas, Julia Bryan

Sourcebooks Landmark (384 pp.)

\$16.99 paper | June 6, 2023

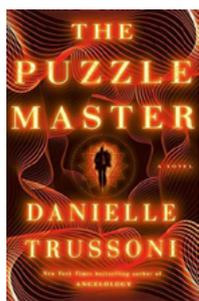
9781728248578

Four 18-year-old girls spend a year at Radcliffe College in the autumn of 1955, exploring books as they plan for their futures.

When Tess Collins arrives at Radcliffe for her first year of college on a scholarship, she is thrilled at the opportunity to make her own future and get away from her constantly arguing parents and fighting brothers in Ohio. She might not have much money, but she has plenty of plans about how she will be top of her class. Her roommate, Caroline

Hanson, is her polar opposite: gorgeous, wealthy, fun-loving, and generous with her time and possessions. The pair become friends with the young women in the adjoining room: Evie Miller, a boy-crazy farmer's daughter with a mostly steady boyfriend from back home in New York, and Merritt Weber, the artistically inclined daughter of an academic father in San Francisco whose mother died when she was 15. The story follows them as they join a book club run by Alice Campbell, a once-married woman from Chicago determined to find her own way in life by running a small bookstore in Cambridge. The women read a variety of books as Alice pushes them to think deeply about what it has meant to be a (White) woman across the centuries and how, while much might have changed when it came to (White) women's rights, there was still much that hadn't. Rather than being a book about nothing of importance—as Mark Twain said of *Emma*, a book from their book club—this is a book in which (after a slow start) the women experience joy and tragedy as they try to figure out who they are, what they stand for, and what their futures might hold. Themes of bullying, alcoholism, wealth disparity, (White) women's rights, assault, and rape are all addressed.

A story of female freedom and constraints that doesn't shy away from the trauma—and joy—that faced U.S. women in the 1950s.



THE PUZZLE MASTER

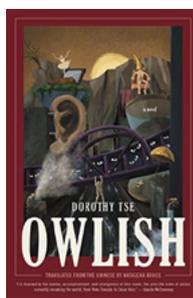
Trussoni, Danielle
Random House (384 pp.)
\$27.00 | June 13, 2023
9780593595299

Called in as an expert on a murder case involving a mysterious puzzle, famed puzzle constructor Mike Brink is drawn into a dark conspiracy going back to the 13th century.

Brink was a high school football star in Ohio when he suffered a brain injury on the field that left him with acquired savant syndrome (a real, though rare, condition). He can read *War and Peace* in a few hours and quote from it at will—and make a living creating puzzles for the *New York Times* and other outlets. But when a prison psychologist asks him to take a look at a puzzle drawn by Jess Price, a noted young writer who hasn't spoken a word since being arrested for the killing of her boyfriend in a Gilded Age mansion in upstate New York five years ago, he has trouble deciphering it. The puzzle, an ancient work of Jewish mysticism, holds the key not only to Jess' innocence, but to saving humanity. Secret words contained in the puzzle, which Jess found hidden inside a 19th-century porcelain doll in the mansion, have the power “to change the relationship between humankind and our place in the universe.” People have died in pursuit of the doll, whose creator in 19th-century Prague killed himself after seeing those who commissioned it transformed into a fearsome golem. Under constant threat, Brink becomes obsessed with the puzzle and with freeing Jess, with whom he develops an eerie connection. One wishes that

Trussoni had devoted a bit more attention to Jess, easily her most interesting character. That said, the author of *Angelopolis* (2013) and *The Ancestor* (2020) is at the top of her game in involving the reader in the puzzle-solving process, making the most of historic settings, including the Pierpont Morgan Library, and making the book's *Da Vinci Code*-like trappings pay off.

The Kabbalah meets the *New York Times* crossword in a brainy thriller.



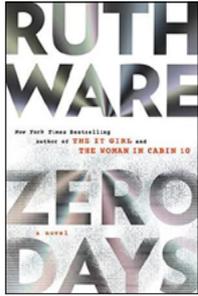
OWLISH

Tse, Dorothy
Trans. by Natascha Bruce
Graywolf (224 pp.)
\$16.00 paper | June 6, 2023
9781644452356

Professor Q's “bland, uneventful life” gets shaken up as he's consumed by his love affair with a doll.

Nevers, a coastal city on Valeria Island, is constantly changing to suit the wants and needs of its colonizers, but underneath the city is a “shadow zone” where the college students are organizing a revolution. Professor Q, a 50-year-old instructor at Lone Boat University, receives a package in the mail with a doll inside. He becomes enamored with the doll, Aliss, in a way he hasn't felt before. At the encouragement of his mysterious friend Owlsh, who tells him, “This could be your last chance for adventure,” he begins an extramarital affair with Aliss. He creates a “love nest” in a church on a nearby abandoned island so his wife, Maria, won't find out. At first, Aliss is a normal doll, but one day Professor Q leaves a window open and a strange wind blows in, transforming her into an animate being. Professor Q, who was obsessed with her even when she was simply a doll, is delighted by her development of sentience. His relationship with Aliss remains a consistent distraction from the social unrest brewing in Nevers. He barely realizes that his students have gone on strike even though his classes are practically empty. As the book progresses, it becomes unclear how much of what Professor Q experiences is real and how much is imagined. The line between dream and reality becomes increasingly blurred as Professor Q's sanity comes into question, making things difficult to follow. Chapters 29 and 31 change from a third-person perspective to a second-person narrative addressed to “you” and attempt to unveil some of the obscurities in the story. In the book's best moments, it's a wonderfully imaginative fable that resonates with political critique and protest. However, in some areas the book's vision gets murky, like a dream, which is interesting conceptually but doesn't quite work here.

A fabulist fever dream that is perhaps a bit too opaque.



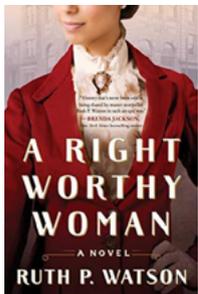
ZERO DAYS

Ware, Ruth
Scout Press/Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)
\$29.99 | June 20, 2023
9781982155292

When a security expert is murdered, his wife will stop at nothing to find the killer—even as she becomes suspect No. 1.

Jacintha “Jack” Cross is a “penetration tester”: She’s the boots-on-the-ground person for testing out security systems, while her husband, Gabe, does the same for cybersecurity. Leaving a job one night, Jack is picked up by the police—an occupational hazard—and when she returns home, she finds Gabe’s body, throat slit. In shock, Jack reports the murder, talks to the police again, and goes to stay with her older sister, Helena Wick, for a day. When she’s asked to return to the station for a few more questions, Jack quickly realizes that she’s under suspicion—and so she goes on the run. With the help of her sister and Cole Garrick, Gabe’s oldest friend, she’s able to elude capture and begin her own investigation, determined to find her husband’s killer. Apparently, Gabe had found a “zero-day exploit,” a backdoor vulnerability, in a popular app, one that could be worth a lot of money to governments and bad actors. Ware has often highlighted technology as a malignant, uncontrollable force in her novels, and it’s frequently at odds with her luxurious, somewhat timeless settings. But in this novel, tech is front and center. Despite the contemporary trappings, though, the story is still a familiar one: It’s *The Fugitive* if the main characters were women. There’s plenty of excitement—chases, break-ins, shady bitcoin deals, an impending medical emergency—but the pool of characters is too small to leave much suspense about the mystery of Gabe’s death. Jack is a strong and fearless heroine, and Ware is always a master of setting and atmosphere, but the great reveal makes one wonder: Was it all worth it? Or more accurately, couldn’t Jack have figured this out much faster? Did it all have to come down to the poetic moment when she has nothing left?

Lots of adrenaline-driven action, a departure from Ware’s usual wire-taut mysteries.



A RIGHT WORTHY WOMAN

Watson, Ruth P.
Atria (304 pp.)
\$27.99 | June 13, 2023
9781666800302

Watson chronicles more than 50 years in the extraordinary life of Maggie Lena Walker, the first Black woman to charter an American bank.

When she’s 12, narrator Maggie Mitchell finds her life upended when her father is found floating facedown in the James River in Richmond, Virginia. Forced to grow up fast, Maggie helps her grief-stricken mother in her laundry service and soon begins

attending meetings of the Independent Order of St. Luke, a humanitarian group for Black people in the community. Here, Maggie eventually meets and marries Armstead Walker, a man who admires her self-sufficiency, and they go on to have three children. Over the span of five decades, Maggie’s unwavering dedication to improving the lives of Black people is depicted in meticulous detail. Her efforts to expand the Order, eventually taking over its leadership, and her triumphs in establishing both a newspaper and the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank are challenged at every turn. Maggie weathers physical assaults, intimidation by White businessmen, and colorism from her darker-skinned peers, yet she remains dedicated to her causes even amid personal tragedies. Historically minded readers will enjoy the accurate details here; Maggie’s life is anchored around concrete dates that add context. Others may be disappointed by the expository prose and dialogue. There are conversations between close friends that feel more like public speeches, as do parts of Maggie’s narration: “Negro women, hemmed in and circumscribed with every imaginable obstacle in our way, blocked and held down by the fears and prejudices of whites—ridiculed and sneered at by the intelligent Blacks. Let us all advance.” In addition, the time span means some milestones are given only glancing treatment—Watson shines when conveying Black patrons’ joy at finally having an emporium that caters to their needs, yet the passage is all too fleeting. At the same time, repetition takes up precious space. Armstead’s vacillation between approval and dismay at Maggie’s not being a typical housewife grows tiresome after the umpteenth mention. Still, Watson’s love for Maggie shines through.

A stirring fictional account of a remarkable figure that’s occasionally hampered by wooden prose.

M Y S T E R Y



MURDER ON MUSTANG BEACH

Besette, Alicia
Berkley (336 pp.)
\$28.00 | May 16, 2023
9780593336915

Murder disrupts a bookseller’s love life while complicating her deepening reconnection to her childhood home on the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

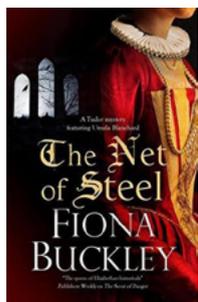
After waiting nearly a year for Toby Dodge to complete his self-imposed experiment in abstinence, Calista “Callie” Padgett is eager for what she calls “the most epic first date ever” with the handsome martial arts teacher she’s been patiently wooing for the past 11 months. She can’t believe it when on the morning of that date, she and Toby find a body gazing lifelessly at the ceiling of his dojo, Cattail Family Martial

“An Oregon coffee maven’s life is going well until it isn’t.”

FLAT WHITE FATALITY

Arts. More than their relationship is at stake, since families rush to pull out of the dojo’s programs once they learn that Seth Goodnow, the bridegroom in a Cattail Island destination wedding, met his end there shortly after saying his vows. So Callie summons the detective skills she discovered in *Smile Beach Murder* (2022) to prove that Seth’s death had nothing to do with Toby’s business. When she interviews members of the wedding party, including Seth’s brand-new widow, she learns that she isn’t the only one captivated by the magic of Cattail Island. Despite their grief, none of them are willing to leave the gentle pace of the island and its wild natural beauty. Just as Callie struggles with learning that, thanks to the boom in tourism, her meager salary at MotherVine Bookshop won’t begin to cover her rent at the tiny Hyde Road cottage where she grew up, the wedding guests confide their difficulty reconciling their horror at Seth’s murder with their growing attachment to Cattail. All good things must end, and with grief for some, as Callie’s sleuthing skills once again crack a case that baffles the police.

A worthy successor to Bessette’s *Outer Banks* debut.



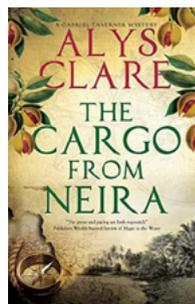
THE NET OF STEEL

Buckley, Fiona
Savern House (256 pp.)
\$29.99 | May 2, 2023
9781448310593

Ursula Standard, who’s undertaken many dangerous missions as a spy for Queen Elizabeth I, her half sister, never imagined that her past could put her friends and relatives in danger.

Thrice-married Ursula, her son, Harry, and her faithful servants, Dale and Roger Brockley, arrive at Faldene House, her childhood home, for her uncle’s funeral in 1590. Her relationship with her aunt and uncle may have been uneasy, but when Aunt Tabitha dies a painful death from poison during Ursula’s stay, Ursula is certain she didn’t commit suicide. When her cousin Francis insists she stay for the reading of the wills, she learns, much to her surprise, that she’s been left Faldene House. Harry hastens home to his betrothed, Eleanor, but he can’t prevent her from being killed in a riding accident he doesn’t think was an accident. The two suspicious deaths make no sense until Harry’s half brother on his father’s side, Capt. Julien de la Roche, arrives with a chilling tale. Matthew de la Roche was Ursula’s second husband, but his identity as a French Catholic and an enemy of Queen Elizabeth doomed their marriage to brevity. Julien has been involved with the piratical Mercer brothers, whom Ursula knew during her marriage to Matthew. They wrongly blame Ursula for their mother’s death, and they plan to take revenge by attacking Ursula’s family and eventually killing her. Now that Ursula and her devoted friends know why Tabitha and Eleanor died, they can take on the daunting task of protecting themselves and each other. They do their utmost to protect Ursula’s property even as the merciless Mercers manage to do more damage.

Though much of this mystery is focused on relationships, there’s plenty of action to move the story forward.



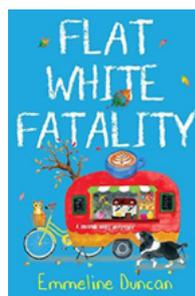
THE CARGO FROM NEIRA

Clare, Alys
Savern House (256 pp.)
\$31.99 | May 2, 2023
9780727823021

A good deed may forever change Dr. Gabriel Taverner’s life in 1605.

Living in Devon with his sister, Celia, the respected doctor has been a great help to the coroner in solving mysterious deaths. When coroner’s assistant Jarman Hodge shows up at Gabriel’s home after finding a woman in a nearby creek, the harsh laws pertaining to suicide make both men uncertain what to do. The body is that of a lovely pregnant woman, who, it turns out, isn’t a suicide because she’s not dead, though she does seem to be in a deep sleep. But the pair are still hesitant about lying to coroner Theo Davey and Gabriel’s best friend, vicar Jonathan Carew, about the circumstances in which she was found. While waiting for their mystery guest to recover, Gabriel is called to view a body found in a cesspit, a man who was struck on the head and his mouth stuffed with nutmegs. Merchants from rival countries have formed trading companies to make fortunes from the exotic spices of the East, and nutmegs are worth more than gold. The rescued woman, Artemis Brownynng, turns out to have been exaggerating her sickness so she won’t have to talk to anyone, but she eventually tells Celia some of her story. After someone tries to break into the house, the terrified Artemis reveals more of her woes. When she tries to pay for her care with nutmegs soon after Jonathan finds a headless man near the house, Gabriel is convinced that all the deaths are connected. Much questioning reveals a fierce competition to find a ship loaded with nutmegs and the location of the island where they grow. Gabriel, drawn back to the seafaring life he had to give up after an injury, must make a big decision.

A historically detailed mystery full of action and philosophizing.



FLAT WHITE FATALITY

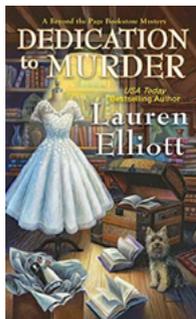
Duncan, Emmeline
Kensington (288 pp.)
\$16.95 paper | May 23, 2023
9781496733436

An Oregon coffee maven’s life is going well until it isn’t.

Sage Caplin and Harley Yamazaki, the owners of Ground Rules, have rented space to store supplies for their coffee carts while their new store is being built in a java-friendly area of Portland. The rented space houses a number of quirky neighbors, including the video game developer Grumpy Sasquatch Studio, whose co-owner Lukas Evans “Bax” Baxter is Sage’s boyfriend, who’s hired her to do some part-time motion-capture work for a new game. Sage is friendly with the mixed bunch of Sasquatches, though she finds some of

them difficult to deal with, especially Australian Robbie Kayle, whose pranks are consistently mean-spirited. At a Sasquatch team-building event, the participants are dressed as ducks—or, in Robbie's case, a goose—and then divided into teams that will search for clues in a scavenger hunt. Toward the end of the game, Sage's team notices the door to her roastery standing ajar, and they find Harley standing over Robbie's body. Det. William E. Will's previous experience with Sage makes him less than thrilled to see her or her brother, an attorney who's advising them. When Robbie's sister arrives on the scene, all sorts of odd facts emerge, including the news that Robbie wasn't really Australian. The biggest thorn in Sage's side is her former boss Mark Jeffries, a rival coffee shop owner, who wants to buy Ground Rules from her and Harley while posting nasty comments about them on social media. Despite her problems, however, there's no way Sage will ignore a murder that puts Bax, her friends, and herself in such danger.

Tips on coffee and a touch of romance combine in a mystery with a strong West Coast vibe.



DEDICATION TO MURDER

Elliott, Lauren

Kensington (304 pp.)

\$8.99 paper | April 25, 2023

9781496735140

A shocking surprise disrupts a bookseller's wedding.

Standing at the altar waiting for the minister to pronounce you and your groom man and wife probably isn't anyone's preferred time or place to learn that the man you're about to wed is still

married to someone else. But Addie Greyborne did have to recognize, however grudgingly, that Valerie Price's eleventh-hour announcement that Simon Emerson was still legally married to Valerie's niece, Laurel Hill, saved her from entering unknowingly into a bigamous union. Still, Addie's gratitude does not extend to mourning Valerie's death days later. Not does it extend, at first, to using her considerable sleuthing skills to solve Valerie's murder. Taking time off from her store, Beyond the Page Books and Curios in Greyborne Harbor, Massachusetts, Addie spends her days grieving the loss of Simon and prowling the house her great-aunt Anita left her for mementos of her benefactor. When she finds an unworn wedding dress in the attic among all the boxes of books, she decides that's the puzzle she wants to probe. It isn't until her good friend Marc, a detective on the local police force, asks for her help that she admits she might be able to handle two investigations at once. Working out two simultaneous puzzles teaches Addie a lot about herself and proves to be just the tonic she needs to cope with the shock of a lifetime.

Detection as therapy, while not exactly new, proves highly effective.



TELL-TALE BONES

Haines, Carolyn

Minotaur (368 pp.)

\$28.00 | May 16, 2023

9781250885852

Several missing women, an abusive husband, and a fight over money add up to murder and mayhem for a pair of Southern belles with deep roots in the Mississippi Delta.

Sarah Booth Delaney has her own haint—that is, ghost—named Jitty, who one day shows up in the guise of Edgar Allan Poe. Shortly afterward, Sarah gets a visit from a very-much-alive medium who's been having disturbing dreams of a heart beating loudly in her house and a bathtub filled with blood. The biggest piece of gossip in town, though, is that Tope Maxwell, lawyer and college football star, is petitioning to have his wife, Lydia Redd, who's been missing for years, declared dead. Rumor has it that Tope wants to remarry and is desperate to inherit Lydia's money. Lydia is the only child of wealthy Elisa Redd, who wants Sheriff Coleman Peters, Sarah Booth's boyfriend, to reopen the case. Before Lydia vanished along with her best friend, Bethany Carter, while they were working as human rights organizers in Afghanistan, people knew that Tope beat her and spent her money, but everyone was too afraid of Tope and his influential family to say anything. Since Coleman's hands are tied, he suggests Elisa hire Sarah Booth and Tinkie Richmond, her partner in detection, to look into the case. Elisa is afraid that Tope murdered both women, and when his new fiancée falls or is thrown to her death, he becomes the likely suspect in that murder. The determined sleuths dig up a lot of useful information and possible sightings of the missing women, but will that be enough to find them and get Tope arrested?

Full of Southern charm and an eye-opening look at the difficulties in ending domestic abuse.



THE LAST SINNER

Jackson, Lisa

Kensington (400 pp.)

\$28.00 | June 27, 2023

9781496739056

Is the potential return of a series villain the end for a clever detective and his daughter, a true-crime author, in the last book in Jackson's Rick Bentz and Reuben Montoya series?

On the streets of the French Quarter of New Orleans, an unnamed killer is plotting his next crime with satisfaction. He's been waiting a long time to go after Kristi Bentz and end her string of true-crime bestsellers. But when the murderer makes his move, he's thrown off course by the unexpected arrival of Kristi's husband, Jay McKnight. In the ensuing struggle, Jay is killed and Kristi left in shock. Her father, Det.

“Serious actors and drag queens compete for space in an amusing whodunit.”

REHEARSED TO DEATH

Rick Bentz, wants to comfort his daughter, but he and partner Det. Reuben Montoya have other things to worry about when an earlier case resurfaces in a way that seems impossible. They'd thought Father John, a fake priest obsessed with killing women in the name of God, was dead after their last face-off, but their most recent string of cases follow his M.O. to a T: working girls choked to death by a string of sharpened rosary beads. Is Father John back, or do Bentz and Montoya have a copycat on their hands? The case is clearly linked to Kristi, who wrote a hit book on the so-called Rosary Killer and whose agent is demanding she do press and a follow-up volume. As Kristi worries that the unnamed killer may just be waiting to strike again, help arrives in the form of mysterious stranger Cruz Montoya, Reuben's brother, who may need Kristi's help.

Excitement for series fans looking to revisit Bentz and Montoya's greatest hits while promising something new for the future.



A NOVEL DISGUISE

Larsen, Samantha

Crooked Lane (320 pp.)

\$18.99 paper | May 16, 2023

9781639103461

In 1784 London, a woman attempts to salvage her life in a highly unusual way.

Tiffany Woodall, a 40-year-old spinster, lives with her half brother, Uriah, who treats her like a servant. After years of near poverty, Uriah has finally

obtained a post as librarian for the Duke of Beaufort, a position that comes with a little cottage. When she finds her brother dead in bed, surrounded by vomit, Tiffany, with nowhere to go and desperate to avoid penury, comes up with a scheme to pretend to be Uriah, since they look enough alike for her to pass if she wears his clothes and makeup. After burying him in their yard, she cleans herself up in the lake, where she encounters Mr. Lathrop, a handsome bookseller who has the duke's patronage. She soon begins to masquerade as Uriah while occasionally appearing as herself. If it weren't for her precarious position, Tiffany might find it amusing to pose as Uriah, but she knows so little of his job that she's always on the brink of discovery. The members of the duke's household, both upstairs and down, have secrets of their own, including illicit love affairs and thievery. A childhood playmate who snubbed Tiffany after marrying a duke arrives for a visit, but their friendship cannot overcome the class differences that have arisen between them. Although the minister, who already has 14 children, wants to marry Tiffany, she much prefers Mr. Lathrop and seeks to communicate her lack of interest to the minister as both her brother and herself. When the thieving maid dies just like Uriah and a footman becomes very ill, she realizes they were both poisoned and sets out to find the killer.

Class differences, prejudice, and the lack of women's rights drive this enjoyable mystery.



FLESH AND BLOOD

Mark, David

Severn House (256 pp.)

\$31.99 | June 6, 2023

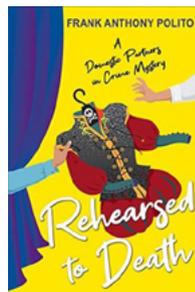
9781448309375

DS Aector McAvoy comes back from the dead, sort of, to nail his would-be killer.

A pair of contrasting prologues set a wry and gritty tone and foreshadow the crimes to come. First, elderly ex-cop

Tom Spink, lonely in his retirement, is murdered by a hulking figure with designs on Trish Pharaoh, Tom's surrogate daughter. Then an inappropriately bubbly true-crime podcast makes passing reference to superwoman Trish, the veteran Yorkshire Detective Superintendent. Meanwhile, Trish herself is in flagrante delicto with Icelandic cop Thor Ingolfsson, with whom she is head-over-heels smitten. A loud bang lures Thor outside and into a near-fatal ambush. Arriving paramedics at first think the victim is DS McAvoy, as does the anonymous hit man, so uncanny is the resemblance. But Aector McAvoy is on a well-deserved vacation two hours north in Gamblesby with his wife, Roisin, and his two children. In his 11th McAvoy novel, Mark again delivers both breadth and depth, depicting not only the intricacies of investigation, but the nuances of human relationships. Trish's entire team, from relative newcomer PC Matt Paul to experienced Ben Neilsen to DC Andy Daniells, is shaken. The assassin, whose chapters are written from his warped perspective, has vowed to kill everyone close to Trish. Trish at first thinks the attack was a car theft gone wrong, but McAvoy links it to a hit-and-run of another man who's been close to her. The reign of terror that follows will engulf Trish's daughters, Sophia and Olivia, before it's ended.

An involving, nail-biting police procedural from a masterful storyteller.



REHEARSED TO DEATH

Polito, Frank Anthony

Kensington (288 pp.)

\$16.95 paper | May 23, 2023

9781496735607

Serious actors and drag queens compete for space in an amusing whodunit.

JP Broadway and Peter Penwell have scored a hit with *Domestic Partners*, their HGTV show, which shows them renovating the house they bought in the fictional Detroit suburb of Pleasant Woods. But Pete has a bad feeling about his new play, which is about to be produced by the Royal Heights Players. The original director, Vicky Marshall, has been pushed aside by Xander Sherwood Deva, a hotshot who has the connections to get *Blue Tuesday* a New York opening. Unfortunately, Xander turns out to be an autocratic, mean-spirited, demanding fashionista who's no fun to work with. A

series of rocky auditions eventually leads to a cast that includes Pete and JP's next-door neighbor Bob Kravitz, who's driven to quit by Xander's insistence that he's gay though he says he's not. Xander refuses to let Vicky's protégé Rusty Doyle—whose most recent performances have been at Drag Queen Queeraoke—even audition, and once rehearsals start, he drives everyone crazy with his petty demands and harsh criticisms. So it's no great surprise when Hunter Bellamy, Xander's latest lover, finds him dead in the theater. It looks like his extra-long scarf was caught in some fan blades and accidentally strangled him, but Pete's not convinced because he knows there's a long list of people, himself included, who won't miss the abrasive director. Pete writes mysteries, JP's played a cop, and they've already solved one murder, so in a last-minute attempt to save the play, they start looking at all the people who may have done the deed.

Just the thing for those who love TV renovation shows.



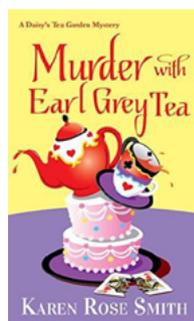
A DISAPPEARANCE IN FIJI

Rao, Nilima
Soho Crime (288 pp.)
\$25.95 | June 6, 2023
9781641294294

In colonial Fiji, the search for a missing plantation worker exposes the deep roots of the island's racism.

Young police sergeant Akal Singh, who's been in Fiji a mere six months in 1914, is finding his bearings and growing in confidence through a strong relationship with Taviti, a Fijian corporal. The biggest challenge the police face is a miscreant known as the Night Prowler, who's been terrorizing children by peeping in their windows. To his surprise, Akal is pulled off this case and instructed to investigate the disappearance of Kunti, an indentured laborer on a sugar plantation owned by Henry and Susan Parkins, an influential Australian couple. The case probably wouldn't have garnered much attention but for the interest of righteous missionary Father David Hughes, who suspects kidnapping and has written to the newspaper. The Parkinses assume that Kunti has run away, so the investigation is at a stalemate. But Akal suspects foul play, and bolstered by the involvement of the sympathetic Father Hughes and the influential Mr. Ravendra Choudry, he continues his probe. The undercurrent of the White community's racism reminds Akal of a time he was reprimanded in Hong Kong over his "indiscretion" with Emily Strahan, a young Englishwoman who deceived him in a criminal case. He is determined not to make a similar mistake in Fiji. Akal's journey from optimistic junior officer to sadder but wiser fighter for justice provides this debut with a relatable heart.

A complex and engaging mystery given even greater weight by its important historical backdrop.



MURDER WITH EARL GREY TEA

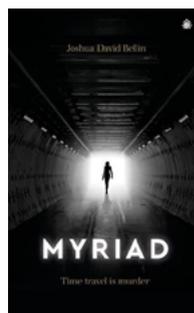
Smith, Karen Rose
Kensington (320 pp.)
\$8.99 paper | May 23, 2023
9781496738462

The quiet Pennsylvania town of Willow Creek remains a magnet for murder.

The mild manner of attractive widow Daisy Swanson, who has two grown girls and is engaged to former police officer Jonas Groft, hides a keen intellect and a penchant for solving murders. As she busies herself planning an anniversary party for her parents at The Farm Barn with owner/manager Lydia Aldenkamp, whom she's become friendly with, life seems good. Brought up Amish, Lydia has been shunned by her parents since marrying Englisher Neil Aldenkamp, but she's still close to her childless twin sister, Leah, who adores Lydia's little daughter, Frannie. Daisy's Tea Garden restaurant keeps her busy, but she enjoys her early morning hike-and-talk sessions with Lydia until the morning when she arrives at The Farm Barn a bit late and her dog, Felix, finds Lydia dead on the trail. Shattered by Lydia's murder, Daisy is determined to help despite push back from the police detectives who've welcomed her input before. Neil, who's had little to do with running The Farm Barn, begs Daisy for help in planning and running a wedding already booked at the venue. Spending time with the people who work there gives her plenty of insights into the dynamics of the business, which is rumored to be in financial trouble. Lydia's problems ranged from fights with suppliers to Neil's brief affair, so it won't be easy to pick out a killer from a surprisingly large bunch of suspects.

Murder plays second fiddle to a warm and charming cozy complete with appended recipes.

SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY



MYRIAD

Bellin, Joshua David
Angry Robot Books (328 pp.)
\$15.99 paper | May 23, 2023
9781915202468

An attempt on her partner's life forces a time-hopping cop to go on the lam in search of answers.

When she was just 6 years old, Miriam Randle witnessed her twin brother's

“An orphaned prince on the run gets a chance at freedom if he can become one of his would-be enslavers.”

THE WILL OF THE MANY

murder, and the event has colored her entire life. If Jeremy had lived, her mother would not have abandoned her. She would not have had to manage her father’s alcoholism on her own, and there would be someone else to care for her estranged mother now, in the wake of an early-onset Alzheimer’s diagnosis. At 26, Miriam works as a “travel agent”: a private law enforcement officer who goes back in time to stop murders before they happen. Hours after a mission goes sideways, she narrowly misses the chance to stop a would-be assassin from gravely injuring her partner, Vax. These back-to-back failures would be enough to unsettle any agent, but they fall on the 20th anniversary of Jeremy’s death. The ensuing debriefing reveals Miriam and Vax’s affair as well as his belief that Miriam may be losing her grip. All signs indicate that Vax’s assailant is a rogue agent, but the duo’s handler does not give Miriam time to testify. He fires her mere moments before the killer strikes again, leaving her in possession of a literal smoking gun. Shades of classic science fiction permeate Bellin’s noir, to both positive and negative effect. The central mystery keeps the pages turning well into the third act, but the author doesn’t provide readers with the necessary tools to stitch the case together for themselves, resulting in several eleventh-hour reveals that feel unearned. In spite of the lack of signposting, however, readers familiar with Bellin’s SF predecessors will spot many of the plot twists coming from miles away. That may please eagle-eyed speculative-fiction fans, but Bellin’s decision to forego the trail of breadcrumbs may disappoint readers who approach this genre blender as a thriller.

A twisty time hop that never fully escapes the shadow of its influences.



THE COMBAT CODES

Darwin, Alexander

Orbit (464 pp.)

\$18.99 paper | June 13, 2023

9780316493000

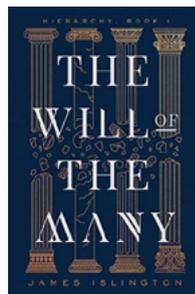
A gritty tale set in a world where fighting well is the highest honor.

“We fight so the rest shall not have to.” For Murray, an aging former fighter with a strong sense of honor, these words are his way of life: The strongest and best

Grievars fight in single combat to settle national disputes. No longer able to fight himself, he’s forced to scout the dangerous Deep for kids with potential—even though most of his “discoveries” never stand a real chance. But when he watches an apparently blind boy dominate a much larger Grieviar in a fight, he sees his chance to restore honor to his profession through a new fighter who lives by the ancient Codes. That boy, Cego, has memories of another life—training with a master alongside his brothers, studying fighting and meditation techniques on a black-sand beach. What he doesn’t know is how he ended up in the sordid Underground, blinded by light he wasn’t used to, easy prey for slavers looking for fresh fighting meat. For Cego, Murray’s offer to take him to the Surface and give him a chance to train at the prestigious Lyceum is at first a chance to find

his brothers and his old master. But as Murray teaches him the ancient Codes, Cego realizes how similar they are to the teachings of his old master and gets swept up in the drive to do well at the Lyceum Trials. Cego and Murray are both compelling characters. The novel takes a while to clearly establish a goal for each of them, but the world and characters are strong enough to carry the reader through to the point where Cego’s quest to prove himself at the Lyceum takes over as the engine of the plot. Clearly drawn martial arts bouts add action and drama to the narrative.

This dark tale of martial arts and ancient Codes in a fallen world will captivate readers who crave action.



THE WILL OF THE MANY

Islington, James

Saga/Simon & Schuster

(688 pp.)

\$29.99 | May 23, 2023

9781982141172

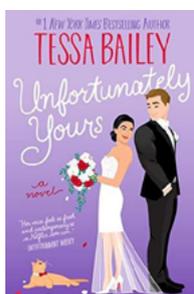


An orphaned prince on the run gets a chance at freedom if he can become one of his would-be enslavers.

Three years ago, when the Hierarchy killed his family, 17-year-old Vis Solum had to hide in their Republic, bury his rage, and pretend to support the population’s enslavement in order to survive. The Hierarchy is built on Will—a person’s mental and physical energy—ceded by the low to those above them, and then again, all the way to the top of the three pyramids of leadership: Military, Governance, and Religion. Will powers carts and carriages, keeps vaults locked, and gives Will-users inhuman abilities while sapping ceders of their health and life span. So far, Vis has managed to refuse the ritual to cede his Will. Now, he has little more than a year before he legally *has* to cede or have his Will drained by Sappers. When Senator Quintus Ulciscor Telimus offers Vis the chance to escape ceding for at least another year, and perhaps never do it at all, Vis agrees. The man officially adopts him so he can attend the Catenan Academy, where all students are tested and prepared for the highest Hierarchy positions. If Vis dominates at the Academy, he can choose a position where he doesn’t need to cede or receive Will at all, far away from the Hierarchy. In return, Vis must act as a spy to prove Religion is unearthing a dangerous weapon. Then, when Vis is blackmailed to act as a double agent, everything changes. In order to succeed, he must become one of those he so hates while keeping his true identity a secret. If he doesn’t, he’ll end up dead, or worse. This Roman-inspired fantasy starts slow but more than makes up for it soon enough. With the inevitable comparisons in mind, fans of Pierce Brown’s *Red Rising* will enjoy this book, but it’s darker, deeper, and takes unexpected paths worth traveling. Trust that the author will get you there in the end.

A multilayered exploration of the complacent as complicit, all within a unique yet relatable magic system.

ROMANCE



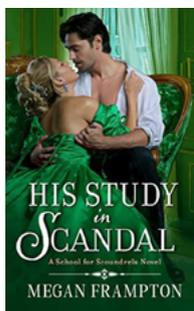
UNFORTUNATELY YOURS

Bailey, Tessa
Avon/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
\$30.00 | June 6, 2023
9780063239074

A winery heiress and a new face on the Napa Valley scene enter into a marriage of convenience for the sake of future financial success.

Natalie Vos belongs to a famous winemaking family, but she's done her best to leave that behind by managing hedge funds in New York City. After a particularly bad trade, though, Natalie is left devastated: She's jobless, and her engagement is off. To hide from her professional and personal embarrassment, she moves back home to California. August Cates is a former Navy SEAL who's put all his money on the line to make his dreams of owning and operating a winery come true. Sadly, the reviews are in for his first crop of wine, and they are rather scathing. August and Natalie frequently butt heads at winery events, but they eventually realize there's a way they can help one another. Natalie wants to return to New York and restart her career, but she needs some cash, and her trust fund can't be paid out until she's married. If August will agree to be her temporary husband, Natalie can offer him some advice in the winemaking department. Their fake marriage begins to feel a lot like the real thing, though, especially when it comes to sharing personal spaces like bedrooms and bathrooms. As usual, the book features Bailey's trademark dirty talk and rivalry between the leads. Disappointingly, though, there's nothing new or fresh here, and the book feels like a familiar blur of innuendo-filled banter, sexually charged moments, and rich-girl-meets-blue-collar-hunk that readers have seen before from Bailey.

A typical Bailey romance filled with sex and snark but one that feels rote at this point.



HIS STUDY IN SCANDAL

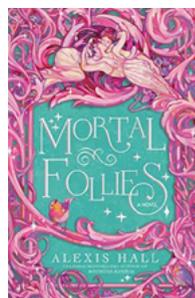
Frampton, Megan
Avon/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
\$9.99 paper | May 23, 2023
9780063224223

A night of passion in a pleasure garden turns into an age-gap romance between a dowager duchess and a dashing entrepreneur.

In the second *School for Scoundrels* novel, Alexandra, dowager Duchess of Chelmswich, is finally ready to claim her independence. Enjoying a sexually fulfilling night with a stranger feels like a good start. When she later learns that Theo Osborne is the man

chosen by the current duke—her stepson—for her debutante daughter, Harriet, it's an unanticipated complication. Wealthy, self-made Theo had planned to marry up the ranks in keeping with his adopted father's wish. But a final night of enjoying his unattached state before meeting Harriet has ensnared his heart. Now he's willing to give up his earlier plan and risk the spite of the duke, but the skittish widow might take some convincing. Alexandra has had enough of men dictating her choices, and even Theo, the attractive younger man who matches her intellectually and sexually, feels like a threat. But as they are forced to pretend that she's engineering a match between him and her equally uninterested daughter, the couple slips into a passionate affair, including a sudden trip to Paris. A series of scenes meant to show their compatibility and the ensemble cast of his foster brothers and her protofeminist stepdaughter and daughter don't quite live up to the intriguing opening scene. A rushed third-act breakup and a predictable development end with the reluctant 40-year old heroine trusting that her young lover can be a better man than any she has known.

An exciting premise and feminist theme, but the execution feels contrived and conservative.



MORTAL FOLLIES

Hall, Alexis
Del Rey (416 pp.)
\$18.00 paper | June 6, 2023
9780593497562

A midsummer night's Regency.

Miss Maelys Mitchelmore doesn't understand why her dress is falling apart at a society ball. (It's not even fairy-made!) Though the situation seems at first to be a social disaster, her predicament leads to adventure when Lady Georgiana, better known as the Duke of Annadale, comes to her rescue. Everyone fears the Duke, who became the sole heir to a dukedom thanks to a series of mysterious deaths. She doesn't mind, as she is generally happy to be left on her own. Miss Mitchelmore, for her part, is grateful to be saved from ruination and then surprised when the Duke's kiss on her hand leads her to a sudden realization that perhaps her lack of passion for any eligible young man this season (or last) is due to the fact that none of them are women. When Miss Mitchelmore is struck by yet another magical attack, she starts to look for the cause and to see if the Duke will help her fix it—assuming the Duke is not the cause herself. And so the story begins, accompanied by a great deal of additional commentary from our petulant narrator, Puck (yes, that Puck), recently banished from the court of Oberon, now forced to write to make ends meet. He proves to be an enchanting and delightfully petulant storyteller, repeatedly winking at the reader as the paranormal meddling continues and a beautiful romance between Miss Mitchelmore and the Duke begins to bloom. The cast is rounded out nicely by Miss Mitchelmore's brother and best friend, both trying their best to help Maelys solve her magical mystery, but it may ultimately be only the

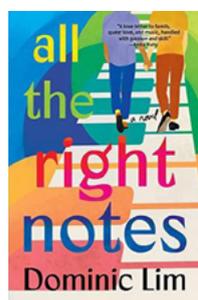


“A bestselling author is forced to go back to college and revisit more than one part of her past.”

THE DO-OVER

women who can save each other. This is a lovely, pitch-perfect romance, with an alternate Regency setting that is well developed and has tremendous charm. The intimacy is relatively tame, for Hall, but the story still contains all the delicious tension and wry humor that he writes so well. Hall continues to prove himself to be one of the best romance writers working today.

Part historical, part fantasy, all top-notch queer romance.



ALL THE RIGHT NOTES

Lim, Dominic
 Forever (352 pp.)
 \$15.99 paper | June 6, 2023
 9781538725382

In this debut queer romance, a musician must convince an old high school friend, now an actual movie star, to perform at his father’s retirement concert.

Quito Cruz and Emmett Aoki seemed like opposites in high school.

Emmett was a popular athlete, already modeling underwear for Macy’s ads. Quito was the son of Sunvalley High School’s choir teacher, and while he was gifted with music, his sexuality made him a target for bullies. When Emmett joined the choir after dropping out of woodshop, both Quito and his father saw a diamond in the rough. With a less-than-subtle nudge, Mr. Cruz convinced Quito to tutor Emmett in singing, leading to a tentative friendship and a secret relationship between the boys. Now, as adults, they haven’t spoken in decades. Quito plays at a Manhattan piano bar and dreams of producing his own Broadway show. Emmett is a famous action star, starring in a spy thriller on Apple TV. When Quito’s father decides to retire, he tells Quito he’s announced plans to host a retirement fundraising concert and has already promised attendees that Emmett will be performing. It’s clear to Quito that his father has vastly overstated the two men’s current relationship, but, unwilling to disappoint his dad, he decides to try to reunite with Emmett. With Quito narrating, the book is split between “Then” and “Now” chapters, juxtaposing awkward and sometimes painful high school moments with Quito’s current life, in which he’s very much stuck both professionally and romantically. He also has trouble saying no to people, which frequently leads him to overpromise things at the expense of his own emotional well-being. While the romance between Quito and Emmett is sizzling and sweet, it takes a back seat to Quito’s journey of self-fulfillment, and there’s a disjointedness to the book as Lim piles on the romance tropes without pause. The romance and Quito’s own personal journey are both compelling, but they could have used more breathing room. There’s a lot of promise in Lim’s debut, though, with its dual-timeline storytelling, charming cast, and love of show tunes.

A fun and effervescent, if uneven, debut.



THE DO-OVER

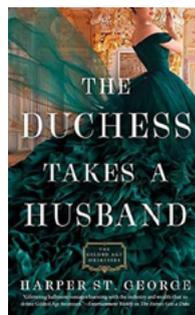
Park, Suzanne
 Avon/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
 \$16.99 paper | April 4, 2023
 9780063216051

A bestselling author is forced to go back to college and revisit more than one part of her past.

Lily Lee is best known in the literary world as the go-to author for learning how to succeed in the workplace.

In fact, she’s on top of the world in her corporate career, with a job offer from a dream company and a second book in the works. That all comes to a screeching halt when her new employer’s background check reveals that she never officially graduated from her alma mater 10 years ago—she’s a few credits short of a diploma, even though she walked across the stage at commencement, and what’s more, she’ll have to go back to school in order to complete her degree. Although Lily initially balks at the idea, she eventually decides to let herself relive her senior year of college. But it’s not all frat parties and dining hall meals; the teaching assistant for one of her classes is none other than her ex-boyfriend Jake Cho. As far as Lily’s concerned, Jake is the one who broke her heart when they were at school together. She’s reluctant to let him back into her life, especially when he seems to have everything together and her world couldn’t be more out-of-order by comparison. Now that she has a second chance to get things right, though, does that mean she should give things with Jake another try? Park’s latest novel skews a bit closer to women’s fiction than romance—Lily’s journey to self-empowerment and making peace with her setbacks feels more essential to the plot than her relationship with Jake. That said, the story is rooted in complex, relatable issues that are sure to have readers rooting for Lily the whole way through.

A story of second chances in life more than love.



THE DUCHESS TAKES A HUSBAND

St. George, Harper
 Berkley (336 pp.)
 \$8.99 paper | May 23, 2023
 9780593440988

A young widow makes a pact with a gaming hell owner: She’ll be his fake fiancée in exchange for sex lessons.

Readers of the previous books in the Gilded Age Heiresses series will remember Camille, who became Duchess of

Hereford and served as a cautionary tale to the other heroines. Her parents forced the young American heiress into a marriage with a cruel, older, titled Englishman. Now that he’s dead, Camille gets a second chance to find happiness. She never experienced pleasure from lovemaking, so she propositions Jacob Thorne, owner of Montague Club. At first he declines, although

not due to lack of interest in her, but when he's in need of a fiancée in order to secure an investor for a new enterprise, they make an agreement. This relationship is supposed to be purely physical for Camille, and Jacob always thought love was not for him, but eventually they both want more. Camille so deserves her happily-ever-after, and this exquisitely written story sensitively handles her growing awareness of the abuse she faced. It's gratifying to witness her discover her own voice and power, both in the bedroom and in society. Her internal growth is aided by her new involvement in the fight for women's suffrage, while her sexual journey takes time and realistically includes setbacks and frustrations. Jacob's business plotline feels slight and less compelling, and his switch from not wanting a relationship to total devotion is abrupt, but his kindness makes him the perfect partner for Camille.

A delightfully trope-filled romance with a most deserving heroine.



ONCE MORE WITH FEELING

Sussman, Elissa

Dell (416 pp.)

\$15.30 paper | May 30, 2023

9780593357378

When two former pop stars reunite for a Broadway show, the drama spills offstage and into their personal lives.

Kathleen Rosenberg always knew she wanted to be on stage—she just never imagined it would involve rein-

venting herself as Katee Rose, a pop star who was more famous for her contrived nasal singing voice and famous boyfriend than she was for her talent. Together with Ryan LaNeve, one-fifth of the boy band CrushZone, she made up one-half of America's favorite couple. That is, until things went awry and she found herself falling for another, more sensitive CrushZone member: Calvin Kirby. When her relationship imploded, so did her career. More than 10 years later, Kathleen has mostly moved on from her Katee Rose days—until she gets the chance to star in a Broadway show written by Harriet Watson, her best friend and songwriter, and directed by none other than Cal Kirby. Kathleen hasn't forgotten how he abandoned her when her career went up in flames, and she doesn't trust him. But the opportunity to live out her dream and show off her natural talent is too great to resist, and soon she's working side by side with the man she hates. Through long hours and lots of dance practice, though, Kathleen discovers that their chemistry never went away—in fact, it's stronger than ever. Would a relationship with Cal destroy everything Kathleen has worked so hard to build? As she did in her adult debut, *Funny You Should Ask* (2022), Sussman creates a dual-timeline story, simultaneously showing Kathleen and Cal's past as pop stars and their current lives as they attempt to move on and reinvent themselves. The chemistry between Kathleen and Cal is smoldering, and the stakes feel high—Kathleen doesn't want a dramatic romance to take attention away from her best friend's writing or to fall back into the

same mistakes she made when she was younger. Fans of 2000s pop music will eat up the details of Kathleen's early singing career—and her downfall, which mirrors the media's treatment of female pop stars at the time.

A winning second-chance romance that's fun, steamy, and full of crackling chemistry.

NONFICTION

★ These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

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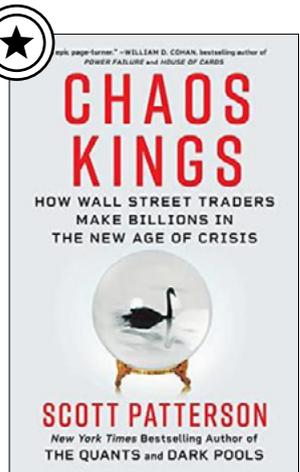
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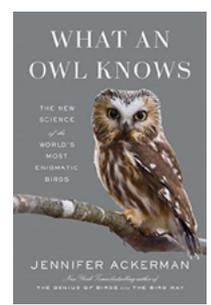
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CHAOS KINGS
How Wall Street Traders Make Billions in the New Age of Crisis
 Patterson, Scott
 Scribner (288 pp.)
 \$30.00 | June 6, 2023
 9781982179939



★ **WHAT AN OWL KNOWS**
The New Science of the World's Most Enigmatic Birds
 Ackerman, Jennifer
 Penguin Press (352 pp.)
 \$28.00 | June 13, 2023
 9780593298886

The award-winning science writer dives into the mysterious world of owls. Following *The Genius of Birds* and *The Bird Way*, Ackerman turns her attention to owls, which continue to captivate and inspire us—even though there is much we have yet to learn about these majestic creatures. Owls, she writes, are “powerful symbols” in many cultures, frequently depicted in literature and art. “Owls are hard to study in the wild for some of the same reasons we love them,” writes the author. “They’re quiet, wary, secretive, and often elusive.” Ackerman shares recent discoveries by researchers using new tools and technologies as well as her personal observations from the field. For example, scientists once thought owls did not scavenge, but “camera traps have caught owls helping themselves culturelike to carrion of all kinds.” While owls are aggressive defenders of their young, the extent to which they protect their nests is impressive. Researchers have observed great horned owls throwing themselves to the ground, feigning an injury known as a “broken wing display” in order to distract would-be predators. In studying owl communication, scientists have found that some “owlets begin vocalizing in the egg, even before they hatch.” Given that owls are primarily nocturnal, observing their migratory patterns has also proved challenging. However, high-tech tracking devices have allowed us to follow the owls for vast distances, yielding surprising insights. “Perhaps strangest of all,” writes Ackerman, “some Snowy Owls actually move north in the winter.” Ackerman also discusses the dangers owls are facing due to natural disasters and human activity, including wildfires, logging, and the widespread use of rodenticides. This book, like Ackerman’s others, is well written and researched, and the author offers sound advice from experts regarding what individuals can do to help save owls.

Fascinating food for thought for owl seekers and sure to please any lover of immersive treks into the lives of birds.

REVISITING WACO 30 YEARS LATER



Leah Overstreet

This April marks the 30th anniversary of the 1993 Waco, Texas, massacre. The horrific 51-day siege, which began on Feb. 28 when federal authorities sought to execute a search warrant for illegal weapons, pitted David Koresh and his Branch Davidian cult against the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. After the final attack on April 19, more than 80 people had been

killed in the fighting.

The events served as a catalyst for both the Oklahoma City bombings two years later and the continued proliferation of radical militia groups across the U.S. Three recent books provide indelible portraits of all aspects of the tragedy, including Koresh's life, the formation of the Branch Davidians, the standoff and siege, and the aftermath.

First up is *Waco: David Koresh, the Branch Davidians, and a Legacy of Rage* (Simon & Schuster, Jan. 24), by Jeff Guinn, who brings the same psychoanalytical skills that made *The Road to Jonestown* and *Manson* such

memorable biographical portraits. Digging into the history of the fascinatingly dark character of David Koresh, the author presents a “vivid combination of well-researched facts, personal testimonials, and controversial perspectives,” noted our reviewer. In addition to providing background on Koresh's life and leadership of the Branch Davidians, as well as narrating the siege and aftermath,

Guinn draws a clear line from Waco through the 1995 Oklahoma City bombings and up through the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. Ultimately, the author creates “an engrossing report on David Koresh and the endurance of cult culture.”

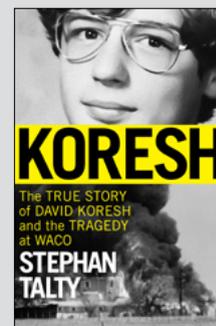
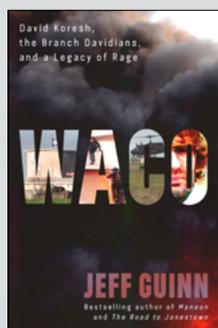
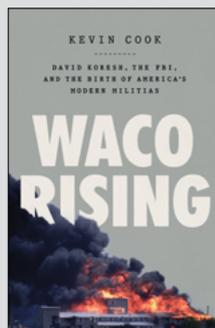
In *Waco Rising: David Koresh, the FBI, and the Birth of America's Modern Militias* (Henry Holt, Jan. 23), Kevin Cook delves even further into the motivations of Koresh and his followers and how their thoughts and actions have influenced militia culture to this day. “In the aftermath,” wrote our reviewer, “certain elements

of the story were distorted and misrepresented, and this controversial attention caused the true humanity behind the narrative to get lost. In this engrossing resurrection, prolific journalist and author Cook digs deep to uncover the forgotten human side of these terrible events, and he offers a painstaking reconstruction of leader David Koresh's life and ascent to leader.” Cook, the author of *The Burning Blue*, *Kitty Genovese*, and *Titanic Thompson*, among other books, is a diligent researcher, and his “meticulous history and character portraits also serve as timely reminders of the danger of homegrown militias and the cult-like figures who often lead them.”

Sadly, the topic of militias and mob violence seems to be evergreen, but Cook is a capable guide to one of the signal events of late-20th-century American history.

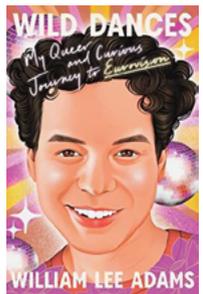
Maintaining a tighter focus on the troubling life of the Branch Davidian leader, Stephen Talty's *Koresh: The True Story of David Koresh and the Tragedy at Waco* (Mariner Books, April 11) is a vividly detailed chronicle of a madman's assumption of power. In what our reviewer describes as a “dark chronicle of hubris and violence,” Talty, the author of *The Good Assassin*, *The Black Hand*, and *Agent Garbo*, examines Koresh's “rise among unquestioning followers; his apocalyptic prophecy that led them to amass weapons; and the ill-conceived government surveillance that ended in a deadly raid.” Throughout this riveting historical biography, Talty is relentless in his investigation of Koresh's character. It's an often distressing read, but it's also necessary reading for anyone seeking to better understand how cult leaders are able to persuade people to do their bidding, which, more often than not, results in widespread violence and suffering.

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.



“An intimate and layered portrait of disabled womanhood.”

HEAD ABOVE WATER

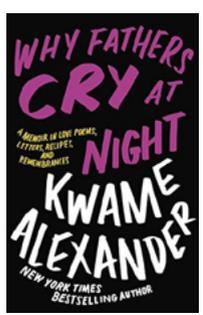


WILD DANCES
My Queer and Curious
Journey to Eurovision
Adams, William Lee
 Astra House (320 pp.)
 \$27.00 | May 23, 2023
 9781662601576

A biracial, queer American journalist chronicles his life from a tough Southern upbringing to a celebrated London-based blogger.

Vietnamese American BBC journalist Adams begins with his unconventional youth in rural Georgia as an effeminate boy saddled with a homophobic, pious family. Frighteningly embarrassed by his “slight lisp and high-pitched voice,” the author vividly describes his boyhood angst, trying “to hold my wrists straight, afraid of what the persistent bend and flop might signal.” At the same time, he fantasized about Burt Reynolds and considered Barbara Eden his muse. Adams also cared for his quadriplegic brother, monitored his bipolar Vietnamese mother, and voraciously studied encyclopedias. Excelling in school, the author received a scholarship to Harvard, which catapulted him away from the claustrophobic dysfunction to the big city, and he began thriving as a gay man searching for true love and dreaming of a life in Europe. After graduate school and an array of jobs in journalism, Adams fell in love with and married a dashing Brit named Ben, who introduced him to the international Eurovision song contest, whose founders sought “to create a space for countries to compete in peace through song, a musical World Cup.” Adams is an outspoken and humorous narrator. He is generous with personal details, and he amply shows how the glitzy allure of performance and competitive rivalry fuel his passion for the Eurovision contest. Happily, the author seems more at ease with himself and his present popularity, as the issues of belonging and identity that haunted him are, despite being formative, now bittersweet memories. Fans have come to know and love Adams for his informative, dishy Eurovision commentary on everything from vocal tone to sartorial missteps; with this book, he is certain to increase his fan base.

A revealing memoir about surviving childhood trauma to embrace the prismatic rainbow of chosen family.



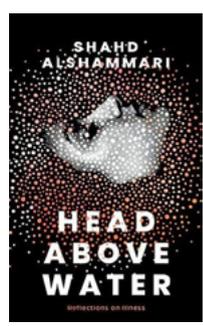
WHY FATHERS CRY AT NIGHT
A Memoir in Love Poems,
Letters, Recipes, and
Remembrances
Alexander, Kwame
 Little, Brown (240 pp.)
 \$28.00 | May 23, 2023
 9780316417228

A poetic and epistolary collage focused on familial, romantic, and nourishing love.

“This is not a traditional memoir,” writes Newbery Medalist

Alexander in the first of three introductions. “These are just snapshots of a man learning to love. Again.” In the second introduction, “A Letter to My Daughters,” the author writes, “All the things I wished I could have learned from my mother and was too afraid to ask my father are between these covers.” In the third, “How to Read This Book,” he advises, “Let these humble meditations and musings / carry you close, permanent, abreast—a wave.” The remaining sections of the book include “Looking for Me,” “A Letter to My Mother,” and an eponymous section. Using poetry, prose, and recipes, Alexander reminisces about healing his long-distant relationship with his father; moving forward following the death of his beloved mother; being inspired to become a writer by—and being a college student of—Nikki Giovanni (“My first grade in Nikki’s class was a C-minus. I was disappointed, but not discouraged”); the beginning and end of marriage (“and I remember feeling defeated / at not having a key / to my own wife’s apartment”); and myriad lessons about how to live a curious and wholehearted life. “Part of moving yourself forward in a life-giving way,” he writes to one of his children, “is to take the things from the past that have helped shape and mold you and use them as anchors to the future.” Writing about certain recipes, the author describes when and why he makes them—e.g., “this 7UP pound cake represents family tradition, connection, and love. Now, for the best results, don’t go substituting Sprite”; and Granny’s hot buttered rolls (“What I’m listening to while I bake: ‘Brighter Day’ by Kirk Franklin”). Alexander connects disparate forms through his disarmingly forthright, humble voice, familiar vernacular, and optimism.

This magnanimous hybrid-form memoir is rich with solace and wisdom.



HEAD ABOVE WATER
Reflections on Illness
Alshammari, Shabd
 Feminist Press (176 pp.)
 \$17.95 paper | July 18, 2023
 9781952177071

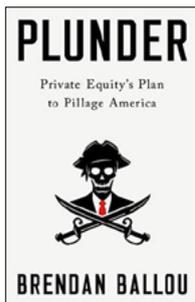


A Kuwaiti Palestinian professor of English literature reflects on living with multiple sclerosis.

When she was 18, Alshammari was diagnosed with MS and told that she had little time left to live. “It’s strange how compelling it is to think about your own death while you’re still alive,” she writes. Despite this devastating news, the author defied the odds, going to graduate school in the U.K. and returning to Kuwait to teach university students. Yasmeeen, one of her students, became Alshammari’s “friend and confidante” and encouraged her to write the book. When the author got overwhelmed, Yasmeeen suggested typing up passages from her diary, a recommendation that resulted in a conversation between the two women about passages Yasmeeen found fascinating or confusing. What results is a conversation that meanders from topic to topic, including Alshammari’s fiercely complicated love for her mother (“She is everywhere, a shadow, a ghost, a being that

there is no severing from”); meeting an older mentor at the MS society who helped her make sense of her deteriorating body; a near-death experience she had during an experimental treatment; and her first experience teaching *Otbello* to an all-male and an all-female class at her first postgraduate job. Throughout, the author places her personal battles with her body within the context of the disabled community’s battles with a social hierarchy that continuously attempts to rob them of agency. Alshammari’s frequent shifts between tenses and points of view generate a flowing intimacy that fully immerses readers in the traumas and triumphs of her life. While the author is honest about her pain, she never reduces herself to her trauma. This approach results in a vulnerable, compassionate narrative of tenderness and humanity. Ultimately, writes the author, the text is “the result of years of framing an illness narrative, a life-interrupted narrative, and one that captures the different angles of my kaleidoscope as I look inwards.”

An intimate and layered portrait of disabled womanhood.



PLUNDER
Private Equity’s Plan To Pillage America

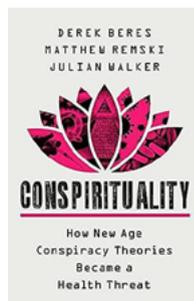
Ballou, Brendan
PublicAffairs (368 pp.)
\$30.00 | June 27, 2023
9781541702103

An examination of the role of private equity companies in gutting large segments of the American economy.

It’s no small irony that the typeface in which federal antitrust investigator and prosecutor Ballou’s book is set is “owned and licensed by a private equity portfolio company.” So is much of the retail and service sector. In one case, the Carlyle Group bought the ManorCare company for \$6 billion, which, by the magic of creative accounting, ManorCare had to pay back. Carlyle then sold much of ManorCare’s real estate and forced it to pay rent. In the end, Ballou writes, the resulting insolvency spoke to three facts: Private equity buys for the short term, piles up debt and fees on its acquisitions, and walks away from the wreckage thanks to elaborate protections assured by Congress, which are ensured by endless lobbying. Citing a litany of failures wrought by equity firms — Sears, Radio Shack, Toys “R” Us, Rockport, Neiman Marcus, and more — Ballou notes that the owners make their fortunes on the backs of workers deprived of pension funds and jobs. In 2021, the CEO of one equity firm made more than 10 times the CEO of JP Morgan Chase. The power of equity firms is only growing, in large measure because many municipalities are turning to them to provide and maintain infrastructure as well as “services once provided primarily by the government, including ambulance companies and firefighting departments, 911 dispatch services, and technical colleges”—all funded by taxpayers and ratepayers with no say in the matter. Ballou concludes with a program keyed to federal agencies and departments—e.g., “investigate rollups,” the practice of procuring small firms such as dental

practices and merging them into larger companies; and contain the usurious practices of payday lenders, once controlled but then unleashed by Trump-era deregulation.

A powerful, maddening account of some of the chief drivers of inequality and immiseration in the world’s richest economy.



CONSPIRITUALITY
How New Age Conspiracy Theories Became a Health Threat

Beres, Derek, Matthew Remski & Julian Walker
PublicAffairs (384 pp.)
\$30.00 | June 13, 2023
9781541702981

A sprawling critique of the dangerous promise and politics of the modern well-

ness industry.

Beres, Remski, and Walker—three veterans of New Age wellness and co-hosts of the eponymous podcast—attempt to untangle a web of histories connecting yoga, pseudoscience, toxic individualism, and fascism. The titular term, a portmanteau of *conspiracy* and *spirituality*, describes the ideological pathway that ushers many wellness-seekers from innocuous self-improvement to political extremism. Conspiritualists generally come to wellness depoliticized and ideologically vulnerable, and they are often desperate for answers to physical or spiritual problems that traditional religion and medicine have failed to provide. Conspiritualists generally assign more agency to individual impurity than systemic injustice. Their faith in charismatic gurus, who unveil the arbitrary forces (karma, “energy”) supposedly governing bodily health, primes them to accept similar myths (Pizzagate, QAnon) about the wider world. This trajectory is bolstered by a lucrative online wellness-influencer industry in which algorithms encourage extremist political content, resulting in “an online religion that strings mysteries together on a compelling narrative arc.” The authors couple their firsthand experiences with well-researched accounts of clairvoyants and cult leaders to criticize the cultural appropriation, disaster profiteering, and moral panic scaffolding the conspirituality economy. Their study locates pieces of this formula across time and space, from present-day Hindu nationalism to Nazi racial ideology and the American eugenics movement. “The timeline is chaotic,” write the authors, “but cryptic hashtags keep it strung together: #savethechildren, #trustthepan, #enjoytheshow, #WWG1WGA. It’s chilling, because you’ve heard these terms in a news report about QAnon.” If this seems like a lot of threads to weave into a single narrative, it is. The book verges on conspiratorial thinking in trying to neatly connect them all through disparate accounts of sexual, racial, and bodily anxiety. However, the core argument about the contemporary conspirituality pipeline is compelling.

Useful, timely revelations about the political underbelly of New Age spiritualism.



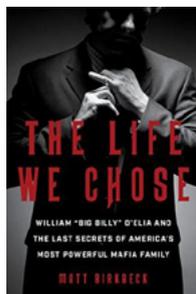
MAGIC WORDS
What To Say To Get Your Way

Berger, Jonah
 Harper Business (256 pp.)
 \$32.00 | March 7, 2023
 9780063204935

Want to get ahead in business? Consult a dictionary.

By Wharton School professor Berger's account, much of the art of persuasion lies in the art of choosing the right word. Want to jump ahead of others waiting in line to use a photocopy machine, even if they're grizzled New Yorkers? Throw a *because* into the equation ("Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine, *because* I'm in a rush?"), and you're likely to get your way. Want someone to do your copying for you? Then change your verbs to nouns: not "Can you help me?" but "Can you be a helper?" As Berger notes, there's a subtle psychological shift at play when a person becomes not a mere instrument in helping but instead acquires an identity as a helper. It's the little things, one supposes, and the author offers some interesting strategies that eager readers will want to try out. Instead of alienating a listener with the omniscient *should*, as in "You should do this," try *could* instead: "Well, you could..." induces all concerned "to recognize that there might be other possibilities." Berger's counsel that one should use abstractions contradicts his admonition to use concrete language, and it doesn't help matters to say that each is appropriate to a particular situation, while grammarians will wince at his suggestion that a nerve-calming exercise to "try talking to yourself in the third person ('You can do it!') in fact invokes the second person. Still, there are plenty of useful insights, particularly for students of advertising and public speaking. It's intriguing to note that appeals to God are less effective in securing a loan than a simple affirmative such as "I pay all bills...on time"), and it's helpful to keep in mind that "the right words used at the right time can have immense power."

Perhaps not magic but appealing nonetheless.



THE LIFE WE CHOSE
William "Big Billy" D'Elia and the Last Secrets of America's Most Powerful Mafia Family

Birkbeck, Matt
 Morrow/HarperCollins (272 pp.)
 \$28.99 | July 11, 2023
 9780063234673

A fresh tale of "mafia royalty."

Even readers well versed in true-crime tales may not have heard of the Bufalino family, headed for decades by Russell Bufalino (1903-1994), "arguably the most powerful and important organized crime figure of the twentieth century." Bufalino was known as a fixer, the guy who would broker a truce between warring

factions or persuade a recalcitrant manufacturer why he should break with the Teamsters. As veteran investigative journalist Birkbeck writes, Bufalino and lieutenant and surrogate son Billy D'Elia were strongly implicated in the disappearance of Jimmy Hoffa, and Billy had tales to tell—not that he told them, at least not to the feds. There were plenty of things to talk about, many full of tangles: Russell was an initial protector of Hoffa, though he warned him that it was a mistake, after a jail term for jury tampering, to try to regain leadership of the union after having made a deal with federal prosecutors to the contrary. On the dirtier side of things, mobster pariah Joey Gallo may have run afoul of Russell just ahead of having his head blown off in a Little Italy restaurant, about which Billy mildly remarks, "Russell? He never said anything about Gallo being killed. Nothing. And I didn't ask him." Throughout, the quotidian details of mob life are fascinating. Regarding the so-called poultry wars of the 1980s, for instance, there was a good reason why a leading manufacturer ran an ad proclaiming, "It takes a tough man to make a tender chicken." Even more intriguing is how Russell, the quiet don, became a

Joy

What dwells within a body?
 A soul

What dwells within a soul?
 A song

What dwells within a song?
 Only sorrow

I dream of a land
 where every heart
 when lonely dances
 every petal when withers
 arrives at pearly gates
 every tear becomes a star

ISBN-10: 1594980926
 ISBN-13: 978-1594980923

"A Chinese poet seeks answers in the sky and the soul...from the first page to the last, the poems are dramatic and deeply spiritual."
 —Kirkus Reviews

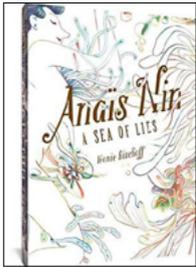
For All Inquiries, Please Email
xueyanpoetry@163.com • xueyanpoetry.com

“A dazzling portrait of a complicated writer.”

ANAÏS NIN

central inspiration for Mario Puzo and then Marlon Brando’s *Godfather*, while D’Elia, putatively a waste-management consultant, was an obvious model for Tony Soprano.

An eye-opening look at the ordinary—and nasty and lethal—business of organized crime.



ANAÏS NIN *A Sea of Lies*

Bischoff, Léonie

Trans. by Jenna Allen

Fantagraphics Books (200 pp.)

\$29.99 | June 6, 2023

9781683967590



A full-color illumination of the intersection between the renowned writer’s creativity and sexuality.

In her latest book, which serves as a kind of psychobiography, Brussels-based Swiss cartoonist

Bischoff captures both the inner and outer lives of her fascinating subject Anaïs Nin (1903–1977). The narrative opens with Nin’s stifling marriage to a banker with his own creative aspirations, a tolerant man who was unable to help his wife unleash the sexuality she knew was within her. In the text, Nin often describes herself as “innocent,” and the combination of art and text reflects that side of her—the initiate, the explorer—while a second voice inside her, perhaps the voice of her diaries, urges her to be true to herself. “On the surface, I am calm and secure,” she says. “But few know how many women live inside me.” During the course of Bischoff’s chronicle, Nin encounters a kindred spirit in Henry Miller and becomes even more deeply enraptured by his wife, June. However, it’s clear that Miller wants to edit Nin’s work to make it more conventional, to have her, she fears, write like a man. Later, a psychiatrist tries to help her with her tumultuous emotional journey while also succumbing to her seductive lure. Then she travels further into forbidden territory with her cousin. Throughout, the illustrations are graphic and sensual without being pornographic. They are at their most powerful when they address Nin’s stormy inner life. As she becomes consumed by her dedication to a very daring sort of artistic truth, she defies the conventions of monogamy, heterosexuality, and domesticity. Bischoff effectively demonstrates how Nin splits into different incarnations with the different people who enrapture her and discovers a way to turn her personal truths into celebrated art: “I will make of my life a masterpiece and invent a language to tell it.”

A dazzling portrait of a complicated writer.

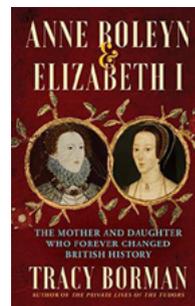
DELAWARE
before the RAILROADS
A DIAMOND AMONG THE STATES
DAVE TABLER

ISBN: 979-8987000601 [paperback]
ISBN: 979-8987000625 [hardcover]
ISBN: 979-8987000618 [eBook]

“...the volume should appeal to regional history buffs and proud Delawareans.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*

“A lavishly illustrated history immersing readers in Colonial Delaware life and culture.”
—*BookLife Reviews*

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ANNE BOLEYN & ELIZABETH I *The Mother and Daughter Who Forever Changed British History*

Borman, Tracy

Atlantic Monthly (320 pp.)

\$28.00 | June 20, 2023

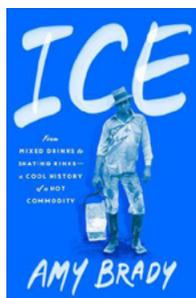
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A new look at the Tudors from the prolific author of *Crown & Sceptre* and *The Private Lives of the Tudors*.

Borman, the joint chief curator of England’s Historic Royal Palaces, delves deeply into two of the most influential women of the era. Anne Boleyn may have been a minor historical figure compared to her daughter, but the author delivers an insightful portrait. Spirited and cultured from many years in France, she fascinated Henry VIII, who was bored after 15 years with his first wife, Catherine, and frustrated by the lack of a male heir. As king, he had little difficulty acquiring mistresses, so her refusal to go to bed with him increased his ardor, and he married her. Her first child, Elizabeth, wasn’t male, several miscarriages followed, and “the qualities that had made Anne so alluring as a mistress—her...passionate nature, her obstinacy and outspokenness—had quickly become irksome in a wife.” Attracted by the more placid Jane Seymour, Henry had Anne beheaded in 1536. Royal children were raised by an army of attendants; their

parents lived elsewhere, so readers should take with a grain of salt Borman's statement that Anne was a major influence in her daughter's life. Elizabeth spent her first 14 years dealing with her father's frightening mood swings and then another decade under two half siblings (Edward VI and Mary) who were no improvement. When she assumed the throne in 1558, she could learn from three predecessors, and historians agree that perhaps her most important decision was to treat them as bad examples. Borman's detailed biography of Anne gives a minor role to politics and European affairs because she exerted little influence. Although Elizabeth I was a powerful world figure, the author gives her the same treatment, concentrating on her private life, family quarrels, and life at court. Readers will learn more about her wardrobe than the ongoing Reformation.

Very personal lives of two famous Elizabethans.



ICE
From Mixed Drinks to Skating Rinks—a Cool History of a Hot Commodity

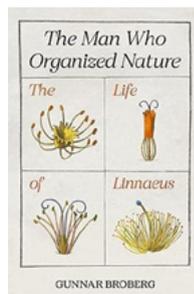
Brady, Amy
 Putnam (336 pp.)
 \$29.00 | June 6, 2023
 9780593422199

A lively history of ice in America.

Environmental historian Brady, executive director of *Orion* magazine, takes a wide-ranging, comprehensive tour of places and people associated with our frosty obsession. Frederic Tudor's idea of shipping blocks of ice from post-Revolutionary War Massachusetts to Martinique and selling them didn't go well. It went better in Cuba and New Orleans, where ice and liquor paired well, and Tudor's ice-cutters and icehouses were a big success. Florida doctor John Gorrie's experiments using ice on yellow fever victims led to his groundbreaking invention of a hand-cranked ice-making machine. Their use in hospitals and shipping was transformative. With the advent of cars, people could stop at their local ice dock, and icemen and their wagons, as popular as milkmen, were popping up all over in popular culture. In the 1930s, General Electric began manufacturing affordable refrigerators. A visit to Mount Vernon taught Brady about Washington's slaves harvesting ice on the Potomac for his well, which fed his love of ice cream. In 1818, Philadelphia free Black man Augustus Jackson's ice cream was a sensation. Ice cream peddlers became commonplace, and the sundae, iced tea, and Good Humor ice cream bar were born, as were electric air conditioners and cocktail bars like Manhattan's influential Milk and Honey. The author also visited Bill Covitz, a master ice sculptor, to watch as a laser cut designs from massive blocks. In 1887, St. Paul, Minnesota, made a big splash with its 14-story ice castle, constructed of 30,000 blocks of ice. "Mechanically created ice could transform ice sports as we know them," Brady notes, as she uncovers the indoor worlds of ice skating, hockey, speed skating, and curling. In 1949, Frank Zamboni unveiled his eponymous machine, which could resurface an entire rink in 15

minutes. The author also investigates why ice is so slippery, and she concludes her spirited book with a look at the dire effects of cold and making ice on an endangered planet.

Bursting at the seams with icy facts and trivia.



THE MAN WHO ORGANIZED NATURE
The Life of Linnaeus

Broberg, Gunnar
 Trans. by Anna Paterson
 Princeton Univ. (440 pp.)
 \$39.95 | June 27, 2023
 9780691213422

A Swedish scholar chronicles the life of the indispensable botanist and taxonomist.

Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) formalized the modern binomial system of naming organisms. Broberg (1942-2022), former

★ "Uschuk's poetry collection calls out authoritarianism and social injustice."

"This moving set of poems offer messages of hope as it addresses timely issues."

"...a spellbindingly compassionate collection rooted in the belief that redemption remains possible: 'Earth carries us, heals our wounds as we spin on the hub of desire.'"

"A mordantly tender triumph rich with natural imagery."

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review) Ⓢ

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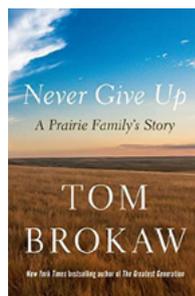
“Brokaw pays homage to the sacrifices of his parents’ generation—and finds their successors wanting by comparison.”

NEVER GIVE UP

professor emeritus of history of ideas and sciences at Sweden’s Lund University, provides a detailed account of his subject’s work as well as his “darker aspects.” The son of a country pastor, Linnaeus overcame poverty to impress scholars and acquire patrons, who financed expeditions across Sweden, beginning with a yearlong trek through Lapland, to document wildlife and people as well as economic possibilities. Beginning in his 20s, he published scores of books on botany and zoology, and his naming system gradually won over other naturalists. By middle age, he was world famous, and travelers deluged him with their discoveries. Definitely not ahead of his time, Linnaeus never doubted that all species came from the hand of God and remained unchanged, but he was a stickler for evidence. He rejected spontaneous generation and most legendary creatures (unicorns, dragons) that other naturalists accepted. That his classification of plants according to their sexual parts was denounced as obscene is probably exaggerated, but his conclusion that humans were animals shocked many contemporaries. Scholars still debate whether his classification of modern humans is racist, and Broberg digs into this element of his legacy.

Writing for a general audience, the author mostly avoids turgid academic prose, but those who are less scientifically inclined may struggle with some passages. They can easily ignore the generous footnotes and bibliography but not the dense thicket of quotations. Within the text, if Linnaeus quarrels with a colleague, Broberg describes the disagreement and then follows with a long excerpt from a letter in which Linnaeus recites his complaints. Readers will lose little by skipping past any pair of quotation marks.

Everything you ever wanted to know about Linnaeus and more.



**NEVER GIVE UP
A Prairie Family’s Story**

Brokaw, Tom
Random House (160 pp.)
\$28.00 | June 13, 2023
9780593596371

The venerable news anchor narrows the Greatest Generation to the folks back home.

Born and raised in small-town South Dakota at the end of the Depression, Brokaw recounts values learned in farm fields and at the kitchen table, all distilled into the admonition of his title. The Brokaw family, erstwhile French Huguenots converted to Catholicism out on the prairie, made do with what they had. Emblematic of their grit was Brokaw’s father, known as Red for his fiery hair, who began to work as a frontier factotum at the age of 8 and, on the side, did a little bare-knuckle fighting. “It was the beginning of an adventurous working-class life,” writes the author, “that lifted Red to heights he could not have imagined as a youngster working on difficult prairie projects.” He moved on from descending into crumbling holes to clear wells to helping build one of the country’s largest dams. “His unspoken guide to life,” Brokaw reiterates, “was never give up, never complain.” It was the kind of regime guaranteed to send a person to an early grave, but it afforded Brokaw the wherewithal to get an education and start out on a journalism career that would eventually land him at the top of his profession. With no false sentimentality, the author also celebrates his mother, who seemed able to do just about anything around the home but also “taught her sons to do laundry and ironing” and was a whirlwind of an organizer for the Democratic Party. With his customary evenhanded tone, Brokaw voices a few regrets, including not quite understanding at the time how the anti-Vietnam War movement, mostly populated by people who had deferments and weren’t going to fight anyway, alienated old-school liberals such as Brokaw’s dad and “played right into the fury of working-class Americans.”

Brokaw pays homage to the sacrifices of his parents’ generation—and finds their successors wanting by comparison.

Creating Beauty from the Abyss
THE AMAZING STORY OF SAM HERCIGER, AUSCHWITZ SURVIVOR AND ARTIST

Lesley Ann Richardson

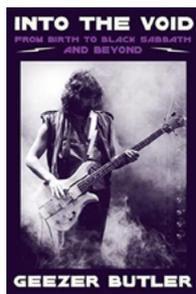
ISBN: 978-9493276109 [paperback]
ISBN: 978-9493276123 [hardcover]
ISBN: 978-9493276116 [eBook]

“An intimate portrait of a life which experienced the extremes of suffering and joy, that captures in searing prose the horrors of the Holocaust.”
—Colin Barnes, Author of *They Conspire Against Your People: The European Churches and the Holocaust*

“...a monumental work of historic fact and power.”
—Christine Darg, Author of *Jerusalem: The Inmoveable Rock*

“A gripping, harrowing account of suffering and hard-won humanity.”
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

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INTO THE VOID
From Birth to Black Sabbath—and Beyond

Butler, Geezer
 Dey Street/HarperCollins (288 pp.)
 \$29.99 | June 6, 2023
 9780063242500

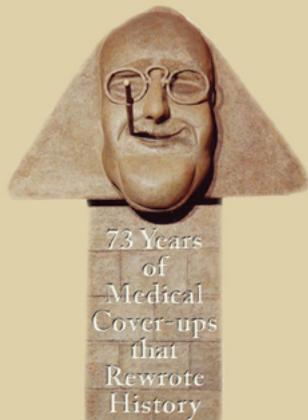
The Black Sabbath bassist chronicles his life and career.

Resolutely working-class, dirt-poor, and downright dirty, the four members of Black Sabbath were an unlikely success. It's not often that a bassist is called on to offer an opinion, Paul McCartney notwithstanding, but Butler acquits himself well in this memoir—and he did, after all, write most of Sabbath's lyrics. The trajectory is unsurprising: Seeing the Beatles, another working-class bunch, set the world on fire, they were royally ripped off by management. Drugs and alcohol did the rest of the damage, so that the millions they made turned into hundreds until finally an honest

bloke came along and helped sort them out. Butler isn't afraid to laugh at himself or his mates. "Tony [Iommi] was the year above Ozzy at school and allegedly bullied him—he always said that Ozzy had the kind of face you wanted to punch," he writes. "Ozzy never stopped being the kid from the year below Tony, and Tony never stopped being the band leader. As is common with lots of groups of mates, once that hierarchy was established, it never disappeared." The author also offers a few what-if moments, such as the fact that Sabbath almost didn't happen because Ian Anderson was trying to lure Iommi to join Jethro Tull, a band that pointed the way to success: "We had to treat it like a nine-to-five job...and we had to start writing our own songs. Covers would no longer do." Butler, apparently mild-mannered, is less tender toward other erstwhile band mates, especially Ronnie James Dio, and is downright scathing in his assessment of Emerson, Lake & Palmer. The author's opening is particularly apropos: "It's a minor miracle all four of the original lineup survived beyond the 1970s, let alone that we're all still here."

Sabbath fans will enjoy Butler's long stroll down Memory Lane, though not his never-again epitaph for the band.

FDR UNMASKED



by Steven Lomazow, M.D.
 Foreword by David A. Andelman

ISBN: 978-90-6299-293-5

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WORDS WITH...

CLAIRE DEDERER

In *Monsters*, a critic and memoirist grapples with how to approach art by problematic artists

BY LAURIE MUCHNICK



Stanton J. Stephens

CLAIRE DEDERER HAD a Roman Polanski problem. She loved the director's movies, but in 2014, as she researched his life for a book she was writing, she couldn't get past what she calls his "monstrousness." He'd made *Rosemary's Baby*, and he'd raped a 13-year-old girl. What was she supposed to do with this cognitive dissonance? Moreover, could she still watch Woody Allen movies? Listen to Michael Jackson's music? She found herself less interested in the question of how a monster can make sublime art than in the audience's problem: What to do with your love for the art when you're disgusted by the artist? Further immersion in this question led to Dederer's new book, *Monsters: A Fan's Dilemma* (Knopf, April 25).

It wasn't a problem that could be solved by thinking, she discovered. "You do not need to have a grand unified theory about what to do about Michael Jackson," she writes. "The way you consume

art doesn't make you a bad person, or a good one. You'll have to find some other way to accomplish that." Speaking over Zoom from her Seattle houseboat, Dederer recently addressed this and other issues. Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

You say that in certain ways this is a book about broken hearts.

What do you mean by that?

I think that one of the central ideas of the book is that knowledge of these artists' biographies comes to us whether we want that knowledge or not—we can't avoid it. And sometimes we really don't want to know. So if you accept the idea that we can really love a work of art—and especially in that section about broken hearts, I was writing about music and the way music can become so interwoven with our lives that it almost feels like you're speaking it yourself—and then to find out that the person who made the music has done something awful: It's a specific kind of heartbreak. It's just a deep sadness.

The book is called *Monsters*, but you're focusing on the audience, not the artist—how the monster's work is being received.

When I wrote my last book, *Love and Trouble*, I was writing about predation of young girls in the 1970s. It's about my own experience, but I used Roman Polanski as a sort of central figure to help me think about this problem. And when I finished the book, I was still watching Roman Polanski movies, even though I knew so much about him, and I thought, *Well, that's an interesting problem*. So I came to this book with this idea of the problem of my own experience. And I think I really benefited from my experience with having written two memoirs, because I was already comfortable with the idea that you can write from your own experience and, in doing so, find a way to reach your audience and have them think about their own experience. I think if I had just been coming at it as a critic, I might have balked more.

You mention that when you started writing for the *New York Times Book Review*, your editor told you "no swearing" and said the use of *I* is discouraged. It felt like in this book you were rebelling against that kind of criticism. You swear, you

insist that impersonal subjects like “we” or “women” actually mean “I,” and you use a lot of exclamation points!

I think that a lot of what the book is about has to do with the irrepressibility of our enthusiasm as fans, and that’s why *fans* is foregrounded in the title. There were a lot of other words that came up for the subtitle, but *fan* held its own. And I think that irrepressibility of love for the work, and enthusiasm for the work, sort of rides through the book, and I think it does erupt syntactically in those exclamatory moments. And, you know, as a critic, that’s a really frightening thing to do. It’s vulnerable—to show that emotion, to be enthusiastic, to be a cheerleader in that particular kind of way, is not a safe place to be. But it was really important to me because, first of all, it’s very easy to talk about the argument against consuming the work, the badness of the act. It’s much harder to talk about the love of the work, so I really wanted that to animate the book.

It’s interesting that you say enthusiasm makes you vulnerable. You write about how you don’t approach criticism like you’re standing on Mount Olympus declaring a piece of art a success or failure.

When a critic makes a pronouncement like that, when they say *This is the best* or *This was a success*, that’s a way of cloaking one’s subjectivity in the garb of authority. And that can be fun, because it’s so ridiculously arguable, but it’s inherently bananas.

Does it make a difference if the artist isn’t making money from your consumption of their art?

There’s a certain kind of person who, when they hear about my book, says, “Well, you just don’t pay for their work.” And they’re sort of done and dusted; you can see them dusting off their hands. But if you start thinking about it, where do you draw the line? How do you decide what’s monstrous enough to stop paying for it? I think it’s falling back on a very limited role that we can play in a capitalist world, our role as consumers, and that that is ultimately a false sense of power and a false sense of meaning.

You say that sometimes we’re attracted to artists—male artists, mostly—because they’re assholes, not in spite of the fact. Why do you think that is?

Yeah, let me point at the history of rock. I think there are these kind of avatar figures that we allow to enact freedom, and somehow that freedom always involves being a dick. They’re performing urges and actions that we’re constrained from performing in day-to-day life. So I think they’re acting on our behalf. And also, we live in this maw of information, there’s just a constant flow of information, and being an asshole is a way of moving the plot forward. It’s something that happens, and we all get to talk about it. So on its most basic level, I don’t know if we’re attracted to that, but we’re certainly attracted to talking about it.

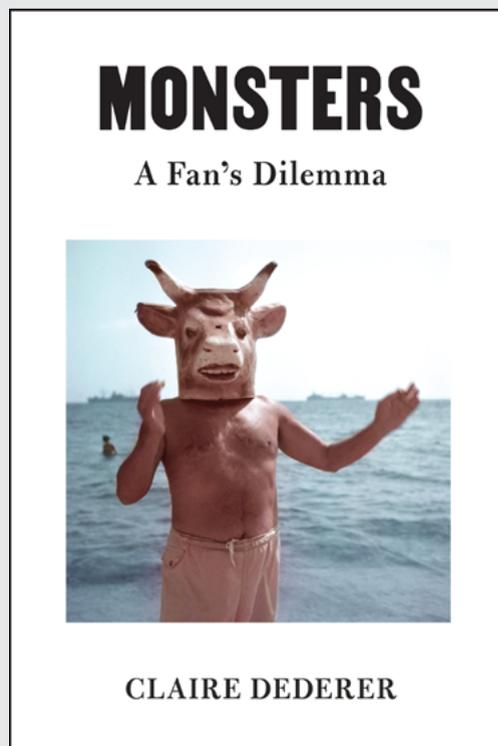
Is there a difference between just, say, watching Woody Allen’s *Manhattan* or agonizing over these questions and then watching *Manhattan*? What about the critic who says the artist’s biography doesn’t matter?

I like the idea that people who are critics and read all the time and think about things to the point of absurdity can agree that agonizing over it makes them a better person—so I’m tempted to just say, yeah. But what I really think is...let’s say I watch *Manhattan*. And I’m somebody who was predated and molested as a preteen, so that isn’t something I’m choosing to agonize over; I’m *forced* into a position of agonizing by that film. Whereas somebody who didn’t have that experience isn’t forced into the agonizing position. And everybody who has a history or a biography has something in art that’s going to be agonizing for them. So I guess to me, the problematizing of the consumption comes from my biography and yours, and this person’s and that person’s, and to say that the two things should be separated is to diminish a person’s biographical experience that is different from yours.

So the people who say that biography doesn’t matter are basically the people who had the same biography as the creator?

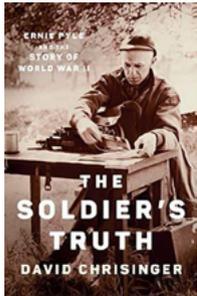
Exactly. There’s this transmission from somebody who’s from this narrow range of human experience, and then that’s called an objective appraisal of the art. But what it is, in fact, is a misunderstanding of one’s own role in history.

Monsters received a starred review in the Jan. 1, 2023, issue.



“A meticulously researched, authoritative history.”

REVOLUTIONARY SPRING



THE SOLDIER'S TRUTH
Ernie Pyle and the Story of World War II

Chrisinger, David
Penguin Press (400 pp.)
\$30.00 | May 30, 2023
9781984881311

The World War II career of America's most popular war journalist.

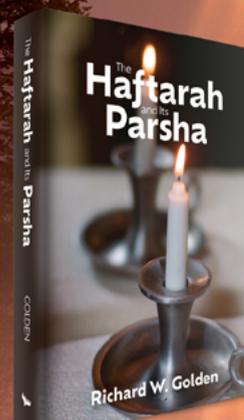
In 1944, with a Pulitzer Prize under his belt and his column circulating to more than 14 million readers, Ernie Pyle (1900-1945) was exhausted. He was ready to return from liberated France to his ailing wife and the seclusion of the New Mexico desert. However, the war drew him back in, and he died during the American landing on Ie Shima. Chrisinger, a writing instructor and author of *Stories Are What Save Us: A Survivor's Guide to Writing About Trauma*, illuminates the approach to reporting that won Pyle so many fans but cost him his life. The author shows how

Pyle captured “the average guy’s picture of the war” by living among soldiers, collecting their stories, and relaying them to his readers in immersive detail. Though he shows that Pyle’s journalism was not without detractors—Arthur Miller thought it too focused on “the boys who make homes in foxholes” and not enough on the war’s “meaning”—Chrisinger does not comment directly on Pyle’s merit. Instead, he puts his writing into context for modern readers, providing “the stories beneath the stories Ernie told his readers” and the wider-angle accounts of troop movements and battles that Pyle typically left out. Moreover, the author provides ample quotations from Pyle’s columns, showing us a portion of what wartime readers would have seen: a pilot trapped in his downed plane calmly smoking a cigarette and waiting for whatever came next; a soldier taking cover in an Italian cowshed and musing on the best way to keep his son out of the next war; the ride into Paris in August 1944 (“they tossed flowers and friendly tomatoes into your jeep”). Displaying Pyle’s detailed snapshots of victory, levity, fatigue, death, and grief, Chrisinger leaves his readers free to form their own conclusions about Pyle’s journalistic achievements.

The compelling story of “America’s most beloved war correspondent,” who lost his life recording soldiers’ real experiences.

"Groundbreaking"

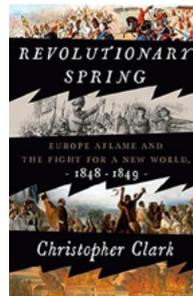
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REVOLUTIONARY SPRING
Europe Aflame and the Fight for a New World, 1848-1849

Clark, Christopher
Crown (880 pp.)
\$40.00 | June 13, 2023
9780525575207

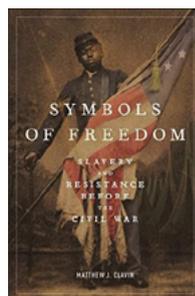


A panoramic portrait of Europe in turmoil.

Clark, a professor of modern European history, offers a sweeping view of the political turbulence that broke out across the entire European continent in 1848, “the only truly European revolution that there has ever been.” He sets the stage for these uprisings with a close examination of social, economic, and political conditions throughout Europe in the 1830s and ’40s, a period characterized by competition for scarce resources, low rates of productivity growth, and a “deepening of patriotic networks.” In the 1830s, liberal and radical activists faced sanctions “ranging from military interventions to prosecutions, the covert sponsorship of government-friendly organizations and newspapers, and networks of spies and informants,” and pressures and grievances built up and finally erupted. Examining uprisings in France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, and Hungary, Clark finds “no single issue at the heart of the revolutions, but rather a multitude of questions—about democracy, representation, social equality, the organization of labour, gender relations, religion, forms of state power, among many other things.” Furthermore, he writes, the revolutions did not catapult radicals into power; the new parliaments created after 1848, he reveals,

were predominantly conservative. Nevertheless, they ushered in “modern representative politics: “parliaments, parties, election campaigns and the publication of parliamentary debates.” Clark’s abundantly populated narrative features major players, such as Robert Blum, Giuseppe Mazzini, Clemens von Metternich, Alexis de Tocqueville, Marx and Engels, along with lesser-known figures, including women confronted with the “immovability of the patriarchal structure.” The author thrillingly captures the excitement of cities “humming with political emotion,” the effect of the uprisings on geopolitical tensions around the world, and the international interventions that “shaped the revolutions’ course and conclusion.” Clark makes a clear connection between the tumults of 1848—“the unpredictable interaction of so many forces”—and “the chaotic upheavals of our own day, in which clearly defined endpoints are hard to come by.”

A meticulously researched, authoritative history.



SYMBOLS OF FREEDOM
Slavery and Resistance
Before the Civil War

Clavin, Matthew J.
New York Univ. (304 pp.)
\$29.95 | June 13, 2023
9781479823246

Historical study of how the nation’s iconography inspired patriotism and rebellion.

Clavin, a professor of history, argues persuasively that the nation’s iconic national symbols and images fueled and shaped slave and anti-slavery resistance before the Civil War. “For enslaved people and their allies,” he writes, the American flag, Fourth of July celebrations, and language of the founding documents “justified and inspired revolutionary violence in the pursuit of two interconnected objectives—the death of slavery and the birth of a new and truly egalitarian nation.” Both slave uprisings and abolitionist

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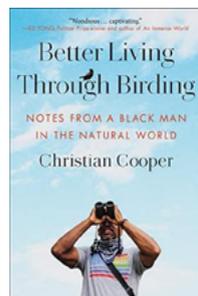
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“Candid reflections from an appealing guide to the birding life.”

BETTER LIVING THROUGH BIRDING

movements were motivated not only by the cruelty and inhumanity inherent in enslaving men, women, and children, but by the existence of slavery as “the ultimate symbolic betrayal of American freedom.” Images of the slave trade being carried out in front of the Capitol, with the flag proudly waving, appeared in anti-slavery publications. Fourth of July celebrations, likewise, seemed blatantly hypocritical: In some Southern states, slave auctions were held on that date, while elsewhere in the South, pro-slavery Whites tried to strip the holiday of its political meaning, “making the holiday a carnival of food, drink, and entertainment, rather than a celebration of revolutionary people, events, and ideas.” Clavin reports that many instances of escapes and uprisings occurred on the holiday grounded most famously in American values. On July 5, 1852, the escaped slave and acclaimed orator Frederick Douglass delivered a rousing two-hour speech, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” in which he underscored American exceptionalism as aspirational, offering a plan “for the republic’s redemption,” if it lived up to its claim of liberty and equality for all. Yet others—such as David Walker and Henry Highland Garnet—justified their call for violent slave resistance by citing the revolutionary Declaration of Independence, which affirmed “both the right and duty of Americans to overthrow their oppressors” and to ensure justice for all.

A deeply researched, generously illustrated perspective on antebellum America.



BETTER LIVING THROUGH BIRDING Notes From a Black Man in the Natural World

Cooper, Christian
Random House (304 pp.)
\$28.00 | June 13, 2023
9780593242384

A celebration of the delights of watching birds.

On Memorial Day 2020, Cooper was bird-watching in Central Park when he asked a dog walker to comply with the park’s rules and leash her dog. Her angry response prompted him to video the interaction on his phone—including her call to the police claiming that “there’s an African American man threatening my life.” Posted by one of Cooper’s friends, the video ignited a “firestorm of attention.” That racist incident brackets the author’s engaging debut memoir chronicling his transformation from a nerdy kid on Long Island in the late 1960s, who confessed that he was gay only to one friend, into a Black, queer activist who revels in bird-watching. Cooper became a birder on nature walks with his father and during the family’s yearly summer camping trips to national parks. As they drove, he read *Peterson’s Field Guide to the Birds*, surprising his parents when he could identify some of the species they encountered. Birding was an immediate pleasure. “One of the best things about birding,” he writes, “is how it pulls you out of your inner monologue and forces you to observe a larger world.”

Feeling like a misfit in high school, Cooper found Harvard more welcoming. He discovered the Harvard Ornithological Club and the Gay Students Association, and he came out to his three roommates. The author recounts many remarkable bird sightings in his travels in Central Park and around the world, and he peppers the text with birding tips—e.g., don’t learn bird-songs from recordings but rather from attentive listening. As the author shows, birding was a constant amid personal tumult: affairs and a brief marriage; renewing his relationship with his difficult father; the deaths of his mother and grandmother; protesting racism and anti-LGBTQ+ violence; and introducing the first gay superhero when he wrote for Marvel Comics.

Candid reflections from an appealing guide to the birding life.



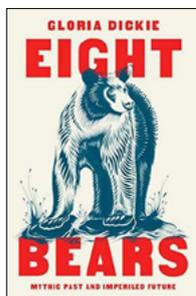
THE LAST ACTION HEROES The Triumphs, Flops, and Feuds of Hollywood’s Kings of Carnage

de Semlyen, Nick
Crown (352 pp.)
\$28.99 | June 6, 2023
9780593238806

A film journalist looks at the era of action-hero movies and the stars that powered them.

The action movies made in the 1980s and ’90s had no pretensions to be high art. Rather, they told simple stories in which muscle-bound good guys punched, shot, or blew up armies of bad guys. *Empire* magazine editor de Semlyen, the author of *Wild and Crazy Guys*, loves the genre, and this book is an engaging tribute to the figures who created it. Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger are at the center, with lengthy biographies, but the author has plenty to say about other stars like Bruce Willis, Chuck Norris, Jean-Claude Van Damme, and the odd Steven Seagal. Some of the action movies of the era—e.g., *Rocky*, *Terminator*, *Die Hard*, and *Under Siege*—were huge hits, while others made decent money even though their appeal was more limited. Of course, many were awful. Entertainment was the goal, and comic-book violence was the means; any connection with reality was entirely coincidental. There was a long-running feud between Stallone and Schwarzenegger, which de Semlyen enjoys exploring, although he notes that it ended with the two of them waltzing together at a party (which must have been something to see). The period was fun, but it couldn’t last, partly because the stars themselves began to age and partly because CGI would begin to dominate the movie-making business. Schwarzenegger’s semi-ironic *Last Action Hero*, made in 1993, foretold the end of the era, with the focus shifting to younger, spryer men like Keanu Reeves as well as to women like Charlize Theron. The author is clear on the reasons for the appeal of the genre: “There’s something eternally comforting... about cheering on characters who don’t need superpowers to make the earth a better place. Just bravery, brawn, and a well-placed kick.”

A joyful romp featuring larger-than-life characters, iconic movies, and plenty of behind-the-scenes info.



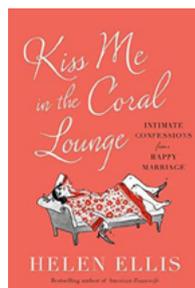
EIGHT BEARS
Mythic Past and Imperiled Future

Dickie, Gloria
 Norton (336 pp.)
 \$30.00 | July 11, 2023
 9781324005087

A look at the world's eight surviving bear species.

As Reuters global climate and environment correspondent Dickie notes, some of the world's embattled bears are charismatic bywords for wild animals as a whole: the polar bear, say, or the grizzly. Others, such as the spectacled and sloth bears, are scarcely known. Yet all are slipping away save for the black bear, the sole species "considered secure throughout its global range," and 6 of the 8 are under immediate threat of extinction—all due to human interventions in their environments. Their fortunes were not always so tenuous. As the author writes, modern bear lineages appeared over the last 5 million years or so, "extremely recently in terms of geological time," and spread to every continent except Australia. Still, their day in the sun has been curtailed: There are perhaps 500 primate species, vastly outnumbering ursines. While many hunting cultures revered bears even as they feared them, urban civilizations have tended to discount them—and to kill in the course of encounters almost always initiated because humans are intruding into bear country. This sometimes happens in unexpected places. In North Gujarat, India, for example, sloth bear attacks on humans numbered 1 per year between 1960 and 1999, on average, while today the number has jumped to nine. The culprit? Lack of water in the hot summer months, when most attacks occur, caused by climate change. Climate change, of course, is devastating polar bears, who are becoming fewer and smaller, the result of a tightening food chain and loss of sea ice habitat, which "could disappear completely as early as 2035." Dickie concludes by noting that the future is likely bleak. By 2100, she observes, the world's human population is projected to reach 11 billion, and "every new human exacerbates the crises faced by the natural world."

Gloomy in outlook but a cleareyed view of the world's bears and the many threats they face.



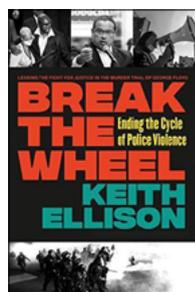
KISS ME IN THE CORAL LOUNGE
Intimate Confessions From a Happy Marriage

Ellis, Helen
 Doubleday (224 pp.)
 \$26.00 | June 13, 2023
 9780385548205

Life and marriage can be difficult and hilarious, as these short essays demonstrate.

The chapter titles in this collection by novelist Ellis give a good indication of the tone throughout—e.g., "My Husband Snores and Yours Will Too," "Slumber Party Side Effects May Include...," and "How To Talk About Touchy Subjects." Most of the pieces are whimsical with an edge, with the author holding forth on topics such as her marriage to a Greek American husband, her Alabama upbringing, her life among the New York literati, her fondness for grudges ("I love my shit list. If I had the nerve to type it, I'd laminate it"), and more. In the chapter on her husband's snoring, Ellis chronicles her attempts to block it out. One tactic was to have him sleep in their TV room, which they call the Coral Lounge because "we painted it a delirious shade of coral that borders on Starburst candy orange." In a memorable piece on wedding calamities, the author writes that she was late for her own wedding because she couldn't get a taxi in midtown Manhattan, and two nights before the ceremony, "the Greek restaurant where we'd booked our reception had burnt to the ground." In "A Woman Under the Influence of Joan Collins's *Dynasty*," Ellis notes that she binge-watched the prime-time soap because "I want to live like a 1980s TV villainess." As with many essay collections, some lines are excellent while others feel forced. Unfortunately, this one has more than its share of clunkers. For example, "I want a sex drive that rivals a Chevrolet dealership." This book is for readers who appreciate passages like this one about the revitalization of the author's sex life after her husband started taking Viagra: "How can I put this? I haven't seen *Star Wars* since the 1970s, but I know enough to recognize a lightsaber in my hand."

Hit-or-miss comic essays on marriage and its discontents.



BREAK THE WHEEL
Ending the Cycle of Police Violence

Ellison, Keith
 Twelve (288 pp.)
 \$30.00 | May 23, 2023
 9781538725634

A revealing behind-the-scenes look at the legal proceedings surrounding the murder of George Floyd.

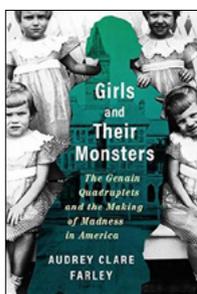
In a lucidly written narrative that deftly handles a variety of legal tangles, Ellison, Minnesota's attorney general, observes that, though he was deeply troubled

“Haunting and impactful, this story does not leave the mind easily.”

GIRLS AND THEIR MONSTERS

by Floyd’s murder and its place in a “wheel of policing” of deeply embedded racism, he was obligated by his oath of office to be evenhanded and fair—and more, “to be perceived that way.” In a season of unalloyed injustice, a swirl of police killings of other young Black men, this was easier said than done. The Minnesota AG’s office assumed ownership of the case from the start, unusually, with some legal experts assuming that the officer charged in the killing, Derek Chauvin, could not receive a fair trial in the city. Instead, Ellison and his team, sometimes against and sometimes with the cooperation of the defense, selected “the single most diverse jury I had ever impaneled”—no easy matter in itself. The argument Ellison and his team mounted was not simply that Chauvin had gone murderously rogue as his fellow officers stood by (and refused to allow a passing paramedic to examine Floyd), but that Chauvin and company knew they were violating procedure. On that note—and of systematic application in examining police brutality elsewhere—Ellison writes, “Something buried inside the culture of the MPD determined the behavior Chauvin displayed and the other three mirrored, regardless of training, policy, or strategy.” That culture, he suggests, requires thoroughgoing reform that may not be politically popular; the test for him came soon after the trial. “Can a prosecutor charge, prosecute, and convict an officer and survive reelection?” Ellison asks meaningfully. “The voters said yes. But so much more needs to be done.”

A vital contribution not just to the literature of the Floyd trial, but to that of police reform generally.



GIRLS AND THEIR MONSTERS
The Genain Quadruplets and the Making of Madness in America

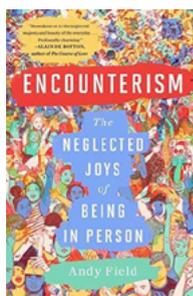
Farley, Audrey Clare
Grand Central Publishing (304 pp.)
\$29.00 | June 13, 2023
9781538724477

A dark vault of pseudoscience, mental illness, and fame contained in a chronicle of four identical quadruplets in midcentury America.

In her latest book, following *The Unfit Heiress*, Farley chronicles the devastating lives of famous identical quadruplets born in 1930 to Carl and Sadie Morlok. The Morlok quadruplets performed on stage and off, maintaining the image of the perfect American family with matching outfits, dance routines, and plenty of publicity. Behind the doors of the Morlok home, however, the girls lived in a tumultuous, often brutal environment. By their mid-20s, all four were diagnosed with schizophrenia and institutionalized. At the time, schizophrenia was one of psychology’s core puzzles, and the Morlok girls were the once-in-a-lifetime candidates for research. At the time, writes the author, “the estimated frequency of quadruplet births with at least one baby surviving is about one in a million.... The chance of their *all* having schizophrenia is about one in one and a half billion. It’s hard to imagine they will ever again have such an

opportunity for study.” Pulling no punches, Farley chronicles their story from birth to death, extracting the truth of their abuse by their father, the medical community, and the world. Not for the faint of heart, the book is a powerful but unsettling tale. Readers will be upset at the horrifying events of the girls’ lives as well as America’s dark obsession with them as children. Throughout, the author does well to maintain concise readability while investigating the murky waters of midcentury psychology, pop culture, and eugenics. The archival narrative approach feels deeply personal with respect to the Morlok women, but the segments expanding on psychiatric philosophy and procedures may take readers out of the otherwise novelistic flow of the text. Nonetheless, Farley tightly interweaves the quadruplets’ lives with the story of America’s fraught relationship with mental illness.

Haunting and impactful, this story does not leave the mind easily.



ENCOUNTERISM
The Neglected Joys of Being in Person

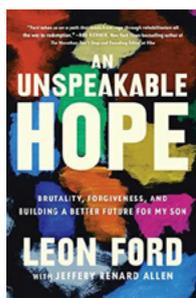
Field, Andy
Norton (304 pp.)
\$17.95 paper | July 18, 2023
9781324036586

According to this engaging book, building personal connections takes courage, but it’s worth the effort.

In the 21st century, many of us have forgotten how to forge meaningful relationships with those outside our inner circles. However, while we might be out of practice, we can rediscover how to do it. This is the underlying message of this book, a textured exploration of the myriad forms of human contact. Field, a performance artist based in London, has participated in events that have been surprising, comedic, and poignant, and he has drawn crucial lessons from his experiences. The author’s essays cover a wide range of topics, from the intimacy of a haircut to the collective joy of a dance party to the importance of holding hands. Field believes that humans have a basic need for contact, and the isolation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic was psychologically damaging at both the social and personal levels. With the pandemic waning, it’s the perfect time to reconsider our interactions, renew our relationships, and be open to the wider world. Field also shows how the move away from face-to-face interaction was underway before the pandemic. Though he appreciates the utility of smartphones and Zoom, he is clear that we should not let them take over our lives or replace the nuanced warmth of conversation. Deepening a friendship is something that enriches life, but the other ingredient is being willing to venture into the unknown by connecting with strangers. Field discusses how temporary communities suddenly form, such as when sheltering from a rainstorm or with a spontaneous snowball fight. He also looks at cinema audiences at a horror movie, showing how catharsis, like many things, is better when it’s

shared. In fact, the author recommends you give this book to a stranger after reading it—an appropriate conclusion for a quietly inspiring book.

A poetic, insightful examination of human connections and unexpected intimacy.



**AN UNSPEAKABLE HOPE
Brutality, Forgiveness, and
Building a Better Future for
My Son**

Ford, Leon with Jeffrey Renard Allen

Atria (320 pp.)

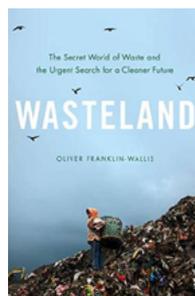
\$28.99 | May 2, 2023

9781982187279

Racially implicated police violence finds an unlikely redemptive turn in this memoir by a survivor.

On Nov. 11, 2012, Ford was pulled over by Pittsburgh police for allegedly running a red light. Mistaken for a gang member with a similar name, he was ordered to step outside his car. When he did not immediately comply, he was shot five times, paralyzing him from the waist down. During the trial, “all three officers were claiming they believed their lives were in danger.” However, the jury decided that the police response was unwarranted. Given his experiences, Ford has many valuable lessons to offer. “Now I know that I might not have been shot had I said to the officers, ‘I’m uncomfortable. Please have your supervisor come here to the scene.’ These are words all young Black men should know,” he writes. Angry and yearning for revenge, Ford began to absorb peacemaking lessons of the sort offered at one turn by Quaker activists and at another by an entrepreneur who advised him to invest the proceeds of his legal settlement. Speaking to young people about his experiences also began to change some of his views. “If I killed a police officer,” he asks, “what example would that set for these youth who believe in me? Who follow me? What example would it set for my son?” Anti-police activism gave way to an unexpected reconciliation with the officer who shot him. More, Ford urges a kind of enlightened capitalism amid a closing self-help manifesto: “Money talks. Activists must learn to engage in conversations across the racial, political, and financial divide, for only the sharing of widespread resources can bring about change. If we build more businesses, if we generate more jobs, if we grow the economy, everybody wins.”

A timely book about resiliency that will find both advocates and detractors but is well worth hearing out.



**WASTELAND
The Secret World of Waste
and the Urgent Search for a
Cleaner Future**

Franklin-Wallis, Oliver

Hachette (400 pp.)

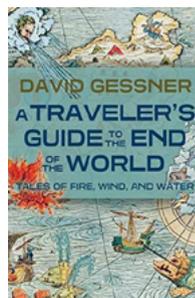
\$29.00 | July 18, 2023

9780306827112

When it comes to waste, out of sight is definitely not out of mind, as this book makes clear.

Franklin-Wallis, features editor at *British GQ*, is interested in what happens to things after we throw them away, although the story inevitably becomes intertwined with his personal attempts to reduce his own output. The author chronicles his treks through sewer systems and visits to recycling plants, staggered by the size of the waste problem even while finding some reasons for optimism in changing social attitudes and practices. However, as he shows, most solutions seem to generate further problems. For example, he believed that using tote bags instead of plastic was environmentally responsible, until he learned that totes come with a sizable footprint. For decades, wealthy countries exported their waste to poorer countries, and although the practice has diminished, there is a painful legacy. Writing about his trips to India and Ghana, he shows us that they have waste problems of their own, many so massive they might be impossible to overcome. The most common ways to dispose of waste are to burn it, bury it, dump it into the ocean, or simply let it pile up. Of course, these “solutions” merely turn it into a problem for someone else. Franklin-Wallis wishes he could offer a sweeping solution, but he sees no easy fixes. He proposes legislation to require greater transparency from companies, which is a good idea but does not get to the core issue of waste being caused by overproduction, which in turn is tied to overconsumption. “The conclusion that I come to is laughably simple,” he writes. “Buy less stuff. I recognize that this is not the most original idea, but there’s something liberating in it.” Is this sort of individual action the remedy? It’s an essential part, perhaps, but it’s not a satisfying answer. Nevertheless, the author gives readers much to ponder.

A sturdy outline of the future of toxic chemicals, microplastics, and endless garbage.



**A TRAVELER'S GUIDE TO THE
END OF THE WORLD
Tales of Fire, Wind,
and Water**

Gessner, David

Torrey House Press (320 pp.)

\$21.95 paper | June 20, 2023

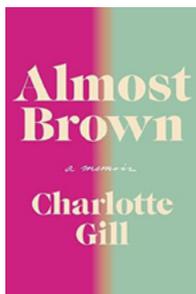
9781948814812

A climate change polemic that attempts to be less apocalyptic than most.

Early on in his latest book, award-winning nature writer Gessner, author of *All the Wild That*

Remains, presents a droll cartoon illustrating how to write a nature essay in six panels: “Find something. Contemplate it. Express awe. Quote Thoreau. Describe threats. End hopefully.” Despite admitting that “my faith in number six is wavering,” he aims to describe what the world will be like when his daughter reaches his age, in 2063. A veteran journalist, he has no trouble finding bad news. Climate change has damaged places he has lived—hurricanes in North Carolina, fires in Colorado—and he chronicles his travels to Norfolk, Virginia, where Atlantic tides are already rolling through downtown, and southern Louisiana. The latter has become a poster child for environmental ruin after a massive oil spill followed by a steady annual ooze and five recent hurricanes that have left a landscape of abandoned towns, crumbling homes, a forest of oil rigs that continue to provide close to 20% of U.S. oil production, and countless dead birds and other wildlife. Perhaps uniquely in the U.S., few quarrel with estimates that the region will be underwater within a century. Despite a few bright spots—e.g., Glen Canyon’s lake in Arizona is not doing badly—the future looks grim, as the environment remains a low priority for most Americans and the subject itself has been swept up in witless sectarian politics. Gessner quotes veteran geoscientist and climate activist Orrin Pilkey: “What we are experiencing, along with the rising sea, is a tsunami of anti-intellectualism. Science is at a new low in the public’s view....I think the coal and oil companies, aided by politicians, have done fundamental damage to science in this country. It’s true we are not always right. But we deserve to be listened to.”

Excellent environmental journalism, light on optimism.



ALMOST BROWN
A Memoir

Gill, Charlotte
Crown (256 pp.)
\$27.00 | June 6, 2023
9780593443019

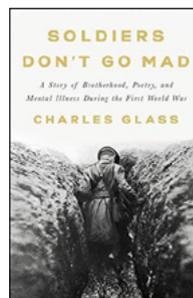
A biracial writer uses her father’s story to interpret her own.

Gill was born in London, but she grew up in a small town in upstate New York where everyone knew her biracial

family’s story. When her father, who was born in India but grew up in Kenya, married her Catholic English mother, his family disowned him for marrying a “white bride.” This estrangement, combined with Gill’s father’s intensely gendered household rules, led her to support her mother during the couple’s subsequent divorce. “At the time, it didn’t really seem like a choice between white and brown so much as a preference for Mom over Dad....It wasn’t simply a question of skin, or belonging, or the Englishness of Mom, or the Indianness of Dad, or some murky middle state in between,” writes the author. “It had become a curry of emotion and allegiance and identity, everything cooked together, all at once.” Gill spent years not speaking to her father, which heightened confusion about her racial identity. The author wonders, “What does it mean to be brown?”

and notes that her Punjabi cousins, whom she considers racial role models, lack the “singsong accents or delightful head wobbles or any other mango-infused idiosyncrasies often attributed to Indians.” When asked to outline her “diversity practices” for a job interview, Gill admits that she considers diversity “some deeply flawed bullshit,” and she worries that admitting to her biracial identity might lead to her stealing a job from “some better-qualified, normal, non-diverse person.” While the author never seemed to fully resolve issues about her identity, she reconciled with her father. The book’s strongest sections depict the evolution of Gill’s relationship with her father and explain the historical context that shaped her parents’ lives. Unfortunately, her analysis of her biracial identity is problematically superficial and outdated, and her memoirlike sections are overly descriptive but inadequately circumspect.

A largely disappointing memoir from a biracial immigrant.



SOLDIERS DON'T GO MAD
A Story of Brotherhood, Poetry, and Mental Illness During the First World War

Glass, Charles
Penguin Press (352 pp.)
\$29.00 | June 6, 2023
9781984877956



The devastating trauma of modern warfare and its influence on psychotherapeutic advancements and inspiration for some of the most emotionally charged poetry of the 20th century.

Craiglockhart War Hospital, which opened in October 1916 outside of Edinburgh, was among the first hospitals established to treat officers suffering from shell shock (later called PTSD). Rather than return these officers to civilian life, the treatment was intended to prepare them to return to battle and fill in the ranks of massive losses sustained since the beginning of the war. Craiglockhart was notable for the significant role it played in advancing therapeutic treatments of shell shock through psychiatrists such as W.H.R Rivers—and for the impact this facility had on the lives of two emerging poets: Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen. The literary journal *The Hydra*, produced by the patients and edited by Owen, became “a vehicle...for some of the most profound and heartrending poetry of the war.” Within an engrossing novelistic structure, Glass, a former war correspondent and author of *They Fought Alone* and *The Deserters*, expertly weaves the stories of these men into a history of Craiglockhart and advancing insights into the causes and treatments for shell shock. Along the way, the author traces how class differences influenced the level of treatment provided. Only ranking officers received sufficient treatment for shell shock, while the soldiers were often forced to go back into battle or risk being executed. Drawing from letters, diary entries, and military and medical documents, Glass probes deeply into the complex lives of Rivers, Sassoon, and Owen, and he capably explores the

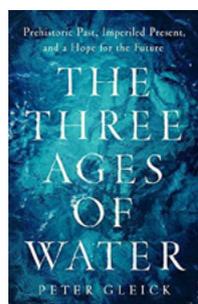
“A masterful portrait of a man of great intellect, patience, and ability who should not be overlooked by history.”

PRESIDENT GARFIELD



profound influence that Sassoon and Rivers had on each other's careers and how the burgeoning friendship between Sassoon and Owen impacted their poetry and feelings about the war. “To both poets, the war was damnable,” writes Glass. “Sassoon blamed the country's rulers and its complacent citizenry, while in Owen's poetry the war appeared as a natural catastrophe beyond human control.”

An absorbing, well-researched addition to the expansive canon of World War I literature.



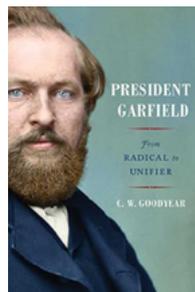
THE THREE AGES OF WATER
Prehistoric Past, Imperiled Present, and a Hope for the Future

Gleick, Peter
PublicAffairs (368 pp.)
\$30.00 | June 13, 2023
9781541702271

An expert warning on climate change with an emphasis on water.

MacArthur fellow Gleick, a globally recognized expert on water, begins with statistics—e.g., 97% of the world's water is salt water, and 80% of the fresh water is used to grow food—and then devotes nearly half of the text to a history of the world. The author's first “age” of water runs from the Big Bang to the end of the Middle Ages, and the second is “our age,” when scientific and industrial revolutions led to the “replumbing of the entire planet with hard infrastructure that dammed, channelized, collected, treated and redistributed almost every major freshwater source on Earth.” Though we possess the ability to feed Earth's 8 billion people, deliver safe drinking water, and take away wastewater, it's not happening because these advances came with “the unintended consequences of pollution, ecological disruption, water poverty, social and political conflict, and global climate change.” The third age of water will lead to a dystopian future unless we fix matters, and Gleick devotes the remainder of the book to that prospect. The most gripping (and distressing) chapters recount our disastrous abuse of freshwater ecosystems, which cover less than 1% of the Earth's surface and continue to shrink. Freshwater fish have the world's highest rate of extinction among vertebrates. When fossil fuels are exhausted, alternatives exist, but this is not the case with fossil water (wells, aquifers for irrigation). Gleick delivers a realistic solution in which economists do cost-benefit analyses that include the loss of free-flowing rivers, dislocated communities, floods, the costs of human ill health from pollution, pandemics, loss of wilderness and nature, and the “use-value” of natural ecosystems. However, this requires governments to spend money, nations to work together, and communities to “do what needs to be done.” Ultimately, writes the author, “the chronic problem is a lack of will and commitment.”

A well-documented book with more hard facts than usual but not more optimism.



PRESIDENT GARFIELD
From Radical to Unifier

Goodyear, C.W.
Simon & Schuster (624 pp.)
\$35.00 | July 4, 2023
9781982146917

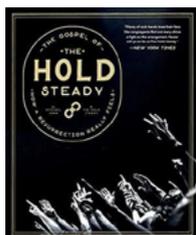
The first extensive biography of the scholar, soldier, and statesman whose short-lived presidency influenced change and even unity in American government.

In his debut book, Washington, D.C.–based historian Goodyear chronicles the life of James Garfield (1831–1881). In the acknowledgments, the author describes himself as “an embarrassingly starstruck” admirer of renowned biographer Edmund Morris, and his vividly descriptive style, buttressed by an exhaustive use of primary and secondary sources, effectively echoes the approach and prose in Morris' brilliant trilogy of the life of Theodore Roosevelt. Goodyear relates his subject's life in fascinating, comprehensive detail, from his remarkable climb from onerous poverty in what was known as the Ohio Western Reserve to college president, state legislator, brigadier, major general in the Civil War, U.S. congressman, and president and his relationship with his indispensably patient, tolerant, and loving wife, Lucretia, whom Garfield labeled “unstampedable.” The author displays a smooth aptitude for the complex postwar political workings of 19th-century machine politics and internecine Republican Party patronage squabbles, and he ably explores Garfield's relationships and tussles with the likes of James Blaine, Roscoe Conkling, and Conkling's lieutenant, Chester Arthur. Goodyear describes Garfield's remarkably even, conciliatory deportment, which made him a friend to nearly all in his various stations and won him the 1880 Republican presidential nomination. He also offers a gripping account of a deranged office seeker's attack that would eventually end the president's life and how his legacy helped foster comity and reform in American politics and government. Goodyear's invaluable biography breaks Garfield free from the group of late-19th-century presidents seemingly crystallized as interchangeable, bearded figures occupying the first chair of a weakened executive branch and offers a compelling profile of one of the ablest men to serve as president.

A masterful portrait of a man of great intellect, patience, and ability who should not be overlooked by history.

“Brace for media feuds and frostbite as Hartman entertains on the trail between New York City newspapers and the North Pole.”

BATTLE OF INK AND ICE



THE GOSPEL OF THE HOLD STEADY *How a Resurrection Really Feels*

Hann, Michael & The Hold Steady

Akashic (160 pp.)

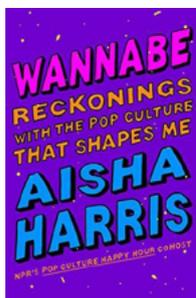
\$40.00 | July 25, 2023

9781636140957

A colorful montage of stories about and photographs of American rock band The Hold Steady, by both members of the group as well as dedicated fans.

“The Hold Steady didn’t change my life, it *is* my life,” writes the band’s frontman, Craig Finn, in the introduction. “And if you’ve read this far, it’s likely yours too.” The band formed in 2003, when Finn moved from Minnesota to New York City following the breakup of his and guitarist Tad Kubler’s previous band, Lifter Puller. This book’s publication coincides with The Hold Steady’s 20th anniversary. “We’re all about to hit fifty or well into our fifties,” says guitarist Steve Selvidge, “so there’s not a lot of room for bullshit or drama at this point.” Much of the “the gospel” features new interviews—compiled by Hann, a former music editor at the *Guardian*, to read as conversational dialogue—with band members, notably Finn, Kubler, and bassist Galen Polivka: “It was never a chore to practice,” says Finn, “because we were gonna get a bunch of beer and have a party with the instruments on”; “If you put that much booze into people who are having fun,” Polivka says, “it’s going to invariably get weird”; “We’re terrible communicators,” notes Kubler, “and I think part of it is just being a bunch of guys from the Midwest who are not comfortable talking about how they feel.” The text covers the band’s history, loyal following, and plenty of alcohol. Chapters of dialogue are interspersed with a handful of reverential essays by music journalists, including Rob Sheffield and Hann, who writes, “The Hold Steady no longer spend shows drinking like they’re at a Hold Steady show.” The book closes with dozens of testimonials from devotees—e.g., “Their shows were the closest I’d come to a religious experience.”

A must-have for admirers of the band and a good choice to fans of bar rock.



WANNABE *Reckonings With the Pop Culture That Shapes Me*

Harris, Aisha

HarperOne (320 pp.)

\$26.99 | June 13, 2023

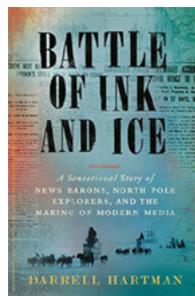
9780063249943

An interrogation of movies, TV, and music and their impact through the lens of a Black millennial.

In this debut collection of lively essays, Harris, co-host of NPR’s “Pop Culture Happy Hour,” ranges from topics such as how to critique Black art and the cultish behavior of superfans, aka stans, to how parenthood and

the desire to have children are depicted on-screen. The author shows how pop culture narrowly depicts Black and brown people and lays out the entertainment industry’s uneven transformation to more equitable representation. The strongest essays are the personal ones, such as “I’m a Cool Girl,” which shows how Harris took her cues on dating from romantic comedies such as *Sleepless in Seattle* and *She’s Gotta Have It*, featuring the powerful protagonist Nola. “I’m drawn to her,” writes the author, “because she’s emanating domination and superiority, wielding the quintessential Brooklyn artist life in the kind of vast, chic, exposed-brick Fort Greene loft that no twenty-something could afford today without self-identifying as a trust-fund baby, influencer, or both.” Later, Harris speaks to how she was often the only Black girl in her friend group and how she just “wanted desperately to blend in and bury the inescapable self-awareness of being The Only One at a time in my life when existing as anyone already really, really sucks to begin with.” In some of the more academic essays, the author cites numerous studies, articles, and opinion pieces, which can feel like padding in an already-slim book. Furthermore, since pop culture contains many genres and is always expanding, one wonders whether many of the current TV shows, movies, and songs Harris references will be remembered by readers in five years. Still, this collection offers a thoughtful and incisive discussion on how pop culture, whether intentional or not, influences the way we move in the world.

A vibrant, well-researched view on how current pop culture both reflects and informs our society.



BATTLE OF INK AND ICE *A Sensational Story of News Barons, North Pole Explorers, and the Making of Modern Media*

Hartman, Darrell

Viking (400 pp.)

\$30.00 | June 6, 2023

9780593297162

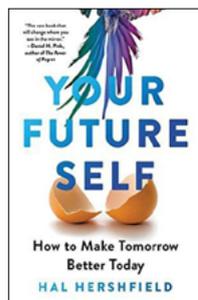
A thorough account of the unexpected connection between American media and Arctic exploration at the turn of the 20th century.

Hartman, who has written for the *Paris Review*, *Travel + Leisure*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, pulls back the curtain on an era in which newspapers not only paid for exclusive rights to explorers’ reports; they also funded full expeditions. He deftly links the dual narratives of Arctic exploration and the emergence of modern media in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. When “comparatively unknown southerner” Adolph Ochs assumed control of the *New York Times*—a newspaper many thought was beyond saving—near the end of the century, James Gordon Bennett Jr. and the *New York Herald’s* domination of the market began to slip. Ochs chose the paper’s new slogan, “All the News That’s Fit to Print,” and wanted the paper to become a respected “national authority” and an “impartial



arbiter of ideas.” Bennett, meanwhile, planned to “give the public what it craved” and “achieve unprecedented circulation.” In spite of these varied approaches, the *Times* and *Herald* both found the quest for the North Pole newsworthy. Ochs and Bennett were on opposing sides as Arctic explorers Frederick Cook and Robert Peary asserted competing claims of reaching the North Pole. The ensuing battle featured payouts for damning proof that an explorer had invented his data, a nasty confrontation at a public lecture, and the stunningly flimsy presentation of evidence from both explorers. Though Hartman occasionally succumbs to the challenge of keeping dual subjects on track, he is a natural storyteller who breathes life into the most obscure details, keeping readers invested as the tale progresses. This is an engrossing and readable account of polar exploration, the birth of the modern newspaper, and media wars that feel all too familiar to modern readers.

Brace for media feuds and frostbite as Hartman entertains on the trail between New York City newspapers and the North Pole.



**YOUR FUTURE SELF
How To Make Tomorrow
Better Today**

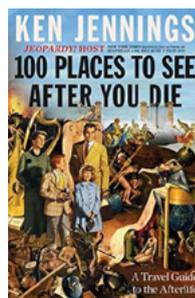
Hershfield, Hal
Little, Brown Spark (304 pp.)
\$29.00 | June 6, 2023
9780316421256

How to act on your own behalf. Hershfield, a psychologist and professor of marketing, offers thoughtful, research-based guidance about making

decisions in the present to create a better future for yourself. “If you were able to sit down and have a conversation with your future self,” he asks, “what would you say, and what would happen as a result?” Marshaling abundant anecdotes, hypothetical scenarios, and findings from social science research, the author asserts that often we use “the emotional states of our current selves to make decisions for future selves who will no longer feel the same way.” Instead, we must recognize that our future self may have different needs and perspectives from our present self. Everyone changes over time. Rather than there being “a central self at our core,” Hershfield has found from his own research that each individual is “an aggregation of separate, distinct selves.” When we become “overly anchored on present-day concerns,” though, we imagine that a future self will feel exactly the same way as we do now. The author suggests that connecting with a vividly imagined future self can make us more likely to act on that future self’s behalf—by saving more for retirement, for example, or by choosing a healthy diet and exercising. Some strategies to help make that connection include writing a letter to a future self or looking at age-progressed images. “In a variety of ways,” he writes, “we see our distant selves as if they are other people. What matters is the relationships we have with those other people.” When deciding whether to commit to some future activity, we should weigh “how much burden and stress” the

activity may create against the positive opportunities that may arise from the experience. To help achieve our goals, Hershfield proposes assorted commitment devices to help us follow a desired course of action and overcome undermining behavior.

An encouraging, practical guide for decision-making.



**100 PLACES TO SEE
AFTER YOU DIE
A Travel Guide to
the Afterlife**

Jennings, Ken
Scribner (304 pp.)
\$27.99 | June 13, 2023
9781501131585

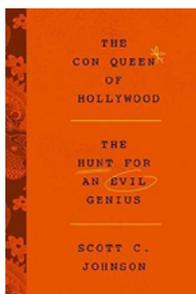
Everything you always wanted to know about the afterlife but were too alive to ask.

Jennings, famous *Jeopardy!* champion and author of multiple bestselling books, catalogs 100 conceptions of an afterlife conjured from mythology, world religions, books, movies, TV, music, theater, and beyond. Sources include such landmark depictions of heaven and hell as those in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and Milton’s *Paradise Lost* as well as in lesser-known texts. Amusingly, Jennings presents his compilation as a sort of guidebook for tourists. There are sidebars on “Where To Stay” (in Dante’s *Inferno*, that’s the First Circle, “but it’s crowded and books up fast”), “Getting Around” (in Hades, via Charon, the ferryman of the dead), and “Eating and Drinking.” In ancient Egypt, “In-Room Dining” for the pharaohs includes a personal supply of mummified eats. Popular-culture portrayals of the afterlife include usual suspects like *It’s a Wonderful Life* and *The Twilight Zone* but also more obscure fare such as “Heaven,” the Talking Heads song about “a place where nothing ever happens.” For many cultures, death leads to a literal kind of travel to the afterlife, a journey, often across water. Certain figures recur in these otherworldly voyages, including all manner of ghosts and “psychopomps,” or “immortal guides.” In the origins of Haitian Voodoo, death is a journey back in time to the “Mother Continent” of the enslaved population. In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, one must “clear customs,” a series of floating stations, on the way to heaven. Jennings also explores Hieronymus Bosch’s *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, Marvel and DC Comics, Disneyland rides, *Twin Peaks*, the network comedy *The Good Place*, video games, and Dungeons and Dragons. The most resonant “No-Frills Accommodations” may be found in Jean-Paul Sartre’s *No Exit*, where “each room has a door, but it usually won’t open,” and “Hell is—other people.”

An entertaining, amusing collection of a wide variety of visions of the afterlife.

“A well-informed, engrossing consideration of the significance of vitalist ideas.”

ANIMAL SPIRITS



THE CON QUEEN OF HOLLYWOOD *The Hunt for an Evil Genius*

Johnson, Scott C.

Harper/HarperCollins (256 pp.)

\$30.00 | June 6, 2023

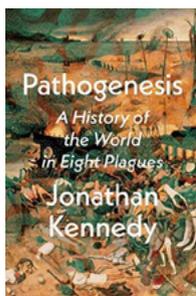
9780063036932

Tracking an elusive con artist.

Beginning in 2018, investigative journalist Johnson, author of *The Wolf and the Watchman*, wrote several articles for the

Hollywood Reporter about a criminal known as the Con Queen who had impersonated famous individuals in the entertainment industry in order to extort money from hundreds of victims. Johnson reported on the dogged efforts of a New Jersey private investigator to document the widespread scam, which eventually involved the FBI in pursuing the con man who posed as “a Netflix producer, a writer, the scion of a dynasty, the son of a movie mogul, a self-made man, a wealthy investor, a Warner Bros. executive, a real estate magnate, friend to the illustrious and the blessed.” However, as the author discovered when he embarked on his own search, “he was none of these things. He inhabited avatars when they suited him.” Johnson’s tense page-turner begins with a focus on some of the Con Queen’s victims: men eager for recognition, affirmation, and, not least, money. Each shelled out tens of thousands of dollars on trips to Indonesia, where they were sent on assignments by someone they thought was a big-name film or TV executive. All were the creations of Hargobind “Harvey” Tahilramani, described by some as a psychopath and by others as the embodiment of evil. Johnson, who admits “the allure that the dark holds” for him, was determined to track him down. In 2020, the author was able to meet with him, and after Johnson returned home to Seattle, they talked daily, sometimes for hours. “Harvey,” he writes, “was a room of voices, lucid or raving, frantic somehow to escape or hold me hostage or both.” Harvey’s strange seductiveness entrapped him: “I had begun to feel as though he had found a way to inhabit me.” Although Johnson’s obsessive investigation results in a penetrating picture of a sad, sick man, it is his portrayals of Harvey’s vulnerable victims that prove more compelling.

A grifter exposed in sordid detail.



PATHOGENESIS *A History of the World in Eight Plagues*

Kennedy, Jonathan

Crown (304 pp.)

\$30.00 | April 18, 2023

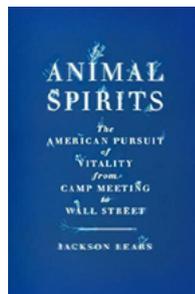
9780593240472

World history through the eyes of microbes.

Bacteria may be microscopic and easy to disregard, writes Kennedy, a

professor of politics and global health, but they’re ubiquitous and astonishingly prolific—outweighing humankind, for one thing, by 1,000 times in terms of total mass. However, along with viruses, bacteria shape the fortunes of all life on Earth. It’s hardly news that this includes the course of human history. In 1976, William McNeill’s *Plagues and Peoples* made a strong case for the radically important role of disease in the rise and fall of civilizations and as a significant force in propelling innovation and warfare. Kennedy’s book is in some ways redundant, but it is well grounded scientifically and draws on recent literature to examine, for instance, the effect of disease on the eventual hegemony of *Homo sapiens* over other early humans. If “for early humans, the Eastern Mediterranean region must have seemed like a cursed realm, the Paleolithic equivalent of Tolkien’s Mordor,” the arrival of human-borne pathogens into Neanderthal populations must have been even more deadly. Plagues in third-century Rome helped an obscure offshoot of Judaism gain supremacy over pantheistic religions whose gods, by allowing such calamities, were proven weak; without those murderous bacteria, Christianity might never have established itself. Kennedy charts the interaction of climate change with disease—the reappearance, for example, of the bubonic plague after a long absence as the Northern Hemisphere warmed and pest-bearing rodents proliferated, just in time for the Mongol Empire to spread the pandemic through its widespread raids—and he helps puzzle out a long-standing mystery concerning the Columbian conquests: “How do we explain the almost unilateral flow of pathogens from Europe to the Americas?” The answer is nuanced but reveals a great deal about how so many great Native American empires were so quickly subdued.

Of interest to students of world history, with lessons to ponder for our own pandemic-hobbled time.



ANIMAL SPIRITS *The American Pursuit of Vitality from Camp Meeting to Wall Street*

Lears, Jackson

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (464 pp.)

\$32.00 | June 20, 2023

9780374290221

How ideas about the blending of spirit and materiality have influenced American thought and life.

In his latest book, history professor Lears explores the American evolution of so-called animistic thinking, “a loosely defined outlook acknowledging the centrality of spontaneous energy in human experience,” or a somewhat more formalized “metaphysical worldview...known as vitalism.” The author first covers some key British expressions of vitalism in such figures as John Donne, Daniel Defoe, and Laurence Sterne, who “epitomized the lingering and lurching of the patriarchal ethos in a world where male authority was becoming detached from its traditional sources in dogmatic religion and landed wealth.” Then he moves on to a series of American exemplars, including

both the well known (Timothy Dwight, Walt Whitman, Theodore Roosevelt) and the more obscure (Andrew Jackson Davis, Helen Wilmans). As Lears memorably demonstrates, the belief in the significance of pulsing flows of energy that move through minds and objects has played a profound, if not often well-acknowledged, role in American philosophy and lived experience. The author makes a convincing claim that vitalism remains relevant not just in popular, but also scientific discourse and has in fact “begun to acquire new legitimacy in our own time as scientists have rediscovered the uses of animist-derived ideas in physics, botany, geology, and epigenetics.” Such recuperations will continue to be crucial, the author argues, in responding to the contemporary threat of ecological collapse. A notable strength of the book is the richness of the author’s commentary on the context in which vitalist ideas emerged; he offers a strikingly detailed view of the lineage of specific articulations of a faith in “animal spirits.” The only lacuna is a thorough accounting of how Indigenous worldviews have impacted Anglo-American thinking over several centuries; a little more close attention to those worldviews, which have undergone their own substantial transformations, would have been useful.

A well-informed, engrossing consideration of the significance of vitalist ideas.



THE PALESTINE LABORATORY
How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World

Loewenstein, Antony
 Verso (304 pp.)
 \$24.95 | May 23, 2023
 9781839762086

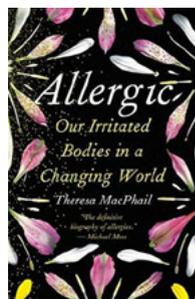
A sharp exposé of how Israel’s suppression of Palestine has translated into lucrative anti-terrorist systems that the

Israeli government exports globally.

In the introduction, Australian journalist Loewenstein, an “atheist Jew” and author of *Disaster Capitalism* and *Pills, Powder, and Smoke*, writes about growing up “in a liberal Zionist home in Melbourne...where support for Israel wasn’t a required religion but certainly expected.” However, as the Israeli domination of the Palestinian narrative became increasingly apparent, the author grew disillusioned, not unlike many young people in the West. In this meticulous study, he asserts that “Israel’s claim to be a thriving democracy in the heart of the Middle East is challenged by the facts”—namely, that the nation has been exporting sophisticated, state-of-the-art weaponry and surveillance technology around the world, largely to unsavory dictators who are trying to crush rebellious minorities, much like the Israelis with the Palestinians. Loewenstein lays out the methods the Israelis have used to control the Palestinians, including high-tech defense equipment, checkpoint security, and cybersurveillance, all of which have been tested and modified for effectiveness in order to export globally. As the author shows, the Israelis have sent weapons and technology to Pinochet’s Chile in the 1970s as

well as to disreputable regimes in Burma, Sri Lanka, Rhodesia, and Rwanda, among others. Israel’s vaunted Uzi gun, designed in the late 1940s, has been sold to more than 90 countries since then. “Militarism [eventually] became the country’s guiding principle,” writes the author, especially since 9/11, when the rest of the world got a taste of the terrorism Israel has battled for decades. In his diligent narrative, Loewenstein devotes chapters to the now-ubiquitous Pegasus system, a phone-hacking tool sold by the Israeli surveillance company NSO Group, and the recent activities of social media companies that have “routinely blocked content that was critical of Israel or showed the Palestinian point of view.”

An eye-opening, intriguing study.



ALLERGIC
Our Irritated Bodies in a Changing World

MacPhail, Theresa
 Random House (368 pp.)
 \$28.99 | May 30, 2023
 9780593229194

A holistic study of how allergies continue to bewilder medical science.

As a medical anthropologist, MacPhail’s subject matter is both professional and personal. In 1996, her father died suddenly of anaphylaxis after a bee sting. That event prompted the author to carry an EpiPen and to launch a research project examining the “puzzle of allergies.” In a deft three-part analysis, she probes the biological processes of allergens and the misconceptions surrounding them. She then examines the “confusing maze” of diagnosis and the causative theories on why allergies are proliferating, and she explores possible solutions and the progress medical science has made (outside of antihistamines) treating global allergy issues, including the development of promising new vaccines. MacPhail cites historical information from the early 1800s, when the first allergy was medically documented, and consistently attempts to nail down the ever shifting definitions of what allergies actually are, tackling the vexing question of origin with informed speculation. Whether it be the cumulative effects of environmental changes, industrial development, food additives, or genetic mutations, specific people seem more vulnerable to certain allergens. The author optimistically reflects on modern immunological advancements that have provided relief, and she presents a series of crisply rendered perspectives of people who cited severe allergies to airborne allergens, dust mites, or specific foods—all frustrated by the lack of a definitive cause or the unaffordability/unavailability of longer-term remedies. “In a capitalistic system,” she writes, “a patient is akin to a customer.” While the culprits responsible for the increases in allergic sufferers are debatable moving targets, MacPhail skillfully narrows down the possibilities and some of the solutions, although her contradictory advice on air purifiers may confuse readers seeking solace. Nonetheless, the author’s examination of the science of immunology from

“McNeal has the experience, understanding, and insight to explain the influencer industry and the impact it has on society.”

SWIPE UP FOR MORE!

a social and cultural perspective will give readers plenty of relevant, thought-provoking information.

An exhaustive and accessible report.



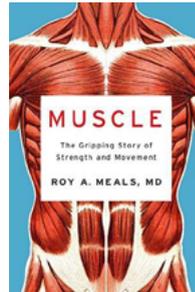
SWIPE UP FOR MORE!
Inside the Unfiltered Lives of Influencers

McNeal, Stephanie
Portfolio (272 pp.)
\$29.00 | June 6, 2023
9780593418604

Influencing has become a massive, powerful industry, and this book explains how it happened.

“If you want to understand mainstream female culture today,” writes McNeal, “you should examine how influencers have contributed to it.” As a culture reporter for BuzzFeed News, she has been writing about bloggers, vloggers, and influencers for years, and she admits to being personally addicted to influencers. The author is surprised that the industry hasn’t attracted more analytical attention given the massive amounts of money involved and the huge number of people affected. She muses that it might be due to the fact that most influencers are women, as are most of those who follow them. McNeal focuses primarily on three successful influencers: one who works mainly in the fashion field, a “mommy blogger,” and another who specializes in running and health. They have built large followings, which generates incredible incomes through sponsorships, affiliate programs, and advertising, and they also receive mountains of free merchandise. However, there are ethical concerns about displaying one’s children for public consumption as well as the blurring of the line between private and public life. A problem for influencers is the intense criticism that they attract, and there are even websites such as Get Off My Internets that are dedicated to snarky attacks. Influencers must walk the fine line between authenticity and authority even though it is constantly moving. McNeal makes many salient points, but the book is not without flaws. Readers may question whether the three women are typical of the influencer community, and some might find the author’s adulatory, sometimes breathless tone to be grating. Nevertheless, her knowledge of the subject is undeniable, and her view that influencers are now critical elements of the social and commercial landscape is valid.

McNeal has the experience, understanding, and insight to explain the influencer industry and the impact it has on society.



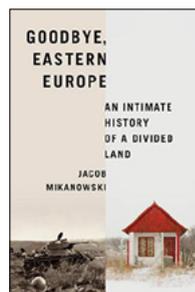
MUSCLE
The Gripping Story of Strength and Movement

Meals, Roy A.
Norton (304 pp.)
\$28.95 | June 13, 2023
9781324021445

A pop-science overview of muscles from the author of *Bones: Inside and Out*.

Meals, a professor of orthopedic surgery at UCLA, begins with a quick history that reveals how thinkers from all cultures taught mostly nonsense about human anatomy until the European Renaissance, when artists and researchers became obsessed with getting it right, so they began dissecting bodies. By the 19th century, scientists were able to show how muscles create movement. This is a subject less straightforward than anatomy, and the author’s admirable effort to explain it, heavy with analogies and diagrams, is generally accessible but may cause a few struggles for readers unfamiliar with biochemistry. Science buffs will perk up when he delivers the basics. Humans have 650 muscles, more or less (some are born missing a few, usually without a problem; others have extras), and there are three types. Most familiar are skeletal muscles, which make up about 40% of our weight and are under conscious control. Smooth muscles work automatically to control our digestive tract, urinary tract, blood vessels, and other housekeeping systems. Uniquely, cardiac muscle cells contract regularly without any neurological stimulus—and can do so for more than 100 years if properly cared for. In the chapter on muscle issues, Meals largely focuses on fatigue, strains, injuries, and aging, and he offers an amusing account of physical training programs throughout history. The author wisely devotes several chapters to exercise and sports, paying special attention to conditioning, nutrition, and muscle-building supplements, including a mildly skeptical review of performance enhancers and an entertaining review of cheating. Readers who suspect that many animals have muscles that produce bizarre phenomena will find plenty to engage in the chapter titled “Zoological Survey.” For example, even though the octopus has “a large brain for its body size, roughly two-thirds of tentacle control comes from nerve centers in the tentacles themselves.”

An easy-to-digest science lesson tailored for general readers.



GOODBYE, EASTERN EUROPE
An Intimate History of a Divided Land

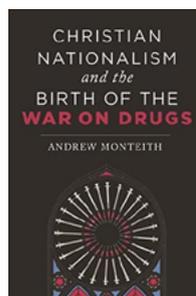
Mikanowski, Jacob
Pantheon (400 pp.)
\$30.00 | July 18, 2023
9781524748500

An epic history of Eastern Europe, from pagan days to an uncertain future.

Eastern Europe is a great arc of countries stretching from the Baltic to

the Black Sea, although the names and number of them have varied over time. Indeed, some of the most striking parts of this book are the maps, which show how the boundaries within the region have changed over time. Mikanowski, a Portland, Oregon-based journalist, has traveled much of the territory, seeking traces of his half-Catholic, half-Jewish ancestry. The author covers centuries of empires rising and falling, pogroms and invasions, brutal dictators and snatches of artistic beauty. Most of the countries that currently exist were stitched together as geopolitical compromises, with the crosscutting cleavages of separate faiths, languages, and ethnic backgrounds. With so much history, the book could have easily become a dark, unwieldy canvas, but Mikanowski adds stories and personal anecdotes, many of them involving his own family, to provide a sense of balance. "This book is not a family history," he writes, "but my family history forms a braid running through it...my ancestors are at the root of everything I write." The author also delivers a few jokes along the way—e.g., "Eastern Europeans share one legacy in common, and that is a gift for seeing comedy in tragedy." The nadir was the Nazi era of occupation, although the Stalin period often rivaled the Nazi horrors. The collapse of the Soviet Union presaged a period of economic hardship, which slowly dissipated as capitalism took root. Mikanowski is not sure where the region is heading, but he asks the world to acknowledge its diversity and potential, and he proves to be a capable guide to countries and cultures that many readers may have never encountered.

An informative study of a part of the world too often ignored, told with vigor, color, and authority.



CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM AND THE BIRTH OF THE WAR ON DRUGS

Monteith, Andrew

New York Univ. (320 pp.)

\$30.00 paper | July 18, 2023

9781479817924

The American crusade against intoxicants began earlier than you might think.

Monteith, a professor of religious history, offers a rigorous history that

locates the origin of the contemporary so-called war on drugs in the Christian temperance movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The author cites and investigates a matrix of American Protestant beliefs regarding social progress, race, and colonialism that, together, helped craft "a society where it seems self-evident that governments should regulate substance use." This is a work of academic religious study, but Monteith explains with lay-level clarity concepts like morality and post-millennialist eschatology, which are essential for understanding the cultural context in which Protestant activism eventually came to dominate American politics around drugs and alcohol—which were, to them, less distinct than we generally think today. The author argues that the driving forces were Protestant beliefs that the Second Coming hinged on society's moral

perfection, which could be achieved through the cumulative salvation of sober-minded individuals. Because "Protestants frequently treated the mind as a sacred location for God's work on earth," they saw the distortions of drug and alcohol use as violations of "biomorality." These beliefs, often coded in racist, anti-Indigenous, and nativist language, contributed to the moral panic of the eugenics movement. Monteith narrates a strategic shift in which activists—still ushering in the kingdom of God—came to downplay explicit religious arguments in favor of pseudoscientific progress narratives designed to appeal to an increasingly intersectional public. He does not deny that the drug war has been influenced by racism, class antagonism, and other secular forces emphasized in previous histories. Rather, he positions them all as tools and outcroppings of a "transdenominational Protestantism [that] held a profoundly hegemonic grip on American culture."

An in-depth reassessment of the war on drugs, with lessons for students of American religion, crime, and White supremacy.



THE BOY WHO REACHED FOR THE STARS A Memoir

Morillo, Elio with Cecilia Molinari

HarperOne (368 pp.)

\$28.99 | June 6, 2023

9780063214316

An Ecuadorean immigrant and NASA "space mechanic" blends his story with that of the Mars 2020 mission.

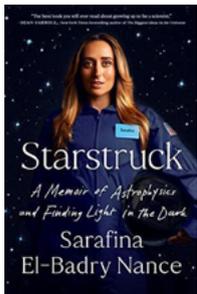
In his debut memoir, Morillo tracks his spectacular rise to "systems testbed engineer" in NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. As he traces his trajectory from Ecuador to New York and Puerto Rico and eventually into the field where he thrives today, he focuses on his education, the doors it opened, and the support he had in its pursuit, particularly from his mother. Along the way, brief asides of aerospace history build toward more technical content in later chapters as Morillo describes the launch of the Mars rover Perseverance and its groundbreaking partner helicopter system Ingenuity. Told in straightforward, earnest prose, the book reads as part motivational keynote and part dinner-table storytelling. Whether because of his youth or his scientific disposition, the author moves quickly over some elements of his life story—e.g., his parents' fraught relationship; navigating language barriers; a school counselor lowering his grades to make them "believable" for an "immigrant student"; and work burnout, which he teases throughout the text. Though he sidesteps sensationalism, he also bypasses deeper reflection, trivializing some of his metaphors. Still, his story maintains a heartwarming gravitational pull, and Morillo's wonder at and pride in his experience is infectious. The narrative is every bit the inspiration he means it to be to young Latine readers considering STEM careers. The author writes that a completed launch or landing is "also only another beginning," and with this book, he creates his own

“A trenchant analysis of the many dangers of the far right.”

THE AGE OF INSURRECTION

new beginning, a platform from which to offer useful insight in many areas: standardized testing, diversity in STEM careers, and how the immigrant experience colors everything from the pressure to succeed in school to the management of burnout.

A charming story about realizing one’s potential in our vast universe.



STARSTRUCK
A Memoir of Astrophysics and Finding Light in the Dark

Nance, Sarafina El-Badry

Dutton (336 pp.)

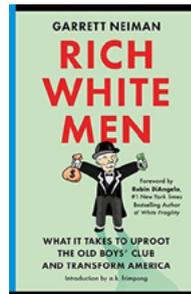
\$29.00 | June 6, 2023

9780593186794

An Egyptian American astrophysicist describes a turbulent life.

Nance was educated at a religious private school, where her fascination with the stars overcame her reluctance to quarrel with the school’s minister about spiritual matters. Though her parents were loving, they fought constantly. They separated for the first time when the author was in high school, and they got divorced while she was in graduate school. With a chaotic home life, Nance took shelter in education and her yearning to become an astronomer. Readers will admire her ability to overcome the expected barriers, including sexist teachers and a lack of female mentors and classmates. Most of the text describes the miseries of her personal life; at one point during high school, both parents moved out, leaving her to live alone for much of the year. The author fell in love with a fellow college student, but he turned out to be jealous and abusive. Later, her father was diagnosed with late-stage cancer. After she discovered that she inherited his cancer gene, which would likely lead to breast cancer, she underwent a double mastectomy in her early 20s. The remainder of the book recounts her progress to a career in astrophysics, and Nance discusses inspirational teachers and exhilarating experiences contemplating the heavens, often pausing for short, stand-alone essays on astronomical basics, including planets, black holes, and the Big Bang. The author is unafraid to admit being overwhelmed by her setbacks and recounts a steady stream of crushing disappointments, anxiety, panic attacks, psychotherapy, depression, and treatment for PTSD. “It is at night,” she writes, “when my work pauses and I have no structure, that the terror takes over, when I feel invisible claws wrapping around my heart and squeezing my chest.” At the conclusion, she has found love and a satisfying career.

A scientist’s candid, unnerving memoir in which her profession takes a back seat to personal struggles.



RICH WHITE MEN
What It Takes To Uproot the Old Boys’ Club and Transform America

Neiman, Garrett

Legacy Lit/Hachette (384 pp.)

\$29.00 | June 20, 2023

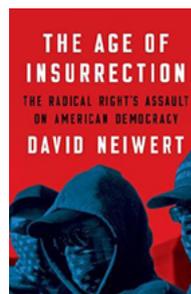
9780306925566

A social justice activist and self-described “rich white man” serves up ideas about breaking the class strangle-

hold on the American polity.

“It turns out that racist thinking is common among white people,” writes Neiman, who opens by noting that the U.S. is racially and socio-economically segregated in astonishingly entrenched ways. The former CEO of a nonprofit devoted to placing students of color from “high-poverty” areas in colleges, the author writes about a seemingly sympathetic executive who, while putatively a “good” billionaire, revealed his view that such students were noncompetitive for ingrained reasons of culture. Meanwhile, by Neiman’s account, the executive was a prime example of the rich, White, male class that holds disproportionate political and economic power and expresses its views in unmistakably self-serving ways—e.g., by preparing to transfer \$36 trillion in intergenerational wealth to their offspring, who aren’t as likely to put those dollars to work solving social problems. Neiman paints with a wide brush, but interestingly, he applies notions of intersectionality not just to the oppressed, but also to the oppressors. “Compounding unearned advantage says nothing about how hard any individual works or the quality of their choices,” he writes. “Rather, it simply acknowledges that those who benefit from unearned advantages receive a premium on their positive efforts and a discount on their missteps.” Neiman shows how wealth can be leveraged differently to dismantle social and economic inequalities and create a more equitable society. He uses the example of Prince Harry, who walked away from “the power and prestige that was his birthright as being in his own self-interest.” Harry, of course, remains rich and White all the same, but Neiman’s larger point is that “each generation gets to decide for itself what it means to be good,” including the prospect of giving up some of its loot.

A thought-provoking book sure to cause heated debate in discussions of equity and social justice.



THE AGE OF INSURRECTION
The Radical Right’s Assault on American Democracy

Neiwert, David

Melville House (448 pp.)

\$27.99 | June 27, 2023

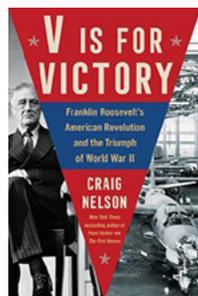
9781685890360

A trenchant analysis of the many dangers of the far right.

In the days following the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol—planned

by “paramilitary clques who spearheaded the attack, and supported by...conspiracy theorists, Christian nationalists, and far-right street brawlers”—the GOP made noises about disavowing the insurrection and its actors. No more. As Neiwert, author of *Red Pill, Blue Pill* and *Alt-America*, writes, instead of “breaking the fever of right-wing extremism, the event ushered in “an age in which insurrection is celebrated, seditionists are defended as ‘patriots,’ and the politics of menace and violence are woven into our everyday discourse and interactions.” Fueling this are all manner of White supremacist complaints, including the fearful view that immigrants and minorities will “replace” the White majority or the “accelerationist” notion that modern civilization itself is a poison and that fascism is the antidote. Neiwert ranges widely to look at actors major and minor, from the tea party members who paved the way for the angrier, more militant radical right of the sort that we saw in Charlottesville to mouthpieces like Tucker Carlson, who “endorsed the idea that Republicans are being forced to abandon democracy and eventually embrace fascism because of liberal hegemony.” Well reported and well written, Neiwert’s book also exposes allies that one wishes the radical right didn’t have—e.g., local police departments such as those of Portland, Oregon, whose leaders saw the Proud Boys as less alien than the left-wing protestors; and even the senior echelons of the Department of Homeland Security, who exhibited “authoritarian incompetence” throughout the Trump years. As long as Trump and Trumpism are on the political stage, there will be more to come, with the Jan. 6 insurrectionists hailed as heroes and “political prisoners” and QAnon bleatings about pedophilia and evil drag queens still common coin among the retrograde set.

Politics watchers will find Neiwert’s book illuminating—and frightening.



V IS FOR VICTORY
Franklin Roosevelt's
American Revolution
and the Triumph of World War II

Nelson, Craig
 Scribner (448 pp.)
 \$28.00 | May 23, 2023
 9781982122911

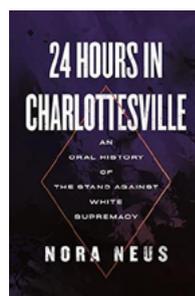


A strong argument that “if any one human being is responsible for winning World War II, it is FDR.”

Most scholars agree that industry was the deciding factor in the war, but Nelson, bestselling author of *Pearl Harbor* and *Rocket Men*, gives it his full and expert attention. He points out that one American Revolution established the country in 1776, but another began in 1933 with Franklin Roosevelt. His administration created an explosive expansion of industry, managerial expertise, national infrastructure, and government-business cooperation that literally drowned the enemies in weapons. Nelson reminds readers that FDR took office in a nation awash in unemployment, poverty, and starvation. Unsure how to act,

he listened to his advisers and launched many expensive programs. The ramped-up war effort helped alleviate unemployment, and the government relief allowed the unemployed to put food on the table and persuaded them that they had a leader who cared about them. Aware that Americans overwhelmingly opposed rearmament, he began on the sly. Beginning in 1938, he told military chiefs that he wanted a 10,000-plane Air Force and then siphoned money from social programs to pay for them. By 1940, the U.S. was producing more planes than Germany, and the Public Works Administration was integral to the financing of the aircraft carriers that helped win the war in the Pacific. While most historians emphasize military icons (Marshall, Eisenhower, Nimitz) Nelson concentrates on relatively obscure civilian figures such as Donald Nelson, Bill Knudsen, and Edward Stettinius Jr., “dollar-a-year patriots who relinquished the comparatively mild civil-service salary that would normally be their due.” The industrial miracle they oversaw was far more complex than anyone had predicted, so politicians, generals, and the media at the time have looked down on them, but Nelson doesn’t. This hyperproduction continued after the war was over, when the U.S. helped rebuild the world and gave birth to one of the first affluent, consumer societies in which, for a generation, the middle-class made up the majority.

A compelling and convincing history lesson.



24 HOURS IN
CHARLOTTESVILLE
An Oral History of
the Stand Against White
Supremacy

Neus, Nora
 Beacon Press (240 pp.)
 \$25.95 | July 18, 2023
 9780807011928



A riveting account of the human consequences of the violent 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.

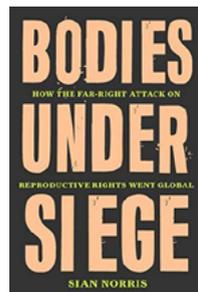
Journalist Neus, who field-produced the rally for Anderson Cooper’s CNN program, uses the voices of counterprotesters, local clergy, elected officials, University of Virginia students, and journalists to lay bare the collective anxieties engendered by “alt-right” protesters. The result is a gripping narrative of psychological and physical damage, laid out vividly by Neus via the voices of those on the ground. On May 13, according to the Heaphy report, White nationalists in KKK regalia “formed into ranks...in front of the statue of Robert E. Lee and chanted ‘blood and soil,’ ‘you will not replace us,’ and ‘Russia is our friend.’” In July, notes the UVA dean of students, “the flyers for the Unite the Right rally had started showing up and they had very neo-Nazi imagery, a fascist eagle.” According to the chaplain at a local hospital, medical professionals “were preparing for mass casualties.” On the night of Aug. 11, White supremacists marched to campus, and a UVA professor “saw 150, 200 neo-Nazis with torches....The students were in a circle, locked arms around the [Thomas Jefferson] statue.” The next night, noted a student, “a group of white

“An illuminating, myth-free exploration of mental health from a unique perspective.”

I FEEL LOVE

supremacists, some with their hands taped like boxers, punched, kicked, and choked people who tried to block their path, leaving them bloody on the pavement.” Amid the turmoil, a counterprotestor and former member of Congress recalls, “The shocking thing...was that [the fighting] went on for like three hours and the police still hadn’t moved in.” When the police finally did arrive, they pushed the marchers into a crowd of counterprotestors. A local clergyman remembers: “What we had for hours after that were bands of Nazis roaming through downtown.” Another: “There was blood everywhere.”

Not just a visceral portrayal of political violence, but also a major addition to our understanding of right-wing terrorism.



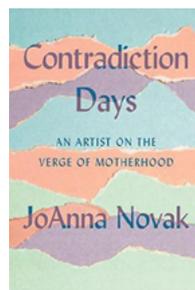
BODIES UNDER SIEGE
How the Far-Right Attack on Reproductive Rights Went Global

Norris, Siân
Verso (304 pp.)
\$26.95 | June 6, 2023
9781839764738

A thorough, alarmed delineation of threats to abortion rights around the world.

“My central claim—that the far right sees abortion bans as a way to reverse the so-called Great Replacement—is no longer confined to creepy natalist Telegram channels,” writes Norris. “It is spoken out loud by anti-abortion political leaders.” A British writer and reporter, she presents “an account of how the attacks on abortion rights in the Global North [are] part of a larger misogynist and white supremacist project of the far right.” The author codifies her arguments cleanly, beginning with a chapter titled “The Ideology: The Place of Women in Fascist Thought” and closing with “The Tipping Point: Which Future Do We Choose?” Due to the author’s direct-address approach, her first nonfiction book reads much like a lecture, e.g., “In the following pages, I will share with you...”; and “Think back to....” After a considered explication of how fascist theories, such as those fueling QAnon, endanger sexual and reproductive rights, Norris covers mainstream extremist politics, how the legal status of abortion is being threatened, and the far right’s attacks on LGBTQ+ rights. Regarding White women, specifically, the author writes, “the reality of being a revered body is that *you are nothing more than a body*—a reproductive vessel to exploit.” Norris makes the convincing case that politicians, including Trump, Orbán, and Putin, evoke “the fascist mythic past in order to attract a right-wing populist base.” Additionally, “the pressure pushing the elite towards the fascists is that same crisis facing capitalism: the demographic changes caused by aging populations threaten the economic stability of nations.” Throughout the text, the author’s position and call to action are urgent and unwavering.

A polemical exhortation that will appeal to readers interested in the criminalization and protection of abortion rights.



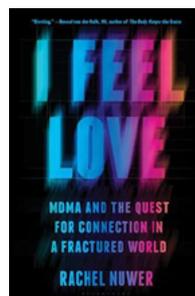
CONTRADICTION DAYS
An Artist on the Verge of Motherhood

Novak, JoAnna
Catapult (256 pp.)
\$26.00 | July 25, 2023
9781646220762

A poet and short story writer describes a pregnancy spent in Taos, New Mexico.

Novak begins her debut memoir with a list of things she wants to forget: her dog, impending motherhood, “my husband snoring beside me,” the changing shape of her body, and her “debt-pay-off plans,” among others. Instead, she focuses on the purpose of her trip to Taos, which is to research the artist Agnes Martin, who had recently become something of an obsession. A recovering anorexic and bulimic with diagnosed depression and an undiagnosed anxiety disorder, Novak is prone to flights of frightening anger that lead to violent rages that she is unable to recall after they pass. Pregnancy wreaked havoc on her vulnerabilities, disfiguring the body she spent years trying to control and tipping her into suicidal ideation that, her physician cruelly reminded her, endangered both her and her baby. “How impossible it is to be fully here—present in the present—when you’re pregnant,” she writes. “Pregnant, the present zips you between future and past.” In Taos, where she and her husband moved temporarily, Novak tried to survive her pregnancy by focusing on her research on Martin, an endeavor that morphed from a literary project into an attempt to transform into the abstract painter herself. “I was here to be like Agnes Martin, not relapse into the past,” she writes. The more she sank into Martin’s world, the more she descended into the complexity of her own bodily needs and desires as well as her deepest fears. Novak’s rhythmic prose is stunningly creative, clearly drawing on her poetic background. Structurally, though, the first third of the book drags, mostly because the author doesn’t explain the origin of her obsession with Martin or fully reveal her neurodiversity. Still, the majority of the story pulses with honesty and vulnerability, spiraling to a satisfying ending.

A lyrical memoir about pregnancy, mental illness, and art.



I FEEL LOVE
MDMA and the Quest for Connection in a Fractured World

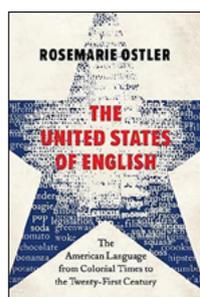
Nuwer, Rachel
Bloomsbury (384 pp.)
\$28.99 | June 6, 2023
9781635579574

A sobering and eye-opening look at the psychedelic drug MDMA and how people’s quest for healing persists through the generations.



Science writer Nuwer, author of *Poached: Inside the Dark World of Wildlife Trafficking*, begins by noting how MDMA, aka ecstasy, started out as one of the most restricted Schedule I drugs. Now, it is on the way to being FDA approved for use in a therapeutic setting for individuals who struggle with a plethora of mental health problems. The author offers numerous memorable firsthand accounts of using MDMA in various settings such as raves, in therapy, recreationally, and in many other scenarios, exemplifying the various benefits and drawbacks of the drug in the quest for connection. Nuwer effectively brings us into a community of people who have dedicated their lives to the drug, fashioning a colorfully curated story of its therapeutic uses and how it fits into the larger narrative of health care reform. One of the overarching themes of the book is the need for effective regulation of MDMA and other drugs, which would ensure a safe outlet to those who choose to use them as part of a treatment program. Throughout the book, Nuwer presents studies that show the potential advantages of using MDMA in a therapeutic setting to help individuals, such as veterans, autistic adults with social anxiety, and those struggling from alcoholism, heal from their trauma and go into the world with fresh perspectives on how to manage their mental well-being. Although research on how MDMA interacts within the human brain is still early in development, it is paving the way for significant changes in how people heal from a host of mental issues. Even though MDMA has a tumultuous road ahead, the community that stands behind the drug continues to demonstrate its positive impact in many people's lives. Pair this with Michael Pollan's *This Is Your Mind on Plants*.

An illuminating, myth-free exploration of mental health from a unique perspective.



THE UNITED STATES OF ENGLISH
The American Language From Colonial Times to the Twenty-First Century

Ostler, Rosemarie
Oxford Univ. (240 pp.)
\$27.95 | Aug. 29, 2023
9780197647295

A learned tour of American English and its many peculiarities.

Chalk up the first “American” word in English to John Smith, who described a meeting with the Powhatan people. A few years later, the spelling *raccoon* was more or less fixed. As linguist Ostler writes, there’s American English, but then there are multiples of it. For example, regional dialects afford their speakers at least eight ways of saying *you* in the plural, including *y’all*, *yinz*, and *youse*. American English is replete with British terms, naturally, but many had begun to diverge in both pronunciation and meaning before the Revolution. Whereas a British *creek* is an inlet of the sea, in the American version, a *creek* is any small stream. Ostler analyzes numerous avenues of words and expressions in American English, from Native American

languages recorded by the Lewis and Clark expedition (*medicine man, camas*) to Spanish, French, German, Chinese, and many other sources. She is also good on borrowings from popular culture—from baseball, for example, we have phrases such as *three strikes and step up to the plate*, while political cartooning may have given us *o.k.* as a jocular abbreviation for *oll korrekt*. (The latter etymology is a topic of much discussion among linguists.) Throughout, the author invites readers to participate in limning local and regional speechways: What, she asks, do you call a “sudden, heavy rain” or “someone who worries or fusses a lot”? Ostler also examines words and expressions that remain in use after the relevant technology is long gone, such as *hang up*, still used decades after the last phone circuit was closed by hanging a handset on a hook. Modern sources for inputs into English include technology, in-group slang, politics, and gender identity, to say nothing of older sources such as the phrase-happy hippies, surfers, and “Valley girls” of yore.

An accessible, entertaining outing for logophiles.



RECODING AMERICA
Why Government Is Failing in the Digital Age and How We Can Do Better

Pahlka, Jennifer
Metropolitan/Henry Holt (336 pp.)
\$29.99 | June 13, 2023
9781250266774



The founder of Code for America digs into the pitfalls of government technology.

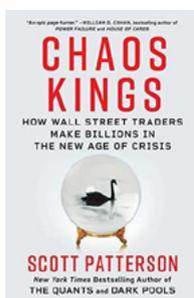
Beginning with “I’m Just a Bill,” an animated musical introduction to the American legislation system from *Schoolhouse Rock!*, Pahlka, the deputy chief technology officer during the Obama administration, delivers an eye-opening and accessible examination of why online interactions with government in America work—or, often, do not. The author provides numerous examples of failures, including a form for Veterans Affairs health insurance that only really worked on certain computers with certain versions of software; the development of health-care.gov, where “the full set of rules governing the program they were supposed to administer wasn’t finalized until the site was due to launch”; or an “application for food stamps that requires answering 212 separate questions.” Through these and many other illustrative cases, Pahlka effectively shows that “when systems or organizations don’t work the way you think they should, it is generally not because the people in them are stupid or evil. It is because they are operating according to structures and incentives that aren’t obvious from the outside.” Indeed, by tracing the requirements of any technology developed by or for the government, it becomes increasingly apparent that simply adding new laws or throwing money at the problems fails to alleviate the confusion or waste. Throughout this empowering book, the author makes compelling, clear arguments, revealing inefficiency, bureaucracy, and incompetence, whether it stems

“Complex economic and scientific theories lucidly rendered, even if the resulting picture is unremittingly gloomy.”

CHAOS KINGS

from legislators, administrators, or IT professionals. “The good news is that software and the US government have something very important in common: they are made by and for people,” writes Pahlka. “In the end, we get to decide how they work.” Anyone dealing with the implementation of technology in government should pay attention to the author’s suggestions.

An incredibly readable look at the fraught intersection of technological innovation and government bureaucracy.



CHAOS KINGS
How Wall Street Traders Make Billions in the New Age of Crisis

Patterson, Scott
Scribner (288 pp.)
\$30.00 | June 6, 2023
9781982179939

Wall Street Journal stalwart Patterson continues his explorations of high finance with a clutch of contrarian risk takers.

Playing the market is part art, part science, and part leap of faith. Investor and statistician Nassim Nicholas Taleb, who stands at the center of Patterson’s latest, following *The Quants* and *Dark Pools*, takes an alternate view. He assumes that the world is a series of rare “black swan” events (“extreme events no one could have predicted...like a sudden market crash”), and he further urges clients to think that the conventional wisdom of investing—diversified portfolio, trying to time the market—is a fool’s game. Come the pandemic, and the contrary wisdom of Taleb and company, codified as “*Panic now—panic early*,” proved its use. While a single black swan event might be survivable, a cluster of them, including disease, financial closures, supply-chain issues, inflation, and more, can break the bank. Taleb and like-minded investors bet on things going wrong and planning for worst-case scenarios. Although Taleb’s black-swan protection protocols were widely if incompletely imitated, they were not universally accepted. Patterson highlights the thought of “complexity theorist” Didier Sornette, who argues that Taleb’s notion that the future is hard, if not impossible, to predict is unnecessarily dark and who developed an alternate theory exemplified by “dragon kings” rather than black swans. No matter which image you follow, the facts are incontrovertible: Set a multipartite catastrophe such as the pandemic in motion, and huge amounts of wealth will disappear, as with one popular fund that lost 97% practically overnight, “a stark real-world example of gambler’s ruin.” If anything, Taleb, by Patterson’s account, is more pessimistic than ever, warning that climate change is going to yield a world that will make us long for the present. Throughout, the author provides deft, accessible analysis and guidance.

Complex economic and scientific theories lucidly rendered, even if the resulting picture is unremittingly gloomy.



BROTHERS AND SISTERS
The Allman Brothers Band and the Inside Story of the Album That Defined the '70s

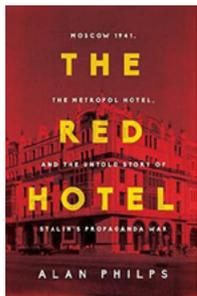
Paul, Alan
St. Martin's (352 pp.)
\$32.00 | July 25, 2023
9781250282699



The author’s second book on the Allman Brothers focuses on the early 1970s, when the band recorded the titular album.

Rock journalist Paul draws on extensive interviews with band members and others from their circle, including tapes recorded in the 1980s by the band’s archivist, Kirk West. The author begins with Gregg’s and Duane’s musical careers before forming the band, and he follows them through their early success. The deaths of Duane and bassist Berry Oakley in 1971 and 1972, respectively, might have ended the band, but Gregg and guitarist Dickie Betts took over leadership roles and brought the band—with new member Chuck Leavell on keyboards—back to the studio to record *Brothers and Sisters*, which was released in 1973. Paul diligently explores nearly everything involving the album and time period, including the band’s encounters with the Grateful Dead, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and then-presidential candidate Jimmy Carter; the drug problems of several members; the dishonest business dealings of their predatory record company; and domestic dramas, including Gregg’s tumultuous marriage to Cher. The author also shows how Betts and Gregg had differing visions for how the band’s music could evolve: Betts leaned in the direction of lyrical tunes with a country flavor, while Gregg adhered to the group’s blues-band origins. At times, it seems a miracle that any album got made, let alone one that Paul credibly touts as central to the era. The author covers some of the Allmans’ live shows, notably the 1973 Summer Jam at Watkins Glen concert, where they shared the stage with the Dead and The Band and played in front of 600,000 people. The book is full of trenchant observations by friends and contemporaries, creating a valuable perspective on the music scene in the early ’70s.

A warm, entertaining appreciation of a key period in the career of a vital American band.



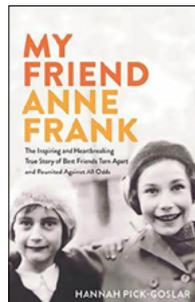
THE RED HOTEL
Moscow 1941, the Metropol Hotel, and the Untold Story of Stalin's Propaganda War

Philips, Alan
 Pegasus (448 pp.)
 \$29.95 | July 4, 2023
 9781639364275

Unsettling account of how a cadre of foreign correspondents in Moscow during World War II were pressed to acquiesce to the Kremlin's censorship.

British journalist Philips, who served as Moscow correspondent for Reuters and the *Daily Telegraph*, frames his multilayered story of wartime foreign journalists around their base at the Metropol Hotel, which, since opening in 1905, "has been witness to the seminal events of Russia's tempestuous twentieth century history." In June 1941, when Hitler invaded Russia, journalists from the U.S., Britain, and Australia were allowed to stay and report on the war—as long as it suited Stalin. Winston Churchill, formerly a journalist himself, pressured Stalin to allow the journalists access, yet it soon became apparent that the foreign reporters—feted with vodka-fueled "Potemkin banquets" and supplied with young Russian translators and secretaries who were clearly spies and, occasionally, prostitutes—could only report information that shined positive light on the Stalin regime. The author focuses on the plight of a host of journalists, including feminist writer Charlotte Haldane; Ralph Parker, who "tended to rub people the wrong way"; Vernon Bartlett, who "challenged Stalin in public to accept the principle of a free press"; American photojournalist Margaret Bourke-White; Alice Moats, a correspondent for *Collier's*; and Godfrey Blunden, an "ambitious roving reporter" for the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*. All tried to follow events on the Eastern Front and were branded either "Kremlin stooges" or "fascists beasts." Philips also explores the tragic case of Nadya Ulanovskaya, a reputable Russian translator and accomplished spy who grew disillusioned with Stalin and conveyed to Blunden the truth only to be unmasked in his subsequent novel and sent to the gulag along with her family. The muzzling of these journalists by the Kremlin was not revealed for decades, and though overlong, this thoughtful narrative puts their work into the appropriate historical context.

Authoritative, sometimes repetitive history of the terrible ramifications of the silence about Stalin's lies.



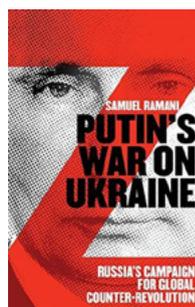
MY FRIEND ANNE FRANK
The Inspiring and Heartbreaking True Story of Best Friends Torn Apart and Reunited Against All Odds

Pick-Goslar, Hannah with Dina Kraft
 Little, Brown Spark (288 pp.)
 \$29.00 | June 6, 2023
 9780316564403

Firsthand account of a Holocaust survivor who knew Anne Frank.

Born into a prosperous, middle-class German Jewish family like the Franks, Pick-Goslar fled to Amsterdam after the Nazis came to power in 1933. Born in 1928, the author was the same age as Anne, and since the families lived in adjacent buildings, they quickly became friends and classmates. In the early chapters, Pick-Goslar recounts the carefree activities of two schoolgirls, but the text is imbued with an increasingly ominous background, capped by the brutal German invasion in May 1940. In July 1942, the Franks disappeared, leaving a message that they had moved to Switzerland. In fact, they had gone into hiding in Otto Frank's warehouse, where they remained until they were betrayed in August 1944. Pick-Goslar's family was arrested in June 1943, and they spent six months in a filthy Dutch transit camp before being sent to Bergen-Belsen in Germany. Although not an extermination camp, the conditions were so awful that most prisoners died of starvation or disease after months of suffering. That included the author's entire extended family except a baby sister under her care. During this time, she encountered Anne, already starving and ill, in a neighboring camp. Liberated in 1945, Pick-Goslar moved to Palestine in 1947, became a nurse, and died in 2022 at the age of 93. Co-author Kraft, a journalist based in Tel Aviv, renders a compelling yet disturbing story. Readers will squirm at the Nazis' loathsome behavior and feel disheartened to learn that all advanced Western governments (the U.S. included) denounced Nazi atrocities but turned away Jews fleeing Germany except for those who were wealthy and famous. Holland was no exception, classifying Pick-Goslar's family as "temporary refugees," with the understanding that they would move on.

Painful history but a good choice for readers interested in Anne Frank or Holocaust-era memoirs.



PUTIN'S WAR ON UKRAINE
Russia's Campaign for Global Counter-Revolution

Ramani, Samuel
 Hurst Publishers (352 pp.)
 \$29.95 | June 20, 2023
 9781787388512

An assessment of Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a global turning point.

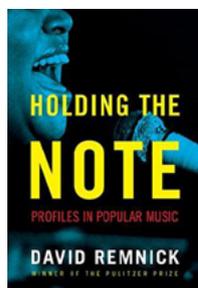
The progress of the war on the ground is well known, but Ramani, a professor of

“A perceptive pleasure for literate music lovers.”

HOLDING THE NOTE

politics and international relations at Oxford, looks behind the headlines to determine the motivations for the invasion and the likely path forward. He is keenly aware of the danger of believing something simply because you want to believe it; for this reason, he is willing to assemble and consider a wide range of research sources and opinions. He eventually concludes that the invasion was part of a long-term plan to impose Putin-esque authoritarianism in the post-Soviet space and to cement Russia's position as a world power. However, Putin and his advisers, mostly yes men, overestimated the strength of the Russian military and underestimated the willingness of the West to support Ukraine. The objective of regime change in Ukraine fell apart in the face of stiff, innovative resistance, and the mission was scaled back to holding the eastern provinces. Ramani threads his way through the morass of propaganda, noting that the war has actually been popular with much of the Russian public. Now, both sides appear to be digging in for the long haul, a situation that probably favors Ukraine. “Nearly one year after Putin's decision to invade Ukraine,” writes the author, “it is apparent that Russia cannot win and cannot afford to lose the war.” At the same time, Russia is reinforcing its relationships with non-Western countries—mainly India and China but also nations in Africa and South America. Whether this represents a new alignment is not yet clear, but Ramani is convincing in his view that the war marks a seismic shift in the geopolitical landscape.

Clear-minded and authoritative, this book is a thorough analysis of how Putin's gambit fits into the big picture.



HOLDING THE NOTE *Profiles in Popular Music*

Remnick, David
Knopf (304 pp.)
\$29.00 | May 23, 2023
9781400043613

Portraits of musicians who blossomed anew late in their careers.

Remnick, the intellectually nimble editor of the *New Yorker*, has lately been focusing closely on world politics, but he finds time to profile a number of artists who, having enjoyed early success, “were all grappling, in music and in their own lives, with their diminishing gifts and mortality.” The best way to grapple is to maintain “the spirit of *sostenuto*” that keeps one at work composing, performing, teaching, and spreading the word. “Sometimes, when I go to hear music, I feel like a weekend naturalist of the Anthropocene, feverishly trying to catch a last glimpse of some glorious species.” Regarding the venerated Leonard Cohen, Remnick finds the Canadian-born poet, novelist, and later Zen Buddhist priest in a moment of somberness wrought by grief, with one loss in particular the Marianne who had inspired so many of his most famous songs. “The depth of his voice makes Tom Waits sound like Eddie Kendricks,” writes Remnick of Cohen's impressive rumble. Keith Richards, having improbably survived to the age of 80, remembers that his first job as a member of the Rolling Stones was to turn audiences

on to the blues, work he continues to this day; the improbability of his survival, of course, hinges on his “heroic” consumption of drugs, now a thing of the past. Richards may trade on “roguish charm,” while Paul McCartney has assiduously built up a fan base that “is the general population.” There's dish here—no love lost between Mavis Staples and Aretha Franklin—and plenty of astute observation, but the central point is that many older artists will go offstage only kicking and screaming—a little diminished, true, but full of fight, as a closing image of Patti Smith belting out “People Have the Power” suggests.

A perceptive pleasure for literate music lovers.



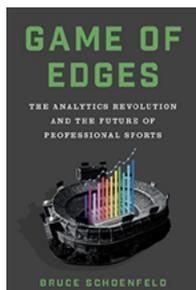
THE PLAGUE *Living Death in Our Time*

Rose, Jacqueline
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (192 pp.)
\$27.00 | Aug. 1, 2023
9780374610869

A feminist literary critic considers the Covid-19 pandemic.

Rose, the prolific author of *On Violence* and *On Violence Against Women*, *The Question of Zion*, *Women in Dark Times*, and other intellectually challenging books, assembles expanded versions of four previously published essays and one talk given at the London Freud Museum, along with an introduction and an afterward. The essays consider, at least tangentially, the lingering effects of the pandemic on society. More directly, they focus on three of Rose's heroes: Albert Camus, Sigmund Freud, and Simone Weil. Writing in an abstruse, academic style, Rose conducts close readings of Camus' *The Plague*, Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and several of Weil's more difficult works, and she considers the effect of Covid-19 restrictions on a possible upswing in domestic violence aimed at women. Rose touches briefly on the Russian invasion of Ukraine and, more frequently, on what she considers to be Boris Johnson's many flaws. She also brings into the mix her personal emotions about—though not her personal experience of—the pandemic. “I struggle, like so many, to bring into some psychic alignment the pain of my inner life and the tragedy unfolding outside my door,” she writes. In respect to Weil, Rose notes, “on the page her concepts slide into and out of each other in a sometimes creative, sometimes tortured amalgam, a blur.” The same could be said of this collection. Rose's essays raise questions and spark thoughts, but they seldom arrive at cohesive conclusions. The author is best when she slows down to examine all sides of a passage from one of the authors she loves, bringing to light implications that might slip by in a cursory reading or, in the case of Camus, meditation on questions of translation. Rose has never been accused of talking down to her readers, and many may find this volume not worth tackling.

Best for committed fans of Freud, Camus, and Weil.



GAME OF EDGES
The Analytics Revolution and the Future of Professional Sports

Schoenfeld, Bruce
 Norton (288 pp.)
 \$30.00 | June 6, 2023
 9780393531688



An account of how professional sports is now “driven by data.”

Schoenfeld, the author of *The Match* and *The Last Serious Thing*, chronicles how high-tech, public relations-savvy, cutthroat entrepreneurs have turned professional sports into engines of profit. The author admits his debt to Michael Lewis’ 2003 bestseller, *Moneyball*, which tells the story of how the manager of an underfunded Major League Baseball team hired a mathematical analyst to mine the game’s vast statistics and tease out player attributes that won games without showing up in conventional metrics. For several years, he enjoyed spectacular success until other teams caught on. Having followed how analytics affected the game, Schoenfeld turns his attention to the franchises themselves. For decades, rich business owners bought teams like they bought yachts or racehorses. “You didn’t buy a sports team to make money,” writes the author, “you did it because you had money and wanted to do something fun with it.” Galvanized by the *Moneyball* story, a new generation of owners and front-office experts has turned teams into superefficient mega-corporations resembling those in which the owners had originally made their fortunes. Winning remains important, but many devoted fans will note that strictly following the numbers takes away much of the thrill. As dynamic agents of capitalism, modern sports franchises seem obsessed with keeping fans engaged (i.e., spending money) rather than entertained. Formerly verboten, sports betting has exploded, and franchises have expanded into real estate, fashion, concessions, and digital content. Combining in-depth research and illuminating interviews, Schoenfeld describes the transformation of a dozen organizations, emphasizing baseball and basketball but casting his net widely. He shows clearly how soccer, the world’s most popular game, has become the poster child for the transformation of professional sports—and the rebellion of dissatisfied fans. Read *Moneyball* first and then turn to this one.

A timely and eye-opening look at the current and future landscape of sports.



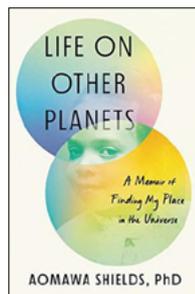
THE LOST SONS OF OMAHA
Two Young Men in an American Tragedy

Sexton, Joe
 Scribner (384 pp.)
 \$30.00 | May 9, 2023
 9781982198343

Carefully written account of a tragic encounter during a Black Lives Matter protest.

Nebraska is a deep-red state, Omaha a purplish blue. While the city has made efforts to address racial inequalities, it has much still to do. As veteran journalist and debut author Sexton observes, in the demonstrations following George Floyd’s death, Omaha police were involved in more than 120 “use of force” encounters with protestors. In one zone of demonstration, a young Black man confronted a business owner and was shot to death. Instantly, as Sexton shows, a war of words ensued on social media, with White nationalists declaring that the deceased was a thug and worse and the left proclaiming that the bar owner was a racist, Nazi, and more. The story is a complex one at every turn, and the author handles it well. The business owner was a Marine veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan who ran a tight ship, including enforcing a dress code in his bar that some believed was discriminatory against young Black men; the deceased was a sometime patron with a long history of legal troubles. Yet that story was immediately simplified in the hands of ideologues. As Sexton writes, “a narrative was taking hold, and it gained momentum at extraordinary speed.” One fomenter of the narrative that the bar owner was a racist with an itchy trigger finger later admitted to Sexton that he had no evidence. However, having bombarded social media with allegations, he “could not have been prouder of his efforts.” He was far from alone, and although Omaha police did not bring charges, a prosecutor conducted a heavily politicized inquiry. Sexton does exemplary journalistic work not just in digging up the facts and interviewing family members and eyewitnesses, but also in exposing how the whirlwind of opinionating works against finding the truth on all sides.

A well-reported, somber, troubling look at crime and punishment without justice.



LIFE ON OTHER PLANETS
A Memoir of Finding My Place in the Universe

Shields, Aomawa
 Viking (352 pp.)
 \$28.00 | July 11, 2023
 9780593299180

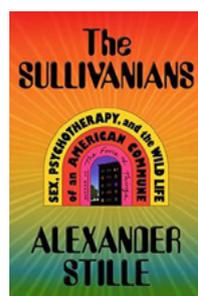
An astronomer and astrobiologist reveals the winding path that took her from science to acting and back again in a poetic memoir charting how she became “a champion of interdisciplinarity.”

“A brilliantly written, sobering investigation of a secret society within plain sight.”

THE SULLIVANIANS

In her first book, Shields unpacks her experiences as a rare Black woman in the STEM disciplines and how she was inspired to begin widening the opportunities for others. Despite a privileged education at Phillips Exeter Academy, where she traversed snow-covered fields at 4 a.m. to take part in advanced astronomy courses, the author always felt marked out for being one of only a few young women of color. Throughout the book, Shields brings the text alive with telling details and well-connected anecdotes. The author is adept at weaving together surprisingly disparate threads—e.g., *Top Gun* and *Elle* and *Vogue* magazines sit comfortably alongside a description of the *Challenger* space shuttle disaster as early formative influences for the author. Early on, Shields establishes the significance of her “two loves, astronomy and acting,” and she goes on to reveal overlapping identities, where motherhood runs into fighting for tenure and spirituality finds balance within scientific exploration. The author has a gift for rendering unimaginable astrological concepts in vivid prose, pulling readers into her world. The rings of Saturn are “majestic bands circling a planet so tenuous and light that it would float in a bathtub large enough to hold it,” and “new knowledge was an emerald jewel I kept inside my body, warm and glowing near my heart, with a thin silk thread connecting it to my mind.” While the book’s inspirational bent can verge on the saccharine, truly unique comparisons keep the narrative on course. In one passage, Shields explains how we determine the Earth’s age by calculating the ages of the chemicals within its most ancient rocks while also analyzing the harsh chemicals used in the hair-straightening process.

A lyrical, image-rich investigation of an unconventional blueprint for authentic living.



THE SULLIVANIANS Sex, Psychotherapy, and the Wild Life of an American Commune

Stille, Alexander

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (432 pp.)

\$30.00 | June 20, 2023

9780374600396

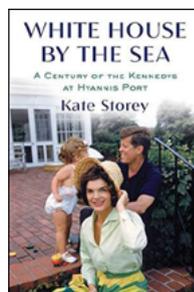
The life and times of a cult that was strange even as cults go.

Prolific journalist Stille examines the Sullivanians, offshoot followers of psychologist Harry Stack Sullivan (1892-1949), “high-performing urban professionals—doctors, lawyers, computer programmers, successful artists and writers, professors—who went to normal jobs by day but returned in the evening to a very different and highly secretive world.” That world, encompassing some major cultural figures, embraced polygamy and polyamory and the group raising of children and abnegation of the nuclear family. Moreover, belonging to it required fealty to a psychologist named Saul Newton and a succession of his wives, one a “rather conventional young woman from a middle-class Jewish family” who tasted power and, by the account of some members, took a tyrannical turn. In the end, it was a sort of Ponzi scheme:



“Therapists” unqualified to practice outside the cult took money from lesser “therapists,” and most of it wound up in the hands of the leaders. So it went from the late 1950s to the early 1980s, when some members, awakened by one injury or another, began to drift away. Stille’s onrushing, riveting narrative makes *The Blithedale Romance* seem like a children’s book by comparison. As Newton and company became worse and worse, he demanding sexual favors from every woman in the Sullivanian orbit, a quiet resistance grew. Surprisingly, children raised collectively and discouraged to seek the identity of their biological parents embarked on that search during adulthood, while a few of the erstwhile leaders came to accept that maybe their program was highly flawed. As with so many cults, the Orwellian principle that some animals are more equal than others shines through always. “Although it was in principle an egalitarian communist group,” Stille writes, “the Sullivanians were remarkably hierarchical, and everyone was aware where they stood at any given moment in the pecking order.”

A brilliantly written, sobering investigation of a secret society within plain sight.



WHITE HOUSE BY THE SEA A Century of the Kennedys at Hyannis Port

Storey, Kate

Scribner (432 pp.)

\$30.00 | June 27, 2023

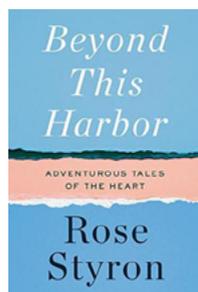
9781982159184

The latest book about one of America’s most famous families presents a novel approach to a well-charted course.

Storey, senior features editor for *Rolling Stone*, creatively compiles the last century of Kennedy family history through the lens of their residence in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, purchased by Joseph P. Kennedy in the 1920s. Part of the uniqueness of this book are the insights gleaned from personal interviews with—and subsequent descriptions of—heretofore unknown Hyannis Port neighbors (friendly and otherwise) and the social evolution of the small Cape Cod village that the family put on the world stage. The text is a treasure trove of interesting, amusing, and poignant stories and anecdotes of the dynamic, tightknit, and consequential clan, yet many have been told in countless books by Kennedy family members, Laurence Leamer, Barbara Leaming, and numerous other authors. As such, much of the content will be familiar ground for Kennedyphiles. Storey does well not to overlook the well-publicized and multigenerational foibles and flaws of the family, including Joseph parading his paramour, film superstar Gloria Swanson, around Hyannis Port; the death of Mary Jo Kopechne at Chappaquiddick and the subsequent attempts at damage control; and a revealing conversation that Rose had with a local friend about her husband’s unilateral decision to lobotomize their eldest daughter, Rosemary. The author presents the family’s many triumphs, heartbreaks, and attempts at redemption (particularly arranging Rosemary’s return visits to

Hyannis Port) matter-of-factly and mostly without judgment but with a decidedly soft focus. This is perhaps best illustrated in Storey's description of the circumstances surrounding Ted Kennedy's infamous interview with Roger Mudd conducted at Hyannis Port, during which he was unable to articulate exactly why he wanted to be president. Appropriately enough, the book makes for great beach reading, as breezy as the summer air off Nantucket Sound.

A light yet thoroughly researched book that will appeal to followers of the Kennedy family and celebrity culture.



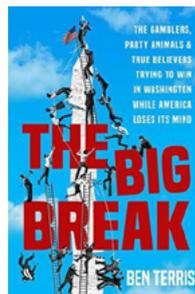
**BEYOND THIS HARBOR
Adventurous Tales of the Heart**

Styron, Rose
Knopf (400 pp.)
\$32.00 | June 13, 2023
9780525659020

The longtime wife of William Styron reflects on her poetry, her work as an international human rights activist, and her vast social network.

Styron begins in 1974 while in Chile on an early assignment for Amnesty International, shortly after the American-backed coup that replaced Salvador Allende with de facto dictator Augusto Pinochet. The horrifying accounts she learned during her assignment influenced her life and work for the next few decades. The author then moves back in time to recall her courtship and early years of marriage to William, their expanding family, and their eventual long-term residences in Roxbury, Connecticut, and Martha's Vineyard. These were busy social years, and Styron references an expansive array of prominent names that included leading political, literary, and artistic figures of the day. Peter Matthiessen, Arthur Miller, Philip Roth, and Mike Nichols were among their inner circle; the Clintons, the Kennedys, Lillian Hellman, and Frank Sinatra were part of a wider network. The book takes on more substance as Styron recounts further experiences on behalf of Amnesty in Moscow, Sarajevo, and El Salvador as well as later encounters with political figures such as Fidel Castro. The author offers more intimate reflections when describing her care for William during his periods of severe depression. "I became the scholar of Bill's moods and behavior, too interested and curious to turn off entirely even when I could not reach him," writes the author. "I know that this man I had married was never boring, always brilliant, mesmerizingly mercurial....I realized I must look around the corner to be ready for what was coming next onto our windswept, waterlogged path if health and sanity were ever to return." Throughout her memoir, the author recalls a rich and productive life, but her excessive name-dropping somewhat undermines the strength of her accomplishments and skills as a storyteller.

Colorful stories from a remarkable woman's life well lived.



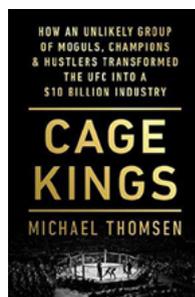
**THE BIG BREAK
The Gamblers, Party Animals, & True Believers Trying To Win in Washington While America Loses Its Mind**

Terris, Ben
Twelve (320 pp.)
\$30.00 | June 6, 2023
9781538708057

A feature writer for the *Washington Post* looks into D.C.'s concentric rings of lobbyists, influence peddlers, and wannabes.

"I was rarely the kind of reporter who chased The Big Story," writes Terris. "I was more interested in the sideshow." As he ably shows, most of the D.C. scene is precisely that sideshow, with a shifting cast who are in one day, out the next. His text opens with a midlevel Democratic Party official who throws poker parties that were once quite popular, with juicy quotables emerging from them (of Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, the operative remarks, "She has such bad politics, but she's so hot." Of course, many of Terris' subjects are die-hard Trump supporters, desperate to claw themselves back to either respectability or a place in a presumed second administration. Among the most visible of the White nationalist outcasts is Matt Schlapp, who, with his wife, "had once been the very picture of the old Republican establishment....But they were Trump people now." Thanks in part to the author's reporting, Schlapp is now damaged goods on the strength of an alleged untoward sexual advance toward a male staffer, but that didn't stop him from hosting a Christmas party at which George Santos was loudly present—"the kind of grifter," one GOP stalwart worried, who would have success "gaining purchase in Trump's, and Matt's, Republican Party." On the Democratic side, the picture is scarcely prettier. After fomenting bad polling, one operative, already iffy because his "love of money in politics put him at odds with most liberals," found himself on the outs with the powers that be. "It's amazing what people are willing to overlook when things are going well for them," writes Terris.

A dishy look at how insider Washington works, fueled by drugs, booze, and, of course, mountains of money.



**CAGE KINGS
How an Unlikely Group of Moguls, Champions, & Hustlers Transformed the UFC Into a \$10 Billion Industry**

Thomsen, Michael
Simon & Schuster (464 pp.)
\$28.99 | June 20, 2023
9781501198472

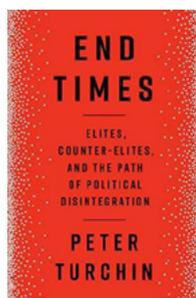
An in-depth examination of the professionalization of mixed martial arts and the rise of the Ultimate Fighting Championship.

“A striking text that takes us beyond our planet for a fresh perspective.”

IN LIGHT-YEARS THERE'S NO HURRY

In its relatively short existence, the UFC has transformed the landscape of competitive martial arts—and not always for the better. A longtime devotee of the sport, Thomsen traces the UFC's history from its beginnings as a struggling, controversial new league to its current state as a media juggernaut. Writing about an internationally broadcast 2019 UFC event, the author gives visceral context to the company's modern ubiquity. Head kicks that land with the force of a two-by-four, submission holds that tear ligaments and muscle from the bone, chokes that starve the brain of oxygen—none of it seems as instinctively wrong as it did to many at UFC 1,” he writes. “To the contrary, today, mixed martial arts has become commonplace as a form of personal fitness, as popular and accessible as yoga or Pilates.” Thomsen's enthusiasm for the sport shines in blow-by-blow breakdowns of historic fights, making dozens of near-invisible decisive moments accessible to the uninitiated and underscoring the tremendous skill of these world-class athletes. The fighters' stories—evocatively detailed in chapters about several key competitors—display single-minded dedication and remarkable discipline in the face of hardship. However, the UFC is a business, and within its world of licensing fees and investor capital, the fighters become little more than numbers, their long-term financial and physical well-being mortgaged to the company for the increasingly miniscule chance of making it big. “For long-term followers of the sport, it can be difficult to rationalize its effects on those who make it possible,” writes the author. “Over time, it can sometimes seem as if you're watching people come apart in slow motion.” Covering its monumental highs and troubling lows, Thomsen delivers a fascinating look at this brutal, morally complicated industry.

A compelling story of passionate athletes and the ambitious businesspeople who manipulate them for profit.



END TIMES *Elites, Counter-Elites, and the Path of Political Disintegration*

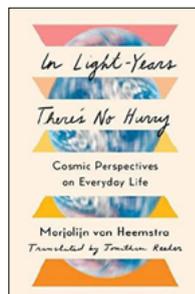
Turchin, Peter
Penguin Press (368 pp.)
\$28.00 | June 13, 2023
9780593490501

A pioneering social scientist examines the roots of social problems and sees dark days looming.

Everyone wants to know where the society in which they live is going, but answers are elusive. Turchin, an academic working in the emerging field of complexity science, believes he has found a path forward with a discipline called cliodynamics, which melds statistical analysis, social trend data, and historical comparisons to create a sophisticated model. He has written several books using cliodynamics, including *Ultrasociety* and *Ages of Discord*, and here, he aims to understand the current situation in the U.S, which he sees as sliding toward social and political disintegration. The author lays out a series of interlocking causes, such as the emergence of a class of overcredentialed people who

want to join the upper class but find there is no room for them. Meanwhile, those on lower socio-economic rungs have seen a decline in their status and living standards, opening a vast gap in wealth distribution. As Turchin shows, when the equilibrium between ruling elites and the majority tips too far in favor of elites, political instability driven by extremists is nearly inevitable. This is intriguing material, but some crucial parts of the argument fail to connect, and the assertion that the U.S. is in a period of unprecedented turmoil might not be valid. Some would argue that the period between 1962 and 1975 was just as tumultuous, for example, but the core institutions proved durable, and stability eventually returned. This is not to make light of the deepening polarization that now defines politics but simply suggest that Turchin's model may be less reliable than he asserts. Though the author explains his methodology in an appendix, questions remain. The text will be overly dense for general readers, but the author does have important things to say about power relationships and social evolution.

A well-informed yet heavy, disturbing assessment of where we are now.



IN LIGHT-YEARS THERE'S NO HURRY *Cosmic Perspectives on Everyday Life*

van Heemstra, Marjolijn
Trans. by Jonathan Reeder
Norton (160 pp.)
\$26.00 | June 20, 2023
9781324035695

An escape from doomscrolling social media to the vantage point of the Hubble telescope, 340 miles above the Earth's surface.

Following three books of poetry and a novel, Amsterdam-based space reporter van Heemstra invites readers to take a breath, forgo the breakneck pace and seeming futility of modern life, and take a view of our lives from the point of view of an astronaut in orbit. As the author points out, the daily inundation of emails, bills, social media, and negative news coverage has increasingly limited her view to “the chaos occurring at eye level.” She continues, “I want to shrink, zoom out, find an overview from which I can see things, myself, others, in their proper proportion.” This hyperengagement also counterintuitively hampers any attempt to make meaningful progress, and van Heemstra takes inspiration from the astronauts who, after witnessing the world as a proverbial blue marble, return to rededicate their efforts to the well-being of the planet, whether continuing their scientific studies fighting climate change or advocating for social injustice. This cognitive shift, coined by author Frank White as the “overview effect,” occurs when one is able to break away from the constant barrage of mundane life, and the resulting feeling is one of cosmological connectedness. Throughout this brief yet paradigm-shifting book, the author guides readers through poignant vignettes and interviews with leading thinkers in the science of space.

In the course of her journey, she seeks to “mentally remove myself from Earth,” an exceedingly difficult task. Each investigation into the minutiae of space brings a subtle suggestion of the interconnectedness of all things, and by the conclusion, readers will start to believe it is possible to attain a whole worldview between the covers of a book.

A striking text that takes us beyond our planet for a fresh perspective.



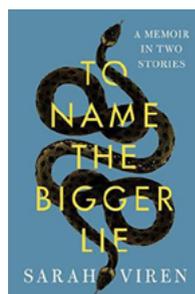
ULTRA-PROCESSED PEOPLE
The Science Behind Food That Isn't Food

van Tulleken, Chris
 Norton (336 pp.)
 \$30.00 | June 27, 2023
 9781324036722

A fact-filled, discouraging attack on the modern diet.

Van Tulleken, an infectious disease doctor and TV and radio commentator, rocks no boats by agreeing that our convenient, highly refined, additive-rich, chemically enhanced food is making us unhealthy. He has no kind words for “junk food,” but he also reveals the distressing details behind many of the organic, ultra-processed foods (UPFs) that tout their relative healthiness. “Almost every food that comes with a health claim on the packet is a UPF,” he writes. Unfortunately, as van Tulleken shows, denouncing unhealthy food (containing too much sugar, salt, fat, and calories and too little fiber) hasn’t worked. People in nations where calorie consumption has dropped, including in the U.S., continue to get fatter. The author defines unhealthy food not for its ingredients but for how it’s processed. Generally soft and energy-dense, UPFs are literally addictive. The author also devotes generous space to obesity, the world’s leading dietary disorder. Most writers of this genre give advice on dieting, but van Tulleken, sticking to the science, admits that diets’ success rates are close to zero. It’s proven (but widely disbelieved) that obesity is not the result of weak will power, gluttony, or indolence but rather a mixture of genetics and environment. UPFs are cheap, so being poor is a risk factor. Delving into immersion journalism, the author tests the effects of spending a month on a diet containing 80% UPFs. At the end, he gained 13 pounds, and his appetite grew, but the food became unpalatable. Realistic to the end, van Tulleken maintains that UPF manufacturers will never make better food because it’s designed to be consumed in the largest possible quantities. Healthy food, made to be consumed less, will never sell as well as food that’s consumed more. Everyone, including food industry professionals, agrees that only stronger government regulations will improve matters. Unfortunately, in most countries, especially the U.S., that’s unlikely to occur.

A painfully eye-opening study of food and health.



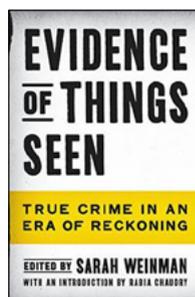
TO NAME THE BIGGER LIE
A Memoir in Two Stories

Viren, Sarah
 Scribner (304 pp.)
 \$28.00 | June 13, 2023
 9781982166595

An immersive look into how lies and misconstrued truths can capture the psyches of those willing to listen.

In this philosophical follow-up to her essay collection, *Mine*, *New York Times Magazine* contributor and creative writing instructor Viren chronicles two instances when the ramifications of lies nearly derailed her life. The author begins with her high school years, writing about her teacher Dr. Whiles, who challenged his classes. Whiles was revered by his students, including the author, as an all-knowing figure, someone you desperately wished to make proud with your work. That is, until he began teaching known conspiracies as truths, planting toxic seeds into the minds of impressionable students. In reflecting on her time in class, Viren writes that she was bothered by “the sense that it’s not just the individual facts that are wrong, it’s the whole premise. Yet no one else seems to be screaming, so I feel crazy for wanting to.” As the author was compiling research for this initial topic, she learned about anonymous sexual assault accusations made against her wife, Marta, a fellow professor. Now with a future job on the line and her wife’s reputation in jeopardy, Viren worked to dismantle the lies. “One story can easily interrupt another, just as questions build one atop the next,” she writes. “The past may mirror the present but the future also casts its shadow back on us.” Ruminating on these experiences, Viren investigates the wider concept of truth. Drawing from the work of Socrates, the author aligns her memoir around the allegory of the cave and what could happen if one discovers deeper truths beyond a manufactured reality. Throughout, Viren examines a wide range of relevant questions—e.g., What is the appropriate punishment for these lies, and how can someone move forward from this state of cognitive dissonance?

A compelling and propulsive memoir that interrogates the nature of truth and trust.



EVIDENCE OF THINGS SEEN
True Crime in an Era of Reckoning

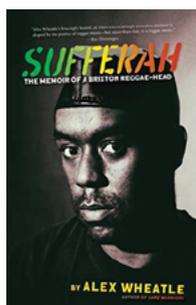
Ed. by Weinman, Sarah
 Ecco/HarperCollins (304 pp.)
 \$18.99 paper | July 4, 2023
 9780063233928

A collection of previously published essays on crime.

Weinman—a crime writer and the editor of a previous anthology, *Unspeakable Acts*—compiles some of the past few years’ best reporting on crime and crime media, previously published in outlets

including *Vice* and the *Atlantic*. Some of the essays offer explicit critiques of crime discourses (both true and fictional), from a True Crime Junkies Facebook group to *The Wire*. Others use the format to tell underreported stories. In an exemplary piece, Justine van der Leun employs both data and human-focused storytelling to reveal the pipeline that pushes women from poverty and childhood abuse to sex work, violence, and prison, often as punishment for “acts of survival” or self-defense. Many essays are well worth reading, but most of them have been widely circulated already, so readers may wonder about the purpose in reprinting them. Both Rabia Chaudry’s introduction and Weinman’s editor’s note make claims about *true crime*—a phrase that generally conjures murder-mystery podcasts and serial-killer documentaries—without defining it or distinguishing between the genre of voyeuristic entertainment and the systems-focused crime writing that comprises the volume. Chaudry confusingly writes that the recent rise in public consciousness about the injustices of policing and criminal-legal systems can “nearly all... be attributed to true crime media.” However, as some contributors note, sensationalized crime stories can do as much harm as rigorous ones do good. The middle section of the book contains critiques of popular crime media, which Amanda Knox, in a chapter rebuking her own story’s relentless misrepresentation in the media, calls “a voracious content mill.” Weinman sought “to hold the true crime genre to higher ethical standards,” but most of these essays surmount the genre altogether. Other contributors include Wesley Lowery, May Jeong, and Diana Moskovitz.

An up-and-down anthology of important perspectives on injustice within the legal system and crime media alike.



SUFFERAH
The Memoir of a
Brixton Reggae-Head

Wheatle, Alex
Akashic (256 pp.)
\$26.95 | July 4, 2023
9781636140933

A memoir showing how reggae music sustained the author as a troubled youth and helped him become a successful author.

Wheatle has written numerous novels, including *Cane Warriors* and *Straight Outta Crongton*, about sufferahs, those who, born into disadvantaged circumstances, navigate “a hostile environment, often at a terrible personal cost, for a purpose bigger than themselves.” In this inspiring, often harrowing narrative, the author chronicles how, shortly after he turned 3, he was abandoned by his parents and placed in the care of the government. That led to a childhood of physical and sexual abuse on top of the racism and police brutality he experienced growing up in Brixton, England, in the 1970s and ’80s. Wheatle felt like he was alone in the world, failed by the systems that were supposed to support him, but he found solace in reggae. The lyrics from classics from reggae legends like Bob Marley, Dennis Brown, and



Lee “Scratch” Perry offered comfort and advice for him during stressful times, especially after he was imprisoned for participating in the 1981 Brixton uprising against racism. The music, especially the bass lines, prompted him to dance, which provided one of the few escapes, albeit temporary ones, from his troubles. As dark as his early memories are, Wheatle describes his reggae memories with glimmers of hope and appreciation. “The resident sound system was the Mighty Observer, operated by a dreadlocked guy named Austin,” he recalls. “One of his crew was a bulky brother nicknamed Rhino. When he hit the floor, you had to be careful he didn’t take you out with his wild skanking, hence his moniker.” It’s those flickers of happiness that make a seemingly bleak story bearable. Eventually, Wheatle found purpose from his prison cellmate and was able to start turning his life around.

A striking tribute to reggae’s ability to protect a fragile soul when seemingly everything else had failed him.



TO DYE FOR
How Toxic Fashion Is Making
Us Sick

Wicker, Alden
Putnam (304 pp.)
\$29.00 | June 27, 2023
9780593422618

Why our clothes could be slowly undermining our health.

As Wicker shows, fast-fashion garments often have a cocktail of dangerous chemicals embedded in the fabric, and there is no effective national regulation of them. The author, founder and editor-in-chief of *EcoCult*, first became aware of this issue when investigating health problems reported by airline employees, mainly rashes and eye irritations but sometimes much more serious concerns. The cause was traced back to new uniforms that, like most garments sold in the U.S., had been produced overseas. This led Wicker to look more broadly at the clothing industry, and she discovered that nearly everything contained harmful chemicals, ranging from fungicides to anti-wrinkle additives. Many dyes, especially those used to produce neon colors, are used in dangerous quantities, and toxins can be absorbed through the skin or even inhaled. Wicker supplies a useful glossary of chemicals and notes that one of the most common is formaldehyde, which is harmless in small doses but carcinogenic when used intensively. People with allergies are often the first affected, but there are links to broader health issues, and Wicker has a long list of horror stories. Even more, in the countries where the garments are produced, there are cases where entire communities have been poisoned by toxic fumes or contaminated water. Wicker points to some clothing companies that have started to detoxify their products, but others are seemingly willing to prioritize profits over customer health. She argues for stronger regulation to ensure transparency and a higher level of safety, with an expansion of the oversight of the Consumer Product Safety Commission to include clothing. At

“This heartfelt book will appeal not only to LGBTQ+ readers, but to anyone committed to the fight for social justice for any marginalized community.”

A PLACE FOR US

another level, consumers can help themselves by avoiding cheap knockoffs, buying natural fabrics, minimizing dry-cleaning, and staying away from garments that have been heavily dyed. Also, writes the author, trust your nose: If something smells bad, it probably is.

A disturbing, well-researched study with solid proposals to address a deep-seated problem.



A PLACE FOR US

A Memoir

Wolf, Brandon J.

Little A (222 pp.)

\$28.99 | July 1, 2023

9781542036467

An account of how an activist’s search for community led him to experience a tragedy so profound it changed the course of his life forever.

Wolf’s first experience with death came when his fierce and beautiful mother died from cancer. The loss shattered him: As a “half-Black kid...[with] a knack for musical theater,” he always knew he was different, but his mother had always made him feel safe and accepted in the small Oregon town where they lived. The author’s dark skin and sensitivity made him a target for racist boys “desperate to prove their masculinity,” as they forced him into confrontation with White supremacist propaganda meant to belittle him. Feeling misunderstood by an otherwise sympathetic White stepfather and stifled by bigotry seemingly everywhere he went, Wolf moved to Florida and took a job as a costumed character at Disney World. Adjustment to an independent life, along with a terrifying experience with racial profiling by police, left him disoriented. Despite hardships, however, “the freedom of a new world was intoxicating,” and he found life-affirming camaraderie with other queer people, especially those at Pulse nightclub in Orlando. Through Drew, Wolf learned how to love another gay man as a “confidant...accomplice...[and] brother” and also to celebrate Drew’s passionate commitment to Juan. When a lone gunman killed Drew, Juan, and dozens of others on a June night in 2016, Wolf’s life was shattered again. He was assailed with guilt for having survived the massacre and for having been the one to invite both men to the club that night. Yet rather than allow himself to succumb to fear and grief, Wolf helped found the Dru Project, an organization dedicated to creating safe spaces for all queer youth. This heartfelt book will appeal not only to LGBTQ+ readers, but to anyone committed to the fight for social justice for any marginalized community.

Poignant, inspiring reading.

CHILDREN'S

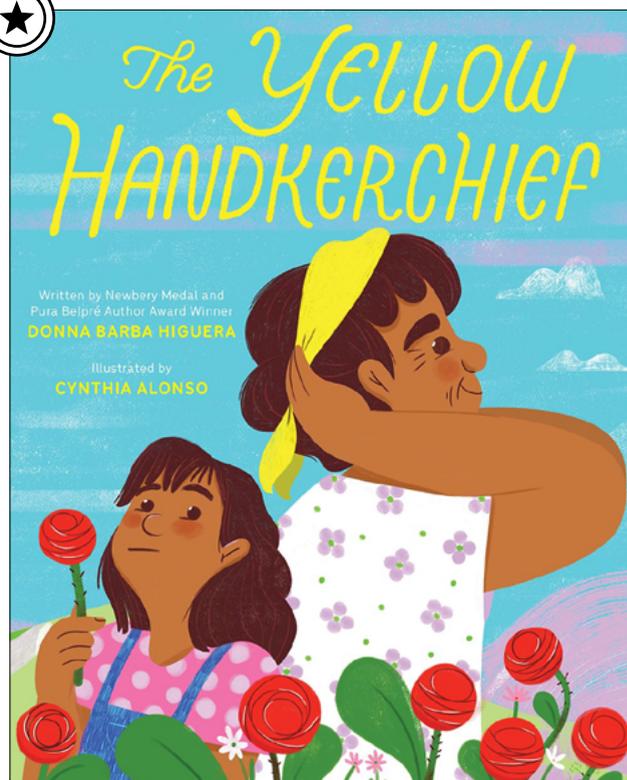


These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

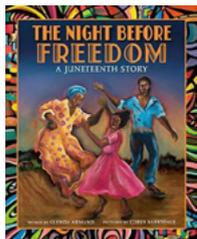
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THE YELLOW HANDKERCHIEF
Higuera, Donna Barba
Illus. by Cynthia Alonso
Abrams (40 pp.)
\$18.99 | March 21, 2023
9781419760143



**THE NIGHT BEFORE FREEDOM
A Juneteenth Story**

Armand, Glenda

Illus. by Corey Barksdale

Crown (40 pp.)

\$18.99 | \$21.99 PLB | May 2, 2023

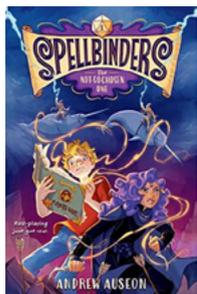
978-0-593-56746-3

9780593645338 PLB

A Black family gathers on Juneteenth.

David's family has joined relatives to celebrate the holiday in Galveston, Texas. After the parades, speeches, food, and music, the culminating activity is David's grandmother's telling the story of her grandmother Mom Bess and the events that came to be known as Juneteenth. The rumors that freedom was coming for enslaved people finally came true with the arrival of a White soldier on horseback who read the Emancipation Proclamation. Bess, who was 6 at the time, did not understand until her mother explained what freedom meant. The newly freed began to plan what they would do next. Bess' parents started to work for wages, eventually purchasing land and providing an opportunity for Bess to get an education. The afterword explains that although President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation to take effect Jan. 1, 1863, enslaved people in Texas did not learn of the change in their status until June 19, 1865. For years some states celebrated the holiday. In June 2021, President Joe Biden declared Juneteenth a federal holiday. Armand uses the same meter as Clement C. Moore's "Twas the Night Before Christmas," evoking the same anticipation—in this case for freedom. Infused with movement, Barksdale's lively, fluid, colorful acrylic, oil, and pastel watercolor pencil illustrations complement the rhythmic text that centers family and story. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A jubilant combination of verse and illustration that captures this momentous historical event. *(Informational picture book. 4-8)*



**SPELLBINDERS
The Not-So-Chosen One**

Auseon, Andrew

Illus. by Lisa Weber

Labyrinth Road (432 pp.)

\$14.99 | \$17.99 PLB | June 6, 2023

9780593482711

9780593482728 PLB

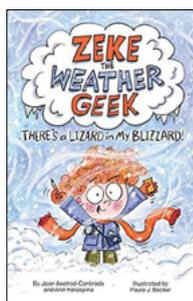
Series: Spellbinders, 1

A lonely tabletop role-playing game fan gets a quest in a real magical world.

Ben is constantly writing in his notebook, daydreaming up new games for his adventuring party to play in Dungeons & Dragons analog Kingdoms of Forever. His divorced mother moved him away from his friends, leaving him bored and alone. After being stood up by his party at the con they'd always attended, he's discovered by purple-haired, awesomely costumed Niara. She's on a mission to retrieve the Chosen One for

a quest. Ben assumes she's a con-goer inviting him to a game and follows Niara to Lux, where he's plopped into the middle of a conflict between the Elders, who are devoted to an ancient prophet's writings, and the king whose knights riding flying narwhals contribute to the ridonkulous comedic tone. Ben finds a magic of his own—what he writes in his notebook comes true (within reasonable limits). Ben's sure he's not the actual Chosen One, but he enjoys living the fantasy until he's in too deep. The Lux storyline's stakes are a little slow in coming, but once they do, the revelations come alongside reveals of Ben's real-world struggles. While the writing could sometimes be tighter, the themes of interpersonal relationships and change give the work emotional heft. The ending teases a sequel. Spotlight art emphasizes game-guide-style profiles and sidebars. On the cover, Ben's White and Niara has brown skin.

A love letter to escapism and writing one's own destiny. *(Fantasy. 8-14)*



**THERE'S A LIZARD IN
MY BLIZZARD**

Axelrod-Contrada, Joan & Ann Malaspina

Illus. by Paula J. Becker

Kids Can (168 pp.)

\$15.99 | May 2, 2023

9781525304439

Series: Zeke the Weather Geek, 1

Meteorology and school life combine in this series starter.

Fourth grader Zeke Abramovich loves all things weather (particularly snow), tracking conditions with his backyard station and noting his findings in Sky Tracker, his daily log. He's especially thrilled that his hero, TV meteorologist Freeze Jones, has predicted a major blizzard for the city of Green River. It's Zeke's ninth birthday today, and he's hoping for a Saint Bernard puppy—perfect for saving lives during blizzards. He receives a pet...a bearded lizard that excites his dino-loving little brother, Bub, but leaves Zeke cold. Zeke also desperately wants to win his class's Winter Photo Contest, but the competition is stiff: his best friend Kiho, a math whiz from Uganda, and, especially, his supercompetitive neighbor Luna Díaz, coded as Latine. But could Zeke's new pet be the key to his success? Pages with information on meteorology are scattered throughout but not always well integrated. This is no Magic School Bus, where science and Ms. Frizzle's classroom aligned perfectly. Nonetheless, the grayscale digital illustrations are amusing, the science is sound, family and school episodes are realistically humorous, and kids wanting easy doses of science will be engaged. Zeke's family is depicted as light-skinned in the images; Freeze Jones is dark-skinned.

A likable protagonist, a fun premise, and science galore. *(glossary, selected sources)* *(Chapter book. 7-10)*

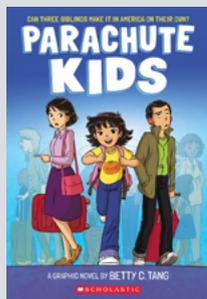
GROWING UP TOO FAST



WHAT WORDS COME TO MIND when you think of childhood? For me, *carefree* and *idyllic* have been the operative words, but I had a rude awakening when I read Betty C. Tang's *Parachute Kids* (Graphix/Scholastic, April 4). Set in 1981, this graphic novel follows three Taiwanese children as they arrive in Los Angeles for a vacation that they soon realize is a permanent stay: Their parents

will be returning home to Taiwan due to visa issues. The siblings' lives are anything but untroubled as they adjust to a new country, manage the household, and study hard, and though family friends are on hand to help, nothing can replace the support of their own parents. As Tang writes in her author's note, the phenomenon of sending kids to the United States alone isn't uncommon for Chinese immigrants, but it's one that is rarely talked about; she hopes her book will change that.

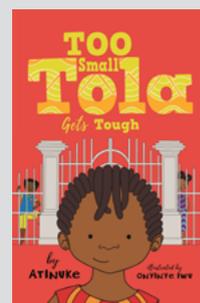
Parachute Kids is a powerful reminder that there is no universal experience of childhood. Many kids, for various reasons, are forced to assume adult responsibilities, from looking after younger siblings to putting food on the table. Shouldering burdens is tough, but so is loneliness; it's easy for kids to assume they're the only ones going through this, that everyone else has a so-called "normal" life. But more and more middle-grade novels are centering children who are forced to grow up fast. For some readers, the books below will be eye-opening, while others will see their own experiences reflected in these pages.



"It takes a village to raise a child." These words don't impress the narrator of Torrey Maldonado's *Hands* (Nancy Paulsen Books, Jan. 24). Twelve-year-old Trevor's stepfather went to jail for beating Trevor's mother, and now that he's due to be released, the young Black boy feels he alone must protect the family from further abuse. While Trevor's stepfather has al-

ways told him it's his duty to stand up for himself—with his fists if needed—various men in the neighborhood attempt to set him on a different path. Maldonado's terse yet potent prose roils with Trevor's pent-up anguish. Though the book doesn't wrap up neatly, his skepticism for the "it takes a village" mindset slowly evolves into appreciation as he realizes that his community is willing to step up for him.

The protagonist of Atinuke's Nigeria-set *Too Small Tola Gets Tough* (Candlewick, March 21), illustrated by Onyinye Iwu, is no stranger to taking on adult responsibilities; an earlier installment in this chapter-book series saw her and her older siblings pitching in when their grandmother contracted malaria. Though things seem to be on the upswing now, life becomes complicated with the arrival of a global pandemic. To earn money, little Tola must work as a live-in servant for a prominent family. Atinuke keeps the tone matter-of-fact and lively, and though she depicts Tola as a resourceful heroine capable of solving problems that stymie adults, it's clear that she's a young child who more than anything longs to be with her grandmother.



Raised by her grandparents, Lizzie Chu, a 12-year-old Scottish Chinese girl, took over running the household when her grandmother died a year earlier, but she now has a new and much more daunting duty: watching out for her grandfather, Wai Gong, who's showing signs of dementia. Lizzie's convinced that a trip to the Blackpool Tower Ballroom will restabilize Wai Gong, but nothing goes according to plan. With *Keep Dancing, Lizzie Chu* (Amulet/Abrams, March 28), illustrated by Natelle Quek, Maisie Chan crafts a poignant tale of a young girl discovering it's OK to ask for help. Lizzie's loneliness is especially palpable; readers in similar situations will feel reassured that they aren't alone.

Mahnaz Dar is a young readers' editor.



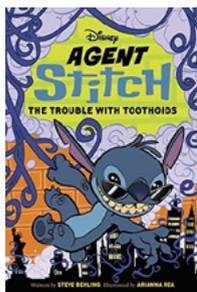
GLITTER EVERYWHERE!
Where It Came From, Where It's Found & Where It's Going

Barton, Chris
 Illus. by Chaaya Prabhat
 Charlesbridge (48 pp.)
 \$19.99 | June 27, 2023
 9781623542528

The whats, whys, and hows of glitter.

Barton began his successful writing career with a book about shining colors, *The Day-Glo Brothers* (2009). Here, he tackles another showy subject. In an engaging, conversational narrative, he explains why glitter sparkles, speculates on why humans like sparkly, shiny things, and looks back at historical uses. He describes glittery bits made from the wings of beetles in ancient Egypt and from mica in civilizations around the world. Barton also examines the etymology of *glitter*. (It was once called flitter.) Then he turns to modern glitter, made from plastics, touching on the manufacturing process as well as glitter's small size (measurable in microns) and uses, with special attention to Mardi Gras. Barton explains why glitter clings so easily to anything it touches and unpacks environmental concerns about microplastics, which often end up in the ocean. He mentions the more recent innovation of biodegradable glitter and problems with mica mining. Throughout Prabhat's lively digitally created art, three young people follow the investigation. On one spread, a dark-skinned child with Afro puffs peers at glitter through a microscope while a light-skinned child with long, dark brown hair uses tweezers, and a brown-skinned child gazes through a magnifying glass. There's humor, too, mostly related to glitter's clinginess. The author ends on a hopeful note, praising "the steps humans are taking to shimmer more thoughtfully." (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

An intriguing, entertaining investigation sure to catch readers' attention. (author's and illustrator's notes, further reading, selective bibliography) (*Informational picture book. 5-10*)



AGENT STITCH
The Trouble With Toothoids

Bebling, Steve
 Illus. by Arianna Rea
 Disney Press (224 pp.)
 \$12.99 | May 30, 2023
 9781368071338
 Series: Agent Stitch, 2

Lilo, Stitch, and members of the Galactic Detective Agency track down an unknown alien species taking over the

New York City subway system.

In the second installment of the Agent Stitch series, characters from the Disney film *Lilo & Stitch* (2002) take on aliens who pose a threat to Earth. In this case, the agents of the Galactic Federation are investigating reports of humans falling into a trance and dropping everything to descend into the subway

tunnels, all the while repeating a bizarre rhyme. Stitch, eager to prove himself a worthy member of the agency, takes off on his own. It's only when the agents realize they work best when they work together that they're able to get a handle on the case. The omniscient narrator at times directly addresses readers: "How long have you been reading this book now?... You probably need a break—maybe go and stretch your legs, pet a dog or something, right?" The story's conflict moves along at a good pace, each chapter bouncing back and forth between the separated agents. Overall, the style and tempo succeed. The final resolution, however, comes almost too easily, with a character anticlimactically uttering, "Ugh, I hate it when my plans fail. My bad." Black-and-white comic strip-style scenes pepper the story. Fans of the film's characters and of alien wackiness will appreciate the plot even if it's lacking in depth.

Fan fodder but not an out-of-this-world success. (*Science fiction. 8-12*)

ISBN: 978-1-7379498-0-0

A burping boy. A family with quirks.
 Will their food choices and lack of movement burden them forever?

● ● ●

"A junk food-loving family learns the value of eating healthy and getting exercise in this picture book debut."

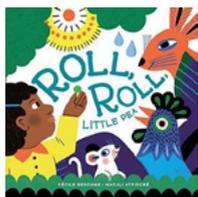
"Lewis' over-the-top characterization of the Everyday family will make young readers giggle...It's simplistic but effectively bolsters the overt message."

"A goofy, gassy tale with an obvious but important moral."
 —Kirkus Reviews

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“Nighttime is the right time for young readers thanks to this perfect amalgamation of soothing text and image.”

IN THE NIGHT GARDEN



ROLL, ROLL, LITTLE PEA

Bergame, Cécile
 Illus. by Magali Attiogbé
 Trans. by Angus Yuen-Killick
 Red Comet Press (24 pp.)
 \$17.99 | June 20, 2023
 9781636550442

In this French import, a pea escapes a bowl and starts an adventure.

While a girl is shelling peas, one accidentally drops to the floor and rolls away. The tiny green sphere then becomes a possibility for lunch for many different animals. As the pea rolls through the house and out the door, a mouse looks at it hungrily, a cat wants to “CRUNCH” it, and a rabbit wishes to “NIBBLE” it. Bolded action words that describe how each animal would consume the pea highlight new vocabulary. Propelled by a baffling momentum, the pea rolls down a path, through some mud (where a pig wants to “MUNCH” it), and into a forest. It is finally swallowed by a hole in the ground. The next harvest season, a new shoot appears, and high atop a tendril, the girl is reunited with the pea. The repeated refrain “ROLL, ROLL, LITTLE PEA” makes the tale roll along as merrily as the little pea itself. Bold graphic designs with thick accent lines are visually arresting. The girl, seen only on the first and last pages, has dark skin. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A sneaky plant life-cycle story for the youngest set. *(Picture book. 3-6)*



IN THE NIGHT GARDEN

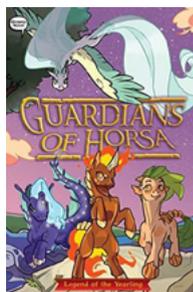
Berger, Carin
 Neal Porter/Holiday House
 (40 pp.)
 \$18.99 | June 6, 2023
 9780823449866



A cut-paper extravaganza welcomes young readers to the wonders of the nighttime.

The titular phrase “In the night garden” kicks off this exploration of a bedtime world. Indeed, those words repeat themselves several times as readers watch fireflies that resemble stars, the opening of perfumed moonflowers, and a black cat that acts as a guide through most of the book. Readers are led on a gentle journey past streams, crickets, and even bullfrogs croaking in the night before we see a tan-skinned child—depicted early on in the story gazing at stars—tucked into bed, yawning. Exceedingly delicate paper collages incorporate everything from ticket stubs and receipts to ledger books to make the darkness magical, the most impressive sight being the dramatically rendered harvest moon, all “fiery red” in the sky. Berger’s pen is just as adept as her scissors as she twists a turn of phrase into its simplest and most evocative form, as when “bats swoop and glide in the bluing sky.” Children are told not to fear when the light is gone or when they hear strange noises. “Just close your eyes and listen,” and young readers will do just that. Indeed, they’ll be unable to resist. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Nighttime is the right time for young readers thanks to this perfect amalgamation of soothing text and image. *(Picture books. 3-5)*



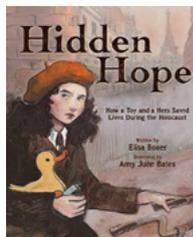
LEGEND OF THE YEARLING

Black, Roan
 Illus. by Glass House Graphics
 Little Simon/Simon & Schuster (144 pp.)
 \$9.99 paper | Jan. 24, 2023
 9781665931564
 Series: Guardians of Horsa, 1

A powerful prophecy brings an unlikely group of heroes together in this series-starting graphic novel.

Divided for centuries into four separate kingdoms, the warring realms of Horsa have not enjoyed harmonious relations. The horses in the Aqua, Solar, Firma, and Derecho herds possess magical powers—related to water, fire, earth, and wind, respectively—which allow them to thrive in their realms. That careful division comes to an end with the uncharacteristic rising of a pink sun, a portent of magic coming to Horsa. Four horses—one from each realm—are tasked with locating the prophesied yearling and bringing them safely back using only a magical map to guide them. Dubbed the Guardians of Horsa, the group must overcome decades of distrust to accomplish their mission. Readers will be forgiven for thinking this sounds reminiscent of the TV series *My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic* (talking horses with elemental talents, a plotline and prophecies, the importance of collaboration). Though the tales have some similarities, there is an omnipresent suspicion among the Guardians that adds the possible threat of impending betrayal, the likes of which the *MLP* gang couldn’t imagine. And while the Horsa herds do have fantastical, elemental manes, their bodies have a much more equine trim, which may have some crossover appeal for realistic horse fiction fans. Together, the art and story build a solid foundation for what promises to be a thrilling series.

Familiar fare but will hold the attention of fantasy readers and horse lovers alike. *(Graphic fantasy. 6-9)*



HIDDEN HOPE
How a Toy and a Hero
Saved Lives During
the Holocaust

Boxer, Elisa
 Illus. by Amy June Bates
 Abrams (48 pp.)
 \$19.99 | March 14, 2023
 9781419750007

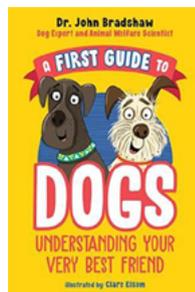


An adolescent girl and a toy duck helped save hundreds of Parisian Jewish lives during World War II.

Jacqueline Gauthier, a heroic Jewish teenage French Resistance member, posed as a Christian social worker and bicycled

her way through the streets of Paris during the German occupation. She carried a wooden toy duck on wheels in her satchel, ostensibly to homes with children as a plaything. This was a ploy; unbeknownst to Nazis who'd overtaken the city and were on the constant lookout for hidden Jews, the toy had a secret compartment. Inside were false identity papers—not bearing the stamp *Juive* (the French word for *Jew*)—that Gauthier clandestinely ferried to desperate Jews so they could flee the city undetected and unharmed. Also unknown to the Nazis: The “social worker” undertook this task at enormous personal risk, for she was Jewish herself. Her real name was Judith Geller, and she had hidden her own parents and brother and carried her own fake documents. Boxer tells Judith’s story in an understated manner, making it all the more heart-rending; succinct sentences heighten dramatic tension. The illustrations, rendered in watercolor, gouache, and pencil, are somber, in keeping with the story’s dark themes and images of terrified people literally hiding in the shadows. Judith’s red beret and the yellow duck stand out to deliberately keep readers’ focus on them throughout. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

This quiet book rightfully helps a little-known Holocaust heroine emerge from the darkness. (author’s and artist’s notes, bibliography) *(Informational picture book. 8-11)*

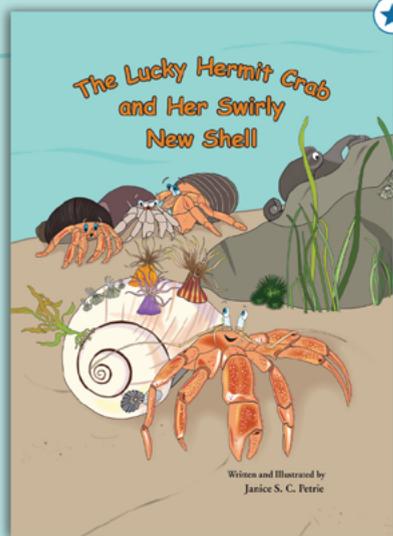


A FIRST GUIDE TO DOGS
Understanding Your Very Best Friend

Bradshaw, John
Illus. by Clare Elsom
Penguin Workshop (128 pp.)
\$7.99 paper | June 13, 2023
9780593521830

How dogs think, feel, and make sense of their world.

Introducing himself as a biologist who specializes in pet research, Bradshaw offers a dog’s-eye—or, far more precisely, dog’s-nose—view of human behavior by following fictive terrier



What do hermit crabs and children have in common? They both outgrow things that they have to leave behind.



“Petrie’s full-color cartoon illustrations mix realistic detail with friendly facial expressions; the octopus hiding on almost every page makes for an excellent seek-and-find.”

“A sea story with a solid message, fanciful rhymes, and engaging characters.”

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

for *The Lucky Hermit Crab and Her Swirly New Shell*

ISBN: 978-1-7330517-2-9 [hardcover 9 x 12]
ISBN: 978-1-7330517-5-0 [hardcover 8.5 x 11]
ISBN: 978-1-7330517-4-3 [paperback]
ISBN: 978-1-7330517-3-6 [eBook]

For All Inquiries, Please Email seatalespublishing@gmail.com • seatalespublishing.com • janicepetrie.com

Rusty Barker, a former shelter dog, through a cozy set of daily routines with a loving and sensitive family. As monochrome scenes and vignettes appear on nearly every page, Bradshaw explains how a dog's more than 800 supercharged olfactory detectors work together, trumping sight to help this lively pooch track and identify beloved humans, potential food, and other creatures both around the house and in the outside world. The author also focuses on how dogs communicate with both humans and other dogs, how they interpret body language and other cues, and how their memory differs in several respects from human memory. His overall message—even if most dogs are eager to please (and no matter how intelligent they are), they don't really think like us—comes through clearly and makes a solid foundation for a healthy relationship between pets and their two-legged companions. Bradshaw has a gift for making complex science accessible and absorbing, and his narrative is peppered with humor. Elsom expands her winningly expressive canine cast to include multiple breeds; Rusty's human family is light-skinned, though some dark-skinned dog owners are included, too.

Perceptive and engaging—essential reading for anyone seeking greater understanding of their four-legged best friends. (interview with the author) (Nonfiction. 7-9)



AND THEN COMES SCHOOL

Brenner, Tom

Illus. by Jen Hill

Candlewick (32 pp.)

\$18.99 | June 13, 2023

978-1-5362-0913-6

Summer comes to a close as a family prepares for the first day of school.

The sights, sounds, smells, and feel of the season's end come through on each page of this picture book. Brenner's lyrical verse follows a soothing pattern: "WHEN...the leaves of trees seem tired by noon," "THEN, with fingers stained deep purple, watch as / the berries bob and boil into glistening jam." "WHEN pumpkins take on an orange tinge," "THEN bring in baskets / of flowers and fruits / and veggies." Meanwhile, a light-skinned family helps a child get ready for the first day of school. A list of school supplies is sent home, a first-day outfit is chosen, and then the big day arrives. Hill's mixed-media illustrations pair perfectly with the text, adding movement and depth as the sun sets on a game of flashlight tag and as a rush of students heads into the school and settles into a new classroom. While the story might help prepare anxious readers for the new year, it mostly plays up the mood and energy surrounding the wind down of summer, making for a rather original take on the subject. Background characters, including the students at the end, are diverse; one student uses a wheelchair. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A back-to-school book refreshingly focused on the sensory feel of the familiar season. (Picture book. 4-7)



AFTERWARD, EVERYTHING WAS DIFFERENT

Buitrago, Jairo

Illus. by Rafael Yockteng

Trans. by Elisa Amado

Greystone Kids (64 pp.)

\$19.95 | May 9, 2023

9781778400605



A wordless black-and-white tale detailing the journey of a Pleistocene family.

Opening with six double-page graphite sketches of a bison hunt that precedes the title page—a cinematic touch that will have kids mesmerized from the get-go—this story of prehistoric people encourages readers to look closely, notice details, and imagine coexisting with saber-toothed cats and mastodons. Some animals (apelike creatures) are helpful companions of the hominids, some (primarily herbivores) live peaceably with them, while others see them as food. As the family travels, the youngest children, naked even in the snow, climb trees and play, while their older sister, who wears animal furs like the adults, examines footprints and looks out for predators. In their search for a cave home, they encounter many animals, including a gigantic bearlike creature that becomes the rug in their cave after they kill it. When the family leaves the girl alone inside the cave, she begins to draw on the stone walls with a charred stick, and by the time they return, she has covered the cave walls with an extensive pictorial story of their journey. Yockteng makes meticulous use of shading and ramps up the drama through thrilling use of scale that sees this intrepid family dwarfed by mountains, trees, and animals. This gorgeously illustrated work will encourage young readers to speculate about the joys, dangers, and complex family dynamics of the hominids of the Pleistocene. Characters have gray-tinged skin. Backmatter with more information on the Pleistocene is translated from Spanish. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A stirring and thought-provoking reflection on the essential part stories play in making us human. (Picture book. 4-9)



WOMBAT

Bunting, Philip

Charlesbridge (40 pp.)

\$17.99 | June 13, 2023

9781623543914

Fall in love with wombats.

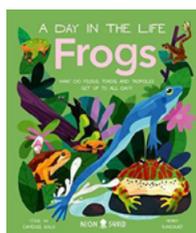
Bunting's digitally rendered, cut-paper cartoon art depicts an adorable, squat brown animal who peers out at readers on the first page. Each page contains a simple but playful illustration of one or more wombats, set against a solidly colored background, and a short, pun-based description beneath. A daring and darling wombat does a handstand on a ball ("Acrobat"), while two others talk on cellphones

“An impressive primer on one of nature’s most fascinating animal families.”

FROGS

(“Chit.” “Chat”). Some wombats are just plain silly, like the one eating a doughnut (“Om-nom-nombat”) or the “Fallendown-holebat” (accompanied by an illustration of the creature on its back), but others introduce basic skills. There are wombats to count (“Wombat. Twobats. Threebats. Morebats”), shapes to name (“Squarebat. Roundbat. Longbat”), and primary colors to recognize (“Redbat. Yellowbat. Bluebat”). More advanced concepts include emotions (“Happybat. Grumpybat”) and directions (“Leftbat. Rightbat”). Making the read-aloud even more fun are some internal rhymes later in the book (“Wrongbat. Songbat”). There is some potty humor—a close-up of a wombat posterior and some freshly deposited droppings (“Stinkbat”)—and adults might need to explain what a cricket bat is. A string of images at the very end of the book depicting two lovestruck wombats who form a family is especially clever and heartwarming (“Likebat. Lovebat. Thisbat. Thatbat. Madeanotherwombat”). *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Readers will go batty for this one. *(Picture book. 2-5)*



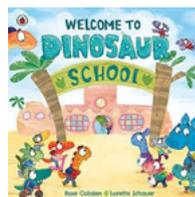
FROGS **What Do Frogs, Toads, and Tadpoles Get Up To All Day?**

Caviedes-Solis, Itzue W.
Illus. by Henry Rancourt
 Neon Squid/Macmillan (48 pp.)
 \$16.99 | May 2, 2023
 9781684493074
 Series: A Day in the Life

Frogs hop into the spotlight.

Not everyone loves frogs, but herpetologist Caviedes-Solis makes a strong case for looking at them with wonder. As in other volumes in the publisher’s A Day in the Life series, this title offers an hour-by-hour look at what various species get up to all around the world—at 1 p.m., in Eastern Austria, a male moor frog seeking a partner turns bright blue (a signal to other males); at 5 p.m. in Australia, cane toads are taking a break from their long migration. But first, the book opens by smartly differentiating between commonly mistaken animals: toads vs. frogs. All toads are types of frogs, but not all frogs are toads, and by visually comparing how most look and how they lay eggs, the groundwork is established for a wide-ranging journey. Frogs, Caviedes-Solis illustrates, are pretty amazing. Flying frogs can glide through the air using membranes between fingers and toes and skin flaps on their ankles and elbows. Suriname toads reproduce in a complex underwater embrace that transfers eggs to the female’s back once she has laid them. In tandem with Rancourt’s clear, colorful explanatory illustrations, Caviedes-Solis’ stories enchant as they reveal more and more about the many ways frogs adapt and pass life on to new tadpoles. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

An impressive primer on one of nature’s most fascinating animal families. (glossary, index, species list) *(Picture book. 5-8)*



WELCOME TO **DINOSAUR SCHOOL**

Cobden, Rose
Illus. by Loretta Schauer
 Ladybird (32 pp.)
 \$14.99 | June 20, 2023
 9780241607275

Even a dinosaur can be nervous about the first day of school.

Jewel, a little teal stegosaurus who walks on two legs, would rather stay in bed than go to school, but her two dads are here to buoy her each step of the way. Jewel’s dread is endearingly obvious as she trudges her way to the kitchen for breakfast and reluctantly polishes her scales. Jewel and the other students are met at the school gate by their teacher, who introduces the young dinos to the classroom. Their teacher shows them their personalized hooks for their school bags, the lava pits where they’ll play, and the ever important bathroom. Once lessons begin, Jewel sits next to super-tall Roary, who loves school. Roary saves Jewel a seat during lunch and plays with her at

ISBN: 978-1-68401-808-6

“Ellis’ charming debut picture book, written in rhyming couplets, tells a story of how fireflies discover their light.”

“...Ellis presents a delightful tale that will entertain young readers.”

“An uplifting, well-illustrated adventure full of whimsy and joy.”
 —Kirkus Reviews

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WORDS WITH...

M.T. ANDERSON

In his heartfelt new middle-grade fantasy, the award-winning author gives a boy and his dog a happy ending

BY VICKY SMITH



SONYA SONES

M.T. ANDERSON HAS BEEN liberally lauded for his books for teens (a National Book Award, a Boston Globe–Horn Book Award, a couple of Printz Honors, etc.). Yet he has been writing for younger readers throughout his career as well, comic adventures for middle graders and thoughtful picture books for youngsters, bringing to all his books a keen respect for the intelligence of his readers. His most recent novel for middle graders, *Elf Dog and Owl Head* (Candlewick, April 11), finds the author in a gentle mood as he pens a boy-and-his-dog fantasy with heart. When Elphinore, an elf-hound from the Royal Hunt of the People Under the Mountain, arrives in Clay’s life, she brings wonder with her, guiding her new human friend along the “magical paths [and] tracks that led through time” in the New England hills around his home. Anderson spoke with Kirkus via Zoom from his home in rural Vermont; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

You and I first met at a library conference about 20 years ago. You’ve changed a lot.

Well, I’ve gone from being a young brat to being an actual adult.

I don’t know about the young brat part. But I felt very keenly the grown-up-ness of M.T. Anderson in *Elf Dog and Owl Head*.

[My editor] said that it’s the first one of my books that’s actually not ironic. It’s straightforwardly emotional. I do think that’s different, and I’m kind of excited about that. It was based on things that were very real to me and very emotional to me.

Just how much fun did you have writing this?

Oh, total fun, total fun. The whole story is that I had a dog whom I loved dearly who got very, very sick [right before the pandemic]. And the vet told me, “She’s gonna live probably three or four days; let’s set up an appointment to euthanize her.” And then, instead, what happened was somehow she decided she wasn’t going to die. There was this kind of miraculous recovery that took place over the next two months, where we went from her being diagnosed as being ready to die within a few days to her walking five or six miles a day. Then, of course, the pandemic happened. And I live alone, except for her. For the next four months, she was my only companion up here in this little house, up in the mountains of Vermont. And every day we would go in loops all around town, every day, another five or six miles covered. It was just this fantastic time, in a sense, because I felt very cut off from the human race but then there’s this almost supernatural-feeling connection between me and this dog. I had long been wanting to write about the connection between humans and pets. I just feel like it’s one of the most important connections that we have, especially many of us who live alone. So I wrote this

book at exactly the time when it takes place. That is to say, in late spring/early summer of 2020. And every day I would live the plot in the sense that I would go out with the dog for a couple of hours, up in the mountains. That's when I would come up with what was going to happen in the chapter I was about to write. And then we would come back and write it, and it was just so joyful. It had to be one of the easiest, happiest pieces of writing I ever did, because I was just doing exactly what I wanted at that time.

Did you have any boy-and-his-dog books in your childhood library that you remember?

No. I was always frightened of pet books from the time I was in sixth grade or something, because all the pets frickin' die. You know, they just keep on shoving *The Red Pony* and *Old Yeller* [at kids]. And I feel really traumatized by all the pet books I had to read in middle school. Then there's the book about the kid who had the raccoon.

Rascal.

Yeah, *Rascal*. I loved that book. I don't think that Rascal dies. But the kid has to let Rascal go off into the wilderness at the end. In any case, why not just keep the frickin' pet around?

Did you fight with yourself at any point as a novelist? With the happy ending?

No, no! Why would you inflict another unhappy animal ending on kids? Why don't you say to them, sometimes you love a thing. And it's just great. Of course there's sadness, there's pain. I even mention death at one point, but I just wanted this to be a celebration. They can read *Love That Dog* by Sharon Creech if they want to read about a dead dog—that's a great book.

Speaking of death...when I read that Death's pale horse was named Trigger Mortis, the first thing I thought was that it was hilarious, and the second was that no kid was going to get that joke.

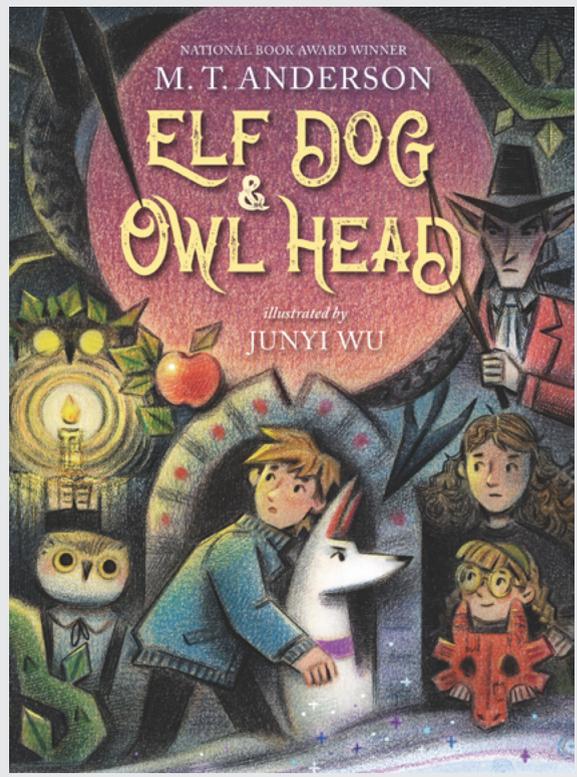
Why not present the full world of references? Even though most kids aren't going to get them, one of the exciting things about growing as a reader is, suddenly things that didn't make sense to you, suddenly you're like, *oh, that's why that's there*. You know what I mean? Death and the pale horse, that's a reference that they may not get now, but it pulses through the culture. I think it's only good to connect the book to wider cultural artifacts, in general, Trigger not necessarily being what I'd call a wider cultural artifact anymore. But you know, the Book of Revelation arguably is. I al-

ways feel like, if you can do it without alienating readers or bugging them, why not connect to the world of knowledge?

In your acceptance speech for the 2019 Margaret A. Edwards Award, you say you want to give children "a literature of joy." Is that what you did in this book?

That's exactly right. When we first got to know each other, it was this age when White middle-class Americans were all very insulated by a consumer society that wanted to convince us that everything was fine. For me, in that period, I wanted to punch out at those things that were stopping us from seeing the reality that we're creating. Now I feel like all of those things are out in the open. Every single person is posting this stuff every day, you know, *Oh, my God, the Earth is dying, oh, my God, I can't believe our country is doing this*. In a way it feels to me like one of the best things we can do right now is support each other in the battles that are ongoing by saying, look, there are all these ways that humanity can be wonderful. And there are all these ways that life can be fantastic and worth living. I feel like there's a desire for people to read restorative books right now, books that help you say, *Yeah, let's go forward*. And this book is an expression of that.

Vicky Smith is access services director at Portland Public Library in Maine. Elf Dog and Owl Head received a starred review in the Feb. 1, 2023, issue.



“An underdog story makes for high drama in this relatable take on the source material.”

SPARE PARTS (YOUNG READERS' EDITION)

recess. During art class, Jewel's enthusiasm grows, and at the end of the day, she proclaims that school was great—but she's a bit confused that she has to go back again. Readers will easily relate to Jewel's initial nervousness and feel encouraged by her progress. Colorful cartoon illustrations feature typical classroom scenes of delightful and busy young dinosaurs with oversized heads and eyes. One student uses a wheelchair. Pre-read this book before sharing, as the meter is not always consistent. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A dinosaur friendship story that will turn first-day jitters into first-day joy. (Picture book. 4-6)



GROWL

Corace, Jen
Abrams (40 pp.)
\$18.99 | June 6, 2023
9781419757488

A growling tummy prompts a child to head for the kitchen for a midnight snack.

As the light-skinned protagonist prepares some toast, a host of animals have the same idea—the household dog and the cat would both like some, so the child obliges. They're soon joined by wilder and wilder guests: a mouse, bunnies, and a...snake?! But yes, even serpents are welcome, as are a panda, a koala, an elephant, a sloth, and more. After providing the animals with toast, the child still has a “GRRRROWL!” in their stomach and reaches for more bread—only to realize the bag is empty. But the guests have a surprise for our protagonist. In this ode to toast, a deep purple background signals nighttime. An abrasive yet faded pastel palette layers onto the purply-black backing, suggesting an older storybook style. The narrative is fairly simple; toast is the main event, though Corace also conveys the importance of sharing and considering others' needs. The use of dark negative space might be disorienting to some, as it gives the overall feeling of watching a crew of animals having a raucous fete but from an odd distance. Still, animal lovers may enjoy this midnight feast. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Dreamlike and quirky. (Picture book. 3-5)



HAARVILLE

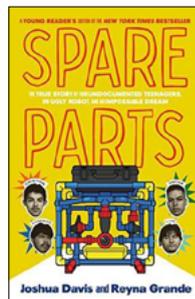
Davies, Justin
Illus. by Francesca Ficorilli
Kelpies (296 pp.)
\$9.95 paper | June 6, 2023
9781782508441

Manx Fearty smells something fishy in Haarville—and it isn't the limpets.

Like all his ancestors, Manx, who is cued White, expects to die in a horrific accident one day. That's the hazard of tinkering with perpetuums, devices powered by amberose. Ever since the founding of Haarville, an island surrounded by fog and

treacherous reefs, the citizens have relied on the Fearty family's talent for handling the volatile substance that heats their houses, pumps their water, and makes their clocks tick. After his parents died when he was baby, Manx inherited the family's perpetual repair shop, which he runs alongside Gloria in Excelsis, or Father G for short, a drag queen with dark brown skin who apprenticed with Manx's grandparents. The tides turn unexpectedly with the arrival of Ninian Baggit and his son, Nathaniel, the first strangers to cross the causeway into Haarville in 40 years. Not only do the Baggits announce that they're direct descendants of Manx's great-granduncle Fabian, they have proof, and they've come to claim their inheritance. With the help of Fantoosh, his best friend whose ancestors sailed to Haarville from the Indian Ocean, Manx embarks on a quest for the truth that teaches him that the dishonesty, greed, and corruption in his community are as perpetual as their fish boilers. The plot is lively with high stakes and misadventure. Intermittent illustrations pair well with the quirky sense of humor.

An eccentric and fantastical mystery. (map, glossary) (Fantasy. 8-12)



SPARE PARTS (YOUNG READERS' EDITION) The True Story of Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and an Impossible Dream

Davis, Joshua
Adapt. by Reyna Grande
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (160 pp.)
\$17.99 | May 30, 2023
9780374388614

Adapted from a popular adult title that inspired a feature film and a documentary, this young readers' edition tells the story of four young undocumented immigrants from Mexico who triumphed over more privileged teams at a robotics contest.

Each of them arrived in Arizona through very different circumstances but ended up meeting at Carl Hayden Community High School, where their various interests brought them together for a huge challenge—the 2004 Marine Advanced Technology Education Robotics Competition. These teens were up against students from colleges such as MIT and had to build submersible technology that could travel and take scientific measurements underwater. The story focuses on each of the four in turn. Oscar is the JROTC-trained leader, disciplined and driven; Luis is the strong and mostly silent presence of the group; Lorenzo is teased by schoolmates for his long hair but is a creative dynamo; and Cristian is a skinny, unathletic whiz kid who as a child loved taking apart electronics. Together, they worked on a vehicle, Stinky, made from low-cost materials that nonetheless blew the competition out of the water. This thrilling tale offers an intimate glimpse into the difficulties faced by many young immigrants. Anecdotes and details about each of the four flesh them out; readers will be rooting for these hard-working, determined teens.

An underdog story makes for high drama in this relatable take on the source material. (afterword) (Nonfiction. 10-14)



**BREAKING NEWS
Why Media Matters**

Delisle, Raina
 Illus. by Julie McLaughlin
 Orca (96 pp.)
 \$26.95 | May 16, 2023
 9781459826564
 Series: Orca Think, 10

How does the news get told?

This comprehensive yet concise overview covers the evolution of journalism from pictographs on cave walls and town criers to print, broadcast, and internet news, including social media. Delisle examines myriad issues including accuracy, bias, the violence and harassment many journalists, especially women, face, the importance of a diverse newsroom, and ways

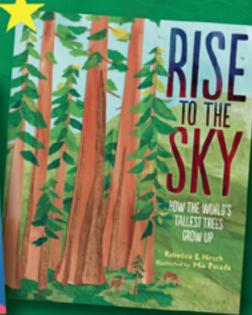
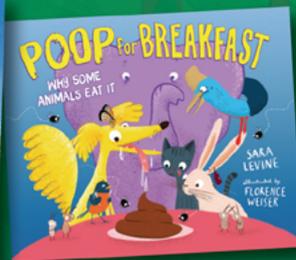
in which the internet has forced media outlets to rethink their business models. Several capsule portraits of journalists, including Nellie Bly, who covered vital but often overlooked topics such as the mistreatment of mentally ill people or missing or murdered Indigenous women, demonstrate that curiosity and commitment are essential to good journalism. Delisle looks at ways that the industry has progressed, including the growth of solutions journalism. She touches on the use of artificial intelligence in reporting and data-gathering and examines new ideas for business models, such as nonprofit and collectively owned news organizations. The colorful, dynamic layout includes diverse representation in photos and illustrations. References to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Canadian publications in addition to U.S. ones reflect a Canadian voice. Solid advice to aspiring reporters, a glossary, and strong resource recommendations complete the picture.

A welcome look at how journalists shine a light on the world. (author's note) (Nonfiction. 9-14)

INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING FOR INDEPENDENT READERS



★ Booklist

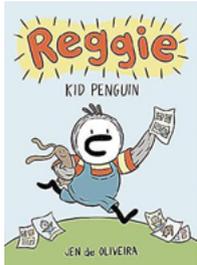


★ Kirkus Reviews

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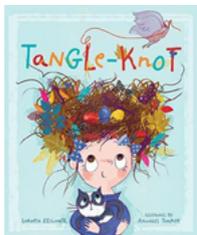
KID PENGUIN

de Oliveira, Jen
Little, Brown Ink (80 pp.)
\$7.99 paper | June 6, 2023
9780759557567
Series: Reggie, 1

A webcomic-turned-graphic novel about a youngster exploring his world.

Reggie, an anthropomorphic penguin living in the suburbs, has all the familiar idiosyncrasies that make young children both charming and baffling. He finds hilariously imperfect—yet ultimately successful—ways to solve kid problems like a too-drippy popsicle (letting it melt into his hat and then slurping up the “grape-sicle soup!”) or the dreaded toddler leash (running around on all fours like a dog makes it a much more fun experience), and his zany energy enlivens a text that treads comfortable ground for young readers. On school picture day, he gives himself an impromptu haircut before trying to glue the snippets back on, setting into motion a cascade of calamity that ends in him donning a cowboy hat atop a glue-y mess. In another story, he collaborates with friends to create a city for roly-polies during recess. When the roly-polies reject their efforts, their teacher suggests that they relocate their construction to better suit the bugs’ chosen habitat, with great success. Reggie’s editorial interludes between stories offer more opportunity to connect with this charming character. A cursory cast of animal folks include a fox, bear, and goat; some readers may be a bit confused when Reggie mimics a dog (do pets exist in this world?). Expressive cartoons in muted primary colors keep the story moving at a steady pace.

A wacky and weirdly wise series of scenarios solved with comical kid logic. (Graphic early reader. 4-8)



TANGLE-KNOT

Ellsworth, Loretta
Illus. by Annabel Tempest
Page Street (32 pp.)
\$18.99 | June 6, 2023
9781645677130

A young girl has a bird’s-nest ’do.

Fia “refuses to brush her hair,” much to her mom’s consternation. A gray bird soon takes up residence in the White-presenting girl’s scraggly, bushy coiffure. Soon the bird lays eggs—one red, one yellow, and one blue—in Fia’s “tangle-knot nest,” attracting attention, some of it judgmental but most of it encouraging, from others, including a TV crew. Fia takes good care of the nest, refusing to wash her hair in order to keep it safe, and eventually the eggs hatch into red, yellow, and blue birds. When the birds leave, Fia finally decides that it’s time for a new style, to her mother’s relief, and her shorn tangle-knot becomes a tree-bound nest. This could be a very relatable story for any child who hates running a comb through frizzy knots or who longs

to have a live-in pet (or four), but the prose gets bogged down by unnecessary dialogue tags and written descriptions that are better shown through the jaunty, energetic illustrations. However, it also raises thought-provoking questions about whether a child of color would receive the same admiration if they showed up to school with an unkempt head of hair, and many children will likely get distracted wondering where the birds go to the bathroom. Fia’s mother presents White; the supporting cast is diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A fantastical but flawed fairy tale. (Picture book. 4-7)



ATTACK OF THE BOTS

England, M.K.
Illus. by Chris Danger
Random House (304 pp.)
\$8.99 paper | \$12.99 PLB | June 13, 2023
9780593433447
9780593433454 PLB
Series: Player vs. Player, 2

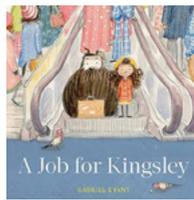
Players of a popular online game are hot off a win at the Affinity Invitational Tournament in this second series entry.

Hannah, Larkin, Josh, and Wheatley have gone pro and are playing together under the team name The Weird Ones. Making money playing video games might seem like a dream come true, but the pressure that comes with their new celebrity status is taking a toll. Hannah and Larkin are livestreaming their gameplay, and other users aren’t always kind. Hannah isn’t sure that she wants to continue but doesn’t want to let her friend down. Josh is struggling with feeling left out as his parents restrict his participation, and Wheatley—an AI persona who has taken on a mind of his own—has been missing under suspicious circumstances since the last game of the tournament. The Weird Ones are taking an upcoming gaming conference as the opportunity to confront the game creators and demand they bring Wheatley back. Roadblocks abound as Josh’s anti-gaming parents forbid him from attending and malicious Wheatley wannabees are flooding the Affinity gameplay. The friends need to put aside their personal struggles to find Wheatley and win more matches. The realistic portrayals of racism and inappropriate behavior toward girls and women in the gaming world are commendable. Hannah and Larkin are White, and they are mentored by Glitz, a prominent Black gamer; the previous volume established Josh as Chinese American. Final art not seen.

A fast-paced gaming story with substance. (game manual) (Fiction. 9-14)

“A charming family story with a touch of fairy-tale atmosphere.”

THE ISLANDS OF ELSEWHERE



A JOB FOR KINGSLEY
Evans, Gabriel
 Little Hare/Trafalgar (32 pp.)
 \$17.99 | June 13, 2023
 9781761210211

Following on the heels of *A Human for Kingsley* (2023), this companion book follows the bushy-faced pookah as he

looks for work.

Kingsley knows a job is a big responsibility, but he feels guilty when he sits in the comfortable chair at home and eats treats and plays with toys he hasn't earned. After preparing a resume and indulging in a fragrant bath and luxurious blow-dry, Kingsley sets out, confident he'll land something. He tries mightily, but he realizes humans are better at the jobs he applies for: waiter, florist, gardener, boutique worker, bookseller, department-store gift wrapper. What Kingsley really wants is a job at which he outshines everyone else. The sight of a small, familiar-looking girl on a bench makes Kingsley realize he already has an important job—one that only he can do. Young readers will be charmed by the sweet, deeply satisfying ending to this adorable Australian import. Like the first installment, this tale deals with genuine emotions and warm relationships. Readers will understand Kingsley's thoughts through the kind, understanding voice of a droll, unseen narrator. Kingsley's girl and other humans express themselves realistically and humorously, their dialogue rendered in different fonts and incorporated into softly colorful, delightfully expressive illustrations. Kingsley's little girl is tan-skinned and curly-haired; background characters are racially diverse. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Kids have a job: to read this book. They'll be great at it, and they'll love the work. *(Picture book. 3-7)*



THE ISLANDS OF ELSEWHERE
Fawcett, Heather
 Rocky Pond Books/Penguin (224 pp.)
 \$17.99 | June 20, 2023
 9780593530528

Granddaddy lives alone, and he is ill: Will his grandchildren be able figure out the best way to help him before he gets worse?

The Snolly sisters—Hattie, 12; Bee, 10; and Plum, 8—along with their mom and baby brother, Theodore, are visiting their sick grandfather in Misty Cove, a wild and mysterious place many hours' drive and a ferry ride away from their Vancouver, British Columbia, home. When they get there, they learn that their grandfather owns the Fairy Islands, which include the three islands called Fairy, Little Fairy, and Ghost. Legend has it that there is something spooky about them, and the children's family is closely tied to some of the stories, specifically Granddaddy's own grandmother Lucy Juniper. Each sibling uses their personal strengths to help figure out the best way to help their grandfather, who

has been forgetting things and often seems confused. Aspiring botanist Bee collects algae, Hattie and Plum are enthralled by magic and fairies, while Dore can imitate sounds, from cats (his favorite) to seals. In addition to the strong characterization and magical setting, the story weaves in realistic topics that many children will recognize from their own lives, including bullying, aging grandparents, and divorced parents, all the while validating their feelings. Primary characters read White.

A charming family story with a touch of fairy-tale atmosphere. *(Fiction. 8-12)*



THE SINISTER SECRETS OF SINGE
Ferrell, Sean
 Illus. by *Graham Carter*
 Pixel+Ink (384 pp.)
 \$18.99 | June 6, 2023
 9781645951834
 Series: The Sinister Secrets, 1

Robots and humans interact in this steampunk adventure.

Eleven-year-old Noah has only known nighttime construction noises in his house, as new rooms are erratically built by an unknown creature. But when Noah wakes up to silence one day, his caretaker, humanoid robot Elijah, who is the only friend he's ever known, refuses to answer his questions. Noah's mother also won't tell him anything and goes to work as usual at the robot factory in town, leaving Noah a list of contraptions to fix—something he, like his absent father, has a gift for. As the story unfolds, Noah learns secrets about what creature is hammering each night and why his father is gone. Accompanied by Elijah, Noah sets off to find his father and eventually comes face to face with incredible monster robots. The story's promising beginning introduces readers to a compelling world of retrofuturism full of noise, steam, and whirring gears. But as the story continues, it doesn't maintain this momentum. The initially impressive descriptions of the mechanics of the robots are overused, taking chunks out of what could be a terribly imaginative plot. While a few succinct observations about the morality of relying on the perfection of machines over the imperfection of humans are worthwhile, overall, the story is lacking in heft. Atmospheric black-and-white illustrations add a bit of whimsy. Noah reads White; the supporting cast is diverse in skin tone.

An impressively descriptive story hampered by thin substance. *(Adventure. 10-14)*

“Thirteen-year-old love at its finest.”

THE SONG OF US



FIREBORN **Phoenix and the Frost Palace**

Fowler, Aisling
Illus. by Sophie Medvedeva
Harper/HarperCollins (448 pp.)
\$17.99 | April 18, 2023
9780062996749
Series: Fireborn, 2

Hunters-in-training travel to the frozen wastes to defeat a great evil.

Phoenix (the tween formerly known as Twelve) has a new Hunter name and a shocking fire elemental power, but the world has changed for the worse since the great battle at the Hunting Lodge. When Headwitch Yelara appears, it's the first contact any of the clans have had with the witches for 40 years, and she bears a dire warning. Phoenix and her friends Five, Six, and Seven, who read White, must journey to the great frozen wave of Icegaard to battle the Shadowseam, a terrifying hole in the world. The all-female band of witches have been entirely isolated in the decades since all the adult witches were killed by the Shadowseam; nevertheless, they have children (a diverse trio, one pale and blue-eyed, one olive-skinned, and one with dark brown skin and braids). Phoenix, trying to master her elemental fire and constantly trying to remember monster descriptions from *A Magical Bestiary*, doesn't notice that Seven is acting strangely. Never fear, the reveal of Seven's behavior at the end of this overlong adventure sets up Phoenix and Seven's next adventure. Like Widge, Phoenix's squirrel friend who exists only to chitter periodically on her shoulder, most characters feel like mere set dressing for Phoenix's quest.

Sometimes entertaining but largely underdeveloped and forgettable. (map) (Fantasy. 10-13)



DADDY & ME, SIDE BY SIDE

Freelon, Pierce
Illus. by Nadia Fisher
Little, Brown (40 pp.)
\$18.99 | May 2, 2023
9780316055864

A father and child bond while camping.

The two awaken in their tent on a chilly morning in the woods. The young narrator is cold, but Daddy says they'll warm up as they start walking. As the pair hike past trees and over rocks, then bait their hooks and cast their lines, it becomes apparent that Daddy is retracing the path he and his late father, Pop-Pop, once took, re-creating the same moments of wonder and awe. The child ponders: "Are we looking under the same rocks? Weaving through the same trails? Resting beneath the same magnolia tree as we sit still, listen, and breathe?" The narrator becomes overwhelmed with emotion over the loss of Pop-Pop, but Daddy says that he feels the same way and lets the protagonist know that showing emotion is OK—a valuable lesson for young readers coping with grief. This potent, poetic

story is complemented by Fisher's art, which blends soft colors and is full of movement and captures the characters' expressions. Fisher has a delicate touch, conveying the small pleasures of the great outdoors as well as the importance of giving oneself permission to sit with sadness. Daddy and the child are brown-skinned, while Pop-Pop, seen in flashback, is lighter-skinned. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Tender and affirming. (Picture book. 5-8)



READY FOR KINDERGARTEN

Freitas, Bethany V.
Illus. by Maja Andersen
Clarion/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
\$16.99 | June 6, 2023
9780063321977

You might be more prepared for the first day of school than you think!

How do you know when you—or your child—are ready for kindergarten? This upbeat book will tell you both, in specific detail. "Have you ever tried to point to your head, shoulders, knees, and toes?" Do you listen to, and tell, stories? Do you like to make art? Count steps or shoes? Do you love colors? Can you identify some shapes? Sing the alphabet song? Like active play? Know your name and can introduce yourself to others? You are ready—to learn, explore, try new things, and have fun! Bright yellow blocks of color offer a background for equally scintillating patches of vibrant primary blue, red, and green and touches of teal, maroon, pink, orange, purple, and more. The children have extra-large shining eyes and smiles and are diverse in skin tone. One child uses a wheelchair. The pages are crowded, but because the illustrations are shadowless and flat, like colored paper-collage, they are very legible. This book provides a great deal of joyous reassurance, especially for those who missed nursery or preschool and are new to school settings. Their caregivers get similar specific encouragement on preparing children for kindergarten in the final pages.

Buoyant and useful—for children, teachers, and parents alike. (Picture book. 4-6)



THE SONG OF US

Fussner, Kate
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins
(368 pp.)
\$19.99 | May 30, 2023
9780063256941

Two seventh grade Boston girls meet in poetry club, fall in love, fight, and find their way back to each other in this verse novel.

Even though "Love at First Sight is not a thing," Olivia and new girl Eden quickly become friends and then more. But Eden, whose mom has left and whose dad is homophobic, wants to keep their relationship secret. Eden

also becomes part of a tightknit group of girls she names the Crash. After one of their parties, Olivia hurls a misogynistic slur at Eden and breaks up with her. Regretful, Olivia later comes up with a scheme to win Eden back: a poetry night where she will perform a poem of apology. Both girls are largely without supportive adult guidance—Olivia’s mother has depression, and her avoidant dad works long hours—so they make mistakes and correct them as best they can, relying on poetry, music, and friends to fill in the gaps. Their personalities shine through their beautifully crafted poems, full of aches, worries, and joys. Three final poems, set a few months later, provide a coda and some closure. Olivia’s poems are aligned left, Eden’s are aligned right; drafts of Olivia’s apology poems appear on lined paper in a spiral-bound notebook. Both girls are coded White; Olivia’s best friend is trans.

Thirteen-year-old love at its finest. (*Versé fiction. 11-14*)



**YOU, ME, WE
A Celebration of Peace and
Community**

Gandhi, Arun & Bethany Hegedus

Illus. by Andrés Landazábal

Candlewick (32 pp.)

\$18.99 | June 13, 2023

978-1-5362-1744-5

Peace takes center stage in this picture book co-authored by the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi.

Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi’s friendship with Maria Montessori and his belief that “If we are to teach real peace in this world...we shall have to begin with children,” this work opens by asking, “Where do we find peace?” An unseen narrator tells readers that peace can be found in many different situations. “Peace is in the way we walk, / the way we sit, // the way we stand / the way we form a circle.” An accompanying image shows a diverse group of children in their classroom, some standing, others gathered on a rug. “Peace is in speaking up”—we see vignettes of a child asking for help with a zipper and of another child pointing out that their foot has been stepped on. Peace can be difficult to maintain—“There can be misunderstandings / angry words / hurt feelings.” But as a community, the authors urge, we can work together to cultivate peace. Soft, gentle artwork with a cotton-candy feeling infuses the narrative with warmth and depicts the students playing, meditating, and sharing. The text is simple and concise, though occasionally didactic. Nevertheless, it should be a good starting point to spark discussions about peace and community-building using cues from both words and images. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Will encourage young readers to give peace a chance. (*Picture book. 3-5*)



I AM A MEADOW MERMAID

George, Kallie

Illus. by Elly MacKay

Tundra Books (32 pp.)

\$17.99 | June 6, 2023

9780735271371

A whimsical homage to imaginary play and friendship.

The child narrator, who has light brown skin and wavy dark hair, proclaims, “I am a meadow mermaid.” This tot is a creative, playful sort who dreams of visiting the sea. Despite living on landlocked plains, the meadow mermaid splashes in puddles, cavorts through “waves in the wheat,” and, wearing a blanket that evokes a mermaid tail, uses a seashell to listen to sounds of the ocean. Pairing well with the lyrical text, the illustrations, photographs of cut-paper dioramas, have a three-dimensional quality, the overall warm palette punctuated by the blue of the sky and, in many spreads, the child’s denim overalls. It’s a happy, solitary existence (except for a pet cat who appears on various spreads) until midway through, when text reads, “I listen for the music of a mermaid a million miles away and hear the shout of a...shipwrecked sailor?” The meadow mermaid encounters Milla, a child who has light skin and a blond ponytail. The children are immediate playmates, searching for treasure, gazing at “seahorses” (horses), eating “cookies shaped like sand dollars,” and becoming fast friends. An immensely satisfying conclusion reveals that Milla is “a prairie pirate.” (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Joyful and memorable. (*Picture book. 2-7*)



OUR CLASSROOM RULES!

George, Kallie

Illus. by Jay Fleck

Rodale Kids (32 pp.)

\$12.99 | June 13, 2023

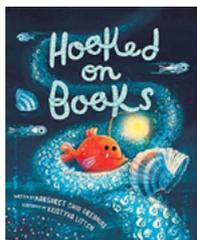
9780593378786

A peek into a classroom that may ease some little ones’ first-day jitters.

This isn’t just any ordinary classroom; this one has anthropomorphic animal students, a fox teacher, and two worms for comic relief. Bear, Duck, Turtle, Rabbit, Porcupine, and Hedgehog make sure to follow the school rules: “be on time... and ready to learn,” listen, work individually and together, play, clean up, line up, be polite, “look out for each other,” “give new things a chance,” “share ideas,” express yourself, and take pride in your work. Readers follow along as the students go through a typical school day full of familiar or expected activities and sights: sitting at tables, raising hands, recess, classroom shelves of books and toys, lunch, the ever popular parachute in gym, sharing time, art. Along the way, the two worms will likely crack children up with their antics: They form the number 11 at the top of the hopscotch board and play their own version of parachute with a leaf; during sharing time, one flies across the room in a paper airplane. Fleck’s pencil-and-digital illustrations bring

to life the care the students feel for and show one another, and George has a couple sentences that really hit at the heart of the matter: “Mistakes are part of learning,” and “we try to be our best. Not *the* best. Our best.” (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

A sweet addition to the back-to-school shelf. (*Picture book. 3-7*)



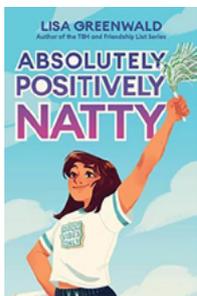
HOOKED ON BOOKS

Greanias, Margaret Chiu
Illus. by Kristyna Litten
 Peachtree (32 pp.)
 \$18.99 | June 27, 2023
 9781682633670

Pearl the anglerfish lives in the twilight zone—no, not THAT one, the real one...the one that lies far beneath the sea.

Pearl loves to read, using the glowing lure atop her head as a night light. But she can't seem to get away from pelagic pests. Everyone wants to take a peek at her book (a scallop shell), but Pearl doesn't want to share her long-awaited story about a kraken's “quest for happiness” with anyone. To what depths must she go in order to get some peace and quiet? It helps that she has her own light source—especially since she's trying to find the deepest, darkest spot in all the ocean. Eels, jellyfish, and mollusks all want to get in on the fun. And the yeti crabs mistake Pearl's lure for a nifty disco ball! Aghhhh! Finally, she ditches the determined but unwanted denizens of the midnight zone and finds herself in the tranquil darkness of the abyss. But wait—when did blissful silence become just plain lonely? “She ached for someone—anyone—to bug her about her book.” Returning home, Pearl realizes that sharing doesn't have to be annoying—well, not *all* the time. Litten's whimsical illustrations, made up of adorably anthropomorphic undersea creatures, make wonderful use of light and dark. Coupled with *Greanias'* adept storytelling, they capture the perfect balance between frustration and friendly compromise. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Bookworms—whether on land or in the sea—will feel seen. (*Picture book. 4-8*)



ABSOLUTELY, POSITIVELY NATTY

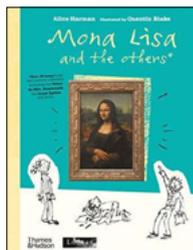
Greenwald, Lisa
 Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (272 pp.)
 \$18.99 | May 9, 2023
 9780063062726

A girl uses positivity to block out painful truths.

Seventh grader Natty and her dad have moved to Miller Creek to live with her paternal grandparents. Her mom remains behind in a deep depression that has fractured their family, perhaps irrevocably. Natty is determined to put forth only good vibes and enthusiastically maintain a positive attitude, hoping to

convince her mom that she should join them. When anything negative crosses her consciousness, she experiences severe stomach pains. Natty, who comes from a financially privileged background, initially is insensitive about economic hardships in her new community. Instead, she screams her good vibes, creates a pep squad for a community that is decidedly un-peppy, makes a new friend in a girl named Mack, and, surprisingly, actually makes things a little better. But her refusal to deal with reality causes an estrangement with her best friend back home, whose pleas for help receive only cheerful platitudes. She follows the same path with Mack. There is no pat ending, but Natty finally allows herself to face things as they are, mend her relationships, and accept that some things are out of her control. Natty tells her own story, revealing only what she understands about her complicated situation. Readers may by turns feel annoyed and exasperated with her, but they will commiserate with her pain and root for her all the way. Characters present White; Natty's family is Jewish.

A sad but hopeful coming-of-age tale. (*Fiction. 9-12*)



MONA LISA AND THE OTHERS

Harman, Alice
Illus. by Quentin Blake
 Thames & Hudson (96 pp.)
 \$19.95 | June 6, 2023
 9780500652749

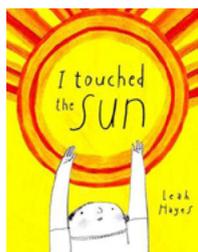
Famous artworks speak up.

In this art survey, *Mona Lisa* and 30 other masterpieces in Paris' Louvre, among them the *Venus de Milo*, Johannes Vermeer's *The Lacemaker*, and *The Winged Victory of Samothrace*—describe themselves (occasionally referencing *Mona*). A label accompanying a photo of each piece includes, besides the work's title, year(s) of creation, and medium, the artist's name (if known), their dates, their nationality, and a brief biographical blurb. The works, primarily paintings by White European men (though statues and sculptures can also be found here), depict mostly White figures, although works from ancient Egypt, Sumer, and Bukhara (in present-day Uzbekistan) are included. Some pieces display nudity. Following each work is an explanatory “monologue” presented by its character(s); as applicable, some figures chat among themselves. Using colloquial language, often laced with overly hip, snarky humor, the artworks dish on their histories, artists' techniques (defining technical terms), and more. Blake's quirky drawings embellish the text. An art book's chief function is to invite readers to scrutinize artworks closely to better understand and appreciate them. This title accomplishes that task: These masterpieces assert themselves well overall, and examining them is both illuminating and fun. However, small details in some works may be tricky to spot. Additionally, though some featured works are among the world's most celebrated, not all are equally child appealing. A short essay about the Louvre concludes the book.

Helpful guidance before a museum visit. (ways to think about art, timeline, glossary, list of artworks, index) (*Nonfiction. 9-12*)

“It’s hard to write with such simple authenticity:
The world needs more stories like this.”

GINNY OFF THE MAP



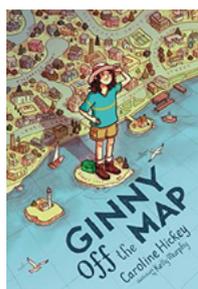
I TOUCHED THE SUN

Hayes, Leab
Enchanted Lion Books (64 pp.)
\$18.95 | June 6, 2023
9781592703906

In graphic novelist Hayes’ picture-book debut, a boy gains cosmic knowledge. The young narrator’s wish to “touch the sun” isn’t taken seriously by either

naysaying parents or a distracted older brother. Undaunted, the boy flies to the sun. She welcomes him graciously, letting him perch on a ray and introducing him to cloud friends. Sun shows him “where she worked...and what she’s made,” from trees to rainbows. The boy learns that Sun doesn’t dream, “because when it’s night for you, I am always shining somewhere else.” He confides that his dreams are often happy but sometimes scary; she thanks him for his brave candor. Sun explains that her light “comes from within”—and that he has an inner light, too. Her touch and the warmth the boy feels lead to an epiphany—“like a little sun inside”—which Hayes depicts as an orange-yellow circle over his heart. It undulates outward in sun-hued rays, powering him back to his loving family. Spare gray line drawings use detail selectively: Hatching textures clouds and earth, and rendering delineates facial features. Humans’ skin is the white of the page, like nearly everything in the surrounding space. Crayonlike color is generally reserved for Sun and her selected achievements: plant life, the sunlit sea, a woven rug in sunset colors. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Economically told and illustrated yet pulsing with the sun’s life-giving energy. *(Picture book. 4-8)*



GINNY OFF THE MAP

Hickey, Caroline
Illus. by Kelly Murphy
Christy Ottaviano Books (320 pp.)
\$16.99 | June 20, 2023
9780316324625

A geography-obsessed girl faces a summer of near-impossible change.

Eleven-year-old Ginny and her 12-year-old sister, Allie, already know they’re moving from North Carolina to Maryland the

week after school lets out. Their dad is an Army doctor, and he’s transferred regularly. But Dad learns he’s instead being deployed to Afghanistan right away, just as they are about to move. Then, the geography camp Ginny was counting on gets canceled, and she’s wait-listed for the STEM magnet school. While her outgoing, athletic sister enjoys getting to know the kids in their new neighborhood, Ginny recites geography facts; reads about Marie Tharp, her favorite geographer; obsesses about her father, who isn’t responding to her messages; and makes a disastrous attempt at running her own geography camp. When her father finally calls, her emotions are overwhelming, and Ginny blows up—and then, gradually, realistically, and

sympathetically, begins to understand other people’s points of view, try activities outside her comfort zone, and make friends without sacrificing or disguising her true self. It’s all very believable and very well done, from the wide range of fully developed characters to the realistic challenges of being a military family. Ginny’s quirky and engaging voice pushes this story to a lovely conclusion. Main characters read White; some of Ginny’s new neighborhood friends are Black and Indian American. Chapters open with interesting geography facts, and delightful spot art throughout enhances the text.

It’s hard to write with such simple authenticity: The world needs more stories like this. *(Fiction. 8-12)*



THE YELLOW HANDKERCHIEF

Higuera, Donna Barba
Illus. by Cynthia Alonso
Abrams (40 pp.)
\$18.99 | March 21, 2023
9781419760143

In Newbery Award-winning author Higuera’s latest, cultural understanding between generations blossoms.

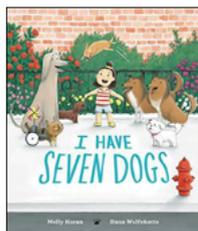
A Latine girl with brown skin and wavy brown hair lives in a modest farmhouse with her family, including her abuela. Abuela keeps busy with chores, and the yellow handkerchief she wears in her hair—a gift from her own grandmother—proves useful throughout the day. Feelings of shame and embarrassment swirl as the narrator’s visiting friend Becca, who presents White, asks innocent questions about what Abuela is doing. Reading Becca’s curiosity as criticism, the narrator concludes, “I definitely don’t like the yellow handkerchief.” To the granddaughter, the handkerchief has come to represent a sense of otherness, and as she thinks about Abuela growing her own food, raising chickens, and speaking Spanish, she wishes that her family could do things more “like everyone else.” When Abuela needs to leave for several days, the girl steps into the role of caretaker, donning the yellow handkerchief to stay connected to Abuela, and gains new appreciation for her grandmother’s hard work. A sweet reunion brings with it acceptance and a new capacity for self-love. Alonso’s saturated, textured artwork brims with emotion. Her dynamic illustrations paired with evocative, purposeful prose convey the nuance of identity and young people’s often complicated feelings about their families and cultural backgrounds. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A gentle triumph. (author’s note) *(Picture book. 6-10)*



“An expertly drawn and composed introduction to self-discovery.”

THE WISHING FLOWER



I HAVE SEVEN DOGS

Horan, Molly

Illus. by Dana Wulfekotte

Nancy Paulsen Books (32 pp.)

\$18.99 | June 13, 2023

9780593324356

A dog lover prevented from pet ownership finds a creative solution.

“Our apartment is the perfect place for pillow forts and movie nights and family dinners,” Zoe tells us. “Unfortunately, it is not the perfect place for dogs.” But Zoe is a good problem solver, and the young narrator takes us on a walk around the neighborhood, where we meet a variety of dogs, from Wishbone, a Chihuahua whom Zoe reads to, to Marmalade, a Yorkie who has wheels in place of hind legs, to Gabby and Abby, Zoe’s piano teacher’s collies. Conversations with a neighbor at the community garden and later with big sister Meg lead Zoe to a great idea for a birthday party in the park...with all of Zoe’s pals, human and canine. The celebration is a joyous event. Horan’s straightforward, minimal text tells a cheerful story; the closest we get to anything negative occurs when Zoe admits to a pang of jealousy over a friend who has just adopted a pet dachshund. Overall, it’s a sweet and gently humorous tale, with lively, colorful illustrations that bring to life a tightknit urban community. Young children will feel empowered witnessing how Zoe finds a way to deal with a seemingly insurmountable issue. Zoe, Meg, and their mother are light-skinned; their neighborhood is diverse. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

An upbeat, charming reminder that any problem can be solved with the right attitude. *(Picture book. 3-6)*



SKATING ON MARS

Huntoon, Caroline

Feiwei & Friends (224 pp.)

\$17.99 | May 30, 2023

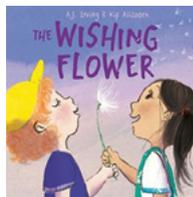
9781250851871

Mars Hart is dealing with a lot at once: burgeoning understanding of their nonbinary identity, the loss of their father to cancer a few months ago, and starting seventh grade.

Not to mention, a figure skating career that’s backed up by real talent. Passionate and driven yet insecure, Mars wants to *win*. But they’re not certain they want to skate in the more feminine way they have been up until now. With a new coach and a chance to compete somewhere nobody knows them, there are both advantages and costs to showing the world who they truly are. In first-person narration, Mars explains their competitive spirit, anger, and resiliency. The loss of Mars’ father is carefully handled, like Mars and their friends and family, this is depicted with honesty. A crush on a new girl at the rink, family dynamics, fraught middle school friendships, and bullying hold their weight as important issues in their own rights. The intricacies of Mars’ figure skating is a highlight, with

exciting and accessible technical detail even for non-enthusiasts. Above all, Mars’ identity is examined with nuance, given depth and consideration as life on and off the ice grows both more euphoric and increasingly complicated. Most characters seem to default to White.

A strong sports story and an earnest coming-of-age tale in one. *(Fiction. 9-13)*



THE WISHING FLOWER

Irving A.J.

Illus. by Kip Alizadeh

Knopf (32 pp.)

\$18.99 | \$21.99 PLB | May 30, 2023

978-0-593-43044-6

9780593430453 PLB



Wishes can help us to feel brave.

Birdie, a light-skinned girl with curly red hair, is happy by herself, reading books, watching bugs, and blowing on delicate wishing flowers. But when she is around other children, Birdie feels out of place and shy. When a new girl arrives in her classroom, Birdie is entranced. Sunny, who is beige-skinned with long dark pigtails, has a “nature name” like Birdie’s, and they like many of the same things—reading, rescuing bugs, drawing... and wishes. The more they play together, the braver Birdie feels, finding her way, little by little, out of her shell. Soon, Birdie feels confident enough to play with the other children at school, too. Birdie’s wish has come true and helped her to grow inside and out. Loose lines and vibrant springtime hues of deep green, blue, and purple lend a playful aura to the girls’ interactions, at times even seeming ethereal and otherworldly. Birdie’s responses to Sunny’s presence—her stomach does flips, she blushes, and her heart beats fast—suggest that this is more than a friendship; many young queer readers will feel seen. Smaller vignettes pair well with larger spreads that alternate close-up and distant perspectives, drawing readers into the drama of new friendships and Birdie’s social-emotional development. Concise prose, at times nearly poetic, features expressive and carefully chosen phrases, such as “Her heart ballooned like a parachute.” *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

An expertly drawn and composed introduction to self-discovery. *(Picture book. 3-6)*



THE ONLY ASTRONAUT

Jain, Mabak

Illus. by Andrea Stegmaier

Kids Can (40 pp.)

\$19.99 | June 6, 2023

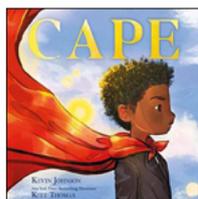
9781525307362

Being a (pretend) astronaut can be lonely.

Avni loves climbing aboard a cobbled-together spacecraft made of cardboard and various household objects. There is, after all, a whole galaxy

(or neighborhood) to explore. But it can be tough being a solo pilot. Avni plans all the missions (first on the agenda? “Make Pluto a planet again”), makes all of the repairs, and puts all of the gear away without any help. Time to get an assistant. Alas, pets are too wiggly, toddlers are too smelly, and adults “are too old for long trips.” Avni find a kindred spirit in Aya, a submarine-obsessed tot. Avni and Aya’s friendship has a rocky launch (space and sea are so very far apart), but they learn to compromise. Showcasing imaginative play and creative engineering, this tale homes in on youngsters’ ambitions and focused passions. The story unfolds through a mixture of full and paneled pages, with wash-taped logbook entries adding a personal touch. Detailed illustrations dotted with humor bring to life the two tots’ creativity at every turn. Avni has long dark braids and brown skin, while Aya has darker brown skin and dark, Afro-textured curls. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Both STEM encouragement and friendship navigation, all while reaching for the stars. (Picture book. 4-7)



CAPE

Johnson, Kevin
 Illus. by Kitt Thomas
 Roaring Brook Press (40 pp.)
 \$18.99 | June 20, 2023
 9781250840509



A child grapples with loss.

A Black boy sits on his bedroom floor, holding his knees, looking bereft. Along with “a new haircut and suit for today,” he has a red cape hanging from his chest of drawers—an item of clothing also worn by the brown-skinned action figure next to him. As he walks downstairs, red cape billowing out behind him, he comments, “Got my cape...in case I remember.” After his auntie hugs him, a grayed-out parade of cars drives to the graveyard, where “We...place you by the stones.” During the funeral and the repast at the house, the mourners’ faces are indistinct or seen from behind, awash in grays or blues, representing the boy’s refusal to engage with them emotionally. Dynamic hues fill the pages as he imagines himself fighting off memories with his cape, soaring through space and diving deep under the water—before suddenly finding himself surrounded by joyful memories of a loving Black man, presumably his dad (an author’s note states that the story is rooted in Johnson’s childhood experience of losing his father). Thomas’ striking illustrations have a rounded softness, tempering the intensity though never sugarcoating it—this child’s rage, sadness, loneliness, and love are palpable. Johnson’s terse prose brims with emotion as the boy, amid his own mourning, covers his grieving auntie with the cape and promises, “I’ll never forget.” *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A resonant child’s-eye view of grief—and hope. (Picture book. 4-8)



102 DAYS OF LYING ABOUT LAUREN

Jortner, Maura
 Holiday House (224 pp.)
 \$17.99 | June 20, 2023
 9780823453627

After Lauren Suszek spends 102 days living inside a theme park, her cousin and a tornado show up on the same day.

The 12-year-old goes by Mouse, since that’s the name printed on what looks like an official employee nametag. Tall for her age, she pretends to be 16, since she’d have to be that old to be a park employee. During the day she sweeps the grounds; at night she sleeps inside the Haunted House of Horrors. She’s been doing that ever since the day Mama took her to the park, put her on a ride, and walked away. Mouse has become friends with Tanner, a teenage employee who says she’s a doppelgänger for his sister, a similarity that evokes a strong emotional reaction in him. When Cat, a tween girl who uses a cane, shows up claiming to be her cousin, Mouse denies it. But when a ferocious storm traps the two of them and Tanner inside the haunted house attraction, Mouse’s world crumbles, walls and all. Debut author Jortner’s writing is smooth and interesting; her setup is good, and the storm chapters are page-turners. However, the story treats the central trauma of Mouse’s abandonment too lightly and resolves it without Mouse herself, a supposedly enterprising character, taking any action, which may disappoint readers. Main characters are coded White; there is racial diversity among the park employees.

A promising story whose central premise demands deeper exploration. (Fiction. 8-12)



**MIHI EVER AFTER
 A Giant Problem**

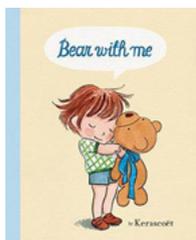
Keller, Tae
 Illus. by Geraldine Rodriguez
 Henry Holt (208 pp.)
 \$16.99 | May 16, 2023
 9781250814227
 Series: Mihi Ever After, 2

Three friends face one giant problem.

Since narrowly escaping many dangers in *Mihi Ever After* (2022), Korean American Mihi Whan Park has been afraid to admit her secret to besties Reese and Savannah: She misses the Rainbow Realm and its magic. When Genevieve, Mihi’s former best friend and current archnemesis, is near tears due to punishment for a fight they got into at school, Mihi impulsively tells her about the Rainbow Realm in an attempt to cheer her up. Soon after, Genevieve disappears—and Mihi discovers her backpack near the portal. Mihi, Reese, and Savannah decide they ought to rescue Genevieve even though “she’s rude and a little spoiled and she doesn’t seem to care about other people’s feelings.” They

are surprised to find the Rainbow Realm in dire straits thanks to a large beanstalk and a giant who has been stealing the rain. The action-packed plot maintains a brisk pace as the trio meet with familiar characters, friendly and otherwise, and learn that Genevieve has gone searching for the giant's gold. Using a spell, the three girls disguise themselves and sneak into the giant's ball. Even though they are captured, with a bit of magic and ingenuity, they are able to save the day. Keller deftly explores both perseverance and the evolving nature of friendships that sometimes need to end. Readers would benefit from familiarity with the first book. The ending paves the way for another adventure. Final art not seen.

A high-interest fantasy romp. (*Fantasy*. 8-12)



BEAR WITH ME

Kerascoët
Random House Studio (40 pp.)
\$18.99 | \$21.99 PLB | June 13, 2023
9780593307670
9780593307687 PLB

A nearly wordless tale of the bond between stuffed toy and child.

The title shares three of just four words used throughout this story, which relies on well-paced sequential art to establish a child's love of their toy bear and to chronicle how they navigate their first day of school without it. With a style akin to Bob Graham's with a dash of Helen Oxenbury, wordless frontmatter illustrations show Bear in a blue beribboned box. Next, the blue ribbon now around its neck, Bear sits on a nursery shelf. Subsequent spreads show the child growing up, with Bear their constant companion. Fore-shadowing the school-day separation to come, one of the child's parents takes Bear to the washing machine, and the protagonist turns red with rage ("BEAR WITH ME!"). Soon after reuniting with a clean Bear, the child sits the toy with other stuffed animals and points at a picture on an easel emblazoned with the word *SCHOOL*. Though the child makes valiant efforts to keep "Bear. with. me" while preparing to go to school, their parent insists that Bear stay home. Another tantrum doesn't follow, however, as the child settles into classroom routines and keeps Bear "with" them by dressing up like a bear, painting a picture of Bear, and so on before a happy reunion at home sure to delight anyone who's ever missed a plush pal. The child and their parents are light-skinned; their school is a diverse one. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

A bear-y good choice for storytime. (*Picture book*. 2-5)



THE LAST FALLEN REALM

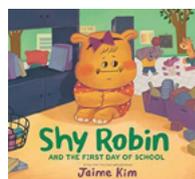
Kim, Graci
Rick Riordan Presents/Disney (320 pp.)
\$16.99 | June 6, 2023
9781368073165
Series: Gifted Clans, 3



The worlds-shattering conclusion to the Gifted Clans trilogy.

Thirteen-year-old Riley Oh's world has turned upside down. Hattie, her adoptive sister, has opted to stay in the Spiritrealm to better understand her problems in the Mortalrealm; her parents have adopted Dahl, her soul twin from back when they lived in the sky; and to top it all off, she and Dahl are supposed to save the world and somehow defeat the Godrealm's vengeful goddesses, which is causing her more than a little anxiety. Luckily, Riley has the support of her friends from both the Spiritrealm and the witch clans, and she's going to need it, because the barriers between the Mortalrealm, the Spiritrealm, and the Godrealm are starting to thin—and even nonwitches have noticed. Non-stop action, a dash of humor, and a world of technology and Korean magic combine once again in the ways that make this series special. In this installment, Riley truly grows and changes ("compassion isn't only for your friends—it's for your enemies, too"), but the themes of family and friendship remain ever present, no matter how far into the Godrealm she may stray. With higher stakes, even more creatures from Korean mythology, and plot points from earlier installments finally addressed, this is an intense, satisfying series finale.

Funny and heartfelt; a compelling tale featuring a sympathetic cast of characters. (*author's note, glossary*) (*Fantasy*. 9-13)



SHY ROBIN AND THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

Kim, Jaime
Candlewick (40 pp.)
\$17.99 | June 13, 2023
978-1-5362-0929-7

An uncertain hippo's first day at school.

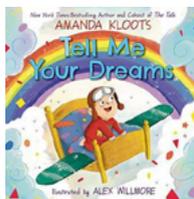
Robin is a "big, brave animal"—specifically, a yellow hippo with bangs. While Robin is a boisterous force of nature at home, out in the "big, busy world," Robin feels shy. On the first day of school, Mom gives Robin a purple headband for good luck, but the hippo still feels overwhelmed in their new classroom. But Robin notices a young otter named Marco who's also struggling with anxiety. Finding a super-cool purple cape in the costume box gives Robin the courage to approach Marco, but the loss of their new headband makes Robin hide again. Luckily, Marco is there to offer Robin one of his lucky purple bracelets and to help find the headband, and together they learn to be the bravest, shyest animals in class. Lovingly rendered chalky illustrations bring to life this tale in a well-paced balance of spot art and spreads, showing a variety of soft, round anthropomorphized

“Brief and beautiful, much like the mayfly’s life—children will come for the comics and leave with much to chew on.”

TINY FOX AND GREAT BOAR

animals going about their days around Robin. Shy human children—especially those who feel more outgoing in a familiar environment—will be reassured that they will most certainly not be the only ones nervous about their first day of school. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Encouragement for those who are exuberant, loud, and full of energy...but only at home. *(Picture book. 4-7)*



TELL ME YOUR DREAMS
Kloots, Amanda
Illus. by Alex Willmore
 Harper/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
 \$18.99 | April 25, 2023
 9780063225114

Talk-show host Kloots’ first children’s book is an imaginative bedtime book about dreams and a tribute to her late husband.

A blond, light-skinned mother cuddles at bedtime with her light-skinned child, who has short, curly blond hair. From the toys scattered in the room and the bedding, it’s clear this tot loves vehicles of all sorts, so it’s not surprising that when mom guides the child to talk about where their dreams will take them, a garbage truck leaps to mind. It’s green, just like their toy one, and their father, a man with light skin, brown hair, and some beard scruff, is driving. As the duo go for a ride, suddenly the truck morphs into a plane that they fly through a rainbow and land on a beach, where they make a train that they drive into the ocean and then back home again. The mother mostly narrates this adventure, with the child’s brief sound effects, comments, and “I love you, Dada,” in a colored font. The text can be a bit stiff, the language workmanlike. Willmore’s mixed media, pencil, and digital cartoon illustrations are full of bright colors and imaginative details, though the humans are rather wooden, their mouths wide open on almost every page. The only evidence of the father is in the child’s imagination/dreams. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

This fails to stand out on the crowded bedtime/dreamland shelf. *(Picture book. 2-6)*



TINY FOX AND GREAT BOAR Dawn
Kolomycka, Berenika
Trans. by Karol Bulski
 Oni Press (64 pp.)
 \$14.99 | April 4, 2023
 9781637152058

The inevitability of death is the name of the game in this tale of a mayfly on her Most Beautiful Day in Life.

While exploring the forests and meadows, friends Tiny Fox and Great Boar meet and befriend a nymph who is looking forward to growing her wings. The next day the little bug gets her wish and flies off immediately, leaving Fox and Boar behind. Fox is miffed, but all is forgotten when the mayfly returns and

immediately dies. Distraught, Fox runs from the shadow of sadness now chasing him. It’s only when Boar finds him and the two are able to talk about their feelings and the mayfly they loved that the healing can begin. The watercolor art of this graphic novel takes on a distinctly atmospheric tone. The illustrations convey transitions between different moods and capture beams of light as adeptly as they do darkness and dusk. This Polish import—the third starring these woodland pals—gives adequate time and attention to the seriousness of its topic. For those children for whom the mayfly’s death is a shock, the book does an excellent job of showing methods for navigating grief.

Brief and beautiful, much like the mayfly’s life—children will come for the comics and leave with much to chew on. *(Graphic early reader. 6-9)*

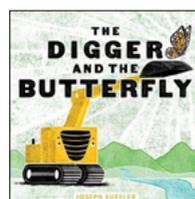


BIZARD THE BEAR WIZARD
Krebs, Chrissie
 Margaret Ferguson/Holiday House
 (160 pp.)
 \$20.99 | June 20, 2023
 9780823451456
 Series: Bear Wizard, 1

In the aftermath of a tornado, Bear becomes a wish-granting wizard.

Bear is an average...well, bear—he spends his days eating honey, lounging about, and sleeping. When a tornado hits and a wizard’s magic wand flies off and embeds itself in his head (making him look a bit like a unicorn or a narwhal), Bear becomes magically capable of making all of his—and his friends’—dreams come true. Against his will, the animals of the forest dub him Bizard the Bear Wizard and coerce him into opening up a wish-granting business. However, the wish-granting takes a turn when Bizard nonchalantly grants evil Wolf’s wish for a wand more powerful than his own. With the help of his manager, Squirrel, and friends Fox and Owl, Bizard must take action to save the homes of the forest animals and stop Wolf and his sinister entourage once and for all. In the process, he realizes how rewarding it feels to step up and take care of others. The humor is just as lighthearted as the plot. Exaggerated cartoon illustrations match the silly tone of the text; however, Krebs also explores deeper themes—friendship, community, responsibility—that will resonate with young readers.

Quirky fun, with a good message. *(Graphic fiction. 7-10)*



THE DIGGER AND THE BUTTERFLY
Kuefler, Joseph
 Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (48 pp.)
 \$19.99 | May 23, 2023
 9780063237940
 Series: The Digger

The latest in Kuefler’s Digger series deftly melds mechanized wonder with a tender appreciation of the natural world.

“A heart-rending narrative of friendship, family, and the path to healing.”

THE ORDER OF THINGS

In an open clearing in the woods, Digger and his construction crew are hard at work when he accidentally uncovers a caterpillar. Though everyone is entranced by it, the work waits for no one. However, the caterpillar has other plans. It immediately climbs up Digger and forms a chrysalis. Digger is now stuck in place, but in waiting for the caterpillar to emerge, he is able to appreciate the river, trees, sun, and wind in ways he couldn't before. And when the butterfly emerges at last, it leads Digger and his friends to a place filled with other butterflies where they can relax together without feeling the need to work. Helpful backmatter spells out each stage of a caterpillar's life. The construction-equipment characters may seem at odds with the woodsy setting (given the implication of the destruction of the natural world), but the story expertly avoids the conflict by having the crew work on a project in an already empty clearing. While not overtly a book of mindfulness, this gentle look at taking time to pay attention to nature relays its message without overt proselytizing, and as always, Kuefler's bold, blocky illustrations bring the tale to life beautifully, imbuing his vehicular cast with verve and personality. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Automation and natural environments come to a sweet accord in this gentle paean to taking time out. (Picture book. 3-6)



MOTH IN A FANCY CARDIGAN

Lance, Charlotte
 Illus. by David Booth
 Berbay Publishing (136 pp.)
 \$19.99 | June 6, 2023
 9781922610577

A moth and a butterfly struggle with outsides that don't match their insides.

Gary, a gray moth, is unhappy with his somber exterior (especially his gray cardigan), which leaves him virtually invisible and envious of the brightly colored butterflies. When Florence, a butterfly, ditches her colorful cardigan outside the school, he grabs it. At home that night he tries it on and feels like himself in it. Meanwhile, reserved, awkward Florence, who feels uncomfortable trying to live up to her serene mother's example, comes across Gary's cardigan and finds it a perfect fit. But losing her cardigan causes Florence trouble—its pocket contained a gift for her beloved grandmother, who accepts her for the black-and-white-and-gray-loving butterfly she is. (When Gary eventually finds the drawing, he thinks it incomplete and colors it to “finish” it, ruining what Florence loved most about it.) When Florence confesses to Grandma that she lost her cardigan, her grandmother reveals a family secret. Before the protagonists can reconcile their inner-to-outer selves, they must navigate their interpersonal conflict (over picture and cardigan) and pre-conceptions. Gary and Florence's solution will be obvious to readers based on how happy these brief tastes of change make them. Still, the message of self-acceptance rings through. Short chapters that switch between Gary's and Florence's perspectives showcase frequent illustrations, grayscale with

yellow pops. Heavily anthropomorphized characters look like gray-skinned humans with wings and antennae.

Message-heavy but ultimately affirming and empathy-promoting. (Fiction. 7-11)



THE ORDER OF THINGS

Langley, Kaija
 Nancy Paulsen Books (288 pp.)
 \$17.99 | June 6, 2023
 9780593530900



An 11-year-old girl suffers a devastating loss when her best friend suddenly dies.

April and best friend Zee, both African American, live across the hall from each other in their Boston apartment building. Their tight unit is disrupted when gifted violinist Zee, who comes from a musical family, is admitted to a new STEAM charter school. April is happy for him but knows her school experience will change. Sure enough, she is paired with socially awkward Asa, who's shunned by the two other White girls in class. April asks Zee's dad, Papa Zee, to give her drumming lessons, fulfilling her own dreams. But there are difficult things too: Zee has some alarming health symptoms and swears April to secrecy, April's single mom is seeing a new woman, and Asa is behaving unusually. When Zee's next medical episode proves fatal, April's grief is compounded by her guilt over keeping quiet. Before long she's hiding something else, as she observes the extent of Papa Zee's depression. When she learns the truth about what Asa's family is going through, however, April realizes she has to share all she has been keeping inside. This well-crafted novel in verse is rich in detail and successfully conveys the depth of April's emotions. The characters are fully realized, and the themes of family, change, and grief are handled with sensitivity and care.

A heart-rending narrative of friendship, family, and the path to healing. (author's note) (Verse fiction. 10-14)



A VACCINE IS LIKE A MEMORY

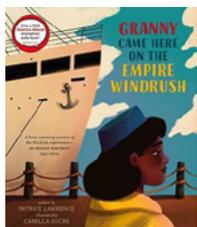
LaRocca, Rajani
 Illus. by Kathleen Marcotte
 Little Bee Books (40 pp.)
 \$18.99 | June 20, 2023
 9781499813265

An introduction to the history and benefits of vaccines.

“A vaccine,” the author, a physician, writes, “is like a memory of a disease you never had.” In simple but not simplistic terms, LaRocca explains how vaccines work with the immune system to minimize the effects of certain diseases and traces the history of their development up to the creation of vaccines for Covid-19—crediting not only English physician Edward Jenner for popularizing the

idea of smallpox inoculation in the late 18th century, but also Onesimus, an enslaved man who told Cotton Mather about a similar procedure in 1721. LaRocca ramps up the level of detail in the backmatter with descriptions of different sorts of germs, six types of vaccines, including those using mRNA and adenovirus, and a list of common infections (with symptoms) that can be prevented with vaccines. The message that vaccines are safe as well as effective comes through clearly in both the narrative and Marcotte's cartoon illustrations of inoculated children surrounded by figurative dotted-line shields. The racially diverse cast of adults and children includes a hijab wearer, several people wearing face masks, and two using wheelchairs. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Authoritative and reassuring. (bibliography) *(Informational picture book. 6-8)*



GRANNY CAME HERE ON THE EMPIRE WINDRUSH

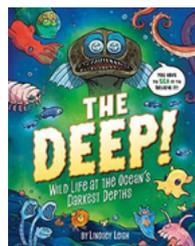
Lawrence, Patrice
 Illus. by Camilla Sucre
 Nosy Crow (40 pp.)
 \$17.99 | May 2, 2023
 9798887770338



A young Black girl learns about her beloved Trinidadian grandmother's immigration story.

When Ava must dress as someone she admires for a school project, Granny invites Ava to explore her special trunk. As Granny talks about the contributions of Black women such as singer Winifred Atwell, Ava learns a lot, but none of the suggestions quite fit. But then Ava sees an unfamiliar suitcase. Items in the cardboard case encourage Granny to tell her own story. An empty jar that once held orange peels reminded Granny that the scent of island oranges helped her cope with sea sickness as she sailed on the *Empire Windrush*, a real-life ship that carried emigrants from the Caribbean to the United Kingdom in the mid-20th century. A pebble helped her recall a swim in the river with her younger sister. Granny speaks of overcoming homesickness and loneliness and finding happiness once she met Ava's grandfather in her adopted home. Stirred by Granny's bravery, Ava decides her story is one to celebrate and chooses to share it with her class. Rooted in relatable, concrete details, this uplifting tale centers on a loving intergenerational relationship and illustrates the importance of sharing memories and history. Sucre's vibrant images make especially vivid use of the color yellow, contributing to the warmth of the narrative. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A loving family story that pays tribute to the often unseen but no less powerful moments of courage. (author's note) *(Picture book. 5-8)*



**THE DEEP!
 Wild Life at the Ocean's Darkest Depths**

Leigh, Lindsey
 Penguin Workshop (96 pp.)
 \$15.99 | June 27, 2023
 9780593521687



Meet our aquatic neighbors, from sperm whales and vampire squid ("Welcome!") to pigbutt worms.

"Well, hi there!" burbles a toothy deep-sea hatchetfish, swimming up to invite viewers on an unforgettable dive into ocean depths from the sunny epipelagic zone down to really deep, really dark hadalpelagic regions. Wonders aplenty await, from creatures with transparent heads and stomachs to sea angels, which change from male to female as they grow, carnivorous sponges, and siphonophores longer than blue whales. The author stoutly defends the reputations of the much maligned blobfish ("Blobfish? No, Blob Sculpin!") and demonstrates a sure sense of theater with, for instance, a "Supersize Squid Showdown," not to mention nods to the aforementioned pigbutt worm ("It's not every day you see flying buttocks soaring through the seas!") and the giant larvacean's "magnificent snot palace." In pursuit of a friendly vibe, Leigh puts smiles on the faces of creatures that have them (faces, that is) but otherwise draws her teeming wildlife in accurate detail. She also fills much of the open spaces in her mix of broad seascapes and inset panels with informative commentary and supplements the tour with closer looks at microenvironments such as hydrothermal vents and deadly undersea brine pools ("jacuzzi of despair!") as well as special topics such as the continual descent of nutritious corpses and poop known as "marine snow." She ends with further resources and eco-activities for readers who share her patient enthusiasm for denizens of the deep.

A broad and buoyant undersea venture. (index) *(Graphic nonfiction. 10-13)*



THE UMBRELLA MAKER'S SON

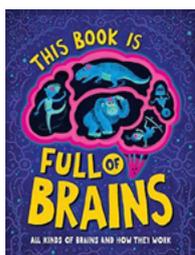
Leno, Katrina
 Illus. by Davide Ortu
 Little, Brown (384 pp.)
 \$16.99 | June 27, 2023
 9780316470872

A boy finds himself in peril when he investigates the constant rain plaguing his city.

The city of Roan endures rain daily: 47 types in all, from a gentle wib to a life-threatening blanderwheel. Eleven-year-old Oscar Buckle is an umbrella maker's son, which should come in handy. But business isn't exactly booming; people prefer the shoddy but inexpensive umbrellas manufactured by Brawn Industries over Bilius Buckle's durable but pricey creations. When Bilius informs Oscar he must leave school and become his apprentice,

he is dismayed; he wants to carve wooden figures, not craft umbrellas. Even worse, Saige Cleverer, his best friend, is moving to the rich—and mysteriously sunny—part of town for her dad’s new job with Brawn Industries. Is there something sinister behind the precipitation deluging Oscar’s neighborhood? The worldbuilding, much of which occurs in wry footnotes provided by an unnamed narrator, relies heavily on the quirky names and vocabulary. Saige, a wheelchair user, lives up to her surname, designing a jet pack and a wheelchair flotation device to circumvent barriers. Readers may quickly guess what’s up, and the ending is somewhat anticlimactic after the narrator’s dramatic foreshadowing. However, Oscar and Saige’s friendship is believably portrayed, and Oscar’s relationship with his single dad is touching, as are his complex feelings about his mother’s death. Oscar and his dad read *White*; Saige has brown skin, and secondary characters are racially diverse. Final art not seen.

A fast-paced, heartwarming read. (glossary) (*Fantasy*. 8-12)



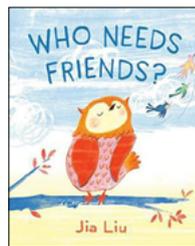
THIS BOOK IS FULL OF BRAINS
All Kinds of Brains and How They Work

Little House of Science
Union Square Kids (96 pp.)
\$14.99 | May 16, 2023
9781454947592

A close look at the brain’s parts, regions, and functions.

Simplified painted images of body parts and a cast of diversely hued figures in animated poses give this survey an elementary look, but it actually goes through the gross anatomy of our brain and nervous system in a methodical way—describing the features of each major region, from the cerebellum’s flocculonodular lobe to the parietal lobe’s primary somatosensory cortex, and explaining not only how each processes specific types of sensory data, stores memories, or keeps our bodies ticking, but also the science behind dreams and imagination. Just to nudge all of this away from abstraction, several optical illusions and simple tests of memory or perception are also tucked in. The book goes on to examine the notion that plants, computers, and one-celled animals have “brains” of a sort. (Spoiler alert: No.) Following a shivery look at wasps and fungi that can control the minds of their prey and a glimpse at the “grisly past” of brain surgery, this eye-opening overview of “the most important system in your whole body” closes with remarks on the present and future of neuroscience.

Meatier than it might seem at first glance but not just for brainiacs. (glossary, index) (*Nonfiction*. 9-12)



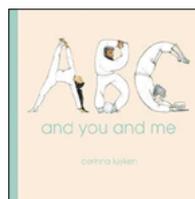
WHO NEEDS FRIENDS?

Liu, Jia
Nancy Paulsen Books (32 pp.)
\$18.99 | June 13, 2023
9781984813695

Even a wise owl has plenty to learn.

Merlin the owl searches for potential friends in the woods. Attempting to join several flocks of birds, i.e., butting into their conversations without invitation, the owl brags brazenly (“I tell the *best* stories!”). The others don’t give a hoot and fly away. Alone, Merlin proclaims, “I DON’T NEED FRIENDS!” and tries to make a case for why friends are a drawback: They’re noisy, Merlin dislikes sharing, and flying alone affords “true freedom.” Of course, friends *do* provide comfort in a rainstorm... and rain brings out “juicy worms.” Said worms set the stage for a friendship story in which Merlin discovers that niceties such as helping, offering compliments, taking an interest in others, and even telling a joke can help forge bonds with others. This cute, gently humorous tale’s ending feels rushed and doesn’t add anything new to the crowded field of making-friends stories. However, it will arouse empathy and is worth sharing with youngsters spreading their own wings and feeling uncertain about developing social relationships. The guide to making friends at the end of the book will reassure children as well. The illustrations, rendered in ink, colored pencil, and digital collage, are bright, lively, and expressive; Merlin is a feisty character. (*This book was reviewed digitally*.)

Whoo needs friends? Tips from this owl protagonist may help children learn how to make them. (*Picture book*. 4-7)



ABC AND YOU AND ME

Luyken, Corinna
Rocky Pond Books/Penguin (48 pp.)
\$18.99 | June 6, 2023
9780593530467

Posed bodies of adults and children form the upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet.

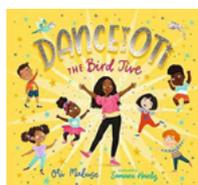
A handstand and a tall stretch make up the two versions of the letter I, while two other people each stand on one leg, the other leg held out, to form the letter K. Some of the poses appear doable, while others would likely require expert-level contortionist skills to complete. In each case, the adult forms the capital letter and the child, the lowercase letter; all are depicted holding relevant objects (eggs for E, umbrellas for U). A key at the back of the book outlines which objects are in which letter pictures; including the words alongside the images would have made for a more reader-friendly experience. Some simple rhyming text appears at a couple of points throughout, inviting readers to move. The illustrations are the real standout here, fluid and soft, a pale pastel palette setting the tone. All the people are dressed in white, allowing their unique features to stand out. The book’s greatest strength is its diversity—characters vary by

“Rejoice and rally for the axolotl!”

NOT A MONSTER

ability, age, skin tone, and size, with a wide range of body types on display. As a guide to understanding the alphabet, it's less successful, however; readers unfamiliar with their ABCs will have trouble recognizing what letters many of the bodies are attempting to spell out. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Not an alphabet book so much as an ode to the beauty of the human body. *(Picture book. 2-5)*



DANCE WITH OTI The Bird Jive

Mabuse, Oti
Illus. by Samara Hardy
 Candlewick Entertainment (32 pp.)
 \$17.99 | June 6, 2023
 978-1-5362-2500-6

Dancer and choreographer Mabuse, best known for performing on the British reality TV series *Strictly Come Dancing*, teaches kids how to do the jive.

The story opens with a racially diverse group of children lined up outside Mrs. Oti's dance studio, waiting for their first lesson. Mrs. Oti, a Black woman, presumably a stand-in for Mabuse, greets them happily. First, it's time to warm up. Hardy's bright, expressive illustrations depict the children as they do stretches, jumping jacks, and more. Then it's time to learn the jive. Mrs. Oti invites her students—and readers—to lift their hands up, then put them down, then to jump to the left and then to the right. The marvelous dancers make plenty of mistakes that add just the right amount of adorable hilarity—and will reassure uncertain little dancers that it's OK to mess up. One child forgets her steps as she stares at her shoes. Another dance pupil cannot remember which direction he's going. With kindness and wit, Mrs. Oti always reins the class back in and keeps everyone in step. A green parrot flies into the room, inspiring Mrs. Oti to tell the kids to grab some feathers from the dress-up box, flap their arms, and do the bird jive! Filled with arrows and text instructions, this book will make for a very active storytime. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A charming story that will encourage little readers to MOVE! *(more information on Mabuse and the jive, QR code linking to a step-by-step tutorial of the jive)* *(Picture book. 4-8)*



THE PEBBLE An Allegory of the Holocaust

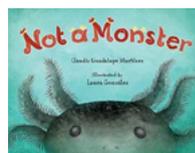
Marcinkevičius, Marius
Illus. by Inga Dagilė
Trans. by Jūra Avišienis
 Thames & Hudson (56 pp.)
 \$17.95 | May 2, 2023
 9780500653265

A boy describes love and devastating loss.

In summer 1943, in Vilnius, Lithuania (identified as such in the backmatter), a Jewish boy named

Eitan opens his narrative with an anecdote about flying his yellow kite with Rivka, his best friend and “the bravest girl in the whole world.” He and Rivka wear yellow stars on their clothing; townsfolk wear the same. Eitan speaks of big black birds in his town that, in a frequently invoked metaphor, he compares to “men in black uniforms” who “built a wall and closed the gates.” Nobody who entered “ever came home”—like his Papa. Sometimes, “whole families” passed through. One day Rivka's family is gone. Next, Eitan says, “it was our turn to walk through the gates.” Darkness descends; years pass; Eitan sleeps and becomes a pebble. In a final scene, an old woman and her grandchild visit a cemetery, where the woman—subtly identified as Rivka—places the pebble on a grave because “his place is here, with his family.” Translated from Lithuanian, this is a poignant allegory about the Holocaust, but some symbolism may elude children. Eitan's voice is matter-of-fact and dispassionate. Illustrations exude a folkloric feel; town scenes suggest enclosed spaces. Yellow and black represent Stars of David and horror, respectively. A moving epilogue discusses the Holocaust and explains why pebbles are placed on Jewish gravestones. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A somber and affecting Holocaust account, though the intended audience may find it a bit cryptic. *(Picture book. 7-11)*



NOT A MONSTER
 Martínez, Claudia Guadalupe
Illus. by Laura González
 Charlesbridge (32 pp.)
 \$17.99 | May 9, 2023
 9781623543037



Deep in a murky, azul-tinged body of water, the axolotl swims under the cover of the moon.

Along a canal near an unspecified city “that was once a great empire,” an egg grows and transforms; the creature inside gains fins, gills, and a bit more before it hatches into a tadpole. Four long limbs soon sprout, and the creature's color deepens into an inky black. It scours for food beneath “los lirios rosados” (pink water lilies), resting under a floating garden. The creature is “Not a Monster”—it's an axolotl. Martínez devotes the first half of the book to chronicling the axolotl's life journey—from birth to mating—in eclectic, whimsical strokes, egged on by González's sublime, earthy artwork. It's a tenderhearted ode to the water-based salamander. From there, the axolotl's tale pivots to spotlight the creature's connection to Xolotl, the Aztec god of monstrous things, said to have leapt into a lake and turned into an axolotl. “Guided by the stories their abuelos have told them,” two friends “row their chalupa **morada**” into the canals, spearheading cleanup efforts to remove plastic and bottles from the water. The author brilliantly positions the restoration of the endangered axolotl's natural habitats as a kind of modern rebirth infused with hope. Spanish words pop up throughout this sly call to action, and color words are bolded; definitions are provided in a glossary. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Rejoice and rally for the axolotl! (author's note) *(Informational picture book. 4-8)*

“Character-driven, thought-provoking,
often funny, and, above all, timely.”

CODE RED



CODE RED

McCullough, Joy

Atheneum (240 pp.)

\$17.99 | June 13, 2023

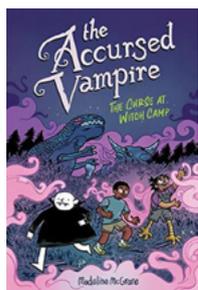
9781534496262



Heather Sorensen rose from poverty to lead a major menstrual products company, but she's MIA when her daughter gets her first period.

Eden, 13, was fulfilling Heather's lofty dream for her future—Olympic medal-winning gymnast—until a growth spurt and injury cut it short. Though less invested in her divorced mother's ambitions, Eden feels lost: Gymnastics always came first, leaving little time for friends. She rarely sees her pilot dad and is often alone in the enormous Seattle-area mansion she shares with Heather, whose high-profile career trumps parenting. Heather's appearance at a career day assembly to extol her company, MySecret, leaves Eden feeling humiliated and a target for teasing. After she defends herself against a harassing boy with help from classmate Maribel, both girls are suspended. With Heather unreachable, Maribel's mom brings them to the food pantry she manages, where Eden starts her period. Maribel's Guatemalan immigrant family take to Eden, as do their friends Will, a trans boy, and his mom, Raven (who are White, like Eden). Raven's small nonprofit makes and distributes free, reusable cloth menstrual pads. Learning about period poverty (and poverty, period), Eden ponders ways to fund period products and gets a crash course in income inequality, but her commitment to social justice strains her relationship with Heather. Readers learn about these subjects alongside Eden in a well-integrated way and will root for the quirky, well-rounded characters who challenge outdated cultural taboos.

Character-driven, thought-provoking, often funny, and, above all, timely. (author's note, glossary, resources) (Fiction. 8-14)



THE ACCURSED VAMPIRE The Curse at Witch Camp

McGrane, Madeline

Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins

(256 pp.)

\$22.99 | \$13.99 paper | Feb. 21, 2023

978-0-06-295438-1

978-0-06-295437-4 paper

Series: The Accursed Vampire, 2

For the next three weeks, Dragoslava the vampire is stuck at a summer camp for witches, where no one wants to be their friend and the campers are mysteriously disappearing.

All of Dragoslava's friends have something to do at summer camp—teaching “living kids” magic, fighting latrine goblins, crafting spells, and rehearsing for the play—but Drago doesn't fit in or know how to join the fun. The living kids either think

they're scary or treat them like a baby. Despite rumors about missing campers, Drago decides to wander off alone, leading to an unexpected reunion with the old spell book belonging to Velmira, the witch they are apprenticed to. Parch the spell book has a new human body and feels as out of place as Drago but is determined to remain a person at any cost. In this second volume of the Accursed Vampire series, McGrane brews a summer camp mystery with an enchanting balance of impish but honest humor and strong themes of friendship and self-discovery. All the characters, including the antagonists, have complex relationships that impact their decisions and character growth. Abundant irreverent witchery, brought to life through quirky character design and a vibrant palette of contrasting shades, keeps the tone playful. A meticulous trail of clues, flashbacks, and scenes that shift the narrative focus between multiple characters build suspense and momentum. The art reflects racial diversity and casual queerness in the world around pale, bald Dragoslava.

Mischievously magical. (sketches) (Graphic paranormal adventure. 8-12)



REBEL UNDERCOVER

McMann, Lisa

Putnam (336 pp.)

\$17.99 | \$10.50 paper | June 6, 2023

9780593615805

9780593696187 paper

Series: The Forgotten Five, 3

As the Forgotten Five investigate President Daniel Fuerte's plans to build an army of supers, the reappearance of their criminal parents continues to complicate matters in this sequel to 2022's *The Invisible Spy*.

Reeling from Cabot's decision to rejoin her parents, who are coerced members of President Fuerte's supers criminal gang, the rest of the Five—Birdie, Brix, Seven, and Tenner—grapple with their friend's perceived defection. Is Cabot (whose latent powers have started appearing) now a baddie? But other storms arise. Following the public unmasking of President Fuerte as a super, protesters from around Estero storm the presidential palace. The surprise announcement of a presidential run by Magdalia, Seven's AWOL mom, also threatens Fuerte's bid to retain power. As the presidential race gets heated, stalwart ally Lada preps to infiltrate the presidential palace by going undercover as a recruit for Fuerte's army, a risky move that's deadlier than the group realizes. Meanwhile, The Librarian's enigmatic actions begin to raise the Five's suspicions about their once-reliable spy mentor. Like a well-oiled Saturday-morning cartoon, McMann's series continues to feature boisterous superpower hijinks and lighthearted espionage with dabs of engrossing familial melodrama. The political shenanigans remain deeply, endearingly silly, and the author does a fine job of maintaining high stakes as the plots get knottier and the twists even dizzier. Another doozy of a cliffhanger swoops in at the end to carry willing readers into the following installment.

Fantastically silly fun! (Fantasy. 8-12)



WHEN WORRY WHISPERS

Meyer, Joyce
 Illus. by Marcin Piwowarski
 WorthyKids/Ideals (32 pp.)
 \$17.99 | June 6, 2023
 9781546012542

What do you do when anxieties seep in?

A child with short brown hair, light skin, and thick glasses is plagued by Worry, an amorphous gray blob with large eyes. As the child considers various activities, Worry supplies some answers to its favorite question—"What if?" Like what if you fall while rollerblading? Or what if you get soaked in the rain on the way to the school bus? When this happens, pretty bad feelings arise. An unseen narrator tells readers that talking to God can make things better. As the child decides to "think about God's promises," a protective bubble forms around them. The child rollerblades, trusting God to take care of things, and finds courage and security in the good things planned even when some things go wrong. In the end, God is more powerful than Worry. Opening with a Bible verse, this book is an affirmation of a Christian perspective that belief in God will see a person through uncertain times. Caregivers and educators should note that the book focuses more on typical worries than clinical anxiety. The boilerplate illustrations add some interest to the pages, doing a bit of the heavy lifting left from the general and bare second-person narration. Racially diverse children populate the background. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A satisfactory, Christian-themed guide to coping with worries. *(Picture book. 3-7)*



OUT THERE

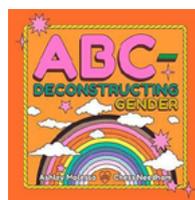
Miller, Seaerra
 Little, Brown Ink (232 pp.)
 \$12.99 paper | June 27, 2023
 9780316591874

Julia's father, David, believes he was abducted from their backyard by aliens a few years earlier.

Julia is dealing with the reality that her parents are separated and her dad's now obsessed with the paranormal. The father-daughter duo are headed to Roswell, New Mexico, for a festival celebrating the anniversary of the famous UFO crash. Thoughtful, self-conscious Julia shares David's passion, to the perplexity of her overprotective mom and her best friend, Sara, even turning down a trip to Hawaii with Sara's family in favor of Roswell. Fellow young tourist Josh and his abductee parents give Julia new perspectives on her relationships and the unusual world David has brought her into. Miller paints David and the other abductees with compassion, never judging or pathologizing them even when noting the damage their preoccupations cause their loved ones. Julia's dad is fun and kind, and she shares good times with him—but he's also not steadily employed, has

abandoned his former hobbies, and forgets things that matter to her. There's melancholy alongside the cheerful, animated character design and beautiful Southwestern landscapes with their vivid, inky starlit skies and luminous sunrises. The story ultimately doesn't settle on easy answers when asking what it means to care about someone who believes something that you're beginning to doubt. Julia and her parents read *White*; Josh has light brown skin and black hair.

A poignant trip. *(Graphic fiction. 8-12)*



ABC-DECONSTRUCTING GENDER

Molesso, Ashley
 Illus. by Chess Needham
 Running Press Kids (32 pp.)
 \$18.99 | May 2, 2023
 9780762481408

An ABC book that challenges gender norms.

Each page depicts a child who embodies a different characteristic, usually one not stereotypically associated with their gender: For B: "Mohammad likes to do makeup and get beautiful with his sister." For M: "Ximena is mighty and strong. She lifted her friend's bike when it got stuck in the mud!" The message that kids can and should reject rigid gender roles is important, but the book misses the mark. The words chosen to represent each letter include adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and nouns, and their placement within the text is random—sometimes toward the end of a sentence, other times in the middle—which makes the alphabet-book connection feel tenuous. Eye-catching, at times visually overwhelming, illustrations feature a strongly '70s-inspired psychedelic aesthetic and palette, but several images are perplexing. On one page, a child rides a motor scooter instead of a kick scooter—without a helmet. On another, a child using a wheelchair is depicted teetering dangerously on a winner's podium that is not wheelchair accessible. Wordy, at times clunky, and somewhat didactic, the text likely won't engage readers, though it does offer a good starting point to discussions of gender. The characters are diverse in terms of gender identity and expression (some use *they/them* pronouns), ability, and race. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Offers a much-needed takeaway—if kids can make it through to the end. *(Picture book. 4-7)*



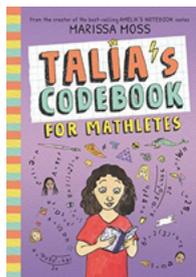
PACK YOUR BAGS, MAGGIE DIAZ

Moreno, Nina
 Illus. by Courtney Lovett & Asia Simone
 Scholastic (272 pp.)
 \$18.99 | May 2, 2023
 9781338818611

Maggie Diaz is back for the second half of seventh grade, cellphone in hand, ready for more adventures.

Set a few months after the first volume, this lighthearted second installment follows Maggie, now nearly 13, as she and best friends Julian and Zoey prepare for their Miami middle school's big spring break trip to Saint Augustine. The spring semester arrival of new classmate Vanessa, who was formerly home-schooled, changes the trio's dynamic, and things get even more awkward when Maggie's recently widowed Abuela decides to be a chaperone for the trip. As friends and classmates begin to experience first crushes, Maggie explores her complicated feelings for her pal Eddie, who now sports earrings and eyeliner. The author packs an emotional punch into this fun middle school dramedy: sibling issues (Maggie continues to feel like she can't compare to her perfect 16-year-old sister, Caro), loss (Abuela and the whole family are mourning Abuelo's death), friendship jealousy, and first love. In addition to the Cuban American Diazes, the multicultural cast includes Haitian, Creole-speaking Zoey and Japanese and Puerto Rican Vanessa. There's positive queer representation as well, since Caro now has a cool girlfriend. The cheerful, evocative spot-art illustrations vividly support the text. This is ideal reading for fans of Meg Medina's *Merci Suárez* trilogy and anyone looking for stories about plucky girls with close-knit, multigenerational families.

A sweet, amusing tale about navigating friendship and family drama. (Fiction. 10-14)



TALIA'S CODEBOOK FOR MATHLETES

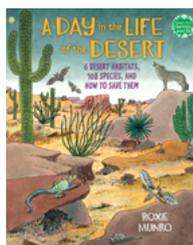
Moss, Marissa
Walker US/Candlewick (240 pp.)
\$19.99 | June 13, 2023
978-1-5362-1802-2

Talia Zargari's notebook helps her deal with the new challenges of sixth grade.

A few weeks into the school year, Dash, Talia's neighbor and longtime best friend, tells her they can't be friends anymore. Desperate to fit in, Dash succumbs to peer pressure and teasing from other boys. Hoping to be able to stay close to Dash through their shared love of math, Talia, whose mom is a computer programmer, is excited to join him on the mathlete team. As the only girl, Talia experiences discrimination from the team captain, however, so she decides to start a new, girls-only team. The Mathlete Mermaids show the boys' team up by winning their first competition. But there is still work to be done in including girls in STEM, and the Mermaids must prove themselves in ways boys don't. The book shows with authenticity how Talia has to manage complex feelings around growing up, recognizing her own mistakes, and making room for others, particularly when teammate Leticia, a skilled leader, steps in as Mermaids team captain. Talia's love of code-breaking and scavenger hunts is incorporated through fun puzzles for readers to solve. Fans of Moss' *Amelia's Notebooks* series will feel at home with the engagingly illustrated text and tips for navigating social situations. Talia has tan skin and curly

black hair; Dash reads Black, and background characters are diverse in appearance.

A fun, interactive guide to forging your own path in middle school. (author's note) (Illustrated fiction. 8-12)



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE DESERT 6 Desert Habitats, 108 Species, and How To Save Them

Munro, Roxie
Holiday House (48 pp.)
\$18.99 | June 13, 2023
9780823450923
Series: Books for a Better Earth

Arid ecosystems harbor a variety of interdependent creatures, but these Southwestern habitats face serious pressures.

Munro, whose *Dive In* (2020) invited readers to explore coral reefs, returns to—very—dry land with an enticing tour of several North American deserts: the Sonoran Desert, the Mojave Desert (with additional attention to Death Valley), the Great Basin Desert, the Chihuahuan Desert, and the Painted Desert. An opening map sets the stage. An introduction makes the point that though deserts are dry and often hot, they're not uninhabitable. Twelve scenes, pictured over a 24-hour period, offer readers opportunities to discover inhabitants of each desert with challenging seek-and-find puzzles. Explanatory text runs across the bottom quarter of each spread describing weather, typical plant life, some geological features, and some threats to each habitat. A small box lists the numbers and names of various creatures pictured. Readers will have to look carefully: Some are very small and may be partially concealed! The following pages provide answer keys to the search-and-finds and further information about each of the six habitats. In conclusion, Munro suggests ways readers can help these fragile habitats. Munro's acrylic paintings, outlined in ink, convey the different senses of each place and time effectively through light and color, and the creatures are recognizable though not always to scale. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

A solid, geographically specific introduction to desert communities—and how we can protect them. (relevant organizations, glossary) (Informational picture book. 5-9)

“A playful, lyrical, and persuasive love letter to a dandelion.”

ÂMÎ OSÂWÂPIKONES (DEAR DANDELION)

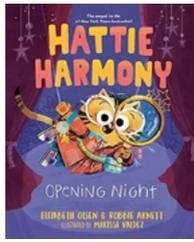


ÂMÎ OSÂWÂPIKONES (DEAR DANDELION)
Okemow, Sŷ
 Annick Press (40 pp.)
 \$18.99 | May 23, 2023
 9781773217406

A playful, lyrical, and persuasive love letter to a dandelion.

Okemow (Nêhiyaw/Plains Cree) weaves an important message throughout this picture book that follows a dandelion through each of the four seasons: Every living thing has value and brings “joy to others.” Each season begins with the same greeting: “Dear Osâwâpikones,” Plains Cree for *dandelion*. Over the course of a year, a cheerful tan-skinned child, cued as Indigenous, watches as Dandelion sprouts, spreads its seeds, lies dormant in the winter, and then grows anew come spring. Referring to the flower as a “bouquet of light,” the child narrator makes clear that Dandelion is no pesky weed. As the child draws, cuddles with an adult, dances, and plays in the snow, Dandelion is always there, offering life lessons: persevere when faced with challenges; kindness connects all living things; rest and be silent while pursuing hopes and dreams. Okemow presents resilience last: “You remind me, always, we are more than just one thing. / Even when things are hard, / you still bloom.” Alliterative phrasing (“cracks in concrete,” “season of strawberries”) heightens the vivid imagery of the verse. Bright, flat colors bring the story to life; a buzzing bee that appears on various spreads helps pull the tale together. Cree terms are used throughout; a glossary is appended. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

This tribute to a precious flowering plant will capture readers’ hearts. (author’s note) *(Picture book. 3-8)*



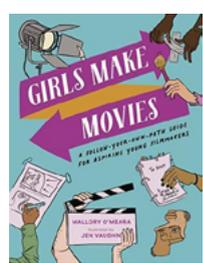
HATTIE HARMONY: OPENING NIGHT
Olsen, Elizabeth & Robbie Arnett
Illus. by Marissa Valdez
 Viking (40 pp.)
 \$18.99 | June 13, 2023
 9780593351468
 Series: Hattie Harmony

In this latest from actor Olsen and her husband, musician/writer Arnett, a feline “Worry Detective” once more helps her animal classmates conquer their fears.

It’s opening night of Wildwood Elementary’s school play, and anxieties abound. After receiving a call from Pearl Peppercorn, who needs help dealing with stage fright, Hattie Harmony is on the case with her Worry Detective Tool Belt. As the students prepare for showtime, Hattie provides others—including Seymour Swiggletooth, a member of the crew upset at having spilled paint, and Duncan Delmar, the play’s director, who frets when he can’t turn the stage lights back on—with coping strategies such as journaling, taking breaks, and breathing deeply. Hattie’s classmates—and Hattie herself—benefit from her anxiety-relieving strategies, which readers in similar

situations will find valuable. An authors’ note explains various skills to help kids cope with anxiety, perfectionism, and overwhelming thoughts. Valdez’s illustrations are appealing. Hattie is a bespectacled, trench coat-wearing striped cat. The other animals have expressive faces and exaggerated features, like the buck teeth on Seymour, a beaver. Stage lights and flashlights (when the lights go off) bring several scenes to life, and there are plenty of details to take in. The story is straightforward, the writing without flourish, but it nevertheless presents concrete, useful suggestions for confronting anxiety. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Practical advice to help empower young worriers. *(Picture book. 5-8)*



GIRLS MAKE MOVIES
A Follow-Your-Own-Path Guide for Aspiring Young Filmmakers
O’Meara, Mallory
Illus. by Jen Vaughn
 Running Press Kids (144 pp.)
 \$17.99 | May 23, 2023
 9780762478989

O’Meara, whose adult biography, *The Lady From the Black Lagoon* (2019), tackled misogyny in Hollywood, invites would-be filmmakers to learn more about the industry.

Ever wonder why the closing credits of a film are so long? It takes many people to make a movie. Divided into four sections—development, preproduction, production, and postproduction—this book centers women by exclusively using *she/her* as generic pronouns while describing the work of hypothetical people holding various jobs (screenwriter, editor, sound mixer, etc.) and by highlighting specific women in the industry (director Greta Gerwig, composer Angela Morley). The breadth of information is impressive and will offer readers a greater understanding of and appreciation for the work that goes into filmmaking as well as the skills required for each role. As readers follow the creation of a fictional film called *Sasha Versus Zombies*, they are prompted to make choices—an addition that allows young people to see the process in action but at times feels like an unnecessary gimmick. The interactive elements and the writing style skew young, yet the career-oriented angle and several references to mature-rated media feel better suited for teens, making the book’s intended audience feel unclear. Still, the material is solid; future filmmakers will find this a good starting point. Orange- and purple-hued illustrations depict diverse women.

Uneven in presentation yet will still appeal to, inform, and inspire those aspiring to a career in films. (glossary, recommended films made by women, resources) *(Nonfiction. 11-16)*

“An affirming story that feels like a warm hug from a beloved relative.”

MARTINA HAS TOO MANY TÍAS



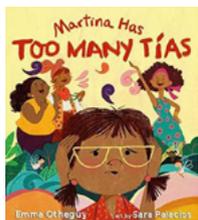
THE GOLDEN FROG GAMES

Ortega, Claribel A.
Scholastic (384 pp.)
\$17.99 | May 2, 2023
9781338745795
Series: Witchlings, 2

Seven Salazar, Valley Pepperhorn, and Thorn La Roux are back in this follow-up to *Witchlings* (2022).

The Golden Frog Games are the Twelve Towns’ most significant tournament, and the Witchlings are poised to once again make their mark. As Spares, without a traditional coven of their own, Seven, Valley, and Thorn don’t fit the usual definitions of champions and leaders. Further stacking the decks against them, Seven is struggling to come into her newly discovered Uncle powers: She’s hearing the voices of monstros— including the dread Night-beast—much more often than those of animals. Capping it all, there’s a hexer on the loose at the games, threatening the safety of all the witches in the Twelve Towns. Luckily, the Witchlings are on the case. Navigating changes in their friendships, new romances, old bigotries, and some shattering losses, the Spare witches have a lot of growing to do. The story is unequivocally queer, quietly mirroring our world’s rich landscape of genders and sexualities. Sharply insightful about the epidemic of hate against minority groups, Ortega invites readers to ponder the true definition of monstrosity as she puts her beloved trio through more challenges in this fast-paced and emotionally charged adventure with future nail-biting installments promised.

Cheeky and moving by turns; an adventure for a new generation. (*Fantasy*. 8-12)



MARTINA HAS TOO MANY TÍAS

Obeguy, Emma
Illus. by Sara Palacios
Atheneum (40 pp.)
\$18.99 | June 20, 2023
9781534445369

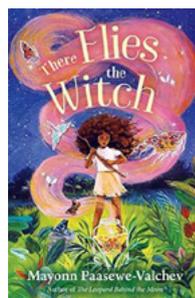


A Latine child has a tía problem.

Martina loves her tías—salsa dancer Tía Susana, flashy fashionista Tía Leonor, and loud, laughing Tía Alberta—but her aunts give her a headache when they’re around! Dreading another boisterous visit from them, Martina slips away during a party to the corner bodega. She buys a flower with a found coin and heads back to her apartment. While sniffing a big pot of guava, she plunges headlong inside and is transported to a jungle, where she interviews potential animal playmates—all of whom are too loud for her head to bear. Finally, she befriends a quiet mouse, and they bond over a love of imaginary adventures and hushed voices. As darkness falls, the fun fades, loneliness creeps in, and—in a scene reminiscent of Max returning from the land of the Wild Things—Martina reemerges in her kitchen surrounded by tías who can’t wait to hear her story. In this

sweet homage to the Caribbean folktale “La Cucaracha Martina,” a young girl comes to cherish familial love. Colorful, digitally rendered illustrations have a three-dimensional, collage feel, exuding warmth and light and capturing a child’s world of imagination. Readers who prefer quiet contemplation to rowdy celebrations will feel kinship with Martina. Though the child needs some alone time, she’s always clearly an integral part of her family—a much-needed message that comes through loudly (but not too loudly!). (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

An affirming story that feels like a warm hug from a beloved relative. (author’s note) (*Picture book*. 4-8)



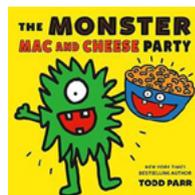
THERE FLIES THE WITCH

Paasewe-Valchev, Mayonn
Greenwillow Books (224 pp.)
\$18.99 | May 16, 2023
9780062993649

A girl seeks a sense of belonging and the truth about her identity.

Red, whose real name is Janneke, lives with her mother, Yakaka. Yakaka is a witch, and she and Red spend their days healing the earth with Yakaka’s stories. Red is uncertain about her real connection to Yakaka and about her own past, the only clue to which is “a dreadful dream” that returns every night. Although they both have brown skin, mother and daughter otherwise do not resemble each other; Red also does not have wings or possess magic like her mother, and she is not satisfied with Yakaka’s explanations for why this is. One day, while flying over the sea, Red clinging to Yakaka’s back, they crash, washing ashore on an island they’ve never seen before. Yakaka abandons Red there, but she meets Rubos, a boy who brings her home to his mother. There begins Red’s journey to uncovering who she really is. Paasewe-Valchev’s elliptical prose effectively conveys Red’s thoughts and feelings: “Feel my chest pounding. Feel my legs shaking. I need to get back to the dunes before Yakaka leaves without me.” The descriptions of the setting evoke a faraway land, both idyllic in its natural beauty and containing lurking dangers and existing outside of time in a way reminiscent of folklore. Red’s story expands on themes of family, love, self-identity, forgiveness, and growth in this novel that will appeal to sophisticated readers.

A dreamy story that reads like an extended folktale. (*Fantasy*. 9-13)



THE MONSTER MAC AND CHEESE PARTY

Parr, Todd
Little, Brown (40 pp.)
\$17.99 | June 27, 2023
9780316376426

Come to a mac-and-cheese party.

Readers are all invited...that is, if they are monsters. No humans are allowed at this celebration,

hosted by a bright green, one-eyed, three-toothed fuzzy monster. All the guests bring their own special mac and cheese. Bat brings bat “mac ’n’ bugs.” The witch brings “glow-in-the-dark mac with snakes and furballs.” The zombie brings “mud mac with fingers.” Readers are asked what kind of mac and cheese they would bring—would their dishes be seasoned with stinky socks, unicorns, or hot dogs? Strategic page turns add suspense as kids are asked to ponder what the spider and the mummy have brought. After all the monsters have arrived, the doorbell rings. It’s two humans (one with purplish skin, one with yellow skin) who have brought their favorite mac and cheese—gasp!—from the box. Despite this faux pas, the monsters and humans happily share a mac-and-cheese meal and remind readers that trying new foods and making new friends are fun. The book’s goofy, childlike, digitally created images are set against bright contrasting backgrounds. Thick black lines and neon colors make for a zany tale, perfect for group read-alouds. Parr keeps the laughs coming fast and furious. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Monster lovers and mac-and-cheese connoisseurs are sure to eat this one up. (two recipes for mac and cheese) (Picture book. 4-7)



**BEFORE COLORS
Where Pigments and
Dyes Come From**

Pimentel, Annette Bay
Illus. by Madison Safer
Abrams (88 pp.)
\$24.99 | June 6, 2023
9781419757068



How the hues that bring art and fabrics to life are made and used.

“BEFORE COLORS, blue gum trees swelter in the sun. Someone strips off leaves and boils them. She is making...ORANGE.” Sticking largely to colors produced from natural sources—with nods to a few manufactured hues such as mauve and the recently discovered “Vantablack”—Pimentel deftly describes how each in turn is derived, usually from multiple plants native to diverse regions of the world, from minerals, animal products, or other materials, like ground-up mummies for “mummy brown.” She enriches each entry with specific examples of its uses, with notes on topics from mordants to Vincent van Gogh’s fondness for various shades of yellow and the work of modern Indonesian artist Iwan Tirta in reviving batik. She mixes in more general considerations of the science of vision, too, such as how direct light rays and reflected ones produce different “primary” colors and how colors are differently perceived and classified in different cultures. Along with precisely drawn botanical and mineralogical vignettes, Safer underscores the author’s global perspective with frequent full-page scenes of artists and dyers, mostly women and often with children in attendance, linked by dress or surroundings to a broad range of times and cultures.

Lyrical notes add wonder to a bright mix of creative arts and scientific fact. (activities, quotation sources, selected sources) (Nonfiction. 9-12)



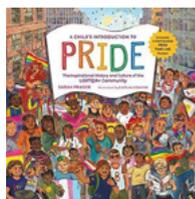
**DOOR BY DOOR
How Sarah McBride Became
America’s First Openly
Transgender Senator**

Pincus, Meeg
Illus. by Meridith McKean Gimbel
Crown (40 pp.)
\$18.99 | \$20.99 PLB | May 9, 2023
978-0-593-48465-4
9780593484661 PLB

Pincus chronicles Delaware state Sen. Sarah McBride’s childhood and coming out.

McBride always knew that she wanted to be a politician, but it took time to learn that she could do that and be herself—a transgender woman. Following her through her childhood and college years, when she came out, the book emphasizes her commitment to helping others. It narratively connects her to her political role models, Barack Obama and Joe Biden. Informative and absorbing, this is an enjoyable and uplifting read, though it lacks a strong unifying structure. Most of the narrative is devoted to McBride’s coming out; her 2020 election win is covered quickly at the end and does not feel like a strong payoff. Doors are a theme throughout: Telling others that she is transgender initially feels like something best left behind a closed door, and later, McBride works to open “the doors of opportunity” for others. It’s a meaningful metaphor, though one that might go over younger readers’ heads. However, Pincus tells McBride’s story effectively and explains trans identity in an understandable and empathetic way, enhanced by pleasant, straightforward illustrations. She describes McBride’s childhood without ever using the wrong pronouns or her birth name. McBride is White; other characters are racially diverse. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A heartfelt biography that will encourage readers to live their truths. (author’s note, note from McBride, guide to being a trans ally, glossary, bibliography) (Picture-book biography. 5-8)



**A CHILD’S INTRODUCTION
TO PRIDE
The Inspirational History
and Culture of the LGBTQIA+
Community**

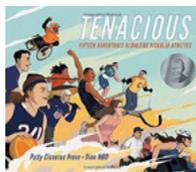
Prager, Sarah
Illus. by Caitlin O’Dwyer
Black Dog & Leventhal (96 pp.)
\$21.99 | May 2, 2023
9780762481910
Series: A Child’s Introduction to...

Prager offers young readers a deep dive into LGBTQIA+ history.

The author starts by explaining gender and sexual identities, defining terms such as *lesbian*, *gay*, and *asexual*, before exploring LGBTQIA+ history from the ancient world to the

present. Prager includes racially and culturally diverse figures from around the world, among them poet Sappho, painter Frida Kahlo, and civil rights leader Bayard Rustin, though the book is weighted a bit more toward the United States. She also addresses the impact of colonialism on LGBTQIA+ identities in a way that young people will easily understand. Prager asks readers to consider whose stories get told (we're far more likely to know stories of LGBTQIA+ royalty than of servants and peasants, for example) and how interpretations of history affect our understanding of the past. For the most part, the author effectively walks the line between presenting information accessibly and oversimplifying, though several times she uses pronouns for historical figures that aren't entirely supported by historical records. Though the assumptions are reasonable efforts to respect those individuals' identities, these figures may not have identified in ways that modern readers would easily recognize. Ultimately, however, the author is thoughtful in her analysis of historical evidence, and readers will love combing through and learning about LGBTQIA+ people throughout history. O'Dwyer's graceful illustrations enhance the text.

A strong survey of queer culture and history. (places of interest, resources, glossary, further reading) (*Nonfiction. 8-13*)



**TENACIOUS
Fifteen Adventures Alongside
Disabled Athletes**

Prevo, Patty Cisneros
Illus. by Dion MBD
Lee & Low Books (40 pp.)
\$20.95 | June 27, 2023
9781643790985

Profiles of 15 disabled athletes.

A racially diverse “crew” of softball and basketball players, handcyclists, and more navigates disabilities such as limb difference, spina bifida, and visual impairment. Adult subjects include Samoan adaptive surfing champion Meira Va’a Nelson, partially paralyzed at age 14; children include Annabelle Geib, a White-presenting middle schooler who has spastic diplegia cerebral palsy and dances ballet, tap, and hip-hop using a walker and leg braces. MBD’s expressive, energetic portraits of athletes in motion, overlaid by brief, italicized rhyming text, nearly fill each single-page profile. Text curving across the page urges, “Pick up speed before the pit. / Then take your leap! And never quit” as John Register, a Black Paralympic long jumper leaps across the page, his prosthetic outstretched. Each spread provides more biographical details and includes quotes from the subjects, who share their daily joys and challenges. The intended audience is unclear. The rhyming text appears to address younger readers, while the wordier sections, with their complex, informative sentences, clearly target older readers. Older readers may find the singsong rhymes stilted, and younger readers may not understand such jargon-tinged lines as “Drop in, pop it, grind the rail. Take a risk! Let skills prevail.” However, older readers who can reconcile the uneven tone will enjoy meeting these talented athletes. In an author’s note, Prevo, herself a disabled

athlete, explains concepts such as ableism and includes notes on inclusive language. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

An eclectic, encouraging lineup. (resources, glossary, timeline, bibliography) (*Collective biography. 7-10*)



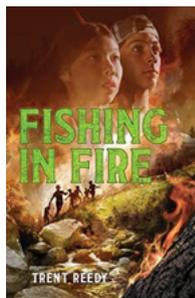
**HOW TO BABYSIT YOUR
GROWN UP
Activities To Do Together**

Reagan, Jean & JaNay Brown-Wood
Illus. by Lee Wildish
Knopf (96 pp.)
\$18.99 | \$21.99 PLB | June 20, 2023
9780593479230
9780593568903 PLB
Series: How To...

Reagan and Wildish, with co-author Brown-Wood, continue their How To... series, this time with a longer tome focusing on activities kids and grown-ups can do together.

Seven chapters focus on fun...“in the fresh air,” “with paper,” “with science,” “you can eat,” “with crafts,” “with imagin-yay-tion,” and “with family.” Each has five to eight entertaining though not especially original activities that include easily procured supplies; simply worded, often tongue-in-cheek directions (“How To Go Stargazing”: “1. Wait for nighttime—this won’t work if it isn’t dark”); occasional other ideas to try; and Wildish’s digital cartoon illustrations playing up all the intergenerational fun. While some ideas definitely involve kids and grown-ups working and spending time together (a park picnic), others are adult-adjacent (making a kite) or don’t involve adults at all (making a mosaic). Notably, a few activities will reach across distances: sending letters or playing games over a video call. The book jumps around the seasons wildly, with a snowman-building activity following camping, and includes both indoor and outdoor fun. The focus is definitely on families, as several steps prompt children to say or write “I love you.” And not only does Wildish not picture any cellphones, but in the directions for making a family memory, children collect all electronic devices until the end of the day. Characters are racially diverse.

While the activities aren’t particularly unique, the humor and focus on family fun are. (activity checklist) (*Activity book. 5-10*)



FISHING IN FIRE

Reedy, Trent
Norton Young Readers (208 pp.)
\$18.95 | Feb. 7, 2023
9781324011415
Series: McCall Mountain

A group of middle schoolers’ fishing trip goes awry when a forest fire threatens their lives.

Sixth grade in McCall, Idaho, was a social war between popular girls Swann

“The courageous heroine and titular mantra will resonate with those who recognize the dynamic.”

I AM MINE ALONE

Siddiq and McKenzie Crenner, with everyone choosing sides—and Annette Willard caught in the middle. With the summer before seventh grade almost over, Annette decides to start the year fresh by going fishing with her best friend, Yumi; her new pals, Swann and Kelton; and her crush Hunter. After the group makes a bet with McKenzie and her friends about who can catch the most fish, Annette and company continue on to a river fishing spot. Feeling like the fifth wheel, Yumi heads back to town only to come across McKenzie and crew—and discover a forest fire heading toward her friends. Trapped, the two friend groups must work together, using their skills to navigate the woods and outrun the fire. Reedy crafts an authentic, absorbing nature survival story. Brief interludes between chapters detailing the spread of the fire and other characters’ experiences with this natural disaster add more context about the severity of wildfires. The book’s first half is slower, focusing on relationships and fishing, but the second half moves as quickly as the intense fire. Despite being the series’ third book, it can be read as a stand-alone. McCall is described as a predominantly White town; Yumi is biracial (Japanese and assumed White).

An intense, thrilling wilderness survival story. (*Fiction. 9-12*)



I AM MINE ALONE

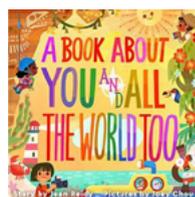
Reguera, Raquel Díaz
 Trans. by Cecilia Ross
 NubeOcho (40 pp.)
 \$17.99 | April 25, 2023
 9788419253590
 Series: Égalité

In this tale translated from Spanish, a mouse endures an abusive relationship—

until she doesn’t.

Mousy was happy to move in with Buck. Now, the stylish creature has mournful eyes. The male rodent is belligerent and controlling, proffering presents, like a nightgown, that cater to his preferences, not hers. Buck contextualizes his behavior as love, wanting her to say that she is his and his alone. The passage of time is periodically noted with “The days went by” followed by increasingly disturbing descriptions. Strong colors and patterns comprise the sophisticated scenes, and shadows reveal emotions. In a particularly poignant scene, Mousy’s shadow cries, and a real puddle forms at the base of the wallpaper. Her fear escalates as Buck grows bigger, his eyes more menacing; she thinks she hears him meow. In a climactic confrontation, he asks what she did to obtain a promotion at work, and as he tries to snatch her, she flees. Murmuring, “I am mine and mine alone,” Mousy ponders what real love is as she walks toward a new life and friends: Their collective outline forms the shadow of a dog. Adult characters and innuendos raise the question of intended audience. The pictures are both essential to the story’s impact and a potential barrier to an older readership, but many older children, teens, and even some adults who have encountered similar situations will find it an affirming balm. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

The courageous heroine and titular mantra will resonate with those who recognize the dynamic. (*Picture book. 10-14*)



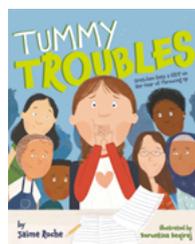
A BOOK ABOUT YOU AND ALL THE WORLD TOO

Reidy, Jean
 Illus. by Joey Chou
 HarperCollins (40 pp.)
 \$19.99 | June 13, 2023
 9780063041523

What adventures are in store?

In *What Would You Do in a Book About You?* (2021) and *Me and You in a Book Made for Two* (2022), Reidy invited readers to imagine the stories someone might tell about them. Now, reminding readers that “We’re in this together,” she asks kids to mull the exploits they—and the whole world—might get up to. The book starts off in a library. After describing the joy of making friends, it transitions into a series of rhetorical questions about the types of adventures a child might imagine, from riding in a car with clownfish to eating pie with giraffes. The tale changes once again into a message about the importance of finding unity among diverse friends, followed by a reminder of the need to protect our planet. Finally, the text comes almost full circle when a character enters a library, or perhaps a classroom, greeted by children. The book lacks a clear narrative arc or central theme, veering among stanzas about making friends with people of other faiths, going on imaginary adventures, and saving the planet. As a result, the text feels unnecessarily long, and the rhythm grows monotonous and clunky. While the illustrations, depicting a diverse group of children, are charming, they don’t always support the accompanying text, which amplifies the general feeling of confusion. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

A bewildering picture book that tackles too many topics. (*Picture book. 2-5*)



**TUMMY TROUBLES
 Gretchen Gets a GRIP on Her Fear of Throwing Up**

Roche, Jaime
 Illus. by Doruntina Begiraj
 Magination/American Psychological Association (32 pp.)
 \$19.99 | June 6, 2023
 9781433840784

A small fear causes some big emotions.

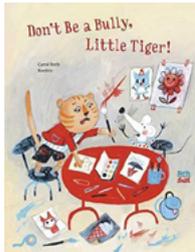
Gretchen looks forward to Fridays—pizza day at school! While she’s munching on her slice, her stomach starts to make angry noises, and she throws up. Her mom thinks it’s just a stomach bug, and indeed, Gretchen wakes up the next morning feeling better. When next Friday arrives, however, Gretchen is too nervous to enter the cafeteria. Her teacher takes her to see the school counselor, Dr. Hernandez, who explains that Gretchen’s body is experiencing a “fight-or-flight response.” This can make a person feel anxious and sick, even if nothing is physically wrong. She then tells Gretchen to “get a GRIP”—“Ground, Refocus, Inflate, and Pause”—in a targeted breathing exercise.

“Hauntingly hopeful.”

WILD POPPIES

Success! Gretchen is able to eat pizza once more. An extensive readers note from a licensed psychologist provides more information on emetophobia (the fear of vomiting and seeing others vomit) and tips for assisting children experiencing anxiety. It also acknowledges that though Gretchen quickly conquers her fear, in reality, this is a process that requires consistent support. This well-paced and informative narrative may seem niche to some, but it's useful for young readers experiencing many forms of anxiety. Straightforward illustrations depict friendly characters with large round heads but no actual vomit. Gretchen and her family are light-skinned; Dr. Hernandez is brown-skinned.

Supportive. (Picture book. 3-8)



DON'T BE A BULLY, LITTLE TIGER

Roth, Carol

Illus. by Rashin

NorthSouth (32 pp.)

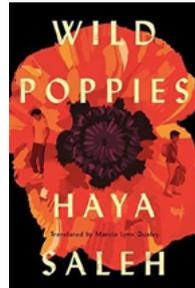
\$19.95 | June 27, 2023

9780735844957

When Little Tiger realizes that his egotism has left him friendless, he makes a 180-degree turnabout.

Having solved his anger-management issues in *Hold Your Temper, Tiger* (2017), our hero happily starts school. Alas, Little Tiger shows no consideration for his classmates. He grabs Mouse's paintbrush, pushes young Wolf aside, and kicks Duck out of the sandbox. Little Tiger is surprised to find that he's not happy: No one wants to play with him. His teacher sees him sitting forlornly at his desk and offers advice: "If you are nice to them, they will be nice to you." Although he begins "with small things," his reversal is quick and complete; he shares, asks politely to join in, admires his classmates' work, and in general is such a paragon of courtesy that when it's time for him to sing solo, everyone is stunned by his enormous, enthusiastic ROAR. Most characters have round faces with dots for eyes and lines for mouths. A deep saturated red appears throughout the bright, naïve illustrations, bringing to life the slide, sandbox, seesaws, and tables, in contrast to a deep turquoise for the sky and tan for backgrounds. Though Little Tiger turns things around much faster than most kids would, it's still a solid lesson in being a good classmate, enhanced by vibrant, childlike visuals. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

The transition is abrupt, but the message is clear—and valuable. (Picture book. 4-8)



WILD POPPIES

Saleh, Haya

Trans. by Marcia Lynx Qualey

Levine Querido (176 pp.)

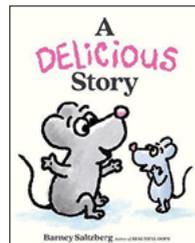
\$19.99 | June 6, 2023

9781646142019

A tale of two brothers set against the backdrop of the Syrian civil war.

After fleeing the violence that destroyed his family's home and led to the death of his father, 15-year-old Omar diffidently steps into his role as head of the family. Living with his mother and younger brother and sister in his aunt Sajida's home in Al-Nuaman ("the poppy flower"), Omar must obtain rations and other necessities, including medicine for their diabetic mother, while also trying to keep intractable Sufyan, 12, in line and his own heavy feelings at bay. Angry and unimpressed by his brother's feeble attempts, Sufyan secretly provides for his family only to be coerced and abducted by the Falcons of Truth, a group of Muslim extremists seeking to indoctrinate and use child soldiers. Distraught over Sufyan's disappearance, Omar attempts to find him, but soon further violence comes to the village and threatens his friends' and family's survival. Throughout this novel, which alternates between Omar's and Sufyan's perspectives, the brothers make thoughtful and heartbreaking observations about the cruelties of war, the loss of childhood innocence, and the hypocrisy of the Falcons, whose theology and practices sharply contrast with their own understandings of God and Islam. Saleh's prose, translated from Arabic by Qualey, is accessible and straightforward. Though the novel is short, it carries deep emotional impact, and while the ending is somewhat abrupt, it's imbued with themes of reconciliation and healing.

Hauntingly hopeful. (Fiction. 10-14)



A DELICIOUS STORY

Saltzberg, Barney

Hippo Park/Astra Books for Young

Readers (80 pp.)

\$17.99 | June 6, 2023

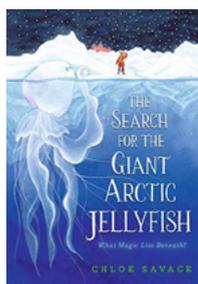
9781662640162

Sometimes a metafictional story just needs a little spice.

A small, blue-tinted mouse enters from the right side of the page. On the left, against the blank background, sits a big gray mouse, who asks, "What are you doing here?!" "I'm looking for a story," responds the small mouse. The big mouse claims not to have seen one. But aren't they in a book? The confession comes several pages later: "I was hungry." The big mouse admits to having eaten the story that was supposed to be in the book. The small mouse is not happy. The larger rodent offers to replace the story but has trouble producing a new one under scrutiny and at one point amusingly disappears into the gutter as the smaller rodent waits with some

impatience. Finally, the story that emerges is the one at hand: There was a story, but a big mouse ate it. The end? Fortunately, there's more. The small mouse wants a surprise ending, and happily, there's one in store. Saltzberg's mice are big-eyed, plump, and friendly looking, and his lively use of the plain page as stage, wall, and background is intriguing and entertaining. Children will giggle; many will be inspired to craft their own tales. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Rib-tickling for many beginning readers and writers. *(Picture book. 3-7)*



THE SEARCH FOR THE GIANT ARCTIC JELLYFISH

Savage, Chloe
 Candlewick (32 pp.)
 \$18.99 | June 6, 2023
 978-1-5362-2851-9



Will Dr. Morley ever see the elusive Arctic jellyfish she has pursued for months?

In this imagined exploration, Dr. Morley, a determined scientist, leads her crew through icy Arctic waters. They see narwhals, beluga whales, and orca, but where is the giant jellyfish? Savage's ink and watercolor illustrations reveal the secret: The jellyfish has been following them all along. These playful images are the heart of this engaging story. For the most part, the ocean surface runs across the middle of the page so readers can see underwater as well as above. There are cutaway views of the ship showing a diverse crew of sailors and scientists (in matching white-and-red sweaters, heavy red outer clothing, or wetsuits; light-skinned Dr. Morley usually wears green) at work. The details repay careful attention. Savage's precise artwork depicts the crew's preparations, the clothing and equipment, and all the parts of the ship from the bridge and pilot to the compartments below, including an engine room, galley, bunks, and bathrooms. The people are always tiny, dwarfed by the animals. The crew encounters storms, the northern lights, giant shelves of ice, and, once, a polar bear. Most of these images are double-page spreads, varied occasionally by pages of panels that moderate the pace of the storytelling. This voyage may be fictional, but the frustrations—and joys—of scientific exploration are real indeed. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Whimsical and wonderful. *(Picture book. 4-8)*



PICTURE DAY

Sax, Sarah
 Knopf (288 pp.)
 \$20.99 | \$13.99 paper | \$23.99 PLB
 June 27, 2023
 9780593306888
 9780593306871 paper
 9780593306895 PLB
 Series: Brinkley Yearbooks, 1



A seventh grader's attempts to live her truth backfire when she fails to listen

to her friends.

Olivia Vivian Sullivan, now going by Viv to differentiate herself from all the other Olivias in her grade, is horrified when her mother sends her to school on picture day wearing a hand-knit floral cardigan with her hair in the same old boring braid. A follower of cutting-edge internet influencer Quinn Sparks, who's Black and androgynous, Viv, unlike best friends Milo (a brown-skinned boy) and Al (a redheaded White girl), longs to attract attention. Racially ambiguous Viv, who has light brown skin and purple hair, initiates this plan for self-expression by hacking off her braid in the school bathroom. When that doesn't garner the response she hoped for she escalates matters, creating big scenes. She helps another girl arrange an elaborate, public Halloween-dance invitation for her cheerleader crush with great success. But when she strong-arms Milo and Al into another all-school spectacle, it backfires, humiliating her friends. An impressively strong debut, this work authentically touches on family relationships, individuality, the pros and cons of online fame, and the value of genuine apologies. Supporting characters are multidimensional, and Viv, Milo, and Al are skillfully given full family backgrounds in just a few scenes. The drawings vary from several panels to full pages, with and without borders, conveying drama and emotion.

Bold, brash, and honest. *(Graphic fiction. 8-12)*



GREAT WHITE SHARK

Saxby, Claire
 Illus. by Cindy Lane
 Candlewick (32 pp.)
 \$18.99 | June 6, 2023
 978-1-5362-2503-7



Introducing the ocean's most feared predator.

Stunning illustrations grace this account of a pregnant great white shark's journey northward to warmer waters, where she will give birth in an unknown location. She finds food along the way—a young seal pup and, later, a sea turtle. The two-level narrative features a graceful read-aloud text and additional information in a smaller font. Writing in easily understood prose, Saxby discusses the great white's appearance, ability to adjust body temperature, speed and power, hunting prowess, parental care (none—mother sharks don't stick around after birth), indiscriminating appetite (great white taste buds distinguish

only between food and not food), and lack of interest in humans. In her picture-book debut, Lane uses seawater and “found natural pigments” among other materials (watercolor, pastel, pencil, and digital drawing and collage), a nice touch. Color and light are used to great effect to convey the darkness of ocean depths and the changing hues of the water. Cutaway views add interest. The kills are dramatic but sensitively portrayed; the shark’s explosion out of the water to grab the turtle is a wonderful surprise. There are plenty of titles about this perennial favorite sea creature, but this could become a favorite. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A splashing success. (more information on great whites, index) (Informational picture book. 4-8)



REMIND ME

Shute, Linda
Neal Porter/Holiday House
(32 pp.)
\$18.99 | June 13, 2023
9780823450480



A young elephant copes with his grandmother’s progressive memory loss.

Eldon loves asking his grandmother Big Ella to remind him of stories from his past. When Big Ella starts asking Eldon for reminders, at first he thinks it’s funny (she asks where her hat is while already wearing it). Eldon doesn’t understand what’s going on; he reacts by asking her for even more stories. For a time, the mutual reminders work well in maintaining the normalcy in their relationship. But that changes when Big Ella can’t remember their way home or recognize her house. Worse, finally Big Ella has to ask Eldon to remind her of his name and then asks him who she is. He replies: “You are my very own Big Ella! I’ve loved you and you’ve loved me forever! I will always remember that and always remind you!” The spare, efficient text allows the artwork to do the heavy emotional lifting. The choice to make the protagonists anthropomorphized elephants is an inspired one, given the animals’ reputed memories, and makes Big Ella’s loss even more poignant. Eldon and Big Ella are highly expressive—their trunks, ears, and facial folds are exquisitely and precisely drawn to show mood—and softened by the beautiful watercolor shading. The sad subject matter is balanced by the loving details and the humor in Eldon’s remembered moments. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Simple without being oversimplified and reassuring, countering fears with love. (Picture book. 4-8)



COME BACK TO ME A Bedtime Story for Sleepy Eyes

Sin, r.h.
Illus. by Janie Secker
Andrews McMeel Publishing (32 pp.)
\$17.99 | May 30, 2023
9781524874612

Sin and Secker team up for another bedtime soother.

This title differs from *Dream, My Child* (2022) in that it features no humans, just an adorable cast of anthropomorphized forest animals, and instead of promising to be there when the child awakes, the parent asks the child to return to them after their night of dreaming, perhaps an acknowledgment that the child is growing older and more independent. This gentle lullaby begins around sunset as a young fox and their constant hedgehog companion begin to wind down from their day, gathering with forest neighbors for dinner and a campfire under the moon. The parent fox tucks the duo in, and the text turns to some of the things they might see in dreamland: some fishes, a whale, storytelling rabbits, bees, etc. But no matter where the two go or what they do, the parent fox wants them to always return in the morning. The odd sights the two see in dreamland may spark a conversation about a child’s own dreams, but while the illustrations (the true stars here) are full of delightful details, the lack of rhyme or rhythm, as well as the fact that there is not an end mark or a capital letter to be found in the text, may relegate this to the bookshelf full of similar titles that fail to stand out against the classics. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

This sleepy tale doesn’t live up to its imaginative illustrations. (Picture book. 3-6)



STARBOARD

Skinner, Nicola
Harper/HarperCollins
(416 pp.)
\$16.99 | June 6, 2023
978-0-06-307173-5



An 11-year-old English reality TV star discovers what really matters.

Kirsten Bramble, *the Kirsten Bramble of At Home With the Brambles*, a successful show in which Kirsten tries to help her single, adoptive dad find a girlfriend (even though he doesn’t want one), thinks of her life in terms of lines to be learned, scripts to be followed, and a brand to be developed. On a class school trip to visit the dry-docked SS *Great Britain* in her hometown of Bristol, Kirsten feels a strange pull toward the beautiful ship. During the tour, she becomes separated from the other children, later to be found by her ex-best friend, Olive Chudley. (Clever but not traditionally telegenic Olive was replaced on the TV show with a child actor in the role of best friend; she and Kirsten have been estranged since.) As the

“A wide-ranging survey of insect homes delivered with humor and heart.”

BURT THE BEETLE LIVES HERE!

two girls begin to leave, strange things happen: The ship starts moving, breaking out of dry dock and setting off with Kirsten, Olive, and the mannequins who inhabit the exhibits onboard. This magical mystery tour of an adventure quest is written with a profound understanding of the human condition and all the ways people (and magical ships and mannequins) try to avoid the pull of their deepest needs. As the story unfolds, Kirsten, at turns fearful and belligerent, gradually begins to understand the true nature of the journey. Main characters read White.

An extraordinarily profound and far-reaching coming-of-age story. (author's note) (*Fantasy*. 8-12)



PAPA'S HOME

Soman, David
 Little, Brown (32 pp.)
 \$18.99 | May 2, 2023
 9780316427838

What will happen while Papa is away?

A father bear and his young cub are going to be separated for a short time—Papa is going away, and Aunt Jessie is coming to stay. The cub has many questions. What if Aunt Jessie insists that the cub wear their detested yellow boots? What if she makes bologna pancakes? Does she know how to give baths? Will she read bedtime books? And will she tuck the cub in? Papa is happy to discuss all these things and, throughout the story, points out how the cub is growing up. This charming tale provides comforting answers to the cub's many questions, all the while showcasing the affectionate relationship between an apparently single father and his child (the cub is not gendered, and no other parent is mentioned). Appealing illustrations make lovely use of crosshatching and glow with warmth. The visuals depict the many things that Papa and child do together over the course of the day, from eating breakfast to visiting the park to getting ready for bed. Though Papa's departure is never depicted, by book's end, the little one is prepared for it. Young children will see themselves and their caretakers in this story and will realize that while being apart may bring on anxiety, worries can be addressed and fun can still be had. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

A cozy, reassuring tale certain to soothe little ones grappling with separation anxiety. (*Picture book*. 2-6)



BURT THE BEETLE LIVES HERE!

Spires, Ashley
 Kids Can (64 pp.)
 \$14.99 | June 6, 2023
 9781525310119
 Series: Burt the Beetle

Burt checks out all the places *other* insects can live, but none seems quite right for a June bug.

Can a ten-lined June beetle with sticky arms and a fondness for hugs find a comfy home? Alas, as our hero discovers in this

follow-up to *Burt the Beetle Doesn't Bite!* (2021), not in the tunnels of yellow meadow ants or in the nests of cathedral termites, not in human houses like stink bugs or in a spittlebug's shelter (“I made this with my bum! Want a tour?”), nor with bees or wasps or tent caterpillars. Spires sandwiches this informative look at where and in what insects live between cartoonish galleries of real estate-style listings trumpeting a beehive’s “quality craftsmanship,” the “charming layout” of a wasp nest, the “open floor plan” of a flea’s furry backside domicile, and so on, then closes with pages of additional facts about select insect builders. She doesn’t leave her six-legged house hunter unprotected from predators and the elements either, as a simple leaf turns out to be not only excellent shelter for one...but big enough to fit an entire coterie of chance met new friends of diverse species: “GROUP HUG!” “Bring it in, everybody!” Whether a massive network of tunnels or a single leaf, that’s one good way to make a house a home.

A wide-ranging survey of insect homes delivered with humor and heart. (*Graphic nonfiction*. 6-9)



THE SPOOKY STORY

Stadelmann, Amy Marie
 Aladdin (112 pp.)
 \$19.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
 9781534451643
 Series: Paige Proves It, 2

A dedicated fact collector and mystery solver eagerly shares her secrets with readers.

In this second in the series, Paige gladly opens her detective notebook and explains her process as she and her friends Karla and Penn solve the mysteries of a haunted music school and a missing baby owl. First, Paige teaches readers to distinguish between fiction and fact (or nonfiction). Paige prefers nonfiction, which, she notes, is rooted in truth and can be confirmed by evidence gathered from reliable sources and through observation. Together, Paige and her pals investigate. Despite the ghostly subject matter, this tale will also induce giggles: Boogers reportedly have been oozing from the bathroom sink, while the halls ring with funny parodies (“The eyes on the bat go round and round...”). The book also serves as a solid introduction to deductive reasoning and the differences between fact and fiction. Even after the trio solve the mysteries, Penn isn’t entirely convinced, and Paige realizes that “Even when you have fully investigated, made clear observations, and proven the facts, some people still come to their own conclusions”—a comment many adult readers will find insightful. Colorful cartoon illustrations are interspersed with excerpts from Paige’s notebook. Paige has a purple ponytail and tan skin, Karla has long, wavy blue hair and tan skin, and Penn has short, dark blue hair and brown skin.

Thoughtful investigation and deduction wrapped in a slightly spooky mystery with a bit of humor. (*Graphic fiction*. 7-11)

“Recycling at its best.”

GREAT CARRIER REEF



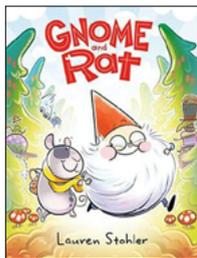
WE DUG UP THE WORLD

Stewart, Alexandra
Illus. by Kitty Harris
Laurence King (48 pp.)
\$18.99 | June 27, 2023
9781510230415

A dig into some of the greatest hits of not just archaeology, but paleontology and geology, too.

Written and designed in accordance with the principle that anything worth doing is worth overdoing, this highlight reel survey offers an outstanding gallery of finds with clear explanations of their significance—framed, unfortunately, in bursts of overwrought, pun-tastic prose that has been set in arbitrary mixes of font and typeface and scattered in sometimes hard-to-follow bits angled or curved to fit around busy montages of small workers, bystanders, sites, and artifacts. The rewards of staying the course are many, though: Along with the familiar likes of the Rosetta Stone (“a discovery that would **ROCK the world**”) and the location of the literally “**Earth-shattering**” asteroid that put paid to all the nonflying dinosaurs, readers are treated to plenty of less high-profile finds, from fossilized poop in Spain that proved Neanderthals to be omnivores and a spear point found in a prehistoric bison that pushed human presence in North America back at least 7,000 years (“**incredi-BULL**”) to the clean underwear in King Tut’s tomb. Stewart opens with an acknowledgment that many artifacts are stolen goods at the outset and notes that the proto-human dubbed Lucy by her American finders is named Dinkesh in her native Ethiopia. Harris adds a dark-skinned young tour guide to illustrations; other characters are racially diverse. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Pun-ishing prose aside, a treasure chest of insights into our past, and our planet’s, too. (glossary) (*Informational picture book. 7-10*)



GNOME AND RAT

Stobler, Lauren
Knopf (80 pp.)
\$10.99 | \$13.99 PLB | June 13, 2023
9780593487822
9780593487839 PLB

A series of hat-centric episodes.

Light-skinned, rotund Gnome and gray, spotted Rat live in a hollowed-out tree stump in the Enormous Forest. The central theme across all five of the stories within this graphic novel is Gnome’s hat and how the titular pair react to it. In the first tale, Gnome celebrates Hat Day (observed in Gnomevember, of course) with a song and a surprise party thrown by Rat (who knows the importance of this momentous occasion). Other stories see Gnome attempting to fit inside the hat, going without the hat, and losing and attempting to replace it. Through it all, Rat is a steadfast and perceptive friend who enjoys spending time with Gnome. They interact with other woodland creatures, such as rabbits, a

crow, and a possum. The Enormous Forest, with its trees, mountains, and streams, makes for a colorful, bright setting, and there are plenty of fun gags. The cartoonish artwork is incredibly expressive, whether bringing to life a moment of utter enthusiasm or a wordless nine-panel page depicting Gnome’s coping with a hatless existence. Readers might recognize themselves in Gnome’s single-minded exuberance or Rat’s even-tempered patience. No matter what these two get up to, they always have a good time together.

Friendship at its most whimsical. (a page of creative beard designs for Gnome) (*Graphic fiction. 6-9*)



GREAT CARRIER REEF

Stremmer, Jessica
Illus. by Gordy Wright
Holiday House (40 pp.)
\$18.99 | July 4, 2023
9780823452682

Series: Books for a Better Earth

A tribute to a decommissioned warship turned to a better purpose.

The aircraft carrier USS *Oriskany*, or “The Mighty O,” saw action in the Korean and Vietnamese wars but rather than being scrapped at the end of its career, was scuttled off the Florida coast to serve as an artificial reef. It “remains the largest ship ever reefed,” and a sense of its length and bulk comes through clearly in Wright’s atmospherically lit, realistically detailed illustrations—some of which are full wordless spreads. Along with explaining in her spare account and one of several afterwords the importance of natural reefs as habitats and how they are endangered, Stremmer highlights the painstaking efforts required to clear out the hulk, rid it of toxic substances, tow it to its final location, and control its sinking so that it comes to rest in a stable position. Amazingly, divers sent to inspect it only hours later found sea life already checking it out. Though Aimée M. Bissonette’s *Shipwreck Reefs* (2021), illustrated by Adèle Leyris, provides glimpses of a variety of manufactured reefs and closer looks at what lives on them, here the author’s quicker closing tally of marine residents gives the tale a properly triumphant finish. The groups of human workers appearing in a few scenes are racially diverse. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Recycling at its best. (select sources, tips for saving the reefs, index) (*Informational picture book. 6-8*)



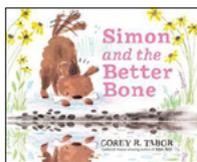
HOW TO SPACEWALK Step-by-Step With Shuttle Astronauts

Sullivan, Kathryn D. & Michael J. Rosen
Illus. by Michael J. Rosen
MIT Kids Press/Candlewick (48 pp.)
\$19.99 | June 6, 2023
978-1-5362-2621-8

Sullivan, who, in 1984, became the first woman to walk in space, shares her journey.

Born in 1951, Sullivan was interested in science from an early age. In an era when girls were not encouraged to be scientists, she persevered and became a geologist, then an oceanographer. When, in 1977, NASA at last allowed women to apply for the astronaut program, Sullivan was picked (she was also offered the job of going down in a submersible to the deepest part of the ocean and had to choose between the two options). Addressing readers as if they're also taking part in her astronaut training and space shuttle travel, she discusses the ins and outs of the spacesuit she wore. To simulate a lack of gravity, she trained in the world's largest pool, which contained a life-size replica of the space shuttle. Sullivan also explains what it felt like to be strapped in and waiting for liftoff and what it was like to walk in space. The book relies on a combination of photos, text, sidebars, and muted, graceful artwork from co-author and illustrator Rosen. The lively visuals are echoed by the effervescent text. While plenty of intriguing facts are presented, this is also an empowering and uplifting account of a woman achieving her dreams—and encouraging readers to live the “life you invent.” *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

An irrepressibly joyous tale of a woman who reached for—and attained—the stars. (author's note from Rosen) (Informational picture book. 7-10)



SIMON AND THE BETTER BONE

Tabor, Corey R.
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
\$19.99 | May 9, 2023
9780063275553



A tale of canine fun and friendship inspired by Aesop's “The Dog and His Reflection.”

Simon, an endearing and perky brown pup with a tasty bone, spots what he considers to be a scraggly dog with a seemingly larger snack in the surface of the pond, not realizing it's his own reflection. (The book opens vertically, allowing viewers to see both our furry hero and his reflection.) How can Simon get the bone for himself? A request for a trade goes nowhere, so he tries to challenge the other dog to a staring contest. When nothing works, he decides to pounce—which results in the loss of the bone! Young listeners will explode into giggles as they recognize Simon's toddlerlike mistakes, all the while appreciating his good (and not-so-good) intentions. There just happens to be an additional bone nearby, and Simon eagerly acquires it—but maybe making a friend is more important than having a bone.... Tabor's smudgy illustrations depict Simon with warmth and humor in a gentle park setting that cleverly leaves room for young readers and listeners to spot Simon's errors and show off their own knowledge; the author/illustrator also deftly folds in a joke-filled lesson about sharing and friendship. Kids will fall in love with this enticing introduction to Aesop—and with Simon. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A charming, clever, and feel-good version of a classic fable. (author's note) (Picture book. 3-6)



THE POODLE OF DOOM

Tan, Susan
Illus. by Wendy Tan Shiau Wei
Branches/Scholastic (96 pp.)
\$5.99 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-338-75636-4
Series: Pets Rule!, 2

A would-be overlord Chihuahua meets his poodle nemesis.

One week into his new home life with the Chins, Ember wakes up next to Lucy Chin, his “favorite human.” But the peace is interrupted as everyone prepares for the arrival of Lucy's Poh Poh and her poodle, Fluffy. The other Chin household pets—BeBe the beetle, Neo the canary, and Smelly Steve the hamster—warn that Fluffy is “PURE EVIL.” With nefarious schemes like turning on the dreaded dryer and catchphrases like “YOUR DOOM IS HERE!” villainous Fluffy initially inspires Ember, a “fan of evil.” But when Ember and friends catch a glimpse of Fluffy's “DOOMSDAY DEVICE,” things get serious (though the humans just think that the pets are playing). Can they stop Fluffy before it's too late? Much like its predecessor, *My Kingdom of Darkness* (2022), this early chapter book delivers hijinks and hilarity from a pup's first-person point of view. Wei's black-and-white cartoon illustrations up the ante with expressive, entertaining visuals. A refreshing reversal of traditional gender roles sees elder brother Kevin wanting to be a baker and Lucy, a scientist. The Chin family is cued Chinese. Lucy's classmate Arjun is brown-skinned and appears to have two dads (one brown-skinned, one White-presenting). The cliffhanger ending promises more dastardly deeds to come.

Wacky capers and plenty of humor. (questions & activities) (Humor. 6-8)



KITTENS ARE MONSTERS!

Tan, Susan
Illus. by Wendy Tan Shiau Wei
Branches/Scholastic (96 pp.)
\$24.99 | \$5.99 paper | April 4, 2023
9781338756401
9781338756395 paper
Series: Pets Rule!, 3

A Chihuahua babysits kittens in exchange for a promised army of minions.

Directly following the events of *Poodle of Doom* (2022), this third series entry sees future Dark Lord Ember on “a night of DESTINY.” He strikes a deal with a mysterious orange cat, agreeing to not only watch her kittens, but train them in the ways of evil. Ember's lust for power comes at a bad time, though—his human Lucy Chin's eighth birthday is three days away, and he needs to find her the perfect present. Before he can scheme up a solution with the other Chin family pets, a box of kittens appears in the yard. Worse, Ogre—a neighborhood cat with a sourpuss attitude—seems intent on

sabotaging everything. All signs point to cat-astrophe unless Ember and friends can save the day—and find Lucy the right gift. Tan Shiau Wei’s black-and-white illustrations complement the laugh-out-loud chaos with cinematic cartoon scenes. Lucy’s birthday-planning conversations lightly touch on fears of classmates yucking her yum (red bean and green tea ice cream). Tan deftly steers the plot—and other kids’ responses—into an affirming rather than othering experience. The Chin family is cued Chinese. Party attendees are diverse in skin tone and include Lucy’s brown-skinned friend Arjun and his two dads.

A furball of nonstop feline fun. (questions and activities)
(Humor. 6-8)



THERE'S A GOBLIN ON THE ARK!

Tarcov, Susan
Illus. by Mackinzie Rekers
Apples & Honey Press (32 pp.)
\$17.95 | May 23, 2023
9781681156026

In this whimsical imagining of Noah’s Ark, the animals puzzle over a mysterious noise.

What could be making that “woooooo” sound? It’s not the owls or the cows or the pigeons; those “hoooooo,” “moooooo,” and “coooooo,” respectively. When the animals discover an adorable little green goblin, they immediately team up to drive the creature away. But soon they realize that the goblin is calling out to find their mate—the goblin is one of a pair, just like everyone else on the boat. The read-aloud-friendly text lends itself to a younger audience, with rhyming sounds and pleasant repetition. There’s even a brief exploration of the senses as the animals combat the goblin using bright lights, loud noises, and stinky odors (courtesy of the skunks). Halfway through, the story shifts to a narrative about the importance of helping strangers, no matter how different, as the animals work to unite the two goblins. The colorful cartoon animals and their emotive faces contribute to an overall coziness that bridges both halves of the tale. The illustrations depict one representative from almost every species pair with long eyelashes—an unnecessary hint of sexism. Though we’re told early on that Noah brought the animals onto the ark, no humans are seen, and the story contains no overt biblical references. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A gentle, accessible take on Noah’s Ark laced with a message of acceptance. (author’s note) *(Religious picture book. 2-5)*



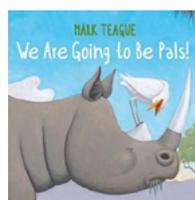
CARGO

Tariel, Adèle
Illus. by Jérôme Peyrat
Orca (32 pp.)
\$21.95 | Feb. 14, 2023
9781459833760

A sea gull keeps watch over the voyage of a cargo ship and the man who helms it.

This serene book begins with a child asleep in the dark of night, a sea gull flying out the window. “Tonight I am a bird. A seagull.” The bird glides over the water, finding a massive ship loaded with a colorful patchwork of cargo containers in the dark waters and a tiny solitary figure pulling a rolling suitcase toward the ship. It is this man, the captain, who holds the sea gull’s interest as the boat begins its journey. The poetic text and sweeping art capture the grandeur of the ocean and the immense size of the ship. Eventually the ship arrives at its destination, a beautiful city nestled in mountains, and “arms of steel reach out to move the containers.” The bustle of activity is not pictured, only the man leaning on a rail and looking out at the ocean. Varied perspectives, textures, and palettes keep readers engaged and highlight the solitude of traveling the ocean as well as the more complex workings of the ship and shore. But the spare use of color and weight when the man finally arrives home with a big hug for the child dims the emotional climax somewhat. Both man and child have paper white skin. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A dreamlike journey afar and back home. (Picture book. 4-8)



WE ARE GOING TO BE PALS!

Teague, Mark
Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster (40 pp.)
\$18.99 | June 6, 2023
9781665911863

Egret and Rhino need each other, but will they really be pals?

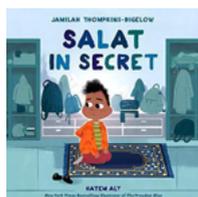
When an egret lands on a rhino, the egret is certain they will be friends. The rhino is noncommittal. Egret says they’ll have a symbiotic relationship (“It means... We are going to be pals!”). “Perhaps you are thinking, ‘I am not the friendly type,’” says the egret. “I understand. I will teach you.” The talkative egret starts suggesting things they can do together. Chase the jackals? Rhino doesn’t seem inclined. Eat grasshoppers? Rhino’s not interested. A ride on the rhino’s horn? The rhino really doesn’t like that, and the egret says that’s a teachable moment about recognizing boundaries. The rhino goes about their day as the egret keeps proposing activities. When the two each enjoy some alone time, the egret gets stuck in quicksand, and the rhino comes to their aid. With the egret safe, the friendship (such as it is) continues. The egret’s loquacious lesson in friendship includes some large words that may take some explaining, and their barrage of bad animal puns will be lost on the youngest listeners. Teague’s acrylic illustrations

“An empowering and important tale of bravery.”

SALAT IN SECRET

are as beautiful as ever, but the egret’s nonstop blather verges on bullying. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A bit of a miss for an accomplished author/illustrator. *(Picture book. 4-7)*



SALAT IN SECRET

Thompkins-Bigelow, Jamilah

Illus. by Hatem Aly

Random House Studio (40 pp.)

\$18.99 | \$21.99 PLB | June 6, 2023

9781984848093

9781984848109 PLB



A Black Muslim boy must summon the courage to ask for a place at school to pray.

It’s Muhammad’s seventh birthday, and Daddy has a special gift for him: a prayer rug that’s royal blue with gold stitching and that smells of incense. Muhammad is now old enough to independently offer the five Muslim daily prayers, or salat. He packs the rug before school the next day and plans to find a private place for salat. But asking his teacher for help feels harder than anticipated—especially after seeing mean passersby jeer at his father, who prays in the open while working as an ice cream truck driver. To claim a space, Muhammad will need to be brave, just like his joyful, hardworking Daddy. Once again, Thompkins-Bigelow (*Mommy’s Khimar*, 2018) has written a beautiful, positive, and welcome portrayal of Black Muslim families. Her melodic writing captures Muhammad’s feelings as he works to find his voice and advocate for his needs. Aly’s playful, energetic illustrations offer a nod to Islamic art traditions and work in tandem with the text to give readers a glimpse into Muhammad’s hopes, fears, and growth. An author’s note explains what salat is, the times and names of the prayers, how it is performed, and other relevant terms used within the text. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

An empowering and important tale of bravery. *(Picture book. 5-8)*



THIS IS NOT A UNICORN!

Timms, Barry

Illus. by Ged Adamson

Nosy Crow (32 pp.)

\$15.99 | June 3, 2023

9798887770017

Series: This is NOT a ..., 1

If it’s not a unicorn, what could it be?

In short, rhyming verse, a little gray bird addresses both readers and a young Black child. The bird introduces a special animal with a sparkling horn but warns that it shouldn’t be confused with a unicorn. What follows is page after page of wordplay well supported by colorful and fanciful illustrations. The creature in question isn’t a unicorn; it’s a “spoon-icorn” (we see its horn become a spoon that helps it dole out ice cream). It’s not a unicorn; it’s “a make-a-secret-wish-icorn” (here, the horn

becomes a wish-granting magic wand). It’s not a unicorn; it’s a “hover-in-the-air-icorn” (the horn becomes the whirring blade of a helicopter). Because this special animal is so clever, it needs a special name. Of course! It’s not a unicorn; it’s the “perfect-friend-for-you-icorn,” or a “you-icorn” for short. Over the course of this imaginative story, the child and the not-a-unicorn visit a castle, backpack through a jungle, and rocket to the moon. This book will be a hit with children who love unicorns or wordplay; many readers will enjoy coming up with their own examples. Pair this book with a stuffed unicorn with a sparkling horn for the perfect gift. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Quirky fun that will have kids dreaming about their own unicorn pals and engaging in wordplay. *(Picture book. 4-8)*



THE MYSTERY OF THE PAINTED FAN

Trinh, Linda

Illus. by Clayton Nguyen

Annick Press (128 pp.)

\$19.99 | \$7.99 paper | April 25, 2023

9781773217710

9781773217727 paper

Series: Nguyen Kids, 3

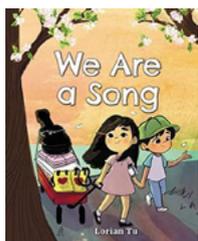
Eight-year-old Jacob copes with gender roles and expectations.

Youngest Nguyen sibling Jacob knows what he likes and is used to getting his way. So he doesn’t understand why people are suddenly questioning his choices—like when a friend’s father tells him Vietnamese boys don’t wear pink. When his sister tells him she’s never seen a boy wear nail polish, Jacob retreats to his room, where his Grandma Nôi’s fan hits him in the head. Grandma Nôi passed away two years ago, but his Vietnamese Canadian family believes that their ancestors stay with them even after death. Unlike his family, Jacob doesn’t really remember Grandma Nôi. But as he traces the Vietnamese zodiac animals adorning the fan, they turn a glittery gold color. Is Grandma Nôi offering advice? As he draws strength from the different characteristics of the zodiac animals and Grandma Nôi, Jacob gains the confidence to remain true to himself. In this latest series installment, Trinh explores the intersection of cultural identity and gender expression and identity. Readers will easily follow the straightforward first-person narrative as Jacob tries to make sense of it all. Though Jacob receives mixed reactions from kids and adults alike as he explores who he wants to be, his family is generally supportive, and their affirmation, especially from elders like Grandpa Nôi, is comforting. Dynamic black-and-white illustrations capture Jacob’s ups and downs.

A simple yet heartfelt tale of self-acceptance and identity. *(character biographies, author’s note) (Fiction. 6-9)*

“A sweet celebration of the different notes that create the song of family.”

WE ARE A SONG



WE ARE A SONG

Tu, Lorian

Harper/HarperCollins (32 pp.)

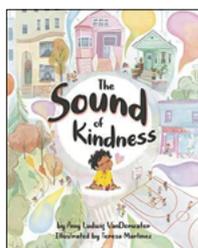
\$19.99 | May 2, 2023

9780062970541

What does it mean to be a family?

Arturo and his sister, Emilyn, who are of Chinese and Latine heritage, seek inspiration for Emilyn’s poem about their family as they set off to pick up supplies for a big party. From the delicious cakes at Tía Cari’s bakery to the colorful kites at Yeh Yeh’s toy shop to dominoes at Abuelo’s house, they discover something at each stop that sparks their imaginations. Their family members may be different from one another, but just like ingredients in a cake, colors in a rainbow, or notes in a song, they are part of something special together. The story engages the senses, whether it’s the sound of oil in Amah’s wok going “ping-ping-ping,” the scent of Tía’s pastries, or the sensation of a falling petal fluttering on Arturo’s face like Mama’s kisses. All these moments help evoke a relatable feeling of familial love. The title could have benefitted from a glossary or more context for readers unfamiliar with terms in Chinese or Spanish such as *dan tat* or *palmita*. Still, the message of the beauty in united differences shines through. Digitally rendered watercolor, gouache, ink, and colored pencil illustrations bring to life a cast of wide-eyed, big-headed characters whose love for one another is apparent. The author’s note reveals that the story was inspired by her own journey to embrace her multiracial background. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

A sweet celebration of the different notes that create the song of family. (Picture book. 4-8)



THE SOUND OF KINDNESS

VanDerwater, Amy Ludwig

Illus. by Teresa Martínez

Imagination/American Psychological Association (32 pp.)

\$18.99 | June 13, 2023

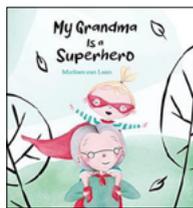
9781433841491

A parent and child go for a walk in their neighborhood, finding examples of kindness in the dialogue they hear.

The duo’s rhyming adventure is told entirely through upbeat dialogue balloons. “You can do it.” “That sounds fair.” “Oh! I’m sorry.” “We can share.” An adult cheers on a young cyclist; two children play cards; and two children work out playing with one toy. Other overheard kindnesses include offers to help, recognition of a good deed, declarations of friendship, examples of compassion and empathy, extensions of courtesy, reassurances, and affirmations—all easy for children to emulate. Martínez’s illustrations effectively highlight the parent and child and the people interacting in each spread by picturing them in full color. The rest of the various scenes are in muted shades. Parent and

child share the same brown skin and short black hair; other people are diverse. Backmatter lists other types of kindness walks; e.g., a quiet kindness walk is for noticing people’s actions, and on a literary kindness walk, you read a story while pausing to point out examples of the characters helping others. The author notes that “when we look for something in our world, we have a greater chance of finding it,” and that “our world and its loud news offers many angry sounds.” Kindness walks counteract the negative by seeing ways others “lift each other up.” (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Inspiration to find—and perhaps spread—acts of kindness in our world. (Picture book. 3-10)



MY GRANDMA IS A SUPERHERO

van Loon, Marloes

Clavis (32 pp.)

\$18.95 | June 13, 2023

9781605378398

As Granny’s memory slips away, will Suzy lose their special relationship?

Suzy and Granny—both light-skinned—have had marvelous times together, pretending to be astronauts, riding toy horses, and, most of all, playing superhero. But Granny is becoming increasingly forgetful; once she even calls Suzy “Lily.” When Granny explains what memory is, Suzy secretly tries to find it before taking a different approach: When Granny doesn’t know where her glasses are, Suzy—and readers—will help find them (a challenge, as they are thin wire frames located on a page with many other objects). When Granny isn’t sure of the way home, Suzy and readers can trace it through a maze from store to house. Putting away the groceries is another task that Suzy and readers must complete—by following long, winding lines connecting items such as carrots and toilet paper with their destinations. But Suzy’s guiding principle is clear: “Now it’s my turn to be just as sweet to Granny as she has always been to me.” Suzy will become Granny’s “sweet superhero helper.” This is a tender and original take on coping with memory loss; spotting a cute black cat on every spread adds to readers’ engagement. Many objects are simply outlined in black, with no color filled in. Varied-width black lines and touches of a darker red punctuate the pastels in the delicate but uncrowded illustrations. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Love motivates acceptance and assistance in this warm, direct, and interactive story. (Picture book. 4-8)



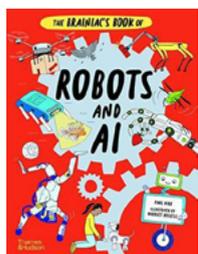
LET'S DRAW PEOPLE

Various
 Reycraft Books (32 pp.)
 \$18.95 | April 15, 2023
 9781478876137

Thirteen diverse artists deliver step-by-step instructions for drawing characters, objects, and features.

A short, upbeat preface encourages aspiring artists to find a style that works for them, spend plenty of time practicing, and embrace a “no rules” approach to creativity. Each double-page spread features numbered instructions paired with a full-color finished drawing, several “Tips and Tricks,” and a photograph of the artist. The kid-appealing subjects include a ninja, superhero, wizard, and astronaut, with the titular catch-all “people” stretched to include Wook Jin Jung’s robot and C.G. Esperanza’s robustly embellished sneaker. Kyle Beckett covers cartoonish facial expressions, while Ángeles Ruiz offers examples of boys’ and girls’ haircuts. Approaches to the steps and tips vary among the artists. Lian An-Lin’s approach to drawing a biker, which appends a thoughtful suggestion to each of six steps, is among the most child-friendly. Several artists provide ideas for creating the illusion of form by using shading and color variations. Colin Bootman’s pirate has an androgynous appearance; Tim Palin encourages artists to jazz up their images of a clown by playing around with clothing and makeup. The strength of this work is in the practicing artists’ varied styles and their collective, dual emphasis on technical tips and readers’ own imaginative choices. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

An accessible, appealing introduction for beginning artists. *(Informational picture book. 6-8)*



THE BRAINIAC'S BOOK OF ROBOTS AND AI

Virr, Paul
 Illus. by *Harriet Russell*
 Thames & Hudson (64 pp.)
 \$17.95 | May 23, 2023
 9780500652862
 Series: Brainiac's

A wide-angle look at the past, present, and promising future of cybernetics.

Starting out with a superficial checklist designed to distinguish robots from “non-bots” (“Does it move?” “Is it automatic?”) and a list of machines (readers must decide whether they are robots; answers are provided in the backmatter), Virr goes on to an equally quick gallery of automata from the ancient world to the 18th-century “Digesting Duck,” then rushes headlong past modern robot construction and design, programming, common current or potential uses for work and for play, and finally prospective employment in near-future industry, medicine, and space exploration. Aside from a single glancing mention that robotic cars could cause taxi and delivery drivers to “lose work,” he keeps the outlook of a robotic future

rosy—blithely minimizing the danger of artificial intelligences taking over in a “technological singularity” and citing author Isaac Asimov’s fictive three Laws of Robotics as if they were actually achievable. Still, in conjunction with a mix of stock photos and Russell’s cartoon figures and cutaway views, he does offer younger readers basic understandings of how mechanical motion is generated, algorithmic programming, and present and future possibilities while keeping the tone light with jolly interjections (“Come on Sci-Fido, time for cyber-walkies!”) and talking heads exchanging robot jokes throughout. Humans depicted are diverse.

A broad, breezy once-over. *(timeline, glossary, index) (Non-fiction. 8-10)*



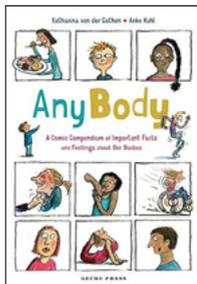
THE OJJA-WOJJA

Visaggio, Magdalene
 Illus. by *Jenn St-Onge*
 Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (192 pp.)
 \$22.99 | \$13.99 paper | March 7, 2023
 978-0-06-285239-7
 978-0-06-285242-7 paper

Outsider teens battle a reawakened, hungry ancient spirit.

Small towns like Bolingbroke don’t take kindly to misfits. Fortunately, that helps unique souls like Valentine and Lanie find each other. Friends since sixth grade, Val, who is White and autistic, and Lanie, who is Vietnamese American and trans, team up for an independent project about local paranormal lore. It’s the perfect collaboration—Val loves the supernatural, and Lanie’s into witchcraft. After an eerie encounter with a horse-riding phantom on their first night of ghost-hunting, Val runs into the town “crazy lady,” who recites an unsettling rhyme about the Ojja-Wojja, a mysterious presence said to be haunting the woods around the town. The friends have research to do, all of which is complicated by Andrea, Lanie’s cruel swim teammate who becomes a nonconsenting host for the forest spirit. Meanwhile, Lanie grapples with the realization that she might like girls. Val’s neurodivergent tendency toward infodumping is conveyed through inspired expository scenes that draw from TV shows like *Unsolved Mysteries* and *Sailor Moon*. The illustrations and storytelling blend the fanciful beauty of Maggie Tokuda-Hall and Lisa Sterle’s teen wolf drama, *Squad* (2021), and the creeping dread of Emily Carroll’s *Through the Woods* (2014). The pieces of this character-driven, inclusive graphic novel come together perfectly, creating a satisfying read that honors teen friendship.

Spooky, queer, and magical—it’s no mystery why this book is a wonder. *(Graphic fiction. 11-14)*



ANY BODY A Comic Compendium of Important Facts and Feelings About Our Bodies

von der Gathen, Katharina

Illus. by Anke Kubl

Trans. by Shellee Tanaka

Gecko Press (88 pp.)

\$16.99 paper | May 9, 2023

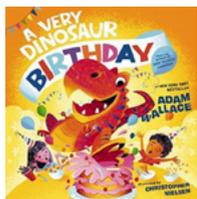
9781776575466



A close-up look at how bodies work—and the emotions they evoke.

This book, translated from German, was informed by a 2020 survey conducted by von der Gathen and Kuhl on “how people see their bodies and how they feel others see them.” Topics include body parts (skin, hair, sexual organs), beauty ideals, gender identity, people’s feelings about their bodies, ways in which bodies change (puberty, age), body alterations (haircuts, tattoos), and more. A sense of acceptance and celebration for body differences permeates this joyful read. There are many naked bodies depicted in the comic-style illustrations, reducing the stigma of nudity and sending the much-needed message that bodies differ widely—and that’s OK. The images alternate between the goofy (hairy human ancestors laughing at their not-as-hairy descendants) and the more realistic (accurate depictions of skin features like pimples and scars), making for a good balance and ramping up reader appeal. Of particular note, the book includes sections on trans people, body size, and bodily autonomy; diagrams on body language; and information on the harms of social media filters and making hurtful remarks about others’ bodies. The people depicted are diverse in terms of race and ability, although light-skinned bodies are mostly given center stage.

A whimsical, enlightening, and empowering volume to set readers on the path toward self-acceptance and body positivity. (reader activities, index) (Nonfiction. 8-12)



A VERY DINOSAUR BIRTHDAY

Wallace, Adam

Illus. by Christopher Nielsen

Thomas Nelson (40 pp.)

\$12.99 | June 20, 2023

9781400242054

Do you want to celebrate your birthday with dinosaurs?

“Dinosaurs are BIG and strong. / They’re clumsy and they’re FARTY,” we’re told. “So do you *really* want them coming / to your birthday party?” A birthday banner drapes across the gutter, while full-bleed art depicts a diverse group of partygoers surrounded by dinos and looking perturbed (one child is holding their nose). The party appears to be thrown by a pair of adults for their child (all are brown-skinned). Spread after spread features overly busy art and more verse about why dinosaurs make poor

party guests. A dinosaur at a pool party would jump in and displace all the water. Brontosaurus would love playing hide-and-seek—but likely wouldn’t be very good at it. Dinosaurs would gobble up all the food and, in their haste, accidentally trample all the birthday gifts. But, the narrator points out, dinosaurs are well intentioned, and soon we see examples of prehistoric pals working to make the celebration a smashing success—a group of kids use a dinosaur belly as a trampoline, and a velociraptor joins in for a fun game of tag. Though some dino fans may enjoy this one, it doesn’t rise to the top. The art is garish, and the verse often scans awkwardly. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

In the crowded field of dinosaur-themed children’s books, this one does not shine. (Picture book. 3-5)



JOY TAKES ROOT

Wallace, Gwendolyn

Illus. by Ashleigh Corrin

Kokila (32 pp.)

\$18.99 | June 20, 2023

9780593406786

When Joy visits Grammy in South Carolina, she acquires much more than a bag of seeds.

From Grammy, Joy learns that some plants can be powerful medicines and that it’s important to pause before planting to remember the ancestors who worked the same soil before you. Grammy also insists that the Earth has a heartbeat just like humans, although “listening takes practice.” Grammy’s okra plants stand taller than she is—a testament to her gardening passion and persistence. She teaches Joy to hold the soil in her hands and breathe her intentions into it to plant her hopes along with the seeds. Joy delights in the variety of shapes, sizes, and colors of the seeds they plant, and when it’s time for her to go home, Grammy gives her a bag of seeds of her own. Joy feels doubtful that she can cultivate a garden as successfully as her grandmother, but Grammy has taught her well. This contemplative portrayal of a Black grandmother and granddaughter bonding over their mutual love of gardening and the outdoors is both rare and welcome. In Corrin’s expansive and colorful illustrations, the heavy use of the color green, including on Grammy’s gardening apron, emphasizes the characters’ love of nature and how nature embraces them, too. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

A quiet, thoughtful tale that promotes mindfulness, intentionality, gratitude, and connection. (Picture book. 4-7)

“A fantastical romp to lasso any heart.”

CINDA MEETS ELLA



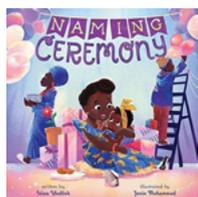
THE AIRPORT

Walton, John
Illus. by Hannab Abbo
 Neon Squid/Macmillan (64 pp.)
 \$16.99 | July 11, 2023
 9781684493098
 Series: The Inside Story

A simple introduction to many types of airport workers.

Walton, a self-described “aviation journalist,” follows a group of travelers who are diverse in terms of age, race, and ability into one airport and, after a quick, uneventful flight, out another. Along the way he not only introduces an equally diverse cast of employees, from brown-skinned security agent Francine at the luggage scanner to light-skinned immigration official Kevin examining passports at a checkpoint, but also points out different types of airport buildings and sizes of passenger planes, explains how checked luggage is sorted and transported, and ducks behind the scenes to watch brown-skinned chef Safir adding veggies to each preassembled dinner plate; Jasmine, Bradley, and Mia, a diverse trio of technicians, replacing a jet engine; and brown-skinned animal trainer Meena deploying a falcon (named Felix) to chase geese off the runway. It’s an eye-opening tour for young travelers, experienced or otherwise, who think it takes only pilots and flight attendants to get them where they’re going—even if, unlike Lisa Brown’s *The Airport Book* (2016) and most of the many similar picture books that overtly aim to soothe the anxieties of infrequent fliers, the content focuses more on people than safety procedures. Nearly everyone here is given a name, and within her stylized, screen print–style settings Abbo picks up on that cue by depicting figures with individualized dress and faces. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Informative and notable for its people-centric approach. (glossary, index) *(Informational picture book. 5-8)*



NAMING CEREMONY

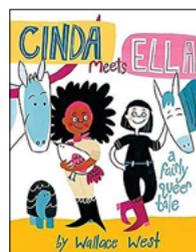
Wedlick, Seina
Illus. by Jenin Mohammed
 Abrams (40 pp.)
 \$18.99 | April 11, 2023
 9781419756269

Amira wants to bestow the perfect name on her baby sister.

True to tradition in many West African countries, Amira’s family has planned a big celebration, complete with food and gifts, for the naming of their new arrival. But the baby doesn’t get just one name; everyone who comes can give her a name, and as she grows, each attendee can either call her their special name or use the name her parents have given her. Grandma Nana, who has dark brown skin like Amira, is gifting the name Shakira, meaning *thankful*; Amira’s friend Miki gives the baby the name Akahana, Japanese for *bright red flower*, and appropriately brings along a red flower. The naming ceremony

begins—Habiba, or *beloved*, is the name chosen by Mama and Papa. Though Amira is unsure how her name measures up, at last she proudly names her Otta, or *friend*. Amira, Mama, Papa, and the baby wear bright blue fabric with golden yellow patterns on it resembling gingko leaves, and though Grandma Nana wears a deep pink dress, it also has the same leaf pattern—identifying them as family. This informative and impactful story gives young readers a window into how West Africans welcome new children into their family. Mohammed’s digitally rendered mixed-media images capture the joyous mood of the gathering. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A wonderful story of a family’s cultural tradition shared with the whole community. (author’s note) *(Picture book. 3-8)*



CINDA MEETS ELLA A Fairly Queer Tale

West, Wallace
 Little, Brown (40 pp.)
 \$18.99 | May 16, 2023
 9780316628372
 Series: Fairly Queer Tales, 2

A Western-themed retelling of “Cinderella” starring young queer protagonists.

Cinda loves adventure, her critters, and jalapeno fritters. Not so much dresses and “adult supervision.” When her parents are eaten by a gator and Aunt Hildy shows up to take away everything else she loves, Cinda finds hope in an invitation to a contest (including racing, lassoing, and a “surprise challenge”) hosted by Ella of the rich Del Reina family. It helps that the Rider who delivers the invitation is cute and that they seem as interested in Cinda as she is in them. The day of the contest, a giant boar named Merrie Hoggmüther and a slippery snake named Slipper assist Cinda—with the caveat that Slipper must be home before sundown or she’ll get cold and grumpy enough to bite. Cinda’s love of critters carries her through the day and wins the regard of Ella, who turns out to have been the Rider the whole time, much to Cinda’s delight. With a happily-ever-after full of animals and adventure on the horizon, this story jazzes up “Cinderella” with a vibrant palette of primary colors and expressive illustrations that relate as much of the story as the text itself. Playful language and a sweet depiction of a budding queer relationship make for a fun, touching story. Cinda presents Black, while Aunt Hildy and Ella are light-skinned; the supporting cast is diverse. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A fantastical romp to lasso any heart. *(Picture book. 3-7)*

“All hail the paw-some Dog Knight!”

THE DOG KNIGHT



TEAM TRASH A Time Traveler's Guide to Sustainability

Wheeler, Kate & Trent Huntington

Illus. by Kate Wheeler

Holiday House (80 pp.)

\$22.99 | \$14.99 paper | June 13, 2023

9780823452279

9780823454914 paper

Series: Books for a Better Earth

Two young time travelers discover that “Reduce/Reuse/Recycle” isn’t exactly a new idea.

Involuntarily paired for a Sustainability Science Fair project, Charlie and Oliver—respectively presenting in Wheeler’s neatly composed panels as Black and Asian—get off to a ragged start until a classmate’s junky-looking device whisks them back in time for a series of eye-opening encounters. First stop: Pompeii, 72 C.E., to watch a mason recycling broken ceramics into filler for wall repair (as a volcano smokes in the background). From there it’s on to Edo-period Japan to witness traders bartering and repurposing small used items, 18th-century Philadelphia to see the first paper mill in North America turning linen rags into paper, and other stops where they learn to their dismay that most types of plastics are hard or impossible to recycle but that researchers are developing biodegradable alternatives. Out of their cogent observations come a book (“How did you find the time to do this?” asks an impressed teacher. “Oh, we found LOTS of extra time”), a school club, and, for young eco-activist readers, a flurry of sustainability tips, tools, and talking points, plus another R to add to the first three: “Reach Out!” Figures in both past eras and present scenes are depicted with a range of skin tones; one brown-skinned classmate wears a hijab.

Upbeat and optimistic, with some uncomfortable realities to underscore the size of the task ahead. (*Graphic nonfiction. 9-12*)



THE SHARING BOOK

White, Dianne

Illus. by Simone Shin

Margaret Ferguson/Holiday House

(40 pp.)

\$18.99 | June 13, 2023

9780823443475

A merry group shares special experiences on a camping trip.

A just-about perfect day begins when two children—one brown-skinned, one tan-skinned—and a tan-skinned adult marvel at a glorious sunrise and revel in the realization that TODAY is for sharing. Things just get better from there. The family greets the other campers—who are diverse in skin tone and age—and the brown-skinned child waves to a lighter-skinned friend; throughout, this pair can be seen hugging, playing, and holding hands. The campers all play games, hike, share meals, and go boating. The fun continues well into the night as everyone gathers by a campfire to sing songs. The outing turns

out to be a warm, memorable one for all concerned, joyfully expressed through bouncy, lilting rhymes (“A hammock is perfect / for dreaming. A chair / is just right for three”). Emphasizing warmth, good feelings, and togetherness, this sweet tale about a most enjoyable excursion makes for a cozy lap-time or group read-aloud. The colorful, exuberant art, both hand-painted and digitally rendered, captures the expansiveness of the outdoors as well as the openness of the campers’ spirits. Adults reading this tale aloud should encourage children to discuss their own outdoor or camping exploits. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

A book to be shared again and again. (*Picture book. 4-7*)



THE DOG KNIGHT

Whitley, Jeremy

Illus. by Bre Indigo

Colors by Melissa Caprigione

Feiwel & Friends (224 pp.)

\$14.99 paper | May 16, 2023

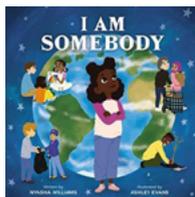
9781250756725

Series: The Dog Knight, 1

A dog-loving tween drummer discovers a magical canine connection.

After coming out to their supportive mom and (now ex-) best friend, Dallas, nonbinary Frankie Bryant faces bullying from Dallas and others that leaves them feeling unsure of where they fit. After two run-ins with a friendly golden retriever who always seems to be in the right place at the right time, Frankie hits their head and is transported to the Omniversal Doghouse, the palace of “the Pawtheon, the secret legion of dog heroes.” The Pawtheon lend Frankie a helmet that allows them to understand dog-kind. They learn of a magical alliance between humans and dogs: Humans care for dogs, and dogs protect humans from chaos-sowing, batlike gremlins. The Pawtheon have recruited Frankie as the next potential Dog Knight, connector and protector of the two realms. The catch? They have to successfully complete six trials, one for each of the dog virtues, back in the human realm while living with their dog-allergic mom. Readers will root for Frankie, whose desire to find their place will resonate. The rebuilding of Frankie and Dallas’ fractured friendship is careful and authentic. Sparse backgrounds leave space for expressive human and dog faces to shine. Frankie and their mom read Black; background characters are racially diverse. The gremlins use ungrammatical English, unfortunately making an implicit connection between grammar and morality, but quality queer representation and a strong narrative voice make this sweet, funny series opener a winner.

All hail the paw-some Dog Knight! (content warning) (*Graphic fiction. 8-14*)



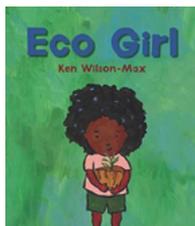
I AM SOMEBODY

Williams, Nyasha
Illus. by Ashley Evans
 Running Press Kids (32 pp.)
 \$17.99 | June 27, 2023
 9780762480517

Be a “somebody” who makes a difference!

A Black child witnesses various transgressions over the course of a day. Noticing trash on the walk to the bus stop, the young narrator thinks, “*Somebody should do something about that.*” Two students push their way ahead of everyone else in order to get good seats on the school bus, prompting the child to muse, “*Somebody should speak up about that.*” Throughout the day, the child notices examples of bullying and unfairness. These seemingly minor infractions start mounting. Finally, when the protagonist’s teacher tells the students that it’s snack time, the narrator notices that some students don’t have anything to eat. Instead of wishing for a “somebody,” the perceptive pupil realizes, “*I am Somebody*” and shares food with the others. The epiphany doesn’t stop there. When the narrator arrives home and notices there are toys everywhere but Mom is on a work call, the child responds to Mom’s request for help by cleaning up the mess. Accompanied by simple yet expressive illustrations, this is a loving and much-needed story that encourages kids to make a difference; pair it with Joshunda Sanders’ *I Can Write the World* (2019), illustrated by Charly Palmer. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Empowerment to children to be the change they wish to see in the world. (*Picture book. 4-8*)



ECO GIRL

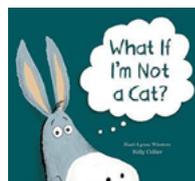
Wilson-Max, Ken
 Candlewick (32 pp.)
 \$17.99 | March 7, 2023
 978-1-5362-2809-0

A child longs to be a tree.

Eve, a young Black girl, lives on the edge of a forest in an unnamed African country where she can see baobab trees in the distance. She tells her parents she’d like to be a baobab tree, and when they reply that being a tree means being patient and taking care of animals and people, she insists that she’s up for the job—indeed she dubs herself Eco Girl as she sets out seed for the birds, looking after them the way the baobab does. To celebrate Eve’s birthday the next day, the family leaves to visit Grandma, who lives in the forest. On the big day, Eve welcomes a rainstorm, arms outstretched like a tree. When the rain stops, she and her family walk further into the forest while her Grandma leads, carrying a wrapped baobab seedling for Eve to plant in a very special place. This is a charming story that captures children’s curiosity about the natural world and their eagerness to be old enough to do the things they want to do. Illustrations drawn in thick black lines with beautiful washes

of greens and punches of yellow, blue, and brown make for a warm and affectionate depiction of nature; readers will close this book eager to follow Eve’s worthy example. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

A young naturalist’s delight. (information on baobab and other trees) (*Picture book. 4-6*)



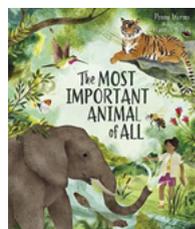
WHAT IF I’M NOT A CAT?

Winters, Kari-Lynn
Illus. by Kelly Collier
 Kids Can (32 pp.)
 \$19.99 | June 6, 2023
 9781525305535

The farmer’s offhand comment creates a crisis for Donkey and the barnyard cats.

Despite his name, Donkey knows he is a cat. After all, Farmer always says, “Goodnight, kitty cats!” before leaving the barn for the night. Donkey licks, pounces, and perches like a cat, but sometimes he feels out of place. When Donkey climbs onto Farmer’s lap one day, she exclaims that he is acting just like a cat. “What if I’m NOT a cat?” Donkey asks the barn’s cats. The logical cats suggest he is a dog, cow, horse, or “a spiffy, strong cat” capable of protecting them. Knowing he doesn’t belong with the cats, Donkey sadly leaves the warm barn for the cold, rainy pasture. Later, he hears “scaredy-cat whimpers.” Racing to defend a kitten from a fox, Donkey instinctively turns and bucks his back legs high into the air. The fox flees. When Donkey and the kitten return to the barn to a “mewed chorus of cheers,” Donkey embraces his true self and reveals his new identity—Don-kitty! Detailed cartoon illustrations vary from scenes spanning double-page spreads to vignettes that result in fast action. Speech-bubble commentary and feline facial expressions help develop the cats’ personalities and make for a warm and funny read. Farmer is light-skinned with blond hair. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Delightful barnyard humor sends the important messages of embracing individual strengths and the power of friendship. (*Picture book. 4-7*)



THE MOST IMPORTANT ANIMAL OF ALL

Worms, Penny
Illus. by Hannah Bailey
 North Star Editions (40 pp.)
 \$19.99 | June 5, 2023
 9781631637018

Which animal is most important? Seven children offer different opinions.

Following a semester of zoological studies, a teacher asks their students to name the most important animal. Tan-skinned George proposes elephants (“Even their poo is useful!”), brown-skinned Nimmie goes for bees because they’re “like fairies for farmers,” and five other classmates chime in with candidates

of their own: sharks, beavers, bats, tigers, and krill. In the end, Worms leaves it up to readers to decide, but as the chosen creatures are all keystone species and the children make compelling cases for their choices, a definitive answer isn't obvious, and they are not likely to actually settle on one...but readers will be inspired to mull the topic themselves. To keep the conversation going, the author introduces four more keystone species at the end (wolves, sea otters, corals, and sea stars). Bailey places painted images of a diverse class led by a brown-skinned teacher in a tiger suit and renditions of wildlife in natural settings alongside bright, clear photographic portraits (of the animals) and adds helpful schematic views of flower parts next to three bee species and an Antarctic marine food web. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Tailor-made for sparking animal study and lively discussions. (resource list/fact boxes, index) (*Informational picture book. 7-9*)



A FAMILY PRAYER

Youngblood, Shay

Illus. by Kristina Swarner

Convergent/Crown (40 pp.)

\$18.99 | May 9, 2023

9780593234693

A Black child celebrates their family through prayer and affirmations.

Using repetition (“My mother is a blessing,” “My father is a blessing”), the young narrator prays for various family members, asking that they be kept “safe and well.” Each spread explains why a different member is beloved. The child’s mother “listens to my hopes and dreams” and “watches over me while I sleep.” The child’s father “teaches me to see that rainy days / are lucky days.” Their grandmother “bakes buttery lemon pound cake just for me,” while their grandfather “knows the histories of the world.” Their sister “keeps my secrets” and “helps me find my way,” and their brother “holds my hand when I’m afraid.” Complementing the loving verse, the illustrations are full of warmth and texture and play with geometrical shapes. Godparents, babysitters, and the family dog are even included, too. This book promotes an appreciation for household members as well as the family that can be created outside the home. In an author’s note, Youngblood explains that when she was growing up in Georgia, members of the Black community who weren’t related were often still considered family and that prayer was a big part of her life as a child coping with the death of her birth mother and the realization that she had siblings she’d never met. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

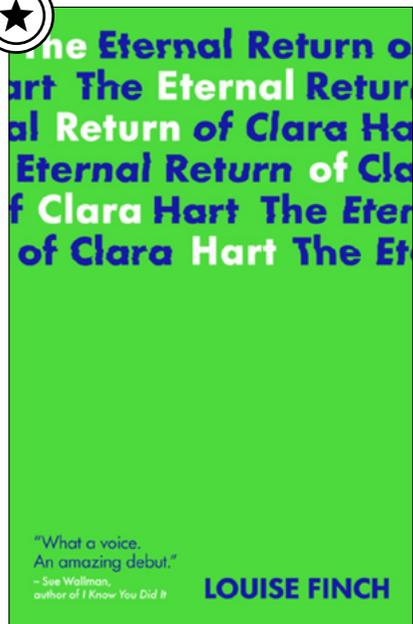
Brimming with gratitude, familial love, and joy. (*Religious picture book. 4-8*)

YOUNG ADULT



These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

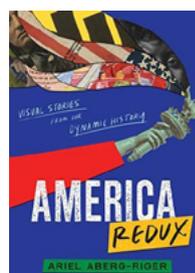
- AMERICA REDUX by Ariel Aberg-Riger..... 147
- WHEN IT ALL SYNCES UP by Maya Ameyaw..... 149
- THOSE WHO SAW THE SUN by Jaha Nailah Avery 149
- GOOD AS GOLD by Candace Buford 152
- SING ME TO SLEEP by Gabi Burton..... 153
- THE ETERNAL RETURN OF CLARA HART by Louise Finch..... 157
- MAGE AND THE ENDLESS UNKNOWN by S.J. Miller 161
- MONSTROUS by Sarah Myer 163
- THE MOONLIT VINE by Elizabeth Santiago;
illus. by McKenzie Mayle 165



THE ETERNAL RETURN OF CLARA HART
Finch, Louise
 Little Island (288 pp.)
 \$11.99 paper | June 13, 2023
 9781915071026



AMERICA REDUX Visual Stories From Our Dynamic History



Aberg-Riger, Ariel
 Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (304 pp.)
 \$24.99 | May 2, 2023
 9780063057531

“It’s not just the image that matters, but how it takes up space. It’s not just the event that matters, but how we shape the stories around it”: This illustrated

journey through lesser-known and frequently erased parts of United States history vividly demonstrates these points.

Each of 21 chapters in this debut by visual storyteller Aberg-Riger provides information typically missing from standard retellings of the nation’s past. The opening chapter discusses the post–Civil War rise of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, White women who promoted their version of history through distorted content in textbooks used by millions of children through the 1970s. A chapter on the annexation of Hawai’i connects present-day poverty and Native Hawaiian activism to the impacts of missionaries, the military, White plantation owners, and culturally exploitative tourism. Other chapters cover involuntary sterilization, urban renewal, toxic-waste dumping, HIV/AIDS, extractive mining on Native lands, and more. This stellar offering combines startling facts, gripping prose, and appealing, vibrant collage illustrations that use photographs, maps, and other ephemera. The typeface, designed by the author, looks handwritten, bringing a feeling of immediacy. The contributions of women, people of color, individuals with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ people are featured prominently. Thought-provoking connections are made to today’s burning issues, e.g., gun control, lack of affordable housing, and mass incarceration. The short chapters in this accessible work will pique readers’ interest in diving deeper to learn more about these challenging topics.

Beautifully illustrated, riveting, enraging, and empowering: a must-read. (image sources, bibliography, index) (*Nonfiction. 13-adult*)

OUTSTANDING VERSE NOVELS FOR TEENS



NOVELS IN VERSE are a staple for young readers who often have not yet absorbed many adults' negative associations with poetry as something obscure, difficult, and intimidating. In fact, verse novels are particularly well suited to struggling and reluctant readers, as the ample white space and minimal text make them highly accessible.

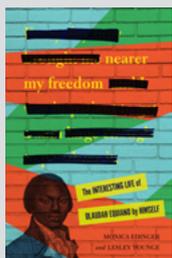
The Academy of American Poets sponsors National Poetry Month each April, providing a wonderful opportunity to focus on this versatile method of storytelling. In some cases, each poem in a verse novel can be savored individually yet they are linked together, in whole telling a complete story. In other cases, free verse functions in the more unified manner of a traditional novel. Many offerings experiment with a range of poetic formats, giving readers exposure that is far more engaging than any textbook.

These early 2023 titles explore a diverse range of subjects; each one is compelling and well executed, highlighting the flexibility and reader-friendliness of this format.

We Are All So Good at Smiling by Amber McBride (Feiwel & Friends, Jan. 10): "We are shaking & free / & imperfect but hopeful." Whimsy is a Black girl wrestling with suicidal ideation in this original tale that intertwines fantastical elements with an exploration of very real issues, offering readers solace through lush writing and imagery.



One Last Shot: The Story of Wartime Photographer Gerda Taro by Kip Wilson (Versify/HarperCollins, Jan. 17): This fictional retelling of the life of a remarkable young Jewish woman in 1930s Europe—a photojournalist determined to expose the truth—has an immediacy that draws readers in and will encourage them to learn more about the real woman who inspired it.



Nearer My Freedom: The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano by Himself by Monica Edinger and Lesley Young (Zest Books, March 7): "Oppressed and weighed down by grief, / my love of liberty great, / I determined to seize the first opportunity / of making my escape." The authors transformed Equiano's 1789 autobiography into a series of found poems, creating this absorbing account of his life before, during, and after enslavement.

Spin by Rebecca Caprara (Atheneum, March 28): Arachne's story unfolds in a way very much in keeping with contemporary #MeToo themes, reframing a tale from classical mythology. Pushing back against the charge of hubris, Arachne presents readers with a provocative version that gives voice to the concerns of a mortal girl.



An Appetite for Miracles by Laekan Zea Kemp (Little, Brown, April 4): Two Mexican American teens fall in love, bonding over their shared understanding of the impacts of stressful family circumstances, including parental pressure to lose weight and succeed in school. The strong characterization pulls readers into a richly realized world as Danna and Raúl find ways to heal.

Wings in the Wild by Margarita Engle (Atheneum, April 18): A refugee camp in Costa Rica brings two teens together—Soleida, who has fled Cuba following political persecution of her artist parents, and Daniel, a visitor whose musician grandfather left Cuba for the U.S. under similar circumstances. This beautiful, emotional work shares hard truths but offers genuine hope.



Standing on Neptune by Valerie Sherrard (DCB, April 18): As this delicately told story unfolds, a high school student, feeling alone, fears she may be pregnant: "I cannot help but think / this week has / acquainted me with truths / that may only / have been found in the / silence of a solitary path."

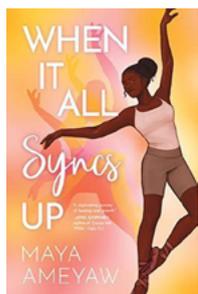


Forever Is Now by Mariama J. Lockington (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, May 23): Mental health is explored compassionately in this novel centering Sadie, a queer Black girl in Oakland, California, wrestling with personal heartbreak and racial trauma while doing everything she can to build community and work for change—in the world and in herself.

Laura Simeon is a young readers' editor.

“These elders’ voices are a collective treasure.”

THOSE WHO SAW THE SUN



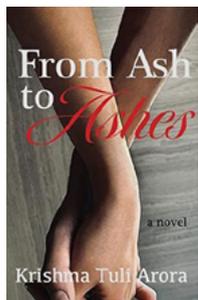
WHEN IT ALL SYNCs UP

Ameyaw, Maya
 Annick Press (336 pp.)
 \$19.99 | June 6, 2023
 9781773217819

The highs and lows of ballet—and of growing up.

Sixteen-year-old Aisha Bimi has worked hard to be one of the best dancers in her ballet-focused boarding school, but she is continually reminded that, in many people’s eyes, she doesn’t look the part. Aisha is Ghanaian Canadian, and there are few Black people in the world of ballet. After she fails to receive an apprenticeship with the Western Canadian Ballet, Aisha makes the split-second decision to return home to Toronto. There, she toys with the idea of enrolling in an arts high school with her best friend, Neil. She can see that Neil, who is of Korean descent, has an alcohol problem, and she is determined to help, enlisting the aid of Algerian Canadian Ollie, one of Neil’s quiet yet compelling school friends. Can Aisha balance her relationships old and new, her mental health, and ballet, or is it all too much? Aisha’s feelings about dance consistently ring true, from the isolation of having few role models or friends who look like her to her love of classical technique and her hunger for something new. Her struggles with body image are especially authentic. Aisha and her friends face real problems and are not without their stumbles and missteps, but they also work to support each other in finding healing and healthy ways to move forward.

A hopeful, realistic exploration of mental health among teens invested in the world of the arts. (*Fiction. 14-18*)



FROM ASH TO ASHES

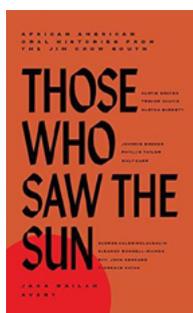
Arora, Krishna Tuli
 Apprentice House (280 pp.)
 \$18.99 paper | May 23, 2023
 9781627204262

A Punjabi girl and her family reconcile their Indian customs and Sikh faith with their new lives in late-20th-century America.

Mira Singh is grieving a loss too shameful to talk about. Growing up in a mostly White suburb in Long Island after her family left Queens, she was teased for her hairy legs and Indian lunches, but she had memories of a happy childhood and her faith in Guru to anchor her. When her sister, Ritu, falls in love with a Muslim boy and is quickly married off to a fellow Sikh to avoid gossip, Mira starts to see flaws in the customs she never questioned before. Her brother Jazz was mercilessly bullied at school, and her brother Jeet felt the heavy weight of living up to his parents’ expectations at all costs. Mira and her siblings each experiment with activities their parents forbid and struggle to understand against a backdrop of worries about community judgment. It’s

not until the Singhs suffer a terrible loss that they are forced to consider each other’s perspectives. Chapters move forward and backward in time, slowly revealing the central mystery in a tantalizing way, ultimately flashing forward to 2018. The writing feels heavy-handed at times, but the book encourages readers to wrestle with questions of parental abuse, individual dreams, personal sacrifice, and religious faith as Mira and her siblings navigate a multitude of challenges.

A complex depiction of a family in turmoil. (*Fiction. 14-18*)



THOSE WHO SAW THE SUN

African American Oral Histories From the Jim Crow South

Avery, Jaba Nailab
 Levine Querido (320 pp.)
 \$19.99 | June 6, 2023
 9781646142446

Jim Crow comes alive in oral histories.

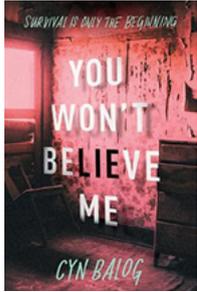
“So when you were a kid, Black people couldn’t vote at all?” Avery asks Clotie

Graves, daughter of a Mississippi farmer. “Oh no, no. My goodness!” is the answer, prefacing a description of voting restrictions that leads to the ferocious reminder that “people *died* for us to have just the *right* to vote.” Now in her 70s and the operator of an African American history tour company, Graves is profiled alongside nine others, including a dentist, a bank examiner, a music teacher, and a cartoonist. Their upbringings were equally varied: one the son of a North Carolina sharecropper, another the daughter of a San Francisco pastor. They testify to both the diversity of African American experiences and cruel universalities as well as the nurturing of children and teens within caring Black communities. The Rev. John Kennard, the first Black tax assessor in his Alabama county, reminisces, “Growing up going to totally Black schools was the best thing that ever happened to me, and then to go to basically a totally white institution was the next best thing. Because I found out I could excel in either.” Avery asks each of her subjects whether they believe that Dr. King’s dream can be realized in America. The answers differ; what doesn’t is the wisdom and experience that inform them. An extensive appendix to this invaluable work serves as a micro-encyclopedia of the era.

These elders’ voices are a collective treasure. (*Nonfiction. 12-adult*)

“An enchanting romantic fantasy.”

OF LIGHT AND SHADOW



YOU WON'T BELIEVE ME

Balog, Cyn

Sourcebooks Fire (368 pp.)

\$11.99 paper | June 27, 2023

9781728265568

A teenage girl in Pensacola, Florida, fights to uncover the mystery of her current reality in a horrifying new world.

When 16-year-old Willow Lafayette wakes up restrained to a bed in a room she doesn't recognize, she has no memory of how she got there, who brought her there, or how long she's been imprisoned. Held captive by an older woman calling herself Granny who force-feeds her, Willow recalls her former life: her almost-boyfriend August, her singing channel on YouTube, the bunyavirus pandemic that was quickly spreading throughout the country, and the work her father, an internationally recognized epidemiologist, had done to treat the virus. When Granny dies suddenly in front of her, Willow is planning how to escape when a mysterious boy named Elijah appears and frees her. Elijah tells Willow that the world is ending, an experimental drug has turned people into deadly monsters who are roaming the country—and her father may be at fault. Willow must grapple with these revelations and figure out how to survive and whom to trust. The sheer number of plot twists ultimately ends up teetering on the verge of frustrating rather than surprising. However, this is a timely, chilling story that explores fear and consequences. Main characters are cued White.

An unsettling thriller that will leave readers questioning what's real. (*Thriller*. 14-18)



MASTER OF SOULS

Barron, Rena

HarperTeen (432 pp.)

\$18.99 | April 11, 2023

9780062871169

Series: Kingdom of Souls, 3

Arrah and company return in this closer to a trilogy that started with *Kingdom of Souls* (2019).

Arrah, romantic interest Crown Prince Rudjek, and their friends are where readers left them in *Reaper of Souls* (2021): searching for the tribal people. Arrah is also grieving her decision to give up the chieftains' *kas* and her subsequent loss of longed for magical ability. When they finally discover the tribal people's hiding place, the latter aren't pleased to hear of Arrah's surrendered magic, as it was also the key to their safety from the demons who want to consume their souls. Even without this magic, however, Arrah is determined to help keep her people safe, but there's not much she can do without this power—or is there? The point of view shifts among Arrah; Efiya, her half-demon sister; Daho, the Demon King; and others, although Daho's is the only viewpoint that does not unfold concurrently with

the others. Once again, Barron skillfully weaves plot twists into the narrative, the greatest of which may surprise even astute readers. Readers who made it through the losses of the second book, in particular, will be rewarded with an ending that feels earned. This is a happy conclusion to a complex and engrossing series centering Black characters that makes the sometimes heart-rending journey worth it, both for the cast members and readers.

Satisfying and hopeful. (*map*) (*Fantasy*. 13-18)



OF LIGHT AND SHADOW

Bhathena, Tanaz

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (448 pp.)

\$19.38 | May 23, 2023

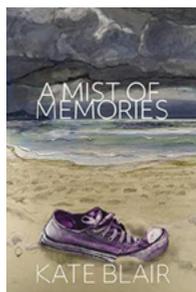
9780374389116

A teen bandit thrust into leadership of her clan fights for justice, dignity, and restoration of her people's rights.

Orphaned at birth, adopted, and brought up by the leader of the Shadow Clan, Roshan's innate healing powers

take a back seat to guerilla raids for their survival. One such raid leads to the capture of Prince Navin, a gadabout royal second in line to the throne. The clan hopes to barter his freedom to stop crushing blood tithes and reclaim their land. Atrocities by the governors' marauding army have turned once-fertile valleys into barren wastelands where villagers face starvation, violence, and displacement. While the prince tries to use his magic to secure his escape, the poverty and desperation he witnesses ignite a spark of awareness alongside growing attraction to his captor. The alternating voices of the prince and the rebel pit the power and corruption of the privileged against the hardship, steely determination, and hope of people fighting for their birthright. The evocative writing reveals a magical world of rugged landscapes, underground caverns, dark magic, political machinations, surprising plot twists, diverse peoples, and deeply seated prejudices that reflect contemporary times. While the quest for resolution takes a slightly naive turn, the historical inspirations of real-life bandits and Indian and Persian mythology create a spellbinding fantasy.

An enchanting romantic fantasy weaving together history, magic, and inspired resistance. (*glossary, author's note*) (*Fantasy*. 13-18)



A MIST OF MEMORIES

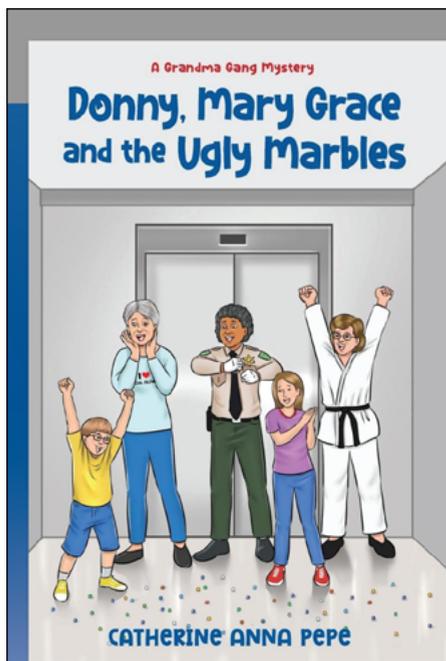
Blair, Kate
 DCB (280 pp.)
 \$16.95 paper | May 16, 2023
 9781770866966

A forgotten island holds the answers to more than one mystery in this haunting page-turner.

Charlotte and her parents live alone on Levay Island, surrounded by cliffs and separated from the coast of England by a misty sea. After her traumatic accident earlier in the year, she's been confined to the island, struggling with memory lapses and plagued by the feeling that something isn't quite right with her family. In a small town across the water, Ajay is reeling from the disappearance of his friend Oleander. He can't shake the dire circumstances under which she went missing or her erratic behavior in the days prior. Ajay decides to retrace Oleander's steps, and when his investigation leads him to Charlotte's island,

the two find kinship and a common goal in their search for truth. But to their dismay, it seems the more they try to probe the island's secrets, the more it fights to stay forgotten. Both the gloominess of Ajay's seaside town and the crumbling grandeur of Charlotte's island lend atmospheric dread that complements the story's gothic elements: unreliable narrators, visions, uncanny occurrences, and more. Twists and turns abound, but the heart of the book is its poignant exploration of regret, grief, and loss. Ajay is of South Asian descent, bringing subtle tension to interactions with the otherwise predominantly White cast, including Charlotte and her parents.

A modern gothic thriller with emotional depth. (*Mystery*, 14-18)



ISBN: 978-1088072189

10% OF THE NET PROCEEDS OF BOOK SALES WILL BE DONATED TO THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS

"The Grandma Gang is back and ready to embark on another adventure in Pepe's third volume of a mystery series."

"Written in the vein of James Preller's *Jigsaw Jones*, Pepe's early elementary school mystery novel is one of the few currently on the market to feature a disabled main character."

"A warm, well-paced follow-up in an inclusive series that will keep readers coming back for more."
 —*Kirkus Reviews*

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**PART OF YOUR WORLD
A Twisted Tale Graphic Novel**

Braswell, Liz
Adapt. by Stephanie Kate Strohm
Illus. by Kelly Matthews &
Nichole Matthews

Disney-Hyperion (160 pp.)
\$21.99 | \$14.99 paper | June 13, 2023
9781368064095
9781368068185 paper
Series: A Twisted Tale

A graphic adaptation of an entry from the popular Twisted Tale series that reimagines Disney fairy tales.

Basing her work on Braswell’s 2018 novel of the same name that remixes “The Little Mermaid,” Strohm presents readers with a cinematic, full-color graphic novel that ponders what might have happened if mermaid Ariel had never defeated the nefarious sea witch Ursula. Rather than having a fairy-tale wedding to Prince Eric, Ariel is made to serve her undersea home, Atlantica, as its queen after her father, King Triton, bargains himself away to save her. When Ursula, now living on land as Eric’s wife, Vanessa, puts his kingdom at risk with her evil aspirations, he and Ariel must find a way to expose her and put an end to her conniving machinations. This graphic interpretation is captivating in its own right: Fans of the classic Disney film should be delighted with the highly recognizable characters and the visually stylish format culminating in a happily-ever-after. Panels burst to life with bright action sequences working in concert with evocative facial close-ups, keeping the pages flying with swooning eyes and a race to beat the clock as Ursula’s powers grow. As this closely follows the Disney original, expect some chauvinism and fatness signaling evil. Main characters read White.

Great fun for aficionados of the film. (*Graphic fantasy.* 12-16)



WOLFPACK

Brunskill, Amelia
Little, Brown (272 pp.)
\$18.99 | June 13, 2023
9780316494557

What does it mean to be complicit?

Nine young women are being raised in a cult—though that’s a word they never use—the kind with a handsome male leader and strictly proscribed roles based on gender. We may think we know

what’s coming, but these girls have carved out a safe, even happy, space at Havenwood. They share their own cabin with a door that locks, and in some ways their home really is a haven; the girls have lived in this bucolic setting since childhood, have the freedom to focus on skills they love (beekeeping, foraging, baking), and believe in their community. Two of them share a monthslong clandestine romance despite strictures against sex; all of them collude to hide this and other transgressions

from themselves as much as the larger community. Alternating between a collective first person (“The nine of us were not always as we are now”) and multiple close third-person perspectives, the text allows readers to glimpse the girls as individuals while seeing how they subsume that individuality to maintain their group identity. While the poetry is more prose with line breaks than flowing verse, the brevity effectively keeps the pages turning as the discomfort builds and the answer to the underlying mystery—one of the girls has vanished—slowly becomes clear. The limited physical descriptions included point to a White default.

A disquieting read sure to linger. (*Verse thriller.* 13-18)



GOOD AS GOLD

Buford, Candace
Disney-Hyperion (320 pp.)
\$18.99 | June 6, 2023
9781368090254

While trying to save her family, a Black girl tugs on a string that will unravel her small town and the lies that built it.

Casey Whitecroft’s life has been going downhill since the failure of her father’s business and their subsequent decline in social status. Formerly part of the “charmies”—a subset of the rich, primarily White people in their small town of Langston, Georgia—she is now one of the “downstreamers.” Her demoralized father won’t leave the house, her mother is constantly angry, and her sister, a Spelman College junior, is keeping her distance—leaving Casey with few options as she adjusts to her new reality. When they face losing their home, Casey reaches out to attractive co-worker Tanner for help selling her last remaining valuables at his parents’ pawn shop. In the process, she discovers a rust-covered coin she picked up in the local lake may matter more than she thought and may lead to discovering secrets behind Langston’s legend of buried treasure. However, Casey and Tanner aren’t the only ones searching for the treasure—and they are in real danger. The closer they get to the truth, the more they uncover about Langston’s founding. This thrilling coming-of-age story unfolds briskly, keeping readers engaged in the details of the 100-year-old mystery. Through her multiracial cast of characters, Buford examines the impacts of racism and revisionist history through the generations.

A riveting examination of power and the importance of history. (*Mystery.* 13-18)

“An immersive tale with an empowering social justice tone.”

SING ME TO SLEEP



SING ME TO SLEEP

Burton, Gabi
 Bloomsbury (400 pp.)
 \$18.99 | June 27, 2023
 978-1-5476-1037-2



In the kingdom of Keirdre, sirens are presumed extinct.

The trouble is that Saoirse is very much a siren—and not only does she live in Keirdre, she regularly gives into her instincts to kill by seducing men marked

for death by the Employer, her anonymous boss, using her astounding beauty and entrancing singing. Her earnings supplement her family’s meager income from operating a flour mill under the exploitative rule of the Royals, the all-powerful fae at the top of Keirdre’s social hierarchy. Because Royals hate sirens more than any other creature, she hides in plain sight, disguised as an ikatus, or fae without a magical affinity. No shrinking violet, Saoirse is at the top of her class at graduation and gunning for an esteemed position in the Keirdren military. When she is instead offered a position as a guard to Prince Hayes, she initially rejects the position out of disdain for the Royals, but when Rain, Saoirse’s beloved and vulnerable little sister, receives a threatening letter, Saoirse joins the prince’s guard in hopes that proximity to the Royals will help her identify the blackmailer. Questions pile up, leading Saoirse into a deep web of deceit and intrigue in a thrilling page-turner. Snappy dialogue, unpredictable plot twists, skillful worldbuilding, strong characterization, and steamy, sensual tension between Saoirse and the prince create an immersive tale with an empowering social justice tone centering a predominantly Black and brown cast.

A winning debut. (map) (Fantasy. 13-18)



ALWAYS ISN'T FOREVER

Cervantes, J.C.
 Razorbill/Penguin (384 pp.)
 \$18.99 | \$11.00 paper | June 6, 2023
 9780593404485
 9780593619575 paper

A romantic story of young love and grief with a fantastical twist.

High school seniors and soul mates Hart Augusto and Ruby Armenta have known each other since they were kids,

their personalities complementing each other’s and propelling them toward a shiny future together. But their dreams come to a tragic end when Hart drowns while saving a child’s life. Five months later, Ruby is stuck in her grief, not wanting to heal and move on. That’s when Hart wakes up to find that he has died, but an angel named Lourdes has intervened to give him a second chance at living—in the body of someone who is near death. He requests to be a boy close to Ruby’s age in their little California town of El Cielo, hoping they can be reunited—and his soul is placed in the body of arrogant, obnoxious football

player Jameson Romanelli, their classmate who’s in a coma following a motorcycle accident. Hart is unable to tell anyone who he really is and will gradually forget his former life. Can he convince Ruby he is back and rekindle what they had? While the relationship between Ruby and Hart has endearing elements, readers may wonder what makes theirs a more special and true romance that warrants this heavenly intervention, making it hard to fully invest in the central premise. Most characters are Latine; Jameson is White.

Well-written and designed to be a tear-jerker but ultimately fails to persuade. (Fiction. 13-18)

Shannon Stewart

Feed Ruby to the Wolves

THE CONTINUATION OF JADE'S STORY COMING EARLY 2024

“Stewart’s spare, stark novel is an artful showcase for two compelling, first-person coming-of-age stories.”
 —Kirkus Reviews

ISBN: 979-8987864203

“...this is a book that can redefine how you perceive class structure, by bringing abject poverty to the forefront of your mind...Stewart can hold her own against John Green and Stephen Chbosky when it comes to pulling on your heartstrings. But I found her message to be more real, to run deeper.”
 —Kate Moretti, NYT Bestselling Author of *Thought I Knew You*

For Agent Representation or Information on Publishing and Film Rights, Email shannondstewart2@gmail.com

WORDS WITH...

RUCHIRA GUPTA

A journalist and anti–sex trafficking activist brings her passion to the page in *I Kick and I Fly*

BY LAURA SIMEON



Vicky Roy

I KICK AND I FLY (Scholastic, April 18) is an intense, dramatic story showing the desperation of families living in poverty in a gang-controlled red-light district in Forbesganj, Bihar, India. It skillfully shows the overwhelming scale of systemic problems and the importance of individual initiative without veering into hopelessness or blaming those who cannot break the cycle. Author Ruchira Gupta established the anti–sex trafficking NGO Apne Aap, and her global activism, including work with the United Nations, has earned her many accolades, among them a Clinton Global Citizen Award and l'ordre national du Mérite from the French government. Gupta also edited *River of Flesh and Other Stories: The Prostituted Woman in Indian Short Fiction* and *As If Women Matter: The Essential Gloria Steinem Reader*.

With *I Kick and I Fly*, she channels years of experience and passion for reform into a gripping and empowering novel. Fourteen-year-old protagonist Heera, from the formerly nomadic Nat caste that was criminalized by British colonizers, is supported by a network of women and girls. She pursues an education, learns martial arts, escapes being sold into sex slavery—something that she learns affects girls worldwide—and helps others. Gupta divides her time between her hometown of Forbesganj and New York City, where she spoke with us over Zoom; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

How did you first come to do this work?

I was walking through the hills of Nepal in the 1990s, and I came across villages with missing girls. I asked the men [who were] drinking tea and playing cards, and they told me, “The girls are in Mumbai.” Now, Mumbai was 1,400 km away, and these villages were even two hours away from the highway. I couldn’t understand how this could be. So, as a good journalist, I followed the trail and ended up making a documentary, *The Selling of Innocents*, and won an Emmy. But finding the answer to my question changed my life: I’d covered war, famine, hunger, and conflict, but I had never seen this kind of exploitation of one human being by another—and to little girls. The women saved my life when I was filming [in a brothel]. Somebody stuck a knife to my throat and said, “You can’t film here.” The women surrounded me in a circle and said, “If you kill her, you’re going to have to kill us first.” I said, “OK, let’s do this together. Let’s form a circle.” Apne Aap means *self-action* in Hindi. The women had four dreams: school for their children, a room of their own—Virginia Woolf in Mumbai!—a job in an office, and punishment of those who bought and sold them.

It's fascinating how martial arts is central both in the book and in Apne Aap's work in real life.

It was really hard: Traffickers would attack us; school principals would refuse to admit the children, saying they are prostitutes; and the kids were hungry. Some were dependent on drugs and alcohol, or their family members were. The kids had no faith in themselves; the community didn't have faith in them. We begged the government to let us start a hostel inside a local school's premises. The traffickers would jump over the walls to kidnap the girls; the parents would try to pull the kids out, saying nothing is possible; and the kids also didn't respect themselves. I was walking home, completely frustrated, and I saw someone teaching karate near a rice field. I thought, maybe this is the way? Even if they are constantly being bullied and beaten, and even if they drop out of school—because who knows what the future holds—they can at least kick in a few teeth of those who are exploiting them. Karate changed everything. One girl told me, "In learning self-defense, I learned that I have a self worth defending."

What inspired you to turn these incredible stories into a YA novel?

I began writing the book when a girl just like Heera won a gold medal in karate. I was trying to help her stay in school in spite of the fact that her father wanted to sell her. It was quite a huge moment. I began writing the story, but I dropped it because there was no time. And then during Covid, when there was so much misery and doom and gloom, one of the girls texted me saying, "I'm in Forbesganj too. Can I come and see you?" She was telling me how she had rented a place, gotten a job, moved her mother out of the red-light area, and suddenly I felt hope. I thought, *why am I not sharing these stories?* Human trafficking is such a big problem, and it grew during Covid. We need to be able to talk about these issues with children; children should know what other children go through.

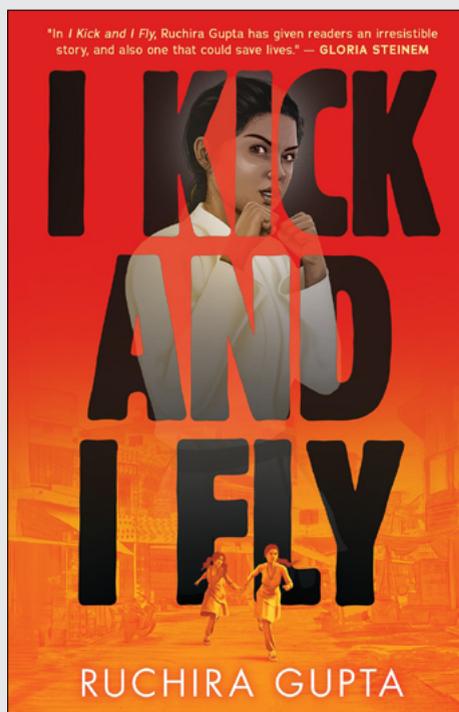
Twenty years ago, I began working on human trafficking. I knew nothing about it, but I had determination. I thought, *I'll go to the two most powerful places for changes in the law—the United Nations and the U.S.—and succeeded somehow.* We were able to go to different countries and say, *Meet the standards of this law: Provide services to victims, have prevention programs, and punish the traffickers. Shift the blame from the victim to the perpetrator.* Now we have more than 160 countries that have signed the U.N. protocol. But what I realized was that the traffickers are one step ahead of us. This is the second larg-

est crime in the world according to the U.N., after the arms trade. What are we going to do if this is the scale of what we are taking on? I need to get to these kids before the traffickers do and tell them what the real story is. One of the biggest culture wars in America right now really is what can we talk to our young people about? We have to talk to them about the truth, and what better way than to do it through storytelling?

Why did you move the setting from India to the U.S. for the later chapters?

I help law enforcement work with victims of trafficking, so I've met a lot of survivors here [in New York]. I mentor a group of survivors, and the story in the last chapter is true. A lot of trafficking narratives are of the White male savior: Someone goes from here to a red-light district in India and rescues a girl by knocking down the door. It's only part of the solution, it's not holistic. The girl they're getting out of the brothel will then be put into a shelter. When she turns 18, she'll be told, go back to that same village, to that same situation with no [extra] skills, whereas what I'm talking about is women and girls taking their own agency. There's a part in the book set in this shelter in America, with kids working together for this kung fu championship—and they are from everywhere to show how universal this problem is.

I Kick and I Fly was reviewed in the Feb. 15, 2023, issue.





MAGIC HAS NO BORDERS

Ed. by Charaipotra, Sonal & Samira Ahmed
HarperTeen (352 pp.)
\$19.99 | May 23, 2023
9780063208261

A collection of fantastically diverse South Asian stories reimagining and recentering ancient tales by beloved and well-known names from young adult literature as well as intriguing new voices.

From a jinn to a timeline guardian, battlefields to high schools, this anthology pushes the boundaries of fantasy, drawing on a broad range of settings, figures, and tales from South Asian religions, mythologies, and history. While some of the stories feature deeper character and plot development than others, they all offer skillfully reimagined worlds and characters. Centering female and queer characters is particularly successful in “A Goddess of Fire and Blood” by Tanaz Bhathena, “Shamsuddin-Jalal” by Tahir Abrar, “Unraveled” by Preeti Chhibber, and “Daughter of the Sun” by Sayantani DasGupta. In “Dismantle the Sun” by Sangu Mandanna and “What the Winds Stole” by Sabaa Tahir, the theme of enacting vengeance is intriguingly depicted, balanced against discussions of self-worth, choice, and love. Revenge also appears in other stories, explored through reincarnation, rituals, belief, and war. The magic is wonderfully varied, encompassing vengeful spirits, reincarnated deities, food sorcery, and a shape-shifter. The focus on connection and familial love rings true, although many of the romances feel rushed. The stories do not shy away from portraying brutal societal views on and practices toward women and girls, contrasting it with powerful female characters. Final art not seen.

Dark, engrossing, and entertaining. (map, author and illustrator bios) (*Fantasy*. 13-18)



THE BROKEN HEARTS CLUB

Crispell, Susan Bishop
Sourcebooks Fire (368 pp.)
\$11.99 paper | June 6, 2023
978-1-72824-717-5

When her perfect relationship is revealed to have been fake, an aspiring photographer must make amends.

Imogen “Mo” Finch blames her single status on her ability to read people’s auras—rose gold for love, teal for heartbreak; no one wants to be with someone who knows their feelings without being told. Mo’s mom also has this ability and, ironically given her daughter’s nonexistent love life, works as a professional matchmaker. For the last year, Mo has been pretending on Instagram that August Tate, a boy she met once who lives on the other side of North Carolina, is her boyfriend. After Ren Kano, her real-life crush, and his girlfriend break up, Mo stages a breakup with August so she’ll be available if it turns out

that Ren is interested in her. But when the real August shows up at the bakery where she works with best friend Gemma and asks why they’re not still together, her elaborate web of lies threatens to unravel. Then, as Mo gets to know August as an actual human being, she starts to fall for him for real. At the same time, Mo is struggling with her application to a prestigious art program. Many readers will relate to Mo’s difficulties bringing her artistic visions to life and will root for the characters to find their happy endings. Ren is Japanese American; other characters default to White.

Fans of sweet romances with a light magical touch will enjoy this story of personal growth. (*Romance*. 12-18)



THE QUIET PART OUT LOUD

Crossland, Deborah
Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)
\$19.99 | June 27, 2023
9781665927123

Just as former teen lovers reconnect, a natural disaster rips them apart.

Five months after torching her relationship with Alfie Thanasis; running away from her parents, who divorced following a scandal; and giving up her spot at Sarah Lawrence College, 18-year-old Mia Clementine is crashing in her best friend Simi’s college dorm room in San Francisco and looking for a job. She runs into Alfie in a coffee shop with another girl and flees—but later phones him only to have the call disconnect as a massive earthquake rolls through the city. Mia, initially joined by Simi, embarks on an epic quest through the rubble to find Alfie. As Mia meets people who influence both her physical and spiritual journeys, the trip starts to take on a mythic dimension, while, in alternating chapters, Alfie unspools the tangled story of their relationship. Although religious faith is an important part of the story, both Mia’s parents’ Evangelical Christianity and Alfie’s parents’ Greek Orthodoxy are treated one-dimensionally. It’s initially hard to invest in Mia despite Simi’s and Alfie’s affection for her, so her gradual transformation into a more evolved and aware person isn’t as believable and doesn’t have the emotional impact it should. The tear-jerker ending adds to the overall sense that this is a book to elicit emotion rather than evoke it. Mia and Alfie are White; Simi is a Punjabi Sikh American, and supporting characters reflect the diversity of the setting.

A teen melodrama without sufficient depth. (*Fiction*. 12-16)

“Required reading.”

THE ETERNAL RETURN OF CLARA HART



THE ETERNAL RETURN OF CLARA HART

Finch, Louise
 Little Island (288 pp.)
 \$11.99 paper | June 13, 2023
 9781915071026



Debut author Finch tackles sexual assault, toxic masculinity, and grief with precision and courage.

James “Spence” Spencer lives in a small English town where he plays rugby with best friends Anthony Mansbridge and Gary “Worm” Worley. Anthony’s constant harassment of women and immense wealth situate him as the respected leader of the group. At a party, Anthony sexually assaults artsy classmate Clara Hart, who flees into the night, drunk and on foot, and is hit by a car and killed. The next day, Spence wakes up to find it is the previous morning; he is stuck in a time loop. As Spence begins each morning desperate to control the events of the coming day and

save Clara, he also grapples with its being the first anniversary of his mother’s death. The book’s structure is perfectly paced with superb attention to detail as each day unfolds differently. Reliving events also allows Spence to grow in his own awareness of the impact of Anthony’s devastating behavior while giving space and value to Clara’s and other young women’s stories, showcasing Finch’s strong character development. Some dark humor lightens the heavy mood, but the sexism and misogyny are revisited relentlessly, fully implicating this group of boys who have made countless decisions every day to disrespect the girls in their lives. The centering of a male narrator grappling with grief makes this story required reading, shining a light on patriarchal norms all young men deal with. Major characters read White.

A devastating, essential journey. (Fiction. 14-18)

BE WARY OF THOSE YOU MEET IN THE WOODS

“People are mysteriously disappearing in Langston’s SF fantasy set in small-town Georgia.”

“...entertaining narrative...”

“...an enjoyable ride, with at least one incident that’s laugh-out-loud funny and a surprise denouement.”

“An amusing, imaginative read featuring a lovable furry critter with unique qualities.”

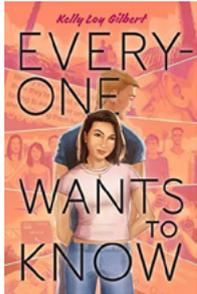
—Kirkus Reviews

ISBN: 978-1737823742

For Information on Film Rights, Email DruidJosh@gmail.com • JoshLangston.com

“A deeply humane story readers will reflect upon.”

EVERYONE WANTS TO KNOW



EVERYONE WANTS TO KNOW

Gilbert, Kelly Loy
Simon & Schuster (384 pp.)
\$19.99 | June 13, 2023
9781665901369

When your entire life is a public commodity, how do you figure out what’s real?

Influencers Nathan and Melissa Lo raised their family—16-year-old twins Honor and Atticus; high school senior Skye, and oldest siblings Wrangell and Jamison, now in their mid-20s—in the spotlight. There was their reality show, *Lo and Behold*, not to mention a podcast, a book, and more. They have a carefully crafted image: “wholesome and really cute, somehow both relatable and aspirational” and also “Asianish” (both Lo parents are biracial, Chinese and White). Married Jamison has a toddler and a profitable social media career. Menswear designer Wrangell distances himself from the family media circus. Skye leveraged her YouTube popularity to become a brand ambassador for Baylor University. Volleyball star Atticus stays centered and ignores the trolls. But Honor struggles with severe anxiety and obsessively reads comments about her family on celebrity gossip sites. After Nathan announces he’s leaving Northern California for Brooklyn, the Los’ world is rocked. When Honor’s confidences to two lifelong best friends are leaked to *People* magazine, she’s devastated. Melissa and the twins move, and Honor meets a boy who also hides behind walls; when another crisis strikes, she faces deep-seated fears of trusting again and navigates conflicts between being a good Lo and her own well-being. The superlative characterization and insights into complex, messy family dynamics make this a deeply humane story that readers will ponder and reflect upon.

An emotional roller coaster grounded by achingly authentic characters. (*Fiction. 13-18*)



ODE TO MY FIRST CAR

Gow, Robin
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (352 pp.)
\$18.99 | June 20, 2023
9780374388430

Coming out as bisexual? Not easy. Admitting you love your best friend? Potentially disastrous.

The summer before senior year, Claire Kemp totals her beloved car, *Lars*, her ticket to escaping her financially struggling family—mom, dad, and younger brother, Chris. *Lars* gave Claire the freedom to take aimless drives through the suburbs outside Philly and spend time with the person she secretly loves: her trans best friend, Sophia. Unsure whether Sophia, who dates boys, is attracted to girls too, Claire is afraid to reveal her feelings. Instead, she has her first queer sexual relationship with classmate Pen. To pay off the expenses related to

her accident, Claire takes a job at a nursing home, where she befriends Lena, an 85-year-old lesbian who serves as a valuable mentor and guide. Claire also learns that Chris is closeted and gay, and the siblings’ journeys to embracing their sexualities are intertwined. Written in free verse, the first-person narration follows Claire’s inner experiences as she navigates queerness, shares her inner hopes and fears, and shows readers how to find true freedom. The story moves quickly, combining introspection with action, and is likely to appeal even to reluctant readers. Most characters read *White* by default.

A compelling tale that explores queerness, friendship, and love. (author’s note) (*Verse fiction. 14-18*)



THE CHAPERONE

Hendrix, M
Sourcebooks Fire (332 pp.)
\$18.99 | June 6, 2023
9781728284859

A teenager coming of age in a patriarchal dystopian America discovers the way of life she’s always known is not the only one possible.

Seventeen-year-old Stella lives a privileged life in New America: She is beautiful, *White*, and the daughter of one of the wealthiest men in the nation, which broke away from the part of the country they refer to as Old America. Despite her privilege, Stella’s existence is sheltered and circumscribed by the rules that keep women in their place in her society; since she turned 12 and got her first period, she has been under the care of Sister Helen, her beloved chaperone who supervises her at all times, ostensibly to protect her but really to indoctrinate her into her future role as a wife and mother. After Sister Helen dies under mysterious circumstances, she is assigned a replacement, Sister Laura, who encourages her to imagine a different future for herself. Before long, Stella is plotting her escape from New America, but she’s determined to do more than just save herself. Overall, Stella’s transformation feels stilted, with plot developments outpacing organic character growth. Stronger writing could have rendered her a more fully realized person whose responses to shocking events and later initiative and ability to effect change would feel more believable and cohesive.

An unconvincing foray into a dystopian future. (reading list) (*Dystopian. 14-18*)



HOW TO WIN A BREAKUP

Heron, Farah
 Skyscape (350 pp.)
 \$28.99 | March 21, 2023
 978-1-5420-3608-5

When Toronto gamer nerd Samaya meets hockey jock Daniel, sparks fly—but will Samaya’s desire for revenge ruin her happily-ever-after?

After Samaya Janmohammad’s boyfriend, Devin Kapadia, dumps her and sabotages her summer plans, she begins senior year unsure how to get back on track as a top student. When her guidance counselor suggests completing her community service hours by helping with a bake sale to support a family shelter, she meets Daniel Ramos, an athlete with a penchant for baking. When Samaya sees a chance to get back at Devin by proving she’s moved on, she and Daniel make a fake-dating pact: She’ll tutor him in calculus, and he’ll pretend to be her boyfriend. But as Samaya teaches Daniel to be the perfect gamer-nerd boyfriend, and he teaches her how to bake, their relationship begins to feel like it might not be so fake anymore. Heron keeps their sweet romance interesting—Samaya is a perfectly flawed character who eventually realizes her privilege and grows; Daniel, the always smiling loyal hunk with a heartbreaking past, feels a little too perfect, however. Samaya’s Indian grandparents emigrated from Nairobi and are Ismaili Muslim; Devin’s Hindu parents are from Mumbai, and Daniel is Filipino Canadian. Readers familiar with Heron’s 2021 novel, *Tabira in Bloom*, which centered Samaya’s older sister, will enjoy spending more time with the Janmohammad family.

A charming romance about gaming, baking, and finding yourself after heartbreak. (recipe) (Romance. 13-18)



THE DOS AND DONUTS OF LOVE

Jaigirdar, Adiba
 Feiwel & Friends (336 pp.)
 \$18.99 | June 6, 2023
 9781250842114

A teen baker in Dublin reckons with dreams of baking glory and a new love interest.

Seventeen-year-old Bangladeshi Irish Shireen Malik is going through breakup blues when she finds out she’s made it: She’s going to join the cast of the *Junior Irish Baking Show*. She’s thrilled about being on reality TV—but it’s a shock to learn that not only is Christina Huang, her ex-girlfriend, on the show as well, but the producers have paired them for the first round. Though Shireen quickly makes a new friend, Niamh Lynch, who may or may not be flirting with her, it’s not going to be easy to be so close to her ex for the duration of the competition. In fact, it just might be the thing that throws her off her game. The pressure

builds—Shireen hopes that a win will help You Drive Me Glazy, the family doughnut business, and Chris’ parents own a rival shop, The Bakers Dozen, making things even more personal. Full of culinary puns, the prose flies by with Shireen as the hilariously dramatic lead. Shireen is easy to root for; she’s a fat girl who’s not trying to lose weight, she’s aware of her anxiety and doesn’t let it hold her back, and she’s proud of being queer, brown, and Muslim. Her parents are loving and supportive as well. This joyful read with a cheerful protagonist also explores racism, fatphobia, and mental health with care.

Cute, fresh, and endearing. (content warnings) (Romance. 14-18)

“Velvet is the story you might get if *The Secret Life of Bees* cozied up with *Where the Crawdads Sing*. Gorgeous writing and a gripping story you could stay up all night reading...What a wonderful read, I loved it!”

—Jennifer Louden, National Best-selling Author of *The Woman’s Comfort Book: A Self-Nurturing Guide for Restoring Balance in Your Life*

ISBN: 979-8-9865220-1-2 [paperback]
 ISBN: 979-8-9850242-9-6 [hardcover]

“A forever kind of book.”

—Julie Jo Severson, Author of *Secret Twin Cities: A Guide to Weird, Wonderful, and Obscure*

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THE ISLES OF THE GODS

Kaufman, Amie

Knopf (464 pp.)

\$19.99 | May 2, 2023

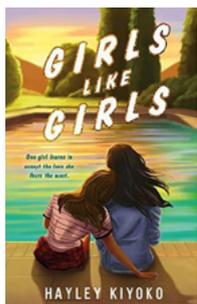
9780593479285

Series: The Isles of the Gods, 1

When gods go to war, the world lies barren in their wake.

Selly is a saltblood, with a storm in her heart and secrets to hide; Leander is a prince, more powerful than he cares to acknowledge and desperate to run from his duties, no matter the cost. Keegan is a scholar who would rather study history than be part of it. Jude is a boxer, swinging futilely at a cruel world; Laskia feels wronged by life and will go to any lengths to get what she feels she deserves. In the background of their lives, sibling gods lurk as threats, one bound in sleep, the other a patient, distant sentinel. When war brews between nations, the gods hold the fate of the world in their hands. Kaufman's worldbuilding is richly detailed, immersing readers in the twists and turns of a well-paced plot. Her characters are not heroes but ordinary people battling extraordinary circumstances: tired, bruised, dirty, and sympathetic. The emotional impact of each setback and triumph is elevated by the care shown for the ordinary people caught on opposite sides. The cliffhanger ending will leave readers eager to spend more time in this world. This fantasy features characters who are diverse in physical appearance; race holds no significance. There is also LGBTQ+ representation.

A thrilling series opener. (map) (*Fantasy*. 12-18)



GIRLS LIKE GIRLS

Kiyoko, Hayley

Wednesday Books (320 pp.)

\$20.00 | May 30, 2023

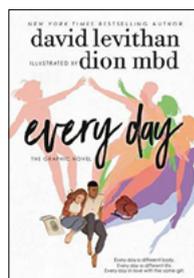
9781250817631

Two girls wounded by their past relationships grapple with the undeniable intensity of their feelings for one another in this novel based on the pop-star author's popular song and music video.

Seventeen-year-old Coley, who is White and Japanese, braces for impact as a minivan hurtles toward her in a parking lot. The crash never comes, but in that moment, she and fierce Sonya, beautiful with her tan skin and dark hair and eyes, collide. Horrible circumstances brought Coley to small-town Oregon; after her mom's suicide, she's raw with grief and stuck living with the dad who abandoned her when she was 3. Wealthy, competitive dancer Sonya feels no less trapped. Afraid of rejection and loneliness, she buries her true self to appease her perfectionist mother and the demanding ex-boyfriend who refuses to let her go. Unspoken attraction pulls Coley and Sonya together, but the masks they wear to protect themselves from their pain create a barrier that

may keep them apart. Set in the summer of 2006, the novel alternates Sonya's public and private LiveJournal posts that reveal her side of the story with Coley's first-person narration. Sharp, poetic prose heightens the emotional and romantic drama. References to early 2000s pop and alternative music in Sonya's posts create a playlist that sheds more light on her feelings. Coley demonstrates satisfying character growth as she opens up to herself and others. Apart from Coley, most characters are presumed White.

A searing romance. (content note) (*Romance*. 14-18)



EVERY DAY The Graphic Novel

Levithan, David

Illus. by Dion MBD

Knopf (208 pp.)

\$24.99 | \$17.99 paper | May 2, 2023

9780593428986

9780593428979 paper

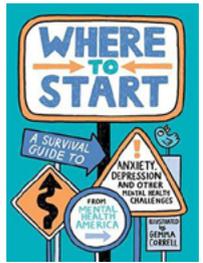
A tries to maintain their own identity in this graphic adaptation of Levithan's bestselling 2012 novel by the same name.

Every day, A wakes up in a new body. They've had this uncontrollable ability since birth and have grown used to keeping people at a distance—that is, until A wakes up in Justin's body and spends a romantic day at the beach with Rhiannon, Justin's girlfriend. Unable to forget her, A conspires to spend more time with her. As Nathan, A attends a party and exchanges emails with Rhiannon, finally building an ongoing relationship. Unfortunately, Nathan remembers being a spectator in his own body and tells people he believes he was possessed by a demon. Rhiannon does some investigating, realizes A's story doesn't add up, and A reveals the truth. Despite her growing feelings, Rhiannon doubts their relationship could work due to A's constant body-hopping. Questions of consent and selfhood are explicitly addressed through A's body swapping, making A an incredibly relatable protagonist and the premise as intriguing and relevant as ever. Because A wakes up in a different body every day, it can be difficult at times to spot which character they are currently inhabiting, but this is overall a very successful adaptation. The racially diverse cast is drawn in an expressive style, and the use of light and shadow and the varied color palette are highly effective.

Demands readers' attention and does not let go. (*Graphic fiction*. 12-18)

“Phenomenal.”

MAGE AND THE ENDLESS UNKNOWN

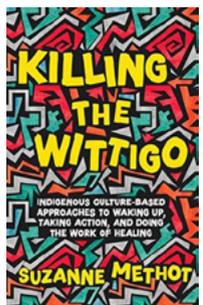


WHERE TO START
A Survival Guide to Anxiety, Depression, and Other Mental Health Challenges
Mental Health America
 Illus. by Gemma Correll
 Rocky Pond Books/Penguin (208 pp.)
 \$19.99 | April 11, 2023
 9780593531402

A quick reference guide suitable for teens wanting to explore many aspects of their mental health journeys on their own terms.

This offering from a major U.S. mental health nonprofit offers teens an overview of psychological concerns, explains what can be done to address them, and provides self-help tips. An opening list of ways to use the book details its flexibility and adaptability. Next, there are four main sections: The first describes major types of mental health disorders and includes a self-assessment; the second supports readers in reaching out to parents and caregivers; the third is a guide to professional support, including apps and other online resources; and the final section offers a variety of things teens can try doing on their own. Bullet points and worksheets that utilize open-ended questions to aid readers in reflecting on their learning offer guidance. The warm, conversational tone and straightforward, accessible language welcome readers to explore the text as they wish and establish autonomy over their wellness. Readers will find an abundance of beneficial information, but there is no index, and no sources are provided for the facts included. The book’s design is clean and attractive, with ample white space. The illustrations show racially diverse young people as well as bold graphics in shades of orange and sometimes-humorous vignettes that help lighten the mood.

A valuable, comprehensive manual for navigating mental health struggles. (resources) *(Nonfiction. 12-17)*



KILLING THE WITTIGO
Indigenous Culture-Based Approaches to Waking Up, Taking Action, and Doing the Work of Healing
Methot, Suzanne
 Illus. by Jessica Albert & Mapris Purgas
 ECW Press (280 pp.)
 \$23.95 paper | June 6, 2023
 9781770417243

This is an uncomfortable book to read—but it is meant to be.

This concise but broad-ranging work examines the lasting emotional and psychological impacts of colonization on Indigenous people in the U.S. and Canada. Experienced educator Methot (Nehiyaw) discusses many difficult subjects in chapters such as “Terror Anger Grief Loss,” “Isolation, Disconnection, Reconnection,” “Families and Relationships,” “Dis-ease and

Self-Care,” “Systems and Institutions,” and “Culture and Spirit.” The chapter on lateral violence, intracommunity dysfunction that is usually not openly addressed, is particularly valuable. Throughout, activities help readers learn about themselves and process what they have read. An important author’s note emphasizes that this book is not a substitute for getting help from a trusted adult. Although there are disclaimers before content about topics like abuse, neglect, and suicide, there are instances of traumatic stories that are not prefaced with a warning; in her introduction, Methot emphasizes pacing your reading to avoid becoming overwhelmed. Along with a variety of fonts, line art, and interesting graphics and charts, quotes and social media posts from young Indigenous people discussing their experiences add to the mixed-media appeal. These voices also give readers the feeling that they are not alone. The book does not delve into differences between various nations’ histories or U.S. and Canadian governments’ policies. Throughout, there’s an emphasis on healing and connecting; readers are reminded to “be a good ancestor” and “do more than survive, thrive.”

A valuable introduction to Indigenous culture-based approaches to trauma. (resources, citations, and permissions) *(Nonfiction. 12-18)*



MAGE AND THE ENDLESS UNKNOWN
Miller, S.J.
 Iron Circus Comics (152 pp.)
 \$15.00 | June 20, 2023
 9781638991199



Young Mage is sent out to explore a fantastical world with dark sides.

Titular Mage is an innocent magic-wand user. Their design is rounded and has a wholesome, vintage, *ligne claire* feel to it, giving them strong characterization from the start. Their happy exploration of ruins and use of plant magic are interrupted by a monster that swallows them whole—and that’s only the beginning of the creatures they face. In this almost wordless graphic novel, readers make meaning and piece together the narrative by following the art. This narrative device effectively captures reader sympathy and induces a shared sense of exploration. The art is also a pleasure to follow all on its own, with exquisite linework and detail, especially in the surprises and horrors—some of them quite grotesque and embracing body horror—that Mage faces. Each page has a heavy border; while some have multiple panels, most are single-page, and the effect is as though readers are looking through a portal to Mage’s world. What little text there is gives key insights to Mage’s purpose, though it is ambiguous enough not to spoon-feed information. On his journey, Mage meets and bonds with two strangers, in particular, who remain unnamed until back-matter character sketches. One of them has an elven vibe with pointy ears and is a bespectacled, curious, book-carrying being with dark skin; other characters are pale or not humanoid.

Phenomenal. *(Graphic fantasy. 14-adult)*



BLISS ADAIR AND THE FIRST RULE OF KNITTING

Mills, Jean

Red Deer Press (312 pp.)

\$14.95 paper | April 30, 2023

9780889956841

A teenager finds the world is more complicated than she thought.

Sixteen-year-old Bliss Adair loves the order and predictability of math and knitting. She's never been kissed and doesn't really get boys. Bliss spends most of her time when not at school at String Theory, her parents' knitting store, located just outside Toronto. One day, while ensconced in the store's secluded window seat, Bliss overhears a whispered phone conversation by the mother of classmate Finn Nordin that appears to be about an adulterous meeting, and she is alarmed. To complicate matters further, Bliss and Finn are picked to represent their school in the grade 11 math competition run by the University of Waterloo. Bliss wonders if she should tell Finn (whom she doesn't know well) what she overheard. Meanwhile, store regular Mrs. Bart confides to Bliss that Sydney, her pregnant 16-year-old granddaughter, will be staying with her. Might Bliss help her navigate school? Suddenly, Bliss' orderly math-and-knitting world is turned topsy-turvy. Narrated in the first-person present tense by Bliss' warm, authentic voice, the story is notable for its depiction of acceptance and community even as things get a bit tense. Main characters read White; others who are diverse in ethnicity and sexuality round out the ensemble. This story delivers nuggets of wisdom, a balanced outlook, and the refuge of knitting—just take it one stitch at a time.

Humorous, wise, and comforting. (knitting guide and patterns, author interview) (Fiction. 12-17)



A SPARK IN THE CINDERS

Moke, Jenny Elder

Disney-Hyperion (384 pp.)

\$17.99 | June 6, 2023

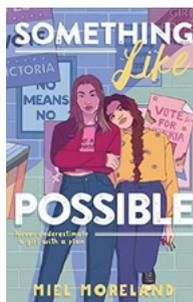
9781368039918

An adventure for those who haven't yet found their fairy-tale ending.

Now that Cinderella has married the prince, her older stepsister, Aralyn, has been forced to take on the household chores. Cinderella, now going by Princess Ellarose, seeks out Aralyn, who has had the benefit of an extensive education, for assistance with troubling diplomatic matters. The two discover a royal coup is brewing. When Aralyn's ambitious mother decides to cut her losses and take her younger daughter, Divya, to a neighboring kingdom in pursuit of a suitor, abandoned Aralyn makes a desperate wish and meets her own fairy godmother, Lyra. Tall, fur-clad, and purple-skinned, Lyra reveals the existence of an ancient fey weapon that may be powerful enough to save the kingdom and get Aralyn back in

good social standing. Aralyn and Vee, Ellarose's loyal knight, set off together to find the three scattered pieces of the weapon, traveling through the danger-filled Mortel Mountains, ominous Silent Forest, and the Impassable Sea. At first mutually antagonistic, the two young women realize their overly demanding, abusive parents have given them similar outlooks on life. The worldbuilding is so expanded that the story's fairy-tale origins add little; still, this is an interesting journey of self-discovery with plenty of magic, action, an enemies-to-lovers romance, and a strongly developed theme of becoming your own person despite your origins. Main characters are cued White.

An entertaining jaunt. (Fantasy. 13-18)



SOMETHING LIKE POSSIBLE

Moreland, Miel

Feiwel & Friends (384 pp.)

\$18.99 | May 23, 2023

9781250845818

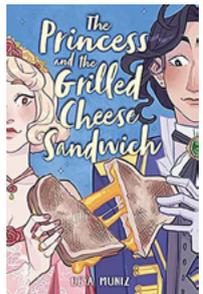
A 15-year-old Minnesota girl knows exactly what she wants, but life is about to show her that there may be more than one way of getting there.

High-achieving Madison has a plan, specifically The Plan, mapped out in her Life Notebook, detailing exactly what steps she needs to take to reach her dream of becoming a political campaign manager. First, she needs to successfully manage the campaign to get Jade, her girlfriend, elected as their school's next junior class president, which will help her earn a scholarship to attend the Youth Politics Boot Camp, which will in turn increase her chances of getting into her dream college, Georgetown. However, Madison's plans are thrown off course when Jade both dumps and fires her. Determined to keep moving ahead, Madison quickly finds a promising new candidate in kind and intriguing Victoria. As the relationship between Madison and Victoria shows signs of budding into something more, everything seems to be falling back into place. But when Madison discovers a sexual harassment scandal within her school, she will once again have to fight to maintain control of her future. The supportive friendships between the multiple queer characters are endearing and refreshing. However, the pacing of more serious plot points feels unbalanced, with little time given for readers to become invested in and then digest these important events and themes before the story wraps up. Main characters are White.

An engaging but unevenly paced story about perseverance and solidarity. (resources) (Fiction. 14-18)

“A beautifully depicted emotional journey.”

MONSTROUS

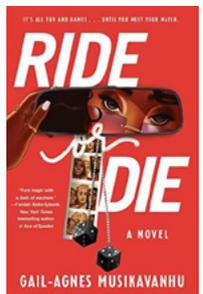


THE PRINCESS AND THE GRILLED CHEESE SANDWICH

Muniz, Deya
Little, Brown (256 pp.)
\$17.99 paper | May 9, 2023
9780316538725

A charmingly cheesy fairy-tale romance. With no legal means of inheriting the family estate after her dear father’s passing, a young woman disguises herself as a man. The newly minted Count Camembert moves to the capital city, Fondue, with trusted servant Feta and tries to keep a low profile. About to go bonkers from boredom, Cam attends a “no-furs” ball hosted by activist Crown Princess Brie. The two immediately collide and bond over fashion. Brie later invites Cam to a private brunch with friends (including delicious cheesy sandwiches) to launch a more targeted cruelty-free fashion event. The two are soon smitten with one another, but Cam knows she can’t get too attached. Eventually, truths come out and more than one heart goes on a roller-coaster ride of emotions. This story is such a joy—a spectacular, feel-good, comfy romance. Olive-skinned Cam, with her flowing black locks, is suave—but also, in Brie’s own words, “an air-head with the attention span of a worm.” In other words, she’s adorable. Brie, with her curly blond bob and pale, rosy skin, is conscientious and beautiful, and she will capture readers’ hearts as quickly as she does Cam’s. Plenty of roses and sparkles à la shōjo or yuri manga and cute, exaggerated facial expressions make the watercolor-style images endearing. The setting is an interesting mix of clothes and architecture that evoke the 18th century along with some modern technology and colloquialisms that add to the humor.

So cute. (*Graphic romance. 12-18*)



RIDE OR DIE

Musikavanhu, Gail-Agnes
Soho Teen (384 pp.)
\$18.99 | June 6, 2023
9781641294201

Self-involved, self-destructive Loli seeks thrills and chaos, but one mystery adventure carries her kicking and screaming to the point of self-reflection. High schooler Naloli Tamryn Crawford is bored with life in Woolridge Grove, where there are few other Black girls. Doting best friends Ryan Pope, who reads White, and Cairo Dahmani, who is Moroccan, enable her shenanigans. When Loli decides to throw an impromptu rager at an ex-boyfriend’s house, few questions are asked before they’re onboard with what becomes a historical event. So Loli never has to reveal that the party is actually a ruse to right a wrong before it’s revealed and can break Ryan’s heart. Still, the party changes everything as, among other rumored happenings, Cairo is tapped to become a supermodel, Ryan

experiences a moment that puts his sexuality in question, and Loli becomes entangled in a risky competition with an appealing but anonymous individual. Like the accompanying playlist that punctuates the story’s beats with song titles naming chapters, the novel uses tropes compellingly. Loli hates cliché, but even she would have to accept that her budding romance with the Mysterious Voice from the party proves to be as predictable as it is dangerous. And ultimately that’s the rub: Loli pursues being interesting in ways that often make her anything but and selfishly puts her relationships in jeopardy, but the novel doesn’t offer much depth as to why, which may frustrate readers.

An imperfect protagonist—and novel—with a lot of charm. (*Fiction. 13-18*)



MONSTROUS A Transracial Adoption Story

Myer, Sarah
First Second (272 pp.)
\$17.99 paper | June 27, 2023
9781250268808

An adopted teen struggles with monstrous submerged anger amid bullying and self-criticism in this graphic memoir.

Author Myer, South Korean by birth, grew up in rural Maryland with White adoptive parents and a sister, Lizzy, who was adopted from a different South Korean family. Unlike Lizzy, who was popular and did well in school, rambunctious Sarah didn’t quite fit in, playing more easily with boys than girls. However, a wildly vivid imagination and burgeoning artistic talents helped Sarah interact with others; Sarah’s focus on drawing and animation wasn’t just a hobby, but a passion and an ongoing lens for relating to the outside world. Sarah’s use of anime cosplay to explore curiosity about gender expression and sexuality skillfully expresses central elements of the book and adds complexity to this coming-of-age story. The frequent racial microaggressions of early childhood escalated over time, with racist and homophobic White middle and high schoolers insulting, physically bullying, and harassing Sarah on a daily basis. As Sarah internalized this hatred, it was magnified by self-doubt, much of which was centered around being adopted, and it began to manifest as an angry, monstrous self that lashed out violently at bullies, friends, and even family. The themes of anxiety and self-image are powerfully depicted by contrasting the more minimalist drawing style in fairly neutral tones with dramatically shaded and dynamic panels.

Immersive and engrossing: a beautifully depicted emotional journey. (resources, author’s note, photos) (*Graphic memoir. 13-18*)



“Atmospheric, evocative, and just the right amount of chilling.”

I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO BE IN THE DARK



I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO BE IN THE DARK

Neilson, Riss M.
Henry Holt (400 pp.)
\$18.99 | May 9, 2023
9781250788535

A Providence, Rhode Island, teen who sees spirits senses something supernatural is happening with her former best friend.

High school senior Aria Cayetano, who is of Filipino and Cape Verdean heritage, drinks special tea concocted by her grandfather to dull her connection to the spirits she sees at night. Lately, she's also been secretly watching her neighbor and ex-best friend, Derek Johnson, who is cued Black, wondering where he mysteriously goes off to in the dark. When Derek suddenly starts talking to her again after two years of silence, Aria hopes it means their friendship can be repaired, but there's something different about him. She discovers he's being possessed by a spirit who sometimes takes control. Aria stops drinking her tea to uncover the extent of her abilities—which she'll need in order to save Derek, for whom she's developing feelings. This dreamy and ethereal story combines mystery and romance with the paranormal world of magic and spirits. It's atmospheric, evocative, and just the right amount of chilling. Patience is required of readers as the world slowly unveils itself, especially as Aria's family has many closely guarded secrets. Aria's detective work to discover the truth keeps the momentum going, but it's the examination of relationships and human nature that makes the book sparkle. The tale weaves in grief, empathy, and how far people will go to protect the ones they love.

Lushly written and full of emotion. (*Paranormal*. 14-18)



THINGS I'LL NEVER SAY

Newbould, Cassandra
Peachtree Teen (320 pp.)
\$18.99 | June 6, 2023
9781682635964

After her twin's death, a teen journals as an exercise in sorting out her grief, anxiety, and crushes on her two best friends.

This debut is told mostly in epistolary form, mixing Casey Jones' letters with occasional verse as she writes down all the things she'll never get a chance to say to Sammy, her twin who died of an opioid overdose 17 months prior. Between the crushing weight of survivor's guilt and the crushes bisexual Casey has on both Benjamin Dean and Francesca Romero, the other members of the siblings' tightknit friend group, her anxiety is spiraling out of control and the already narrow gap between casual drug use and a dangerous addiction is shrinking. One fateful night, Ben kisses Casey; at the same party, Casey sees Frankie kissing

another girl. She'll have to decide if honesty is really the best policy when you've got crushes on two of your friends at the same time. Though the slang used will soon feel dated, readers will appreciate getting to know a gritty, complicated protagonist who has a frank, matter-of-fact vibe about the darkness in her life. Casey is many things—fat, queer, a grieving sister, a surfer, and someone struggling with anxiety. Newbould also successfully normalizes consensual nonmonogamous relationships for teens. Frankie is Puerto Rican; other main characters read White.

A forceful exploration of the complexities of love and loss. (content warning, resources) (*Fiction*. 14-18)



LEGENDS AND LIARS

Rhodes, Morgan
Razorbill/Penguin (352 pp.)
\$19.99 | June 13, 2023
9780593351734

Josslyn Drake and Jericho Nox unravel the Empire's web of lies in this follow-up to *Echoes and Empires* (2022).

Soon after finding out she is the biological daughter of Lord Banyon, the Empire of Regara's greatest enemy, Joss finds herself on the run from Queen Isadora along with her newly found half brother, Prince Elian, and dangerous thief and assassin Jericho, the boy she is falling in love with. The trio hope to turn to Jericho's powerful boss to learn how to control the wayward magic that plagues each of them in different ways, but when they do find the answers—in the most unexpected of places—it may well lead to cataclysmic changes to the very foundation of the Empire as they start to question everything they thought they knew about magic and how far the queen is willing to go to keep its secrets. Starting shortly after the events of the first book, this sequel ups the ante with nonstop action, further twists, huge revelations about the magic system, and a dynamic romance between Joss and Jericho. While some of the flair and snarky humor from the first book are sadly missing from this sequel, the skillful plotting and strong character development help make up for that. The majority of characters are assumed White.

A taut, fast-paced, romantic close to a satisfying duology. (*Fantasy*. 14-18)



SQUIRREL IS ALIVE
A Teenager in the Belgian
Resistance and French
Underground

Rostad, Mary with Susan T. Hessel
 Fulcrum (158 pp.)
 \$15.95 paper | June 27, 2023
 9781682753774

The story of one teen's work spying for the Belgian resistance and French underground during World War II, this is a new edition revised and updated by Holocaust educator Stephen Feinberg.

On May 10, 1940, the German army bombed Brussels, and 15-year-old Roman Catholic Rostad's life changed forever. After exposure to the horrors of war as a Red Cross volunteer, Rostad, code name Squirrel, became a saboteur in a Nazi-run factory where members of the resistance first contacted her. When fellow resisters went missing, she realized she must leave and join the Free Belgian Army in England. Heading toward Portugal, where she'd board a ship to England, she delivered intelligence, documents, and small arms. Just before crossing the border into Spain, however, news of a Spanish bounty on resisters forced her to remain in France, where she spent the rest of the war. The memoir covers the entirety of Rostad's life, including her marriage to an American GI, immigration to the U.S., and commitment to educating people about the horrors of the Holocaust. Unfortunately, her account tends toward flat summary, and the authors display a preference for dwelling on happier times, providing more richly detailed anecdotes from Rostad's Depression-era childhood than from her wartime efforts. Lengthy quotations and explanations of historical context slow the narrative. Nevertheless, given the dearth of teen literature spotlighting the resistance, this work represents a valuable resource for initiates seeking firsthand information.

A rich life too often flattened into dry chronology. (notes, discussion questions) (*Nonfiction. 13-18*)



THE MOONLIT VINE

Santiago, Elizabeth
Illus. by McKenzie Mayle
 Tu Books (368 pp.)
 \$24.95 | May 30, 2023
 9781643795805



The 14-year-old descendant of a Taíno leader finds the strength in ancestral roots to help her present-day community.

Taína, who goes by Ty, has a lot on her plate. Her parents have been separated since her father got out of jail. She takes care of her grandmother, who has Alzheimer's, and her little brother, who's in first grade, while her mother works two jobs. Her mom just kicked her older brother out of the house for getting into a fight at school. Childhood friends, including her crush, have

felt pressured to join a violent gang. Her neighborhood is gentrifying, and Ty, whose brown-skinned family is Puerto Rican, encounters racism and prejudice everywhere, from the teacher who shames an English language learner to the welfare officer who made her mother feel terrible for applying for affordable housing. One night, Ty's grandmother gives her an amulet and a zemi, a sacred carving, created by their ancestor Anacaona, a Taíno leader, warrior, and poet. Abuela tells Ty that knowledge of her birthright is her power. As Ty learns more about her heritage, one crisis after another ensues. Readers will cheer for the bold, resourceful protagonist as she uses her newfound power to bring everyone she cares about together to save loved ones and create positive change in her neighborhood. Mayle's evocative black-and-white art and interstitial chapters centering Ty's ancestors through the centuries round out the contemporary storyline.

Deeply moving, beautifully written, and inspiring. (author's note, ancestors, historical timeline, inspiring Boriqueños, references) (*Fiction. 13-18*)



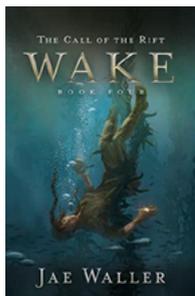
COSMOKNIGHTS
Book Two

Templer, Hannah
 Top Shelf Productions (280 pp.)
 \$24.99 paper | June 13, 2023
 9781603095112
 Series: Cosmoknights, 2

A popular webcomic returns with more galactic drama.

Pan wakes up with an audio message from the past: Five years ago, she helped her best friend, Princess Tara, escape the fate of an unwanted marriage. Now she is startled to hear Tara crying and saying they made a mistake. But she and the crew must focus on their plan to continue freeing other princesses. They currently have one onboard, but she won't come out of her room. When she finally does emerge, it's to ping her location, signaling wardens to come take her home. Unfortunately for them all, she only ends up alerting pirates to their whereabouts. Pan finally gets through to Scottie, the latest princess, who shares that she never actually wanted to be saved in the first place and had plans for doing good in her role as queen. This leads Pan to open up about Tara's delayed message and her self-doubts. Everyone on the fleet seems to have a different opinion as to which strategy to follow now, but they have to decide soon, especially with the pirates on their tail. This sequel raises the stakes as Pan continues to explore different aspects of feminism. In exciting action scenes and sweet romantic subplots, readers, too, will start asking questions. The illustrations offer bursts of hot colors and beautiful sequences that highlight the queer, multiracial cast.

A gripping feminist space adventure. (Graphic science fiction. 14-18)



WAKE

Waller, Jae

ECW Press (432 pp.)

\$18.95 paper | May 23, 2023

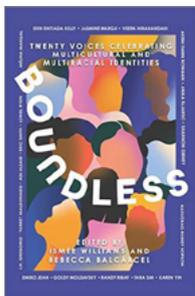
9781770414594

Series: The Call of the Rift, 4

Knife-edge action and terrifying truths abound in Waller's follow-up to *Crest* (2021).

It has been one month since the Battle of Tjarnnaast, during which Kateiko lost both of her parents in their pursuit to kill Liet, the leader of the violent Rúonbattai, only to realize that their true leader may have been Liet's cleric companion who has vanished. Kateiko, who once had better control of her visions, struggles to live her daily life, haunted by scenes of a desolate wasteland and messages from her parents in the spirit world that she still cannot fully interpret. She leaves Nettle Ginu to search for missing friends Jorungard and Tiernan who could play a critical role in protecting Eremur from the destructive Rúonbattai who seek to destroy it. As expected, Kateiko's journey is relentless, and her self-control is tested as she balances being a hero determined to save her world with being a vulnerable young woman. She makes new acquaintances and must carefully discern who her allies and foes are. As in previous installments, Kateiko honestly and maturely explores dynamic romantic relationships, particularly those with Tsiala, a sarcastic woman warrior, and Tiernan, her much older mercenary friend with whom she shares a special connection even when they are apart. The Indigenous, or viirelei, people are brown-skinned; itherans are White, and the cast includes queer characters.

Emotionally stirring and complex; a promising conclusion awaits. (maps, glossary, timeline) (*Fantasy. 15-adult*)



BOUNDLESS

Twenty Voices Celebrating Multicultural and Multiracial Identities

Ed. by Williams, Ismée & Rebecca Balcárcel

Inkyard Press (368 pp.)

\$20.99 | June 13, 2023

9781335428615

The agonies and ecstasies of adolescence are relayed through the lens of multicultural identities.

Exclusively featuring multiracial and/or multicultural authors, this anthology reflects the painful awkwardness of a bifurcated existence while celebrating a boundless self. Pubescent agonies are in abundance here, from the humiliation of an unrequited crush to the challenges of wrestling with menstrual products. Overlaying them all is the added feeling of isolation from never quite fitting in, sometimes not even in one's own family. A few stories offer a lighter touch—Goldy Moldavsky's "Hispanic Jewish Bingo" has Jewish Latino characters debating

the ethics of cheating at the synagogue's charity casino night, and Karen Yin's "My Kinda Sorta Badass Move" finds a queer Chinese American coming to a new understanding with her tough-as-nails grandmother. While the anthology is packed with acclaimed authors, including Erin Entrada Kelly, Jasmine Warga, Torrey Maldonado, and Randy Ribay, emergent authors like Nasuğraq Rainey Hopson hold their own. Hopson's "The Perils of Beige" astutely captures smarmy, condescending faux collegiality at a speech and debate competition from the perspective of an African American Inupiaq novice. Vastly different voices show the breadth of multicultural identities, but the collection doesn't always feel cohesive. There is also a broad range in maturity among the teens depicted: Some are younger-sounding middle school students while other protagonists feel significantly older, making this a collection readers may dip into rather than reading cover to cover.

A worthwhile and sprawling compilation. (author bios) (*Anthology. 12-18*)



BLOOD BORN

Wilson, Shelley

BHC Press (206 pp.)

\$22.99 | May 23, 2023

9781643973401

Series: Immortals, 1

Everything changes for Emma Hartfield after she dies, awakens as a vampire, and learns the dark history of her family.

Seventeen-year-old Emma, who was raised by her grandmother Flora, has always been a loner who has felt darkness inside her. After she's attacked by a vampire, Emma suddenly has enhanced powers of perception and a craving for blood. Flora is oddly unsurprised by this turn of events but sets out with a promise to get more information about what's going on. Then Cara, a different vampire, shows up and opens Emma's eyes to the (literally) underground world of vampires and the ongoing struggle between the Immortals and the half-bloods. Emma starts developing real friendships with the vampires in the nest she joins, and they team up to rescue Flora, who has gone missing. But when the truth about her biological family comes to light, Emma will have to decide where her loyalties lie. The action-forward story combines tried-and-true vampire lore with some new twists. However, worldbuilding elements are often plopped into the story rather than being naturally woven in, and the descriptions feel too slight to make it fully engrossing. A romance subplot isn't given enough time to be believably built up. Readers may relate to Emma's questions surrounding family and belonging, but because so many characters are one-note, it's hard to become truly invested. Emma is cued White; some racial diversity of secondary characters is implied.

A flimsy story about vampires and chosen family. (*Paranormal. 13-18*)

“Entertains and engages.”

CITY OF VICIOUS NIGHT



CITY OF VICIOUS NIGHT

Winn, Claire
 North Star Editions (456 pp.)
 \$14.99 paper | May 23, 2023
 9781635830842
 Series: Requiem Dark, 2

Riven, Asa, and the *Boomslang*'s crew are back, facing new dangers in Requiem, a human colony in Alpha Centauri.

It's been four months since the fateful events of *City of Shattered Light* (2021), when Asa saved her sister, Kaya, and Riven lost her friend Ty to Asa's all-powerful father, Luca Almeida. The duo, alongside their outlaw friends, are taking odd jobs in the crime-ridden matriarchal city of Requiem. When they become the target of a hacker, Riven and the crew join the Ascension Trial for choosing a new matriarch, a process bound by rules that can keep them safe for a time. But before they can complete the trial's dangerous tasks, a new revelation about Luca Almeida's nefarious plans for Requiem surfaces—along with the news that Ty is still alive but, just like Kaya, irrevocably changed. Asa, Riven, and now Ty (although apart from the central action) alternate perspectives as the story spirals and old enemies become allies. This sequel skillfully mixes found family and aliens with adventure and politics, with the added emotional core of romantic tension between Riven and Asa and the gang's ongoing grieving over the friend they believe lost forever. Altogether, it's a heady combination that entertains and engages while centering an overall diverse cast.

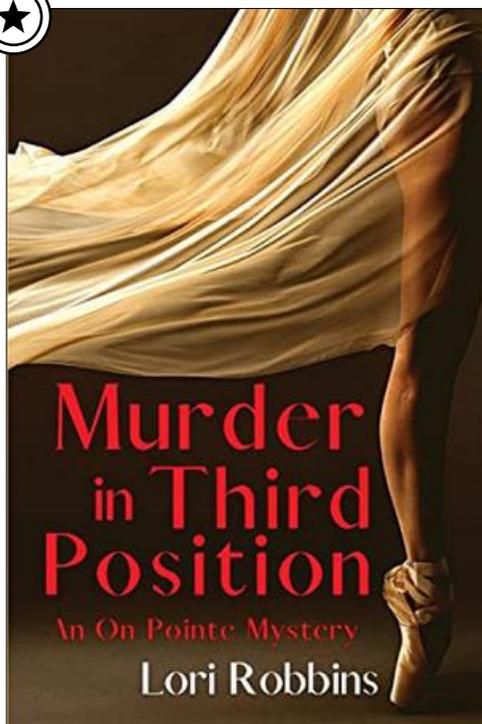
An immersive sequel with higher stakes, romance, and satisfying relationship dynamics. (Science fiction. 14-18)

INDIE

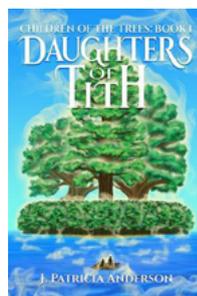


These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

- THE GIRL WHO COUNTED NUMBERS** by Roslyn Bernstein 171
- HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF COLLEGE** by Elliot Felix 185
- PORTRAITS FROM LIFE** by George Franklin 185
- NOBODY KNEW SHE WAS THERE** by Andrew Glascoe 187
- A PERSISTENT ECHO** by Brian Kaufman 189
- OBSERVER** by Robert Lanza & Nancy Kress 190
- MURDER IN THIRD POSITION** by Lori Robbins 195



MURDER IN THIRD POSITION
Robbins, Lori
 Level Best Books (260 pp.)
 \$16.95 paper | \$0.99 e-book | Nov. 22, 2022
 9781685121969



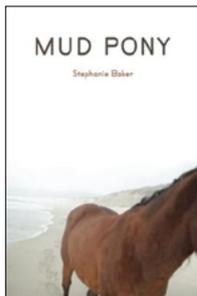
DAUGHTERS OF TITH

Anderson, J. Patricia
 Root of the World Publishing (640 pp.)
 \$29.99 | \$16.99 paper | \$2.99 e-book
 May 1, 2023
 9781778288135
 9781778288104 paper

In Anderson’s fantasy debut, a queen-to-be braves a harrowing journey across worlds to pull her people out of exile.

Tchardin, the youngest of five sisters, is one of the kandar—a “guardian race” meant to guide humans on the nine Earths. But for several generations, the kandar have been exiled to their planet Derkra. Tchardin will soon be Derkra’s queen, but she questions her ability to effectively rule; during this exile, no kandar has been able to travel to any of the Earths to fulfill the Purpose their Creator gave them. Tchardin differs from her sisters in her curious nature: “The longing for something beyond had come to her early in life, but it had been easy to ignore until lately. Now the feeling pressured her almost constantly.” She indulges her hunger for the unknown by answering a mysterious call while traveling toward the kandars’ long-abandoned city of origin. Surprises ensue, including the rediscovery of the kandars’ ability to “shift” between worlds. An unexpected foe whose nefarious plan involves starting a war pulls Tchardin to one of the Earths. To get back to Derkra, she must traverse the nine Earths—all while fighting an enemy’s interplanetary influence and menacing presence. This epic novel, which launches a prospective series, excels at worldbuilding; in particular, Anderson evocatively describes the planet Derkra, covered by an empty, desolate, seemingly infinite ocean that the kandar appear to fear. The story takes full advantage of its length, fleshing out its characters and ever changing locales. While the cast includes plenty of Derkra’s inhabitants (as well as some humans), the empathetic Tchardin and her multilayered sisters bask in the brightest spotlight. As the author has sequels planned, myriad questions linger, from the fates of various individuals to the particulars of Derkra’s past, including the kandaran war and resultant exile.

This mythical series opener abounds in vivid characters and crisp details.



MUD PONY

Baker, Stephanie
Kettle River Books (222 pp.)
\$16.00 paper | Oct. 5, 2022
9798986096209

Baker's debut memoir follows her attempts to train a willful horse on the Northern California coast.

The author always imagined her first steed would be a purebred Arabian. Instead, it turned out to be small, dirty Mud Pony, a "mutt" of a horse. A lifelong horse lover, Baker had been hoping to have a close, almost spiritual connection between herself and her animal, but Mud Pony wasn't interested in being ridden. Baker received the orphaned creature for free from a rancher's wife, and since Mud Pony had never been trained at all, Baker found that her first task was to acclimate him to the presence of people. She didn't imagine that this would be as difficult as it was; she thought that she could easily draw on experiences from her day job teaching high school in San Francisco, where she was used to winning over defensive or standoffish students. However, the process of "breaking" Mud Pony was so arduous that Baker bought a second, pre-trained horse to help things along. This memoir is an account of what the author learned during her yearslong relationship with Mud Pony, who, over the course of the story, effectively becomes a symbol for the gulf that exists between man and beast. The remembrance also serves as a reflection on the author's relationships with the land and the weather, the changing city of San Francisco, and the many colorful characters that populate the horse-training world. Baker details the ways that humans and animals interact, what they might learn from one another, and what each may never understand.

Baker is a sharp observer, and her prose is filled with succinct, poetic passages that will likely stop readers in their tracks: "Carter, my husband, thinks the first human who rode a horse must have raised a foal and tamed it. 'At least that's what I would do,' he says. But I imagine it a singular, spontaneous moment—private, quick, no witness—and only after much waiting and watching." The memoir has the feel of a diary, and Baker does note in a postscript that it was drawn from her journals from the time. As such, there's a slightly hesitant, searching quality to the narrative, with accounts of making progress little by little along with plenty of second-guessing and trial and error. When rare successes do arrive—such as the first time that Mud Pony permitted Baker to sit on him—readers will share the author's excitement, knowing how hard-won these moments were. This is a book for readers who are familiar with horses but will also interest those who simply aspire to be. Many of its pleasures come from Baker's descriptions of ranches and trails, the personalities of people who spend time around horses, and other elements of equine ownership. Readers who give themselves over to the minutiae of it all will find that the book offers a wonderful meditation on an endeavor that's nearly as old as human history.

A quietly rewarding equestrian remembrance.



PEACE & HEALTH

Barber, Charles
Octoberworks (178 pp.)
\$19.99 paper | \$9.99 e-book | Oct. 25, 2022
9781959262008

A chronicle of Middletown, Connecticut's Community Health Center from its modest beginnings in the 1970s to its frontline fight against Covid-19 today.

In October 1973, recent college dropout Mark Masselli rolled out a sleeping bag in the cold, dangerous North End of Middletown, Connecticut. For three days he half-slept outside the building at 631 Main St. to ambush the delinquent leasee for the keys to the abandoned Carrie Plumbing & Heating Company, soon to be the neighborhood's Community Health Center. Such was the modest beginning and first location of the CHC, which over the next several decades would evolve from a much-needed independent free clinic providing dental services and sickle cell anemia screenings to a federally qualified health center with numerous locations. Mark, educated in the activism of the 1970s and assisted by proximity to Wesleyan University, was aided by others, including pharmacists, doctors, and community figures who believed in the basic tenet that "healthcare is a right and not a privilege." They would work to bring patient-centered care to overlooked poor, immigrant, and minority citizens. The steady growth of the CHC and the champions behind it are beautifully featured in pages of full-color and black-and-white photos and news clippings as well as sobering early balance sheets. Their battles, including bureaucratic fights with a callous city hall, prepared the CHC to later respond quickly to the Covid-19 pandemic. Barber's book boasts attractive layouts and design, vibrantly presenting a thorough timeline of the CHC, its innovations and expansions, and the development of its internationally recognized research entity, the Weitzman Institute. The story is as much about Masselli as a personality as it is about the clinics he founded, and it effectively captures his devotion to equity in health care through shared missives and regular examples of leadership through listening. Still, the book can be a bit dry and textbooklike in its presentation, which might have been alleviated by more expansive interviews and testimonials. Overall, though, there's a hopefulness in seeing such important services not only surviving, but thriving.

A colorfully presented and encouraging history of an important community institution.



BARSA KELMES
The Nomads Return

Bekakhmetov, Gabit
New Degree Press (158 pp.)
\$16.99 paper | \$4.99 e-book | Aug. 30, 2022
9798885045544

A pre-modern steppe lord is reborn as a contemporary clone in Bekakhmetov's debut novel.

In Almaty, Kazakhstan, in 2021, aging molecular biologist Ansar Tolengitovic

GREGG R. OVERMAN TALKS ABOUT HIS NOVEL

[SPONSORED]

Please tell us a little about yourself and your work.

At the tender age of 71, I still go to work every day to shake my fist and yell at the workers in my industrial detergent business in Memphis, Tennessee. They smile politely and say, “Yes sir, Mr. Gregg,” and then completely ignore whatever I said. We have a system, and it’s working. In fact, it’s working so well that I can now devote most of my energies to writing. It only took 20 years.

How did you choose the genre of your book?

When I was 8 years old, my dear Aunt Betsey gave me five Tom Swift Junior books for my birthday. They had titles like *Tom Swift and His Ultrasonic Cy-*



cloplane and *Tom Swift In the Caves of Nuclear Fire*. I discovered worlds within those covers where great things might be done, and no one in a black-and-white habit would rap your knuckles or make you kneel on rice. It was a safe haven for a young boy tragically prone to taking on way more responsibilities than he could possibly

handle, and I was well and truly hooked before the end of the first book. It changed my life. Thank you, Aunt Betsey! By the time I entered high school, I had read every science-fiction book in the local library. It would make no sense for me to write anything but science fiction.

How did you develop your subject?

One day I read an article in a science magazine about how humans are hunter-gatherers. The article pointed out that even though there are vast cultural differences between us, we humans all share certain

universal traits because of our common evolutionary past. I remember walking out on the porch—not sure at this point if drugs were involved—and wondering, *Well, what if we weren't hunter-gatherers? What if we had evolved from, I don't know...scavengers?* And that was the genesis of the Koombar, an alien race with a penchant for genocidal self-protection. As luck would have it, you can read all about them in *Blue Sunrise*.

Was your storyline something that you envisioned from the beginning, or did you build/change it as you were writing your novel?

My method, such as it is, is to envision the arc of the story. I know the beginning, the middle, and the end before I start. Certain events need to occur to link these things together. My job is to shape those events into a seamless whole. At times, a piece simply presents itself, and it is one of the great joys of writing when this happens.

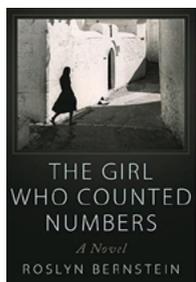
What are you working on now?

The sequel to *Blue Sunrise* was banging around in my head for years. It was making me crazy. When I finally sat down to write it, I rediscovered the sublime joy of writing. *Blue Sun Rising* is now in the editing and rewriting stage. As I wrote this sequel, the idea for a third novel barged in unannounced and uninvited. It seems I have more work to do in my office at home. It’s going to interfere with shaking my fist and screaming at workers, and I know they’ll miss me even if they’re too proud to admit it, but it can’t be helped. They’re the best.

Portions of this Q&A were edited for clarity.

laments how much his country has changed in the past few decades: "The young men particularly weren't as masculine and brutal anymore...not even like he and his friends had been in Soviet times," he notes. "Forget resembling their glorious nomad ancestors, who could boast of being able to conquer any city, country, or empire." Ansar gets it into his head that the only way to return his nation to its glorious nomadic past is to clone Kenesary, the last khan of the Kazakh people, using DNA from the khan's long-dead body. He finds a willing surrogate mother in Tomyris, a multilevel marketing hustler and sometime harpist. Raised on a secret biological preserve on the island of Barsa-Kelmes, the new Kenesary is sent to an elite school in Britain so that he may rub shoulders with future world leaders and captains of industry. At a Uyghur restaurant in Berkshire, he meets a tightrope walker named Amursana who considers himself to be a reincarnation of the last prince of Jungars. The two men seem destined to reinstate the ancient ways of steppe life—at least until the powers that be get wise to their plan and vow to halt the revolution. Bekakhmetov's prose is barbed and often funny, as when the two revived steppe lords meet with the queen of England: "Kenesary and Amursana were happily enjoying their new titles in Berkshire. Having royal prefixes added to their long and unpronounceable names made the gentlemen feel more comfortable. Declaring in all seriousness that they were princes felt outrageously uplifting." The author is adept at crafting larger-than-life characters and introducing them economically. There are some issues with the novel's momentum, however, in part because the reader never really gets a clear idea where the story is headed. Even so, the novel succeeds as a satire of modern concerns about masculinity, Soviet nostalgia, and even cryptocurrency, among other contemporary issues.

A madcap satire that skewers notions of returning to an imaginary past.



THE GIRL WHO COUNTED NUMBERS

Bernstein, Roslyn
 Amsterdam Publishers (284 pp.)
 \$24.95 | \$19.95 paper | \$4.99 e-book
 Oct. 12, 2022
 9789493276376
 9789493276369 paper

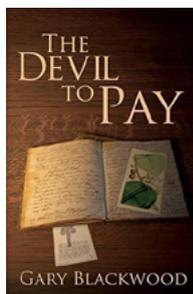


A young Jewish woman searches for her lost uncle in Israel during the harrowing trial of Adolf Eichmann in Bernstein's novel.

In 1961, Susan Reich, a first-generation Jewish teenager raised in an Irish Catholic neighborhood in New York City, is not the dutiful Zionist of her father Yehudah's wishes. She wants to travel before going off to college, a plan her domineering father will only support if she goes to Israel to investigate the fate of his brother, Yakov, who disappeared after the Germans invaded Poland during World War II 20 years earlier. With little information to go on, Susan arrives in Jerusalem at a time of tumult and mourning as Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi war

criminal and one of the principal architects of the Holocaust, is put on trial. As she listens to heartbreaking accounts of survivors in the course of the search for her uncle, she struggles with what it means to be a Jew. When she falls for Ezra, a Moroccan man in her Hebrew language class, she sees firsthand the impoverished conditions and prejudice his people face as non-European Jews. The experiences of Ruth, a waitress and Holocaust survivor whom Susan befriends on her quest, raise complex and contradictory ideas about love, rape, power, fear, and survival during the most horrific of times. The author brings the troubled young nation of Israel alive on the page, with trash-filled alleyways, smoke-filled cafes, and the pall of the Eichmann trial hanging over everything. The novel has a noirlike quality ("Around them, they heard the sounds of neighborhood cats yowling in the darkness. When she first heard them, Susan thought they were babies crying"), which, along with recurring themes of identity, history, culture, ethnicity, and sexuality, makes for an immersive detective novel. Bernstein's story is no mere exercise in pulp—the narrative leans into the disturbing physical imagery and emotional fallout of the Holocaust while vividly capturing the tenor of Israel in 1961. This compelling, character-driven story will captivate even those with limited knowledge of Jewish history, the Nazis, or Eichmann and teach valuable lessons along the way.

An engrossing mystery wrapped in a coming-of-age story and the heart-rending legacy of the Holocaust.



THE DEVIL TO PAY

Blackwood, Gary
 Black Rose Writing (297 pp.)
 \$20.95 paper | \$5.99 e-book | June 1, 2022
 9781684339501

In this novel, a graduate student discovers a puzzling codex in a university library.

The year is 1969, and graduate student Simon Hannay is working on his master's thesis in comparative literature at Van Dyne University while teaching karate. In the library's rare book room, he stumbles across a 16th-century codex (a handwritten book) with "paper pages...bound after a fashion, by a method known as stab sewing, which involves poking holes through the entire thickness." Apart from one paragraph in Portuguese, the codex appears to be written entirely in code. With the help of his newfound Brazilian friend, Gabriela, Simon decides that cracking the code will become his new thesis topic. He soon discovers that the codex was written by Portuguese fortune hunter Vicente Marques, who discovered a plant with miraculous healing powers. But Simon isn't the only one interested in the codex. The original soon disappears, and the copy that Simon handed over to his adviser, professor Espinoza, vanishes after the professor is drugged by a blond "mystery man" lurking on campus. The closer Simon and Gabriela get to uncovering the secrets of the codex, the more danger they face. The twisty tale's central mystery is presented in a way

“An entertaining tale that showcases Mayell’s clever and creative illustrations.”

HELLO, MY NAME IS BUNNY!: LONDON

that invites the audience to join in. Readers are shown excerpts of the codex, and at certain points, they have more information than Simon himself. While the prose can become a bit bogged down by inconsequential details (the university’s fraternity hazing rituals, for example), Blackwood maintains a steady pace toward a compelling conclusion. There are plenty of subplots to keep things intriguing as well, including questions about Simon’s father’s death and Gabriela’s heartbreaking secret. The backdrop of the Vietnam War also looms large as Simon becomes increasingly drawn into the conflict between the war’s protesters and supporters on campus.

A satisfying thriller with enough history and mysteries to keep readers enthralled until the end.



ALL THINGS UNDER AND OVER THE SUN AND STARS *Enigmas in Various Stages*

Blair, Maurice James

Self (470 pp.)

\$37.90 | \$17.56 paper | Jan. 2, 2023

9798985909470

9798985909456 paper

In Blair’s SF novel set around the 42nd century, the cult members of a human-settled planet launch a war of universal annihilation.

The author starts his time-leaping, dimension-folding epic “a few hundred years into the fourth millennium of the common era.” New Gwalintu, a human colony, claims supremacy over everything in the universe, with a faith based in part on archaeological evidence an advanced alien civilization once thrived on the planet. Organizing themselves into a dictatorship via the use of brain implants, the people of New Gwalintu wage war against all other civilizations, pursuing a mission of conquest and extinction. Behind the plentiful nuclear arsenal of New Gwalintu is a shadowy religious cult whose mental powers threaten to sunder the entire universe, which would leave the consciousness of New Gwalintu as the only entity left. The best minds on Earth counterattack in a “War Beyond Human Comprehension,” but they find that reality itself has become frayed. Some Earth heroes wind up in alternate universes; Ezra Kalkin, one defender, materializes on a parallel Earth where his own planet is the subject of a popular SF tale, and watching philosophical dissertations is a major pastime. Kalkin headlines the Alpha Conference, where he offers deep thoughts alongside a popular pair of shamans/comedians, which could prove crucial in the war effort. A team of hit men await to assassinate Kalkin, but even they hang on his every wise word. The narrative then shifts to a team of 55th-century space explorers on a habitable planet, discovering an incredible pyramid covered with Dan Brown–esque symbols representing Earth culture, math/science, and religion. An alien “Great Reverberating Voice” greets the amazed humans, ultimately transforming them into other beings to do good works. A final episode happens in 3534 on another variant Earth, involving an amazing prisoner from the dawn of time.

Readers who are expecting closure to the New Gwalintu plot thread will be disappointed. In prologues and epilogues, Blair acknowledges a wide spectrum of intriguing influences, ranging from classic SF author Arthur C. Clarke to director Alfred Hitchcock, *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd, actor Bette Davis, chess master Garry Kasparov, and even pop singer and actor Olivia Newton-John (whose first motion picture, 1970’s *Toomorrow* is an SF rock musical). However, this imaginative and ambitious work of fiction most readily brings to mind Count Jan Potocki’s mythic and famously unfinished *The Saragossa Manuscript* (1810), which codified a recursive, fabulist-fantasy genre narrative in which bizarre stories lead to even more stories—seemingly making no sense but all interconnected nonetheless. Such is the case in this novel, which offers readers an absurdist odyssey that also recalls James Joyce, Spike Milligan, Tom Robbins, and Kurt Vonnegut, by turns, with its puns, conspiracies, Eastern mysticism, transcriptions of sitcom and old-timey radio scripts, and its surprising reverence for religion. At the heart of this storm of concepts is what appears to be a loving homage to literary creativity and imagination itself.

A quizzical, nonlinear journey through complicated SF plotlines involving philosophy and epistemology.



HELLO, MY NAME IS BUNNY! *London*

Bloom, Matt & Shelley Simmons-Bloom

Illus. by Pippa Mayell

Hello Bunny (80 pp.)

\$13.99 paper | Sept. 30, 2022

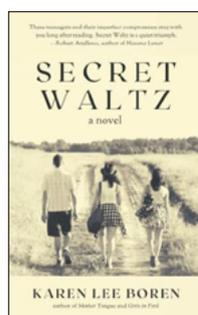
9780997642544

This second installment of a children’s book series follows a compassionate feline to downtown London.

Bunny Simmons-Bloom, a 2-year-old tuxedo cat who lives “a life of international adventure,” is back again—this time in London. Bunny wants to cheer up 10-year-old Lily Hayward, her blond next-door neighbor who gets bullied at school for being “nerdy.” The feline tells readers: “Nothing upsets me more than young humans or animals being mistreated.” As Bunny contemplates how to help her friend, she mentions to Lily that the city is planning a giant fox cull since the animals have been making giant messes and threatening kids and small animals. Horrified by the idea, Lily and Bunny (alongside the girl’s rambunctious golden retriever puppy, Goldy) embark on a quest to warn the foxes and try to work out a solution. They soon run into Freddy Fox, who shows the group just how hard his life can be while trying to scrounge for food and avoid getting hit by cars. He eventually brings them to Chieftess Fox—a haughty leader amusingly illustrated with a jaunty eye patch and plenty of attitude—whose mistrust of humans makes sense once she explains that people have been hunting foxes and encroaching on their natural habitat for years. As Bunny, Lily, and the Chieftess discuss the need to work together, Lily comes up with a brilliant solution that may just save the foxes—and make her a hero in her community. While Bloom’s overly simplistic dialogue may make this a less-than-exciting tale for parents, elementary-age readers

will be delighted that they can peruse it on their own. The story brims with worthy lessons about responsibility, altruism, and respect for animals, providing a perfect platform for discussions about these important topics between kids and adults. The sequel also proves to be an entertaining tale that showcases Mayell's clever and creative illustrations of an endearing feline in a colorful animal world.

This romp's adventures—and lessons in kindness—make a cat an adorable role model.



SECRET WALTZ

Boren, Karen Lee

Flexible Press (374 pp.)

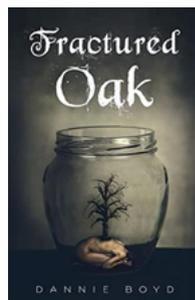
\$18.00 paper | \$9.99 e-book | June 9, 2022

9781736403365

Five teenagers grapple with questions regarding sex, identity, and morality during the tumultuous and transformative years of the late 1960s in Boren's novel.

In suburban Wisconsin in 1966, young women are expected to follow a certain path—one of marriage, motherhood, and obedience. Hiding a secret pregnancy while dreaming of attending college on a science scholarship, Sonya Morrow has a difficult choice to make. Meanwhile, friends Leo Meitka and Emelia Demski enjoy the simple but fraught lives of teenagers. They explore the woods by the lake, go to school, work, and attend church functions together; they also grapple with their changing bodies and individual autonomy in a small and stubbornly rigid world. Leo, imaginative and musical, wants to break away from his drunken father and emotionally volatile mother. Emelia, uncertain and fierce, is trapped between her burgeoning sexuality and her desire to be a “good girl” in a society that punishes women who dare to be anything else. After a traumatic and horrifying event, each teenager makes choices that alter the courses of their young lives, culminating in a poignant and thoughtful reflection on what it means to grow up in a time of both great repression and great expression. The narrative primarily alternates among the perspectives of Sonya, Leo, and Emelia, with small interjections from Dean, a young child connected to Sonya, and Elisa, the mentally unstable younger sister of Emelia. Each character is distinct, well developed, and thoughtfully crafted—Boren excels in conveying the tortured thoughts of each personality, as when Sonya laments, “She used to be smart and flip. Quick. Too quick, one teacher had written on her report card long ago. Now she was simply too fast.” The novel's powerful exploration of repression, sexuality, trauma, and identity is uncomfortable, tragic, messy, and real. Boren boldly lays bare the naked realities of growing up and facing seemingly unsurmountable challenges. Sonya's, Leo's, and Emelia's stories will stay with the reader long after the novel's thoughtful final words.

A courageous tale of growing up and standing up.



FRACTURED OAK

Boyd, Dannie

Indigo Dot Press (270 pp.)

\$13.99 paper | \$3.99 e-book | April 4, 2023

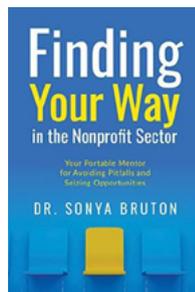
9781958160046

9781958160053 e-book

In this debut mystery, an Ohio detective's homicide case has curious links to a doctor's mid-19th-century murder.

In 1853, Catherine Miller becomes only the third woman to graduate from a prestigious American medical college. But before the new doctor can even celebrate, a blow to the head kills her. Her soul spends 170 years inside an oak tree, where, in the present day, she sits near the property of pharmaceutical scientist Mark Carver. As Catherine can't move or speak, she can do nothing to stop Carver from killing someone and then hiding the murder weapon. Seasoned homicide detective Lani Whitaker picks up the case and quickly suspects Carver of something shady, but she'll need concrete evidence, which is hiding somewhere close or maybe in the man's past. Around the same time, Lani unearths her great-grandfather's journal in an attic. She reads of his lifelong obsession with a “pretty young doctor” who inexplicably disappeared. This unsolved mystery parallels and ultimately connects to the detective's present-day investigation. Some of Boyd's engaging tale plays like a procedural. Catherine and the audience know Carver is guilty and can only watch Lani meticulously piece together clues. Mysteries nevertheless abound, from Catherine's unknown killer to what Lani digs up in her homicide investigation. The narrative perspective alternates between these two women with similar lives but different time periods, aptly developing them both. For example, Catherine, as a tree, recalls men's unfounded animosity and fear of her success. Lani, whose forced retirement is imminent, deals with a younger, condescending male police chief. While serious detective work fuels the plot, the author allots space for welcome comic relief. Highlights include Catherine's becoming fascinated with modern things such as cars and charmingly snarky Lani's calling her loathsome boss “Chief Toddler.” It all leads to a satisfying wrap-up of the mysteries as well as the women's personal struggles.

Two remarkable heroes enliven this absorbing crime story.



FINDING YOUR WAY IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR
Your Portable Mentor for Avoiding Pitfalls and Seizing Opportunities

Bruton, Sonya

Advantage Media Group (146 pp.)

\$14.99 paper | \$6.99 e-book | Jan. 30, 2023

9781642254129

Nonprofit executive Bruton discusses the guiding principles for working effectively in the social services sector in this career primer.

“An exuberant high-tech ancient-world adventure.”

THE HERO ENGINE

The author, CEO and president of CCI Health Services and a licensed clinical psychologist, draws from her “three decades in the social services arena, hard-won executive savvy, and insights as a clinical psychologist trained to foster human development” to give guidance on working in the “social services domain, which is the landing spot for those searching for meaning.” Originally from the for-profit world herself, Bruton outlines a “Five Cs” system of Care, Community, Collaboration, Can Do, and Change that will “serve as your guides when operating within the social services sector and provide more useful metaphors for work in this environment.” Care comes first: care for the work being done (essential to serving the mission of a social service agency); care for co-workers (all important stakeholders in fulfilling the mission); and care for oneself (such as finding a mentor). Community involves treating the population being served as a “partner, not an experiment that is being manipulated.” Collaboration is necessary in this sector, and Bruton shares her experiences of joining with other agencies to achieve objectives. Those working in nonprofit social services must maintain a can-do attitude and culture focused on solutions and embrace change. The author provides actionable steps for each C and offers a concluding “Social Services-Sector Entry Quiz” to further assist readers interested in pursuing the profession. Bruton is candid about the challenges of this career path, cautioning that it “is so demanding of people’s time and energy and dedication that it tends to bring out weaknesses in people not prepared to deal with it.” While Bruton’s detailed “Social-Sector Ecosystem” graphic and accompanying discussion may intimidate some readers, there is useful information here for those who wish to succeed in any profession. The author explains in clear, readable prose both the challenges and rewards of working in the nonprofit world. The book is organized so that key concepts can be easily accessed again, making this work a useful, ready reference.

An illuminating guide to navigating social services work that also has applications for any field.



THE ART AND LAW OF REST A Legal Guide to Paid Medical Leave for Mental Health

Chu, Andy

Nimsa Press (128 pp.)

March 1, 2023

9798986990804

9798986990811 e-book

A manual offers tips to disabled workers on how to navigate the benefits bureaucracy.

Every year, about 5% of working Americans will experience a short-term disability due to an illness, injury, or pregnancy. In theory, disability benefits can replace the lost income, but in practice, many Americans find the prospect of dealing with the benefits bureaucracy overwhelming or are even unaware that they qualify for aid. Disability attorney Chu presents a guide through the benefits thicket in this chatty, readable book that

uses anecdotes from his legal experience and self-help aphorisms to “empower people to use their disability benefits, take time off and take care of their mental health.” The acronyms alone might be enough to send shudders through applicants—STDI (Short-Term Disability Insurance), LTDI (Long-Term Disability Insurance), SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance). Adding to the confusion, the federal government, states, and some employers provide benefits. And the more money an individual applies for, the more rigorous is the bureaucratic review by “disability adjudicators.” Because of mental health stigmas, some potential claimants hesitate to seek benefits. “I knew dad’s mental illness was real,” one tearful client told the author. “I can’t believe I have it too. I am so ashamed.” Chu discovered that the Social Security Administration was investigating another client, a woman with PTSD and depression who survived the Cambodian genocide, because officials thought she was faking her symptoms to get benefits. “Mental health disability is riddled with myths and misconceptions that have ruined lives,” the author observes. Chu is particularly effective at explaining the differences among benefits programs, how to communicate with health care providers, and how to transition from short- to long-term disability, eschewing complicated verbiage for clear-cut, witty counsel. “We are not what we do. Even when we are not working (being ‘productive’), we are worthy,” he writes, and “Be brave; it takes guts to declare: I have a serious illness. I need a medical leave. I am going to apply for benefits.” The book may only be of interest to the relatively limited universe of potential disability benefits claimants, but other self-help writers should study its clarity and pithiness.

Plenty of straightforward, punchy advice to make the benefits claims process less overwhelming.



THE HERO ENGINE

Cooper, Dennis

Self (213 pp.)

\$9.99 paper | \$3.99 e-book | April 22, 2022

9798986181202

After her adopted grandfather’s visionary weapons plans are stolen, a teenage girl joins forces with a soldier’s son to save the Roman Republic in this YA alternate-history novel.

In the year 79, 13-year-old Petra goes aboard an arriving ship to get available scrolls to copy for the Library of Alexandria. To her shock, the scrolls are plans for innovative weapons—the work of her adopted grandfather Hero. Cassius, a Roman officer who had tried to get these plans from Hero, must have stolen them. Petra and Hero travel to Pompeii to alert Pliny that Cassius, trying to put a new “false Nero” in power, has this military advantage. Upon arrival, Petra meets Pliny’s nephew, Gaius, a boy around her age whose father, Lucius, has been captured by Cassius’ forces. Gaius and Petra sneak into the coliseum to help Lucius fend off a mechanical gladiator and other dangers. Hero also deploys the nimble teens to drop into Cassius’ weapons factory. Afterward, as Petra and

SHEPHERD SIEGEL DISCUSSES TRICKING POWER

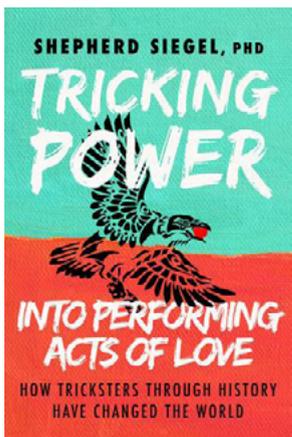
[SPONSORED]

Please tell us about your work.

I write about the Trickster, an archetype found in every culture, often an animal or even a bug. They can be a spider, fox, rabbit (Bugs Bunny!), or even a fly. The book covers showcase Trickster demigods from Indigenous America. In *Disruptive Play* I dressed up a coyote in a businessman's suit, putting Trickster in a contemporary context and suggesting a joke, where Trickster infiltrates corporate America. *Tricking Power* features Raven, the Trickster god of the Pacific Northwest, depicting the almost perfect tale of how the Raven tricks power—the Chief—into performing an act of love. Raven steals the sun and gives light to the world.

Please tell us a little about yourself.

Though quite young at the time, I was aware of the war in Vietnam. Living in the Bay Area, I witnessed and participated in a vigorous anti-war movement and a joyful



counterculture. Without diminishing the horrors of war, the protest movement was artistic and playful; rather than confronting power with power, power was mocked. Humor is more than getting a laugh; it gets to the truth and can even be a lie that reveals a greater truth. Impressionable me was indelibly marked, for example, by the satire of the San Francisco Mime

Troupe and the yippie exorcism of the Pentagon, as activists attempted to levitate it 300 feet off the ground. Thus, my guiding light has been how grown-ups who retain the ability to be playful as they were when children have something of great value to share, in culture and in politics.

How did you develop your subject?

An early draft of *Disruptive Play* viewed the world through this lens of the playful adult and featured profiles of Banksy,

Anonymous, the Yes Men, Marcel Duchamp, Alfred Jarry, the Beats, Andy Kaufman, Abbie Hoffman, even King Lear's Fool. But then a colleague introduced me to Lewis Hyde's *Trickster Makes This World*, and that changed everything. I had to go back and rewrite the book through the more illuminating lens of the Trickster. Over the course of writing both books, our society's ominous and growing fixation with the warrior—solving problems by defeating adversaries—made the Trickster's approach even more relevant to the cultural and political issues of today.

How has critical and/or reader response influenced the way you think about your work?

When giving talks for *Disruptive Play* throughout the U.S. and Canada, I got feedback about the fact that many of my protagonists were White males. This came from the culture in which I grew up, but the response inspired me to write *Tricking Power*, whose two hearts are the Trickster in Afro-Atlantic culture, from Sun Ra to HBO's *Watchmen*, and the female Trickster—which is tricky. Nigerian anthropologist Ayodele Ogunipe writes that Tricksters are ultimately without gender. In *Tricking Power*, I wrestle with this, teasing out the patriarchy in order to get a clearer view of the feminine in the Trickster. In this companion book, you will find illustrative profiles of Mae West, Muhammad Ali, the Marx Brothers, Yoko Ono, Sacha Baron Cohen, and more.

How did you research your book?

I build my library around themes. I buy books more than I use the library or even the internet. Besides taking notes, I mark up books with Post-its, notes in the margins, and highlights. And if you're writing to make the world a better place, research includes participation. Be with people; notice how they behave and how they change. Notice where our collective psyche is and where, for good or ill, it might go.

Portions of this Q&A were edited for clarity.

Hero depart for home, they discover that Vesuvius is about to erupt and that Cassius has a special new battleship. Petra and Gaius employ other intriguing contraptions before the story's end. Over the course of the novel, Cooper provides an engaging spin on history that leverages some real-life historical figures (Hero, Pliny, and others) and almost nonstop action. The coliseum scene is a tour de force, with the teens filling it with water (as was sometimes done in ancient times) and facing a wonderfully realized "wall of death" of mechanized weapons. Cooper also includes some lovely moments in which the teens consider giving in to rage ("No revenge is worth our lives") or flirt with each other. Although the revelation of Petra's identity feels a bit rushed, it also tees up future exploits featuring the charming, intelligent main character.

An exuberant high-tech ancient-world adventure.



CHOCOLATE SPACE BUNNIES

DaVeiga, Cberyl

Illus. by Luis Peres

Waterhole Productions (40 pp.)

\$17.99 | \$12.99 paper | \$3.99 e-book

Feb. 1, 2023

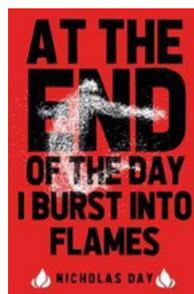
9781958050064

9781958050057 paper

DaVeiga's picture book presents an out-of-this-world origin story for a common confection.

Chocolate was not always a cherished treat on Earth; originally, the substance only existed on a distant planet called Fondue, inhabited by anthropomorphic bunny rabbits called Fonduliens. The planet was dripping in sugar, candy, and syrup, and "everything, including the bunnies, was covered with sweet, fudgy chocolate." The Fonduliens set out on a mission to find a new home when rising temperatures threaten their planet, and they choose Earth for its beauty. A diverse group of parents and children are amazed when the Fonduliens' spaceship enters Earth's atmosphere. The parents are afraid of the visitors, but the children are simply curious, especially when the crew presents a chocolate fondue fountain. The author playfully imagines the history of chocolate while emphasizing the virtues of teamwork, curiosity, and friendship. DeVeiga's writing is enhanced by the use of sensory details, such as clouds that "rained gooey syrup." The text is complemented by Peres' bright, appealing illustrations. The planet Fondue is rendered in vibrant shades of brown, pink, and blue set against a deep blue background. In one fanciful tableau, a line of text circles the spaceship carrying Fonduliens Flop, Hop, and Flip.

A whimsical and sweet tale told with a lot of imagination.



AT THE END OF THE DAY I BURST INTO FLAMES

Day, Nicholas

Bizarro Pulp Press (98 pp.)

\$10.95 paper | Dec. 21, 2018

9781947654792

A man looks back at his life and loves as he awaits his death in Day's novel.

A cartoonist named Martin, nicknamed Firecracker, recalls, "my daddy burst into flames when I was six years old." Now an adult and married with children in Edwardsville, Illinois, Firecracker knows in his bones that "the fire is coming" and that he will one day spontaneously combust, just like his father and grandfather before him. After he heads into the Night Cap, a local dive bar, the story goes back and forth in time, focusing on Firecracker's memories of childhood and the events of the present day in equal measure. Firecracker particularly examines love—his addiction to it and the many ways in which he has experienced it through his lifetime. He looks back on his childhood friendship with a boy named Stephen; his relationship with his wife, Emily; and a girl whose name he cannot remember but whom he knows he loved fully. In his childhood, Firecracker saw Stephen's mother dead in her driveway; he has seen and communicated with an incarnation of Death ever since. It is in these passages with Death that the author's descriptive prose truly shines: "Darkness and light became as a curtain, which rippled and pulled apart to reveal a human shape whose eyes shone like dying stars and whose clothes were fashioned from shadow and fog." Firecracker's moments with Death convey both the fear and love he feels for the specter throughout the story—Death is a nightmare-fueling figure earlier on but becomes a constant, steadying presence in Firecracker's life. Day's story is at times lyrical, blending prose with poetry to convey Firecracker's more expressive, dreamlike ruminations as he nears his end: "*You are one of them, one of us, an infinite being / The dream never ends / None of this is real...I could finally see time for what it was. An infinite circle.*" Day's tale is a quick read, creative and addictively readable.

A short, stirring story with a unique premise.



MAGNIFICENT TALES OF DOOMED KINGDOMS

Dhillon, Rupendra

Elder Owl Press (240 pp.)

\$9.45 paper | \$0.99 e-book | Oct. 24, 2022

9781738730018

Dhillon creates his own classic stories in this quartet of tales set in ancient India.

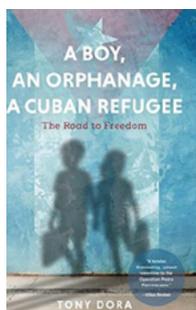
All of the stories here center on the theme of kingship and its burdens. The first two tales are stand-alone, while the last and longest, "King's Prize," follows from the third, "A King's Son." The first, "Escape," is about protecting one's own and the

“A captivating synthesis of poetry and visuals, full of vibrant, resonant tableaux.”

WINDOWS

hard choices that the plague levies on a king in that situation. The second, “Queen Mother,” sees Prince Trilok marrying Princess Vijyavati, who is known for her intellect but hardly for her beauty; her intelligence does come in handy as she carves out a distinguished life for herself in long absences from Trilok, who adores and misses her, until she finally frees herself from him through extreme measures. “A King’s Son” focuses on a father’s failure to understand his son and the fatal mistake that follows as that son tries to measure up—a familiar story with many iterations in world literature over the centuries. The last and longest follows Ngapo Prithvipal’s grandson, Dharmaputra, as he chases his dream of greatness through territorial conquest. This story, one as old as the ancient Greeks, is about the dangers of hubris and overweening ambition but mixed with the heavy weight of leadership. It’s easy to approach these stories expecting the simple solemnity of ancient folktales, but then one finds, time and again, dialogue and prose that betray that presumption, especially in characters’ unspoken thoughts, which run freely throughout. The author seems to revel in dignified mock-Homeric speech but intersperses this with modern-day colloquialism: On one page we get, “You idiots, why are you listening to this kid?” Then Dhillon abruptly shifts to more arcane phrasing such as, “My son, oh my lovely child...be safe....” Although the author creates a world that tends to (sometimes confusingly) skirt the boundaries between the real and the hallucinatory, these stories do manage to drive home plenty of age-old truths.

An ambitious, challenging book that brilliantly evokes a classical mood and time period.



A BOY, AN ORPHANAGE, A CUBAN REFUGEE **The Road to Freedom**

Dora, Tony

Koehler Books (244 pp.)

\$25.95 | \$18.95 paper | \$7.49 e-book

March 21, 2023

9781646638819

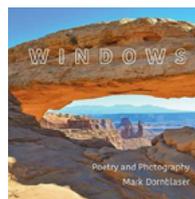
9781646638819 paper

A memoir focuses on the two-year exodus of unaccompanied Cuban children to the United States.

Between December 1960 and October 1962, under a rescue program created by the Catholic Welfare Bureau, 14,048 children were evacuated from Fidel Castro’s Cuba. They were sent by their parents to begin new, safer lives in the country up north. Operation Pedro Pan (also known as Operation Peter Pan) ended abruptly with the outbreak of the Cuban missile crisis. Nine-year-old Tony and his 8-year-old sister, Norma, were two of those thousands of children who were airlifted to Miami. The author’s memoir offers a compilation of recollections from his first 13 months in America. In the wee hours of the morning of March 15, 1962, Tony’s widowed mother brought him and Norma to the airport terminal in Havana, where the anxious youngsters boarded a Pan American plane to Miami. After they disembarked, they were brought by bus to Florida City, a gated,

makeshift refugee camp where they met their temporary foster parents. Six weeks later, the siblings were transferred to Saint Vincent’s Orphanage in Vincennes, Indiana. The majority of the children at Saint Vincent’s were orphaned or abandoned Americans, plus a few Canadians. But the Cubans were different. They were political exiles with hopes of being reunited with their parents in the future. Their most important job was to learn English. The author’s writing is inflected with a persistent buoyancy, notwithstanding the frightening depictions of life under Castro. He fills detailed anecdotes of his year at the orphanage with reconstructed conversations that display humor and informatively illustrate the meticulous process of learning a new language and a new culture among the strangers who became his friends. There are poignant, teary moments of melancholy and reminiscences of the father he lost to leukemia when he was just 4, but Tony focuses primarily on the comfort he found in the compassion of the nuns who taught and cared for the children (“They cooked for us and fed us, washed our clothes and dirty linen, nursed us when we were sick, prayed with us, and played with us”). Despite a few too many basketball stories, this book delivers an enjoyable immigration story with a uniquely positive perspective.

A tender, illuminating, upbeat valentine to the Operation Pedro Pan rescuers.



WINDOWS

Dornblaser, Mark

Manuscript (79 pp.)

\$24.95 paper

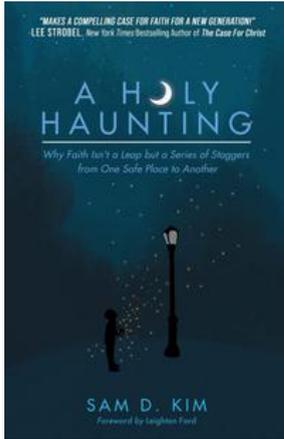
9780578320540

Rapt observations of nature and people frame reflections on the human predicament in this luminous collection of poems and photographs.

Dornblaser, an environmental researcher and photographer, focuses primarily on landscapes, seascapes, and pastorals, from a lush tropical island to a lake in the high Arctic, both for their own beauty and for their hinting at ineffable truths: An approaching hurricane suggests the turbulent uncertainty of life; falling autumn leaves evoke the possibility of a gentle death; and a humble, hopeful act of forestry hints at a continuity beyond death. (“When I rise slowly / and stumble in the dark / When my path is clear / though my steps unsteady / When the light fades / and ghosts whisper my name / I will plant a tree / whose shade I’ll never see / And that is how it should be.”) He also makes nature a mirror and a balm to human travails, as when the narrator likens his aging father’s skin, bruised by daily injections, to the gray, snowy soil of a Minnesota farm or lets the arrival of a flock of geese at a pond quiet his own self-loathing. Dornblaser pairs each poem with a photograph that echoes its themes, mostly of nature scenes—haunting views of roads stretching to the horizon through sere prairies, dazzling turquoise lagoons, moss-covered primeval forests, and a stony monastery on a storm-swept Irish island. The vibrant colors, elegant compositions, and atmospheric textures make them an arresting commentary on the text. Dornblaser’s verse works in

DISCOVER INDIE READS

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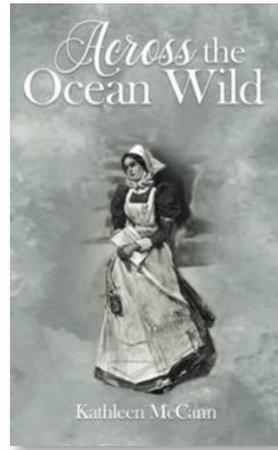


A HOLY HAUNTING

by Sam D. Kim

“The founder of 180 Church in New York City calls for a reevaluation of his faith’s core principles in this debut book.”

A nuanced, if not comprehensive, call for revitalization of Christianity’s core messages.

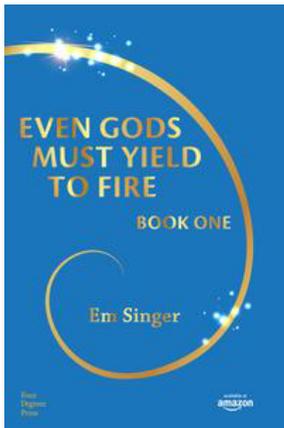


ACROSS THE OCEAN WILD

by Kathleen McCann

“A historical novel follows the early life of an Irish girl who immigrates with her family to New York City.”

An enjoyable read with a strong protagonist and a trove of historical nuggets.

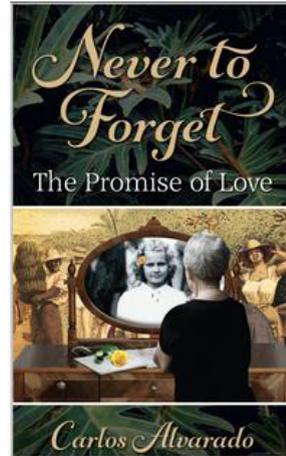


EVEN GODS MUST YIELD TO FIRE

by Em Singer

“In this debut novel, an American college student undertakes an important mission—delivering a warning to Olympian gods.”

This remarkable fantasy boasts an indelible cast of gods and mortals.

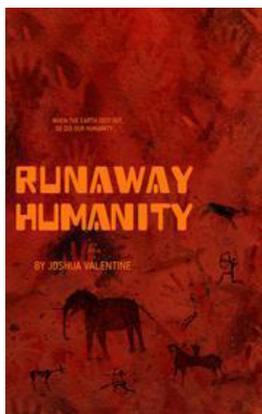


NEVER TO FORGET

by Carlos Alvarado

“This expansive and elegiac novel focuses on the life of a woman who searches for true love.”

An enjoyable family tale with a tough and memorable hero.

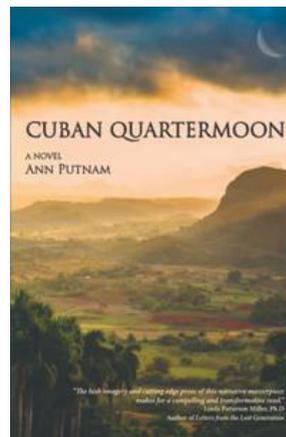


RUNAWAY HUMANITY

by Joshua Valentine

“An ailing human scientist on a Mars colony faces mental and physical horrors during an expedition to her supposedly desolate home planet in Valentine’s SF novel.”

An often gruesome speculative yarn in which male malevolence predominates.

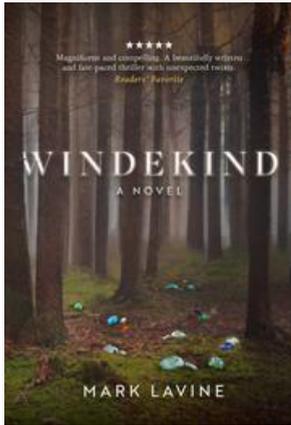


CUBAN QUARTERMOON

by Ann Putnam

“An American scholar visits Cuba and becomes embroiled in the politics of everyday life in this poetic novel by Putnam, author of *Full Moon at Noontide* (2009).”

A story with sumptuous description and a gradually intensifying plot that makes for compulsive reading.



WINDEKIND

by Mark Lavine

“Music and mayhem play out in the Vermont countryside in Lavine’s debut mystery.”

A sharp, deftly plotted thriller by a promising new author.

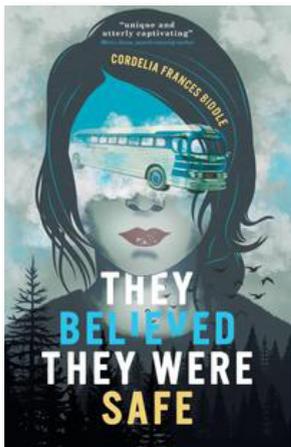


BLUE SUNRISE

by Gregg R. Overman

“In Overman’s SF series starter, the crew of a nascent Mars colony and a lunar pilot struggling with addiction play key roles in a crisis as a fleet of alien ships approaches Earth.”

An often impressive debut of an author in deft control of a mind- and galaxy-spanning SF premise.

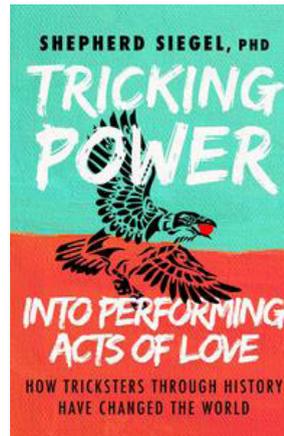


THEY BELIEVED THEY WERE SAFE

by Cordelia Frances Biddle

“In this novel, a female graduate student becomes an object of desire.”

A short, captivating tale of unwanted attention.



TRICKING POWER INTO PERFORMING ACTS OF LOVE

by Shepherd Siegel

“An activist scholar explores the value of the Trickster archetype to contemporary society.”

A compelling catalog of Tricksters and a convincing analysis of their power.

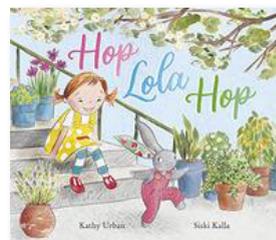


MURDER UNDER ANOTHER SUN

by Colin Alexander

“An American war veteran in the forefront of future space exploration awkwardly turns into a crime investigator when a planetary colony he is replenishing is revealed as a hotbed of intrigue and murder.”

An engaging sequel that cross-breeds established SF characters with a credible extraterrestrial murder mystery.



HOP LOLA HOP

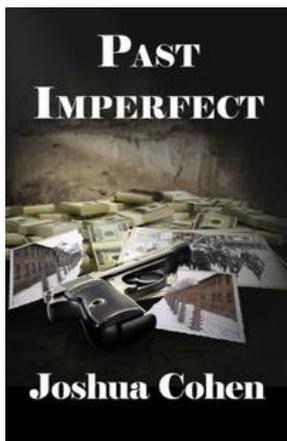
by Kathy Urban;
illus. by Siski Kalla

“Debut author Urban presents an illustrated children’s tale about a lost toy, the emotions that come with separation, and solving problems.”

A sweet, charming story that could have practical applications.

DISCOVER INDIE READS

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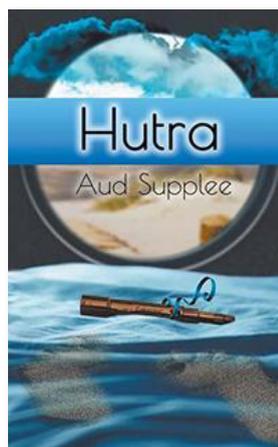


PAST IMPERFECT

by Joshua Cohen

"A private eye's assignment sends him hunting for WWII collaborators."

An intimate mystery with a determined, complex lead.



HUTRA

by Aud Supplee

"In this middle-grade sequel, a teenager must follow her step-brother through a space-time portal and rescue him from an alien world."

A safe but sophisticated teen quest fantasy brimming with magical ideas.

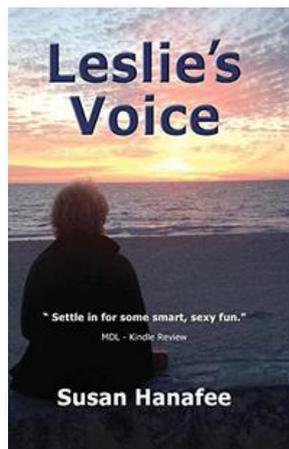


FIRE & FLIGHT

by Brianna R. Shaffery

"A teenager harboring potential magical powers vows to confront the red-eyed stranger who's been haunting her in this debut YA novel."

A shrewd, absorbing fantasy showcasing extraordinary characters worth rooting for.

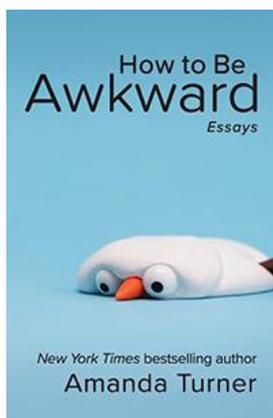


LESLIE'S VOICE

by Susan Hanafée

"A series of vexing work-related conflicts complicate a female executive's life in journalist-turned-novelist Hanafée's series opener."

A rousing corporate melodrama full of twists, turns, and vivid characters.

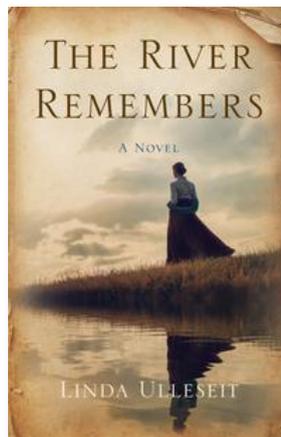


HOW TO BE AWKWARD

by Amanda Turner

"In this collection of essays, a humorist reflects on the awkward incidents and characteristics that have shaped her life."

An incisive and entertaining celebration of awkwardness.

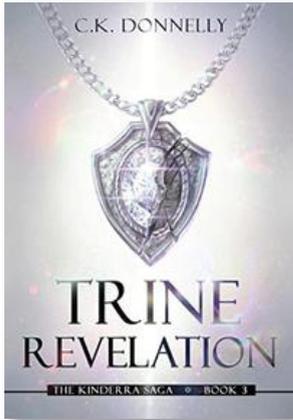


THE RIVER REMEMBERS

by Linda Ulleseit

"A historical novel tells the stories of three young women in Michigan Territory with different challenges and goals."

An engaging tale that powerfully evokes a time and place in American history.

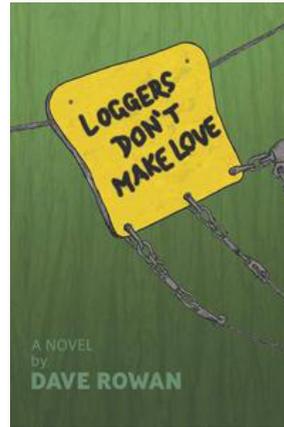


TRINE REVELATION

by C.K. Donnelly

“The two most powerful people in a world called Kinderra prepare their final moves against each other in this third volume of a YA fantasy series.”

A highly inventive and gripping installment of an impressive fantasy saga.

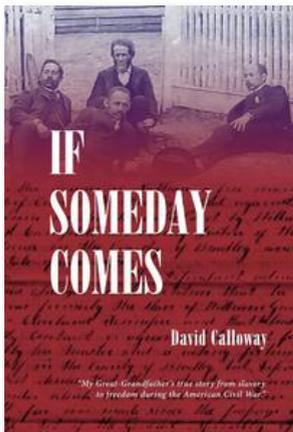


LOGGERS DON'T MAKE LOVE

by Dave Rowan

“In Rowan’s short novel, a young logger recalls a past murder and a search for answers.”

A generally engaging labor of love with details that truly immerse readers in its characters’ work.

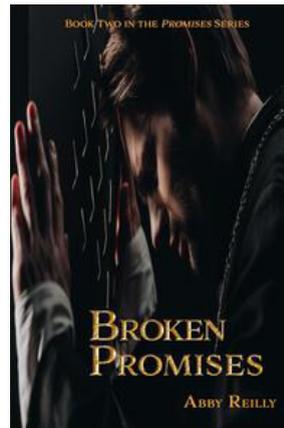


IF SOMEDAY COMES

by David Calloway

“In this debut historical novel, Calloway fictionalizes the story of his enslaved Black great-grandfather.”

A sprawling, often engaging story of a family in bondage set against the backdrop of the Civil War.

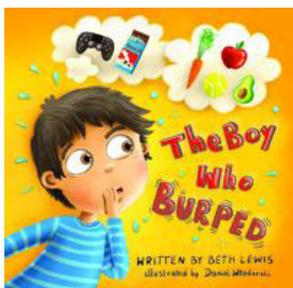


BROKEN PROMISES

by Abby Reilly

“Abuse allegations, vicious assaults, and an unexplained death rock a Philadelphia community in this mystery sequel.”

Superbly drawn characters elevate this engrossing crime tale.



THE BOY WHO BURPED

by Beth Lewis; illus. by Daniel Wtodarski

“A junk food-loving family learns the value of eating healthy and getting exercise in this picture book debut.”

A goofy, gassy tale with an obvious but important moral.



PARALLEL LIVES

by Judith A. Ferry

“Mutual animosity between two men stains their lives and many others’ in ensuing decades in this debut novel.”

A lengthy but worthwhile novel about the dangers of rancor and spite.

DISCOVER INDIE READS

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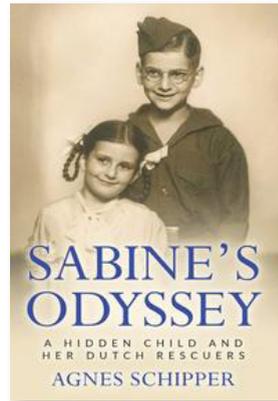


MORPHOLOGY

by Liv Reimers

“In a misogynist future society, genetic engineer/entrepreneur Alix Edison creates humanoids who can shape-shift into perfect romantic partners.”

Intelligent, affecting feminist dystopian SF puts a gene-modified spin on the Pygmalion wish-fulfillment dream.

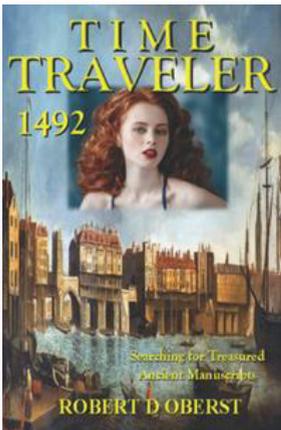


SABINE'S ODYSSEY

by Agnes Schipper

“In this biography/memoir, a woman relates her mother's experiences as a Jewish child under Nazi occupation in the Netherlands and her mission as an adult to uncover her brother's fate.”

An extraordinary account of a Jewish family's tribulations during and after Hitler's reign.

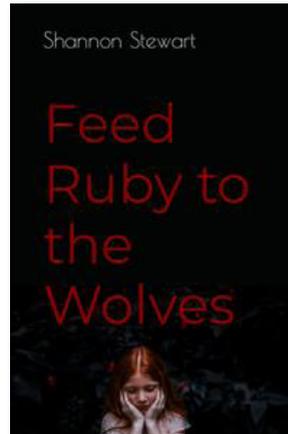


TIME TRAVELER 1492

by Robert D. Oberst

“A Silicon Valley app developer continues his time-traveling literary adventures in the second installment of Oberst's adventure series, set in the 15th and 21st centuries.”

A creative fantasy rendition of past-meets-present.



FEED RUBY TO THE WOLVES

by Shannon Stewart

“In this YA contemporary novel, a guarded Texas teen gains life-changing insights into her fractured family after she is given her mother's 1990s journal.”

A moving family tale that offers a powerful set of mother-daughter teen narratives.



APSARA

by Pearl Whitfield

“A dancing girl weathers exile, palace intrigues, and horrendous childbirths on her way to becoming queen of Cambodia in this historical romance.”

A captivating tale of survival and love full of rich period details.

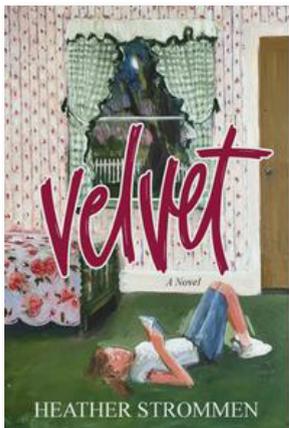


FIREFLY FRAN'S FRAN-TASTIC DAY

by Kristin Crowell Ellis;
illus. by Brian Talbott

“Ellis’ charming debut picture book, written in rhyming couplets, tells a story of how fireflies discover their light.”

An uplifting, well-illustrated adventure full of whimsy and joy.

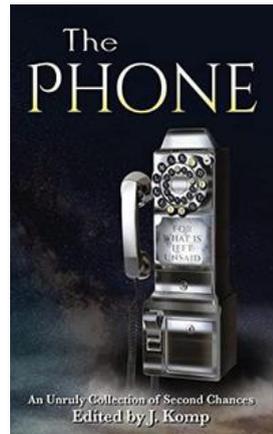


VELVET

by Heather Strommen

“A teen discovers her mother’s old diary in this debut YA novel.”

A sincere, endearing coming-of-age tale about a daughter and her single mom.



THE PHONE

Ed. by J. Komp

“This genre-spanning anthology explores grief using antiquated telephone technology.”

An eclectic and engaging collection probing the silence on the other end of the line.

a range of registers and a fertile mixture of them, managing to be both scientific and lyrical in the same breath—"the astronomer might tell of the pebble's true origins...the solar nebula, a cloud of dust and gas, / leftovers of the feast that created the sun"—and replete with visceral imagery ("I measure the rhythm of the road in the steady thumping of my tires passing over / seams in the concrete slabs, front wheels then rear in rapid succession, / like a heartbeat charged with adrenaline"). The result is a sumptuous feast for the mind and eye.

A captivating synthesis of poetry and visuals, full of vibrant, resonant tableaux.



THE COURTESAN'S DAUGHTER

Dunlap, Susanne

Atmosphere Press (340 pp.)
\$18.99 paper | \$7.99 e-book | April 25, 2023
9781639886524

Dunlap presents a mother-and-daughter drama set in the era of early silent movies.

It's 1910, and 17-year-old Sylvie Button and her mother, Justine, have been keeping secrets from each other. When Sylvie was a small child, the pair left

Paris, establishing a new life in New York City. Justine found employment as a piecemeal seamstress, raising Sylvie as a single mother while working out of a tenement apartment in Lower Manhattan. She's never told Sylvie anything about her father, nor about the circumstances surrounding their hasty exit from France. Meanwhile, Sylvie, a top student who's on track to receive a teaching scholarship, has begun fantasizing about a future that will disrupt Justine's carefully laid plans for her; she longs to work in the burgeoning silent movie industry and perhaps even become like the famous young woman she sees onscreen at the nickelodeon: "I didn't fall in love with the Vitagraph girl. I wanted to be the Vitagraph girl." It's a dream she shares with Paolo Bonnano, a handsome Italian man whom she meets at church one Sunday. Paolo convinces her to have pictures taken by a professional photographer who owes him a favor. When Sylvie returns home after a photo shoot, she finds Justine in the arms of a strange man and runs away from home with Paolo, who's running away for other reasons; they find themselves in the middle of a wicked blizzard that's hit the city. Dunlap's melodrama is narrated in alternating chapters by Sylvie and Justine, their voices full of youthful determination and world-weary suspicion, respectively. The story can be overly melodramatic at times, but it offers an enjoyable peek behind the scenes of early moviemaking, with much of the story taking place in the Vitagraph Studio in Brooklyn, where many original 10-minute silent shorts were filmed. A bit of adventure and danger keep the action moving at a steady clip, and readers will also be intrigued by the evolving friendship between Justine and her employer, Aaron Silverstein.

A pleasantly engaging and evocative historical novel with strong main characters.



THE NEW BAD THING

Ebner, Michael

Pen and Picture (270 pp.)
\$15.99 paper | Aug. 15, 2023
9780993061318

A reporter confronts terrorists, the Mafia, and fertility issues in Ebner's thriller-series starter.

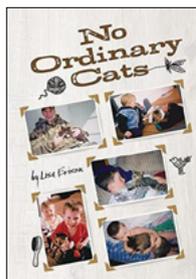
Teagan Penn is a 37-year-old Seattle journalist with a prominent facial dog-bite scar and a talent for drawing out celebrities in soul-baring interviews. Her own soul is troubled by her and her husband Todd's inability to conceive a child and by news of nearly daily atrocities committed by KIL, an Islamic terrorist group. When KIL starts kidnapping and enslaving girls in the Middle East, Teagan's frustrated maternal instincts prod her to launch a personal rescue mission of her own. She strikes a deal with a shadowy crime lord named Roman to raise \$12 million, which he is to use to mount a mercenary operation called Project Rebound to rescue the girls. The caper goes awry before it even gets going, and after Teagan goes to Paris to untangle it, her hotel is attacked by KIL commandos bent on slaughtering all the guests. When she gets on the phone with Roman, he implies that he sent the shooters to murder her under cover of a massacre. After gunning down two terrorists herself and evacuating the hotel, Teagan is approached by CIA counterterrorism agent Robert Lexington, who drags her into an even murkier imbroglio. Lexington is secretly working for Italy's Una Banca crime family, who want to kill Roman for betraying them; if Teagan assassinates Roman, he promises he'll shield her from criminal charges for Project Rebound. This plot thickens further when Teagan gets unexpected news that changes her life. Soon, however, she sets off to hunt Roman down on the other side of the world.

This first installment of Ebner's series suffers from an ungainly structure, with the narrative lurching from a storyline about improbably omnipotent terrorists to a different tale of implausibly omnipotent gangsters in its second half. Fortunately, much of the action is well staged and effective, especially Teagan's stalking of Roman, which unfolds in unflashy scenes that highlight her doggedness before a blunt, brutal climax. Ebner gives his characters rich backstories and complex motivations that are reminiscent of a John le Carré novel, with Lexington intriguingly emerging as both victim and antagonist. Throughout, the author renders Teagan's experiences in vivid prose that captures both the intimacy of motherhood ("After feeding her son, his little head would snuggle between her chin and shoulder...she could hear his every little breath and feel his tiny heart beating throughout his whole body") and the jagged tensions of violence: "Teagan took a deep breath—ignoring the stabbing-like echo of the attacker's assault rifle—stayed focused, exhaled and pulled the trigger." In other passages, he evokes a George Smiley-esque mood of painful disillusionment: "You can't make an omelette without breaking a few eggs' a supervisor had told him. But omelettes aren't made from week old rotting bodies." Overall, Teagan proves to be an appealing hero with depth and determination—readers will enjoy rooting for her.

An entertaining page-turner that mixes punchy shootouts with resonant soul-searching.

“A revelatory, reflective, and gracefully drawn homage to a consummate group of poetic mentors.”

PORTRAITS FROM LIFE



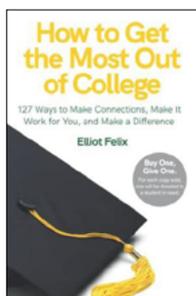
NO ORDINARY CATS

Erixon, Lisa
 FriesenPress (162 pp.)
 \$31.99 | \$17.99 paper | \$6.99 e-book
 Nov. 10, 2022
 9781039160897
 9781039160880 paper

Erixon chronicles the misadventures of and tender relationships between several generations of cats in this YA novel.

Tabby cats Terrence, aka Riser, and Phyllis, aka Dilly, are about to be rehomed. They have spent their lives as indoor cats, but now they find themselves in a carrier, in a strange car, with two little humans poking at them with their fingers; it's all very unsettling. Soon, they are deposited on a garage floor, where the small humans gently pet them. Beyond the garage, the great outdoors begs to be explored. Life is good: They are well cared for, free to roam the farm, and, best of all, they have each other. Dilly discovers a stray cat injured by a rat trap in an open field's tall grass. She begins to bring him food and decides to remain with him and a group of other strays. Riser is bereft without his sister. Enter Angel, a standoffish young calico in need of a new home, adopted to boost Riser's spirits. When Angel's brief dalliance in the woods with a stray leaves her pregnant, Riser is enchanted by her two kittens, Moonie and Bandit: "Her family had become his family. And he promised himself he would do whatever was necessary to protect them." Best for the younger range of YA readers, Erixon's collection of cat tales offers an amusing and poignant portrayal of feline antics and diverse personalities, plus a few life lessons for humans. The narrative captures the animals' devotion to one another through the generations; in one charming episode, the rambunctious Moonie recklessly climbs a tall tree and Riser must guide him step by terrifying step back to safety. In another sweet moment, after baby kitten Chuck is brought into the fold, a grumpy Angel eventually softens and tenderly teaches him how to properly wash his face and check for debris between his toes. There are also tear-jerking losses, some peaceful and some decidedly less so.

An endearing story with memorable characters who will bring smiles to cat lovers.



HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF COLLEGE
127 Ways To Make Connections, Make It Work for You, and Make a Difference

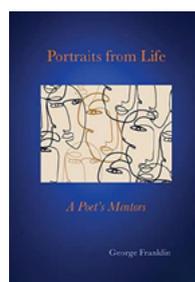
Felix, Elliot
 Alinea Learning (246 pp.)
 \$12.99 paper | \$9.99 e-book | Jan. 10, 2022
 9781735810768

A wide-ranging guide to enjoying college in the 21st century.

In his nonfiction debut, Felix draws on the extensive work he's done with dozens of colleges and interviews he's conducted

with all kinds of students in order to present his readers with a vast amount of practical and personal information broken down into three broad categories: what you need to know before you go, general advice, and more pointed advice to meet the special needs of certain students—all with the aim of maximizing the value everyone can get out of "courses, campus, community, and career." He notes, for example, how students with disabilities can get the necessary accommodations: "Many accessibility offices can be particularly helpful with the transition to college by orienting you to placement exams, housing options, and your school's policies and processes—it's really never too early to get in touch." Each well-organized chapter includes bulleted points, tips, lined blank spaces for responses to discussion questions, and an ample list of references for further reading. Felix both instructs and supports his readers, reminding them to be patient with important social elements like fitting in or finding friends. He details the benefits and challenges of things like clubs, class projects, sports teams, and other group activities, and he lays out the basics of residence halls. He uses a vibrant, friendly prose style keyed to reduce the intimidation factor of college, and he consistently reassures his readers that "colleges and universities are full of people who want to help you.... They are there for the mission and they are there for you." The resulting atmosphere in the book is one of an open, confidential chat with a sympathetic expert on every aspect of university life. Particularly refreshing is Felix's emphasis on the potential value of college: In addition to a degree, the college experience should also provide a "guided pathway" to a career.

A knowledgeable, enthusiastic guide packed with strategies and encouragement.



PORTRAITS FROM LIFE
A Poet's Mentors

Franklin, George
 Nicasio Press (164 pp.)
 \$16.95 paper | April 13, 2022
 978-1737581451



Franklin reflects on the poets who inspired his creative spirit in this collection of essays.

Split into two sections, the book first presents essays on the lives and work of poets Marie Ponsot, William Maxwell, and Robert Fitzgerald (in whose memory he dedicates the book) as well as dancer and choreographer Erick Hawkins. As an aspiring poet struggling with mild dyslexia, Franklin says that he absorbed the masterful work of these artists while learning to be an expressive artist himself. He describes Ponsot as a charismatic presence exuding a "gentle authority" throughout her poetry workshops and classes. Her work is celebrated here alongside that of Maxwell and Hawkins, both of whom Franklin initially met through his parents and went on to befriend in adulthood. Maxwell, displaying a "tough and flinty" side, became a close friend, and the men shared a deep connection; Franklin discusses at length his affinity for Maxwell's homoerotic novel about male adolescence, *The Folded*

KATHY URBAN TALKS ABOUT HOP LOLA HOP

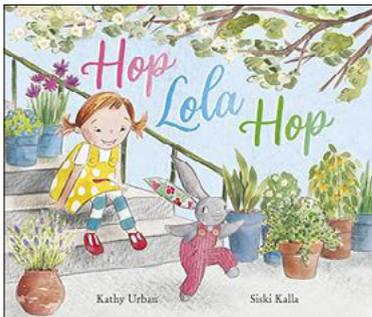
[SPONSORED]

Please tell us a little about yourself and your work.

I have been working as a journalist for most of my professional life, writing for TV news networks in the U.K. but also completing assignments for German and Danish media as well as the United Arab Emirates where I live. Having three children changed that. I was inspired by my own experiences as a mother to write a series of picture books about the adventures of Lola, a wandering toy bunny, to help children deal with the absence of their missing teddies. *Hop Lola Hop* was first published in 2022, the second book in the series, *Hop Lola Hop—A Yummy Market Day Adventure*, has just been released. A third book will be out this Christmas.

Was your storyline something that you envisioned from the beginning, or did you build/change it as you wrote *Hop Lola Hop*?

The core concept of the book—an adorable toy bunny who gets lost but manages to have a fun adventure while away from



her friend Ella—has been there from the outset. The storyline, however, changed during the course of the editing process, with Lola beginning as a mere cute-looking toy that accidentally goes missing [and changing]

into an anthropomorphic character with a knack for adventure. In the story, Lola learns by exploring rather than waiting for things to happen to her, and I think this is something young children are able to relate to.

How did you create/acquire the artwork?

The story was illustrated by Siski Kalla, a watercolor artist from England but based in Chile.

The artwork was one of the main reasons why I decided to independently publish *Hop Lola Hop*.

Siski shared my excitement for Lola from the beginning, and we instantly connected even though the collaboration

took place online. I shared lots of reference material with Siski, from photographs to maps, to help her create the look of the city and rural landscape imagery in the book. An important part of our collaboration involved developing two lovable characters that readers can instantly fall in love with. While we settled fairly quickly on the look of Ella, the young girl in the story, we spent considerable time on Lola to balance her toy bunny-like features with her childlike personality.

How have you built your audience?

Like other indie authors I have been connecting with parents and caregivers through social media platforms. I also do a lot of in-store events, library readings, and school visits. There's nothing more exciting and rewarding than engaging with young readers directly. More recently, I was one of the participating authors at the Emirates Airlines Festival of Literature, an annual literary event in Dubai, championing both English and Arabic writing. I was joined by a cast of actors who helped me turn *Hop Lola Hop* into a theatrical stage performance. It was an amazing experience that allowed me to share my story in an entirely different way. It's something that I am looking to develop further.

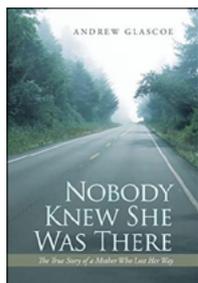
Any advice for others starting the process of independent publishing?

Know your audience! To give your book the best possible start in life, you have to research the market and have a good idea of what else is out there. You should also be aware of who you are writing for. As a picture book author it's important to consider the expectations of the child but also the adult who is likely to buy and read your book. All my choices—from the book's format, paper quality, the illustrations, and my writing—took all of this into account. *Hop Lola Hop* is aimed at a very young audience. I avoided using big, clever words and long sentences but instead opted for language that would make my story instantly accessible to young readers and listeners.

Portions of this Q&A were edited for clarity.

Leaf (1945). In a portrait of Elizabeth Bishop, the author surmises her creative “late-in-life flowering” was due to the attentions of a younger female lover. Franklin shares amusing anecdotes about Bishop and Fitzgerald, both mentors of his at Harvard University (Franklin graduated in 1975), highlighting their charming temperaments and Fitzgerald’s masterful prosody. The second section, split into three illuminating essays, showcases the author’s vulnerability and growth in the context of his relationship with the work of Robert Lowell. Lowell was a prominent poet and Harvard instructor during the author’s undergraduate years, and Franklin charts the ways his ambivalence and antipathy toward Lowell and his work changed over time. Franklin’s initial assessment of Lowell’s poetry, especially verses focusing on his father, found it to contain unforgivable “reptilian cruelty,” but he offers a mature reappraisal in the moving “Coming to Terms with Lowell,” the book’s most resonant piece.

A revelatory, reflective, and gracefully drawn homage to a consummate group of poetic mentors.



NOBODY KNEW SHE WAS THERE
The True Story of a Mother Who Lost Her Way



Glascoe, Andrew
 AuthorHouse (192 pp.)
 \$27.99 | \$16.95 paper | \$3.99 e-book
 Jan. 23, 2014
 9781491854037

In this interview-based memoir with hints of a mystery, a man tries to get to the bottom of his mother’s troubled life.

Debut memoirist Glascoe opens his story at the nursing home where his mother, Maggie, is in the end-of-life stage with Alzheimer’s. He then begins his search of the past in their native Scotland and in Toronto, where Glascoe’s family had immigrated when he was still a child. In Scotland, his father, Bob, worked in the coal mines before and after his traumatic World War II service, while Maggie supported the family with factory defense work. Living close to the bone, it wasn’t a happy marriage, yet it lasted right up until Bob committed suicide and Maggie’s Alzheimer’s began to manifest. But had she been seriously unbalanced long before that? Glascoe gathers recollections from his estranged brother, his nephew, his daughter, his wife, and others, probing what they remember and what they feel—anything that could shed light on the life of this passionate, intelligent, but stymied and contentious woman. Memories conflict, and many of these people are in denial. Glascoe learns more about the family’s messy dynamics than he ever realized; in fact, it may all be a fool’s errand with no satisfying answers, and he may never truly know his mother and her dark motivations. In an ironic twist, the funeral home misplaces, then “finds,” her ashes, so Margaret McGregor Glascoe is as elusive a figure in death as she was in life. Aware and witty, Glascoe is a talented writer. The chapters adroitly toggle between his weekly visits with his mother in a Toronto nursing home and his

interviews with everyone who might illuminate his search. The nursing home scenes can be rather depressing, and he captures that despair and absurdity perfectly. In an eloquent late chapter that could stand by itself, he reminds readers that Maggie was like most of us: We will never be famous or exceedingly celebrated, but we deserve to be remembered and loved.

A tortured love letter from son to mother, well worth reading.



FILTHY CREATION

Hagood, Caroline
 MadHat Press (254 pp.)
 \$21.95 paper | May 1, 2023
 9781952335563

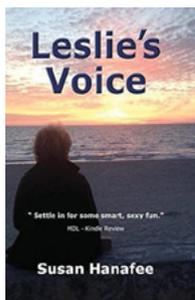
In Hagood’s novel, a young aspiring artist loses her father but not before he tells her a long-held secret that sets her on a quest for the truth.

Dylan Cyllene, a Brooklyn-based high school student and amateur artist, is hit with two bombshells: First, she finds out that her beloved father is terminally ill with cancer; second, before he dies, he tells her that he’s not her biological parent. Thus begins a whirlwind tale of Dylan’s search for her birth father and her reparation of a fractured relationship with her mother, an artist whose emotional state is erratic at best. Meanwhile, renowned photographer Simon Ambrogio, whose work also includes monster references, comes to give a lecture to her class. This leads Dylan to new revelations. At the same time, she builds a romantic relationship with fellow student Shay, a girl who shares her love for “filthy creations” of the artistic kind. A massive art installation made of discarded car parts eventually offers clarity to Dylan on all fronts. Hagood’s book is part coming-of-age novel, part mystery, part family drama, and part queer romance; it hits a lot of notes, and most are the right ones. Its title comes from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), a favorite of Dylan’s that informs her artwork, and the allusions to that classic work eventually become repetitive. However, Hagood has crafted an engrossing story with vivid characters; Dylan, Shay, and Simon are effectively revealed as artists who are dedicated to a fault, going to extremes for inspiration and creation. At one point, for instance, Shay even jumps into the East River near the Brooklyn Bridge, which gets Dylan’s creativity flowing as she jumps after her: “I felt I might just sink to the bottom. Shay and I could both live down there together, surviving on a diet of only ships.” Other over-the-top plot elements include the repeated use of monster masks and a scene involving a visit to a cockfight, but these are believable in the context of the lives of artists who feel their work so deeply.

An allusion-heavy story that’s ultimately compelling and absorbing.

“A measured and inquisitive speculative mystery with a lyrical soul.”

THE CHAOS PRINCIPLE



LESLIE'S VOICE

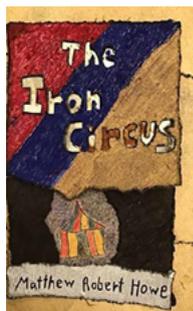
Hanafee, Susan
BookBaby (398 pp.)
\$18.95 paper | \$4.99 e-book | March 8, 2021
9781732489417

A series of vexing work-related conflicts complicate a female executive's life in journalist-turned-novelist Hanafee's series opener.

Outspoken, 40-something Leslie Elliott has her hands full as a busy public relations guru for the utility company Metro Energy. Her firm's new CEO, a womanizing cad named Brad Stewart, embroils Leslie in his lofty plans to merge with Statewide Power and Light, a lucrative utility concern based in the Midwest. With a combination of fear, vulnerability, opportunism, and erotic excitement, Leslie decides to accept Brad's offer to collaborate with him on his latest venture, though she knows he's unscrupulous both in and out of the office. When the merger offer is rejected, Brad becomes obsessed with making Leslie his "next conquest," manipulating her with intimate personal confessions. When Leslie's curt "control freak" husband, Scott, abruptly files for divorce and begins openly seeing another woman, a shift occurs in her outlook, and she begins to act with carefree liberation. She spontaneously treks back to Florida and begins seeing Tim Fletcher, an older Statewide executive who had refused the initial merger with Brad, but Brad's pursuit of Leslie continues. When Leslie convinces Tim to attend another meeting with Brad about the proposal, she is caught in the middle of Brad's unethical hostile takeover plot. These developments complicate her burgeoning feelings for Tim and feed her reluctance to continue supporting Metro altogether.

As the situation unspools, it becomes clear that the crux of Hanafee's novel lies in power dynamics, as the narrative cleverly addresses hot-button issues of sexual harassment on the job. Leslie becomes uncomfortable around her new boss, allowing his inappropriate behavior to intimidate her while neglecting to report it. She needs her job and initially finds Brad alluring, so she makes excuses and allowances that, in turn, proliferate the abuse. Leslie's inner monologue reveals that she is tiring of the terse treatment from the men in her life and the double standards in the corporate arena and that she has been working to "find the voice to respond" to the treatment she's had to endure. A minor weakness of the novel is its unevenly portrayed peripheral characters, such as Leslie's college-age daughter, Meredith, who is enticingly drawn but sparsely appears in a narrowly focused narrative that could use some opening up. Readers may also want more of Leslie's charismatic best friend, Karen Chanders, who adds some feisty spice to the melodrama. Despite this, the lead characters are memorable and provide the needed grounding the busy plot requires. With Leslie as an anchoring, empowering element, former *Indianapolis Star* reporter Hanafee's novel is a fast-paced, intense depiction of corporate America and the perennial struggle of women seeking equal treatment in the boardroom. This is an auspicious start for an adventurous, creative author.

A rousing corporate melodrama full of twists, turns, and vivid characters.



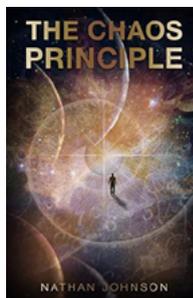
THE IRON CIRCUS

Howe, Matthew Robert
Steal the Moon Books (316 pp.)
\$24.99 | \$15.99 paper | April 1, 2023
9798987506028
9798987506035 paper

In Howe's debut middle-grade novel, a bored boy finds adventure in a nighttime circus.

Lewis Bokurtz is not having a good summer. While his parents are at work, he spends his days being looked after by Mr. Butterfield, a retired teacher who forces Lewis to do schoolwork and whose idea of a good time is having a picnic in the basement. Distraught that he can't go to summer camp like his friends, Lewis convinces Mr. Butterfield to take him fishing at a nearby pond. They don't catch any fish, but Lewis finds a coin with the phrases "IRON CIRCUS" and "ADMIT ONE" stamped on either side. That night, Lewis awakes to the sound of eerily cheerful music echoing from the fields beyond his house. He sneaks out and follows the sound through a coin-operated gate to the largest tent he's ever seen—constructed, strangely, of iron. Inside, a group of performers is preparing for the big show: a strongman, a fire breather, a tiger trainer, a slightly sinister ringmaster, and others. They all seem desperate for Lewis' help, so much so that he comes back the next night. As Lewis becomes enmeshed in the Iron Circus and its mysteries, he's forced to confront some of his greatest fears. Howe's prose perfectly captures the magic and menace of a circus performance, particularly when viewed through the eyes of a child: "It went on for some minutes, this dazzling confluence of dancing, color, lights, music, acrobatics and fire...." The story is episodic, with Lewis lurching from one dreamlike adventure to another, with only a spine of narrative to connect them. Even so, there's something darkly memorable about the Iron Circus and its ringmasters—both the fictional one in the novel and the inventive author at work behind the scenes.

An addictively odd middle-grade novel set in a stylized world of circus folk.



THE CHAOS PRINCIPLE

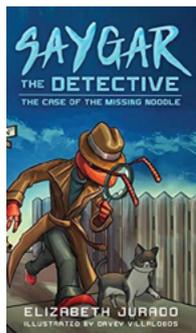
Johnson, Nathan
Self (258 pp.)
\$10.99 paper | \$2.99 e-book | Sept. 30, 2021
9781087999920

In Johnson's debut SF novel, an experienced investigator looks into several murders in an era in which serious crime is almost nonexistent.

Decades in the future, Ansel Black is the last detective left on the Rim, a sparsely populated windswept region between the urbanized Everything Sector and the uninhabitable Waste. When it comes to solving crimes, he's not entirely on his own, though: He has an

ANI (short for annotated intelligence) program that can predict the likelihood of any suspect's guilt as a percentage. There aren't that many Real Crimes anymore, as most people stay at home inside their cubes and act out their destructive urges in an ANI-run virtual reality known as the Stream. The ruminative Ansel is unsatisfied with both his work and his life in general: "Years as a detective have developed in Ansel something of a sixth sense: specifically, an ability to measure the proximity of a truth that is just out of grasp. It is a sense that has guided him...to surprising confessions. He has but to apply it to something greater." Then he catches five strange murders. The victims were found shot to death in a religious settlement at the edge of the Waste. ANI's comprehensive observation network somehow missed how all five of them got there, but evidence suggests each of them arrived on their own. Clearly, someone (or several someones) blacked out ANI's cameras—a feat that Ansel would normally have considered to be an impossibility. To figure out how these people died, he will have to rely on an antiquated solution: good old-fashioned detective work. The ensuing investigation, which involves clues hidden in cryptic paintings of children watched over by a backward moon, soon becomes a personal quest into the true purpose of ANI—and of Ansel himself.

A measured and inquisitive speculative mystery with a lyrical soul.



SAYGAR THE DETECTIVE
The Case of the Missing Noodle

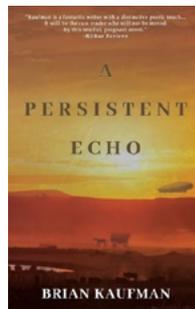
Jurado, Elizabeth
Illus. by Davey Villalobos
Wind Rock Press (174 pp.)
9781735634869
9781735634876 paper

Jurado's Saygar, an ant, is back for a new adventure in this children's chapter book, this time as a detective solving a missing person case.

Saygar isn't an ordinary ant; he's fully kid-sized and needs to eat constantly to keep from shrinking. You'd think it would be tough for anxious third grader Joseph Mateo to keep his science project-turned-best friend (the reasons for Saygar's startling size remain a mystery) under wraps, but Saygar actually masquerades rather well as a student in Joseph's class. By the time this third installment in the Saygar series takes place, Joseph is well practiced at deceiving everyone. This includes his own Spanish-speaking family, which unfortunately includes two members that he wishes he didn't have to know at all: his cousins Julia, a 4-year-old, and Saul Sam, a toddler also known as Little Noodle. When Joseph's mom leaves him and Saygar to babysit these two troublemakers, Little Noodle disappears, and it's up to Joseph, Julia, their neighbor Amanda Chavez, and Detective Saygar to find him in their Texas town before the adults come home from running errands. Joseph laments, "I wanted to un-family Little Noodle, but I didn't want to get rid of him." This early elementary chapter book mystery drops enticing clues for readers in

an entertaining, often humorous manner that still manages to explore deeper themes, especially those regarding family. The book is peppered with illustrator Villalobos' fun, cartoonish black-and-white drawings that highlight key moments of Jurado's story. The plot moves at a steady pace that incorporates the danger of local villains (like the mean neighborhood kid known as the Moose), wacky hijinks (hiding Saygar's true identity as an ant), and kooky neighbors (Mrs. Rosales and her many cats). This book may appeal to fans of series like the Geronimo Stilton books by Elisabetta Dami and Tadgh Bentley's Dino Detectives, which similarly keep their readers on their toes.

A tightly written early readers mystery that will leave kids hungry for more.



A PERSISTENT ECHO

Kaufman, Brian
Black Rose Writing (226 pp.)
\$25.95 | \$20.95 paper | Aug. 24, 2023
978-1685132682
9781685132620 paper



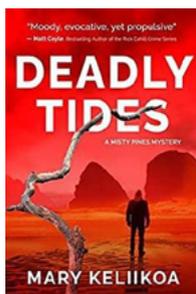
Against a historical backdrop of UFO sightings, a dying man tries to nudge the world along a righteous path in Kaufman's novel.

Rhyme, Texas, 1897. August Simms has returned to Rhyme ostensibly to investigate reports of mysterious airships landing there. But his purpose for returning to Rhyme is twofold. August is also dying and wants to spend his final days at the Martin family boardinghouse where his wife, Christy, died some 15 years before, and he wants to be buried beside her. But life keeps happening in the interim to interfere with his plans. Nadine Martin now runs the boardinghouse and doesn't remember August at first. But her father was murdered back then, just before Christy's death, and the true killer (as everyone knew) was spirited off by the railroad bosses; Luther Williams, an innocent local Black man, was lynched instead. August and his old friend Judge Proctor are racked with guilt over not doing enough to stop Luther's lynching. Racism, no surprise, is alive and well in Rhyme in 1897. But then something else comes to light that's even more incendiary than anything related to racially motivated hate crime. The righteous townspeople (spurred on by the railroad crew) are enraged and will do anything they can to save innocent people in harm's way. There are more good people to be noted, like Bill Ackerman, August's wagon driver and wingman, and huge Bose Williams, son of Luther, and Natalie Martin, Nadine's daughter, who is suffering the throes of adolescence. Kaufman is a fantastic writer with a distinctive poetic touch (consider such lapidary phrases as "a smile threatening the corners of his mouth" or "morning arrives like a shovel to the head"). And August Simms is a charming, sympathetic protagonist; he's a true font of wisdom and a still point in the storms that rage in Rhyme. It will be the rare reader who will not be moved by this soulful, poignant novel.

A remarkable, virtuosic performance that will certainly leave persistent echoes in the reader's mind.

“A thought-provoking fictional examination of big ideas.”

OBSERVER



DEADLY TIDES

Keliikoa, Mary

Level Best Books (353 pp.)

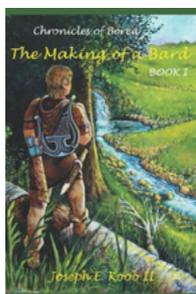
\$5.99 e-book | Oct. 24, 2023

A mystery sequel set in the fictional Oregon coastal town of Misty Pines.

As the story opens, FBI profiler Abby Kanekoa is on a frantic search for her missing mother, who has Alzheimer's disease. After an exhaustive search of her parent's usual haunts, Abby finds

her covered in blood on the beach. However, her mother isn't injured; she's holding someone's tennis shoe—inside of which is a severed foot. That foot, in turns out, belongs to local surfer legend and unique board designer Terry Chesney—and the rest of him is missing. Abby and local sheriff Jax Turner, who've been separated for several years after the death of their young daughter, are brought together by the case along with Jax's 27-year-old niece, Rachel Killian, who's new to the police force. Chesney's local surf shop is responsible for surfboard designs that his competitors covet; however, they're not the only suspects in the disappearance, and possible death, of the mysterious surf pro. Keliikoa has crafted a page-turning second series installment; Abby is a fully fleshed-out character, and the mystery is one that readers will be truly invested in seeing through to the end. The well-paced story offers engaging commentary on the trials of women in law enforcement while avoiding clichés and common tropes. The emotional pain of child loss that Abby and Jax suffer was present in the first installment, and here it's effectively used to show the long-term effects of loss on relationships. The author's descriptions of the atmosphere of the Oregon coast may leave readers longing for more: “The sound of the ocean played off the cliffs below and wafted the steady roar into the air....Slices of cobalt sky peeked through the thinning trees.” Still, for a novel whose mystery centers on a legendary surf pro and board designer, the surf settings are oddly sparse. Nonetheless, the novel will leave readers looking forward to the next series entry.

An intense and satisfying whodunit.



THE MAKING OF A BARD *Preludio*

Koob II, Joseph E.

Self (207 pp.)

\$7.95 paper | \$2.99 e-book | May 9, 2019
9781097485406

The first installment in Koob's Chronicles of Borea fantasy series follows a trio of unlikely heroes as they embark on perilous journeys of self-discovery.

In the fantasy realm of Borea, half-elven brothers Jared and Ge-or return to their village after hunting to find it under attack by a horde of Qa-ryks, bestial warriors comparable to J.R.R.

Tolkien's orcs. After joining the fight and battling courageously, Jared sees his brother clubbed to the ground and, assuming he's dead, flees for his life as his village burns. After meeting another survivor—a girl named Thistle—the two go on a quest to retrieve Jared's father's sword, which was stolen in the attack. Ge-or, meanwhile, survives the carnage and eventually makes his way to a remote farmstead where he is nursed back to health by a beautiful “mountain girl.” Torn between starting a new life with her and avenging the murder of his father, Ge-Or ponders a difficult decision. Some minor issues negatively impact the reading experience: The setting is a blandly formulaic fantasy backdrop inhabited by humans, elves, dwarves, and dragons (although the author, to his credit, does introduce a fascinating creature called an ovietti, a mysterious organism that looks like a “brown fried egg” and accompanies Thistle on her journey). The formula continues with the antagonists, who are disappointingly two-dimensional—purely evil characters bent on taking over Borea and re-creating it in accordance with their dark vision. But these flaws are ameliorated by the solid writing (“The ebon altar stood deep within the old mage's palace. It had been the centerpiece for his most dire magic, sacrifices, and torture. Aberon had been there many times, as had his brethren. It served as a place where they could release themselves to its aura and drink in its powers”), which is fluid, focused, and powered by well-developed, identifiable, and endearing protagonists that readers will find themselves rooting for.

The beginning of a sweeping, albeit formulaic, adventure that should satisfy fans of grand-scale fantasy narratives.

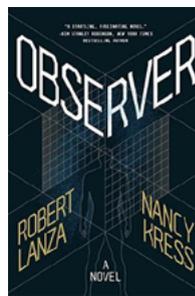


OBSERVER

Lanza, Robert & Nancy Kress

The Story Plant (368 pp.)

\$21.99 | \$4.99 e-book | Jan. 10, 2023
9781611883435



A neurosurgeon gets involved with a scientific research team's mind-bending project in Lanza and Kress' SF novel that blends elements of biology, physics, and multiverse theory.

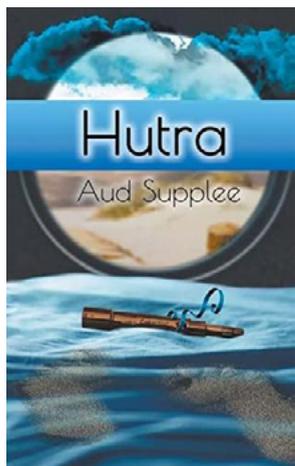
Caroline “Caro” Soames-Watkins is a capable, smart young neurosurgeon whose promising career is threatened after she reports a fellow doctor for sexual harassment and an onslaught of her harasser's supporters come after her on social media. Drowning in loans, and with a sister and a disabled niece who rely on her for financial support, Caro accepts an invitation from her great-uncle Samuel Louis Watkins, whom she's never met. He's a terminally ill Nobel laureate who offers her a lucrative position as surgeon at a remote facility in the Caribbean. Her suspicions that the facility isn't an ordinary hospital are proven right when, after signing nondisclosure agreements, she's told about the real research going on behind closed doors. Her great-uncle—together with his lifelong friend and genius physicist George Weigert and with support from tech developer Julian Dey—is apparently in the process of creating technology that will allow people to observe different branches of the multiverse. The

AUD SUPPLEE TALKS ABOUT HER NOVEL

[SPONSORED]

Please tell us a little about yourself and your work.

As a reformed, reluctant reader, I can empathize with anyone with an aversion to books. When I first learned to read, I didn't believe good books existed, so I made up my own stories. On book-report day in eighth grade, I dreamed of publishing my own novel. That way, I could report on my book and not have



to read it first—because I wrote it! I had no idea how often an author must read a manuscript during the editing process. I gained a passion for books in college through a juvenile literature class. Awesome literature is out there for young readers, and I want to be a part of that. I write for the young and the young at heart because

they deserve an engaging, adventurous story filled with unexpected turns and a few laughs. I think I just described a roller coaster! As for my work: My stand-alone novel, *Hutra*, is Book 2 of my Winnie and the Wizard fantasy series from Wild Rose Press. Winnie lives by a warrior code, and Kip, the “wizard,” is a young, aspiring magician who gains magical powers during their travels.

How did you develop your characters?

Each one has a different origin. For instance, the main female character in *Frama-12* and *Hutra* shares a few characteristics with my older sister. I originally named her Torie. Then one day while I was listening to an oldies station, they played “Windy” by the Association. The chorus described my character so well I renamed her Windemere, with the nicknames Winnie and Windy. Her little stepbrother, 6-year-old Mikey, is based on my nephew when he was

that age. The inspiration for Kip's Cockney accent came from a tubing excursion. One of the kids in our group started speaking in a Cockney accent for absolutely no reason. That memory stuck with me and became a part of Kip's character. The character of Nor, also in *Hutra*, appeared through pure imagination and pure fun!

Was your storyline something that you envisioned from the beginning, or did you build/change it as you wrote your novel?

I'm one of those seat-of-the-pants writers. After I come up with a “what if” idea, I thumb through a “name your baby” book until I find a character name that fits my story idea. Next, I imagine the character experiencing and reacting to different scenarios until the plot starts to solidify. Some days it's agony writing this way, but once I find the groove, I dive into it and let the characters tell the story.

What are you working on now?

I'm working on Book 3 in this series. Winnie, Mikey, and Kip visit an island in an alternate world where they're tasked with breaking an enchantment on a princess and stopping an invasion from the mainland led by their nemesis, Thaddeus Krell.

What can readers expect that might be different from your previous body of work?

One of the joys of writing a fantasy series featuring alternate worlds is that each is different. *Frama-12* is a little like *Alice in Wonderland* on steroids. *Hutra* is more realistic, with a Victorian feel, except with cell-phones and zero tolerance for other-worlders.

Portions of this Q&A were edited for clarity.

“A quaint and charming bookstore tale with a healthy dose of intrigue.”

THE PAPER PIRATE

process involves brain-implant surgery that Caro will be doing on volunteers. It's supposed to be life-changing, potentially Nobel Prize-winning science, but Caro isn't entirely convinced—until her personal life and the scientific project converge. This compelling novel by Hugo and Nebula Award-winning author Kress and medical doctor and scientific researcher Lanza strikes a fine balance between hard-SF ideas around quantum physics, consciousness, and biology and accounts of the lives of people who deeply engage with those ideas. Caro, as one of the viewpoint characters, effectively acts as a surrogate for lay readers: “She said aloud, ‘I am made of quantum foam that has been collapsed into Caroline Soames-Watkins.’ No, she thought, I am made of confusion.” The other viewpoint character, George, provides more in-depth scientific takes, but both speakers are equally well developed and accessible. Overall, it's a novel full of life-affirming ideas that's likely to make readers rethink concepts of time and space.

A thought-provoking fictional examination of big ideas.



SHADOW COPY *Exit Darkness*

Leathers, Michele & Ryan Leathers

Self (375 pp.)

\$23.00 | \$13.99 paper | \$3.99 e-book

June 23, 2020

9798786963152

9798655934375 paper

A teenage girl with an unusual secret hunts her stalker in this YA SF thriller.

Becca Tanner seems like a typical high school student, but no one at her new school knows about her cancer or the revolutionary measures her father took to save her. Six months prior to starting West Johnston High School, the teenager underwent a procedure performed by her father, a doctor who specializes in extraordinary full-body transplants called psychocedent transfers. During the operation, which was a success, something happened that caught the attention of patient Darla Monroe. The family relocates to North Carolina, where her father continues his work at a secret facility. Becca intends to tell no one—not her new friends or old—about the transplant, but a baddie knows all about it and begins menacing and stalking her. While Becca searches for the villain, Darla searches for Becca. Darla has critical information and needs to find Becca before it's too late. The entire cast works well in this first installment of Michele and Ryan Leathers' *Shadow Copy* series. The authors create a convincing ordinary teenager trying to manage the transplant's odd fallout: Her mother tells her, “Before, people said, ‘You look just like your mother,’ or ‘You two could be sisters.’ Nobody says that anymore.” The Leathers deftly consider the ethics of the operation and ably toggle between Becca's and Darla's perspectives as their stories connect. There may be more to Becca's second chance than she realizes, and it's up to her and Darla to uncover the truth.

A thrilling SF mystery that explores mortality and the nature of identity.



THE PAPER PIRATE

McIntyre, Dawn

Running Wild Press (338 pp.)

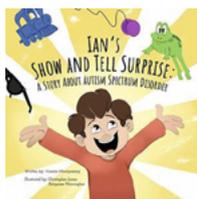
\$19.99 paper | \$9.99 e-book | Nov. 8, 2022

978-1955062183

In this novel, a criminal who wants a coveted book targets a group of friends.

Five friends and business partners—Felicia Cocolo, Charlie Santorelli, Lavinia “Vinnie” Holcomb, Al Rockleigh, and Lenora Stern—own The Paper Pirate, a bookstore that is in financial trouble due to a balloon mortgage that needs to be paid. The mostly 60-somethings plan a fundraiser, as they risk losing the shop “in less than four months.” While trying to save the enterprise, the five protagonists cope with personal issues—such as Lenora wanting her boyfriend, Jason, to finally make a commitment, and Felicia secretly working on erotica—as well as meeting for a writing group where they review one another's efforts. But unbeknown to the quintet is Rick Foster—and his partner, Nina Bartov—who is after a copy of Benjamin Conway's *The Stargazer at Dawn*. The long-dead author “had never achieved the fame he had no doubt desired, and this tale was an obscure early offering that wasn't even available from Amazon.” Rick has been offered a half-million dollars for this novel—mainly because it contains significant scribblings from an ancestor of a current Eastern European politician. Later, Rick, under an alias, attempts to buy The Paper Pirate, though the friends decline. Rick and Nina's criminal partnership grows contentious and increasingly violent as they begin breaking into the homes of the five friends in search of Conway's work. McIntyre presents a smooth and enjoyable story. Though the tale focuses more on the friends' personal lives than on the book heist attempt, the characters are individually engaging. Similarly, despite the separate stories for each protagonist along with the overarching plot of thieves wreaking havoc on the friends' lives, the tale does not feel bogged down by too many character arcs and plot points. Rather, with its accessible prose and captivating players, the story feels lived in. It is evident that the protagonists' friendships are as meaningful as they are long and that *The Paper Pirate* is beloved. Still, the series of break-ins feels a bit repetitive, and more time could have been spent on the importance of Conway's novel. But despite these minor issues, McIntyre's tale is often cozy and delightful as well as menacing and moving.

A quaint and charming bookstore tale with a healthy dose of intrigue.



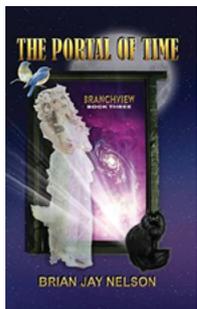
IAN'S SHOW AND TELL SURPRISE
A Story About Autism Spectrum Disorder

Montgomery, Vicenta
 Illus. by Christopher-James Bolognese-Warrington
 Ruby Dolphin Books (32 pp.)
 \$11.99 paper | \$2.99 e-book | April 11, 2023
 978-1667891293

A boy finds a way to explain autism to his classmates in this show-and-tell picture book based on a true story.

Ian is excited about a new school year, but his classmates have trouble understanding why he does things differently. Ian ends up mostly playing by himself. When the teacher announces a show-and-tell project, he isn't sure what to do. He wishes his classmates could understand him as well as his favorite stuffed animal does. That gives him an idea: "I'll tell them about autism and show them how I think differently. Then they'll understand." With his mom's help, Ian puts together objects to help him explain autism to his class, like a hula hoop to show how he sometimes forgets personal space. Later, a classmate reminds him of the hula hoop, and he understands he's too close—they now speak the same language. Montgomery uses a clear font and simple sentences to pack a lot of information into the captivating tale. The voice feels authentic to Ian's experiences, and the empathetic story is based on a presentation the author's own son did for his third grade class. Bolognese-Warrington skillfully uses color, showing Ian's world primarily in grayscale until the White boy begins his presentation. Each of Ian's objects brings a splash of color to the page. At the end of his talk, the whole classroom is depicted in bright hues. The correlation of being understood with seeing in full color is an effective technique.

A sympathetic, engaging, and understanding look at autism.



THE PORTAL OF TIME

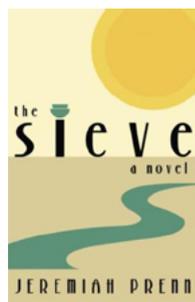
Nelson, Brian Jay
 Writer's Publishing House (686 pp.)
 \$34.99 | \$36.95 paper | \$8.99 e-book
 Aug. 19, 2021
 9781648731792
 9781648731808 paper

In Nelson's third fantasy-series installment, adventures unfold in different time periods for a couple, their family, and their mythological friends.

Popular fiction writer Steven Spencer and his wife, Loraine, have encountered supernatural phenomena before when they fought alongside Greek gods. So when Steven, who has god-given powers to transform into a beast, inadvertently passes through a time portal somewhere in the couple's New England mansion, the couple know just what to do. Loraine gets help from family members and colleagues, including gods Poseidon and Amphitrite, who pass themselves

off as mortals. Steven, who winds up in 1697, summons the couple's godly friends, too, although he must prove to them that he hails from the future. The present-day group believes that the safest person to send through the portal after Steven is Charlotte Locke, a "spirit with the powers of witchcraft." Unforeseen misfortunes pop up in the late 17th century (including familiar enemies the Spencers battled in 2019), and Loraine and the others deal with beings who take a wrong turn through the portal into the modern day. Hopefully, after Steven returns, Loraine and friends can close the troublesome portal for good. Series regulars turn up in Nelson's latest—most notably the Spencers, Charlotte, and immortals such as Zeus, who goes by the name Ezekiel in 2019. They bring a host of entertaining and often episodic subplots with them, which involve such elements as pirates, a vengeful ghost, and a frame-up. It's a lot to digest in one novel, and the goal of getting Steven home occasionally gets lost in the shuffle. The author somewhat lightens the proceedings with concise prose and supernatural touches, including fairies, gnomes, and a shape-shifting ability that several characters possess. The time-travel plot is refreshingly simple, only asking readers to pay attention to a singular timeline. Romantic couplings dominate the final act, which nonetheless introduces avenues for a potential fourth volume to explore.

An appealing, if occasionally overwhelming, cross-genre sequel.



THE SIEVE

Penn, Jeremiah
 Self (387 pp.)
 \$16.00 paper | \$9.99 e-book | Jan. 9, 2023
 9798371597236

A group of adventurers set out on a perilous journey to find a magic artifact—one that may be key to their survival in this debut historical novel.

During the French Revolution, the titular sieve—resembling a pair of large metal bowls on top of a square pillar—mysteriously appears to Monsieur Jean-Luc Descoulis, giving him the power to double whatever this magical item touches. While Descoulis sees the sieve as "the eraser of man's burden," his colleague Armand Dupuis notices that the copies created by the sieve grow progressively weaker: Pens don't have as much ink, chickens are progressively skinnier and sicker, and so on. Yet Descoulis sees it as a way for humans to live forever. Then the narrative leaps to the year 1964, when a group of men from wildly different backgrounds are drawn together for one common purpose: They intend to find the now-lost sieve, rumored to be somewhere in the Sonoran Desert. These adventurers include Grant Wyatt, a bitter archaeologist; Abram, an assassin; Jean-Michel Descoulis, a priest who spearheads the search; Cassius O'Mills, a former actor caught up in the Irish Republican Army; Ken, a floundering young man; Izuki, a depressed Japanese office worker; and Rod Arch, a disgraced former lawyer. While there is plenty of action to keep things moving, the story thrives on philosophical

BRIANNA R. SHAFFERY TALKS ABOUT FIRE & FLIGHT

[SPONSORED]

Please tell us a little about yourself and your work. Writing and storytelling have always been a part of me. I've written a variety of short stories and novellas, but *Fire & Flight* is my debut novel and also the first in my young adult fantasy-adventure trilogy. I've always been captivated by stories, particularly ones involving magic and faraway lands, so writing my own novel about a magical world sparked by my own imagination is a dream come true.

Was your storyline something that you envisioned from the beginning, or did you build/change it as you wrote your novel?

Fire & Flight bloomed from a singular idea that completely enthralled me. I was a junior in high school taking a “creative expressions” class, and all I could think of was a girl with silver hair and lilac eyes in a forest with sapphire leaves. The idea immediately captivated me, and the more I turned it over in my head, the more it came to life. And then the girl had a name: Nyla. And she was about to discover something about herself and her family history that would upend her life.

How did you create/acquire the cover art?

I had the amazing opportunity to work with Marcella Thaler, an immensely talented graphic designer, who took my vision and provided me with an amazing concept that—through some revisions—turned into three fantastic covers that I can't wait to see side by side on bookshelves in the coming year! Our focus was to showcase the symbols of the trilogy while also giving some insight into the Heirs of Tenebris.



I think once people see them, they'll appreciate our vision. I get goosebumps whenever I look at these cover images and how they not only represent Nyla's character arc throughout each book, but also the progression of the trilogy itself.

How has critical and/or reader response influenced the way you think about your work?

People come up to me at events I've done since *Fire & Flight's* release and tell me they started reading the book immediately after purchasing their signed copy and that they loved my opening chapters—or that they're fascinated by the world I've created. Reviews such as the one Kirkus gave the novel and reader reviews on other platforms bolstered my confidence and inspired me to create content for people to enjoy as I continue to grow into who I am as an author. The community I've found myself in—of fellow writers and readers alike—has been exciting, encouraging, and humbling all at once. When I first set out to publish *Fire & Flight*, I knew I wanted to create a world, and by extension an “author brand,” that people could escape to. I just didn't realize that in doing so I would be building a community of people I would come to know personally and that it would extend to something more than just my work.

What are you working on now?

Currently, I'm working on publishing *Fire & Flight's* sequel, *Embers of Eternity*, which should be released later this summer. My team and I are also working on revising the third and final book in the Heirs of Tenebris trilogy. I'm determined to do everything I can so readers won't have to wait too long after *Embers of Eternity's* release for the trilogy's conclusion, *Winds of War*.

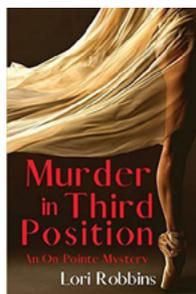
Portions of this Q&A were edited for clarity.

“A highly entertaining whodunit with a twisty plot and plenty of biting ballet intrigue.”

MURDER IN THIRD POSITION

inner monologues interspersed with intense scenes of graphic violence (“Jaunito lay dead, the weight between his head and the table cracking the stick in half, blood with bubbles spurt-ing and pooling over the table and floor”). Prenn favors a loose, stream-of-consciousness writing style—but this can prove chal-lenging when it results in, for example, nine pages of prose with no paragraph breaks: “A blank spot in that vision, those mazes drawn on his apartment walls all paths to the same spot, his open window, where the unspeakable center would be.... Time skips.” But those who relish digging into the ethical and reli-gious ambiguities of deeply flawed humans will find enough sub-stance here to stay engaged.

Dazzling and occasionally ponderous experimental fiction.



MURDER IN THIRD POSITION

Robbins, Lori

Level Best Books (260 pp.)
\$16.95 paper | \$0.99 e-book | Nov. 22, 2022
9781685121969



A prima ballerina investigates a homicide by dangerous stage prop in this rollicking mystery.

Robbins’ third On Pointe yarn finds Leah Siderova, the aging, sore-kneed ballerina of New York City’s American Ballet Com-pany, enmeshed in yet another murder at the world’s deadliest dance troupe. The victim this time is artist and set designer Maurice Kaminsky, who built a rickety escalator for Leah to ascend when she dances the Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nut-cracker*. Maurice turns up mangled to death in the contrap-tion’s gears. Suspects include Maurice’s husband, Brett, the company’s domineering choreographer; Tex, Leah’s dance partner, who may have been sleeping with the victim; a film-maker who was shooting a documentary about the designer; Maurice’s art dealer, who stands to gain from the inflation of his paintings’ prices; and Victor Roth, a wolfishly charm-ing lawyer. Assisting Leah is her posse of amateur detectives, including her crime writer mother, Barbara; her Aunt Rachel; the dancer’s cagey Russian ballet coach, Madame Maksimova; and Olga Shevchenko, Madame’s friend, who may be in the Russian mob. Along the way, Leah juggles relationships with hunky emergency room doctor Zach Mitchell and Jonah Sobol, the sexy but poker-faced police detective assigned to the case. When another body plummets from the sky, Leah fears that she might be the killer’s next target. Robbins, a former bal-lerina, steps the novel in the glamorous grunge of the dance world as Leah nurses her aching body, obsessively counts the calories in every spinach leaf, dodges a too-familiar donor, and fences with her (metaphorically) back-stabbing rival, Kerry Blair. The author stocks the story with sharply etched char-acters and deploys vast schools of red herring to keep readers guessing as Leah and her pals ponder every possible perpetra-tor. Robbins renders this well-observed zoo in lively prose that weaves between catty humor—“When I dance Juliet’s death

scene, there won’t be a dry eye in the house. If you get top billing, there won’t be a dry eye at the box office”—and bloody mayhem. (“His head lay at an odd angle, and he had four severe cuts, one on his face and three across his chest. Glitter from the set was mixed in with the blood.”) The result is a suspense-ful romp with loads of atmosphere.

A highly entertaining whodunit with a twisty plot and plenty of biting ballet intrigue.



MRS. RABBIT'S FRIENDSGIVING DINNER

Roman, Carole P.

Illus. by Mateya Arkova

Chelshire (36 pp.)

\$26.99 | \$14.99 paper | \$5.99 e-book

Oct. 25, 2022

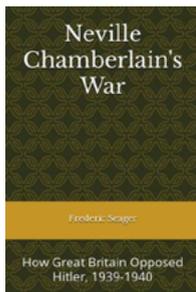
9798218071950

9781950080052 paper

A lonely rabbit receives support from her community in Roman’s picture book.

Mrs. Rabbit is all alone and upset because none of her fam-ily can attend their traditional dinner. In an attempt to make her empty burrow feel less empty, she accidentally makes far too much carrot stew. Soon, she hears knock after knock on her front door as her critter friends each drop by to make sure she isn’t feeling sad. Gary Gopher brings grubs and worms; Olivia Owl arrives with her unspecified dinner, and, eventu-ally, Sally Sparrow joins them. Mrs. Rabbit realizes that a party has sprung up around her. As her guests share a meal together, Mrs. Rabbit decides to rename the day to more accurately encompass friendship and community; thus, the tradition of Friendsgiving Day begins. This sweet story effectively celebrates chosen families and community care. It reimag-ines North American Thanksgiving without directly naming it while highlighting how it gives people the opportunity to spend time with those they care about. The anthropomorphic animals wear typical human clothing, but the specific dishes that each guest brings are true to real animals’ diets. Arkova’s illustrations feature a jewel-toned palette and antique styling for the characters’ clothes.

A pleasant work that teaches readers to be kind and gather together.



NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN'S WAR
How Great Britain Opposed Hitler, 1939-1940

Seager, Frederic
Self (286 pp.)
\$22.00 paper | \$8.99 e-book | Aug. 2, 2021
9798548548795

In this new World War II history, Seager argues that British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was not a naïve appeaser but a reckless warrior.

When one thinks of Great Britain during its war against Adolf Hitler's Germany, the figure that usually comes to mind is Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Churchill's predecessor, Chamberlain, by contrast, is associated mainly with a failed policy of Nazi appeasement. By signing the Munich Agreement with other leaders in 1938, Chamberlain allowed Germany to seize the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia, hoping in vain that it would curb the Nazi dictator's expansionist ambitions. According to Seager, however, Chamberlain's mistakes far exceed the Munich Agreement. He was the prime minister when Britain formally declared war on Germany in 1939 and thus a dominant figure at a pivotal moment. He largely kept British forces out of open conflict, thinking, again in vain, that he could break the Germans via economic pressures. This early period of the war, prior to Germany's invasion of France and the commencement of large-scale battle—a period known in Britain as “the Twilight War,” in France as “La Drôle de Guerre” (“the Strange War”), and in the United States as “the Phoney War”—is perhaps the least covered of the entire conflict. Despite this, Seager argues, it has vital lessons to teach us: “There was nothing glorious about the Phoney War, and that is precisely why it merits our attention,” writes the author in his introduction. “In the context of international relations, it was worse than a crime—a tragic blunder.”

An illuminating look into the early days and strategies of World War II.



WISE MEN

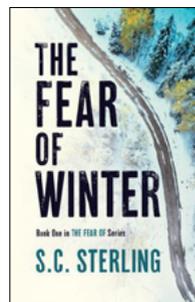
Smith, Lonon
Self (312 pp.)
\$14.98 paper | Oct. 31, 2022
9798357952516

An Egyptian man is forced to travel to Palestine as a spy for the Roman Empire amid rumors that a prophecy of a Messiah has been fulfilled in Smith's debut historical novel.

Khefren is a scribe in Alexandria, and according to his own typically self-effacing description, he's “very, very ordinary.” He lives a reasonably comfortable life with his wife and two daughters, but his life really isn't his own, as he's little more than a servant to Roman Gaius Duccius Aquila,

a tribune who hails from one of the most powerful families in Rome. Aquila notices an Ethiopian in town and, suspicious of his motives, compels Khefren to spy on him; the man turns out to be Shabako of Meroe, the court astrologer for the king of Kush, who's on his way to see Persian friends in Palestine. Aquila takes this for evidence of a conspiratorial collaboration between Jews and Parthians against Rome and orders Khefren to accompany Shabako to gather more information. In a spirit of humble resignation, astutely and often comically captured by author Smith throughout the novel, Khefren complies: “I'd been sent on this journey with the understanding that I would betray the confidence of anyone who gave it.” Khefren's journey is a perilous one—his life is threatened first by pirates, then by assassins—but the greatest danger he encounters comes from the Romans he serves. The author skillfully combines historical rigor and dramatic suspense with a light, humorous touch. He also broadens the story beyond mere political intrigue; while in Palestine, for example, Khefren learns more about the Judaic monotheism he finds perplexing and ends up searching for the new king that people say has come to deliver them from their earthly bondage.

A rare novel that's as riveting as it is historically astute.



THE FEAR OF WINTER
Book One in THE FEAR OF Series

Sterling, S.C.
No Bueno Publishing (233 pp.)
\$10.99 paper | \$3.99 e-book | Jan. 18, 2023
9780997017526

The search for a missing young woman unearths dark secrets in Sterling's thriller.

Megan Floyd disappeared on Dec. 12, 1996, when she was 19 years old. Two years later, her father, Tom, is still searching for her. His marriage has fallen apart and his wife, Lisa, is barely hanging on, believing Megan to be dead. Yet Tom still has hope. He hires Marshall York, a troubled detective, and his assistant investigator, Hannah Jacobs, who has a disturbing past of her own. Tom suspects Kevin Strand, a local serial killer who sits on death row, convicted of other crimes. Tom also points Marshall in the direction of Megan's ex-boyfriend, Jack Gardner, who did not participate in the search for Megan. Hannah does her own sleuthing and becomes suspicious of Benjamin Paterson, who worked with Megan in the deli of the Fraser Market and had previously broken into a woman's home. As the three continue their search, they uncover a startling and dark secret: Megan was using and dealing drugs. Tom is closer to answers than ever before, but he may not like the truth when he finds it. The author has delivered an emotionally raw and viscerally intense mystery/thriller that never pulls its punches (“He instantly realized he'd never said those words aloud—that he was hopeful that a rotting corpse deep in the forest was his baby girl”). The three main characters, Tom, Marshall, and Hannah, are varied and compelling, driving the plot forward in complex

“A memorable story of war and seemingly miraculous escape.”

UNDER THE NAGA TAIL

storylines that explore their multifaceted personalities. The mystery itself is unpredictable while also believable, with many unexpected and harrowing twists and turns. The content of the story is heavy and dark, but Sterling handles the material and the characters with care and sensitivity. Fans of Stieg Larsson's *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* (2005) will find much here to love and will look forward to further stories in the series.

An exciting and surprising thriller with a great mystery.



UNDER THE NAGA TAIL

Taing, Mae Bunseng with James Taing
Greenleaf Book Group Press (352 pp.)

\$26.95 | Feb. 7, 2023

9798886450187

In this memoir, James Taing records his father's recollections of his experience living through the Cambodian genocide of the late 1970s.

Mae Bunseng Taing was 16 years old when the Communist Party in Cambodia, called the Khmer Rouge, took over his country. In short order, he and his family were forced from their homes and moved to poor villages in the country where they had to farm for the state. The young people were frequently sent away on backbreaking construction jobs with meager rations. On one job, Mae nearly died from an illness. On another, he escaped to find his father, who he believed was dying; a few days later, Mae was captured by the Khmer Rouge and put in a concentration camp with even more horrific conditions. When the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia, he and his comrades took the opportunity to escape. After traveling for weeks, he was reunited with his family, and they escaped into Thailand, believing their troubles were over. However, Thai soldiers forcibly repatriated the Cambodian refugees, sending them down Preah Vihear Mountain, which was riddled with landmines. Against all odds, Mae and his family survived the mountain, and eventually all of them—save his father, who died—immigrated to the United States. These events are faithfully and unforgettably transcribed by Mae's son James, who includes his own notes on how difficult the experience of reliving these events was for his father. The story bears unflinching witness, with a raw intimacy that feels as if one is sitting at a table with Mae, hearing the stories in person. In his preface, James writes of his desire to make sure his father's experience and the experiences of thousands like him are not forgotten: “It would be a denial of reality, as if all those inexcusable crimes never happened. As if the element of human nature which allowed them to occur had left us.” Overall, the writing is effectively infused with heartfelt descriptions of Cambodia's land, Mae's interactions with other refugees whose lives intersected with his, and the fierce loyalty that bound him and his family together.

A memorable story of war and seemingly miraculous escape.



THE EIGHTH OTTER

Telemark, Peter

ISBN Services (220 pp.)

\$19.95 | \$14.95 paper | \$4.95 e-book

Oct. 21, 2022

9780578272023

9780578272016 paper

An 18th-century apothecary investigates strange deaths and disappearances seemingly connected to an old Irish legend about supernatural otters in Telemark's historical mystery.

In Dereham, New York, in the year 1754, when a woman is attacked and killed by a white otter with a strange marking resembling a cross on its back, local apothecary Seth Athenor investigates what he suspects is a supernatural occurrence. Athenor observes the behavior of the townspeople and begins to make connections as more people are found dead or missing. When Athenor eventually uncovers the relationship among the victims, he realizes that he too may be in danger from a vengeful otter spirit of Irish legend. The author's descriptions of the 18th-century village make for a fascinating backdrop to the mystery. The townspeople, many with names reminiscent of characters from Charles Dickens novels, are especially amusing as Athenor observes their drama. The town council is composed of particularly unpleasant folks, including the mayor, Ulysse von Mardure; magistrate Benedict Fletcher, an amusing caricature of a corrupt lawman; and the hypocritical pastors David Cranford and Jacob Osterhout. Most of the characters involved in the mystery of the otters are delightfully unlikely; this makes for satisfying murder scenes, often from the killer's point of view. This is the fourth book in Telemark's series featuring Athenor, but readers are not required to have read the previous installments to enjoy this one, as Telemark recaps important events and characters at length. Occasionally heavy on exposition, the mystery still progresses at a thrilling clip. While the language has been updated from 18th-century locutions to contemporary English (“I'm a soldier, Mr. Athenor... You're not the first man I've sewn up. Just relax and let me be the doctor for a change”), Telemark's descriptive abilities and researching of the milieu lend ample verisimilitude.

Unique characters inhabiting an interesting setting make for an engaging mystery.



SPRINKLES TO THE RESCUE

Traver, Teresa

Illus. by Jitumoni Goswami

Thousand Acre Woods Books (28 pp.)

\$11.99 paper | \$3.99 e-book | Dec. 1, 2022

9798218108649

A giant pink pastry finds a new job in this picture book by Traver. Sprinkles is a frosted donut living above Dan's Donuts. As she watches police officers, firefighters, and ambulance drivers come in to order confections, she wonders if she could do what

they do: “Rescue workers came in all shapes, colors, and sizes. Maybe she could be one, too.” She gets accepted to the Rescue Academy, hugs Dan the donut maker goodbye, and races off to start her training—but learning to help people is much harder than Sprinkles expected, and she starts to think she should give up. Then a storm sweeps over, breaking a dam and flooding the town. Initially, she’s unsure how to help, but when she spots someone drowning, she throws herself in, using her donut body as a life preserver to rescue townsfolk. The ending, however, is somewhat unclear: The text says “Sprinkles took to her new job like a donut to coffee,” but the illustration shows her napping in grass by the shore. That aside, it’s satisfying to see Sprinkles follow her dream and find her own unique way of helping. Goswami’s watercolor illustrations manage to show both a sense of peril in the flooded town and a wide range of expressions on Sprinkles’ donut face.

A sweet story about discovering one’s talent, despite a confusing conclusion.

This Issue’s Contributors



ADULT

Colleen Abel • Stephanie Anderson • Mark Athitakis • Colette Bancroft • Robert Beauregard Layla Benitez-James • Ty Billman • Sarah Blackman • Amy Boaz • Rhea Borja • Kate Brody • Jeffrey Burke • Catherine Cardno • Tobias Carroll • K.W. Colyard • Morgan Davies • Coeur de Lion • Dave DeChristopher • Amanda Diehl • Melanie Dragger • Lisa Elliott • Chelsea Ennen • Rosalind Faires Katie Flanagan • Mia Franz • Jenna Friebe • Jackie Friedland • Roberto Friedman • Glenn Gamboa Michael Griffith • Geoff Hamilton • Peter Heck • Bridey Heing • Melissa Kravitz Hoeffner • Katrina Niidas Holm • Natalia Holtzman • Matt Jakubowski • Jessica Jernigan • Mikayla Kaber • Jayashree Kamblé • Maya Kasutto • Carly Lane • Tom Lavoie • Judith Leitch • Elsbeth Lindner • Kirk MacLeod Michael Magras • Matthew May • Don McLeese • Gregory McNamee • Carol Memmott • Karen Montgomery Moore • Sarah Morgan • Molly Muldoon • Ari Mulgay • Anna Munday • McKenzie Murphy • Jennifer Nabers • Christopher Navratil • Liza Nelson • Therese Purcell Nielsen • Sarah Norris • Mike Oppenheim • Nick Owchar • Derek Parker • Sarah Parker-Lee • Jim Piechota Katherine Pushkar • Margaret Quamme • Stephanie Reents • Lauren Roberts • Bella Rodrigues Lloyd Sachs • Bob Sanchez • Alexis Sattler • Gene Seymour • Danielle Sigler • Linda Simon • Zhanna Slor • Jennifer Smith • Lily Smith • Wendy Smith • Margot E. Spangenberg • Mathangi Subramanian Caroline Tien • Valeria Tsygankova • Laura Villareal • Francesca Vultaggio • Mark Wadley • Kerry Winfrey • Marion Winik • Adam Winograd

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WHERE NO ONE WILL SEE

Watson, Felicia

D. X. Varos (340 pp.)

\$19.95 paper | \$2.99 e-book | April 11, 2023

9781955065788

A private eye’s familial ties convince others that she’s on the wrong side of the law in Watson’s thriller.

Lucia Scafetti, still in her late 20s, has been running a private investigator’s office in Philadelphia for nearly a decade. It’s become a bit mundane, with the majority of her jobs involving cheating husbands. She gets an unexpected jolt when her father, Carlo, shows up at her door. He’s out of prison a few months earlier than his scheduled September 1995 release from a 20-year sentence he received after killing (for hire) eight people. Lucia doesn’t fancy reconnecting with her dad, whose mobster past has tainted her surname with infamy. But almost as soon as he reappears, Carlo mysteriously vanishes. Then someone starts killing criminals using his M.O., and the police think it’s Lucia. And everyone seems certain that she now has her hands on a diamond and a cache of rare coins that her father had allegedly stashed prior to his jail sentence. If Lucia hopes to clear up the whole mess, she’ll have to delve into the past, identifying the person who hired Carlo as a gunman. As the PI hits the streets to get answers, she eludes the police who are following her, and bad guys take shots at her and even kidnap her beloved dachshund, Rocco. Luckily, she has the strength and resilience to tackle such a precarious undertaking as well as the savviness to make everything she’s doing look easy.

The author delivers an enthralling mystery. Many of the characters are unpredictable, from a potentially crooked cop to various untrustworthy family members. A host of knotty questions concerning the homicides, pilfered goods, and Carlo’s disappearance builds intrigue, and readers won’t have to wait until the very end for every resolution. Lucia is an extraordinary hero, standing 6 feet tall and weighing in at a muscular 200 pounds, leading one person to deem her “Amazonian.” Her most notable feature is her wit, as she repeatedly outsmarts others and delivers one-liners with panache: “You’re not only shopping for a smackdown, you brought a coupon.” She also owns up to her faults, as when she uses people to get what she wants, although she’s much more benevolent than she lets on. Her big personality and lurid backstory occasionally overshadow the stellar supporting characters; attorney Hank Narváez, her new office neighbor and possible romantic interest, relates the sad fate of his professional boxer father, a compelling story that is dropped when Lucia, as she’s wont to do, seizes the conversation. Rocco the dog, however, is an exception—Lucia fawns over him as she does no one else, and he’s a fiercely loyal dog whose incessant barking makes his presence impossible to ignore. There are whiplash-inducing plot turns throughout and a wholly gratifying final act. Hopefully Watson will give this unforgettable private eye her own well-deserved series.

A clever, supercool gumshoe effortlessly steals the show in this delightful caper.

SUSAN HANAFEE TALKS ABOUT LESLIE'S VOICE

[SPONSORED]

Please tell us a little about yourself and your work.

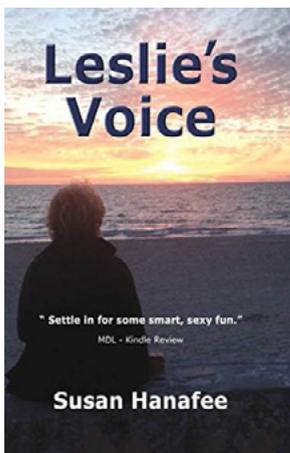
I spent more than 30 years as a newspaper reporter, followed by a lengthy career in corporate communications. You could say I honed my cynical, skeptical views during those disparate professions. I think I also became a better observer of people and details—skills that have helped me in my novel writing.

What was your editing process like?

I am the terminator editor, relentlessly looking for areas in my story that might bore the reader. I also employ a quartet of editors to tell me what's wrong with what I've written. Sometimes I wish they were tougher. *Leslie's Voice* was originally self-published under another title and a pen name. When the pandemic kept many of us locked inside, I took another look at the novel, gave it a thorough edit, and republished the book with its new title. I think it's a better read now.

How did you develop your characters?

My characters are bits and pieces of the many interesting people I've met over the years. I gave a talk at the local library recently wearing a T-shirt that said, "Be careful or you could end up in my novel." I live on a small island in southwest Florida, and almost everyone there could find a home in my mysteries. Some have, to their delight. (I ask first.) *Leslie's Voice*, the first of my series featuring a strong and inquisitive female character, is set in the corporate world where many corrupt people thrive. One of my favorite characters in *Leslie's Voice* is an exasperating and immoral public relations expert. She surfaced in one chapter and refused to leave, serving as my main character's nemesis. I was grateful for



her surprise appearance. Even though I work from an outline, characters are allowed to take control of my storyline. Sometimes I'm just along for the ride.

Was your storyline something that you envisioned from the beginning, or did you build/change it as you wrote your novel?

Leslie's Voice is set against the backdrop of a failed corporate takeover attempt of one Midwestern utility by another and of the egos involved. This was an actual event, although my characters are fictional. Corporate intrigue aside, this is a story of Leslie's personal growth in dealing with the men in her life and in confronting sexual harassment and misgyny in and out of the workplace.

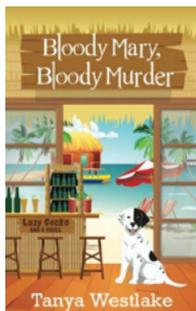
What are you working on now?

After Leslie left the corporate world, she moved to a small island in southwest Florida to become a novelist. Like Leslie, I was drawn to mysteries. The first mystery, *Scavenger Tides* (2021), pits Leslie and her reporter friend, Wes, against a group of criminals who are using the island as a stopping-off point before shipping drugs into Canada. *The End of His Journey* (2022) is based on an island shooting from two decades ago and has Leslie and Wes trying to solve this cold case. *Deadly Winds* (2023) follows, with Leslie looking into the death of a wealthy island widow who was killed by a falling church bell. The sheriff claims it was an accident, but Leslie suspects the woman was killed because she objected to a pricey church renovation project. As the mystery unfolds and she confronts the church-bell killer, Leslie finds herself locked in a room from which there is no escape and in the path of a deadly storm racing toward the island. In the works is a continuation of the Leslie Elliott mystery series. In *Under the Sand*, Leslie and Wes enlist the local iguana hunter to help deal with criminals who plan to kidnap two wealthy island residents and keep them buried alive until a hefty ransom is paid.

Portions of this Q&A were edited for clarity.

“Cheers to this cozy mystery that’s an enjoyable, breezy beach read.”

BLOODY MARY, BLOODY MURDER



**BLOODY MARY,
BLOODY MURDER**

Westlake, Tanya

Impractical Press (270 pp.)

\$9.99 paper | \$0.99 e-book | Dec. 5, 2022

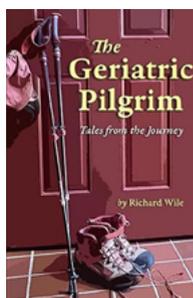
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At the height of spring break, a Florida bartender finds a murdered woman in her car and becomes obsessed with finding the killer in this debut novel.

Mike, the security guard, and Carlos, the night manager, escort The Lazy Gecko’s premier bartender, Kalliope Brooks, to her car at the end of a busy night. After the men say goodnight to her, Kallie starts the engine and then, in the rearview mirror, sees something on the dark back seat. A shopping bag? A pair of shoes? No, it’s the hand of a petite blond whose lifeless body is folded up in the leg space of the car’s back seat. After Det. Morrison interviews Kallie, he says the police will need to keep her car as evidence. It’s late when she is given a ride home, but her dad has waited up. Her father has been a widow magnet since he moved in with Kallie sometime after his divorce. The next day, after volunteering at a homeless shelter’s kitchen with her best friend, Tess, Kallie breaks down sobbing, thinking of the poor, dead woman. After police reveal the victim was the 24-year-old daughter of a famous, wealthy Washingtonian widower, Kallie and Tess commit to solving the murder. Although Morrison leans toward Mike as the killer (and toward Kallie as his future girlfriend), the young women find plenty of other suspects, including the victim’s landlord and her fiancé, who has a girlfriend on the side. But spring breakers, other bar employees, and possibly even Kallie’s friends are not above suspicion. The story’s pacing is excellent, and a few curveballs are thrown into the plot. The spring break wackiness in this beachfront town seems authentic (“Can you believe that fight on the beach

tonight?” “That was so crazy! Don’t these people know they’re supposed to be having *fun*?”). Humor and quirky but believable characters add to Westlake’s entertaining mystery. Bonus: Kallie has a rescue dog, Sherman, a “happy fuzzleball” who gets into mischief and loves pizza. Loose ends involving Kallie’s multidivorced mom and troubled brother, Jack, indicate a sequel may be in the works.

Cheers to this cozy mystery that’s an enjoyable, breezy beach read.



**THE GERIATRIC PILGRIM
Tales From the Journey**

Wile, Richard

Maine Authors Publishing (197 pp.)

\$16.95 paper | Oct. 25, 2022

9781633813328

An octogenarian author recalls finding healing in walking pilgrimages around the world in this memoir.

Adapted from his bimonthly blog, Wile’s book reflects on his life as a pilgrim, which he credits for helping him “to become more curious, to look for surprises, to live without planning every single detail, to put myself in uncomfortable situations.” He writes of his “palpable pilgrimages” to sites in America, Britain, Israel, Tanzania, and “the pond behind my house.” But his real journey, he asserts, was “to find healing from growing up in an alcoholic family...and these days, from growing old during a worldwide pandemic.” Wile was inspired to embark on walking pilgrimages after seeing the film *The Way*, in which Martin Sheen’s character re-creates the 500-mile journey that took the life of his son. Wile and his wife chose the 62-mile trek on St. Cuthbert’s Way, “from Melrose on the Scottish border...to the Holy Island of Lindisfarne off the Northumberland coast.” Surprises along the way make for engaging reading, but it is some devastating connections that give these travels an emotional resonance, as when he writes: “This pilgrimage reminds me of other times when I’ve been prepared but not ready...for example...the death of my eighteen-year-old daughter,” who was diagnosed with cancer. In this memoir, Wile has lived-in experience to impart, and his exterior and interior journeys “through grief and grace” grappled with life’s mysteries and lessons. But not every trip he took was the result of “intense planning, a degree of discomfort, and an even greater degree of ‘spirituality.’” Wile writes of a trip to Turkey to visit friends. As a mere “tourist,” he felt the country’s “palpable sense of history” that allowed him to further process his devastating personal loss. “Anyone reading this who’s lost a child understands how your entire world—past, present, and future—is destroyed,” he writes. “All your old landmarks become rubble, and you have no point of reference, nothing to guide you....But maybe one of the ways we grieving parents survive is by embedding parts of our old, destroyed selves into transformed ones, possibly becoming stronger in the process.”

One man’s personal journeys offer universal truths in this effective, reflective account.

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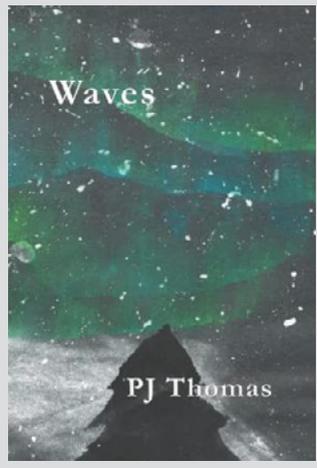
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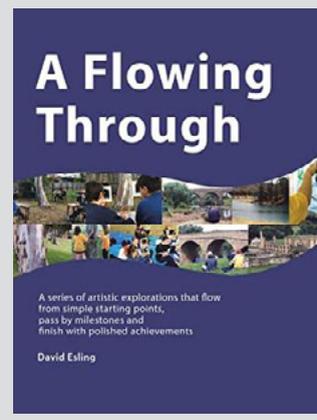
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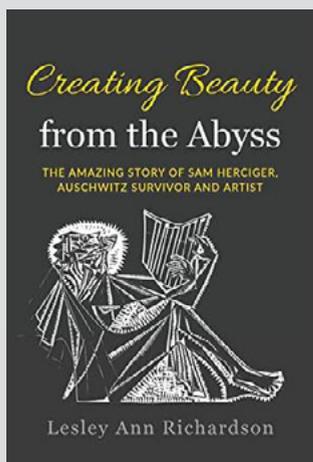
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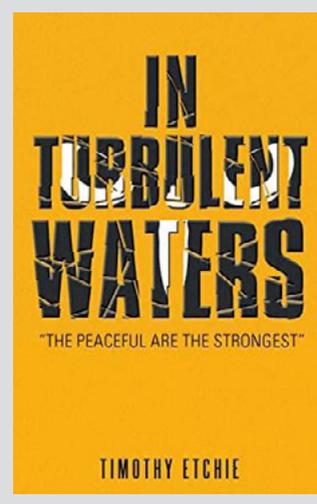
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BOOK TO SCREEN

FILM AND TV ADAPTATIONS IN THE WORKS

BY MICHAEL SCHAUB

ONE DAY IN DECEMBER SERIES IN THE WORKS

Josie Silver's *One Day in December* is headed to the small screen, *Deadline* reports.

Silver's novel, published in 2018 by Crown, was a selection for Reese Witherspoon's popular book club. The book follows Laurie, who instantly falls in love with a man she sees through the window of a bus. She spends months looking for him only to be introduced to him at a party—as her best friend's new boyfriend.

A critic for Kirkus wrote of the novel, "Anyone who believes in true love or is simply willing to accept it as the premise of a winding tale will find this debut an emotional, satisfying read."

Drake Doremus, known for films including *Douchebag*, *Like Crazy*, and *Zoe*, will write and direct the series for Netflix, with actor Lucy Boynton (*Murder on the Orient Express*, *Bohemian Rhapsody*) starring. Doremus and Boynton are among the series' executive producers.

Silver shared news of the adaptation on Instagram, writing, "I have been bursting to share this happy news forever, I'm so glad it's finally out there so I can shout about it! I cannot begin to tell you how thrilled, excited and downright GIDDY I am to think of *One Day in December* coming to the TV screen—and what a superstar dream team to bring it to life, I'm proper dazzled. Pretty exciting, eh?"



Lucy Boynton

Leon Bennett/Getty Images

LIES WE SING TO THE SEA BEING ADAPTED FOR FILM

Sarah Underwood's *Lies We Sing to the Sea* is headed to the big screen, according to the *Hollywood Reporter*.

Underwood's young adult fantasy novel, published last month by HarperTeen, follows Leto, an orphan girl who is sentenced to be hanged as a sacrifice to the sea god Poseidon but afterward finds herself still alive, washed up on an island with a girl named Melantho. A critic for Kirkus called the book "inconsistent but intriguing."

Ripley Parker, the writer and executive producer of *Everything Now*, which debuts on Netflix later this year, is penning the adaptation of Underwood's novel.

"I couldn't be more thrilled and honored to have been entrusted with these characters," Parker said. "To be handed someone else's story for safekeeping is such a beautiful responsibility, and I only hope I can do it justice. It's a truly incredible book, and Sarah is obviously prodigiously talented. The world will very soon be clamoring for more of her words."

Underwood shared news of the adaptation on Instagram. "So so so ecstatic to announce that *Lies We Sing to the Sea* is being adapted for film by the absolutely extraordinary Ripley Parker and the brilliant team at Archery Pictures," Underwood wrote. "Publishing this book has been a whirlwind dream and now there's going to be a MOVIE...my heart is full to bursting and I can't wait for everything coming up next."



Ripley Parker

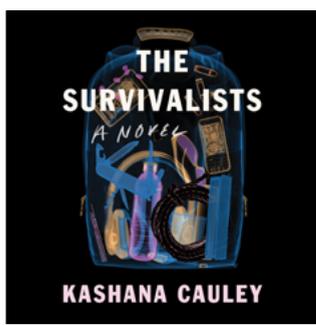
Suzan Moore/PA Images via Getty Images

Michael Schaub, a journalist and regular contributor to NPR, lives near Austin, Texas.

AUDIOBOOKS | Connie Ogle

The Human Comedy

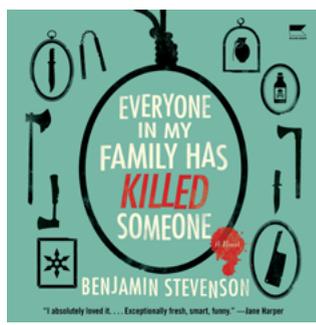
BAHNI TURPIN IS ONE OF the best audiobook narrators around, a talent who excels across different genres. This range of experience makes her the perfect ironic narrator for Kashana Cauley’s hilarious novel *The Survivalists* (Brilliance Audio, 10 hours and 23 minutes), about Aretha, an ambitious Black attorney who discovers that Aaron, the coffee entrepreneur she’s dating, shares an old Brooklyn house with two doomsday preppers.



Aretha isn’t sure how deep Aaron is into the movement, and besides, she has never heard of Black survivalists. But one roommate is up on the roof with a gun, and the other sneers at Aretha’s innocence. Does she really think Harriet Tubman didn’t have a go-bag ready at all times? Does anyone have more reason to embrace preparation for the worst than Black people?

Cauley uses this irresistible setup to explore and satirize racial stereotypes, the mendacity of the corporate world, and the perils of modern dating. Turpin’s lively reading is funny but also empathetic as the increasingly erratic Aretha starts to rethink her career and her principles. Turpin turns out to be the ideal inner voice not only for Aretha, but also the rest of the characters struggling to cope with contemporary disasters.

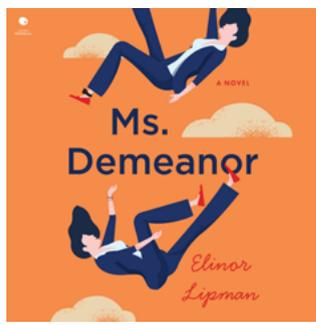
You might think a book that revels in the rules of classic murder mysteries should be read and not listened to, and that’s a fair point: Keeping track of characters and events is easier on paper if you’re trying to guess who the villain is. But then you’d miss Barton Welch’s delightful performance in Benjamin Stevenson’s jaunty, clever *Everyone in My Family Has Killed Someone* (HarperAudio, 9 hours and 30 minutes), and that would be a shame.



As Ernie Cunningham, a crime fiction enthusiast who declares himself a reliable narrator—even his name tells you he’s earnest—Welch gives a profoundly comic reading. He’s so assiduous in his explanations he makes you doubt the truth of them. Ernie is a member of an infamous Australian family, and when a dead body turns up at a ski resort during a family reunion, the Cunningham clan finds itself embroiled in new crimes and old secrets.

The novel is filled with Ernie’s amusing asides to the reader—yes, that brewing storm is a cliché, he knows, he *knows!* And, of course, internet access is sketchy, because it always is in this sort of book. Happily, Welch pulls off such broad winks with humor and brio.

Elinor Lipman is one of America’s most reliably funny authors, and in *Ms. Demeanor* (HarperAudio, 7 hours and 27 minutes), she continues to find new ways to tease out laughs at middle-class conceits and moral dilemmas.



The novel follows the misadventures of Jane Morgan, who has run afoul of the law after being caught naked with a younger male co-worker on the roof of her Manhattan condo. Trapped at home under house arrest, Jane proves you don’t have to roam far to create a life, as she considers a new cooking career, braves TikTok, and discovers she’s not the only one in the building wearing an ankle monitor. Reader Piper Goodeve picks up on every comic nuance, and her narration reflects Jane’s alternating outrage, despair, and calculation, driving home Lipman’s wry observations about family, romance, and redemption.

Connie Ogle is a writer in Florida.

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Thinking on the other side of Zero Part 2

Alan Joseph Oliver

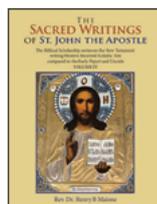
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