N.K. Jemisin
In *The City We Became*,
the award-winning
science fiction writer
keeps breaking
new ground
p. 14

Also in the issue:
Kevin Nguyen,
Victoria James,
Jessica Kim,
and more
FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK:

Great Escapes Through Reading

BY TOM BEER

March is the dreariest month. We know that spring is around the corner, but...it can be a long time coming. If you’re fortunate, you might escape to a Florida beach or some other far-flung destination for rejuvenation. For the rest of us, spring break may come in the form of a book that transports us elsewhere, indelibly rendered through prose. Here are five titles, new or coming soon, that the travel agent in me would like to recommend. But be forewarned: There is frequently trouble in paradise.

Saint X by Alexis Schaitkin (Celadon Books, Feb. 18): The title refers to the fictional Caribbean island where the Thomas family is on a vacation at an evocatively described resort—“the long drive lined with perfectly vertical palm trees,” “the beach where lounge chairs are arranged in a parabola,” the scents of “frangipani and coconut sunscreen and the mild saline of equatorial ocean.” Alas, this family vacation does not end well, forever altering the lives of Claire Thomas, age 7 at the time, and Clive Richardson, an employee at the resort. In a starred review, Kirkus called Saint X a “killer debut” with a “vivid setting.”

Later: My Life at the Edge of the World by Paul Lisicky (Graywolf, March 17): Provincetown, Massachusetts, has long been a vacationer’s getaway at the very end of Cape Cod as well as an accepting mecca for gay men and lesbians. In this memoir, Lisicky recalls his arrival there in the early 1990s after being awarded a fellowship at the Fine Arts Work Center. But this period was also the height of the AIDS epidemic, and Town (as the author calls it) is being devastated by the disease. Of the book, Kirkus’ reviewer writes, “Lisicky does a fine job capturing the emotional ambience of a special place consumed by both joy and fear.”

The Glass Hotel by Emily St. John Mandel (Knopf, March 24): The titular hotel of Mandel’s new book is situated on a hard-to-reach island off the coast of northern Vancouver Island in Canada—a luxury retreat for the 1%. (Yes, the building features enormous glass windows that play a role in the plot of this puzzle-box novel.) A female bartender named Vincent and her drug addict brother, Paul, are working here when one of the hotel’s wealthy guests—the hotel owner, as it turns out—takes notice of them. In a starred review, Kirkus calls it a “strange, subtle, and haunting novel.”

The Everlasting by Katy Simpson Smith (Harper, March 24): Rome—ancient, medieval, Renaissance, and contemporary—is the glorious setting for this Kirkus-starred novel that follows four characters: a biologist, a princess, a monk, and a saint. Presiding over them all is Satan, offering what Kirkus calls “weary, ironic comments” on proceedings in the Eternal City. “A compelling, beautifully rendered tale of passion and pain,” writes our reviewer in a starred review. Bon voyage—and happy reading.
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The Kirkus Star is awarded to books of remarkable merit, as determined by the impartial editors of Kirkus.

The lives of two teen girls—one in New York City and one in the Dominican Republic—intersect in the wake of a deadly plane crash in Elizabeth Acevedo’s affecting verse novel *Clap When You Land*. Read the review on p. 167.

Don’t wait on the mail for reviews! You can read pre-publication reviews as they are released on kirkus.com—even before they are published in the magazine. You can also access the current issue and back issues of Kirkus Reviews on our website by logging in as a subscriber. If you do not have a username or password, please contact customer care to set up your account by calling 1.800.316.9361 or emailing customers@kirkusreviews.com.
At the intersection of love, art, and politics, characters within a romantic triangle and a few just outside it discover that they’re puppets whose strings have been pulled by a bureaucracy and whose fates are connected in ways beyond their control.

The latest from a novelist who’s both been a Marine and worked in the White House opens with a reception for photographer Peter, an American expatriate in Istanbul, to celebrate his provocative series of shots from a recent protest in Istanbul. Among the attendees is Catherine, another expatriate American and the wife of a high-profile Turkish real estate magnate; she is having an affair with Peter, and much to his surprise, she’s brought her young son, William, to the reception. Addressing the party is Kristin, an American diplomat in Cultural Affairs, who has apparently helped facilitate the photographs (and perhaps the protest that they document). The reception is being held at the apartment of Deniz, the director of the gallery presenting the exhibition. Catherine’s husband, Murat, waits at home for his wife and son, who return much later than he had anticipated. There is a blowout; Catherine and William flee to Peter, and she hopes they can return to America with him. The rest of the novel alternates the narrative tension of a woman caught between two men over the course of a single day, with flashbacks that provide context on the marriage, the affair, the protest, and the much larger web in which these characters are caught, mostly without their knowledge. The novel is deftly plotted, though the characters themselves seem more like pawns in the author’s narrative scheme, lacking much flesh-and-blood depth, though perhaps this is a reflection of the “moral hollowness” that Catherine suspects in herself, as she is suspended between a marriage of convenience and what might seem to be an affair of convenience. As Kristin says, “Each of us has to live....No matter how we do it.”

A novel in which relationships develop more from pragmatism than passion.
COCKFIGHT
Ampuero, María Fernanda
Trans. by Riddle, Frances
Feminist Press (128 pp.)
$15.95 paper | May 5, 2020
978-1-936932-82-5

Some say home is where the heart is, but in Ecuadorian writer Ampuero’s English-language debut, a collection of brutal and brutalizing stories, home is not a place of love or refuge. Instead, home is a place where women are often abused, neglected, or tortured by those they know best. The 14-year-old maid in “Monsters” tries to warn the twin girls she watches of this fact, telling them that they “should be more afraid of the living than the dead.” She keeps repeating this line, though only at the end do we understand exactly what, or who, she is trying to protect the girls from. In “Mourning,” two sisters suffer, first at the hands of their father, who beats them, and then at the hands of their brother, who brands María, one of the sisters, a whore for masturbating and exiles her to a shed. The story, which catalogs in uncomfortable detail the ways that María’s body is violated, drives toward its point that “cruelty would always triumph over helplessness.” Love, when it is present at all here, is tainted by incest, dysfunction, and poverty, and God has gone missing. At least that’s what the little girl in “Christ” comes to believe after her baby brother dies; neither medicine nor miracles saved him. These stories, none longer than 14 pages, are like tiny, bitter pills. They’re not pleasant, but who said literature needs to be? Instead, they are antidotes against forgetting the myriad forms that violence takes and its psychic costs on those who manage to survive. Ampuero writes with steely nerves and an ear for the beauty of simple, concrete language—not a word feels out of place.

Reading these stories won’t make you happy, but discovering this talented new writer will.

THE KIDS ARE GONNA ASK
Anthony, Gretchen
Park Row Books (336 pp.)
$17.99 paper | Jul. 28, 2020
978-0-7783-0874-4

Seventeen-year-old fraternal twins start a podcast searching for their biological father, and it goes viral. Savannah McClair is a high schooler who has lots of opinions and no trouble standing up to her twin brother, Thomas, but she lets her best friend, Trigg, boss her around and tell her what to do. Thomas is in a similar situation with his twin sister and his best friend, Nico, who tears him down every chance he gets. The twins are being raised by their well-to-do grandmother, whom they call by her first name, Maggie, in Minneapolis. Their mother, Bess, found out she was pregnant just before her college graduation and moved home, where she and Maggie raised the kids until her untimely death when the twins were almost 13. When Savannah and Thomas decide they want to broadcast their search for their father via podcast, they team up with a high-octane producer with a laser focus on getting the show as much attention as possible. This is a slow-moving story told sequentially and from the points of view of Maggie, Thomas, Savannah, and Jack, a man living in Georgia who could be the children’s father. The story unfolds in a variety of formats, utilizing third-person narrative, letters, texts, social media posts, and voicemail and podcast transcripts. Author Anthony is particularly adept at sharing the conflicting emotions of adolescence and the fear of not being good enough that can extend into adulthood, but there is little tension in the story to pull the reader along. Instead, significant attention is given to frequent fights between the twins as they struggle with who they are, who their mom was, and where they should draw the line between public and private.

A dialogue-rich book that explores the emotional turmoil of adolescence.

THE CONSULTING GIG
by C.J. Capen

A job interview leads to an unexpected offer—and a potential lover—for a widow reinventing her life and career in this debut novel.

“...a fresh and sharply written contemporary romance featuring dynamic characters and a unique and surprisingly tender love story at its center.”

—Kirkus Reviews

ISBN # 978-1-885297-03-7 • EISBN - 978-1-885297-08-2

For agent representation or information on publishing and film rights, email archiesevenpub@comcast.net
Perhaps I’m the last person in the world to discover audiobooks, but forgive me: I’ve discovered them now, and I’m ready to start proselytizing. After downloading Libby, an app that lets library-card holders borrow e-books and audiobooks, I began listening to I’ll Be Gone in the Dark by Michelle McNamara, a true-crime story about the hunt for the Golden State Killer. I wasn’t sure I’d like listening to audiobooks—the only time I’d done it before had been on a family road trip, and I’d found myself losing the plot as I looked out the window, thinking inconvenient thoughts that weren’t about The Watchmaker of Filigree Street, and I had to pick up a hard copy when I got home to fill in the gaps—but McNamara’s book seemed like the perfect test case. How different could it be from listening to Serial or other narrative podcasts?

I was right, and I was hooked. I listened to I’ll Be Gone in the Dark while cooking dinner, walking on a treadmill, standing on the subway—times I would have been listening to a podcast or scrolling through Twitter, which are things I enjoy doing, but actually listening to a book I’d been wanting to read felt like a more substantial accomplishment. (I keep a journal with a list of books I’ve finished, and after going back and forth about it, I decided that listening to a book would count as having read it.) When I finished the McNamara book, I borrowed Jeffrey Toobin’s American Heiress, about the kidnapping of Patricia Hearst, but I got bogged down in the minibiographies of the Symbionese Liberation Army members, which felt endless and kind of boring. Without the ability to peek ahead and see what was coming next, I put it aside without finishing.

Fiction, of course, is my job as well as my predilection, so I figured it was time to try listening to a novel. Something with more emphasis on plot than prose seemed like a good idea, which led me to the mystery shelf. I’ve read several of Laura Lippmann’s stand-alone novels and had been wanting to plunge into her Tess Monahan series, so I downloaded the first volume, Baltimore Blues, and barely did anything but listen to it until I was finished a couple of days later. Now I’m in the middle of The Rumor by Elin Hilderbrand, which is told from the perspectives of a number of Nantucket residents, including a desperately blocked novelist, and so has introduced me to the idea of having more than one narrator. (I was also delighted by a reference to Kirkus as “notoriously cranky.”)

Since I still have a lot to learn about audiobooks, I took to social media for advice. I was inundated with responses—this is clearly something my friends have strong opinions about, which made me feel even more like I’d been missing out. People recommended specific narrators—English actress Juliet Stevenson reading classics like Middlemarch; Julia Whelan, who won an Audie for Best Female Narrator and has also written her own novel, My Oxford Year, which, of course, she narrates for the audiobook; “sexy Irish narrators” reading either Tana French novels or Patrick Radden Keefe’s Say Nothing. There were a lot of votes for Neal Gaiman and the acclaimed, operatic audiobook of George Saunders’ Lincoln in the Bardo; several people said they prefer listening to memoirs read by their authors (including David Sedaris, Carrie Fisher, and Patricia Lockwood reading Priestdaddy). Tom Hanks reading The Dutch House by Ann Patchett came up a few times; I’ve already read the book but may be tempted to listen to it, too. Or maybe I’ll listen to Hanks narrate his own fiction.

As you can tell, this list could keep going and going. For more ideas, find me on Twitter (@lauriemuchnick), where I’ve pinned the thread that brought in all these recommendations. Happy listening.—L.M.

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.
Women in love: the good, the bad, and the still-figuring-it-out. In her second short story collection and third book, Brazilian writer and translator Borges Polesso explores the depths of amorous relationships between women young and old, married and single, out and closeted, independent and cripplingly co-dependent—but first and foremost, in love. In “Auntes,” a pair of older women, both called “Tia” by the narrator, reveal they’ve been in love for decades and want to marry before they die. A married mother is having an unexpected affair in “Como Te Extraño, Clara” and is suddenly forced to confront her husband about this much-younger woman. In “Catch the Heart Red-Handed,” a young woman has been falling for a friend, and the two finally confront their mutual attraction at a messy college party. Borges Polesso’s characters struggle to move beyond their internalized heteronormativity, such as the soccer player in “Thick Legs” who realizes years later how many of her high school teammates are also lesbian or the woman in “My Cousin’s in Town” who tells her co-workers that her live-in girlfriend is her visiting cousin. Tension results as characters are forced to mask their intentions or to contend with other women who are concealing theirs. Borges Polesso splits the book into two sections: “Big & Juicy,” which includes 22 short stories, and “Short & Tart,” comprising 11 prose poems. After the first few stories the actions and entanglements of Borges Polesso’s characters begin to feel recycled while the poems offer welcome insight into their more abstract thoughts and feelings.

A romp through 33 stories of lesbian love but rather circular and expected.
EAGLE STATION
Brown, Dale
Morrow/HarperCollins (432 pp.)
$28.99  |  May 26, 2020
978-0-06-284308-1

The American Space Force must battle a Sino-Russian alliance aiming to combine military and technology resources.

Retired U.S. Air Force captain Brown delivers the next chapter in the Space Force series featuring the skilled pilots, high-level politicians, and elite operatives who strive to maintain American dominance in the sky and beyond. In the spring of 2022, the U.S. Navy leads a successful war game against China near the contested Paracel Islands. Of course, a fleeting military win over China does not mean that all is secure. Concerned about Russia’s bellicose behavior and their “ten-megawatt fusion power generator,” President John Dalton Farrell calls for an automated lunar mining operation to master fusion and power generation. If this can be achieved, America will maintain military and economic advantages into the foreseeable future. With China also considering mining the moon, a new type of lunar race has begun. All indications point to the fact that America is far ahead in the contest, but China and Russia form a secret pact to sabotage the U.S. program. Now, famed pilot Patrick McLanahan, his son, Brad, and Brad’s fellow spaceplane pilot (and wife) Nadia Rozek, along with the rest of the heroes from the joint Sky Masters/Scion program, must stop this sinister alliance. Along the way there will be plenty of action-filled flying time described in the type of detail that will thrill most space junkies and fans of flight.

A well-researched tale of technologically rich thrills.
In an Appalachian hamlet, a girl’s world is shattered by the secrets of the adults around her.

SHINDER

Burns, Amy Jo
Riverhead (372 pp.)
$27.00 | May 12, 2020
978-0-525-53364-1

In an Appalachian hamlet, a girl’s world is shattered by the secrets of the adults around her.

Burns’ first book, Cinderland (2014), was a memoir about her childhood in western Pennsylvania. She sets this assured debut novel nearby, in the remote hollers outside the ominously named Trap. It’s a minuscule, poverty-ridden West Virginia town where the dying coal industry still poisons the environment and the moonshiners of the title still make illegal liquor for tradition’s sake. At age 15, Wren Bird, who narrates much of the book, has never been more than a few miles from her family’s cabin. Her father, Briar, is a snake handler, a preacher whose services, held in an abandoned gas station for a shrinking congregation, revolve around him grasping his venomous rattlers and copperheads and raising them skyward while speaking in tongues. Wren tells the reader, “My father obeyed the rituals of snake-handling law, which meant he pretended we still lived in the 1940s instead of the age of the internet.” Called to God when a lightning strike blinded him in one eye as a teen, Briar fell in love with Wren’s mother, Ruby, not long afterward. He’s ruthlessly protective of his wife and daughter, forbidding most outside contact and only grudgingly letting Ruby home-school Wren. Ruby’s closest relationship is not with Briar but with her longtime friend Ivy, who lives down the mountain with her four kids and opioid-addicted husband. As girls, Ruby and Ivy dreamed of escape, but Ruby—also a snake handler’s daughter—married at her father’s command, and restless Ivy married so she wouldn’t have to leave Ruby. As the novel opens, Ivy falls into an open fire, but it seems Briar has worked a miracle when she suffers no grievous injury. That fall, though, sets off a cascade of revelations and rebellions. And Briar’s lethal snakes are this book’s version of Chekhov’s gun—you know they’re going to bite someone. Wren’s engaging, convincing voice leads the reader through her strange world.

A teenage girl is the strong center of a fever-dream story of hidden pasts.

THE DEATH OF JESUS

Coetzee, J.M.
Viking (208 pp.)
$27.00 | May 26, 2020
978-1-9848-8090-1

Nobel Prize–winning author Coetzee concludes the biblically tinged trilogy he began with The Childhood of Jesus in 2013.

The title gives it all away, though it’s not the familiar Jesus who dies. Instead, it’s Coetzee’s protagonist, David, now 10 years old. Readers of the predecessor volumes will recall that he’s a foundling, although his adoptive father and mother, in their roles more or less by accident, aren’t quite sure what to do with him. David is a handbook, committed to reading only one book, a child’s version of Don Quixote. Simón, the father, recalls that he borrowed the book from a library in Novilla, a city in an unnamed but presumably Latin American country, and “instead of returning it to the library as a good citizen...
would have done, David kept it for himself.” It becomes the willful boy’s lodestone. Meanwhile, he decides that, since he’s an orphan, he ought to live in an orphanage—and one just happens to be handy, one whose director is recruiting a soccer team. David is a natural standout at the game, and he becomes the ringleader of a crew of—well, disciples, to whom he imparts a message that none will reveal when he sickens, the victim of a mysterious ailment, and dies. Figures from those predecessor volumes turn up, including Simón’s bête noire, Dmitri, who knows David’s thoughts as well as anyone; another character named Alyosha provides a second allusion to *The Brothers Karamazov*, though most of the characters bear names straight out of the Bible. As for David’s mother, Inés, the death of her son is enough to drive her away, “leaving the man alone in a strange city, mourning his losses.” Coetzee’s tone is flat and matter-of-fact throughout, and the book feels slightly underdone, with several unanswered questions—the most central of them that message, at which we can only guess.

For Coetzee completists, though not up to masterworks like *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Life & Times of Michael K*. 

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A dual narrative pits a New Age beauty with a checkered past against an old-fashioned gal fighting for her kids and her man.

Piper Reynard has moved to Westport after the mysterious deaths of her husband and stepdaughter on the West Coast, and actually he was dead husband No. 2. Now she has changed her name, erased her internet footprint, and opened Harmony Healing Arts on the premises of a failed recovery center: “Maybe things were really going to be different here. They had to be. She couldn’t keep starting over and finding new places to hide.” In short order, Piper fixes her gaze on a handsome married lawyer named Leo Drakos. Leo has “always been a loyal and faithful husband,”

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**GEMINI ASCENDING**

An immortal and a psychiatric patient may be the only ones who can stop a potential catastrophe on Earth in this second installment of a fantasy series.

“...Terranova’s concise prose generates memorable scenes.”

“The story triumphantly fuses fantasy with real-world relationships...”

“A captivating, otherworldly sequel that should appeal to both new and returning readers.”

—Kirkus Reviews

ISBN 13: 9781478780137

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**THE WIFE STALKER**

*Constantine, Liv*

Harper/HarperCollins (320 pp.)

$27.99 | May 19, 2020

978-0-06-296728-2

A dual narrative pits a New Age beauty with a checkered past against an old-fashioned gal fighting for her kids and her man.

Piper Reynard has moved to Westport after the mysterious deaths of her husband and stepdaughter on the West Coast, and actually he was dead husband No. 2. Now she has changed her name, erased her internet footprint, and opened Harmony Healing Arts on the premises of a failed recovery center: “Maybe things were really going to be different here. They had to be. She couldn’t keep starting over and finding new places to hide.” In short order, Piper fixes her gaze on a handsome married lawyer named Leo Drakos. Leo has “always been a loyal and faithful husband,”
so his wife, Joanna, is taken by surprise when he responds to Piper’s charms and almost immediately kicks her out of the house and cuts her off from their children. Neither her therapist nor her awful mother seems very sympathetic as Joanna’s whole life goes up in smoke. As Piper ruthlessly maneuvers her way into the family, having hot sex with Leo on her sailboat and forcing the children to drink green smoothies, Joanna turns private investigator in order to find out who this creepy platitudespouter really is. A woman who hates children was a strong element of the author’s first book, the very successful *The Last Mrs. Parrish* (2017); a somewhat watered-down version is in play here. In general, Constantine’s (actually two sisters writing in collaboration) third suspense novel relies on many of the same strategies as the first two, and they feel a bit mechanical at this point. The prose, too, is flat and the characters, thin.

Readers who love to be tricked by an unreliable narrator may forgive the shortcomings of this fast read.

### A HAPPY CATASTROPHE

**Dawson, Maddie**

Lake Union Publishing (380 pp.)

$14.95 paper | May 26, 2020

978-1-5420-0646-0

A matchmaker who believes herself able to see love shimmering in the air must get through a series of personal setbacks in her own life.

In this follow-up to Dawson’s *Matchmaking for Beginners* (2018), Marnie MacGraw and Patrick Delaney return, and the story is told through their perspectives. Marnie is a 33-year-old Florida transplant to Brooklyn, a magically influenced matchmaker, and the owner of a flower shop that has become a community hangout space. She loves Patrick, a prickly artist with significant physical and mental scarring from an explosion that, years earlier, killed his then-girlfriend. The pair live in a Brooklyn brownstone, where Patrick led an almost hermitlike existence in the basement apartment before Marnie inherited and moved into the building. A one-time sculptor, he can no longer create because of the scarring and pain in his hands. The story begins nearly four years into their relationship, with Marnie longing for a baby, Patrick uninterested in being a parent, and the universe taking over their lives as surprise after surprise is dropped into their laps. A broken condom; the return of Tessa, a one-night stand (well, two-night, she and Patrick are quick to point out) with a child in tow; the opportunity for Patrick to put on an art show in a new medium with as-yet-unpainted work; the arrival of Marnie’s mom from Florida; and the constant ups and downs in the lives of a handful of neighborhood teenagers are just the tip of the iceberg. The chaos brings Marnie to life and causes Patrick to withdraw ever further into himself. Dawson has created a truly quirky story, filled with a little bit of magic (think unicorn glitter and sparkles) and a lot of love. This is a long read leisurely told, but there is enough tension to keep the reader racing through its pages.

### A WEEK AT THE SHORE

**Delinsky, Barbara**

St. Martin’s (416 pp.)

$27.99 | May 19, 2020

978-1-250-11951-3

A middle-aged woman returns to her childhood home to care for her ailing father, confronting many painful secrets from her past.

When Mallory Aldiss gets a call from a long-ago boyfriend telling her that her elderly father has been gallivanting around town with a gun in his hand, Mallory decides it’s time to return to the small Rhode Island town that she’s been avoiding for more than a decade.

### THE CENTER CANNOT HOLD

**Stander, Aaron**

This 10th installment of a series focuses on a sheriff with a new case rooted deep in a Michigan county’s history.

“...wonderfully unexpected, and the author’s practiced pacing should keep readers engaged throughout. Fans of the series should be pleased with this engrossing episode.”

Kirkus Reviews

ISBN # 9780997570137

For information on publishing and film rights, email aaron@aaronstander.com • www.aaronstander.com

An optimistic, feel-good story that celebrates love, community, goodness, and the creation of family, however it might appear.
Mallory’s precocious 13-year-old daughter, Joy, is thrilled that she’ll get to meet her grandfather at last, and an aunt, too, and she’ll finally see the place where her mother grew up. When they arrive in Bay Bluff, it’s barely a few hours before Mallory bumps into her old flame, Jack, the only man she’s ever really loved. Gone is the rebellious young person she remembers, and in his place stands a compassionate, accomplished adult. As they try to reconnect, Mallory realizes that the same obstacle that pushed them apart decades earlier is still standing in their way: Jack blames Mallory’s father for his mother’s death. No one knows exactly how Jack’s mother died, but Jack thinks a love affair between her and Mallory’s father had something to do with it. As Jack and Mallory chase down answers, Mallory also tries to repair her rocky relationships with her two sisters and determine why her father has always been so hard on her. Told entirely from Mallory’s perspective, the novel has a haunting, nostalgic quality. Despite the complex and overlapping layers to the history of Bay Bluff and its inhabitants, the book at times trudges too slowly through Mallory’s meanderings down Memory Lane. Even so, Delinsky sometimes manages to pick up the pace, and in those moments the beauty and nuance of this complicated family tale shine through. Readers who don’t mind skimming past details that do little to advance the plot may find that the juicier nuggets and realistically rendered human connections are worth the effort.

A touching family drama that effectively explores the negative impact of stress on fragile relationships.

**THINGS YOU WOULD KNOW IF YOU GREW UP AROUND HERE**

Dinan, Nancy Wayson

Bloomsbury (336 pp.)

$27.00 | May 19, 2020

978-1-63557-443-2

Centered around an actual Memorial Day flood in 2015, Dinan’s first novel takes a mildly numinous, not so mildly pre-apocalyptic approach in following the lives of a young Texas Hill Country teenager and her loved ones as they fight to find each other, or at least survive, in their suddenly devastated landscape.

Supersensitive Boyd, 18, has an unusual, not necessarily welcome, ability: Like a dowsing, she can sense others’ pain. Home-schooled, she lives with her mother, Lucy Maud, who has divorced but not stopped loving her father, Kevin, a classics professor now living in Austin and in love with one of his grad students. Boyd’s dearest friend and sort of lover is Isaac, a pre-med student at the University of Texas. Isaac and Boyd plan to spend the summer panning for gold in Boyd’s backyard and figuring out where their relationship is going given that introverted Boyd wants to stay in their safe, isolated rural world while down-to-earth Isaac yearns to leave and lead a more conventional, materialistic life. But when the rains pour down, ending a long drought, on the same weekend that Boyd’s maternal grandfather is getting married with her father as best man, Boyd and Isaac each end up alone. Isaac finds himself stranded high in a pecan tree with an array of usually wild animals while a river surges below. Sensing that he’s in danger, Boyd goes searching for him. Along the way she meets a number of otherworldly characters caught in a quirk of time caused by the weather. (Think Dorothy in a nightmarish Oz, especially when a scarecrow comes to life.) Meanwhile, as Lucy Maud and Kevin set out together to look for their daughter, they struggle individually with their complex, unresolved relationship. If the storm is an omen of the climate risk the world currently faces, the dead cellphones beleaguering the characters represent communication breakdown on a deeper scale. Dinan breaks up the narrative with short, educational, sometimes didactic sections that illuminate the title by defining flash floods, bemoaning climate change, and explaining gold mining, among other topics.

By turns magical, harshly realistic, poetic, aggravating, and enthralling.
A reclusive musician is forced to reckon with his past in the wake of a local environmental disaster.

THE POISON FLOOD
Farmer, Jordan
Putnam (288 pp.)
$26.00 | May 5, 2020
978-0-593-08507-3

A reclusive musician and songwriter is forced to reckon with his past in the wake of a local environmental disaster.

Hollis Bragg is a man who prefers to stay out of the public eye. Some of this is due to his discomfort in his own body: “Back forever crooked forward, forcing my stomach into permanent lines, flesh left sagging from being unable to perform even modest exercise.” And some of it has to do with his complex relationship with former band mate Angela—now a successful musician for whom Hollis writes songs in secret. He’s haunted by other memories as well, including some from his childhood in his father’s church, its congregation mostly “strange hill folk whom the starched-shirt preachers in town wouldn’t want to touch long enough to baptize in the creek.” Hollis’ life changes when Russell Watson, a young musician, shows up at his house with a burgeoning appreciation for Hollis’ musical history. Russell is the son of a wealthy business owner; his unstable friend Victor, who accompanies him to Hollis’ house, is an activist who hates the pollution Russell’s father’s company is responsible for. A massive chemical spill into a local river further ratchets up the tension. But the disparate threads of this novel never quite connect. Although Hollis himself is vivid and contradictory—at one point, Angela talks about her frustration with his reticence, saying “The only option is to force you to [perform]”—the rest of the characters don’t feel as fleshed out. Russell never really comes into focus while Victor seems more like a plot device than anything else.

When the novel focuses on a musician’s creative struggles, it sings, but other elements feel forced.
“I’m a fucking Nerd, and I just want to talk about nerdy shit,” says author N.K. Jemisin over tea at a Brooklyn cafe. Our table is slightly unbalanced, and we laugh at a joke about spilling tea, literally and figuratively. Jemisin knows a thing or two about overturning tables, too: She’s won an unprecedented three straight Hugo Awards for her Broken Earth Trilogy, recently ventured into comic-book writing via “Far Sector,” and is set to release a breakthrough novel, The City We Became (Orbit, March 24), about the rise of powerful avatars battling for the soul of New York City. The book sprawls, and whether you’re new to Jemisin’s writing or have read her eight previous novels and many stories, you'll marvel at her way of interweaving contemporary conversations and decades-old racial and social politics in a type of science fiction and fantasy that feels almost too real.

In The City We Became, a sinister power seeps its way throughout the Big Apple, infecting people, landmarks, buildings, and institutions. The novel splits and comes together again as five avatars awaken—each in a different New York City borough—with new powers and an awareness of being a part of something bigger: an Indian female mathematician; a middle-aged black female former rapper; a sheltered white female librarian; a racially ambiguous white-collar man; and a female Lenape nonprofit executive.

Before she became one of the leading lights of science fiction and fantasy, Jemisin was a longtime fan who understood the harm of misrepresentation; now she is a forceful corrective to the genre’s limited imagination when it comes to the depiction of marginalized identities and experiences.

In telling new stories—with new heroes, new issues, and new politics—Jemisin has rankled some of her peers and critics. “So much of storytelling is centered around the feelings of people that are privileged,” she says. She sees her fiction as “decentering the feelings of those people [so] that you get new stories.” The reaction has been persistent, but not surprising, as her work points toward the type of future that makes a lot of her peers uncomfortable. (One white male writer referred to her as “savage.”)

“Art exists in the crosshairs of the society we discuss,” Jemisin says, and she reminds me that as black writers, “we exist at the intersection of so many places [in] our society that aren’t valued.” She goes on to share her simple mission statement: “All I’m trying to do is make sure I don’t do harm.” Her work, as a result, leads us to more honest, braver places.
This mission also keeps her in constant conversation with fans, especially on her very active Twitter account (123,500 followers and counting). That kind of relationship means a lot to Jemisin, not just from a branding perspective, but for the community and the connection it provides. She knows that firsthand.

Jemisin pauses to tell me her Octavia E. Butler story. It was years ago at an SF convention, and she remembers seeing Butler, a known introvert, placed at a table in a huge exhibition corridor, her books stacked neatly on the table before her. Across the way, Jemisin stared at her hero, an anxiety attack washing over her. “I loved her with all my heart,” Jemisin says. “I would have never tried to get published if Octavia Butler wasn’t doing stories.” As she looked at Butler, likely the only other black woman at this genre convention, she took in Butler’s visible discomfort as hordes of conventiongoers raced by the table. “She’s sitting there, trying to be accessible to people even though I could see the sensory assault,” Jemisin recalls. “If I was able to step outside my own anxiety and talk to someone, I could have helped her.” She pauses before adding, “I could have simply treated her like a human being.”

Jemisin thinks about that moment when she interacts with fans at book signings and author events. In some cases, she’s personally befriended fans; she talks about one woman who followed her public appearances and was often too anxiety-ridden to interact with her. Eventually they formed a relationship, and there again is the notion that even in the wider world, outside the pages of her books, Jemisin isn’t just entertaining fans—she’s building a community.

Trey Johnson is a Philadelphia-based writer whose work has appeared in Rolling Stone, the New York Times, Vox, and Vanity Fair. The City We Became received a starred review in the Dec. 15, 2019, issue.

**THE FALLING WOMAN**

Farrell, Richard

Algonquin (336 pp.)

$26.95 | May 19, 2020

978-1-61620-857-8

An ambitious debut novel about a plane crash investigation and the solitary survivor of the deadly accident.

Farrell tells two parallel stories that eventually intersect. Charlie Radford, who works for the National Transportation Safety Board, is on his first big assignment—probing the midair explosion of a passenger jet over southwestern Kansas. A would-be pilot grounded because of a heart condition, Charlie is anxious to prove himself and overcome feelings of inadequacy, engendered in part by his remote, alcoholic father. Erin Geraghty, a lawyer and mother of two, is chafing in a lackluster marriage (she’s also having an affair) and dealing with a recent diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. One day she boards a flight from Washington, D.C., to San Francisco that never reaches its destination. The author is good at building suspense around the cause of the air disaster as well as the fate of its unlikely survivor—a woman passenger who apparently tumbled through the sky and landed in a barn. He’s also good at describing the politics surrounding the investigation and the personalities of the NTSB team. A former pilot himself, he writes vividly, at times rhapsodically, about flying. Not so persuasive are his domestic scenes—for example, Charlie’s dust-ups with his wife, Wendy, who desperately wants a baby (Charlie resists); and Erin’s arguments with her lover, Adam, who presses her to reveal her identity as the “falling woman” (she demurs). Sole survivors of commercial plane crashes are not unheard of—the recent novel Dear Edward, about a young sole survivor, is based on a true story. Yet a number of plot points here strain credulity. And the musings on bravery, betrayal, the randomness of fate, and the extraordinariness of the ordinary feel prosaic.

Despite a promising premise, the book tries to do too much and never quite gets off the ground.

**SORRY FOR YOUR TROUBLE**

Ford, Richard

Ecco/HarperCollins (272 pp.)

$27.99 | May 12, 2020

978-0-06-296980-4

A collection of stories about lives shattered by divorce or death, with protagonists discovering that the pieces they are trying to put together no longer fit, and perhaps never did.

Though Ford remains most widely heralded for his novels, with Independence Day winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1996, his story collections have often been almost as cohesive and ambitious. The latest finds the author in his mid-70s writing about men who are also in life’s later stages...
and who are lost and bewildered by just about everything but the certainty and imminence of death. “Life—and it seemed very suddenly—was this now. And little more,” he writes in “Happy.” And “this” is where these white, privileged men of a certain age find themselves, in a time and place where the rules and truths by which they’d lived no longer seem to apply, where nothing seems to mean much or explain anything, where words themselves were incapable of conveying significance. One of them wonders whether “the entire passage of life, years and years, is only actually lived in the last seconds before death slams the door. All life’s experience just a faulty perception. A lie, if you like.” Many of them have roots in the South, residences in the Northeast, and some connection with Ireland, yet they don’t feel at home anywhere. Amid the darkness that permeates these stories, the longest two offer glimmers of something closer to hope, if not quite redemption. In “The Run of Yourself,” the collection’s 57-page centerpiece, a man who needs to “re-invent himself” following his wife’s suicide finds the possibility of some sort of direction through a chance connection with a directionless and much younger woman. And in the closing

“Second Language,” two former spouses in what had been a brief second marriage for each sustain a relationship after their divorce. They know each other better, but how well can anyone really know anyone, or even themselves?

Powerfully unsettling stories in which men nearing the end of their lives wonder, befuddled, if that’s all there is.

SEA WIFE
Gaige, Amity
Knopf (288 pp.)
$26.95 | May 19, 2020
978-0-525-65649-4

A family sailing excursion goes badly awry in a perfect storm of weather, naiveté, and marital tension. Michael Partlow feels trapped in a dull job and wants an adventure; his wife, Juliet, is a stay-at-home mother of two who’s prone to depression. (Her malaise is exacerbated by her having to abandon her dissertation on the poet Anne Sexton, another depressive mom.) In an impulsive moment, Michael decides to purchase a small yacht (which he renames Juliet) and brings the family down to Panama to sail it to Cartagena, Colombia. We know early that something went wrong on the trip: Juliet notes that their house is “a point of interest,” Michael is absent, and she’s taken to retreating to a closet. As Gaige parcels out details of the calamity, she frames Michael and Juliet’s story as he said, she said dueling narratives: Juliet’s present-day narration of the trip’s aftermath alternates with entries from Michael’s logbook. The parrying reveals how sometimes even the closest couples fail to understand each other: Michael is prone to mocking Juliet’s sensitivity (“Tears, a husband’s kryptonite”) while Juliet only has the slightest sense of his internal seething, which intertwines grumpy political grievances with escalating contempt for his marriage. Gaige is well-suited for this sort of psychological exploration: Her previous novel, Schroder (2013), smartly chronicled the irrationality that can consume a marital split. And the seafaring sections are gripping, as the family’s lives are literally tempest-tossed. Yet the novel is also a ship carrying a lot of ballast, as Gaige sometimes strains to keep the couple’s parrying going: spats, riffs on parenting, literary analysis, and a late-breaking murder mystery that feels tacked-on. None of which sinks the story, but it does dampen its power.

A powerful if sometimes wayward take on a marriage on the rocks.
SHAKEDOWN
Gingrich, Newt & Earley, Pete
Broadside Books/HarperCollins
(368 pp.)
$27.99  |  Mar. 24, 2020
978-0-06-286019-4

Ex–Navy SEAL Brett Garrett and ex–FBI agent Valerie Mayberry, each disgraced in their respective field, go outside of official channels to avert a devastating threat to the United States.

The murder of an Iranian scientist who lived in a condo down the hall from Garrett primes the plot of this geopolitical thriller, which involves a criminally connected Russian oil billionaire; an evil Iranian general who was “conceived in a brutal rape”; a Palestinian father-daughter assassination team out to avenge the killing of the rest of their family in an Israeli bombing; and an Islamic terrorist recruited by Iran to detonate a nuclear device on a “ghost” submarine off the coast of Virginia. Back from Gingrich and Earley's Collusion (2019), Brett and Valerie are quite the duo. He is an opioid-addicted Afghanistan and black ops veteran whose torture/murder of Russian general Andre Gromyko (Gingrich's backhanded salute to the late, real-life Soviet foreign minister?) led to his ouster from the SEALs.

She is an obsessive, oxycodone-popping beauty (her partner thinks she resembles Keri Russell of TV's The Americans, but she acts more like Claire Danes on Homeland) who has to cope with permanent nerve damage from a gas attack on the U.S. Senate. Though the authors are happy to install a naïve president with the name Randle Fitzgerald, their political commentary is largely restrained—Fitzgerald's party affiliation is not revealed. This is, at its best, an action thriller, with a full share of bang-up scenes (and at least one torture too many). And though former House Speaker Gingrich and Earley have a nagging tendency to have characters verbalize plot details (as in “Remind me, Petrov, how many fights did you win before we were released?” and “You mean, before your father bribed three judges to erase our crimes?”), they keep the story afloat.

An entertaining, if coldhearted, international thriller.

MONARCHS OF THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM
Hammons, Chera
Torrey House Press (242 pp.)
$16.95 paper  |  May 19, 2020
978-1-948814-21-8

An older woman copes with grief and deer poachers in rural Vermont.

When her husband, John, sets out with his secondhand rifle to investigate drops of blood he found in the snow outside their isolated home in a remote part of Vermont, Anna expects he’ll return later that day having found that hunters shot a deer out of season and left it to suffer. But John doesn’t come back, leaving Anna to saddle their mule, Charlie, and follow his footprints into the treacherous woods. What follows is a lush, evocative, and tragic tale of convenient lies, intense encounters with horses, deer, bear, moose, and wolves, and well-meaning assistance from an emergency veterinarian, local game warden, and sheriff as Anna struggles with multiple chronic illnesses, learns to make custom saddles for hard-to-fit horses, and confronts poachers on her property. “If you live out of town,” she opines, “you have to get used to some killing. That’s the way of things. But that doesn’t mean you have to like it.” Despite her determination and resourcefulness, it may all be more than she can handle, especially when an even deeper, darker secret than the truth about John’s death is revealed.

A highly satisfying, delicately woven story about loss, loneliness, life, and death.
Kevin Nguyen’s debut novel, *New Waves* (One World/Random House, March 10), is narrated by a young Asian American guy named Lucas who didn’t go to a fancy college, who has a low-level job at a tech startup, and whose best friend suddenly dies. These are a few of the details that gave friends and family who read early copies of the book reason to exclaim, “Oh, this is so interesting, to get a peek inside your brain!”

For the only time in our interview, Nguyen, features editor at the tech website *The Verge* and former culture editor at *GQ*, breaks his calm demeanor. “Man,” he squawks. “Lucas is a dumbass. I’m way smarter than him.”

He goes on to explain the many ways he tried to signal “not me!” Lucas is half Chinese; the author has two Vietnamese parents. Lucas is “kinda chubby”; the author is “kinda skinny.” Lucas is from Oregon; the author is from Massachusetts. And perhaps most importantly, unlike Lucas, Nguyen didn’t steal data from his employer.

“I never considered it stealing,” Lucas explains in the first sentence of the book. It happened like this: His best friend Margo, an African American software engineer, gets fired from their mutual employer, Nimbus. Margo is a strong, edgy character, a real badass, and her “uncooperative” attitude is what has gotten her canned. As they’re drinking in their customary spot around the corner that night, she comes up with the idea of copying the user database and possibly offering it to a competitor.

But before Chapter 1 is over, Margo is hit by a car and dies. For the remainder of the book, Lucas struggles to deal with the hole in his life. Trying to fill it involves breaking into her laptop, connecting with her online best friend, and discovering her attempts to write science fiction.

Turns out, those science-fiction snippets are just another element of the book taken from life.

In 2007, Nguyen was on winter break from the University of Puget Sound, where he was double majoring in English and International Political Economy, when his best friend, a star athlete, dropped dead from an undiagnosed heart-valve problem during an indoor soccer game. After graduation, Nguyen struggled to find a job and was thrilled to land “an extremely low-paying menial job at Amazon.”

When Amazon moved him to New York in 2012, the idea of becoming a professional writer was still far off (“I didn't even know what Condé Nast was”). But his next job got him a little closer; at Oyster, conceived as a Netflix for books, he ran the editorial team. (“It was just...me.”)

Now it looks like Oyster was doubling as an incubator for the publishing industry. About a year before Nguyen arrived, Anna Wiener, author of the recent Silicon Valley memoir *Uncanny Valley*, had departed, on her way to the West Coast. With many points of connection between the
two books’ descriptions of the tech workplace, we wondered how Nguyen felt when he read Weiner’s book a few months before his own pub date.

“I’m not a competitive person,” he says. (Neither is Lucas, by the way.) “Anna’s book is great. I think it’s the best thing I read last year.” If the two have not yet become close friends, they do DM on Twitter.

During the years that Nguyen was riding the subway to his tech job, he was always scribbling in the Notes app on his phone: lines of dialogue, things he experienced at work, beginnings of science-fiction stories. “The Notes file got so long that the app crashed,” he reports. “When I pasted 20,000 words into a Google doc, I thought, ‘What am I doing with my time?’ Then I started trying to turn it into a novel.”

Those SF snippets became Margo’s, recorded in .wav files on her computer, one of the secrets she kept from Lucas that he discovers, with both hurt and excitement, after her death.

We asked Nguyen if, in our current literary climate, it was intimidating to write a bold, black, female character like Margo.

“There is a strong argument out there that you can only write characters that resemble you,” he acknowledges. “But the endgame of that is, no one would ever be able to write a book where an Asian man and a black woman are friends. I have a lot of friendships with people who don’t look like me, and I want to read books about that kind of thing. But as much as Margo is based on people I know, she’s a wholly new invention. That’s a place only fiction can go, and I hope it’s a place where fiction can keep going.”

Race is a central issue in the book; Margo and Lucas originally bond over all the annoying and ridiculous ways racism is expressed in their workplace. Nguyen’s omnipresent dry humor lightens this aspect, much as it does the grief plot. “I don’t like reading total bummers of a book,” he confesses.

New Waves is anything but, thick with witty asides and ironic plot developments. An anonymous texting service designed for whistleblowers and investigative journalists turns out to be used only by mean teenagers. The conversation of a character in finance is boiled down to “Let me tell you about my Starwood points.” A particularly funny section describes Lucas’ Vietnamese father’s preparations to work at a Japanese steakhouse. (He watches Bruce Lee movies to master the accent, obsessively practices knife tricks, takes the nom de guerre “Sony.”)

Identity as an issue is built into Kevin Nguyen’s name, which is the John Smith of the Vietnamese diaspora. He is not the Kevin Nguyen who wrote the “Which Disney Villain Are You?” quiz—that Kevin Nguyen is an editor at BuzzFeed. He is not one of the Southern California party boys who are the target of a popular Kevin Nguyen meme on the internet. Nor is he the bodybuilder, the Dunkin Donuts gift-card thief, or the megachurch pastor. He is, however, the author of an article called “We Need Talk About Kevin,” in which he explains that he might as well be called “Kevin Vietnameseperson,” “which would have the added bonus of being easy to pronounce.”

Though Lucas’ last name is not revealed until the last chapter, it turns out to be…Nguyen. While the family is watching a TV show with characters named Kevin and Winnie—the first episode of The Wonder Years—his father reveals that people used to call him “Winnie Nguyen.” He says he kind of liked it, but Lucas thinks they were mocking him.

“Both of you be quiet,” says his mom. “I’m trying to watch the white people.”

All protestations aside, New Waves belongs in an illustrious tradition of semiautobiographical first novels. Now, Nguyen says, he’s working on something very different. We’ll be eager to see it.

Marion Winik is the author of The Big Book of the Dead and reviews regularly for Kirkus, the Washington Post, and other publications. New Waves received a starred review in the Jan. 15, 2020, issue.
A marvelous introduction to a fresh Southern voice.

**F*CKFACE**

Hampton, Leah

Henry Holt (208 pp.)

$25.99 | May 19, 2020

978-1-250-25959-2

The complexities of life in a changing Appalachia link the 12 stories in Hampton’s impressive debut collection.

In the title story, a closeted grocery store cashier named Pretty is stuck in her small-minded mountain town. “This place is a long way from Asheville—eighty miles, and a lot of churches in between.” Her only support is friend and co-worker Jamie, who “didn’t care that [she] liked girls.” But when Jamie quits her job to move to Asheville with her boyfriend, a devastated Pretty finds an unexpected new ally. In the brutally painful “Devil,” Tech. Sgt. Boggs had enlisted in the military to escape his Cumberland, Kentucky, home, but he discovers the past is never really past when he reluctantly spends the night with his fundamentalist parents before shipping out to Afghanistan. As Carolyn and Frank, the twin protagonists of the poignant “Frogs,” embark on an evening nature walk at a mountaintop research station run by a local university, Carolyn plaintively asks her brother, “Are we rednecks?” Without the right clothes or equipment for the hike, the siblings stand out as locals, and Carolyn is further humiliated by the naturalist guide’s condescension. “He’s not even from here,” she angrily notes. The demeaning attitude of outsiders toward Appalachian people is highlighted even more notably in the dazzling “Sparkle” when a visit to Dollywood shatters a woman’s romantic illusions about her husband’s scientific research partner. In writing about an often misunderstood region, Hampton could easily have succumbed to the romanticism of Lee Smith or the negative stereotypes of J.D. Vance’s *Hillbilly Elegy*, but she avoids these tendencies with clear-eyed honesty, humor, and compassion.

*F*uckface

A marvelous introduction to a fresh Southern voice.
**HAPPY & YOU KNOW IT**

*Hankin, Laura*

Berkley (384 pp.)

$26.00 | May 19, 2020

978-1-9848-0623-9

A children's play-group musician discovers that the glamorous, Instagram-famous moms who employ her might be hiding something.

Claire Martin is reeling after her former band found a sexy new lead singer and suddenly scored a hit song that's inescapable. In desperate need of cash, she agrees to take a gig singing for a playgroup. She thinks she's just there to provide a little bit of entertainment for privileged babies and their bored, wealthy moms. That's partly true—her new employers are obsessed with Goop-style “wellness,” going on juice cleanses and trying eye-poppingly expensive new vitamins called TrueMommy. But Claire also discovers that she kind of likes these women—they're fun, and funny, and she admires how effortlessly they seem to do it all. She grows especially close to Whitney, who maintains a mega-popular Momstagram account that reaps sponsorships, and sarcastic Amara, who used to work in late-night TV and is now struggling as a stay-at-home mom with a difficult baby. But as Claire gets to know them better, she realizes that things might not be as perfect as they look on social media—in fact, some of the moms might be hiding secrets that could destroy not only the playgroup, but their entire lives. There’s no shortage of books that deal with rich moms keeping up appearances, but Hankin manages to make overused subject matter feel fresh and vibrant. What starts out as a satire of privileged parenting quickly becomes something else entirely—a domestic thriller with twists and turns that are entirely unexpected and incredibly fun.

A dramatic and immensely entertaining page-turner about secrets, lies, and mom culture.

**LITTLE SECRETS**

*Hillier, Jennifer*

Minotaur (352 pp.)

$26.99 | Apr. 21, 2020

978-1-250-15422-4

The day Marin's 4-year-old son, Sebastian, was kidnapped was the day her life stopped. But things can always get worse.

Lured away from Seattle's Pike Place Market by someone dressed in a Santa Claus suit offering the expensive lollipop Marin had stalled on buying, Sebastian was easily taken. Since that day, 16 months ago, Marin's life has fallen apart. She fantasizes about suicide, and now her best friend, Sal, texts “You alive?” every day. Barely able to make it to the upscale beauty salon she founded, Marin now simply cuts hair, admittedly for celebrity clients, but she’s

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In this trilogy opener, Blackwood pulls readers into the world of fallen angels through the eyes of Ariel, a spunky college freshman.

**SIREN SONG**

*Blackwood, B.A.*

ISBN: 978-1-4791-4486-4

“A dramatic and immensely entertaining page-turner about secrets, lies, and mom culture.”

—Kirkus Reviews on Siren Song

A smashing cliffhanger and lingering questions will surely leave readers impatiently awaiting Book 3.

**“A breezy, winsome fantasy sequel populated by a delightful batch of characters.”**

—Kirkus Reviews on The Crucible

ISBN: 978-0-9904367-1-3
turned over most of the business to her right-hand woman, Sadie. Her husband, Derek, still won't talk about the tragedy. The police have given up looking. But Marin hasn't. She's hired a private investigator to search under every rock. But instead of finding evidence of Sebastian's whereabouts—or even evidence of his continued existence—the PI finds evidence that Derek is having an affair, which lights a fire under Marin: The kidnapper may be elusive, but Kenzie, Derek's mistress, is very real and a perfect target for Marin's rage. Once Kenzie comes on the scene, however, Hillier deepens the tale from one of simple vengeance into a psychological thriller by shifting perspectives between Marin and Kenzie, revealing not only the two women's secrets, but also skeletons in the closets of a few more characters. The tensions ratchet up as nefarious motives and twisted allegiances come to light.

A delightfully twisty psychological thriller perfect for fans of *You* and *Gone Girl*.

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**CASTLE OF SHADOWS**

by Anna Lawton

"...ambitious, sophisticated, and controlled storytelling."

—Kirkus Reviews

"Captivating characters... fascinating reading that reminds me of Downton Abbey!"

—Wilee Lewis, Vice President, PEN/Faulkner Foundation

"Anna Lawton has written a beautiful book of place, time, and character."

—NetGalley Review

"polished language...contemporary take on the classical family saga, historically accurate and absolutely enjoyable."

—Finlay Lewis, Contributing writer, CQ Roll Call


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**BOYS OF ALABAMA**

*Hudson, Genevieve*

Liveright/Norton (272 pp.)  
$26.95 | May 19, 2020  
978-1-63149-629-5

A German teenager whose family moves to Alabama gets a deep-fried Southern gothic education.

Max is gifted, but if you’re thinking “honors student,” think again. He touches dead animals or withered plants and they return to life; whether his power (or curse, as Max thinks of it) works on dead people is part of the story’s suspense. The curse comes with pitfalls: Migraines besiege him after his resurrections, and he craves gobs of sugar. This insightful novel isn’t a fantasy, and Hudson treats Max’s gift as quite real. In addition, Hudson, an Alabama native, memorably evokes her home state, both its beauty and its warped rituals. Max’s father is an engineer, and the car company where he works has transferred him to a factory in Alabama; Max’s parents hope living there will give him a clean break from his troubled love for his dead classmate, Nils. Max is drawn to Pan, a witchy gay boy who wears dresses and believes in auras and incantations. Pan is the only person who knows about Max’s power. But Max also becomes enchanted with the Judge, a classmate’s powerful father who’s running for governor and is vociferous about his astringent faith in Christ after an earlier life of sin (it’s hard to read the novel and not think of Judge Roy Moore, who ran for U.S. Senate from Alabama, as the Judge’s real-life analogue). The Judge has plans for Max, who feels torn between his love for outcast Pan and the feeling of belonging the Judge provides. But that belonging has clear costs; the Judge likes to test potential believers by dosing them with poison. The real believers survive. Hudson invokes the tropes of Alabama to powerful effect: the bizarre fundamentalism; the religion of football; the cultlike unification of church and state. The tropes run the risk of feeling hackneyed, but this is Southern gothic territory, after all. Hudson brings something new to that terrain: an overt depiction of queer desire, welcome because writers such as Capote’s and McCullers’ depictions of queerness were so occluded.

A magical, deeply felt novel that breathes new life into an old genre.
In the insular post–World War II gloom of an English village, seven damaged people soldier on, heartened only by their shared enthusiasm for Jane Austen. Chawton, the village at the heart of this story, contains the small cottage Austen occupied before her death, and it’s also a cauldron of repressed longing and regret worthy of a Victorian novel. James Knight, dying heir of the Knight estate, owns the cottage as well as a stately manor house. The embittered James has altered his will: Upon his death, his only child and caregiver, Frances, a reclusive spinster of 47, will be dispossessed and the estate entailed to the closest male relative. Frances and her father’s lawyer, Andrew, were once in love, but James forced them apart.

Adeline, a former schoolteacher, is pregnant and widowed—her husband died in combat in the war’s closing days. Her physician, Dr. Gray, a widower who blames himself for his wife’s accidental death, is too guilt-ridden to act on his attraction to Adeline. After she loses the baby, she’s Pride and Prejudice-style bantering with Dr. Gray gives way to distrust, and each flirts with morphine addiction. “Sad, silent” Adam, who farms the estate, was introduced to Austen by a visiting American fan, Mimi, a Hollywood star, who, at 35, is about to be put out to pasture by a lecherous studio boss. Evie, compelled by circumstance to forego scholarly ambitions, is a housemaid for the Knights. She’s been secretly cataloging every book in the manor’s vast library and has discovered some potentially priceless Jane Austen artifacts. These lost souls, who have been misjudged by society and/or misjudge themselves, find healing through forming the titular society to preserve the cottage as a museum—as its real-life counterpart is today. More than a passing familiarity with Austen’s work may be a prerequisite to fully appreciating this book—Austen’s characters often seem more real to Jenner’s characters than their own relatives and neighbors. But, thanks to Jenner’s

Readers will root for these characters, wishing them Austen-worthy happy endings.
QUEERIES

Simon Jimenez, Author of The Vanished Birds

By Karen Schechner

Of The Vanished Birds’ many virtues—it’s diverse cast includes a gentle, queer lead and several nearly indomitable women; it’s elegant and philosophical; the spaceships are cool—one biggie is that it’s a novel of wild surprises. One planet grows a purple cash crop; another is inhabited by dogs and a single human; on another, animatronic birds peck at crumbs. Our reviewer called The Vanished Birds (Del Rey, Jan. 14) “the best of what science fiction can be: a thought-provoking, heart-rending story about the choices that define our lives.” Here we talk with author Simon Jimenez about his writing playlist, science fiction, and queer characters.

The Vanished Birds—a sweeping, intergalactic tale with time travel and teleportation—stars nonwhite, queer, and female heroes. How did your novel emerge?

Writing a novel has for a while now been one of the big goals in my life. I had only two prerequisites when I began, which was to have it be genre inflected and for it to have a nonstereotypical gay male protagonist at the center of events. Everything else was up for negotiation as I wrote. As for how it all emerged: slowly, with long periods of frustration and angst. It was a good time.

The Vanished Birds tackles multiple issues—class, power, race, gender, climate change, sexuality. Does SF lend itself to exploring big themes without sacrificing storytelling?

Interesting question. Assuming by “storytelling” we mean narrative momentum and character work, science fiction can be just as guilty of turning into meandering and didactic polemic as any other flavor of story, if not more so. I think that balance depends more on the creator and their craft, less so the genre they are working in.

What led you to give music, particularly that of the flute, a large role in The Vanished Birds? And did you have a writing playlist?

Music has been a part of my life since I was pretty young—[I] was forced into piano lessons for the better part of a decade. Much as I hated practicing or going to recitals, I quickly fell in love with the tactile aspects of playing—the weight of the keys and the vibration of a well-struck chord. There was something elemental to music that I wanted to capture in this book. There’s no good crunchy reason for why I chose a flute. It could’ve been any instrument really. Even a tuba.

I did have a playlist. Lots of movie scores. Things on constant rotation were the soundtracks to Gattaca and Cloud Atlas, also Million Dollar Baby. Emotional, melody-forward music. Nothing with words, for the obvious reasons.

In your novel, as the title notes, birds are virtually extinct; they’re memorialized in space station names, like Pelican and Macaw. Why birds?

I truly can’t remember how birds first came into the story; though I do remember where the title came from, sort of.
There was an old poem I read about birds vanishing from the sky as the day came to an end, but what poem that was I also can’t remember, because apparently my brain is Swiss cheese. I liked the image and thought it had resonance for the story I was telling.

Nia Imani, a loyal, confident captain, has a hot flash. It might be a first for a space hero, and it’s a great detail.

What made you think to include it?
Time and aging [are] a big part of the narrative. With aging come the less glamorous changes of the body. The hot flash was a useful concrete image to represent that change.

What’s next for you?
I’m working on a second book with the same publisher. It’s mythic fantasy, about two warriors that have to escort a god across a land ravaged by a despot. Should be out next year.

Karen Schochner is the vice president of Kirkus Indie. The Vanished Birds received a starred review in the Nov. 1, 2019, issue.

THE ONLY GOOD INDIANS
Jones, Stephen Graham
Saga/Simon & Schuster (320 pp.)
$26.99 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-9821-3645-1

A violent tale of vengeance, justice, and generational trauma from a prolific horror tinkerer. Jones delivers a thought-provoking trip to the edge of your seat in this rural creature feature. Four young Blackfeet men ignore the hunting boundaries of their community and fire into an elk herd on land reserved for the elders, but one elk proves unnaturally hard to kill. Years later, they’re forced to answer for their act of selfish violence, setting into motion a supernatural hunt in which predator becomes prey. The plot meanders ever forward, stopping and starting as it vies for primacy with the characters. As Jones makes his bloody way through the character rotation, he indulges in reflections on rural life, community expectations, and family, among other things, but never gets lost in the weeds. From the beer bottles decorating fences to free-throw practice on the old concrete pad in the cold, the Rez and its silent beauty establishes itself as an important character in the story, and one that each of the other characters must reckon with before the end. Horror’s genre conventions are more than satisfied, often in ways that surprise or subvert expectations; fans will grin when they come across clever nods and homages sprinkled throughout that never feel heavy-handed or too cute. While the minimalist prose propels the narrative, it also serves to establish an eerie tone of detachment that mirrors the characters’ own questions about what it means to live distinctly Native lives in today’s world—a world that obscures the line between what is traditional and what is contemporary. Form and content strike a delicate balance in this work, allowing Jones to revel in his distinctive voice, which has always lingered, quiet and disturbing, in the stark backcountry of the Rez.

Jones hits his stride with a smart story of social commentary—it’s scary good.
Gorgeous and alive.

THE THIRTY NAMES OF NIGHT
Joukhadar, Zeyn
Atria (304 pp.)
$27.00 | May 19, 2020
978-1-9821-2149-5


This is the story of two artists who are connected by secret histories. This is also the story of a trans man struggling to come out to the people closest to him and a woman who found new love even though her way of desiring seemed impossible in the time and place in which she was born. This is a story about immigrants. This is a ghost story, and the specters that haunt its pages are literal and figurative. And this is a story about birds. What binds all these disparate strands together are Joukhadar's deep sympathy for his characters and his powerfully poetic voice. One-half of the novel is set in contemporary New York. The narrator is unnamed because the name he was given at birth no longer fits him. As he tries to express his true gender, he addresses his dead mother as if her absence makes his transition impossible. “There is so much of you—and, therefore, of myself—that I will never know,” he writes. Laila Z’s tale begins in 1920, in French-occupied Syria. After her family immigrates to America, she becomes an acclaimed illustrator of birds. The unnamed narrator knows her work because she was his ornithologist mother’s favorite artist, and, when he stumbles upon Laila’s diary, he finds the key to unlocking himself. Joukhadar is writing for a general American audience about people who are often categorized as “other.” Both narrators are Syrian American, as are most of the significant characters. Many of these characters are also queer. The author creates a world for his characters in which readers who are perhaps unfamiliar with the communities being represented can find their way around, but he does not feel compelled to translate and explain. And Joukhadar’s prose style—folkloric, lyrical, and emotionally intense—creates its own atmosphere.

Gorgeous and alive.

THE EARL AND THE ENCHANTRESS
by Paullett Golden

Two wallflowers bond over books in this debut historical romance.

“The well-written prose is a delight, the author’s voice compelling readers and drawing them into the story with an endearing, captivating plo...”

— Kirkus Reviews

eBook: 978-1-7323342-2-4 • Print: 978-1-7323342-0-0

For information on publishing and film rights, email goldenromance@yahoo.com • www.paullettgolden.com

A BURNING
Majumdar, Megha
Knopf (304 pp.)
$25.95 | Jun. 2, 2020
978-0-525-65869-6

A polyphonic novel that sharply observes class and religious divisions in India.

Shaken by a terrorist attack that sets train cars ablaze and kills more than a hundred people, Jivan, a young Muslim woman living in the nearby Kolabagan slum, posts a careless comment lambasting the government on Facebook and is thrown in jail as a suspect for the attack. As her case becomes national news and the public is increasingly convinced of her guilt, Jivan works to prove her innocence by arranging clandestine conversations with a reporter. “Believe me when I say you must understand my childhood to know who I am, and why this is happening to me,” she tells him. It was a youth marked by poverty, humiliation, and violence, often at the hands of local officials: Policemen wielding bamboo rods demolished her family’s hut in a rural village, leaving her father with a debilitating injury, and the family was tricked into purchasing a plot in a dangerous slum. Meanwhile, as Jivan’s trial nears, two of her acquaintances become witnesses: Lovely, a neighbor who learned English from Jivan, takes acting classes and dreams of becoming a film star while PT Sir, the physical training teacher at Jivan’s old school, gets involved with the populist Jana Kalyan Party and performs a series of increasingly morally questionable acts to curry favor with its leader. Debut author Majumdar has a gift for capturing the frustrating arbitrariness of local government and conjures up scenes in just a few well-chosen images, like this lunch: “PT Sir looks at her, and her plate, where she has made a pile of fish.
Get the ultimate inside scoop on the best new books.

New episode every Tuesday
bones, curved like miniature swords." Lovely, a hijra—a trans woman who lives in a religious community with others like her—is, voicewise, a particular gem. "My chest is a man's chest, and my breasts are made of rags. So what? Find me another woman in this whole city as truly woman as me." But Jivan's storyline feels a bit thin, seemingly purpose-built to make a point about the very real injustices of being poor and a member of a hated religious minority.

The novel's brilliant individual vignettes far outshine a rather flimsy overarching plot.

YOURS, JEAN
Martin, Lee
Dzanc (240 pp.)
$26.95 | May 26, 2020
978-1-950539-14-7

The fifth novel from Martin, based on a real crime in small-town Illinois in 1952, begins with the on-campus murder of Jean De Belle on the first day of her first job as a high school librarian. Jean has come to town after breaking her engagement and severing ties with hard-drinking salesman Charlie Camplain. She's moved into an upstairs room in the home of a student and her mother, a widowed English teacher whose affection for her protégé and lodger strikes some in town as suspicious. The book's first hundred pages, which detail Charlie's clamorous arrival in town to win Jean back, the crime, and his capture, are a bit flat and desultory, but Martin gains his footing at the novel's midpoint, where the book's impelling force changes from plot to psychology and where its focus turns to the crime's beautifully mapped aftershocks. We follow the lonely, lovelorn middle-aged hotel clerk who summoned a cab for Charlie and noticed his gun; the toothless, good-natured cab driver who ended up playing a pivotal role in his capture; the high school boy pressed into service as an unwitting getaway driver on what was already the worst day of his life; that boy's estranged and anguished girlfriend, Robbie McVeigh; and the novel's moral center and best element, Robbie's mother, Mary Ellen, the landlady, confidante, and accused lover of Miss De Belle, who stubbornly refuses to defend herself or to submit to the binary "Is she or isn't she?" thinking that the school board and fellow townspeople demand of her. In the end, Martin creates a subtle and intricate portrait of small-town mores and of the after echoes and reverberations, for those who've witnessed it, of sudden, shocking violence.

A wobbly start, but eventually Martin—like the complex woman he's conjured—finds his way.

ALL MY MOTHER'S LOVERS
Masad, Ilana
Dutton (336 pp.)
$27.00 | May 26, 2020
978-1-5247-4597-4

A debut novelist explores the complexities of love and grief. Maggie Krause is in bed with her girlfriend when she gets the call: Her mother has just died in a car accident. When she returns to her childhood home, she finds her younger brother angry and her father paralyzed by grief. The discovery of a cache of letters that her mother, Iris, wanted delivered to five different men gives Maggie something to do besides coping with her family's loss or processing her own feelings: She decides that she will find the strangers to whom these letters are
addressed. This road trip is a journey of discovery for Maggie. She learns that her parents’ seemingly idyllic union was not quite what she thought it was; the affairs to which the book’s title refers are extramarital. As she gets to know the men her mother loved, Maggie also gets to know her mother better. And, of course, she begins to better understand herself. This setup is interesting, but the storytelling veers from the slow and slightly superficial to the...kind of kitschy. A scene with an all-seeing psychic is particularly hard to take seriously and the whole narrative hinges on a big reveal that feels melodramatic and a bit cheap. Masad has chosen to surprise readers instead of providing them with information they need to understand Iris even though there are chapters narrated from her perspective. Getting glimpses of her trysts feels more voyeuristic than revealing. And the one letter we get to read seems macabre and manipulative—gaslighting from beyond the grave. Where the book succeeds is in depicting queer characters as multifaceted human beings who are not defined solely by their sexuality or gender. Maggie’s relationship problems aren’t because she’s a lesbian; they’re because she’s afraid of commitment. And it’s not often that fiction writers—or anyone, for that matter—depict women of middle age and beyond as beings who desire and wish to be desired.

An intriguing but uneven debut.

HOW BEAUTIFUL WE WERE
Mbue, Imbolo
Random House (384 pp.)
$28.00 | Jun. 16, 2020
978-0-593-13242-5

The author of the award-winning debut Behold the Dreamers (2016) follows up with a decades-spanning account of environmental calamity and its reverberating, often violent impact on a fictional African village.

The year 1980 finds Pexton, an American oil giant, in the midst of a yearslong project that by slow degrees is choking the
life out of Kosawa, many of whose villagers have already perished “from the poison in the water and the poison in the air and the poisoned food growing from the land that lost its purity the day Pexton came drilling.” Whatever efforts the villagers make to seek relief or repairs have been met with relative indifference by the company and brutal reprisals from their nation’s dictatorship. But in October of that year, a Pexton delegation that had come to Kosawa to placate its desperate citizenry is taken captive by the village madman, Konga, whose reckless gesture is joined by others who believe their dire circumstances leave them no choice but to fight back. So begins a long, valiant, and costly struggle between this tiny farm village and the seemingly overpowering forces both within and outside its country poised to curtail or ignore its grievances. Mbue tells her story from several perspectives and displays deep and detailed empathy toward men and women of various ages, however they may feel about the bloodshed, imprisonment, thwarted hopes, and pervasive fear that dominate the village for the remaining years of the 20th century. At some point, the concerns of these and other villagers coalesce around Thula, an avid and intelligent 10-year-old girl when the Pexton spokesmen are kidnapped, who later goes to America to become educated about the wider world, though she vows to return to Kosawa someday. When she does, she is intent on setting in motion a plan to “bring down” the country’s despotic regime. Meanwhile, the land becomes less habitable, Pexton’s promises of reparations come to little, and Thula’s patience with legal remedies erodes further. Among the many virtues of Mbue’s novel is the way it uses an ecological nightmare to frame a vivid and stirring picture of human beings’ asserting their value to the world, whether the world cares about them or not.

A fierce, up-to-the-minute novel that makes you sad enough to grieve and angry enough to fight back.

**A GOOD MARRIAGE**
McCreight, Kimberly
Harper/HarperCollins (400 pp.)
$27.99 | May 5, 2020
978-0-06-236768-6

A white-collar criminal defense attorney takes on the case of a millionaire accused of the brutal murder of his wife in McCreight’s new thriller.

It’s only been a few months since Lizzie Kitsakis joined the prestigious New York law firm Young & Crane. It’s not her dream job, but her husband Sam’s alcoholism has put them in a precarious financial position, and she can’t afford to be picky. When her college friend Zach Grayson, now a millionaire, calls her from Rikers, he tells her he’s the prime suspect in the gruesome murder of his wife, Amanda, and is being held on an assault charge with no bail while awaiting indictment. He wants Lizzie, and no one else, to represent him, and she’s surprised when her boss tells her to take the case. Lizzie believes Zach is innocent, and by all accounts, Amanda was a devoted wife and a wonderful mother to their son, Case, who is away at camp. No one can think of a motive for her murder. However, the events leading up to the case are fodder for a gossip-obsessed press: Zach and Amanda reportedly attended a party the night of her death, at which parents of students from the upscale Brooklyn Country Day school let loose while the kids were away at various summer activities. The hostess even encouraged couples to use her upstairs rooms for a bit of partner swapping. Meanwhile, someone has hacked into the records of Brooklyn Country Day families, digging up dirt and threatening blackmail. Then Lizzie discovers Amanda’s journals, and it becomes clear that her life and marriage may have been darker and more complex than they appeared. Lizzie knows a bit about keeping secrets, and as she gets closer to the truth, she wonders if Zach might not be so innocent after all. McCreight’s law credentials lend authenticity to the legal proceedings and to Lizzie’s high-stakes tango with a formidable assistant district attorney eager to put her in her place. Lizzie’s narrative alternates with one that details Amanda’s movements for a few days before her murder, and McCreight expertly weaves multiple plot threads with a few sly
red herrings, paving the way to a series of surprising, and satisfying, reveals.  
A fierce, up-to-the-minute novel that makes you sad enough to grieve and angry enough to fight back.

COLLECTED STORIES  
Moore, Lorrie  
Everyman's Library (776 pp.)  
$27.00 | Mar. 3, 2020  
978-0-375-71238-8

Forty superb stories by one of America's most beloved (and best) fiction writers.

Moore is a short story superstar, a wily wordsmith, an extraordinary empath. In a few short pages—sometimes in just a few words—she is able to evoke essentially everything about the characters she conjures: the early disappointments that have shaped them, the hunger for connection that propels them, the quippy wordplay that protects them, the ways they hold themselves back or get in their own ways. That makes this vast yet intimate collection of 40 stories drawn from Moore's decades of exceptional work—many originally published in her collections *Self Help* (1985), *Like Life* (1990), *Birds of America* (1998), and *Bark* (2014) and others extracted from her novels—something to savor, whether you are rereading old favorites or enjoying Moore's deeply affecting blend of humor and heartache for the first time. In stories such as “The Jewish Hunter,” about a New York poet visiting the Midwest who finds and then leaves a man she might have loved; “Four Calling Birds, Three French Hens,” about a woman whose grief for her cat separates her from and then returns her to her family; and “Two Boys,” about a woman who craves the attention of an inconstant man more than the man who’s true, among others, Moore's characters exist in a tremulous zone between hope and despair, boredom and excitement, fear and bravery, connection and detachment, belonging and displacement. And while the humans who populate Moore’s stories—presented in

SECRETES OF THE ORCHARD  
by Jean Kelly

Set in 1950s Massachusetts, a debut novel reminds readers, as Faulkner did, that the past is never dead.

"Kelly has created a vivid cast of characters."

"The final twist certainly is stunning..."

"...the book comes to a very satisfying conclusion, with the mystery solved and the slate cleaned."

"...this engaging and unpredictable mystery delivers strong characters."

—Kirkus Reviews


For information on publishing and film rights, email jeank535@verizon.net  •  www.jean-kelly.com
alphabetical (by title) rather than chronological order, “like a playlist set to shuffle,” the author writes—differ in age, life stage, gender, sexual orientation, location, and situation, all share a familiar humanity apt to resonate with readers. Moore’s stories have a way of burrowing into the head and the heart and taking up residence there, reverberating like a startled laugh or a stifled sob.

This expansive, exquisite collection cements Moore’s standing as one of the greatest short story writers of our time.

Better known as the author of Dracula, Bram Stoker in his day job as general manager of London’s Lyceum Theatre is the focus of Irish writer O’Connor’s atmospheric new novel.

Mind you, there are plenty of nods to his famous horror story, from a ghost in the theater’s attic named Mina to a scene-painter named Jonathan Harker, plus the fact that the dreaded vampire bears a more than passing resemblance to Stoker’s mercurial boss, legendary actor Henry Irving. Harker turns out to be a woman, a twist that suits the seething homoerotic currents between Stoker and Irving, who can also be found entwined in the naked arms of co-star Ellen Terry. Terry’s voice as recorded in 1906—funny, bitchy, extremely shrewd about her acting partner’s gifts and limitations—offers a welcome counterpoint to the sometimes overly dense third-person narrative of Stoker’s tenure at the Lyceum and on tour in the late 1870s and ’80s, grappling with Irving’s neuroses while striving to snatch some time for his own writing. This is a tougher, colder work than Ghost Light (2011), O’Connor’s previous fictional excursion into theatrical lives, and that novel’s portrait of actor Molly Allgood’s love affair with playwright John Synge was gentler than this one of Stoker’s thorny relationship with Irving, a toxic blend of need, rage, resentment, and profound love. Still, the men’s bond is as moving and more unsettling, proof that, as Stoker later tells Harker, “Love is not a matter of who puts what where but of wanting only goodness and respectful kindliness for the loved one.” Irving seems less deserving of such kindness than Stoker’s assertive wife, Flo, who makes sure he gets copyright protection for the vampire story his boss cruelly dismisses as “filth and tedious rubbish from first to last.” Flo’s tender letter to Terry after Stoker’s death closes the novel, with another affirmation that “There are many kinds of love. I know that. He did, too.”

An uneven mix of Dracula and theater lore but a thoughtful exploration of the tangled nature of desire and commitment.

A preteen bully and a 22-year-old con artist collide in Pascal’s thriller.

The creator of the Sweet Valley High series turns to adult fiction with mixed results in a story set in a sleepy town on
New York’s Long Island. Here, 12-year-old “Big Larry” terrorizes a group of younger neighborhood kids including sensitive 10-year-old Charley and Charley’s bright, determined 7-year-old sister, Lucy. Into this small-town scene drops shady, attractive Australian Luke, who has skipped bail and hitchhiked across the country from LA. He and Larry work up a mutual enmity while they’re both shoplifting from a local drugstore. When, after a rendezvous on a deserted town beach with sweet, innocent drugstore clerk Daisy Rumkin, Luke takes shelter in a storm drain and is pinned down by falling debris, Larry seizes the opportunity to amp up his bullying game into full-scale torture, with the reluctant aid of the members of his little gang. Having gotten hold of his abusive father’s gun, Larry makes plans that include not just the elimination of Luke, but violence inflicted on the entire community. Pascal knows how to craft short, snappy chapters that leave the reader wanting more, and little Lucy, described as “weird” by most of those who know her, makes an appealingly different heroine. But the novel is oddly untethered in time. While it’s clear that this is supposed to be a relatively contemporary story—Harry Styles, for example, is the teen heartthrob referenced—the characters say things like “Your pa don’t know beans” and “My ma says a bum’ll steal the eyes out of your head.” Daisy thinks of herself as a “shopgirl” and has never heard of IMDb. In addition, Luke, in whose head we spend a significant portion of the novel and whose redemption is its main narrative arc, is a singularly unappealing hero. Younger and older readers alike will be baffled by this half-baked adventure.
DON'T SHED YOUR TEARS FOR ANYONE WHO LIVES ON THESE STREETS
Pron, Patricio
Trans. by Lethem, Mara Faye
Knopf (304 pp.)
$26.95 | May 21, 2020
978-0-451-49317-0

The sins of the fathers are visited on the children in this pensive multigenerational novel.

Argentinian writer Pron, who now lives in Madrid, travels east to Italy to locate his newest story. It opens in 1978, the era of the Red Brigades, but immediately looks back to the end of World War II, with a one-time fascist writer recalling the death of a comrade: "When we found Luca Borrello's corpse, his eyes were open and he was looking up at the sky, as if a moment earlier Borrello too had been appreciating that it was a splendid day." Borrello had been taking part in a conference of fascist writers even as Mussolini's Nazi-backed Republic of Salò was collapsing—says another participant, "We wanted new ruins we could dedicate our poems to"—and he was hiding a secret: He'd been sheltering a member of the resistance from roving bands of SS troops. A generation later, the son of the rescued fighter seeks to comprehend the attraction of fascism by interviewing survivors of that literary generation, a story whose denouement reaches into the present. Pron reveals each detail deliberately, letting the mystery build, and he populates his pages with real historical figures and events ranging from the birth of futurism at yet another writers conference to the killing of the conservative politician Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades. His story is part suspense novel, one that explores several puzzles: Why would Borrello have saved a putative enemy, and who killed him in turn? What happened to the texts of a poet who enlisted in Mussolini's army, and how did he die? It is also part historical investigation, reminiscent of the recent work of the Spanish writer Javier Cercas in its insistence on getting at hidden truths.

A skillfully constructed exploration of past events that many Italians would just as soon forget.
THE SUN SISTER
Riley, Lucinda
Atria (528 pp.)
$28.00 | May 19, 2020
978-1-9821-1064-2

The sixth installment of Riley's mammoth series about the adopted daughters of an enigmatic shipping magnate.

This volume, weighing in at 500-plus pages, concerns Electra, the youngest of the six D'Aplièse sisters—each named for a star in the Pleiades constellation—who were rescued by seafaring entrepreneur “Pa Salt.” As always, the prefatory cast of characters notes that a seventh sister, Merope, is “missing.” Like her sisters before her, Electra was bequeathed clues by Pa (who died under mysterious circumstances) as to her birth origins. But Electra, a Manhattan supermodel who’s addicted to vodka and cocaine, is blasé about her personal quest. When Stella Jackson, a prominent black attorney, claims to be Electra’s biological grandmother, Riley begins the extended backstory common to all the books, this one about Electra’s ancestor. Stella’s reluctance to spill the beans all at once and Electra’s own prodigious procrastination slow the narrative just enough to maintain suspense. The tale centers on Cecily Huntley-Morgan, a white New York socialite who, on the eve of World War II, finds herself living in Kenya in a marriage of convenience to Bill Forsythe, who spends most of his time away on cattle drives with Maasai tribesmen. This situation stems from Cecily’s broken engagement in New York, which she followed with an unwanted pregnancy courtesy of a rebound rake. Rarely for this series, both storylines hold their own. Electra checks into rehab, vowing to forswear hedonism and use her fame and wealth to help addicted and underprivileged youth.

The heart of this American domestic epic is expressed pretty neatly midway through by a delivery nurse tending to Ellie McGinty at the birth of her second child, an event missed by her troubled husband, Brick, and coordinated by a neighbor. Was it always like this? asks Ellie. Did women always have to rely on other women? “A woman’s world has always revolved around...other women,” the nurse replies. “We love our men, and the idea of a husband is a good thing. What woman wouldn’t want that?” Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist Schultz studies that question through generations of women: Ellie’s paternal grandmother, Ada, who raises the child her son abandoned; Brick’s mother, trapped in a brutally violent marriage that produced 12 children; Ellie herself, whose precipitous marriage to Brick in many ways marks the ruin of both of their lives; their daughter Samantha, who comes of age with Motown and career options. Like Jennifer Weiner’s Mrs. Everything, except with Catholics instead of Jews, the novel sharply illuminates evolving social mores and tucks in plenty of womanly wisdom. We go from Peyton Place (1956) to The Women’s Room (1977)—and, cleverly, both books make cameo appearances in the plot. More
cleverness energizes the dialogue. How old were you when you fell in love with Grandpa? asks young Ellie in an early scene. “I’ll let you know,” Ada replies. “We only had five or six boys to pick from, and two got eliminated for inbreeding.” The minor characters in Schultz’s fictional Erietown include some from central casting (a spinster aunt with a career, a caring basketball coach) and a few we haven’t seen as much of (including a somewhat sympathetic homewrecker).

A masterful debut novel.

THE LION’S DEN
St. John, Katherine
Grand Central Publishing (368 pp.)
$28.00 | May 19, 2020
978-1-5387-3363-9

Gal pals invited on a luxury cruise face rigid supervision, surveillance cameras, drugged drinks, and worse at the hands of a controlling, gold-digging birthday beeyotch.

Aspiring Hollywood actress/cocktail waitress Belle is among the gaggle of friends invited on a Mediterranean cruise to celebrate the birthday of their ultraglamorous pal Summer—all expenses paid by her new boyfriend, John (“not a day over sixty-three to her twenty-six”). But as soon as they start the trip on John’s private jet in Los Angeles, the girls learn that his generosity comes with many extremely irritating strings attached. Belle and Summer’s friendship goes back to high school, but Summer’s self-centered, freeloading, man-eating ways have been a problem all along. Now, it seems, the two are barely on speaking terms—yet, for some reason, Belle grits her teeth and gets onboard with a group that includes Summer’s trashy mother, loudmouth sister, Brittani, Brittani’s sexpot bff, Amythest [sic], and a couple of other thought leaders of the professional eye-candy set. The daily schedule on the ship is rigid and boring, and it is enforced by a pair of scary goons who make the girls go to spin class and lock them in their rooms at night. On top of everything else, there’s no Wi-Fi. Talk about a supposed fun thing they’ll never do again! As Belle eavesdrops on John’s conversations with various dinner guests, she begins to get a sense of just how dirty his money may be. Meanwhile, a series of flashbacks investigate the fate of a dead ex-boyfriend of Summer’s who could not possibly have committed suicide because she dumped him. St. John’s sizzling debut sparkles with yacht and fashion porn, and smart, decent Belle is easy to root for as the panic reaches its peak.

Blingy, swingy fun plus a well-crafted, socially conscious suspense plot: Anchors aweigh!

GROWN UPS
Unsworth, Emma Jane
Scout Press/Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)
$27.00 | May 12, 2020
978-1-9821-4193-6

A 35-year-old woman obsesses over social media and her ex-boyfriend as her life implodes.

Jenny McLaine is having a rough time. She and Art, her photographer boyfriend of seven years, just broke up. Her job at the Foof, a feminist online magazine, is on the rocks. Her roommates are moving out and her tarot card–loving medium mother is moving in. Her life doesn’t seem as flawless as those of the women she idolizes on social media, but that doesn’t mean
she won't spend an alarming amount of time trying to make things look picture perfect. She even scrolls through her phone during sex—in her defense, it was “a slow bit.” At one point, Jenny panics to the point of tears as she attempts to make an Instagram post about a croissant—should there be a hashtag? an exclamation point?—before throwing the croissant itself into the garbage (an apt metaphor for the amount of attention Jenny pays to her online life versus her real one). It's easy to sympathize with Jenny's put-upon single-mom friend, Kelly, who's annoyed with Jenny's self-obsessiveness and social media fixation. Through script dialogue, email drafts, and texts along with prose, Unsworth (who also writes for television) gives an up-close and personal view of Jenny's gradual breakdown as her life falls apart. Although Jenny's constant need to filter every life experience through social media often feels exhausting, there's no denying that her obsession will resonate with many millennials. Jenny's voice is strong, sharp, occasionally disgusting, and alternately charming and horrifying as she narrates every one of her stumbles through life.

A bracing look at a breakdown that's sometimes difficult to read but always completely captivating.

Contemplative and complex.

LIFE EVENTS

Waclawiak, Karolina
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (288 pp.)
$27.00  |  May 19, 2020
978-0-374-18695-1

A messy meditation on life in the face of death from the author of The Invaders (2015).

Evelyn is waiting for her parents to die—not looking forward to it but preoccupied with this inevitability for which she does not know how to prepare. She's also waiting for her marriage to die; she's given up, but she wants her husband, Bobby, to be the one who asks for a divorce. While she waits for both of these endings, she checks out temporarily by taking long drives around Los Angeles, drinking wine, and hitting her weed pen. She's searching the web for a grief support group when she finds a program that teaches people how to help the terminally ill die. Training for this task compels Evelyn to think deeply about her own life, as does preparing her clients for death. One of the pleasures of this book is that these experiences do not lead to dramatic revelations. The shifts in Evelyn's thoughts and behavior are subtle and slow. She never makes an explicit connection between her work as a death doula and her decision to finally leave Bobby, but she begins to take practical steps toward that end. Indeed, the process that Evelyn devises to leave her marriage is similar to the process she uses to ease clients toward their final exits. And both processes are morally, ethically, and emotionally fraught. This is not an action-packed novel, and the narrative moves at a meditative pace. What makes it engaging is its narrative voice and its clear-eyed assessment of the human condition. Evelyn is self-aware enough to understand her despair and resilient enough to not succumb to it entirely. This does not mean that she has any idea what she should do in order to feel contented and fulfilled—and it's not that she hasn't tried. In a passage in which Evelyn is trying to get her doctor to increase her prescription for a sedative, she considers all the therapists she's sought help from. The obstacle between Evelyn and happiness is not a grand tragedy; it is the accumulated weight of the small tragedies we all endure and carry with us.

Contemplative and complex.
Six crime novellas from Winslow, who pays homage to Steve McQueen, Elmore Leonard, and Raymond Chandler.

The world is a broken place, thinks Eva McNabb, a 911 dispatcher in New Orleans in the title novella, and “you come out broken.” Her sons, Danny and Jimmy, are cops, and Jimmy is “as sensitive as brass knuckles.” When he and his partner stumble on a mountain of meth, gunfire and heartbreak follow. In Crime 101, a jewel thief named Davis notes the basics of successful crime—“keep it simple,” for example. He never strays far from “the 101,” his beloved California Highway 101. When Davis jacks $1.5 million in diamonds, Lt. Lou Lubesnick tries to identify and capture him, and it all comes down to this: “What would Steve McQueen do?” There are so many good lines in these yarns. How could the reader resist The San Diego Zoo’s opener: “Nobody knows how the chimp got the revolver”? This story is especially funny: A good cop becomes the department’s laughingstock after disarming Champ the chimp. Lowlife Hol-lis Bamburger once turned in a term paper with the Wikipedia heading still on it. Even Superman and Spartacus take a hilarious turn. Meanwhile, the characters in Sunset and Paradise spend a lot of time surfing or thinking about surfing. A bail bondsman looks for a heroin-addicted surfing legend, and a woman in Hawaii thinks Peter, Paul, and Mary were Jesus’ parents. Each storyline will keep readers entertained with wit, humor, and occasional sadness. Finally, in The Last Ride, a Border Patrol agent simply wants to return one Salvadoran girl to her mother. The tale is sad and powerful as it comes back to the theme that everyone is broken somehow.

_A great collection of short crime fiction._

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*THE END OF OCTOBER*

Wright, Lawrence

Knopf (400 pp.)

$27.95 | May 12, 2020

978-0-525-65865-8

As a lethal virus of unknown origin ravages huge swaths of the planet, legendary American disease fighter Henry Parsons heads up increasingly hopeless attempts to control it.

The easily transmitted disease, which literally turns its victims blue, is first detected in a refugee camp in Indonesia, “hothouse of diseases.” Sent there by the World Health Organization, Parsons quickly recognizes the dangers at hand but not quickly enough to prevent his infected local driver from leaving the camp to join some 3 million worshipers on the annual hajj. When attempts at quarantines in Mecca fail and the infected pilgrims return home, they carry the disease all over the globe. In light of the relatively few disease-related deaths in Russia, suspicions arise that the virus was bioengineered by Putin. The Russian leader, of course, blames America, where cities and institutions begin crumbling. After blood drips from the eyes of the president, mid-speech, and the vice president is infected, the ill-prepared government is driven into an underground facility in Virginia. (CNN’s Anderson Cooper apparently perishes but not Wolf Blitzer, who still commands _The Situation Room_.) Featuring accounts of past plagues and pandemics, descriptions of pathogens and how they work, and dark notes about global warming, the book produces deep shudders. Wright, author of acclaimed nonfiction such as _The Looming Tower_ (2006), about the Sept. 11 attacks, knows his way around geopolitical terror, but he’s less successful as a thriller writer, upstaged here by the recent, real-life coronavirus. There is little true suspense in the novel, which sketches in its nightmarish scenarios rather than dramatizing them. Even a suicide bombing has marginal impact. Ultimately, the book gets caught up in family drama, sentimentality, and end-of-the-world moralizing.
An atheist since his missionary parents were killed in an air crash, Parsons rediscovers religion. A disturbing, eerily timed novel but no page-turner.

**SANSEI AND SENSIBILITY**

*Yamashita, Karen Tei*

Coffee House (232 pp.)  
$16.99 paper  |  May 5, 2020  
978-1-6689-578-1

An elegantly written, wryly affectionate mashup of Jane Austen and the Japanese immigrant experience.

Yamashita, author of the brilliant experimental novel *I Hotel* (2010), here delivers a book of stories in many voices. The first set is told, usually matter-of-factly, by sansei, third-generation Japanese Americans who often have only tenuous connections with the mother country. In the first, a sansei visits Kyoto, “cold with a barren sense of an old winter,” and there becomes part of a story within a story that revolves around bathing—but with many twists and turns, involving people made slow by old age, captured by terrorists, and lashed by typhoons, and all in the space of 17 pages. The closing line is a droll, note-perfect commentary on what has happened before. A more straightforward story, punctuated by haunting photographs from the early years of the last century, turns on certain differences between the descendants of Japanese immigrants to the U.S. and to Brazil (“What was a sansei? I was a figment of their imaginations”) but closes with the gently perceptive reminder that while it is winter where the narrator lives, north of the Equator, it is summer to the south. The second set of stories brings Jane Austen into the picture, she serving as the putative author of a book of stories whose characters “represent the minutiae of sansei life as it once existed in a small provincial island in an armpit of postwar sunshine.” Those stories share the once-upon-a-time incantation “mukashi, mukashi,” but they’re altogether modern, with Regency carriages giving way to gold Mercedes sedans and Fitzwilliam Darcy taking the form of one Darcy Kabuto II, football hero, class vice president, and best-looking member of his class, “which meant he looked like he was the son of Toshiro Mifune.” Yamashita’s reimagining of Austen is sympathetic and funny—and as on target as the movie *Clueless.*

A humane vision of people and their stories traveling, learning, sometimes suffering, and always changing.

**DRIFTS**

*Zambreno, Kate*

Riverhead (336 pp.)  
$26.00  |  May 19, 2020  
978-0-593-08721-3

A free-spirited, essayistic novel exploring the complex links among art, parenthood, and making a living.

If this foray into autofiction by Zambreno initially feels aimless, that’s by design. Trying to make ends meet as a writer and teacher in New York, the unnamed narrator is struggling to complete a book tentatively titled *Drifts.* Her goal is to tell a story that’s intimate yet free of story arcs and the baggage of character: It is “my fantasy of a memoir about nothing.” So the forward movement in the early going has less to do with plot than its “series of moods or textures,” the steady accrual of quotidian events: reading about artists and poets (Rilke and Dürer are particular favorites); arguing with her husband about...
moving; walking the dog; masturbating; binge-watching TV. Zambreno holds the reader thanks to the punchy, brief paragraphs and her quirky, gemlike sentences (“I began smoking again after we saw the stray kitten hit by one of the speeding cars on the corner”). The narrative gets a sense of order (or a different kind of disarray) once the narrator becomes pregnant; there’s less of a feeling of “the vastness and ephemerality of the day,” but Zambreno harbors no easy platitudes about how motherhood gives women a sense of purpose. (The section covering it is titled “Vertigo.”) Rather, it applies a different kind of economic, emotional, and artistic pressure, prompting the narrator to think further about how her physical transformation impacts her senses of time and self. The charm of this novel is how it makes this deep uncertainty feel palpable and affecting; its fragmentary nature is a feature, not a bug. Adrift, the narrator engagingly tangles with everything from the Kardashians to Joseph Cornell for a sense of fellow-feeling.

A lyrical, fragmentary, and heartfelt story about the beauty and difficulty of artistic isolation.

M Y S T E R Y

A SPELL FOR TROUBLE
Addison, Esme
Crooked Lane (336 pp.)
$26.99 | May 12, 2020
978-1-64385-303-1

Addison’s sparkling debut brings a woman back to her mother’s hometown, where she learns a shocking truth about her family—and herself.

Aleksandra Daniels was forbidden by her father to return to Bellamy Bay, North Carolina, after her mother drowned there more than 20 years ago. After his death, however, she leaves her New York City job as a risk manager and, with her dog, Athena, goes to visit her Aunt Lidia and cousins Minka and Kamila, who are thrilled to see her after such a long hiatus, and help them out at their herbal remedies store. There she meets Pepper Bellamy, an inquisitive reporter who mentions the hidden secrets of the town’s oldest clans, the Wesleys and the Sobieskis, Alex’s own family. Lidia has an odd, nasty confrontation with Randy Bennett, one of her customers, who badly needs an elixir but finally departs with some tea. By contrast, Alex and new police officer Jack Frazier hit it off, but their relationship is taxed when he arrests Lidia after Randy is found fatally poisoned by deadly nightshade berries. Furious, Alex decides to look into the case herself. After all, Randy’s widow, Stephanie, stands to inherit millions; his business partner, Edwin Kenley, was angry with him; and the wealthy and powerful Wesleys want to buy their business. Alex is astonished when Pepper tells her she’s working on an article claiming the Sobieskis are water witches descended from mermaids. When Lidia is put under house arrest, Alex learns that her relatives really are witches and that she’d be wise to develop some of the powers she inherited from her talented mother. As she begins to investigate the Wesley family, she meets Dylan, a stunningly attractive man who reminds her that they played together as children. The connection’s still there, but she can’t trust him or his steely mother and sister. As she struggles with her powers, Alex can’t talk to Jack about her theories because he’s a nonmagical Mundane, and she puts herself in great danger when she turns up more dangerous secrets.

For those who love cozies, romance with an edge, and magical adventures.

A CALL FOR KELP
Baker, Bree
Poisoned Pen (352 pp.)
$7.99 paper | May 26, 2020
978-1-7282-0572-4

An effort to help endangered honeybees ends in murder.

Movie star Mitzi Calgon has volunteered to provide the voice-over for a documentary on bees as a favor to the Swan sisters, relatives of a long-departed friend. The sisters, Everly Swan’s great-aunts, are bee experts with a reputation as healers, but Everly’s best known for solving murders. When Mitzi is apparently stung to death at a luncheon with hordes of fans who’ve traveled far to see her, Everly is drawn to investigate even after the man she loves, Detective Grady Hays, warns her to leave the case to him. Grady is a widower who gave up a hotshot law enforcement job to move to the Outer Banks. Life there is better for his son, but Grady can’t escape meddling by his wealthy mother-in-law, a former senator whose husband is currently on a secret government mission. Despite her duties at the iced tea shop she owns, Everly still manages to find time for sleuthing. Narrowing her list of suspects from the enormous group of fanatic fans, she focuses on the husband Mitzi was divorcing; his daughter, who worked for Mitzi; and the producer of the documentary. But she can’t exclude stalkers or crazy fans, especially when she starts getting warnings to butt out.

A swarm of bee-centric suspects, a bit of sweet romance, and a surprise sting add up to a honey of a tale.
A young French scribe, risking everything, turns sleuth to save the life and reputation of a slandered duchess.

IN THE COMPANY OF FOOLS

Bayard, Tania
Severn House (224 pp.)
$28.99 | May 5, 2020
978-0-7278-8941-6

A young French scribe, risking everything, turns sleuth to save the life and reputation of a slandered duchess.

Paris, 1396. A dark figure ventures into a disreputable neighborhood to receive a dirty infant from a gnarled crone. Not long after, the baby is handed off to a surprised Christine de Pizan by a quartet of fools who serve the Duke of Orléans, each with an animal nickname: Giliot, Hanotin, Coquinet, and Blondel. Christine, a scribe, has been copying a book for the Duchess of Orléans, Valentina Visconti. When the fools claim that the baby was found in the palace gardens and insist that Christine take charge of it, she gives it to her mother for safekeeping. As the kingdom’s turmoil is deepened by the grave illness of the king, gossipmongers spread dangerous rumors about Valentina, depicting her as an evil sorceress. The murders of two young women, the prostitute Fleur and the young newlywed Klara, who lived with Christine and her mother after Klara’s groom disappeared, seem somehow connected to the secret baby. The surprise reappearance of Klara’s husband, Martin du Bois, who claims the baby and declares that her name is Bonne, puts yet another spin on the story. Valentina’s enemies weave a tale that she murdered Klara and plans to swap the orphan baby for the queen’s. As one of the Duchess’ only supporters in the court, and with considerable experience as a sleuth, Christine feels compelled to clear her name.

Bayard vividly immerses the reader in the complex and perilous world of medieval France.
Two half siblings separated by time and past events forge a better relationship as they work a complex case.

County cop Jimmy Vega is recovering from several cases that almost ended his career. Doing a mitzvah for his girlfriend’s elderly neighbor, Holocaust survivor Max Zimmer-man, involves him with Edgar Aviles, the handyman at the local synagogue, who’s about to be deported to El Salvador despite mitigating circumstances. Max wants to give Edgar sanctuary while his lawyer and his niece, Lissette, who works as a housekeeper for district attorney Glen Crowley, see if they can help. Meanwhile, Jimmy’s girlfriend, Adele Figueroa, a Harvard-educated lawyer who runs the immigrant aid center La Casa, also pitches in despite the long odds. Then Jimmy gets a call from a neighboring police department seeking his expertise in a possible case of suicide. The dead woman is Talia Crowley, the DA’s second wife. The whole case seems off to Jimmy from the start, but he faces enormous pressure to close it out, especially since Crowley has an alibi. Then Lissette vanishes, leaving behind only a wallet with a picture of two children. Immigration and Customs Enforcement sends in agent Michelle Carmelita Vega-Lopez, the half sister Jimmy has rarely seen since childhood, when he was growing up in the Bronx in the care of his mother and grandmother. Jimmy has had no particular feelings for Michelle ever since his father left his mother for hers, and he still has nightmares and unresolved issues from his early life. As Aviles stubbornly refuses to disclose information that might harm his family, Jimmy ruffles feathers in several police departments by persisting in his theory that Talia was murdered. Despite Jimmy’s and Michelle’s very different outlooks on deportations, she uses her contacts in ICE to uncover a nefarious scheme related to Talia’s murder.

The excellent mystery is almost upstaged by an anguished tale of old hurts and ripped-from-the-headlines political quarrels.

An elite American soldier is captured in Nicaragua during a time of brutal rivalry between the Contras and Marxist rebels in this historical novel.

“The book brings the details of covert operations right to you. The sweat of the jungle and heat of battle jump out at you. Any similarity to the Contra Scandal of the 1980’s is purely coincidental.” —James Dunn, Author

"…Calling all history buffs and army veterans. This book is right up your alley...." —Breakeven Books, Eric McManus

“"A thrilling peek into a tumultuous era.”

—Kirkus Reviews


For information on publishing and film rights, email jay@jaycadmus.com • www.jaycadmus.com • www.constableoutreach35.com
The year’s first snowfall reveals a corpse to a small-town entrepreneur.

Making up most of the tiny African American population of Chagrin Falls, Ohio, the Crewse family is a tight-knit bunch. That’s why, even after earning her MBA, youngest daughter Bronwyn doesn’t mind coming back to her hometown to reestablish Crewse Creamery, the ice cream shop her grandparents opened in 1965. In fact, when her PopPop hands over the keys to the shop on Christmas Day, Win’s heart just about bursts with pride. Family loyalty also explains why Win, struggling to reestablish the fledgling business, takes the time to investigate the death of Stephen Bayard, whose body she trips over after sled-ding down to the river to collect clean snow to use in Grandma Kay’s Snow Ice Cream recipe. Back in the day, Bayard wrought havoc in the Chagrin Falls business community, tricking Grandma Kay into signing the family business over to him before running away with bike shop owner Dan Clawson’s wife. So Bayard’s death makes Win’s father, surgeon James Crewse, Detective Liam Bev-erly’s prime suspect in a murder. It doesn’t help Dr. Crewse’s case when the coroner discovers that Bayard was catapulted into the next world by a hard-to-find anesthetic called succinylcholine. Putting a promising relationship with law professor Morrison Kaye on hold, Win focuses on two family-oriented goals: making Crewse Creamery a success and clearing her father’s name.

Ticks all the cozy boxes but sets none aflame.

Cats may have nine lives, but an animal rescuer has only one, and that one’s hanging by a thread.

Arriving at the home of Joe Hitch-cock, who’s adopting Maine coon cat Sheamus, Liz Denton finds that he’s not only been murdered, but has been revealed as someone else. The police inform her that he’s really Joseph Danvers, still a person of interest in the disappearance of his wife, Christine, 30 years ago. Although no body was ever found, racist bigot Harry Davis claimed to have seen Danvers with a body and a shovel. Liz is disturbed that her customary vet-ting of prospective adopters didn’t turn up the truth about Joe and nervous when someone in a brown sedan follows her home. She consults with her daughter, Amelia, who’s interning for Chester Chudzinski, a private eye who’d been trying to prove Joseph Danvers innocent of any crime before Joseph was driven from town by prejudice and finger-pointing. The case takes a major turn when Liz’s stalker turns out to be Joseph’s son, Erik Deavers, whose mother, Christine, changed her name when she skipped town already pregnant. Though she’d tried to find Joe after he changed his own name, she died without seeing him and always told Erik it was better if he didn’t know what had happened years before. On top of her fears about these investigations, Liz is frazzled when her nemesis, Courtney Shaw, another pet rescuer, dumps what she claims is a lost Chihuahua on her and stands by idly when the owner accuses Liz of stealing it. With her husband busy at his veterinary clinic and her son involved with the latest in a string of unsuitable girls, Liz works with Amelia to solve the case a killer doesn’t want solved.

Who can resist such charming pets and a mystery stuffed with so many suspects, even if it runs a mite too long?
quickly discerns that he was murdered. With five feet of snow predicted, there’s little time to figure out who killed private investigator Loomis Winslow or what happened to the people missing from a different abandoned car. Back at the hotel, Connie Mulroy asks Jessica for an autograph and invites her to join her group for dinner. Connie is the mother of the groom and part of the wedding party that is staying at the hotel, which, due to the storm, may be forced to provide the venue for the ceremony if the bride and groom ever arrive. When Connie barely survives a poisoning attempt at dinner, Jessica plunges into the affairs of her new acquaintance. All the suspects are friends or relatives, and there’s been no love lost between the families ever since Connie’s husband swindled the bride’s father out of a bundle before jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge. As the other guests are picked off one by one, Jessica’s usual lifelines remain too far away to help, and she must rely on her wits to survive.

A tense, complex, action-filled mystery with shoals of red herrings and plenty of surprises.

**DEAD WEST**
Goldman, Matt
Forge (320 pp.)
978-1-250-19734-2

Minneapolis investigator Nils Shapiro heads west for fun, sun, and murder. Beverly Mayer is used to getting what she wants, and what she wants from Nils is that he fly to Los Angeles and see if the sudden death of his grandson Ebben’s fiancée has jolted him into frittering away any more of his $50 million trust fund. Arriving in La La Land with Jameson White, the nurse practitioner he’s been nursing over a nervous breakdown, in time for Juliana Marquez’s memorial service, Nils learns that Ebben has used $1 million in seed money to persuade other investors to pony up the much larger sum needed to launch The Creative Collective, a cooperative that aims to fund artists without diverting any money to agents, producers, executives, or other bloodsuckers. By the time he’s persuaded himself that Ebben is displaying admirable moral and financial responsibility, Nils has already satisfied himself that Juliana was murdered, slipped a lethal dose of caffeine very likely intended for her intended. As one-eyed Russian stalker Vasily Zaytzev hovers menacingly in the background, Nils finds himself in the middle of a hilarious pitch meeting with Ebben’s current team—screenwriter Brit Dawsey, line producer Thom Burke, manager Debra Schmidt, and one-named agent Sebastiano—that could have come straight out of Get Shorty. Declining Ebben’s tearful request for him to stay in town and watch over him, Nils jets back to Minnesota to report to Beverly that she has nothing to fear except her grandson’s sudden death, but the urgent report of a second murder drags him back to hunker down until he ties up all the loose ends. Well, maybe not quite all of them.

A droll portrait of “a town where almost everything and everyone was for sale,” with felonies obbligato.
A spa trip takes a back seat to the investigation of a murder spree in a Mississippi town.

**THE DEVIL’S BONES**

**ARCHIE GOES HOME**  
Goldborough, Robert  
Mysterious Press (248 pp.)  
$16.99 paper | May 19, 2020  
978-1-948403-15-3

In Archie Goodwin’s 15th adventure since the death of his creator, Rex Stout, his gossipy Aunt Edna Wainwright lures him from 34th Street to his carefully unnamed hometown in Ohio to investigate the death of a well-hated bank president.

Tom Blankenship, the local police chief, thinks there’s no case since Logan Mulgrew shot himself. But Archie’s mother, Marjorie Goodwin, and Aunt Edna know lots of people with reason to have killed him. Mulgrew drove rival banker Charles Purcell out of business, forcing Purcell to get work as an auto mechanic, and foreclosed on dairy farmer Harold Mapes’ spread.

Lester Newman is convinced that Mulgrew murdered his ailing wife, Lester’s sister, so that he could romance her nurse, Carrie Yeager. And Donna Newman, Lester’s granddaughter, might have had an eye on her great-uncle’s substantial estate. Nor is Archie limited to mulling over his relatives’ gossip, for Trumpet reporter Verna Kay Padgett, whose apartment window was shot out the night her column raised questions about the alleged suicide, is perfectly willing to publish a floridly actionable summary of the leading suspects that delights her editor, shocks Archie, and infuriates everyone else. The one person missing is Archie’s boss, Nero Wolfe, and fans will breathe a sigh of relief when he appears at Marjorie’s door, decries Archie, notices a telltale clue, prepares dinner for everyone, sleeps on his discovery, and arranges a meeting of all parties in Marjorie’s living room in which he names the killer.

The parts with Nero Wolfe, the only character Goldborough brings to life, are almost worth waiting for.

**LITTLE ALTAR BOY**  
Guzlowski, John  
Kasva Press (322 pp.)  
$14.95 paper | May 21, 2020  
978-1-948403-15-3

A Chicago nun tells a cop she trusts that she witnessed a priest doing something wrong with an altar boy; when the nun is murdered, the case becomes complicated and political.

Detectives Hank Purcell and Marvin Bondarowicz know that Chicago in the 1960s is a tough town, and although it’s been a decade since they worked the case of dismembered bodies that Guzowski wrote about in *Suitcase Charlie* (2018), they still don’t hold out much hope that powerful, guilty parties will ever be held responsible. As they work the case, Hank especially is distracted because his 19-year-old daughter, Margaret, has gone missing after having gotten involved with drug-dealing hippies. The author, who grew up in Chicago, once again gets the period details right, from prejudices to politics. The dialogue, about as politically incorrect to modern ears as possible, is realistic, witty, and often bleak—these are tough guys, survivors of World War II, with little sympathy for anyone.

Readers who want a vivid portrait of an earlier time will find much to appreciate, but don’t look for optimism.

**THE DEVIL’S BONES**

Haines, Carolyn  
Minotaur (368 pp.)  
$26.99 | May 12, 2020  
978-1-250-25786-4

A spa trip takes a back seat to the investigation of a murder spree in a Mississippi town.

On a girls’ trip to George County, Sarah Booth Delaney and her friends Tinkie and Cece are prepared to do nothing but relax at the superexclusive Bexley B&B and spa. As if celebrating springtime weren’t enough of an excuse for a getaway for these longtime friends, Tinkie is finally pregnant after years of trying. But trouble follows Sarah Booth wherever she goes, and not just in the form of her ancestral home Dahlia House’s resident haint, Jitty, who’s enlivening Sarah Booth’s vacation by appearing in such varied guises as Persephone and Princess Di. Jitty’s spectral presence may be a warning of the danger that looms when lawyer Perry Slay is the first in what seems like a real pileup of deaths on the trip. The most likely culprit is bachelor pharmacist Erik Ward, who until now has been known as the town’s resident dreamboat. Sarah Booth’s own dreamboat—or, as she calls him, her lover—Sheriff Coleman Peters is back home in Sunflower County, but he may be worried enough to come help when she and Tinkie agree to explore Erik’s case in their roles as the Delaney Detective Agency. Who needs a spa day when Sarah Booth and Tinkie can catch a killer?

This Southern girl’s guide to murder and mayhem is good but not as snappy as it thinks it is.

**STREET MUSIC**

Hallinan, Timothy  
Soho Crime (384 pp.)  
$27.95 | May 12, 2020  
978-1-64129-123-1

Hallinan brings the Thailand-based adventures of expatriate travel writer Poke Rafferty to a close with this ninth installment, which, like so many of the first eight, bears its readers back to a heart-rending past.

Except for not sleeping more than two hours at a stretch, Rafferty’s living his best life as the father of a new baby. The
2-week-old, named both Frank (after Rafferty’s long-estranged father) and Arthit (after his old friend on the Bangkok police), is the subject of conversation everywhere Rafferty goes. Yet the plot seems determined to subordinate the baby and his mother, ex-Patpong dancer Rose, to the other members of his family. Rafferty himself is sucked into the disappearance of Vietnam veteran Bob Campeau, a barely with whom he’d recently traded words and blows. And the hitherto blank-slate early years of his adopted daughter, Miaow, absorbed by her infatuation with her schoolmate Edward, who’s to play Freddy Eynsford-Hill opposite her Eliza Doolittle in the school production of Pygmalion, turn out to be at the heart of Rafferty’s stalking by Hom, a mas-"anyone who will listen." Hee-and-more who’s been bullied into the job by a shadowy figure she thinks of as the Sour Man. The connection between Hom and the unsuspecting Rafferty is unfolded in a painfully extended flashback that emerges as the heart of the story and, in some ways, of the series as a whole.

Even fans accustomed to Hallinan’s lurid, compassion-ate view of Bangkok may have to fight back tears.

THE BUTCHER OF CASABLANCA
Hamdouchi, Abdellah
Trans. by Daniel, Peter
Hoopoe (248 pp.)
$16.95 paper | May 5, 2020
978-977-416-966-7

The head of Casablanca’s CID fights an epidemic of murders and dismem-berments that seem to be the work of more than one perp.

On his way to Marrakesh with his family to congratulate his daughter Atiqa and meet his latest grandchild, Mohamed Bineesa, universally known as Detective Hanash (which means “the Snake”), is yanked back home by an urgent call from no less than Mohamed Alami, chief of police. The remains a waste picker has found in two plastic bags at the bottom of a dumpster can’t be identified because they’re limited to “just the lower limbs…minus the genitalia.” Since the killer has left no physical evidence that might identify either himself (herself?) or the victim, Hanash and his squad are left waiting for the next move, which takes the form of another equally hor-rific murder, and another, and another. Every time the police succeed in wresting a clue from a new corpse, the crime at hand turns out to be the work of a copycat rather than the original killer, and at times it seems as if everyone in Morocco must be taking advantage of the well-publicized crime spree to rid them-selves of personal enemies. Resolving to overlook his daughter Manar’s budding romance with his right-hand man, Inspector Hamid, a good cop who drinks too much, Hanash eventually gets his perp. But it takes a long time (months, not pages), and the results are anything but satisfactory.

Notable for its glimpse of a world rarely presented in crime fiction and its refusal to offer the genre’s expected pleasures.

FROM THE GRAVE
Housewright, David
Minotaur (320 pp.)
$26.99 | May 19, 2020
978-1-250-21217-7

St. Paul private eye Rushmore McKenzie (Dead Man’s Mistress, 2019, etc.) gets a price put on his head by someone hot for revenge: a man he killed more than 20 years ago.

Psychics can see the future; mediums can contact the dead. Psychic medium Hannah Braaten is a double threat who can do both. At a reading attended by McKenzie’s childhood crush Shelby Dunston, Hannah reveals impossibly intimate personal details about half a dozen attend-ees before ending with a walloping climax: the news that Leland Hayes, whose armored-truck heist of $654,321 ended 22 years ago when McKenzie, hot in pursuit of the thief as a member of the force, shot him dead, is willing to tell his son and accom-plice, ex-con Ryan Hayes, where the money is if only Ryan will kill McKenzie. “Dead men do not talk from the grave,” McKenzie tells himself when he hears the news. “They certainly don’t arrange assassinations.” Even so, it’s a gorgeous setup, enriched even further by the entrance of up-and-coming psychic medium Kayla Janas, whose astral contacts lead Bobby Dunston to the body of missing housewife Ruth Nowak even though her read-ings aren’t quite as reliable as Hannah’s, maybe because she’s still a college freshman. As the two mediums angle to land a contract that will star them in Model Medium, a new TV series, McKenzie, Shelby, and Nina Truhler, his live-in lover, all worry that McKenzie’s own contract may be canceled. And evidently with reason: Shortly after he transfers the tracking device on his car to a pesky neighbor’s vehicle, that neighbor is found dead. McKenzie’s own contract may be canceled. And evidently with reason: Shortly after he transfers the tracking device on his car to a pesky neighbor’s vehicle, that neighbor is found dead. And there’s mounting evidence that the late Leland Hayes, whose armored-truck heist of $654,321 ended 22 years ago when McKenzie, hot in pursuit of the thief as a member of the force, shot him dead, is willing to tell his son and accom-plice, ex-con Ryan Hayes, where the money is if only Ryan will kill McKenzie. “Dead men do not talk from the grave,” McKenzie tells himself when he hears the news. “They certainly don’t arrange assassinations.” Even so, it’s a gorgeous setup, enriched even further by the entrance of up-and-coming psychic medium Kayla Janas, whose astral contacts lead Bobby Dunston to the body of missing housewife Ruth Nowak even though her read-ings aren’t quite as reliable as Hannah’s, maybe because she’s still a college freshman. As the two mediums angle to land a contract that will star them in Model Medium, a new TV series, McKenzie, Shelby, and Nina Truhler, his live-in lover, all worry that McKenzie’s own contract may be canceled. And evidently with reason: Shortly after he transfers the tracking device on his car to a pesky neighbor’s vehicle, that neighbor is found dead. And there’s mounting evidence that the late Leland Hayes, concerned that Ryan might not take up his deal, is offering it to “anyone who will listen.”

It’s a disappointment but not a surprise that the payoff doesn’t fulfill the promise of this premise. What could?

TO KILL A MOCKING GIRL
Kencaid, Harper
Crooked Lane (352 pp.)
$26.99 | May 12, 2020
978-1-64385-304-8

A suspect in the murder of a mean girl pairs with her cousin, a nun-in-training, to dig deeper into the suburban Virginia landscape.

Tricia Pemberley is not a nice girl. When bookbinder Quinn Caine runs into her soon after having returned to her hometown of Vienna, Virginia, Tricia reminds Quinn of how not nice she is by mock-ing Quinn’s German shepherd, Ruff Barker Ginsburg, before bragging about her latest news. Yes, Tricia has finally won
The murder of an Alaskan chef reveals that the friends who’d known him for years didn’t know him at all.

**MOUSE AND MURDER**

Logan, Elizabeth
Berkley Prime Crime (304 pp.)
$7.99 paper | May 5, 2020
978-0-593-10044-8

The murder of an Alaskan chef reveals that the friends who’d known him for years didn’t know him at all.

Charlie Cooke has taken over her mother’s diner in Elkview, where French-trained cook Oliver Whitestone has ruled for years. When he’s murdered shortly after a fight with Charlie over a menu change, she feels guilty and wants to help the local lawman, fondly called Trooper, uncover the killer. The Bear Claw is especially busy with tourists marooned by the weather, but all Charlie’s staff and friends pitch in, and reporter Chris Doucette, a buddy from high school, convinces Trooper that they can help with research. Evidently, everything they knew about Oliver was wrong, beginning with his name. He was abandoned as a child, survived a group-home fire, and has a sister, Kendra Burke, who lives in Anchorage and is reluctant to talk about Oliver except to admit that he was adopted. Sneaking into Oliver’s house, Charlie and Chris discover a well-hidden cookbook manuscript and other papers before Kendra chases them off. They realize that Oliver was hiding his identity and his background in an attempt to escape some mysterious danger. It seems that the only way to uncover the killer is to find out all they can about Oliver’s past and what he could have done that marked him for death.

Logan’s series kickoff is a mundane mix of simple mystery-mongering, food tips, and romance in a beautiful setting.

**THE STREEL**

Logue, Mary
Univ. of Minnesota (240 pp.)
$22.95 | May 12, 2020
978-1-5179-0859-1

Logue kicks off a new series with a compelling narrative of Irish immigration, determination, and murder in 1887. Fifteen-year-old Brigid Reardon and her 16-year-old brother, Seamus, reluctantly leave Ireland for the United States, forced out by the potato famine. At sea they meet Paddy and Billy Hennessy, who save Brigid from being raped by the steerage captain. Once they reach New York, the three boys take jobs with the railroad, and Brigid takes one at a boardinghouse. When the boys end up working a gold claim in Deadwood, Dakota Territory, Seamus sends Brigid money to go to St. Paul, where she takes up a much better position with the wealthy Hunt family, who treat her well. The son of the house, Charles Hunt, is strikingly attractive and dangerous to women, and his improper attentions force Brigid to seek a home with Seamus.
in Deadwood. After a harrowing trip, Brigid is welcomed by the boys, who share a house and work their claim when they aren't enjoying the pleasures of the town. Seamus introduces Brigid to his love, Lily, a street (or prostitute) whose beauty makes her wildly popular. On Christmas Eve, an exhausted Brigid bows out early from their party. While looking for firewood the next morning, she discovers Lily stabbed and partially covered by snow. Seamus is forced to run when Sheriff John Manning, who hates him, arrives along with Al Swearingen, Lily's boss, looking to arrest him for murder. Seamus escapes, leaving Brigid to seek evidence that will exonerate him while keeping house and even working at the mine. Deadwood is a wild amalgam of small businesses, hotels, theaters, and bars peopled by miners, whores, and a thriving Chinese community, all of which Brigid finds fascinating. When Charles shows up with an offer to buy the mining claim, life becomes exponentially more dangerous for her.

The easily solved mystery introduces a gritty, charming, clever protagonist whose musings provide a perfect period feel.

THE TALENTED MR. VARG
McCall Smith, Alexander
Pantheon (240 pp.)
$24.95 | Apr. 28, 2020
978-1-5247-4896-8

A second course of Nordic blanc for Ulf Varg and his colleagues in Malmö's Department of Sensitive Crimes. Now that uniformed officer Blomquist has been seconded to the DSC, Varg's regulars—Anna Bengsdotter, whom Ulf secretly pines for; Carl Holgersson; and Erik, the clerk who fishes whenever he's not maintaining the files—all appreciate his uncanny talent for intuiting the answers to the riddles that cross their desks. This time, Ulf will have his help in shadowing Anna's husband, anesthetist Jo Asplund, whom she suspects of cheating on her (if only he were, thinks Ulf mournfully). It's Ulf's neighbor and dog sitter, Agnes Högfors, who has the honor of figuring out who's blackmailing Nils Persson-Cederström, the Swedish Hemingway, whose partner Ulf has met in group therapy. Ulf thinks he's the one who'll have to decide what to do about a stolen Saab grille he's been presented with by grateful and a thriving Chinese community, all of which Brigid finds fascinating. When Charles shows up with an offer to buy the mining claim, life becomes exponentially more dangerous for her.

The easily solved mystery introduces a gritty, charming, clever protagonist whose musings provide a perfect period feel.

THE WAR WIDOW
Moss, Tara
Dutton (352 pp.)
$26.00 | May 5, 2020
978-0-593-18265-9

A fashionable Australian private eye finds herself embroiled in a difficult case just after World War II. As a war correspondent, Billie Walker witnessed some terrible things in Germany and still carries many burdens, including the disappearance of her journalist husband. Back home in Sydney, however, she has returned to full-time work as owner and investigator of a private inquiry agency she inherited from her late father. She even has Sam, a brave and affable secretary-cum-assistant, himself a former soldier. When a woman asks Billie to find her missing teenage son, clues lead to The Dancers, an elite club, and Georges Boucher, owner of an expensive auction house. It seems that an old family photo of a particular necklace is at the heart of the case, but who has taken Adin Brown, and to what end? At the same time, Billie's secret informant Shyla...
reports on a man in the country who has been mistreating girls. Of course, both cases are related, and the truth behind Adin's abduction, in a very Dashiell Hammett–like turn of events, involves Nazi war criminals, stolen treasures, and a prostitution ring. Billie is a smart, glamorous, kind, and well-turned-out woman, and her addition to the world of literary private detectives is welcome and deserved. She carries a bit of the hard-boiled tradition on her shoulders—the vulnerability, the brashness—while providing a completely feminine perspective on both the crimes and the approach to crime-solving. Moss clearly did a lot of research for the novel, including a great deal in fashion and sewing, so sometimes the details and descriptions can be lengthier than necessary, but gradually, as the pace picks up, these details serve to help us get to know the characters on multiple levels. The setting feels simultaneously familiar and exotic.

Neatly incorporates history, social commentary, and a satisfying mystery in one appealing package. More, please!

**GREAT LONESOME**

*John D. Nesbitt*

Five Star/Gale Cengage (246 pp.)

$25.95 | May 20, 2020

978-1-4328-6832-1

An aspiring Ohio transplant’s dream of owning his own spread in turn-of-the-century Wyoming is put on hold due to a series of inconvenient murders.

Earl Miner, who owns the Pick, makes no bones about insisting that every man who works for him file a claim to 160 acres under the Homestead Act and then sell it to him so he won’t be troubled by competing ranchers in the Decker Basin. As soon as cowpuncher Reese Hartley bridles at that arrangement, foreman Dick Prentiss gives him his walking papers, and Hartley packs his gear. Lacking any particular plan or destination, Hartley wanders off, encountering what seems to be virtually every woman in town: Pick hand Ben Deeley, an actor who claims to have some info on the case, Riley’s cerebral partner in investigations and thus Flick’s and Albert’s deaths. Even Riley Ellison has made no progress in pinning down the person or persons unknown responsible for either of the deaths. So when disgraced and incarcerated former Tuttle Corner Sheriff Joe Tackett claims to have some info on the case, Riley’s desperate to get him some sort of deal in exchange for what he knows. After all, Flick is the only one who believed that Albert Ellison’s death was murder, and Riley’s pretty sure that someone offed Flick because he was too close to the truth. What if the information Tackett has explains both Flick’s and Albert’s deaths? Even Will Holman, Riley’s cerebral partner in investigations and thus

**THE DOOM LIST**

*Gerard ODonovan*

Severn House (224 pp.)

$28.99 | Jun. 2, 2020

978-0-7278-8903-4

As Will H. Hays, the movie industry’s first censor, descends on 1922 Hollywood, Tom Collins, private eye to the stars, lands a second case in the scandal-ridden town.

With Hays newly arrived and sniffing around for blood, hot Metro director Rex Ingram, about to head east for the New York premiere of *The Prisoner of Zenda*, wants to do everything he can to make sure that Barbara La Marr, the star of his latest movie, *Black Orchids*, is squeaky clean. The trouble is that she isn’t. Ben Deedee, an actor who claims to be married to the bombshell actress, is suing her for divorce, and when she replies that their marriage was never legal because she hadn’t divorced his predecessor, his attorney offers to add bigamy to the suit. The timing couldn’t be worse, because inside La Marr’s glamorous costumes is a baby bump that Phil Olsen, of the *Los Angeles Herald*, or somebody else outside the studio is bound to notice any day now. Nor is La Marr the only performer subject to extortion. Ramon Samaniegos, a Metro contract player whose turn in *The Prisoner of Zenda* seems likely to launch him into stardom, is being blackmailed over the disappearance of the waiter Gianni, who was much more than a friend to the rising star. Meanwhile, an unidentified corpse lies cooling in the morgue after baking for weeks or months in the California sun. Could it be Gianni’s?

Silent-film buffs won’t care that there’s not much doom and more loose ends than a shoelace factory.

**THE FULL SCOOP**

*Jill Orr*

Prospect Park Books (280 pp.)

$25.95 | Jun. 9, 2020

978-1-945551-81-9

Getting to the roots of her grandfather’s death completes a multivolume arc for a small-town news reporter.

In the month following Hal Flick’s death during his investigation of her grandfather’s apparent suicide long ago, Riley Ellison has made no progress in pinning down the person or persons unknown responsible for either of the deaths. So when disgraced and incarcerated former Tuttle Corner Sheriff Joe Tackett claims to have some info on the case, Riley’s desperate to get him some sort of deal in exchange for what he knows. After all, Flick is the only one who believed that Albert Ellison’s death was murder, and Riley’s pretty sure that someone offed Flick because he was too close to the truth. What if the information Tackett has explains both Flick’s and Albert’s deaths? Even Will Holman, Riley’s cerebral partner in investigations and thus

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**KIRKUS.COM | MYSTERY | 15 MARCH 2020 | 49**
And since the outbreak is not caused by the usual polio virus but instead by a parvovirus, the team must consider a wide range of possible carriers, including starfish. When further tests reveal that the victims also carry Zika antibodies, the investigators ask that the more cautious of the pair, is in favor of striking a bargain with the ex-lawman. But things fall through when Riley’s ex, federal agent Jay Burman, quashes the deal. Instead of believing that Jay has at least the interests of justice at heart, maybe even her own interests, Riley resolves to work around his objections. After all, if Jay wanted to be involved with the investigation, he never should have left town (and her) for job opportunities in D.C. And Riley’s new quasi-boyfriend Ash Campbell is far more accommodating, though it’s not clear whether it’s because he cares or because he just isn’t paying attention. Perhaps the horoscope service Riley’s overly involved mother has subscribed her in will have the insight Riley doesn’t, though like the unveiling of the whodunit and whydunit of Flick’s and Albert’s deaths, it may just provide more fanfare without any underpinning.

A shift in tone produces something a little more murderous but a little less fun.

**BITTER PARADISE**

Infectious-disease specialist Pennie brews up a complicated medical mystery that puts a great many people in danger. Ontario Public Health epidemic investigator Dr. Zol Szabo’s teenage son, Max, and his friend Travis are getting their hair cut when someone enters the shop and attacks Marwan, one of the barbers. Hosam, another barber, is a Syrian refugee and experienced trauma surgeon whose considerable skills cannot save the savagely injured man. As Zol, and even Max and Travis, works feverishly with his fiancee, Natasha, another investigator, to find the source of a sudden outbreak of polio, Hosam, formerly a wealthy and respected doctor, struggles to raise the money to become a licensed Canadian physician. His wife, Leila, a dentist also barred from practicing legally in Canada, uses the money from the secret dental clinic for poor refugees she runs out of their garage to support the family while Flick’s and Albert’s deaths, in Canada, may just provide more fanfare without any underpinning.

A shift in tone produces something a little more murderous but a little less fun.

**ONE FATAL FLAW**

Rising barrister Daniel Pitt reluctantly accepts a case that entangles him with a professional adversary as formidable as he is unscrupulous.

Jessie Beale assures Daniel that despite all the evidence against him, her boyfriend, Rob Adwell, didn’t bludgeon Paddy Jackson, his sometime partner in crime, or set fire to the warehouse they’d planned to rob, the place where Paddy’s body was found. Desperate for an expert witness to refute the medical testimony, Daniel and Miriam fiord Croft, the daughter of his head of chambers, who’s partnered with him in two earlier cases, ask Sir Barnabas Saltram, the forensic pathologist who discouraged Miriam from pursuing her medical studies 20 years ago, to examine Jackson’s corpse, assuming that his nonpareil reputation will give whatever alternative theory of the crime he advances well-nigh irrefutable status. Their plan works all too well. Bolstered by Saltram’s testimony, Adwell is found not guilty, setting the stage for his own death in a remarkably similar arson two months later. Jessie Beale, who all but confesses her guilt to Daniel, smilingly tells him that Saltram’s testimony will surely get her off as well—especially since the distinguished expert couldn’t possibly refuse to testify, because that would indicate he had doubts about his theory of Rob Adwell’s death. Now Daniel labors to do everything he can to get his own client convicted while giving every public sign of mounting a vigorous defense. And the ancient case in which Saltram first proposed the theory Daniel used as Adwell’s brief offers still more twists before the curtain comes crashing down.

Reliable Edwardian legal suspense, liberally flavored with contemporary feminism, from an old pro.

**THE SHOOTING AT CHÂTEAU ROCK**

Bruno Courrèges investigates an insurance scam as languidly as only he can.

As chief of police for the town of St. Denis in the Dordogne, Bruno must investigate every complaint of every citizen, even when it isn’t clear that a crime has taken place. Still, as a citizen himself of that region of France he considers unrivaled in beauty, culture, and cuisine, his investigation into the death of the elderly farmer Driant at the urging of Driant’s son, Gaston, moves at a pace leisurely enough for him to spend the requisite time
cooking impossibly tender lamb shanks for a group of friends who gather for dinner each Monday night. Bruno does think it odd that Driant mortgaged his farm shortly before his death to buy an insurance policy that would have assured him a place at Château Marmont, a luxury retirement home, had he lived long enough to actually move in. But his probe must also leave time for al fresco dining with old friend and aging British rock star Rod Macrae and his soon-to-be ex-wife, Meghan, who are selling their pied-a-terre in France prior to the divorce. And of course, there’s the first mating of Bruno’s basset hound, Balzac, an event so momentous that he invites Isabelle, the love of his life, from Paris (which she will not leave to be with him and where he will not go to be with her) to watch. While waiting for the eventual crime to be solved, readers can revel in the wonders of the Dordogne, even if witnessing a doggie defloweration may be a bridge too far for some.

**Falling-off-the-bone French at its ne plus ultra.**

**SOUTHERN SASS AND A CRISPY CORPSE**

*Young, Kate*

Kensington (336 pp.)

$7.99 paper | May 26, 2020

978-1-4967-2147-1

A ghost, murders, and romantic anxiety keep a Georgia gal in a constant state of confusion.

After escaping an abusive marriage, Marygene Brown has returned to Peach Cove Island, where she and her sister, Jena Lynn, run the family diner. Marygene has inherited both her mama’s house and her specter, who gives her occasional tips and warnings. A nude early morning swim in the ocean is ruined when she’s apparently attacked by a burned corpse, an episode that earns her a scolding from Mama and Eddie Carter, the sheriff and her biological father. Marygene’s rocky romance with deputy Alex Myers is foundering over his flirting, and Eddie’s new hire, Javier Reyes, who’s also gone through a dramatic divorce, is ringing her chimes despite his cold demeanor and odd sense of humor. While catering a party, Marygene and her brother, Sam, find another crispy corpse in the cellar. Mama warns her that she must help Eddie solve the case, though the rules Mama must follow in order to finally move on prevent her from giving Marygene solid information. Reluctantly Marygene and her best friend, Betsy, whose Meemaw knows all about the island ghosts, decide to investigate. Once the corpses are finally identified, all roads lead back to the past, and Marygene uncovers family secrets that are deeply disturbing.

Plenty of red herrings and a touch of the paranormal add zip to this entertaining cozy.

**URANUS**

*Bova, Ben*

Tor (384 pp.)

$27.99 | May 19, 2020

978-1-250-29654-2

For nearly 30 years, Bova has been exploring the solar system in his Grand Tour novels; this entry is the first of an Outer Planets trilogy.

Through the series, certain themes tend to recur — there are alien life-forms, environmentalists battling wealthy industrialists, scientists
clashing with religious fundamentalists—but not here. Of conditions on Earth we learn only that there’s still much poverty and hardship and, jarringly, no shortage of well-funded scientists eager to jaunt off to remote planets. An idealist, the Rev. Kyle Umber has commissioned a huge habitat orbiting Uranus to accommodate disadvantaged folk from Earth. He offers education, employment, and, optionally, religion. One such refugee, the beautiful prostitute Raven Marchesi, seizes the opportunity and soon finds herself working for astronomer Tómas Gomez, who wants to know why Uranus’ hidden ocean is lifeless. But Raven is determined to snuggle up to the habitat’s moneybags sponsor, Evan Waxman. Big mistake: Waxman’s idealism is just a cover for narcotics manufacture and distribution. Unfortunately, it doesn’t feel like we’re a very long way from Earth or that there’s a large and extremely peculiar planet nearby—the habitat could be parked anywhere. In plotting and development, the book is just as formulaic as it sounds. Take a well-meaning but deluded religious leader, a former sex worker, an obsessive scientist, and a criminal lurking behind a mask of riches. Stir.

Decant. Decorate with froth about ancient aliens. Work it through to an unsurprising conclusion.

Bland.

**MAKER’S CURSE**

Canavan, Trudi

Orbit/Little, Brown (544 pp.)

$28.00 | May 19, 2020

978-0-316-42120-1

Wrapping up the Millennium’s Rule fantasy series, although the outcome dangles just enough for sequels.

Again, the narrative alternates between two points of view. Sorcerer Riele the Maker, with her uniquely potent ability to create new magic, has been tasked by the Restorers to fill “dead” worlds with new magic. But when the Restorers’ leader, Bahuka, asks her to take sides in an alarming dispute between two competing worlds, she refuses. Meanwhile, Tyen, one of the most powerful sorcerers in existence, needs to research ways to defeat the magic-powered war machines that are fast becoming a major problem among the many worlds linked by magical pathways. Hoping to take charge of the failing, hidebound school on his magic-depleted home world, he asks Riele to flood the world with new magic. All this trundles along, preceded by detailed recaps of and updates to prior events and interspersed with Riele’s musings or Tyen’s bureaucratic wrangles. Finally, the story gets going when the sorcerer Dahli, once a ruthless opponent, now a trusty ally—maybe—shows up to report overwhelming attacks by a new generation of magic robots: onslaughts that leave entire worlds empty of humans, depleted of magic, and dedicated solely to manufacturing new robot hordes. Renegade sorcerers are working for whomever’s directing them. Worse, young Zeke, a talented machine designer and Tyen’s protégé, has been captured and enslaved. Yet the plot still tends to meander around minor characters of faint charm and scant importance to the main thread. And the existential threat never really persuades—the good guys just seem too confident, the machines aren’t particularly baleful, the villains lack incentive. So the conclusion boils up nicely yet doesn’t fully deliver on the potential displayed in the earlier books.

An agreeable conclusion to a worthy but not outstanding series.
In the conclusion of Miller's Unraveled Kingdom trilogy, revolution has become war, and all wars must end—even when the rules of war are changing due to magic.

Sophie Balstrade's once-simple life as a seamstress and crafter of simple charms is a thing of the past. Now she is a feared sorceress, wielding the curse magic she once dreaded to bring misfortune and sickness down on Royalist troops. As part of a people's uprising, Sophie fights alongside her revolutionary brother, Kristos, and her betrothed, Theodore—once the crown prince and now a reluctant rebel general. With allies both old and new, they battle for a better world, but as the body count rises, Sophie must wrestle with the consequences of her own contributions. She has pioneered magic as a battlefield weapon, and war will never be the same. And, as the political and the personal, contrasting Sophie's internal conflicts with clever details, like vizglasses that transmit what people see even when the rules of war are changing due to magic.

In the Interdependency—Nadashe now seeks the throne for herself. Meanwhile, Cardenia's lover, the Flow physicist Lord Marce Claremont, attempts to devise a scientific solution to the Flow collapse, unaware that Cardenia is hiding vital data from him. And the clever but hot-tempered Lady Kiva Lagos attempts to spy on Nadashe in hopes of defusing the coup, but she may have gotten herself in too deep this time. Scalzi treads a delicate line here: He set out to chart an apocalypse, and a deus ex machina would be cheating. The book also serves as an acknowledgment that intelligence and good intentions are not an impregnable armor against venality and the pitiless laws of physics. (In addition to slowing down Scalzi's writing—something he acknowledges in an afterword—the current sociopolitical situation in the U.S. has clearly flavored the story.) Given those parameters, Scalzi plays fair while still offering his readers some hope. And even when depicting the direst situations, Scalzi's work retains its snarky cheer.

**Punchy, plausible, and bittersweet; studded with zingers until the very last line.**
to a computer, “frozen synth shrimp from Tennessee,” and “freegans...living off a dying society’s leftovers.” With the success of this bot, many copies will follow; all learning quickly, all subordinate to their humans.

The FBI’s bots are a great premise for a series. Just keep those suckers away from Putin.

ROMANCE

NOT THAT KIND OF GUY
Christopher, Andie J.
Jove/Penguin (336 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Apr. 14, 2020
978-1-9848-0270-5

A romantic comedy with plot elements from The Proposal and Crazy Rich Asians.

Bridget Nolan, an assistant state’s attorney in Chicago, is “supersmart, no bullshit, and hard as nails.” Raised by her South Side Irish dad and older brothers after her mom abandoned the family, she is totally focused on prosecuting sexual assault cases and crimes against children. She reluctantly agrees to take on Chicago law student Matt Kido as a summer intern only because his connections might secure her a fellowship that would pay her student loans. Matt’s family is politically connected (his grandfather was a senator from Hawaii) and wealthy, which is why they are shocked when he turns down a cushy associate position to intern with the state. Matt is more keen to avoid his cheating ex and defy his parents’ expectations than to be a public servant, but one look at Bridget and he’s smitten. The attraction is mutual, so when the internship ends, Bridget invites Matt to her brother’s wedding in Vegas, the better to show up her jerk of an ex-boyfriend, who will also be there. They end up getting drunk and married, having sex, and then deciding to stay together to piss off their relatives until the state allows them to divorce. Along the way, they banter, have sex, and fall in love, which scares Bridget: “If she couldn’t make the necessary compromises for [her ex], who had grown up the same way she had, what hope did she have with someone like Matt? Matt lived in a whole other stratosphere.” While Bridget’s ballsy prosecutor persona is described rather than illustrated, she and her family are, on balance, fully developed characters, and readers of Not the Girl You Marry (2019), the first book in the series, will find their return very welcome. Except for his infatuation with Bridget, Matt is underdeveloped, and his ambivalent feelings about his family’s wealth wear somewhat thin. His disapproving Japanese American mother and blonde, rich, pouty ex-girlfriend are caricatures.

Plenty of humor and a great heroine are pluses in this unevenly paced romance.

BEACH READ
Henry, Emily
Jove/Penguin (384 pp.)
$16.00 paper | May 19, 2020
978-1-9848-0673-4

Two struggling authors spend the summer writing and falling in love in a quaint beach town.

January Andrews has just arrived in the small town of North Bear Shores with some serious baggage. Her father has been dead for a year, but she still hasn’t come to terms with what she found out at his funeral—he had been cheating on her mother for years. January plans to spend the summer cleaning out and selling the house her father and “That Woman” lived in together. But she’s also a down-on-her-luck author facing writer’s block, and she no longer believes in the happily-ever-after she’s made the benchmark of her work. Her steady dwindling bank account, though, is a daily reminder that she must sell her next book, and fast. Serendipitously, she discovers that her new next-door neighbor is Augustus Everett, the darling of the literary fiction set and her former college rival/crush. Gus also happens to be struggling with his next book (and some serious trauma that unfolds throughout the novel). Though the two get off to a rocky start, they soon make a bet: Gus will try to write a romance novel, and January will attempt “bleak literary fiction.” They spend the summer teaching each other the art of their own genres—January takes Gus on a romantic outing to the local carnival; Gus takes January to the burned-down remains of a former cult—and they both process their own grief, loss, and trauma through this experiment. There are more than enough steamy scenes to sustain the slow-burn romance, and smart commentary on the placement and purpose of “women’s fiction” joins with crucial conversations about mental health to add multiple intriguing layers to the plot.

A heartfelt look at taking second chances, in life and in love.

THE MONEY MAN
Herkness, Nancy
Montlake Romance (270 pp.)
$12.95 paper | Apr. 14, 2020
978-1-5420-0016-1

A high-finance dreamboat and a mousy bookkeeper become entangled in a white-collar mystery.

Alice Thurber is known for her thoroughness with numbers, finding comfort in their dependability after having grown up in financial uncertainty. But when she takes a chance on a new bookkeeping software, the accounts of several of her clients start coming up short, so Alice takes advantage of a free service for small businesses from KRG Consulting Group. Derek Killion, a co-founder of KRG, is riding high after having secured a large
international partnership, but his pet project is their new Small Business Initiative. When Alice comes to him with her problem, he assumes he’ll find the solution in a matter of minutes. Instead, Derek is stumped, causing him to work a bit more closely with shy, self-conscious Alice. Soon, they’re uncovering the origins of Alice’s shady bookkeeping software, with its links to Russian programmers, which feels depressingly close to today’s news cycle. Alice is living a Cinderella story: Ever since her parents underestimated her looks and her dreams when she was young, she’s been full of self-doubt, which permeates every interaction she has with Derek, plus there are clear class differences between her and her Prince Charming. It quickly becomes pitiable to see Alice view the world with such an overwhelmingly negative light. The romance is fine but stilted due to oddly placed information dumps about people like computer pioneer Ada Lovelace and outdated pop-culture references to American Graffiti and The Music Man. The suspense elements are the most interesting part of the book, given their plausibility, but they feel more carefully thought-out than the characters’ actual chemistry.

**A middling romance that fails its suspenseful setup.**

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**HEIRESS FOR HIRE**
Hunter, Madeline
Zebra/Kensington (336 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Apr. 28, 2020
978-1-4201-4997-5

An unexpected heiress finds love with the nephew of her benefactor as they both investigate the death that brought them together.

After an eccentric duke dies, his family unhappy discovers that his estate has been bequeathed to three unknown ladies in this series opener. Chase Radnor doesn’t believe his uncle’s death was an accident. Minerva Hepplewhite, one of the new heiresses, is on his list of suspects. The unanticipated fortune means Minerva can finally start her investigation business, Hepplewhite’s Office of Discreet Inquiries, and she decides to become her own first client. She wants to uncover the truth about the duke’s death and her connection to him before someone goes digging too much into her past and reopens the case of her abusive husband’s murder five years ago. Chase doesn’t trust this woman who keeps showing up in his path, yet he’s captivated by her. Minerva thought her husband forever ruined her appetite for intimacy, but Chase is reawakening long-buried yearnings. They know an alliance is a bad idea, but since they are working on the same case, perhaps they could share some information, and a few kisses, with each other. The romance is a slow burn for the first half as the pair learn to develop trust, though their hunter is sharp and exciting, and it’s the mysteries surrounding the dead duke and both Minerva’s and Chase’s pasts that propel the plot forward more than the romance. Unfortunately, the anticlimactic resolutions of these mysteries undermine the satisfying relationship at the end.

**Fun but ultimately underwhelming.**

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**REAL MEN KNIT**
Jackson, Kwani
Jove/Penguin (336 pp.)
$16.00 paper | May 19, 2020
978-1-9848-0650-5

Four brothers must decide whether or not to close the Harlem yarn shop they inherited after the sudden death of their mother, Mama Joy; a neighborhood legend.

Jesse Strong would say he’s laid back, but his brothers believe he lacks ambition and focus. When the four of them have a hard conversation about the future of the shop, Jesse surprises himself and his brothers by insisting he can be trusted to keep their mother’s dream alive. When he decides to reorganize and refresh the store before a grand reopening, Jesse turns to Kerry Fuller, a longtime store employee, to help him learn the ins and outs of the business. Author Jackson reveals the important role the shop plays in the community—especially for one boy who’s being bullied—and elaborates on the value of handcrafts. Meanwhile, Kerry is in a professional holding pattern. Although she hopes to finally land a full-time position at the local community center, she agrees to continue working in the shop to help Jesse learn the yarn business. Kerry is stuck emotionally, too—she’s had a long-time crush on Jesse but didn’t think she had a chance with him after years of being relegated to the friend zone. Jackson makes an unusual choice to delay the development of the romance between Jesse and Kerry for so long; in fact, Jesse is involved in a casual relationship with another woman for more than half the book. Unfortunately, the gamble doesn’t pay off. There isn’t much tension or chemistry between Kerry and Jesse—just vague feelings of longing—and the pacing of their romance ends up being rushed and incomplete.

**A heartwarming story about family and community that might disappoint readers looking for a stronger romance.**

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**ISLAND AFFAIR**
Oliveras, Priscilla
Zebra/Kensington (304 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Apr. 28, 2020
978-1-4201-5017-9

A social media influencer asks a firefighter to pretend to be her boyfriend during a stressful family vacation in Key West.

Sara Vance is panicked. She arrived in Florida for a weeklong family vacation only to be stood up by the man she’d been casually dating. Her mother is in recovery from a recent bout with cancer, and this vacation was supposed to help knit her fractured family closer together. Sara is the youngest sibling and an underachiever—her parents and both siblings are high-powered doctors—and
Sara worries that being dumped will either make her the butt of the family’s jokes or cause her mom to worry. Enter kind, handsome Key West firefighter Luis Navarro. Luis has an unplanned week of vacation; his captain insisted he take time off to get his emotional bearings after handling a particularly gruesome car accident. After meeting a distressed Sara when she arrives in Key West, he agrees to play the part of her boyfriend—anything to avoid his own feelings and family dramas. The story’s opening is tight and compelling, but the middle section drifts by without much conflict, just Sara and Luis ruminating about past mistakes and marveling at how easy it is to be together. The Key West setting is lovingly portrayed, showing how local families struggle with the rising costs of living on an island paradise. Also notable: Sara is in recovery from an eating disorder she developed in college, and the book carefully portrays her determination to implement her therapist’s advice and avoid triggers, all while refusing to succumb to her family’s overbearing concern. Oliveras has a gift for showcasing how new lovers navigate introducing romantic partners to their families. Eventually, the plot snaps together and Luis and Sara realize they are stronger together than apart.

Two good people find love in this emotional, slow-burn romance.

**FIRST COMES SCANDAL**

Quinn, Julia

Avon/HarperCollins (84 pp.)

$7.99 paper | Apr. 21, 2020

978-0-06-295616-3

A man studying to be a doctor in Edinburgh is called home to England to marry a neighbor in trouble.

When Nicholas Rokesby receives a letter from his father ordering him to immediately return to the family home in Kent, he obeys the summons, fearing that some disaster has befallen the family. When he arrives, he’s informed that his neighbor and lifelong friend, Georgiana Bridgerton, was kidnapped a month earlier by a man hoping to force her into marriage. Georgie freed herself, but she’s pronounced “ruined” by society rather than being celebrated for her quick thinking and bravery. Nicholas’ father informs him that he can save Georgie by offering for her hand in marriage; otherwise, her only choices are to live as a spinster or to marry the cad who kidnapped her. Unfortunately, Quinn’s witty dialogue isn’t enough to hide the fact that there’s very little conflict or plot in the novel. The setup leans heavily on the “friends to lovers” trope but doesn’t invest any time developing the couple’s past. They are two nice people in their mid-20s who agree to marry out of duty and deference to society’s rules. More detailed attention is given to Georgie’s plan to make a rope hammock to soothe her yowling cat during a carriage ride than to her and Nicholas’ development as a married couple. Georgie’s character might frustrate modern readers. Her ingenuity is often highlighted—she escapes from her kidnapper, has her own interests, and verbalizes her frustrations with how society treats women unfairly—but she’s also strangely passive, happily serving as Nicholas’ nurse rather than pursuing her own interests in medicine. Die-hard readers of this Bridgerton prequel series are likely to enjoy the book as fan service, with glimpses of beloved characters from the original series appearing as children.

A lukewarm romance for series fans only.

**A TASTE OF SAGE**

Santos, Yaffa S.

Harper/HarperCollins (304 pp.)

$15.99 paper | May 19, 2020

978-0-06-297484-6

When Dominican chef Lumi Santana’s unconventional restaurant fails, she takes a job as sous chef at traditional French outpost DAX, owned by the acerbic Julien Dax.

Julien is presented as a Gordon Ramsay type who cuts an intimidating figure in the kitchen. But though Julien ejects a customer who deigns to ask for ketchup and fires a cook who ruins some expensive dried meat, Santos never fully captures either his bark or his bite. And although Lumi is a more fully realized character, she still suffers from a lack of a strong plot to support her. Santos writes the kitchen staff as friendly and Julien as sarcastic and nit-picky but affable. Most disappoiting, the romance between Lumi and Julien is completely unearned. The two spend a minimal amount of time together before falling head over heels, so when both claim an intense and life-altering attraction, there is little evidence to support it. Several underdeveloped and unnecessary side plots (a disgruntled chef, an obsessive secretary) take needed time away from cultivating a real romantic connection between the main characters. It’s clear that Santos is as proud of her Dominican heritage as she is passionate about food—when she shares the beauty of her culture (a thread of magical realism runs through the text in Lumi’s ability to taste emotions in food) and lushly describes Lumi’s culinary creations, the passages shine. But these brief moments are not enough to save the uneven writing and thin plot.

This dish sounds good on the menu but ultimately fails a taste test.
A sparkling debut with vibrant characters, a compelling Hollywood studio setting, and a sweet slow-burn romance.

**SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT**

Wilsner, Meryl

Berkley (336 pp.)

$16.00 paper | May 26, 2020

978-0-593-10252-7

A successful showrunner and her capable assistant reassess their relationship when their red carpet appearance fuels dating rumors in Wilsner’s debut.

Jo Jones has been a Hollywood star since the age of 13. Now a powerhouse showrunner, she’s about to be tapped to write and produce for a James Bond–esque action franchise. Already facing industry skepticism thanks to her gender, the last thing Jo needs is gossip, but that’s what she gets when she brings her much younger assistant, Emma Kaplan, to a red carpet event. Emma failed out of film school five years ago, and while she’s happy working for Jo, she yearns to get back on a directing path. As Jo and Emma face fallout from the rumor mill, their relationship evolves. They open up to each other, Emma sharing her dreams, and Jo, ordinarily unflappable, admitting some self-doubt. Their mutual attraction is strong throughout, but their age difference and employer-employee relationship create caution, which turns this into a very slow burn. Jo worries about how their relationship will appear: “You think people don’t look at pictures of us and think I’m corrupting this lovely young lady? I’m a predatory lesbian in the middle of a midlife crisis.” Jo, who is Chinese American, had to be strong to survive in show business, and she has a hard time with feelings, her own or anyone else’s. The novel is populated with strong secondary characters who bring Jo and Emma to life. Emma’s Judaism in particular is thoughtfully integrated into her character. Wilsner’s writing is matter-of-fact but effective, lending the novel a believable Hollywood insider vibe with a deftly handled #MeToo subplot.

A sparkling debut with vibrant characters, a compelling Hollywood studio setting, and a sweet slow-burn romance.
THE BIRD WAY
A New Look at How
Birds Talk, Work, Play,
Parent, and Think
Ackerman, Jennifer
Illus. by Burgoyne, John
Penguin Press (368 pp.)
$28.00 | May 5, 2020
978-0-7352-2301-1

The author of The Genius of Birds
returns with an exploration of “surpris-
ing and sometimes alarming behavior” of everyday avian activity.

Science journalist Ackerman showcases various aspects of
typical bird activity—communicating, working, playing, parent-
ing—that have been “dismissed as anomalies or set aside as
abiding mysteries.” In reexamining these behaviors, scientists
have been able to identify “remarkable strategies and intelli-
gence underlying these activities, abilities we once considered
uniquely our own,” including deception, kidnapping, infanti-
cide, cooperation, collaboration, altruism, and culture. Extreme
behavior reveals insights and new perspectives on birds’ adap-
tation abilities and flexibility of mind. Ackerman is a smooth
writer; her presentation of ideas is deft, and her anecdotes are
consistently engaging. She demonstrates that birds’ novel or
seemingly eccentric behaviors are often clever strategies rooted
in evolutionary wisdom as well as complex cognition in differ-
ent contexts, such as decision-making, finding patterns, and
planning for the future. It is becoming increasingly evident
that bird vocalization postures express emotions, convey intent,
and signal a range of social purposes—e.g., sharing information,
negotiating boundaries, influencing behavior. And some bird
species “are not just memorizing complex signals but rather
applying a generalized grammatical ordering rule to decode
messages.” Ackerman demonstrates bird science as an evolving
discipline that is consistently fascinating, and she offers brilli-
ant discussions of the use of smell, long overlooked but indeed
deployed for navigation; courtship signals; predator avoidance,
and, not surprisingly, locating food. There is a captivating sec-
tion on birds working in concert with ants in foraging as well as
an examination of the mean tricks of parasitic chicks and
particularly aggressive species. Cowbirds, for example, often
show “mafia-like tactics,” and they are “so good [at what they
do] that they appear to be contributing to the demise of dozens
of already troubled North American songbird species on the
brink of extinction from habitat degradation.”

A brightly original book sure to please any nature
lover.

These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

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THE NEW ONE by Mike Birbiglia with J. Hope Stein ..................... 64
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MAGDALENA
River of Dreams
Davis, Wade
Knopf (432 pp.)
$30.00 | Apr. 14, 2020
978-0-375-41099-4

A story of Colombia
WADE DAVIS
A raw and eloquently unflinching memoir.

GOOD MORNING, DESTROYER OF MEN’S SOULS

HELL AND OTHER DESTINATIONS
A 21st-Century Memoir
Albright, Madeleine
Harper/HarperCollins (400 pp.)
$29.99 | Apr. 14, 2020
978-0-06-280225-5

The former secretary of state reflects on the world that has emerged since she left office in 2001.

Following her previous memoir, Madam Secretary, and particularly the self-explanatory Fascism: A Warning (2018), Albright begins by confessing that the end of her tenure as secretary of state found her “a little overcooked.” She was worn out, frazzled, and out of shape from too little home cooking and not enough exercise. Yet, she allows, she didn’t want to retire, so, after ceding her post to Colin Powell, she examined her options: write a memoir, hit the lecture circuit, teach, establish “a small consulting firm, run primarily by women.” Never one to shy away from the controversial, complex, or incendiary, Albright expresses past and present frustrations with record label melodrama, the importance of continuing conversations about sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, government oppression, and attacks on LGBTQ rights worldwide. A section on 9/11 comes into vivid focus when Amos describes an eerie walk through a muted Manhattan as “the drums of war had begun beating.” She continues, “as I write these words all these years later, we are still at war—in that very same war.” In addition to her politically charged thoughts, the author reflects poignantly on the end-of-life care and eventual loss of her mother, which occurred while she was writing this book. The concluding chapters address her grief and how she has been processing this absence by manifesting her beloved mother’s influence through prose and music. Though the narrative structure is haphazard, the result, nevertheless, is a dramatically inspired volume of lyrics and legacy, presenting Amos as an artist, an activist, and a sharp, thoughtful musician with a commanding voice.

A profound autobiographical playlist and radically political call to action primarily for Amos fans.

RESISTANCE
A Songwriter’s Story of Hope, Change, and Courage
Amos, Tori
Atria (288 pp.)
$26.00 | May 5, 2020
978-1-9821-0415-3

The inimitable musician memorializes her artistic journey through music and activism.

With great conviction, Amos believes “we are all confronting dark forces that aim to divide us as a world, as countries, as people, as artists, as creators.” This book is rooted in motivated political resistance and the preservation of artistic expressionism. As a 40-year veteran of the music industry, the author acknowledges pivotal moments throughout her career and lets her song lyrics shine at the beginning of each chapter. Amos begins with “Gold Dust,” reflecting back on her teenage self and the creative impulses that guided her as a young artist and a rising social and human rights activist. The author discusses how the “weight of processing conflict” fueled the writing of her hit “Little Earthquakes” and how the 2017 song “Bang” was intended to energize advocates of true democracy after Donald Trump’s Muslim ban. Never one to shy away from the controversial, complex, or incendiary, Amos expresses past and present frustrations with record label melodrama, and the importance of continuing conversations about sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, government oppression, and attacks on LGBTQ rights worldwide. A section on 9/11 comes into vivid focus when Amos describes an eerie walk through a muted Manhattan as “the drums of war had begun beating.” She continues, “as I write these words all these years later, we are still at war—in that very same war.” In addition to her politically charged thoughts, the author reflects poignantly on the end-of-life care and eventual loss of her mother, which occurred while she was writing this book. The concluding chapters address her grief and how she has been processing this absence by manifesting her beloved mother’s influence through prose and music. Though the narrative structure is haphazard, the result, nevertheless, is a dramatically inspired volume of lyrics and legacy, presenting Amos as an artist, an activist, and a sharp, thoughtful musician with a commanding voice.

A profound autobiographical playlist and radically political call to action primarily for Amos fans.
I've never been much of a cook, but I love to eat. Oddly enough, even though I rarely cook anything that doesn't involve the microwave, I also love cookbooks, cooking shows, and reading about nearly anything food related. This March features five particularly intriguing books, each offering a distinct perspective on the world of food.

Mark Bittman and David L. Katz, *How To Eat* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, March 3): In this straightforward, practical guide, two noted food experts answer a wide variety of questions about eating habits. Along the way, they dispel a number of myths (e.g., the concept of superfoods) and emphasize the importance of eating locally and avoiding processed foods. As our reviewer writes, “they deal with debates over questions such as eating eggs, avoiding foods that cause inflammation, adding probiotics to one's diet, using artificial sweeteners, getting enough antioxidants, and whether to take vitamin and mineral supplements, which “should be supplements to a good diet, not substitutes for one.”

Teresa Lust, *A Blissful Feast* (Pegasus, March 3): A pleasing “combination of a culinary travel adventure and a search for the author's Italian family's home cooking,” Lust's memoir smoothly incorporates elements of gastronomic history and family lore, resulting in a delicious portrait of Italy and its abundant gustatory pleasures. It's a fascinating journey into rustic, regional dishes that will have readers salivating for their own adventure through the endlessly vibrant world of Italian cooking. "For foodies," writes our reviewer, "Lust hits all the right notes; she demonstrates abundant love and respect for the food and the people dedicated to making it right," delivering "an exploratory, celebratory memoir that elevates family repasts."

Ben Katchor, *The Dairy Restaurant* (Schocken, March 10): Katchor, a MacArthur fellow who teaches illustration at the Parsons School of Design, brings his considerable cartooning talent to this gorgeous tribute to a unique element of New York City's rich culinary history: "cafes, cafeterias, buffets, milk halls, lunch counters, diners, delicatessens, and, especially, dairy restaurants, a favorite destination among New York Jews, which Katchor remembers from his wanderings around the city as a young adult." The book is not just visually beautiful across each vivid page; it is a consistently informative piece of historical excavation informed by the author's meticulous research via "menus, memoirs, telephone directories, newspaper ads, fiction, and food histories." It would make a perfect gift for any foodie interested in the intersection of Jewish culture and NYC food.

Victoria James, *Wine Girl* (Ecco/HarperCollins, March 24): In 2013, James won the Sud de France Sommelier Challenge, the first American to do so, and at age 21, she was the youngest certified sommelier. But this book isn't a mere celebration of wine. The author's story is deeper, as she "endured a tumultuous upbringing due to an absent mother and an alcoholic father as well as verbal and sexual abuse from customers." Even after finding success in the world of fine dining, she couldn't escape the misogyny that permeated the restaurant business. So she set off to learn in the vineyards of France, discovering her purpose. Though "many of the details James shares about her experiences are disturbing and graphic in nature...her story also exudes warmth as she breezily weaves in her knowledge and passion for wine and shares the generous love she has for her siblings, friends, and husband."

Thom Eagle, *First, Catch* (Grove, March 10): This is one for true food geeks. Eagle, a London-based chef, digs deep into the "craft, chemistry, and cultural history of cooking and the 'inexorable currents of history and economics' that influence taste." From the absolute necessity of salt in the process of bringing out flavor to the mechanics of following a recipe—or not, since, as he writes, cooking is "a work in progress, one outcome of a long, silent conversation between cook and cooked”—Eagle takes readers on a graceful, beguiling journey. —E.L.

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.
son. Yet despite her good fortune, the author could not “out- 
run my own sadness,” much of which stemmed from witness-
ning people she loved struggle with addiction and codependence.
Diagnosed with both major depressive disorder and dysthymia,
she found herself forced to confront the fact that marriage 
had transformed “hot, young, carefree love” into a prison. As 
she desperately attempted to understand and embrace her 
life, K suddenly reappeared, this time on Facebook, and they 
began a friendship that quickly developed into an affair. Dis-
covering she was pregnant, Aron tried and ultimately failed to 
reconcile with her husband. She and K then began a relation-
ship in which she soon found herself not only fighting with him 
about substance abuse problems, but sometimes partaking in 
and even funding K’s addictions. Interwoven throughout with 
meditations on desire, caretaking, and the role of early femi-
nists like Carrie Nation in the modern temperance movement, 
the narrative offers dramatic and compelling insight into Aron’s 
struggles with codependency as it complicates the relationship 
among femininity, feminism, and enabling. 

A raw and eloquently unflinching memoir.

DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN
The 1948 Election and the 
Battle for America’s Soul
Baime, A. J.
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (432 pp.)
$30.00 | Jun. 2, 2020
978-1-328-58506-6

An absorbing chronicle of the months leading up to the extraordinary 
1948 presidential election.

In this insightful look at the players and issues that dominated the campaign, Baime, whose previous book was The Accidental President: Harry S. Truman and the Four Months That Changed the World (2017), focuses on the years following Franklin Roosevelt’s death in 1945, leading to Truman’s surprising triumph in the 1948 election. Without downplaying the seriousness of the postwar problems confronting the new president, the author pays particular attention to how they affected his chances for election given his opponents on both the left and 
the right. These included Henry Wallace, FDR’s one-time vice 
vice president, who ran as a Progressive candidate in the 1948 elec-
tion; Strom Thurmond, founder of the States’ Rights Democratic 
Party (popularly known as the Dixiecrats); and Thomas Dewey, 
the popular New York governor and Truman’s main rival. Truman 
had some unfortunate stumbles in his first years as president, and 
seemingly everyone—including his wife and daughter—believed 
that he could never actually win a presidential election. “To err 
is Truman” was a “popular quip” at the beginning of his presi-
dency. Compounding his woes, Republicans won both houses in 
the 1946 midterm by a landslide. However, despite his hostility 
to what he called the “Do-Nothing Congress,” he passed major 
bills like the Marshall Plan and championed civil rights legis-
lation, which so infuriated the South that many switched allegiance 
to the Dixiecrats. In 1948, Truman’s name was purposely left off 
the ballot in Alabama. Baime engagingly chronicles how Tru-
man campaigned vigorously and creatively. Each speech on his 
whistle-stop tours was tailored to his audience; a documentary, The Truman Story, and a comic-book version of his biography 
were released in October 1948; and Eleanor Roosevelt gave a 
stump speech that was broadcast on radio to the entire nation. 
There were TV and newspaper ads as well.

Even readers familiar with Truman’s presidency will 
be engaged by the story of the campaign that came before.
A welcome addition to the literature of the Shoah and of anti-Nazi resistance.

THE LIGHT OF DAYS

Recognizing the impact that journalists made on shaping public opinion, Demetracopoulos was determined to join their ranks. By the time he was 21, he had gained a position on “the most prestigious and influential paper in Greece,” which gave him access to powerful Greeks and the many Americans who had come to help shape Greece’s economic and political future. Eager to go abroad, Demetracopoulos arrived in the U.S. in 1951 to report for his home paper. He carried with him 24 “letters of introduction to high-ranking officials,” and he quickly came to the attention of the CIA, which offered him a part-time job sharing intelligence. He declined, returning to Greece, where he once again found himself roiled in politics when a military junta came to power in 1967. Barely escaping, he made his way to the U.S., where his outspoken opposition to the junta made him a subject of intense interest to the CIA, FBI, and State Department for the rest of his career. Barron offers an evenhanded portrait of a complex man: Detractors called him egotistical, self-aggrandizing, and narcissistic; admirers praised him as “a highly intelligent, well-informed man of influence, generous in doing favors, and a loyal friend.” Tireless and bold, he cultivated a network of sources who afforded him a close view of political intrigue; Barron gives ample evidence of the tangled machinations that characterized American policy toward Greece from Truman to Reagan.

A deeply researched life of a man at the crossroads of history.
are people like you in the world. I don’t want to live.” Surprisingly, she survived, although her story and those of many others were reshapd for political purposes. Those women, Batalion convincingly argues, have often been misrepresented for just those reasons. Many were politically active before the war and even militant, espousing “Zionist, socialist, and pioneer values,” and some chroniclers have been reluctant to celebrate their work because doing so might unduly judge those who did not resist, “ultimately blaming the victim.” In a vigorous narrative that draws on interviews, diaries, and other sources, Batalion delivers an objective view of past events that are too quickly being forgotten—and a story much in need of telling.

A welcome addition to the literature of the Shoah and of anti-Nazi resistance. (20 b/w photos)
men on horseback is Pasquale Paoli (1725-1807), a Corsican who fought for his island’s independence and became celebrated as the first apostle of liberty, aided by James Boswell’s worshipful bestseller, written long before his biography of Samuel Johnson. George Washington became America’s icon upon his appointment as commander in chief, and “even 240 years later, it is easy to take this initial surge of idolatry for granted.” Bell agrees with historians that his sense of transcendence was mostly a facade but admits that he alone of the five achieved long-lasting success. Napoleon referred to himself as the Washington of France, but he was merely a brilliant general; like most talented generals who don’t die prematurely, he self-destructed. Simón Bolívar (1783-1830) was the Washington of South America because he fought for his people’s freedom. Sadly, his elevation occurred after his death because the independent nations hated his attempts to rule, and he ended life reviled and alone. In Haiti, Toussaint Louverture (1743-1803) led a bloody slave rebellion that won admiration in revolutionary France, which subsequently outlawed slavery in its colonies before Toussaint’s death under the rule of Napoleon, who tried, unsuccessfully, to reinstitute it. Bell concludes that the rise of autocrats today indicates that charismatic leaders, especially those who maintain that achieving national glory trumps boring institutions like laws, are finding a receptive audience.

A disturbing theme explored by a capable historian.

Self-deprecating reflections on the peaks and valleys of modern fatherhood. Comedian Birbiglia and his wife, Stein, parlay their individual creative talents into a funny and wise memoir on parenting. Fusing good humor and raw honesty with selections from Stein’s evocative poetry, Birbiglia narrates his journey into parenting using material previously adapted for the Broadway stage. From the outset, the author admits to having “a low tolerance for children because I’ve lost a lot of great friends to kids.” He was up front about that fact since he and wife Stein got married in 2008, but when she casually mentioned that having children would “be different” for them, Birbiglia knew he was in store for some major changes. Though he outlines seven reasons for his reluctance about becoming a father—e.g., overpopulation, cancer history, a lack of great people in the world (“The men we used to think were great were priests, politicians, and gymnastics doctors. It hasn’t ended well for great”)—Birbiglia eventually warmed to the idea. The couple birthed their daughter, Oona, despite the author’s varicocele condition, demanding touring schedules, and Stein’s brutally difficult pregnancy. The author ably narrates these hurdles with the serious concern of a devoted husband and the comic timing of a seasoned entertainer. Throughout the book, Stein seamlessly interweaves her artistic verses, tempering all the facetiousness beautifully. Never clinical or overly extreme, Birbiglia’s lighthearted, refreshingly droll approach to starting a family will appeal most to readers who can identify with both his reluctance to couple up and his acceptance and embracement of parenting. There are also shared moments of introspection and maturity, not to mention useful wisdom. As Oona moved into toddlerhood, Birbiglia began to accept himself as the “decent dad” he never thought he could become.

Hilarious, relatable, cringeworthy, and effortlessly entertaining, particularly for new parents or those in contemplation.
A warning on the geopolitical front: Forget about the Islamic State group. It’s the rising superpower of China, and probably Russia, that the U.S. will be fighting in the future.

Brose, former policy adviser to John McCain and staff director for the Senate Armed Services Committee, doesn’t mince words: War drives military adaptation, and “many of the ways in which the US military has innovated and changed in recent years have only happened because it has been at war.” Yet the enemy, by his account, has been misidentified. Our military has been developing expensive platforms, with hardware favored over software (and software rapidly rendered obsolete in the bargain), that are directed at nonstate targets such as IS and the Taliban when the real enemies are various people’s republics. The People’s Liberation Army of China, Brose writes, has a highly evolved understanding of the “kill chain,” military parlance for the process of intelligence gathering and decision-making that can end—but doesn’t have to—in actual fighting. “We have been building our military to project power and fight offensively for decades,” he argues, “while China has invested considerably in precision kill chains to counter the ability of the United States to project military power.” Send a fleet to the South China Sea, in other words, and China will await with highly developed aircraft carrier-killing missiles; meanwhile, Chinese hackers are targeting American infrastructure and satellite systems. It will come as no surprise, given Brose’s ties to McCain, that Donald Trump comes in for a drubbing for not understanding any of this. His spending priorities are all wrong, writes the author, while his war with Jeff Bezos compromises the military’s development of cloud-based AI, and the many vacancies in the chain of command mean that nothing is getting done in the Pentagon, “which really means falling behind.” The likely outcome? A world dominated by our one-time Cold War enemies.

Alarmist at points, but an alarm all policymakers, military planners, and students of international affairs should heed.
When a Florida couple has their wedding written up in the New York Times, they’re either very well connected, or they have a good story. For Leslie Gray Streeter and Scott Zervitz, it was the latter.

The couple originally crossed paths as high school classmates in Baltimore, Maryland—but got no closer than a few rows apart in a humanities class. Nineteen years later, on a high school reunion Facebook page, the sparks finally began to fly. She was in Florida, working as “the black Carrie Bradshaw,” writing about the adventures of a 30-something out on the town for the Palm Beach Post. Scott, too, had been living in Florida, 20 minutes away—but had moved north just weeks earlier.

Cupid was able to work around his error in timing. After a year of online conversation, Leslie and Scott met in person. Their marriage in 2010 was the first time to the altar for both. He was 39 and she 38—a virgin by choice because of her faith, as she confides in her new memoir. So, not all that Carrie Bradshaw, really. “Well…it was a family newspaper,” she says.

“Maybe if I’d known I’d only have him for five and a half years…” she sighs wistfully. Scott was just 44 when he died of cardiac arrest.

Streeter’s unflagging sense of humor lights up every page of Black Widow: A Sad-Funny Journey Through Grief for People Who Normally Avoid Books With Words Like “Journey” in the Title (Little, Brown, March 10). In a recent phone interview, she recalled a comment made by the newspaper editor who eventually offered her a job in Florida. They met at a luncheon where Streeter, then a fledgling journalist in York, Pennsylvania, was receiving an award. “When bad things happen, people don’t know they need to laugh, but they do. You can make them laugh,” said her employer-to-be.

From the first chapter of Black Widow, which she opens with casket selection then flashes back to the night of Scott’s death, Streeter’s ability to ferret out the funny in almost anything will make this book a comfort to those dealing with grief themselves. When she finds herself planning a funeral instead of a 45th birthday party, she despairs of her ability to orchestrate the event expected by Scott’s family.

“I’m black and Baptist. He’s a white Jewish guy.” She wonders if quizzing grieving relatives about Jewish customs will come off as insensitive. “How would I feel if one of them was married to a black person and summoned me to Ebenezer Whatever Baptist AME Church as the spokes-Negro?”

“I think I’d understand,” she concludes.

At the time of Scott’s death, the couple was fostering a 2-year-old whom they hoped to adopt. One of the most heartbreaking moments in Black Widow is when Leslie and...
an acclaimed cooking school, and toiled among the staff of a famous restaurant. The first months were difficult, he admits: “each member of our small family had come to doubt the wisdom of the project.” But he and his sons learned French (the children more quickly than their father), the boys assimilated to school, and his wife pursued her ambition to earn a diploma as a wine expert. Buford honed his skills as a chef and enthusiastically steeped himself in the culture of the French kitchen, where apprentices suffer “unregulated bullying and humiliation.” As the author demonstrates, French kitchens are no less hierarchical and combative than those in Italy, and nothing less than perfection is tolerated. It “was all about rules: that there was always one way and only one way” to peel asparagus, for example, devein goose livers, and construct puff pastry; that the three principles of a French plate are “color, volume, and texture”; and that the secret of glorious bread, meat, cheese, and wine is the soil. “What makes Lyonnais food exceptional,” Buford writes, is “a chef’s access to the nearby ingredients” from local farms, mountain lakes, and rivers. “Lyon,” he adds, “is a geographical accident of good food and food practices.” He describes in mouthwatering detail the many dishes he cooked and ate and the charming restaurants the family visited. A lively, passionate homage to fine food. (first printing of 125,000)

The Hispanic Republican
The Shaping of an American Political Identity, From Nixon to Trump
Cadava, Geraldo
Ecco/HarperCollins (448 pp.)
$29.99 | May 26, 2020
978-0-06-294634-8

A survey of changing political trends among Latino American constituencies over the last half-century.

Hispanics are not born Democrats, although they have trended that way in the last several elections. It seems likely that they’ll do so in 2020, if only because of the current president’s anti-immigrant and nativist rhetoric. Still, Northwestern University professor Cadava points out, Hispanics voted for him “by a slightly wider margin than the percentage of Hispanics who voted for establishment candidates such as John McCain in 2008 and Mitt Romney in 2012.” The author rightly observes that the Hispanic population is not monolithic: Mexicans, Cubans, Central Americans, and Puerto Ricans bring different cultural sensibilities to the table. Cubans who left their native country because of opposition to Fidel Castro are far more likely to vote Republican, for instance, than Mexican farm-workers in the Southwest, and though most are at least nominally Catholic, both progressive and conservative elements in the Hispanic population can cite church teachings to back their political views. Cadava looks back at the days when Hispanic support was strongest for Republican candidates, as with the Latinos con Eisenhower organization and its follow-up, Latinos
con Goldwater, which enjoyed reasonable success because of Goldwater’s determined courtship of Cuban Americans and Mexican Americans. Even Nixon had a so-called “Brown Mafia,” though it relied for support on “doling out government grants and contracts, dangling appointments in front of prominent Hispanics, cutting deals with some of the Chicano movement’s leaders, and efforts to suppress support for McGovern.” Other Republicans have been more worthy of that support—Gerald Ford, for instance, who expanded the Voting Rights Act to include ballots and other election materials written in Spanish. As for the present, Cadava ventures that Hispanic supporters of Trump believe that while he’s “unrefined,” he’s not a racist.

Of interest to political trend watchers—and a warning to Democrats not to take the Latino vote for granted. (8-page color insert)

A vigorous argument against the entrenchment of elite interests in the nation’s higher-education system.

The and universities are supposed to serve as levelers of the playing field, giving members of ethnic and economic minorities a chance at success. As it is, write Georgetown University scholars Carnevale and Strohl and education journalist Schmidt, the elite, “using selective colleges as gatekeepers,” has taken deliberate steps to limit access to power and wealth to its own members. “Instead of being havens of diversity,” they observe, “where Americans of all walks of life can learn from one another, many of our colleges and universities have become isolated communities, where students and faculty largely interact with those who are like them.” Although higher education is broadly accessible, it has also become highly stratified, with top-tier schools increasingly out of reach for students of limited means. Even when minority students do get into places such as Yale, the authors note, the dropout rate tends to be higher than that of white students because of a lack of support in the form of counselors, faculty advisers, and faculty who themselves are minority members. While the graduation rate at elite schools is 82%, it is only 49% at two- and four-year schools with large minority populations. (The minority graduation rate for black and Latino students at elite schools is 81%.) The authors attribute the country-club quality of elite schools in part to academic tracking that is growing ever stronger within K-12 schools, by means of which “low-income and racial-minority children have the odds stacked against them even before they enter kindergarten.” Against all this, they propose a number of correctives, including class-based affirmative action, noting that family-need measures are broadly popular even as ethnically based programs are not.

A strong argument for educational reform at every level in order to make schooling truly equitable.

THE MERIT MYTH
How Our Colleges Favor the Rich and Divide America
Carnevale, Anthony P. & Schmidt, Peter & Strohl, Jeff
The New Press (256 pp.)
$27.99 | May 19, 2020
978-1-62097-486-5

A strong argument for educational reform at every level in order to make schooling truly equitable.

WRITE YOURSELF INTO YOUR Dreams
Essential Life-Story Method
Teri Whale
ISBN #978-0-9708809-0-1
For information on publishing and film rights, email teri@theevolvingartist.com • www.TheEvolvingArtist.com

A debut guide advocates self-improvement through autobiographical exercises.

“It’s a basic and thrilling claim, one that will cause readers at all stages of writing expertise to seriously consider putting their own stories down on paper.”

“An unconventional and ultimately uplifting call to reclaim your own life story.”

—Kirkus Reviews
Making an impressive book debut, journalist Carter offers a sweeping, comprehensive biography of economist, political theorist, and statesman John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946), one of the most influential figures of his time.

As the author shows, Keynes’s prescription for staving off financial disaster led to an important government post for the duration of World War I. “Dispatched to summits all over the world, called to parliamentary debates in the House of Commons, and welcomed into the social circles of the British political elite,” Keynes became Great Britain’s top financial adviser.

Carter ably traces the evolution of his thought: He became disillusioned with classical economic theory, which held that market forces always would result in stability, and he came to realize that imperialism promoted inequality rather than spreading humanitarian values. In 1919, he mounted a “devastating attack” on the Treaty of Versailles, predicting with chilling accuracy that the treaty “would march Europe to economic ruin, dictatorship, and war.” In his many economic treatises, Keynes tried to synthesize “the practical, risk-averse, anti-revolutionary conservatism” of Edmund Burke and “the radical democratic ideals advanced by Rousseau.” Although he became hugely wealthy and enjoyed the privileges of his class, at heart, Carter notes, Keynes was an idealist who tried “to democratize the trappings of ruling-class life.” In his personal life, Keynes was a sometimes admired, sometimes cattily dismissed member of the Bloomsbury group of artists and writers, counting among his friends Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Lytton Strachey, and Duncan Grant. He had many male lovers until he met, and married, the dazzling ballerina Lydia Lopokova. Assessing his subject’s legacy, Carter asserts that Keynesianism “is not so much a
school of economic thought as a spirit of radical optimism” that “was for a time synonymous with liberal internationalism—the idea that shrewd, humane economic management could protect democracies from the siren songs of authoritarian demagogues and spread peace and prosperity around the globe.”

An absorbing, thoroughly researched life of a singular thinker.

WHO ATE THE FIRST OYSTER?
The Extraordinary People
Behind the Greatest Firsts in History
Cassidy, Cody
Penguin (240 pp.)
$17.00 paper | May 5, 2020
978-0-14-313275-2

Pop archaeology about individuals responsible for a series of significant firsts.

“I set out to find out about not just humankind’s ancient firsts, but also about the people who accomplished them,” writes Cassidy. “This is a book about who these people were. What they did. And why it mattered.” It is a book about individual achievement during the long period of prehistory, before writing attached names or histories to the individuals who accomplished these firsts. In each entry, Cassidy, whose previous book, And Then You’re Dead, examined the science behind numerous outlandish ways to die, assigns a name to each individual and provides description and a story based on scientific research. Some of the subjects include the inventions of fire and clothing; the discoveries of soap, the Americas, and Hawaii; the first case of smallpox; and the murderer in the first murder mystery. Regarding the invention of clothing, Cassidy pays tribute to the person “who ended the million-year streak of nudity.” I’ll call him Ralph, after Ralph Lauren, because the evidence suggests that when our Ralph made his insight, he was interested in fashion as much as function. (And I’ll call him a him because in truth, I don’t know. I flipped a coin.)” So, we’re really not that much closer to knowing who specifically invented clothes or whether it is even possible to give such individual credit. What is interesting in the research has more to do with the why and how than the individual involved. Throughout these chapters, the subjects of which may strike readers as random, whoever did it remains a matter of speculation, but the significance of the legacy that followed is a story worth telling. The “Sources and Further Reading” section will prove helpful for readers seeking deeper dives into the various subjects.

A breezy read through millennia of human development.

STRAY
A Memoir
Danler, Stephanie
Knopf (256 pp.)
$25.95 | May 5, 2020
978-1-101-87596-4

A writer’s memoir of familial dysfunction and addiction.

Despite the breakthrough success of her debut novel, Sweetbitter (2016), Danler’s life remained very much up in the air in her early 30s. Her mother was an alcoholic and never quite recovered from a brain aneurysm that nearly killed her. The author’s father was a drug addict, frequently relapsing and largely unemployed. He had left the household when she was a toddler, and she had lived with her increasingly alcoholic and abusive mother until she was 16, when she was shipped to the father, who provided no supervision. In college and early adulthood, Danler did all she could to sever ties with both of them and entered a marriage that seemed doomed from the start. She cheated on him, and when the marriage ended, she explained to her friend Carly, “I just want more....Once Carly figured out that I was self-destructing with no plan, nerves frayed by lust, she was concerned.” Will this “stray” ever find some sort of stability? “There is nothing falser to me than a story that ends
with catharsis,” she writes. “Loving liars, addicts, or people who abuse your love is a common affliction....No one taught us how to trust the world, or that we could, so we trust no one. We’ve never developed a sense of self.” Danler’s first memoir is as well-written as her novel was, but it can be as frustrating for readers as it was for her friends and family—indeed, as it was for the author herself—to watch her going back and forth with the married lover she calls the “Monster,” with whom she ended things for good countless times. She seems to have a more stable, somewhat tepid relationship with another man, referred to as “the Love Interest.” Toward the end, she tells herself, “You have to make a change,” and perhaps she will.

A mostly moving text in which writing is therapeutic and family trauma is useful material. Most readers will root for Danler. (first printing of 100,000)

**TOMBOY**
*The Surprising History and Future of Girls Who Dare To Be Different*

Davis, Lisa Selin
Hachette Go (336 pp.)
$28.00 | May 5, 2020
978-0-316-45831-3

An analysis of girls who identify as “tomboys” and how the designation has changed over time.

For decades, girls who had short hair, preferred to wear pants rather than dresses, and liked to do “boy” things like climb trees or play sports were often called “tomboys,” a term that disappeared once the girl reached puberty and “outgrew” it. Though the name is still widely used, journalist and essayist Davis, who has contributed to the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and other publications, explores the (in)adequacy of the word to cover the spectrum of gender and sexual identities finding
Victoria James didn’t necessarily intend to stride into the midst of the #MeToo movement when she began writing a memoir five years ago. As she worked on what would become *Wine Girl: The Obstacles, Humiliations and Triumphs of America’s Youngest Sommelier* (Ecco, March 24), those scandals broke—and by last fall, when a prominent New York City sommelier was publicly accused of sexual assault, James’ book was already finished. “[I started it] way before the whole #MeToo thing,” says James. “Then I remember that right after Mario Batali was accused of sexual assault, my agent said, ‘OK, I think it’s time for your book.’ ”

James was already well known in the insular New York City wine world for having become a sommelier (or somm, for short) at the almost unfathomable age of 21, when she scored the job at the Michelin-starred restaurant Aureole. Far from being smug about it, though, James hid her age at the time, “embarrassed by my youth,” she writes.

The book’s title cleverly riffs on the epithet some customers used when James’ youthful face appeared at their table, eager to help them choose wine. Yet *Wine Girl* is less the story of a wunderkind and more a tale of the tumult James endured to get there: a poverty-stricken, deeply neglectful childhood; multiple sexual assaults, beginning in her teens; and misogyny both subtle and overt from bosses, customers, and others in the often toxic restaurant world. “Every single woman I speak to has some sort of story of harassment or abuse,” James says. “[All of us] are victims or survivors in some way.”

James, now 29 and the beverage director at the acclaimed Korean steakhouse Cote, didn’t necessarily predict #MeToo—but she certainly had lived it. “In an instant, his hands pressed my body against a wine rack, and my heart broke,” she writes of a boss. “Was this all I was worth to him?”

“It was important for me to include, because it’s usually under the rug to talk about,” James says. “My experience, and how I got to where I am today, the struggle—it would be dishonest not to include it. I think many women can relate, to some degree, in any field.”

Writing about those experiences wasn’t easy, though. Prodded by an agent, James co-wrote a breezier book on rosé wine (*Drink Pink: A Celebration of Rosé*, published by Harper Design in 2017) while continuing to work on her memoir, which initially clocked in at double its current 336 pages. “I spent a lot of my time at my computer crying or leaning on my husband for support,” says James. “[The book] was not easy to write, but I think it was important to do it.”

James grew up in suburban New Jersey, the child of a chaotic divorce, and began working at a greasy spoon at age 13. She immediately felt simpatico with those in the
hospitality industry and eventually found her way to New York City and behind the bar of a Theater District restaurant. Determined to shed her childhood, James doggedly tasted, read, and researched (as well as drew up flash cards) to gain her wine credentials, steadily notching better and better jobs. She also endured the humiliations of power-hungry superiors and sometimes vulgar customers. James, a chronic journaler, took notes along the way, even while working 80-hour weeks. “Some people have to get up and go to the gym every day,” James says. “If I’m not writing every day, I feel kind of aimless. After a few years, I realized I had a collection of stories.”

Wine Girl is not all desolation—James spills the proverbial tea about New York’s raucous restaurant industry. While working at Marea, the celebrity-splashed Midtown restaurant, she watched as a woman mixed two wildly expensive wines, a white and a red, for “a $5,000 glass of pink wine.” James also waited on a Danish princess until dawn and lays bare the trade secrets of New York’s prominent food critics, including the New York Times’ Pete Wells, “a master of disguise.”

At Cote, where she is a partner, James oversees dozens of staff, travels frequently to winemaking regions, and is immersed in a forthcoming expansion. “It’s an adrenaline rush every day,” she says. Yet she has also found time to start a nonprofit, Wine Empowered, to educate and mentor women and people of color. “I think the industry as a whole needs to heal,” James says.

Corin Hirsch writes about food and drink for Newsday. Wine Girl was reviewed in the Dec. 1, 2019, issue.

expression today. In this meandering journey through the history and current state of “tomboyism,” some of the author’s pressing concerns include the pinkification of everything remotely feminine and the extreme boy-girl separation of toys and children’s products based on algorithms that instantly promote specific items tailored by gender. Davis scrutinizes the area surrounding gender identity vs. sexuality, especially in the chapter titled “War of the Words: Tomboy or Trans Boy?” She also considers the role of socio-economic status in the application of many of these designations. In addition to citing research into a variety of relevant topics, Davis includes personal stories of women who were considered tomboys as children who have since been able to find a comfortable place on the wide spectrum that exists today “I think it’s important for parents, and kids,” she writes, “to understand how sex, gender, and sexuality have been understood in different eras, to see that the way we are experiencing and understanding them now is part of the evolution, and that we’ve still got so much more to learn.” There is still much to learn, and though Davis could have gone more in-depth in some areas, readers will find this a good place to start their education.

An informative jumping-off point for further investigation.

MAGDALENA
River of Dreams
Davis, Wade
Knopf (432 pp.)
$30.00 | Apr 14, 2020
978-0-375-41099-4

The explorer, photographer, and prolific author returns to a country beloved since his boyhood to chronicle a river whose rehabilitation mirrors Colombia’s own.

Traveling to Colombia in the early 1970s from Canada, Davis—a professor of anthropology and former explorer-in-residence at the National Geographic Society whose book Into the Silence won the 2012 Samuel Johnson Prize—regards the country as the place that first allowed him to “imagine and dream” and to give him “license to be free.” Davis’ popular book One River, published in a Spanish edition in 2002, was “a love letter to a nation by then scorned by the world,” still in the throes of the violence and corruption of drug cartels, which sadly marred the country’s reputation as a place of natural splendor. In his latest delightful journey, the author takes on the Magdalena, the so-called Mississippi of Colombia, which is celebrated for its legendary status as the life artery bringing food to the regions, exploration, trade, and commerce but also excoriated as a highway for the death and corruption that plagued the country for 50 years. Davis is a natural, engaging storyteller, and while he makes his way through Colombia’s history—from the early Tairona natives’ sophisticated civilization on the shores of the river, first contacted by the Spanish explorers in the early 16th century (and subsequently decimated), through the dark
days of the drug wars of the 1980s and ’90s—the book is also an affecting account of on-the-ground exploration. The author skillfully weaves in accounts by academics, who have studied the vicissitudes of the river, and by the people who have lived and toiled along its shores. Many of these people have endured decades of political turmoil, beginning in 1946, when the Liberals and Conservatives “faced off in fratricidal conflict” known as La Violencia. This remarkable river has endured eras of massive extermination, erosion, damming, and pollution, but it has emerged renewed thanks to a people’s spirit and resilience.

An elegant narrative masterfully combining fine reporting and a moving personal journey.

THE TERRORIST ALBUM
Apartheid’s Insurgents, Collaborators, and the Security Police
Dlamini, Jacob
Harvard Univ. (368 pp.)
$29.95 | May 5, 2020
978-0-674-91655-5

A harrowing descent into the hell of apartheid via documents the regime neglected to destroy.

One person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter, and such people are made, not born. In the case of South Africa, writes Princeton history professor Dlamini, a native of a township near Johannesburg, the apartheid regime created many through its campaign of repression and separation. The rolls were extensive, the archives vast, and when the regime collapsed, the documentation was deleted in a “memory purge…so extensive that some commentators have called it a ‘paper Auschwitz.’ ” Officials with whom Dlamini spoke lamented that the paperwork was not hidden in a friendly nation such as Taiwan or Israel, if only because it could be used to prove who was a self-proclaimed freedom fighter and who wasn’t. As it is, in a project reminiscent in some ways of Michael Lesy’s Wisconsin Death Trip, Dlamini closely examines the surviving documents, including a dossier informally called, yes, the “Terrorist Album.” Begun in the early 1960s, it records the names and images of thousands of people who left South Africa because of their opposition to the government. “If the album has much value as a historical source,” writes the author, “it is because it allows us to look at each mug shot and, by investigating that image, find the specific account of how this or that person fled into exile and, by doing so, came to be in the album.” Some of the people depicted there did commit acts of political violence, but Dlamini turns up trouble with the discovery that the asterisk alongside many names signifies that the person in question was no longer of state interest. The album and the author’s account of it are charged with meaning, but perhaps the greatest takeaway is his observation that no matter how a government tries to obliterate the past, it can never do so completely.

An important document in the history of the apartheid era. (24 photos)
Trenchant history of the gang that Donald Trump has called as dangerous as al-Qaida.

MS-13, which takes its name from the enigmatic Spanish phrase “Mara Salvatrucha,” is now 40 years old, and it has members throughout the U.S. as well as El Salvador. Owing to a vicious civil war between a government backed by the Reagan administration and communist guerrillas, tens of thousands of Salvadorans fled to the United States, with a particularly strong presence in Los Angeles. Two refugee brothers founded MS-13 to protect their community from other gangs—and then, over time, discovered that they could gain power and wealth by controlling segments of the drug trade and other criminal enterprises. Now, journalist Dudley writes, MS-13 is a loosely organized gang that “had grown by coming at their enemies in waves, like a marabunta, or army of ants, as the street gangs were baptized so many years ago in El Salvador.” The gang is marked by several signatures, including heavy tattooing and a tendency to kill their victims with machetes, chopping them to bits. Like any gang, Dudley observes, MS-13 is both a product of its environment and a shaper of it, strengthening social bonds “via violence and predatory criminal acts.” Gang life is also far from romantic, as he reveals, marked by excessive drug and alcohol use, that constant violence, and, often, homelessness—landlords are reluctant to rent to gang members who treat their properties as “a crash-pad, a party-place, a meeting spot, a stash house, a torture chamber, a brothel or all of the above.” The gang is also dominant in places such as LA, New York, and even Washington while its members travel freely back and forth to El Salvador, bribing the authorities to look the other way.

A cleareyed account of a criminal enterprise that is undeniably a threat to civil society wherever it turns up.

A family’s mysteries inspire a search into a dark past.

In the novel Everything Is Illuminated (2002), Jonathan Safran Foer invented the journey of a 20-year-old Jewish American man who travels to a town in Ukraine in search of his family’s past, particularly for the woman he
believed saved his grandfather from Nazi persecution. The novel had roots in his own family's history, which Foer's mother excavates in her moving literary debut, a recounting of her own real-life quest to uncover facts about her assorted relatives who fled from the Nazis. Her life, she writes, has been “haunted by the presence of absence”: the silence surrounding her family's experiences before they arrived in the U.S. in 1949. She knew that her mother had wandered through Russia for three years and her father had been hidden by a Christian family. But she was stunned when her mother remarked that he had fled after Nazis had murdered everyone in his village, including his wife and daughter. The revelation about a half sister was shocking, but her mother could add nothing more about this first family. Foer needed to know: “I feel a great responsibility to keep the story became,” as the family's struggles emerged from the clouds of history. She met distant cousins she hadn't known existed, and in Ukraine, where her ancestors' village had been obliterated, she trekked into a forest to the site of “unimaginable horror”: the mass grave of murdered Jews. Foer, who in her 60s became the director of Sixth & I, a Jewish cultural institution in Washington, D.C., sees her “side career as the family connector,” an undertaking in which her husband and sons have enthusiastically participated. “Traumatic memories,” she writes, “live on from one generation to the next.”

A vivid testimony to the power of memory.

NO FILTER
The Inside Story of Instagram
Frier, Sarah
Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)
$28.00 | Apr. 14, 2020
978-1-9821-2680-3

The story of the supercharged rise and inevitable distortion of one of the world's most wide-ranging and influential social media platforms.

As a technology reporter for Bloomberg News, Frier has covered social media for years, so she is well positioned to chronicle the founding and subsequent evolution of Instagram, the ubiquitous photo- and video-sharing service. Long before the site became the darling of celebrities and socialites (e.g. Paris Hilton), the invention was the brainchild of Stanford graduates Kevin Systrom, who parlayed his personal interest in photography into an early version of the app called Burbn, and levelheaded engineer Mike Krieger. Readers looking for the power dynamics and interpersonal drama that fuel many Silicon Valley sagas will find them here, though Frier's compelling narrative style is more journalistic than soapy. Still, the book does contain friction, notably between Instagram and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, who purchased it in 2012 for $1 billion, as well as the long-simmering feud between Zuckerberg and Twitter founder Jack Dorsey. The cast of characters is daunting, but it's rewarding to see the platform's innovations emerge, largely driven by the passion of its internal evangelists. It's also disappointing—but not necessarily surprising—given revelations about Facebook in recent years—to watch as Instagram employees fail to receive their expected rewards from the acquisition. Facebook slowly but purposefully turned a creation aimed at social artistry and communality into yet another advertising platform with the secondary purpose of funneling users toward the mothership. The author entertainingly portrays the clash between company values as well as the rise of Instagram's bizarre celebrity culture, with cameos from the likes of Ashton Kutcher and Kim Kardashian West (who receives “about $1 million for a single post”)—not to mention the horde eventually known as “influencers.”

An eminently readable cautionary tale about technology that once again questions what—or who—the product really is.

THE PINK LINE
Journeys Across the World’s Queer Frontiers
Gevisser, Mark
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (544 pp.)
$30.00 | May 12, 2020
978-0-374-27996-7

A global exploration of LGBTQ issues in the 21st century in relation to public policy, human rights, and economic pursuits.

In his expansive new undertaking, South African journalist Gevisser offers sharp insights into queer cultures throughout the world. Early on, he defines the titular pink line: “between those places increasingly integrating queer people into their societies as full citizens, and those finding new ways to shut them out now that they had come into the open.” In the current century, writes the author, “new battlegrounds [are] opening up new frontiers of the culture wars.” Traversing across a diverse selection of countries, Gevisser shares stories from either side of the line, reflecting a broad sweep of gay and transgender human rights and cultural challenges. These include a newly partnered gay male couple (Israeli and Palestinian) exploring their relationship in gay-friendly Tel Aviv, tested by the social intolerance directed toward Palestinians; a lesbian couple in Cairo struggling to keep their gay-leaning cafe afloat after the Arab Spring; a transgender woman in Moscow and another in Malawi, each caught up in her country's bureaucratic restrictions. In alternating chapters, the author expands on emerging themes. He explores gender ideology and fluidity and how trans-related concerns have gained prominence. He examines the sociopolitical and economic motivations of these countries regarding their level of LGBTQ support, and he reports on anti-LGBTQ laws that expand and contract in response to right-wing or religious influence. Gevisser's journalistic acumen and breadth of research are impressive. While he offers an
unprecedented scope, however, the densely packed text lacks a unifying narrative flow, reading more like a series of articles (several of the chapters were derived from previously published pieces). Consequently, sometimes the author’s capable storytelling skills take a back seat to what often feels like an excessive overflow of reporting.

Not fully compelling but a solidly researched, important addition to queer studies.

THE GOLDEN THIRTEEN
How Black Men Won the Right To Wear Navy Gold
Goldberg, Dan C.
Beacon (288 pp.)
$28.95 | May 19, 2020
978-0-8070-2158-3

The moving story of the Navy’s first black commissioned officers.

Politico journalist Goldberg reminds readers that large numbers of blacks fought in the Revolutionary and Civil wars, but the triumph of Jim Crow after 1900 led to them being phased out. By 1932, blacks made up only 441 of 81,000 Navy men, all working menial jobs. “By the summer of 1940,” writes the author, "discrimination in the Army and Navy ‘cut deeper into Negro feelings than employment discrimination,’ and had replaced lynching as the chief political priority of the black community.” Their newspapers and activists pointed out the hypocrisy of...
A beguiling and witty assessment of a country’s obsessive urge to curate.

THE MUSEUM OF WHALES YOU WILL NEVER SEE

Greene, A. Kendra
Penguin (272 pp.)
$22.00  |  May 12, 2020
978-0-14-313546-3

A quirky, personal travel guide to some of the offbeat sites that Iceland has to offer.

Greene, who has worked at several museums, joyfully recounts her experiences in Iceland, a country of 330,000 people, visiting 28 of their 265 museums, most “established in the last twenty years.” In this debut memoir, the author writes that she’s never “known a place where the boundaries between private collection and public museum are so profoundly permeable, so permissive, so easily transgressed and so transparent as if almost not to exist.” Some, in fact, don’t exist—e.g., the title museum. There’s an air of Italo Calvino’s fantastical Invisible Cities wafting its way throughout, as Greene guides us with childlike wonder through such museums as “Sverrir Hermannsson’s Sundry Collection,” the “Herring Era Museum,” the “The Museum of Prophecies,” and the “Icelandic Sea Monster Museum.” First up is the Icelandic Phallogenical Museum, a “kind of mammal-phallus Noah’s Ark,” where visitors can gaze upon penises of duck, ocean perch, polar bears, and other domestic and foreign animals. On one wall there’s a “lovely installation,” Our Silver Boys, which the author describes as “fifteen silver casts representing the Icelandic national handball team, stood upright like thriving mushrooms.” Petra’s Stone Collection, picked by her and family members near their home, is outside, for all to see. Greene’s story is not just about the museums, but also about the people who create their individualistic collections and their families, who often keep them and a small cafe or gift departures, “there were no bureaucratic hoops to jump through.”

A lack of transparency about official practices has always been a problem. Goodman notes that “immigration historians know little about how authorities have forcibly removed people, and even less about the US government contracting private companies to effect expulsions.” He explores how return migration provided profitability to steamship companies followed by private aviation and even Greyhound buses; even in the 1950s, conditions aboard ships were so vile that detainees mutinied. The author also argues that manufactured border crises, abetted by sensationalist media, caused expulsion rates to begin climbing during the 1960s, and he notes that “INS also ramped up neighborhood and workplace raids,” a harbinger of today’s militarized borders and mass-incarceration approach. Goodman’s writing can be dry, but he confidently handles arcane historical details and a volatile subject.

A well-researched historical discussion with clear current relevance. (b/w tables, graphs, photos)

THE DEPORTATION MACHINE

Goodman, Adam
Princeton Univ. (336 pp.)
$29.95  |  May 12, 2020
978-0-691-18215-5

The deportation machine has been running on all cylinders in recent years...it did not just come into being during the presidency of Donald J. Trump,” whose policies are discussed in a chilling epilogue. The author’s lean narrative contains six long chapters, examining the many political events that have caused fluctuating severity and approaches. Goodman illuminates surprising historical aspects—e.g., how enforcement began as racist local efforts aimed at Chinese and Mexican laborers. With increased central bureaucracy in the 1920s, “authorities placed an even greater emphasis on control over noncitizens, and especially Mexicans.” Later, the Bracero agricultural workers who’d been welcomed during the war were scapegoated, culminating in the aggressive “Operation Wetback.” In the mid-20th century, writes the author, “voluntary departure and anti-immigrant fear campaigns became the dominant mechanisms of expulsion.” With so-called voluntary

fighting for freedom in a nation where they were denied it. In 1942, responding to political pressure, President Franklin Roosevelt ordered reluctant Navy officials to train blacks for better jobs. Goldberg tells his inspiring story through the lives of 16 candidates who joined that year and trained in entirely segregated facilities. They worked at routine jobs within the U.S. until December 1943, when they were flabbergasted to learn that they were chosen for officer training. Goldberg delivers a gripping account of the brutal two-month accelerated course taught by mostly white officers, who often made it clear they hoped the men would fail. “The men lived like lab mice caged for experimentation,” writes the author. Knowing what was at stake, they studied obsessively, and everyone passed with “a collective 3.89 out of 4.0, the highest average of any class in Navy history.” The white pass rate was 75%, so, without explanation, the Navy commissioned only 13 of the men. Forbidden from commanding whites, most supervised black work details, and discrimination continued. Many white sailors refused to salute, and officers’ clubs sometimes emptied when black officers entered. Yet, Goldberg emphasizes, the pressure to end segregation persisted. By the time of Harry Truman’s 1948 order for experimentation,” writes the author. Knowing what was at stake, they studied obsessively, and everyone passed with “a collective 3.89 out of 4.0, the highest average of any class in Navy history.” The white pass rate was 75%, so, without explanation, the Navy commissioned only 13 of the men. Forbidden from commanding whites, most supervised black work details, and discrimination continued. Many white sailors refused to salute, and officers’ clubs sometimes emptied when black officers entered. Yet, Goldberg emphasizes, the pressure to end segregation persisted. By the time of Harry Truman’s 1948 order...
shop going. Greene tantalizes us with a visit to the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft, formerly a hardware store, curated by Siggi, or the Sorcerer, which displays whips, life-size facsimiles of outlandish Icelandic necropants (pants made from a dead man’s skin) and 11 installations. “Ten,” Greene writes, “if you fail to count the invisible boy.”

A beguiling and witty assessment of a country’s obsessive urge to curate.

WON’T LOSE THIS DREAM
How an Upstart Urban University Rewrote the Rules of a Broken System
Gumbel, Andrew
The New Press (336 pp.)
$27.99 | May 26, 2020
978-1-62097-470-4

An urban university strikes a determined path to improve the academic performance and graduation rates of minority students—and does much more in the bargain.

Georgia State University is scattered across several campuses in Atlanta, long a choice of black and Latino students who lacked the means to go to schools farther from home. It barely ranked among institutions of higher learning until, during the last financial crisis, the university’s president made it a priority to improve conditions, thereby earning what journalist Gumbel calls "a national reputation for its pioneering work in..."
retaining large numbers of students.” One example is a young man who, though “poor, black, and struggling to make it as the first in their family to attend college,” earned a degree in computer science. GSU initiated reforms along several lines, including enhanced financial aid even in a time when an increasingly conservative legislature was reducing educational funding. The administration also took an activist position in identifying parts of the culture of higher education that automatically assumed that minority students would not succeed. In the process, the GSU administration not only recruited more minority students than ever before; they also saw them graduate in higher numbers than the national average. Money was part of the equation; so was raising the number of student advisers substantially and changing certain pedagogical methods. “Committed leadership is of course essential,” writes Gumbel of such transformations as the one evidenced by GSU. But it’s not enough: The faculty must be invested in the change, and university representatives impressed upon Georgians, including legislators, the thought that adding college graduates to the urban mix by way of cost-effective educational programs would improve the economy, offering “a solid return on investment and moral justice, economic growth and social mobility.” Drawing on extensive on-the-ground reporting, Gumbel offers a richly detailed narrative of how such changes are effected.

Required reading for education reformers seeking to broaden community connections and benefit minority constituencies.

**KEEP SHARP**
**Build a Better Brain at Any Age**
Gupta, Sanjay
Simon & Schuster (336 pp.)
$28.00 | Jun. 2, 2020
978-1-5011-6673-0

CNN chief medical correspondent Gupta counsels that in order to best take care of your body, you have to first take care of your mind.

The author’s primary concern is to nurture a resilient brain that propagates new cells, makes the ones you have work more efficiently, and is continuously enriched throughout life. In particular, he wishes to stave off age-related brain illnesses classified under dementia, with Alzheimer’s at the fore. Unfortunately, writes Gupta, “we often don’t and can’t know what triggers cognitive decline in the first place or what propels it over time.” Regarding the brain as a whole, “we are still not exactly sure what makes it tick.” As such, the author suggests that we get out in front of it and act preventatively by engaging in behaviors that are widely considered brain-friendly. In a steady, measured voice, he presents a comprehensive view of the best brain science has to offer to preserve and improve memory at the cognitive level. The villains are a rogue’s gallery of familiar faces: “physical inactivity, unhealthy diet, smoking, social isolation, poor sleep, lack of mentally stimulating activities, and misuse of alcohol.” Gupta explores the evidence, both scientifically documented and anecdotal (but common-sensical), behind the value of exercise; strategies to heighten attention, focus, and concentration; relaxation (including meditation and restorative sleep); diet’s microbial effect on the brain; and the value of a diverse social network. None of this is going to make your jaw drop, but they are all good reminders of their import and how we can let them slide by without much thought. Gupta is a shameless name-dropper—“my friend, actor and fitness buff Matthew McConaughey” gives him exercise advice; the Dalai Lama privately tutors him in meditation—but he is also a genuine source of practical knowledge and sympathy to those struggling with dementia and the family members who are primary caregivers—to whom he tenders a wealth of resources.

Inclusive and recognizably sturdy advice on building a healthy brain.

**IT’S ABOUT DAMN TIME**
**How To Turn Being Underestimated Into Your Greatest Advantage**
Hamilton, Arlan with Nelson, Rachel L.
Currency (256 pp.)
$27.00 | May 5, 2020
978-0-593-13641-6

A celebrated gay venture capitalist offers advice about “how diversity could be our greatest superpower.”

In 2018, Hamilton became “the first “Black female non-celebrity to grace the front cover of Fast Company magazine.” Before that, she was a live music production coordinator fascinated by the alien world of venture capitalism. In her debut, the author provides a guide for anyone not in “the straight white male population” to “do the thing they’re passionate about.” Drawing on her experiences in both music and business, she emphasizes the need to gather information in all ways possible: not just by consuming print and online information, but also by connecting with people in one’s chosen area of interest. For “underestimated people,” in particular, gathering together a diverse collective of individuals and not buying into the myth of the self-made person is key to success. “I am made up of my brother, my wife, my friends,” and every member of her company, Backstage Capital. Hamilton also highlights the need to “amplify the voices of those without a microphone,” especially in cases where an individual has gained enough power and influence to be heard. One of very few African Americans who seek to create a funding pool for startups headed by other minorities, Hamilton at first received many rejections from the (white male) business establishment she courted. She tells readers to expect the same but to also cultivate both an extra measure of self-confidence as well as forgiveness, which she calls “the ultimate productivity hack.” Resilience—part of a person’s “adaptability quotient”—fosters the ability to move forward. At the same time, Hamilton urges fighting against the business establishment’s proliferation of “hustle porn” by trading in “hustle
A readable, persuasive argument that our ways of doing business will have to change if we are to prosper—or even survive.

**NO RULES RULES**
**Netflix and the Culture of Reinvention**
Hastings, Reed & Meyer, Erin
Penguin Press (320 pp.)
$28.00 | May 12, 2020
978-1-9848-7786-4

Netflix co-founder Hastings and business guru Meyer hold forth on the unusual workplace culture—high performance, top pay, no rules, and constant candor—behind the entertainment company's streaming success.

Founded in 1997 as a DVD-by-mail business, Netflix now has 7,000 employees, creates its own award-winning TV shows, and reaches 150 million streaming customers in 190 countries. In a 2018 *Wall Street Journal* profile, the firm was criticized for its culture of underperforming employees. In this debut, Hastings offers a different view. He celebrates his firm's culture, arguing that its emphasis on keeping only the most highly effective people is essential to innovation and creative success. In alternating sections with Meyer, who provides elaboration based on more than 200 Netflix interviews, Hastings details the making of the Netflix way, from hiring the best creative talent at high pay to removing controls that stifle innovation. The latter begins with removing vacation policies and travel/expense controls and culminates in sharing “unprecedented” amounts of company information so that employees can make good decisions on their own. No approvals from higher-ups are needed: “Don’t seek to please your boss,” only to advance the company. All of this is possible only after you have formed a team (not a family) of “self-motivated, self-aware, and self-disciplined” staff. A critical element, the “keeper test,” suggests a staffer ask a boss, “If I were thinking of leaving, how hard would you work to change my mind?” Fired employees receive generous severance. The book is conversational, packed with sidebars, asides, graphs, and charts, and illuminating, sometimes self-satisfied anecdotes. Netflix-like cultures of “freedom and responsibility” are most effective in “creative” companies that depend on “innovation, speed, and flexibility.” Firms focused on error prevention generally opt for stricter policies.

A self-congratulatory but fascinating story of a counterintuitive approach that apparently works—at least for Netflix.

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**REIMAGINING CAPITALISM IN A WORLD ON FIRE**
Henderson, Rebecca
PublicAffairs (336 pp.)
$28.00 | May 1, 2020
978-1-5417-3015-1

A well-constructed critique of an economic system that, by the author’s account, is a driver of the world’s destruction.

Harvard Business School professor Henderson vigorously questions the bromide that “management’s only duty is to maximize shareholder value,” a notion advanced by Milton Friedman and accepted uncritically in business schools ever since. By that logic, writes the author, there is no reason why corporations should not fish out the oceans, raise drug prices, militate against public education (since it costs tax money), and otherwise behave ruinously and anti-socially. Many do, even though an alternative theory of business organization argues that corporations and society should enjoy a symbiotic relationship of mutual benefit, which includes corporate investment in what economists call public goods. Given that the history of humankind is “the story of our increasing ability to cooperate at larger and larger scales,” one would hope that in the face of environmental degradation and other threats, we might adopt the symbiotic model rather than the winner-take-all one. Problems abound, of course, including that of the “free rider,” the corporation that takes the benefits from collaborative agreements but does none of the work. Henderson examines case studies such as a large food company that emphasized environmentally responsible production and in turn built “purpose-led, sustainable living brands” and otherwise led the way.

A readable, persuasive argument that our ways of doing business will have to change if we are to prosper—or even survive.
A SHORT HISTORY OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CRISSES (and How To Prevent the Next One)
Hirsch, Alan
City Lights (200 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Apr. 7, 2020
978-0-87286-829-8

The noted law historian, author of *Impeaching the President*, examines the handful of seriously problematic presidential elections in American history and what the Constitution elucidates about the process of undoing such an event—namely, nothing.

Like many historians and political analysts, Hirsch believes the Electoral College is direly flawed and should be abolished. In his latest book, he begins with an overview of the presidential election process, set out in Article II of the Constitution, which was soon to be revealed by Alexander Hamilton as a “defect.” In the election of 1800, between Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr, each received the same votes, and the crisis resulted in the 12th Amendment, creating a distinct ballot for president and vice president. However, in 1824, the race between John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson resulted in a tie and had to be brokered by the House of Representatives, as per the Constitution. It came down to the wheedling of charismatic Speaker of the House Henry Clay to throw his support behind Adams—perhaps in return for his appointing him secretary of state, the so-called “corrupt bargain.” In the 1876 election, Samuel Tilden received 250,000 more votes than Rutherford B. Hayes, yet three states were “too close to call” (South Carolina, Florida, and Louisiana)—an eerie similarity to the future 2000 nail-biter between Al Gore and George W. Bush, which came down to one state, Florida, and was thrown to the courts for a decision. Hirsch quotes election law expert Edward Foley: “the Hayes-Tilden dispute exposed structural frailties in the nation’s constitutional order that...were unchanged in 1876 and remain unchanged today”—decidedly unnerving news as we approach the 2020 election.

In the concluding chapters, the author delineates the “fraud and chaos” rampant in the EC and argues for a constitutional amendment for handling future crises.

A highly relevant study featuring much food for thought and prospects for change.

THE INNER COAST
Essays
Hohn, Donovan
Norton (256 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Jun. 2, 2020
978-1-324-00597-1

A professor of English and former magazine editor lends literary stature to science writing and the exploration of interior landscapes, including his own.

Collected here are 10 of Hohn’s distinctive essays, many originally appearing in *Harper’s*, the *New York Times Magazine*, and other publications. Throughout, the author weaves dissections of environmental issues through meditations on culture and family. Other essays—e.g., “A Romance of Dust, featuring unlikely but fascinating observations on antique tool collecting—are elegies for (and critiques of) a misremembered past. While providing antidotes to romanticism and nostalgia—“Memory, after all, is a kind of dream”—he unfailingly finds the magical or mysterious where it does exist. Some essays are set in the American Midwest (the “Inner Coast” of the title), others in New York, Quebec, California, or Thoreau’s Walden (with a riposte to the poet’s critics). A few have the flavor of expansive book reviews. There are echoes of Barry Lopez here, but Hohn’s voice—reflective, trenchant, often eloquent—seems all his own. He has an almost unerring ability to choose just the right word or phrase to enrich a line of thought. His descriptive passages, whether amusing, pithy, or lyrical, will capture readers’ imaginations. He is a poet of the prosaic, as on the subject of water, reminding us that the Great Lakes are actually a river. He also possesses an admirable way of presenting ecological or cultural problems without lecturing. He evaluates and argues, sometimes strenuously, but seldom judges. Hohn suggests his mindset from the start: “We are surrounded by a multitude of facts whose significance is neither stable nor self-evident.” The world can be an amorphous place, and clarity elusive, but there are havens of the rational if we wish to inhabit them. Hohn finds some of those havens in the work of Thoreau, Evan S. Connell, Marilynne Robinson, and Matthew Power.

Settle in and savor a keen mind with a laudable moral compass.
DAUGHTER OF THE BOYCOTT
Carrying on a Montgomery Family's Civil Rights Legacy
Houston, Karen Gray
Lawrence Hill Books/Chicago Review
(240 pp.)
$27.99 | May 5, 2020
978-1-64160-303-4

A reporter recalls her family's part in the landmark 1955 Montgomery, Alabama, boycott that desegregated buses and brought fame to Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr.

Journalist Houston was born into a remarkable family at the center of an event that changed U.S. history. She was 4 years old when, to protest segregated seating, black passengers stopped riding city buses in Montgomery, galvanized by Parks' arrest and by a Gandhi-inspired call for nonviolent protest from King, the new pastor of Montgomery's Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. The author's father, Thomas Gray, helped organize the 382-day boycott, arranging carpools and taxi rides for the thousands of black residents who normally took buses; before it ended, her uncle, Fred Gray, had become the lead counsel in <i>Browder v. Gayle</i>, the U.S. Supreme Court case that eventually forced Montgomery to desegregate its buses. In her debut memoir, the author warmly recalls her kin and deals matter-of-factly with the appalling Jim Crow–era injustices they faced: Houston was born in a hospital for black patients because “Negroes were either denied admission to white hospitals or accommodated in segregated, subpar units, sometimes in basements or attics.” The author also chronicles her interviews with relevant figures such as the daughter-in-law of the targeted bus line's manager and a son of <i>Browder</i> plaintiff Aurelia Browder Coleman, who laments that Parks—though not a litigant in that watershed case—has eclipsed his mother and others (“a lie has become history”).

In her real coup, however, is a rare at-home interview with <i>Browder</i> plaintiff Claudette Colvin, who refused to give her seat to a white rider months before Parks did and disputes popular accounts of her story: “I wasn't kicking and scratching like they say I was.” Arriving at a time when racial injustices regularly lead to tragedy, this modest book is a welcome reminder that profound social changes can also result from the quiet heroism of people with unshakable commitment to nonviolence.

A daughter's fond memoir of her father and the pioneering civil rights activists in his circle. (30 b/w photos)

ALL AGAINST ALL
The Long Winter of 1933 and the Origins of the Second World War
Jankowski, Paul
Harper/HarperCollins (480 pp.)
$32.50 | Apr. 28, 2020
978-0-06-243352-7

Brandeis history professor Jankowski examines world events from 1932 to 1933, and it is not a pretty picture.

Three years into the Great Depression, everyone deplored the international crisis, and there was no shortage of claims that democracy, supposedly triumphant at the end of World War I, was on its way out. Although pundits draw parallels with today's world, where autocrats are growing increasingly popular, Jankowski points out that the Depression saw no rise in dictatorships except in Germany. Everywhere else—in Russia, Italy, Japan, China, Poland, and most of Eastern Europe—they were already up and running. Demagogues promised to restore national glory, but their audience at that time gave food and jobs equal priority. Throughout this bleak narrative history, the author shrewdly juxtaposes interminable peace and disarmament conferences and political events with the national mood in a dozen countries whose leaders revealed a distressing eagerness to discover the source of their misery in rival nations or undeserving minorities. Everyone hated the Treaty of Versailles, including those who imposed it. Far less populous than Germany, France feared invasion no less than it had before 1914: “The menace would return...if not today, then tomorrow.” German representative government was moribund. Hemmed in by the left and right, centrist parties were a permanent minority in the Reichstag, and President Paul von Hindenburg appointed a series of ineffective chancellors—until Hitler, who “had entered...much as his immediate predecessors had—appointed by an aged president under no obligation to do so, after weeks of favoritism, speculation, and backstairs intrigue.” Japan's year-old invasion of Manchuria and China already prefigured the next war, and Italy under Mussolini (not yet a comic-opera figure) announced its intention to reconquer an empire. “He promised...that in ten years,” writes the author, “all Europe would be Fascist.”

An expert if discouraging history of the world 90 years ago, when “postwar became prewar.” (8-page b/w photo insert)
Demanding, bighearted, and generous—we should all be so lucky to have such a grandfather.

GRAND
A Grandparent's Wisdom for a Happy Life
Johnson, Charles
Hanover Square Press (160 pp.)
$19.99 | May 5, 2020
978-1-335-01586-0

The National Book Award winner fleshes out 10 ideas on the art of life for his grandson, Emery. Johnson knows that he will want Emery to be a thinker, to “realize that it is every serious thinker’s job to sustain the frail light of clarity and reason in the ever-present darkness of ignorance, superstition, ideology, dogma, prejudice, and demagoguery.” But as he proceeds through life, hunting and gathering the experiences that will continuously shape him over the years, the author wonders if there are “some things that are timeless or come close to being so”—knowing himself through self-examination, which will be “necessary for him at every stage and season of his life, because he is a process, not a product.” Johnson draws on his many experiences throughout his rangy and inquisitive life, a life he frames as a source of his guidance: the examples of his family members who struggled against and overcame the daily bigotry that infested their lives; his years as a young political cartoonist; his college years in the early 1970s and his doctorate in philosophy; his time as an English professor and literary scholar; and his practice of Eastern philosophy and martial arts. He uses all of these experiences to create valuable lessons and tools, including egoless listening; letting things go (“we live best when we are devoted to giving, not to accumulating”); the beauty of love, both of self and of others; that pain is an inevitable part of life, but we are free to decide how we will react, in suffering, vengeance, or empathy; that our intentions are critical to our way of being. Johnson digs deep, but he is never obscure, presenting these ideas in context in order to properly explain why he thinks they are important.

Demanding, bighearted, and generous—we should all be so lucky to have such a grandfather.

HOLLYWOOD PARK
A Memoir
Jollett, Mikel
Celadon Books (384 pp.)
$27.99 | May 5, 2020
978-1-250-62156-6

A painstaking emotional accounting of a tortured youth ultimately redeemed through music, therapy, and love.

In his debut, Jollett, the frontman for the indie band Airborne Toxic Event, opens the narrative in an orphanagelike facility in California when he was introduced to a strange woman who had come to take him away. “I remember that a ‘Mom’ is supposed to be a special thing....She tells me I’m her son and she wanted kids so she would not be alone anymore and now she has us and it is a son’s job to take care of his mother,” he writes. Both the author’s parents were members of Synanon, a drug-recovery program–turned-cult that took children from their parents when they were 6 months old. After their release from captivity, Jollett and his brother grew up in extreme poverty in rural Oregon. Their mother’s distorted view of the parent-child relationship made her almost completely useless as a caretaker; her terminally alcoholic boyfriend was the boys’ only reliable source of either physical sustenance or affection. For the first third of the book, the author attempts to portray the world, and the English language, as he perceived it at age 5 and 6. His troubled mother had “deep-russian.” She hated “Thatasshole Reagan.” Another escapee from the cult was beaten by goons and developed “men-in-ji-tis” in the hospital; he thought about sending the cult leader a “sub-peena.” This becomes tiring, and since Jollett’s mother was ultimately diagnosed with a personality disorder, the level of detail and repetition with regard to her maternal failures is overdone. The author’s father, though an ex-con and former addict, is the story’s hero; he is beautifully written and lights up the book. In fifth grade, a friend introduced Jollett to the Cure. The Smiths and David Bowie were not far behind, and the teenage portion of the book, during which he often lived with his father in Los Angeles, is a smoother read. Ultimately, as he lucidly shows, music would change his life.

A musician proves himself a talented, if long-winded, writer with a very good memory.

FEASTING WILD
In Search of the Last Untamed Food
La Cerva, Gina Rae
Greystone Books (336 pp.)
$26.95 | May 26, 2020
978-1-77164-533-1

A geographer and environmental anthropologist travels the globe in search of those who hunt and gather in the midst of civilization.

Although La Cerva pays some attention to those who pick mushrooms and weeds for food and medicine, she focuses mostly on those who kill animals—often illegally, though in line with historical and cultural traditions—chronicling her time in Maine, Scandinavia, Poland, Borneo, and, particularly, the Democratic Republic of Congo. Eating at the world-famous Copenhagen restaurant Noma, the author ruminates on how the act of serving tiny portions of wild foods—including “caramel made from sourdough bread yeast served with Icelandic yogurt and sea buckthorn flower marmalade”—is in some ways a “fetishization of need.” La Cerva prefers the fried grasshoppers she and her friends ate as children in New Mexico, which “tasted like some kind of discordant freedom.” In chapters that bounce precipitously from topic to topic, the author manages to keep a steady eye on her central concern: the contradictions...
This specificity is the most helpful part of a book that is  
also daily. As for publication.

Forest reserve and whose “narrow lips arch into two perfect  
administrators and students, and otherwise do your homework.

are highly specific: If you want to sign up for an MFA, they  
as a writer, at first short-term (daily word count achieved, for  
proves her ability for diligent observation, and if her prose is  
sometimes overwrought, it also offers glimpses of human activi-

ties that have grown increasingly rare—e.g., butchering a moose  
or gathering birds’ nests for soup.

For armchair adventurers, a competent examination of the pros and cons of living off the land.

A welcome vade mecum on the business and art of writing for publication.

“Writing is easy. You just open a vein and bleed.” So growled  
the prolific sports journalist Red Smith, who had to bleed  
daily. As Poets & Writers' veteran editors Larimer and Gannon  
note, the business of publishing has changed considerably  
since Smith's heyday, but the verities are eternal. “Writing is a  
lifelong endeavor,” they write, “and one that doesn’t end when  
you finish a poem, story, essay, or longer writing project.” That  
is just so, and against that truth and others, they propose sets  
of “action items,” such as making a list of your personal goals  
as a writer, at first short-term (daily word count achieved, for  
instance) and then longer-term career objectives. These items  
are highly specific: If you want to sign up for an MFA, they  
write, then research which ones fit your needs best, interview  
administrators and students, and otherwise do your homework.  
This specificity is the most helpful part of a book that is alto-
gether instructive, if sometimes a touch discouraging: As Lar-
imer and Gannon are quick to point out, in 2017, the median  
income for full-time writers was $20,300, a shade south of the  
poverty line for a family of three. For those willing to brave the  
long odds, the authors offer a few bits of cheerfuling, includ-
ing the thought that it’s OK to “give yourself permission to  
brag a bit”—which is to say, if someone asks what you do, call  
yourself a writer and own it without apology. Among the many  
highlights of this book for beginning writers is a list of writers’  

THE PoETS & WRITERS  
COMPLETE GUIDE TO BEING A  
WRITER  
Everything You Need To Know About Craft, Inspiration,  
Agents, Editors, Publishing, and the Business of Building  
a Sustainable Writing Career  
Larimer, Kevin & Gannon, Mary  
Avid Reader Press (496 pp.)  
$29.99 | Apr. 7, 2020  
978-1-9821-2307-9

confers that appeal to underrepresented constituencies in  
a publishing world that, because it’s so economically marginal,  
tends to favor those advantaged enough not to have to worry  
about income.

A book of benefit to well-practiced as well as novice  
writers, full of useful advice, pointers, and prompts.

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**Dr. Vivian Lee**, a physician, scientist, and health care administrator,  
charts a new and improved system that lowers costs while  
providing more efficient service.

Lee, president of Health Platforms at Verily (formerly  
Google Life Sciences), is appalled by the current state of health  
care in the U.S., where spending is “rapidly approaching $4 tril-
lion per year,” far more than in countries that provide universal  
coverage—and our results are worse. In a nation in which 10%  
of citizens don’t have or can’t afford health insurance (and mil-
ions are underinsured), the landscape is dire: We waste 30 cents  
of every dollar spent on health care, 20% of which is unnecessary,  
medical errors are the third-leading cause of death,  
we forego preventative care, and we push high-cost, branded  
drugs instead of generics. Although Lee sometimes drifts into  
insurance-speak—“the Bundled Payments for Care Improve-
ment pilot project”—she mostly presents sensible options: “Pay  
for results instead of action” (collaring costs, predicating fees  
for results); set expectations of zero tolerance for serious medi-
cal errors; giant providers (such as Medicare and the Veterans  
Health Administration) should negotiate prices; take cues from  
successful “employer-driven and government-run health sys-
tems”; and understand that it will take time to build “on the vital  
roles that everyone needs to play.” Lee believes that the fee-for-
service models undercut doctors’ intrinsic motivations—such  
as purpose and mastery—and that it is crucial for patients to  
become fully engaged in their health care. Of particular value  
are the action plans that conclude each chapter, which contain  
countless helpful suggestions for patients, consumers, physi-
cians, health care professionals, health care payers, and policy-
makers. These include tapping into big data (with buffers for  
privacy), a 10-point plan for employers, and a health system that  
learns from its results and acts on them.

A health professional turns an experienced eye toward  
sensible, ground-level actions to make medical care bet-
ter and cheaper.

**THE LONG FIX  
Solving America’s Health Care Crisis With Strategies That Work for Everyone  
Lee, Vivian  
Norton (256 pp.)  
$26.95 | May 12, 2020  
978-1-324-00667-1

Physician, scientist, and health care  
administrator Lee charts a new and  
improved system that lowers costs while  
providing more efficient service.

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A health professional turns an experienced eye toward  
sensible, ground-level actions to make medical care bet-
ter and cheaper.
In her first book of nonfiction, best-selling crime novelist Lippman gathers 15 essays on motherhood, family life, and her writing career. Except for the six months after college when she worked part-time at “the finest Italian restaurant in Waco, Texas,” Baltimore native Lippman always earned a living by her pen. First, she was a newspaper reporter who eventually went to work for the *Baltimore Sun*. Then, in 1997, she fulfilled a childhood fantasy and became a novelist. Here, the author offers a collection of personal essays that she started writing in 2017, in part to overcome a “distaste for the first-person pronoun.” Mining personal experiences for material, Lippman provides humorous insights into her life as a writer, mother, and wife to acclaimed TV writer and producer David Simon. She opens the book with an essay about finding self-acceptance at age 60. After spending too much time struggling with her body image, she finally learned to say “the most infuriating [thing]” possible for a middle-aged woman: that she actually liked the way she looked. A positive self-image was the gift she wanted to give her young daughter, whom she discusses in “Game of Crones.” Bucking convention, Lippman became a first-time mother to an adopted daughter while in her 50s, which led to numerous questions about whether the child was her granddaughter. A dedicated career woman, the author reveals how motherhood “made me less robotic [and] more inclined toward improvisation and spontaneity” and marked the beginning of the most successful period in her writing career. Yet for all her fame, Lippman still sees herself as a “happy gherkin alongside the James Beard Foundation Cookbook Hall of Fame, became deeply involved in the Zen movement in the Bay Area, a 20-year association that involved not just meditation, but cooking and running a restaurant. She tells us about her parents’ lives, her childhood fondness for Twinkies, her growing passion for fresh vegetables and fruit, and her decisions to devote herself to cooking, restaurant managing, and, eventually, writing cookbooks. We also learn about her two marriages and her move to the Southwest (first Flagstaff, then Santa Fe). The author does not observe a rigid organization. As if her writing were a meal, she moves from topic to topic like a diner enjoying her segue from course to course. Readers will enjoy her amiability and learn much from her ruminations, including the advice to “break your plans in the face of something wonderful and unexpected, like [discovering] morels. Let this food rule take over and push you here and there as it will.” Madison offers detailed accounts of her Zen life, her decision to focus on vegetarian food (though she confesses that she occasionally eats—and likes—meat), her involvement in the founding of Greens Restaurant (which, 40 years later, still stands with its dazzling view of the Golden Gate Bridge), and her trips abroad. Madison also shares some lessons she’s learned about cooking and restaurant work—e.g., “Be Forever Gracious,” “Eat Like a Guest,” “Treat Everyone the Same,” “Salt As You Go.” She ends with details about her writing, book tours (including some of her gaffes), memorable meals (including “that first meal at Chez Panisse”), and affecting thoughts about “nourishment and sustenance.”

A wryly observed collection from a reliably good writer.
Barbara Jordan, and Bruce Springsteen to assess patriotism in America. He then discusses *Moby-Dick*, a novel “that, in America, defines the contours of a common imagination as much as anything America has ever produced.” Indeed, “in the American story, Ahab is always out there.” Marcus traces the *Gatsby* effect as it later weaved its way into the “American fabric” in books by Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Ross MacDonald, and Walter Mosley as well as, perhaps most significantly, Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain*. Instead of an ordinary plot summary, Marcus draws on Andy Kaufman’s quirky *Saturday Night Live* in 1978 and an extended discussion of *Gatz*, the six-hour public theatrical reading. After an insightful examination of the historical “ferment that fed the energies of the decade into Fitzgerald’s book,” Marcus goes to the movies. He dismisses the “enervating” Robert Redford version in favor of Baz Luhrmann’s 2013 edition. The author is much taken with Leonardo DiCaprio’s acting and Tobey McGuire’s sensitive narration.

Astute, challenging, and far-reaching: There’s much to chew on in Marcus’ disquisition on *Gatsby’s* legacy.

DUTCH GIRL
*Audrey Hepburn and World War II*
Matzen, Robert
GoodKnight Books (404 pp.)
$18.00 paper | Apr. 21, 2020
978-1-7327-358-0

A popular biographer’s intimate portrait of Audrey Hepburn’s wartime experiences.

Before the world knew Audrey as an actress and UNICEF humanitarian, she was born Adriaantje, in 1929. With this scrupulous account of Hepburn’s upbringing in Belgium, England, and the Netherlands—elements that previous biographies have only glanced at—Matzen completes his trilogy on Hollywood stars during World War II, following books on Jimmy Stewart and Carole Lombard. The author delves into the attraction of fascism for Hepburn’s mother, Baroness Ella van Heemstra, and father, Joseph Ruston. He opens the book with a chilling passage about Ella’s meeting with Hitler in 1935. “He was so pale, so composed as he smiled that enigmatic smile, full of humility, the one seen so often in newscasts flickering on screens around the world,” writes Matzen. “He reached out his hand and accepted hers lightly.” After Joseph left the family, Hepburn’s life was irreversibly altered, as it would be again when the Germans invaded their town. The author interweaves detailed military and social history with Ella’s lineage, quotes from Hepburn’s letters from the diaries of her contemporaries, and interviews with people who knew her. Hepburn seldom spoke of Ella’s early Nazi support or her own war efforts, but Matzen resurrects this history, thoroughly contextualizing Ella’s dominant personality. In addition to documenting the family’s many traumas, the author explores Hepburn’s love for ballet, and accounts of early film auditions add light to the bleakness. When thoughts and impressions are ascribed to Hepburn—e.g., her reaction to Anne Frank’s diary (“‘There were floods of tears,’ Audrey said of that first encounter with the writing of Anne Frank. ‘I became hysterical.’”) and her 1992 trip to Somalia—the journalistic text is often moving but sometimes slows the narrative flow. Nonetheless, Matzen’s labor of love amply shows how war shaped Hepburn’s worldview. Useful chapter notes blend bibliographic sources with the author’s reasoning for engaging with specific topics.

An illuminating and devastating examination of an icon and her dramatic experiences.

**THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS**
How a Selfish Ape Invented a New Moral Code
McCullough, Michael E.
Basic (368 pp.)
$30.00 | May 12, 2020
978-0-465-06474-8

Almost everyone applauds a good Samaritan, but this wasn’t always the case. Psychologist McCullough delivers a delightfully ingenious explanation of how we came around. “Modern humans’ concern for the welfare of perfect strangers has no analog in the rest of the animal kingdom or even in our own history as a species,” writes the author. “It’s a true one-off.” An ant, wolf, lion, or chimpanzee who wanders into an unfamiliar group will be attacked and likely killed. Primitive humans were no different: “Our stone-age ancestors didn’t care very much at all about the well-being of true strangers.” Darwin maintained that natural selection evolved an instinct to help strangers in the hope of getting help in return and also to obtain praise from those around us. This instinct developed with the advance of civilization, during which culture, trade, and technology added to our capacity to reason and then refined our compassion. McCullough offers a superb history of charity. Ancient rulers and aristocrats paid little attention to the poor. Mostly arising during the first millennium B.C.E., world religions and philosophies gave rise to the golden rule; kindness to others became both virtuous and a mark of piety. Yet few doubted that poverty was “just another of life’s unpleasant inevitabilities” until after 1500, when urbanization and its accompanying squalor and disease convinced observers that it endangered social order, public health, and business, so government should take action. This gave rise to the first effective poor laws and national charitable institutions. By the 20th century, arguments for “natural rights and the dignity of all persons” produced both domestic social programs in developed nations and a steady stream of foreign aid. The 21st-century explosion of social media revolutionized philanthropy, allowing instant appeals and massive responses from “bathrobe humanitarians” sitting at their computers.

A deliciously provocative analysis of an entirely admirable human quality. (10 figures, 2 tables)
**SEX MATTERS**

Good ammunition for mandating sex- and gender-based differences in health professional education, research, and practice.

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**JAMES MONROE**

A Life

McGrath, Tim

Dutton (736 pp.)

$34.00 | May 5, 2020

978-0-451-47726-2

The life of “the last Founding Father to hold the presidency.”

In this deliberative take on Monroe (1758-1831), McGrath, a two-time winner of the Commodore John Barry Book Award, mines the Revolutionary and post-1812 eras, concentrating on Monroe’s two-term presidency. A mentee of Thomas Jefferson and Revolutionary War hero in his home state of Virginia, Monroe served as a delegate on the Continental Congress and notably voted against the ratification of the Constitution. He was partly embroiled in the revelation of Alexander Hamilton’s being blackmailed for his affair with Maria Reynolds—did Monroe reveal it to Jefferson? The bad blood would nearly cause them to fight a duel a few years later. As the author shows, Monroe certainly helped stoke the political animosity between Jefferson’s supporters and Hamilton’s Federalists. Serving as George Washington’s ambassador to France when the mood in Paris was still dangerously revolutionary, Monroe was recalled due to his handling of the Jay Treaty, and his veneration of Washington was deeply shaken. McGrath follows Monroe from his time as governor of Virginia to his role as Jefferson’s envoy in negotiating the Louisiana Purchase. Later, he served as James Madison’s secretary of state and secretary of war, at the same time, while war with Britain raged. As president, he was able to defuse political tensions between the parties, and the Federalists were neutralized. Under his tenure, “he sought an Indian policy that would please both white and Native Americans, and came up woefully short,” and he freed only one of his more than 200 slaves. McGrath, whose wide-ranging research is evident from the extensive list of primary sources, considers Monroe’s legacy as “put[ting] his country on the world stage, for better and worse, for all time.” It’s a sturdy, straightforward text that will appeal to fans of presidential biographies, if not general readers.

A proficient, readable life, though McGrath does not convincingly explain why a new biography on Monroe is necessary now.

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**SEX MATTERS**

How Male-Centric Medicine Endangers Women’s Health and What We Can Do About It

McGregor, Alyson J.

Hachette Go (272 pp.)

$28.00 | May 19, 2020

978-0-7382-4676-5

A physician urges women to speak out against the abuses of “male-centric” models in medical research and practice.

As McGregor, who co-founded the Sex and Gender Women’s Health Collaborative, cogently shows, women’s and men’s bodies are different not only in their sex organs, but in all their cells, brains, and the ways in which they metabolize drugs and experience disease and treatments. From her job as an emergency department physician in an urban trauma center and her teaching and research experience, she has amassed ample data and cases to prove her point. A woman with vague chest pain, fatigue, and nausea may be seen as emotionally overwrought and prescribed an anti-anxiety drug rather than perceived as a potential heart attack patient because women don’t experience the crushing chest pain and left arm pain that men do. Unfortunately, writes the author, the anxiety diagnosis is all too often the “go-to” choice, on par with a dismissive, “it’s all in your head.” In the early chapters, McGregor cites older studies such as a hormone replacement therapy trial that showed that the post-menopausal use of female hormones raised serious blood-clotting risks rather than preventing heart disease. Curiously, her chapter on pharmaceuticals suggests that many drugs in use today have not been tested in women, yet Food and Drug Administration regulations have long required that all new drug applications include sufficient sex and demographic subgroup numbers to allow separate analyses of safety and efficacy. Regardless, McGregor is to be commended for showing how medicine has long skewed male and harmed women. Especially spot-in are the later chapters on implicit bias, treatment of women of color, and issues affecting trans individuals. The author concludes with to-do lists, questions women can ask their providers, and suggestions for advocacy roles to raise awareness of the issues.

Good ammunition for mandating sex- and gender-based differences in health professional education, research, and practice.
THE LINCOLN CONSPIRACY
The Secret Plot To Kill America’s 16th President—And Why It Failed
Meltzer, Brad & Mensch, Josh
Flatiron Books (448 pp.)
$29.99 | May 5, 2020
978-1-250-31747-6

The tale of how Abraham Lincoln came close to being assassinated even before taking the oath of office.

In short, energetic chapters, Meltzer and Mensch, who collaborated on The First Conspiracy: The Secret Plot To Kill George Washington (2019), fashion a brisk political thriller centered on a nefarious plot to murder Lincoln before his inauguration. Lincoln, who won a slim majority of the popular vote, was deeply hated by the slaveholding South. Six weeks after the election, South Carolina became the first state to secede; five others soon followed, and Jefferson Davis was sworn in as president of the Confederacy. But secession did not satisfy a group of conspirators who gathered to devise a plan to seize the city of Washington and prevent the inauguration and even to kill Lincoln on his way to the capital, “and thus inaugurate a revolution.” The authors speculate that the conspirators were likely members of the Knights of the Golden Circle and National Volunteers, groups composed of pro-slavery white supremacists that grew in virulence after Lincoln’s election and likely were precursors of the Ku Klux Klan. They were thwarted largely through the efforts of pioneering private detective Allen Pinkerton, who was called in to investigate, and foil, the plot. The authors create an admiring portrait of Pinkerton and his staff, which included the first female detective, the sly, unflappable Kate Warne. In addition, a secret “Committee of Five,” convened by Secretary of State William Seward, gathered in Washington to ensure the peaceful transfer of power. Pinkerton was charged with logistics, which meant studying the train route for Lincoln’s convoluted inaugural journey, planning for every contingency, and eventually masterminding a plan that involved smuggling Lincoln, in disguise, onto a train days before he was expected. In addition to revealing the conspiracy, the authors vividly convey the virulent racism endemic in the South.

A sharply drawn episode from a regrettable part of America’s past. (b/w illustrations)

POLAND 1939
The Outbreak of World War II
Moorhouse, Roger
Basic (432 pp.)
$30.00 | May 5, 2020
978-0-465-09538-4

A fresh, well-documented look at the Nazi-Soviet invasion and partition of Poland in September 1939, rejecting both “the Nazi mythology of an easy Blitzkrieg victory” and “the Soviet lie that the Red Army never invaded at all.”

An accomplished British historian of World War II, Moorhouse delves deeply into this five-week opening to the larger conflict, showing how it presaged the horrors to come. The author notes how this campaign—during which Hitler restoked the animosity between Poland and Germany through a series of fabricated border skirmishes and plunged headlong into invasion to quell Polish “terror” and defend German “honor”—is too often overlooked in WWII histories. Just as he did in his previous book, The Devil’s Alliance: Hitler’s Pact With Stalin, 1939-1941 (2014), Moorhouse refreshingly looks beyond the chronicles of the victors, clearly portraying the shameful lack of action on the parts of Britain and France to come to the defense of the country it had sworn to defend as well as the ongoing Soviet efforts to disguise its subsequent invasion as some kind of “humanitarian intervention.” The fact is that Hitler and Stalin had already agreed to divide the country via a German-Soviet nonaggression pact, which would have essentially wiped Poland off the map. While the British and French vowed to protect the country if attacked, they were in no military position to do so and hoped, futilely, that by threatening war, Germany would back down. What the author demonstrates splendidly is the tenacity of the Polish resistance and bravery in the face of the Nazi onslaught, a spirit inculcated through centuries of invasion and occupation. This was not an easy annexation, as the Nazis had hoped. Moreover, as Moorhouse ably shows, the overwhelming air power and targeting of noncombatants, as well as racial murder and revenge, foreshadowed later atrocities.

An excellent study by a thorough chronicler that adds considerably to the historical record. (16-page insert; 10 maps)
DARE TO SPEAK
Defending Free Speech for All
Nossel, Suzanne
Dey Street/HarperCollins (320 pp.)
$28.99 | May 5, 2020
978-0-06-296603-2

The CEO of PEN America suggests how to protect free speech in a digital age. As Nossel notes in her debut book, Herbert Marcuse argued that “creating a broadly tolerant society demands intolerance of certain ideas, including right-wing ideologies.” With far-right extremism on the rise, his view is making a comeback, writes the author, and she rebuts it in a defense of free speech that alternately hits the mark and wanders far afield from First Amendment issues, dealing instead with cultural insensitivity or noninclusive language. In much of the first half, Nossel serves up unedifying bromides on how to respond to “unintended offenses” such as stereotyping millennials as “snowflakes” or “asking a fellow party guest if she’s pregnant when she isn’t.” The narrative gains traction when the author addresses urgent questions such as how to protect free speech while responding effectively to harmful material like online revenge porn, terrorist recruitment, and deepfake videos. Nossel, who has also served as the COO of Human Rights Watch, shows in chilling detail how tech companies are failing to moderate content appropriately. Google and Facebook, for example, “demote problematic posts, limiting how often they are seen without excising them entirely,” or “shadow ban” them by “suppressing social media users so that, unbeknownst to them, their posts and content cannot be seen by others.” The social media giants must become more transparent, argues Nossel, partly by notifying users promptly if they face sanctions. Throughout the book, the author argues persuasively that “informal self-governance” protects free speech better than corporate or government restrictions, but after reading her accounts of abuses by Silicon Valley behemoths, few readers are likely to disagree with one of her conclusions: “Mandated transparency is one area where government regulation of online content may be a positive step and would not entail intrusions on content in violation of the First Amendment.”

Apt and inapt arguments commingle in a passionate defense of free speech.

MANIFESTO FOR A MORAL REVOLUTION
Practices To Build a Better World
Novogratz, Jacqueline
Henry Holt (272 pp.)
$26.99 | May 5, 2020
978-1-250-22287-9

A distinguished social entrepreneur offers insights on how to responsibly transform the interconnecting worlds of technology, business, and politics to elevate “individual and collective dignity.”

The early 21st century is an era characterized by increasing economic inequality, crumbling sociopolitical systems, and the looming threat of climate catastrophe. Drawing on her experience working with change-makers and lessons learned from her own humanitarian efforts, Novogratz outlines a set of principles grounded in the idea that a better world can only emerge when individuals seek to serve others rather than themselves. She begins by highlighting the need to cultivate a moral imagination, the ability to “view other people’s problems as if they were your own.” This kind of sensitivity helped a young Japanese entrepreneur build meaningful relationships with Colombian cacao farmers who had suffered through decades of political violence and who also wanted to maintain natural balance in the lands they farmed. The process took time, but, in the end, the entrepreneur was able to launch a business that was both socially conscious and sustainable. Listening to “voices unheard”—especially those belonging to the poor—is also critical, as is making a conscious effort to transform oneself into “a bridge…that others might walk across.” To help break down the polarities that have come to define our modern age, the author suggests the need to “reach across the wall of either-or and acknowledge the truths that exist in opposing perspectives.”

Wise and optimistic, the author provides a benevolent tonic for those looking to rise above the troubled waters of the age and embrace the “beautiful struggle” of rebuilding our broken world.

An inspiringly hopeful book.
The wild, improbable rise of Kim Jong Un.

Although Kim jokes are a media staple, readers will find none in this grim but expert assessment by Pak, former CIA analyst and currently senior fellow at the Brookings Institute. In the prologue, the author, who studied in South Korea as a Fulbright scholar, reveals that North Korea’s existence owes much to Cold War politics. In 1945, Stalin installed Kim’s paternal grandfather, Kim Il Sung, in the northern half of the newly divided nation. A fierce nationalist and no puppet, he yearned to unite Korea and sent his army south in 1950. He did not expect the U.S. to intervene, which it did, and the 1953 armistice saw borders largely unchanged but North Korea devastated. With Russian and Chinese aid, he rebuilt, establishing a bizarre personality cult in which adjectives such as “Orwellian” or “Stalinist” barely scratch the surface. His clunky command economy went into free fall in the 1990s after the Soviet Union and its aid vanished. However, despite widespread famine, Sung and his successor son, Kim Jong Il, devoted enormous resources to building an arsenal of nuclear bombs and missiles. Jong Un succeeded his father in 2011. His Swiss education and love of basketball suggested a cosmopolitan outlook, but this proved illusory as he brutally demonstrated his power on the international scene and executed family members. Knowing that family ties did not ensure loyalty, Edward heaped land grants and sumptuous goods on George to buy his faithfulness. As Penn writes, he “would be enveloped in Edward’s smothering love; in return he would give the king his unconditional obedience.” But when George married an heiress, his need for his brother’s largesse diminished, and he became susceptible to treasonous plots. After a decade of George’s defiance, Edward finally had enough; being the king’s brother could not save him from an ignominious fate. As for Richard, the young man praised for his “reckless bravery” grew into a violent, arrogant, and devious politician with his eye on nothing less than the throne. Besides chronicling intrigues, conspiracies, and shifting alliances among a large cast of characters, Penn details the “messy reality of life” among the nobles and their subjects: births and deaths, festivals and weddings, feasts and tournaments, famines and illness, and, not least, the unstoppable gossip that circulated constantly.

Rebellious decades come to life vividly in a taut, spirited history.
**CHILDREN OF ASH AND ELM**
*A History of the Vikings*

**Price, Neil**

Basic (624 pp.)
$35.00 | May 12, 2020
978-0-316-43512-3

A fresh history of the Vikings and their world.

The Vikings, writes Uppsala University archaeologist Price, whose books include *The Viking Way*, were “as individually varied as every reader of this book.” Yet, he adds, it’s possible to advance some generalizations about them. They regarded the world as a hostile place to be met with violence that was supernaturally empowered by their gods. The Vikings thought of themselves as children of the great ash tree Yggdrasill, “the steed of the terrible one,” an epithet for Odin. Over the course of three centuries, they ranged over an impressively large territory in a number of guises, from traders and soldiers to raiders and legendarily ferocious fighters. One Norse woman lived in Greenland, meeting First Peoples, and later visited Rome and met the pope; moving to Iceland after becoming a nun, she was “probably the most traveled woman on the planet.” In this elegantly conceived, constantly surprising narrative, Price charts this evolution. When Viking merchants landed near wealthy British monasteries to attend trade fairs, one of their number, thinking hard about the possibilities, likely turned to his fellows and said something like, “Why don’t we just take it?” So effectively did they put the fear in their targets that the English were soon calling them “slaughter-wolves.” With clarity and verve, Price examines various aspects of Viking society, including the place of women and transgender people on the battlefield and other venues of warrior society; the structure of warrior cults such as the berserkers; what Viking mass burials tell us about the people thus interred; and, especially, the structure of the Viking economy, which was enriched by the widespread application of slavery. The author also considers the last generations of Vikings as pirates whose society, though founded on violence, was also definitively democratic.

*An exemplary history that gives a nuanced view of a society long reduced to a few clichés. (16-page color insert; maps)*

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**RISE OF HITLER**

*How Hitler Came To Power*

**Range, Peter Ross**

Little, Brown (464 pp.)
$29.00 | May 12, 2020
978-0-316-35112-3

A history of the “stunning turn of events” that led to Hitler’s dictatorship.

That flamboyant men whom no one takes seriously become national leaders no longer surprises anyone, but Hitler’s rise shocked everyone, and Range’s lively addition to the groaning bookshelves on the Führer describes the critical years from 1919 to 1933. In 1919, a penniless immigrant from Austria but already a World War I veteran and fierce German nationalist, Hitler attended a meeting of the German Workers’ Party, a tiny Munich group whose extreme views appealed to him. He joined, and his dazzling oratory quickly made him the party’s leader and a Munich celebrity. By 1923, his party (now with “national socialist” added to its name) numbered over 50,000, and he launched his famous beer hall “putsch,” which failed but produced a great deal of publicity. Released from prison at the end of 1924, he resumed party leadership. For the remainder of the relatively prosperous 1920s, Nazis remained a negligible political force, but Hitler’s fierce anti-government, racist rhetoric kept them in the news. Matters changed when the Depression crushed Germany’s economy. To worldwide amazement, the Nazis received 6.4 million votes in the 1930 election (eight times their 1928 total) and over 100 seats in the Reichstag. Their vote doubled again in 1932. Germany’s leaders could no longer ignore the nation’s largest political party; but Hitler refused any government position except chancellor. Finally, after nearly a year of national paralysis, conservative figures convinced themselves that they could control Hitler from subordinate positions in the cabinet, and he took office on Jan. 30, 1933. Every reader beginning this lucid, provocative history will want to know how such a fringe character with views abhorrent to educated citizens could become a national leader. Range provides the answer: persistence, luck, and an ignorant establishment—all qualities as common today as a century ago.

*A lucid account of a spectacular and disheartening success story. (8-page b/w insert; map; timeline; cast of characters)*

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**UNFATHOMABLE ASCENT**

*A Public Defender Movement To Transform Criminal Justice*

**Rapping, Jonathan**

Beacon (256 pp.)
$27.95 | May 5, 2020
978-0-8070-6462-7

An indictment of the U.S. criminal justice system, which treats the majority of defendants as ciphers—or worse.

Rapping, a public defender who has received a MacArthur award for his pioneering work, explains how his career has led him to spearhead much-needed reforms. After struggling against recalcitrant judges, prosecutors, and even fellow public defenders in numerous jurisdictions, the author decided that the path to meaningful change for indigent defendants would need to come from public defenders themselves. Throughout the book, filled with detailed case studies of justice gone awry, Rapping describes the heavy caseloads and lack of funds with which most public defenders struggle, which means that their clients receive almost no attention. Rather than seeking courtroom trials for clients, besieged public defenders accept plea
Much-needed, readable concise political and economic analysis.

THE SYSTEM

REVOLVER
Sam Colt and the Six-Shooter That Changed America
Rasenberger, Jim
Scribner (448 pp.)
$28.00 | May 26, 2020
978-1-5011-6638-9

Vigorous life of Samuel Colt (1814-1862), the renowned and controversial inventor of the pistol that bears his name today.

Colt was a young teenager when he shipped out to sea, where he had one of those lightbulb moments—or would have, if there had been lightbulbs in 1831. He probably owed it to something he’d seen in a market in India, but there it was: a model he’d carved of a pistol that, unlike the single-load models of the day, had a “fist-shaped bulge above the trigger” inside of which could be found the solution to a nagging technological problem: how to fire several bullets without reloading. With Colt’s invention, by popular historian and journalist Rasenberger’s account, two great forces met, one economic and the other demographic. Here was an invention more important than the mechanical reaper or cotton gin, one that, with all its murderous possibilities, gave specific force to Manifest Destiny and the conquest of the continent. Colt seems to have had some inkling of all this sooner or later, whispered into their ears about the benefits of Colt’s patent extension.” Himself a carouser of indifferent morals, Colt made and lost a fortune or two over the years. He died near the beginning of the Civil War, in which his “revolver was a sideshow...a desirable but insensational accoutrement carried by officers and cavalry”—but especially by guerrillas such as Quatrill’s Raiders and the gang of the Confederate bushwhacker Bloody Bill Anderson, who used Colt’s invention to slaughter Union troops equipped with single-shot muskets. As Rasenberger notes in conclusion, knowing all this about Colt won’t change anyone’s mind about guns, but his useful study certainly lends depth to the ongoing debate about them.

A solid blend of technological, economic, social, and popular history.

THE SYSTEM
Who Rigged It, How We Fix It
Reich, Robert B.
Knopf (224 pp.)
$24.00 | Mar. 24, 2020
978-0-525-65904-4

The bestselling author presents his case that severe income inequality is the leading factor eroding American democracy.

After serving as the secretary of labor for Bill Clinton, Reich became a professor, frequent commentator on our ailing political system, and author of such bestsellers as Locked in the Cabinet, The Common Good, and Supercapitalism. In his latest, he urges all Americans outside the wealthiest 1% to stop thinking in terms of left vs. right or Democrat vs. Republican. Instead, writes the author, the crucial battle is Oligarchy vs. Democracy. The oligarchs, no matter what they say publicly about promoting democracy within a vigorous capitalistic economy, care almost exclusively about expanding their wealth. The accumulation of such wealth, writes Reich, has destroyed the middle class and offers nothing but misery to minimum wage workers. Throughout the narrative, the author relies heavily on the career of Jamie Dimon to illustrate his theories. Dimon, the CEO and chairman of JPMorgan Chase, presents himself as an enlightened supporter of the Democratic Party as well as a philanthropist actively seeking to reduce income inequality. Digging deeper, Reich argues that Dimon, while perhaps sincere in his own mind, is just another enabler of oligarchy. That enabling occurs not only via his too-big-to-fail bank, but also through Dimon’s leadership of the Business Roundtable, a lobbying organization consisting of the most powerful chief executives in the U.S. By opposing government regulation of industry and pushing for corporate tax cuts, Dimon and his fellow BR board members demonstrate their disdain for any legislation that might increase income equality among all socio-economic levels. As the author incisively shows, while opposing a safety net for the needy, corporate leaders regularly accept socialism for the extremely wealthy through government bailouts, an unfair tax code, and other measures. In various passages, Reich explains how the oligarchs have helped create and then bolster Donald Trump and his supporters.

Much-needed, readable political and economic analysis.
An essay gone viral leads to this memoir about deep loss and navigating profound grief.

In March 2017, on the eve of her death from ovarian cancer, bestselling author Amy Krouse Rosenthal published a piece in the “Modern Love” section of the New York Times. Titled “You May Want To Marry My Husband,” it read like an expanded dating-site post extolling the virtues of the man who would soon become a widower. It generated millions of views and plenty of responses, including a few marriage proposals, but also numerous messages of support from well-wishers who had experienced similar tragedies. This book contains the entire original column as well as a follow-up column, written by the author, titled “My Wife Said You May Want To Marry Me,” excerpts from many of the responses he received, and passages from notes and letters he and his wife exchanged during what seemed like an idyllic marriage. “If he sounds like a prince and our relationship seems like a fairy tale, it’s not too far off,” she wrote in her essay, and this memoir corroborates that account. Yet her death wasn’t the turn a fairy tale is supposed to take, and the author’s coming to terms with it is easily the most moving and useful part of the book. As he writes, he discovered that “grief as a process is unique to everyone, and there is no right or wrong way to flow through it.” He takes us through that process and shows us what kinds of support were particularly helpful. He doesn’t have any desire to let go, but he found that he was able to move on, even to fall in love again, perhaps partly because his late wife encouraged him to do so.

A memoir filled with advice and support for anyone else going through similar circumstances.

THE WAR OF RETURN
How Western Indulgence of the Palestinian Dream Has Obstructed the Path to Peace
Schwartz, Adi & Wilf, Einat
Trans. by Lecy, Eylon
All Points/St. Martin’s (304 pp.)
$28.99 | Apr. 28, 2020
978-1-250-25276-0

A controversial manifesto against the one-state, two-peoples approach to peace in the Middle East.

Since 1950, Israel has had a Law of Return, granting Jews the right of Israeli citizenship. The Palestinians, however, want to have a Right of Return—not to their own country, but into the State of Israel. Schwartz, a one-time correspondent for Haaretz, and Wilf, a former Labor MP, count themselves among peace-inclined Israelis on the political left. However, they mount a vigorous, methodical argument against such a Palestinian Right of Return. Their disillusionment with the process begun at Camp David came with the realization that the Palestinian leadership did not want the two-state solution but instead demanded a “right to return” to what is now Israel and form a political majority. “We no longer want to throw the Jews in the sea,” they quote one Fatah official as saying, “but
Donald Trump's election, Sellers asserts, was caused not by economic but cultural fear "that somehow, black and brown people were going to replace whites."

A strong voice for social justice emerges in an engaging memoir. Shackelford may have spent less than a decade as a diplomat with the U.S. Foreign Service, but her tales about practicing diplomacy between the shifting priorities and alignments of the State Department and the White House are powerful—and terrifying—nonetheless. After an initial stint in Warsaw, she got her "dream assignment" in Juba, the capital and largest city in the newly independent Republic of South Sudan. "I wanted to be in Africa," she writes. "I wanted to experience diplomacy on the front lines. I wanted to help a post-conflict country find stability and prosperity. I was naïve. I was looking for a real challenge, something unique. Juba was it." Despite her inexperience, Shackelford's compassion for the locals and dexterity in navigating the complexities of inter factional conflicts earned her pervasive respect—and later garnered the State Department's highest award for consular work. The primary narrative thread is the bloody civil war between newly elected President Salva Kiir and his former vice president, Riek Machar. The author chronicles her desperate attempts to save civilians while drafting sharply worded cables urging the State Department to investigate war crimes. Between these disconcerting dispatches, Shackelford offers a condensed history of U.S. foreign policy in Africa, and the many failures of U.S. foreign policy.

A strong voice for social justice emerges in an engaging memoir. MY VANISHING COUNTRY

In a candid and affecting memoir, CNN political analyst Sellers, the youngest member of the South Carolina Legislature when he was elected in 2006, chronicles his evolution as a political activist. Sellers grew up in the rural town of Denmark, South Carolina, where his family moved in 1990. Sellers loved being "country," where he could ride his bike on back roads, fish in the ponds, and play in cotton fields. Even in what he describes as a bucolic setting, the civil rights movement pervaded the family's life: Both parents were activists; Sellers was "the campaign baby" during Jesse Jackson's second run for president in 1988; and when the phone rang, the caller might well be "Uncle" Julian Bond or "Aunt" Kathleen Cleaver. The author counts as decisive his education at historically black Morehouse College, where he was "hit by the political bug," winning his first campaign to become junior class president. Later, he mounted a successful run for election to the state legislature and, in 2014, resigned that seat to run for lieutenant governor. Although his Republican opponent won that race, Sellers garnered a respectable 41% of the vote. "I always tell people that we chipped away at the glass," he writes. Sellers admits disappointment with the black church for becoming "passive and insular at best at a time when it needs to be younger and more progressive." He is forthright, as well, about suffering from anxiety, which he attributes to the fear, rage, and anger that result from continued racial oppression. Hostilities, such as the hatred that led to the Mother Emanuel AME church tragedy in Charleston, are endemic.

"to live together"—shorthand, the authors hold, for "one state, with no right of self-determination for the Jews." The authors argue that the majority of Palestinians are no longer refugees properly speaking, as they were after the partition of 1948, but instead citizens of neighboring states as well as Germany and the U.S. "In Jordan," they write, "there exists a situation unlike anywhere else in the world, whereby citizens of a state, most of whom were born in that state, have lived there their entire lives...are designated as refugees from a different state." Even so, the U.N. gives refugee status to descendants of displaced Palestinians, and by supporting the agency that issues such a designation, the authors write, the West tacitly endorses the Palestinian goal of a wholly Arab nation "from the River to the Sea." For this reason, they charge, the Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) should be dismantled.

"A book certain to fan the flames of a seemingly unquenchable fire."
THE BUDDHIST ON DEATH ROW
How One Man Found Light in the Darkest Place
Sheff, David
Simon & Schuster (272 pp.)
$27.00 | May 5, 2020
978-1-9821-2845-6

The “Three Jewels” of Buddhism help an African American man dubiously convicted of a jailhouse murder overcome decades of hellacious abuse inside San Quentin State Prison.

Jarvis Jay Masters entered San Quentin State Prison at age 19. One night, four years into a sentence for armed robbery, prison guard Howell Burchfield was stabbed to death on duty inside the penitentiary. Masters steadfastly denied any involvement in the deadly conspiracy but was nevertheless convicted and sentenced to death. In response to his decades-long imprisonment on death row—much of it in solitary confinement—Masters turned to an intense study of meditation and Buddhist thought. Those practices not only preserved his life and sanity—they ultimately transformed him from a stunted individual engulfed in anger and self-loathing into a purposeful man of compassion dedicated to uplifting everyone he could. Further directing his anguish and pain to writing, Masters began publishing a voluminous body of illuminating stories and poems that revealed him to be more of a bodhisattva than the death row monster the State of California penal system painted him out to be. An ever widening circle of friends and teachers became convinced of Masters’ innocence, too, and dedicated their own lives to his exoneration. The author would come to know Masters through his writings as well. Applying the same mix of empathy and journalistic integrity demonstrated in Beautiful Boy (2009), Sheff conveys Masters’ transformative jailhouse exchanges with Buddhist masters, family members, and special friends with poignancy and profound emotional power. During one episode, Masters attempts to counsel a young man newly arrived on death row. “When you’re in hell and things can’t get any worse, you can try things you never tried before,” he says. “Like trusting people. Looking at yourself. Admitting you’re scared.”

An indelible portrait of an incarcerated man finding new life and purpose behind bars.

ENTANGLED LIFE
How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds & Shape Our Futures
Sheldrake, Merlin
Random House (368 pp.)
$28.00 | May 12, 2020
978-0-525-51031-4

A deep-running mycological inquiry from fungal biologist Sheldrake.

“Fungi provide a key to understanding the planet on which we live, and the ways that we think, feel, and behave,” writes the author in this delightfully granular debut book. “Yet they live their lives largely hidden from view, and over ninety percent of their species remain undocumented.” Fungi are busy everywhere, from the bottom of the sea to the recesses of your nostrils, ranging in size from the microscopic to sprawling networks that are among the largest organisms on Earth. Sheldrake does an excellent job conveying just how essential fungi are to the processes of life—as regenerators, recyclers, and networkers that stitch worlds together—despite the fact that so little of their operations is fully understood. Sheldrake shows how fungal lives have made him rethink what he thought he knew about evolution, ecosystems, intelligence, and life. The author engagingly instructs on the symbiotic relationship between fungi and the roots of seed plants. “Today,” he writes, “more than ninety percent of all plant species depend on mycorrhizal fungi,” creating an “intimate partnership…complete with cooperation, conflict, and competition.” Sheldrake also explores the curious lives of truffles and lichen (“A portion of the minerals in your body is likely to have passed through a lichen at some point”), the evolutionary advantages of ingesting psilocybin mushrooms, and the idea that algae made it out of water and onto dry land only with the help of fungi. Certainly one of the most vital and fascinating aspects of fungi has to do with environmental remediation. “Human waste streams are being reimagined in terms of fungal appetites,” writes the author, who notes how mycological solutions have been deployed in the service of corralling oil spills, combating honeybees’ colony collapse disorder, and creating building materials, from sustainable, biodegradable furniture to entire buildings.

From bread to booze to the very fiber of life, the world turns on fungi, and Sheldrake provides a top-notch portrait. (b/w illustrations)
Simple yet profound insights and advice to return to in times of confusion or loss.

**KEEP MOVING**

*Notes on Loss, Creativity, and Change*

Smith, Maggie

One Signal/Atria (224 pp.)

$24.00 | May 5, 2020

978-1-9821-3207-4

Words of encouragement from an award-winning poet.

A couple years ago, following the end of her marriage, Smith, the author of *Good Bones* (2017) and other poetry collections, took to Twitter to share a daily affirmation, imploring herself and her readers to #keepmoving. Combined with original short essays, those tweets demonstrate that social media can be a source of wisdom, as the author allows her own story of grief and transformation to inspire. Drawing on her experience as a writer, Smith views the self through the metaphor of a composition, one the “author” must constantly tend to: “Accept that you are a work in progress, both a revision and a draft: you are better of what the ‘author’ has known struggle—i.e., everyone—it will resonate plenty.”

Many other counterprotestors. Who was to blame? Smolla, a civil liberties lawyer and dean of the Widener University Delaware Law School, weighs the evidence in a tangled mix of memoir, legal scholarship, and a timeline of the actions of the police, demonstrators, and elected officials on Aug. 12. The author sets the stage by analyzing related First Amendment cases, showing that while the U.S. Supreme Court has moved to the right, the liberal and conservative justices remain “remarkably aligned” on one issue: free speech, and especially the idea that laws can’t suppress it just because it offends “the prevailing views of good order and morality.” Since the 1960s, free speech has gained enough protections that people of any political stripe may take violent offense to its messages, a possibility for which Charlottesville was inadequately prepared. In the run-up to the rally, writes Smolla, “the lines of communication and coordination among the four law enforcement agencies in and around Charlottesville were shockingly deficient.” The Charlottesville Police Department and the Virginia State Police, for example, didn’t establish radio communications on the same channel. The author gives a repetitious and poorly edited account of such lapses; the narrative lacks the polish of far better memoirs by crusading lawyers, such as Bryan Stevenson’s *Just Mercy*. Yet it’s hard to imagine a mayor or police chief who—in planning for the arrival of controversial figures—wouldn’t profit from Smolla’s account of the cascade of missteps in Charlottesville. Ultimately, the raw facts of the events described transcend their disorganized presentation.

A messy but enlightening recap of the lessons of a tragic far-right gathering in Charlottesville.

**ECONOMIC DIGNITY**

Sperling, Gene

Penguin Press (384 pp.)

$28.00 | May 5, 2020

978-1-9848-7987-5

Noted number cruncher Sperling delivers an economist’s rejoinder to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Former director of the National Economic Council in the administrations of Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, the author has long taken a view of the dismal science that takes economic justice fully into account. Alongside all the metrics and estimates and reckonings of GDP, inflation, and the supply curve, he holds the great goal of economic policy to be the advancement of human dignity, a concept intangible enough to chase the economists away. Growth, the sacred mantra of most economic policy, “should never be considered an appropriate ultimate end goal” for it, he counsels. Though 4% is the magic number for annual growth to be considered healthy; it is healthy only if everyone is getting the benefits and not just the ultrawealthy who are making away with the spoils today. Defining dignity, admits Sperling, can be a kind of “I know it when I see it” problem, but it does not exist where people are a paycheck away from homelessness; the fact, however, that people widely share a view of indignity suggests the “intuitive universality” of its opposite. That said, the author...
Identifies three qualifications, one of them the “ability to meaningfully participate in the economy with respect, not domination and humiliation.” Though these latter terms are also essentially unquantifiable, Sperling holds that this respect—lack of abuse, in another phrasing—can be obtained through a tight labor market and monetary and fiscal policy that pushes for full employment. In other words, where management needs to come looking for workers, workers are likely to be better treated than when the opposite holds. In still other words, writes the author, dignity is in part a function of “take this job and shove it” power, which is a power worth fighting for.

A declaration worth hearing out in a time of growing inequality—and indignity.

**A MOST WICKED CONSPIRACY**
*The Last Great Swindle of the Gilded Age*

Starobin, Paul
PublicAffairs (320 pp.)
$28.00 | May 5, 2020
978-1-5417-4230-7

A scandalous tale of rampant greed and criminal behavior amid a gold rush near Nome, Alaska, in 1900. Freelance journalist Starobin, a former Moscow bureau chief for *Business Week*, returns with a thoroughly researched account of a massive mining swindle in Nome. Thankfully, because the significant players are so abundant, he provides a cast of characters at the beginning of the book along with a simple but helpful map of the relevant area. But certain key figures quickly emerge and dominate, principally the master con man and powerful “boss” from North Dakota, Alexander McKenzie, who saw opportunity in Nome, headed north with some cronies (including lawyers), and abruptly took over mining claims from the less powerful. The author does an excellent job of moving readers around, teaching us about other figures who were there (including Wyatt Earp); providing some history of the region and of other gold rushes; giving deeper biographical information for some of the players; and describing the geography, weather, and modes of transportation and communication.

Starobin begins with the discovery of gold before digging into the initial claims (some of the more surprising ones: on Nome’s Bering Sea beaches). The author then discusses McKenzie before telling us about his decision to go to Nome—and what he did when he got there. Using his considerable political influence, McKenzie got friendly local judges appointed and was cruising along—conning and usurping—when a court case on the issues ended up, on appeal, in the 9th Circuit in San Francisco. Also appearing in the narrative are President William McKinley, Attorneys General John W. Griggs and Philander C. Knox, and the members of the 9th Circuit. Tacit analogies to today’s political conditions abound, and while the occasional dense detail may be off-putting for some readers, the story is entertaining.

Sturdy research and clear prose reveal some truly abominable snowmen wreaking havoc in Alaska.

**IT WAS ALL A LIE**
*How the Republican Party Became Donald Trump*

Stevens, Stuart
Knopf (256 pp.)
$26.95 | Apr. 30, 2020
978-0-525-65845-0

“Blame me”: A one-time Republican operative recounts the transformation of the big-tent GOP into an organ of white nationalism.

Stevens has been working in Republican politics for decades. Looking back at the age of 65, he regrets being “focused on winning without regard for the consequences.” Whereas a Republican presidential candidate could once expect to win between 30% and 40% of the black vote, that figure tumbled in the years after Barry Goldwater, when, successively, leaders like Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan sounded racist dog whistles to get the votes of insecure Southern and rural whites. Stevens himself admits, “I played the race card in my very first race,” driving just those white voters into the arms of the GOP by highlighting the fact that an otherwise unknown black man was running as an independent for Congress. Fast-forward to the present, when the party is headed by a man whose values should be anathema to it: Like the man himself, the GOP is “addicted to debt and selling a false image of success.” While Stevens does not place all blame on the current president, he avers that “in retrospect, the Clinton presidency adhered to the values espoused for decades by Republicans far more than the Trump years.” Ouch! As for the party, Stevens writes that it’s nearly impossible to imagine a GOP that adheres to the values of “compassionate conservatism” advanced only two decades ago by George W. Bush or one that will stand up to a resurgent Russia. He closes by predicting that Republicans who have given Trump free rein will one day “look back on this period of their lives with a mixture of shame, sadness, and regret,” holding some dim hope for a return to the values of old by virtue of moderate Republican governors and state legislators.

An epitaph, of interest to all politics junkies, for a formerly venerable party by a champion-turned-gravedigger.

**TROOP 6000**
*The Girl Scout Troop That Began in a Shelter and Inspired the World*

Stewart, Nikita
Ballantine (288 pp.)
$27.00 | May 19, 2020
978-1-9848-2075-4


The main character in the narrative, Giselle, the founder of Troop 6000 and program manager at the Girl Scouts...
Sutter’s macabre humor and lucid science writing make this an entertaining read with mass appeal.

HOW TO DIE IN SPACE

A Journey Through Dangerous Astrophysical Phenomena
Sutter, Paul M.
Pegasus (336 pp.)
$27.95 | Jun. 2, 2020
978-1-64313-438-3

Sure, space travel sounds like fun—but there are countless ways to die out there.

Comets, black holes, radiation, solar flares, neutron stars, supernovae—the universe is endlessly creative in devising phenomena that make leaving the comfortable atmosphere of Earth a risk. “Space is nasty,” writes astrophysicist Sutter, who adopts an informal, humorous persona in this book-length warning to aspiring astronauts: “Let’s sketch out the most dangerous parts of the solar system: The solar system. There, that was easy.” It’s a refreshing approach to a vast and complex subject, and the author doesn’t skimp on the science despite his non-serious tone. He walks readers through the physics of familiar dangers such as asteroids (“rocks that are looking for a target”) and unstable stars (“slumbering dragon[s], just waiting for the chance to awaken and begin breathing flame”) as well as more exotic elements—e.g., the “deadly, poisonous embrace” of the white dwarf or “the infinite density” of a black hole’s singularity. Sutter also covers what he calls “speculative threats,” which include “relics of the ancient universe” such as dark matter, cosmic strings, or the alluring possibility of aliens and wormholes. The author’s analyses are deeply researched and enormously interesting, and he navigates the nuances of new science and evolving knowledge deftly, with nontechnical readers in mind.

In the end, Sutter shifts slightly from his doomsday focus to reveal his serious enthusiasm for humankind’s future as intergalactic explorers. “I wrote these chapters to weed out the weak and unwilling. To scare some sense into them,” he writes. “For the remaining, the more foolish and daring and curious than usual, this book is a guide. It’s really an excuse to talk about all the wonderful physics happening in the cosmos…. There is so much to learn, and we need to study it as closely and intimately as possible.”

Sutter’s macabre humor and lucid science writing make this an entertaining read with mass appeal. (8 pages of color photos)
Unsentimental nature writing that sheds as much light on humans as on eels.

**FAIREST**  
A Memoir  
Talusan, Meredith  
Viking (320 pp.)  
$27.00 | May 26, 2020  
978-0-525-56130-9

An award-winning journalist tells the story of how she came to terms with a complex identity that forced her to navigate issues of gender, race, and class.

In 2017, Philippine-born “Harvard Man” Talusan returned to her alma mater as a woman. She had first arrived there in 1993 as the male “anak araw,” an albino her grandmother believed would one day live among other whites in America. A former child star, Talusan learned early on that she could parlay whiteness into a source of money and power. She also learned that her difference was more than skin deep: In sixth grade, she became “hopelessly smitten” with a male friend. The homosexual crushes continued through adolescence along with vague stirrings of a secret desire to be a woman who, like Lea Salonga in Miss Saigon, was “capable of getting a rugged and kind [American] man to fall in love with her.” Talusan moved with her parents to California, where she earned a scholarship to Harvard. There, she quickly learned the benefits of using her albinism and indeterminately Asian features to pass for an exotic-looking Caucasian. She came out as gay, but she was unable to reconcile her desire for womanhood with her life as a gay male. During her final year in college, she developed a sexually explicit one-person show called Dancing Deviant, and she began a relationship with a white, upper-class MIT professor who introduced her to a life of privilege. However, she soon realized that his desire for her ran counter to her own wish to be desired as that “beguiling woman who stared at me from the other side of the mirror whenever I put on makeup.” The author examines queer otherness with relentless honesty, and she investigates how accidental whiteness did not automatically lead to the fairest outcomes, either for herself or others.

A captivatingly eloquent memoir.

**HERE WE ARE**  
My Friendship With Philip Roth  
Taylor, Benjamin  
Penguin (192 pp.)  
$26.00 | May 19, 2020  
978-0-525-50524-2

A writer chronicles his long, intimate friendship with novelist Philip Roth (1933-2018).

Roth was already considered one of America’s most esteemed living novelists (two National Book Awards, among other honors) when Taylor, a founding faculty member of the New School’s Graduate School of Writing, became acquainted with him in the mid-1990s. Roth’s past had also been marked by two miserable marriages, scores of past lovers, and increasingly debilitating health concerns. He was irascible and mercurial yet always candid and authentic, and in this slim, affectionate memoir, Taylor perfectly captures the essence of Roth’s charmingly enigmatic humor and complex behavior. He generously shares memories of their somewhat unexpected friendship, honing in on their quiet, often amusing moments together—e.g., Taylor convincing a reluctant Roth to sit through the classic Bette Davis chestnut Now Voyager despite Roth’s more highbrow film interests. “In keeping with the unseemliness of my profession (as he would say) I’d been taking notes all along,” writes Taylor. “A lot of conversation got squirreled away.” The author liberally quotes Roth throughout, yet some passages seem to be derived from Roth’s novels (a notes section would be helpful). Taylor was there for Roth throughout his declining years, and he poignantly reflects on this experience and what their friendship has meant to them both. “I can’t be the first gay man to have been an older straight man’s mainstay,” he writes. “Philip had searched diligently for a beautiful young woman to see to him as Jane Eyre looked after old Mr. Rochester. What he got instead was me. The degree of attachment surprised us both. Were we lovers? Obviously not. Were we in love? Not exactly. Sufficient to say that ours was a conversation neither could have done without.”

A touching and entertaining portrait of Roth that is sure to delight his many readers.
A provocative book that, if correct, helps explain the ways of Trump, Putin, Bolsonaro, and other demagogues.

**WAR FOR ETERNITY**

Inside Bannon's Far-Right Circle of Global Power Brokers

Teitelbaum, Benjamin R.

Dey Street/HarperCollins (336 pp.)

$28.99 | Apr. 21, 2020

978-0-06-297845-5

A provocative book that, if correct, helps explain the ways of Trump, Putin, Bolsonaro, and other demagogues.

Teitelbaum, whose previous book, *Lions of the North* (2017), focused on nationalism and anti-immigration activism in Nordic countries, is an ethnomusicologist who has long reported on the radical right. He characterizes his latest book as something between ethnography and investigative journalism. To write an ethnography, an anthropologist has to get inside what used to be called “the native’s point of view.” To his credit, the author digs deep into the foundations and guiding documents of the ideology that guides Bannon, the author and champion of such things as Donald Trump's border wall and the Muslim ban. That ideology is what Teitelbaum characterizes as “a bizarre underground philosophical and spiritual school with an eclectic if minuscule following throughout the past hundred years”—i.e., Traditionalism, always capitalized. “When combined with anti-immigrant nationalism… it was often a sign of a rare and profound ideological radicalism.” While at Harvard, Bannon, by Teitelbaum's account, read libraries full of esoteric religious and philosophical texts that figure into the doctrine; if there’s an Illuminati-ish feel to the investigation, it’s no accident. The author traveled far and wide to talk to the Traditionalists, who include nationalists, racists, anti-immigrants, and outright kooks as well as surprisingly thoughtful acolytes—Bannon, when not blustering, among them. It takes some reading between the lines to see how Traditionalism works in action, but one element is the widely shared thought that Europe ought to break up into little states. Thus Brexit, whose advocates might be surprised to locate its origins in the view held by a Russian nationalist (and advocate of Ukrainian genocide) that “a Europe fractured into smaller units would...disperse and weaken the power emanating from the United States.”

A provocative book that, if correct, helps explain the ways of Trump, Putin, Bolsonaro, and other demagogues.

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**BREAK 'EM UP**

Recovering Our Freedom From Big Ag, Big Tech, and Big Money

Teachout, Zephyr

All Points/St. Martin's (320 pp.)

$28.99 | May 19, 2020

978-1-250-20089-1

A forceful argument about the stealthy resurgence of monopoly within the global economy.

Teachout, a law professor at Fordham University, redirects progressive attention toward this easily overlooked issue. “Wall Street,” she writes, “has been a driving force behind the gutting of antitrust laws.” The purported democratic norms of the tech economy have clouded such predatory business practices in many aspects of life, from the effect of Uber on drivers’ livelihoods, to less obvious but chilling examples—e.g., how poultry monopolies have turned farmers into indentured servants. “Uber successfully sold the idea that, if we wanted to use our phones to get a taxi, we needed to destroy 80 years of anti-monopoly laws,” writes Teachout. Furthermore, the “chickenization” model is creeping into many industries, especially restaurant delivery: “Surveillance and power go hand in hand, each reinforcing the other.” Race and class inform many of these hidden narratives: In one chapter, the author tracks how arbitration has become an alternate justice system serving the ultrawealthy. She also discusses the “body snatcher” effect of corporate super PACs on the political system: “Corporate institutions replacing democratic institutions by burrowing inside them and using their language and forms.” Similarly, the journalism industry has been gutted by greedy corporate raiders and their continued search for quarterly profit increases. Regarding the secretive CEOs of social media, Teachout writes, “it is crucial that we understand [Mark] Zuckerberg, as seekers of political power, for it is only through political action that they can be tamed.” Wide-ranging, well-organized chapters are full of unsettling tidbits, such as Amazon's courting of the surveillance state via commercial data-sharing. Finally, the author looks back at the original populist antitrust movement, but she also makes the salient point that “we shouldn’t require people to boycott essential communications infrastructure like Facebook and Google in order to demand that they be broken up.” Teachout confidently wields energetic, urgent prose and stark research, adeptly blending subtopics including law and technology.

Deserves wide attention in our current political landscape.
OUR HOUSE IS ON FIRE
Scenes of a Family and a Planet in Crisis
Thunberg, Greta & Thunberg, Svante & Ernman, Malena & Ernman, Beata
Penguin (288 pp.)
$17.00 paper | Mar. 24, 2020
978-0-14-313357-5

A collective portrait of activist Greta Thunberg’s family, encompassing not only climate change, but also issues of mental health.

In this moving text, Swedish opera singer Malena Ernman, her husband, Svante Thunberg, and their daughters, Greta and Beata, stitch together vignettes about “burned-out people on a burned out planet.” Before Greta stepped into the public eye with her 2018 strike outside the Swedish Parliament, she had fallen into depression. Ernman details the end of her music career, when Greta refused to eat or speak. Through distilled recollections, she elucidates how autism and selective mutism unfolded in her household, with all its initial hardship, and how Swedish society views spectrum disorders in general. When Greta was finally diagnosed with Asperger’s and OCD, and Beata with ADHD and other conditions, the family found a measure of solace. But they still struggled: “We scream. We kick down doors. We scratch. We pound walls. We wrestle. We cry. We ask for help and we somehow endure.” The narrative delivers a potent, challenging, and heartening portrayal of a family’s struggle to hold it all together. The text is more problematic when it conflates environmental issues—such as sustainability and the climate crisis—with mental health problems, positing that society’s prioritization of economy over ecology has led to increasing isolation and desperation. While provocative, the argument feels grounded in simplified conviction. Passages about carbon emissions, damage wrought by air travel, the failure of world leaders to take charge, and related issues are unabashedly alarmist and valuable. Because these elements echo Greta’s many speeches, they come off as repetitive in the book. The buildup to Greta’s strike—and the strike itself—is an inspiring depiction of the teen who has become a leader on the world stage and of the family who supports her behind the scenes. It also represents a courageous triumph over many of her demons.

An impassioned call to action and a vulnerable family portrait of neurodiversity.

DEEP DELTA JUSTICE
A Black Teen, His Lawyer, and Their Groundbreaking Battle for Civil Rights in the South
Van Meter, Matthew
Little, Brown (304 pp.)
$28.00 | May 19, 2020
978-0-316-43503-1

An examination of a 1966 racial confrontation and its aftermath, which “would help dismantle the infrastructure of white supremacy that had strangled [a rural Louisiana] community for centuries.”

Van Meter, a Detroit-based journalist who is an assistant director of that city’s Shakespeare in Prison project, describes an altercation between two black high school students and four white students. It took place in Plaquemines Parish, a bayou community already infamous for its virulent racism, in large part because of the bigoted politician who ruled the area, Leander H. Perez, who “hurled himself bodily at challenges, heedless of opposition or difficulty.” The criminal case that resulted from the incident, which received a push from Perez, involved Gary Duncan, 19 at the time. On Oct. 18, 1966, Duncan noticed the two black students while driving out of town. Sensing that the white students might attack them, Duncan stopped his car and defused the situation, lightly touching the arm of one of the white boys before driving off. That moment, writes the author in this readable legal and civil rights history, “marked the beginning of one of the most important—and improbable criminal cases in history.” Duncan was charged with assault. Through a series of unlikely connections, he found 28-year-old Richard Sobol, a white attorney visiting Louisiana to work on civil rights litigation while on a brief break from his corporate firm in Washington, D.C. White lawyers in the area, pushed by Perez, become so enraged at Sobol that they attempted to ban him from practicing law in the state, but Sobol prevailed. The federal court in New Orleans ruled that the prosecution “can only be interpreted as harassment” and “was meant to show Richard that civil rights lawyers were not welcome in the parish and their defense of Negroes…would not be tolerated.” Though not as revelatory as Just Mercy, this will appeal to admirers of Bryan Stevenson and similar crusaders.

Timely reading as Americans continue to reckon with an unreliable, sometimes racist criminal justice system.
A sweeping chronology of human deafness fortified with the author’s personal struggles and triumphs. (b/w illustrations)

Refreshingly literary and offbeat—a mother-to-be book for firebrands.

NINE MOONS

Wiener, Gabriela
Trans. by Powell, Jessica
Restless Books (224 pp.)
$22.00 | May 5, 2020
978-1-63206-223-9

A Peruvian journalist’s vibrant musings on pregnancy and childbirth.

In this whip-smart follow-up to Sexographies (2018), the author details her nine months of pregnancy as anything but pastel. Wiener interweaves facts on embryonic development and other scientific elements with visceral experience and accounts of her rabbit-hole internet searches to reveal the
anxiety of her first full-term pregnancy. The author examines a host of commonplace markers, such as sonograms, weight gain, baby showers, and choosing a name, but also taboos—e.g., pornography featuring pregnant women (“future mothers were seen as literal sex bombs”) and mythological cannibalism. Such dark, fertile forays signal Wiener’s original take on the simultaneously common and unique experience of pregnancy. Whether contemplating sex and abortions in her youth, the portrayal of murders in the media, or the “terrifying mother-daughter dialectic” that prompted her to wish for a boy instead of a girl—to avoid a “bad residual copy” of herself—the author’s ruminations are consistently provocative, digging into areas many are not willing to go. When Wiener turns to the Lima of her childhood or Barcelona, where she and her husband navigated life as undocumented immigrants looking for work and a decent apartment, the evident love and passion serve as effective counterweights to the nightmarish moments recounted elsewhere. References to pregnancy guides, which Wiener read with some disbelief, and pop culture further enrich the author’s investigations. Wiener’s reflections on her relationship with her mother, which included microaggressions and tense exchanges, are also illuminating. When Wiener gave birth to a girl, it didn’t happen as she’d imagined (when does it ever?), but it’s a natural conclusion. “They show her to me like a waiter shows you a bottle of wine,” she writes, “as if I could say that I don’t want her. They lay her on top of me. She’s no longer an extension of me. She’s another.”

Refreshingly literary and offbeat—a mother-to-be book for firebrands.

THE FIXED STARS
Wizenberg, Molly
Abrams (256 pp.)
$25.00 | May 12, 2020
978-1-4197-4299-6

A bestselling memoirist’s account of coping with an unexpected midlife evolution in sexual identity.

When Wizenberg, who runs the popular Orangette blog, received a jury duty summons, she never thought that it would lead to divorce. In court, her eyes were immediately drawn to a female defense attorney dressed in a men’s suit. Her thoughts lingered on the attractive stranger after each day’s proceedings. But guilt at being “a woman wearing a wedding ring” made the author feel increasingly guilty for the obsession that seized her. Her husband, Brandon, a successful Seattle restaurateur, and their daughter were the “stars” that guided her path; the books she had written revolved like planets around the sun of their relationship and the restaurants they had founded together. However, in the weeks that followed, Wizenberg shocked herself by telling her husband about the attraction and suggesting that they open their marriage to polyamorous experimentation. Reading the work of writers like Adrienne Rich who had discovered their lesbianism later in life, Wizenberg engaged in deep, sometimes-painful self-interrogation. The author remembered the story of a married uncle, a man she resembled, who came out as gay and then later died of AIDS as well as a brief lesbian flirtation in late adolescence where “nothing happened.” Eventually, Wizenberg began dating the lawyer and fell in love with her. Wizenberg then began the painful process of separating herself from Brandon and, later, from their restaurant businesses that she had quietly seen as impediments to her writing. Feeling unfulfilled by Nora, a self-professed “stone top” who preferred to give pleasure rather than receive it, Wizenberg began to date a nonbinary person named Ash. Through that relationship, she came to embrace both gender and sexual fluidity. Interwoven throughout with research insights into the complexity of female sexual identity, Wizenberg’s book not only offers a glimpse into the shifting nature of selfhood; it also celebrates one woman’s hard-won acceptance of her own sexual difference.

A courageous and thought-provoking memoir.
An inkling that something has gone “Terribly Wrong” in the cosmic Library prompts Second Apprentice Librarian Lenora to book a return visit. Almost immediately, 12-year-old Lenora learns to her dismay that the vain, choleric (and oddly familiar, at least to politically aware readers) new Director is firing Librarians wholesale, crowing over fictive “patron fees,” and cutting down the book collections. Stoutly, she ventures back into the endless stacks of the Library of Ever (2019) to confront him—only to discover that he’s just a tantrum-prone pawn of the Forces of Darkness, a trio of slithery agents out to extinguish the light of learning everywhere. Joined by the Director’s naïve but computer-savvy young daughter, Lenora resolutely sets out to stymie the bowler-hatted foes. Along the way, she demonstrates the well-known thrills of reference work by, for instance, responding to a young patron’s query by seeking out the largest meaningful number (pro tip: “infinity” is not a number) and helping a tentacled extraterrestrial archaeologist recover stolen research notes on the mysterious Mississippian culture. (All in a day’s work, as any public-service librarian will attest.) Between the cast of intellectual-freedom fighters and the hissing forces of ignorance, Alexander leaves no doubt about which side to cheer for. Lenora, the Director, and his daughter present white; several other members of the human cast are people of color, indicated by name or description.

Further proof that librarians are mighty in all universes. Any questions? (Fantasy. 9-11)

This third entry in the charming series takes Peter and Ernesto on an exciting journey to find a lost friend.
When I opened the box that contained my review copies of Linda Sue Park’s *Prairie Lotus* (Clarion, March 3), my feelings were...complicated. On the one hand: a new Linda Sue Park! On the other hand: a book that explicitly revisits Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little House* series. Haven’t we been trying to move beyond them?

I certainly have. I never noticed, as I was reading and loving these books as a child, how their celebration of the rugged white pioneer spirit as embodied in the Ingalls family was inextricably bound up in the darker aspects of U.S. history. I didn’t notice the casual, sometimes vicious racism, and I didn’t think about how Laura’s life on the prairie was enabled by genocide.

As an adult I did, helped along by less-credulous readers, most notably Debbie Reese, a Nambé Pueblo Indian critic and educator who has written often about the Little House books on her blog, *American Indians in Children’s Literature*. She and others have helped me imagine seeing the books through the eyes of those whom Wilder denigrates and demonizes, and it’s an uncomfortable feeling.

Many have rightly suggested elevating Louise Erdrich’s *Birchbark House* series as an alternative or complement to the Wilder classics. Rich in homely details of family relationships and living off the land, they cover much the same territory as the Little House books—literally, as Ojibwe protagonist Omakayas and her family move, like the Ingallses, through the upper Midwest to the Dakota Territory over the course of the books. That their migration is forced by the westward flood of white settlers like the Ingallses is made explicit.

So do we really need another settler story? *Prairie Lotus* returns readers to Wilder’s world—again, literally, as Park’s fictional Dakota Territory town of LaForge is modeled on the real-life town of De Smet, where the Ingalls family eventually settled. But if imagining reading the Little House books through Indigenous eyes changed the way I saw them, reading the settler story through Hanna’s eyes is equally transformative.

Hanna is biracial, with a Chinese-immigrant mother and a Tennessee-born white father. Hanna and her father left Los Angeles and its Chinese community three years ago, after Hanna’s mother died due to injuries incurred during the Chinese massacre of 1871. At the beginning of the book, they arrive in LaForge in 1880 in search of a place to put down roots.

In my recollections, De Smet was a bustling prairie town full of mostly friendly people, the odious Nellie Olson a notable exception. LaForge is bustling all right, but friendly it is not, at least not to Hanna. Hanna has never been to school and desperately wants to attend. Winning provisional permission from the justice of the peace, she attends in her bonnet, acutely conscious of the fact that the curious attention she attracts by concealing her face is probably preferable to the negative attention she would attract by revealing it.

And once the people of LaForge understand that the new dry-goods merchant has a half-Chinese daughter, the racism commences, and readers experience it right along with Hanna. She watches as most of her fellow students drop out of school; endures sabotage from those who remain; is subject to what her 21st-century counterparts would call microaggressions; must assert rights even to well-meaning white people; is assaulted. She also sees and questions the injustice dealt to the Native nations generally and the local Ihanktowan people she meets. Her view of this slice of American history is one unimagined by Laura Ingalls Wilder, yet it’s one experienced by so many real-life Americans both historically and today.

So yes, we do need another settler story—so long as it’s this one.—V.S.

**Vicky Smith is the children’s editor.**
When highly mobile sloths Peter, Ernesto, and their friends realize that Bernard, one of their own, is nowhere to be found, the anthropomorphic pals must figure out what to do. Enigmatic Ernesto convinces nervous Peter and the others that Bernard is definitely with the mysterious dragon that is rumored to be in the forest temple and that the other sloths should follow suit—after all, why would you go anywhere else when there is a dragon to be seen? After an unfortunate zip-line incident leaves Peter separated from the group, he meets a river otter captaining an abandoned boat. Together, they journey to the forest temple, where they reunite with Ernesto and the gang. They even discover the dragon—a Komodo dragon shipwrecked far from home. But no Bernard! The gang travels back home, leaving the otter to sail the dragon back to Komodo, only to discover—spoiler alert!—that Bernard was napping in their home tree the whole time. Thick lines, white space framing panels, and a large font make this perfect for readers newer to graphic novels. The sloths are stylized beyond recognition, looking more like tall, furry stumps with arms, legs, and eyes than the familiar tree-dwelling mammals, and they are adorable. Their big expressions and body language perfectly complement the dialogue's sweet, silly humor. Delightful. (Graphic fantasy. 6-10)

THE ELEPHANT THAT ATE THE NIGHT

Bai Bing
Illus. by Li Qingyue
Reycraft Books (48 pp.)
$18.95 | Apr. 30, 2020
978-1-4788-6850-7

Baby animals learn to overcome their nighttime fears.

Whenever night falls in the Black Mushroom Forest, all the baby animals cry out and cower in fear. One day, an elephant arrives at the forest. Awu “[isn’t] a typical elephant” or, indeed, a typical forest creature. Unlike the other animals, Awu looks forward to the nighttime, when he can “open his mouth big and wide and swallow the dark nights.” Seeking a way to allay the children’s fears, Bear Cub’s mother enlists Awu’s help. One by one, Awu visits the children of the forest and eats away the dark. Sun shining, “they danced and cheered”—but quickly realize the trouble when it is “always bright as day.” With yawns and exhaustion comes an appreciation for balance and an understanding of the promise of a new day. Bold typographic design sets dialogue and onomatopoeic words apart on the page from the main narrative. Occasionally, the text design mimics the text—a sentence curls in on itself just like “Baby Porcupine [who] would cling to his mother’s side and shrink into a little ball.” Recurring swirls and curves visually draw readers’ eyes, and details such as constellation-like diagrams peppered throughout Li’s artwork add to the whimsy of Bai’s bedtime story.

A quirky addition to the afraid-of-the-dark shelf. (Picture book. 3-7)

SHEEP-DOG AND SHEEP-SHEEP

Barclay, Eric
Illus. by the author
Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 30, 2020
978-0-06-267739-6
Series: Sheep Dog and Sheep Sheep

Can Sheep Dog pull the wool over Sheep’s eyes? She isn’t so easily fleeced.

The farmyard pals, introduced in Sheep Dog and Sheep Sheep (2019), return. Sheep’s lush, woolly coat, which she loves to style, is too long; it falls over her eyes. Sheep Dog suggests a good shearing, but Sheep obstinately demurs. She opts for a ten-gallon hat but quickly abandons the oversized headgear (it doesn’t bring her joy). Sheep Dog raises the haircut idea again, but this time, Sheep has abandoned her friend, preferring to hide from him in a bush. She admits she’s not ready to part with her wool. However, when a duckling (“a water chicken,” as Sheep calls it) points out that her fleece will grow back, Sheep can’t wait to be shorn. It turns out she loves her shorter coif, but when she tells Sheep Dog it’s now his turn for a trim, guess who’s not so keen to seize the scissors! This
is a lively, humorous romp, and readers who are less than thrilled to submit to haircuts themselves will relate. The supportive relationship between the friends is sweet and charming, and the fine-lined cartoon illustrations are comical and very expressive. Kids will appreciate Sheep’s funny antics and dialogue. Occasionally, both characters’ speech is set in large capital letters for dramatic emphasis, and onomatopoeic words are used to good effect.

This caper is, ahem, shear fun for young readers. (Picture book. 4-7)

50 REASONS TO LOVE ANIMALS
Barr, Catherine
Illus. by Clulow, Hanako
Frances Lincoln (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-0-7112-5246-2

In her latest animal survey, Barr focuses on wild residents of six habitats threatened by climate change or other human misuse.

The tally begins and ends with elephants but encompasses creatures including penguins, elephants, blue whales, and Bengal tigers. The number included exceeds the 50 singled out for empathy-building observations such as “Giraffes give birth standing up, so their babies start life with a bump as they fall to the ground” or “Octopuses...solve problems, use tools and, if bored, they play!” Introductory paragraphs on, mostly the perilous state of each habitat (“Around the world oceans are polluted—awash with plastic”) supplement the titular 50 reasons, and the author tucks in frequent suggestions for low-effort ways young activists can show concern. As in 10 Reasons to Love a Bear (2018) and its predecessors, the smiling, googly-eyed animals in Clulow’s comfortably spacious natural scenes require some getting used to, and some scenes are overlabeled (do readers really need captions for “ice” or “lake”?). Still, the creatures and settings are easily recognizable, and the message is delivered clearly but without the scary urgency of the author’s Red Alert! Endangered Animals Around the World, illustrated by Anne Wilson (2018).

An eye-opener, though the readiest audience probably already loves them. (Informational picture book. 6-8)

MAYA AND THE RISING DARK
Barron, Rena
HMH Books (304 pp.)
$16.99 | May 5, 2020
978-1-328-63518-1

Maya knows her father’s stories aren’t real—are they?

Maya, a comic-book-loving, anemic 12-year-old black girl, is suffering through situational math when she experiences a sudden, time-stopped moment when “the color bled from the world like someone was sucking it away through a straw.” That is not the only strange incident: Maya has an all-too-real dream of a man with skin “the color of the moon” and “pale violet eyes” who has the same color-sucking ability; her structural engineer papa literally disappears in front of her; and when she and her friends Frankie and Eli find themselves fighting shape-shifting darkbringers, Frankie discovers her own light-shooting skills. What Maya, Frankie, Eli, and readers find out from Maya’s mother is that Papa’s real identity is Eleggúa, the most powerful of the West African orishas, guardian of the veil between this world and those of the darkbringers and other forces. Not only that, but Frankie’s newly found gift came from her late mother, who is also an orisha, and Eli is part orisha, too. The astonishing series of subsequent revelations leaves readers agog, eager to know how Maya and her pals will use their powers to heal the veil and save their mostly black and brown neighborhood. In her author’s note, Barron describes how this book has risen from her explorations of the traditions of her West African ancestors.

A truly #BlackGirlMagic, cloudy-day, curl-up kind of book. (Fantasy. 10-12)

HOW WOMEN WON THE VOTE
Alice Paul, Lucy Burns, and Their Big Idea
Bartoletti, Susan Campbell
Illus. by Chen, Ziyue
Harper/HarperCollins (80 pp.)
$18.99 | May 19, 2020
978-0-06-284130-8

Highlights of the women’s suffrage movement in the U.S. in the second decade of the 20th century. When young Americans Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, both white college graduates, met in London in June 1909, they formed a connection that would energize the next 11 years of activism for women’s suffrage in the United States. This very compact account encapsulates much of the information in stellar works for somewhat older readers such as Ann Bausum’s Of Courage and Cloth (2004) and Winifred Conkling’s Votes for Women (2018). Bartoletti recounts the women’s experiences in England during 1909, ending with the hunger strike and forced feeding at Holloway prison from which it would take Paul a month to recover. She details the organization of the 1913 parade in Washington for women’s suffrage on the eve of President Woodrow Wilson’s inauguration, taking care to bring attention to the struggle of black women such as Ida B. Wells to be recognized and included. The author also describes Paul’s continued protests and founding of the National Women’s Party as suffragists’ efforts met with ongoing resistance. Sidebars, captions, and the inclusion of photos and newspaper clippings add informative visual interest along with Chen’s clear, unaffected illustrations. Text and pictures convey the conflict and struggle without sensationalism. The inclusion of a photograph of the January 2017 Women’s March acknowledges that there is more work to be done.

VOTES FOR
A well-documented, highly condensed introduction with substantial visual appeal. (source notes, further reading, index) (Nonfiction. 8-11)

CAMP MURDERFACE
Berk, Josh & Mitchell, Saundra
Harper/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$16.99  |  May 26, 2020
978-0-06-287163-3

Two kids team up to unravel a sinister, supernatural summer-camp mystery in 1983.

Corryn’s at Camp Sweetwater while her parents work on the divorce they think she doesn’t know about. She bonds with Tez when they see eerie faces in the bonfire after a strange stick is added to it during their first night there. In their alternating first-person, present-tense narration, scares come fast and furious, with only the duo seeing (or, at least, acknowledging) that something’s wrong. As the scares grow into physical dangers, action-oriented Corryn and scientifically minded Tez unearth the history of the camp. In a neat subversion of an oft-used trope, they learn that in the 1700s, the lake was cursed by the actions of a nefarious French trapper, leading the resident Miami Nation to abandon the area. Since the 1880s, the summer camp has opened and closed in 20-year cycles marked by disappearances—the first being the three girls whose faces the duo saw in the fire. Tez faces extra risks in physical scenes, as he has Marfan syndrome—only the staff knows; he’s enjoying having his peers treat him like a “regular kid.” Corryn presents white, and Tez is biracial, identifying as “half Chamorro” (his father is from Guam); other campers are diverse. While the main storyline resolves, a tantalizing ending suggests there are more chills to come in a planned sequel.

A ghastly good time. (Horror. 8-14)

DRAGONS VS. UNICORNS
Biberdorf, Kate with Homzie, Hillary
Philomel (144 pp.)
$12.99  |  Apr. 14, 2020
978-0-593-11655-5
Series: Kate the Chemist

A fifth grade girl brings her love of chemistry to the school play.

Kate loves science so much she’s determined to breathe fire. Of course she knows that she needs adult supervision, and so, with her science teacher’s help, Kate demonstrates an experiment with cornstarch and a blowtorch that nearly sets her teacher’s cactus on fire. Consequences ensue. Can someone who loves science as much as Kate does find pleasure spending her fall break at drama camp? It turns out that even the school play—Dragons vs. Unicorns—needs a chemist, though, and Kate saves the day with glue and glitter. She’s sabotaged along the way, but everything is fine after Kate and her frenemy agree to communicate better (an underwhelming response to escalating bullying). Doodles decorate the pages; steps for the one experiment described that can be done at home—making glittery unicorn-horn glue—are included. The most exciting experiments depicted, though, include flames or liquid nitrogen and could only be done with the help of a friendly science teacher. Biberdorf teaches chemistry at the University of Texas and also performs science-education programs as “Kate the Chemist”; in addition to giving her protagonist her name and enthusiasm, she also seems represented in Kate-the-character’s love of the fictional YouTube personality “Dr. Caroline.” Kate and her nemesis are white; Kate’s best friends are black and South Asian.

A fun-if-flimsy vehicle for science lovers. (Fiction. 8-10)
OUT ON A LIMB

Bottier, Isabelle
Illus. by Canac, Hélène
Trans. by MacTire, Norwyn
Graphic Universe (56 pp.)
$26.65 | $8.99 paper | May 5, 2020
978-1-5415-4398-0
978-1-5415-8693-2 paper
Series: Cassandra: Animal Psychic, 2

Cassandra the animal psychic is back for a new adventure in this French import.

On the heels of her best friend’s move to another town, Cassandra is moving forward. She’s adjusting to life with her mom’s partner and his daughter now sharing their home and navigating a nascent relationship with her crush, Tristan. Amid all of this she stumbles upon an animal in crisis who needs her unique psychic empathy to help find a new home. Garrett is a loving cocker spaniel whose owner must move into a retirement home that does not allow dogs, but Cassandra, with the help of her sheep dog, Miss Dolly, may have already found the perfect new owner. Like Cassandra, Garrett struggles to find his bearings in his new normal, but Cassandra has just the ticket to help him acclimate while helping her new friends at the retirement home, too. The tale of a child’s uncertainty and jealousy at her uncle’s wedding someone who just happens to be another man and the family’s carefree celebration of that union remains essentially the same. Soto’s bright, friendly cartoons, however, depict a diverse human cast—Uncle Bobby presents white and Jamie presents black—representing a quantum leap forward over the original’s anthropomorphic guinea pigs. Chloe has light beige skin; her mother presents white, and her father’s skin is a shade darker than Chloe’s.

A joyous, heartwarming, sweet—and essential—update. (Graphic fantasy. 9-14)

UNCLE BOBBY’S WEDDING

Brannen, Sarah S.
Illus. by Soto, Lucia
Little Bee (32 pp.)
$17.99 | May 5, 2020
978-1-78628-343-6 paper

Uncle Bobby is getting married—but his niece Chloe doesn’t know if that is a good idea.

When Uncle Bobby announces at the first picnic of the summer that he and “his friend, Jamie,” are getting married, everyone is happy except Chloe. When she expresses her concern to her mother, Mom says she should talk to Uncle Bobby, who reassures Chloe that they will still have plenty of fun together—and then sets out to prove it. Bobby and Jamie take Chloe to the ballet and joke afterward at a soda shop. They go sailing, and Jamie is the first to jump in when Chloe tumbles out of the boat.

A quirky critter finds birds of a feather.

Keith is a vibrant orange cat who likes all the things other cats like: napping, bathing, and bird-watching...in his own way. Rejected by his kin, he decides to pursue his preference for the company of pigeons and spends his time on a bench on the park writing lists of their good qualities (“Pigeons have a great time...THEY CAN FLY”) and composing “Hi-coos:” “Flapping wings so free, / It’s the pigeon way to be / Would they accept me?” Struggling to make an introduction, Keith sets out to be “a bit more pigeon” and ends up painting himself pigeon blue after a charming montage featuring a fabulous feather boa. This plan works with flying colors until it starts to rain. Keith then tries to be a “proper cat” to no avail, and he eventually, predictably, learns that perhaps being himself was the best option along—not a cat, not a pigeon...Keith. Brosnan’s luminous illustrations are lively and endearing, with a printlike look, keeping the story well-paced by alternating between spot illustrations and spreads. A fresh take on a well-worn subject, this British import deserves a soft spot in the heart of anyone feeling out of place, be it for their identity or due to a particular fondness for rock doves.

A sweet story of self-actualization about a kind being who defies cat-egorization. (Picture book. 4-8)
THE SECRET LIFE OF TREES
Explore the Forests of the World, With Oakheart the Brave
Butterfield, Moira
Illus. by Mineker, Vivian
Words & Pictures (48 pp.)
$19.95 | May 19, 2020
978-0-7112-5002-4

A sweet sifting of tree- and forest-related facts and folklore.
Calling on the testimony of beasts and breezes for more far-flung topics, “Oakheart the Brave,” a gnarled oak with anthropomorphic features, offers an easygoing overview of forest types, seeds, tree fruits, and seasonal cycles interspersed with fragmentary versions of old tales. These last range from the story of how Nimue trapped Merlin and a heavily pruned account of an intrepid Hungarian lad who scales a “Sky-High Tree” to a Persian encounter between a wise girl and an invisible dragon beneath “The Tree of Life.” Other tales included hail from India, Scotland, and Norway. The “secret life” motif comes out occasionally, most clearly in explanations of the functions of each tree layer from bark on in. The notion that forests both give and need protection forms a strong secondary theme—leading up to a closing set of “How To Be Tree-Happy” activities such as recycling paper products and planting acorns to make new oaks. Mineker’s delicately detailed illustrations mix spot art with floating woodscapes as airy and uncluttered as the narrative. Human figures, though small and not common, do sport subtle differences in skin hues and generic period or regional dress.

Branches gently out into both natural science and human culture, albeit sparsely. (Informational picture book. 7-9)
THE CANADIAN ACTIVIST AND AUTHOR DREW ON HIS OWN IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE, AND HIS SISTER’S FAMILY’S, TO WRITE SALMA THE SYRIAN CHEF

By Deesha Philyaw

You work with the refugee community, so was there a particular family or situation that inspired this story?

I arrived in Canada as a refugee myself at 17, so that experience was a very important part of how I brought this book to life. What stayed with me during the first couple of years of arriving is the difference between how I viewed this immigration experience and how people around me saw it. I was struggling to adapt, to find belonging, to find a home for myself, and to bring elements of my own culture into a place that is completely different than everything I experienced before. Meanwhile, everybody around me expects there to be a miracle that happens at the airport. You arrive, and, suddenly, you have a home. I don’t think home is a concept that just happens. It’s something that you actively seek and build.

Also, my sister and I were estranged for the majority of her life. I left home when she was 10, and we never talked because of family dynamics. My father was quite rejecting of my identity as a queer man. But over the last couple years, my sister and I started to get to know each other. She has a little daughter, and I’m sponsoring them to come to Canada. My sister is the first family with children that I’ve worked with; I usually sponsor specifically queer refugees from Syria. So this also inspired me to look at the experiences of children arriving from Syria and how their lives are going to be literally uprooted and everything about it will be changed.

Were there challenges you had to overcome in the process of writing this book?

There was the challenge of writing a book aimed for children that would also leave a mark with adults. The adult, the parent or guardian, is the person who’s going to pick up the book and read it first. They have to accept it and allow it onto their children’s bookshelves. And the same goes for teachers.

Also, I had the tendency as I was writing to get the adults in the story to help Salma, to fix things for her. And Claire Caldwell, my editor, came to me one day and told me to focus on Salma’s self-determination. And that really stayed...
with me, because I agree, in the big picture, that when we're working with refugees, we have to focus on their self-determination. We shouldn't treat them like children.

So I focused on finding a way for Salma to be the star of her own book, to be the person who's moving the action forward, to be an active character. That was a fantastic challenge, and I enjoyed writing through that. I'm so thankful for Annick Press and Claire for pushing me to do it.

And I'd also like to thank Anna Bron, my illustrator, for doing fantastic work. She really leaned in and did a lot of hard work, a lot of research. I also sent her mosaic pieces from mosques and churches in Damascus that she incorporated beautifully into the book.

What do you hope young readers will take away from Salma's story?

I wanted to write this book in a way that would create empathy. The general narrative around newcomers and refugees is that we sympathize with them. But I am really looking forward to young readers seeing a strong, independent character who has challenges that she overcomes. And I want this to echo back toward other newcomers in their lives, in their schools, and in their congregations. To build empathy and engagement, where they don't see refugees as lesser than. I want them to have an understanding of the immigration experience as difficult and challenging but also magnificent.

Deesha Philyaw is the co-author of Co-Parenting 101: Helping Your Kids Thrive in Two Households After Divorce. Salma the Syrian Chef received a starred review in the Dec. 15, 2019, issue.
This series finale reads like a whirlwind. (Fantasy. 9-12)

FIVE SISTERS
Campisi, Stephanie
Illus. by Andronic, Madalina
Familius (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 28, 2020
978-1-64170-157-0

A childless couple encounters magic in their woodland home.

At the story's beginning, the despondent husband visits an oak he's grown from a sapling. The kindly tree proffers a branch as thanks for its "gift of life." From this the man carves five brightly patterned wooden dolls that are imbued with magic. The woman cherishes them as longed-for daughters, and the couple is overjoyed. Their happiness is short-lived, however. Spying a wolf lurking, the man chases it away, but having devoured the dolls, the animal disgorges the pieces and flees. Heartbroken, the man wraps the remains in flowers and places them in the hollow trunk of the magical oak. And oh, what miracles follow! The story, in the style of a traditional folktale, presents themes about the natural world and the joys of children and family but is bogged down by florid, stilted prose that may confound young readers. The sprightly, colorful folkloric illustrations, portraying the white couple wearing Eastern European folk garb, don't always jibe with the text. The old man's hair is sometimes black, sometimes gray while the old woman's is consistently gray. The text is set against colored backgrounds; occasionally, white type is difficult to discern against pale backdrops.

Lively illustrations don't make up for a skippable story. (Picture book. 4-7)

MY BIG FAMILY
Canetti, Tanitza
Illus. by Archer, Micha
Reycraft Books (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Apr. 30, 2020
978-1-788-6790-6

Young Alex lives with his mother and father. Although it is just three of them, he knows he has a very big family back in Cuba—and they quickly demonstrate just how many people his little house can hold.

At the book's beginning, Alex and his family get some wonderful news. Abuela is leaving Cuba and coming to live with them! After all, as Papa says, "Where three can fit, four can fit." Alex is excited to be sharing his room with Abuela and spending time together. Soon, aunts, uncles, and cousins come as well, and their house is fit to bursting, until Alex feels that "no one else can fit in this house!" Slowly, Alex's extended family members move out as they become settled in the United States, but there is still one last surprise for him at the end. Archer's beautiful collage illustrations with bright colors and patterns capture the ebullience of this loving extended Cuban family. Its boisterous din is made visible with jagged diagonals everywhere, the double-page spread when Alex learns everybody will be leaving standing as dramatic counterpoint. While this brown-skinned family is Cuban, this is a story that will resonate with many children of immigrants and will give a glimpse into the positive side of bringing in a large extended family for those who aren't.

Familiar colors and foods give this joyous book a distinctively Cuban feel. (Picture book. 4-7)

THE FARM THAT FEEDS US
Follow a Family Farm Through All Four Seasons
Castaldo, Nancy
Illus. by Hsu, Ginnie
Words & Pictures (80 pp.)
$17.95 | May 19, 2020
978-0-7112-4253-1

Activities on a generic family farm through the seasons.

In dry, impersonal language Castaldo acknowledges the existence of corporate, monocultural farms but thereafter sticks to a traditional paradigm, with the bland implication that small family farms like the one explored are the sort that really provide us "with the food we eat." She and Hsu proceed to profile a farm run, in the tidy, bright illustrations, by a white family with two brown-skinned associates or employees (plus some seasonal labor). They are depicted cultivating small crops of organically raised fruits and veggies for local sale, tending an apiary for pollination and honey production, and also raising livestock for milk, eggs (gathered by hand), wool, and/ or "meat" (the last of which is never seen butchered or headed for the table or slaughterhouse). The author's descriptions of
organic practices and season-specific activities include looks at limited varieties of common or heirloom breeds and cultivars as well as sidelines like pick-your-own strawberries, and she closes by urging readers toward greener behaviors like buying local and regarding “use by” dates as just guidelines. For a look at small farming today, Nikki Tate’s *Down to Earth: How Kids Help Feed the World* (2017) is a less systematic but far less parochial alternative.

This idyllic vision reflects broad agricultural reality about as well as “Old MacDonald.” *(Nonfiction. 7-9)*

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**OUR FRIEND HEDGEHOG**

_The Story of Us_

Castillo, Lauren  
Illus. by the author  
Knopf (128 pp.)  
$16.99 | $19.99 PLB | May 5, 2020  
978-1-328-76671-9  
978-1-328-76672-6 PLB  
Series: Our Friend Hedgehog, 1

Hedgehog embarks on an unexpected adventure to rescue her friend Mutty.

Hedgehog and Mutty, two dear friends, “[spend] all their days together. Playing. Imagining. Dreaming.” That is, until the Terrible Storm whisks Mutty (who appears to be a stuffed dog) away from the tiny, midriver island they both live on. Aware that crying won’t solve anything, Hedgehog decides to set out on a rescue mission to bring her friend back. As Hedgehog searches for her lost friend, she encounters various characters such as Mole, who greets everyone she meets in a different language (French, German, Spanish, Arabic, and Korean), and Owl, who sprinkles lofty vocabulary (and definitions) into conversations. The remainder of the cast includes Hen and her Chicks, dapper Beaver, and a brown-skinned human girl named Annika Mae Flores. All together, they distinguish themselves by supporting Hedgehog in her friend’s rescue. Each personality bursts forth in Annika’s narration as the group assembles, acknowledges that their differences become their strengths, and forms a firm and committed community unit. Castillo’s endearing illustrations remind readers that friendships can be found in the most unexpected of places while their full-color softness balances Hedgehog’s action-packed adventures. Readers will appreciate the map shown in the beginning endpapers as they go back and trace Hedgehog’s journey. Challenging readers without overwhelming them, picture-book creator Castillo has achieved a gentle and triumphant pivot into chapter books.

*An outstanding new chapter book with the cozy feel of a classic.* *(Fantasy. 5-9)*

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**Jaya’s Golden Necklace**

*a silk road tale by peter linenthal*

“This fun, engaging read-aloud tale offers plenty of action…”

“The adventure is richly illustrated by Linenthal in bright, celebratory colors.”

“An enjoyable tale that should spark conversations about the ancient world and diverse cultures.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“How charming! How endearing!”  
—Tamim Ansary, author of *West of Kabul, East of New York*

“A fantasy fairytale of Asia and India, brilliantly illustrated, for children of all ages.”  
—Sir John Boardman, University of Oxford

“For information on publishing and film rights, email tppporter@pachell.net • jayasgoldennecklace.com

ISBN 978-1-6429-2326
This lyrical story shows that, for some, the pressure of success is hard to bear.

**LOVE, LOVE**
Chang, Victoria
Sterling (224 pp.)
$16.95 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-4549-3832-3

Rooted in personal experience, this novel in verse captures the trials of being a young Chinese immigrant in suburban Detroit. Frances Chin, the 11-year-old daughter of Chinese immigrants, struggles to adapt to life in America with her parents and older sister, Clara, who is experiencing inexplicable hair loss. Clara’s only wig is stolen by school bullies. Endless doctors’ appointments fail to unearth answers. Frances is bullied at school and feels overlooked at home. Like Nancy Drew, Frances becomes obsessed with determining the cause of Clara’s hair loss. In five chapters of short, free-verse poems, Chang shows young Frances blossoming with the help of a friend named Annie, who is also Chinese American, and a tennis coach. Readers first see the pain and loneliness of being different before Annie’s friendship distracts Frances from her daily troubles. Frances channels her frustration onto the tennis court under the tutelage of an interested coach, which gives her the strength and courage to find the root of her sister’s illness. The starting point of a tennis match is stated as “love, love”—a place of equality. Amid the challenges of first-generation life, Frances grasps onto the hope that there is a level playing field in this country. This lyrical story shows that, for some, the pressure of success is hard to bear. In her author’s note, Chang describes her sister’s experiences with mental illness and provides links to resources.

An expressive book of poetry that provides a glimpse at life in an immigrant family. (Verse fiction. 8-12)

**HELLO, NEIGHBOR!**
*The Kind and Caring World of Mister Rogers*
Cordell, Matthew
Illus. by author
Neal Porter/Holiday House (40 pp.)
$18.99 | May 5, 2020
978-0-8368-4618-6

Welcome, friend, to Mr. Rogers’ neighborhood!
The best neighborhoods are filled with all kinds of people, and Mr. Rogers’ is no different. Fred Rogers invited various artists, musicians, and public figures to his make-believe neighborhood, where he worked with puppeteers, actors, and others to create a unique place for his youngest television viewers—one filled with messages, spoken and sung, that underscored the values of love, kindness, and curiosity. Precise narration leads readers through the touchstones of Fred’s life, highlighting how his childhood influenced his mission: to treat children with deep respect for their emotions and intelligence. Cordell’s signature illustration style—scratchy pen and ink with pastel-hued watercolors—immerses readers in this world of make-believe, infusing graphically distinct spreads with warmth and humor, Fred’s recognizable red cardigan popping against the milder tints. Cordell fittingly includes children of color and children with disabilities, demonstrating the universal appeal and relevance of this special program. Extensive backmatter includes a biography, photographs from the show, a visual glossary of icons in the book and their connection to the show, a note from the author about his connection to Fred Rogers, and ways to learn more about this iconic figure of children’s television. Endpapers bookend the story with inspirational quotes from Fred Rogers.

Essential for storytime read-alouds, emotional-literacy curricula, and bedtime snuggles in neighborhoods everywhere. (Informational picture book. 4-8)

**THE NOT BAD ANIMALS**
Corrigan, Sophie
Illus. by the author
Frances Lincoln (160 pp.)
$24.99 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-0-7112-4748-2

Forty-two creatures of ill repute, from scorpions to hyenas, put on their best faces and protest that they’re just misunderstood.

In paired double-page spreads, Corrigan first presents for each animal the case for considering it scary or gross, then, with the page turn, allows it to contradict itself. “I’m creepy and I’m creaky,” a spider supposedly gloats. “I spin webs from my butt and leave them in places where I KNOW you’ll get stuck in them.” In the following spread, the spider points out that “Only half of my kind spin webs, and we really, REALLY don’t want you to get stuck in them!” Along with pointing to roles in the natural order and including many crowd-pleasing references to butts and poop, these counterarguments tend to run along the lines of the rat’s “I’m a fluffy little SWEETIE!” and the toad’s “I am a plump lump of CUTENESS!” Each testimonial is backed up by a box of background information boldly labeled “FACTS.” Readers may find the chorus of smiley faces and claims of adorability unconvincing, but they will at least come away with more nuanced impressions of each creepy-crawly. The humorous cartoon illustrations don’t measure up to the in-your-face photos of Seymour Simon’s classic *Animals Nobody Loves* (2001), but this gallery of beasties unfairly regarded as “icky and ewyy and downright gross” is considerably broader.

An amiable point-counterpoint for budding animal lovers/haters. (glossary) (Nonfiction. 6-9)
Dairman draws inspiration from the Rabari people, an Indigenous group of nomadic herders and shepherds that live in northwest India, to showcase how two children live and thrive in the era of climate change.

Clipped couplets imagine a nomadic desert girl and a village-dwelling boy and how their lives intersect when the former’s family travels in search of water and the latter’s family seeks to escape it. Paneled pages compare and contrast the children’s experiences. “Patterned veil. / Covered hair” depicts the girl’s mother with a flowing veil and the boy’s father winding a turban on. “Trek for water. / Head to school” reveals two different journeys. Readers see how extreme weather threatens both ways of life before, at the end of the book, both children find higher ground and dance together: “Thirst quenched. / Dry and sound. // Round the fire, / songs of joy.” Bangalore-based Sreenivasan’s extensive research is evident in her saturated, detailed illustrations of families, plants, animals, and nomadic and village life. Dairman’s author’s note provides context and emphasizes that extreme dry and wet weather “will continue to put…lives…in very real danger.” Text and illustrations work beautifully in concert: Desert and monsoon scenes each have a distinctive color palette—golds, rusts, and reds; violets, greens, and blues—and variations in page composition and panel placement create necessary narrative tension.

A beautiful and important book about climate change featuring those who are most affected by it. (Picture book. 4-8)

Bright and cheerful Lolo is the star of the show in this new chapter-book series from South Africa.

Lolo is a little black girl who lives with her mother and grandmother. Lolo is a sensitive child but takes reassurance from the love of her mother and Gogo. In the first chapter, “A Gold Star and a Kiss for Lolo,” Lolo is impatient for the Star Awards at school that afternoon: “During music, Lolo couldn’t wait for the last line of a new song to end. Waiting for Star Awards was painful.” This feeling of eagerness for one’s favorite part of the day will be familiar to young readers. The events in Lolo’s world revolve around school, home, and her community—like most children in early elementary school. Children will find a sense of security in the love that Lolo receives from Gogo, her mother, and the people who live in their community. Volume 2, Hooray for Lolo, publishes simultaneously. It includes a chapter in which Lolo is treated for appendicitis. After being sick for so long, it takes a while for Lolo to reclaim her winning smile, but she manages, and all is well. These two books offer eight easy-to-read chapters between them, almost every page decorated in grayscale with Daly’s trademark loose, humorous cartoons.

Young readers will find much to enjoy in this tale of a winning little girl and her family—hooray indeed! (Fiction. 5-9) (Hooray for Lolo: 978-1-9463953-4-4)
“What would be an Asian mom’s worst nightmare?”

That’s what author Jessica Kim asked herself when dreaming up her debut middle-grade novel, Stand Up, Yumi Chung! (Kokila, March 17), which follows the titular heroine as she works up the courage to defy her parents and follow her dreams of becoming a stand-up comedian. Stand-up comedy is definitely far down the list of career paths most practical-minded parents consider ideal, let alone hardworking Korean immigrant parents like Yumi’s. They discourage Yumi from wasting time filling her Super-Secret Comedy Notebook with jokes in favor of improving her test scores at a Korean test-prep boot camp. But when an opportunity to attend a kids’ comedy camp presents itself, Yumi jumps at it—even if it means stealing another girl’s identity. Jessica Kim talked to Kirkus about what went into creating an middle school-aged Korean American aspiring comedian and what Yumi taught her about taking creative risks.

How did you decide on comedy as the passion Yumi wants to pursue?

The first iteration of this was a young adult novel about this girl Minji who wanted to be a chef....I wanted her to do something outside of the usual doctor/lawyer/engineering path. I queried that version, and all the agents essentially said it read young, so I reconceived it. I wanted to keep this theme, but how do I make it work for an 11-year-old reader? I’d just seen Ali Wong, and she was getting big around that time, and I’m a big comedy fan, but I’d just never put the two together. I’d labored for a year and a half working on my YA, but when I switched it to middle grade and switched it to comedy, Yumi’s voice wrote itself.

You not only have Yumi writing jokes, but also have kids performing jokes with varying levels of success. How did you hit so many levels of kid comedy?

I spent so many years day in and day out teaching [third, fourth, and fifth grades], so I know what kids that age think is funny. Their humor is more individual, whereas adult comedians make jokes that are more societal or global. Middle graders are still figuring out their bodies and their friends so you have to narrow it in. Eventually, when I go on school visits, I want to bring notebooks to show kids. Comedy is a process, it’s an art, just like writing is. You have to do it a thousand times wrong to get closer to right!

Yumi’s mom might seem to fit a few Korean-mom stereotypes but not exactly. How did you find that level of nuance with her?

I wanted to overturn the stereotype of the Tiger Mom. I’m so sick and tired of all the ways we’re ever portrayed, especially women my age. In the early drafts, she spoke without an accent and spoke perfect English...but that didn't ring true either. I was trying too hard to counter what you think I’d do. I rewrote her again, and I wanted to make her really silly and funny so Yumi had learned comedy from her, but that didn’t work, either. I eventu-
ally decided: I’m going to write the Tiger Mom, but when you see her in Chapter 1, you’re going to think you know her. But by the end of the book, you’re going to weep with her. Hers is a different dialect of love than you see in Western media, but it’s just as real.

Did you see your journey to becoming an author in Yumi’s journey to becoming a comedian?
Absolutely. I joined the Society For Children’s Book Writers in my local chapter, San Diego. It took me 15 minutes to get out of the car because I was so nervous and had to convince myself to go and not just drive home. When people asked if I’m a writer, I couldn’t say yes because I hadn’t written anything yet, and I felt like such an imposter. There’s something about growing up Asian and needing validation and needing a degree, needing a job title. That was always the most difficult part: believing in myself even though I didn’t have the credentials…. But I got plugged into the writing community, and the dream just got more tangible, manageable. It became less of a “Power Ranger” dream and maybe more something I could do.

Stephan Lee is a writer in New York. Stand Up, Yumi Chung! received a starred review in the Dec. 15, 2019, issue.

MILO AND MONTY
De Rond, Roxana
Illus. by the author
Child’s Play (32 pp.)
$17.99  |  $7.99 paper  |  Apr. 15, 2020
978-1-78628-352-8
978-1-78628-351-1 paper

A family adopts two puppies and finds that the two dogs grow into quite different personalities.
Monty has brown fur and a confident, outgoing nature. Milo has golden fur and is shy and afraid of loud noises. He doesn’t like to be hugged and likes staying in safe, enclosed spaces. His owners, a single mom and her two kids, wonder whether Milo is happy with them. When their relatives come to visit, the family notices similarities between their cousin Henry and Milo. Henry is also shy, doesn’t want hugs, and withdraws to a quiet spot under a desk along with Milo. These differences are pointed out in dialogue in a matter-of-fact style, and the family later concludes together that Milo is happy in his own way. This calm acceptance of a cousin and a dog who are not like others in the family is conveyed in an understated, loving way that encourages empathy for differences. The mom and her children who own the dogs present white. Their visiting relatives are an interracial family with a white dad and a mom with brown skin; their children include a son with brown skin and two younger children with light skin. Both the human and canine characters gain personality from humorous illustrations full of the details of a busy family life with two dogs.

Some kids and some dogs are different, and this book wisely encourages loving them just the way they are. (Picture book. 3-7)

BE AMAZING
A History of Pride
Desmond is Amazing
Illus. by Glynn, Dylan
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (40 pp.)
$18.99  |  May 26, 2020
978-0-374-31258-9

Meet some popular (and amazing) individuals involved with the LGBTQ+ rights movement.

Twelve-year-old drag artist Desmond is Amazing narrates this glimpse into popular names and faces that make up the recent history of queer rights in the U.S. Along the way, the author introduces himself (“I like to play video games, read, sing, collect toy trains, dance, and model. I enjoy going to school and have many friends”) and his drag inspirations. Following a brief glimpse at life before the Stonewall riots, readers learn about this historic uprising. Important figures from this time period, including Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, are introduced; RuPaul also warrants a double-page spread a little later on. Additional names and faces appear, such as Pepper
The author’s cleareyed, compassionate writing serves as a much-needed wake-up call to readers.

**SANTIAGO’S ROAD HOME**

Diaz, Alexandra
Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster
(336 pp.)
$17.99 | May 5, 2020
978-1-5344-4623-6

“Everyone is separated.”

Return to la malvada, or try his luck on his own? For 12-year-old Santiago, going back to his abusive abuela leaves him with no choice at all. At a loss as to his next move, he finds an opportunity when he meets a young mother named María Dolores and her small daughter, Alegría, on their way to el otro lado. For María Dolores, a new life on the other side means hope comes in glimpses and family separation becomes either of them thought possible. The academic setting, imaginative Stella, and brown-noser Horace combine for an ideal setting for DiCamillo to exercise her characteristic wordplay. Stella is biracial (black/white), Ms. Liliana appears black, and Horace presents white.

An adorable story that teaches readers that things—and people—are not always what they seem. (Fiction. 6-9)

**STELLA ENDICOTT AND THE ANYTHING-IS-POSSIBLE POEM**

DiCamillo, Kate
Illus. by Van Dusen, Chris
Candlewick (96 pp.)
$14.99 | Jun. 9, 2020
978-1-5362-0180-2

Series: Tales from Deckawoo Drive, 5

On the first day of second grade, Stella Endicott meets her new teacher, Ms. Tamar Calliope Liliana, whom she wants very much to impress—and so does the annoying boy at the desk next to hers.

During the second week of school, Stella's class is assigned to write a poem that includes a metaphor. After school, Stella visits her friend Mercy Watson the pig. She cuddles up close to Mercy on the couch and begins to write. Stella eagerly writes about Mercy, the sound of the neighbor’s accordion, and leaves that fall balletically from the tree outside. She is so excited about her poem that when know-it-all Horace Broom asks if he can read it, Stella doesn’t hesitate to share. Horace immediately begins to pick it apart, scornfully informing her, “Pigs don’t sit on couches, they live on farms.” Angry, Stella loudly defends her poem. The two argue, and Ms. Liliana sends them to see Mr. Tinwiddie, the principal. It is this sentence that forces Stella to act using “courage” and “curiosity,” resources she draws on to encourage Horace, who is so afraid by the expected dressing-down that he runs out of the office and into more trouble than either of them thought possible. The academic setting, imaginative Stella, and brown-noser Horace combine for an ideal opportunity for DiCamillo to exercise her characteristic wordplay. Stella is biracial (black/white), Ms. Liliana appears black, and Horace presents white.

An urgent mirror for troubling times. (author’s note, glossary, sources) (Informational picture book. 6-10)

**CHIRRI & CHIRRA UNDER THE SEA**

Doi, Kaya
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Boyd, David
Enchanted Lion Books (36 pp.)
$16.95 | May 12, 2020
978-1-59270-302-9

Chirri and Chirra ride their bikes to a beautiful, magical place.

They unhesitatingly ride into a cave, where, at tunnel’s end, they arrive under the sea. Pedaling all the way and never getting wet, they move along with the current and amid a multitude of fish through a forest of coral. An opening in the seaweed is filled with “seashell sofas,” two of which are reserved for them. They are served lovely, unusual dishes, with the food hiding gifts: a tiny conch for Chirri and a pearl for Chirra. Afterward they pedal to a musical performance and then to a hall presided...
over by a sea horse, where they may each choose one treasure. Their choices are fitting and satisfying and will remind them of their sea adventure. In this Japanese import the tale is told in the sparest of language, only one or two simple sentences per scene and the “dring-dring” of the bicycles’ bells. The illustrations carry readers along with Chiiri and Chirra in the bluest of blue seas, through the waving coral, the lovely, bright, seashell room, the theatre, and the treasure hall—all filled with amusing and surprising details. The children present as stylized Asian girls, informed by the use of the gender-specific “she.”

Young readers will find much to excite and amaze in this gentle fantastical adventure and visual delight. (Picture book/fantasy. 3-8)

A handsomely designed tribute to the brilliant naturalist who very nearly scooped Darwin.

It was “a case of great minds thinking alike,” Dorion writes. But while Darwin had slowly, cautiously articulated his hypotheses to himself over decades in his country home, they came as flashes of insight to Wallace in the course of scouring the jungles of the Amazon and the Malay Archipelago for exotic specimens to sell to European collectors. It was Wallace’s 1858 letter to Darwin that spurred the latter to go public—and Wallace’s salutary lack of ego that turned what might have been a bitter battle over claims of precedence into a long and cordial relationship. Though the author skimps on Wallace’s later career and misleadingly tags the heart of his proposed theory as “natural selection” (that was Darwin’s term, not Wallace’s), she offers clear pictures of his character and his passion for natural science while making generous use of direct quotations. Tennant gives the slightly oversized volume the feel of a collector’s room, the theatre, and the treasure hall—all filled with amus-

A case study of science at its idealistic and paradigm-changing best. (map, glossary, reading list) (Picture book/biography. 9-11)

DARWIN’S RIVAL
Alfred Russel Wallace and the Search for Evolution
Dorion, Christiane
Illus. by Tennant, Harry
Candlewick Studio (64 pp.)
$24.99 | Mar. 17, 2020
978-1-5362-0932-7

Feats like a retreat—it may be time to put this series to bed. (Picture book. 4-7)

YOU DON’T WANT A DRAGON!
Dyckman, Ame
Illus. by Climo, Liz
Little, Brown (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 9, 2020
978-0-316-53580-9

If you thought having a unicorn as a pet was hard, you haven’t seen anything until you’ve tried owning a dragon.

The young protagonist of You Don’t Want a Unicorn! (2017) is back, and they clearly haven’t learned their lesson. Now they’ve wished for a pet dragon. As the intrusive narrator is quick to point out, everything about it seems fun at the beginning. However, it’s not long before the doglike dragon starts chasing squirrels, drooling, pooping (ever wondered where charcoal comes from?), scooting its butt across the floor (leaving fire and flames behind), and more. By now, the dragon has grown too huge to keep, so the child (who appears white and also to live alone) wishes it away and settles for a cute little hamster instead. A perfect pet…until it finds a stray magical cupcake. Simple cartoon art and a surfeit of jokes about defecation suggest this book will find an appreciative audience. The dragon/dog equivalences are cute on an initial read, but they may not be strong enough to convince anyone to return. Moreover, a surprising amount of the plot hinges on having read the previous book in this series (it’s the only way readers will know that cupcakes are unicorn poop).

THE TRUTH ABOUT BUTTERFLIES
Eaton III, Maxwell
Illus. by the author
Roaring Brook (32 pp.)
$16.99 | May 12, 2020
978-1-250-23253-3
Series: Truth About Your Favorite Animals

Eaton explores butterflies.

Having won over his young readers with titles about a wide variety of vertebrates, such as The Truth About Hawks (2019), Eaton introduces insects—with a focus on butterflies—with his signature combination of carefully chosen facts and engaging fantasy. Here, his cast of characters includes a brown-skinned human observer who uses a wheelchair and a hungry cat as well as a wide range of talking butterflies. A selection of colorful species is shown at actual size on an early spread. The author describes some of their “useful parts” (proboscis, antennae, compound eyes, tarsi) and how they avoid being eaten. One double-page spread examines how butterflies differ from moths, with butterflies on verso in the daytime and moths across the gutter on recto at night. Appropriately, Eaton devotes the most space to chronicling butterfly metamorphosis, using the monarch (studied in
WHERE’D MY JO GO?
Eshbaum, Jill
Illus. by Brandage, Scott
Sleeping Bear Press (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 15, 2020
978-1-53411-044-1

A small dog named Big Al gets left behind at a truck stop, where he waits for his owner to come back for him.

Jo drives a big, blue rig with Al in the seat next to her, sharing life on the road. Al has white fur with rust-colored spots and dark, expressive eyes, poignantly illustrated on the appealing cover. Jo has curly, red hair, light skin, and a jaunty baseball cap personalized with her name. In peppy, rhyming text Al details his antics around the truck stop and his sad realization that while he was playing, he was left behind when Jo hit the road. Al waits at the truck stop all afternoon and into the night, growing more and more worried about Jo’s whereabouts. Just as a brown-skinned boy named Zack is begging his parents to let him adopt the stray dog he’s found, Jo pulls up in her blue truck for a happy reunion with her canine best friend. Watercolor-and-pencil illustrations of Al’s playful behavior and expressions help make him an irresistible character. A wide variety of formats and perspectives add interest, with a fine sense of dramatic suspense particularly evident in the nighttime scenes.

Humor, emotion, and great puppy-dog eyes. (author’s note) (Picture book. 4-8)

POUND ON THE TWELFTH FLOOR
Faber, Polly
Illus. by Jennings, Sarah
Candlewick (256 pp.)
$16.99 | Jun. 9, 2020
978-1-5362-0930-3

A horse-crazy city girl has her wish fulfilled when she finds a stray pony at the grocery store.

Kizzy has always wanted a pony, but living in an apartment building on a limited budget hasn’t allowed for so much as riding lessons. So when she and her best friend, Pawel, discover a pony munching on the pastries, Kizzy thinks quickly, claiming the pony and taking it home. She manages to get “Donut” up to her apartment and into her bedroom without anyone noticing—even overnight. But getting her new pony in and out of the building daily, finding the money to buy food for the constant eater, cleaning up his poop, and keeping him out of trouble all challenge her ambition to keep him. With a little help from some old and new friends, Kizzy keeps the pony longer than she logically should, but when she finally finds its rightful owner, it’s not the devastating farewell she had feared. The book’s premise is one many children will enjoy, and though the story feels overlong—rather like Donut’s sojourn with Kizzy—Faber writes in a way that respects young readers’ intelligence, making this a chapter-book/middle-grade hybrid ideal for young, advanced readers. Full- and half-page black-and-white illustrations show that Kizzy and her family are black; her friend Pawel’s family is Polish.

Featuring innocent content written with flair, this book fills a gap. (Fiction. 8-12)

THE OCEAN IN YOUR BATHTUB
Fishman, Seth
Illus. by Greenberg, Isabel
Greenwillow (40 pp.)
$17.99 | May 19, 2020
978-0-06-295336-0

In our world, oceans are everywhere, they affect everything, and everything we do has an effect on the oceans.

In their third joint foray into science-related picture books following A Hundred Billion Trillion Stars (2017) and Power Up (2019), Fishman and Greenberg exhort their readers to do “good deeds” for the ocean. The writer addresses his readers directly with this simple message but starts off with an explanation. Not only do oceans cover most of our planet, they provide almost all the water. Much of the oxygen we breathe comes from ocean plants, and if our food doesn’t come directly from the oceans, it relies on a water cycle that includes the oceans. Similarly, everything we do affects oceans. He points out that people haven’t always thought about human effects on the ocean: “Sometimes it takes a while to learn from your mistakes, right?” The large, legible text is set directly on bold cartoon art characterized by bright, flat colors, blocky shading, and heavy black outlines. The two kids shown on the cover (one black-presenting, one white-presenting) travel throughout the book. One double-page spread shows some suggested actions: cleaning a beach, studying a coral reef, helping seals in an aquarium. Sadly, a final spread still shows one of the kids flying the helium balloon that first appeared over an ocean filled with trash, a mixed message.

On this difficult issue, it’s hard to strike the right balance for young readers; this is a valiant effort. (author’s note) (Informational picture book. 4-8)
Petcentric overviews of each human subject’s life and achievements are generally both spot-on and rich in fascinating anecdotes.

PETS AND THEIR FAMOUS HUMANS

THERE’S AN ALIEN IN YOUR BOOK
Fletcher, Tom
Illus. by Abbott, Greg
Random House (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 30, 2020
978-0-593-12512-0
Series: There’s a...in Your Book

Earth friends are easy to make for this roly-poly, extraterrestrial cutie.

Fletcher pens the fourth in his interactive book series, this time invading his pages with a crash-landed ET. At first readers are encouraged to tell the space being to shove off, but pretty quickly it becomes clear that it’s just too adorable to send away like that. Mostly yellow, it looks like nothing more than a smiley face with antennae, its oversized head occupying more volume than its trunk, arms, legs, and tail combined. The undersides of its hands, feet, and tail are bright green. Repairing its damaged spaceship is out of the question, and attempts to launch it into space by having readers bounce, turn, and lift the book are fruitless. Does it belong here? Well, when readers stop to consider all the creatures that live on this planet (including a cameo by the author in the art), we can recognize that “we’re all weird and wonderful.” So the alien stays and even makes a friend with the star of There’s a Monster in Your Book (2017). The story makes mild overtures toward the idea of embracing our differences no matter our appearance, but that’s all superseded by the interactive elements. By now the series is treading familiar ground, but fans will find the combination of cute creatures and gentle moralizing a comfort.

Not exactly out of this world but a pleaser just the same. (Picture book; 3-6)

REALLY TRULY
Frederick, Heather Vogel
Simon & Schuster (384 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 2, 2020
978-1-5344-1437-2
Series: Pumpkin Falls Mystery, 3

In this latest Pumpkin Falls Mystery, Truly Lovejoy reprises her role as a “middle school private eye.”

Anticipating a “perfect New Hampshire summer in Pumpkin Falls spent bird-watching, bike riding, swimming, working in her family’s bookstore, and hanging out with friends—especially crush Calhoun—Truly survives her family reunion and the town’s 4K race only to find herself unexpectedly exiled to Siren’s Sea Siren Academy on Cape Cod. Here, she’s immersed in all things mermaid, learns to swim wearing a sparkly tail—and discovers a possible link between a real pirate and one of her Lovejoy ancestors. Returning to Pumpkin Falls, Truly alerts fellow sleuths in the Pumpkin Falls Private Eyes to the possibility of pirate treasure buried locally; Splitting time among investigating the pirate mystery, finding the town’s missing silver pumpkin trophy, and a summer production of The Pirates of Penzance, spunky Truly proves she’s up for just about anything. Her vulnerable, humorous first-person narration reveals minor family frustrations, her attraction to Calhoun, and her resolve when faced with a challenge. The pace drags during the opening family reunion sequence but accelerates at mermaid camp and culminates in an action-packed finale. Eccentric new and returning characters and the mermaid/pirate theme add spice to this family-oriented adventure. Truly and her family are white; diversity in Pumpkin Falls is mostly suggested via naming convention.

Pirates, mermaids, and more mystery in this satisfying return to Pumpkin Falls. (recipe, suggested reading) (Mystery. 10-14)

PETS AND THEIR FAMOUS HUMANS
Gallo, Ana
Illus. by Quinn, Katherine
Prestel (48 pp.)
$17.95 | Apr. 21, 2020
978-3-7913-7425-3

Introductions to 20 celebrities, mostly artists or writers, and their pets.

Opening with Frida Kahlo and the fawn Granizo, centerpiece of her powerful painting The Wounded Deer, the gallery lines up a glittering array of prominent figures matched to pets that played significant roles in their lives and, usually, works. Some creatures, such as Karl Lagerfeld’s diamond-collared kitty Choupette, Ernest Hemingway’s six-toed Snowball, and T.S. Eliot’s fictive “Practical Cats” are celebrities in their own right. Others, like the two crocodiles that took up residence in Dorothy Parker’s bathtub or Grip, the talking raven that made its way into both Charles Dickens’ Barnaby Rudge and a famous poem of Edgar Allen Poe’s, really should be. The many mentioned works of art in which pets feature are not reproduced here; instead, Quinn adds both visual continuity and a strong element of dignity to the proceedings with original, formally solemn, mostly full-face double portraits for each entry. Gallo’s narrative is not free of typos or pages of small type against dark backgrounds—but aside from her entry on Newton, which presents the apple falling on his head as fact and highlights his contributions to algebra without mentioning calculus, her petcentric overviews of each human subject’s life and achievements are generally both spot-on and rich in fascinating anecdotes. With the exception of Kahlo, humans profiled are European or American, and most are men.

Unusually intimate angles on a stimulating mix of figures. (Collective biography. 11-14)
IF I COULDN’T BE ANNE
George, Kallie
Illus. by Godbout, Geneviève
Tundra (40 pp.)
$17.99 | May 12, 2020
978-1-77049-928-7

An homage to L.M. Montgomery's Anne of Green Gables.

A picture book “inspired by Anne of Green Gables” could have intriguing possibilities—and there are legions of Anne fans worldwide already primed to love anything Anne. But therein lies the problem. The narrative’s storyline, and therefore its relevance, relies on readers’ knowledge of events in the middle-grade Anne of Green Gables book—an improbable occurrence for readers (unless they are nostalgic adults) of this picture book. Channeling Anne’s legendary imagination—so brilliantly created by Montgomery in her book—author George attempts to string the essence of various chapters of Anne of Green Gables into a sort of stream-of-consciousness Anne-ness, but she succeeds only in presenting a disembodied saccharine-ness. The repetitive “Anne with an e,” so important to her character development in the novel, becomes tedious in 40 pages. Godbout’s pastel-and-colored-pencil artwork infuses the double-page spreads with a visual atmosphere has the effect of further saturating the narrative’s already rose-colored reverence and gives the whole an overall effect of oozing in treacle. While the author’s sincere admiration of Anne shines through, this execution drowns in sentimentality.

Young readers are advised: Wait and read the original instead. (Picture book. 4-7)

THE MADRE DE AGUAS OF CUBA
Gidwitz, Adam & Otheguy, Emma
Illus. by Aly, Hatem
Dutton (224 pp.)
$14.99 | May 12, 2020
978-0-7352-3142-9
Series: Unicorn Rescue Society, 5

The Unicorn Rescue Society investigates the disappearance of a Cuban sea serpent.

In the fifth series installment, returning protagonists Uchenna and Elliot are in school, learning about water, when Professor Fauna calls them away. As the kids board the professor’s rickety single-propeller plane, they learn where exactly they are heading: Cuba. The island is in the middle of a massive drought, and Professor Fauna has reason to believe that the Madres de aguas (the Mother of Waters) has gone missing. It’s up to the society to find the sea serpent before any more damage is done to the people and wildlife of Cuba. As they set out on their mission of derring-do, they realize that once again they are up against their nemesis, the Schmoke Brothers. Via Yoenis, their Cuban American society liaison, Uchenna, Elliot, and readers learn about the political and economic hardships experienced by the people of Cuba, the island’s lack of basic goods and necessities, and Cuba’s need for real democracy (although the current role of the military is elided). This is conveyed within a quick, fast-paced read that’s ideal for kids who want a straightforward magical adventure. Uchenna is Nigerian, Elliot is white and Jewish, and Professor Fauna is Peruvian.

Series fans will enjoy revisiting familiar characters and exploring the island of Cuba with them. (Fantasy. 8-10)

BACKWARD SCIENCE
What Was Life Like Before World-Changing Discoveries?
Gifford, Clive
Illus. by Wilson, Anne
QEB Publishing (64 pp.)
$17.95 | May 10, 2020
978-0-7112-4990-5

A reverse history of watershed inventions, from smartphone to scratch plow. Headed by a series of perfunctory invitations to think about what life would have been like before the arrival of modern (or any) conveniences, Gifford harks back in irregular and often overlapping chunks of time to a standard-issue array of technological breakthroughs. Though he does give African American inventor Granville T. Woods a nod and occasionally challenges received narratives by, for instance, crediting both Eli Whitney and Catherine Green with the invention of the cotton gin and Frenchman Honoré Blanc (rather than Whitney) for interchangeable gun parts, nearly all the figures he names worked in the U.K., or at least Europe, until he reaches the ancient Chinese invention of the compass. Wilson follows suit, mixing stiff-looking individual portraits of pale- and eventually olive-skinned inventors with larger views of racially diverse groups or crowds in, mostly, period European settings. Her depictions of a gory pre-anesthesia surgery and toilets through the ages are amusing, but along with medieval scribes laboring over pre-illuminated manuscripts, the nonfunctional versions of a printing press, catapult, and early cannon on display show a low priority for technical accuracy. The author closes with a glittering promise that new techno-wonders are on the way; a timeline that cuts off in 2008 sends a different message.

Needs more than a gimmick to rise above its superficial content. Look elsewhere. (glossary, index) (Informational picture book. 8-10)
THE MAGIC DAY
Glass, Calliope
Illus. by Mengert, Hollie
Harper/HarperCollins (96 pp.)
$15.99 | $5.99 paper | Jun. 9, 2020
978-0-06-294792-5
978-0-06-294791-8 paper
Series: Sparkleton, 1

A unicorn gains wish-granting powers—that malfunction.
Sparkleton, a young rule-hating unicorn, wants a shortcut to gaining the ability to grant wishes. His sister has that ability, though, and despite her “Goody Two-horseshoes” aversion to rule-breaking, Sparkleton successfully nags her into granting his wish for wish-granting powers of his own for a day. Delighted, he rushes off to show off his new powers to his fellow young unicorn friends. Unsurprisingly, wish after wish goes wrong in comical ways. Once Sparkleton realizes that the opposite of each wish is happening, he has his friends wish for the opposite of their wish-created problems in order to repair the damage he’s done. He finds, though, that it’s not so easy to restore the status quo. Finally, Sparkleton realizes that the wish problem is caused by his self-centered focus instead of a desire to make his wishers happy; and now he can fix the problems he’s caused. Sparkleton’s flaws make him an accessible character and offer a good source of low-stakes tension. The other unicorns are colorful and easy to differentiate in the illustrations through varied shapes and silhouettes, and his best friends in particular have strong personalities. Careful design elements, such as end-of-chapter progress markers, encourage new readers along. Book 2, The Glitter Parade, publishes simultaneously.

A quirky new series that’s strong out of the gate. (Fantasy. 6-8) (The Glitter Parade: 978-0-06-294795-6, 978-0-06-294794-9 paper)

FEDERICO AND THE WOLF
Gomez, Rebecca J.
Illus. by Chavarri, Elisa
Clarion (40 pp.)
$17.99 | May 19, 2020
978-1-328-56778-9

A reboot of the classic tale of “Little Red Riding Hood” brings new flavors to an old favorite.
Federico is given the job of riding his bike to the market for the ingredients on Abuelo’s grocery list, but he soon becomes the object of a hungry wolf’s attention. When the wolf (bloodlessly) takes Abuelo’s place in an attempt to make Federico his lunch, Federico must use his wits and his grocery basket to save the day. While the Red Riding Hood story is a familiar one, the clean abcb rhymes in this retelling give the story a contemporary feel. Federico’s sleeveless, red, hooded sweatshirt and cool shaved hairstyle also give the story an update. Chavarri’s vibrant illustrations include plenty of colorful details for observant readers, such as a luchador mask-themed shopping bag and papel picado bunting at the market. The infusion of Spanish words on almost every page works perfectly with the settings and adds cultural specificity to Federico’s journey to visit his abuelo. Main characters are depicted as a Latinx family with shades of light brown skin and straight black, brown, or white hair. A recipe for the “perfect pico de gallo” salsa—key to Federico’s thwarting of the wolf—is included at the end of the story for a delicious way to extend the fun.
Bright visuals and culinary elements will appeal to readers seeking a twist on the familiar. (glossary) (Picture book. 3-8)

WORLD OF GLASS
The Art of Dale Chihuly
Greenberg, Jan & Jordan, Sandra Abrams (64 pp.)
$22.99 | May 12, 2020
978-1-4197-3681-0

The award-winning authors follow glass artist Dale Chihuly from his Pacific Northwest roots through world-renowned accomplishments in color, form, and technique.
Born in Tacoma, Washington, Chihuly lost his older brother and father as a teen and forged a close bond with his supportive mother. Chihuly enrolled in college at his mother’s urging, working to pay his way. Courses in weaving, architecture, and design played counterpart to frat-house partying. With his mother’s blessing, Dale took time off to travel abroad. On an Israeli kibbutz he matured, returning home to finish school. Study at the University of Wisconsin, the Rhode Island School of Design, and a glass-blowing factory in Venice deepened skills and fostered a lifelong interest in innovative, team-based approaches; natural, organic forms; and the elastic properties of molten glass. In the 1970s, Chihuly co-founded the influential Pilchuck Glass School as his fame grew. After a car crash in England, he lost sight in one eye and adopted his iconic black eyepatch. In narrative details and dozens of well-chosen photographs, Greenberg and Jordan convey the kinetic techniques of glass blowing. Final chapters focus on Chihuly’s artistic vision, technical boundary-pushing, and five decades of richly exuberant work. Notably, the authors mention Chihuly’s adaptations to bipolar disorder. Among more typical information, the backmatter includes a partial list of Chihuly’s collaborators and another of museums and galleries where readers might find his work.
An ebullient homage to an innovative, enduring artist. (source notes, bibliography, index) (Nonfiction. 8-14)
New friendships form when the preconceived notions of various characters are broken down through play.

At recess, four anthropomorphic letters, each a different shape and color, head for the swings. L arrives first and is asked by V to play. With overt disdain, L rejects V for living on the wrong side of the alphabet. When E makes the same polite request, V refuses to play with vowels. The chain of bigotry continues as O, who arrives last, is spurned because it is round. Arguing ensues until O suggests they just swing. They pump and go higher and faster, and the joy of swinging takes over, and that fun becomes a shared experience. When the letters land, they are now in a new place—literally and figuratively—as they have transformed into the word “LOVE.” True to his past work, Hall uses digital illustrations full of simplified graphic shapes made to look like cut paper to explore sophisticated concepts. Done in a mostly primary palette, the letters with their block appendages are effective and charming, and thoughtful compositions help convey their shifting emotional states. When the letters land, they are now in a new place—literally and figuratively—as they have transformed into the word “LOVE.” True to his past work, Hall uses digital illustrations full of simplified graphic shapes made to look like cut paper to explore sophisticated concepts. Done in a mostly primary palette, the letters with their block appendages are effective and charming, and thoughtful compositions help convey their shifting emotional states. When the letters land, they are now in a new place—literally and figuratively—as they have transformed into the word “LOVE.” True to his past work, Hall uses digital illustrations full of simplified graphic shapes made to look like cut paper to explore sophisticated concepts. Done in a mostly primary palette, the letters with their block appendages are effective and charming, and thoughtful compositions help convey their shifting emotional states.

Another positive title for the anti-bullying shelf. (Picture book. 4-8)
Black excellence, black fantastic, and black family combine for a transformational story of passion and persistence.

THE MAGIC IN CHANGING YOUR STARS

300 MINUTES OF DANGER
Heath, Jack
Sterling (192 pp.)
$7.95 paper | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-4549-3141-6
Series: Countdown to Disaster, 1

Ten action-packed short stories of survival, each taking place over the span of 30 minutes, will have readers on the edges of their seats.

George is in a charter airplane flying over the Russian wilderness on his way to a snowboarding camp (George calls it “boarding school”) when the plane malfunctions and the pilot jumps ship. Finding the only other parachute has been destroyed by a rat, George has to figure out what he is going to do before the plane crashes into the Urals. And that’s just the first story. Whether encountering a leviathan during a deep-sea excursion, becoming witness to a crime and then the object of pursuit, escaping a burning building, or avoiding exposure to nuclear radiation, the danger the characters experience in these plot-driven tales is palpable, reinforced with a countdown clock on the edge of each page. Each story stands alone (there are some interconnections) and immediately grabs the attention, making it easy to suspend disbelief in these far-fetched situations. Action-focused, the book offers little characterization or even description, suggesting a white default; alone (there are some interconnections) and immediately grabs the attention, making it easy to suspend disbelief in these far-fetched situations. Action-focused, the book offers little characterization or even description, suggesting a white default; one protagonist has an Arabic name and another a South Asian one. Sure to engage the most reluctant of readers, this will easily appeal to fans of Anthony Horowitz, Rodman Philbrick, and Lauren Tarshis’ I Survived series.

A free-spirited, warmly nostalgic vision. (Poetry. 6-9)

OUR CORNER STORE
Heidbreder, Robert
Illus. by O’Byrne, Chelsea
Groundwood (64 pp.)
$16.95 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-77306-216-7

This companion volume to Rooster Summer (2018) celebrates the pivotal role a neighborhood grocery store plays in the lives of a brother and sister.

Speaking in verse and using a lively present-tense, first-person plural voice chock-full of sensory vocabulary, the two siblings “crackle-rackle / through the fall leaves” to Mr. Stanstones’ store. There, friendly clerk Bert, who, with “his long apron fluttering / like a huge, crazy, scary bird,” is wont to spring out of the walk-in freezer, playfully surprises them. One memorable day Bert takes them into that big freezer, where sausages dangle like “fat party streamers.” Spry “gleaming high” jars filled with enormous cookies, the siblings “think their yums / would fill our tum.” They “cuddle, cat-chat” with Toby Cat, who lives in the storeroom and surprises them with a “trick and treat” mouse on Halloween. The siblings earn coins for their piggy banks by dusting, stacking cans, “heaping mountain rows” of vegetables, polishing glass (including those cookie jars), and collecting pop bottles. They borrow comic books from the “creaky spin-about racks.” When big superstores force the corner shop to close, Mr. Stanstones gives the siblings the cookie jars. Peppered with vibrant verbal images of a bygone era, bubbly, kid-friendly verses are reinforced by cheery, humorous opaque paint-and–colored-pencil illustrations showing the brother and sister freely roaming their beloved corner store and urban neighborhood. Children, clerks, and shopkeepers are white; the neighborhood is diverse.

In Sleepyville, getting ready for sleep is anything but sleepy.

So much to do….The families of the woodland community known as Sleepyville—bears, bunnies, porcupines, foxes, birds, insects, and others—clean up, shutter businesses, and proceed to their various homes. There, they perform cozy nightly rituals: eating dinner, washing dishes, sharing a snack, choosing PJ’s, brushing teeth, snuggling, and listening to lullabies and/or stories before bed. In the meantime, the sun sets, the moon rises, and the stars twinkle. Then all lights are out—except one, the source of which is revealed on a most charming, wordless final page. This endearing bedtime tale strikes a refreshing note in a crowded field with its sweet simplicity. Ditto for the adorable, gently humorous illustrations replete with cuddly scenes of Sleepyville residents comfortably settled in for the evening in their own idiosyncratic ways. Reassuring glimpses of warm, loving families will charm young children, as will the scenes depicting nighttime preparations familiar to them. Minimal text per page, lots of white space, and simple backgrounds permit focus on characters and activities.

Children will want to make this tender story a good-night habit. (Picture book. 2-5)

THE MAGIC IN CHANGING YOUR STARS
Henderson, Leah
Sterling (304 pp.)
$16.95 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-4549-3406-6

Ailey Benjamin Lane can dance outta this world and even drop a dope rhyme, but he struggles to perform his best under the spotlight.
Henderson’s characters have such powerful names, evoking a legacy of black excellence that dovetails triumphantly with this story of facing regrets and achieving redemption. (A list of these names is appended.) At the center, there’s Ailey Benjamin Lane, named for black dancer Alvin Ailey and astronomer/inventor Benjamin Banneker. Ailey is headed into stiff competition for the role of the Scarecrow in the school’s production of The Wiz. Ailey struggles through his first audition, and his stress is compounded when he arrives home to learn that his grandfather, who has shared with Ailey his love of the stars, is hospitalized. At the hospital, Grampa now shares a secret about a prized possession he’s held onto all these years: the tap shoes of Bill “Bojangles” Robinson. Ailey tries on the shoes and is transported to 1930s Harlem. There, he meets a young street tapper who looks an awful lot like Grampa and who is seeking to make a name for himself but must overcome his own doubt and anxiety. Through these magical shoes and this historic journey, there’s a way for Ailey to rewrite the story and “with every bit of heart and grit you have to seize…possibility.”

Black excellence, black fantastic, and black family combine for a transformational story of passion and persistence. (Fantasy: 8-12)

SUPERHEROES DON’T BABYSIT
Hendricks, Amber
Illus. by Reed, Kyle
Beaming Books (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Jun. 2, 2020
978-1-5064-5876-2

Dealing with a little brother is a huge distraction from being a superhero, but it may also be just the job for a young masked avenger.

With a bit of the cause-and-effect feel of If You Give a Mouse a Cookie, this book describes the thankless task a young superhero takes on when her dad asks her to babysit. The unnamed characters spend the day dealing with messes and grabs for attention, culminating in a near meltdown (from the hero, who longs to shout, “I WISH YOU WEREN’T MY BROTHER!”). But it ends with the younger child’s offer of a favorite teddy bear and a hug, and the hero’s embrace of the idea that “MAYBE little brothers aren’t so bad after all.” It’s well-worn territory: the ubiquity of superhero entertainment, the writing style, and the lesson. But the elements jell well, and the illustrations strike a fresh balance, featuring aged photos, bygone wallpaper backgrounds, and restrained use of comic-book-style panels. The stakes are real-life pint-sized, not stretched to fantastical proportions, making the unnamed superhero’s journey all the more accessible. Any caregiver who has witnessed siblings start World War III over a hairbrush will appreciate this caped crusade, which effectively makes the case that putting aside sibling rivalry is a job big enough for a superhero. Dad and kids all have light-brown skin, theirs lighter than his.

Combines familiar picture-book tropes into something clever and new. (Picture book: 4-7)

GRANDPARENTS
Heras, Chema
Illus. by Osuna, Rosa
Trans. by Amado, Elisa
Aldana Libros/Greystone Kids (36 pp.)
$17.95 | May 5, 2020
978-1-77164-566-9

In a refreshing departure from the norm, this Spanish import focuses on the grandparents’ relationship with each other, not with a child protagonist.

Balding Manuel is working in the garden when a passing car announces a dance with the “best musicians in the country.” A call and response between the elders ensues after Manuela insists she is not going—but starts attending to her appearance anyway. Each time Grandfather inquires about her preparations, she bemoans her looks: “I’m going to put mascara on my eyelashes. They are as stubby as a little fly’s feet.” He counters her, asserting that they are like “new-mown grass.” Manuel’s loving if not always romantic similes build cumulatively, inviting reader participation. Wobbly ink outlines suggest a tender fragility to these characters; light gray backgrounds create their
skin tones. Color and humor abound in these compositions due to the playfulness of the onlooking farm creatures and the hilarious visual interpretations of the snappy narrative. Looking in the mirror, Manuela thinks she is “as ugly as a chicken with no feathers”; an inverted image depicts just that. The design is varied and sophisticated yet caters to a child’s naïve sensibilities, as when a tree grows horizontally out of the field. Ultimately, the only change to Grandmother’s appearance is Grandfather’s flower behind her ear; the two dance and flirt in the moonlight as intimate scenes from their past surround them.

Fun and feisty—these memorable characters are a delight to know and revisit. (Picture book. 4-8)

WHAT ABOUT WORMS!?  
Higgins, Ryan T.  
Illus. by the author  
Hyperion (64 pp.)  
$9.99 | May 19, 2020  
978-1-368-04573-5  
Series: Elephant & Piggie Like Reading!

What does an uber-confident tiger about town have to worry about? Flowers? Apples? Books? Of course not! Unless they’re teeming with—WORMS!!!

This tiger loves flowers, but flowers are buried in dirt, and everyone knows worms LOVE dirt. Apples are juicy and crunchy and sweet. The tiger loves apples, but so do WORMS!!!

The tiger also LOVES books...unless they’re about the one thing the tiger’s terrified of—WORMS!!! It’s impossible to tell their tops from their bottoms! (Gross!) As the tiger overreacts and drops object after object, what does the resulting trail of flowerpot shards, apple pulp, and a tossed-aside book attract? Squirmy, slimy WORMS!!! Guess what worms are afraid of? Furry, noncrawling TIGERS! After all, “you can tell their tops from their bottoms!” (Gross!) But this tiger left these worms some wonderful dirt. This tiger left these worms a delicious apple. And this tiger left these worms the best thing of all—a book! Time to give this tiger a WORM HUG! “Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!” Higgins’ latest addition to the Elephant & Piggie Like Reading series is an exclamation-point–packed, liberally uppercased rambunctious rollick through the irrational world of phobias. His Hobbes-like feline is a master of inscrutability (NOT!). Expressions ranging from cheesy grins to abject terror race across the tiger’s face faster than you can thumb a flipbook.

Between snorts and giggles, kids will soon discover they’re READING! (Early reader. 4-8)

I ATE SUNSHINE FOR BREAKFAST  
Holland, Michael  
Illus. by Giordano, Phillip  
Flying Eye Books (128 pp.)  
$19.95 | May 5, 2020  
978-1-912497-74-4

Think you know plants? Guess again. This fact-filled, dazzlingly colorful compendium will teach budding naturalists plenty they never knew about the world’s leafy wonders. With plants being used in foods and beverages, clothing, paper, pigments, sports equipment, building materials, vehicles, medicines, hygiene products, technology, and more, there’s virtually nothing humans haven’t utilized them for. Divided into four parts—“All About Plants,” “World of Plants,” “From Breakfast Until Bedtime,” and “The Power of Plants”—this U.K. import uses concise, engaging prose to inform readers about all these uses as well as how plants function; how they’ve adapted to and survived in various environments over millennia; and then some. Vital timely topics, including conservation and the environment, are covered. Informative labeled diagrams and “Did You Know?” sidebars provide additional, helpful information. DIY projects feature enjoyable craft and game activities for which adult supervision is sometimes recommended; a cautionary advisory is noted on the copyright page. Occasionally, British spellings and word usages crop up, and the scattered proofreading errors may distract some readers. Nods at diversity occur in references to and illustrations of inventor Lewis Latimer, an African American man, and marine biologist and conservationist Rachel Carson, a white woman, as well as in illustrations of international flags and housing. This will work well as a title for browsing and classroom support.

Science enthusiasts especially will want to plant themselves in this one. (glossary, index) (Nonfiction. 9-12)

KAZU JONES AND THE COMIC BOOK CRIMINAL  
Holyoak, Shauna M.  
Disney-Hyperion/LBYR (320 pp.)  
$16.99 | Apr. 21, 2020  
978-1-368-02267-5  
Series: Kazu Jones, 2

Gumshoe Kazu Jones and her detective friends are back in this sequel to Kazu Jones and the Denver Dognappers (2019).

Having solved the dognapping case, Kazuko Jones and her friends pick up a new mystery to solve after three comic-book stores are vandalized with anti-comic graffiti. With pal March’s uncle’s comic-book shop as a possible target, March wants to expose the villain. When March takes the lead and ex-bully Madeleine rejoins the group, the kids start butting heads. The team uncovers the vandal’s connection to a rare
comic-book character, but when they keep running into dead-
end clues, everything starts to fall apart. Kazu's home life isn't
much better. Kazu's mother is bedridden, and her grandmother
from Japan, Baa-chan, has come to help around the house. No
one will tell Kazu why her mom is sick, so she must uncover
the truth on her own. This sequel is just as suspenseful as the
first, but it also tackles more emotional issues, like adults keep-
ing secrets, friend fights, and a parent's mental illness. The
characters are well developed and distinct, expressing feelings
kids will recognize, like anger, confusion, uncertainty, and grief.
With Baa-chan comes Japanese vocabulary and items that play
an essential role in the story. Kazu is biracial, with a Japanese
mom and white dad; March and CindeeRae present white, and
Madeleine is Korean.

A suspenseful yet small-scale mystery for lovers of
comics, art, and adventure. (author's note) (Mystery. 8-12)

**CIRCUIS GIRL**

*Hunter, Jana Novotny*

*Illus. by Camp, Joaquin*

*Child's Play (32 pp.)*

$17.99 | $7.99 paper | May 5, 2020

978-1-78628-298-9

978-1-78628-297-2 paper

A young girl dreams of being a circus
star in this British import.

Posters of trapeze artists adorn Sky's walls, and she sleeps
under a comforter patterned with big-top tents and colorful
balloons. “She dreams of clowns, / She dreams of acrobats, / She
dreams of stardust; / All the fun of the circus!” In this dream, a
diverse troupe of performers makes music and performs stunts,
one of them a figure in a wheelchair. However, a persistent voice
keeps interrupting: “Get up Sky!” and “Hurry up Sky!” Sky, who
has brown skin and straight, black hair, eventually wakes and
heads out to start her day. This is when readers get a glimpse
that there just might be reality behind this dream. There is a
big top in the background, and the school Sky heads to from
her trailer is another one, with “SCHOOL” on its door. Sky is
a circus performer after all! Camp infuses the art with circus
enthusiasm: Sky balances towers of school books in each hand
(juggling and tumbling texts are mixed in), and at breakfast, a
pyramid of coffee cups take center stage on the table. Overall,
the reveal is fun, but while readers will enjoy seeing that the fig-
ures from Sky's dreams inhabit her reality as well, dragging it out
over 11 pages serves to deflate rather than increase excitement.

This twist on dreams coming true goes on a bit too
long. (Picture book. 3-6)

**HELLO FROM RENN LAKE**

*Hurwitz, Michele Weber*

*Wendy Lamb/Random (256 pp.)*

$16.99 | $19.99 PLB | May 26, 2020

978-1-9848-9632-2

978-1-9848-9634-6 PLB

A 12-year-old girl has a special con-
nection to the lake that saved her life
when she was an infant.

As a baby, Annalise mysteriously
appeared one day in a bassinet placed
secretly behind Alden's store. Nearby Renn Lake noticed and
helpfully surged up to attract the attention of Mrs. Alden, who
found the abandoned child. Eventually Annalise was adopted
by a younger childless couple who also owned and operated
summer cabins on that same Wisconsin lake. By the age of
3, Annalise begins to hear and understand Renn in a way that
no one else does. As a result, when toxic algae threaten the
future of the lake and the livelihoods of all who depend on it,
Annalise and her friend Zach spring into action with an inge-
nious plant-based solution. Meanwhile, Annalise eventually
learns more about her personal history and integrates her
“found day” narrative into her life. The story is told in both
Annalise’s and Renn's voices, in alternating chapters, until mid-
way through, when Renn's ill health leads to silence. Eventually
Renn's cousin Tru, the river that feeds the lake, takes up where
Renn leaves off; the inclusion of both bodies of water as nar-
rators adds fuller dimension to the story and emphasizes the
importance of the environment to our lives. Human characters
present as white. An author's note provides further information
on lake ecosystems and algal blooms.

An earnest and disarming tale of human and environ-
mental caring. (Fiction. 8-12)

**NIGHT OF THE LIVING TED**

*Hutchison, Barry*

*Illus. by Cosgrove, Lee*

*Delacorte (192 pp.)*

$9.99 | May 19, 2020

978-0-593-17428-9

Teddy bears come to life—and
they’re evil.

Lisa Marie loves both big words
and the Create-a-Ted-a-Bear store. On
Halloween, while shopping with her
new older stepbrother, Vernon, she sees that Create-a-Ted has
a sign declaring a new owner—and it’s giving away Hallow-
een bears. They get an Elvis bear (original name: Bearvis; Lisa
Marie’s new name: Elvis Grizzly) for her Elvis-loving father;
Lisa Marie makes a cute witch bear; Vernon—too cool for bears
but pressured to make one—tosses together as many ghastly
accessories as he can (a decision that will come back to haunt
him). On Halloween night, the bears come to life, magically
endowed with the abilities and powers of their personae. The
A satisfying, full-fledged story that deftly accommodates the short attention spans and kinetic needs of young listeners. 

JOY
Ismail, Taismeen
Illus. by Desmond, Jenni
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Jun. 9, 2020
978-1-5362-0934-1

The exuberant play of a kitten is the subject of Ismail's latest picture book.

The cover depicts a furry, gray feline leaping in midair while clutching a red ball of unraveling yarn. The loopy, crimson line leads all eyes forward while setting the stage for readers to follow the motion lines in the subsequent action-packed pages. Short, high-energy rhymes and onomatopoeia add to the fun: "ZOOM-ZOOM / ZIM-ZAM / CLIP-CLOP / HIP-HOP / What a trip— / don't stop!" accompanies the loop-the-loops of the young pet as it follows a bouncing rubber ball and tumbles into a standing lamp. After knocking over the food dish, wreacking havoc with the laundry rack, and crashing into the family dog, the creature is propelled through the cat door and crashes down the back steps. Fortunately, the watchful mother cat is right there with a "little hug, a kiss, a squeeze," and she proceeds to "check your paws / and clean your knees." In no time, the kitten is distracted and begins chasing a butterfly. Uncluttered, white backgrounds; clear, colorful details; a buoyant protagonist; and a spirited text make this a perfect choice for one-on-one or group sharing.

A satisfying, full-fledged story that deftly accommodates the short attention spans and kinetic needs of young listeners. (Picture book 2-6)

STORY OF THE MONGOLIAN TENT HOUSE
Jamba, Dashdondog
Adapt. by Pellowksi, Anne
Illus. by Vidal, Beatriz
Wisdom Tales (40 pp.)
$16.95 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-937786-81-6

A prolific Mongolian storyteller's original legend of how the distinctive dwelling known as the ger came to be invented.

Adapted into spare and stately English by renowned storyteller Pellowski, the story is punctuated by quarrels. Once, all living things lived peaceably in "a big house called the earth." But fights began, and all went to find homes of their own—including a man who, being "very old" and "very intelligent," instructs his seven sons to gather willow branches, rope, and fleeces to construct a sturdy round shelter. But the house blows down after the old man dies because his sons have ignored his command to "work together and tighten the ropes that keep our home on the ground." Perhaps to counter the all-male cast of the narrative, Vidal adds silent feminine figures in a few scenes. However, aside from the occasional Bactrian camel or golden eagle, her grassy settings have a generic look, and though each of the sons wears a differently colored robe, in face and feature they are indistinguishable. Moreover, aside from those plain robes there are no decorations or possessions of any sort, culturally distinctive or otherwise, to be seen, and though Pellowski appends a description of how gers are typically furnished, the illustrator's one glimpse inside shows just empty space.

Worthy of theme but lacking in execution. (Picture book 6-8)

THE LOST FAIRY TALES
James, Anna
Illus. by Escobar, Paola
Philomel (288 pp.)
$16.99 | May 5, 2020
978-1-9848-3729-5

Why is the new head of the Underlibrary cracking down on bookwandering? After Enoch Chalk escaped into fiction in series opener The Bookwanderers (2018), the old Head Librarian was disgraced. Her replacement, the smarmy demagogue Melville, begins his tenure with a bang: He forbids Oskar and Tilly from bookwandering, bans Tilly's parents to bookwandering, bans Tilly's whole family from the British Underlibrary, and implements tracking measures to locate every bookwanderer. Oskar and Tilly are ready to battle the new regime, and they don't understand the wariness of Tilly's grandparents, who warn them to obey the new rules. When they disobey the adults' dire warnings and enter a book of fairy tales, they discover horrible dangers. Fairy-tale characters are dissolving into black ooze or vanishing altogether. Oskar's kidnapped into Rapunzel's story, and even Tilly, who's half-fictional on her father's side, is hard-pressed to rescue him. The fairy-tale boundaries are so corrupted that Rapunzel is besieged by countless worthless Prince Charmings—Tilly and Oskar had best find out what's wrong posthaste. Droll illustrations spice up the text, though frequent changes of typeface add distraction rather than flair. An author's note on fairy tales is insufficiently clear on the distinction between the oral tradition and original tales. The story itself is clearer on this point, which is lucky, as fairy tales' having no original source edition is key to the adventure. Oskar has brown skin; Tilly (and most other human characters) seems to be white.

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Kelly writes a heartfelt story of family and the bond of siblings.

**WE DREAM OF SPACE**

*Series: You Are (Not) Small*

Three siblings face their middle school problems as they learn about space.

The Thomas siblings—13-year-old Cash and 12-year-old twins Fitch and Bird—all struggle to navigate the doubts of middle school and their dysfunctional family. Cash sees himself as a failure. He isn’t good at anything, and now he’s repeating seventh grade with his two younger siblings. Fitch is good at video games but bad at controlling his temper. Bird likes tinkering with machines but feels invisible. The Thomas household is toxic with their parents’ constant fighting, and Bird feels like she has to keep their family from malfunctioning altogether. It’s January 1986, and their teacher is gearing them up for the launch of the space shuttle *Challenger*. Bird is enthralled with the space mission and decides she’s going to be a shuttle commander one day. But when the *Challenger* disaster occurs, Bird finds herself in need of the support she’s been giving. Each chapter begins with a date in January 1986, then divides into short vignettes following each sibling on that day. Kelly writes a heartfelt story of family and the bond of siblings. Even though readers are transported to 1986, the characters’ social, emotional, and familial struggles will feel familiar and timely. Characters seem to default to white, with the occasional surname hinting at ethnic difference.

*Put this book in your orbit.*

(Topical note, Resources)

(Fantasy. 9-11)

**IT IS (NOT) PERFECT**

*Kang, Anna*

*Illus. by Weyant, Christopher*

*Two Lions (32 pp.)*

*$17.99 | May 12, 2020*

*978-1-5420-1662-9*

*Series: You Are (Not) Small*

Two bears (one purple, one brown) build a sand castle together on the beach. “Pat pat pat” goes the shovel and bucket as they mold their creation into the right shapes. As the purple bear puts one last shell in place, the brown bear declares that the castle is “perfect.” But the purple bear has another idea: “It needs flags.” They add twigs to the castle’s turrets. Then the brown bear decides the towers could be taller, so—“pat pat pat”—they build some more. Other furry, anthropomorphic characters begin to crowd the beach and offer their creative feedback for additional components. Finally, a gigantic furry creature (seen only as an enormous foot and shin that extends up past the frame of the page) bellows “MOAT!” The bear pals try to accommodate every idea on the exhaustive list as the other animals watch. Eventually, their teamwork pays off with a resulting sand castle that’s big enough to fill a double-page spread. But, wait, is that a wave headed straight for the beach? Uh oh! As with the other books in the *You Are (Not) Small* series, this entry effectively uses simple sequences and the healing powers of remembering the Web. In going global with her String, Karst has a very difficult time maintaining her metaphor. The notion of a concrete, tangible bond of love is a child-friendly way to imagine relationships, but making those crisscrossing bonds into a Web of mutual responsibility strains the concept. Will writing one’s cousin truly prevent world war? By the end, Karst has gone overboard: “The Invisible Web is alive! / Its time is right now. / It breathes as we breathe, / pulsating all over our Earth, / the single heartbeat / of life and love.”

*Hopelessly tangled.*

(Picture book. 3-6)

**THE INVISIBLE WEB**

*A Story Celebrating Love and Universal Connection*

*Karst, Patrice*

*Illus. by Lew-Vriethoff, Joanne*

*Little, Brown (32 pp.)*

*$17.99 | Apr. 14, 2020*

*978-0-316-52496-4*

Karst and Lew-Vriethoff follow up their picture book about *The Invisible String* (2018) that connects loved ones over distances and even after death with an extension of the metaphor. The “hundreds of Strings” that connect each individual “to everyone we know” also “create a nest that covers the planet, / interlacing us together, cradling us forever.” This is the titular Web, depicted in Lew-Vriethoff’s bright cartoons as sweeping colored lines that circle the globe every which way like an ambitious international airline’s route map. It includes humans, animals, plants, and even weather systems: “Everything is linked!” But the Web is only as strong as the people who remember and care for it, and a double-page spread that shows a frightened, pale-skinned family fleeing a burning city on verso for a refugee tent city in a flowered meadow on recto, where a multiracial peace demonstration is also taking place, depicts both the consequences of forgetting and the healing powers of remembering the Web. In going global with her String, Karst has a very difficult time maintaining her metaphor. The notion of a concrete, tangible bond of love is a child-friendly way to imagine relationships, but making those crisscrossing bonds into a Web of mutual responsibility strains the concept. Will writing one’s cousin truly prevent world war? By the end, Karst has gone overboard: “The Invisible Web is alive! / Its time is right now. / It breathes as we breathe, / pulsating all over our Earth, / the single heartbeat / of life and love.”

*Hopelessly tangled.*

(Picture book. 3-6)

*Winsomely harking back to the oldest children’s classics, this has special appeal for romantic bibliophiles.*

*Fantasy. 9-11*

**WE DREAM OF SPACE**

*Kelly, Erin Entrada*

*Greenwillow (400 pp.)*

*$16.99 | May 5, 2020*

*978-0-06-274730-3*

Three siblings face their middle school problems as they learn about space.

The Thomas siblings—13-year-old Cash and 12-year-old twins Fitch and Bird—all struggle to navigate the doubts of middle school and their dysfunctional family. Cash sees himself as a failure. He isn’t good at anything, and now he’s repeating seventh grade with his two younger siblings. Fitch is good at video games but bad at controlling his temper. Bird likes tinkering with machines but feels invisible. The Thomas household is toxic with their parents’ constant fighting, and Bird feels like she has to keep their family from malfunctioning altogether. It’s January 1986, and their teacher is gearing them up for the launch of the space shuttle *Challenger*. Bird is enthralled with the space mission and decides she’s going to be a shuttle commander one day. But when the *Challenger* disaster occurs, Bird finds herself in need of the support she’s been giving. Each chapter begins with a date in January 1986, then divides into short vignettes following each sibling on that day. Kelly writes a heartfelt story of family and the bond of siblings. Even though readers are transported to 1986, the characters’ social, emotional, and familial struggles will feel familiar and timely. Characters seem to default to white, with the occasional surname hinting at ethnic difference.

*Put this book in your orbit.*

(Historical note, Resources)

(Fantasy. 8-13)
BAHAR, THE LUCKY

Kheiriyeh, Rashin
Illus. by the author
Reycraft Books (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Apr. 30, 2020
978-1-4788-6907-8

Bahar, a young Persian girl, supports her mother and siblings by selling her rugs at the Grand Bazaar of Kashan.

One day Bahar is bathing at the hammam when she sees the chief fortuneteller’s wife walk in, “proud as a camel.” Imagining herself “wrapped in...riches of a fortune teller,” Bahar decides her weaving days are over and that her fortunetelling will rescue her family from poverty. Soon she is tasked with finding the king’s cat, and the mayor demands she find where the 40 thieves hid the king’s crown. If she doesn’t, she will be punished. Soon Bahar “mis[s]es the peace and safety of weaving her rugs,” yet in humorous and improbable ways she is able to solve each task—but not without attracting the king’s attention as well as that of the jealous fortuneteller and his wife. With the help of happenstance and an “old Iranian proverb” she passes the last test and cements her lucky status.

Kheiriyeh’s smudgy, stylized depictions of Bahar capture her happiness while weaving and her determination to be a great fortuneteller. Her color palette—reddish-orange, blue, and mustard-yellow—blends well together, adding richness to the setting. The noses of the chief fortuneteller and his wife are caricatured to the point of distraction, but the device does aid in their characterization.

A humorous tale woven from strands of Persian culture. (Picture book: 5-8)

WHICH WAY IS HOME?

Kiely, Maria
Nancy Paulsen Books (192 pp.)
$17.99 | May 12, 2020
978-0-525-51680-4

Kiely bases her debut novel on the true story of her mother’s escape from Communist-era Czechoslovakia.

Eleven-year-old Anna, a Czech girl, lives happily with her family. They thought that once the Nazi occupation was over, everything would go back to normal, but now they worry about the new Communist government. People are being sent to prison camps, and no one knows whom to trust. One night in 1948, Anna is whisked away to Prague, where she, her mother, and her older sister begin a secret escape to Germany—and, they hope, Anna’s father. The plot is straightforward and fast-paced, and though the stakes are high, there’s never any doubt that things will turn out all right for Anna and her family. They know there are untrustworthy people in the world, but they learn to put their faith in the people they meet along their way. There are plenty of anecdotes that clearly come straight from Anna herself, adding a sense of familiarity and veracity to the story.

Readers will easily imagine themselves there with Anna, playing cards with the boys at the refugee camp or eating the unappealing food. A particularly fascinating detail is the secret code involving gloves and Wuthering Heights that Anna’s mother uses to identify herself to people who will help her escape. All characters appear to be white.

A warm story about trust during hardship. (author’s note) (Historical fiction: 10-13)

WHEN PENCIL MET THE MARKERS

Kilpatrick, Karen & Ramos Jr., Luis O.
Illus. by Blanco, German
Imprint (40 pp.)
$18.99 | May 26, 2020
978-1-250-30940-2
Series: When Pencil Met Eraser

A group of pens banishes one of their own in this companion to When Pencil Met Eraser (2019).

All members of this pack of markers love to color, but Purple’s technique stands out. Purple colors “everywhere”—“all over the place.” This means several things: Going outside the lines of the coloring book these markers seem to inhabit; coloring in entire scenes purple, including things that aren’t naturally purple, like a dolphin; and adding shapes or ideas that weren’t invited by the pre-drawn outlines, such as dots to a rainbow or a face to a hot air balloon. Huffily, the marker group ejects Purple. Purple meets an outsider—or two outsiders, for what first looks like a pencil with two faces is in fact a pencil with a ride-atop eraser who sometimes hops off. The pencil and Purple supposedly create a whole new approach that satisfies everyone and enables group reconciliation. Blanco’s uninspired illustrations (pencil, marker, and digital) give areas colored by the step-in-line markers a rote smoothness that evokes machine coloring, not child-applied color. The improvised, collaborative technique finds Purple making abstract shapes that the pencil transforms into realistic objects, so while Purple does get to color free of outlines, the rule still privileges realism. Tepid prose—“There are no mistakes, only happy accidents!”—is further slowed by an odd choice of placing an ellipsis in the middle of sentences that cross a spread.

Conceptually murky, visually dull. (Picture book: 3-5)
LET’S GO TO TAEKWONDO!
A Story About Persistence, Bravery, and Breaking Boards
Kim, Aram
Illus. by the author
Holiday House (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 28, 2020
978-0-8234-4360-4

Helping somebody else becomes key to one kitten’s overcoming her own obstacles.

Yoomi, an anthropomorphic Korean American cat, is working toward a yellow belt in the Korean martial art of taekwondo. The only problem is the test requires punching through a wooden board. She watches her classmates break through their own boards, and they encourage her, but Yoomi is paralyzed by the thought of hurting her hand and cannot bring herself to do it. Her fears are not left at the dojang. After fleeing evil boards in her nightmares, she avoids several days of practice, making excuses to her grandma until she declares she is quitting the sport. In reply, her grandma declares that she is quitting her computer. Shocked by her grandma’s revelation, Yoomi coaches her grandma until she successfully video chats with her sister in Korea. And after coaching grandma, Yoomi uses her newfound tools to visualize her goal and makes another attempt for the coveted belt. Diversity is indicated with a mix of cultural names and animals within the community. Korean words and names are seamlessly incorporated into the simple, winning narrative. (Picture book. 3-7)

SARA AND THE SEARCH FOR NORMAL
King, Wesley
Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster (272 pp.)
$17.99 | May 5, 2020
978-1-5344-2113-4

How can Sara even try to make friends when she knows in her heart that she’s really what her jeering classmates call her?

Sara, who was diagnosed at 6 with bipolar and anxiety disorders, mild schizophrenia, and depression, lives a mostly solitary life. Though she attends a public school, she’s not mainstreamed. The school believes Sara’s too intellectually gifted to be in a regular special education classroom, so she’s been learning solo. Wracked with self-loathing, she’s obsessed with being “normal.” When her therapist (also her psychiatrist) encourages Sara to join a therapy group for teens with mental illness, Sara makes her first friend ever. Erin has trichotillomania, an anxiety disorder in which she pulls out her own eyebrows and eyelashes, and (unlike nearly silent Sara) she’s gregarious and affectionate. Though Erin and Sara adore one another, they could hardly be more different. Sara is desperate for a cure while Erin insists she has no desire for normalcy. Sara constantly uses slurs to describe herself while Erin’s convinced that they’re special kids: Star Children. Nearly all the characters are white except for one other kid in the group. With multiple encouraging adult mentors who say mostly excellent things about mental health, the educational message is unsubtle, but it’s delivered in a thoroughly compelling vehicle with a tidy but gripping subplot. This prequel to OCDaniel (2016) works just as well as a stand-alone.

Readers will take heart to see this well-realized character learning self-esteem and life skills. (Fiction. 10-13)
Lalli’s picture-book debut highlights the delights of doodling and sketching.

NOLA’S SCRIBBLES SAVE THE DAY

STEPPING STONES
Knisley, Lucy
Illus. by the author with Cogar, Whitney
RH Graphic/Random House (224 pp.)
$20.99 | $12.99 paper | $23.99 PLB
May 5, 2020
978-0-593-12524-3
978-1-9849-9684-1 paper
978-1-9848-9685-8 PLB

In her first graphic novel for kids, Knisley explores the struggles and joys of blending families.

Jen is not happy about the newest change to her life: She and her mother are moving from the city to the country, where her mom and her mom’s boyfriend, Walter, are starting a farm. This is her mom’s dream, but it’s certainly not Jen’s. Forced to help out at the farmers market, an uncertain Jen is left to independently run the till (without a calculator) even though she’s anxious about making change. Everything gets even worse when her new stepsisters arrive. While little Reese mostly stays out of the way, Andy is a confident know-it-all who completely gets on Jen’s nerves, just like Andy’s father, who ignores others’ feelings and commands space in a way that some readers may recognize as abusive. Knisley expertly renders the shame and frustration Jen feels at her lack of agency, balancing it with a positive shift in her relationship with her new siblings as they begin to reveal their own vulnerabilities. Although Jen’s stepsisters come around to see his behavior is hurtful, Walter is never held accountable. In her author’s note, Knisley references “My ‘Walter’” with some fondness and further explores the parallels between her own childhood and her semiautobiographical story. All characters seem white; the setting seems to be the 1990s.

Painfully realistic, this is a strong addition to the middle-grade shelf. (Graphic historical fiction. 8-12)

AMERICAN IMMIGRATION
Our History, Our Stories
Krull, Kathleen
Harper/HarperCollins (288 pp.)
$16.99 | Jun. 16, 2020
978-0-06-238113-2

Beginning with the arrival of the continent’s first Indigenous inhabitants and ending with events following the 2016 election, this book chronicles the social, cultural, and political trends that have shaped the United States’ historically fraught relationship with immigration.

Krull contextualizes important pieces of legislation such as the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, tracing how everything from labor demands to world wars shaped American attitudes toward newcomers. The text is peppered with profiles of immigrants, ranging from the children onboard the Mayflower to cellist Yo-Yo Ma, who immigrated to the States from China via France, and Apple founder Steve Jobs, whose birth father and adoptive mother were both immigrants. Laudably, Krull categorically dismisses the classification of slaves as immigrants, and she frankly recounts the genocide of Native Americans. Too often, though, Krull approaches immigration from a deficit mentality. For example, she characterizes immigrants who are learning English as poor performers in school rather than framing them as bilingual; uncritically recounts America’s openness to “any able-bodied immigrant”; and praises the fact that “all” newcomers to America “have assimilated,” without acknowledging the cultural loss that entails. Most problematically, she asserts without any context that “it’s human nature to be suspicious of people different than us,” seemingly excusing the very xenophobia the book clearly wishes to fight.

This comprehensive take on American immigration history is strong on facts and weak on analysis. (Nonfiction. 10-14)

NOLA’S SCRIBBLES SAVE THE DAY
Lalli, Cristina
Illus. by the author
Page Street (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 23, 2020
978-1-62414-942-9

Nola loves to draw, and she “scribbles” on a sketch pad everywhere she goes.

Her town—illustrated as a pencil-and-ink sketch of large rectangular buildings—gains colorful crayon squiggles and doodles as Nola walks past, immersed in her sketch pad. Unfortunately, no one else seems to appreciate Nola’s scribbles, and she feels the need to hide them. Nola also tries to “fix” her scribbles and create art that the people around her understand, contorting her scribbles “in ways they didn’t like to bend and twist.” The harder Nola tries, the more exhausted she gets. Ultimately, Nola literally draws a blank, a “big, boring blank,” and falls right inside it—where, much to her surprise, Nola finds that she’s not alone. Other creators are stuck on the same blank page. Can Nola summon enough scribbles to inspire everyone out of their respective creators’ blocks? Lalli’s picture-book debut highlights the delights of doodling and sketching as well as the lack of inspiration that sometimes follows. Colorful sketches on otherwise gray illustrations mark the difference between imagination and lack thereof. Nola has brown skin and puffy brown hair, and her fellow creators on the blank page are children of different races and abilities.

A lighthearted tale that validates following your own artistic vision. (Picture book. 4-8)
Bina wants a band, not a boyfriend: Is that so wrong?

In this follow-up to All Summer Long (2018), Bina, now in eighth grade, has formed a band with new-girl Darcy and aloof prodigy Enzo. When Enzo and Darcy start dating, Bina finds herself dumped by her band mates, who reorganize the group as a duo. Additionally, her neighbor and BFF, Austin, fresh from a breakup with his long-distance girlfriend, now seems to like like her; could her oldest friend become her boyfriend? Everywhere she turns, it seems that everyone is concerned with only one thing—dating—whereas Bina swoons solely for music. Bina feels she must present herself a certain way to find acceptance. And she struggles to be true to herself and her friends as opportunities swirl around her. Bina's smart, likable, and familiar, and her coming-of-age fears are palpably engaging as she learns that romance need not be romantic. The story is written and drawn by Larson; colorists Sycamore and Edwards add a sophisticated two-toned, muted rose-gold scheme. Larson has a wonderfully sharp eye for her characters, including a range of skin tones, sexual orientations, and body types. Aftermatter includes Larson's explanation of her artistic process and is sure to inspire budding artists. Bina presents as mixed-race, though it's not explicitly stated; her dad presents white, and her mom has brown skin.

Altogether perfect. (Graphic fiction. 10-14)

In this story, Lázaro presents an original legend surrounding the coquí. Like many legends, it starts “long, long ago” at a time when “life was so easy that the animals didn’t have to do much but eat, sleep, nap, and snack.” Naturally, this behavior leads to a lethargy that does not please the queen of the forest, the parrot. And a race is announced. One representative from each type of animal will race. Whichever one wins, all of its type will get “a fantastic prize.” With many an onomatopoeic sound, the competitors exercise and get ready for the big day, all except for the quiet little frogs. Their representative hops, jumps, and leaps with glee on its face, but no sound issues from its throat. It will come as no surprise to readers—but is no less satisfying—to find the little frog wins the race. And, the prize? Why, the sound that visitors to the island to this very day can still hear: “coquí.” Bright and colorful illustrations beautifully capture the Puerto Rican rainforest setting, rendered mostly in double-page spreads. The movement-filled illustrations are as dynamic as the race itself, with display type adding playful emphasis.

Make room for this book on the pourquoi shelf. (Nonfiction. 10-13)
Iliana, the new girl at school, looks at the sky all the time and draws meteors and planets, but she does not smile much and cries sometimes.

Jeannette’s mother encourages her to become friends with Iliana. Jeannette learns that Iliana crossed the sea on a small crowded boat to escape war; that she was cold and hungry; and that her mother comforted her with the idea of looking at the sky, which belongs to everybody. After Jeannette reports this, her mom suggests that she invite Iliana’s family over, where they share more about their frightful displacement story, summarized in the third-person narration. During the visit, Jeannette shows Iliana her telescope, and they gaze up at the sky and clouds, paving the way for a firmer friendship. The story strives to portray refugees as people, giving its characters identifiable names, hobbies, fears, professional lives, and ambitions. However, it grossly fails at doing so by silencing Iliana’s and her family’s voices, instead representing their narratives solely through a character may be as hard as stopping him. Corey is of mixed European and Puerto Rican heritage; Leila’s is European Jewish. Notably, most of the characters in the illustrations are children, both domesticated and wild, appear in many scenes. The stylized illustrations are whimsical and engaging, often thematically speaking to children’s interest in outer space, readers looking for resettled refugees with narrative agency will likely be disheartened. Readers seeking a genuine refugee voice will be disappointed. (Picture book. 5-9)

A young time traveler decides to “go big” with his ability by killing Hitler. Corey, 13, learned in trilogy opener Throwback (2019) that changing the past has unpredictable consequences both historical and personal, such as the small but real chance of returning from a jaunt transformed into an animal. Nevertheless, he figures it’s worth the risk. Much as she disagrees, fellow traveler Leila tags along, serving as both voice of reason and translator as the two repeatedly hop back to the early 20th century. For better or worse, though, the past turns out to have a certain resilience...to the point that Corey’s efforts to kill Hitler in Munich in 1939 or at least kick-start his artistic career in 1908 Vienna utterly fail. In the end Corey does manage to work a lesser change by saving the lives of a group of Polish resistance fighters, including his own great uncle, in the last days of World War II—at disturbingly great cost. In this fast-paced follow-up, Lerangis brushes on a light wash of credible period detail based on actual events. He also casts Hitler as a lost (but resolutely anti-Semitic) young man who winds up in a final, lurid encounter as a mad-eyed monster, demonstrating that writing him as a character may be as hard as stopping him. Corey is of mixed European and Puerto Rican heritage; Leila’s is European Jewish.

A provocative scenario with twists painful and droll make this sequel worth the...time. (Fantasy. 11-13)

A provocative scenario with twists painful and droll make this sequel worth the...time. (Fantasy. 11-13)
A young boy with brown skin and a fluffy black Afro begins the first day of his dog-training journey by showing the gray, shaggy mutt his doghouse. He tells the dog that while he is permitted to venture into the backyard, “you have to stay out of the flower bed, and you absolutely cannot go into the house.” The illustration shows Scamp on his haunches in the flower bed next to a pictorial no-dogs sign. In the next double-page spread, labeled “Day 2” in a childlike scrawl, Scamp stands in the kitchen, wagging his tail, with muddy paws and uprooted flowers in his mouth. The boy goes easy on Scamp and tells him that while he is now allowed “to help in the garden” and to enter the family room, “you are not allowed to play my video games.” The following double-page spread depicts Scamp doing exactly that, and a hilarious cumulative tale ensues. Kids will pick up and recite the repeating lines easily, and they will enjoy Scamp’s antics and the surprise ending, which reveals Scamp’s keen insight into human psychology. There are several very funny illustrations that will get lots of laughs, including one in which Scamp takes a bath while wearing a shower cap.

A very funny shaggy dog story. (Picture book. 4-8)

**S IS FOR SLUGGER
The Ultimate Baseball Alphabet**
Littlejohn, James
Illus. by Shipley, Matthew
Triumph Books (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-62937-796-4

A quirky baseball-based ABC provides the format for this offbeat homage to the game and its players.

Shoeshine Joe Jackson, Babe Ruth, and Mamie “Peanut” Johnson are the only representatives of baseball’s long-ago past, with admiring nods to many 20th-century players, such as Jackie Robinson, Henry Aaron, Nolan Ryan, and Cal Ripken Jr., but the book has a very contemporary feel, also shining the spotlight on players active in the 21st century. “C” is for Captain Clutch,” Derek Jeter; “Z” is for ZZTTTTT,” closer Mariano “Sandman” Rivera; “D” is for Slugout, where the bench players (a dream team of sorts including Roger Clemens, Bo Jackson, and Mike Piazza) wait to play while cheering for their teammates. The author seems to have applied some personal algorithm to his choice of players, who were or are respected in their positions and include several Hall of Famers. In single- and double-page spreads, the players are either directly named in a brief, pithy alphabetic blurb or identified in bright white uppercase letters within the illustration. Shipley’s deeply hued depictions of characters that inhabits Froggy-world does double duty as supporting as visual segues to page turns. Other than a final endpaper showing Froggy and Frogilina holding a “Vote” sign, the empowerment aspect of voting isn’t addressed; rather, the story hints at the importance of wise platforms and endorses the idea of working together.

A lighter take on elections that’s full of Froggy favorites. (Picture book. 4-6)

**THE FRIEND THIEF**
Loveless, Gina
Illus. by Bell, Andrea
Andrews McMeel (224 pp.)
$13.99 | Apr. 14, 2020
978-1-5248-5574-1

Will a fifth grader lose all her friends to a bully?

In this sophomore volume in the Robin Hood–themed Diary of a 5th Grade Outlaw series, green-hoodie–clad Robin Loxley and her group of friends are enjoying fifth grade, playing basketball, and eagerly awaiting the upcoming fair. Robin has her eye on bully Nadia, with whom she has a history. She soon notices her friend LJ spending more and more time with Nadia. As her concern slowly spirals into fixation, her other friends also begin to drift away. When she realizes she is all alone, Robin angrily confronts her friends and is then faced with the impact of her outburst. Watching Robin slowly and carefully sort out her feelings and hearing her unpack her missteps could certainly be an asset to
those struggling with similar issues. Loveless’ offering is told in diary format with a large, easy-to-read typeface; pages of prose are sprinkled with cheerful crayonlike illustrations by Bell. At times, however, the illustrations can interrupt the text flow, as when a basketball bounces through it, seemingly out of nowhere. Similarly, the high-concept narrative feels overstuffed with unnecessary gimmicks, like spontaneously rapping twins Allana and Dale and an overabundance of food-related figurative language. Main character Robin presents white and her friends are racially diverse but not specified; the twins have two dads.

Ambitious but overworked. (Fiction. 7-11)

PRAIRIE DAYS
MacLachlan, Patricia
Illus. by Archer, Micha
McElderry (40 pp.)
$17.99 | May 26, 2020
978-1-4424-4191-0

Newbery Medalist MacLachlan tells the story of a pastoral childhood on a prairie farm.

The unnamed narrator is depicted as a pale child with fair hair living in a small prairie town in, perhaps, the 1940s. In a nostalgic, retrospective voice, the protagonist recalls the wild-life and flowers near the farmhouse; the vast landscapes; swimming in the farm pond; and the sights, smells, and sounds of happy summers spent primarily outdoors. The narrator remembers trips to small towns, the local filling station, the granary by the railroad, and the nearby shops. Characters all appear to be white, and it is strictly from this perspective that the story is told; it comes complete with cowboys who say, “Hello, little lady,” and nearby towns with names like Rattlesnake and Spotted Horse. The story is insular, told as it is from this one child’s point of view, yet sprawling in its visual depictions of the “sky so big” (the book’s wide, horizontal orientation does its best to capture this) and the point “where the prairie met the mountains.” Archer’s vivid, textured mixed-media illustrations include tissue papers and homemade stamps. They are richly colored and detailed; these are spreads to linger over. Readers may see something new with each look.

A deeply nostalgic look at once-upon-a-time Midwest farm life. (Picture book. 4-10)

A HATFUL OF DRAGONS
And More Than 13.8 Billion Other Funny Poems
Madan, Vikram
Illus. by the author
Wordsong/Boyds Mills (64 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 21, 2020
978-1-68437-150-1

A loopily meta collection of silly, interactive poetry.

Madan’s collection of rhymed verse lives up to its subtitle thanks to a poem with 12 numbered blanks and 12 lists of seven words or phrases each to insert, mix-and-match style, in those blanks…that equals seven-to-the-12th-power possible poems! You do the math. (All 13 billion rhyme.) The fun starts in the illustrations even before the poetry does, with characters that recur throughout the book. A mummy pops up on the copyright page, for instance, and is then seen running in the distance in one illustration and watching a movie in another before finally showing up in its own poem: “Mummy wrapped in / Hoary cloths— / Scrumptious feast for / Hungry moths.” On the page with the table of contents, a bespectacled, bearded white man peers out of a rock and keeps peeping in but doesn’t introduce himself until the end, when he is revealed to be “Professor Dobbledook, / Inventor of the Page Machine, / Which lets me travel through this book / To spy on any page or scene.” The interrelations continue, as does the foolishness. There is a “cracked-concrete” poem (some of the words have fallen to the bottom of the page), a rebus chant composed entirely of pictures of Australian animals, and some poems in comic strips. The cast appears to be of many races and species.

This collection will encourage several giggle-filled read-throughs. (Poetry. 5-10)

THE RUBY PRINCESS RUNS AWAY
Malcolm, Jahnna N.
Illus. by Collina, Sumiti
Scholastic (96 pp.)
$6.99 paper | May 5, 2020
978-1-338-56567-6
Series: Jewel Kingdom, 1

A princess tries to run from her responsibilities.

It’s time for the big ceremony when Roxanne will be crowned as a Jewel Princess—she’ll be the Ruby Princess while her royal cousins each have their own jewel theme—and sent to reign in the Red Mountains. But she’s overwhelmed by the responsibility, prefers pants to dresses, and considers herself “a regular girl” who likes active, outdoor activities, so, she runs away. But the Dreadlings who serve Lord Bleak of Castle Dread lurk in the Mysterious Forest. Roxanne has a near miss with them before befriending a dragon and a
Experienced campers will smile knowingly while the inexperienced will gain tips.

**THE CAMPING TRIP**

A WORLD OF OPPOSITES

Malin, Gray

Photos by the author

abramsapplesseed (48 pp.)

$17.99 | May 5, 2020

978-1-497-3970-5

Pairs of bold, quirky photographs from varied locations illustrate contrasting concepts.

An aerial-photography specialist focuses on waterscapes, landscapes, and animals, sometimes unusually enhanced. Settings (named under each photo) include Bolivia, the Caribbean, the Pacific, Antarctica, and a hotel in Palm Springs, California, complete with fantastical animal inhabitants, previously featured in Malin’s *Be Our Guest!* (2018). The most intriguing photos are of llamas in Salar de Uyuni, a Bolivian salt flat. The woolly animals have traditional wool tassels hanging from their ears and, sometimes, quite untraditional large balloons surrounding their bodies. Two llamas, one black, one white, each covered in matching balloons, dominate the jacket. The spectacular large balloons show up again inside the book, where two llamas, one black, one white, each draped in pink. The intense blue sky, the white salt surface, and the pink balloons are striking, but the concept words “ALONE” and “TOGETHER” in embossed block capital letters across the photos’ middles distract from the strong visuals. Unfortunately this same layout is used throughout. While many coupled images artfully represent the simple concepts being introduced, others don’t work as well. Two flamingos labeled with the word “FEATHERS” are next to a tiger labeled “FUR.” An elephant surrounded by tall, balloon-festooned shrubs oppose a bunch of balloons rising in the salt flat, labeled “HEAVY” and “LIGHT,” respectively, is positively opaque.

All the photos are diverting, but the conceptual premise stumbles. (Picture book: 3-5)

**DRAGON OPS**

Mancusi, Mari

Disney-Hyperion/LBYR (384 pp.)

$16.99 | May 12, 2020

978-1-368-04090-7

Trapped inside a mixed-reality game, two siblings race the clock to defeat a villainous AI dragon and rescue their cousin.

Ian Rivera, a 12-year-old misunderstood gamer, loves the Fields of Fantasy role-playing game more than anyone. Now he gets to enter the world through Dragon Ops, a mixed-reality theme park on a small island. When the game’s ultimate, undefeatable opponent seize control of the game, the stakes rise to the highest possible level: die in the game, die in real life. In order to beat that boss—Atreus, a red dragon with fire power—Ian’s party needs to collect three Elemental Stones from the other three dragons that maintain balance in the world: earth, water, and (no, not air) ice. Mancusi packs the story with references to memes, video games, and Disney in the vein of *Ready Player One* (the movie is actively referenced in the text). The surname Rivera is the only indicator of cultural identity for Ian and his family. They are otherwise presumed white. Ikumi, a girl whose avatar has “eyes like an anime character’s,” is Japanese, as is one of the game’s creators. Their representation comes in the form of sprinkled-in lines about bowing and “gaijin,” which smacks more of exoticization than authenticity, especially as they are seen through Ian’s perspective.

For all its cool premise, this fantasy’s full of tropes but no surprises. (Science fiction/fantasy: 8-12)

**THE CAMPING TRIP**

Mann, Jennifer K.

Illus. by the author

Candlewick (56 pp.)

$17.99 | May 5, 2020

978-1-5362-0736-1

A young black girl experiences her first-ever camping trip, invited along by her aunt and cousin.

Ernestine, the immediately likable narrator, has never been camping, but she knows she is going to love it. She is thoroughly prepared, barely fitting all the gear her aunt listed into her duffel bag. When at last Aunt Jackie arrives, Ernestine says goodbye to her dad. She and her cousin amuse themselves in the car until they arrive at the campground: a full-bleed, double-page spread of lake and trees and mountains that will have readers ready to break out their own tents. After working hard to set up their tent, the girls are ready for a swim—but newbie Ernestine, who loves swimming at the Y, is surprised to find there are fish in the pond. After lunch, they all go on a hike, but someone seems to have packed too much in her backpack. A campfire, dinner, s’mores, some tossing and turning in her sleeping bag,
a touch of homesickness, and a star-filled night all await the narrator in her memorable trip that is full of surprises. Experienced campers will smile knowingly while the inexperienced will gain tips about how real camping compares to the imagined. Mann’s thin, sometime-scribbly lines and earth-toned colors capture the child’s viewpoint masterfully, and the variety of layouts, from pages full of small vignettes with speech bubbles to spread-spanning landscapes, carries readers through anticipation, humor, and awe in this longer-than-usual picture-book/graphic-novel hybrid. All characters are black.

This delightful trip will be savored again and again. (Picture book. 5-10)

DO NOT EAT THE GAME!
McElligott, Matthew
Illus. by the author
Crown (40 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | May 19, 2020
978-1-5247-6723-5
978-1-5247-6724-2 PLB

Board games, much like playtimes, take two or more players to make everything go right.

Schoolkids need a helping hand as they move from solo to social play—especially in a screen-oriented world—and McElligott here guides them along. Illustrated in a game board–style layout and written in the imperative style of game instructions, this clever book externalizes kids’ worst playtime impulses in the form of literal monsters. Readers first encounter a small child laden with a big, multicolored game box. When the family’s gray terrier wanders out of the room, the kid lets a pink, furred monster in through the window to serve as a substitute playmate. Things begin well enough, but, as a crowd of monsters accumulates and overwhelmsthe protagonist, the loyal pup returns to scare them off. Unfortunately, the furry fiends abscond with the game board, then refuse to give it back. Undaunted, the enterprising kid handcrafts a decoy game that distracts the thieving horde with explicitly naughty directives—throwing pieces, munching the board, and so on—enabling the retrieval of the board. Once the monsters realize good fun is contingent on good sportsmanship, they apologize and rejoin the game. By the amicable ending, readers have discovered the basics of fair play: abiding by the rules, waiting your turn, respecting your competitors, winning (and losing!) gracefully, and, per the titular mandate, abstaining from conspicuous consumption.

This book requires two or more readers—the more participants, the merrier. (Picture book. 5-8)

NO PARTY POOPERS!
McLellan, Gretchen Brandenburg
Illus. by Semple, Lucy
Little Bee (32 pp.)
$17.99 | May 5, 2020
978-1-4998-0988-6

This picture book begins by listing every stereotype about every type of animal and ends by tearing them all down.

The color-coded dialogue starts with the words “Hey, let’s have a party!” but the panda who’s hosting rejects every guest its brown-bear co-host wants to invite. “The Lions?” the brown bear suggests in black type. “Always take more than their fair share,” the panda scoffs in blue. “The Peacocks?” ventures the brown bear. “Show-offs!” This pattern leads up to the only possible moral. Having given up on hosting a party, the two end up at a different party that surprises the panda: “Why didn’t you tell me our neighbors were so much fun? They weren’t at all like I expected!” It’s touching, but there are two problems. One is
that the dialogue attribution is not always clear; the other is that the author tries to speak up for just about every species on Earth. A single page halfway through the book features beavers, hippos, kangaroos, and shrews. This would seem to be an illustrator's dream job, but the animals look strangely generic. Far too many of them have pear-shaped bodies, as though they were all traced from the same template. And the pages feel a little too cramped. There are just too many monkeys in this barrel of monkeys.

This is a running gag that, sadly, just keeps running. (Picture book. 4-8)

**FLYING HIGH**
*The Story of Gymnastics Champion Simone Biles*

Meadows, Michelle  
Illus. by Glenn, Ebony  
Henry Holt (40 pp.)  
$18.99 | May 26, 2020  
978-1-250-20566-7

Simone Biles enchanted the nation at the 2016 Summer Olympics, and this book aims to introduce her to young readers. Readers watch as little Simone and her three siblings are placed in a foster home, then separated, before she and one sister are adopted by their biological grandparents. Simone is always in motion from toddlerhood, "shooting off the vault / like a rocket blast" when she discovers gymnastics. There is a simple beauty in showing how Biles' rise to Olympic gold medalist was not smooth. Children will be saddened by her failure at making the national team and heartened by her determination to keep pursuing her dream. Meadows emphasizes resilience, demonstrating how Biles met each failure with persistence, getting back up and trying again. Glenn's clean line-and-color illustrations are reminiscent of animation, at their best in the many vignettes of Biles in motion. One double-page spread, in which 10 separate images trace Biles doing her trademark double layout with a half-twist landing, is electrifying. The text does not equal the illustrations' effectiveness; scansion is sometimes spotty, and the jaunty rhythms are at odds with the challenges and drive depicted. Its lightness seems particularly inapt when juxtaposed against Biles' powerful muscularity. Two pages of backmatter include a few more facts and selected sources.

This book was so close to soaring! (Picture book/biography. 4-8)

**GRANDPA GRUMPS**

Moore, Katrina  
Illus. by Yan, Xindi  
Little Bee (40 pp.)  
$17.99 | Apr. 7, 2020  
978-1-4998-0886-5

Love can be expressed in many different ways. Young, bubbly Daisy eagerly awaits the arrival of her paternal grandfather from China. She's already made a list of activities to make sure "This will be the best week ever!" When Yeh-Yeh finally arrives, Daisy notices that "Grandpa isn't jolly"—even after she gives him a hug. "Would you like some tea?" Daisy offers. Although she arranges a full tea party complete with stuffed animals, Yeh-Yeh reacts only with a stern "Harrumph." Undeterred, Daisy brings him one of her books to read. Yeh-Yeh attempts to communicate with Daisy, suggesting in Mandarin that she read his Chinese newspaper; misunderstanding, she takes it as a request for an art session. Yan's cartoons have the look of modern animation; rendered in bright blended colors, they are sure to elicit giggles with their portrayals of Daisy's failed attempts to engage her grandfather. A discouraged Daisy asks, "Mama, why is Yeh-Yeh such a grump?" Mama answers, "He shows love in other ways." Shifting paradigms, Daisy and Yeh-Yeh finally make headway through a shared love of food (recipe appended). Daisy and her family are Chinese, and a handful of romanized Chinese appears within the well-structured text, with many Chinese characters in the illustrations. Both characters and romanized Chinese appear with their English translations on the endpapers in a decorative picture dictionary.

Comical and heartwarming, this title should spark discussions of relationships and understanding. (Picture book. 4-7)

**CAN I GIVE YOU A SQUISH?**

Neilson, Emily  
Illus. by the author  
Dial (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | Jun. 9, 2020  
978-1-9848-1477-7

A lesson in consent delivered under the sea.

Kai is an affectionate merboy with light brown skin on his torso and an orange-scaled fish tail. He lives under the sea with his mermaid mama, who shares his skin color but has a silvery tail and flowing, white tresses instead of his blue-black hair. She warmly welcomes her son's "squishes," the text's word for hugs, which seems ideally suited to the aquatic setting. In fact, lots of sea creatures enjoy Kai's squishes, including an octopus, a lobster, and a dolphin. But when Kai swims up behind a puffer fish and gives it a squish, the startled fish puffs up alarmingly. Kai feels terrible about this turn of events, and his friends help him figure out how to make amends and do better next time. Ensuing pages show Kai and his friends asking for and then giving fin bumps, tail claps, and tentacle shakes. Humor, especially when the crab asks, "Does anybody want a claw pinch?" helps the intentionally
instructive text avoid preachiness. Likewise, the tropical palette and rounded cartoon-style characters create a playful sensibility from one page to the next. Unfortunately, the story does not explicitly validate the right to refuse any contact at all.

A mostly nifty vehicle to teach little ones about personal space, respect, consent, and bodily autonomy. (Picture book. 3-6)

ITZHAK
A Boy Who Loved the Violin
Newman, Tracy
Illus. by Halpin, Abigail
Abrams (40 pp.)
$18.99 | May 12, 2020
978-1-4197-4110-4

Newman recounts the childhood of renowned Israeli American violinist and polio survivor Itzhak Perlman.

In his family’s tiny Tel Aviv apartment, the “graceful classical symphonies” and “lively klezmer folk tunes” pouring from the radio enchanted Itzhak; at 3, he begged for a violin. But at 4, polio left him paralyzed. Though “other four-year-olds might have given up,” a “steady melody played inside Itzhak,” spurring him to relearn everyday tasks. But his legs remained paralyzed, requiring him to walk with forearm crutches and play his violin seated. Undaunted, he made the “extraordinary choice” of being neither sad nor angry; barriers, such as stairs, were “ordinary things Itzhak just had to get used to.” After joining Israeli orchestras at 6 and playing solos at 10, he performed on The Ed Sullivan Show in New York at 13 despite knowing little English.

The upbeat text, interspersed with quotes from the adult Perlman, amplifies his resilience and passion. But Halpin’s vibrant illustrations take center stage. Bars of Bach and Mendelssohn adorn the pages, bursts of red, yellow, blue, and green reflecting the musical “rainbow” in Itzhak’s mind; tender facial expressions convey Itzhak’s passion and his family’s love. An author’s note mentions Perlman’s advocacy for people with disabilities (jarringly and anachronistically referred to as “the handicapped” and “wheelchair-bound”); a timeline charts Perlman’s extensive career. Most characters, including Itzhak, present white.

An eye-catching tale of music and perseverance. (Illustrator’s note, notes, links, bibliography) (Picture book/biography. 6-10)

SEEKERS OF THE WILD REALM
Ott, Alexandra
Aladdin (400 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 16, 2020
978-1-5344-3858-3
Series: Seekers of the Wild Realm, 1

Twelve-year-old Brynja lives in a small island town near the Wild Realm, which is home to a variety of magical plants and animals.

Five Seekers serve as guardians of the Realm, maintaining the balance within it. Bryn wants to be a Seeker more than anything else in the world, both because she loves the creatures of the Realm and because the Realm will give her access to magical plants that can help her sickly little sister. However, only boys have ever become Seekers. Thus, when a Seeker retires and competitions are held to choose the next Seeker, Bryn is not allowed to train with the other competitors. Nonetheless, Bryn is eager to change how things have
A slapstick adventure across Wales, with cinematic middle school humor.

THE SUPER MIRACULOUS JOURNEY OF FREDDIE YATES
Pearson, Jenny
Norton Young Readers (235 pp.)
$16.95 | May 12, 2020
978-1-324-01133-0

A trio of 11-year-old boys goes on a zany, coincidence-packed journey after one experiences a death in the family.

Fred’s got only his dad and his grandmother, and his dad’s been laid up ever since the accident with the mail truck. His two best mates will soon be away for the summer. Ben’s going to the States and Disney World, which would be brilliant except for Ben’s horrible stepmother, and Charlie’s off to vegan camp because his mother wants him to lose weight. The beginning of the summer holidays takes a turn from merely bad to horrible when Fred’s grandmother dies suddenly. A letter Grams left for him reveals something Fred had assumed he’d never learn: the name and birthplace of his biological father, Alan Froggley, who abandoned his pregnant mother before he was born. (She died shortly after.) In a flash of inspiration that makes complete sense to the grief-stricken Fred, he decides on a quest to find Alan Froggley in Wales. Fred has no intention of replacing his real dad, whom he adores, but he’s seeking…something. Family? Connection? Answers? Ben and Charlie join him for a slapstick adventure across Wales, with cinematic middle school humor marred only by Charlie’s characterization via an endless stream of fat jokes. The boys (seemingly all white) are mistaken for superheroes and saints by Welsh villagers, and they are chased by a taxi-driving, gun-wielding criminal. By some fluke, their adventures are connected, as Fred the narrator continuously foreshadows.

A high-stepping tribute to friendships, musical and otherwise. (Fantasy. 8-12)

ELLA THE SWINGING DUCK
Overmeer, Suzan
Illus. by Berenschot, Myriam
Clavis (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Apr. 28, 2020
978-1-60537-498-7

A scat-singing duckling sets out in search of soul mates in this Dutch/Belgian import.

Waddling and warbling to her own rhythms, little yellow Ella seems a silly duck to her dignified parents (one white, the other a mallard) and sibs Wolfgang, Ludwig, Hildegard, Johan-Sebastian, Clara-Belle, and Amadeus. Is there anyone who will sing and swing with her? Not the dove (“I only sing alone”) nor the croaking frog choir, alas—but what’s this? Out of the reeds comes a “Doo daa daa” to echo her own! It’s a young (what else?) trumpeter duck to her dignified parents (one white, the other a mallard) and “raven-black hair”—and the book’s primary focus is on gender inequalities faced by women. The ending is not completely smooth, but Ott’s fast-paced fantasy highlights the importance of persistence, especially with regard to changing society’s (rather set) ways.

An immersive and fun—if predictable—series opener. (Fantasy. 8-12)

HEART OF GOLD
Penney, Shannon
Illus. by Sonda, Addy Rivera
Scholastic (112 pp.)
$5.99 paper | May 5, 2020
978-1-338-54036-9
Series: Cutiecorns, 1

A new series features puppies with magical unicorn horns.

The Cutiecorns are thrilled when they learn that they’re about to have their Enchanted Jubilee, which means they’re ready to start learning how to use their magic. Golden retriever puppy Sparkle gets an extra surprise—her parents celebrate her Jubilee by gifting her a locket that’s a precious family heirloom. As with any book for this age group, as soon as an important item is introduced it’s guaranteed to be promptly lost; poor Sparkle is robbed of it by a mysterious stranger. While investigating, the Cutiecorns overhear a scary story about a bad cat wizard, Claw—and the
A monarch butterfly befriends a newly hatched monarch larva and offers it a glimpse into a future with wings.

The narrative is voiced by the caterpillar: “Coming out of my egg, I see... / green.” When a monarch butterfly comes to “sip nectar from a nearby flower” the caterpillar refers to it as Orange. The butterfly tells the caterpillar, “Once, I was just like you on this milkweed plant.” The caterpillar longs to see more than the leaves nearby: “I can’t wait to fly with Orange.” The butterfly tells the caterpillar about what she sees from above: flowers blooming, forest, ocean, a schoolyard. She says that one day the caterpillar will be able to see these things for itself, but the butterfly won’t be there: “I must go. We all must, someday.” Halliday’s bold, frequently full-bleed digital collages have an impressive sense of depth and realistically depict the colors of the insects and flora, but they anthropomorphize by giving large, round, glossy, expressive eyes to both butterfly and larva. The gentle conversations between caterpillar and butterfly reach for a metaphor along with the factual depiction of the monarch’s life cycle, but the result is that both story and science are somewhat weakened. Backmatter briefly describes the life cycle and mentions the annual migration of each season’s last generation.

This introduction to a well-loved butterfly species meets with mixed success. (bibliography) (Picture book. 3-7)

A camping trip gives rise to many new worries for Little Hoo, but the little owl’s parents soothe them all.

The owl family is going camping for vacation. Though Little Hoo’s parents are reassuring, the owlet (who clutches a stuffed owl under a wing) meets each new experience with trepidation (some rightfully so: carsickness). While it may be grating to adults reading aloud, the repetitive nature of the text (“What’s wrong? / Don’t worry...”) aids little listeners who are learning story patterns, giving them opportunities to chime in and guess what’s coming next. “What’s wrong, Little Hoo? Are you feeling hungry? / Don’t worry, Little Hoo. It’s time to make a fire and roast some dinner.” Little Hoo’s hooded eyes in this illustration may have readers guessing that his next worry is the dinner menu; a page turn proves them right (though readers may have a hard time distinguishing the hot dog Little Hoo eyes
suspiciously, as it is similar in color to the owlet’s torso). Ponnay hits all the camping staples: setting up the tent, fear of the dark (inexplicably, these owls sleep at night and need flashlights), toasted marshmallows (that get Little Hoo sticky), and scary noises. But when it’s finally time to leave the next morning (quick trip!), Little Hoo is reluctant, finally enjoying camping. Simple illustrations keep the focus on Little Hoo’s new experiences, though young children may be confused when characters repeat on spreads, separated by only the gutter.

Don’t worry, readers, camping season will soon be here...and maybe you can stay longer than one night. (Picture book: 3-6)

### A NEW GREEN DAY

**Portis, Antoinette**  
Illus. by the author  
Neal Porter/Holiday House (40 pp.)  
$18.99 | Apr. 21, 2020  
978-0-8234-4488-5

In a series of nature riddles that beg to be read aloud, a child finds joy and wonder in the great outdoors.

Prolific author and illustrator Portis leads readers through a summer day spent outside. Through gentle, brain-teasing verse, aspects of the natural world introduce themselves to the story’s only human character, who sports dark pigtails and a warm brown complexion. As readers follow along, they are treated to a delightful guessing game: Based on the poetically brief clues, what everyday plant, animal, or weather pattern is calling out to be discovered by the protagonist? For example: “I’m a mountain that moves. Look, I come to you,” one clue begins. With the turn of the page, the natural element’s identity is revealed with the simple completion of the sentence: “says cloud,” here accompanied by a breezy, textured illustration of an overcast sky. Because the answer to each riddle is declared on the subsequent spread, readers have a chance to brainstorm as they approach each intimation. Though this formula carries throughout the text, the book remains straightforward and engaging thanks to Portis’ fresh take on familiar outdoor sights. Very young children will love reading along with adults, who can help them make sense of the sometimes-abstract hints; older kids will have fun making guesses on their own. This sweet celebration of summertime, nature, and youthful curiosity is a worthy addition to school and public libraries and personal collections alike.

Simple, poetic, and fun. (Picture book: 4-9)

### RAINBOW REVOLUTIONARIES

**Fifty LGBTQ+ People Who Made History**

**Prager, Sarah**  
Illus. by Nathaniel Pippin  
Harper/HarperCollins (128 pp.)  
$17.99 | May 26, 2020  
978-0-06-294775-8

This colorful compendium covers 50 boundary-breaking LGBTQ+ figures from across history and around the globe.

Starting at A with Adam Rippon, each hero receives a straightforward one-page biography that includes an account of how they changed the world, broke a barrier, or fought for LGBTQ+ rights and is accompanied by vivid, blocky illustrations. This list of potential role models includes big names like Harvey Milk as well as some that may be unfamiliar to many Americans, like Simon Nkoli. The selection showcases a diversity of races, ethnicities, genders, and sexualities, with some gaps; for example, the glossary explicitly includes intersex people, yet none are identified as such within the text of their biography, and the only East Asian included is from the second century B.C.E. Stylistically, many of the sentences are wordy and sometimes awkward, including unclear or unusual constructions and tone shifts. Add a handful of cringeworthy word choices, such as “between her legs” and an instance of “female” used as a noun, and readers may find themselves shaking their heads. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the book’s fundamental value as a resource for young people. Prager presents each figure with enthusiasm and provides lots of interesting details that allow readers a glimpse into that person’s world, be it 1970s San Francisco or 1600s Mexico.

An exciting if uneven volume that offers much to inquisitive kids seeking LGBTQ+ information. (timeline, LGBTQ+ flags and symbols, selected bibliography) (Collective biography: 8-14)

### THE MESSY LIFE OF BLUE

**Railey, Shawna**  
Little Bee (240 pp.)  
$16.99 | May 5, 2020  
978-1-4998-1025-7

Eleven-year-old Blue—never Beulah—fears that she is a bad person because memories of her deceased mother are fading. She is the only girl in the family, and there are plenty of extreme sibling shenanigans and issues with her neighborhood nemesis, Crybaby Jared, but she definitely gives as good as she gets and then some. She wishes she could talk to her father about her feelings, but she senses his own grief and sadness. She lists her mother’s interests and attributes and sets goals to emulate her. Jumping into her schemes with little thought to possible repercussions
A tale of family relationships and transitions told with plenty of heart.

ANY DAY WITH YOU
Respicio, Mae
Wendy Lamb/Random (224 pp.)
$16.99 | $19.99 PLB | May 5, 2020
978-0-525-70757-8
978-0-525-70758-5 PLB

Family, folklore, and honors long overdue.

Kaia watches as her family plays on the beach in Southern California. She knows this is the last summer before her older sister, Lainey, leaves for her graduation trip to the Philippines and then heads off to college in New York. When her great-grandfather Tatang announces he is moving back to the Philippines, Kaia is shocked. The thought of losing two close confidants at once springs her into action. She will develop her special-effects makeup skills and win a citywide film contest to out an application for Tatang to finally receive a Congressional Gold Medal of Honor. Kaia’s family is originally from the Ilocos region of the Philippines, and tidbits of Filipinx folklore and culture are woven into the story—at times the explanations of these cultural themes impede the narrative flow. However, as she did in The House That Lou Built (2018), Respicio brings another refreshing contemporary glimpse into the Filipinx American experience while exposing the overlooked history and contributions of Filipinos in the U.S.

A tale of family relationships and transitions told with plenty of heart. (Fiction. 8-12)

THE ELEPHANT'S GIRL
Rimington, Celesta
Crown (336 pp.)
$16.99 | $19.99 PLB | May 19, 2020
978-0-593-12122-1
978-0-593-12124-5 PLB

An orphan girl discovers her true identity with the help of a ghost, an elephant, and the wind.

Seven years ago, an approximately 5-year-old white girl was found by an employee in the Omaha zoo’s elephant habitat following a tornado. After efforts to locate her family led nowhere, the zoo employee, a white man named Roger, called the girl Lexington after the zoo and became her guardian. Rimington sets this poignant novel when Lex and Roger figure she is 12. Refusing to go to public school, Lex remains mostly isolated at the zoo, much like her favorite character, Karana, from Scott O’Dell’s Island of the Blue Dolphins (1960). Readers familiar with this Newbery winner will notice many interesting parallels between the orphaned girls. Lex’s day-to-day activities consist of her routine with Roger; hanging out with best friend and fellow zoo resident Fisher, a boy with mixed Thai and white heritage; communing with Nyah, the elephant who saved her the night of the tornado; and listening to the wind. These latter fantastical elements come into the fore when Lexington begins seeing Miss Amanda, the “misplaced spirit” (please, don’t call her “ghost”) of a Southern white woman who has lost some treasure. Soon, an already engaging tale of life at a zoo turns into a mystery, with Lex and Fisher’s efforts not only to locate Miss Amanda’s treasure, but also to recover Lex’s identity in the process. The book adheres to the white default.

A bittersweet ending completes the story’s magic and mystery. (author’s note) (Fantasy. 8-12)

ME AND MY SISTER
Robbins, Rose
Illus. by the author
Eerdmans (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 14, 2020
978-0-8028-3542-8

Two animal siblings are both alike and different.

Two unnamed anthropomorphic characters with yellow skin, pointy triangle ears, and doglike snouts are the main characters of the story. One narrates, describing “my sister” in the opening pages as not being able to use words “but she says a lot!” The narrator describes their differences, each one followed by something that unites them. For example, though they like different foods, they finish eating at the same time. While the sister enjoys watching TV and the narrator likes listening to music, the following double-page spread depicts the two dancing together. Though it is not explicitly stated, readers may place the sister on the autism spectrum, as illustrated by
Hicks’ cheerful illustrations deftly integrate a childlike drawing style with visually sophisticated composition and postures.

**THE PROBLEM WITH PROBLEMS**
Rooney, Rachel
Illus. by Hicks, Zebra
Rodale Kids (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 16, 2020
978-0-593-17317-6

Problems are colorful creatures, underfoot and under your wheelchair and getting under your skin.

Swirly or scribbly, winged or scaled, and often roly-poly, these googly-eyed imps range from tiny to too tall for the page. Some walk on many legs; one seems to be part of a wall. Sometimes the creatures embody a problem: When an ice cream cone falls splat, the creature’s face is the down-facing scoop; in a cafe serving unappetizing fare, the creature is the frightening dish the child wonders if the dog was “born on a cold day” or if “somebody threw [it] away.” The child draws the mischief, dumping black paint all over or sticking out a tongue to intercept a ball. Problems are “Knotty…Hairy…Slippery…Tough... / Sticky like superglue, gathering stuff.” Hicks’ cheerful illustrations deftly integrate a childlike drawing style with visually sophisticated composition and postures—for example, a character’s leg stuck expressively straight out. The creatures besetting a multiracial cast of kids and adults are called problems, but despite lip service to problem-solving, the suggested solutions lean more toward stress-soothing techniques: venting, intentionally relaxing, ignoring them, or waiting them out—“Some you can sleep on. They wake in the night, / then quietly tiptoe and slip from your sight.”

The slippery concept of “problem” aside, rhyming verse and peppy illustrations make for a fun and funny ride. (Picture book. 4-7)

**UNDER YOUR FEET**
Royal Horticultural Society
Illus. by Ting, Wenjia
DK Publishing (64 pp.)
$14.99 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-4654-9095-7

A view of the “important jobs” that soil and all the things that live in it have. Considering the uncountable plants, animals, fungi, and microbes that live there, soil is a busy place—as the page design goes overboard in reflecting, with floating labels, teeming dollops of fact in diverse typefaces, snippets of photographs, and larger images done in a printlike style shoveled together in high-density arrays of angled or undulating lines on every spread. After opening with an overview of soil’s roles, particularly in regulating climate, the discourse plows through its organic and inorganic elements, how it varies in different environments, the living things that populate it, and, in broader context, how the dusty surfaces of the moon and Mars compare. Earthworms are such major players that they get two spreads of their own, six mentions of their “poop,” and instructions for setting up a catch-and-release “worm hotel.” Because the visuals are more about flash than furthering understanding, and the authors too seem bent on cramming in the dazzle (“Astronauts tried tasting moon dust!”), readers with a yen to dig deep may just scuff through this before going on to more fertile surveys like Marc ter Horst’s *Hey There, Earth Dweller*, illustrated by Wendy Panders and translated by Laura Watkinson (2019), or Tom Jackson’s *Earth Sciences* (2019).

Peeks under lots of rocks and logs but barely scratches the surface. (projects, glossary, index) (Informational picture book. 7-9)

**HEY LITTLE ROCKABYE**
A Lullaby for Pet Adoption
Sainte-Marie, Buffy
Illus. by Hodson, Ben
Greystone Kids (32 pp.)
$16.95 | May 12, 2020
978-1-77164-482-2

A lullaby picture book about pet adoption. While out for a walk, a child sees a stray dog being taken away in a van marked “animal shelter.” Thinking about the dog day and night, the child wonders if the dog was “born on a cold winter day” or if “somebody threw [it] away.” The child draws many pictures: of a sad dog in bad weather or a cage and of themselves with a happy dog. After the child shows their parents the pictures, the whole family goes to the shelter to adopt the dog. The child assures the dog, “You didn’t have no choice and you didn’t get no vote, / When they dropped you off at the shelter, / All you had was your little fur coat, // But now you got somebody loves you.” In a note, Sainte-Marie shares that she sings this song for all her animals upon welcoming them home. Read aloud, the
refrain, “You got somebody loves you,” is extremely awkward; sheet music is appended for readers who wish to try singing. In Hodson’s illustrations, the narrator’s expressive face conveys emotion clearly, making readers feel sadness and love toward the abandoned dog. The child has brown skin, and their parents are an interracial couple.

It’s sweet and heartfelt, but it works better as a song than as a book. (Picture book. 3-7)

MAYOR PETE
The Story of Pete Buttigieg
Sanders, Rob
Illus. by Hastings, Levi
Henry Holt (48 pp.)
$19.99 | May 12, 2020
978-1-250-26757-3
Series: Who Did It First?

From childhood to office to who-knows-where? Be inspired by the life of Pete Buttigieg.

For politically minded readers, Sanders and Hastings provide a concise account of the life and political career of the mayor-turned–presidential candidate. Sanders, an elementary school teacher, knows how to communicate effectively with children and delivers his text in a friendly mix of easy and more-complex sentences. While the majority of the text is written directly, the occasional folksy metaphor adds a little buoyancy. When introducing Buttigieg’s future husband, Chasten Glezman, Sanders states that “like Indiana sweet corn, a relationship began to grow.” Hastings’ digital illustrations capture the humanity of his subject and depict the highs and lows of a life in politics. Many of the illustrations appear to be inspired by photographs of Buttigieg on the campaign trail and in his daily life. While the attention is solely on Mayor Pete, the background artwork features a range of ages, ethnicities, and genders interacting and engaging with Buttigieg. There is no mention of his fraught relationship with Pete Buttigieg. Hodson’s illustrations, the narrator’s expressive face conveys emotion clearly, making readers feel sadness and love toward the abandoned dog. The child has brown skin, and their parents are an interracial couple.

A worthy candidate for your shelf. (Picture book/biography. 6-10)

CITYSCAPE
Where Science and Art Meet
Sayre, April Pulley
Greenwillow (40 pp.)
$17.99 | May 19, 2020
978-0-06-289331-4

An eclectic collection of photos of architecture is linked by simple rhymes in large type, highlighting the visual confluence of engineering and art.

A photo depicting electrical wires against a building with corrugated siding is accompanied by the text “Lines merge, / diverge, divide,” followed by “Science, math, art / live side by side” on the facing page, accompanied photos of a statue of a lion, a tiled wall, and a close-up of a grille of some sort. Similarly, curves, triangles, and other geometric elements are evoked in photos of skyscrapers, bridges, cranes, and sculpture. In places, the concept seems too advanced for the likely audience. “Structures transmit,” set against a photo of electrical transformers, is shown opposite the text “transport, / and power,” which accompanies four photos: of people riding a Vespa, a fire engine, an overhead view of a recreational kayaker, and a view of the U.S. Capitol with a school bus in the foreground. Readers will be understandably confused as they try to parse this sentence. Are the scooter, fire engine, and kayak to be read as “structures”? Is the picture of the Capitol dome a play on the word “power”? Most of the generic cityscape images seem to be of Chicago, with landmark structures from Machu Picchu, London, Paris, and other cities mixed in. A concluding spread contains questions for children to consider as they navigate cities.

A rare misfire from Sayre. (Informational picture book. 5-9)
A noisy classroom turns out to be a delightful place to learn. (Picture book. 4-8)

WHO’S THE BEST?
Shaskan, Stephen
Illus. by the author
Random House (72 pp.)
$9.99 | $12.99 PLB | May 5, 2020
978-0-593-12330-0
978-0-593-12331-7 PLB
Series: Pizza and Taco

Anthropomorphic foodstuffs campaign for their own excellence.

Shaskan goes for the goofy with this graphic-early-reader series opener. Each of the book’s five chapters revolves around Pizza and Taco, who are such “BEST-BESTIES!!” that they finish each other’s sentences. One day, the friends—who are literally a slice of cheese pizza and a beef taco—come to a stalemate over who is the best. They ultimately put it to a vote, but Pizza—aka “Cheaty McCheato”—deliberately misreads the ballot. They bring in another set of BFFs, Hot Dog and Hamburger, to settle things once and for all. But what does being “the best” mean anyway? Does it have anything to do with fist bumps or butt bumps? If so, Pizza and Taco are solid. Though appropriately repetitive, the plot packs a contagiously zany sense of humor that pairs well with series like Tedd Arnold, Martha Hamilton, and Mitch Weiss’ Noodleheads and Ben Clanton’s Narwhal and Jelly. Shaskan’s distinctive character design combines cartoon illustration with photography, augmenting the humor. Recycled catchphrases like “AWESOME!” and “YAAAS!” keep the lightness going—although the pair’s constant dismissal of Hamburger is a little disconcerting. The sparse backgrounds—most often a blue polka-dot sky set above simple shapes—help make the white speech bubbles readable. The well-paced, easy-to-follow structure keeps the panel count at six or fewer per page.

YAAAS! This lunch bunch serves pure silliness. (Graphic early reader. 5-8)

BRICK BY BRICK
Sheffield, Heidi Woodward
Illus. by the author
Nancy Paulsen Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | May 5, 2020
978-0-525-51730-6

A young boy dreams of a para siempre—forever—house for his family.

Young Luis cherishes and admires his strong papi, who is a bricklayer. “He helps build the city, brick by brick.” While Luis is at school, Papi is at work, spreading mortar thick, tapping bricks in place, scraping drips, and repeating the process. Luis dreams of a house the Latinx family can call its own, with a garden for Mama and maybe a dog. At midday, Papi eats lunch on a bench while Luis eats in the school cafeteria. Mirrorlike images show both brown-skinned father and son with similar lunchboxes, both eating Mama’s special empanadas. One Saturday, Papi takes Luis for a surprise ride out of the city and into more rural terrain. There, Luis sees a new house made of Papi’s bricks, and Mama is moving their items in. This is illustrator Sheffield’s debut as a picture-book author. She excels with boisterously textured, mixed-media illustrations, many incorporating photographs, digital painting, and collage, capturing vibrant colors. Told in the first person, with minor Spanish interspersed (“horchata,” “una sorpresa,” “fuerte”) and occasional sound effects printed in all-caps (“SCRRRRAPES,” “KERCHUNKS,” “WHIRRRRRRR”), the written text will engage the youngest readers. Her command of pacing, however, is shaky; the sense of elapsed time is unclear, and the ending, though satisfying, is abrupt.

Lovely and heartfelt if a little off in the pacing. (Picture book. 3-6)

THE MYSTERY OF THE MASKED MEDALIST
Shibutani, Maia & Shibutani, Alex with Schusterman, Michelle
Illus. by Ma Van As, Tao Yao
Razorbill/Penguin (272 pp.)
$16.99 | May 12, 2020
978-0-5931-1373-8
Series: Kudo Kids, 1

Siblings race to solve a series of puzzles only to get more than what they bargained for.

Japanese American siblings Andy and Mika Kudo are ecstatic. Since their mother is the editor-in-chief of Compete, a popular sports website, the family will experience their first visit to Japan during the upcoming Summer Olympics. The siblings will also be able to play Olypifan, a popular augmented-reality game app, right there on the ground in Tokyo. The two already have plans to find more clues and virtual medals, all in hopes of correctly guessing the identity of the Masked Medalist. Their
excitement soars when they learn that the creator of the game—an actual Olympic athlete—will have the winners be the beta testers for their upcoming game. Things get even more interesting when rumors begin to spread: of teams cheating, mysterious notes, and possible hacks. Mika has her own secret—breaking a family rule with an Instagram account to enter the Olympic photography contest. Chat transcripts, online postings, and lively illustrations are interspersed throughout the text, with most of the intrigue and puzzle-solving occurring toward the end. There is little reflection on Mika’s unsanctioned social media account, even after she receives personal messages from a possible stalker. Disappointingly, there is no note or other reinforcement about online safety.

An amusing international adventure with some dicey internet practices. (Mystery. 8-11)

Leading her herd, a majestic elephant teaches, guides, and inspires.

An elephant group or family is a matriarchal society, usually led by the eldest female among them. The matriarch’s most important jobs are to lead the group to food and water, to teach new mothers how to care for their young, and to protect her family from enemies and threats. She comforts and helps care for orphaned calves and keeps a watchful eye over the young family from enemies and threats. She inspires.

This leads the way among lovely books about elephants for young children. (Informational picture book. 4-8)
clearly reinforcing that Mr. Hagerty and Khalil both need each other and enjoy each other’s company. Taherian’s illustrations—collage with oil and colored pencil—strengthen the focus on the relationship between Mr. Hagerty and Khalil, revealing little details. In Khalil’s upstairs apartment two adults hold babies, and below sits Mr. Hagerty in a chair, reading. These careful glimpses give readers space to build their own backstories for Springstubb’s endearing characters. Khalil and his family have olive skin, and Mr. Hagerty presents white.

A sweet and simple story about an intergenerational friendship and the bond between neighbors. (Picture book. 4-8)

**ICK!**

**Delightfully Disgusting Animal Dinners, Dwellings, and Defenses**  
Stewart, Melissa  
National Geographic Kids (112 pp.)  
$14.99 paper | Jun. 23, 2020  
978-1-4263-3746-8

Ready for a slide through some of the animal kingdom’s more revolting behaviors? Cue the mucus! Arrays of big, bright nature photos showing more than 50 creatures ranging from cute, fuzzy cottontails and baby pandas to the ever popular Pacific hagfish and evocatively named pustulated carrion beetle (not to mention—but let’s—the bone-eating snout flower worm) anchor this gleeful introduction to many of nature’s poop eaters, slime exuders, projectile vomiters, carrion recyclers, and butt squirters. As if it were necessary, regular sidebars offer “Extra Ick!” to a commentary punctuated by the occasional “Yuck!” or “Now, that’s disgusting!” Stewart happily brings on the gross as she trumpets the “Toxic Toots” of the beaded lacewing’s larva, buzzes over flesh fly maggots that eat out harlequin toads from the inside (“That’s right: In this scenario, the toad croaks”), and flings out stomach-churning facts about “vile vittles” and the many uses of spit. If most of the photos aren’t as explicit as the text, which may disappoint some readers, they do consistently provide riveting close-ups of the wild kingdom guaranteed to leave even the most committed animal lovers a touch queasy.

Riotous reading for students of snot flowers and fans of fecal facts. (glossary, index, bibliography) (Nonfiction. 9-11)

**THE SEWER RAT STINK**  
Stilton, Geronimo & Angleberger, Tom  
Ilus. by Angleberger, Tom  
Graphix/Scholastic (208 pp.)  
$12.99 | May 5, 2020  
978-1-338-58730-2  
Series: Geronimo Stilton Graphic Novels, 1

The ubiquitous rodent journalist returns in a new iteration. Geronimo Stilton, publisher extraordinary of the Rodent’s Gazette, has a new story to investigate: New Mouse City is plagued by a deeply malodorous stink. As the stench intensifies, the residents flee, selling their homes. Stilton, flanked by his banana-loving friend Hercule Poirat, forays into the sewers to locate the fount of the funk. There, the duo encounters rat queen Trashfur Sparkles XIII and her Grand Council. Trashfur, the mastermind behind the nefariously noxious plan, has set her sights on wedding Hercule and marrying Geronimo off to one of her council members; how will Geronimo escape this time? This new graphic-novel series published by Graphix/Scholastic (not to be confused with Papercutz’s ongoing Geronimo Stilton, Reporter graphic-novel series) and illustrated by Angleberger (of Origami Yoda fame) utilizes a decidedly more cartoonish style than the Papercutz version, more along the Dav Pilkey aesthetic. Funny and fast-paced, this offering is infused with a generous amount of over-the-top silliness, with occasional breaks to explain jokes to readers (explaining that gorgonzola is a type of cheese, for example). With easy-to-read and varied typefaces and oversized, full-color panels, this should effortlessly appeal to the younger set, making it an obvious choice for those deciding what to read next after Dog Man.

A crowd pleaser in an otherwise crowded oeuvre. (Graphic fantasy. 7-10)

**BRAVE LIKE THAT**  
Stoddard, Lindsey  
Harper/HarperCollins (272 pp.)  
$16.99 | Jun. 2, 2020  
978-0-06-287811-3

A sixth grader who’s struggling to find a path forward that doesn’t disappoint his adoptive father befriends a bullied boy who’s delightfully comfortable in his own skin.

His father was a talented football player, so Cyrus believes that if he doesn’t succeed on the gridiron, he won’t live up to his expectations. But last year was the first year of full tackle, and Cyrus hates it. He finds far greater satisfaction helping out alongside some friendly girls at the local animal shelter, where a stray dog that he befriended has been taken. To volunteer there he must lie his way out of practices and deceive his father, too. Meanwhile, he conceals another
serious problem: Even though he reads fluently, he comprehends almost nothing. When his two football-star friends begin to unmercifully pick on puny, smart, and unconventional Eduardo, Cyrus is faced with a daunting challenge. He's convinced he's not brave, but can he find the courage to stand up to his friends and protect the boy he finds understands him much better than they do? Cyrus is movingly supported by his grandmother, who can no longer speak after a stroke but whose love shines through. Cyrus’ plight believably expands to seem almost insurmountable, but help comes from surprising directions in this moving, character-driven tale. Cyrus and his family seem to be white; Eduardo is Latinx.

With a strong, never-preachy anti-bullying message, this one scores a touchdown. (Fiction. 9-13)

**THE BIG BREAK**

Tatulli, Mark
Illus. by the author with Caravan Studios
Little, Brown (248 pp.)
978-0-316-44054-7
978-0-316-44055-4 paper

Will a girl break up a long-standing friendship?

In this middle-grade graphic offering, Andrew Fineman and Russ Kahng are best friends who happily work on their movie and investigate the local lore of the Jersey Devil. Suddenly their two-some seems in jeopardy when Russ begins dating blue-haired violinist Tara Wallbuck and spending less time with Andrew. Clearly angry and resentful of Tara’s infiltration of their friendship, Andrew’s disdain is visibly growing. Before long, Russ has ditched Andrew to make his own Jersey Devil movie with Tara. When Miss Robbins, the local librarian and resident Jersey Devil expert, offers to take the group camping to substantiate white, Russ has Asian features and olive skin, Tara has light-brown skin, and Miss Robbins presents black.

A fun, smart choice examining middle-grade male friendships. (Graphic fiction. 8-11)

**THE DAY I WAS ERASED**

Thompson, Lisa
Scholastic (384 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 2, 2020
978-0-593-11693-7

An English preteen’s impulsive wish that he’d never been born is granted.

For Maxwell, 12, home is anything but tranquil: His parents fight constantly; his nerdy sister, Bex, 15, ignores him. His beloved dog, Monster, provokes complaints from neighbors. Maxwell relieves stress by disparaging his (only) school friend, Charlie Kapoor. (While most characters default to white, Charlie’s name and home cuisine imply South Asian ancestry) Maxwell’s prizewinning portrait of an elderly, forgetful neighbor, Reg, earned Maxwell prestige, benefiting his school financially. During an announcement regarding the school’s centennial celebration, with the inclusion of the filming of a popular TV show segment that’s meant to be an exciting surprise, Maxwell deliberately gives the secret away. After bullying and injuring Charlie in PE, Maxwell’s banned from the celebration but disrupts the event with catastrophic results. He flees to Reg, vents his misery, and, via a mysterious artifact, erases himself from his life. He finds himself in a Maxwell-free world where his parents have divorced, his dad is miserable, and Bex shoplifts. Worse, Monster doesn’t even exist. The premise closely tracks Frank Capra’s 1946 film, It’s a Wonderful Life. Like George Bailey, Maxwell’s shown the difference his past good deeds made to others through learning their fates in a world where he’s never existed. But slapdash execution, inconsistent plotting, and Maxwell himself hinder reader buy-in. His prior good deeds mainly reflect being in the right place at the right time; the Maxwell readers will remember is a selfish, manipulative bully.

Unconvincing. (Fantasy. 8-12)

**THE UNADOPTABLES**

Tooke, Hana
Viking (384 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 2, 2020
978-0-593-11693-7

Targeted in a wicked scheme, five resourceful kids flee their orphanage in 1892 Amsterdam.

Each longs to be adopted, but would-be parents reject them when they see the kids’ atypical attributes: Lotta’s 12 fingers, Egg’s East Asian ancestry (other characters default to white), Fenna’s muteness, clumsy Sem’s ears, and Milou’s wild ferocity. That is, until sinister Meneer Rotman sees their remarkable gifts—but Milou’s special sense warns her that Rotman’s evil. Indeed: They discover he intends to buy them as slave labor to crew his ship. Milou, who keeps a Book of Theories regarding why her birth family hasn’t claimed her,
persuades them to escape to the puppet-making Poppenmaker family she’s sure she belongs to. Loyal if not convinced, the others join her. Lotta’s math and Egg’s cartographic acumen help them follow coordinates on Milou’s mysterious timepiece to the Poppenmakers’ windmill home and puppet theater, now abandoned. Thanks to Lotta’s technical ingenuity, Egg’s artistry, Fenna’s culinary prowess, and Sem’s needlework—assisted by clockmaker and dike warden Edda Finkelstein—it’s almost home. Then Milou forgets the other orphans have family longings, and the orphans discover Rotman has not forgotten them….While the vivid, Dickensian setting—grim orphanage, icy mists, and shadowy dockyards—and quaint puppet creations and life-size puppets spin a web of Gothic creepiness, the bonds among this found family of lively orphans add plenty of warmth and light.

Unfolding with the clarity of a fairy tale, this sure-footed debut casts a delightfully spooky spell. (Fantasy. 8-12)
Just the ticket for budding naturalists with a serious interest in our planet’s remotest reaches.

**PROFESSOR Astro Cat’s Deep Sea Voyage**

The feline science explorer conducts a tour of the world’s oceans.

Though readers who have navigated Miranda Kurtzovnikoff’s *Ocean: Exploring Our Blue Planet*, illustrated by Jill Calder (2020), or any of the many like ventures will find the territory and content familiar, the professor’s enthusiasm (“KNOWLEDGE AWAITS!”) and Newman’s busy, blocky scenes of sea life and landforms lend extra vim to the adventure. There are bits of comedy and side commentary, but generally the members of the bright-eyed animal crew familiar from previous expeditions are all business, asking leading questions or pointing significantly to underscore the professor’s neat, legible blocks of observations and explanations. After first gathering on the beach for a look at tides, tide pools, and erosion, the

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he finds out that his parents’ catering business, Smotch (roots: Polish food), risks falling into financial troubles due in part to LA’s notorious traffic flow. Convinced that his Snarl Solutions could help alleviate his parents’ problems if only someone in power would listen, Rick joins his neighbor’s Girl Scout group, led by a celebrated street artist with familial ties to the head of LA’s Department of Transportation. Can the “Colossus of Roads” save his parents’ business and lead LA toward a brighter future? Uss’ slice of whimsy teleports readers to the smog-filled, congested streets of Los Angeles and gives them a hearty appreciation for big, improbable ideas. Thanks to a fun cast of eclectic characters, the author manages to temper the story’s more peculiar moments, but it’s her soft mix of humor and insight that steals the spotlight. Though Rick’s neighbors are Latinx, the book’s default seems to be white.

**Colossally Cool.** *(Fiction. 9-12)*

**THE Three Little YOGIS And THE WOLF Who LOST His BREATH: A Fairy Tale To Help You Feel Better**

*Vérde, Susan*  
*Illus. by Fleck, Jay*  
*Abrams (32 pp.)  
*$16.99  |  May 5, 2020  
978-1-4197-4103-6*

This wolf huffs and puffs whenever he is angry, simply because he doesn’t know what else to do with his anger.

But now he has a problem: He has lost his huff and puff. One day when in a cranky mood he encounters a peaceful-looking pig practicing yoga. Much as he wants “to huff and puff and blow down” the pig's straw house, he cannot. The pig yogi—a caricatured stereotype of all things yoga—oozes compassion for his natural competitor; suggests they “meditate on that” when he explains his dilemma (which is, of course, that he can't blow down her house); and teaches him belly breathing.

When this isn't enough to fully squelch the wolf’s urge to huff and puff, they go off to another yoga-practicing pig’s home for more meditation and breathing until they finally wind up at a brick yoga studio. It’s surprising to see such a flawed treatment from the author of *I Am Yoga* and *I Am Peace* *(2015 and 2017; both illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds).* The tone is surprisingly elitist, suggesting that those who don’t know how to breathe away their anger just need to be enlightened by yoga. The illustrations further propagate this trope with their stark contrast between the villainous wolf and the serene pigs. The only bright spot is the inclusion of a nonbinary pig, who’s referenced using the singular “they.”

**Even the most yoga-enthused readers may find this title pretentious and off-putting.** *(Picture book. 4-8)*

**AFTER the WORST THING HAPPENS**

*Vernick, Audrey*  
*Margaret Ferguson/Holiday House (224 pp.)  
*$17.99  |  May 5, 2020  
978-0-8234-4490-8*

A girl heartsick over her dog’s death finds solace in helping others.

A serious animal lover, 12-year-old Army agonizes for her dog, Maybe, feeling responsible for the accident that caused his death. When Madison, a young girl with autism, moves into her neighborhood, Army stumbles into helping Madison’s mom, who also has twin infants, look after her. In short chapters told from Army’s earliest first-person perspective, she finds new ways to negotiate with her caring but emotionally reserved parents and steps out of her own comfort zone; this exploration of family dynamics is where the novel shines. Madison’s experience with nonverbal autism is a fairly sparse sketch; an author’s note at the end speaks about the sources she consulted to understand neurodiversity more fully. The detail emphasized most is that Madison often finds her way around locked windows and doors, leading Army to believe she must take action to help the family. While Army’s trajectory is a believable one, the unsubtle messaging of this story, which also includes Army’s finding a new friendship with a girl she’d previously not understood very completely, feels pedantic. All of the main characters seem to be white.

**A realistic but somewhat heavy-handed portrayal of finding a way through grief.** *(Fiction. 9-12)*

**PROFESSOR Astro Cat’s Deep Sea Voyage**

*Walliman, Dominic*  
*Flying Eye Books (64 pp.)  
*$19.95  |  Apr. 7, 2020  
978-1-912497-89-8  
Series: Professor Astro Cat*

The feline science explorer conducts a tour of the world’s oceans.

Though readers who have navigated Miranda Kurtzovnikoff’s *Ocean: Exploring Our Blue Planet*, illustrated by Jill Calder (2020), or any of the many like ventures will find the territory and content familiar, the professor’s enthusiasm (“KNOWLEDGE AWAITS!”) and Newman’s busy, blocky scenes of sea life and landforms lend extra vim to the adventure. There are bits of comedy and side commentary, but generally the members of the bright-eyed animal crew familiar from previous expeditions are all business, asking leading questions or pointing significantly to underscore the professor’s neat, legible blocks of observations and explanations. After first gathering on the beach for a look at tides, tide pools, and erosion, the
With these new illustrations, Wolff offers intimate views of this multiracial family that are rarely found in picture books.

**ONLY THE CAT SAW**

A little girl has a goldfish named Sal, who gives her special kisses.

The book opens with endpapers filled with bubbles and musical notes and concludes with endpapers that add sea horses, sax-playing turtles, a brown-skinned mermaid (who might resemble the book’s celebrity author), and the brown-skinned protagonist-as-mermaid, dancing with Sal. Wearing her hair in a big, maroon afro puff, the child takes Sal everywhere.

Some songs don’t make good books. This is one of them. (Picture book. 3-6)

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**CHICKEN LITTLE**

*The Real and Totally True Tale*

Wedelich, Sam
Illus. by the author
Scholastic (40 pp.)
$17.99 | May 5, 2020
978-1-338-35901-5

A chicken investigates whether or not the sky is falling. The bespectacled fowl protagonist immediately yells out to readers that she “is NOT little!” via an ocher speech balloon. “Little” implies young and small,” she goes on, asserting that “babies are easily scared and I’m not afraid of anything!” But when an unidentified projectile bonks her on the head, she panics, soon jumping to the conclusion that the sky is falling. Word spreads of her investigation (the sky itself trying to convince her otherwise), and soon it’s “utter hens-demonium.” Persuaded by the sky, the chicken calms down her comrades with an impassioned appeal to reason and sympathy (how optimistic), and she is soon clucked over, bandaged, and demobilized. “More people have stepped on the surface of the Moon than have been to the Mariana Trench.”

Just the ticket for budding naturalists with a serious interest in our planet’s remotest reaches. (glossary, index)

(Informational picture book. 7-9)

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**BUBBLE KISSES**

*Williams, Vanessa*  
Illus. by Whitaker, Tara Nicole  
Sterling (32 pp.)  
$17.95 | May 5, 2020  
978-1-4549-3834-7

A little girl has a goldfish named Sal, who gives her special kisses.

The book opens with endpapers filled with bubbles and musical notes and concludes with endpapers that add sea horses, sax-playing turtles, a brown-skinned mermaid (who might resemble the book’s celebrity author), and the brown-skinned protagonist-as-mermaid, dancing with Sal. Wearing her hair in a big, maroon afro puff, the child takes Sal everywhere.

Some songs don’t make good books. This is one of them. (Picture book. 3-6)
1985, Wolff also offers intimate views of this multiracial family that are rarely found in picture books: Readers see Tessa’s head and legs as she sits on the toilet at 2 a.m.; Mother nurses Sam in bed while Father sleeps. Since the book opens with Father hanging laundry on the clothesline while holding baby Sam in a baby carrier and ends with Father feeding Sam while Mother cooks breakfast, it seems that both parents take an equal share in raising the children and caring for the house.

A beautiful, quiet, indoor-outdoor family story that will dazzle the eye and warm the heart. (Picture book. 3-5)

**OTTO TATTERCOAT AND THE FOREST OF LOST THINGS**  
**Woods, Matilda**  
Philomel (256 pp.)  
$16.99 | Jun. 9, 2020  
978-0-525-51527-2  

When Otto’s mother disappears shortly after the pair arrives in Hodeldorf—“the coldest city in the world”—Otto meets an orphaned girl named Nim, and a series of adventures ensues.

The book evokes the worlds of Roald Dahl, Neil Gaiman, and traditional fairy tales. The third-person narrative meanders gracefully among the points of view of an omniscient narrator, Otto, and Nim. Naïve, kindhearted Otto is easily duped into servitude in the boot-polish factory of villainous Frau Ferber. Nim, motivated by guilt from an earlier encounter with Otto, manages to rescue him—and Otto expands his goal of finding his mother to rescuing all of Frau Ferber’s child labor force. Nim helps Otto join the tattercoats, a band of homeless children with a strict code of honor. Two of its five rules state that they must steal only what they need and that no one may possess more than one coat—despite the atrocious cold that forces them to sleep near people’s chimneys. Other than two brief, death-from-freezing descriptions, threatened dangers are frequent but violence rare; baddies meet imaginative but non-fatal justice. A misunderstood ex-tattercoat named Blink, a rat named Nibbles, and numerous forest denizens add humor and menace to an already engrossing tale. The light tone assures young readers that good will prevail over bad and that sometimes people just have to venture into the woods. All characters seem to be white.

Both charming and wise. (Fantasy. 8-11)

**LITTLE HIPPO**  
**Abery, Julie**  
Illus. by Mason, Suzie  
Amicus Ink (20 pp.)  
$8.99 | Feb. 25, 2020  
978-1-68152-563-1  

A playful, curious little hippo wanders away and is found by its mother.

As Little Hippo (safely) strays from the herd, readers see joyful mud baths and splashy water play. There’s a brief moment of childlike moping when Mama Hippo pulls Little Hippo back to the herd, but it’s not long before it’s grins and giggles once more. Mason’s warm illustrations are irresistibly front and center in this board book. The rhyme and cadence of Abery’s text gives the story a lullaby feel, with a rich vocabulary. Patterned stanzas—“Little Hippo / puzzling, / nuzzling, / finds a red-billed bird”—work wonderfully when read aloud, and words like “romping / stomping,” “bustling / hustling,” and “sulking” expose little readers to new verbs. The second word in each rhyming pair is printed in blue, contrasting with the overall purple type. The illustrations have a watercolor feel, with softly mottled grays, pinks, and purples for the hippos’ skin, and include nuances like shadows from passing birds and light filtering through water. Little Hippo’s face is drawn with mini-mal features but is nevertheless incredibly expressive, with joy and even remorse easily discernible. Abery and Mason also created the simultaneously publishing *Little Monkey*, with similar themes of an adventurous little animal who is rescued and loved by its mama. The text follows the same format of rhythm and rhyme paired with lovely illustrations.

A delightful animal outing. (Board book. 6 mos.-2) (Little Monkey: 978-1152-565-5)

**STANLEY’S PAINT BOX**  
**Bee, William**  
Illus. by the author  
Peachtree (18 pp.)  
$6.99 | Mar. 1, 2020  
978-1-68263-186-7  
Series: Stanley

Stanley and his friends learn how to mix colors while transforming ordinary cardboard boxes into a vibrant castle.

Bee’s hamster protagonist, Stanley, and his animal friends Sophie, Benjamin, and Little Woo are back in this board book. This time, they are taking white and primary paints and learning how to make secondary colors. Standing in a room full of cardboard boxes, they begin transforming them little by little, and readers will notice a red paw print, orange circles, and green stripes standing out against the brown. The work progresses
A boisterous kitty playfully debates the merits of hugging various critters before deciding hugging baby brother is the best cuddle of all.

Exuberantly rendered in Cabrera’s signature bold, painterly style, the vibrantly colored full-bleed animals look almost touchable while bright, patterned backgrounds saturated with color make the hugging duos pop off the page. As the big-eyed tan-and-white kitten tries to determine a “favorite friend to cuddle,” the fuzzy tot meets and is enveloped by animals as varied as a luxuriously patterned peacock, an oversized teddy bear, and even a coral-colored octopus with safely rounded, drifting tentacles. Using lighthearted language sure to appeal to little ones, the kitten reflects on what makes each hug special: A small mouse has a “teeny-weeny cuddle” and an elephant, “a big strong” one while even potentially off-putting creatures like a “spiky” porcupine or “scaly” armadillo have reassuring (if leprous, for the latter) cuddles. It’s gratifying to see the little kitty’s progress from seeking cuddles to being large and in charge when readers meet the new baby brother on the last page. Resized from Cabrera’s 2007 picture book of the same name, this is one of those rare board-book adaptations that works well thanks to her brief, toddler-friendly text and emphatic illustration style.

Lap-sit readers will eagerly snuggle up for their own cuddles. (Board book. 6 mos.-3)
D’Haene’s question-and-answer structure makes it nicely predictable for little readers.

**WHO IS MAKING A MESS?**

From spilled motor oil to sprayed water, everyone makes a mess. The repeated phrase “Who is making a mess?” finds everyone from Grandpa to the baby involved in the untidiness. The marriage of D’Haene’s text with Ryan’s illustrations invites readers to guess who's made each mess based on the images. The purposefully vague initial depiction of the culprit often challenges readers’ assumptions of who has left each smear or heap of debris. For example, the opening illustration shows a denim-clad someone changing the oil in a car, legs poking out from underneath. A turn of the page reveals that it is Mama making that mess while her partner or spouse (gender is unclear) wrangles the little ones. Other scenes—Grandpa baking while wearing an apron and with a baby in a back carrier—play out similarly. The diverse cast includes same-sex parents, interracial families, and many children and adults of color. The repetition of D’Haene’s question-and-answer structure makes it nicely predictable for little readers, with familiarity quicker to build upon repeat readings. Ryan’s illustrations feel alive thanks to the motion of the mess itself, with flying blobs of batter, juicy drips of food, and sprinkles of grease and oil. Charming details provide plenty for readers to pore over on each page, and the deep orange, red, and golden yellow tones give the book warmth.

*Good clean fun.* (Board book: 1-3)

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**THE WOLF AND THE FLY**

Kids will enjoy this test of their powers of observation in this German import via New Zealand, but caregivers may cringe at the devil-may-care approach to choking hazards.

Author/illustrator Damm’s *The Visitor* earned her a Best Illustrated Book nod from the *New York Times* in 2018. This book, unfortunately, though playful in intent, is muddled. The artwork is wonderful—the protagonist, a hungry little wolf, has an abundance of personality, and he stands out against the bright, monochromatic backgrounds. Each facing page features three shelves of his “toys,” as they’re described on the back of the book. They include a duck, an apple, a fish, a cactus, a car, a fly, a bird, and a cat. The wolf, “feeling a bit peckish today,” eats one unspecified item at a time. With each turn of the page, young readers are challenged to identify which item is missing, and they will likely squeal with delight as they do. Caregivers who’ve had to yell, “Don’t put that in your mouth!” or wrestle a choking hazard from the jaws of a toddler may be less amused. If this sparks a “Can you really eat that?” conversation, perhaps that’s all to the good. Kids will also enjoy a bit of potty humor—all that eating occasions a quick trip to the bathroom—and a climactic puke scene, as the titular housefly proves one morsel too many is for *toilet*. 

**Hard to swallow.** (Board book: 2-4)

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**ABCs OF KINDNESS**

Rhyming couplets use the alphabet to simply explain the abstract concept of kindness. Each letter of the alphabet stands for a word that adds nuance to the notion while line drawings of pink-cheeked stuffed animals—bear, bunny, elephant, mouse, lion, and giraffe—illustrate the behavior. The verses hint at exactly how to act kindly. Some are concrete: “Hi is for inviting everyone to play.” Some suggest attitudes that facilitate kindness. For example, “Bb is for believing things will be okay in the end!” and “Hh is for hope—tomorrow’s another day!” While many might take issue with the simplistic assertion that “Fe is for everyone—we are all the same,” taken as a whole, the book will lead even the youngest toddlers to the message. Organizationally, the book devotes one page each to 11 letters while 14 others share pages. “Zz is sleeping peacefully when your day of kindness is through” sprawls across a final double-page spread, showing all the
animals fast asleep. Creating an ABC book is harder than this makes it look. The true test is what is chosen to represent Q, X, Y, and Z. “Quiet times.” “Yes I can,” and the aforementioned “zzz’s ably rise to the challenge. “Xx is for kisses” is a bit of a stretch but understandable. Pastel backgrounds, uncluttered design, and unforced rhymes keep the focus on the concept.

Light, friendly, and not at all preachy—a gentle win for a kinder world. (Board book. 1-4)

**FEDERICO AND ALL HIS FAMILIES**
Hernández, Mili
Illus. by Gómez
Trans. by Siret, Céline
nubeOCHO (18 pp.)
$9.95 | Apr. 21, 2020
978-84-17673-56-7

In this Spanish import, Federico the cat spends his days going from one home to another, always welcome by his many families.

In the morning, Federico has breakfast with Anne and Sam and their two moms. “He loves yogurt.” As the day progresses, he “cleans his whiskers” at the home of a white mom and dad (dad is for Xx “zzz”s ably rise to the challenge. “Nick, his mom and their cat Frida read a book.” By focusing on Asian child, and a white, redheaded child. Then, he accompanies a dad and daughter to catch the school bus. Later, Federico rocks the crib of baby Paula as her two dads—one white, one black—look on. Later yet, Federico visits Tadeo, who “lives with his grandparents.” There, he “loves playing with the balls of wool while grandma Margaret knits.” At night, Federico listens in as “Nick, his mom and their cat Frida read a book.” By focusing on Federico and his activities, and presenting the families in a simple and matter-of-fact way, the book neatly avoids being preachy. The humorous and expressive illustrations carry as much weight as the text. Although the theme is overwhelming in its scope (the world after all, is a pretty big place), Hopgood does a commendable job of choosing engaging images. His most effective pages are sweeping landscapes, especially a red-tinged “desert” complete with towering saguaro cacti, an isolated “island” teeming with plants and animals, and a lush double-page “jungle” spread. That’s not to say the pictures of animals aren’t strong—there’s a definite Eric Carle vibe, particularly on the “polar bear”—but it’s illustrations such as an oversized splotty “moon” with pines standing majestically beneath that truly capture the eye. While the renderings vary in artistic style from letter to letter, Hopgood doesn’t shy away from dramatic, intense colors and lots of stark contrast in his spckled and richly textured illustrations. A functional mirror on letter Y is a highlight, allowing little ones to gaze in at “you.” Occasional pages that contain two letters feel crammed—what could that stylized, graphic “rainbow” have looked like with more space? One human appears, a pale-skinned child admiring the “clouds.”

An elegantly executed abecedary. (Board book. 1-3)

**BABY KITTEN**
Finger Puppet Book
Huang, Yu-hsuan
Chronicle (12 pp.)
$7.99 | Feb. 11, 2020
978-1-4521-8172-1

A cute novelty element encourages caregiver-child interaction.

A finger poked through the opening at the back of the book makes an orange kitten puppet’s head emerge from a die-cut circle on each page. The built-in finger puppet is securely anchored on the back page. All the pages are extra thick to withstand the rough handling this toy disguised as a book may inspire. The ears of the kitten don’t automatically fit through the opening, so if multiple pages are turned by accident, it’s difficult to fit the kitten’s head back through to correct the mistake. This problem is even more pronounced in companion title *Baby Goat* because of the goat’s long ears. With each page turn the kitten’s lengthening neck becomes increasingly out of proportion with the rest of his body. The slight storyline follows the kitten through a busy day, beginning with waking up and ending with “Sweet dreams.” The text suggests an action for the finger puppet, as in “When Baby Kitten is happy, he makes a low purring sound.” Unfortunately, the next behavior—licking his fur “clean with his tongue”—is impossible to execute. Still, the finger puppet serves its purpose: to get caregivers to pause and play with words and sounds as they read to their very young children.

Readers are unlikely to want all 19 titles in the set, but one or two are fun for the moment. (Board book. 1-3) (Baby Goat: 978-1-4521-8171-4)
Isaac Newton is confusing. With his round face, long gray hair, and finally filled with a column of sprinkles that Jorden doesn’t take that route. Then there’s the science. Various City specialist baker, recaps its creation…without specific ingredients but step by step in the simplest language: “Pour it! / Mix degrees of clarity the scientific principles in question. Unfortunately, the material is poorly contextualized for toddlers. Even Isaac Newton is confusing. With his round face, long gray hair, and ruffled sleeves, he’s likely to be misidentified as someone’s kindly old grandmother. As children have no knowledge of 17th- and 18th-century fashion, simply calling him “Sir,” the title he eventually earned, might have helped eliminate confusion, but Jorden doesn’t take that route. Then there’s the science. Various laws of physics are stated whole, as they might be introduced in a junior high school or high school science class. The illustrations do illustrate each point, but expecting children to relate these dry statements of scientific fact to what’s going on in the pictures seems an overreach. The book ignores the opportunity to tie Newton’s observations to children’s natural curiosity. Often, the exposition presents concepts in terms that themselves require definition, adding to the confusion.

Information overload for toddlers. (Board book: 2-5)

Too much, too soon?
In this newest example of a board book aimed at parents intent on turning tots into overachieving science prodigies when they’re barely out of diapers, Isaac Newton discovers that “everything could be explained by three simple laws.” What follows is a mess of true science accompanied by artwork with movable elements that illustrates with varying degrees of clarity the scientific principles in question. Unfortunately, the material is poorly contextualized for toddlers. Even Isaac Newton is confusing. With his round face, long gray hair, and ruffled sleeves, he’s likely to be misidentified as someone’s kindly old grandmother. As children have no knowledge of 17th- and 18th-century fashion, simply calling him “Sir,” the title he eventually earned, might have helped eliminate confusion, but Jorden doesn’t take that route. Then there’s the science. Various laws of physics are stated whole, as they might be introduced in a junior high school or high school science class. The illustrations do illustrate each point, but expecting children to relate these dry statements of scientific fact to what’s going on in the pictures seems an overreach. The book ignores the opportunity to tie Newton’s observations to children’s natural curiosity. Often, the exposition presents concepts in terms that themselves require definition, adding to the confusion.

BAKE A RAINBOW CAKE!
Kassem, Amirah
Illus. by Chavarri, Elisa
abramsappleseed (10 pp.)
$16.99 | Feb. 25, 2020
978-1-4197-3746-6

It’s all about the colors in this board-book version of the virally popular “rainbow explosion” cake.

The cake, which stars in many online videos and slide shows, is actually all about the sprinkles, evoked here with a combination of multihued spinners or sliders and hundreds of tiny holes punched into the sturdy cover and stock. Kassem, a New York City specialist baker, recaps its creation…without specific ingredients but step by step in the simplest language: “Pour it! / Mix it! // Color it!” The images are abstract enough that the result never really looks like food, but young digerati are unlikely to care as they’re directed to choose colors for each of the six layers, pull a tab to watch them rise in the oven, then see all but the top layer hollowed out before being stacked in rainbow order (sans indigo) and finally filled with a column of sprinkles that will pour out in a climactic rush (“Surprise!”) when the finished cake, its outside likewise sprinkle encrusted, is sliced. Chavarri’s simple illustrations flash with oversaturated hues, each succeeding double-page spread being somehow brighter than the last one, until the final uncomplicated pop-up unfolds in a grand shower of confetti and sprinkles. Budding chefs may find the recipe-based approach in Lotta Niemenen’s Cook in a Book series more to their taste, but for sheer energy and dazzle, this is hard to beat.

A feast...at least for the eyes, and much better for the teeth. (Board book: 3-5)

FUN ON THE FARM
Illus. by Lucas, Gareth
Tiger Tales (12 pp.)
$9.99 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-1-68152-570-9
Series: Peekaboo Pop-Up Fun

Six pop-up spreads display the over-the-top antics of a bunch of anthropomorphic barnyard animals.

A shades-wearing rooster in a roadster poses for the paparazzi. Three pigs relax with Pampered Pigs Weekly in a hot tub. In a scene reminiscent of the folk-song hero Bill Grogan, a flock of goats “munch” clothes right off a clothesline. A fashionista lamb models purple fleece with matching accessories. Two horses tango on ice skates, and singing cows suggest that readers “warble or hum, / bang a cymbal or drum” while sheep and ducks dance along. These improbable talents are announced in four-line rhyming stanzas. The silliness may amuse adults who are bored with the usual farm-animal fare, but the jokes will go right over the heads of toddlers. A simultaneously publishing second title in the Peekaboo Pop-Up Fun series is more focused.

In Snuggle Tight, Kiss Good Night, by Danielle McLean and illustrated by Denise Hughes, seven (single) animal parents prepare their babies for bed with gentle, age-appropriate rhyming couples.

The animal pairs really do pop against muted nighttime nature scenes. The most intriguing features of both books are the pop-out portions that highlight the main character of each verse. However, the pop-outs go flat if the book is opened wide, and little fingers may quickly grab and tear the pop-out portions.

Not enough pop for the price. (Novelty board book: 2-4)
Snuggle Tight, Kiss Good Night: 978-1-8010-601-5

THE AMICUS BOOK OF ANIMALS
Illus. by Lundie, Isabel
Amicus Ink (10 pp.)
$8.99 | Feb. 25, 2020
978-1-68152-570-9

Meet a varied assortment of animals and learn a brief fact about each one.

There’s no question that the collage-style art here is striking. Boldly clipped animals pose in a sophisticated, modern-looking palette of desaturated primary colors. Illustrator Lundie collages with innovative papers, including weathered graph paper, cardboard, and old maps. Put together, they create
A prodigious polylingual production. (Board book/nov.-elty. 6 mos.-5)

20 FIRST WORDS IN 20 LANGUAGES
Odd Dot
Odd Dot (11 pp.)
$12.99 | Mar. 31, 2020
978-1-5344-5433-0

A set of stock photos, mostly of happy babies or toddlers, with big spinners between each that offer appropriate single words in 20 languages.

A baby waves in the first picture, and turning the toothed wheel reveals 20 greetings in a small die-cut window adjacent. These range from “bonjour” to—with phonetic pronunciation in brackets and, as required, nonroman script—“kumustá,” “xin chào,” and “[mar-ha-baan].” Each language is identified (the ones above being French, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and Arabic), with English included in the mix but, due to the circular format, not privileged. Refreshingly, European languages are in the minority and there is an uncommon bounty of Asian languages. Except for colonial tongues, South America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Oceania are unrepresented. The infant cast and the grown-ups sometimes posed alongside appear diverse, although all wear secular Western clothing. Human images give way toward the end to equally cute pictures of pets (English: “dog,” pronounced “[dahg]”; Mandarin: “[goh]”; Cantonese: “[gow],” a VW beetle (German: “auto”; Hindi: “[gair-lee],”) and other subjects. They’re all capped by a final view of a diapered butt (Italian: “arrivederci,” etc.). Many polylingual picture books, such as Ben Handicott’s Hello Atlas, illustrated by Kenard Pak (2016), offer samples of a greater number of languages, but along with its large vocabulary this positively shines with visual appeal. It may be one of those rare board books that draws more interest in repeat visits from older sharers than younger ones.

Handsome but odd. (Board book. 2-4) (The Amicus Book of Colors: 978-1-68152-571-6)

Let’s Fix Up the Yard
Pizzo, Robert
Illus. by the author
Schiffer (24 pp.)
$9.99 | Apr. 28, 2020
978-0-7643-5915-6

Little ones can learn about all the tools and machines involved in yard maintenance.

On each verso, one of these tools—such as a lawn mower, a hose, or a hedge trimmer—is pictured against a white background accompanied by the repeated “We’ll need” across the top and the caption labeling this object at bottom to complete the sentence. On the facing page, faceless, gender-indeterminate figures with either black or white circles for heads use said tool accompanied by a four- to five-word explanation. While Pizzo’s stylistic imagery is direct and graphically clean, it is a bit disorienting. It looks as if the figures are working on a specific project, but it is unclear where the leaves are coming from on the leaf-blower page, why holes need to be dug on the shovel spread, and where “concrete” is being poured to demonstrate the “cement mixer.” A companion title, Let’s Fix Up the House, is equally disorienting, as there is no presentation of any start-to-finish project. Walls are demolished with a sledgehammer, tiles are laid, and lumber is sawed with little explanation. While one must admire a board book that includes a chainsaw, it ultimately disappointments with disjointed scenes and a lack of any overall framing.

Even toddler tool enthusiasts may find this a mess despite the graphic simplicity. (Board book. 1-3) (Let’s Fix Up the House: 978-0-7643-5913-2)

In My Heart
Porter, Mackenzie
Illus. by Lovlie, Jenny
Little Simon/Simon & Schuster (26 pp.)
$7.99 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-1-5344-5433-0

Sweet assurance for a child heading off to day care: Mama spends her day missing you.

This message is repeated in rhyming text on 12 spreads. As mother buckles the car-seat belt, the child asks, “Mama, I will miss you. What do you do all day?” On the left side of subsequent spreads Mama moves through her day in an office constantly thinking of her child—even peeking at baby pictures during a meeting. The right-hand page shows the child happily playing at day care. The final four spreads show them cheerfully together again for evening rituals: bath, reading time, and bedtime. Both mother and child have dark skin with straight black hair. The pair share the same persistent smile and pink dot cheeks, and their clothing and dispositions are consistently sunny and bright. The pages are decorated with birds, hearts, and flowers. Readers will note that their days are rather unrealistically stress-free. There are no tantrums or guilty feelings in this idealized world (and also no parental
Watercolor-and-pencil illustrations are whimsical, with the joyful florals capturing center stage.  

**IN THE GARDEN**
Riggs, Kate  
Illus. by Felix, Monique  
Creative Editions/Creative Company (12 pp.)  
$9.99 | Feb. 25, 2020  
978-1-56846-335-3

Follow a garden’s growth as pages unfold vertically toward the ground.

The book opens vertically on a pretty blue songbird, and more sections of the sturdy, blooming potted plant it’s perched on unfurl with each consecutive flap turn. As the book extends, readers see more of the tall shrub with its flowering blossoms and then a bright collection of daffodils, hyacinths, and tulips planted around its base. Readers will enjoy spotting small treasures among the foliage: a nest filled with tiny eggs, a grinning caterpillar, a clothed mouse and fairy, tiny and hard at work on the next-to-last flap (where a tiny line of ants crawls up the side of a terra-cotta pot). Watercolor-and-pencil illustrations are whimsical, with the joyful florals capturing center stage, like a boisterous explosion of spring. Before each flap unfolds, readers see spare text decorated with nature-inspired vignettes that announces what is changing in the garden but with a bit of flair: “Flowers unfurl, calling butterflies to land.” Although charming, it’s challenging to read—as the book lengthens, it’s increasingly difficult to hold with a child in one’s lap. The book comes with a small hole punched at the top, allowing the book to be hung so that it might function as either book or decor; spread out, it could be ideal for little ones to crawl upon.

**EASTER BUNNY**
A Wag My Tail Book  
Yoon, Salina  
Illus. by the author  
Little Simon/Simon & Schuster (12 pp.)  
$7.99 | Jan. 28, 2020  
978-1-5344-4344-0

Bunny hunts for an Easter egg as young readers wag her tail.

When readers pull the large, smoothly moving tab on the right edge of the book, a mechanism inside moves the rabbit’s puffball tail, covered in white felt, that protrudes over the top of the pages. The back cover extends higher than the front and internal pages to protect the tail—and little fingers—as it moves. Bunny finds three eggs, one on each double-page spread, but they belong to a butterfly, a duckling, and a robin, respectively. (The butterfly’s eggs and the duckling’s eggs are brightly painted Easter eggs; the robin’s are its clutch of bright blue eggs in a nest.) The sound that each animal makes is written on the bottom right corner of the previous recto, providing a clue as to who will be appearing on the next page. (“Flap! Flap!” goes the butterfly; “Chirp! Chirp!” goes the robin.) Bunny becomes more and more despondent, with her ears sinking lower on the page. Though it leans more toward toy than book, it’s a welcome touch of spring. (Board book/novelty. 6 mos.-3)

**SLEEPY FARM**
A Lift-the-flap Book  
Wan, Joyce  
Illus. by the author  
Cartwheel/Scholastic (12 pp.)  
$6.99 | Jan. 7, 2020  
978-1-338-33871-3

Each animal in this board book goes to bed with a lift of a flap.

Wan’s distinct, boldly outlined illustrations show each farm animal going to bed. The animals are tucked in with a simple rhyming couplet (“Off to sleep, / little sheep”), and the turn of the flap shows the animal, eyes closed and blanket pulled up, with their animal sound (“BAA”). The opening spread depicts all of the animals, eyes heavy, the moon and stars with sweet faces shining above them. In the pages that follow, there are darling details found in the background and on the animals’ blankets. There are buzzing dragonflies flying in heart patterns behind the frog, for example, and lily pads on its covers. After they’ve worked out some initial stiffness, little readers will enjoy pulling down the flap that transforms the animal’s face into its sleeping version tucked into bed. This say-goodnight-to-the-animals concept has certainly been done before, and while Wan doesn’t usher in a new age of bedtime book, this does work as a well-paced, familiar outing, comforting to little ones and caregivers alike. It’s this familiarity that makes the book a suitable choice for winding down before bed, the ever hopeful line, “Ready to sleep / the whole night through,” echoing loudly in all caregivers’ ears.

The well-paced conventionality of this one makes it a pleasant bedtime read. (Board book. 1-2)

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Series: FunJungle, 6
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Oud, Pauline
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Pell, Eva J.
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Stilton, Thea
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$14.99 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-338-58740-1
Series: Thea Stilton and the Treasure Seekers, 2
(Fiction. 7-10)

THE STAR DUNES
Truer, Trudi
National Geographic Kids (216 pp.)
$16.99 | Mar. 17, 2020
978-1-4263-3682-9
Series: Explorer Academy, 4
(Science fiction. 8-12)

SIMONE BILES
Wetzel, Dan
Illus. by Baez, Marcelo
Henry Holt (160 pp.)
$16.99 | Mar. 17, 2020
978-1-250-29582-8
Series: Epic Athletes
(Biography. 8-12)

MALALA YOUSAFZAI
Williamson, Lisa
Illus. by Smith, Nick
Abrams (160 pp.)
$9.99 | Mar. 31, 2020
978-1-4197-4074-9
Series: First Names, 6
(Nonfiction. 8-12)
Tackles family secrets, toxic masculinity, and socio-economic differences with incisive clarity and candor.

Camino Rios lives in the Dominican Republic and yearns to go to Columbia University in New York City, where her father works most of the year. Yahaira Rios, who lives in Morningside Heights, hasn’t spoken to her dad since the previous summer, when she found out he has another wife in the Dominican Republic. Their lives collide when this man, their dad, dies in an airplane crash with hundreds of other passengers heading to the island. Each protagonist grieves the tragic death of their larger-than-life father and tries to unravel the tangled web of lies he kept secret for almost 20 years. The author pays reverent tribute to the lives lost in a similar crash in 2001. The half sisters are vastly different—Yahaira is dark skinned, a chess champion who has a girlfriend; Camino is lighter skinned, a talented swimmer who helps her curandera aunt deliver neighborhood babies. Despite their differences, they slowly forge a tenuous bond. The book is told in alternating chapters with headings counting how many days have passed since the fateful event. Acevedo balances the two perspectives with ease, contrasting the girls’ environments and upbringings. Camino’s verses read like poetic prose, flowing and straightforward. Yahaira’s sections have more breaks and urgent, staccato beats. Every line is laced with betrayal and longing as the teens struggle with loving someone despite his imperfections.

A standing ovation. (Verse novel. 14-18)
In the midst of the controversy over Jeanine Cummins’ recent novel, American Dirt, a couple of troubling words and phrases have been tossed around with some frequency: “the story” and “voiceless.” Of course, there is no single story about any group of people, something that should not need to be spelled out, yet this wording is frequently used in reference to works about marginalized people, particularly those that conform to expected narratives. Additionally, communities may be systematically excluded from traditional avenues of publishing and marketing, but that does not mean they have no voice, merely that mainstream gatekeepers would do well to listen to what they have to say.

Far from being absent from the literature, several recent young adult releases offer well-informed, well-written takes on the important topic of Latin American migration, a subject that is deserving of nuance and care.

We Are Not From Here by Jenny Torres Sanchez (Philomel, May 19) draws readers into the lives of three Guatemalan teenagers who are fleeing from a powerful criminal in their hometown. The two boys witnessed a murder he was responsible for while the female cousin of one of them was raped by the gangster, is pregnant, and faces pressure to marry him. Our reviewer praised the fact that the story is “enriched by linguistic and cultural nuances.” Sanchez writes in a note to readers that she was inspired by the experiences of her family, including her uncle in El Salvador who was assassinated during the civil war of the 1980s, her young cousin who desperately missed his mother but could not leave the U.S. because it was too dangerous to return home, and her own visits to see family in the town in Guatemala where the book is set. The book is infused with her passion and care for innocent lives lost.

One of the 2019 Kirkus Prize finalists in the Young Readers’ Literature category was the nonfiction title The Other Side: Stories of Central American Teen Refugees Who Dream of Crossing the Border by Juan Pablo Villalobos and translated by Rosalind Harvey (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019). Villalobos, a Mexican author and journalist, interviewed 11 young people who came to the U.S. as unaccompanied minor refugees and used narrative nonfiction techniques to convey their stories. From being detained in “freezers” at the border to being forced through desperation to trust random strangers, these young people from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras share the varied reasons they left behind family, friends, and home cultures to make the hazardous journey to a land where they hoped to find safety. Readers learn as well about the fears that haunt them and the long-lasting emotional and psychological consequences of the traumas they endured.

Alexandra Villasante, the daughter of immigrants from Uruguay, took an imaginative approach with her science fiction novel The Grief Keeper (Putnam, 2019). Focusing on undocumented siblings from El Salvador, 17-year-old Marisol and her 12-year-old sister, the story explores the vulnerability of people who are willing to make tremendous sacrifices in the name of safety and protecting those they love. In exchange for asylum, Marisol agrees to participate in an experimental program, becoming a grief keeper, someone who bears the emotional burden for U.S. sufferers of PTSD. Readers learn of the terrible violence visited by gangs upon the girls’ family as well as the homophobia that made El Salvador a hostile environment for a queer teen like Marisol.

Manuelito is a work of graphic fiction written by Elisa Amado, originally from Guatemala, and illustrated by Abraham Urias, a native of El Salvador (Annick Press, 2019). It tells the story of a 13-year-old Guatemalan boy who journeys with a friend through Mexico to the U.S. border, where they turn themselves in to Border Patrol as asylum seekers. The contrast between the boys’ ordinary lives at home—playing soccer, going to school—and the arrival of various groups of dangerous armed men is stark. It becomes clear to Manuelito’s family that for him to remain would put his life at risk. The book references past conflicts that led to villagers hiding for years in the mountains while others were killed and buried in mass graves. The straightforward prose and expressive charcoal-style illustrations in this slim story clearly convey the dangers that drive caring families to make the unimaginable choice to send their young people away.

Each of these books contributes to readers’ broader collective understanding of refugees’ experiences. There are many more out there, all worthy of notice, each one a single story that speaks its own truth.—L.S.

Laura Simeon is the young adult editor.
Will make readers want to dive into the story and love these flawed characters.

CHASING LUCKY

A determined 17-year-old has an explosive summer.

Josie Saint-Martin isn’t happy thanks to the facts that she’s never lived in one location long enough to make connections; her single, 36-year-old bookstore manager mom isn’t capable of responsible parenting or communication; and her fashion photographer father, whom she doesn’t really know, won’t take her on as an apprentice until she proves her worth. Josie has a plan for her future, and the last thing she needs is to test the infamous Saint-Martin love curse with former childhood bestie Lucky Karras, who’s now the hot bad boy in Beauty, their gossipy hometown where they’ve returned to live. Her cousin Evie drags her to a party hosted by Evie’s ex-boyfriend, a descendant of the town’s founder, who spreads vicious rumors about Josie. In a fit of rage,
Josie commits a regrettable action, landing her and Lucky in a holding cell—with Lucky taking the fall. As summer progresses, Josie uncovers long-buried family secrets, learns why Lucky lied to the police, and falls in love. Bennett’s detailed descriptions add to the lore of Josie’s small, historic New England harbor town, giving readers a crystal-clear sense of the setting. The brisk pace and Josie’s realistic, inviting voice will make readers want to dive into the story and love these flawed characters. Josie and Lucky are white; Evie’s late father was black.

A fun summer read about honesty and making mistakes. (Romance. 14-18)

EAT, AND LOVE YOURSELF
Boo, Sweeney
Illus. by Lafuente, Joana
BOOM! Box (160 pp.)
$14.99 paper | Apr. 21, 2020
978-1-68415-506-4

Can self-love be packaged in a chocolate bar?
Mindy is a young woman with body dysmorphia who finds emotional comfort in eating. Lately she has been feeling depressed—unhappy with her body and unsure about her life and future. One day, at her neighborhood corner store, Mindy purchases on impulse a chocolate bar with a label reading “Eat and Love Yourself.” She discovers that each bite transports her to a time in her past. Readers, along with Mindy, get to watch pivotal moments in her younger years when she endured derisive comments and bullying around weight and food that led to her struggles with low self-esteem and disordered eating. Throughout the story, readers observe Mindy coping with the negative feelings resulting from these interactions—some, painfully, with loved ones—and they witness her present-day journey to self-acceptance, self-advocacy, and openness to love. The illustrations are vivid yet subdued, with a jewel-toned palette that manages to evoke warmth in a story that deals with sharp, uncomfortable realities. The writing and artwork complement each other and serve to make the reading experience more immersive. Boo’s graphic novel reads as realistic despite involving time travel, and readers will find themselves rooting for Mindy as she relives deeply hurtful experiences. Mindy and her family are light skinned and racially ambiguous, and there is ethnic diversity in secondary characters.

A sad but ultimately hopeful story of learning to love oneself. (Graphic fiction. 12-adult)

I AM HERE NOW
Bottner, Barbara
Imprint (352 pp.)
$17.99 | May 19, 2020
978-1-250-20769-2

A Bronx teen comes of age in a dysfunctional family.
Set in 1960, Bottner’s verse novel explores the hardships endured by straight 15-year-old Maisie Meyers and her gay 11-year-old brother, Davy, who are repeatedly subjected to their mother’s violent physical and emotional outbursts and their father’s extended absences. First-person narrator Maisie, from a middle-class Hungarian Jewish American background, takes solace in the friendship of working-class Irish American neighbor Richie O’Neill, the son of a troubled Vietnam veteran prone—like Maisie’s mother—to erratic, abusive behavior. Maisie laments that she and Richie “have parents / who could compete to be / the most unhappily married people / in all of Parkchester” and, given the tense congestion of their urban neighborhood, concludes: “Nobody who lives in the Bronx can relax.” Bottner’s narrative of familial dysfunction probes Maisie’s development as she attempts to protect her brother in a house where “it’s always war” as she acts out, seeking from a boy the affection denied by a mother who “stands firmly against happiness, / as if it’s a bad religion” and who makes no bones about telling her children they were mistakes. Packed numerous themes of evolving teen self-identity amid the cityscape of a broken home, this turbulent, plot-driven tale shows how a miserable home life transcends ethnic, historical, and socio-economic bounds.

Timeless lessons in how to find one’s self-worth in the face of parental abuse. (Verse fiction. 14-18)

LAST GIRLS
Brodsky, Demetra
Tor Teen (368 pp.)
$17.99 | May 5, 2020
978-1-250-25652-2

Three sisters living in a doomsday prepper compound discover there is more to their lives than they thought.
Honey Juniper and her sisters, Birdie and Blue—high school senior, junior, and sophomore respectively—live with their mother in Washington state in The Nest, a compound peopled by a group who are convinced that the end of the world is coming and for which the group is preparing by stockpiling food and weapons. It is the sisters’ fifth move in a decade, a fact relayed by Honey in one of her letters (whose sole purpose seems to be to sum up previously relayed events) to her imaginary friend, Bucky. Honey’s first-person present-tense narrative relays details of life in the compound—always be prepared, don’t trust Outsiders—and about high school, where she and her
sisters are considered “weirds.” A concurrent storyline told in separate chapters is narrated by Toby, an 18-year-old street artist who lives with his mother, also an artist, in San Diego. The connection between the two storylines becomes apparent early on, and it’s not clear if this is intentional. The rest of the story unfolds with much of the plot being easily anticipated. The narrative lacks nuance and is blocky with implausibly convenient coincidences and conveniently dense characters. The characters, mostly white but with a black love interest, are solidly one-dimensional, never moving beyond their initially described character traits.

A clumsy offering. (Fiction. 15-18)

A BREATH TOO LATE
Callen, Rocky
Henry Holt (272 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 28, 2020
978-1-250-23879-5

After shattering her life, a girl finds the healing in the shards.

Seventeen-year-old Ellie Walker woke to the silence of her oppressive life on Sunset Street with her abusive father and battered mother and headed to school, blasting music to make the world go away—only to face the reality of her own death by suicide the previous night. Ellie struggles to recall most of her memories, but as her specter observes the grief left in the wake of her death, her memories are triggered chronologically. It’s only through them that she can piece together what led up to that tragic night. A bystander in death, Ellie begins to notice the small things that often went overlooked in the moment, such as promises long forgotten, and the love others have for her, including August, the light-hearted, goofy boy who makes her dream in color, and her mother, who she thought was broken and whom she had given up on. This epistolary novel told from Ellie’s perspective details the raw reality of life’s darkest moments but shows where to look for the bright spots. Callen’s sharp, poignant writing depicts the events leading up to and following Ellie’s suicide without romanticizing either it or her depression. In this debut, the author also honestly examines the effect that abuse has and how hard it can be to escape. All characters are white.

A memorable, hopeful story of regret. (author’s note, resources) (Fiction. 14-18)
As a girl, Samantha Mabry was terrified of ghosts. “I would sleep with the covers up over my head,” says the young adult author with a laugh. She insisted on getting a cat to guard against ghostly presences, eventually moving on to the ghost stories of Edith Wharton to shake her fears and demystify the genre.

At long last, Mabry has poured her lifelong obsession onto the page. Her new novel, *Tigers, Not Daughters* (Algonquin Young Readers, March 24), follows three sisters on the one-year anniversary of their oldest sister’s death. There’s Jessica, trapped in an abusive relationship with her sister’s old flame; Iridian, a writer obsessed with the ghostly romance in Anne Rice’s *The Witching Hour*; and dreamy Rosa, content to watch the fireflies light up their San Antonio neighborhood.

Haunting them all, quite literally, is the ghost of Ana, who died one night while climbing out her window. In the year since her death, she’s become a local legend, described in loving and obsessive detail by a chorus of neighbor boys. “I had always wanted to write a book in this we voice,” Mabry explains. She eventually decided not to write the entire book as a choral narrative, “because it would so clearly be *The Virgin Suicides* 2.0.”

The chorus of teenage boys amplifies the legendary quality of the Torres sisters, reinforcing gossip handed down in the community and generating a kind of summoning spell. “If it weren’t for us, things would’ve turned out differently,” they lament. “If it weren’t for us, Ana wouldn’t have died...and her sisters wouldn’t have been forced to suffer at the hands of her angry ghost.”

Once the ghost arrives, Mabry conjures chills galore, but finding the right way to tell the story of the Torres girls and their grief wasn’t easy, she says. “I think there’s an element of people being haunted in every good human moment. There’s a sense of something pressing on you,” she says. “But for a really long time, I could not figure out what the ghost wanted.”

By returning to ghost stories she loved, like Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* and Sarah Waters’ *The Little Stranger*, Mabry envisioned a better purpose for Ana’s ghost: spurring her sisters to action. When the novel opens, the Torres sisters are a fractured unit, an experience Mabry—who grew up an only child—borrowed from her extended family.

“When I was thinking about these sisters, one of the reasons I wanted to write this story is my mother’s family,” says Mabry. “She’s one of three sisters and a brother, and they are a Mexican American family, like the Torres family. They pick on each other, but they don’t ever come together to say sorry. I always thought that was worth trying...
to fictionalize,” she adds.

By the time Mabry figured out why Ana was haunting her sisters, the pressure was on. Mabry had given birth to her first child and was under a tight deadline. “I had less than a year to finish the first draft,” Mabry recalls. “It was due in October, and I had a baby in April.”

A compressed timeline ultimately helped Mabry take bigger storytelling risks. “I stopped being timid with my choices. I was just trying to be a little bit more ruthless,” she explains. Mabry wound up falling in love with Jessica, the most complex of the sisters. Of the surviving trio, Jessica also expresses the most rage. “She’s just so mean,” says Mabry. “I really liked to invent the things that she blurs out. I was trying to home in on her anger.”

Now that her third YA novel is in the world, Mabry wonders whether she can write a book that isn’t so dark. Her debut, *A Fierce and Subtle Poison*, dealt with curses while her follow-up, *All the Wind in the World*, depicted a less-than-rosy near future in the Southwest desert. (It was longlisted for the National Book Award.) “I’m interested in unseen forces from the past that meddle in people’s lives,” says Mabry. “And I like the sense of helplessness that lends to a story.”


Kristen Evans reviews fiction for Kirkus and writes about culture for BuzzFeed, the Los Angeles Times, the New Republic, NYLON, and elsewhere.

deeper into their private despair, their refusal to realize that they themselves need help might just cost them their friendship—and their lives. Carpenter weaves an incredibly rich tale of female friendship, beautifully written and refreshingly free of romance. Both characters feel wholly realistic in their interactions with each other, their families, their teachers, and their peers. A litany of painful topics—mental health, medical trauma, aging, grief and loss, financial insecurity, social isolation, and more—is handled with a deft touch that is equal parts humorous and heart-wrenching. A description of the author’s own battle with OCD emphasizes the story’s positive attitude toward seeking help.

A powerful, tender reminder of the importance of friendship in times of trauma. (author’s note, mental health resources) (Fiction. 13-adult)

**THE AUTOMATIC AGE**

Chomichuk, GMB

Illus. by the author

Yellow Dog (112 pp.)

$11.95 paper | May 30, 2020

978-1-77337-040-8

A rebuilt veteran of the seventh war and his son struggle to survive in a world that is being systematically swept of human life by robots.

Chomichuk really stacks the deck against Londoners Barry and his dad, Kerion. On the one hand, robots have built a paradise where every store is always fully stocked, every home kept clean and maintained, and all traffic runs automatically. But something has gone wrong in the software, and even the slightest unusual use of electricity or facilities quickly draws squads of armed robotic exterminators called autovolts. The two fugitives have only survived this long because Kerion was massively wounded in combat and so much of his repaired body is prosthetic that he can get close enough to a confused would-be executioner to jack in and fry its circuits. It’s plainly just a matter of time, though, before they’re cornered—and time at last runs out. Dark images of shadowy electronica and human figures too distant or distorted to discern faces or skin color add grim atmospheric notes to a dystopic tale which, being framed in one- to seven-page episodes, has a shocked, staccato feel. Narrowly escaping a particularly persistent pursuer, Kerion at last leads his son away from the city in hopes of finding a place where, as he puts it, “the future never happened.” Good luck with that.

Desperate, suspenseful action in a nightmarish scenario. (Illustrated fantasy. 14-18)
YOU SAY IT FIRST

**Cotugno, Katie**

Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (368 pp.)
$18.99 | Jun. 16, 2020
978-0-06-267412-8

Two 18-year-olds form a turbulent connection after a chance phone call.

On the surface, Meg's suburban life in Philadelphia seems picture perfect—she's college-bound, politically active, and works at a voter registration call center. In reality, though, Meg is still suffering from her parents' tumultuous divorce and avoids conflict at all costs. About an eight-hour drive away, in Alma, Ohio, Colby Moran is dealing with his own troubled family life while working a dead-end job. When a voter registration call accidentally connects Meg and Colby, the two decidedly do not hit it off. Despite this difficult start, they have an undeniable connection, and their long-distance phone calls turn into a friendship and, eventually, romance.

Told in alternating perspectives, Meg's and Colby's distinct voices and equally flawed characters complement each other in an unconventional yet realistic way. Meg is an optimist and hell-bent on changing the world, one voter at a time; meanwhile, Colby doesn't have many expectations about things changing and is mostly content living in his small town. Together, they challenge each other to think and act differently—but are they strong enough to overcome their differences? Part romance, part coming-of-age, this is a realistic and captivating story that speaks to the issues relevant to teens today. Most characters are cued as white; Meg is attracted to both boys and girls.

**Romance, politics, family drama, and more—this one has it all. (Fiction. 14-18)**

THE FASCINATORS

**Eliopulos, Andrew**

HarperTeen (320 pp.)
$18.99 | May 12, 2020
978-0-06-288804-4

Spellcasting gets extracurricular at a Georgia high school.

Seniors Sam, Delia, and James are the three (and only) members of the Friedman High Fascinators, their school's magic club. The trio hopes to do well at their last magic competition before college, but the “infinite question marks” surrounding Sam and James' feelings for each other are nothing if not distracting. Rather than talk it out, James keeps partying and spending time with Amber, a girl from his church. Meanwhile, the club recruits new-to-town Denver, a boy who seems keen on Sam. When James steals a spell book at a party, a group of dark magic practitioners haunts the Fascinators until they return it. But even if they give it back, will their lives be the same? Eliopulos, an editor at HarperCollins, makes his YA debut with a strong, queercentric premise.

**The tight, third-person–omniscient focus on Sam offers a contagious flair for the dramatic. Though light on the specificities and rules of magic, Eliopulos draws powerful parallels between queerness and magical ability in a Deep South where the fear of both is present but not prevailing. However, with all the crescendo of the promising premise, the ending tumbles toward anticlimactic. Multiple unanswered questions hint at a potential sequel. The cast assumes a white default, though black-haired Amber has dark brown skin and other character names code for diversity.**

**A magical exploration of queer and religious themes. (Fantasy. 12-18)**

LIZARD IN A ZOOT SUIT

**Finnegan, Marco**

illus. by the author

Graphic Universe (144 pp.)
$12.99 paper | May 5, 2020
978-1-5415-8695-6

With a dash of mid-20th-century pulp monsters and a backdrop of 1940s Los Angeles, Finnegan mingles humanoid swamp creatures with victory rolls and zoot suits to highlight Mexican American families struggling to hold their own.

Cuata is soft, petite, and keen to help others. Her sister, Flaca, on the other hand, is, as her name suggests, tall, lean, and angular with a short temper and a rebellious edge. Though their characters represent, respectively, traditionally feminine norms and those who push against them, all their traits are needed to save a new friend in need. When a night out in downtown LA turns violent amid the clashes of the Zoot Suit Riots, Cuata and Flaca escape with the help of a subterranean creature who is part man and part lizard with echoes of the “Creature From the Black Lagoon.” The creature follows them home, where Cuata discovers that he has been separated from his family, and the girls must work together to reunite them while evading Navy men and a mysterious man-in-black scientist who want to get to the creature first. Though the adventure is fast-paced and fun, themes of racism, colonialism, counterculture, and family are all explored. Backmatter includes historical context about the zoot suiters and the events that triggered the 1943 riots as well as insight into Finnegan's creative process.

**Period pop horror that will lure readers in for important history lessons. (Graphic science fiction/historical fiction. 12-18)**

Mingles humanoid swamp creatures with victory rolls to highlight Mexican American families struggling to hold their own.

**LIZARD IN A ZOOT SUIT**
“Baby Shark”—feel somewhat forced, as does the use of such... however, last summer at Camp Chemo, his past didn’t prevent... Mari’s supportive family is heartening. Most charac-... However, Mari’s supportive family is heartening. Most charac-... Two high schoolers are simultane-ously united and divided by their cancer diagnoses, threatening their tentative romance. Jase Ellison’s friends at Atlanta West Prep don’t know he had leukemia at age 3; he’s safe from the intrusive questions and taunts he endured in middle school. However, last summer at Camp Chemo, his past didn’t prevent a “flirtationship” with Mari Manos. Mari, who “rocked the one-legged look” on pink forearm crutches thanks to osteogenic sarcoma at 10, can’t hide her history. But when Mari transfers to his school and students gawk and gossip, Jase fears that his secret’s in danger and pushes her away. In alternating third-person chapters, the teens navigate medical and academic problems while wrestling with their fear, anger, and attraction. Gardner, an amputee and cancer survivor, realistically tackles... strains credulity. Pop-culture references—from “Hamilton” to “Baby Shark”—feel somewhat forced, as does the use of such disability rights terms as “super crip” and “inspiration porn.” However, Mari’s supportive family is heartening. Most characters are affluent and white; olive-skinned Mari and her family are working-class and cued as Greek American. An awkwardly written but unusually in-depth portrayal of cancer and disability. (Romance. 13-16)

A kung fu student combats a kidnapper. Savannah Taylor has gotten used to relocating every time her mom falls for a different man. Now in Portland, Oregon, she struggles to live with Tim, her mom’s controlling boyfriend, while pursuing her newfound passion: In kung fu class she uncovers newfound strength, finding a sanctuary from her chaotic home life. Though she’s resolved not to make friends, she’s drawn to Daniel Diaz, a green belt who shares her interest in Bruce Lee. Meanwhile, rumors swirl at school about a driver who is following girls in battered, unmarked cars. Even worse, a girl one town over vanished last year. Leaving kung fu one night, Savannah is attacked, waking up in the back of an old white van with her wrists duct taped. Her kidnapper is a man who goes by Sir. With the help of an unexpected ally and Bruce Lee’s words of wisdom, Savannah must summon the strength to outwit Sir if she wants to make it out alive. The narrative, told through multiple first-person perspectives, offers insight into trauma’s ripple effects. While this is interesting and the pacing is strong, insufficient time is spent on character development, detracting from the immediacy of Savannah’s situation. The ease with which the mystery is solved further dampens the tension. Daniel is cued as Latinx; other major characters are presumed white. An uneven mystery with intriguing explorations into the myriad effects of trauma. (Mystery. 14-18)

In this duology closer, heroes from The Devouring Gray (2019) must end the Gray and the Beast for good. May seeks to restore her family’s sacred hawthorn tree, damaged when Harper lashed out at them, as she chafes against her complicated relationship with her mother. Meanwhile, Harper needs to learn to control her powers (and decide who to side with in the town’s conflicts). Violet and Isaac have teamed up on a research project to destroy the Beast once and for all—which is complicated by the return of Isaac’s last surviving brother (forcing him to face what happened the night of his ritual). And the Beast isn’t the only problem: A sinister corruption leaks from the Gray, infecting townspeople. The founders must unravel their ancestors’ secrets—the nature of the magic and the Beast—in order to fulfill their responsibilities. Reveals and surprises make up for an occasionally dragging pace. The romantic entanglements form an elaborate love quadrangle: Bisexual Violet has a crush on bisexual Isaac, who is in love with Justin, who loves Harper, who still has feelings for him despite their fraught-wuth-betrayal past (while, in their parents’ generation, Justin’s and Violet’s mothers—Augusta and Juniper, respectively—dated in high school). However, the relationships are given depth and nuance, especially when the characters work through familial, unreciprocated, or unequal feelings. Characters default to white. A solid conclusion to a story with many spinning parts. (Paranormal/horror. 12-adult)
Growing up, Rin Chupeco’s favorite story was the tale of Maria Makiling, the guardian spirit of a mountain in the Philippines: She fell in love with a mortal man, and they were betrayed by jealous men. Filipino tales weren’t all Chupeco read; she devoured Japanese and Chinese myths, the famous Western fairy tales, and modern classics like *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.

Chupeco saw the Western stories being retold again and again but couldn’t find many different versions of the Asian tales, even in the Philippines. Rather than retell just those stories on their own, she decided to combine them with all the other fairy and folktales she loved. “I want Filipino mythology on equal footing with other fairy tales from around the world,” she says. “Just because you’re not familiar with Filipino mythology doesn’t mean it’s of lesser value.”

In thinking about how to combine such diverse folktales, Chupeco started wondering, what if all these fairy tales were real and part of history? That question inspired *Wicked As You Wish* (Sourcebooks Fire, March 3), the first book in her new trilogy *A Hundred Names For Magic*, about a magic-canceling descendant of Makiling and her best friend, the prince of a magical kingdom previously ruled by legendary leaders like Snow White and Cinderella.

The problem with fairy tales is that they tend not to explain how or why things happen, which made developing a world inspired by these stories a challenge. “All the magic in fairy tales doesn’t make sense….It was really hard to figure out, what is the internal logic of the system?” Chupeco says.

In *Wicked As You Wish*, Tala Makiling Warnock has spent most of her life in Invierno, Arizona, a city where magic doesn’t work quite right, with her Filipina mother and Scottish father. Refugees from the kingdom of Avalon (currently frozen in ice), they have to hide their true identities and abilities in a United States where magic is heavily regulated and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement terrorizes anyone who sticks out. But when the exiled prince of Avalon, Alex, moves in next door, it’s only a matter of time before the older generation’s past—and the younger one’s destiny—catches up to them.

What ensues is a desperate race across the world as Tala, Alex, and a diverse group of magical teens have to work together to outwit the terrifying Snow Queen and restore Avalon. The Bandersnatches, as they’re called, include Zoe, a New Yorker dogged by doubts about her capacity to lead and her relationship with Alex’s ex; West, a British shape-shifter with little awareness of social norms or contemporary culture; Loki, a nonbinary Chinese adoptee with a magical staff and a mysterious heritage; Ken, the bearer of a pair of cursed swords; and Cole, the distrusted descendant of the Sheriff of Nottingham.
Since she was drawing on so many well-known stories and tropes, Chupeco decided not to worry about surprising readers with shocking plot twists and instead focused on developing the relationships between the characters. She wanted to show that “who I am isn’t all that different from who you are,” she says. “People from different backgrounds can come together with common purpose and common interest.”

Though she published several books before it, Wicked As You Wish was actually the first book Chupeco tried to sell. Ten years ago, she says, “literary agents weren’t open to emails, so a lot of what I had to do was actually ship out my query letters and then ship out my manuscripts by snail mail.” Shipping from Manila cost as much as $40 per package, and much of the feedback Chupeco got was discouraging. Agents liked the story but wondered if it couldn’t have a white protagonist. Reluctantly, she decided to put the book aside.

Now, though, she’s glad to have had the extra time to hone the story. “This book in particular is all about hope,” Chupeco says. “My other books do write about hope but it’s more subtle, and this one is just balls out, hey we are hoping for the best, and we’re fighting to make sure that best comes true. And that’s the heart of the book.”

Alex Heimbach is a writer and editor in California. Wicked As You Wish received a starred review in the Jan. 1, 2020, issue.
rising junior with pronounced ADHD, and his character is sympathetic and charmingly hapless in the best of ways; readers will root for him to realize all the truths right under his nose, not least of which is his own worth. Nick’s best friend of nearly 10 years, Seth, is a pale, chubby, bisexual boy with thick glasses and baggy clothes. Gibby is a butch black lesbian; along with her girlfriend, they complete their circle of outcast friends. Klune plays with superhero genre tropes and fan-fiction clichés with the skill of a true fan—completely aware of their ridiculousness but in love with them anyway.

Hilarious, sweet, and absolutely super! (Fantasy. 14-18)
violent anger, jealousy, and oft-repeated insistence that she scapegoat the Jewish gem cutters to secure her own acquittal show him to be far more toxic than her besotted narration acknowledges. The ethnically Jewish characters are conversos, or Christian converts, portrayed as simply virtuous and inexplicably generous with the Christian French characters who use their knowledge for their own gain. All characters are white. A winding tale of jewelry-based intrigue darkened by an uncomfortably unhealthy romance. (author’s note) (Historical fiction. 14-18)

THE LOST CARNIVAL
A Dick Grayson Graphic Novel
Moreci, Michael
Illus. by Middledge, Sas & Hester, Phil
DC (208 pp.)
$16.99 paper | May 5, 2020
978-1-4012-9102-0

Welcome, one and all, to the marvelous Haly’s Circus, home of the dazzling Flying Graysons!

Summer’s arrived for young Dick Grayson, who feels trapped performing alongside his mother and father as part of Haly’s legendary act. Dwindling attendance numbers, however, offer much to worry about. Haly’s fortunes take a turn for the worse when a competing carnival sets up nearby. Crowds flock over to the Lost Carnival, a world “of unexplainable delights, and unfathomable dangers.” Dick quickly falls hard for the magical Luciana, a girl with a tragic, mysterious past, and the smitten pair soon embark on a summer romance destined for heartache. As tensions flare up between the circus and carnival, Dick notices something off about the otherworldly carnival. When his best friend, Willow, falls prey to a powerful spell, Dick must unearth the truth. In this brooding coming-of-age tale, Moreci’s portrait of Dick from the early days before he met Batman gives prominence to his relationship with his parents and, by extension, his life at Haly’s and the independence he craves. Though Luciana exists more as Dick’s dream girl than a fully fledged character, their professed hopes and doubts prove to be startlingly moving. The moody artwork—awash in glum blues for Dick and golden yellows for Luciana—nicely reinforces the tale’s themes. Both Luciana and Willow are girls of color in an almost entirely white cast.

A must-read for fans of a blossoming hero. (Graphic fantasy. 12-16)

RIVER
Nayman, Shira
Guernica Editions (285 pp.)
$25.00 paper | Apr. 1, 2020
978-1-77183-457-5

Fourteen-year-old Emily, a Jewish American girl, is pushed through time to meet her ancestors in their youth. In the prologue, the married adult Emily travels to Australia to visit her sickly grandmother, who mentions the summer years ago “when we were both fourteen.” From Chapter 1, Emily narrates the strange events of that summer: how a family trip got cut short by her mother’s cancer diagnosis and treatment and she and her 5-year-old brother, Billy, were sent to Australia to stay with their grandmother. During a midnight storm, Emily was transported back in time: first to her mother’s childhood in Australia, where she met the grandfather she never knew, then to her grandmother’s childhood in South Africa, the Lithuania of her great-grandmother, and, finally, ancient Babylon. In each region and era, Emily finds herself able to speak the language and pretend to be a local despite her need to ask questions whose answers she should know. She traces a history of anti-Semitism and varying injustices against Indigenous peoples while also reciting cultural and historical facts for readers’ edification. While the story’s concept is intriguing, its execution is lacking. The characters feel like place holders serving the plot, which itself lacks direction and momentum. Indigenous and black characters appear to explain or demonstrate their peoples’ plights to white main characters in strange, inauthentic ways.

With more skillful writing and editing, this could have been an engrossing tale. (notes) (Fantasy. 12-16)

MAN UP
Oclon, Kim
Trism Books (240 pp.)
$12.95 paper | Apr. 22, 2020
978-0-9993886-3-1

High school athletes reckon with being gay.

In her debut novel, Oclon explores the charged playing fields of homophobia and high school sports. The tale unfolds through first-person narratives alternating between Lincoln High School students and boyfriends David and Tyler, who are equally committed to one another but at differing degrees of comfort with their sexual orientation. The novel opens with David’s responding to his father’s asking how he’d like his burger grilled by saying that he is gay—setting the stage for the focus on the unscripted awkwardness and challenges of coming out. A varsity baseball player, working-class David has been secretly dating blond track team member and AP student Tyler, who’s openly gay and gladly participates

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A brutally honest, not-to-be-missed narrative enriched by linguistic and cultural nuances.

**SUNCATCHER**

*Pimienta, Jose*

Illus. by the author

Random House (224 pp.)

$24.99 | May 19, 2020

978-0-593-12482-6

Pimienta’s debut is a graphic novel set in Mexicali, where music is life and—for a brief moment—life threatening.

High schooler Beatriz Ana Garza has played guitar in a few bands. Her love of music comes from her grandfather Tata Mario, a former musician whose declining health leads, after long decline, to his death in the hospital. While emptying her Tata’s belongings from his home, Beatriz discovers her grandfather’s soul is trapped inside his Gibson guitar. Tata’s spirit explains that years ago he made a trade with an Indigenous Yaqui man he met while traveling in Sonora, gaining musical talent but forfeiting the ability to finish writing the song that has haunted him. Determined to liberate Tata’s soul, Beatriz joins a band and becomes obsessed with completing the song. Together with her new band mates, she begins to riff and write music. Chronicled in a nonlinear fashion with intermittent flashbacks, the dynamic illustrations pan Beatriz’s bedroom, concert venues, garage rehearsal space, and Mexicali streets. Awash in shades of purple and yellow, with splashes of pink and orange, they convey the 1990s setting and help readers feel the music. Refreshingly, colloquial Spanish greetings and free. Determined to liberate Tata’s soul, Beatriz joins a band and becomes obsessed with completing the song. Together with her new band mates, she begins to riff and write music. Chronicled in a nonlinear fashion with intermittent flashbacks, the dynamic illustrations pan Beatriz’s bedroom, concert venues, garage rehearsal space, and Mexicali streets. Awash in shades of purple and yellow, with splashes of pink and orange, they convey the 1990s setting and help readers feel the music. Refreshingly, colloquial Spanish greetings and sets the stage for a personal journey of self-acceptance, noting how others in their community need to grow with them.

**FORGED IN FIRE AND STARS**

*Robertson, Andrea*

Philomel (384 pp.)

$18.99 | May 12, 2020

978-0-525-95412-5

A girl is destined to become a magical blacksmith who helps her country’s restoration.

Ara’s father was the Loresmith—a blacksmith gifted by the gods with the magic to equip and guide the Lorn-knights in order to prevent the evil Vokkan Empire from overrunning Saetlund. But corruption weakened Saetlund from within, and it fell. Fifteen years later, Ara’s a smith who doesn’t know how to access her Loresmith destiny; as her father didn’t survive to train her. When Saetlund’s princess and prince return from exile to seek her out (believing that getting the gods’ blessing will enable Ara to take up the Loresmith mantle and turn the tide against the Vokkans), she sets off on a quest with them, forming a small band, with ties to the Resistance, naturally. The storyline is straightforward and mostly free of obstacles and setbacks; there are only minimal intrigues and twists (all of which are heavily forecasted). The third-person limited narrative following Ara is slow-paced and given to large chunks of exposition. At the conclusion, one quest is finished in time for the next quest to be assigned, and a character who (hopefully) will have more prominence in the sequel is teased. Ara is white; the royals are brown skinned, as is Ara’s love interest. While there’s association between ethnicity and geography, the racial diversity has no impact on the plot or world.

**WE ARE NOT FROM HERE**

*Sanchez, Jenny Torres*

Philomel (368 pp.)

$17.99 | May 19, 2020

978-1-9848-1226-1

Three Guatemalan teenagers flee their dangerous hometown.

In this action-packed and beautifully rendered depiction of the refugee migrant experience, Sanchez tells the story of 15-year-old Pulga, his brother by choice, Chico; and his cousin Pequeña, three teenagers from Puerto Barrios, Guatemala, who must sneak away from their town to survive. Pulga and Chico unfortunately happen to be at the wrong place at the wrong time when they witness the murder of Don Felicio, the convenience store owner who gives them Cokes in exchange for help. Pequeña, who is 17 and a new mother, wants to escape Rey, the gang member who raped her and wants to force her into marriage—and who murdered Don Felicio. The chapters switch between the first-person perspectives of Pulga, who has
The heart of an artist, and Pequeña, who sees beyond her surroundings and escapes reality during stressful situations. Scared of a future controlled by Rey, the trio embark on the journey that will bring them to the United States. But first they must conquer La Bestia, the name given by migrants to the train that claims the limbs and lives of many who flee violence. Sanchez delivers a brutally honest, not-to-be-missed narrative enriched by linguistic and cultural nuances in which she gracefully describes the harrowing experiences the young people endure after making the choice to survive.

A gripping, heart-wrenching, and thrilling tale of survival. (map, author’s note, sources) (Fiction. 14-adult)

**HEADS UP**

**Changing Minds on Mental Health**

Siebert, Melanie  
Illus. by Wutrich, Belle  
Orca (192 pp.)  
$24.95 paper | Apr. 21, 2020  
978-1-4398-1911-5  
Series: Orca Issues

A comprehensive guide highlighting diverse approaches to mental health and illness and featuring stories of teens and adults.

From biological factors to Indigenous healing practices, Siebert’s guide to navigating mental health is incredibly thorough. After opening with personal anecdotes, Siebert covers the history of attitudes toward and treatment of mental illness, contemporary options for treatment, summaries of common diagnoses, paths to maintaining wellness, and confronting shame and stigma. Throughout Siebert highlights real teens and adults from a variety of backgrounds to help readers understand the material being presented. By addressing the impacts of structural and social inequality as well as biological aspects, Siebert has written a well-rounded guide to understanding mental health and healing in a holistic way. Although aimed at young adults and with a focus on the Canadian context, references to international stories and coverage of issues that transcend national lines, such as the impact on mental health of homophobia, substance abuse, and pressures that lead to challenges with body image, make this broadly relevant for all readers seeking to understand mental illness and the importance of mental health. Filled with captivating full-color graphics that provide information in a visually appealing, bite-sized manner, this book serves as a one-stop guide for the busy teen and busier adult.

Informative, diverse, and highly engaging; a much-needed addition to the realm of mental health. (author’s note, resources, glossary, photo credits, index) (Nonfiction. 12-adult)

**AS MUCH AS I EVER COULD**

Snow, Brandy Woods  
Filles Vertes Publishing (300 pp.)  
$14.00 paper | May 26, 2020  
978-1-948802-58-3

A summer of love provides a girl with the strength needed to recover from a car accident in which her little sister and mother were killed. Eight months after the accident, CJ carries emotional and physical scars. Hoping a change of scenery will do her good, her father sends her to summer at Memaw’s house on Edisto Beach, South Carolina. That her father has reached out to his estranged mother is enough to shock CJ and help start her healing process. But it is the way the couple confides in each other that brings about the biggest change. The consummation of their relationship offers a solid example of consent so it’s disappointing that contraception is glossed over with a weak hint at condom use. A dramatic event nearly throws CJ off track, but soul searching and a loyal network of family and friends bring her around. Well-drawn characters, expressive language, and a slow reveal of the details of the accident will hook readers. Most affecting is the heavy dose of a start-and-retreat, butterflies-in-the-stomach romance that becomes a large part of CJ’s cure. All main characters seem to be white.

A swoonworthy summer read with a hopeful lesson about how to move forward without fear. (Fiction. 14-18)

**THE MERMAID, THE WITCH, AND THE SEA**

Tokuda-Hall, Maggie  
Candlewick (368 pp.)  
$18.99 | May 5, 2020  
978-1-5362-0431-5

As the Nipran Empire seeks total domination of the Sea, a genderfluid pirate and young Imperial noblewoman fall in love.

Fifteen-year-old Evelyn Hasegawa faces a long sea voyage that will end in an unwanted arranged marriage, so she jumps at the chance to make a friend when she meets Florian, the sailor assigned to guard her. Florian harbors resentment toward privileged Imperials, but Evelyn’s wit and sincerity slowly melt his cynicism, though not enough for him to reveal that Florian is also Flora and that their ship, the *Dove*, is actually a slaver disguised as a passenger ship. Flora is determined to earn enough money to start a new life with her brother, and it is this dream that has driven her to carry out the *Dove’s* cruel business up until this point. But as her relationship with Evelyn deepens, Flora’s resolve starts to crumble. Careful prose juxtaposes gentleness and brutality, contrasting the
tender emotions between Flora/Florian and Evelyn and the violence of a pirate's life. Set against the backdrop of colonial expansion, this nautical fantasy goes beyond mere swashbuckling to examine the impacts of imperialism and misogyny on a diverse cast of varying ethnicities, sexualities, and gender identities. Witches, mermaids, and secret operatives add layers of magic and intrigue to the queer romance at the heart of this book. Flora is black and uses he/she/they pronouns; Evelyn's homeland is a fantasy equivalent of Japan.

Absolutely enthralling. (map) (Fantasy. 13-18)

STICKS & SCONES

Ukazu, Ngozi
Illus. by the author
First Second (332 pp.)
$23.99 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-250-17949-4
Series: Check, Please!, 2

A college hockey player copes with school and the challenges of a secret long-distance relationship.

The effervescent Eric “Bitty” Bittle returns in this sequel to Check Please! #Hockey (2018). Many of Bitty's closest friends have graduated, and he finds himself getting to know (and baking for) a new crop of ice hockey teammates. He also has the difficult task of maintaining his secret relationship with former teammate Jack Zimmerman. Jack is now in the spotlight playing for the Falconers, a professional team, and Bitty struggles to keep up the facade that he and Jack are simply best friends. In addition to relationship and family issues, Bitty is once again agonizing about life post-graduation. After the Falconers' championship game, it's clear that Jack and Bitty are more than friends, and the couple spends the next year answering questions about being openly gay athletes. Bitty's bighearted personality will have readers cheering for him on and off the ice. The white main characters are surrounded by a lively, diverse cast of characters who defy the conventions of jock culture in their acceptance of Jack and Bitty even as they deal with outsiders who do not. The colorful graphic format is ideal for telling this story, with plenty of action shots. As before, the dialogue is laced with humor and camaraderie.

An upbeat story of love and acceptance. (extra comics, tweets) (Graphic fiction. 14-18)

A nuanced exploration of the immigrant experience and blatant and internalized racism.

SUPERMAN SMASHES THE KLAN

THE BEST WEEK THAT NEVER HAPPENED
Woodburn, Dallas
Month9Books (303 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 21, 2020
978-1-951710-11-8

A teen girl gets to live the best week of her life, but something feels wrong.

Tegan Rossi wakes up in the secret hideout lava tube of her childhood vacations on the Big Island of Hawaii. She doesn't remember how she got there, why she’s there, or really anything since graduating high school a few weeks prior. When she finds Kai Kapule, the childhood friend from Hawaii she’s kept in touch with, she concludes she must have come to surprise him. Tegan gets caught up in paradise with Kai, letting herself give in to the moment. But things aren't quite right: Nightmares haunt her sleep, her scar from an old sports injury is gone, no one can reach her parents, and she’s got an unexplainable hourglass tattoo. This debut novel is captivating and moving. Most of the story is told from Tegan's present-day point of view, with her memories and messages from Kai woven in. The nightmare she has keeps building on itself, revealing more of her lost memories, creating anticipation and suspense. There is hope in second chances, mixed with first love and the fear, heartache, and joy of living. Some of the best experiences Hawaii has to offer are highlighted, including shave ice, waterfalls, snorkeling, and malasadas. Kai’s name cues him as Hawaiian; Tegan is implied white.

A dazzling, emotional story of love, loss, and living in the moment. (Fantasy romance. 14-18)

SUPERMAN SMASHES THE KLAN

Yang, Gene Luen
Illus. by Gurihiru
DC (240 pp.)
$16.99 paper | May 12, 2020
978-1-77950-421-0

Superman confronts racism and learns to accept himself with the help of new friends.

In this graphic-novel adaptation of the 1940s storyline entitled “The Clan of the Fiery Cross” from The Adventures of Superman radio show, readers are reintroduced to the hero who regularly saves the day but is unsure of himself and his origins. The story also focuses on Roberta Lee, a young Chinese girl. She and her family have just moved from Chinatown to Metropolis proper, and mixed feelings abound. Jimmy Olsen, Lois Lane’s colleague from the Daily Planet, takes a larger role here, befriending his new neighbors, the Lees. An altercation following racial slurs directed at Roberta’s brother after he joins the local baseball team escalates into an act of terrorism by the Klan of the Fiery Kross. What starts off as a run-of-the-mill
superhero story then becomes a nuanced and personal exploration of the immigrant experience and blatant and internalized racism. Other main characters are white, but black police inspector William Henderson fights his own battles against prejudice. Clean lines, less-saturated coloring, and character designs reminiscent of vintage comics help set the tone of this period piece while the varied panel cuts and action scenes give it a more modern sensibility. Cantonese dialogue is indicated through red speech bubbles; alien speech is in green.

A clever and timely conversation on reclaiming identity and acknowledging one’s full worth. (author’s note, bibliography) (Graphic fiction. 13-adult)
APPALOOSA SKY
Brenner, K. Blanton
Brenner Pathways (384 pp.)
$13.99 paper | Dec. 9, 2019
978-1-73433-681-8

A Texas matriarch and her nieces come of age Old West style in this debut novel.

Ginny Spangler’s father, a horse thief, is gunned down by Texas Rangers when she is 11 years old. Ginny escapes on a stolen Appaloosa and rides all the way to Oklahoma. There, she meets an aging widow and her gay farmhand and joins their motley family, growing up to marry a local Choctaw boy. But tragedy seems to follow Ginny: Not long after her marriage, she loses both her husband and their unborn baby. Even so, she finds a way to continue, helped in part by her deep love of horses. She later marries a New York businessman transplanted to Texas and has two sons. As the years pass, she takes her three nieces—the half-Choctaw daughters of her first husband’s sister—under her wing: Scottie, Rory, and Georgie O’Brien. The girls, who don’t get much attention from their parents, find role models in the figures of Ginny and the fictional detective Nancy Drew—going so far as to refer to themselves as the Drew Crew. Ginny’s son Sam is particularly taken by Georgie. Unfortunately, as the girls age—and especially after the deaths of their parents in a car accident—they begin to rebel against Ginny and her family’s attempts to help them. Even as they travel and find love, the big skies of Texas call them home, and the Drew Crew will have to work together when confronted with tragedies like rape, kidnapping, murder, and possibly even the loss of Ginny’s beloved ranch. “We’ll call this adventure, The Secret of the Old Ranch,” jokes Scottie. “What do you think?” Yet some adventures may be too big for even this unusual family.

Brenner’s prose is light and bouncy even when dealing with fairly difficult topics. She savors the folksy cant of her characters as much as they do: “During Ginny’s talk, Fitz sat very quietly, smiling at his wife. He loved to listen to her. She murdered the Queen’s English, but her philosophy of life, her salty language, and the use of Texas sayings never failed to enchant him. He could listen to Ginny talk all day.” The plot covers some 60 years and its tendrils snake out in many unexpected directions, but new characters are established economically, and the narrative speeds along. The story is essentially a soap opera, with mostly contrived problems emerging out of the blue. Even serious developments or horrific tragedies are not given much emotional weight. (“I guess my daddy’s most likely dead,” Ginny tells her horse in an early...
Readers who share such interests and ideals will likely enjoy this fast-but-not-deep river of a novel as it flows across the plains. A breezy, engaging family saga about spirited women and their beloved horses.

**THE WEDGE**

*Evolution, Consciousness, Stress, and the Key to Human Resilience*

Scott Carney

Foxotopus Ink (310 pp.)

$17.99 paper  |  Apr. 13, 2020

978-1-73419-430-2

A far-out exploration of neurophysiological life hacks.

In his previous book, investigative journalist Carney (*What Doesn’t Kill Us, 2017, etc.*) offered an account of fitness guru Wim Hof’s unorthodox program of breathing exercises and exposure to intense cold. Here, the author examines an expanded concept that he calls “the Wedge,” involving a variety of uncomfortable or unsettling regimens that disrupt one’s climate-controlled routines and foster more creative and healthy responses to stress. He revisits breathing exercises and ice-water baths, which he credits with curing his own autoimmunity-related mouth cankers, and endures agonizing heat in a broiling sauna, which he says cleanses his mind; saunas could also be useful, studies suggest, in alleviating depression. Drugs, he writes, are a multifaceted Wedge; he took Ecstasy with his wife and resolved thorny marital issues in a blissful rapture, thus achieving the equivalent of “eight months of weekly [couples] therapy in just the course of two or three hours,” and drank a Peruvian shaman’s hallucinogenic ayahuasca brew, which initiated a psychedelic trance that, he says, ended his addiction to video games. He also lost five pounds on the “Potato Hack,” a blandly filling all-potato diet that, he asserts, severs the link between hunger and instinctual noshing on tasty food. Carney deftly explains the biological and neurological bases for these unusual nostrums, and the book is full of intriguing research findings about links between the brain, the body, and the environment. (Neurotic anxiety, he writes, may be caused by faulty chemoreceptors in the brain that overreact to carbon dioxide—a universal trigger for panic.) His mystical effusions on the oneness of all being—“I was the mountain...the partition between the environment and what happens inside us is an illusion,” he rhapsodizes when climbing, bare-chested, to Kilimanjaro’s snowy summit—are less cogent, and his idea that “evolution seeks to preserve experience” will baffle evolutionary theorists. Carney sometimes sounds like a spiritual seeker, but his evocative prose and knack for scientific exposition make his urge to transcend the self by pushing his mind and body to their limits seem thrilling and sensible.

An engrossing case for rebooting one’s system through extreme experiences.

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**THE BOOM PROJECT**

*Voices of a Generation*

Ed. by Crum, Kimberly Girts & Johnson, Bonnie Omer

Butler Books (352 pp.)

$24.95 paper  |  Aug. 6, 2019

978-1-941953-69-3

A baby boomer anthology offers poetry, personal essays, and short fiction primarily by Ohio River Valley authors.

In this collection, debut editors Crum and Johnson compile works by boomers born in the years 1946 to 1964. The pieces present many of the typical ’60s tropes—the Vietnam War, Kent State, the assassinations of John F. and Robert F. Kennedy and the Rev Martin Luther King Jr., the rise of feminism, and the styles of the era. Yet the most memorable works in this book go beyond these expectations to supply insights that supersede boomer generational concerns. Divided into five sections, the first part explores the Ohio River, and the second examines the boomer generation. Sections three and four concentrate on the coming-of-age and maturing of the ’60s generation. The final section provides stories and poems dealing with home as a refuge and place of security. “What you will find here are more questions than answers, more searching than certainty,” Crum asserts in introducing the 47 authors—some published and some unknown—and their works. For example, E.G. Silverman’s story “Bagel Macher” vividly portrays the characters who inhabit a bagel shop but not much of the ’60s ideas that typify many boomer-centered tales. This anthology also stretches the meaning of the term “boomer.” John Limeberry’s story “Child of the Sixties” delivers the ruminations of an author born late in the boomer cycle (1962), a writer who has no personal recollections of the signal events and personages that so typify that era. Not all of the work that the editors—who are Louisville, Kentucky, writing coaches—have selected comes from the Ohio River region. Reed Venrick’s superb poem “Success of a Cypress,” which skillfully looks at the Cypress swamps of Florida using humor and self-reflection, has little to do with the Ohio River or boomermism. Varying quite widely in style, some fictional, autobiographical, and poetic gems emerge from this compendium for readers who are willing to journey through these pages.

An illuminating collection that focuses on the boomer generation.

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**PAIN IN MY HEART**

Daryl Jarod

Daryl Jarod Entertainment (129 pp.)

$10.95 paper  |  Nov. 3, 2019

978-1-945748-13-4

Relationships are a source of bitterness and occasional bliss in this collection of confessional verse.

In these 82 short poems, Daryl-Jarod addresses the failings and betrayals of
TALES OF THE GREAT WAR

Sam Mendes’ new film, 1917, drops viewers into the fiery, treacherous barbed-wire battlefields of World War I. More than a century after the Great War, movie directors and authors still have true and fictional stories to tell about the politicians on the sidelines and the combatants in the trenches of the catastrophic conflict. Kirkus Indie recently reviewed three books about the war to end all wars that killed an estimated 9 million soldiers.

Robert Eugene Johnson based his debut historical novel, Austin in the Great War, on his father, a Nebraska farmer. Austin works in a United States Army unit in France in 1918 that wrangles huge hydrogen balloons. The story richly details the dangers from high winds, German planes and artillery, balloon explosions, and poison gas attacks. Our reviewer calls the work “a fine evocation of the face of war and the hidden wounds it leaves.”

In Tweets From the Trenches, Jacqueline Carmichael offers poems, stories, diaries, photographs, and documents. The inspiration for the project came from the “trench letters” of her World War I veteran grandfather, George “Black Jack” Vowel. Carmichael’s poems include tidbits from Vowel in italics: “Must try to remember why I am here / I am done / I am played out / I look like a loose button on an overcoat.” The compilation delivers “a harrowing, compelling, and moving scrapbook of primary sources and reflections,” our critic writes.

A passionate Theodore Roosevelt vigorously attempted to prepare America for World War I after the 1915 sinking of the Lusitania. David Pietrusza’s TR’s Last War details Roosevelt’s push for military readiness and his fervent wish “for a chance to crush Woodrow Wilson.” According to our critic, the well-researched book presents “a captivating look at a singular American figure and the tumultuous history he helped fashion.”—M.F.

Myra Forsberg is an Indie editor.

DEAR KHLOE

Love Letters To My Little Sister
Detrick-Jules, St. Clair
Photos by the author
Kenzo Productions (230 pp.)
May 5, 2020
978-1-73423-730-6

One hundred black women tell their stories of learning to love their natural hair.

Photographer/debut author Detrick-Jules was in her final semester at Brown University when she received a troubling phone call from her father. Her 4-year-old sister Khloe’s classmates had “told her that her hair was ugly—and she believed it.” The news caused “a pain, sharp and familiar.” When Detrick-Jules was younger, she too had internalized that her natural, curly hair was unattractive. It wasn’t until she was in college that she “began to love the melanin in my skin and the curls in my hair.” Thus her book was born, a message to Khloe and other black girls that their hair is just right, just as it is. The
author interviewed and photographed black women of all ages and from all walks of life, who share their images and experiences in this compelling and inspirational coffee-table book. Many of their stories are heartwrenching or infuriating. Numerous women talk of the damage done to their hair and self-esteem by perms and chemical relaxers while others have spent years fielding offensive and hurtful comments about their appearances. (One woman recalls a co-worker who casually told her that “curly hair just seems so immature.”) Some reflect on the cultural and family biases against natural hair or the privilege granted to those with “good hair.” But for every painful memory, there is a strong message of self-love and acceptance.

“Your hair is a work of art,” one woman says. A woman who came “Wish,” a young girl tells her father over dinner that she wants to accompany the illuminating and stirring commentary are examples included in each stanza (“On a chilly day in winter / You let out a SHIVER, shake and say BRRR”). The poems are complemented by debut illustrator Scroggins’ whimsical images that are reminiscent of Shel Silverstein’s pictures for his poetry collections. The illustrations provide visual interest for some of the shorter poems. For example, the stanzas follow the track of a giant looping roller coaster in “Roller Coaster” and kudzu vines in “The Thing About Kudzu.”

A fun and buoyant collection of poetry full of sweet and inspiring messages for kids.

THE GUMBALL LOTTERY
A Delicious Assortment of Rhyme
Dollar, Sally
Illus. by Scroggins, Rorie
Self (110 pp.)
$22.95 | $13.91 paper | Mar. 18, 2019
978-1-64388-051-8 paper
978-1-64388-052-5

A debut volume of poetry for young readers explores the wonders and delights of childhood.

Geared toward readers ages 4 to 12, the 61 poems in this collection are a cheerful celebration of childhood and the power of the imagination, offering characters ranging from mermaids to a curious and brave chicken. The opening poem, “Find Your Thing,” sets the tone for the assemblage in its invitation to the capitalist system” by refusing to purchase fake hair made with polluting chemicals. Others discuss how their natural hair is a way of connecting with and reclaiming their African heritage by embracing an ideal of beauty that was lost during slavery. Accompanying the illuminating and stirring commentary are gorgeous color photographs of each woman, each with her own look and personality but all equally beautiful.

A powerful celebration of self-acceptance and sisterhood.

Wordplay also figures prominently throughout Dollar’s poems. “A Girl Named Ella Minnow” focuses on a girl who loves singing the alphabet song because “her name is halfway through it.” “On-Uh-Mot-Uh-Pee-Uh” explores onomatopoeia, with playful examples included in each stanza (“On a chilly day in winter / You let out a SHIVER, shake and say BRRR”). The poems are complemented by debut illustrator Scroggins’ whimsical images that are reminiscent of Shel Silverstein’s pictures for his poetry collections. The illustrations provide visual interest for some of the shorter poems. For example, the stanzas follow the track of a giant looping roller coaster in “Roller Coaster” and kudzu vines in “The Thing About Kudzu.”

A fun and buoyant collection of poetry full of sweet and inspiring messages for kids.
stance, doing so through an entertaining narrative that doesn’t resort to preaching. The author’s heart and craftsmanship make a sequel welcome.

Well-drawn characters and playful twists keep this thriller fully charged.

**GIG MINDSET**

*Reclaim Your Time, Reinvent Your Career, and Ride the Next Wave of Disruption*

*Estes, Paul*  
Lioncrest Publishing (310 pp.)  
$15.99 paper | Jan. 4, 2020  
978-1-5445-0632-6

A veteran of big tech extols the virtues of the gig economy.

Estes, who held a senior position at Microsoft, uses this lively debut as a soapbox for a kind of career–personal life equilibrium he says can be achieved through adopting a “Gig Mindset.” If the gig economy is “fundamentally changing the world of work,” then the Gig Mindset “changes the way we work forever,” writes the author, who advocates employing “on-demand experts to reclaim our time.” Estes discovered the value of relying on talented freelance professionals to get things done, and it revolutionized his life. He cleverly developed a process to take full advantage of the gig economy that he calls “The T.I.D.E. Model: Taskify, Identify, Delegate, and Evolve.” Using engaging, motivational text supplemented by examples primarily from his own experience, the author walks readers through these four elements in detail. Of great interest are the excerpts of interviews he conducted with a panel of five senior executives, each of whom provides commentary that enriches and shapes the Gig Mindset conversation. T.I.D.E. itself is an intriguing concept; still, each of the four elements has intrinsic value that applies to business management in general. For example, Estes discusses a concept he calls “radical delegation,” which involves setting expectations, developing timelines, and trusting others to execute tasks. He offers seven specific steps he recommends for practicing effective delegation. Regarding the need to think differently, GE executive Dyan Finkhousen tells Estes: “The truth is that engaging with gig resources required an evolution of our own mindsets and behaviors.” The author wraps up the book with some key observations by his panelists and himself about negative perceptions surrounding the gig economy. Tucker Max, bestselling author and co-founder of a publishing service called Scribe Media, says about the myth implying freelancers are subpar: “That people are freelance because they can’t get a full-time job. It’s nonsense….In fact, we find overall the freelance pool to be far higher talent than the people applying” for full-time jobs. It’s nonsense….In fact, we find overall the freelance pool to be far higher talent than the people applying” for full-time jobs. Two appendices—gig-related tasks for business and home—are useful additions.

Illuminating and forward-thinking; demonstrates how to leverage gig workers for time-saving life tasks.

**LORD OF RAVERS**

*Faulkner, A.K.*  
Ravensword Press (380 pp.)  
$15.99 paper | Oct. 1, 2019  
978-1-912349-13-5

Two lovers discover new paranormal gifts and enemies in this third installment of a series.

Things seem to be looking up for Laurence Riley in San Diego, California. The god Herne the Hunter appears before him and tells him that, along with other abilities like precognition, Laurence is capable of magic. Actually learning magic will necessitate seeking out a man named Rufus Grant, whom Laurence first saw in a vision. Meanwhile, Laurence’s romantic relationship with British Earl Quentin d’Arcy has become decidedly more fervent. Unfortunately, the earl has an unwelcome encounter with his own father, the Duke of Oxford, who Quentin is convinced killed his mother. The duke demands his son return home, and Quentin, who has essentially been hiding out in the United States, suspects his father tracked him down via magic. Sadly, the duke’s presence casts a dark cloud over the lives of both lovers. Laurence subsequently has a glimpse of the past involving 5-year-old Quentin suffering his father’s abuse. The vision is so horrifying it nearly sends Laurence back to his heroin habit. Soon, Black Annis, a “blue-tinged” creature, threatens those youngsters with special abilities whom Quentin has befriended and cares for. Alarming, the creature vows to eat the children. In order to defeat Black Annis, Laurence will have to acquire a weapon from the Otherworld, a place outside of the mortal realm. But as he can only use the weapon for a specific purpose, Laurence must resist the temptation to slay both the blue-tinged creature and Quentin’s depraved father with it.

Faulkner (Knight of Flames, 2019, etc.) excels at creating individual stories within a cohesive urban fantasy series arc. For example, this book spotlights Quentin’s frayed connection to his father. But earlier installments had teased this with Quentin’s outburst at his mother’s funeral (which Laurence also sees in a vision in this story) and the earl’s scars, courtesy of the duke. As in the preceding novel, the couple’s relationship and shared intimacy show progress, having begun with virginal Quentin’s hesitancy. This time their scenes are unmitigated erotica, as they’re much more explicit than before. The author beefs up the pages with characters from folklore (including Black Annis) while Laurence’s trek through the Otherworld features a few recognizable faces (and objects) from Arthurian legend. Despite the story’s overall grimness, there are occasional lighter touches, like periodic appearances of the couple’s loyal dogs, Pepper and Grace. Similarly, Herne’s gift to Laurence is a raven egg. The resultant “bald little pink baby” raven, named Windsor, is like a child, as Laurence regularly feeds him and sometimes needs others to birdsit. Eventually, the raven, Laurence’s familiar, will be able to relay messages to the god. Readers anticipating the author’s knack for indelible prose won’t be disappointed: Laurence “lowered his hand to the pendant as he spoke the final word, and the universe became a vacuum….His life flashed from...
heart to fingertips, and he saw whorls of green flow from his fingers and into the pentagram.”

A grand entry in a consistently gripping and remarkable urban fantasy saga.

**TRACE**

*Figg, Melanie*

New Rivers Press (104 pp.)

$17.00 paper | Oct. 1, 2019

978-0-89823-385-8

In this debut poetry collection, Figg kindles broken, dying embers into a roaring memorial for the voiceless.

“God save the devils, afflicted / and tumored. Speech stalled / in their cursed throats,” writes Figg in her deeply insightful collection’s first poem, “The Measure of Things.” From there, readers are led into a world of remnants; in one poem, for instance, the ashes of insane asylum residents are kept in long-forgotten canisters. Figg is adept at combining contrasting images; for example, in “Stitching a World,” the natural world intertwines with the highway, but it’s unexpectedly revealed how nature’s beauty—represented by kudzu blocking the sunlight—is deceptive. Throughout, the poems’ speakers share the pain of the forgotten and the damned. In “Interview With Sister,” a mentally ill woman interviews her sister, or perhaps she interviews herself; each line begins with the word “Sister,” as if the two are one. Figg gently scatters themes of loss, loneliness, and rejection throughout her poems, and these sharp shards sparkle. Take, for example, “Refuse,” a poem with an unsettling fireplace image in which “the birch / collapses into the fire’s belly.” That same poem also replaces birdsong with the shocking noise of birds hitting windows: “He mistakes / the sounds of their necks breaking / for visitors knocking.” There’s a fear of insignificance here, too; in “The Trace of Nothing,” a woman steps away from a wall and simply vanishes. Figg’s poetic timing is spot-on, and her lines, though often dark, remain powerfully musical. In “Once Was,” the sound of words melts into a bluesy moan of a woman “on the ground, the asphalt hot and soft / from the sun and slowly caving in to cover her edges and set her firm.” But there’s light here, as well, as in an image of goddesses who chew laurel leaves for prophecy, and Figg’s contemplative voice consistently casts a strong, soft glow.

Hatungrily beautiful pieces that will leave deep impressions.

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**THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S DAUGHTER**

*Fritsch, Ron*

Self (156 pp.)

$9.99 paper | Dec. 3, 2019

978-0-9978829-7-1

Ophelia offers the true story behind what caused things to turn rotten in the state of Denmark in this postmodern take on *Hamlet*.

Fritsch’s (*Cordelia Lionheart*, 2018, etc.) work opens with an event labeled *The Visit*, which turns out to be King Fortinbras’ meeting with Ophelia, who had long been believed to be dead, at her cottage. Over the course of their conversation, which moves back and forth through time to follow the primary characters of Shakespeare’s play—Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, Laertes, Polonius, Horatio, and Ophelia herself, the eponymous daughter—the duplicitous nature of court life under the senior Hamlet and then Claudius is laid out. While Denmark starts a calamitous war with Norway, which is how Fortinbras enters the story, Ophelia and Horatio take note of the castle’s intrigues, discovering many secrets along the way and putting their free time to good use. It isn’t necessary to be familiar with *Hamlet* to enjoy Fritsch’s tale, but readers who know the Bard’s work will have a greater appreciation for the changes. Rather than a pitiable character driven mad by unrealized longing, this Ophelia is a strong, intelligent force who moves to improve her fate, as befitting the title character of the narrative. Purists may view these characterizations with distaste—no royal except for Fortinbras is portrayed in any way close to positively, for example, although Gertrude is given more agency here than in the play—but Fritsch deploys his changes with a sure hand, setting their behavior in a context that makes sense for the time. The narrative’s structure precludes suspense, but the story unfolds in a clear, straightforward fashion, with a solid grasp of where all the plot pieces are at any time. Much of the dialogue is rendered in an anachronistic fashion, with profanity that reads more 21st century than the period when the original play was written, which will occasionally jar readers. But the language gives the characters an immediacy and relatability that more classical portrayals sometimes lack and largely fits into the author’s feminist revamping.

Despite anachronistic language, this inventive retelling of *Hamlet* resonates through clear plotting and strong characterization.
A glove salesman offers advice for improving worker safety.

In this debut business book, Geng draws on his experience selling work gloves in a variety of industries to advocate for making employee safety a top priority. The volume reviews the reasons companies should take hand safety seriously. Geng then explains that safety is a matter of both having the right equipment and cultivating a strong corporate culture. The author guides readers through how to develop such a culture and evaluate progress toward keeping workers free from injuries on the job. He makes it clear that establishing a culture of safety requires a clear understanding of how employees do their jobs and the obstacles that make it difficult to practice safe habits, offering numerous suggestions for making concrete and actionable changes in the workplace. Geng is clearly knowledgeable about the intricacies of protective gloves, and readers without experience in the field will learn plenty about the subject. But the book's real strength lies not in its narrow applicability to high-risk industries but in its approach to employer and worker psychology that has broad applicability in organizations of all kinds. Managers who will never encounter a conveyor belt or a vat of molten metal will find just as much useful information in the volume as those who work in those industries. The author explains how to understand the underlying causes of major problems—for instance, workers may fail to wear necessary protective equipment not because of laziness or ignorance but because they have been given gloves that provide padding while hampering movement. He shows how readers can effectively evaluate and respond to both the immediate and more fundamental causes of workplace problems. The book discusses the roles of empathy and effective communication in the workplace, particularly at the management level, and helps readers to understand and solve the problems caused when departments fail to communicate and have differing financial goals. While the volume does a good job of addressing hand safety specifically, its real value is much broader, as it is a comprehensive guide to developing safe and functional workplaces of all kinds.

A thorough and effective guide to establishing safe work environments.

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

Characters in these tales, which are predominantly set in Madras (aka Chennai), India, sometimes encounter the otherworldly. In “Upper Class,” for example, young Alauddin is an orphan serving coffee to train passengers traveling from Madras to Calcutta. But he does something extraordinary when he, draped in a chaadar (shawl), steps off the moving train and seemingly flies away. Similarly, in the eerie “Blood Red and Black,” a house in a small community is now vacant after two people committed suicide there. Later, one boy sees house lizards inside—pale, bloodless creatures that may be more than simple reptiles. Ghosh’s succinct prose ensures that the stories as well as instances of horror remain largely ambiguous. But passages are descriptive; the author’s SF outing, in which astronauts in 2034 endure an unnerving excursion to Mars, is filled with rich details. Nevertheless, though tales of magic and the like are delightful, standouts in this collection are grounded in reality. The book opens with “Scarlet Tanager,” in which New Jerseyan Swapan Bose, piloting his new drone, spots a nest of baby birds high in a tree. But when the mother bird disappears, the Bose family looks for a way to feed the hatchlings. Another tale, “The Earthen Moon,” is a pleasant comedy featuring Madras ninth grader Sam, whose surname, incidentally, is also Bose. His school’s upcoming dance-drama could be a chance for Sam to get close to Radha Iyer, a “dainty, elegant and tall” South Indian girl. But with a principal who frowns on any male-female interaction, Sam may find proximity to Radha an unachievable goal. Ghosh’s stories are easy reads and free of profanities or graphic imagery. Regardless, there’s an impressive range of characters, from a cruel father who goes to great lengths to prohibit his son from running away again to a South Korean woman whose inheritance from her estranged Indian father is more heartfelt than lavish.

Quietly absorbing tales with indelible characters.

A U.S. airman dies and finds himself in limbo after being shot down over Hiroshima in Harmon’s novel (The Paranormalist, 2019, etc.).
Bombardier Micah Lund’s B-29 is on a mission to drop propaganda leaflets over Hiroshima during the campaign against Japan in World War II. Having lost his brother to Japanese fire on Guadalcanal, Micah is set on revenge, openly declaring that “hate doesn’t begin to describe how I feel.” After taking flak, the plane goes down, and the crew attempt a difficult bail out. Kiyomi Oshiro, a young mother and war widow, sees an airman falling through the sky. Micah’s body lands near Kiyomi, and, to the disgust of the attending Japanese military police, she whispers a prayer for him. Micah learns he isn’t in heaven but limbo—a “black void”—when he awakes and discovers a group of soldiers laughing at his dead body. This only intensifies his hatred for the Japanese, yet he is strangely drawn to Kiyomi and follows her. He soon encounters others in limbo and learns that it is possible to communicate with the living. His first thought is to relay intelligence to U.S headquarters, but his unfamiliar emotions for Kiyomi create an opposing pull. Other than the devastating reality that the atomic bomb will be dropped, the reader is given little indication of how the plot will unfold.

Thorough research and stylish execution make for a striking tour de force. Debut authors Kashani and Moss offer a revisionist take on an obscure painting in their art history debut.

Kashani, an Iranian American antiquities dealer, believes he has found a lost painting by the 16th-century Dutch artist Cornelis van Haarlem, who the authors say is sometimes called “the Da Vinci of the Dutch” or “the Michelangelo of the North.” The painting, *Single Combat*, depicts the battle between two sets of warrior triplets, the Horatii and the Curiatii, as recounted in ancient world’s greatest empires. As the mystery unravels, the reader is given little indication of how the plot will unfold. As in this elegant description of Kiyomi bathing: “Dirt and grime fell off in black rivulets….As she eased into the steaming water, he noticed the tautness of her skin, how her stomach concaved and her ribs lay exposed. She’s starving to death, he thought.” The novel becomes in part a thoughtful study of how human connection can challenge racist ideology. Harmon also displays a profound understanding of Japanese culture, drawing on folklore to illuminate what happens beyond the veil: “When a person dies, their soul exits the body in the shape of a bluish ball of light we call a Hitodama.” This is an extraordinarily imaginative and compelling exploration of love, death, race, and patriotism with countless unusual twists to keep the reader guessing.

Heppner’s sensory descriptions transport the reader to the very carriage in which he traveled. A train enthusiast recalls a lifetime of rail journeys in this evocative memoir.

After teaching biology for 41 years, Heppner (Emeritus, Biological Sciences/Univ. of Rhode Island; *Railroads of Rhode Island, 2012*, etc.) decided to fill his retirement time by writing about his lifelong passion: trains. At the age of 3, he received his first toy engine, named “Big Red,” and not long afterward, his first train book, *Smoky the Lively Locomotive*. So began his fascination. In this endearing book, he charts his most memorable rail journeys, although his first, he concedes, occurred prenatally—when his mother traveled from San Francisco to Auburn, California (“I must have been a passenger in the ‘baggage car’”). Born in 1940, Heppner counts himself fortunate to have experienced an exciting period in railroad history, having witnessed “cab-forward steam locomotives” and ridden high speed trains such as the French TGV. Among countless other journeys, Heppner recalls the severe grades of the Raton Pass in New Mexico and Colorado, the ugliness of the Italian Settebello, and the efficiency of the Japanese bullet train. Heppner admits to being “a certifiable nerd” and gives enough attention to railway minutiae to satisfy other train geeks—a photograph of the train to Ténom, Malaysia, bears the caption: “Japanese equipment, but note the American style knuckle coupler.” However, it is Heppner’s attention to detail that beguiles the reader. An early train journey took place when he was 10 years old—an overnight from San Francisco to Salt Lake City. He recalls lying in his bunk: “It was a moonlit night on the Nevada desert. I could see in the distance the shadowy outline of the Great Basin mountain ranges, and there was a hint of sage smell through the vent.” Heppner’s sensory descriptions transport the reader to the very carriage in which he traveled. On occasion, the author digresses, making the memoir read more like generalized travel memoir as he discusses air and sea travel. All but the most hardcore rail fans will forgive these meanderings. Illustrated with the author’s accomplished photography, this is a treat for anyone with a love of trains.

**THE PAINTED PROPHECIES**

*Of Cornelis van Haarlem, “da Vinci of the Dutch”*

Kashani, Mike & Moss, Lisette

Kashani Press (332 pp.)

$39.99 | Jan. 1, 2019

978-0-578-59326-5

Debut authors Kashani and Moss offer a revisionist take on an obscure painting in their art history debut.

Kashani, an Iranian American antiquities dealer, believes he has found a lost painting by the 16th-century Dutch artist Cornelis van Haarlem, who the authors say is sometimes called “the Da Vinci of the Dutch” or “the Michelangelo of the North.” The painting, *Single Combat*, depicts the battle between two sets of warrior triplets, the Horatii and the Curiatii, as recounted in the writings of the Roman historian Livy. Kashani acquired it in 2000 and since then has been seeking to authenticate it as the lost “battle scene” mentioned in an inventory at the time of the artist’s death and to decode the complex visual message hidden in—and underneath—its paint. As Kashani tells it with help from Moss, the painting reveals connections to Leonardo, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Rubens, and others and to two of the ancient world’s greatest empires. As the mystery unravels, the book reveals itself to be not only an in-depth glimpse into a distant moment in art history, but also an exploration of one man’s singular obsession to prove a highly unorthodox theory.
Elaine Kozak refers to herself as a “restless soul.” Even before publishing her debut novel, she already had several fascinating careers; she designed and sold information systems in the early days of the internet, worked on agreements and policy to expand international trade, and, most recently, founded her own winery. Twenty years ago, however, Kozak found that characters had camped out in her brain and were clamoring to have their stories told. Stealing hours away from her busy schedule, Kozak found time to bring those characters to the page with her murder mystery, *Root Causes*, and her upcoming release, *The Lighthouse*, which centers around Leah Larsen, a tortured young woman in New Mexico with more than her share of family drama.

After such a diverse career, what led you to start your own vineyard?
At a dinner party one night, a guest mentioned that people were starting to grow grapes in our region (Canada’s west coast). Fireworks went off in my head. Two months later, we found an old farm on Salt Spring Island offering perfect growing conditions for grapes and within a year had prepared the land, planted our first vines, and begun a glorious career as winegrowers. It was an inspired move: We lived in a beautiful setting; were engaged in stimulating, often challenging work; created a product that gave people pleasure; and left a lasting legacy. But writing became my place away, how I unwound, what kept me in balance.

How were you drawn to write a mystery novel?
My first book, *Root Causes*, began as a memoir about starting the vineyard. We had told our story too often to media and interested groups, however, and it felt stale. At some point, the memoir morphed into a mystery novel. I read all kinds of books but appreciate the careful plotting that goes into crafting a mystery and especially enjoy ones that are crisply written, plausible, and have appealing characters.

Why did you switch gears toward a family drama?
Although I had two follow-up vineyard mysteries to *Root Causes* planned, the characters who populate *The Lighthouse* wouldn’t give me any peace. The book took shape as a Jane Austen–inspired tale but set in the present and reflecting contemporary situations, values, social conventions, and notions of family and duty. The more complex structure and multiple voices required to tell the story offered an intriguing challenge.

What inspired the lead character, Leah Larsen?
*You gotta make them suffer*, a writer friend once told me. And Leah Larsen does. To survive loss, hurt, and the devastating consequences of her choices, she folds herself up into “a tight little package”—I had the image of
Kashani is like a character out of a novel: eccentric, cultured, verbose, and happily at war with establishment thinking. “I’ll share my secrets—or rather Cornelis’ secrets—with you, gentle reader,” he writes in his introduction. “Far from wallowing in self-pity for feeling misunderstood, I’ve learned to kill my ego, stand strong, move forward with integrity, and make existence count regardless of academia’s prejudices.” In addition to the historical background on Cornelis and his work—fascinating in and of itself—this handsomely designed book bolsters its case with zoomed-in photographs of tiny sections of the painting and with related art, including portraits of artists and engravings of the city of Haarlem. There is as much talk of codes as in a Dan Brown novel, and at some point the reader begins to lose the thread, but the puzzle is certainly an enjoyable one to attempt to solve. Whether or not they accept Kashani’s theories, readers will come away with a greater understanding of just how much information a given painting has to communicate—and the extent to which that meaning depends, like beauty, on the eye of the beholder.

An intricate and fun art mystery surrounding an old painting.

SECRETS OF THE ORCHARD
Kelly, Jean
Stillwater River Publications (246 pp.)
$15.00 paper | Sep. 19, 2018
978-1-946300-77-5

Set in 1950s Massachusetts, a debut novel reminds readers, as Faulkner did, that the past is never dead. Ellen Von Der Hyde, the story’s heroine and narrator, is just recovering from her parents’ tragic deaths and dealing with her jerk of an ex-husband when her older brother, Eric, dies back home in Springton. He left mysterious, hush-hush orders for his burial and other final matters, including a letter entrusted to his childhood friend Julian Baker. This situation is entirely odd, and Ellen, a journalist, is determined to get to the bottom of it all. Nick Stanton is Ellen’s co-worker, who will acquit himself well while, early on, readers will get bad vibes about Julian. Other important characters are Ellen’s sister, Meg; Edwin Lake, the bad-tempered, alcoholic Springton police chief; Harvey Poston, a retired lawyer; and a strange, skittish woman named Theresa. The Pomarium, once a monastery and now an old folks’ home, also figures prominently in the tale. And readers mustn’t forget a certain star-shaped dimple, a clear hereditary marker. Questions driving the plot involve what secrets Eric may have taken to the grave, the strange disposition of Ellen’s parents’ estate, and the enigmatic Theresa, who runs off when Ellen startles her at Eric’s gravesite. Suffice it to say that readers will soon learn why Lake is carrying all that anger and hear about another death.

The theme of evil working its way through generations is not a new concept, but it’s still a good idea for a novel. While comparing this tale with the House of Atreus would be quite

Rhett Morgan is a writer and translator based in Paris.

The New Mexico setting is very important in The Lighthouse. What is your connection to the Southwest?
Not long before we started the vineyard, my husband and I took a road trip in our camper van to the U.S. Southwest. I was on a Georgia O’Keeffe pilgrimage. It was my first experience of the Southwest, and I have never recovered. There is something about its raw beauty, haunting landscapes, and extraordinary light that lays you bare. It was very much the right setting for The Lighthouse’s two main characters—both wounded and lost in their own emotional deserts—to find one another.

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The New Mexico setting is very important in The Lighthouse. What is your connection to the Southwest?
Not long before we started the vineyard, my husband and I took a road trip in our camper van to the U.S. Southwest. I was on a Georgia O’Keeffe pilgrimage. It was my first experience of the Southwest, and I have never recovered. There is something about its raw beauty, haunting landscapes, and extraordinary light that lays you bare. It was very much the right setting for The Lighthouse’s two main characters—both wounded and lost in their own emotional deserts—to find one another.

Rhett Morgan is a writer and translator based in Paris.
a stretch, closer to home one thinks of, say, Ross MacDonald’s *Underground Man*. Kelly has created a vivid cast of characters. Ellen is a believable protagonist; readers will like her and root for her. And Julian is deftly handled. Like Ellen, readers will sense there is something off about him, a cruelty lurking just under the suave surface. This makes Meg’s regard for him frustrating, but it also tells the audience a lot about her innocent and charitable nature. Still, what really motivates him comes as a surprise yet is psychologically sophisticated. And the story wouldn’t be complete without a death-defying climax, which the author dutifully supplies. The final twist certainly is stunning, and it and some counterfeiters rather hokey. It does not advance the overall, the book comes to a very satisfying conclusion, with the child also belongs in a bin labeled “Too Fortuitous by Half.” But complete without a death-defying climax, which the author is balanced between “superingenious—didn’t see that coming” and “c’mon, really?” And what happens to one character is really shocking but almost mercifully fitting. On the other hand, many readers will consider a subplot concerning Jake, a jockey, and some counterfeiters rather hokey. It does not advance the main plot, and the idea that Ellen dramatically saves his life is a bit too much. In addition, a man’s deus ex machina rescue of a child also belongs in a bin labeled “Too Fortuitous by Half.” But overall, the book comes to a very satisfying conclusion, with the mystery solved and the slate cleaned.

While some parts will strain readers’ credulity, this engaging and unpredictable mystery delivers strong characters.

**SOMETHING TO LIVE FOR**
King Jr., Garrett S.L.
Xlibris (124 pp.)
$22.99 | $15.99 paper | Mar. 10, 2011
978-1-4568-8092-7 paper
978-1-4568-8093-4

A debut multigenre collection of short pieces presents vignettes focusing on the lives of African Americans from a variety of perspectives, both real and fanciful. This eclectic anthology begins with an autobiographical sketch, “P Is for Pride and Perseverance,” in which King traces his early years from his 1979 birth to a 16-year-old mother to his incarceration for attempted robbery and his subsequent determination to do something positive with his life.

“Baby Girl” reprises the story of King’s birth from his mother’s point of view, a girl whose teen pregnancy seems predestined by both her grandmother’s clairvoyant dreams and her own limited expectations. Other narratives are linked by shared characters, such as “Posse Up, Ladies First!” and “Thug Angel,” which provide somewhat idealized portraits of street gangs as building blocks of the black community. “Battle Kats” is an SF work about a group of humanoid felines from another planet who work undercover to defend Earth and its alien allies. The central section of the book is occupied by a collection of 21 poems. Some, like “Hold on to Love” and “Away From Home,” focus on romance while others, such as “The Rent Is Too Damn High!” and “Blockstars,” illuminate the experiences of working-class African Americans in inner-city neighborhoods. “Remember Me?” calls up the spirit of LaTasha Harlins, a young black woman shot by a Los Angeles shop owner in the early ’90s, speculating “I wonder what you could have been LaTasha?” King’s efforts to describe his personal struggles and the vibrant characters who populate impoverished black communities are ambitious and dynamic. His prose narratives are too short to feel really complete, but they deliver glimpses into a world mainly familiar to the urban poor, where drug dealing is one of the few available career choices, incarceration is a rite of passage, and street gangs view themselves as community leaders. While the author does have a tendency to romanticize life on the street, as in “Posse Up,” in which a girl gang maintains a strict “code of principles,” his writing presents a vision of what could happen if people worked to “play a part in the improvement of the community.”

**VELOCITIES**

A volume of poetry and prose that offers heroic visions of urban African Americans.

**VELOCITIES**

*Stories*

Koja, Kathe

Meerkat Press (160 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Apr. 21, 2020
978-1-940154-23-1

Thirteen dark fantasy stories feature tortured characters whose lives are drastically changing—or will soon end—in Koja’s (*Under the Poppy*, 2010, etc.) collection.

These tales have an estimable provenance: “Fireflies” first appeared in *Asimov’s Science Fiction* (2002), “Road Trip” in *The Year’s Best Fantasy and Horror* 16 (2002), and other stories in similarly respected books. In “Velocity,” an artist creates his art by running bicycles into trees. This act may be his unorthodox way of understanding his famous architect father’s suicide, which likewise entailed driving into a tree. Some of the characters in these generally grim stories come to terms with a tragedy they don’t want to face: The man in “Road Trip” has intermittent flashes of a car accident (or moments before), and he not only mourns losing a loved one, but his responsibility for the fatality. Other characters, like Anne in “Coyote Pass,” have trouble simply moving on. Anne had cared for her ailing art-collector mother, Susan, for years. Now that Susan has died, Anne wants to adopt a dog, which her mother had never allowed—but getting a puppy from the kennel takes a bizarre, unsettling turn. Koja tackles a handful of genres, including SF, somber drama, and sublimely understated horror. Nevertheless, the highlight of this impressive collection is the Poe-esque “The Marble Lily,” one of two stories herein that hasn’t been previously published. In it, a morgue janitor in Paris closely observes a female cadaver that he believes holds some sort of mystery. Koja’s prose throughout the book provides a bevy of indelible passages: “He pressed her leg, the bare skin below the edge of her cutoffs; his hand was warm, with long strong workman’s fingers, small hard spots like rivets on the palm, his skin a topographic map of his days: cut wood, carry water, name and number and know all the plants in the world.”

An impressive collection of stories unafraid to explore bleak topics like death and despondency.
LeGrand does what only a seasoned poet can do—catches readers’ attention while also calling on their empathy.

**STUDIES FOR A SELF-PORTRAIT**

Poems

LeGrand, Rodger

Big Table Publishing Company (67 pp.)

$15.00 paper | Nov. 1, 2019

978-1-945917-41-7

LeGrand (Seeds, 2017, etc.) casts a tender gaze on his neighbors and on himself in this volume of poetry. It’s either ironic or brilliant that the best poems in this new collection are about somebody other than the author himself. Indeed, although his title indicates that he’s composing—or at least preparing to compose—a picture of himself, it’s his portraits of others that are most arresting. “Jenna’s Story,” for instance, tells of a neighbor who lives on public assistance after having been pushed out a second-story window decades earlier; daringly, LeGrand tries to present her fall: “while she looked back at the sun’s glare off the brick / apartment building, / at her brother’s thin, dry faces / hanging from the second floor-window / like potted plants / needing to be watered.” The poet skillfully etches this ghastly image in readers’ minds with an unexpected simile—the siblings’ faces like potted plants—that both surprises and reminds readers of the ways that the tragic shoves the mundane aside. Readers will see this same talent for captivating an unexpected moment in “Marcus Pamiglio’s Left Foot”: “As an infant, / his parents, with normal feet, kept him covered / in layers of blankets. By the time / he entered elementary school, / Marcus knew his foot, / knew he wouldn’t play with the other kids.” Having raised readers’ pathos, the author switches tones, presenting a complex business topic, some analogies can be exceedingly effective while others can wear thin. Leonard’s debut compares the culture of an organization to the bass in an orchestra. More broadly, he views an orchestra and its musicians akin to a business organization and its employees. Because of the author’s in-depth knowledge of both music and project management, the analogy is sustainable: “If an orchestra cannot play a versatile range of music, after a while, their performance will become predictable and stale.... There has to be a framework in place that allows new pieces to be practiced and performed. Companies must design a framework for standardizing project management techniques within their strategic portfolio management environment.” While the music analogy appropriately recurs throughout the book, the material generally follows more traditional and expected topic areas. The content is divided into seven “steps,” including vision, values, best practices, and execution. These steps are described in separate chapters. For each step, Leonard recounts his own musical, personal, and business experiences; cites examples of successful organizations; includes specific implementation strategies; raises key questions; and provides additional resources. Especially helpful are the numerous lists the author presents to make the text more engaging. For example, he lists five areas to consider in preparing for organizational change, eight steps to developing best practices, 10 steps to strategic execution, and 11 common mistakes in the development of project portfolio management. Like many consultants, Leonard has devised his own methodology, and he generously shares it: He outlines and discusses a systematic process he calls “the ADeXI Framework” (which stands for Assess, Design, Execute, and Improve). He closes the volume by urging the reader to “turn up the bass on your favorite music device and in your organization, and enjoy those low tones that move your heart and that rattle your soul.” The author is obviously passionate about both music and project portfolio management, and his enthusiasm shines through the text. He deftly strikes the right balance between orchestral and project management nomenclature.

Nicely orchestrated and well-executed business advice.

**THE PERSISTENCE OF MEMORY AND OTHER STORIES**

Maher, Jan

Dog Hollow Press (128 pp.)

$10.00 paper | Feb. 15, 2020

978-1-943547-04-3

This volume of diverse short stories offers an exploration of memory and age. Subtle surprises abound in Maher’s (Heaven, Indiana, 2019, etc.) stylistic collection. The opening tale, “A Real Prince,” introduces Yanka, a young girl who lives at an “outpost” and is ordered to do chores by her “keepers.” Due to her “obvious deficits,” the narrative reveals it is “irregular” that she has been allowed to live. She finds pleasure in folktales and retreats into her imagination, but when soldiers come to lodge at the outpost, she believes she has encountered a real prince. “Livia’s Daddy Comes Home From the War” continues the theme of youthful innocence, as
the scene of a father returning from combat is recollected from the naïve perspective of a child. In “Vita,” an academic plans on writing her magnum opus after being handed a severance package but finds herself working in a pizza shop and making an unusual deal with an armed robber. In “Dancing in the Dark,” a couple who have long fallen out of love are trapped in a dark elevator. The collection then turns to issues faced by older protagonists. The heartbreakingly moving “Turn, Turn, Turn” sees the world through the fog of dementia, where memory and understanding appear and recede without control. “Answering” is a whimsical but telling tale about a man named Howard whose vital organs take it upon themselves to call him on the phone to tell him how they feel. And the title story introduces a great-grandmother who hops on her great-granddaughter’s bicycle to evoke past memories and prove that she can still ride.

Elegantly written tales laced with melancholy and mischief.

CONFIDENCE LOST CONFIDENCE FOUND How To Reclaim the Unstoppable You McGuinness, Kate Two XX Press (266 pp.) $16.99 paper | Jan. 11, 2020 978-0-9849901-2-2

In this self-help guide for women, an executive coach shares her strategies for building and maintaining confidence.

If anyone’s confidence should have been shattered, it was that of McGuinness (Terminal Ambition, 2012): She was terminated from her position as general counsel of a large company, had a near-fatal accident, got divorced, and was forced to sell her ranch at a loss. To regain her confidence, she writes, “I had to build new neural and well-being. Toward that end, she offers confidence-building strategies and tactics that involve a formula she describes as: “Intention + Repeated Attention = Confidence.” The book rather sweepingly covers many aspects of confidence, including such topics as authenticity, self-compassion, resilience, and assertiveness. It also defines barriers to greater self-confidence, including perfectionism, self-criticism, and “negative rumination.” In a work-related chapter, the book pointedly discusses such topics as interviewing, performance reviews, and public speaking. The final section features helpful advice about facing setbacks and recommends 52 confidence-boosting exercises or “workouts” to perform every week. Each chapter is brimming with motivational exhortations delivered in punchy paragraphs with engaging subheads; the strategies for overcoming perfectionism include “Adjust Your Standards,” “Limit Meticalness,” “Re-characterize Mistakes,” and “Minimize Comparisons.” McGuinness is unfailingly positive, dishing out encouragement every chance she gets, as she draws on her experience and relates it to other women’s challenges. The author backs up her insightful strategies with notes that reference a multitude of articles and books, which makes for an even stronger presentation.

A compassionate and energizing guide full of confidence-building ideas.

MADNESS In the Trenches of America’s Troubled Department of Veterans Affairs Plate, Andrea Marshall Cavendish International (Asia) Pte (233 pp.) $17.98 paper | Feb. 7, 2020 978-981-4841-86-3

Plate (Secret Police, 1981) recollects her profoundly challenging career as a social worker serving homeless and drug-addicted veterans. The author writes that she’d never planned to work with veterans; in fact, she took pride in being a “Red Diaper” baby who’d vehemently protested the Vietnam War as an adult. Nevertheless, after she earned a master’s degree in public policy and social work from the University of California, Los Angeles, she was assigned by a temp agency in 2002 to the West Los Angeles branch of the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs to work with homeless veterans who were struggling with substance abuse problems. It was a post that, in various iterations, she held for nearly 15 years, until 2017. Plate’s account skillfully combines personal memoir with institutional analysis; they strikingly dovetail when the dysfunctions of “America’s largest integrated healthcare system” compel her to become a witness to human suffering. She vividly recounts the grim challenges of working with a beleaguered population that was prone to violence and often desperate, alienated, and haunted by the trauma of war. She experienced sexual harassment—she notes that she was “fair (and easy) game” for the largely male group of patients—and was falsely accused of it, as well, she says. Despite these professional pitfalls, she found deep fulfillment in her work, and she movingly describes the experience in these pages: “For all the travails, I found an immeasurable richness in being of service to veterans,” she says. “Every day I disappeared into the lives of others, blanketeted by their anger and pain, unwaveringly focused on getting veterans through the day, hidden deep within the barracks, away from civilian life.”

The author provides an astute account of various treatment strategies and their evolution over time as well as the impact of shifting public policy from one presidential administration to the next. She also incisively details how unempirical idealism
can be the enemy of sound strategy, noting how “policy wonks in Washington” can be “divorced from reality.” In fact, she tells of how she grappled often with idealism herself—specifically, an unfounded conceit that she could always repair the damage done to her patients: “I would feel the urge to make him better—feed him, introduce him to friends....But feelings of this nature are unhealthy. They cloud your clinical objectivity. You have to be aware of them, then fight them off.” Plate focuses more on the “zany passion and persistence of social workers serving veterans” and on the “crushing pain but astounding resilience of veterans who come to them for help.” She affecting relates the plights of many veterans who were struggling to keep their heads above water and how their number only increased as the nation simultaneously sustained two wars. Plate’s remembrance is as endearing as it is tough, offering a poignant but unsentimental look at an underserved group of Americans and the people trying to help them save themselves.

A wise, unflinching memoir that candidly discusses the realities of growing older.

The SPAWN WAR

Masquerading as a merchant, an Earth spy takes refugees and a small crew into the midst of a gigantic interstellar war that could engulf the human race.

In this fourth installment, Renneberg (The Riven Stars, 2018, etc.) continues his rousing series of SF space operas and star wars. The setting is the year 4607. The human race, spacefaring but long quarantined by the regulating “Galactic Forum” of aliens, is barely a force in the pantheon of ancient, competing species. And humankind has problems of its own with an “Earth Separatist” revolutionary movement, heavy with malcontents and self-serving warlords. Humanity thus seems merely a bit player in a galaxy-spanning war between ancient civilizations. The formidable antagonists are the One Spawn—amphibian types with a hive structure of cruel matriarchs—using sinister robot weaponry and fearless troops in an all-out blitzkrieg against the dominant, more or less benevolent Tau Cetins. Recurring hero first-person narrator Sirius Kade is an undercover Earth Intelligence Service agent, impersonating a merchant/adventurer of the Han Solo sort but secretly endowed with the cybernetic databases and nanotech reflexes of a supersoldier (though he also has a moral and ethics code all his own). Kade’s controller orders him on a mission to a besieged world—with the excuse of uniting a love-struck crew member with a girlfriend imprisoned on a bleak planet—that seems more key to the Separatist war than the One Spawn’s rampage. But in truth, it’s all to gain control of a much-sought item that could make a difference in the Spawn War. Soon, a veritable assortment of aliens and augmented Earth soldiers is on Kade’s ship, the Silver Lining. The ride is somewhat episodic (reminiscent of a vintage cliffhanger serial) but still an enjoyable roller coaster of battles, chases, “novarium” grenades, and narrow escapes, constantly reminding readers that plucky humans are just the small fry in this cosmic ocean of apex predators. But Renneberg clings to the genre trope that Homo sapiens’ fighting spirit, given a fair chance, would impress and intimidate even far older and more advanced E’ts who discount the Earth interlopers. With action blasts right out of the gate, fun faux physics, stellar dreadnaughts bristling with guns, and fearsome, theoretical mega-weapons, this story is space opera as fans like it, sometimes feeling camera-ready for Lucasfilm but not at all Skywalker-derivative.

Be prepared to dodge lethal energy beams on every page of this rip-roaring tale.
Youngstown, New York. While trying to capture muskrats on the Academy of Peace and Justice feels constrained by Reynolds’ large $174,000 income without success.” Stevenson’s plot to found the Miller property, Bailey witnesses a bright light and hideous winged creatures. These are demons that answer to Satan, who currently possesses the body of Sen. Bill Stevenson. When Brian, a hardcore survivalist, learns about Bailey’s sighting, he insists the family drive to Las Vegas, where angels recently defeated some demons. Ian stays in New York in hopes of working at the Pantomime Theater with the Amazing Ahti, an alcoholic magician. In Las Vegas, the Rev. Jay Masters wants to expand his Mysterium franchise to showcase the surreal battles between angels and demons that he and his daughter, Trudy, have experienced. Trudy, pregnant with her husband Gavin’s child, can now see the heavenly “ladders” by which the angels travel. She’s not the only person to display a strange, new power. Ian has been making small objects vanish, a harmless skill until he accidentally casts Bailey into the unknown. In this volume of Reynolds’ (Masters’ Mysterium: Las Vegas, 2015, etc.) quirky series, the author nudges Masters and Trudy out of the spotlight to make room for the Tannahill siblings. Their teenage struggles are well illustrated. Ian wants to be a lighting technician, not a survivalist like his father; Bailey, meanwhile, undergoes a heartening change when the power to communicate with animals manifests, forcing her to question a blind acceptance of hunting. And no story in which the devil possesses a politician would be complete without amusing lines like “Many senators tried to live on their meager $174,000 income without success.” Stevenson’s plot to found the Academy of Peace and Justice feels constrained by Reynolds’ large cast and the rotating tableaux that feature them, but the author’s wicked sense of humor remains intact.

A bracing Vonnegut-esque performance full of angels and demons, winking commentary, and occasional bloodshed.

**Masters’ Mysterium**
**Niagara Falls**
Reynolds, R.R.
Self (301 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Nov. 23, 2019
978-0-9886797-1-9

**MUSIC HALL**
**How a City Built a Theater and a Theater Shaped a City**
Robinson, J. Dennis
Great Life Press (256 pp.)
$35.00 | Nov. 15, 2019
978-1-938394-34-8

A history of the iconic Music Hall in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, which is one of New England’s oldest theatrical venues.

Portsmouth-based historian Robinson (Mystery on the Isles of Shoals, 2019, etc.) captures the history of New Hampshire’s only port city by telling the story of its landmark theater, built in 1878. This sumptuously illustrated coffee-table volume also presents an often compelling history of early American entertainment in general, starting in 1630, when Portsmouth was called Strawbery Banke. The book continues through the Civil War era, detailing the entertainers, jugglers, and local notables who played prominent roles in the evolution of the historical Portsmouth theater scene. The book effectively uses a discussion of the first Music Hall show in January 1878 as a springboard to discuss the history of theater entertainment in the town and region and, by extension, in the United States as a whole. “Buffalo Bill” Cody, Gen. Tom Thumb, John Philip Sousa, Mark Twain, and many other major entertainment figures of the late 19th century make appearances in Robinson’s narrative. Later, “After four decades as a declining old movie house,” the author writes, “the Music Hall stage exploded with live action once more.” By the late 1970s, the hall began to feature popular musical entertainers, such as Dizzy Gillespie, the Persuasions, and Steppenwolf. The book’s focus eventually narrows to discuss the now-nonprofit Music Hall, which may be of primary interest to Portsmouth locals. The book is replete with color photographs and period illustrations; at one point, however, it confusingly presents a montage of photos of modern performers in the middle of a section on the late 19th century. Despite this anomaly, this book provides lots of intriguing material that will appeal to aficionados of American live entertainment.

An engaging overview of a classic New England town and its historic theater.

**THE LIFE OF GUS**
**The Dog With the Big Head**
Roguemoore-Maxwell, Sandee
Illus. by Bordelon, Peggy
Archway Publishing (43 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Mar. 15, 2019
978-1-4808-7419-0

Based on a true story, this debut chapter book tells one abandoned pooch’s story through his own eyes.

Gus wasn’t always a stray dog. When he was young, his name was Rex, and he loved his human, Timmy, very much. But things started to change for Rex when Timmy went to school and didn’t have time for the canine he once loved.
After escaping the backyard to follow Timmy to a friend’s house, Rex was punished. Timmy knotted shoelaces together and tied Rex to a tree, abandoning the dog, first by ignoring him and then neglecting to feed him during the cold winter months. When his family moved, Timmy left Rex tied to the tree. Rex eventually broke free and became a street dog, desperately lonely until he met fellow stray Trixie. The two wished they could hide. Unfortunately, Rex’s health was failing; the shoelace still tied around his neck was making him sicker. He discovered it was hard to breathe and swallow. Luckily, kind strangers took him in, healed him, and made him a TV and internet star. Now named Gus, he and Trixie wait for their forever homes. In her simply worded, dog’s-eye-view narration, Roquemore-Maxwell doesn’t pull any punches when describing the brutality of humans. But the canine’s harsh reality is made bearable through his hopeful, loving worldview. His rescuers also bring light into the darkness that stray dogs face, and the author’s absorbing and moving story may inspire young readers to become motivated and tackle these problems. The images by debut illustrator Bordelon are sparsely spread throughout. They are more successful on the color cover than in the black-and-white linework, as the cartoonish style doesn’t match the seriousness of the content.

Young independent readers’ hearts will go out to the rescue dog in this engaging tale.

A boy and his dog embark on a space adventure in this debut picture book.

Taye, a pale-skinned, dark-haired youngster, wakes to a boom and a bright light: “Taye would normally go back to sleep, but this was not an ordinary night.” He sets off with his dog to find out what amazing thing has happened. In the field near his house is now a door that opens to a stairway to the moon. There, Taye meets aliens and astronauts, having fun until he’s sleepy enough to return to bed and dream about the places he’s been. Youngsters may wonder whether Taye has been dreaming the whole time, as the ending illustration with its bright moon echoes the opening image of the boy and his pooch in a bedroom flooded with light. The soft-edged pictures by debut illustrator Senarak enrich the whimsical fantasy. They show details absent from Santigul’s straightforward tale, such as Taye’s exploration preparations. The brush-stroke style offers grounding before the more fantastic, off-planet escapades begin. Clever design elements also enhance the storytelling. On the moon, the text goes around the sides of the pages. When the house is shown, with a wall absent, heading to a horizon point, the text angles the same way along Taye’s path.

This simple, fanciful narrative will delight youngsters who already dream of the moon.
THE RISE OF THE NATION-STATE IN EUROPE
Absolutism, Enlightenment and Revolution, 1603-1815
Schwartzwald, Jack L.
McFarland (275 pp.)
$65.00 paper | Nov. 7, 2017
978-1-4766-6547-4

A scholarly history explores the emergence of the nation-state out of the political and philosophical upheavals of the 17th and 18th centuries.

In this book, Schwartzwald (The Collapse and Recovery of Europe, 2014, etc.) announces an ambitious task: a chronicle of the genesis of the nation-state. The author divides his history into three interconnected parts. First, he charts the attempt of kings to aggrandize their power by claiming divine support—King James of England pursued such unlimited rule, followed by his successor, Charles, who shared his “absolutist pretensions.” Paradoxically, Oliver Cromwell’s thirst for power, which involved keeping the restoration of a Stuart dynasty at bay, ushered in a “triumph of constitutionalism” in England. Later in this section, the focus is on France and King Louis XIV’s indefatigable quest for a centralization of his power and its territorial extension, a quixotic aim that “sowed the seeds of the monarchy’s destruction even as he raised it to its zenith.” In the second part, state power is reinterpreted as a contract between ruler and ruled, though in such a way that “enlightened despotism” is preferable to democracy. Schwartzwald lucidly demonstrates that such a reinterpretation of legitimate political authority tended more toward revolution than reform. In the last section of the book, he explores the final throes of political absolutism, its death supported by the Enlightenment philosophers who elevated reason and nature over the divine and made popular sovereignty both attractive and defensible. Each part concludes with a “societal achievements” section, which offers commentary on the intellectual and scientific advances of the time. The author aims to reach the “student and the general reader alike” and does indeed in admirably accessible prose. Occasionally, readers will be overwhelmed by a swarm of details, but Schwartzwald skillfully keeps his eye on the big picture. His view certainly isn’t an original one, and he doesn’t delve as deeply philosophically as other well-known studies. But he ably furnishes a brief but rigorous overview.

A slim, useful guide to a politically fraught but historically transformative stretch of European history.

CYCLES OF NORSE MYTHOLOGY
Searfoss, Glenn
Acorn Books (838 pp.)
$34.99 | $24.99 paper | Apr. 4, 2019
978-1-78982-082-9
978-1-78982-071-3 paper

A collection of mythology focuses on the Norse gods’ comedies, tragedies, and bloody histories.

Norse mythology is vast, full of passionate and violent tales about gods, giants, and mortals. Assembled here, gleaned from the Eddas and research of scholars, are six cycles of this pantheon’s legends, battles, and heartbreaks. The first one features Odin, impatient yet dedicated to his quest for wisdom. It includes an old seeress recounting the dismemberment of Ymir and the use of his body in the creation of Earth and the heavens; the history of the nine worlds; and the foreshadowing of their end. Cycles 2 and 3 gather the trials of some of the greatest heroes, following Thor as he grows into a champion; the trickster Loki, whose cunning stands out in a world defined by strength; and the enslavement of V olund, the great W onder Smith, by Nidud. Their legends range from the comical to the horrific—Volund’s revenge ends in the rape of Nidud’s daughter and the forging of his sons into jewelry and chalices. But there is great humor as well, often from sheer incredulity, from Frigg’s reacting to her husband’s impregnating her mother with Thor to Loki’s giving birth to his father’s eight-legged steed, Sleipnir, and Thor’s dressing as Freyja to retake his stolen hammer, Mjollnir, from the Jotun Thrym. Cycle 4 sets the stage for the apocalypse Ragnarök in Cycle 5, as Loki and his wolf-son are bound with a special ribbon, giants of fire and ice stir, and Odin gathers his undead heroes for the final, inevitable battle. Cycle 6 tells further stories of gods and mortals meeting, though these feel slightly outside of the overarching saga that dominates the book. Searfoss (Skulls and Bones, 1995, etc.) has assembled an approachable novel chronicling the sometimes impenetrable Norse myths. Using a style inspired by oral traditions, the author casts Odin, Freya, and other characters as both storytellers and protagonists. Their feats are recounted with an epic flair, replete with violent prophecies, clanging metal in battles, and even Odin’s crushing tears of loss. The work acknowledges the vast resources it draws from with an impressive glossary, albeit short on page numbers; a bibliography listing further readings in English; and a link to a helpful reference website.

Thrilling stories of fire and ice, love and savagery, retold in an accessible, comprehensive package.
Readers will find that the collection has real literary quality—and the ring of hard-won, homespun truth.

**BAR FLIES**

*True Stories From the Early Years*

*Ed. by Silverman, Amy & Bravo, Katie*

Self (360 pp.)

$20.00 paper | Jan. 1, 2019

978-0-578-59121-6

Ordinary folks tell ordinary—and sometimes extraordinary—stories in this sparkling anthology of essays culled from live, spoken-word performances.

Debut editors Silverman and Bravo include 60 nonfiction pieces from “Bar Flies,” their live storytelling series, which they’ve hosted in a Phoenix, Arizona, bar since 2015. As in “The Moth” and similarly anecdotal shows, the fare consists of short, first-person essays—each a few pages long in the text—focusing on tidbits of memoir, family histories, character sketches, and shaggy dog anecdotes; the latter is exemplified by Deborah H. Sussman’s piquant portrait of her border collie, Henry, and the Frisbee games that he apparently played with a ghost. Other highlights beguilingly run the gamut of emotion, including Amy L. Young’s truly raucous account of a meth-fueled Christmas, capped by a theft of oyster stuffing (“That fishy, mushy bread was FUCKING MAGICAL”); Amanda Kate Kehrberg’s droll wonders of family wisdom (“When I was 11, my father told me that I should not be a virgin on my wedding night because that would be a terrible time to find out that my husband did not know what he was doing”). Also notable are Salvador Lee Bravo’s nerve-wracking account of an odyssey through Ukraine, Stacy Pearson’s self-reflective retrospective on her public relations work for a businessman facing #MeToo allegations, and James A. Ahlers’ anguished narrative of his wife’s troubled pregnancy. Overall, readers will find that the collection has real literary quality—and the ring of hard-won, homespun truth.

A charming set of tales that’s funny, heartwarming, and haunting, by turns.

**ELEMENT OF SECRECY**

*Slawecki, Heather*

Manuscript

A woman decides to get answers to the questions that have haunted her since childhood in this debut mystery.

When Jenny O’Rourke was just 10 years old, she heard her father leading a strange chant in the barn behind their small Pennsylvania farmhouse. Not long after, her brother, Danny, was dead, and her family escaped into the night. Twenty years later, she’s in the witness protection program, living under the name Tricia Keller. She’s finally put something of a life together—after a brief career in law and a short marriage, she’s now single and works as a pharmaceutical rep—but she’s risking it all by doing the thing she’s not supposed to do: “I’m absolutely forbidden to be sitting here in front of my childhood home. But here I am with two important mysteries to solve and a shit ton of minor league ones. First, who killed my brother? And why? Second, who—and what—the hell is my father?” She knows that before he moved his family to the obscure town of Brandtville, Pennsylvania, Sean O’Rourke was one of the top defense attorneys in Manhattan, a partner at a firm well known for representing embezzlers and mob bosses. Jenny assumes this job has something to do with the murder of Danny, but there are all sorts of strange things about her childhood in Brandtville: pictures of missing mobsters in the woods, odd symbols and graffiti, and her father’s former law partner, who wound up dead in a swimming hole. To conduct her investigation, Jenny will have to elude her witness protection escorts as well as the bodyguard her father keeps on her at all times. As she digs into the past, a few things soon become clear. First, Danny is still alive. Second, the story of what really happened back in Brandtville is far stranger than Jenny could ever have imagined—and it isn’t over yet.

Slawecki keeps the plot racing forward at full speed, and her prose is taut and gripping. At one point, Jenny muses: “What’s also disturbing is this whole modern-day vigilante thing. My father was a defense attorney. He knew his clients were bad people, especially those who went to that firm. No one forced him to get into that line of work. It’s why I stopped practicing after three cases.” The plot is booby-trapped with some pretty wonderful twists that will likely take even seasoned readers of the mystery genre by surprise. The book’s primary flaw is that its characters’ psychologies and personalities do not seem to match their personal histories. Jenny comes off as more devil-may-care than haunted, and her rapport with her now-living brother (whom she hasn’t seen since they were small children) is a bit too Hollywood smooth. Even so, the tale is fun and highly readable, making great use of its woody Bucks County setting. This is only the first installment of a series following Jenny, and readers will be excited to find out just how much weirder things will get.

A bold, largely successful launch of a series about family secrets and criminal enterprises.
In a giant, futuristic mall, a coffee machine with artificial intelligence excitedly narrates the exploits of its new owner, a retro-style, hard-boiled gumshoe. Stein’s (Lost, 2010) satirical SF detective yarn at least initially owes much to Douglas Adams before those conveniences so accessorized. Arjay, the first-person (or first-gadget?) narrator here, is such a device, an ever upbeat, perceptive huckster who system leaves by the curb.” But at the age of 68, the efficient killer is at high risk of a stroke or heart attack. The AI becomes sidekick to bemused tough-guy Harken. The material finds its own humorous tone.

Sucharitkul’s (The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy fans may recall Adams’ ancillary detail of robotic home appliances with “Real People Personalities,” often annoying, single-minded entities. And coffee machines were among those conveniences so accessorized. Arjay gets delivered to Frank Harken, a private eye of the old school, whose beat is the Great American, a fortresslike, coast-to-coast shopping/dining/entertainment/residential mall (shades of Somtow Sucharitkul’s Mallworld). The mall is a consumer paradise and haven for the elite in an otherwise ill-described (but doubtlessly unpleasant) future United States. Because of a prime directive to serve coffee in any circumstance, Arjay is mobile, resourceful, multilimbed, and filled with extra goodies such as laser cutters. The AI becomes sidekick to bemused tough-guy Harken. The chipper appliance recounts their initial case together, a missing custom-dentistry heiress named Winsome Smiles, connected to shady characters and now apparently kidnapped. Arjay’s enthusiastic narration takes readers through not only the standard private investigator clichés (mobsters, clueless authorities, duplicitous dames), but also bizarre boutiques and services (“legstentions”), literary references encompassing The Princess Bride and Edgar Allan Poe, and—in a very Hitchhiker touch—reams of persnickety Arjay non sequitur footnotes. (Sample: “Assassins were notoriously inconceivable.”) A nice feat for Stein is that he still remains faithful, even in the jokey milieu, to the twisty conventions of a decent gumshoe mystery. And a certain readership demographic will appreciate that he keeps a lid on Quentin Tarantino-type violence and never flavors the brew with gratuitous sex or sleaze. This coffee tale offers good taste (to the last drop).

An amusing SF private eye/coffee spoof chock-full of silicon circuits and served with laughs.
and go up against a number of the crime boss’s vicious henchmen. The title of nationally syndicated cartoonist Summers’s (The Dark and the Dead, 2018, etc.) third novel seems to be baiting snarky critics, but downhill this thriller isn’t. Fast, yes; the pace rarely flags, beginning with Braga’s racing to get to his daughter before Epstein’s thugs do. There are several brutally suspenseful set pieces. Once readers know what the killers are capable of, it’s doubly effective when the author leaves their dirty work to the audience’s imagination. Less successful are the random chapters that provide other characters’ perspectives. Readers will find this crackerjack thriller hard to put down.

Sixteen Holocaust survivors describe returning to Germany after the war in von Treuenfeld’s (Israel, 2018, etc.) work of oral history translated from the German by Siegal-Bergman. The familiar narrative of the Holocaust is that it marked the end of Jews in Germany. Those who managed to survive settled in America or Britain or Palestine. And yet this view does not represent the whole story: When the war ended, some Jews returned to Germany. After all, it was their home. “How could they bear to come back to this country?” asks von Treuenfeld in her introduction. “To the country where relatives and friends were killed, and...futures were destroyed. The country that also wanted to kill the 16 women who I—in search of an answer—have asked to tell me their life stories.” This book profiles women like Bela Cukierman, whose family fled Germany east through Poland and—by way of the Trans-Siberian Railroad—all the way to Harbin, China, and then Shanghai. After the founding of Israel, nearly their entire community was shipped there, but the German-speaking family couldn’t adjust to the already crowded country and returned to Germany. Renée Brauner’s parents kept her alive by fleeing to Yugoslavia, Italy, and Switzerland, settling in France after the war. Ultimately, they returned to Germany when she was 7. Others spent time in the Americas, and many were at least temporarily in Israel. But all found themselves back in a Germany that was quite different than before—though one that was still far from welcoming. Von Treuenfeld is an invisible presence on the page, and the book is compiled as though each woman is narrating her own story uninterrupted. The personalities and underlying trauma shine through the anecdotes, as here when Brauner describes the prewar residence of her father: “His sister had lived on the floor above. The woman who had lived there since then knew that my aunt was taken away with her two small children. That was on Reclamstrasse. When the Wall fell the building was torn down.” The book is a brilliantly composed account of a very different sort of diaspora and return. Each of the 16 strands is haunting and heartbreaking in its own way. The result is something quite distinct from the usual Holocaust memoir: a book that scrambles the very notion of a homeland and the ties that bind us to one.

A vital, understated contribution to the body of Holocaust literature.

The book is a brilliantly composed account of a very different sort of diaspora and return.

GOING BACK

16 Jewish Women Tell Their Life Stories, and Why They Returned to Germany—the Country That Once Wanted To Kill Them
von Treuenfeld, Andrea
Trans. by Siegal-Bergman, Cathryn
Clevo Books (317 pp.)
$14.95 | Jul. 9, 2018
978-0-9973052-0-3
978-0-9973052-2-7 paper

In this well-researched, intelligently written book, Wilson (Innovative Reward Systems for the Changing Workplace, 2002, etc.) suggests to retirees, “This is the only time left where you may be able to make choices about where, how, who and why you want to live your life.” The author first calls upon other credible sources to present his interpretation of “the ten stages that define a lifetime,” a perceptive if not entirely original take on the cradle-to-grave life cycle. This opening establishes a platform for the remainder of the book, which concentrates chapter by chapter on big later-in-life issues, including time, money, relationships, and health. Wilson cites studies and draws on personal interviews he conducted to address each subject with authority in a nonjudgmental way. A key point is that “living a purposeful life, one where you are engaged and feel a sense of importance for how you spend your time, leads to remarkable value for you.” In chapters that are instructive and engaging, Wilson walks readers through content that, for some, could provoke much self-examination. For example, in the chapter “Who Are You Going to Be?” 10 different lifestyle models are defined and described; whether describing a “Traveler, Explorer, Adventurer,” or a “Volunteer/Social Activist/One Who Gives Back,” these models should serve to help people nearing retirement critically evaluate their own skills, passions, and desires. One of the book’s strengths is its core message that people should develop their own “master plan” to enjoy a fruitful retirement. Having neatly woven together the previous chapters, Wilson uses the end of the book to guide the reader through a cleverly designed, step-by-step interactive process that culminates in a personalized master plan. The process requires considerable time and thought, answering questions and completing various forms, but those who make a serious effort are sure to be rewarded. Wilson is keenly aware that retirement can create anxiety and uncertainty; his writing

GOING BACK

In Your Retirement, Create the Life You Want
Wilson, Tom
BalboaPress (226 pp.)
$33.95 | Jul. 15, 2019
978-1-982229-34-4
978-1-982229-32-0 paper

A vital, understated contribution to the body of Holocaust literature.
exudes sensitivity and understanding, and he is realistic yet encouraging in his wise counsel.

A pragmatic, structured approach to carefully planning for retirement.

**FREEDOM DUES**

Zuno, Indra  
Spinning a Yarn Press (438 pp.)  
$28.00 | $16.17 paper | Jan. 31, 2020  
978-1-7341652-2-7  
978-1-7341652-1-0 paper

The destinies of two indentured servants from Europe converge in the American Colonies in this debut novel. Malvina “Mallie” Ambrose spends July 1729 alone and scared in London’s Newgate Prison. An orphan, she was raised by Elizabeth “Lizzie” Batt, a thief who used Mallie as a distraction while committing her crimes. When one of Lizzie’s schemes went wrong, both were arrested and landed in Newgate. After a brief trial, Mallie is sent to the American Colonies with other convicts. Meanwhile, in the province of Ulster in Ireland, Blair Eakins faces an uncertain future. His father is dead and his community is impoverished with no viable opportunities for him or his brother, Ronald. After hearing about work in America, Blair reluctantly leaves his sweetheart, Janet Ferry, and embarks with his brother on a long and dangerous voyage to Pennsylvania. Mallie ends up in Maryland, where she is indentured by a landowner named Bradnox to work on his estate, Prosperity. In Pennsylvania, the Eakins brothers separate, and Blair begins an indenture with a cordwainer named Jeffrey Craig. By 1736, a twist of fate brings Mallie and Blair together in the same home, and they eventually fall in love. After Blair saves Mallie from abuse, he devises a desperate plan to find Ronald and secure their freedom, setting into motion a series of events that threaten to separate the lovers forever. Zuno’s novel is a splendid historical epic with complex characters and richly drawn settings. The nuanced, well-developed narrative spans nearly a decade as it follows Mallie’s and Blair’s journeys to America and the difficult circumstances of their lives as indentured servants. The author’s sturdy, workmanlike prose perfectly captures the joys and sorrows of the protagonists as they struggle to build new lives in America (“Livid, Blair watched the darkness swallow Ronald. He could not imagine ever talking to him again. At the same time, he knew he probably would never see his mother, uncle, or any other member of his family. He felt like a castaway”). Although the tale primarily centers on Mallie and Blair, the myriad supporting characters have equally memorable storylines, including Lucius Groom, a man who recognizes and nurtures Blair’s musical talents, and Ronald. Setting is a key component of the book, and the narrative deftly moves from England and Ireland to Maryland and Pennsylvania.

An accomplished and stirring tale from a promising new author of historical fiction.
INDIE Books of the Month

WHEN DEATH IMITATES ART
P.D. Halt
An engagingly written mystery featuring art, glamour, sex, love, and murder.

THE NIGHT IS DONE
Sheila Myers
A well-wrought, classically inspired riches-to-rags tale.

UNBLINDED
Traci Medford-Rosow & Kevin Coughlin
An emotional account of a remarkable personal odyssey.

WHERE IS THE NUMBER?
Nicholas Temple-Smith
An engrossing and moving war drama with a strong cast of indelible characters.

THE LIQUID BORDER
Jonathan Reeve Price
Illus. by the author
A mournful, beautiful, and original synthesis of word and image.

THE TOWN WITH ACACIA TREES
Mihail Sebastian
An endearingly wistful story of young love.
KATHERINE JOHNSON OF HIDDEN FIGURES FAME HAS DIED

Katherine Johnson, the pioneering mathematician whose career at NASA was the subject of the 2016 book *Hidden Figures*, died last month at the age of 101, the *New York Times* has reported.

Johnson was one of the first African American women employed by NASA, which she joined in 1953 when it was called the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics. She worked as a “human computer,” performing complex calculations by hand. Her work was central to several of the agency’s most famous projects, including John Glenn’s flight around Earth, as well as the Apollo 11 and Apollo 13 missions.

Johnson became a national celebrity of sorts with the 2016 publication of *Hidden Figures*, Margot Lee Shetterly’s bestselling book about Johnson and her fellow mathematicians Dorothy Vaughan and Mary Jackson. The book formed the basis for a hit film, also released in 2016, that starred Taraji P. Henson as Johnson. Johnson was herself an author. In 2019, she published *Reaching for the Moon: The Autobiography of NASA Mathematician Katherine Johnson*, a book for young readers which a reviewer for *Kirkus* called a “national treasure.”—Michael Schaub

STUDENTS, TEACHERS OPPOSE TONI MORRISON BOOK BAN

A group of students and teachers in Southern California are speaking out against their school district’s decision to ban Toni Morrison’s classic novel *The Bluest Eye*.

The Colton Joint Unified School District in San Bernardino County, California, voted to remove Morrison’s novel from its reading list for English classes, the *Mercury News* reported. The novel, Morrison’s first, was banned for its depiction of sexual violence. Four school board members voted to ax the book, with two opposing the decision and one abstaining.

In a news release, a group of students and teachers from the school district said they plan to protest the decision at a school board meeting. “There are dozens of books on the list that deal with controversial issues,” said school board member Dan Flores. “Yet the only one being removed is by Toni Morrison, one of the most prominent black female authors of recent time. Her literature speaks to the African American experience in America, and I could not personally support removing one of her books from our reading list altogether.”—M.S.

Michael Schaub is an Austin, Texas–based journalist and regular contributor to NPR. David Rapp is the senior Indie editor.
There is a moment in Joan Didion’s novel *Play It As It Lays* when the protagonist, depressed and drugged, looks at what is going on around her as if seeing Hollywood for the first time: “Beneath the faded American flag hanging over the sun deck they were arranged in tableau: BZ and the masseur, their bodies gleaming, unlined, as if they had an arrangement with mortality.” It’s flat, without affect, unemotional—and perfect.

*Play It As It Lays* arrived half a century ago, a cheerless novel of the film-centered culture of Southern California, all spaghetti-twisted highways, competitive high fashion, and barbiturates. Didion had been writing fiction throughout the 1960s, but she had become better known for the knife-sharp, cut-to-the-chase journalism collected in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, brittle portraits of John Wayne and Howard Hughes, of Summer of Love hippiedom. Of the latter she wrote, “When I first went to San Francisco in that cold late spring of 1967 I did not even know what I wanted to find out, so I just stayed around awhile, and made a few friends.”

So it is with Maria Wyeth (“That is pronounced Mar-eye-ah, to get it straight at the outset”). She is just 31, but she has lived a crowded life, and it hasn’t been good. Her father was a gambler—the book’s title comes not from golf but from craps—who chased tirelessly after chump change in the remoteness of Nevada, where her mother died in a car crash. It may have been a suicide, but no one can tell for sure since coyotes shredded her corpse. At the start of the novel, Maria tells us that she tries “not to think of dead things or plumbing,” tries not to think of much of anything, but her mind races all the same, and intimations of mortality are all around her.

Maria is under medical care. She self-medicates liberally, too. She has to given the ugly way men talk to her and women look at her, an actress at the far edge of stardom. The people around her are in the movies or want to be—except the doctors, who play parts in dramas of another kind. Maria undergoes a backroom abortion while her 4-year-old daughter suffers from a mysterious chemical imbalance. For all these reasons and more, she has given up whatever hopes or dreams she might have had; writes Didion, “Maria did not particularly believe in rewards, only in punishments, swift and personal.”

The punishments come, even as Maria seems increasingly to be a bystander in her own life. Didion reveals in a small essay in the closing pages of the newly released Library of America edition of her work that “dread of the meaninglessness which was man’s fate” was the governing ethos of her formative years. Matter-of-fact in its depiction of dead souls, *Play It As It Lays* is entirely of a piece with that worldview: Camus with cocaine and celluloid, it’s a somber masterwork that hasn’t lost a bit of its bite half a century on.

*Appreciations: Joan Didion’s *Play It As It Lays* at 50
BY GREGORY MCNAMEE

Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor.
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—Publishers Weekly, starred review

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