Stephen Graham Jones
Is The Only Good Indians the smartest, scariest horror novel of the year? p. 14

Also in the issue:
Anne Applebaum,
Lisa Moore Ramée,
Rachel Lynn Solomon,
and more
FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK:
Rooms With Views and Other Literary Homages

BY TOM BEER

I read my first “beach read” of 2020 well before anyone was venturing to a beach, sitting squarely on my living room couch, sand and surf nowhere to be seen. I was scheduled to interview Kevin Kwan, author of the Crazy Rich Asians trilogy about his new novel, Sex and Vanity (Doubleday, June 30), and I settled in for a frothy tale set on Capri and in the Hamptons, traditional playgrounds of the rich and famous.

As I read, my English major’s antennae began to buzz. Our young protagonist, Lucie, is on a trip to Italy with her older cousin, Charlotte, and they are quite dismayed by the accommodations when they arrive at their hotel on Capri. “We specifically reserved rooms with ocean views, and now they are telling us we can’t have them because some other guests extended their stay? What a sham!” complains Charlotte.

If you’ve read E.M. Forster’s A Room With a View—or seen the 1985 Merchant Ivory film adaptation—you know what happens next. Another hotel guest—here a flamboyant Hong Kong matron, traveling with her handsome, inscrutable son—offers to exchange rooms with Lucie and Charlotte. Kwan’s novel, masquerading as a beach book, is in fact an homage to a literary classic—swapping Florence for Capri but smuggling in a contemporary update of the original’s social commentary. It all works beautifully, on a few levels.

The English major in me was delighted to encounter my beloved old E.M. Forster got up in new garb. Forster was also the inspiration behind one of my favorite 21st-century novels, On Beauty (2005), Zadie Smith’s sly riff on Howard’s End. Here, two academic families, the Kipps and the Belsey, separated by the Atlantic Ocean and a political gap nearly as wide, find themselves nevertheless intertwined. Where Forster explored gradations of class in Edwardian England, Smith puts our multicultural world under the microscope. Kirkus’ reviewer wrote, “As Smith details the generation-spanning interactions of various minorities within a predominantly White, liberal community, she finds shades of meaning in shades of skin tone, probing the prickly issues of affirmative action, race relations, and cultural imperialism while skewering the political correctness that masks emotional honesty.”

Of course the classic English author who inspires an entire cottage industry of literary homages is Jane Austen. Sonali Dev, who concocted an Austen reboot set in the Indian diaspora with last year’s 26) Dev recasts Austen’s last novel with an Indian American chef in Palo Alto, California, who reluctantly joins the cast of a TV cooking show—she needs the money to save her restaurant—only to find herself in shades of skin tone, probing the prickly issues of affirmative action, race relations, and cultural imperialism while skewering the political correctness that masks emotional honesty.

Pride and Prejudice alone has launched a thousand retellings—among them Eligible, Curtis Sittenfeld’s clever 2016 update set in Cincinnati, Ohio; Jo Baker’s Longbourn (2013), which foregrounds the Bennet family servants; and Mary B, in which Katherine. J. Chen hands the mic to Lizzy and Jane’s shy, overlooked younger sister Mary. And who could forget Pride and Prejudice and Zombies? (Whether Seth Grahame-Smith’s 2009 novel was an homage or a desecration is still open to debate.)

Likewise, Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre makes for dependable source material: Margot Livesey’s The Flight of Gemma Hardy (2012) moves the story of a governed and her tortured, romantic employer to Scotland in the 1950s and ’60s; Patricia Park’s Re Jane (2015) puts a Korean American/Queens/Brooklyn spin on the story; Lindsay Faye’s Jane Steele (2016) adds murder to the mix.

There are many, many more in this vein. This summer, if you pick up one of these contemporary literary homages, I suggest you do what I did after finishing Sex and Vanity: Go back and read the original inspiration. Kwan’s delightful novel—and Forster’s small masterpiece—have been two highlights of my reading this year.
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The Kirkus Star is awarded to books of remarkable merit, as determined by the impartial editors of Kirkus.

Ali Smith completes her elliptical, engrossing seasonal quartet, revisiting themes of activism and art. Read the review on p. 26.

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**THE CARETAKER**

*Arbus, Doon*

New Directions (144 pp.)

$19.95 | Sep. 15, 2020

978-0-8112-2949-4

A brief novel cluttered with words about a small museum cluttered with objects.

The unnamed protagonist of Arbus’ debut novel has the charge of a house museum devoted to the possessions and legacy of Charles A.
Morgan, a chemist, philosopher, collector, and the author of the influential Stuff, a book about—well, you can guess. Although this is her first novel, Arbus has written several nonfiction books, mostly about the work of her mother, the photographer Diane Arbus, whose estate she became responsible for after the photographer’s death when Doon was in her 20s. The story unfolds slowly, without much incident: The future caretaker reads a newspaper account of Morgan’s death and writes to the collector’s widow asking for a job. At her urging, the board of the Morgan Foundation interviews and reluctantly hires him to run the museum. In an incident the caretaker calls “the incident,” a visitor breaks a fragile object; gathering the pieces, he hurts his hand. Years pass, board members retire and are replaced, and the neighborhood gentrifies around the museum. The caretaker continues to lead tours. He rants at visitors, performs rituals, and steals objects for obscure, melancholy reasons. All of this unfurls in long sentences laden with unilluminating details and trailing unnecessary clauses. Possibly this is deliberate: Arbus may be making a point about the accretion of meaning through the accumulation of apparently meaningless fragments, and she may be drawing a parallel to the museum itself and its collections. But while it’s easy to imagine some other writer—Dickens, Melville, Isak Dinesen, Nicholson Baker—spinning this premise into thrilling fiction, Arbus’ caretaker and his museum never assemble the details into a moving story.

A depressed protagonist prevents the novel from achieving depth by keeping fellow characters and readers at a distance.

AN INCONVENIENT WOMAN
Buelens, Stéphanie
Scarlet (288 pp.)
$25.95 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-61316-190-6

The inaugural title in Otto Penzler’s new Scarlet imprint of psychological and suspense fiction is a razor-sharp debut that dumps two Los Angeles women with troubled family histories into a blender and cranks the speed up to liquefy.

Freelance French instructor Claire Fontaine told everyone who would listen that her father tried to drown her as a child because the woman he was seeing hated children and that Claire’s ex-husband, wealthy Simon Miller, had his eye on her teenage daughter, Melody, and may even have drowned her five years ago to cover up his predation. In the end, though, nobody would listen, and now Simon, tired of being labeled “CHILD MOLESTER” by the paint Claire has slapped on his house and car, wants to take strong measures against her. So he hires Sloan Wilson, an ex-cop–turned–“sin eater” who specializes in making people’s problems go away, to make Claire go away. Sloan’s own background is so dark—her father abruptly retired from the LAPD after his wife accused him of corruption and killed herself—that it’s a marvel she isn’t cracking herself under the strain. Or is she? After circling warily around her two leads as Claire shuttles from one disturbing pupil to the next and Sloan cultivates Destiny, a girl from the streets whom Claire had befriended, Buelens dives more and more intimately into the traumas that mark them as opposites even as they reveal their profound twinship.

A piercing, high-speed nightmare best consumed in a single breathless sitting.
As we reach the middle of the coronavirus summer, everyone is reacting differently. Some people are staying home most of the time, others are protesting in the streets; some are cautiously meeting friends for socially distanced picnics, others are going to bars and on vacations; some are making phone calls and sending postcards for political campaigns while others are out knocking on doors. Even more than usual, everyone will be looking for different things from the books they’re reading.

I’m one of the stay-at-homes, so I’m looking for books that will remind me what it’s like to go on vacation without being too depressing; I think Maggie O’Farrell’s *Hamnet* (Knopf, July 21) will be just the thing. Last summer I spent a day in Stratford-upon-Avon for the first time, but due to some bad timing, I didn’t manage to see the inside of a single Shakespeare building. I can make up for it with the imagined life of the family Will left behind when he moved to London from Stratford; our review says O’Farrell’s “gifts for full-bodied characterization and sensitive rendering of intricate family bonds are on full display.”

For people who don’t want to be reminded of the wider world they’re missing, how about *The Party Upstairs* by Lee Conell (Penguin Press, July 7), a book set almost entirely inside one apartment building on the Upper West Side of Manhattan over the course of a single day? The protagonist, Ruby, is the super’s 24-year-old daughter, preparing to go to a party in the penthouse apartment that belongs to her best friend’s family. Our review calls it “a slow-burning debut that keenly dissects privilege, power, and the devastation of unfulfilled expectations.”

Perhaps a bit of fantasy will lift us out of our current predicament. Alaya Dawn Johnson’s *Trouble the Saints* (Tor, July 21) conjures a World War II-era New York where “some people of color are blessed and cursed with magic in their hands”—including an uncanny ability to wield knives and to sense threats. “Johnson’s secret history is a nuanced portrait of racism in all of its poisonous flavors, brutally overt and unsuccessfully covert,” says our review. “A sad, lovely, and blood-soaked song of a book.”

Or head back to 1967 with *Utopia Avenue* (Random House, July 14), David Mitchell’s most realistic novel since *Black Swan Green* in 2006. Utopia Avenue is a band, not a street, and our review says “the usual stuff of rock dramas—the ego clashes, the drugs, the hang-ons, the record-company parasites—is all there,” but since this is Mitchell, expect prose that’s as electric as the music.

For those of you missing Mitchell’s more experimental novels, check out *Crossings* by Alex Landragin (St. Martin’s, July 28), about three historical manuscripts—which we get to read, of course—that have been brought to a bookbinder in contemporary Paris. “Landragin layers historical fiction, metafiction, mystery, fantasy, myth, and romance in a way that might remind readers of such books as *Cloud Atlas*, *Life After Life*, *The Time Traveler’s Wife*—or even Dan Brown’s conspiracy-based adventures, albeit with more elegant prose,” says our review.

There’s nothing like discovering a new (to you) writer who’s been around for a long time, and this summer I’m looking forward to reading Jayant Kai-kini. *No Presents Please* (Catapult, July 28) is a collection of stories written between 1986 and 2006; they’re all set in Mumbai, “but the breadth of their subject matter speaks both to the diversity of the metropolis and his reach as a writer.” Sounds like the next best thing to being there.

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.
PAYBACK
Carcaterra, Lorenzo
Ballantine (304 pp.)
$28.00 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-0-399-17759-0

A White ex-cop goes after his brother’s killers while attempting to free a Black man put in jail by a crooked cop.

Tank Rizzo is a New York cop on unwanted retirement thanks to an assailant’s bullet. He’s taken the time to put together what he calls his “team”: his teenage nephew, Chris, living with him after losing his parents in a suspicious car crash; his girlfriend, Connie Tramonti; his ex-partner, Frank “Pearl” Monroe, who uses a wheelchair after having been shot at the same time as Tank; Connie’s restaurateur father, Carmine Tramonti, a retired mobster; and various other contacts on both sides of the law. Prompted by what his nephew is able to dig up on the internet, Tank comes to believe that the accounting firm his late brother worked for arranged his death and sets out to prove it. As if a white-shoe firm willing to stoop to murder isn’t enough of an opponent, Tank also goes after a retired White police detective whose unsurpassed number of closed murder cases had to do with his willingness to pressure young Black men into confessing to crimes they didn’t commit. There’s something appealing about the idea of a team of cops, feds, lawbreakers, and assorted colorful characters out to use any means they can to secure justice—but that’s more the stuff of Jack Reacher-type fantasy than the social realism that characterizes this book. Too often it reads like a cartoon version of what Richard Price has achieved in novels like Clockers and Freedomland. Despite the short, punchy chapters, the book feels padded, full of inflated writing along the lines of “I was a man of action and violence standing in a sun-drenched courtyard seeking solace and wisdom from a man of peace and love.” And in too many cases the relationships between characters seem prefab instead of developing as we read.

Enjoy the revenge but don’t expect lasting pleasure.

SHADOW WOLVES
JAKE KAMINSKI

Jake Kaminski, a Decorated Undercover Cop, Tells the Story of a Group of Native American Trackers Locked in a Life and Death Struggle with a Deadly Mexican Drug Cartel

“…intriguing and suspenseful.”
—New York Times Bestselling Author Joe Pistone, aka “Donnie Brasco”

“a layered and deep reading experience with chapters that you didn’t want to end.”
—K.C. Finn, Readers’ Favorite

“…an exciting, engaging and significant narrative…”
—Karen Walpole, Readers’ Favorite

“An action-driven tale of heroes worth rooting for at the U.S.—Mexico border.”
—Kirkus Reviews

For agent representation, please email jkaminskibooks@gmail.com • www.jakekaminski.net
At the turn of the 20th century, the stultified equilibrium in a Scottish manor is thrown out of kilter when a “stranger” appears at the door in Colin’s posthumously published novel.

Antonia McCulloch, the apparent heiress to Balmarra House—her father’s expansive estate in the west of Scotland—lives a quiet life there with her barrister husband, Malcolm, and a dwindling staff of household help. The once-grand manor of Edward Pick, who made his fortune in tobacco and sugar and was an avid amateur horticulturalist, Balmarra has fallen into disrepair since his death but for the spectacular glass house (a greenhouse to Americans) that is the property’s, and the novel’s, centerpiece. Antonia’s only sibling, George, decamped years before for a life of trekking and botanical exploration in India, heightening Antonia’s resentment at the strictures put upon her: a lack of higher education, a thwarted artistic career, and a dreary routine of domesticity. When George’s beautiful and enigmatic wife, Cicely, and young daughter, Kitty, arrive from Darjeeling for an unannounced stay at Balmarra, Antonia’s frumpish existence is challenged, as is her understanding of her family’s history, during the ensuing competition for the estate’s ownership. Cicely’s mixed racial heritage becomes the basis of gossip and discussion among other local landowners and, ultimately, becomes the sympathetically handled focus of a crucial point in Colin’s jam-packed, Byzantine storyline. Descriptions of the world beyond Balmarra, including lush Eastern landscapes and the rare subjects of botanical quests and obsessions, are complemented by eloquent descriptions of the beauty of the Scottish countryside and coastline (and contrast with the inhumanity that is the source of ugliness and misunderstanding).

Colin’s meandering tale has room for surprises, suspense, and soul-searching in its journey toward a cinematic conclusion.
Murder, sex, and unholy ambition threaten to overwhelm the glimmers of light in Dark Ages England.

**THE EVENING AND THE MORNING**

*Follett, Ken*
Viking (928 pp.)
$36.00 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-52-595498-9

Murder, sex, and unholy ambition threaten to overwhelm the glimmers of light in Dark Ages England in this prequel to *The Pillars of the Earth* (1989).

A Viking raid in 997 C.E. kills Edgar's one true love, Sungifu, and he vows never to love another—but come on, he's only 18. The young man is a talented builder who has strong personal values. Weighing the consequences of helping a slave escape, he muses, "Perhaps there were principles more important than the rule of law." Meanwhile, Lady Ragna is a beautiful French noblewoman who comes to Shirning, marries the local ealdorman, Wilwulf, and starts a family. Much of the action takes place in Dreng's Ferry, a tiny hamlet with "half a dozen houses and a church." Dreng is a venal, vicious ferryman who hurls his slave's newborn child into a river and is only one of several characters whose death readers will eagerly root for. Bishop Wynstan lusts to become an archbishop and will crush anyone who stands in his way. He clashes with Ragna as she announces she is lord of the Vale of Outhen. "Wait!" he says to the people, 'Are you going to be ruled by a mere woman?" (Wynstan's fate is delicious.) Aldred is a kindly monk who harbors an unrequited love for Edgar, who in turn loves Ragna but knows it's hopeless: Although widowed after Wilwulf's sudden death, she remains above Edgar's station. There are plenty of other colorful people in this richly told, complex story: slaves, rapists, fornicators, nobles, murderers, kind and decent people, and men of the cloth with "Whore's...
Leprosy.” The plot at its core, though, is boy meets girl—OK, Edgar meets Ragna—and a whole lot of trouble stands in the way of their happiness. They are attractive and sympathetic protagonists, and more’s the pity they’re stuck in the 11th century. Readers may guess the ending well before Page 900—yes, it’s that long—but Follett is a powerful storyteller who will hold their attention anyway.

Follett’s fans will enjoy this jaunt through the days before England was merry.

THE SHAME
Goodman, Makenna
Milkweed (160 pp.)
$15.00 paper  |  Aug. 11, 2020
978-1-57131-136-8

Driving down a dark, lonesome interstate, Alma is finally alone, finally away from her husband, Asa, and their two small children. Will she do the unthinkable and really abandon them?

The wife of a college professor, Alma spends her days tending to their fairy tale–like Vermont farmhouse and raising Eden and Phin, making sure their furnishings are a bit shabby chic and their days are spent mostly outside, limiting screen time and creating meals from their garden and chicken coop. From the outside, Alma is a picture-perfect version of the organic goddess extolled by Instagram influencers. She’s even an artist who dabbles in painting neo–Bloomsbury Group scenes. She considers writing and illustrating a children’s book
With subtlety and intention, Grumberg implores us to consider the purpose of literature after tragedy.

THE MOST PRECIOUS OF CARGOES
Grumberg, Jean-Claude
Trans. by Wynne, Frank
HarperVia/HarperCollins (96 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-06298179-0

In a fabulist novella, a Jewish man bound for a concentration camp throws one of his twin babies from a moving train; a Polish countrywoman finds the child and raises her as her own.

As he and countless other deported French Jews rush toward doom, a father realizes that his wife does not have enough milk to feed both of their infants and so makes the unthinkable decision to throw one of the babies, wrapped in a prayer shawl, from the moving train. As fairy-tale logic would have it, a poor childless woman in the forests of Poland discovers the baby, and she and her husband risk their own lives to raise the girl as their own. Thus the

AFTERLIFE CRISIS
Graham, Randal
ECW Press (432 pp.)
$17.95 paper | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-77041-470-9

This sprawling novel blends droll comedy, scientific conspiracies, and a strange take on the afterlife.

Graham follows his 2017 novel Beforelife with another book set in the same world: an afterlife that follows many of the same physical laws as our own and also includes a version of the city of Detroit. The novel’s narrator is one Rhinnick Feynman, a man who believes this universe is actually the work of “the Author Himself,” who is constantly rewriting certain details of the residents’ lives. Yes, it’s a winkingly metafictional take on the afterlife, given an additional flourish by Rhinnick’s Wodehouse-esque narration. (“Dashed inconvenient of the chap, I’ll admit,” he observes of one of the Author’s changes.) The literary homages don’t stop there, though: There are also allusions to H.P. Lovecraft’s fiction—and, yes, one character does say “Surely you’re joking, Mr. Feynman.” The plot involves Rhinnick investigating the odd changes to his world and what that might have to do with a group of people known as “Napoleons,” who believe they’re living through cycles of reincarnation. The man responsible for the bizarre happenings may well be Isaac Newton, engaged in a sinister plot to alter the fabric of the landscape. As that all suggests, this is a very crowded novel—which at times feels at odds with Rhinnick’s jocular narration. The mashup of erudite comedy and grand cosmic theorizing may find its admirers, but it frequently feels both too busy and insufficiently kinetic.

Graham’s novel is ambitious, but its tone and plot are in conflict with each other.
father's Sophie's Choice is redeemed and shown to be one of great humanity. On its face, this story—newly available in English thanks to Wynne's beautiful translation from French—is about the devastating lengths to which parents will go for the sake of their children and about how saving one life can mean endangering another. But it is also an unlikely tale of survival during the Holocaust that is entirely aware of its unlikeliness. Grumberg uses fairy-tale conventions, but he does so winkingly. This self-consciousness reaches its zenith with a metafictional epilogue that directly addresses the idea of “true stories,” calling upon the reader to question their assumptions about historical fiction and about the relationships between myth and truth. With subtlety and intention, the novella ultimately implores us to consider the purpose of literature after tragedy: well-trodden thematic territory after 1945, to be sure, but approached here in a unique way. It is difficult, in 2020, to write a work of fiction about the Holocaust that is original; even simply in this sense, Grumberg's work succeeds where many have failed.

A postmodern fairy tale, by turns evoking horror and wonder, that scrutinizes the relationship between myth and history.

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FORGOTTEN WORK
Guriel, Jason
Biblioasis (128 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-77196-382-4

In the near future, obsessive fans try to find meaning in a band's lost legacy in this eccentric, ambitious debut novel by Canadian poet Guriel.

Novels about legendary but unsuccessful artists are not unheard of—see The Commitments, This Is Memorial Device, or Juliet, Naked—but this may be the first rock 'n' roll novel written in iambic pentameter. Composed entirely in heroic couplets, Guriel's book chronicles the long, strange trip of a one-hit-wonder band called Mountain Tea, led by madman composer James Gordon and backed up by Dennis Byrne, Louis Reed, Hal U. Hawks, and a drum machine. The boys released a brilliant album called The Dead in the early 2000s, along with one single, and then promptly disappeared. Some half-century later, a motley crew of fans are chasing down every scrap of information they can find about the band. They include the tragic Patti Devin, a reporter for MOJO magazine who wrote one of the fundamental pieces about the group. Others include a triptych of competitive buyers seeking out rare vinyl copies of The Dead as well as a timid bookstore owner and an English student who find themselves on a strange pilgrimage into a disaster zone to find the heart of Mountain Tea's mystery. To make things even stranger, Guriel has crafted a dystopian scenario that includes bots, an odd Google-ish syndicate called Zuber, and fake nails that can record conversations. The book's rhythm takes a little getting used to, but the story is oddly compelling, particularly when the seekers eventually discover the band members' fates. Name-checking dozens of artists ranging from Nick Drake to Lester Bangs, the novel is strange and affectionate, like Almost Famous penned by Shakespeare.

A love letter to music in all its myriad iterations.

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ADRIANNE GEFFEL
A Fiction
Hajdu, David
Norton (240 pp.)
$25.95 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-0-393-63422-8

A faux oral history of a sui generis performer in New York's avant-garde music world.

In books like Positively Fourth Street (2001) and The Ten-Cent Plague (2008), Hajdu explored how countercultural folkies and comic-book artists rattled conformists in the 1950s and '60s. For his first novel, he attempts to do much the same for 1980s experimental music. Adrienne Geffel, we're told early, is a household name thanks to her passionate and defiant nature, possessed of a
Prodigious talent and impatience for musical strictures. Plus, a mysterious disappearance established a mystique that got her name-checked by the likes of Cardi B and George Saunders. The oral historian doesn’t have access to Geffel herself, instead piecing her life together through interviews with family members, teachers, critics, and participants in New York’s downtown scene who prized intellectualism and a certain abrasiveness. (Susan Sontag and Twyla Tharp were eager to witness this “doyenne of downtown music.”) Despite (and thanks to) Geffel’s idiosyncrasies, she was accepted into the Juilliard School, caught the ears of highfalutin Village Voice and SoHo Weekly News writers, and seemed destined to rise to the semifame of a Steve Reich or Philip Glass. In truth, though, Geffel is something of a MacGuffin, a way for Hajdu to satirize the kinds of people who can’t appreciate genius when it’s right in front of them or who wish to exploit it: the critics, the Oliver Sacks–like neurologist, the sketchy self-declared manager, the record-label executive. It’s funny stuff, even if the targets are easy, though more of Geffel’s presence would’ve been welcome. Writing fiction whose central character is a cipher presents a challenge to even the most accomplished novelists (see Myla Goldberg’s Feast Your Eyes and Alan Hollinghurst’s The Sparsholt Affair), and Geffel’s own voice would’ve bolstered Hajdu’s mythmaking.

An entertaining satire about a musical genre not typically known for its humor.

A WORLD BETWEEN
Hashimoto, Emily
Feminist Press (400 pp.)
$17.95 paper | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-936932-95-5

A sprawling look at the yearslong relationship between two women. Hashimoto’s debut novel follows two Asian American women as they fall in and out of love again and again. When Eleanor Suzuki, “a queer biracial Asian Jewish girl,” meets Leena Shah, a beautiful and “hyperfocused”
For a couple decades and a couple dozen books, novelist Stephen Graham Jones has concocted a delicious literary stew out of rare ingredients: decades of slasher flicks; a deep abiding love of “losers”; a relentless narrative voice that pulls the reader along at a thousand miles an hour; and the experience of growing up in the American West as a member of the Blackfeet Nation.

_The Only Good Indians_ (Saga/Simon & Schuster, July 14) tells the story of four friends being hunted down by an elk that might be a demon or a ghost but is definitely an angry mother. Before the novel begins, Lewis, Cassidy, Ricky, and Gabe go hunting on land set aside by the Blackfeet Reservation for elders. They slaughter a herd of elk, including a pregnant cow, and their actions that day haunt their memories until, on the 10th anniversary of the slaughter, they become the hunted. “Slashers love anniversaries,” Jones tells me.

We spoke in mid-March and the book’s publication, originally set for April, was pushed to July because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Violence and gore pulse through Jones’ novels, and _The Only Good Indians_ is no exception. The memory of the elk slaughter sticks with each character. The first section of the book focuses on Lewis, who left the reservation shortly after the incident but often finds himself remembering that day. “That craziness, that heat of the moment, the blood in his temples, smoke in the air, it was like—he hates himself the most for this—it was probably what it was like a century and more ago, when soldiers gathered up on ridges above Blackfeet encampments to turn the cranks on their big guns, terraform this new land for their occupation. Fertilize it with blood.”

Jones is aware of working within the larger genres of horror and Native American fiction, but he’s always looking for ways to subvert expectations. Jones is the kind of writer who notices a trend and leans his shoulder in the opposite direction. “In American Indian culture, the person who rises above and says he’s different is turning his back on his community. The way to be successful is being part of the community,” Jones says. “That is how 99% of American Indian novels went for a long time, but I wanted to push back against that.”

Eventually, after a series of increasingly bloody murders, Lewis finds himself limping back to the reservation in a desperate attempt to save himself. “I’ve always been poking and prodding at the possibility that the pattern shouldn’t be repeated,” Jones says. “Lewis has the idea that by returning to where that cycle of violence started he can somehow apologize or close the circle. But it doesn’t do him any good.”

The monster at the heart of this novel was inspired by _Deer Woman_, a comic by Elizabeth LaPensée. “I was always looking at that cover; it was a woman with an...
elk head.” The image stuck with Jones and eventually turned into the creature in this book.

Even as the creature is tearing people apart, the reader understands what motivates her: These guys killed her kid. “She’s a mother. She didn’t ever care about her own life, and I completely identify with that. Your kid is the most important thing in the world, and losing that transforms her,” Jones says. “She becomes rage, and she can't stop killing. Dispensing what she feels is justice is not really quenching her fire, so she has to keep burning and burning.”

As the creature edges closer and closer to her victims, the novel embraces the unique combination of horror and tenderness that fans of Jones have come to love. Defeating the creature comes down to Denorah, Gabe’s teenage daughter, and one of the most memorable games of basketball played in literature.

Jones is legendarily productive, and his past work has been published by micropresses, “big-five” houses, and everything in between. Since finishing *The Only Good Indians* he’s completed four novels. The titles alone reflect Jones’ unique range and interests: *The Babysitter Lives*, *Killer on the Road*, *Last Stand on Saber Ridge*, and *Lake Access Only*.

“I think I’m just compelled to write,” Jones says. “My grass will be overgrown, my truck will be half broken, I’ll be missing all my meetings, but I justify it by writing a novel. Novels are a fortress I build around myself, and they protect me from the world. And I need a lot of protection, so I keep writing.”

Richard Z. Santos is a writer and teacher in Austin, Texas, and the author of the novel *Trust Me*. The Only Good Indians received a starred review in the March 15, 2020, issue.
teenager has lost an eye. What isn’t so clear is what Heaberlin, a former journalist, wants to say about the idea of the lost girl in crime fiction, especially with the twist the novel takes halfway through. While there are nuggets of fresh ideas, the themes get a bit muddled. There are, however, interesting twists and turns in the narrative that will carry the reader along. The destination might not be wholly satisfying, but the ride is fun.

An exciting though flawed thriller of lost girls and buried trauma in small-town Texas.

A 35-year-old Norwegian publicist faces an existential crisis in Hjorth’s quirky, unsettling novel.

Hjorth hangs her plot on a footnote in Norwegian history. In 2011, the European Union demanded that the Norwegian postal service allow competition in the delivery of letters weighing less than 50 grams, and the postal union fought back. The novel imagines narrator Ellinor as part of a ragtag three-person publicity company that is reduced by a third when Dag, who is supposed to be handling the postal union’s account, suddenly quits, sails away, and commits suicide. Ellinor, who often can’t remember what she did a day or an hour ago and who yearns “for a breakdown. To surrender to it and be carted off to a quiet and balmy place far away,” at first feels that the boredom of the account may push her over the edge, but then she commits to allowing the passion and enthusiasm of the union members to give her own life meaning. Unfortunately for the reader, unhinged Ellinor is far more fascinating than the Ellinor who exults in the intricacies of letter delivery and the details of converting people to the union cause. Just when it seems that Ellinor may be able to lift herself out of the depths of trying to make sense of her old diaries and focus on the people around her, including a newly pregnant sister and a newish boyfriend with a son from an earlier relationship, she becomes obsessed with the postal union. Her friends and family, insufficiently developed as characters, fall to the narrative wayside, and the reader is left trying to work up some interest in arcane matters. Though it’s tempting to suspect that Hjorth is taking a nuanced view of Ellinor’s obsession, ultimately it seems that we’re supposed to conclude that it’s straightforwardly noble, and it grows increasingly hard to care about either Ellinor or her redemption.

An unconvincing account of willed self-transformation.

An oil worker reckons with the death of his best friend in this quiet but powerful novel.

As German poet Kampmann’s debut novel opens, a middle-aged oil worker named Waclaw grows worried that his bunkmate and longtime confidant, Mátyás, is nowhere to be found. The two have worked the rigs together for years, cultivating an extremely close friendship, even spending their vacations together. When it becomes
Axel Tressler is just your ordinary biology teacher in a California college—that is until the US Agency calls on him as The Follower to solve a major problem.

Axel was born with special energy levels that he can activate. With his experimental body covered with invisible indestructible material, he is a major force for the agency to resolve issues they are unable to resolve.

The agency tasks The Follower to journey to Pakistan to investigate how drugs are produced and delivered to the United States and how to resolve this issue. But for Axel, nothing is ever as simple as it seems.
clear that Mátyás has fallen off the rig and died, a stunned Waclaw takes time off from his demanding job, going in search of something, although he’s not quite sure what that is. He travels first to Morocco, staying in a room the two had frequently shared, then to Mátyás’ town in Hungary to give his late friend’s possessions to his sister. Then it’s off to Italy and to Waclaw’s own hometown in Germany, where he tries to finally come to terms with the arc of his life. This is a highly interior novel, with Kampmann laser-focused on Waclaw’s grief, which is portrayed with compassion and honesty. Flashbacks clue the reader in to the details of Waclaw and Mátyás’ relationship, which, it’s hinted, was possibly more than mere friendship. Kampmann’s characters are memorable; her dialogue spare but realistic. Her prose, ably translated by Posten, isn’t showy, but it’s quite pretty and, at times, gorgeous.

It can be a difficult novel to read with its insistent quietness and emotional heftiness, but readers who prefer their fiction reflective and not plot-heavy will likely find much to admire in its pages. It’s a thoughtful, unsparing look at loss—as Kampmann writes, “Alone, a person can become so angry or sad, it rubs their eyes dull.” A promising fiction debut with understated but beautiful writing.

**A RITCHIE BOY**

*Kass, Linda*

She Writes Press (224 pp.)

$24.95 | Sep. 1, 2020

978-1-64742-007-9

A young Austrian Jewish man whose family has fled Europe on the eve of the Holocaust and settled in the Midwest has an unexpected experience in World War II.

In the wake of the Nazi annexation of Austria, a non-Jewish Austrian immigrant to the United States seeks the help of a wealthy department store magnate—doubtless inspired by the Midwestern Jewish families who founded the likes of Kaufmann’s and Lazarus—to get affidavits for her Jewish friend’s family, the Stoffs, to come to America. The Stoffs’ son, Eli, is a teenager when his family manages to immigrate, inadvertently leaving behind Eli’s grandmother and thereby dooming her. The novel’s title refers to the aspect of the story that has the potential to be the most interesting: When Eli, living with his parents in Columbus, Ohio, is drafted as an American soldier, his German-speaking background makes him eligible for a special military intelligence unit based at Camp Ritchie in Maryland. The “Ritchie Boys” are primarily recent German Jewish and Austrian Jewish immigrants and refugees who are therefore well positioned to spy on the Nazis. A compelling historical novel could certainly be written on this topic, thoughtfully probing an aspect of the Jewish American experience in World War II that has been largely unrepresented in fiction; unfortunately, this is not that novel. Only a small part of the story actually involves Eli’s experience as a Ritchie Boy; the rest describes the same few dramatic aspects of his biography—the day he and his family realized they had to get out of Austria; how a beneficent American businessman saved their lives; how Eli later met his wife—over and over again. These plot elements are reiterated by continually introducing additional narrative perspectives, which despite being new are not sufficiently distinct, nor do they provide any interesting new information. The story that the novel sets out to tell is a relatively simple one, and the rest seems to be only filler—poorly written at that.

A promising idea whose execution is disappointing.

**PINK MOUNTAIN ON LOCUST ISLAND**

*Lau, Jamie Marina*

Coffee House (248 pp.)

$16.95 paper | Sep. 8, 2020

978-1-56689-594-1

In this hallucinatory, impressionistic novel by a 23-year-old Australian writer, a girl’s involvement with an artist opens up a world preoccupied by money and drugs. Fifteen-year-old Monk lives in a dingy Chinatown apartment with her dad, a lapsed art professor who, after Monk’s mother left him, spends most of his time on their brown couch watching nature documentaries and nursing a dependency on alcohol and anxiety medication: “Xanax as a white hunk. Dad takes his with Earl Grey tea. Little yellow sappy sags for eyes.” Monk meets a high school senior named Santa Coy and quickly becomes obsessed with him, but once she starts inviting him to her apartment, Santa Coy begins making “Basquiat-lite” art in the kitchen for her father. The two men host exhibitions of Santa Coy’s work in the apartment, attend art shows, and start having muttered discussions about paint and profit. Monk begins to feel left out, though it’s unclear whether she wants Santa Coy’s or her father’s attention all to herself, to make art herself, to have art made of her—or all of the above. Santa Coy and Monk’s father suddenly come into a lot of money, and Monk’s father is just as suddenly attacked and ends up in the hospital. Perhaps, Monk thinks, it’s because she asked her friend’s mother, a “healer” named Honey, to help her with her situation, which only draws her further into an underworld suffused with scammers and violence. The novel is told in a series of titled, hyperassociative, impressively strange vignettes. The entirety of “This Generation Asks for Signs,” for instance: “Do you think in Heaven everybody will be the same instance: ‘Do you think in Heaven everybody will be the same amount of appealing, and never stop? In the mirror my body’s becoming a tree.” Lau narrates the drug-laced high school parties and booze-drenched art world parties Monk moves through with the same ambivalently threatening mood—selling “fake art” and selling “fake drugs,” it’s clear, are much the same thing. The prose is laden with significance, repeated references to jazz and cowboys and panthers and deserts that can get so dense it’s unclear, in the end, what it’s all supposed to mean.

Hypnotizing and inscrutable.
After the apocalypse, two former Hollywood pals find themselves at odds.

**THE ARREST**

Lethem, Jonathan

Ecco/HarperCollins (320 pp.)

$27.99 | Nov. 10, 2020

978-0-06-302606-7

After the apocalypse, two former Hollywood pals find themselves at odds with one another.

Lethem is an odd duck on the best of days, so it’s no wonder his new novel imagines the end of the world through a peculiar lens. After his _Big Lebowski_–esque version of noir in _The Feral Detective_ (2018), here he takes on the end of the world in a strange amalgamation of 1970s disaster movie, ’80s yuppie comedy, and seemingly whatever else came out of the kitchen sink. The lead here is Alexander “Sandy” Duplessis, who, in the wake of a major disaster called the Arrest that wiped out (gasp!) television and then eventually the internet and all contemporary communications, became essentially a modern version of David Brin’s _The Postman_ (1985), here called Journeyman. Our guy divides his time between making deliveries and studying under the local butcher. The Journeyman got stuck in rural New England when everything went to hell, visiting his sister Maddy’s farm in what seems to have become a feudal community in Maine. Things go sideways when Sandy’s old Yale roommate and Hollywood writing partner Peter Todbaum turns up in a nuclear “supercar” called The Blue Streak—modeled on the vehicle out of the old ’70s post-apocalyptic movie _Dama tion Alley_—that can apparently tunnel underground and operate underwater, among other things. The backstory is that the two men were working on a project in Hollywood (“Todbaum the bullshitter, Journeyman the hands on the keyboard”). But then something uncomfortable happened between Todbaum and Journeyman’s sister. Lethem is certainly capable of having gone full-on Cormac McCarthy here, but instead this is pretty much a sly play on post-apocalyptic fantasies, with the operative word being play. Superminimalist writing, short chapters, interstitial images from the Journeyman’s scrapbook, and Lethem’s unusual perspective make for odd bedfellows, but it’s a decent distraction from the real world right now.

A meditation on a dystopian future that maintains a careful balance between social satire and purposeful provocation.

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**FIFTY WORDS FOR RAIN**

Lemmie, Asha

Dutton (464 pp.)

$26.00 | Sep. 22, 2020

978-0-524-74068-0

Born into a noble Japanese family during World War II, Noriko Kamiza should be a princess, but her illegitimacy makes her a disgrace to her own family. At only 8 years old, Nori is left at her maternal grandparents’ manor in Kyoto. As she abandons her daughter, Nori’s mother gives her a bit of advice: Obey your grandparents. Do not resist. Nori’s grandparents are horrified at Nori’s existence: Her skin color, which reveals that her father was an African American serviceman, is visible proof of their daughter’s infidelity. Nori’s life will be hard, and Lemmie’s debut novel traces her journey from being hidden in her grandparents’ attic, beaten, and subjected to pain-ful bleach baths to lighten her skin; to being sold to a brothel and groomed for sale to the highest bidder; to being rescued and finding freedom from her grandmother’s abuse. Meanwhile, Nori discovers that she has an older half-brother named Akira. Seeing Akira as the only hope to redeem the family’s honor, Nori’s grandmother is dismayed to witness Akira and Nori’s deep love for each other. Lemmie’s sweeping historical backdrop, from the post–World War II decline of minor royalty during World War II, to 10-year-old Eudora Honeysett is 85 and wants the privilege of dying on her own terms. And soon, please.

Growing up in England during World War II, 10-year-old Eudora watches her father go off to fight. When a knock on the door brings the devastating news that he will not be returning, Eudora finds herself living up to her promise to take care of her mother and sister. After a life of sacrifice and heartbreak interspersed with joyful moments, she now watches the world outside her window with a jaded eye. Eudora does some research and finds an agency in Switzerland that just might be the answer to her wish to die. She soon finds herself on the phone with the agency explaining why she is ready to pull the plug. In the midst of her death plans, a rambunctious knock at the door brings an annoyance in the form of 10-year-old Rose, a new neighbor who’s irrepressibly joyful and not to be ignored. Rose introduces Eudora to Stanley, an elderly neighbor, and they soon become an unlikely trio, enjoying life at Rose’s whim. When Eudora tells her pals she’s off to Switzerland for a “vacation,” Rose sends her off with a promise to bring back
a Toblerone, and Stanley drives her to the airport. Then there is a phone call that challenges Eudora’s plans and forces her to decide what really matters. Lyons’ characters are unique and wonderful, portrayed with a depth that allows readers to understand their motivations and empathize with them. Her childhood promise directed most of Eudora’s choices in life except for one that haunts her. Quirky, insightful Rose is bullied and thus gravitates to her kindly older friends. Stanley recently lost his wife and struggles to regain his footing. And yet the trio’s unlikely camaraderie has the power to rejuvenate them all, showing that good friendship makes life worth living.

A sensitive examination of human connections that can both damage and heal.

TO LIVE AND DIE IN EL VALLE
Mancinas, Oscar
Arte Público (68 pp.)
$18.95 | Sep. 30, 2020
978-1-5185-0605-5

The streets of El Valle, Arizona, a Southwest town with its own relentless heartbeat, are seen through the eyes of its fierce gente, who gather in living rooms, at Washington Park, and at the local Circle K, those who disappear tragically and those who got out on their own but always find their way back.

In a story collection that crisscrosses the country from California to Massachusetts, El Valle is always the center of each story and each character, like any hometown. The difference is that the residents of El Valle often straddle two worlds. Seventh-grader Fernanda, who migrates to El Valle from Mexico with her mother without legal documentation and learns to play baseball with the neighborhood boys, experiences a life-shaking shock on her birthday in "Entradas 2001." In "Roach Meets the Surf," Roach is haunted by her mother’s silence and determined to find out who her father is; she takes off for southern California and learns he was deported years before. In "Alicia Returns a la nada," a woman goes home to take care of the funeral arrangements for a mother from whom she’d been estranged for years. While all the stories are solidly written, not every one hits equally hard. The shorter pieces are the most interesting, particularly "Tourista," in which a boy from El Valle going to college in the Northeast gives an impromptu school tour to a Mexican father and son; the congenial interaction turns tense when the student tells the father where in Mexico his own parents are originally from.

With moments of deep pathos and rough power, these stories will ground you in a vivid desert town and its people.

HIS ONLY WIFE
Medie, Peace Adzo
Algonquin (288 pp.)
$25.95 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-61620-915-5

A Cinderella story set in Ghana.

"I think I would have been less apprehensive if Eli himself had been present." Probably so, since this is Afi’s wedding and Elikem is the groom, whom she has barely met. This delightful debut novel from Medie, who was born in Liberia, educated in Ghana and the U.S., and teaches at the University of Bristol in England, is anything but academic. As it begins, Afi—gorgeous, talented, skilled at sewing, dirt poor, and very country—is being married in a traditional ceremony to an absent young man whose wealthy and powerful family, the Ganyos, will do anything to separate him from his Liberian mistress. An aging woman known as Aunty

COPY BOY
"An engrossing work of fiction. An expressive & striking story that examines what one does for family & for oneself."
—Kirkus Reviews

SHELLEY BLANTON-STROUD

Print 978-1-63152-697-8 | $16.95
E-book: 978-1-63152-698-5 | $9.95

She Writes Press
Distributed to the trade by Ingram Publisher Services

HIS ONLY WIFE

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—Sabrina Jeffries, New York Times bestselling author

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is the Don Corleone of the clan, obeyed and feared by all—or almost all. Her selection of Afi as designated daughter-in-law immediately improves the desperate straits of Afi’s widowed mother and a whole slew of other relatives, who begin receiving deliveries of rice and other supplies as part of her bride price. Eli’s brother, Richard, sets Afi up in a fancy apartment in Accra and his sister Yaya helps her enroll in fashion design school. Now...if only Eli would show up. By the time he does, Afi is so lonely and miserable that she might have fallen in love with him even if he weren’t incredibly good looking, generous, and sweet. Unfortunately, he is also completely unwilling to break things off with his other woman, who lives in his primary residence with their daughter. Medie subtly develops Afi’s character as she—mentored by her brother-in-law’s mistress, who lives down the hall—goes from being an innocent, awestruck village girl to a sophisticated, confident woman, accustomed to privilege and luxury, set on a creative career...and mad as hell. She gradually pieces together the scoop on her rival, who “moved to Ghana reluctantly, her cigarettes and booze clutched in one hand and her baby in the other” and now has Eli so wrapped around her little finger that she takes off on a solo vacation to Spain while he’s out of town on business. Afi deserves better. This is war.

A Crazy Rich Asians for West Africa, with a healthy splash of feminism.

**POLAR VORTEX**
Mootoo, Shani
Akashic (336 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-61775-862-1

Will an old lover’s revelations disrupt an apparently secure lesbian couple?

Artist Priya has moved to the Canadian countryside to make a new life with Alex, her lover, a writer. But a visit from Prakash, a male college friend, threatens to expose secrets from her young adulthood she hasn’t shared. After Prakash gets in touch with her after many years and Priya invites him to visit, she begins having nightmares, fearful that Prakash’s revelations could destroy her relationship. Priya’s short chapters of first-person narration attenuate the suspense as Alex, attuned to Priya’s unease, ferrets out facts and asks more probing questions. Photographs from college show Priya and her roommate, Fiona, together with Prakash. Priya, who’s never told Alex that Fiona was her lover, finesses questions on that subject. Nor has Alex, who at one point asks whether Prakash is homophobic, guessed the deeper secret: That Priya and Prakash were also lovers. Flashbacks flesh out Priya’s romantic relationships with Fiona and then Prakash and recall bumpy patches in her six years with Alex. The last time Priya saw Prakash, he was married; does his plan to visit alone mean that he and his wife, Aruna, have divorced? A visit from close friends Skye and Liz raises more uncomfortable questions. The third of Mootoo’s four movements is narrated by Alex, whose insight and compassion come into play after Prakash shares personal secrets that even Priya hadn’t known. A final heart-to-heart between Priya and Prakash triggers still more changes.

Compellingly charts the complexity of human relationships, the illusions of memory, and the corrosive power of denial.

**THE PEACE MACHINE**
Mumcu, Özgür
Pushkin Press (224 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-78227-398-1

The 1903 assassinations of the king and queen of Serbia serve as an unstable anchor for Turkish journalist Mumcu’s debut novel.

The picaresque, frequently violent tale follows Istanbul street urchin Celal...
through his adoption by a rich exporter and then, after a stint of high school in Marseille, into a lucrative career as a writer of French pornography. He gets caught up in a complicated plan to deploy a “peace machine,” which will somehow use “electromagnetism” to bypass free will and block “those waves spread in the soul by wickedness and cruelty.” Serbia being a hot spot in need of pacifying, the group, which now includes seductive and gabby illustrator Céline, heads to Belgrade, where they trick melancholy Lt. Dragan into joining their effort, and set up an enormous circus that will be used to implement the machine. As history suggests, the plan fails, but the group is undeterred and determines to try again elsewhere. The novel is heavy on philosophical dialogue, but because the characters all sound the same and share the same basic points of view, it doesn’t advance the plot. Mumcu also inserts a play and several short stories into the novel, which drag the action to a halt. When a new character, such as Dragan, is introduced, the author backtracks for many pages to recount his biography, even though the character is not going to play a significant role. Casual and often brutal death is omnipresent in the story, with characters being dismissed in a sentence or two, which may represent Mumcu’s cynical attitude toward human progress but can be disconcerting to the reader. An overwrought, poetic ending seems out of step with the rest of the novel.

A frustrating approach to a potentially fascinating topic.

THE SWITCH
O’Leary, Beth
Flatiron Books (336 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Aug. 18, 2020
978-1-25076-986-2

A grieving British woman and her grandmother switch homes and lives in an attempt to shake things up.

Leena Cotton knows she hasn’t exactly been herself since the death of her beloved sister, but after she has a panic attack in a big meeting, she’s shocked that her boss insists...
London roommates provide plenty of laughs. But Eileen, as Leena will live in Eileen's charming, fairy-tale–worthy cottage in Hamleigh-in-Harksdale, population 168, doesn't boast many eligible bachelors. Leena and her grandmother hatch an unlikely plan that just might help both of them—they'll switch lives.

Leena will live in Eileen's charming, fairy-tale–worthy cottage in Hamleigh while Eileen will stay in Leena's London flat with her roommates. Leena will oversee all of Eileen's many projects while Eileen can experience the big-city adventures she missed out on while she was unhappily married. Soon, Eileen is going on dates and adjusting to city life while Leena handles Neighborhood Watch meetings and attempts to fit in with a crowd of mostly elderly people. Although there's slightly less romance than in O'Leary's debut, *The Flatshare* (2019), this novel is full of the charm and warmth readers expect, with an increased focus on family bonds. Leena's attempts to deal with her sister's death and heal her relationship with her mother are quite moving while the eccentric cast of town residents and her quirky London roommates provide plenty of laughs. But Eileen, as a nearly-80-year-old woman who's allowed to have hopes, dreams, and a vibrant sex life, truly shines. She never gives up on helping others or finding her own happily-ever-after, proving that it's never too late to start over.

A cozy, hopeful escape that will make readers laugh, cry, and feel inspired.

**THE GLASS KINGDOM**
Osborne, Laurence
Hogarth/Crown (304 pp.)
$27.00 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-1-984824-30-1

After fleecing a famous New York novelist while working as her personal assistant, Sarah Mullins is targeted by schemers on the other side of the world.

Responding to overtures from a dealer in Hong Kong, Sarah flew there to sell a cache of her employer's letters, with the fading 83-year-old writer's approval. Having peeled off $200,000 in cash from the sale, Sarah is now hiding out in Bangkok in a decaying, once-glamorous apartment complex called the Kingdom. Power outages, seasonal flooding, and rumors of a military crackdown are causing occupants to leave. Though regarded as an oddity, the somber, withdrawn Sarah finds companionship in the extroverted but secretive Mali, a British-educated financial assistant; Ximena, a Chilean chef at a French restaurant; and Natalie, a hotel manager whose "eyes contained a strange hint of vendetta." It isn't long before word of the stash of money in Sarah's closet gets out. The maid, an opportunist like everyone else in this morally compromised world, has a passkey for all of the units and isn't shy about using it. Blackmailed, then implicated in an apparent murder, and finally deserted, Sarah loses all sense of identity. Can she be saved? Coming off his acclaimed Philip Marlowe novel, *Only To Sleep* (2018), the Bangkok-based Osborne here tilts toward Robert Stone and Graham Greene with his languorous portrayal of an ugly American—a farang, as the locals call White people—getting schooled in a foreign culture. It's a masterfully drawn, mesmerizing novel in which the ghosts of the past—like the bats, lizards, and geckos who gain free access to the Kingdom—refuse to vacate the premises.

A seductive, darkly atmospheric thriller with a spine-tingling climax.

**THE BOOK OF TWO WAYS**
Picoult, Jodi
Ballantine (432 pp.)
$28.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-984818-35-5

An Egyptologist-turned-hospice worker contemplates the mysteries of fate, mortality, and love.

Picoult's obsession here is the power of choices and what can happen when they are made under pressure. Dawn, a graduate student in Egyptology, is abruptly called back to Boston from a dig in Egypt by a family emergency. Her mother, who raised her and her brother, Kieran, alone, is in hospice, dying. This death and other circumstances conspire to derail Dawn's cherished career—now she must raise Kieran, who is only 13. Security is offered by Brian, a physicist at Harvard, whom she marries after discovering she's pregnant. For 15 years, she curates a different life than the one she had planned. She's now a "death doula," a concierge hospice worker contracted by the moribund to help wind up loose ends. For Dawn's client Win, winding up involves getting in touch with a lost love, abandoned for another life. Win's situation evokes in Dawn renewed longing for her own lost love, Wyatt, an English earl she left behind at the dig. When fault lines emerge in her marriage and teenage daughter Meret is being extra surly, might-have-beens beckon. The nonlinear narrative ricochets between Dawn's Boston life and her sojourns—past and present—in Egypt. The chronology can be confusing—and, in the case of the prologue, deliberately misleading, it seems. There are no datelines or other guideposts except for periodic headings like "Water/Boston" and "Land/Egypt." Water and Land reference the "Two Ways," alternate routes to the afterlife in Egyptian mythology. Whether on death and dying, archaeology, or quantum physics, Picoult's erudition overload far exceeds the interests of verisimilitude or theme. Do lectures on multiverses bring us any closer to parsing Dawn's epiphanous epigram—"We don't make decisions. Our decisions make us"? This much is clear: The characters' professions are far better defined than their motivations.

A midlife crisis story stifled by enough material for several TED talks.
A legendary spy takes a vacation—or tries to, anyway—in Silva’s 20th Gabriel Allon novel.

**THE ORDER**
Silva, Daniel
Harper/HarperCollins (464 pp.)
$20.49 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-0-06-283484-3

A legendary spy takes a vacation—or tries to, anyway—in Silva’s 20th Gabriel Allon novel.

Gabriel is trying to enjoy some rest and relaxation with his family in Venice when he learns that an old friend has died. As it happens, this old friend was Pope Paul VII, and it’s not long before Allon is summoned by the pontiff’s personal secretary. Archbishop Luigi Donati has reason to believe that the Holy Father did not die a natural death. For each of the past several summers, Silva has delivered a thriller that seems to be ripped from the headlines. This latest book feels, at first, like something of a throwback. Palace intrigue at the Vatican might seem quaint compared to Islamist extremism or Russia’s rise as an international influence, but Silva makes it relevant and compelling. Allon discovers that the most likely culprits in the death of the pope are connected to far-right leaders throughout Europe, and the rediscovery of a lost Gospel sheds new light on Christian anti-Semitism. The villains here are Catholic traditionalists—Silva’s imaginary Paul VII looks a lot like the real-life Francis I—and “populist” politicians who appeal to nativist, anti-globalist sympathies. As Silva looks at European contempt for a new wave of immigrants from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, he finds a model for this xenophobia in ancient hatred of the Jewish people, an antipathy that has its roots in the New Testament. He interjects a few Bible studies lessons and offers a bit of history as background; these passages add depth without impeding the forward momentum of the plot. Readers familiar with this series may notice the evolution of a motif introduced a few novels ago: In the world of Gabriel Allon, the United States has receded from relevance on the world stage.

Engaging and deftly paced, another thoughtfully entertaining summer read from Silva.
Thirty hilarious stories, mostly set in small-town South Carolina, gathered from eight collections published over the last two decades.

As Tom Franklin notes in his introduction, Singleton's stories often proceed from simple, spectacular premises, the kind easily conveyed in a sentence. "Outlaw Head and Tail" features a bouncer—well, a "pre-bouncer"—who accidentally records an episode of Bonanza over his wife's sonogram and then canvasses barflies in search of a substitute tape; in "Show-and-Tell," a divorced father pursues his high school girlfriend, now his son's third-grade teacher, by proxy, sending his boy to school with great love letters of literature during show and tell, mementos like a dried-up wrist corsage and matching boutonniere, etc. "Probate" tells of a couple's misadventures with a heartbroken and gabby "traveling euthanasia vet"; the hero of "This Itches, Y'All" is a man shadowed all his life by his three words of dialogue in a hygiene filmstrip about head lice; "Staff Picks" tells a love story about a librarian and a professional bowler who meet while trying to win an RV by keeping a hand on it for as long as possible. These stories have absurdist energy, wit, and inventiveness to burn, but antic comedy is their mode and métier, not their sole aim or reason for being. Singleton's work doesn't wear literariness on its sleeve; even when he channels canonical writers, as in "John Cheever, Rest in Peace," he does so in a way that's literal and can seem almost anti-literary—making the grandly metaphorical, life-spanning "The Swimmer" into a story in which a man suffers a heart attack on his riding mower and then, dead, cuts a gently arcing swath across his town before crashing into a silo. But these stories are often sneakily ambitious, sneakily moving. Singleton has Charles Portis' gift for writing a satire both ruthless and lined always with affection, and like that Southern icon, he's a master of and evanglist for the joys and idiosyncrasies of speech, especially the loquacious talk of barrooms and Little League fields and scrapbooking shops.

For the uninitiated, a wonderful introduction to a Southern original.

The last volume of British writer Smith's elliptical, engrossing seasonal quartet revisits themes of activism and art and some familiar characters.

Smith weaves from seemingly disparate threads here. "Whether I shall turn out to be the heroine of my own life" is a quote a woman named Grace is trying to source. Her memory has regendered the original "hero," from David Copperfield. Grace and her clever teenage kids join writers Art and Charlotte as they head to Suffolk in early 2020 to return a piece of art last seen in 1985 in Smith's second seasonal book, Winter (2018), when Art's mother slept with a man named Daniel. Now 104, Daniel is helped by Elisabeth, who befriended him in her childhood in Autumn (2017). His memory drifts back to World War II, when he was held in U.K. detention centers with other men of German background. His sister, who helped people escape to Switzerland from Occupied France, has another crucial link to the small cast. Present-day political refugee Hero has been in a detention center for nearly three years; his passage to freedom involves a kind of coffee truck last seen in Spring (2019). "Nothing's not connected," says "a seasoned lefty activist." This volume sounds the quartet's recurrent klaxons about injustice, dereliction, and the perennial problem of how too few people step up. The main issues are immigration, refugees, Brexit, and COVID-19. Smith even briefly works in George Floyd. As always, the narrative zigs and zags, skimps on segues, demands attention and effort. The reward is a novel that is wonderfully entertaining—for its humor, allusions, deft use of time and memory, sharply realized characters, and delightfully relevant digressions—and a reminder, brought home by the pandemic, that everything and everyone truly is connected and the sufferance of suffering hurts us all.

A deeply resonant finale to a work that should come to be recognized as a classic.

A collection of stories in search of an America that resists road mapping.

In nine stories and two short "interludes," Stansel presents protagonists from all over the country in search of their identities (from sexual orientation to musical category), attempting to come
Get the ultimate inside scoop on the best new books.

New episode every Tuesday

Podcast Available on iTunes
to terms with mortality (their own and others), trying to find meaning and order in a world of chance and chaos. Wherever they go, they find themselves—and they generally find themselves adrift. But, as one of the narrators advises, “The world tells us things if only we bother to hear it.” With story formats ranging from question-and-answer to the alphabetical glossary of the title story, the centerpiece of the collection is “The Caller,” based around a radio call-in show. The protagonist, Max, concocts a tale to share on Voices for the Lost, a program about people who have disappeared in the Mexican drug wars, saying his brother disappeared near Juarez. He did lose his brother to drug violence, though not to a Mexican drug cartel, and he invents the story to provide a connection with others on the program, a connection that can offer some relief from his aimless torpor, “a sad amazement at still being alive.” Inevitably, though, connection leads to consequences beyond his control. Elsewhere, the thematic ambition turns heavier handed. In “Caller,” based around a radio call-in show. The protagonist, Max, concocts a tale to share on Voices for the Lost, a program about people who have disappeared in the Mexican drug wars, saying his brother disappeared near Juarez. He did lose his brother to drug violence, though not to a Mexican drug cartel, and he invents the story to provide a connection with others on the program, a connection that can offer some relief from his aimless torpor, “a sad amazement at still being alive.” Inevitably, though, connection leads to consequences beyond his control.

Elsewhere, the thematic ambition turns heavier handed. In “North out of Houston,” a family faces a metaphysical crisis as they’re stalled on the highway while trying to evacuate ahead of a tropical storm. Mother, father, and son must each confront and attempt to resolve some issue related to sexuality amid a storm that is plainly metaphorical as well as natural. There is just too much symbolic baggage for a single story to carry. In “Modern Sounds in Country and Western,” a Brooklyn band’s progression from indie to alt-country results in a breakthrough hit and a terrorist attack. There’s a lot going on in these stories and a lot at stake, but the philosophical weight is sometimes too much for the slighter among them to bear.

This is a writer who thinks hard and deep about the country that forges his fiction.

**FANTASTIC TALES**

Tarchetti, Iginio Ugo

*Trans. by Venuti, Lawrence*

Archipelago (260 pp.)

$20.00 paper | Sep. 29, 2020

978-1-939810-62-5

Originally published in English in 1992, these reissued translations will introduce Tarchetti’s short, fantastic works to a new generation of U.S. readers.

Tarchetti (1839-1869) was a novelist, journalist, and poet aligned with a scrappy Milanese collective of artist-agitators known as the Scapigliatura (from scapigliato, “disheveled”). As is evident in this collection, Tarchetti, who also worked as a translator, was heavily influenced by gothic literature from abroad, favoring the morbid, the metaphysical, the socially and sexually outré. However, despite frequent use of Italian settings in earlier works by gothic authors from other countries, by Tarchetti’s time, gothic literature had not taken hold in Italy, and until Venuti discovered otherwise while translating these stories, Tarchetti was credited with writing the first gothic tale in Italian in 1865. This story, about a young man who drinks a potion to relieve himself of love for his disloyal sweetheart, which appears in this collection as “The Elixir of Immortality (In Imitation of the English),” was actually an unattributed translation (with a few notable tweaks) of Mary Shelley’s “The Mortal Immortal.” Whether viewed as a pure act of literary subterfuge or, as Venuti does, also a sly statement on the anti-bourgeois ethos of the Scapigliatura, comparing Venuti’s retranslation into English with Shelley’s original is in itself a brief and illuminating education in the art and artifice of literary translation. While certain stories, like “The Letter U (A Madman's Manuscript)” and “Captain Gubart’s Fortune,” will likely seem less fresh to modern readers than they would have to 19th-century Italian audiences, others still feel remarkably vivid and innovative. In “A Spirit in a Raspberry,” when the myopic and supercilious Baron B. eats the fruit of a mysterious raspberry bush that has sprouted following a maid’s disappearance, the most interesting aspect isn’t what happens next but the way it unfolds in an almost psychedelic portrayal of the resultant war for dominance of personality and gender expression within the baron’s body. In “Bouvard,” it isn’t the perversity but ultimately predictable ending but the young Bouvard’s unassailable belief in his future success despite the disadvantages of his birth, the sensitivity he displays toward nature and the inspiration he draws in his art, and ultimately the disillusionment he feels with society when his talent and fame as a violinist fail to produce the acceptance and affection he most desires. The collection overall is well worth the read for these and other inventive tales.

**A collection of nine classic macabre tales, exquisitely translated from the Italian by Venuti.**

**HENCH**

Walschots, Natalie Zina

Morrow/HarperCollins (416 pp.)

$27.99 | Sep. 22, 2020

978-0-06-297857-8

An aggrieved Millennial henchwoman sets out to prove that not all heroes are super in poet Walschots’ fiction debut. Shortly after freelance “hench” Anna Tromedlov lands a full-time job entering data for Electrophorous Industries, her boss—a minor supervillain known as the Electric Eel—offers her some fieldwork. Anna is nervous but excited—until she discovers that she’s simply female set dressing for the Eel’s latest press conference. When her employer publicly announces that he’s holding the mayor’s son for ransom, Supercollider—an A-list superhero—crashes through the window, saving the boy but killing multiple henchies and shattering Anna’s femur in the process. Upon learning that her surgically repaired leg will take six months to heal, a laid-off Anna moves in with her best friend, fellow hench June. While convalescing, Anna starts calculating approximately how many dollars and life-years the Supercollider and other so-called “heroes” have cost not just her, but the world at large. She posts her findings online, earning public scorn—and the attention of Leviathan, the world’s most infamous supervillain and Supercollider’s archnemesis. Evocative prose, acerbic wit, and patient yet propulsive pacing complement Walschots’ sophisticated plot, which juxtaposes
philosophic profundity with brutal, meticulously choreographed action. Boldly drawn characters of sundry ethnicities, sexualities, and gender identities engage in realistically complex relationships that evolve (and devolve) over the course of the tale, illustrating the relativity of good and evil, the corrupting influence of power, and the necrotic nature of revenge.

A fiendishly clever novel that fizzes with moxie and malice.

MEMORIAL
Washington, Bryan
Riverhead (320 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-593-08727-5

Benson and Mike, a mixed-race couple in Houston, search for the truth about themselves, each other, and their families.

This debut novel from Washington—author of the award-winning story collection Lot (2019)—is split into three vividly written sections. The first and third are narrated by Benson, an African American man living in Houston with his boyfriend, Mike, who narrates the middle section. Benson and Mike are on the verge of breaking up, but their passion for each other keeps them from being able to fully pull away. Both men have families they feel distant from: Benson’s father is an alcoholic who never fully accepted his son’s homosexuality, and Mike’s divorced parents have both left Houston for their native Japan. At the start of the novel, Mike’s mother, Mitsuko, flies to Houston to visit him at the same time that his father, Eiju, falls seriously ill back in Osaka. Mike picks Mitsuko up from the airport, leaves her with Benson, then flies across the ocean to visit Eiju, whom he hasn’t seen in years. Neither Benson nor Mitsuko is happy about being stuck with each other, but they slowly develop a relationship that’s not quite friendship and not quite family. They both love the same man, and that’s enough to help them understand each other. In Osaka, Mike cares for his sick, grumpy father and helps him run his bar though their relationship is strained. Mike isn’t rushing to forgive his homophbic father for leaving the family in Houston, and Eiju is cold and distant. Both Mike and Benson fall into relationships with other men while they’re apart, and ultimately, both have to decide how to forgive the people closest to them. Washington’s novel is richly layered and thrives in the quiet moments between lovers and family members. Benson and Mike know they could hurt each other, hurt their families, hurt themselves, or they could say words to heal and bring people together. As Mike says, “How did everything come to such a turning point between us? Quietly, I guess. The big moments are never big when they’re actually fucking happening.” There is passion in this novel—fight scenes, sex scenes, screaming matches, and tears—but it reaches a deep poetic realism when Washington explores the space between characters. When so much is left unsaid, that’s when this novel speaks the loudest.

A subtle and moving exploration of love, family, race, and the long, frustrating search for home.

M Y S T E R Y

FOR WHOM THE BOOK TOLLS
Black, Laura Gail
Crooked Lane (264 pp.)
$26.99 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-1-64385-451-9

A desperate North Carolina woman leaps out of the big-city frying pan into a small-town fire.

After she’s acquitted of murder in Charlotte, Jenna Quinn hopes that life might be rosier in quiet Hokes Folly, where her widowed uncle, Paul Baxter, who owns an antique bookstore, has invited her to stay. Arriving at his apartment late at night, she quietly goes to bed. In the morning, she arises to find Paul dead at the bottom of the stairs to the bookstore and herself suspected of his murder. Although sexy Detective Keith Logan gives her the benefit of the doubt, his partner obviously thinks her guilty, especially once he learns that she’s inherited Paul’s considerable estate. Jenna’s money troubles may be over, but the post-mortem discovery of an overdose of sleeping medication in Paul’s system forces her to turn sleuth or go back to jail. Paul’s friend and her new neighbor Rita Wallace is a tower of strength who not only believes her innocent, but is willing to help straighten up the messy store. Paul had several enemies and a big secret: a Hokes Folly family diary he bought at a sale that may hold the key to a treasure. More trouble arrives in the form of an obnoxious man claiming to be Paul’s son and rightful heir. All Jenna has to do is prove him wrong, find the diary, fix up the store, and unearth a killer. Piece of cake.

An appealing debut peopled with believable characters and a well-ordered mystery.

THE UNLOCKING SEASON
Bowen, Gail
ECW Press (350 pp.)
$24.95 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-77041-528-7

The production of a TV series chronicling a real-life murder in Joanne Kilbourn-Shreve’s family is a fertile ground for conflicts magnified by a shocking death.

The six parts of Sisters and Strangers promise to dramatize the story of family and murder that Joanne has worked to uncover since a fateful summer many years ago. The tone is established by the powerful voice of writer Roy Brodnitz, who’s working with Joanne to ensure the script reflects not just the events, but the relationships driving them. Joanne and her husband, Zack, are both part of the Sisters and Strangers production company Living Skies, which
also includes their daughter, Taylor, and Taylor’s partner, Vale, an incandescent young woman perfect for the part of Joanne’s friend Sally. Happy to begin a project that brings Taylor and Vale to their home in Regina, Joanne is horrified when she learns that Roy has had a mental break while scouting locations in Saskatchewan. Terrified and incoherent after separating from the rest of the crew, Roy doesn’t even recognize his colleague and lifelong friend Ainsley Blair. When Roy dies soon after, Joanne hopes to press on with the shooting schedule, though she wonders what truly happened to Roy and who on the set might be involved. Things get even iffier when Ainsley brings in outsider Buzz Wells as a script doctor and new executive producer. It seems as though Joanne’s story will still be told, but how?

Newcomers to Bowen’s series may be overwhelmed by the exhaustive detail and the interest in characters’ stories over time.

THE ENTITLED
Boyarsky, Nancy
Light Messages (246 pp.)
$14.99 paper | Sep. 27, 2020
978-1-61153-324-8

Packed off to London to retrieve a young woman reputed to be quite a hand-ful, private investigator Nicole Graves quickly finds that Abigail Fletcher’s attitude is the least of her problems.

Talk about entitled. As a child, Alina Halichenko was plucked from a Kiev orphanage by “typical L.A. billionaire” Gene Fletcher and his wife, Serena, renamed Abigail, installed in their opulent home, and given every advantage denied the brother and sister she left behind. Now a high school senior, she’s completing a term at King’s College London, and her adoptive parents want Nicole to escort her home. The job seems insultingly routine—after all, Abigail flew to London and settled in on her own—but isn’t. Shortly after Nicole meets the sulky girl and Abigail has her last meeting with her boyfriend, Sami Malouf, he’s stabbed to death with a knife carrying her fingerprints. Nobody’s convinced by Abigail’s story of being attacked, drugged, and left unconscious outside Sami’s door, and she’s promptly arrested and clapped in a detention center well beneath her social station. The friends of Sami’s that closely he sees that the article is a decade old. A second flash-forward highlights this earlier, identical crime, also investigated by Ainsley Blair. When he looks more closely he sees that the article is a decade old. A second flash-forward highlights this earlier, identical crime, also investigated by Piroz. As evidence piles up against him, Jamal and intrepid postdoctoral fellow Mona use their wits and the internet to ferret out the real killer. Bussi creates a devilish nesting-doll plot involving a sudokulike number square, ghosts, and surprising family connections.

A tantalizing puzzle starring a truly lovable protagonist.

NEVER FORGET
Bussi, Michel
Trans. by Whiteside, Shaun
World Noir (480 pp.)
$18.00 paper | Aug. 18, 2020
978-1-60945-612-2

Framed for murder, an optimistic social outcast must prove his innocence.

As the book opens, the collapse of a rugged hillside in Normandy reveals a trio of skeletons who seem to have died in the same place but at different times. Then we flash back to five months earlier, as Jamal Salamou is attempting to climb “the highest cliff in Europe.” As a Muslim, he’s been a scapegoat his entire life. At the Saint Antoine Therapeutic Institute of Bagnolet, where he works, he’s often unfairly accused of neglecting his teenage clients. When he spots a distressed young woman dangerously close to the cliff’s edge, he’s unable to stop her from leaping to her death. At this point, Jamal, now accused of murder, takes over the narrative. After he ventures down to examine the body, things become more complicated. A woman named Denise and her male companion, whom Jamal dubs Xanax, arrive, eyeing him suspiciously. They’re soon followed by laconic police captain Piroz. A cursory look at the dead woman reveals that she’s naked under her coat and that she’s been raped and that someone had also tried to strangle her. Then an anonymous person mails him newspaper clippings, case notes, and witness statements at the hotel where he’s staying, seemingly about the tragedy on the cliff, but when he looks more closely he sees that the article is a decade old. A second flashback spotlights this earlier, identical crime, also investigated by Piroz. As evidence piles up against him, Jamal and intrepid postdoctoral fellow Mona use their wits and the internet to ferret out the real killer. Bussi creates a devilish nesting-doll plot that involves a sudokulike number square, ghosts, and surprising family connections.

A tantalizing puzzle starring a truly lovable protagonist.

MURDER IN THE BAYOU BONEYARD
Byron, Ellen
Crooked Lane (304 pp.)
$26.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-64385-460-1

Halloween festivities turn deadly for a rural Louisiana family.

Like most owners of large properties in and around picturesque Pelican, the Crozats are feeling the pinch. Young entrepreneurs like Gavin Grody, CEO of Rent My Digs, are cutting into their short-term rental business by buying up older homes and leasing them online under the guise of “home-sharing.” To boost business at their B&B, Tug and Ninette Crozat team up with the owners of the Belle Vista Plantation Resort...
to offer a Pelican's Spooky Past package. Belle Vista's offerings include a mystery play directed by local attorney Quentin MacIlhoney; in addition, the Crozats open a spa, complete with massage, skin care, and a clairvoyant. To mix business with pleasure, the Crozats invite Susannah and Doug MacDowell, distant relatives from Canada, to join them for the length of the promotion. Susie, a trained masseuse, agrees to work in the spa to subsidize their stay. Tug and Ninette's daughter, Maggie, gives up her art studio for the duration so that the cousins and Doug's adult children can have plenty of room during their stay but quickly realizes that the Canadians have their eyes on more than one building on the Crozats' property. Soon the bodies start to pile up, and Maggie, who's engaged to Pelican Police Department detective Bo Durand, decides that she'd better start another round of sleuthing if she doesn't want to celebrate her wedding day behind bars.

Kooky characters, Southern charm, recipes.

**GINGERDEAD MAN**
Corrigan, Maya
Kensington (304 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-4967-2244-7

Murder mars a Maryland holiday festival. The townsfolk in Bayport, where caterer Val Deniston lives with her Granddad, are putting on a Victorian holiday festival with the emphasis on Dickens. Granddad is bent out of shape because his usual job as Santa has been given to newcomer Jake Smith, who not only has a nasty cold, but is also a bit drunk. Jake's wife, Jewel, plays Mrs. Claus in a short red dress and thigh-high boots. A tea Val caters for the volunteers at a book festival has only six takers plus a mysterious black-robed figure who drops off gift bags. Jake opens his to discover a gingerdead cookie that's usually reserved for Halloween, eats it, keels over, and later dies, apparently poisoned. Both Val and her Granddad have done detective work in the past, and when Jake's death sparks rumors, Val realizes that her catering business will be in trouble unless she catches the killer. Jake has a history of leaving real estate investors holding the bag while he skips out with the money. He was working on a similar scheme in Bayport and had already made enemies. When an elderly man dies, possibly had already made enemies. When an elderly man dies, possibly poisoned from poisoned chocolates, the morning after his birthday dinner, which Val catered, the pressure increases to find the motive and means in two seemingly unrelated deaths.

Plenty of red herrings, mixed motives, and recipes for foodies make for a spirited holiday cozy.

**CANDY SLAIN MURDER**
Day, Maddie
Kensington (304 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-4967-2317-8

Christmas is coming, but so is trouble for South Lick, Indiana. Robbie Jordan, owner and chef cook at Pans 'N Pancakes, returns from solving a murder in California just in time for the holiday rush, which is complicated more than most Christmastimes by a number of surprises that disrupt her circle of friends. First, her assistant, Danna Beedle, gets a visit from Marcus Vandemere, a young biracial man claiming to be her half brother, an assertion that thrills Danna despite the doubts of some friends and relatives. Next comes a fire that nearly destroys the home of anesthesiologist Dr. William Geller, a racist whose wife, Tina, reportedly left him years ago. When a skeleton turns up in the attic, the not-so-esteemed doctor has some explaining to do. Robbie's nemesis, Detective Octavia Slade, who recently married Robbie's former boyfriend, is more willing than usual to accept help from Robbie, who has a knack for finding things out. The next to die is Tina's twin, Toni, who knew Marcus from karate classes. Toni's husband is the prime suspect, but Robbie's convinced the fatalities are connected. With help from her boyfriend and her network of friends, she attempts to clear things up before the killer spoils her holiday by adding her to his list.

The lavish food descriptions and appended recipes are the best parts of this anemic mystery.

**DON'T EVER FORGET**
Farrell, Matthew
Thomas & Mercer (352 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-5420-1976-7

The killing of a New York police officer during a routine traffic stop turns out to be the tip of a very cold, very massive iceberg.

Pulling over Cindy Garland for speeding, Trooper Patrick Kincaid finds blood on her hands, on her clothes, and on the lid of her car's trunk. Before he can make her open the trunk, he's struck down by Trevor Foster, who's been forced to help Cindy dispose of the body in her car by the mysterious Hagen, who's kidnapped his wife and child. This is only the latest in a rash of abductions stretching back to 1982, when Cindy's sister, Sonia, disappeared. Since then, Bonnie Bernstein, Marcus Ruley, and Tiffany Greene have all vanished—maybe at the hands of retired schoolteacher James Darville. Now James and his visiting nurse, Rebecca Hill, are gone as well. A series of interpolated sections show present and past events from James' point of view; but since James has Alzheimer's, his memories are unreliable, incomplete, and...
riddled with gaps and fabulations, whether he’s struggling to remember things on his own or being pressed by others—a compelling metaphor for bewildered readers’ own experience.

Forced into kidnapping and murder to protect their loved ones, Cindy and Trevor may only be acting out the latest stage of a series of crimes that stretches back as far as the eye can see. No wonder Investigator Susan Adler and ex-forensics specialist Liam Dwyer are utterly overshadowed by the dark web they’re sucked into.

Long after you’ve given up ever being able to make sense of this tangle of horrors, Farrell keeps you turning the pages.

**NIGHTSHADE**

Huie, M.L.

Crooked Lane (320 pp.)

$26.99 | Sep. 8, 2020

978-1-64385-456-4

A British spy puts her life on the line for a friend after World War II.

Livy Nash had a tough war and difficulties adjusting to whatever normal life the late 1940s provided. Heavy drinking helped her cope. Ian Fleming, who runs an unofficial spy agency, gave her a job as reporter/spy. Now she’s in Paris on the verge of losing her nerve when a report comes in that the agent code-named Nightshade has suddenly resumed sending radio signals. Nightshade is Margot Dupont, Livy’s only real friend, who vanished after being dropped into occupied France. The British government, which thinks she could be a captive of the Soviets, hopes to turn Yuri Kostin, an MBG agent stationed in Washington, who may know where Margot is being held. Because Livy had a fling with Kostin during her dissolute years, Fleming asks her to go to Washington to work on him, though he gives her dire warnings about the dangers. The FBI, which runs the show there, doesn’t think much of Livy or the plan, but she refuses to be patronized. Using her cover story as a stringer for Fleming’s news agency, she artfully runs into Kostin at the theater. She works to gain Kostin’s trust, bringing him slightly outdated intelligence and encouraging his sexual attraction. But she’s in danger from the Russians, who don’t trust her, and she can’t count on the FBI as she plays a dangerous game in an all-out effort to save her friend.

**NEXT TO LAST STAND**

Johnson, Craig

Viking (336 pp.)

$28.00 | Sep. 22, 2020

978-0-52-552253-9

Sheriff Walt Longmire investigates a murder associated with a long-lost painting.

When Charley Lee Stillwater, a resident of the Veterans’ Home of Wyoming, dies and a shoe box containing $1 million is found among his otherwise modest possessions, Sheriff Longmire, who had known Stillwater for years, is called in. Preliminary questioning of Lee’s cronies in the home reveals that he had had shadowy meetings with people who might have an interest in art, and a fragment of a painted canvas among his things reinforces the notion that Lee has somehow been dealing in art. With the help of his Northern Cheyenne friend Henry Standing Bear, Longmire has the fragment analyzed, and he eventually establishes that it is part of a study for *Custer’s Last Fight* by Cassilly Adams, a mural-size painting that was for years an iconic image of the Battle of the Greasy Grass but which was destroyed in a fire in 1946. Traveling with Standing Bear and pursuing, as it were, the ghosts of Custer and Sitting Bull, Longmire explores the complex of invention and fact that looms so large in the American consciousness. The value of the painting, in fact, derives not from its quality as art but from its participation in the creation of the Custer myth. This is good stuff, if a little discursive, and helps redress a historical imbalance. However, the measured tone and leisurely exploration give way to accelerating action and a somewhat fragmented plot. Some characters believe the painting still exists, and one, Count von Lehman, a slightly absurd caricature of art dealers, believes he paid a substantial amount to acquire it. Then von Lehman disappears, apparently murdered, and the niceties of civilized competition drop away. All’s revealed in the end, of course. Some of the characters are richly drawn and, in the case of Standing Bear, warmly familiar, and the antics of Lee’s Veterans’ Home cronies are a sweet tribute to America’s better angels, but the villains are disappointing, and while it’s more a caper than a gritty tale, mortal crimes are committed, lives are changed or curtailed, and the plotting seems somehow less than the sum of its parts.

Not Johnson’s best work but a pleasant composition demonstrating deft brushwork.
Miami private eye Willie Cuesta is sent to central Florida to track down a missing person.

**THE WIDENING STAIN**

*Johnson, W. Bolingbroke*
American Mystery Classics (288 pp.)
$25.95 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-61316-171-5

The latest discovery from American Mystery Classics is a brightly waspish account of murder in a thinly disguised version of the Cornell University Library that's the only novel by the prolific academic, translator, and light versifier Morris Bishop (1893-1973), writing under a pseudonym.

Everyone, it seems, is suddenly very interested in manuscript B 58, the library's copy of Hilarius' miracle play *Filius GETRONIS*. Professor Belknap (history) plans to publish it with the cooperation of professor Hyett (classics) and professor Francis Parry (dramatics). And now assistant professor Angelo Casti (romance languages) wants to borrow it for some investigations he proposes in his phonetics laboratory. Absolutely not, says Chief Cataloguer Gilda Gorham, believing that now everything has settled down. Her cozy assumption is promptly exploded by the death of assistant professor Lucie Coindreau, a rival of Cas's, who leaves a reception at President Temple's house, lets herself into the Wilmerding Collections, and plunges from a gallery to the floor below. As if to prove that her demise is no accident, she's followed by Hyett's strangling in the Wilmerding Collections, Gilda must sort through a wide range of decorous secrets her colleagues are hiding—an indebtedness to a predatory lender, a taste for erotica, an affair with the owner's conceit is to operate the hotel as it would have been run in 1911, with the staff dressed in period costume and the butler, Mr. Fig, wielding an iron hand. Ivy is delighted with every bit of knowledge she can cull about her family home, from artwork to secret passages, and Mr. Fig, who favors her, is happy to oblige. Trouble commences when wealthy, obnoxious Amelia Swain and her son arrive. Their reservation had not been taken correctly, but Ivy smooths things over while listening to Amelia give dire warnings about her shellfish allergy. Ivy finds comfort and support in George, the hotel chef, who's meticulous about everything in his kitchen. When Amelia dies from an apparent allergy attack, Ivy is certain that George made no mistake, but he lands in trouble with the police and gets put on leave. Now Ivy must focus on discovering who might have wanted Amelia dead and how they accomplished it despite George's insistence that no one else was in the kitchen. Overcoming panic attacks may be the least of her problems as she learns more about her family's past and all too much about the present to suit a clever killer.

This character-driven debut combines a knotty mystery with the believable real-life problems of its appealing sleuth.

**MURDER AT HOTEL 1911**

*Koosw, Audrey*
Crooked Lane (272 pp.)
$26.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-64385-496-0

A secret family connection helps a newly minted amateur sleuth solve a crime.

Ivy Nichols, 28, has fought panic attacks ever since her mother vanished when she was a child. Having dropped out of college because of them, Ivy is living with her father, but he prefers his daughter, who wants Willie to teach her, um, the salsa. The feds a worthless scrap of land because he takes every government remittances to his family back in Mexico. Now his son, Pedro Pérez, has disappeared while looking for him. So starchy immigration lawyer Abbie LeGrange wants Willie to nose around in Cane County till he finds at least one of them. Capt. Rory Camp, of the Cane County Sheriff's Office, and Homer Eccles, the recently widowed farmer, who's the owner of Narciso Cruz, who supplies Eccles with laborers; Loretta Turk, the Eccles crew leader to whom Ernesto complained about a foreman who cheated him; and E.J. Eccles, the farmer's beautiful daughter, who wants Willie to teach her, um, the salsa. The deeper he digs, the more clearly Willie sees that the county is being torn asunder by two equally dangerous groups: the heroin crew, represented by party girl Dusty Powell and dealer Marcus Morrell, and the Sovereign Rights Movement personified by powerful BioMaster owner Quincy Vetter, who refuses to sell the feds a worthless scrap of land because he takes every government intrusion into his county as a personal affront.

Beneath the so-so mystery is a heartfelt account of the risks Latinos face in modern America whether or not they're undocumented.

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Miami private eye Willie Cuesta is sent to central Florida to track down a missing person. **REMEMBER MY FACE**

*Lantigua, John*
Arte Público (250 pp.)
$18.95 paper | Sep. 30, 2020
978-1-55885-907-4

This character-driven debut combines a knotty mystery with the believable real-life problems of its appealing sleuth.

Miami private eye Willie Cuesta is sent to central Florida to track down a missing person. Maybe persons.

Three months ago, Ernesto Pérez, who'd sneaked into Florida to pick produce after the workers at his coffee farm deserted for better-paying American jobs, suddenly stopped sending remittances to his family back in Mexico. Now his son, Pedro Pérez, has disappeared while looking for him. So starchy immigration lawyer Abbie LeGrange wants Willie to nose around in Cane County till he finds at least one of them. Capt. Rory Camp, of the Cane County Sheriff’s Office, and Homer Eccles, the recently widowed farmer, who’s the owner of Narciso Cruz, who supplies Eccles with laborers; Loretta Turk, the Eccles crew leader to whom Ernesto complained about a foreman who cheated him; and E.J. Eccles, the farmer’s beautiful daughter, who wants Willie to teach her, um, the salsa. The deeper he digs, the more clearly Willie sees that the county is being torn asunder by two equally dangerous groups: the heroin crew, represented by party girl Dusty Powell and dealer Marcus Morrell, and the Sovereign Rights Movement personified by powerful BioMaster owner Quincy Vetter, who refuses to sell the feds a worthless scrap of land because he takes every government intrusion into his county as a personal affront.

Beneath the so-so mystery is a heartfelt account of the risks Latinos face in modern America whether or not they're undocumented.
FOR THE BEST

Lillie, Vanessa
Thomas & Mercer (320 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-5420-0587-6

A recently appointed Providence foundation chief awakens from a black-out drunk to find that her job, her reputation, and maybe even her freedom are toast.

Even though she’s happily married with an adorable little boy, it’s no wonder that Juliet Worthington-Smith drinks. As a child, she was in the car when her inebriated father, Louis Worthington, struck and killed 11-year-old Santiago Ovalle. Her romance with true-crime writer Phillip Hale ended 15 years ago when a man she was flirting with at Briggs, a wealthy corporate attorney who’d been scheduled to Castle, a pioneering advocate of restorative justice, walks out at their home on an offshore Connecticut island, are up to his side. Identified as the police department’s one and only person of interest and publicly denounced by Dezdimona Castle as her husband’s killer, Jules strikes back in the only way she can imagine: By getting Phillip, who didn’t die of his wounds but isn’t crazy about spending any more time with her, to help her produce a series of vlogs that chart her determined pursuit of the truth nobody else wants to hear. She quickly attracts a huge social media following that is bound to be seriously disappointed at the anticlimactic denouement, especially if they read Little Voices (2019), Lillie’s breathless debut.

Works better as a parable of restorative justice in action than as a whodunit or thriller.

ONE FOR THE BOOKS

McKinlay, Jenn
Berkley (320 pp.)
$26.00 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-593-10174-2

Murder threatens to silence wedding bells.

Beloved Briar Creek library director Lindsey Norris is about to marry Mike Sullivan when disaster strikes. The small celebration they’d planned increases exponentially when Lindsey realizes that she accidentally gave the printer the original guest list, which was much larger. Fortunately, her friends and Sully’s parents, who are hosting the wedding at their home on an offshore Connecticut island, are up to the task of reorganizing. But the death of Sully’s old friend Steve Briggs, a wealthy corporate attorney who’d been scheduled to perform the ceremony, proves difficult to work around and involves Lindsey in a hunt for the killer. Steve is found lying on the beach near the home of Sully’s parents, still in the elf costume he wore for a huge Christmas party at his home the night before. His boat is missing, and his head wounds don’t look accidental. When they attended the party, Lindsey and Sully witnessed plenty of snark from Steve’s gorgeous wife, a fight with his former law partner, an odd conversation with his brother, and a mysterious visit from a veiled woman in black. Finding someone to marry them is a comedy of errors, but hunting a killer is both so serious and so time-consuming that Lindsey despair of getting to the church, or the island, on time.

Not much mystery, but plenty of quirky characters enhance the library director’s excellent 11th adventure.

HANGING FALLS

Mizushima, Margaret
Crooked Lane (288 pp.)
$26.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-64385-445-8

A K-9 cop seeks to solve the case of a dead body in the woods so she can take time off to investigate the mysteries of her own family.

Mattie Cobb is finally stepping aside from her role as deputy and the human part of Timber Creek’s only K-9 team to connect with relatives she thought she’d lost many years before. Her sister, Julia, and her abuela have plans to welcome Mattie with open arms, if only she can get away for a few days. But those plans are put on ice when Mattie and her friend Glenna come upon a body while jogging at Hanging Falls. Robo, Mattie’s German shepherd partner, is needed to search the Colorado forests, so Mattie puts off her visit to find out who could have killed what appears to be an out-towner, then dumped him in the water. While Mattie keeps their shift from friendship to full-on romance private, she’s happy to have the help of Cole Walker on the case. Not only is Cole an adept vet whose knowledge is helpful in considering the possible role a horse tranquilizer played in the death, but his calm confidence steadies Mattie when she’s overwhelmed by emotions. A childhood of trauma and then foster care with Mama T has made Mattie slow to trust, and her police training has given her lingering questions about what really happened to split up her family. The sooner she solves the case of the body in the woods, the sooner she can reunite with Julia and Abuela to ask the hard questions about her own life.

An imperfect heroine and her beloved canine sidekick: What’s not to like?
As always, Penny’s mystery is meticulously constructed and reveals hard truths about the hidden workings of the world.

**A Southern Californian journalist searches rural Oregon for her lost mother.**

Caitlin Bergman knows that working for the LA Voice won’t earn her any Pulitzer. But it gives her the press credentials to travel to Coos County, Oregon, on the pretext of writing a feature on the State of Jefferson, the brainchild of a movement from the 1940s whose present-day adherents, known as the Proud Sons, hope to create a 51st state on the California-Oregon border. Caitlin’s real purpose, though, is to investigate the death of a member of the Daughters of God, an apocalyptic cult that lives on an Oregon hillside under the watchful eye of Desmon Pratten, the only male allowed in the single-sex commune. Caitlin has reason to believe that the deceased is Maya Aronson, the mother who surrendered Caitlin shortly after her birth to be adopted by LA cop Matthew Bergman. Caitlin both hopes and fears that she’ll learn more about Maya and discover what led the former porn star to retreat to an Oregon hillside to await the end of the world. But she needs to be careful. The Daughters aren’t exactly popular with the locals, especially not with lumber tycoon Anders Larsen or his son, Johnny. Johnny’s teenage daughter, Promise, ran off and joined the cult, and he aims to get her back at any price. Sparks fly when his mission collides with Caitlin’s. As the Sons and Daughters clash, it’s anyone’s guess which off-the-grid worldview will prevail.

**Action-loving readers are the real winners in this off-beat thriller.**

**THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB**

*Osman, Richard*

Pamela Dorman/Viking (368 pp.)

$26.00 | Sep. 22, 2020

978-1-98488096-3

Four residents of Coopers Chase, a British retirement village, compete with the police to solve a murder in this debut novel.

The Thursday Murder Club started out with a group of septuagenarians working on old murder cases culled from the files of club founder Elizabeth’s friend Penny Gray, a former police officer who’s now comatose in the village’s nursing home. Elizabeth used to have an unspecified job, possibly as a spy, that has left her with a large network of helpful sources. Joyce is a former nurse who chronicles their answers. But it gives her the press credentials to travel to Coos County, Oregon, on the pretext of writing a feature on the State of Jefferson, the brainchild of a movement from the 1940s whose present-day adherents, known as the Proud Sons, hope to create a 51st state on the California-Oregon border. Caitlin’s real purpose, though, is to investigate the death of a member of the Daughters of God, an apocalyptic cult that lives on an Oregon hillside under the watchful eye of Desmon Pratten, the only male allowed in the single-sex commune. Caitlin has reason to believe that the deceased is Maya Aronson, the mother who surrendered Caitlin shortly after her birth to be adopted by LA cop Matthew Bergman. Caitlin both hopes and fears that she’ll learn more about Maya and discover what led the former porn star to retreat to an Oregon hillside to await the end of the world. But she needs to be careful. The Daughters aren’t exactly popular with the locals, especially not with lumber tycoon Anders Larsen or his son, Johnny. Johnny’s teenage daughter, Promise, ran off and joined the cult, and he aims to get her back at any price. Sparks fly when his mission collides with Caitlin’s. As the Sons and Daughters clash, it’s anyone’s guess which off-the-grid worldview will prevail.

**A top-class cozy infused with dry wit and charming characters who draw you in and leave you wanting more, please.**

**ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE**

*Penny, Louise*

Minotaur (448 pp.)

$28.99 | Sep. 1, 2020

978-1-250-14523-9

Gamache goes to Paris. Armand Gamache of the Sûreté du Québec has had an eventful time in Penny’s last few books, taking over as Chief Superintendent, uncovering corruption at the highest levels, facing public scorn, and finally ending up back where he started, as head of the homicide division. Penny has always been a master of pacing on a serieswide level, moving between the overarching corruption story and more local mysteries and also occasionally taking a break from Three Pines, the beloved, unmappable Quebec village that is the main setting. This time around, Gamache and his wife, Reine-Marie, a retired librarian, are spending time in Paris, where both of their children now live, waiting for their daughter, Annie, to give birth to her first child with husband Jean-Guy Beauvoir, Gamache’s former second-in-command. Gamache takes the opportunity to visit the Rodin Museum with his godfather, billionaire Stephen Horowitz, who then joins the extended Gamache clan for dinner—only to be hit by a car and almost killed as they leave the restaurant. Gamache is convinced it was no accident—an impression reinforced the next morning when he and Reine-Marie go to Stephen’s apartment and find the place has been ransacked and there’s a dead body behind the sofa. Soon the whole family is involved in the investigation, and everyone has a part to play, from Reine-Marie, who visits the Archives nationales, to son Daniel, a venture capitalist who moved to Paris to escape his father’s shadow. Gamache calls on an old friend, the head of the Paris police force, but can he be trusted? As always, Penny’s mystery is meticulously constructed and reveals hard truths about the hidden workings of the world—as well as the workings of the Gamache family. But there’s plenty of local color, too, with a trip to the top of the Eiffel Tower to escape
surveillance and a luxurious suite at the Hotel George V for good measure.

If you’re new to Penny’s world, this would be a great place to jump in. Then go back and start the series from the beginning.

**A CHRISTMAS CAROL MURDER**
*Redmond, Heather*
Kensington (320 pp.)
$26.00 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-4967-1717-7

A third return to 1835 London sets two problems for parliamentary reporter Charles Dickens: unmasking a murderer, and clearing himself of an accusation that could put paid to his career and his impending marriage.

Nothing says Christmas like caroling outside the counting-house of Emmanuel Screws, and nothing damps the Christmas spirit like having a chained corpse fall from an overhead window to the ground before the eyes of Charles and his horrified fellow carolers. Soon after the killjoy is identified as Jacob Harley, Screws’ partner, his body inside its coffin vanishes from the custody of the undertaker Dawes. But that’s the least of Charles’ headaches. He’s already scrambling to disprove the allegation of serving maid Madge Porter that he fathered Timmy, the son of Madge’s late sister, Lizzie. Moved by the holiday spirit and simple humanity, Charles has taken up the infant and placed him with pregnant actress Julie Aga, the wife of his fellow journalist William Aga. His solicitude for the defenseless child is a distinctly bad look for his fiancee, Kate Hogarth, and a worse one for her father, George, who, as editor of the Morning Chronicle, holds a great deal of power over his employee’s future.

When the prospective publisher of Sketches by Boz begins to back away from his contract, it seems the only thing that will redeem Dickens is proof that he’s not Timothy’s father. Oh, and solving what by now is a pair of murders as well.

A middling mystery seasoned with period detail and toothless threats to the future success of Charles Dickens.

**VARNISHED WITHOUT A TRACE**
*Simon, Misty*
Kensington (304 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-4967-2376-5

Murder and arson upend the calm of a Pennsylvania hamlet.

Because Tallie Graver’s family owns the local funeral home and is related to nearly everyone in town, she knows all the bingo queens at the Christmas Eve game, including nasty Ronda Hogart, whose more popular husband, Uncle Hoagie, owns the local hardware store. Tallie, who seems to be a magnet for murder, finds Ronda dead, her head bashed in by a can of varnish, outside the bingo hall. Police Chief Burton, a very reluctant partner in the past, has either grown more appreciative of Tallie’s sleuthing talents or has given up trying to discourage her. The plot thickens when Uncle Hoagie goes missing and a dead body that looks remarkably like him is found near the hardware store. Although Tallie usually shuns the funeral business, she recognizes that the body was already embalmed and tracks it down to a West Virginia funeral home. Tallie’s cleaning business provides a perfect excuse for her to start up casual conversations, and she soon learns that Hoagie’s children think he’s dead and are already fighting over the business, which he’s left to his longtime assistant. After grilling her grandmother and other elderly relatives, Tallie discovers that Uncle Hoagie is not actually related to anyone in town. All Tallie and her boyfriend, Max, have to do is solve the murder and discover an arsonist in order to have a merry Christmas.

The down-to-earth heroine’s sense of humor enriches this quirky holiday mystery.

**MURDER MOST SWEET**
*Walker, Laura Jensen*
Crooked Lane (289 pp.)
$26.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-64385-502-8

A Wisconsin mystery author is suspected of a real-life murder.

Teddie St. John is a breast cancer survivor who chose to get a double mastectomy, much to her mother’s dismay. She’s also a fantastic baker, a caring friend, a super mom to her American Eskimo rescue, Gracie, and a published mystery writer. When bestselling author Tavish Bentley comes to Lake Potawatomi for a book signing, Teddie joins the crowd and finds herself immediately attracted to the charming Englishman. Although her scarf is stolen and used to strangle Bentley’s recently dumped fiancee, Teddie’s not a serious suspect for Sheriff Brady Wells, who’s known Teddie forever but still has to question her. It turns out that Tavish has a stalking problem in Annabelle Cooke, a determined woman who creates a nasty scene while Tavish and Teddie are dining at a local restaurant. She’s removed from the suspect list when she too is found strangled with one of Teddie’s many scarves. The town rumor mill has Teddie pegged as a serial killer, and her neighbors post their ideas all over social media, but it worries her more that her publishers are nervous about the publicity. Using their varied skills, Teddie and her two best friends start sleuthing on their own as she pursues her relationship with Tavish, who seems a perfect fit for her. Tavish’s own problems, including an ex-wife, give them plenty of suspects to investigate.

A wryly amusing cozy debut lent credence by the author’s own experience as a cancer survivor.
Once Two Sisters
Sarah Warburton
Crooked Lane (209 pp.)
$26.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-64385-525-7

Warburton’s first novel uses a high-speed action plot to explore the deeply troubled relationship between two sisters.

How close is Zoe Hallett to her older sister, author Ava Hallett, who’s based every one of her bestselling thrillers on easily recognizable versions of Zoe? About 1,500 miles, ever since Zoe, wailing, “She stole my life,” changed her name three years ago and moved from Arlington, Virginia, to Houston, where she married widower Andrew McPhee, moved in with him and his 4-year-old, Emma, and did her best to ignore the displays of Ava’s latest triumph in every bookstore window. Now the news of Ava’s mysterious disappearance has put Zoe, or Lizzie, in the spotlight again, and the public release of her years of angry emails to her estranged sister and the news that she had an affair with Ava’s boyfriend, agent Glenn Melcher, shortly before he returned to Ava and married her has painted a target on her back. Drawn to return to the Beltway, Zoe can find no comfort from her parents, clinical neuroanalysts Walter Hallett and Nancy Renscoe-Hallett, whose attitudes toward her have always been pretty clinical. So she puts aside her obsession with asking, “Why does she keep writing about me?” to team up with Glenn in the hope of tracking Ava down.

Besides enjoying the juicy premise and the edgy thrills, you’ll feel much more relaxed about your own family reunion.

Science Fiction and Fantasy

Apocalypse Yesterday
Brock Adams
Crooked Lane (272 pp.)
$26.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-64385-553-0

Having won the war on zombies, a former customer service rep searches for meaning, a quest that leads him to... more zombies.

The zombie apocalypse has come and gone, and Rip and a few straggler friends have come out alive. But what’s next when you know you can survive the end of the world? Rip finds himself back at his customer service job, writing bullshit excuses for why people’s Pringles are too crumbled, and the meaningless of it all, after he’s faced life-and-death questions, is overwhelming. He aches to put Santana, his machete and closest companion, back into action. Alternating chapters tell the story of “Back Then” and Rip’s triumph in the four-month zombie war, his ragtag mini-army camping in the safety of a water park and finding purpose by trading stories of zombie kills. When Rip runs into formerly powerful and captivating warrior woman Davia in straitlaced business attire, he starts to wonder if the past wasn’t somehow better. He hatches a plan with veteran pilot Duck Duck to restore meaning to life by releasing zombies into the world again. Rip’s best friend, Rodney, is skeptical, not just because he knows that as the Black guy, he’s likely to die first, but because, man, it’s zombies. Plus, Duck Duck seems a little off, and not just because he’s a guy with a plan to loose zombies on humanity. But Rip can’t resist the draw of his heroic self and a zombie war of his own making. What could go wrong?

Unintentionally prescient, a tale of losing and finding oneself at the end of the world.

The Space Between Worlds
Micaiah Johnson
Del Rey (366 pp.)
$28.00 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-0-593-13505-1

Johnson’s world-hopping debut uses science fictional tools to address urgent questions of privilege and position.

In a desolate post-apocalyptic future, narrator Cara is a “traverser” for the Eldridge Institute of Earth Zero, which has discovered 382 alternate worlds. Because interworld travel is lethal to would-be traversers who have “dops” still alive on the Earth they’re visiting, Eldridge employs “trash people” who have died on most other worlds and can therefore survive travel to other realities. Cara, who hails from a bleak wasteland dominated by sinister emperor Nik Nik, has died on almost every known world. When Cara visits an Earth very different from her home, she makes discoveries that could change multiple worlds. Even on Earth Zero, Cara lives an in-between life; her black skin and Ashtown heritage mark her as an outsider in the domed confines of glittering and exclusive Wiley City and may make impossible her dreams of romance with her beautiful handler, Dell. Johnson employs Cara’s situation to forthrightly examine questions of privilege, trauma, assimilation, colonialism, and upbringing. While the story takes time to get going and certain aspects of the setting feel derivative, the characters, voice, and twists all demand readers’ attention.

A compelling stand-alone debut that will leave readers thrilled, thoughtful, and anticipating the author’s next book.
A DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAGICIANS
Parry, H.G.
Redhook/Orbit (544 pp.)
$18.60 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-316-45908-2

An alternate history in the style of Naomi Novik and Susanna Clarke explores the French and Haitian revolutions with a magical twist.

This series opener has three plotlines. One follows Fina, a young enslaved woman who eventually joins with Toussaint Louverture and plays a pivotal role in the revolution against slavery and French rule in Saint-Domingue; the second follows Camille Desmoulins and Maximilien Robespierre as they stir up the bloody Reign of Terror; and the third follows friends William Pitt and William Wilberforce as they rise in the ranks of the British Parliament. Parry is working with historical events and (mostly) real characters here, but this is a world where some people are born with magical abilities. Some can control the weather, some can manipulate metal, some can even control others through “mesmerism.” Some magicians have abilities that are wholly outlawed, like necromancy, and “vampires”—here meaning human magicians who can ingest blood to give themselves eternal life—have been wiped out altogether (supposedly). But who is allowed to use their magic? Only White aristocrats, of course, and with the aid of magic, White slave owners literally control slaves’ every movement, trapping them inside their minds. But enslaved people, like Fina, are finding ways to break free and fight back, and in Europe, politicians like Pitt and Wilberforce are working to abolish the slave trade and give people of all classes the right to use their gifts. Desmoulins and Robespierre start out fighting for freedom, but as the French Revolution descends into pure violence, it becomes clear that someone is manipulating Robespierre to cause as much death as possible. The story leans too heavily on dialogue, which, unfortunately, is not Parry’s strongest suit. Her real talent lies in immersive worldbuilding and meticulous plotting, and she does an expert job of setting the scene for the rest of the series while simultaneously constructing a story that’s engaging in its own right.

An impressive beginning to what looks to be an ambitious series.

EMERALD BLAZE
Andrews, Ilona
Avon/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
$27.99 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-0-06-303547-8

Two powerful magic users forge an uneasy alliance while investigating a murder.

Catalina Baylor is no stranger to duty and responsibility, as we learned in Andrews’ first book about her, Sapphire Flames (2019). Even though she’s in her early 20s, she’s the capable manager of her family’s investigation business, the powerful head of her family’s emerging magical house, and the covert Deputy Warden for the state of Texas. After Catalina is attacked by a series of magically fueled monsters that crawled out of a nearby swamp, her boss, Linus Duncan, the Deputy of Texas, assigns her to investigate the murder of Felix Morton. The dangerous monsters she encountered are connected to the work Felix and a consortium of powerful houses were doing to reclaim a dangerous magic-rich swamp on prime Houston real estate. Catalina has no doubt she’s up to the task of investigating the murder; however, she’s furious when Linus insists she accept the protection of Alessandro Sagredo, a powerful assassin and the only man Catalina has ever loved. They worked together on a previous case, but she was humiliated and depressed when he left her just as she was about to reveal her feelings for him. This time, she’s determined to find the murderer without damaging her heart. They worked together on a previous case, but she was humiliated and depressed when he left her just as she was about to reveal her feelings for him. This time, she’s determined to find the murderer without damaging her heart. Catalina and Alessandro’s discovery of an unsettling, sentient magical presence living in the swamp is frightening not only as an individual enemy, but also for what it reveals about how recklessly humans pursue power. The romance between Catalina and Alessandro is a thrilling match between equals, and both must share their past hurts and reveal their vulnerabilities on the path to love. Andrews has a gift for placing likable characters within complex and interesting mysteries in which small, seemingly inconsequential, clues weave together into a spectacular finish.

A winning romance that will thrill and satisfy fans while leaving them clamoring for the final book in the trilogy.
A suffragist and a rogue move from unwilling business partners to lovers in Victorian England.

A ROGUE OF ONE’S OWN

Dunmore, Evie
Berkley (448 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-984805-70-6

A suffragist and a rogue move from unwilling business partners to lovers in Victorian England.

Lady Lucie Tedbury has an ulterior motive for buying half the shares of London Print, a publishing house known for wholesome magazines for women. She and her fellow Oxford suffragist friends are fighting against the Married Women’s Property Act. Their plan to publish a report is thwarted when Lucie finds out that Lord Tristan Ballentine, “scoundrel, seducer, bane of her youth,” has bought the remaining shares. Tristan cannot let Lucie bring down the publishing house; he needs to make a profitable income so he can free himself and his mother from his horrid father. Although their differing goals for the publisher put Lucie and Tristan at odds, their physical attraction is undeniable. Tristan offers control of the business in exchange for one night in bed together. At first Lucie thinks he’s asking too much, but she soon believes it’s too little. Like its predecessor, Bringing Down the Duke (2019), this second installment in the A League of Extraordinary Women series delivers a smart, capable heroine finding glorious love in a rich historical setting with plenty of wit and swoons along the way. Convoluted plotting and clichéd side characters make parts of the story drag, but Lucie’s consistent characterization pushes through. Her passion and dedication to the cause feel authentic.

SOMEONE TO ROMANCE

Balogh, Mary
Berkley (336 pp.)
$26.00 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-0-393-10861-2

In a new, baggy Westcott family novel, Lady Jessica Archer demands romance and recognition of her inner self from an American newcomer to Regency London.

A brief encounter at an inn gives Jessica, the sister of the Duke of Netherby, and Gabriel Thorne, a merchant from Boston, an initial dislike of each other. But Gabriel has a secret about his identity; and he believes its eventual revelation requires that he have an aristocratic wife at his side—one he decides will be the patrician Jessica. At 25, Jessica is finally ready to marry. Yet she is unenthusiastic about her choices until two men, including Gabriel, show an interest. Gabriel is a hard character to like, however, because of his deception about who he is, his odd choice to remain in London despite the need to rescue a needy family member in the country—and the troubling implications of the fact that he has made money in shipping in pre–Civil War America. Even when his motivation for staying mum about his true identity is revealed, one struggles to feel sympathetic since he seems to prioritize his own griefs over the wrongs done to a woman. His past suffering and Jessica’s desire for him serve to justify her falling in love, but despite some tender moments, the relationship feels contrived. It’s an anomaly in Balogh’s usually deft unpacking of human weakness and worth, better displayed in Someone To Remember (2019). Similarly, Gabriel’s relatives are two-dimensional, with one being a virtuous disabled person mainly meant to show Gabriel in a positive light. As in many novels in this series, the plot gets bogged down by the backstory and crowded by all the Westcotts who show up insistently. The conclusion turns into something of a comedy of humors and has a deus ex machina twist that resolves matters.

A indifferent addition to the long-running series about British aristocrats and their romantic and financial concerns.

TOOLS OF ENGAGEMENT

Bailey, Tessa
Avon/HarperCollins (368 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Sep. 22, 2020
978-0-06-287293-7

A woman desperate to prove her value to her family’s house-flipping business falls in love with her foreman.

Bethany Castle used to embrace her perfectionist tendencies, but lately, those urges are starting to control her. Even a job she used to love—staging homes for her family’s Long Island construction business—has become stifling and unsatisfying. Bethany dreams of leading her own project; she knows she’s capable of more than selecting paint colors and arranging furniture. When her brother responds to her dream with derision, Bethany furiously quits the business. She starts her own project and hires handsome newcomer Wes Daniels as her foreman. Wes is a recent transplant from San Antonio. When his sister’s marriage disintegrated a few months earlier, she asked him to care for her 5-year-old daughter so she could get her head together. Wes has taken a job working construction, awed and bewildered at how, at 23, he’s settled down into sudden respectability and what feels a lot like fatherhood. Wes thinks his razor-sharp banter with Bethany is flirtation while Bethany is flattered by his attraction to a man seven years her junior. Catching wind of the Castle family feud, a TV producer persuades Bethany and her brother to appear on a reality TV show that will judge which one of them flips their house.

A romance between charming characters is sidelined by weighty subplots.
and drive her conflict with the notion of romance. She refuses to lose herself and become a possession, yet she feels the freedom that comes with being loved.

A splendid, if uneven, addition to the series.

PARADISE COVE
Holiday, Jenny
Forever (368 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Jul. 28, 2020
978-1-5387-1654-0

A Toronto transplant moves to a small town on the shores of Lake Huron and falls in love with a man grieving for his deceased child.

Dr. Nora Walsh wonders how her seemingly perfect life turned upside down so quickly. After she discovered her boyfriend was cheating on her, Nora realized she had accommodated his every wish for their life together. Deciding there is nothing salvageable for her in Toronto, she decides to try the life of a small-town doctor for two years; she can rediscover herself and save money toward a down payment on a home. Nora surprises herself by enjoying life in the charming tourist town of Moonflower Bay, and she quickly befriends local woodworker and fisherman Jake Ramsey. Jake has lived in town his entire life, but everyone gives him a wide berth out of respect for his profound grief. Four years earlier his son died of the flu before his first birthday, his marriage broke up soon afterward, and then his mother died of breast cancer. Jake has spent years alone, dealing with the waves of grief that are his constant companion. But something about Nora’s warm acceptance unlocks Jake, and he finds himself able to share his feelings of sadness, loss, and guilt. The pacing of the friends-to-lovers plot is perfect: Nora and Jake bond over home repairs and her pet dog, but eventually they enter into a secret “friends with benefits” arrangement. They pledge to keep the entanglement from becoming “romantic”—Jake is convinced that part of him is dead, and Nora intends to leave town. As their emotional attachment deepens, Jake and Nora each have to evaluate whether they are willing and able to take another risk on love.

This richly satisfying romance is a heart-wrenching and emotional tour de force.

THE CARE AND FEEDING OF WASPISH WIDOWS
Waite, Olivia
Avon/HarperCollins (416 pp.)
$6.99 paper | Jul. 28, 2020
978-0-06-293182-5


When artist Agatha Griffin discovers that a swarm of bees has made itself at home in her workshop, she follows her mother-in-law’s advice and seeks the help of Penelope Flood. The beekeeper convinces the printmaker to let her move the colony to a skep behind the shop, and a correspondence that begins with a brief discussion of the colony’s honey production soon turns more intimate. Penelope is warm and outgoing. Agatha is more inclined to be reserved, but Penelope’s kindness helps her realize that she is—three years after her husband’s death—terribly lonely. Given the genre, it is inevitable that these two will fall in love, but Waite doesn’t rush her protagonists. At first, Agatha knows only that Penelope is married to a sailor who is seldom ashore. Penelope only knows that Agatha loved her husband. It takes time and trust for them to reveal their true feelings and desires to each other. It’s a real pleasure watching this friendship between two women in middle age blossom and evolve into a passionate attachment. Waite wove politics into the first installment of her Feminine Pursuits series, and she is even more explicit here. Agatha and Penelope meet just as the House of Lords is about to put Queen Caroline on trial for adultery, an event that exposed several fault lines in British society and marked a turning point for the press. Agatha faces some difficult choices as she decides how radical she wants to be in choosing what to print, and Penelope is compelled to examine loyalties and relationships that cut across classes. This is a richly layered novel, with much to recommend it to readers who don’t typically read historical romance.

Entertaining, intelligent, and emotionally rewarding.
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

A SERIES OF FORTUNATE EVENTS by Sean B. Carroll .......... 46
A PECULIAR INDIFFERENCE by Elliott Currie ......................... 48
THIS WAY BACK by Joanna Eleftheriou .................................. 50
ROME—CITY IN TERROR by Victor Failmezger ..................... 52
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THIS IS THE NIGHT OUR HOUSE WILL CATCH FIRE
by Nick Flynn ................................................................. 53
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WHY WE SERVE by Alexandra N. Harris & Mark G. Hirsch ...... 58
LIBERTY FROM ALL MASTERS by Barry C. Lynn ................. 64
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BIG DIRTY MONEY by Jennifer Taub .................................. 75
THE NEW MAP by Daniel Yergin ....................................... 78
ONE BILLION AMERICANS by Matthew Yglesias ................ 78

WALKER EVANS
Starting From Scratch
Alpers, Svetlana
Princeton Univ. (320 pp.) $39.95 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-0-691-19587-2

A fresh, scholarly look—complete with more than 200 images—at the seminal American photographer, this time through the lens of fine art and literature.

In a lavishly illustrated narrative bolstered by impassioned research, art historian Alpers reintroduces readers to Walker Evans (1903-1975), one of America’s great artistic observers. Evans began his career dreaming of becoming an expat writer like those of the Lost Generation, and Alpers finds a literary core at the center of his creative makeup. In addition to “having an eye” for photography, Evans was a storyteller and a ruthless editor of his own work. He was meticulous about word choice in his writing and public speaking; in his photography, he tirelessly revised, endlessly searching for the perfect crop. Evans was an avid reader, and Alpers turns to books to unlock his oeuvre (Flaubert looms large). She similarly mines the realm of art history but occasionally reaches too far. After astutely likening the documentary nature of her subject’s undeveloped rolls to a painter’s plein-air sketchbook, she goes on to compare Evans to Paul Cézanne and his many graphite studies. Elsewhere, she connects Evans to Edward Hopper, but “coming as I do from historic European art, the horizontal, two-page composition reminds me of a fifteenth-century Italian predella panel.” Alpers periodically touches on Evans’ well-documented commercial projects—e.g., Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, his celebrated collaboration with James Agee—but primarily searches for new ways to understand Evans’ work as a whole. She resists seeing his work as nostalgic; quoting Evans, she explains that he was “interested in what any present time will look like as the past.” Recalling critic Clement Greenberg, Evans saw photography as “the most literary of the graphic arts,” and Alpers convincingly presents him as a new kind of poet: “a photographer inventing a new language of images for America.”

Great American photography in a welcome new frame.
Even though he has won an American Book Award, Eisner Award, and Ridenhour Book Prize, I believe Joe Sacco (b. 1960) deserves to be better known in the wider culture, beyond the arenas of journalism, comics, and publishing. The Maltese American, Portland, Oregon–based cartoonist and journalist has published some of the most important works of graphic nonfiction of the past two decades.

In such books as *Safe Area Goražde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992-1995*, *War’s End: Profiles in Bosnia 1995-96*, *Footnotes in Gaza*, and *Palestine*, Sacco has proven to be a master of on-the-ground graphic reportage from some of the world’s hottest hot spots. Add in two other noteworthy, co-produced works—*Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* (with Chris Hedges) and *The Great War* (with Adam Hochschild), both of which received Kirkus stars—and you have what the *Economist* astutely labeled the “heir to R. Crumb and Art Spiegelman.”

His latest, *Paying the Land* (Metropolitan/Henry Holt, July 7), which our starred review called “yet another triumph for Sacco,” takes on the fraught nexus of Indigenous land and traditions and modern society’s seemingly endless thirst for natural resources and “so-called progress.” The author and illustrator spent six weeks with the Dene people of the Mackenzie River Valley in the Northwest Territories of Canada, which “is the size of France and Spain combined but has a population—less than 45,000—that might not fill a modern football stadium.”

Deep in this inhospitable yet beautiful landscape—rich with oil, gas, and diamonds—a sadly familiar clash has played out over generations. As predatory corporations move in to extract the re-sources, Indigenous inhabitants seek to maintain their age-old customs as well as the natural world that has sustained them for centuries. At the same time, investment, jobs, and higher wages have complicated matters, leading to improvements in such areas as infrastructure but also to waste, debt, and substance abuse.

“Many readers will be distressed by the many indignities that modern society has visited upon the Dene people,” wrote our reviewer. “The recent phenomenon of fracking creates division between those who see economic opportunities and those who believe the practice is a defilement of their land. Sacco also portrays in stark relief the pervasiveness of problems stemming from substance abuse.” Sacco wisely allows the Dene to carry the narrative, and his distinctive style brings their voices vividly off the page, showing the many issues at play when Native ways of life (“ownership is not how we look at the land”) run up against what Sacco describes as “the snarling and bucking transactional world.” Each page is packed with informative dialogue and narration, but what truly shines are the richly detailed, meticulously rendered black-and-white illustrations. It’s immersion journalism in a cartoon format, pushing readers along but also rewarding closer attention when desired. Our reviewer noted, “part of what makes Sacco’s portrayal so masterful is his proficiency as a journalist; he uses the real words of Dene citizens to tell their stories, augmenting them with his extraordinary artistic insight.”

There are countless individuals and groups around the world who deserve such a platform to voice their stories; after savoring this one, I look forward to Sacco’s next foray into parts too little known.

*Eric Liebtrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.*
FLYING FREE
My Victory Over Fear To Become the First Latina Pilot on the US Aerobatic Team
Aragon, Cecilia
Blackstone (300 pp.)
$26.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-982642-46-4

Aragon recounts how she overcame her fear of flying to become the first Latina pilot on the U.S. Unlimited Aerobatic Team.

"Before I took up flying," writes the author, "I was often plagued by depression and sadness, the feeling that my life was empty, and there was no particular reason to get up in the morning." However, after her training and certifications, "every single time the wheels of my plane rose from the earth in preparation for an aerobatic flight, euphoria spread through me like the warmth of the sun." The narrative begins slowly, and readers may find it difficult to feel sympathy for Aragon. But as she chronicles her burgeoning confidence as a pilot, the reading experience becomes more invigorating. Plagued by bullies and dismissive teachers for most of her life, her success in flying bolstered her self-esteem. "It no longer mattered that I'd spent so many years fighting to prove myself as a woman and Latina in math and software engineering," she writes; nor did the "funny looks" she received from her male colleagues. Aragon interrupts the primary narrative with flashbacks to specific childhood experiences, which disrupts the flow but not fatally so. As she recounts, combining logic and passion, her flying skills continued to develop at a rapid pace, and she was able to deal with her fear "not by ignoring it but by learning to work with it and use it." In the early to mid-1990s, she became one of the top aerobatic pilots in the world, achieving a goal she "once thought impossible." Though the author's prose style is straightforward and unremarkable, studded with self-help platitudes, she describes her feelings and experiences, particularly in flight, with great emotion, and readers will understand her motivations and appreciate her determination.

A message of inspiration for those seeking to break free from societal norms.

THE HYPE MACHINE
How Social Media Disrupts Our Elections, Our Economy, and Our Health—and How We Must Adapt
Aral, Sinan
Currency (416 pp.)
$28.00 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-525-57451-4

The head of MIT's Social Analytics lab warns that Facebook and other social media titans are controlling our behavior—and that breaking up the behemoths won’t solve the problem.

In 2018, Aral and two colleagues made headlines when they published a study that found that lies travel faster than truth online. Such attention-grabbing facts abound in this survey of what the author calls "the Hype Machine," or "the real-time communications ecosystem created by social media," and how it is changing behavior. As the author shows how social networks use "psychological, economic, and technical hooks" to lock in and manipulate people, he makes some points covered in books such as Jaron Lanier's You Are Not a Gadget. Aral also includes a fair amount of material that will hold interest mainly for marketers or other professional persuaders—e.g., "Digital ads don't work nearly as well as they're advertised." The author shines, however, when he validates or challenges many popular beliefs about social media. Anyone who fears that Russia might use Facebook to disrupt the 2020 presidential election, he suggests, is right to do so—but they should also worry about China and Iran. Anyone who cheered Twitter's decision to label fake-news tweets should consider two facts: Such labels can also cause readers to distrust true news and create an "implied truth effect" that leads readers to believe that anything not...
labeled false is true. For all this, Aral argues that leviathans like Facebook don’t need to be broken up but could be reined in by laws that, for example, would increase data portability and allow people to take data shared online to other networks just as they can take their phone numbers to new carriers. Ardent trust-busters may disagree, but Aral’s arguments are clear and stimulating, and as the presidential election nears, the book could hardly be timelier.

A useful, data-rich analysis of how we use social media—and how it uses us.

A sweet Southern sampling of a new generation of talented writers.

A MEASURE OF BELONGING
Twenty-One Writers of Color on the New American South
Ed. by Barnes, Cinelle
Hub City Press (392 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Oct. 4, 2020
978-1-938235-71-9

A collection of writers of color wrestling with the struggles and joys of living in a region rife with tension and possibility.

Edited by Barnes, a Charleston, South Carolina–based author who was raised in the Philippines, the book promises to document the American South “as big as it actually is,” refusing to engage with biased and flattened descriptions of the South that seek to portray a cultural homogeneity. The contributors, some emerging and some established, take on variations of the theme that readers may pull from Devi Laskar’s “Duos”: “I’m supposed to write about being a Southerner while simultaneously being a person of color. I’m somehow supposed to negotiate, on the page, how I have managed to be both at the same time for all of these years.” Fortunately, the roads taken by these authors are anything but rehearsed. In the wake of his critically acclaimed memoir, Heavy, Kiese Laymon digs into the complexity of race and class tension in Oxford, Mississippi, where he is a professor at the university. Soniah Kamal delivers a heartbreaking elegy for the loss of a child in Georgia. Hailing from Louisville, Kentucky, Joy Priest remaps her childhood through male-dominated Southern rap anthems toward feminine self-possession and mental mobility. Natalia Sylvester walks us through a lifelong history of doctor visits due to dysplasia of the hip. “My case turned out to be different,” she writes, “in the way that all bodies are different, in the way that science can often explain how but not why.” Not all the contributors are from the South; however, as the title suggests, they all lay claim to the ways they have come to feel “a measure of belonging” there. Across the collection, the writers push against the limits of what we think we know about the South.

A sweet Southern sampling of a new generation of talented writers.

MATH WITHOUT NUMBERS
Beckman, Milo
Illus. by Erazo, M
Dutton (224 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-5247-4554-7

A math prodigy examines how mathematicians view the world.

Math enthusiasts have a spotty record explaining their favorite subject to a popular audience, even when they exert themselves to hold attention with calculating tricks, paradoxes, or illusions. Beckman, who entered Harvard at age 15,
eschews them all, maintaining that everything—“plants, love, music, everything”—can be understood in terms of math and proceeds to explain how mathematicians try. They love to overthink things. “We take some concept everyone understands on a basic level, like symmetry or equality, and pick it apart, trying to find a deeper meaning in it.” His first example is a simple concept: shape. By the mathematical definition, a square and a circle have the same shape, but a figure 8 is different. It turns out that thinking about shapes is a major field of study called topology. Beckman admits that this has no practical significance, but it’s odd and interesting, and most readers will agree. There seems little to say about infinity, but this turns out to be wrong and pleasantly bizarre. If you remove any number of marbles from a bag containing infinite marbles, what’s left is still infinite. Adding one or 1 trillion—still exactly infinite. Infinity times infinity...the same. Is any quantity more than infinity? Yes; it’s called the continuum, and Beckman offers a fairly clear explanation. Ultimately, the author argues that math is not about numbers or equations but models. A model breaks down phenomena into specific rules that, when applied, explain it. A few simple rules produce a quasi-game remarkably similar to Darwinian natural selection. Beckman concludes with a model of an empty space containing 17 particles that follow well-defined if absurd rules, but the end result is the “standard model,” physicists’ best interpretation of how the universe operates.

A pleasant, amusing look at mathematics as a description of everything.

THE ROOM WHERE IT HAPPENED
A White House Memoir
Bolton, John
Simon & Schuster (592 pp.)
$32.50 | Jun. 23, 2020
978-1-982148-03-4

The latest tell-all—or, at any rate, tell-some—indictment of a dysfunctional presidency.
Bolton, a foreign policy hard-liner, writes that Donald Trump first courted him to serve as deputy secretary of state. Nothing doing, Bolton responded: “State could not be run successfully from that level.” It took back and forth before Bolton finally got to be in charge of something, named national security adviser. Given Trump’s contempt for the intelligence community, it stands to reason that Bolton’s job would be fraught, but he lasted a surprisingly long time—17 months, several lifetimes in the Trump administration. Bolton found allies and foes, but mostly the latter. He mistrusted Rex Tillerson and H.R. McMaster from the beginning while he suspects Mike Pompeo of negative leaks at the end of his tenure. But the author directs most of his ire toward Trump, and the book, while thoroughly self-servingly—where was this information during impeachment proceedings?—delivers a damning portrait of a man quick to suck up to despots and seek their aid in holding onto his office. Instead of begging for China’s help in the coming election, Trump might be an unintended boon: “Democrats will find a Trump finally got to be in charge of something, named national security adviser. Given Trump’s contempt for the intelligence community, it stands to reason that Bolton’s job would be fraught, but he lasted a surprisingly long time—17 months, several lifetimes in the Trump administration. Bolton found allies and foes, but mostly the latter. He mistrusted Rex Tillerson and H.R. McMaster from the beginning while he suspects Mike Pompeo of negative leaks at the end of his tenure. But the author directs most of his ire toward Trump, and the book, while thoroughly self-servingly—where was this information during impeachment proceedings?—delivers a damning portrait of a man quick to suck up to despots and seek their aid in holding onto his office. Instead of begging for China’s help in the coming election, Trump might be an unintended boon: “Democrats will find a Trump

More confirmation of malfeasance than fresh news, but the message is clear: Voter, beware.

A SERIES OF FORTUNATE EVENTS

Chance and the Making of the Planet, Life, and You

Carroll, Sean B.

Princeton Univ. (224 pp.)

$22.95 | Oct. 6, 2020

978-0-691-20175-7

The award-winning science writer offers evidence that pure chance governs life.

“Look at...all the beauty, complexity, and variety of life,” writes Carroll. “We live in a world of mistakes, governed by chance.” Near the beginning, the author looks at the asteroid that struck Earth 66 million years ago, throwing up so much debris that it blocked the sun, cooling the planet for decades and exterminating most species, including the dinosaurs. Within a few hundred thousand years, the survivors, including mammals, flourished and evolved into many families, including primates and then humans. Such a collision is extremely rare, but humans wouldn’t exist without it. Carroll then offers an expert summary of evolution, a process heavily influenced by geological processes and climate changes that have fluctuated wildly over the past 1 million years, during which our species appeared and grew its large brain. Darwin explained evolution as a series of random variations in offspring that persist if they increase an organism’s reproductive fitness and, over time, spread throughout the species. His work teems with evidence, but scientists found much to quarrel with. Nearly a century passed before discoveries in genetics (the dazzling if clunky mechanism through which variations are passed on) and details of DNA (the engine of genetic changes, itself an ad hoc collection of chemicals) convinced the scientific community. Readers will learn numerous fascinating tales, such as a failed effort to produce a human-chimpanzee hybrid (a “humanzee”), how the ancestors of wooly mammoths from tropical Africa learned to live in the Arctic, and how the AIDS virus jumped from chimps to humans. An amusing coda featuring an invented conversation between dead geniuses and living comedians reinforces the necessity of science even when millions eschew it in favor of a belief that things happen for a reason. Ricky Gervais: “[Science] doesn’t hold on to medieval practices because they are tradition. If it did, you wouldn’t get a shot of penicillin, you’d pop a leach down your trousers and pray.”

A short, sweet, and scientifically solid view of life.

THEBES

The Forgotten City of Ancient Greece

Cartledge, Paul

Abrams (320 pp.)

$30.00 | Sep. 22, 2020

978-1-4683-1606-3

Eminent classicist Cartledge examines the history, mythical and proven, of an ancient Greek city that is often overlooked in standard texts.

Located in the province of Boeotia, Thebes was “almost continuously inhabited for five millennia, at one point the most powerful city in all ancient Greece.” It was unusual in having been founded, in legend, by a non-Greek, a refugee from what is now Palestine named Cadmus, who sowed a slain dragon’s teeth on the city site and harvested a mighty army. Cadmus, the legend continues, married Harmonia, the child of an adulterous affair between the god of war and the goddess of love, and the unhappy result: “the near-total (metaphorical, moral) ruin of Thebes and frequent disasters for their mortal descendants.” In real life, Thebes was too close to Athens for comfort, and Athens often waged war against Thebes as a result. It was also relatively close to Sparta, Corinth, and other sometime rivals and sometime allies, and it was in the path of the invading Persians during the reign of Xerxes, when Theban soldiers died nobly alongside Spartans and Athenians at Thermopylae. In the pivotal fifth century B.C.E., writes Cartledge, “mainland Greek history can be seen as playing out within the frame of the fateful Thebes–Athens–Sparta triangle.” The Thebes of
From Pulitzer Prize-winning NYT best-selling author G.B. Trudeau

LEWSER!
More Doonesbury in the Time of Trump
by G.B. Trudeau
978-1-5248-5950-3
$16.99

From TikTok sensation Sarah Cooper

100 TRICKS TO APPEAR SMART IN MEETINGS
How to Get By without Even Trying
by Sarah Cooper
978-1-4494-7605-2
$16.99

From Nicole Byer, Host of the Netflix series Nailed It!

#VERYFAT #VERYBRAVE
The Fat Girl’s Guide to Being #Brave and Not a Dejected, Melancholy, Down-in-the-Dumps Weeping Fat Girl in a Bikini
by Nicole Byer
978-1-5248-5074-6
$19.99
history too often suffered loss. Against this, writes the author, stands the Thebes of myth, with an equally unhappy history: It was the home of Oedipus and Electra, yielding what is widely considered the best of all the Greek tragedies, Sophocles’ cycle of Theban plays. Thebes was also the home of the musican Pronomus, who “was the first to be able to play the three harmonies or modes known ethnically as the Dorian, the Phrygian, and the Lydian on one and the same, enhanced (double) aulos.” The cultural contributions were many, but all the same Thebes was overshadowed, and Cartledge’s well-paced, illuminating survey shows why that should not be the case.

A welcome addition to any philhellenic library by a reliable, readable interpreter of the ancient past.

An entertaining, admirably candid self-assessment of life in the foodie fast lane.

EAT A PEACH
A Memoir
Chang, David & Ulla, Gabe
Clarkson Potter (304 pp.)
$28.00 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-5416-4650-6

The debut memoir from the star chef and restaurateur.

It would be unfair to label Chang’s book as the Korean American Kitchen Confidential, but the similarities in tone and attitude certainly invoke the late Anthony Bourdain. The author, probably best known for his now-global Momofuku culinary brand, is no slouch as a writer, with a style that features a refreshingly defiant attitude and some of the best inessential footnotes since A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius. Chang whisks readers through the steps it takes to be a successful restaurateur, and he makes it clear that there are few viable paths to fame, fortune, and success, who has access, and who does not. A specialist in category theory—a branch of mathematics in which theories and not theorems govern—Cheng proposes that many arguments about supposed gender absolutes can be reframed. For example, she breaks down the logical implications in the syllogism that says that men are better at math than women, because they are better at systematizing—ergo, “being a man implies being better at math.” But what if the frame were moved to encourage decomposition of the terms? “Men have been observed to be statistically more likely to be stronger at systemizing than empathizing, for some very specific definitions of these words,” a strength that often resolves in ways such that “we might expect more men than women to become mathematicians.” The onus is not on numeracy but instead on structures that push people into different endeavors. In a spry—and not number-heavy—text, Cheng suggests that inherent ability is not as important as how math is generally taught: the ponderous lecturer at the front of the class, the mostly bewildered students trying to follow along. She proposes a “congressive,” group-oriented solution to problem-solving to replace the “ingressive” model, which presupposes that learning is a sort of Darwinian matter of survival of the fittest. Most truisms about gender difference, she notes, are “because of bias, not biology,” and the reframing she suggests makes this bias clear.

A carefully developed argument that urges us to discuss character traits without reference to gender.

X + Y
A Mathematician’s Manifesto for Rethinking Gender
Cheng, Eugenia
Basic (288 pp.)
$28.00 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-1-5416-4650-6

Can mathematics break down barriers to entry—in markets, in society—imposed by gender? Mathematician and math popularizer Cheng takes a positive view.

“Math isn’t just about getting the right answers; it’s about dreaming up different worlds in which different things can be true.” The author writes inductively of her experiences as a woman in a field dominated by men to arrive at an alternate world in which gender is not a determinant in who fails, who succeeds, who has access, and who does not. A specialist in category theory—a branch of mathematics in which theories and not theorems govern—Cheng proposes that many arguments about supposed gender absolutes can be reframed. For example, she breaks down the logical implications in the syllogism that says that men are better at math than women, because they are better at systematizing—ergo, “being a man implies being better at math.” But what if the frame were moved to encourage decomposition of the terms? “Men have been observed to be statistically more likely to be stronger at systemizing than empathizing, for some very specific definitions of these words,” a strength that often resolves in ways such that “we might expect more men than women to become mathematicians.” The onus is not on numeracy but instead on structures that push people into different endeavors. In a spry—and not number-heavy—text, Cheng suggests that inherent ability is not as important as how math is generally taught: the ponderous lecturer at the front of the class, the mostly bewildered students trying to follow along. She proposes a “congressive,” group-oriented solution to problem-solving to replace the “ingressive” model, which presupposes that learning is a sort of Darwinian matter of survival of the fittest. Most truisms about gender difference, she notes, are “because of bias, not biology,” and the reframing she suggests makes this bias clear.

A carefully developed argument that urges us to discuss character traits without reference to gender.

A Peculiar Indifference
The Neglected Toll of Violence on Black America
Currie, Elliott
Metropolitan/Henry Holt (288 pp.)
$27.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-250-76993-0

A deep exploration of why Black Americans are disproportionately impacted by violence and what can be done about it.
There’s more intentional violence in the U.S. than in any other advanced industrial nation. Of that violence, African Americans are victimized disproportionate to their share of the population. This is true across age and gender; among the poor and middle classes; in the street and inside homes. Fatal or non-fatal violence, committed with guns, knives, or fists, the story remains the same, and solutions to this problem are within reach. Criminologist Currie documents our “national failure” to take action and address the root causes of the violence in Black communities. The result of this systemic failure is a “public health crisis of devastating proportions.” Currie painstakingly outlines the dimensions of the problem and examines how violence not only affects the victims, but also negatively impacts the physical and mental well-being of the larger community, putting them at an extreme social and economic disadvantage, which fuels the cycle of violence. “Ending the plague of violence” requires a fundamental change in the social and economic conditions within impacted communities. The author preemptively defends against victim-blaming discourse about “black-on-black crime” by acknowledging the anxiety around discussing these issues for fear of playing into stereotypes about Black people and crime, stressing that “the racial disparity in violence is not a symptom of community failure: it is a symptom of social injustice. And though that injustice is long-standing, it is also both preventable and reversible.” These communities have been rendered more vulnerable due to “enduring discrimination,” extreme poverty, and external indifference. Meticulously researched and densely packed with stats and studies, Currie’s book paints a heartbreaking picture, but it also makes an urgent case for bold measures to turn the tide in Black communities.

A damning examination of violence in Black America and a call for intervention that is long overdue.

AUTHORITARIAN NIGHTMARE
Trump and His Followers
Dean, John W. & Altemeyer, Bob
Melville House (368 pp.)
$28.99 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-1-61219-905-4

In which the characters of the sitting president and his followers are weighed and found seriously wanting.

“Anyone who has had a serious ‘discussion’ with a Trump supporter may have noticed that facts and logic bounce off right off them.” So write Dean—yes, that Dean, still going strong nearly half a century after Watergate—and Altemeyer, a Canadian psychologist who developed the RWA [right-wing authoritarianism] Scale. That RWA test, among other measures, helps explain a great deal about Trump’s supporters, whose numbers might seem to be dwindling but whose convictions grow ever stronger. Those who score high on the RWA instrument are revealed to believe in a welter of confusing and contradictory matters, have considerable difficulty in sorting fact from fiction, and have no problem with double standards. “Take their ready acceptance of Trump’s labeling Hillary Clinton as Crooked Hillary” when Trump’s actions regarding charities in New York state “were so illegal that the state has banned him from ever operating a charity in New York again. Thus, there is no doubt about Trump being Crooked Donald, who has single-handedly given charity a bad name.” That doesn’t faze the pro-Trump crowd, who give him a free pass precisely because, according to the test, they are fearful that their world is disintegrating and are in need of a strongman to protect them from a host of imagined evils. By the authors’ account, Trump is nothing but a chain of personality flaws (“His driveway has not reached the main road for a long, long time”) that he learned at the feet of his master, Roy Cohn, and secondarily from Richard Nixon, such lessons as “if you have a vulnerability, tell everybody your opponent reeks of it.” Whether Trump gains a second term or not, the authors conclude, the strong authoritarian base that exists in the country guarantees continued polarization for years to come.

A book that won’t change minds but that will give anti-Trumpers plenty of grist for the mill.

SEEKING LITERARY AGENT OR PUBLISHER FOR Forgive and Forget: A Gay Man’s Memoir
A gay man wants to forgive society for its past bias.

“Burke’s...prose is evocative and moving.”
“...piquant and entertaining sketches...”
“...riveting...”
—Kirkus Reviews

“His writing style is engaging, and his sense of humor shines through... The poignant storyline and the critical social problems addressed makes this book worthy of acclaim.”
4 out of 4 stars
—B. Creech, Online Book Club

Alternate versions of manuscript available for a wider audience with focuses on:
- Lemon Street: Lessons from a Small Town
- Off The Extraordinary Life of an Ordinary Fellow

101,000 words, 60 proposed photos
To see a manuscript, contact Vincent Burke at eggplant@att.net

“Forget the label, Between a Rock and a Hard Place will appeal to all music lovers. Mixing personal work with the work of others, this collection is a wonderful read.”
—Contemporary Literary Review
In this winning and contemplative collection, Eleftheriou considers her divided self in a variety of ways.

**LIFE AFTER PRIVACY**

Reclaiming Democracy in a Surveillance Society

DeBrabander, Firmin

Cambridge Univ. (200 pp.)

$24.95 paper | Sep. 8, 2020

978-1-108-8191-0

A thoughtful exploration of privacy, a surprisingly controversial concept.

Observers generally approve of the 20th-century computer revolution but take a dim view of the 21st-century explosion of information gathering, big data, and social media. One result has been a stream of polemics that deplore this massive ability to sweep up our thoughts, quirks, and opinions. Mostly, critics worry that this will lead to an Orwellian world in which we placidly live under some universal eye. DeBrabander, a professor of philosophy, delivers an often disturbing addition to this genre. He acknowledges the usual worries about government surveillance and intrusive marketing technology and puzzles over one bizarre element: Most of us don’t mind giving up our privacy. In polls, subjects dutifully insist that they treasure personal information, but “when the rubber hits the road”—e.g., when offered coupons at the local supermarket—they happily reveal all. One marketer observed that “shoppers (especially younger shoppers) seem to have developed an almost infinite capacity for tolerating surveillance.” DeBrabander is a philosopher, so he does not provide a solution, but his analysis is solid. Physical privacy is a modern development; during most of history, even the prosperous lived with extended families and servants. The apartment and single-family house became standard in the 19th century, and the law ignored this area until the 20th century. The apartment and single-family house became standard in the 19th century, and the law ignored this area until the 20th century. The word “privacy” does not appear in the Constitution, and when the Founding Fathers urged its protection in other writings, they were referring to private property. Philosophers—from the Stoics and early Christians to Spinoza and Rousseau—extolled privacy as a source of personal autonomy “untainted by social influence” that cleared the way for intelligent decision-making. DeBrabander notes that scholars have long maintained that autonomous thinking laid the foundation of civilization and, later, liberal democracy, but he expresses skepticism. Good insights into an area of personal life that most of us take too lightly.

**TRAGEDY**

Eagleton, Terry

Yale Univ. (216 pp.)

$26.00 | Sep. 22, 2020

978-0-300-25221-7

Noted literary scholar Eagleton limns the literary genre of tragedy, “an aristocrat among art-forms.”

The author is among the most influential Marxist students of literature, and though he is by no means doctrinaire, he does locate the political dimension in tragedy, which, he holds, “began life as a political institution,” a vehicle by which the ancient Greek polis asserted and reinforced its values. The old joke that comedy is what happens when you fall down a staircase, while tragedy is what happens when I fall down the same staircase, doesn’t quite land with Eagleton, who finds much more serious elements in the transformation of tragedy into a kind of anti-politics, now a sort of repudiation of the workaday world in favor of something more elemental and exalted. Still, the old models hold: Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus* affirmed the creation of a political institution while the *Oresteia* commemorated the transition of the polis from a vendetta-based system of justice to an actual legal system. Eagleton can be snippy about some of the figures that appear in his analysis, such as the principal actor of the New Testament. “There is nothing in the least noble or edifying about the squalid death of its low-life protagonist,” he writes, “a death traditionally reserved by the Roman imperial power for political insurgents.” Jesus as low-life is a curious formulation. Similarly, Eagleton rejects some of the noncathartic events that are commonly pegged as “tragic” today, such as the Holocaust. He links the tragic movement as a manifestation of free will: Jesus, whom he later elevates from his former scorn, did not have to appear at Golgotha to take his place on the cross, and neither did Agamemnon have to slay Iphigenia. The clash between “fate and freedom,” as he puts it, is really an argument between different ideas of freedom and a reminder that though we may be free, we are not always in charge of our lives. An accessible, provocative, and philosophically rich view of a primal literary expression.

**THIS WAY BACK**

Eleftheriou, Joanna

West Virginia Univ. Press

(264 pp.)

$23.99 paper | Oct. 1, 2020

978-1-949199-66-6

A Greek American considers her family and identity through the lens of her family’s homeland of Cyprus.

In this winning and contemplative collection, Eleftheriou considers her divided self in a variety of ways. She’s a New Yorker who’s still deeply connected to Cyprus, where her father grew up and where she spent much of her childhood. She’s Greek but formed by American culture, especially books by writers like Laura Ingalls Wilder. She’s an out lesbian but still bearing the weight of religious and cultural dictats that kept her closeted for years. In one essay, she finds an effective metaphor for this split in Cyprus itself, which remains divided into Greek and Turkish sections; taking a road trip into the Turkish north, she considers questions of betrayal, history, secrets, and grudges. “The island is like a human bone that has been badly broken but that no doctor ever set,” she writes. But Eleftheriou feels free to rove around a variety of subjects, letting the theme of division emerge.
rather than announce it. She discusses the firebrand actress Melina Mercouri, at once a Hollywood glamour queen and outspoken critic of the 1970s Greek dictatorship; family squabbles over her late father’s property emphasize an unsettled sense of place. It’s all intimate and a touch mournful, most powerfully so when the author writes about her sexuality. Cyprus did not have a pride parade until 2014, with marchers facing violent attacks and persecution. Much of Eleftheriou’s writing on the subject is candid about finding her voice and standing her ground amid a homophobic culture. (She recalls a Greek Orthodox priest telling her being gay was “like being deformed.”) A more chronological arrangement would clarify her family history and personal journey, but in any order, these essays reveal an impassioned and hard-fought sense of self and place.

A fine collection of essays on identity, at once wide-ranging and site-specific.

**THUNDER IN THE WEST**
*The Life and Legends of Billy the Kid*
Etulain, Richard W.
Univ. of Oklahoma (448 pp.)
$29.95 | Jul. 9, 2020
978-0-8061-6625-4

A comprehensive consideration of the life and post-mortem career of perhaps the most legendary outlaw in American frontier history.

No one is more prepared to write about Billy the Kid—born Henry McCarty (1859-1881)—than University of New Mexico emeritus history professor Etulain, who has spent many years researching and studying his subject, visiting historic sites and archives. Whereas many books trace Billy’s trajectory from New York hooligan to New Mexico outlaw, Etulain painstakingly charts his path across the plains, with a sojourn in Wichita, where many locals, a contemporary recounted, “remember him as a street
gamin in the days of the longhorns.” Out west, the young man took up a life of small crime before becoming embroiled in a big-picture war between competing business factions in a New Mexico that was ruled by “power-hungry newcomers.” Billy’s subsequent career involved cattle rustling, killing, and his eventual execution. Etulain strikes a careful balance between the two main strands of literature and history surrounding his subject, one portraying him as a murderous psychopath and the other as a folk hero. The author sees reason to consider him a complex figure who was capable of great evil but also generosity. Valuably, Etulain weaves the story of the young outlaw into the larger development of the Southwest, including the rancorous years of the Civil War and early cattle-raising era. The second part of the book is for perhaps a more specialist audience, though readers with an interest in Wild West mythography, literature, and film will enjoy the author’s overview of the vast branch of pop culture that surrounds Billy “In the years from the mid-1880s to the early 1920s two writers provided nearly half the books and essays about Billy the Kid that gained notoriety among American readers,” writes Etulain, presaging a flood of works that has barely slowed ever since.

A refreshing blend of fact and legend—essential for collectors of Kid stuff.

ROME—
CITY IN TERROR
The Nazi Occupation
1943-44
Failmezger, Victor
Osprey Publishing (496 pp.)
$35.00 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-4728-4128-5

A look inside the German occupation of Rome, spanning the period between the Allied landings in southern Italy and the liberation of the city just before D-Day.

By the spring of 1943, it was clear to most Italians that the Allies were winning, and the Italian king, Vittorio Emanuele III, made plans to depose Mussolini and seek a separate peace. The Germans responded by clamping down on Rome as if it were an enemy city rather than the Axis ally it had been until that point. In telling the story of that occupation, Failmezger, a former U.S. Naval officer, has made good use of official records, but the appeal of this account is the author’s focus on the experiences of several individuals—Italians, Germans, and other foreigners, mainly British. While the war ground on as Allied troops advanced from the south, its impact on events in Rome was indirect. Both sides were aware of the negative propaganda that would accompany any serious damage to the city itself, and the Allies attempted to confine their bombing raids to “exclusively military targets”—though the bombs “did not always follow the plan.” Meanwhile, Rome’s citizens faced food shortages, sky-high inflation, sporadic infrastructure failure, and oppression, including the roundup of Italian Jews and harsh reprisals for any resistance. Many Romans responded by doing what they could to oppose the Germans, whether it was aiding fugitive Allied soldiers or joining partisan groups to take the fight directly to the occupiers. Much of the action of the narrative centers on the Vatican, where diplomats from Allied countries used their positions to aid and support escaped POWs and other fugitive military personnel who found their ways to Rome. Throughout, Failmezger presents fascinating stories and characters from a dramatic period of the war on the Italian front.

Highly recommended for anyone interested in World War II history.

CONSERVATISM
The Fight for a Tradition
Fawcett, Edmund
Princeton Univ. (514 pp.)
$35.00 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-0-691-17410-5

A bracing history of two-plus centuries of modern Western conservative thought.

A companion to his well-received Liberalism (2014), Fawcett’s latest is as readable and comprehensive as its predecessor. The author, an editor and correspondent at the Economist for more than 30 years, begins with late-18th-century thinkers Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre, using them as examples, respectively, of moderate and radical conservatism. This motif—of different strands of conservatism—pervades the narrative until Fawcett ends with today’s “hard right.” While many familiar figures fill the survey, part of the narrative’s strength lies in the author’s exhumation of long-forgotten conservative thinkers, including William Mallock, Charles Hodge, August Rehberg, and F.H. Bradley, among many others. While explanation of the thinking of others is Fawcett’s strong suit, he never fails to offer criticisms of the thought and actions of those he believes warrant them. Fair toward everyone while skeptical about many, he’s alarmed by those who’ve recently joined the “rightward rush from the liberal-democratic status quo.” The narrative suffers somewhat from a lack of more information about such influential conservative thinkers as Samuel P. Huntington and Robert A. Nisbet, but the author’s broad scope and inclusivity allow him to effectively examine not only the genuine contribution of modern conservative thought, but also the unfortunate results of a variety of relevant historical currents—especially regarding the far right today. “As a left-wing liberal,” writes Fawcett, “I do not claim that this history is neutral. I trust it is objective. I have tried to avoid two standbys of political writing, celebration and caricature.” Ultimately, it’s hard to argue with the author’s concern about the recent darkening of conservatism and its surrender of the high ground of thought and action. He concludes with useful appendices on the sources of conservatism, its principal keywords and concepts, and a 60-page, detailed gazetteer of its leading figures.

An immensely stimulating canter through a major segment of Western political tradition.
A new memoir from Flynn, showing a writer who refuses to be bound by the conventions of form.

Much like his previous work, Flynn’s latest is a collage that mixes narrative, reflection, literary and film criticism, fiction, fantasy, and ruthless self-interrogation. That it works should surprise no one familiar with the author; he has an uncommonly nuanced voice and sensibility, and he holds little back. Flynn begins with his young daughter and a story he has told her “about a man who lived in the woods behind my grandmother’s house.” He quickly admits, “obviously there’s a lot I leave out of the stories I tell my daughter.” Here, that includes his own marital infidelity, the story of which comes framed (emotionally, at any rate) by a set of revelations about his mother, who burned down the family house when Flynn was 6 years old. The fallout of that event runs throughout like a vein of ore, casting everything that follows in its dancing light. “John Cassavetes once proposed,” writes the author, “that when a character can’t find his way home, that’s where the story begins.” Certainly, that’s the case here. Unraveling his past in a series of short prose fragments, jumping around in time, Flynn excavates his history from an angle, as if he can’t bear to look at it head-on. Yet, as the book progresses, the author reveals nearly everything, from his mother’s suicide to the slow build of his affair with a woman who lived 1,500 miles away. For Flynn, there is a line connecting these events, an attempt to exert some sort of chaotic control. “Maybe my mother set the fire to find that sense of control as well,” he writes about their shared sense of complicity. Memoir is a genre of complicity, a form that thrives on questions and filling in the gaps, especially when information is conjectural or scant. Flynn plunges headlong into such a territory, endowing his book with a palpable sense of risk.

A remarkable and daring work, a song of both family and self.
“It’s not a book about Trump voters, it’s really not,” asserts Anne Applebaum when we speak about her latest work, *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism* (Doubleday, July 21). A historian best known for her trio of definitive works about Soviet communism—*Gulag* (2003), which won the Pulitzer Prize; *Iron Curtain* (2012); and *Red Famine* (2017)—Applebaum here tells a more contemporary and personal story: how politics in the U.S. and around the world developed an anti-democratic streak and how some of the thinkers she knew and fraternized with 20 years ago became apologists for would-be authoritarians. Trump looms large to be sure, but so do examples from the U.K., Spain, Hungary, and Poland, where Applebaum lives part time with her husband, Radek Sikorski, a Polish journalist and politician. We spoke by Zoom; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

**The book opens with a party you threw on New Year’s Eve, 1999. What was significant about it?**

It was very basic: We had bought a ruined house [in Poland] and restored it, but it was still not finished. The catering was me and my mother-in-law, and people slept on the floor. We had Poles there, some Americans, some British friends, and there was a kind of optimism—it was 1999, people were looking forward to everything getting better.

And when I think about who was there...I would no longer speak to about half the people at the party, and the other half of the party would no longer speak to them, either. [They are] people who found themselves part of the nativist right, mostly as journalists and propagandists for the current Polish government....The book reflects a lot of time spent thinking about, Why did this happen?

**You write quite a bit in these pages about conspiracy theories. Why are they significant?**

A conspiracy theory is a lie, essentially [what historian Timothy Snyder, in a conversation with me, called] a “medium-size lie.” It’s not an ideology that explains all of the world—it’s not Soviet communism. It’s simply a false story or a false myth that some leaders have sought to get their followers to buy into. The one I describe in the book is a famous one in Poland. There was a plane crash 10 years ago that killed the president of Poland, and it was upsetting for a lot of reasons. But after it happened, his twin brother, who was the head of his own political party, began to spin a se-
ries of conspiracy theories about why the crash had happened. They were never very well explained, but the idea was that it had been the fault of the Russians, or it was the fault of the then Polish government, which was a different political party. [It] was a way of creating a sense of unity among his party’s followers.

The other example is one that we in the United States know better, which is the myth of birtherism—the idea that Barack Obama was born in a foreign country and therefore he’s an illegitimate president. Once you have believed that this is true, that Obama is illegitimate and should not be president—or, if you’re Polish, you’ve accepted that your government helped kill your president—then all institutions of the state are therefore suspect. So the creation of that kind of lie is a tool that would-be authoritarian leaders use to get their followers to doubt and distrust existing institutions.

You also discuss the notion of the “clerc” and how they are used to legitimize an authoritarian regime.

I use this term [borrowed from French philosopher Julien Benda] to identify intellectuals who lose their objectivity and who instead seek to use their very real talents and powers in the service of political ideas. It’s an idea that doesn’t fit every single person that I write about, but it fits, for example, Fox News presenter Laura Ingraham. She’s not a friend, but she’s somebody who I’ve met a few times. She’s a very intelligent and very well-educated person, graduate of Dartmouth, she was a top lawyer. She was a [U.S.] Supreme Court clerk. She’s somebody who understands American politics but has chosen to become a kind of propagandist. I mean, she is all in for Donald Trump, and she will defend him no matter what he does, even promoting fake cures for the coronavirus [hydroxychloroquine] on his behalf. You can identify other such people—Dominic Cummings, who’s Boris Johnson’s top spin doctor in England. There are a few of them that I know in Poland. One of the themes of the book is my seeking to explain how such people are motivated. What do they think they’re doing? What do they say they’re doing?

Obviously, American readers are looking at our country and trying to figure out what the hell is going on. But you probably devote more ink to Poland, to Hungary, to Spain. Why?

Because I think the phenomenon is the same in all of our countries, for some of the same reasons. And I really feel it helps Americans to read about Poland, just like it helps Poles to read about America. We’ll see how American readers feel about all these unpronounceable East European names [laughs]. But I’m hoping that Americans see parallels and echoes of their own experience in those of other countries. The confusing nature of U.S. politics is not just some weird thing happening in the U.S. You can see patterns across the world.

You’re known for scholarly, historical works. This is a very different kind of book.

It’s really an essay—a first draft of an intellectual history of our time. It is not a definitive work. It’s meant to be provocative and meant to make people think. Although, I don’t know, maybe it’s not that different. The thing that links everything I’ve ever written is this: What is the interaction of political ideas with people’s lives? And how do people manipulate and use ideas to shape reality, for better or for worse? That theme is the same in everything I’ve written.

Twilight of Democracy was reviewed in the May 15, 2020, issue.
Despite Zac’s reputation as “the toughest dude” on the gridiron, football. His father, Myles, was a high school and college foot-
ball coach, and his brothers were respected high school players. Despite Zac’s reputation as “the toughest dude” on the gridiron, he was smaller than his teammates and had to work harder than others to build up his physique. Perhaps in response to these factors—an “intimidating hard ass” father and Zac’s own per-
ceived physical inadequacy, especially in comparison to his brothers—Zac routinely led with his head on most plays. His strategy resulted in head pains that he discussed only with his trainer or in his journal. An exceptionally bad concussion ended Zac’s football career when he was a senior. When a doctor sug-
ested that Zac may have chronic traumatic encephalopathy, a disease found in the brains of many similarly troubled NFL players, it was too late. Zac had already begun an emotional and physical spiral that eventually culminated in his suicide at age 24. Forgrave adds a poignant intimacy to Zac’s tragedy by interweaving it with portions of Zac’s journal and personal cor-
respondences. He also offers a detailed look at the evolution of football into “America’s most... lucrative sport” and a game that has defined American conceptions of masculinity over more than a century. Awareness about CTE continues to grow, but, as the author suggests, the American “obsession” with football has defined American conceptions of masculinity over more than a century. Awareness about CTE continues to grow, but, as the author suggests, the American “obsession” with football is still far too complex to do away with the sport or negate the violence that is part of its enduring allure.

An intelligent, provocative tale that will give pause to many parents of football players at any level.

In her second collection of non-
fiction, poet Gabbert moves fluidly from disaster to dislocation to political upheaval, offering a kind of literary road map to our tumultuous era.

In the epilogue the author writes, “it feels like a suspended emergency—like the specious present has been extended in both directions. Now feels longer.” How do we read such a reflection without thinking about this current moment? Yet Gabbert began the book in 2016, so the narrative is haunted by the specter of the president rather than the specter of the pan-
demic—although the two are, of course, intimately related. For the author, the key question is how to remain present and con-
ected, how not to turn away from the disruption of the world. To frame her inquiry, she divides the book into three parts, the first about disaster (human-made and otherwise), the second about memory and self-perception, and the last about exhaustion and social conditioning. Her questing, restless intelligence is what holds the essays together. “Real life is not like fiction,” she insists, citing Errol Morris. We can never know enough, and usually, we are at the mercy of what we don’t know. Gabbert makes that explicit in her writing, which is digressive and dis-
cussive, showing its bones. “The Great Mortality” begins with a subtle change in the author’s ability to taste, which she thought was viral, before shifting into a series of reflections on conta-
gion and apocalypse. In “The Little Room (or, The Unreality of Memory),” Gabbert uses the memory of her grandmother’s den to provoke a wide-ranging examination of memory and its unreliability, ending with a vivid evocation of loss. “It’s hard for me to believe it no longer exists,” she writes, recalling that long-
lost home; “it’s not a place I can go to.” The idea here—as in all the essays in this nuanced book—is that consciousness is condi-
tional, and we can understand ourselves only in pieces.

A fine collection from a poet who seems equally comfortable in prose.
of paper money), who drew Andrew Jackson’s ire; Yale economist Irving Fisher, who redefined the dollar “as a fixed basket of stuff”; and Bruce Bent, inventor of the money-market fund. Goldstein deftly clarifies economic concepts, distinguishing, for example, the real economy (“the carpenter who builds your house”) from finance (“the banker who lends you money to buy the house”). Finance, he explains, “matches people who are willing to give up money now for the possibility of more money later with people who need money now and are willing to pay back more money later. Finance moves money around in time.” The author also explains the underpinnings of the 2008 financial crisis, the consequences of the adoption of the euro, and the possibilities of money in the future: the disappearance of cash, for one, and the end of banks.

An informative primer from a genial guide.

GOOD BLOOD
A Doctor, a Donor, and the Incredible Breakthrough That Saved Millions of Babies
Guthrie, Julian
Abrams (256 pp.)
$26.00 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-4197-4331-3

A breathless history of a miraculous treatment.

Journalist Guthrie begins by explaining that the “Rh factor” is a protein related to blood type. About 85% of humans have Rh protein in their red blood cells; 15% don’t, making them Rh negative. If an Rh negative woman becomes pregnant by an Rh positive father, her fetus might be Rh positive. If so, the woman’s immune system, which has never encountered Rh, treats it as a foreign invader and generates antibodies. This takes time, so the first child is not affected, but the mother becomes “sensitized”—her immune system
attacks future Rh positive fetuses, killing them or producing devastating anemia in the newborn. Doctors prevent it with a simple injection, called RhoGAM, approved in 1968. Guthrie tells this genuinely uplifting story through biographies of two Australians, John Gorman came to the U.S. in 1955, trained as a pathologist, and began investigating Rh disease, which, at the time, killed 10,000 American babies every year. Reading studies, he learned that when a particular antibody is present in blood, it inhibits the immune system from attacking its target foreign protein. He wondered if simply giving Rh antibody to a woman would prevent her sensitization. He was right, and Guthrie delivers an expert account of the eight years of often frustrating research that proved it. The author’s second hero is James Harrison, a bookkeeper who donated blood throughout his life, a total of 1,173 times. During lifesaving surgery as a teenager, he received many transfusions of Rh negative blood. Being positive himself, he developed titanic levels of Rh antibody, far more than the usual donor (RhoGAM is only obtained through donated blood). His blood has saved 2.4 million babies in Australia. Guthrie narrates her account like a novel, as her characters chat, think, brood, agonize, and ultimately triumph just as in a Hollywood movie.

A readable pop-history account of medical research that turned out spectacularly.

An extraordinary book for anyone who wishes to pay more than lip service to truly inclusive, intersectional feminism.

WHYTE TEARS/BROWN SCARS
How White Feminism Betrays Women of Color
Hamad, Ruby
Catapult (224 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-948226-74-5

An exhaustive look at how White women perpetuate White supremacy at the expense of women of color.

Journalist Hamad picks up where her 2018 Guardian Australia article left off, delving into why White women’s comfort is prioritized and their tears “weaponized” to further marginalize women of color. “When challenged by a woman of color,” she writes, “a white woman will often lean into her racial privilege to turn the tables and accuse the other woman of hurting, attacking, or bullying her. This process almost always siphons the sympathy and support of any onlookers to the apparently distressed white woman, helping her avoid any accountability that may be due and leaving the woman of color out in the cold, often with no realistic option—particularly if it is a workplace interaction—but to accept blame and apologize.” Whether responding to indignities such as White women petting their hair or to loss of career opportunities, women of color are treated as aggressors when they challenge bigotry. The author painstakingly documents how, historically and contemporarily, White women function both as “damsels in distress” and as defenders of White supremacy. From slavery and lynching to forced Indigenous child removals, White women have been “co-conspirators” with White men in racism and violence, often under the guise of protecting White womanhood. With scholarly but highly engaging prose, Hamad details White women’s roles in oppression across continents, a much-needed history lesson for those inclined to reduce racism to individual behavior. The author clearly examines how this legacy of centuries of racial violence and White settler colonialism plays out today in the lives of Black, Asian, Latina, Indian, Muslim, Arab, and Indigenous women from around the world, told through their collective geopolitical histories and personal anecdotes. For readers truly interested in dismantling White supremacy, this is a must-read.

An extraordinary book for anyone who wishes to pay more than lip service to truly inclusive, intersectional feminism.

WHY WE SERVE
Native Americans in the United States Armed Forces
Harris, Alexandra N. & Hirsch, Mark G.
Smithsonian Books (240 pp.)
$29.95 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-58834-697-1

A history of Native American military service, which began even before the Revolutionary War.

In a beautifully produced and illustrated volume commemorating the National Native American Veterans Memorial, Harris, senior editor and writer at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian, and Hirsch, a historian at the museum, offer probing, informative essays examining Native Americans’ participation in the armed forces. Drawing on interviews and historical documents, the authors show how motivations to serve were complex and varied: Some individuals wanted “to learn a trade, get an education, experience the thrill of piloting a jet, explore new life horizons, strike a blow for gender equality, or uphold family traditions of military service that stretch back for generations.” Some were drafted; for others, the military “meant a job, meals, and stability that could not be found at home.” Sometimes, the decision to align with the U.S. military was complicated by treaty alliances or tribal rivalries: “defense of territory, revenge, resources, and challenge to traditional enemies.” In the cases of the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and the Civil War, Native Americans—who were not U.S. citizens and realized that the government was hostile to tribal autonomy and covetous of tribal lands—were forced to choose sides or remain neutral. During the Civil War, some tribes aligned with the Union, others with Confederates; all hoped to renegotiate treaties once the war was over. The authors focus chapters on Native American warrior traditions, participation in the Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, Korea, Vietnam, and conflicts in the Middle East. They examine Native American service as scouts, interpreters, and intermediaries and offer many vivid profiles of individuals.
personifying the larger historical narrative. Although the authors write that the book is "a chronicle of ordinary men and women doing extraordinary things under often unforgiving circumstances," many profiled seem far from ordinary.

A welcome and well-informed perspective on a significant aspect of the Native experience in the U.S.

**FOUND IN TRANSITION**

*A Mother’s Evolution During Her Child’s Gender Change*

Paria Hassouri  
New World Library (272 pp.)  
$25.95 | Sep. 8, 2020  
978-1-60868-708-4

A mother’s experience raising a transgender child.

In this engrossing and sometimes heart-wrenching account, pediatrician Hassouri describes Ava's (formerly Aydin) transition from male to female with approachable, empathetic language that bridges gaps in understanding about the transition process. The author’s unflinching honesty about her initial ignorance regarding trans issues is refreshing, and her unwavering adherence to truth makes the story both compelling and edifying.

"Dear God or Universe...if he really is a girl," she writes, "all I ever wanted to do in high school and after her transition. Eventually, Ava began to develop confidence in her new identity. "All I ever wanted to do in high school was disappear into the background and draw as little attention as possible," writes the author. "Ava was not afraid. She put herself a little more out there every day. Stares in the hallways and whispers as she passed were not going to stop her." Hassouri's book joins a thankfully expanding canon on parenting transgender children; for readers seeking a firsthand look at things clear and understandable. Always candid about her struggles ("despite the pride I felt, I continued to alternate between periods of grief and acute anxiety"), she explores the whirlwind of emotions that Ava and her family navigated before, during, and after her transition. Eventually, Ava began to develop confidence in her new identity: "All I ever wanted to do in high school was disappear into the background and draw as little attention to myself as possible," writes the author. "Ava was not afraid. She put herself a little more out there every day. Stares in the hallways and whispers as she passed were not going to stop her."

**ALONE TOGETHER**

*Love, Grief, and Comfort During the Time of COVID-19*

Ed. by Haupt, Jennifer  
Central Avenue Publishing (256 pp.)  
$16.99 paper | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-1-77168-228-2

An anthology of poems, essays, interviews, and reflections inspired by the COVID-19 lockdown, with proceeds benefitting independent booksellers.

During the pandemic, book tours have been cancelled, bookstores closed, and book deals delayed. What is the literary community to do? Write about it, of course, and try to find or make some meaning out of a period when everything seems so uncertain and unstable. Editor Haupt describes the book, which features contributions from "90 authors (68 in the print book and another 22 in the e-book edition)," as "this Lovely Monster," one that addresses "a vast, overwhelming question that became the pumping heart of this book: What Now?" Of course, there are plenty of mournful pieces concerning illness and death in pandemic isolation, but importantly, there’s a sense that life goes on, reinforcing the spirit of interconnectedness as so many of us remain apart. "In telling our stories, we hope to enable you to tell your story," writes Haupt. "That’s the sweet spot of connections, where the healing begins." Many of the essays find some consolation in the feelings of grace and emotions of tenderness we experience now that we’re no longer living in what Luis Alberto Urrea describes as “our continual tantrum of consumption and aggression.” In a hopeful interview with Haupt, Urrea describes those suffering through isolation as “yearning for our better selves, desperately dreaming of a kinder world in the days to come." The collection is diverse in age, race, and ethnicity, and gender perspective is a focus of many of the pieces, which offer informed speculation on the many ways that things will never be the same. In addition to some voices that may not be widely known, the book includes a smorgasbord of big names: Kwame Alexander, Nikki Giovanni, David Sheff, Lidia Yuknavitch, Dani Shapiro, Garth Stein, Andre Dubus III, Dinty Moore, and Ada Limón.

A heartening gathering of writers joining forces for community support.

**LIVES OF THE STOICS**

*The Art of Living From Zeno to Marcus Aurelius*

Holiday, Ryan & Hanselman, Stephen  
Portfolio (352 pp.)  
$28.00 | Sep. 29, 2020  
978-0-525-54187-5

An introductory guide to the luminaries of Greco-Roman ethical philosophy—and their checkered histories.

Stoicism is famously prescriptive: Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations* is cherished for its aphoristic...
guidance on virtue and leadership, and Epictetus' best-known work, *Enchiridion*, loosely translates to “handbook.” But Holiday and Hanselman, founders of the website the Daily Stoic, avoid a strict how-to approach, instead structuring the book as chronologically arranged pocket biographies of Stoic figures, from Zeno, a merchant who founded the school in Athens in the fourth century B.C.E., to Aurelius, who applied its tenets of calm resilience as Roman emperor in the second century C.E.

The approach means there are many filler chapters on lesser-known thinkers like Panaetius, Porcia Cato (a rare woman Stoic), and Thrasea. (Some seem extraneous. The authors have little to say about Diotimus, who wrote some libelous letters. Bad form, but what of it?) The upside of their approach is that it thoughtfully complicates Stoicism. Rather than emphasizing Spock-like, unemotional rigor (as pop culture often does), the authors reveal how the philosophy often debated its identity and how many of the leaders fell short of its ideals. Cicero, for instance, gained fame as a statesman but ran aground thanks to his reputation for self-aggrandizement; Seneca’s seriousness gave him the thankless task of serving as counsel to Nero, who used him as cover for his own despicable actions as Roman emperor. Still, the authors see Stoicism as inherently inspirational, and there are plenty of examples, from corruption-fighters like Publius Rutilius Rufus to Epictetus, who rose from slavery to become a much-admired thinker. The finest Stoics, they write, were “able to focus in even the most distracting of situations, to be able to tune out anything and everything—even creeping death—so that we lock in on what matters.”

At a time when public nobility is hard to come by, this is a good reminder of the power of ethical leadership.

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**CLUTTER An Untidy History**
*Howard, Jennifer*
Belt Publishing (102 pp.)
$26.00  |  Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-948742-72-6

A veteran journalist explores our messy lives.

In this illuminating sociological study, Howard, a former contributing editor and columnist for the *Washington Post*, begins with the discovery that her mother had been living for years in a hoarder’s den. “Squalor and chaos have infiltrated every room—upstairs, downstairs, attic, basement,” she writes. “No space has been left untouched.” Howard then delves into the sordid history of clutter, looking at the intriguing case study of Homer and Langley Collyer, whose Harlem brownstone, in the 1920s and 30s, “became a death trap of neck-high junk, including hundreds of thousands of newspapers.” In 1947, Langley was crushed under the clutter; Homer, “blind and bedridden and dependent on his brother, starved to death.” The author also explores how industrialization helped create the birth of consumer culture as well as the complex psychology of overconsumption in modern-day capitalism. Howard’s research is thorough, and the prose is clear, well written, and inviting rather than being judgmental, even if she’s exploring complex issues such as activism, entrepreneurship, and the potential impact of clutter on the future of the planet. In addition to her historical narrative and contemporary analysis, the author includes commentary from a variety of interesting characters, including *New Yorker* and Kirkus Prize–winning cartoonist Roz Chast, British author Matt Haig (“there is, in the current world, an excess of everything”), and even Oscar Wilde: “Have nothing in your house that is not useful or beautiful; if such a rule were followed out, you would be astonished at the amount of rubbish you would get rid of.” Like George Carlin’s infamous riff on “A Place for My Stuff,” Howard’s exploration of one dark corner of consumer culture is quick-witted and insightful—and, appropriately for the subject, refreshingly concise. The author also discusses the phenomenon of the “mild-mannered Japanese organizing guru” Marie Kondo.

A keen assessment of one of society’s secret shames and its little-understood consequences.
life and the lives of her Holocaust forbears without a narrowing of thematic focus; thanking every individual who taught her lessons or changed her life in end-of-chapter “letters”—the pacing sometimes suffers, as does the structural interconnectedness of the book.

A candid, sometimes moving, but flawed memoir.

**A YEAR IN THE ART WORLD**

Israel, Matthew
Thames & Hudson (256 pp.)
$29.95 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-500-23992-6

An art historian and curator’s attempt to “present an accessible, engaging and historically informed view of what makes the art world go round.”

Israel, who has worked extensively in the business at various positions, is well equipped to write an insider’s guide to “what’s often regarded as a niche, elitist industry.” Employing a journalistic approach and fairly dry prose, the author chronicles his discussions with people from all over the world for whom art is their livelihood. First, he notes with chagrin the lack of diversity before recounting a not-all-that-revealing visit to the studio of Taryn Simon, a photographer and installation artist Israel calls “one of the most important artists of her generation.” Of more interest are the author’s portraits of the warehouses of sculpture fabricators. Artists working on a large scale—e.g., Jeff Koons, who has his own production facility—rarely produce all the pieces of the artwork themselves. Israel learned what it’s like to represent a Robert Rauschenberg or Mark Rothko, and a museum director told him that the key to keeping your job is to get along with board members. In Hong Kong, Israel demonstrates how costly art fairs are a “booming business” for those who can afford them. Managing an artist’s estate wisely can greatly increase their reputation, as in the case of photographer Peter Hujar. Art critic Jarrett Earnest laments that his profession is “going through a crisis.” While MFA programs are in trouble, art online—e.g., at Artsy, where Israel worked for a while—is expanding the art world’s reach. Auctions remain a “central institution for the art world” because of the high prices they can command. The chapter on art storage, a $1 billion-per-year business, is fascinating, but much of Israel’s material has been covered in zestier fashion, particularly by Sara Thornton in her *Seven Days in the Art World.*

The four-color photos are worthy, but the narrative is essentially Art World 101.

**ALL WE CAN SAVE**

*Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis*

Ed. by Johnson, Ayana Elizabeth & Wilkinson, Katharine Keeble
One World/Random House (432 pp.)
$28.00 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-0-593-23706-9

A welcome anthology, in prose and verse, of women’s writings on climate change.

At the outset, marine biologist Johnson, founder of the Urban Ocean Lab, and teacher Wilkinson, vice president of Project Drawdown, write that the political and social constructs that oppress women are one and the same with those that are wreaking havoc on the global environment: “Supremacy, violence, extraction, egotism, greed, ruthless competition—these hallmarks of patriarchy fuel the climate crisis just as surely as they do misogyny, racism, and inequality.” There’s no such zero-sum game-playing here. The editors observe that women are well equipped to transcend ego and competition in order to create a politics of “heart-centered, not just head-centered, leadership.” Many of the writings that follow celebrate Indigenous ways of knowing: Mexico-born Xiye Bastida, for example, invokes her Otomi-Toltec ancestors to advocate a “shift in culture and mindset.” She argues vigorously for intersectional activism and eschews any form of exclusive politics that further marginalizes the disenfranchised. Penobscot writer Sherrí Mitchell emphasizes the importance of recognizing that “we are all inextricably linked” while Joy Harjo, the first Native poet laureate, raises a number of provocative questions for would-be political leaders—e.g., “Do you have authority by the original keepers of the lands, those who obey natural law and are in the service of the lands on which you stand?” If not, the leader has no business in the job. Some writers—Naomi Klein, say—are more grounded in scientific and political approaches, and poet Emily Johnston delivers a needed caution: We can work diligently and still not solve the monumental problems we face, but that is no excuse not to do it: “There is too much we need to heal, and we have to change the path that we’re on. We have beautiful work to do before we die.” Other contributors include Ada Limón, Kendra Pierre-Louis, Varkini Prakash, and Mary Oliver.

A well-curated collection with many ideas for ways large and small to save the planet.

**SWEET DREAMS**

*The Story of the New Romantics*

Jones, Dylan
Faber & Faber (432 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-571-35343-9

The assembled commentators come armed with dishy anec-

dotes, though casual readers would be satisfied with a book half

as long. By the time 1985 rolled around, heroin and fickle tastes

dispute. For example, was she actually successful as a model?

Was she washed up by the time she encountered her future hus-
band? Or, as one insider claims, was her career “really cut short

by her meeting Donald Trump”? Even before Trump, “Melania
had perfected the art of sealing off different parts of her life.”

Via her interviews with more than 120 subjects in five countries,
the author steams open the seals. The hypocrisy of Trump’s
position on “chain migration” has never been made clearer than
it is here: Melania brought her parents to the U.S., and she dines
with them daily; her parents and her son speak Slovenian at
home; her mother cooks and even does the dishes. As for her
purported fluency in Italian, French, and German, the author
notes that those who have worked closely with Melania have
“never heard her use more than a few words in those languages.”

Jordan diligently assembles the facts on the Access Hollywood
scandal, the Stormy Daniels affair, the plagiarized convention
speech, and the bizarre jacket at the border, among other
events. The author’s presentation often achieves the simple
elegance her subject aspires to.

Interesting and fair—as complete a portrait as we can
expect of the current first lady.

ON TREASON

A Citizen’s Guide to the Law
Larson, Carlton F.W.
Ecco/HarperCollins (256 pp.)
$24.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-06-299616-9

A law professor delivers a fluent,
case-rich examination of the laws gov-
erning treason and its punishment.

If you are of a certain political bent,
it is indisputable that by colluding with
Russia (and, apparently, China too), Donald Trump
committed treasonable acts. If you are Trump, meanwhile, you fling
the word “treason” about with abandon when, say, Democratic
representatives do not stand up to applaud you. Neither party
interprets the law correctly, writes Larson, a law professor and
leading authority on treason. There are technical determinants,
one of which is that one must engage in a formal act of war
against one’s own country, which, as it turns out, is “constitutional
quicksand.” Trump may clearly take Russia’s interests to
be his own against those of the nation over which he ostensibly
presides, but Russia and the U.S. are not at war—not officially,
anyway. What of Jefferson Davis, who waged war on this coun-
try? Quicksand again: A prosecuting attorney would have to
establish that secession is constitutionally forbidden and then
seat a jury that would find the defendant guilty, no easy mat-
ter since the crime took place in Virginia. And Jane Fonda, who
broadcast anti-war messages from Hanoi? Now the question
emerges: Was the U.S. officially at war? Even though by some
precedents a formal declaration was not necessary, the govern-
ment under Nixon decided not to prosecute—perhaps, Larson
ventures, because “a prosecution of Fonda risked exposing Nix-
on’s own activities with respect to Vietnam, which were hardly
honorable.” In the end, writes the author, even though today
“many Americans have a powerful desire to define conduct that they find reprehensively disloyal as treason,” the law is seldom applied—just once, in fact, over the course of the nation’s history—and for very good reason. Though bound up in highly technical legal arguments, Larson examines the notion clearly and accessibly.

A book that both clarifies and complicates the laws surrounding treason, which explains why it is so rarely invoked.

**CASSANDRA SPEAKS**

**When Women Are the Storytellers, the Human Story Changes**

_Lesser, Elizabeth_

Harper Wave/HarperCollins (304 pp.)

$27.99 | Sep. 15, 2020

978-0-06-288718-4

To escape patriarchal assumptions, women must invent a new storyline.

Lesser, co-founder of the Omega Institute, an adult education and retreat center in Rhinebeck, New York, draws on her own life, research on gender, and cultural myths to explore challenges to women’s power. Cassandra seems to her emblematic of women’s subjugation: Cursed by Apollo after she rejected him, she would forever be disbelieved. Although her prophecies told the truth, “her words fell flat.” Cassandras, like Eve, Pandora, and many other mythical and fictional women that Lesser cites, represents men’s views. “So much of the sorry state of our world hangs on the excess of the so-called masculine virtues in our guiding storylines,” writes the author. “So much was lost with the disparaging of anything coded feminine and the erasure of women as protagonists and heroes.” Why, for example, are there no monuments to women’s achievements but countless statues of male warriors? Invisible and silenced because of nature, nurture, and “the wounds of patriarchy,” women, Lesser believes, share a tendency to feel self-doubt, shame, and reticence, internalizing expectations “to stay in a narrow lane: mother, caregiver, keeper of the hearth, mender of the hearts, cleaner-uppers of the mess.” These qualities—nurturing, emotional intelligence, and “relational nature”—shape women leaders who are likely “to be more collaborative and “less prone to corruption, to instinctively move to fill the empathy deficit, to seek wiser solutions to conflict.” To encourage women who, like her, are “trying to excel and contribute within a system built by and for men,” Lesser offers exercises designed to promote both activism and what she calls innervism: “the part of me that seeks inner change, inner healing.” These include meditation, guided reflection, listing sources of inspiration, prompts to help talk to someone with differing views, and writing one’s own obituary.

An encouraging guide to help women redefine their lives.

**EXERCISED**

**Why Something We Never Evolve To Do Is Healthy and Rewarding**

_Lieberman, Daniel E._

Pantheon (464 pp.)

$29.95 | Sep. 8, 2020

978-1-524-74698-8

An accomplished intellectual explains our need to be regularly physical.

While there are plenty of generalities that apply to exercise—it’s good for us, it may help prevent disease, it’s best done regularly—most of the important elements are personal and variable. Near the beginning of his latest, Harvard paleoanthropologist Lieberman states, “this is not a self-help book.” Indeed, the narrative is more of a thoughtfully organized natural history than a straightforward how-to guide. In appealing, accessible language, the author tells interesting stories and only seldom slips into the weeds—e.g., overly long discussions of the daily lives of hunter-gatherers. He also addresses relevant topics that regularly generate misinformation: “Is sitting the new smoking?” “Is it bad to slouch? Do you need eight hours of sleep?” As the author notes, many Americans don’t get enough exercise, so some may wonder how many will desire a pure history of something they don’t do and don’t like. Nonetheless, Lieberman adds useful context regarding the _why_ of exercise—we didn’t evolve to spend time on treadmills, yet exercise seems essential in a post-industrial age—and readers will want to know what to do with this compelling information. The author suggests some answers, such as in a section on how exercise might be applied to combat certain common ailments. An example: “This one is easy: cardio is better than weights for obesity.” It wouldn’t be hard to find personal trainers who quibble with that statement. After all, is the goal sustained weight loss or the most weight loss in a specific period of time? How old/healthy/overfed/active is the person? While readers may not be convinced by such statements as “make exercise necessary and fun,” the author successfully makes use of “evolutionary and anthropological perspectives to explore and rethink dozens of myths about physical inactivity, activity, and exercise.”

A good choice for those seeking a macro view of the history of movement. For what to do about it, hire a trainer.

**UNIQUE**

**The New Science of Human Individuality**

_Linden, David J._

Basic (336 pp.)

$30.00 | Sep. 29, 2020

978-1-5416-9888-8

A professor of neuroscience at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine probes the individual traits that make us who we are.
Linden looks at how heredity interacts with experience and “the inherent randomness in the development of the body.” Although he notes that we have only a general understanding of how molecular mechanisms come together to make us individuals, he fearlessly delves into genetic factors, the experience-driven expression of genes, and the subtle changes in the number, position, biochemical activity, and movement of cells within the developing nervous system. The author picks apart those aspects that are biologically regulated and those that are the product of social experience—attachment, social warmth, neglect, and bullying—and describes how they affect brain development. There are a variety of sex manifestations that don’t always sort easily into male and female, and gender is even more variable. Linden provides lucid examinations of the range and dynamism of sexual expression. Regarding food preferences, the author writes, “we have succeeded by being food generalists. As a species, we can’t be overly predetermined when it comes to food. We must adapt to local availability through learning.” However, there is clear evidence of genetic variation in taste sensors as well as life-stage influences on taste sensation. After a foray into gene expression and how it addresses some particular challenge—e.g., high-altitude living “in the Semien Mountains of Ethiopia or the high Tibetan plateau”—Linden moves on to the contentious role of population genetics, systematically refuting pseudo-scientific racist arguments. The author untangles the cultural, biological, and socio-economic factors at play, the fallacy of selective pressures, the fluidity of racial populations, heritable and nonheritable components, and the crystallized and malleable elements of intelligence. Ultimately, the author concludes, “interacting forces of heredity, experience, plasticity, and development resonate to make us unique.”

A sturdy, scientifically grounded, and anecdotally engaging study of the factors that shape us.

LIBERTY FROM ALL MASTERS
The New American Autocracy vs. the Will of the People
Lynn, Barry C.
St. Martin’s (320 pp.)
$28.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-250-24062-0

An examination of our fall into the economic pit crafted by Amazon, Google, et al.—and ideas for how to crawl out.

Lynn, the founder and CEO of the Open Markets Institute, pulls few punches in his grim analysis of the current enormous economic sway exercised by monopolies. The author laments the loss of a bright American past when people owned stores (not franchises), farms, and other enterprises now controlled by global corporations bound by few restrictions. Lynn, who has published two other books on this subject, including Cornered: The New Monopoly Capitalism and the Economics of
In the span of her long, colorful life, Ursula Kuczynski (1907-2000) rose in the Soviet ranks to the level of colonel and, in her later years, became a novelist and memoirist under the name Ruth Wern er. Born to an affluent, left-leaning German Jewish family, she acquired strong communist convictions in her teens. Her career in espionage (code name: Sonya) began in 1930 after she relocated to Shanghai with her first husband, Rudolph Hamburger. In his latest entertaining nonfiction spy thriller, Macintyre tracks Sonya’s numerous audacious exploits during her prolific career. Drawing from her diaries, correspondences, and extensive interviews with her two adult sons, the author crafts a narrative that serves as both an engrossing historical tale and a compassionate portrait of Sonya as a complex woman of northeastern California.

The rousing tale of the Soviet Union’s most celebrated female spy:

In the span of her long, colorful life, Ursula Kuczynski (1907-2000) rose in the Soviet ranks to the level of colonel and, in her later years, became a novelist and memoirist under the name Ruth Werner. Born to an affluent, left-leaning German Jewish family, she acquired strong communist convictions in her teens. Her career in espionage (code name: Sonya) began in 1930 after she relocated to Shanghai with her first husband, Rudolph Hamburger. In his latest entertaining nonfiction spy thriller, Macintyre tracks Sonya’s numerous audacious exploits during her prolific career. Drawing from her diaries, correspondences, and extensive interviews with her two adult sons, the author crafts a narrative that serves as both an engrossing historical tale and a compassionate portrait of Sonya as a complex woman of northeastern California.

The extraordinary combination of ambition, romance, and adventure that bubbled inside her.

An absorbing study of a remarkably accomplished 20th-century spy.

MASS MURDER IN CALIFORNIA’S EMPTY QUARTER
A Tale of Tribal Treachery at the Cedarville Rancheria
March, Ray A.
Bison/Univ. of Nebraska (232 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 1, 2020
978-1-4962-1756-1

True-crime yarn about an explosion of violence in a particularly obscure corner of northeastern California.

Journalist March, hitherto known for books about golf and environmental matters, turns his eye toward a horrific crime committed on Feb. 20, 2014, when Cherie Rhoades, the ousted president of the tribal council at the Cedarville Rancheria, killed four people during a legal hearing. One was Rhoades’ brother, with whom she had been at odds. “She was well known as a bully,” writes March. “She had a sneak-attack temper that could quickly turn violent. At five feet, six inches and 185 pounds she looked like a middle guard.” She also had little connection to the Northern Paiute people: She had grown up White in fairly horrible circumstances, but enrolling in the tribe allowed her to take a share of the casino-profits distribution to Native people and, soon enough, to move enough family members to Cedarville, with only some 35 residents, to gain control. Soon enough, too, her brother, who “could be kind and he could be vengeful,” accused her of embezzling tribal funds. March condemns not only Rhoades, who was sentenced to death, but also a system of Indian governance without much oversight—and what oversight there is comes by way of the notoriously inept federal Bureau of Indian Affairs. March’s attention to these matters sometimes comes spilling out without much apparent concern for transitions or the niceties of organization. However, despite his tendency to dart from topic to topic, the narrative hits on some centrally important questions: Who is an Indian? Who decides? And “to what extent is tribal dysfunction and the dysfunction present in contemporary Native American culture something that state and federal policy, especially gambling policy, incentivizes?”

A story that moves from murder to larger issues of identity, cultural genocide, and Native American life.
A revealing look at the world of the private detective, which isn’t quite as Raymond Chandler imagined it.

“We are everywhere,” Maroney writes of detectives employed by private concerns rather than governments. Having begun his career, like so many PIs, in journalism (academia is another field ripe for recruitment), he reels off employers: large companies, movie studios, wealthy individuals, media outlets, even some government agencies, all of which need some critical piece of information. This can be of a rather sleazy nature—e.g., a juicy detail that will undo a spouse’s divorce proceedings or, in the case of the disgraced entertainment executive Harvey Weinstein, “compromising information on women Weinstein had allegedly victimized (such as Rose McGowan) and journalists whose articles Weinstein sought to quash (such as Jodi Kantor).” The classic PI modus operandi involves disguising one’s identity and deceiving—or, in polite parlance, socially engineering—one’s way into the confidence of the person who holds the desired information. Sometimes this is criminal, sometimes not, but in any event, Maroney pointedly observes, the behavior is ubiquitous and lucrative. It is especially lucrative for the hackers in the PI world, who steal into offices in the middle of the night and copy sensitive computer data without attracting attention or suspicion—a pro tip, Maroney offers, is to remove a hard drive from a computer before copying it off, since USB connections and computer logs tell tales. Having cracked a company’s system, the PI is then often hired to build an electronic fortress around it, double-dipping at its best. There’s more poor Joe Schmo than James Bond in the whole enterprise, writes the author, and the ethics are iffy (“sometimes our work benefits the social good; sometimes we are the instruments of moral outrage”). Whatever the case, being a corporate/private detective is a growth industry, and it’s not going anywhere anytime soon, which says something about the world in which we live.

Maroney deglamorizes the world of private investigators while limning their sometimes essential, sometimes damaging work.

A life-spanning biography of bestselling novelist and critics’ favorite Lee Child. Born James Grant in Coventry, England, in 1954, Child felt “so unloved as a child” that he devoured books about orphans. As an unsettled teen, he broke a rival kid’s arm and played in a rock band. He worked in theater and studied law before settling in at Granada Television in the late 1970s, where he enjoyed success as a presentation director. Partly owing to his stance as a union organizer, he was fired after 18 years, becoming a writer “because he couldn’t think of anything else to do.” After turning out more than 20 thrillers featuring the hulking, Zen-like, all-American problem solver Jack Reacher, Child announced he would be turning over the series to his younger brother, mystery writer Andrew Grant, with whom he co-wrote the forthcoming Reacher book, The Sentinel. In her first biography, based on personal correspondence with Child, Martin offers a variety of intriguing stories about her subject. However, the narrative is so crowded with extraneous material (the author profiles seemingly anyone who ever knew Child) and so prone to redundancies and head-scratching allusions—e.g., the lasting impact of tennis great Chris Evert’s “glow”—the reading experience becomes a chore. The publisher says that Martin had “disarmingly frank” conversations with her subject, whom she calls “Lee” or “Jim” throughout, but he is only superficially revealing, leaving her to hold up excerpts from his novels as mirrors to his soul. As for Child’s exceptional style as a novelist, the fawning Martin offers little critical analysis beyond comparing him to Camus and Borges. “He feels, as much as thinks, his books into something,” she writes, while noting his obsession with figuring out the right “ratio” among “overall number of pages, number of lines per page and number of characters per line.”

An exhaustive and exhausting account for only the most committed fans.

The modern detective: How corporate intelligence is reshaping the world

Maroney, Tyler
Riverhead (272 pp.)
$27.00 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-59463-259-4

At the dawn of the Great Depression, a banker-turned-historian concocted the phrase “the American Dream” to indicate the governing force of the Declaration of Independence’s exaltation of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. “Whether that dream is obtainable, and how access to it has changed over time, is the central theme of American history,” writes Masur, a scholar whose works have ranged from histories of the Civil War era to a book-length look at Bruce Springsteen’s “Born to Run.” The notion of equal opportunity is pretty much hard-wired into the American mind, though it’s often found wanting in practice; in any event, it was long denied to various categories of human being, including those of African descent and Indigenous people. Justifications for this exclusion came in many ideological guises, from the insistence

The sum of our dreams

Masur, Louis P.
Oxford Univ. (368 pp.)
$29.95 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-19-069257-5

A levelheaded history of the U.S. framed on the pursuit of the American dream, however illusory it might now seem.
of the Confederate constitution that slavery was the natural order of things to the social Darwinism of the post–Civil War era, which “served to undergird various ideas as laissez-faire capitalism, imperialism, and eugenics.” (Masur ventures an intriguing connection between that dog-eat-dog belief system and the widespread popularity of boxing in the late 19th century.) The author’s dissection of the American dream often turns to areas in which it did not hold, such as the Panic of 1893, “a worldwide economic crisis caused by a decline in commodity prices,” and populist Wisconsin governor Robert La Follette’s efforts to smash the Republican political machine that eventually crushed him. Money is now the determinant of the dream, Masur suggests, with deep-pocketed players such as the Koch brothers and the National Rifle Association holding the keys to government. Meanwhile, the dreams of others for social justice, equality, and “pursuing a better life,” if often invoked, seem ever less attainable.

A survey of our past that capably blends politics, popular culture, and social history into a coherent, readable whole.

POVERTY SAFARI
Understanding the Anger of Britain’s Underclass
McGarvey, Darren
Arcade (284 pp.)
$24.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-951627-08-9

The Scottish rapper known as Loki reflects on his chaotic Glasgow childhood—and on Britain’s failure “to take lower class people seriously”—in an Orwell Prize–winning debut.

McGarvey calls this memoir “a series of loosely connected rants that give the appearance of a book.” That’s not far off the mark. The narrative is essentially a collection of linked essays that mix the personal and the political as the author inveighs against class inequality in the U.K. The most interesting pieces begin with a memorable event—such as the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire in London or the construction of the M77 motorway on National Trust land in Glasgow—and then show how it affected people, like the author, who grew up in poor neighborhoods. One entry perceptively explains why McGarvey’s peers faulted the heavy media coverage of a blaze that gutted an iconic building at the Glasgow School of Art: “we grew up in communities where things burn down all the time.” The author also acutely portrays his alcoholic, drug-addicted mother, who shot up in front of him, burned many of the contents of their house in the front yard, tried to dig up their dead dog with her bare hands, and undercut his father’s efforts to provide stability for McGarvey and his four siblings. Homeless and suffering from substance abuse by the age of 18, McGarvey began to turn a corner after extensive psychological counseling at a nonprofit youth center and receiving generous welfare-state benefits, including “supported” housing. Though extensive therapy seemed to provide the help he needed, here, it too often leads to writing deadened by self-help bromides and talk of ills such as “low self-esteem,” “imposter syndrome,” and “negative self-talk.” This book gives an admirably deromanticized view of Scotland but in language not always as fresh as its vision.

A mixture of solid, original reporting on class inequality and a less-effective treatment of personal transformation.

THE SECRET LIVES
OF PLANETS
Order, Chaos, and Uniqueness in the Solar System
Murdin, Paul
Pegasus (288 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-64313-336-2

A smooth survey of the planets and satellites.

With nations reviving an interest in human space exploration, this expert overview by Murdin, emeritus professor of astronomy at Cambridge, is a welcome description of what’s out there. The author, who was part of a team that discovered Cygnus X-1, a galactic X-ray source thought to be the first accepted as a black hole, discusses planets (once nine, now eight), some interesting moons, and several miscellaneous bodies. The nearest four planets—Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars—are small and rocky, while the distant four—Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune—are large and gassy. Mercury resembles the moon, airless and cratered but larger and hotter. As hot as melting lead, cloud-covered Venus resembles an Earth with its greenhouse gases out of control. Barren and cold with almost no atmosphere, Mars may be barely tolerable. Hopefully, we will know in a decade or two. Massive Jupiter and Saturn are the “gas giants.” Not so massive but colder, Uranus and Neptune are “ice giants.” Even further, colder, tiny, and with a wacky orbit, Pluto has been demoted to the considerable family of dwarf planets. Earth receives the longest chapter. Many readers take comfort that it orbits in the “Goldilocks Zone,” the distance from the sun where liquid water can exist. But life also requires a large magnetic field to fend off solar radiation—Earth’s won’t last forever—as well as an atmosphere with greenhouse gases. With none, it freezes; with too much, it overheats. Earth’s huge moon stabilizes the planet’s axis and seasons. Since human life requires liquid water, the author focuses intently on that topic. Mars contains almost none, but several moons of Jupiter and one of Saturn contain oceans beneath their surfaces. Another moon of Saturn, Titan, has an atmosphere as well as rivers and oceans of methane. Astronomers, science fiction writers, and Murdin remain fascinated by methane-based life.

Satisfying popular science, just right for the budding astronomer in the household.
Personal digressions and lyrical ruminations from an award-winning writer.

In the latest entry in the publisher’s Why I Write series, lecturer, poet, novelist, performer, and art journalist Myles offers candid, peripatetic reflections on identity, vocation, and, not least, place. The author recounts a protracted struggle to stay in their tiny, rent-controlled apartment in Manhattan’s East Village, home for more than 40 years, after the landlord insisted on a buyout. “The city has taught me almost everything I know about language and existence and being a writer,” Myles reveals. Besides paying homage to the grit and textures of Manhattan, the author creates a palpable portrait of Marfa, Texas, where, after a brief visit, they bought a house. “Texas felt great because it was deeply unfamiliar,” writes the author. Around 1997, Myles began to sense “something I think of as the archival moment, and before I sold anything I already started to feel the creeping value of the past and the new place the past was playing in the present.” A crisis occurred when Myles lost a box destined for the archive; searching for it eventually gave up. The archive—without that box—resides at Yale. Of choosing a career as a writer, the author admits that in almost everything I know about language and existence and being a writer, “I say queer, or trans. Yale. Of choosing a career as a writer, the author admits that in the nearly started to feel the creeping value of the past and the new place the past was playing in the present.” A crisis occurred when Myles lost a box destined for the archive; searching for it eventually gave up. The archive—without that box—resides at Yale. Of choosing a career as a writer, the author admits that in their 20s, “I discovered that to be real was an interior project” that involves “a kind of aesthetic experience I believe that precedes the work so that you kind of fall into it finding your style and content and opportunity all together at last and that’s happened enough times for me to believe that that’s my process.” As for gender identity, “I’m so obviously a lesbian,” Myles writes, “I don’t even call myself a lesbian anymore. I say queer, or trans. I say they but none of that matters.”

A sharply etched, unvarnished self-portrait.

LET’S ASK MARION
What You Need To Know About the Politics of Food, Nutrition, and Health
Nestle, Marion with Trueman, Kerry
Univ. of California (216 pp.)
$16.95 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-520-34323-8

A noted nutritionist critiques the “industry-driven food environment.”

Author and food columnist Nestle, emerita professor of food studies and public health at NYU, joins with environmental advocate Trueman in a broad consideration of food policy, consumption, and sustainability. “Food is political,” Nestle asserts, connecting issues such as obesity, hunger, food safety, and climate change to governmental food policy, industry lobbying, and inequality. Using a question-and-answer format, Trueman elicits Nestle’s responses on the relationship of food to illness, choice of one diet (low-carb, for example) over another, the need for supplements, and the benefits of fake meats. Nestle points out the difficulty of studying what people eat: The best that studies can do, she says, is to “show some kind of association or link between what you ate and the likelihood—your risk—of developing a disease. They cannot prove that what you ate caused a disease.” As for trendy diets, she advocates eating in moderation, choosing plants over meats, and avoiding the supersized portions that the food industry promotes. She admits “discomfort about using ‘addiction’ to describe loving relationships to food. We can’t live without eating. Food is delicious.” Marketing, not scientific evidence, has created a demand for supplements and so-called “superfoods.” Although she has tried manufactured foods, Nestle questions their processed ingredients and finds “technological approaches, no matter how entertaining or potentially useful,” a distraction from addressing problems inherent in the food industry. Decrying the lack of a “committed food safety culture” that would prevent food-borne illnesses, Nestle notes that in the U.S., responsibility for food policies is fragmented among too many agencies, making progress and oversight impossible. Because food advocacy is a global issue, she urges readers to become involved: “pick the problem you want to address, find a group working on that issue, and join it.”

Informative, pragmatic responses about what, why, and how we eat.

A CRY FROM THE FAR MIDDLE
Dispatches From a Divided Land
O’Rourke, P.F.
Atlantic Monthly (320 pp.)
$26.00 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-8021-5773-7

The political satirist frets about America’s state of “angry perplexity,” but he would be well advised to heed his own advice: Calm down.

In his latest broadside, O’Rourke decries the excesses of left and right with (almost) equal disdain. At 72, he remains a libertarian conservative, and he has no use for the mindless populism or rabid partisanship that has Americans baring their fangs at each other. The author fairly wonders when—or if—America will “emerge from its grievous health crisis, lockdown isolation, economic collapse, and material deprivation with a newly calm, pragmatic, and reasonable attitude toward our political system.” Even as he sounds the death knell for classical liberalism—free enterprise, the rule of law, civil liberties, free speech, etc.—O’Rourke also hopes, with scant confidence, that we will dispense with our hysterias in favor of competence and a civil tongue. He proceeds to skewer America’s cultural and political ills in broad, superficial detail while championing a form of “extreme moderation” as the...
The U.S. Senate and House of Representatives are currently spending billions of dollars in the form of a banknote that had no actual value," he writes. "The U.S. Senate and House of Representatives are currently spending twenty dollars in just three days. Along the way, the author considered the concurrent effects of leaders of government and industry who have stymied research. She has an answer: “If governments don’t do their job and don’t do enough to put a stop to climate change, then courts can remind them of their purpose.” Those who doubt the severity of climate change will persist, but for the fact-minded, Otto’s arguments are incontrovertible.

Exaggeration and absurdity are useful tools of humor but not when deployed with a bludgeon.

**ANGRY WEATHER**

*Heat Waves, Floods, Storms, and the New Science of Climate Change*

Otto, Friederike

Trans. by Pybus, Sarah

Greystone Books (256 pp.)

$26.95 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-77164-614-7

Because of human actions, the climate is changing—and not for the better. So argues Otto, whose work is at the forefront of climate science.

Whatever else we might know, or think we know, about the climate, “every weather event takes place under different environmental conditions than those of 250 years ago,” writes Otto, director of Oxford University’s Environmental Change Institute. Unpacking that, the 250-year cutoff roughly coincides with King George III’s awarding of a patent to James Watt for the steam engine, which would soon give birth to the Industrial Revolution—and with it the greenhouse gases that are steadily warming the atmosphere. Commanding a vast body of data, Otto observes that the “seven hottest years [in recorded history] have all taken place within the last decade.” Because we are in the middle of this change, we suffer from observational bias: We know it’s hot, but we keep at our normal affairs. Meanwhile, this rising heat has different effects in different places. More heat means more atmospheric moisture but also quicker evaporation, so that some places will be flooded and others will suffer from drought. The big-picture effects are predictable, writes the author, but we must look beyond those “large-scale averages” to consider the effects of climate change on a storm-by-storm, drought-by-drought basis. Throughout the narrative, Otto intersperses glimpses of that big picture with a major case study: Hurricane Harvey, which in 2017 did nearly as much damage as Hurricane Katrina a dozen years earlier, dropping 41 inches of rain in just three days. Along the way, the author considers the concurrent effects of leaders of government and

**A FIELD GUIDE TO A HAPPY LIFE**

*53 Brief Lessons for Living*

Pigliucci, Massimo

Basic (160 pp.)

$20.00 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-5416-4693-3

An attempt to update the Stoic philosophy as expressed by Roman thinker and former slave Epictetus (50-130 C.E.).

Some things are within our power; most are not. Stoicism offers a path to discerning the difference. Philosophy professor Pigliucci, a staunch proponent of science education, calls his book, based on Epictetus’s *Enchiridion*, a “field guide” because life is lived in the field, not in theory. The *Enchiridion* was composed of 55 “units” or principles; Pigliucci modifies half of those to be in harmony with 21st-century realities, knowing that Stoicism, a highly cosmopolitan body of thought, has undergone many alterations through the centuries and will continue to do so. Founded by Zeno (334-262 B.C.E.), Stoicism espouses the idea that a virtuous and happy life requires applying reason to the betterment of self and society. Pigliucci has the same aim, though, like Socrates (and unlike Epictetus), he does not advise total disregard of “externals” (things not under our control), a dominant ethic of original Stoicism. Of course, the word “stoic” did not mean then what it means today. The author’s modernization of Stoicism involves accepting misfortune or adversity with equanimity but also having goals and pursuing them in a manner consistent with one’s integrity and self-respect. However, even some of Pigliucci’s revisions are ideals; there is a difference between moderation and monasticism. What’s missing here is passion. Being virtuous and phlegmatic all the time would make one admirable but rather dull, and other people’s attitudes, opinions, and actions (externals) are of no concern to us only if we live in a vacuum. While Pigliucci agrees that reading philosophy and living a philosophy are two different things, he stresses that the art of living requires discipline.

The value of Stoicism—traditional or Pigliucci’s version—is in the universal ideas it holds about human nature.
“Our bear, then, is perfectly adapted to a life on the ice,” writes fan, whose haunts include the far north of his country, tells the fested early. “I’ve always been able to get a quick emotional read on anyone to whom I’m speaking and deliver my message with a ferocious confidence,” he writes. “This skill exists on a scale ranging from charm to manipulation. Even as a child, I would speak to adults as their equal, and pick them apart in the process.”

When he entered high school, he discovered natural aptitudes for both technology and rebellion. His first business venture, an on-call computer repair company, grew to include “scam” activities that used hacker skills Roa developed alongside a fellow techie and business partner who eventually seized control of the business for himself. Dropping in and out of college over the next several years before finally earning a bachelor’s degree in sales, Roa began a second, highly successful media company that catered to the online gaming community. He then briefly went to work for a Chicago web design firm, which inspired him to start another business in 2010 that would make him “the design guru” for startup companies. Using personal charisma and a gift for “reimagining[s]...cemented way[s] of doing things,” Roa built a multimillion-dollar company he christened AKTA, run by a crew of “genius misfits.” By 2015, both AKTA and its creator were headed on a “collision course.” While the company was nearing the cliff “when risk would completely outweigh...gain,” the now overstressed Roa had begun drinking heavily and abusing cocaine and Xanax to keep him “1 percent above a breakdown.”

As the author engages with the fascinating question of whether “entrepreneurs are born or made,” he depicts a cutthroat, unhealthy, sometimes bizarre world rarely discussed by insiders. For young entrepreneurs seeking to win the glittering—but personally destructive—startup game, it is essential reading.

A candid and disturbing memoir of the ups and downs of entrepreneurship.
a British botanist and “German racial ideologue” who served as “the bridge between Bayreuth and Nazi Germany.” Ross probes Wagner’s attraction to Jews (Zionist Theodor Herzl, for example), Blacks (including W.E.B. Du Bois), feminists, and homosexuals despite Wagner’s professed bigotry and racism. Across Europe and in the U.S., Wagner became a cult figure: “a torch-bearer of the modern” for the French; “a messenger of Arthuriana” in Britain. For Americans, “Wagner harmonized with a national love of wilderness sagas, frontier lore, Native American tales, stories of desperadoes searching for gold.” <i>Lohengrin</i> is a staple of weddings, and from <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> onward, Wagner’s music has been the soundtrack of more than 1,000 films, which have used his work “to unleash all manner of rampaging hordes, marching armies, swashbuckling heroes, and scheming evildoers.” The author asks: “In the face of a sacred monster like Wagner, what power do spectators have? Are we necessarily subject to the domination of his works, complicit in their ideology? Or, in embracing them, can we take possession of them and remake them in our own image? A deeply informed history as vigorous as Wagner’s music.

**A PASSION FOR IGNORANCE**

**What We Choose Not To Know and Why**

Salez, Renata

Princeton Univ. (208 pp.)

$24.95 | Sep. 29, 2020

978-0-691-19560-5

Willful ignorance can be insidious or self-protective.

Drawing on popular writings, scholarly studies, and her own experiences, philosopher and sociologist Salez, a law professor at the University of London, offers a thoughtful, nuanced examination of the social and psychological motivations for—and consequences of—ignorance or denial. How, she asks, do individuals “try to avoid dealing with traumatic knowledge” by remaining ignorant, and how do societies “find ever new ways to deny information that might undermine the power structures or ideological mechanisms that maintain the existing order?” The pressure to know, the author asserts, has increased with easy access to information online; people feel responsible for being “experts at everything,” including making choices for a healthy lifestyle and deciding on medical treatments. Yet a broad-ranging expertise is impossible. “Perceiving and comprehending the world around us,” writes Salez, “necessarily involves deciding what is significant to our needs and goals and what is not.” In times of crisis, ignorance may contribute to well-being or even survival. The author considers how people respond to traumas such as war, fleeing violence, or receiving a dire medical diagnosis as well as what new anxieties, shame, sorrow, and guilt people feel resulting from knowledge of their genetic makeup. Ignorance or denial are involved in love, as well, “when a person wants a relationship to succeed and does everything possible to keep alive the fantasy that sustains it.” Salez notes the puzzling phenomenon of ignoring information from monitoring that is designed for self-improvement. People who do so are not “consciously embracing self-destructive behavior,” she observes, but rather, just downloading an app makes them feel better. At a time when fake news, propaganda, political rhetoric, and dueling experts dominate the media, the author’s analysis offers a fresh way to think about the decisions each of us make to “embrace ignorance and denial.”

A timely consideration of ways we construct our reality.

**AFTER THE GIG**

**How the Sharing Economy Got Hijacked and How to Win It Back**

Schor, Juliet B.

Univ. of California (272 pp.)

$24.95 | Sep. 1, 2020

978-0-520-32505-0

Noted technology critic, economist, and sociologist Schor examines the appropriation of job-sharing platforms by corporations, to the detriment of working people and consumers alike.

Working with a team of doctoral candidates over a seven-year period, the author documents the rise and fall of what was once a revolutionary idea hatched during the financial collapse of 2008—namely, that “digital technology could solve the problem of work.” One such problem is bad bosses, unneeded when algorithms can do the job of task assignment and supervision; another is the “nine-to-five grind,” obviated by flexible hours; still another is the lack of reasonable pay, which the digital platforms were supposed to remedy by providing close matches in the supply-and-demand realm. Instead, writes Schor, what happened is that the digital platforms fell into the hands of the suits, who increasingly turned a technological revolution into a profit center. “At their worst,” she holds, “the companies have morphed into predatory employers.” Some of those companies are household names—Uber, Lyft, AirBnB—while others might have been. One such case is Zipcar, which rents cars on a short-term basis to city dwellers in need of a run to the grocery or hardware store but who might otherwise have used public transportation, thereby doing nothing to lessen the urban carbon footprint, “a classic case of unintended consequences.” Sharing platforms as originally conceived by technoliberarians included such things as a community pub, a “time bank” that allowed people to barter services, and a library of sorts that allowed people to borrow tools. Instead, what they’ve devolved to are things like the economic “wild goose chase” by which drivers—for-hire cruise the streets looking for clients and algorithm-driven food-delivery services with punishing fees for restaurateurs. The author, a nimble writer, concludes that “social technology” has to match technology itself, the foremost need being “learning how to share.”

The gig economy is a failure, Schor sharply chronicles—but not one that can’t be redeemed by “cooperation and helping.”
A “chronicle of oppression” that makes a rousing counter to the usual celebratory narratives of the American past.

**AMERICAN RULE**

*How a Nation Conquered the World but Failed Its People*

Sexton, Jared Yates

Dutton (384 pp.)

$29.00 | Sep. 15, 2020

978-1-5247-4571-4

A contrarian history of the U.S. dismissing notions of exceptionalism and triumphalism.

Sexton, author of the rousing political-chronicle *The People Are Going To Rise Like the Waters Upon Your Shore* (2017), turns to the same problem that inspired his first book: the ascendency of Donald Trump to the White House. “I could explain Trump’s victory politically, demographically, and socially,” he writes, “but historically, I was at a loss.” His explorations of the American past provide him milestones. The framing of the Declaration of Independence and, later, of the Constitution is an important one: Congress’ rejection of Thomas Jefferson’s language that considered enslaved people to be property, and that government alone to issue money; Woodrow Wilson’s “cal chronicle of oppression” that makes a rousing counter to the usual celebratory narratives of the American past.

**THE TWITTERING MACHINE**

*Seymour, Richard*

Verso (256 pp.)

$26.95 | Sep. 22, 2020

978-1-78873-928-3

A sophisticated critique of the age of social media.

The term social media, ventures Seymour, isn’t quite right, “a form of shorthand propaganda,” since all media are social, tools that connect individual people to the world. “To talk about technologies is to talk about societies,” he continues, and the technology in question is one of the industrialization of the written word. In an argument reminiscent of O.B. Hardison’s now 30-year-old book *Disappearing Through the Skylight*, Seymour examines the code—the writing, that is—and the messages it generates in light of that social industry; whose titans have been rightly accused of hijacking expression to manipulate various untruths—and not just the fake news of Trumpians, but the compromised messages that say less than they mean. “The only way to conform successfully on the internet,” writes the author, “is to be unutterably bland and platitudinous.” All of this falls under the rubric of what Seymour calls the Twittering Machine, one that generates plenty of feeble noises. Some of the author’s arguments seem a little obvious, and some of the best bits are borrowed (with attribution) from critics of technology such as Jaron Lanier, who observes that the technology capitalists “don’t have to persuade us when they can directly manipulate our experience of the world.” However, Seymour dives deep to show just how that manipulation works, making us addicts of the machine—though, as he notes, the standard psychiatric diagnostic manual does not yet have a category for internet addiction—who crave the likes that a post or photo might bring. Indeed, the addition of the “like” button was practically as revolutionary as the internet itself. Nicholas Carr’s *The Shallows* is the more useful book in this regard, though it lacks the essayistic dimension that Seymour capably employs here.

Thoughtful reading for technologists and technology’s discontents alike.

**THIS IS OHIO**

*The Overdose Crisis and the Front Lines of a New America*

Shuler, Jack

Counterpoint (304 pp.)

$26.00 | Sep. 8, 2020

978-1-64009-355-3

Another alarming report from the front lines of the opioid epidemic. Shuler, who teaches journalism at Denison University, focuses his on-the-ground study in nearby Newark, Ohio, “a microcosm of the U.S. economy—a once-prosperous industrial city that has felt the effects of neoliberal free-trade policies.” Though not far from Columbus, Newark is also perched on the edge of Appalachia; it suffers from all the troubles of a Rust Belt city, including a populace that is largely unprepared for this long-term economic shift and has not been quick to reeducate itself. Thus begins a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy—as Shuler points out, the toll that opioids take on the under- or uneducated means more than four times the death rate as compared to those with even some college. This speaks to the current notion, propounded by economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton, of “deaths of despair.” As Shuler further notes, although the opioid crisis is indisputably a matter of public health and “a form of collective trauma on par with the eighteenth century,给了 Trump the election.”

A sophisticated critique of the age of social media.

The term social media, ventures Seymour, isn’t quite right, “a form of shorthand propaganda,” since all media are social, tools that connect individual people to the world. “To talk about technologies is to talk about societies,” he continues, and the technology in question is one of the industrialization of the written word. In an argument reminiscent of O.B. Hardison’s now 30-year-old book *Disappearing Through the Skylight*, Seymour examines the code—the writing, that is—and the messages it generates in light of that social industry; whose titans have been rightly accused of hijacking expression to manipulate various untruths—and not just the fake news of Trumpians, but the compromised messages that say less than they mean. “The only way to conform successfully on the internet,” writes the author, “is to be unutterably bland and platitudinous.” All of this falls under the rubric of what Seymour calls the Twittering Machine, one that generates plenty of feeble noises. Some of the author’s arguments seem a little obvious, and some of the best bits are borrowed (with attribution) from critics of technology such as Jaron Lanier, who observes that the technology capitalists “don’t have to persuade us when they can directly manipulate our experience of the world.” However, Seymour dives deep to show just how that manipulation works, making us addicts of the machine—though, as he notes, the standard psychiatric diagnostic manual does not yet have a category for internet addiction—who crave the likes that a post or photo might bring. Indeed, the addition of the “like” button was practically as revolutionary as the internet itself. Nicholas Carr’s *The Shallows* is the more useful book in this regard, though it lacks the essayistic dimension that Seymour capably employs here.

Thoughtful reading for technologists and technology’s discontents alike.
with the HIV/AIDS crisis," it is generally treated as a criminal matter, which only exacerbates the problem. Some of Shuler’s informants have had it a little better in life but still fall victim: a woman of a comparatively privileged background who turned to drugs to self-medicate for bipolar disorder and who deems the current overdose crisis—"since 2000, the accidental overdose rate in Ohio has more than tripled"—a human rights crisis as well. The author ventures some eminently practical measures, including making lifesaving medications widely available; more users, he urges, "could be saved from an opioid overdose death if more people had naloxone." Furthermore, we blame drugs too readily when "they're just a symptom" of a greater social crisis we continually fail to address. Though not quite on par, this book should be shelved next to Beth Macy’s Dopesick and Sam Quinones’ Dreamland.

Full of grim yet important statistics and vignettes as well as a few sensible solutions.

Patriotic Dissent
America in the Age of Endless War

Sjursen, Daniel A.

Heyday (160 pp.)

$22.00  Sep. 8, 2020

978-1-59714-514-5

A scholar/soldier’s jeremiad in favor of “Participatory Principled Patriotism.”

Sjursen, a retired U.S. Army major who served combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, writes in deft, mordant prose about the lost tradition of oppositional patriotism and its intersection with the post–9/11 forever wars. “The vast majority of the citizenry has divorced attentiveness to America’s wars—even or even basic knowledge about them—from their definition of patriotism,” he writes. The author began questioning his embrace of a professional military career during “fifteen awful, life-altering months” in Iraq, when sectarian violence was at its peak: “The horror, the futility, the farce of the war in Iraq was the turning point of my life.” Yet the Army selected Sjursen to teach at West Point; although he loved it, his scholarship was solidifying his anti-war bent. While he “deftly flew under the radar for quite some time,” his writings eventually were brought to the Army’s attention, leading to medical retirement. He clearly discusses his complex relationship to his service, noting that less than 0.5% of Americans serve in the all-volunteer military, a situation that leads to “pageant patriotism.” As he notes, “taking this veritable soldier worship to the level society has in the twenty-first century can be perilous for the republic.” Later in the narrative, the author pivots toward a broader historical focus, noting that combatants contributed to counternarratives of dissent during all American wars (except World War II). The ferocity of the Vietnam War led to the all-volunteer military; now, dissent has disappeared from the ranks while “service has become ‘optional,’ the responsibility of a tiny professional warrior caste.” These pitfalls were disastrously enacted during the years since the Iraq invasion. “Every one of Bush’s and Obama’s military forays has sown further chaos,” writes Sjursen, “startling body counts, and increased rates of terrorism.” Yet with guarded optimism, he concludes by calling for “a revitalized movement defined by patriotic dissent.”

A brisk, approachably radical treatise bolstered by its rueful veteran’s perspective.

STAKES IS HIGH
Life After the American Dream

Smith, Mychal Denzel

Bold Type Books (192 pp.)

$26.00  Sep. 15, 2020

978-1-56858-873-5

A young Black man surveys the landscape and finds America a poisonous, broken place—but perhaps not irretrievably so.

Toward the end of his second book, Smith asks an arresting question: “Is the potential for the American Dream worth enduring the brutality of American life?” Anyone who has followed the headlines recently knows that life for African Americans is fraught with peril, the American dream ever more distant. This dangerous moment in history, writes the author, is “not an aberration...it is the course this country has always been on.”

Exponents of “Afro-pessimism,” such as Frank Wilderson III, have expressed considerable—and well-placed—doubt as to whether things can ever get better, though Smith sees a flicker of hope and closes with guarded optimism: “Imagining where we want to go teaches us how to get there. No one ever said it would be simple, only that it is possible.” Meanwhile, there are the present realities to consider, some of them embodied in the person of Donald Trump, whom Smith considers absolutely the wrong person to be in office, if one who represents a logical point on a continuum of racism and reaction. The right New Yorker for the job, he writes, was Shirley Chisholm, who is coming in for fresh appreciation half a century after her run for office. Even so, “Chisholm was never going to be elected president. Donald Trump was inevitable.” Yet she was a serious candidate, just as Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez is serious—though, Smith counsels, what is more important is that the many people out there who are of like mind be encouraged to bring democratic socialism into office. The author is sharply self-aware (“Sometimes, reader, I write ‘you’ when I’m too afraid to admit my own failures”), and he would seem to expect his reader to approach his fine-honed argument with the same seriousness. Doing so is well worth the effort.

An urgent and provocative work that deserves the broadest possible audience.
Quietly powerful, deftly crafted essays bear witness to the contagion of suffering.

**INTIMATIONS**

**Six Essays**  
Smith, Zadie  
Penguin (96 pp.)  
$10.95 paper | Jul. 28, 2020  
978-0-593-29761-2

Rueful, angry, and potent responses to ominous times.

With 2020 barely “halfway done,” fiction writer and essayist Smith offers an incisive collection of short pieces reflecting, she writes, “some of the feelings and thoughts that events, so far, have provoked in me.” Those events, not surprisingly, center around the pandemic but also include the killing of George Floyd and the worldwide response to racial injustice that the murder incited. Sheltered with her family, Smith reflects on the meaning of creativity, particularly writing, which seems to once a way to gain control (“when I am writing, space and time itself bend to my will!”) and a way to fill time. “There is no great difference between novels and banana bread,” she writes. “They are both just something to do.” Yet these essays clearly have emerged from profound “moral anxiety” about privilege, hatred, and oppression: “contempt as a virus.” The pandemic, she notes, has underscored pervasive inequality and injustice. “Un timely death has rarely been random in these United States,” she writes. “It has usually had a precise physiognomy, location, and bottom line.” At the heart of those distinctions is racism, laid bare by Floyd’s murder. “It was the virus, in its most lethal manifestation.” She once thought, she writes, “that there would one day be a vaccine: that if enough people named the virus, explained it, demonstrated how it operates, videoed its effects, revealed how widespread it really is, how the symptoms arise, how irresponsibly and shamefully too many Americans keep giving it to each other, generation after generation, causing intolerable and unending damage both to individual bodies and to the body politic—I thought, if that knowledge became as widespread as could possibly be managed or imagined, we might finally reach some kind of herd immunity. I don’t think that any more.” In just under 100 pages, Smith intuately captures the profundity of our current historical moment.

Quietly powerful, deftly crafted essays bear witness to the contagion of suffering.

**RED WAVE**  
An American in the Soviet Music Underground  
Stingray, Joanna & Stingray, Madison  
DoppeHouse Press (416 pp.)  
$26.95 paper | Sep. 22, 2020  
978-1-101-88583-3

A memoir by an American who almost single-handedly introduced Soviet rock to the free world.

Joanna Fields was a young Beverly Hills wannabe pop star when she followed her sister on a school trip to Leningrad in 1984. Offered a chance to meet with some local musicians, she thought she’d wow them with her music; instead, she discovered a robust underground rock scene that was bravely defying censorious authorities. Enchanted by the likes of Boris Grebenshchikov, whose samizdat cassettes were massively successful and earned him a reputation as the Soviet Union’s answer to Bob Dylan, she looked for ways to spread the word. Working some industry connections, she produced a 1986 compilation, *Red Wave*, which presaged the thaw of glasnost and perestroika that inspired more cultural exchanges. (Grebenshchikov would later record a well-received album with Western rock acts.) But Fields was watched by the FBI and fell in and out of favor with Soviet authorities, which denied her a visa to marry another popular musician. (She officially changed her last name to Stingray to exploit a loophole that allowed her to reenter Russia.) With the end of the Cold War, Stingray remained in Russia, becoming a popular musician in her own right and introducing U.S. and U.K. acts to Russian audiences. Stingray, who wrote this memoir with her daughter, Madison, nicely captures her daring amid an atmosphere of liberation and fear (David Bowie and Molly Ringwald each wanted to adapt her story), and she’s a study in moxie and enthusiasm. But without the Cold War intrigue, the book’s second half is much drowsier, larded with dry tales of video shoots and Stingray’s efforts to get a newly liberated Russian society to combat littering.

An earnest, only intermittently engaging tale of an unlikely rock-world champion.

**FINDING MY FATHER**  
His Century-Long Journey From World War I Warsaw and My Quest To Follow  
Tannen, Deborah  
Ballantine (256 pp.)  
$28.00 | Sep. 15, 2020  
978-1-101-88583-3

A devoted daughter pays homage to an extraordinary man.

Drawing on abundant sources, sociolinguist Tannen creates a loving biography of her father, Eli Samuel Tannen, who indelibly shaped her life. She took on the project, she writes, “because he bequeathed his words to me—all the words he wrote and saved; all the letters and documents and cards and notes that he gathered and held on to; all the stories he remembered, wrote down, and told me; and the hours upon hours of conversations we had when he was old.” Arriving in the U.S. from Poland when he was 12, he soon became the breadwinner for his mother and sister after his father died. Although his mother wanted him to finish high school, he dropped out and studied law “because it was the only profession he could pursue at night.” In 1933, though, when he passed the bar, the Depression closed off opportunities to practice. His list of 68 jobs represents “a summary of his adult life” and “his pride in doing whatever he could—whatever he had to do—to support his family.” In 1958, he finally established his own law firm,
specializing in workers’ compensation. Including eloquent passages from her father’s writings, Tannen relates his vivid memories of his childhood in Warsaw; portrayals of his accomplished aunts (one was Einstein’s student and lover), his fervent identification as a Jew, and his early idealistic membership in the Communist Party, which generated a thick FBI file. The author digs deeply into her parents’ relationship, concluding that their marriage resulted from “the inevitable interplay of two young people thrown together by circumstance; the temptations of sex (for him); the desire to marry (for her); and the scaling back of great, often unrealistic expectations by circumscribed opportunities.” Her brilliant, resolute father, Tannen amply shows, was worthy of her undying admiration.

A generous and empathetic portrait.

**BIG DIRTY MONEY**
*The Shocking Injustice and Unseen Cost of White Collar Crime*
Taub, Jennifer
Viking (352 pp.)
$28.00 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-984879-97-4

A scathing indictment of white-collar crime and its unpunished practitioners.

So-called street crime—robbery, burglary, etc.—costs American society about $16 billion per year, according to FBI statistics. Conversely, “white collar crime in America, such as fraud and embezzlement, costs victims an estimated $300 billion to $800 billion per year.” So observes Vermont Law School professor and legal activist Taub, who adds that, as in other aspects of life, the holders of the big ticket pretty much get away with it every time out. Even if they don’t, they get a pass, as when in February 2020 Donald Trump pardoned various perpetrators of “bribery, investment fraud, public corruption, computer hacking, an extortion cover-up, money laundering, conspiracy to defraud the federal government, obstruction of justice, mail fraud, wire fraud.” Taub adds, “No white collar crime left behind.” The laxity with which white-collar crime is treated speaks to social inequality, and the author looks deeply into cases such as that of the opioid-peddling Sackler family, who were given ample time to hide their assets offshore when caught violating federal drug laws. Even though three top officials of their Purdue Pharma pleaded guilty, none served prison time. “They are as bad as the drug pusher on the street corner or the kingpins behind the cartel,” Taub notes with appropriately righteous indignation. For their part, those caught insider trading face an essentially toothless Securities and Exchange Commission. And so on. In this steely-eyed examination of these brazen criminals, Taub holds that this lack of effective punishment merely encourages the wealthy to prey on the rest of society. Though it would be impossible and even undesirable to prosecute every one of them, “we do need to make an example of those who are the worst offenders”—especially when a “lying, cheating, megalomaniac American president” is available to issue pardons like so many doses of Oxycontin.

A significant manifesto for judicial reform that aims at cracking the cabal of big-money grifters at the top.

**GROUNDED**
*A Senator’s Lessons on Winning Back Rural America*
Tester, Jon
Ecco/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
$29.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-06-297748-9

The Montana senator recounts the rough and tumble of the political life.

Tester, a farmer from the high plains of north-central Montana, is known to most casual observers as the senator with the flattop haircut. He is more than that. As he writes, with undisguised pride, he is “one of the few citizens of this nation who has successfully held Donald Trump accountable without suffering politically for it.” He did so, at first, by opposing the nomination of Trump’s personal doctor to be the head of the Veterans Administration in committee, suspecting that someone nicknamed “Candyman” for his easy dispensation of prescription drugs might not be the best choice. Trump swore vengeance at the polls, but Montana voters, despite having gone for Trump over Hillary Clinton, still returned Tester, a Democrat, to the Senate in the last election. Tester writes of his engagement with politics, which began at the local level as a member of his small town’s school board and expanded to incorporate national issues in a number of areas, particularly agriculture. The author is mostly affable and forgiving, though he harbors a touch of scorn for a few opponents—to say nothing of Trump himself and Don Jr., whom he usually refers to as “his greasy-haired kid.” Tester has a good sense of humor, laughing at a hapless political foe who ran an ad with a doctored photograph of Tester shaking hands with Barack Obama, showing the senator to have a full suite of fingers when, in fact, he’s missing three of them as the result of a farm accident. Even so, he writes, he’s since sat next to that opponent on plane rides. “We get along,” he avers, “as most Montanans do when they check politics at the door.” Politics, for all that, are at the heart of this book, manifested in such ways as Tester’s disdain for dark money, the sitting president, Ryan Zinke, and assorted other bugaboos.

Politics junkies, especially those following Western issues, will enjoy Tester’s fluent storytelling.
A historian of the British Empire and the Middle East presents the first volume of his history of Egyptology, “to a large degree the creation of the modern and postmodern imaginations, mostly assembled during the past two centuries.”

Though he is “not an Egyptologist,” Thompson clearly understands that Egyptology is less a history of Egypt than a rather romantic encounter between the modern age and ancient Egypt (especially the language) by a gallery of scholarly personalities through the ages. As a point of departure to this engaging, erudite, and unusual “cross-cultural study” (first published in 2015), Thompson highlights Warren R. Dawson’s Who Was Who in Egyptology (1951), a seminal work that codified the field through the biographies of those who had contributed the most, mostly Western scholars. Moving chronologically, beginning with the ancients’ concept of a great lost civilization long before their own, Thompson folds in intriguing information about—and comments from—Homer, Herodotus, and numerous Roman emperors, many of whom “had a voracious appetite for ancient Egyptian obelisks.” The author notes that the interest in ancient Egypt hasn’t always been about studying its culture, language, and mores; often, it has been about treasure hunting. From Renaissance travelers to Enlightenment scholars, explorers have sought to lift the veil of mystery surrounding Egyptian history—and especially the hieroglyphics, which, until the early 19th century, were erroneously assumed to be merely symbolic. Napoleon’s campaign into Egypt was integral, and many of his army of “savants” returned with a wealth of research material and artifacts, including the Rosetta Stone. Thompson capably handles the stories of dozens of adventurous characters, many of whom were constantly at odds. “The progress of Egyptology has not been invariably marked by a spirit of cooperation,” he writes. Thompson accessibly unfurls the ensuing race for manuscripts and treasure, often lifted out of ancient pyramids and burial sites with utter impunity and rapacity; and the beginning attempts, internally, to regulate and preserve.

An intricate, thoughtful synthesis of enormous research on a recondite discipline.

The second installment of Thompson’s survey of Egyptology, spanning a relatively short but intense “golden age.” Bringing readers up to World War I, the author shows how the study of Egyptology galvanized around wealthy British, French, German, and American patrons and helped lead to the creation of Egyptian collections in museums worldwide. Thompson takes up his chronological study with the death of Auguste Mariette in January 1881 after 23 years as the first director-general of the Antiquities Service in Cairo. In addition to restricting the degradation of Egyptian antiquities by rapacious treasure hunters, Mariette regulated the ongoing excavation work during the British occupation—work continued by his effective successor, Gaston Maspero. The ensuing years would see the amazing work of William Flinders Petrie (1853-1942), first at the Fayyum and later at Amarna, where Akhenaten and Nefertiti had established a capital city. Excavating there in 1891, Petrie, assisted by a 17-year-old Howard Carter, “saw that the importance of the site had been vastly underestimated and proceeded to make the most of the opportunity.” There followed a host of significant discoveries of mummies in the Valley of the Kings, and the scholarly study of ancient Egypt took off, especially through the discoveries of precious papyri. Thompson follows all the personalities, patrons, dealers, and archaeologists responsible for filling the great museums of the world, from New York to Washington, D.C., Berlin, Paris, London, Brussels, and elsewhere. “The accelerating pace of scholarship manifested itself in an ever-increasing volume of publication,” writes the author, as scholars continued to make fascinating discoveries and further advanced ancient Egyptian historiography “based on solid sources, on those left by the ancient Egyptians themselves, not on writers from later ages with alien points of view.” Thompson succeeds in untangling the many rivalries and relationships, creating a clear picture of a rapidly expanding discipline.

Like the first volume, a readable synthesis of a complex, multilayered story.
Michio Kushi, who spearheaded the macrobiotic movement, Utne was everywhere, and he has never been afraid to offer dis- framing of the language is telling. The author too rarely shifts the diate sense of having been a participant. That such a reading is far from a true believer. “If San Francisco is the mecca of love,” he and Robert Bly began as productive before becoming incre -as, of incidents arrayed against its backdrop but in the more imme -of this alternately enlightening and myopic book. On one hand, our actions come out of hopelessness. May our actions be expres -sions of love.” While it’s difficult to argue with the sentiment, the sub ject is his spiritual journey. “This is my prayer,” he writes. “May our actions come out of hopelessness. May our actions be expres -sions of love.” While it’s difficult to argue with the sentiment, the framing of the language is telling. The author too rarely shifts the gaze from his own centrality. “While you are alive, be alive,” his stepgrandmother, Brenda Ueland—who operates as something for a living,” he writes. “Your baggies don’t just weigh them-selves and fly over to your people’s houses.” Still, weighing the odds and considering how people behind bars turn into their own worst enemies and have a terrible habit of killing them-selves, Vorobyov decided to try a different tack: “While I was in jail, I’d figured that I might as well become one of those prison intellectual types: the subversive scholar.” That scholar -ship meant reading, traveling the globe (“call me Narco Polo”), and chronicling such diverse matters as a drug's effects on the brain’s dopamine levels, the trade’s contribution to the interna -tional economy, and a “war on drugs” that is really a genocide of ethnic minorities in slow motion. His conclusion: One day, that war will end, whereupon he’ll open a cannabis shop named for the judge who sentenced him.

A revealing treatise that provides ample ammunition for the legalize-it crowd.

FAR OUT MAN Tales of Life in the Counterculture
Utne, Eric
Random House (368 pp.)
$28.00 | Jul. 28, 2020
978-0-8129-9528-2

The founder of the Utne Reader tells his story. Hippie, vision questioner, early New Age acolyte, and member of the “mythopoetic men’s movement,” Utne is best known as the publisher of his eponymous magazine of politics and culture, which he founded in 1984 and sold in 2006. But as he observes in his memoir, all of these terms are just labels and signifiers, facets of an existence that has been eclectic in the most encompassing of ways. Born on Aug. 6, 1946, the first anniversary of Hiroshima, the author prefers to frame his narrative in terms of history—not as a set of incidents arrayed against its backdrop but in the more imme- diate sense of having been a participant. That such a reading is equally accurate and overstated is the conundrum at the heart of this alternately enlightening and myopic book. On one hand, Utne was everywhere, and he has never been afraid to offer dis -senting views and intriguing, provocative observations. Although he visited Haight-Ashbury during the Summer of Love, he was far from a true believer. “If San Francisco is the mecca of love,” he told a friend, “then I’m an infidel.” So, too, his relationships with Michio Kushi, who spearheaded the macrobiotic movement, and Robert Bly began as productive before becoming increasingly fraught. Unfortunately, that independence—that posture of being inside and outside at the same time—grows increasingly self-serving as the narrative progresses. For Utne, the central subject is his spiritual journey. “This is my prayer,” he writes. “May our actions come out of hopelessness. May our actions be expres -sions of love.” While it’s difficult to argue with the sentiment, the framing of the language is telling. The author too rarely shifts the gaze from his own centrality. “While you are alive, be alive,” his stepgrandmother, Brenda Ueland—who operates as something for a living,” he writes. “Your baggies don’t just weigh them-selves and fly over to your people’s houses.” Still, weighing the odds and considering how people behind bars turn into their own worst enemies and have a terrible habit of killing them-selves, Vorobyov decided to try a different tack: “While I was in jail, I’d figured that I might as well become one of those prison intellectual types: the subversive scholar.” That scholar -ship meant reading, traveling the globe (“call me Narco Polo”), and chronicling such diverse matters as a drug's effects on the brain’s dopamine levels, the trade’s contribution to the interna -tional economy, and a “war on drugs” that is really a genocide of ethnic minorities in slow motion. His conclusion: One day, that war will end, whereupon he’ll open a cannabis shop named for the judge who sentenced him.

A revealing treatise that provides ample ammunition for the legalize-it crowd.

DOPEWORLD Adventures in the Global Drug Trade
Vorobyov, Niko
St. Martin’s (432 pp.)
$29.99 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-1-250-27001-6

An entertaining excursion into the narcotics trade by a one-time practitioner.
Born in the former Soviet Union, Vorobyov landed as a child in “a small boring town in the British countryside that doubles as a film set whenever the BBC want to do a costume drama.” Bored out of his skull, he dabbled in various penny-ante criminal enters such as selling pirated DVDs “until everyone discovered the Internet,” which led him to his next gig: selling cocaine and other drugs to his fellow college students, who proved a willing, lucrative market. “Drugs are an easy, low-risk source of tax-free profit,” he writes. “You can scream how it’s wrong all you want, but name another business where you can quadruple your investment over a weekend.” The drug trade in Britain came under the control of various ethnic groups, most notably—and violently—Albanian gangsters. As for the author, he got caught and did a little time but remains defiant in his defense of the enterprise: “I hate it when people say drug dealers don't work for a living,” he writes. “Your baggies don't just weigh themselves and fly over to your people’s houses.” Still, weighing the odds and considering how people behind bars turn into their own worst enemies and have a terrible habit of killing them-selves, Vorobyov decided to try a different tack: “While I was in jail, I’d figured that I might as well become one of those prison intellectual types: the subversive scholar.” That scholar -ship meant reading, traveling the globe (“call me Narco Polo”), and chronicling such diverse matters as a drug's effects on the brain’s dopamine levels, the trade’s contribution to the interna -tional economy, and a “war on drugs” that is really a genocide of ethnic minorities in slow motion. His conclusion: One day, that war will end, whereupon he’ll open a cannabis shop named for the judge who sentenced him.

A revealing treatise that provides ample ammunition for the legalize-it crowd.

ANGELS AND SAINTS
Weinberger, Eliot
New Directions (160 pp.)
$26.95 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-8112-2986-9

An eclectic look at angels and saints. Dispensing with any sort of introduc -tion, Weinberger delves into the subject of angels by discussing how many might exist, according to bygone Christian and Jewish sources. This disarming begin-ning prepares readers for an entire book of intriguing material that seems to go nowhere in particular. Combining a historian’s level of scholarship with a mystic’s sense of ambiguity, the author crafts a fascinatingly quirky work about the beings of heaven and those humans who are closest to them. His discourse on angels, making up roughly the first half of the book, explores their characteristics and origins, the existence of demons and fallen angels, the role of guardian angels, and the orders of angels. The author makes liberal use of quotes and references from Scripture, apocryphal writings, and church sources from a variety of different eras. Among his questions: Do angels have memories? Can they take on human forms? Are they capable of deception? With poetic flair, he explains that “angels are the largely anonymous
workers in the hive of heaven.” Due to that anonymity, he writes, believers have had to fill in many gaps. The case is different for the saints, whose stories are more familiar. Consequently, Weinberger’s treatment of saints is simply a series of minibiographies, ranging from one sentence to two or three pages. There is no order or apparent overarching purpose, and readers will wonder why the author chose the stories of the saints that he did. The thought-provoking artwork of ninth-century Frankish monk Hrabanus Maurus enhances the text, and the book also includes a guide to the illustrations written by scholar Mary Wellesley.

Most readers will be charmed by this exploration of the divine, which is read best as an escape rather than a study tool.

The latest on global energy geopolitics from the pen of an expert.

Yergin is the Pulitzer Prize–winning author of multiple magisterial volumes on world affairs as they relate to energy. In _The Quest_ (2011), he described the stormy rivalry between an America struggling to maintain its hegemony in the face of upcoming rivals Russia and China. The following decade has not improved matters, and the current global pandemic is proving to be a disaster. However, bad news often makes for entertaining reading, and Yergin delivers a fascinating and meticulously researched page-turner. He maintains that an energy revolution has transformed the world to America’s benefit. However, it’s not wind and solar but fracking. American oil production had been dropping since 1970, but after 2000, fracking changed the game. In 2018, the U.S. overtook Russia and Saudi Arabia to again become the world’s largest oil producer. Production tripled between 2008 and 2020. Yergin astutely examines how other nations responded. Russia, with an economy “only slightly larger than Spain’s,” depends on oil income as much as the old Soviet Union. Responding to American oil sanctions, Putin has vastly improved relations with China, by many measures the world’s leading economy. “China,” writes the author, “has become what Britain had been during the industrial revolution—the manufacturing workshop of the world.” It’s already the largest producer of steel, aluminum, and computers as well as the largest energy consumer. Turning to the Middle East, Yergin describes an unhappy collection of failed states, civil wars, oppressive theocracies, bloody insurgencies, and wealthy ministates, all dealing with plummeting oil prices. The author views Trump with the same mild disapproval he applies to Putin and China’s Xi Jinping, and he chastises environmentalists for getting certain facts wrong. Yergin accepts that humans have dramatically affected the climate, but he doubts the practicality of proposed solutions.

Required reading. Another winner from a master.

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_Yergin, Daniel_  
_Penguin Press (528 pp.)_  
_$38.00 | Sep. 15, 2020_  
_978-1-59420-643-6_

_The New Map_  
_Energy, Climate, and the Clash of Nations_  
_Yergin, Daniel_

**THE NEW MAP**

An argument that blends demography, economics, and politics to suggest a way to maintain America’s great-power status in the 21st century.

It’s enough to make a zero population growth advocate faint. Vox co-founder and editor Yglesias proposes that the only way to keep China at bay is to beat the Chinese at their own game, growing a population of 1 billion Americans. But how? One ingredient is a far more liberal immigration policy: “The solution to the illegal immigration crisis is to let more people come legally, not tie ourselves into knots trying to stop the flow.” Another ingredient is a massive expansion of the social welfare state to allow for such things as family leave and tax concessions. And what of already overcrowded American cities and their minuscule amounts of affordable housing stock? It’s the last matter at which the author’s argument really takes off. He offers a well-deliberated critique of housing policies that he does not hesitate to call racist, policies that forbid the construction of multiple-family dwellings in suburban and exurban areas. Yglesias proposes that immigrants be encouraged to live in uncrowded cities in the interior, bringing new vigor to American places that lack cultural or economic life. Still, the author is a celebrant of the metropolis, noting that, for instance, if a given town builds a base to accommodate 30 restaurants, “not only do you get specialization, you get competition—two different burger joints offering a slightly different approach” —as well as “a deeper labor market.” However, won’t 1 billion people crowd out nature, farms, etc.? In his proposed scenario, the density of the lower 48 states would be 3.5 times lower than England today, resembling France more than overpopulated Holland or Italy. He sees nothing but economic good in population growth. “A bigger country will need a lot of new stuff,” he writes. “So will a zero-carbon economy.”

The thesis is eminently arguable, but the book is packed full of provocative ideas well worth considering.

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_Yglesias, Matthew_  
_Portfolio (288 pp.)_  
_$28.00 | Sep. 15, 2020_  
_978-0-593-19021-0_

.ONE BILLION AMERICANS  
_The Case for Thinking Bigger_  
_Yglesias, Matthew_
CHILDREN’S

These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

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BEFORE THE EVER AFTER
Woodson, Jacqueline
Nancy Paulsen Books
(176 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-399-54543-6
“The year is 50 BC. Gaul is entirely occupied by the Romans. Well, not entirely….One small village of indomitable Gals still holds out against the invaders.” So begins almost every volume of the adventures of Asterix the Gaul, as translated from the French by Anthea Bell and David Hockridge.

I must have read that line hundreds of times when I was a kid. I’m certain it’s how I learned the word indomitable. My family’s library included several volumes from the classic French comic series created by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo in 1959, now numbering 38 volumes. With Asterix and his friend Obelix, I traveled all over Roman-occupied Europe. My vocabulary expanded well beyond indomitable as I puzzled out the characters’ outlandish names. Incompetent Bard Cacofonix led me to cacophony, for instance, and irascible elder Geriatrix to, well, geriatrics. It took me possibly a decade to understand the joke underlying the name of druid Getafix, who brews the magic potion that gives the Gauls the superstrength to hold out against the Romans and make mayhem wherever they go.

Even as a kid, I noticed that illustrator Uderzo employed a very different style in depicting African characters than he did with his European ones. Sure, everybody was a bulbous-nosed caricature, but although I doubt that stereotype had entered my vocabulary when I first saw them, I knew these African characters with their long, apelike arms; big, bare feet; and enormously oversized, bright-red lips were being made fun of in a way that the White characters were not. I regret to say that this did not stop my enjoyment of the comics.

But what’s not changed is the shocking stereotyping of characters of color. In the newest volume, Asterix and the Chieftain’s Daughter, by author Jean-Yves Ferri, illustrator Didier Conrad, and colorist Thierry Mébarki, our heroes encounter some recurring characters: a ship of pirates with one Black crew member. His lips are now brown rather than bright red, but in every other respect, he is the hulking, gorillalike character of yore. What’s more, the depictions of two new (very minor) child characters of color seen in the book’s final panels are equally troubling: a Black child with enormous lips wearing a leopard skin and a ludicrously tiny Asian child with squinty-shut eyes. Does Papercutz not wonder how these books will land in 2020 America?

But with a translation that’s likely to disappoint nostalgic readers and no meaningful attempt to address the series’ racism for new ones, this is one publishing event that’s hard to get excited about.

Vicky Smith is the children’s editor.
Sing it to the tune of “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star”
if you really want to bring down the house.

SHAPE UP, CONSTRUCTION TRUCKS!

THE OLD MAN AND
THE PENGUIN
A True Story of True Friendship
Abery, Julie
Illus. by Pratt, Pierre
Kids Can (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-5253-0208-4

An unlikely friendship is forged between penguin and human.
João, who lives on the shore, spots an oil-soaked, immobile penguin. João cleans the bird and boats him back out to the water, but the penguin returns to João’s home. The two become friends, João even naming the penguin Dindim. Though instinct eventually leads the penguin back to the sea, four months later he returns—right to João’s door. He stays for eight months, returns to the ocean, and then revisits João again and again: “Just like clockwork every year, João knows when he’ll appear.” An appended note states that this true story is based upon the experience of João Pereira de Souza, a retired bricklayer, and the Magellanic penguin who visits him annually at his home on Provetta Beach in Rio de Janeiro. The same note explains the effects of oil spills on wildlife. João and his partner have pale skin, but curious visitors with darker skin, including children, visit to meet Dindim. The breezy, sun-dappled illustrations of João’s home on the beach emphasize the bonding of the old man and the bird; in a couple, João even holds Dindim like a baby in his arms. The rhyming couplets that convey the narrative grow somewhat singsong and, therefore, monotonous. (This book was reviewed digitally with 8-by-16.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.)

An entertaining introduction for young readers to the harmful effects of oil spills on marine wildlife. (Picture book. 4-8)

MILO MOSS IS OFFICIALLY UN-AMAZING
Allbright, Lauren
Little, Brown (224 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-316-42877-4

Milo’s family is different and wildly eccentric, but until recently he’s been cool with that.
Milo’s best friend, Jesse, is also his nephew. Milo’s parents are obsessed with setting a Guinness record, including a usually eager Milo in their adventures but always failing in their attempts. Results of past failures decorate their home, including a toilet-paper tower, outlandish costumes, a huge rubber-band ball, and way more. Now Milo has promised everyone a record, but the failure is even more bizarre than usual, involving insect costumes and food poisoning. He lies, forges a certificate, and starts a whole series of misadventures, betrayals, and strange alliances, causing him to feel that he is the real failure. He and Jesse become estranged, and he forms a very tentative friendship with his arch nemesis, Brandon. Eventually they form a shaky triumvirate dedicated to sabotaging future record attempts, ultimately planning and carefully executing an amazing event involving their whole community. It is Milo’s tale all the way, narrated with a combination of bravado, self-pity, and self-absorption along with a large amount of middle school angst. But he is also a caring, loving son, brother, uncle, and friend who gradually understands some of their worries and feelings. Readers will root for him all the way. Jesse, presumably biracial, is described as having his father’s darker skin while all other characters present White.

Hilarious, offbeat, and often moving. (Fiction. 8-12)

SHAPE UP, CONSTRUCTION TRUCKS!
Allenby, Victoria
Photos by the author
Pajama Press (24 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-77278-134-2

Storytime gets a kick in the pants with this jaunty combo of shapes and vehicles.
In this look at basic geometry via high-resolution photographs of construction trucks, the youngest of readers are introduced to nine different shapes. Using a seek-and-find format, the book encourages them to locate each shape as it appears on a vehicle, clearly delineated with thick, colorful lines. A clear, red triangle decorates the bed of a dump truck; a blue oval surrounds the barrel of a concrete mixer. The rhyming text names the featured equipment, each shot with crystal clarity outdoors on a variety of beautiful days. From the jaunty little red forklift sporting a rectangle on its side to the rhombus of a road sign snapped at an angle, small fingers will have no difficulty tracing each of the featured shapes again and again. Similar in its cadences to Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? by Eric Carle (1967), this book is ideal for construction storytimes everywhere. “Road roller / Road roller / Coming through! / I spy a circle— / How about you?” Be sure to sing it to the tune of “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” if you really want to bring down the house. Activities to further engage young children are included at the end of the book.

Clear, crisp, clean, and concise—trucks and shapes have never before looked (or sounded) this good. (Picture book. 1-3)
Through the vibrant paintings by the subjects themselves, readers are immersed in the bold artistic style and spirit of the Zhou brothers.

**FLYING PAINTINGS**

*A Dance Alphabet*

*Allman, John Robert*

Illus. by *Dean, Rachael*

Doubleday (48 pp.)

$18.99 | Sep. 22, 2020

978-0-593-18094-5

Series: American Ballet Theatre

An introduction to the art for those in the know and those who are new.

In swirls of lilacs and blues, the 26 letters of the alphabet introduce readers to the enchanting world of American Ballet Theater as seen onstage, backstage, in rehearsal studios, and at school. Starting with A for "arabesque," with the legendary Lucia Chase as the dancer, the letters move on through Natalia Makarova performing a "glissade" from *Giselle* and Misty Copeland in a very dramatic pose from the "modern masterwork" *Firebird* to Anthony Tudor and Twyla Tharp rehearsing their original choreography. Not all is graceful movement, however, as one dancer is seen soaking her feet in an "ice bath." Children from ABT’s Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School demonstrate the five basic positions of ballet while in other scenes, dancers stretch, warm-up, waltz, and perform their "révérence." Most figures named in the captions are White, but African American dancers Copeland and Calvin Royal III, Argentine dancer Herman Cornejo, and Korean ballerina Hee Seo are also featured (all such are identified in the backmatter); the supporting cast is multiracial. Children in ballet school or attending a performance for the first time will enjoy the close-up views and the nice mix of former and current dancers. The couplets and quatrains read smoothly, and the illustrations are vibrant and lively, though characters’ faces are stylized and rather stiff. (*This book was reviewed digitally with 12-by-19-inch double-page spreads viewed at 31.4% of actual size.)*

**Those in love with ballet will find much to enjoy. (glossary) (Picture book. 4-8)**

**FLY GUY AND FLY GIRL**

*Night Fright*

*Arnold, Tedd*

Illus. by the author

Cartwheel/Scholastic (32 pp.)

$6.99 | Sep. 1, 2020

978-1-338-54921-8

Series: Fly Guy

Arnold’s buzzworthy Fly Guy series gets another spinoff, this time co-starring Fly Girl.

One day, Buzz invites Fly Guy to go to the zoo, inspired by a book about wild animals. Elsewhere, Liz invites her insect pal, Fly Girl. The human-fly pairs collide on their way with a “WHAP” (the flies) and a “WHUMP” (the humans). Once recovered, they decide to continue to their outing together. Buzz and Liz break off to go see the spider monkeys and naked mole rats, leaving Fly Guy and Fly Girl on their own. The two flies go looking for lunch, finding things that are “sticky,” “slimy,” “slippery,” and “smelly.” Their alliterative adventure culminates in a “scary” exhibit of “Creatures of the Night” (or, from their perspective, a “dark, dark cave”). “Gulpz” after “Gulpzie,” the flies spook themselves silly as they meet each animal. They hide in a box for safety. But will their humans find them? Using fewer than 90 words and their variants—including some decoded “fly talk”—Arnold keeps the text easy to read. The quick pace, including some genuinely surprising page turns, ups the entertainment factor. It’s unfortunate, however, that Fly Girl is presented with gender stereotypes: She’s pink and wears a bow on one of her antennae. Both Buzz and Liz present White. (*This book was reviewed digitally with 8.8-by-11.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 25% of actual size.)*

**Readers will buzz to it like flies to manure. (Early reader. 5-7)**

**FLYING PAINTINGS**

*The Zhou Brothers: A Story of Revolution and Art*

*Alznauer, Amy*

Illus. by Zhou, ShanZuo & Zhou, DaHuang

Candlewick (48 pp.)

$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020

978-1-362-0428-5

A picture-book biography chronicling the artistic and personal journey of the Zhou brothers.

First came Shaoli, and then Shaoning arrived soon after. Together, the Zhou brothers loved to run in the garden and to sit close. And together, the brothers discovered art, “copy[ing] bamboo and plum blossoms with brushes and ink.” Growing up in their family-run bookstore, they listened to grandmother Po Po’s “stories of paintings that once flew through the air”; she encouraged them to “possess the highest of spirits” in the pursuit of becoming artists. But not everyone encouraged art-making—or owning bookstores. Through the years, they’d learn that the terrible and the beautiful could go hand in hand. Circumstance would separate the brothers, but always they would find a way to reunite. Eventually, an artistic collaboration sparked, and together they’d paint—and fight—on canvas to create “paintings that would fly free” as they always dreamed. Recurring narrative elements and refrains alongside Alznauer’s rhythmic prose evoke the kinds of tales Po Po would share with the brothers. Through the vibrant ink-and-watercolor paintings by the subjects themselves, readers are immersed in the bold artistic style and spirit of the Zhou brothers. Alznauer’s author’s note further discusses the Zhou brothers’ (Shaoli and Shaoning now go by ShanZuo and DaHuang, respectively) career as well as elisions and compression made for the sake of narrative clarity.

**This engaging biography will comfort and inspire. (Picture book/biography. 5-9)**
ISIAH DUNN IS MY HERO
Baptist, Kelly J.
Crown (208 pp.)
$16.99 | $19.99 PLB | Aug. 18, 2020
978-0-593-12136-8
978-0-593-12137-5 PLB

Grinding privation itself is the main character as much as it is the mise-en-scène for the protagonist of Baptist’s debut novel.

Each chapter is a calendar-date vignette of hardship for the eponymous character, a young Black boy living with his 4-year-old sister and their mother, who experiences depression-driven alcoholism. They share a smoke-smelling hotel room, having lost their apartment because Isaiah’s mother couldn’t afford the rent in their working-class neighborhood. Each date details the insults and injuries financial difficulty heaps on poetry-loving Isaiah, from worries over housing insecurity and his family’s visits to the food pantry to the socio-economically insensitive writing prompts the teacher assigns (“My world is a good and happy place”) and Isaiah’s suspension for justifiably lashing out at a tormentor. What steadies Isaiah through this turmoil is his candy-profiteering best friend and the notebook Isaiah’s late father left, in which Isaiah is cast as a superhero who derives his power from bowls of beans and rice. But will they be enough? Expanding the tale from her We Need Diverse Books short story contest winner, “The Beans and Rice Chronicles of Isaiah Dunn,” Baptist presents the direness of abject poverty with exquisite empathy. She provides Isaiah with a supportive community that helps as his family’s situation fluctuates, giving readers who also experience housing insecurity hope but no promises. She doesn’t, however, give them much actual plot to carry them along.

Snapshots of a tough childhood. (Fiction. 11-13)

I AM EVERY GOOD THING
Barnes, Derrick
Illus. by James, Gordon C.
Nancy Paulsen Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-525-51877-8

A much-needed book for Black children when society demonstrates otherwise.

The Kirkus Prize-, Coretta Scott King Honor-, Newbery Honor-, and Caldecott Honor-winning team behind Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut (2017) return for another celebration of Black excellence. In a text brimming with imagination and Black-boy joy, Barnes lays the foundation for young Black readers to go forth into the world filled with confidence and self-assurance: “I am brave. I am hope. / I am my ancestors’ wildest dream. / I am worthy of success. / Of respect, of safety, of kindness, of happiness.” Simultaneously, he opens a window for non-Black readers to see Black boys’ humanity. They have dreams, feel pain, are polite and respectful—the list of qualities goes on. Barnes also decides to address what is waiting for them as they experience the world. “I am not what they might call me.” With this forceful statement, he provides a tool for building Black resilience, reassuring young Black readers that they are not those names. James supplies his customarily painterly art, his brushy oils painting Black boys of every shade of brown playing, celebrating, achieving, aspiring, and loving. Through every stroke readers will see that Black boys are “worthy / to be loved.” (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 35% of actual size.)

The title says it all: Black boys are “every good thing.” (Picture book. 4-8)

PERFECT PIGEONS
Battersby, Katherine
Illus. by the author
McElderry (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-5344-5781-2

Birds of a feather flock together (but they can still like different things).

Nine pigeons introduce themselves as a perfect flock, reasoning they are so “because we are all perfectly the same.” And while physically they are all similar, save for variations in the colors of their throat bands, it’s obvious from the front endpapers that one blue-banded bird is a little different. For starters, that particular pigeon sports a pair of hip red glasses and has a singular approach to life. Why walk barefoot through the park when instead you can wear flashy cowboy boots? Why fly from place to place in regular fashion when instead you can wear a cape and show off your superhero moves? As the flock reminds readers of their perfect uniformity, they eventually grow frustrated with the cheerful outlier’s eccentricities, challenging its uniqueness. Unperturbed, the maverick holds its ground when instead you can wear a cape and show off your superhero moves? As the flock reminds readers of their perfect uniformity, they eventually grow frustrated with the cheerful outlier’s eccentricities, challenging its uniqueness. Unperturbed, the maverick holds its ground and encourages the rest of the flock to explore things they like, helping the other birds to learn that individuality doesn’t reduce their connection; it just allows them room to explore their individual interests. The pithy text and bright, humorous illustrations (the pigeons look like simplified bowling pins with wings) work in tandem to deliver moments of quiet amusement. The story overall doesn’t tread new ground, but it treads old ground admirably. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 100% of actual size.)

Feather your nest with this book. (Picture book. 4-8)
GOD SPEAKS IN WHISPERS
Batterson, Mark & Dailey, Summer
Batterson
Illus. by Capriotti, Benedetta
WaterBrook (40 pp.)
$12.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-0-525-65385-1

Rhyming text and colorful multicultural illustrations reassure young readers of God’s omnipresence and still small voice. “Where in the world is God’s voice found?” Perhaps in ocean waves, bird song, or mountain vistas, suggest the couplet rhymes. Even when readers might be faced with difficult emotions and distractions of all kinds, the text reassures them that God is still there and still speaking, if only one pauses to listen. His voice can be found in nature, in starlight, in the love of family and friends, in dreams, and “through His Word.” Admiringly, the bright illustrations, reminiscent of mid-20th-century Disney artist Mary Blair’s stylings, depict children and families with a diverse array of skin tones and ages. There is also a refreshing mix of urban, suburban, and rural settings. Yet, despite the appealing illustrations, the rhymes and scan-son are often forced (‘your feelings, they matter, / even if they’re all mixed up like / pancake batter”), which detracts from the overall message. Contrived couplets notwithstanding, this title will likely find an audience among Christian households seeking reassuring bedtime reads.

Though the rhyme tumbles and at times bumbles, enticing imagery will lure readers in. (Picture book. 4-6)

NORMAN
One Amazing Goldfish
Bennett, Kelly
Illus. by Jones, Noah Z.
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-5362-0671-5

Norman the goldfish is an amazing pet. He can perform several tricks in his bowl and even sing, but there’s one thing Norman can’t do: perform for others.

On the day of the Pet-O-Rama pet talent show, Norman and his human (who narrates) get in line to participate. Once inside, Norman and the child meet Ben and Dylan with their dog, Mustard, who does karate. Ben and Dylan taunt Norman and his pal, but the child is undaunted, ready to prove to everyone just how “amazing” Norman is. When it’s Norman’s turn, the child tries hard to get the fish to perform, but the duo falls short with one failed trick after another. Poor Norman has stage fright. Here, Jones’s cartoon illustrations of the comically panic-stricken goldfish, dorsal fin drooping, will elicit both chuckles and sympathy. The protagonist gives Norman a bit of a pep talk, pulls out a tuba (rather magically, as it did not seem to travel to the talent show with the pair), plays a song, and finally gets Norman to show everyone just how amazing he is. This is a fun read whether shared with a group or a child in a lap. The story moves quickly, and the bright, mostly full-bleed artwork will keep the attention of young readers. Norman’s human presents Black, and the supporting cast is diverse.

Three cheers for Norman the amazing goldfish—and this charming story! (Picture book. 4-7)

THE GREAT BIG POOP PARTY
Berger, Samantha
Illus. by Galán, Manny
Henry Holt (40 pp.)
$14.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-250-23787-3

The you-know-what hits the fan after a lad’s parents rashly allow him to pick a theme for his birthday party. Julian insists, and so after the party store poops out, everyone sets to cranking out homemade poop-up invitations, “poopsicles” and “lollypooops,” costumes, and games like “Pin-the-Poop-on-the-Toilet.” Will anyone drop in? Do they ever—in such massive streams that even the local news team catches wind of the event. Better yet, dancing the “Doo-Doo Doo-op” to tunes from the Dookie-Poo band and whacking the poop piñata, everyone has a blast. The party assumes such legendary status that news of it spreads around the world, prompting Julian and his family to create a graphic instruction manual together. Galán goes to town with swirling scenes in saturated hues with lots of brown, featuring hyped-up figures with wide eyes and huge grins. Julian’s family appears to be an interracial one, with an Asian-presenting dad and White-presenting mom whose attitudes modulate from disgust to delight throughout the course of the story. Readers inspired to organize poop parties of their own will find models for suitable decorations in the pictures. A caveat: The recipe for poop slime that Berger applies to the tail end uses glue and baby oil, among other ingredients, but is not labeled as inedible. (This book was reviewed digitally with 8.5-by-22-inch double-page spreads viewed at 65% of actual size.)

Sure to be poopular with party planners, particularly those with strong stomachs and a hands-on approach. (Picture book. 5-8)

SCOUT THE MIGHTY TUGBOAT
Beyl, Charles
Illus. by the author
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-8075-7264-1

A perky little tug puts her brawn, and brains, to good use. “[H]ugging through the waves on the bright blue water,” a little tugboat named Scout starts her day. Whether it’s a container ship, a cruise ship, or a freighter, she’s always there to help. But what’s this? A massive oil tanker’s engine has failed, and it’s headed toward the rocks. Scout tries to help, but the scope of the endeavor overwhelms her. Eschewing the go-it-alone attitude of the Little Engine That Could, Scout realizes...
TWELFTH GRADE HOPES AND FEARS
BRUCE INGRAM

With Twelfth Grade Hopes and Fears (October 6, 2020) veteran English teacher Bruce Ingram gives us the fourth and final installment in his American High School series of YA novels.

In Twelfth Grade, four friends enter their fourth and final year of high school. They have survived abusive partners, drinking parties, eating disorders, social ostracism, ethnic slurs, star-crossed romances, and even the deaths and divorces of parents—all the challenges that can make the teen years turbulent and painful.

But they have also learned to cope. They have passed the dreaded standardized tests, gotten into a few AP courses, gone to prom, fallen in and out of love, worked summers, learned to drive. They have visited college campuses and begun to apply for—and receive—scholarship decisions.

Their last year is flying past, and their feelings are in a whirl. They can’t wait to leave—but they dread the thought of losing each other.

ISBN: 978-1-944962-65-4

Praise for Ninth Grade Blues: “An author deftly mines his own experiences as a teacher to create diverse and relatable characters facing their first year in high school.” —Kirkus Reviews

Praise for Tenth Grade Angst: “...highly recommended as a revealing leisure read that high schoolers will relate to and learn from.” —Midwest Book Review

For all inquiries, please contact info@secantpublishing.com • info@secantpublishing.com
Following on a strong debut with *A Good Kind of Trouble* (Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins, 2019), Lisa Moore Ramée introduces middle schooler Jenae in her sophomore novel, *Something To Say* (Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins, July 14). The youngest in a multigenerational Black family, Jenae frets over her adored, John Wayne–loving grandfather’s decline in health and her equally beloved older brother’s depression as he comes to terms with the injury that’s dashed his dreams of basketball stardom. At John Wayne Junior High, she threads her way between protesters arguing over a proposed name change to honor Sylvia Mendez, the Mexican American girl who integrated California public schools. Jenae has a paralyzing fear of speaking out and prefers to keep her head down, but she reluctantly allows brash, attention-seeking Aubrey, the only person who loves the science-fiction character Astrid Dane the way she does, to become her first friend and to help her find her voice. We spoke to Ramée at her home in the Bay Area via Zoom; the interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**Before I start asking questions, what would you like to say about *Something To Say*?**

Something that doesn’t get talked about enough is this whole idea of sports and Black young men pinning their hopes on a future based on some type of athletic profession, and how few people truly get to be professional athletes. We see that story play out a lot, particularly in homes where they believe the only hope that their child has for going to college is on an athletic scholarship. It was just something that I thought we should talk about a little bit more within the Black community.

I was ready for you to tell me that you wanted to explore Jenae’s acute anxiety.

One of the things that was hard for me writing this story was that I knew what was coming at the end. And I thought, is this kind of a cheat? [Jenae’s anxiety is not] just a casual fear of public speaking. It’s a completely debilitating fear [and] to then have her overcome that, is it reinforcing this message that [people with disabilities] so often get that “you too can overcome this if you just try”? I decided to go down that path because I did move from having that completely debilitating fear of public speaking to being able to do it.

**Can you talk a little bit about how you came up with Astrid Dane as a device to bring Jenae and Aubrey together?**

I love Astrid Dane. Even though it’s such a wackadoo thing, right? Why is she even in there? [The book began with] just a line: this girl who isn’t looking for a friend and this boy who comes to school and changes her world around, and they connect over this character Astrid Dane. I have to say that some of her characteristics—the fact that she is immortal and a young person—I feel like I stole a little bit from *Interview With a Vampire*. Or maybe it was *Vampire Lestat*. How often is the immortal person a kid? [It gave] me this opportunity to put her in situations someone else wouldn’t survive. What would it mean to be...
a Black immortal young person during the time of slavery? If I was a graphic novelist, I would love to [really get] into Astrid Dane.

You've got a story about a reluctant activist at a time when kids are taking to the streets.

You know, it's interesting because in *A Good Kind of Trouble*, we see [protagonist] Shayla taking part in a protest. And so it's kind of ironic that in this story, we don't see Jenae truly taking part. One of the things that I really like about *Something To Say* is the questions that it raises of being uncertain of what side you stand on. [It] was really clear to me with *A Good Kind of Trouble* [that there was] this need to try to explain to a non-Black audience what Black Lives Matter means. [But] with *Something To Say*, I had the opportunity to explore this idea that there are two sides. I think that this is one of those debates that people have a hard time with. [What] do you do when you have the art and the artist—do you separate them? And I don't think a lot of people [have] resolved that. It was important to look at this question and show how Jenae comes to her position.

And also, sometimes it's not actually about dragging down [but] about building up the people's voices that we haven't heard. Isn't time that we not only say we need more diverse stories, but also *publish* those stories and *market* those stories? That doesn't mean that there's something wrong with the books that don't tell those stories. But if we look away, if we don't celebrate the Black stories, it sends a message that for some reason those stories aren't as important, and they matter less.

[Right now,] I think that out of a multitude of tragedies, we are saying as loud as we can: We're out here and we matter. If you've been thinking that we aren't here, then we need to change your opinion and let you know that, no, these books actually are out here—and maybe if you read our stories, we as a society will start changing this narrative. We have lots of stories to tell.

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**THE GREAT ESCAPE!**
Biberdorf, Kate with Homzie, Hillary
Philomel (144 pp.)
$12.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-593-11658-6
Series: Kate the Chemist, 2

Kate and friends learn chemistry and friendship through fun, gross science.

Ten-year-old Kate is superexcited about the Fall Science Challenge. The winners will demonstrate a Vomiting Pumpkin stunt! But in her team's haste to make the best Ghost (vapor from water and dry ice) and Moon Rocks (lemon juice on colored baking soda), they fight with another team, which leads to a minor injury. Kate and her teammates, Birdie and Phoenix, don't get a detention but a lesson in cooperation. The two squabbling teams are assigned to pretest an escape room. As a consequence for fighting in school while using potentially dangerous substances, it's an unusual choice, but it certainly leads to a clever, multichapter puzzle. While this escape room wouldn't be the best choice for an actual classroom—to solve it, the students rely on outside knowledge from the YouTube videos of author avatar Dr. Caroline and use a steamer while unsupervised—it's a whiz of an adventure when it's safely fictitious. Accurately representing escape rooms, the puzzles are not solvable by readers, who don't have access to the physical artifacts. The excitement of brainstorming under a time limit, however, comes through. Clip-art–style illustrations are scattered throughout the short chapters, and one experiment, requiring some special equipment, is provided in detail. Kate and Phoenix are White; Birdie is South Asian.

A lightweight cooperation lesson wrapped in slime. (Fiction. 8-10)
Each rich illustration invites return visits to investigate all the small, and big, details it contains.

**IF YOU COME TO EARTH**

**DRAGONFLY**
Bissonette, Aimée M.  
Illus. by Pearson, Catherine
Whitman (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-0-8075-5821-8

A dual-level text set against a background of colorful, posterlike art introduces readers to the lives of dragonflies. The art on the initial double-page spread—indeed on all—is dramatic and eye-catching. This one shows a large dragonfly whose golden-and-blue body stretches across the gutter, with a background of green and blue foliage against pink-hued panels. Large, bold text declares: “We’ve been here three hundred million years. We are small now, but back then our wings spread more than 2 feet across. And we ruled the sky.” As with all ensuing spreads but the last, this first-person text—ostensibly narrated by English-speaking dragonflies—is followed by text in a smaller font, more informative and sophisticated, and related in the third person. The dragonflies’ commentary, along with bold imagery, will keep younger naturalists from squirming; reading the additional text is recommended for ages 6 and older. Along with more concepts than the simpler text offers—such as cannibalism among dragonflies in the nymph stage and the importance of external heat to these coldblooded creatures—the additional text uses, usually defining, more-advanced vocabulary words such as “species,” “molting,” “intercept,” and “iridescent.” One unusual word—“naiad”—and its literal definition (“of the water”) does appear early on in the simpler text; its reappearance later provides a comforting appreciation of life cycles.

**Familiarity breeds appreciation.** (author’s note, resources)  
(Informational picture book. 4-9)

**IF YOU COME TO EARTH**
Blackall, Sophie  
Illus. by the author
Chronicle (80 pp.)  
$18.99 | Sep. 15, 2020  
978-1-4521-3779-7

To take care of one another and the Earth, we must truly see one another as unique and valued.

A young child with light beige skin, wispy brown hair, and a gnomish red cap writes an invitation: “Dear Visitor from Outer Space, / If you come to Earth, / here’s what you need / to know.” What follows is a child’s introduction to this complex planet that begins in the child’s room, spins out to outer space, then back to Earth and its geography and topography, then to the people who inhabit this planet—where they live, how they live, and what they do. Along the way, outer-space visitors (and readers) learn about families, careers, clothing, transportation, fauna, even the American Sign Language and Braille alphabets. Throughout, diverse people are distinctively, carefully portrayed, emphasizing representation and visibility. In a library scene, the narrator says, “It’s better when we help each other”—an urgent response to a portrayal of war on the preceding spread. Two-time Caldecott Medalist Blackall balances eye-catching double-page spreads with white space, even focusing on a single powerful image—for instance, one giant bird formed from dozens of small birds fit together. Ribbons appear throughout the book, as winding blue rivers and spools of illustrated paper covered with the narrator’s extraterrestrial drawings. Each rich illustration invites return visits to investigate all the small, and big, details it contains. An author’s note explains the global origin of this offering.

**An introduction to Earth for children big and small who live in this galaxy, or beyond.** (Picture book. 4-8)

**BRAINS ON! PRESENTS... IT’S ALIVE**
From Neurons and Narwhals to the Fungus Among Us
Bloom, Molly & Totten, Sandén & Sanchez, Marc  
Illus. by Seidtitz, Serge & Swaab, Neil
Little, Brown (160 pp.)  
$18.99 | Sep. 8, 2020  
978-0-316-42829-3

A ramble through “the totally bizarre, ultra-epic, sometimes disgusting world of biology.”

With unflagging zest the hosts of American Public Media’s *Brains On!* podcast take on dozens of such need-to-know topics as whether plants can perceive sound, “why…frogs’ tongues stretch so far,” why we dream, and “are dogs self-aware?” Along with introducing real scientists working in the actual Dog Cognition Lab and elsewhere, the authors—depicted as small cartoon figures throughout—cast sidelights on historical hoaxes, tuck in “mystery photo” close-ups, and also pair up lots of unlikely adversaries in smack-down–style contests. For the latter, they lay out facts about each and leave it to readers to judge winners: “Which stinker is cooler: Durian or Corpse Flower?” The survey includes breezy ventures into the animal and plant kingdoms, quick rides through select systems of the Bodyland amusement park, and a closing voyage to the teeming realm of microbiota for ganders at microscopic mites, fungi, and bacteria (but not viruses). Even scientifically savvy readers may find the small-print bibliography more than a bit on the technical and scholarly side. Still, it’s always better to challenge an audience than underestimate it. Recurring cast members in the illustrations present White; other cartoon figures include people of color.

**A grab bag of bio-wonders.** (index) (Nonfiction. 10-13)
A Treasure for Every Shelf

- A Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor Title -
- An American Indian Youth Literature Honor Title -

“Emotionally stunning.”
Kirkus (Starred Review)

9781771644730
$17.95
10 x 10
48 pages

A Best Book of the Year in:
★ Kirkus Reviews
★ School Library Journal
★ Publishers Weekly
★ Horn Book

greystonekids.com
A Children’s Guide to Emotional Wellbeing

Ed. by Botton, Alain
Illus. by Stewart, Lizzy
School of Life (176 pp.)
$24.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-912891-19-1

A mental health guide for early-adolescent concerns.

While many mental health guides for the age group extol the mind-body connection, emphasizing sleep, a healthy diet, and exercise to ward off anxiety, this book goes beyond these principles to explore ways to reshape negative thoughts into more positive ones. Assembled by a team at the London-based self-help publisher, the conversational text is divided into chapters on kid-relevant topics. The first and lengthiest chapter considers parents, such as why they are annoying and don’t always follow their own rules. Through real-world scenarios, examples from literature, and a scattering of art reproductions (all with White subjects and mostly European in origin), the authors ask readers to see things from a different perspective—in this first chapter, to consider their parents as adults who are fussy out of love and want good lives for their children. Subsequent chapters focus on screen time, bullying, anger, friendship, divorce, body image, the pressures of gender norms, and more related topics.

In each chapter, important questions or ideas, such as “Gender doesn’t say what you are supposed to be like,” are highlighted; numerous chapters also include space for self-reflection. Stewart’s friendly, full-color illustrations are consciously diverse in representation of race and family structure. Intermittent criticisms will not deter readers, but the text does stereotype homeless people in one instance and at the same time persistently uses the term “addiction” instead of “substance-use disorder,” and an anti-perfectionism exercise strews words such as “twits,” “idiots,” and “stupid” about liberally.

Imperfect but potentially helpful. (Nonfiction. 10-12)

SCRUFF

Boritzer, Alice
Illus. by the author
Cicada Books (32 pp.)
$14.95 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-908714-78-7

A man discovers that his new dog doesn’t live up to his name.

A bearded, bespectacled, brown-skinned man adopts a small black dog no one else wants. The dog is “scruffy,” but the man is sure they’re a good match: “I’m a scruffy guy, so that suited me just fine.” But the owner soon discovers that the dog, whom he’s named Scruff, doesn’t like to be rambunctious like other dogs, who also tend to roll in the mud and relish the dirt. In fact, while taking a bath, the man discovers that Scruff wants to be pampered. Scruff joins him in the tub, and later the two get a haircut and even get their claws and nails done. After Scruff’s “spruce up” into a well-groomed dog, the man enters him into a dog show, and Scruff wins in an unexpected category. The relaxed, cartoon illustrations themselves are scruffy, with loose, scribbly lines and an absence of background details on a palette of bright, limited colors, including a vivid, glowing green. Built on a weak premise, though, the story is unfocused; there is little to no conflict and no stakes driving the action, though young readers, particularly dog lovers, may get a kick out of Scruff’s makeover and the idea of a dog who loves a blow-dryer directed straight at his face. (This book was reviewed digitally with 8.3-by-17.8-inch double-page spreads viewed at 34% of actual size.)

A thin, forgettable tale. (Picture book. 3-8)

BLINK!

Boyle, Doe
Illus. by Leyris, Adèle
Whitman (32 pp.)
$17.09 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-8075-0667-7
Series: Imagine This!

This nonfiction title explores the structure and workings of the eyes of various species.

From the 60-odd unblinking eyes of a bay scallop to the dragonfly’s enormous compound eyes that allow it to see in nearly all directions, readers will discover the diversity of the amazing organs called eyes. A bullfrog, a cheetah, a gecko, an owl, a squid—every species has particular vision needs that are met in specific ways. Each spread is dedicated to one animal, with a close-up painted illustration of the animal’s eye, two verses about the species in general and how its eyesight helps it function, and two or more additional facts about their eyes, abilities, and habits in smaller print overlaid on callout boxes shaped like small silhouettes of the animal. The verse is rhythmical and poetic, sometimes rhyming or near rhyming, often captivating with detailed description of an animal in action so readers can almost see the scene. The paintings are impressively detailed and beautiful to look at, with vivid color wash and careful lines, blending art and science to great effect. Children who love animals and nature facts will adore this volume. Sources, a glossary, and a description and graphic on the workings of the human eye serve as scaffolds for additional learning.

A strong addition to the nonfiction shelf. (Informational picture book. 3-10)
Pham’s bright, cheery art shows hearts emanating from the protagonist and drifting into the multiracial crowd. **LOVE IS POWERFUL**

**HEARTBEAT**  
Boyle, Doe  
Ilus. by Long, Daniel  
Whitman (32 pp.)  
$17.09 | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-0-8075-3190-7  
Series: Imagine This!  

Using a combination of poetic language and supplemental prose paragraphs, the author relates facts about the hearts and heartbeats of a dozen different animals—including human beings.

Bold, bright, full-color art accompanies each double-page spread. On the first, the image of what appears to be a mammal’s heart supports the artist’s bio, which notes the influence of mid-20th-century design and color. Accompanying it, 11 lines of text, displayed in center alignment, briefly describe a heart’s function and then dwell on the heartbeat as the “unmistakable sound of a tireless muscle...Lub-dub Lub-dub Lub-dub.” That particular onomatopoeia is used for the heartbeats of an octopus, a python, and a human being. (Boyle doesn’t attempt this device for the heartbeat of an Etruscan pygmy shrew—an astonishing 1,500 beats per minute.) Each animal’s spread is worth a good deal of attention, both for the information itself and for the use of different kinds of poetic devices. There is humor, too; no one should miss the funny rhymes about the “relaxed” camel and its “untaxed” heart. Although comparisons among an astonishing range of heartbeats and types of hearts are part of the fun, the sheer amount of words, concepts, and literary play makes this perhaps better suited for reference—in terms of both science and language arts—than as a one-sitting read. Some readers may be taken aback at the omission of bears from the list of the “only four mammals in North America that hibernate.”

Heartily inspiring. (author’s note, resources) (Informational picture book. 6-9)

**THE PILGRIM’S PROGRESS**  
A Poetic Retelling of John Bunyan’s Classic Tale  
Adapt. by Brasseur, Rousseaux  
Illus. by Longhi, Katya  
Harvest House (208 pp.)  
$22.99 | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-0-7369-7948-1  

A verse rendition of the 342-year-old quest fantasy’s first part.

Brasseur keeps the plot intact along with the Calvinist insistence on redemption through grace alone, not works, and camels from pilgrim-eating giants Pagan and Pope. Except for New Testament quotations at each chapter’s head, however, he loses the original’s teeming, pace-killing Biblical references. Some of his other changes will strike readers as arbitrary: Eustace’s neighbors Obstinate and Pliable are “Sir Stubborn” and “Mr. Fickle,” and the Slough of Despond is, disappointingly, just a generic “marshland.” Still, he does somewhat modernize the original’s now-crabbed idiom: “Dad is being ridiculous; there’s nothing we should fear,” Christian’s children say. He sets most of Christian’s journey through the “narrow wicket-picket gate” in anapests, which creates a suitable sense of trotting along, but both meter and rhyme are inconsistent. In any case, this retelling doesn’t measure up in quality or feeling to Gary D. Schmidt’s magisterial *John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress* (1994), illustrated by Barry Moser. Longhi’s frequent full-page paintings likewise suffer in comparison, as her stiff, blocky figures never show other than theatrical emotions. Still, if Christian and most of the rest of the cast are White, Jesus sports an olive complexion, and Christian travels with brown-skinned companions Faithful and Bob (whose auto-da-fé is described but not depicted) and Hopeful.

Too many potholes for a steady Progress. (Verse fiction. 11-14)

**LOVE IS POWERFUL**  
Brewer, Heather Dean  
Ilus. by Pham, LeUyen  
Candlewick (32 pp.)  
$16.99 | Sep. 8, 2020  
978-1-5362-0199-4  

A child prepares for the Women’s March.

City-dwelling Mari is excited to march (a plethora of pussy-hats indicates it’s the Women’s March). Crayons ready, she asks her mother what they’re coloring. The reply: “A message for the world.” But how will the whole world hear their message? The answer: “because love is powerful.” This titular refrain is repeated throughout the story as the pair joins the march. Though Mari doesn’t think anyone will hear in the crowd of thousands, she shouts out the message on her poster: “Love is powerful!” Pham’s bright, cheery art shows hearts emanating from Mari and drifting into the multiracial crowd (especially helpful for younger readers to understand the concept of a far-reaching message). Other marchers take up Mari’s call until the hearts expand farther and farther out into the city. Though the signs they and others carry seem disconnected from some important social justice issues, particularly for a book focusing on a Black child (there are no obvious Black Lives Matter signs, for instance), this feel-good tale can serve as an accessible starting place or to augment such books as Shane Evans’ *We March* (2012) and other stories that delve deeper into the reasons why people march and protest. The prose is somewhat unpolished, but a note from and photograph of the real Mari at book’s end charmingly grounds it. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9.4-by-22-inch double-page spreads viewed at 27% of actual size.)

Lots of heart. (Picture book. 4-8)
As the worry butterfly flaps harder, he remembers something his mommy told him: “Don’t you worry now, my lovely, / you MUST try not to fret. / If it’s not a happy ending, / then it hasn’t ended yet.” Feeling better, Worrysaurus goes through his bag of “happy things” and is able to enjoy the rest of his day. This sweet title will help little human worrysauruses feel as though they are not alone, and it also offers coping tools for when fear and doubt start to take over. Chatterton’s illustrations depict an unthreatening pink theropod with an oversized head (and rather distracting large nostrils) and effectively convey emotion through color: Happy moments are rendered in bright colors while fearful ones have darker spreads. Easy rhymes with good meter make this fun to read aloud. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 36% of actual size.)

A welcome addition to the emotional-literacy shelf. (Picture book 3-6)

This metanarrative is made especially entertaining by its conversational tone.

ANOTHER BOOK ABOUT BEARS.

Think your school mornings are hectic? Slumby and his sloth family take things very slowly, which is fine until he starts school. A double-page spread with small scenes marked by an analog clock showing different times depicts Slumby’s morning rush. Those who can tell time will be astounded at just how long his routine takes him; even beginning at 3:45 a.m., he’s still a half-day late to school, just in time for recess. But Slumby does everything so slowly that he can’t jump rope, participate in the turtle race, or play armadillo ball (yep, that’s what it sounds like). Sad, he spends his recesses observing the butterflies that constantly surround him (à la Pigpen’s dirt in “Peanuts”) until the day the armadillo lands in the river with a hungry crocodile. It’s Slumby to the rescue! Though the book doesn’t provide this fact, sloths can swim up to three times as fast as they can walk on land. Whether that’s fast enough to effect a rescue from a crocodile is debatable, but regardless, Slumby’s classmates are now willing to change their activities so the hero sloth can be included. While the title and cover may bring to mind meditation, this is not a mindfulness book but one about a unique newcomer who’s accepted only once he proves his worth. Angaramo’s adorable cartoon animals wear clothing and have pleasingly mobile expressions. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 31% of actual size.)

Look elsewhere to learn about sloth behavior, punctuality, and how to be a good friend to someone who’s different from you. (Picture book 4-7)
AWESOME MAN
The Mystery Intruder
Chabon, Michael
Illus. by Parker, Jake
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-06-287509-9

There’s a newcomer in the Fortress of Awesome, and Awesome Man doesn’t (want to) like it one bit.

Having given their costumed legend-in-his-own-mind both anger issues to work through and a (poorly preserved) secret identity in *The Astonishing Secret of Awesome Man* (2011), Chabon and Parker truck in a new challenge. Rumors of a rival superhero coming to town (who could it be? Steel Tornado? Glue Girl?) pitch Awesome Man into a funk. At first it looks like his worst fears are realized. Losing his colorful costume and chiseled physique in the shiny, bright scenes to become a seemingly ordinary lad, he accompanies younger sib “Sister Sinister” into the house to meet...bald, ultratiny Captain Stinky. Awesome Man is unimpressed—until, that is, the interloper exhibits multiple superpowers, including an impressive scream and a green and mucky Slime Blast. “Maybe the new kid is going to be okay!” Parker opines the protagonist from a pool, wearing red trunks and puffy yellow water wings. From this overhead view, wavery lines indicate the water’s movement around swimmers and across the pool’s pale blue tiles. But time marches forward, and a sister will begin the taunting. “Summer’s going to end soon,” she announces with a superior air, alarming the protagonist with distress over the pool’s pale blue tiles. But time marches forward, and a sister will begin the taunting. “Summer’s going to end soon,” she announces with a superior air, alarming the protagonist with forecasts of short days, leafless trees, being “stuck on the sofa for days,” and such chilly temperatures that even ice cream won’t appeal. But when fall and winter arrive, they hold their own delights. Chilly air allows nestling in a parent’s long scarf. Rain brings bright red boots, a yellow umbrella, and a chance to stomp puddles. And who needs ice cream when there’s cocoa? It’s an interracial family, with a White-appearing dad and Asian-appearing mom; the narrator looks an awful lot like Dad while big sister looks like Mom. A paradox makes the paradox makes the premise flimsy: A child who can imagine far enough ahead to fear future seasons would probably already hold some memory of Awesome, and Awesome Man doesn’t (want to) like it one bit.

**Slow Samson**
Christou, Bethany
Illus. by the author
Templar/Candlewick (40 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-5362-1547-2

Samson is always late to parties. Samson, a sloth, can never reach a party before it ends. Poor Samson! His animal friends recline on the forest floor, satiated, all partied out. There’s not even any leftover cake. Is it Samson’s thoughtfulness that makes him slow? After all, en route, he talks to a tree frog, mediates a monkey argument, and rights a toppled tortoise. Next time, to determine whether helpfulness is slowing him down, he ignores all those pals (who, amusingly, have the exact same needs as last time). He still misses the party! Alas, his slowness seems unchangeable. Samson sob. His friends hatch a plan, and while some proposals seem flawed—you can’t control balloons; sloths can’t stand, so roller skates are out—one might work. Christou’s animals are friendly and appealing, with cartoony eyes that don’t match Samson’s lovely, loose-handed fur or the occasional pink background washes. Much here is mildly slippery or mismatched: Initially, there’s a distinction between Samson’s friends and the animals he helps, then not; initially, he’s slow specifically because he’s kind, then not; and this copiously airy climate with white and pink backgrounds, ample fields and clearings, and expanses of short grass is supposedly a rainforest. No matter—this a pleasant story with a solution that, while it only works as a one-off, is clever and does the trick. Not a requirement but plenty amiable. (Picture book. 3-6)

**If Winter Comes, Tell It I’m Not Here**
Cirraolo, Simona
Illus. by the author
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-5362-1530-4

Summer’s really fun—so will winter be terrible? “Swimming is my favorite thing,” opines the protagonist from a pool, wearing red trunks and fluffy yellow water wings. From this overhead view, wavery lines indicate the water’s movement around swimmers and across the pool’s pale blue tiles. But time marches forward, and a sister will begin the taunting. “Summer’s going to end soon,” she announces with a superior air, alarming the protagonist with forecasts of short days, leafless trees, being “stuck on the sofa for days,” and such chilly temperatures that even ice cream won’t appeal. But when fall and winter arrive, they hold their own delights. Chilly air allows nestling in a parent’s long scarf. Rain brings bright red boots, a yellow umbrella, and a chance to stomp puddles. And who needs ice cream when there’s cocoa? It’s an interracial family, with a White-appearing dad and Asian-appearing mom; the narrator looks an awful lot like Dad while big sister looks like Mom. A paradox makes the premise flimsy: A child who can imagine far enough ahead to fear future seasons would probably already hold some memory about what last winter was like—and be less vulnerable to a sibling’s dire prediction. Cirraolo’s art is inconsistent, sometimes seasonally evocative, sometimes seeming slapdash, with an odd, expressionist vibe. The text on the closing spreads peters out into dullness. There are many better chronicles of changing seasons. (Picture book. 3-5)
LUNA LOVES ART
Colombo, Joseph
Illus. by Lumbers, Fiona
Kane Miller (32 pp.)
$12.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-68464-046-1

A little girl’s class trip reaffirms her love of art.

Luna, who presents as a biracial Black girl with a Black-appearing father and White-appearing mother, is excited about her school trip to an art museum (called simply The Art Gallery in the text). Her mother is coming along as a chaperone to help her teacher, Miss Rosa (who appears Black), with the large, diverse group of children. One classmate, a little White boy named Finn, is withdrawn and sometimes unkind during the museum visit. Eventually, Luna’s enthusiasm for the art they’re seeing wins him over. While there’s lots to love about Lumbers’ joyful, vibrant illustrations, this friendship subplot and its attendant themes of interracial friendship and inclusivity are hamstrung by the book’s egregious lack of art by diverse artists. Of the 16 pieces highlighted on endpapers and interior pages set at the gallery, one is by the sole White woman referenced in the book, Louise Bourgeois, and one is by another woman who is also the sole artist of color represented, Yayoi Kusama. All other art that Luna and her class see is by White men. Just imagine how much more Luna (and by extension, readers) might love art if she were exposed to a broader range of creative points of view.

This book’s exclusive vision makes it hard to love. (Picture book. 4-7)

BAREFOOT BOOKS
AMAZING PLACES
Colombo, Miralda
Illus. by Cerocchi, Beatrice
Barefoot (64 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-64086-067-8

A slim collection of awe-inspiring sites the world over.

The places are all part of the built environment, created by people throughout the ages, including the Egyptian pyramids, the Parthenon, the Colosseum, Angkor Wat, the Taj Mahal, and 20th-century marvels like Sagrada Familia and the Sydney Opera House. Each section starts with a large picture of the exterior of the site with one short descriptive paragraph, then continues with a second double-page spread with several rectangular panels highlighting information about the interior, interesting facts, and equipment needed for the trip or souvenirs to buy. While the initial visuals are attractive, the secondary pages do not provide the in-depth details needed to really understand the beauty of many of these sites. For example, the text for Sagrada Familia mentions the interior, yet there are no illustrations of the inside of the building with its fantastic columns that evoke the natural world. The different exterior facades are mentioned, and again, readers are told about the details of Jesus’ life that are depicted, but the illustrations do no justice to the sculptural stories that exist. Although the places mentioned are from around the world, Africa is ignored except for Egypt. This could be used as a jumping-off place for further exploration, but it doesn’t really do the job it set out to do. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11.8-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 56.4% of actual size.)

This brief volume offers only a cursory view of places worth a more intense look. (map, glossary) (Nonfiction. 9-11)

JABARI TRIES
Cornwall, Gaia
Illus. by the author
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-5362-0716-3

Jabari works hard to build a gizmo that flies, but his best modification may be inspired by his partner.

When Jabari announces his machine will fly “all the way across” their spacious, landscaped yard, he is certain he won’t need any help. While his father gardens and his younger sister plays, Jabari builds a launch ramp, sends his machine through, and…crash! Little Nika wants in on the fun, but Jabari is “concentrating.” He takes inspiration from inventors and engineers, who use creativity and hard work to solve their problems. He plans, sketches, builds, and tries and tries again. He lets Nika help out, reluctantly at first, and when he gets so frustrated he wants to cry, he takes his father’s advice: gathering his patience and blowing away his “muddy feelings.” When he tries once more, with a clear head and support from his pint-sized partner, he discovers a change that makes his machine—and his confidence—soar. This generously sized picture book offers a lovely picture of mentorship and healthy relationships in the context of a thriving Black family with dark skin tones. Jabari’s emotional ups and downs will be familiar to young children, and his hard-won success feels triumphant. Cornwall’s clean, clear illustrations use patterns, green hues, and white space to deliver a variety of effective scenes.

Jabari succeeds, and so does this book. (Picture book. 3-9)

THE HUFFALOTS
Coy, Eve
Illus. by the author
Andersen Press USA (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-72841-579-6

When Mum wakes her children, she finds that little Huffalots have replaced them.

Mornings are hard. The kids don’t want to get up, but they don’t want to stay in bed. They don’t want to get dressed, but
they don't want to stay in their nightclothes either. And without a doubt, “they don't like each other.” There is a way to handle Huffalots, though, and it starts with breakfast. Slowly, with a bit of help from each other, the two little Huffalots become Huffalittles and eventually Lovealots. They play delightedly together and give each other flowers and feathers and hugs. But most importantly, they give “lovely cuddles.” By the end of the day, Mum has exhausted herself and has become a bit of a Huff-folot herself. Can the children use what they learned today to help Mum find her inner Lovealot? A soft, pastel palette and attention to detail bring to life the children's world, as they are the center of the story. The kids' faces reflect their changing feelings, going from squinty scowls to smiles to broad grins, helping young readers to identify emotions. Readers will notice the children managing their emotions and helping each other to have a good day—an empowering sight. The book's British origins show in cadence and some vocabulary choices. Family members appear White. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10.25-by-19.5-inch double-page spreads viewed at 52% of actual size.)

A sweet, quiet book to help kids learn that as fast as feelings come, they can also go. (Picture book 3-5)

ONE TIME
Creech, Sharon
Harper/HarperCollins (272 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-0-06-257074-1

A standout teacher and mysterious new student open the minds and notebooks of Gina Filomena and her fellow classmates.

Eleven-year-old Gina has always felt different from the other students. She has a bright imagination and a vibrant wardrobe to match. In new neighbor Antonio she finds a friend whose wild mind seems connected with hers. At school, their English teacher, Miss Lightstone, poses questions that ask students to imagine Huffalittles and eventually Lovealots. They play delightedly together and give each other flowers and feathers and hugs. But most importantly, they give “lovely cuddles.” By the end of the day, Mum has exhausted herself and has become a bit of a Huff-folot herself. Can the children use what they learned today to help Mum find her inner Lovealot? A soft, pastel palette and attention to detail bring to life the children's world, as they are the center of the story. The kids' faces reflect their changing feelings, going from squinty scowls to smiles to broad grins, helping young readers to identify emotions. Readers will notice the children managing their emotions and helping each other to have a good day—an empowering sight. The book's British origins show in cadence and some vocabulary choices. Family members appear White. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10.25-by-19.5-inch double-page spreads viewed at 52% of actual size.)

A sweet, quiet book to help kids learn that as fast as feelings come, they can also go. (Picture book 3-5)
EVERY CHILD A SONG

A Celebration of Children's Rights

Davies, Nicola
Illus. by Martin, Marc
Crocodile/Interlink (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-62371-872-5


Spare free-verse text encourages each child to embrace their unique identity; but it also recognizes that they need and deserve the support of the community to reach their potential, in keeping with the UN CRC (selections from which appear in the backmatter). As the title says, each child is like a song. “Whatever melody a song sings, / each one is true and beautiful; / unique and special as your own.” A brown-skinned child with short, straight black hair skips down a road in an aerial view, a serene blue bird in the foreground. But in the next spread, a child stands alone, reaching for assistance as a throng of busy adults walks by, absorbed in their own business. While illustrations with sweeping splashes of rich color and minimal details don’t shy from depicting the chaos and danger for refugees in a small boat in a storm and the darkness of forced silence, hate, and war, the overarching tone is positive. A scene of a multiracial group of people striding (and rolling, for a child in a wheelchair) with purpose accompanies the hopeful text: “For great adventures filled her head / from every tale she’d ever read.” She even has her trusty Pirate’s Almanac to help this young dog learn some new tricks. But Capt. Gnash, an amputee bulldog with a bone for a prosthesis instead of a peg leg, has no respect for bookishness and belittles the peppy pup. Undeterred, Nell finds a treasure map only to have it snatched by Gnash. Ignoring Nell’s good advice, he soon finds himself in the shallows. A shallow fox meets a fox in the shallows.

On a perfect night for finding fireflies, in sweet, gently stylized watercolor-y washes of soft teal, Bramble the fox leads Hazel the hedgehog through a misty evening in the forest. At the direction of Twig the owl, “who knows everything,” they make their way to the lake and discover not fireflies but instead a rude fox peering back up from the water, who mirrors Bramble’s bumbles. The story is theoretically a guide for the golden rule—treating others how you wish to be treated—but Bramble’s jaunt leaves a great deal to be desired, not least her disregard for Hazel’s anxiety in the “creepy, crooked shadows” of the forest at night, which is never addressed. Instead, readers are left to wade through an elaborate exercise in what seems solely to be an attempt to use any dialogue tag other than a simple “said.” The trio “squeak,” “hoot,” “grump,” “sputter,” “bristle,” and “beam”—and yet fail to cultivate an ounce of chemistry. Chalky, charming, child-friendly illustrations of the cheerful forest creatures, in a well-paced balance of spreads and spots, carry the story well but fail to elevate awkward storytelling.

About as much substance as an echo. (Picture book. 3-6)

A literary cur teaches her fellow buccaneers that there be treasure in them that books!

Book-smart pup Nell joins an all-dog pirate crew with big dreams. “For great adventures filled her head / from every tale she’d ever read.” She even has her trusty Pirate’s Almanac to help this young dog learn some new tricks. But Capt. Gnash, an amputee bulldog with a bone for a prosthesis instead of a peg leg, has no respect for bookishness and belittles the peppy pup. Undeterred, Nell finds a treasure map only to have it snatched by Gnash. Ignoring Nell’s good advice, he soon finds himself in need of her rescue, and when the treasure is at last discovered, is it any wonder that it’s 20 treasure chests full of books? Gnash sees the error of his ways, and Nell not only teaches the crew to read, but converts the boat into a floating library. The upbeat rhyming text keeps the plot moving at a fair clip and sails past the occasional awkward turn of phrase (is it possible to “snap… with a sneer”?). Cheery art has a friendly, cartoon-y look, and its buoyant tenor will make even the scurviest wag yearn for a
tropical isle of their own. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-22.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 27.7% of actual size.)

A pox on the haters! Secure the mainsail and set a course for a howling good adventure. (Picture book. 3-6)

A SUPER STICKY MISTAKE
The Story of How Harry Coover Accidentally Discovered Super Glue!
Donald, Alison
Illus. by Zhai, Rea
Maverick Publishing (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-5362-1587-8 paper

Like many inventions, it seems, super glue came about by accident.
Unfortunately, readers are likely to be left with more questions than answers after reading this disappointing biography of the miracle goo’s inventor. Harry Coover invented the stuff, but his surname is inexplicably withheld until the end of the narrative. One irrelevant fact revealed from the beginning was his penchant for saying “yaba daba,” which is irritatingly repeated throughout the text. His favorite subject was chemistry, but readers don’t learn what drew him to it. During World War II, Coover “was asked to develop a plastic [that] needed to be strong, solid and transparent.” Why he was asked to do this, for what purpose, and by whom is not revealed. Coover and his team accidentally created a mixture called cyanoacrylate, which is now popularly known as super glue. After years in development, it was officially put on the market, and his adhesive found many uses. Veterinarians used it to mend bones; battlefield medics used it to stop blood loss; and detectives used it to collect fingerprints—though how is not explained. Engineers supposedly used it to fix a space shuttle, but how and which one are not revealed. Complementing the scant information are equally unenlightening cartoon illustrations depicting the White scientist in action with colleagues, some of whom are people of color. There are no source notes or bibliography.

A remarkably uninformative informational book. (timeline) (Picture book/biography. 4-8)

KIDS FIGHT PLASTIC
How To Be a #2minutesuperhero
Dorey, Martin
Illus. by Wesson, Tim
Candlewick (128 pp.)
978-1-5362-1587-8 paper

An environmentalist’s guide for kids to take action to reduce use of plastics and protect the oceans.

The British author/activist started in 2013 with an online campaign called #2minutebeachclean that encouraged people to spend two minutes picking up plastic waste that had washed ashore onto beaches. In that same spirit, with the creation of 50 #2minutesuperhero challenges kids can do, this aims to lessen the amount of plastic that gets into the ocean in the first place. Engaging diagrams help convey the amount of plastic in the ocean, different kinds of plastic, and the history of plastics. Brief explanations illuminate why people need to limit plastic use and plastics’ effects on climate, air quality, and animal life. Looking at plastics use in school, home, and recreational activities, the book explores the unusual places that plastics show up; through the challenges, it provides actions readers can take to limit their use and impact. When it comes to minimizing use of plastic around shopping, cooking, and meals, it assumes a certain amount of food security, and the fictional “Everyday Superheroes” highlighted are either marine animals or, despite the presence of other dark-skinned characters, White-presenting individuals. Supporting evidence is scant and at times anecdotal, making this more a tool for those already committed to the environmental cause than a piece of persuasion.

Light on the science but packed with good suggestions for environmental action. (resources) (Nonfiction. 7-10)

BAND TOGETHER
Douglass, Chloe
Illus. by the author
Magination/American Psychological Association (32 pp.)
$14.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-4338-3241-3

A loner duck comes into his own.

Duck, a waddling mallard with a hipster hat-and-scarf combo, lives by himself in a tiny shack by the sea. He likes to comb the beach, drink tea, and play the ukulele. He is a self-proclaimed “solo act.” In fact, so much so, that he finds “making friends a little bit overwhelming.” But when a band’s van breaks down at the beach and they ask Duck to “lend a wing,” he can’t say no. Soon he finds himself in the company of friends. They invite him to their concert the next day. Duck must proclaim “solo act.” In fact, so much so, that he finds “making friends a little bit overwhelming.” But when a band’s van breaks down at the beach and they ask Duck to “lend a wing,” he can’t say no. Soon he finds himself in the company of friends. They invite him to their concert the next day. Duck must...
WAITING TOGETHER
Dufayet, Danielle
Illus. by Bassani, Srimalie
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-8075-0279-2

No one likes to wait.
For a child, waiting can be a frustrat-
ingly endless experience. Like the “drip...
drip... drip” wait for a storm to pass. Or the “tick, tick, tick” wait of the
oven timer while cookies are baking. But there are many different
kinds of waits! There is the “clickety-clack” wait of the
train, or the “wibble and jiggly” wait of a loose tooth. There is also
the “shiver and shake” wait of being next on the diving board or
the “ding, ding, ding” wait of the ice cream cart (finally, a wait
worthwhile!). Dufayet’s onomatopoeic language instantly con-
veys the mood of each wait, stretching out the slow and agoniz-
ing ones or speeding up the “lickety-split” ones like toast popping
out of a toaster. Wisely posited: “No matter how hard you try...
you can’t make waiting go faster.” Luckily, Bassani’s bright illus-
trations highlight many of the fruitful results—such as a butter-
fly that lands on one’s finger. Waiting can be worth it! A diverse
group of youngsters learn the value of patience and, as the title
indicates, that waiting is better when done with a friend.
Laconic and simple; earnest and lovely. (Picture book. 3-6)

LEAVE A MESSAGE IN
THE SAND
Poems About Giraffes,
Bongos, and Other Creatures
With Hooves
Dumon Tak, Bibi
Illus. by van Haeringen, Annemarie
Trans. by Watkinson, Laura
Eerdmans (64 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-0-8028-5548-0

In loose, mostly free-verse poems, readers learn a lot about
a variety of hoofed animals.
The lesser mouse-deer, for example, is “Only 12 inches tall, / 18 inches long, / and 4.5 pounds in weight.” And the Arabian oryx
“was the first (nearly) extinct animal / to be returned to the wild.” Each entry is accompanied by an illustration of the animal in
question, in renderings that vary from cartoony depictions to
splashy watercolors, often with a hint of the surreal. While each
poem contains at least a nugget of interesting information, and
many use humor (scatological or otherwise), several may find a
less appreciative audience in the United States than they did in
the Netherlands. The poem about the wild Bactrian camel, for
example, references a harem and uses the slur “lame”; the hippo-
opotamus entry relies in part on fatphobia for effect; and the
Japanese serow’s poem opens by just throwing out a variety of
Japanese words including T oyota and Sudoku. As it’s a transla-
tion, it’s hard to say exactly where these choices originate. The
collection does neatly balance humor with scientific informa-
tion, but poetry lovers may be daunted by the scantily leaded
small type, and children who want to learn about animals are
more likely to seek books with more robust nonfiction ele-
ments (though they may appreciate the factual backmatter).
Clever but of limited use. (further reading) (Picture book/ poetry. 6-10)

RED SHOES
English, Karen
Illus. by Glenn, Ebony
Scholastic (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-338-11460-7

This is the story of a beloved pair of red shoes that finds a home with two little girls from vastly dif-
ferent worlds.
Shortly after Malika, a little Black girl, spies the pair of red shoes in a shop window, Nana surprises her with them. Malika loves her shoes and the “click-clack-click” sound they
make when she walks. She wears them while dancing with her father, during holiday get-togethers with her family, and even while at play. But one day she realizes her shoes have become
too small, and “they don’t let her forget her feet have grown!” Malika and Nana take the shoes to the thrift shop, where they are purchased and taken on a trip to Africa to become a gift for
a special little girl named Amina, who has just fasted for half the month of Ramadan for the first time. The story is thoroughly
crunchy, and English nails Malika’s joy in her shiny, red shoes—
readers who have loved and given away favorite toys, clothing,
or even shoes will recognize her attachment instantly. The illustra-
tions are vibrant, with lots of brown faces that have subtle
varying shades; Amina and the women in her family cover their
hair. However beautiful the story and illustrations, it is unfortu-
nate that the book locates Amina’s home only in “Africa” rather
than a specific country. (This book was reviewed digitally with
10-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 28% of actual size.)
A bright and cheerful story dimmed just a bit by a lack of
specificity. (Picture book. 4-7)

MAURICE AND HIS
DICTIONARY
A True Story
Fagan, Cary
Illus. by Mariano, Enzo Lord
Owlkids Books (56 pp.)
$18.95 | Oct. 15, 2020
978-1-77147-323-1

A little bit of luck, the kindness of
strangers, and a teenage boy’s perseverance drive this elegant
story set during the Holocaust.
All Belgian 14-year-old Maurice Fajgenbaum wants is to
become a lawyer, but the Nazi invasion makes him and his family
refugees. They flee city after city, depending on a combination of their own resourcefulness and the kindness of strangers. As they make their tumultuous journey through wartime Europe before finally securing passage on a ship to a relocation camp on the island of Jamaica, they are guided by Maurice’s father’s mantra: “Solve one problem, and then the next, and then the next.” Even in hiding and in limbo, Maurice’s parents support his education, and Maurice problem-solves wave upon wave of setbacks before finally graduating from high school while still in the camp and embarking on university studies in Canada to realize his dream. While Maurice’s English dictionary does not play as central a role in the story as the title suggests, this story is still a fascinating tale of perseverance based on a true story. The sepia-toned illustrations in neat graphic panels help readers appreciate the story’s historicity, contrasting with warmly hued forays into Maurice’s imagination. Finally, the readers guide in the back of the book features photographs of the real Maurice and some substantive historical backstory.

Maurice’s journey teaches readers to never give up. (Graphic historical fiction. 8-13)
at the farmer’s house; on the day in between, the farmer and his animals tolerate the monkey’s loud, wild ways. Finally, like the clown in the book before him, the monkey hears the circus train coming and goes on its way, smiles all around. Frazee’s soft colors, careful lines, and masterful compositions work their magic once again to evoke mood and feeling in a way that children can immediately grasp. The experience hits adult readers just as powerfully, though readers who decry picture-book depictions of monkeys for reinforcing negative stereotypes of Black people will find no mitigation in the monkey’s antics. (This book was reviewed digitally with 8.3-by-20.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 54.1% of actual size.)

A (mostly) heartwarming follow-up visit. (Picture book. 5-9)

Of the many inventors experimenting in the early 20th century with what became television, John Logie Baird was the first to build a working mechanical machine that transmitted live, moving pictures.

Unfortunately, those are the only significant facts revealed in this sketchy, disappointing biography. Baird, identified by only his first name throughout the narrative, grew up sickly in Scotland in a home full of books. The nature of his illness is never revealed, nor are the titles of the books he read that may have inspired his interest in inventing. Baird’s first invention was a homemade telephone exchange, followed by a machine to generate electricity for his home. Readers never learn when and how he created them, however. His other inventions included a glass razor and shoes filled with air for comfort. While convalescing from another unnamed illness, Baird read about an unidentified inventor attempting to build a machine that could show “real-life pictures” to people in their homes. Baird succeeded in building the first machine able to do this, but how he achieved it is vaguely explained. A timeline reveals that this piggie and pooch will pair up again. (Author’s note) This kicks off a series, and readers will be glad to know that the pet-tectives” are on the case! Horace Homer Higgins III is a most dignified Boston terrier, and he’s not happy that his human Eleanor is moving him from the city to the Homestead. It’s hard enough to keep her safe in town. Then she announces he’s about to get a new sister…and that sister turns out to be a pig! Bunwinkle was the runt of her litter, but what she lacks in size she makes up for in enthusiasm, and she loves living on the farm. All the animal characters are, well, characters: Smith and Jones are horse brothers who’ve seen it all; Smokey is a sardonically nasty stray cat; there’s also a bevy of excitable chicks, alpacas, goats, and troublesome ducks. On one of several trips to the vet (farms can be hazardous), Horace and Bunwinkle start to piece together a local mystery. Animals are disappearing. Is it the vets? Is it Smokey? Aliens? (That’s what Jones thinks.) The chase is on, but can they puzzle it out before one of them gets snatched? Gardner’s debut tale of mystery and (eventual) bucolic bliss brings to mind Joan Carris and Noah Z. Jones’ Bed & Biscuit series. Graduates of the Mercy Watson books will also feel right at home. Mottram’s occasional illustrations just add to the charm. Human characters are default White. (Final art not seen.)

This nebulous biography fails to resolve into a clear picture. (Picture book/biography. 4-8)

HORACE & BUNWINKLE
Gardner, P.J.
Illus. by Mottram, David
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (208 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-06-294654-6

Who’s stealing animals? The “pet-tectives” are on the case! Horace Homer Higgins III is a most dignified Boston terrier, and he’s not happy that his human Eleanor is moving him from the city to the Homestead. It’s hard enough to keep her safe in town. Then she announces he’s about to get a new sister…and that sister turns out to be a pig! Bunwinkle was the runt of her litter, but what she lacks in size she makes up for in enthusiasm, and she loves living on the farm. All the animal characters are, well, characters: Smith and Jones are horse brothers who’ve seen it all; Smokey is a sardonically nasty stray cat; there’s also a bevy of excitable chicks, alpacas, goats, and troublesome ducks. On one of several trips to the vet (farms can be hazardous), Horace and Bunwinkle start to piece together a local mystery. Animals are disappearing. Is it the vets? Is it Smokey? Aliens? (That’s what Jones thinks.) The chase is on, but can they puzzle it out before one of them gets snatched? Gardner’s debut tale of mystery and (eventual) bucolic bliss brings to mind Joan Carris and Noah Z. Jones’ Bed & Biscuit series. Graduates of the Mercy Watson books will also feel right at home. Mottram’s occasional illustrations just add to the charm. Human characters are default White. (Final art not seen.)

This kicks off a series, and readers will be glad to know that this piggie and pooch will pair up again. (Author’s note)
(Fiction. 8-12)

WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU MANGOS
Getten, Kerren
Delacorte (208 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-593-17397-8

A young girl loses her memory after the incident that changed her life. Clara Dee-Henson is a 12-year-old girl from an unnamed tropical island reminiscent of Jamaica. She spends most of her time with her best friend, Gaynah. But Gaynah has become more temperamental lately, and Clara begins to question their friendship. When a new girl moves to town, Clara is excited to meet her. That is, until she begins to fear the new girl will first hear about her from Gaynah and make up her mind about Clara before they get to know each other. Clara used to love surfing until something happened—now she has a deep fear of even going near water. To make matters worse, Clara has no idea what caused this change, as she cannot remember anything from last summer. Clara feels a constant anger that is always
ready to overwhelm her and has begun acting out, much to the concern of her parents and neighbors. In order to work through her feelings, Clara needs to face her past—but how can she do that when she cannot remember it? Debut author Getten tells a story about the commonalities and complexities of friendship and loss that many readers will relate to. Their attention will be held by the fast pace and evocative language that brings the setting to life. All major characters are Black.

*A touching novel about letting go of the past and moving on.* *(Fiction. 8-12)*

**LITTLE OWL’S BEDTIME**

*Gliori, Debi*

_Illus. by Brown, Alison*  
*Bloomsbury (32 pp.)*  
*$17.99 | Oct. 13, 2020*  
*978-1-476-0449-4*

A sweet and comforting bedtime tale for little ones.

It’s “late o’clock,” and Little Owl’s mother is snuggling him into bed. He refuses to sleep and attempts to postpone the inevitable in various, expected ways. Children will relate to his stalling tactics, which include asking for another story, declaring a fear of the dark, and misplacing his beloved stuffed toy Hedge. Mommy Owl patiently handles these diversions with clever responses that soothe her little one. She gently comforts him by turning the sources of his distress into imaginative scenes of whimsy. These charming depictions display as double-page spreads; they stand out through the use of color and provide a nice contrast in perspective next to the bedtime scenes, which mostly unfurl in vignettes and full-page images. Little Owl finally settles down to sleep after he replicates Mommy’s supportive routine with Hedge. Curiously, this owl family goes to bed at night, which even young readers will recognize as unusual for most of the species. Still, this minor discrepancy may be overlooked by readers and doesn’t detract from the overall message of the reassuring effects of unconditional parental love.

*While this story treads familiar territory, it radiates warmth and sincerity to ease readers into a peaceful night’s rest.* *(Picture book. 2-5)*

**ADELITA**

*A Sea Turtle’s Journey*  
*Goebel, Jenny*  
*Illus. by Miminoshvili, Ana*  
*Whitman (32 pp.)*  
*$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020*  
*978-0-8075-8114-8*

A tiny sea turtle, rescued in Baja California, Mexico, and later released wearing a tracker, surprises the researchers and schoolchildren following her journey by crossing the entire Pacific Ocean.

Rescued when she was the size of a dinner plate, the loggerhead spent 10 years growing in a Mexican research lab until 1996, when a visiting American scientist (a White man) had the idea to attach one of the then-new satellite trackers to her shell and let her go free. A local fisherman who helped him named the turtle for his daughter, Adelita. There is little embellishment to this account; it leaves space for readers and listeners to imagine and wonder what she encountered during her 368-day journey and what finally happened to her after her transmitter stopped near the Japanese coast. The author does allude to the dangers she faced in the ocean, but both words and pictures gentle the circumstances of her original capture, in a fishing net, and her likely similar fate. This is a story with cheerful illustrations and a happy ending. Not only did Adelita demonstrate that adult sea turtles swim vast distances to return to their natal beaches to lay eggs, but Japanese fishermen who had been accidentally catching turtles began to release them from their nets. Sea turtles feature prominently in Goebel’s middle-grade novel,* Out of My Shell* *(2019).* Her affection shows.

*Science takes another small step toward understanding the natural world.* *(author’s note, timeline, websites)* *(Informational picture book. 4-8)*

**FROM MAYBE TO FOREVER**

*An Adoption Story*  
*Gold, M.L. & Fong, N.V.*  
*Illus. by Hong, Jess*  
*Creston (32 pp.)*  
*$18.99 | Sep. 1, 2020*  
*978-1-939547-75-0*

A child awaits her baby sister’s adoption.

Gold’s author’s note says she asked her then-5-year-old granddaughter, credited co-author Fong, “If one of your friends said to you, ‘I know your baby brother is adopted, but what does that mean?’ what would you tell them?” This fictionalized account of Fong’s response is about a little girl (who presents as a child of color in a mixed-race family) who draws pictures of the baby her family is adopting. As they await the baby’s arrival, the unnamed child explains to her pet dog, Buddy, “what adopting means.” The explanation presents a private-adoption scenario in which “there are mothers who love their babies but know it’s better for the baby to live with another family.” Such a tidy statement skirts trauma, systemic inequities, and losses inherent in the birthparents–adoptive parents–child triad. Also troubling is the spread reading, “Even after we get a baby, it is still only our maybe baby until a judge says that the baby can stay with our family forever.” An accompanying quasi-courtroom scene shows adults caring for babies before a judge who marks an A+ on a chalkboard, which renders adoption-finalization waiting periods as a test for adoptive parents, not time for birthparent reflection or consideration of the child’s best interests.

*Maybe not.* *(Picture book. 4-7)*
Remarkably, the exchange between the two new friends presents the two languages and cultures as equal and the learning as reciprocal.

A Sukkot Story
Goldin, Barbara Diamond
Illus. by Huy, Amberin
Apples & Honey Press (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-68115-547-0

On the first night of Sukkot, Daniel is apprehensive about sleeping in the dark sukkah without a night light.

Older sister Naomi likes to show off her knowledge acquired in Hebrew school, so she tells Daniel all about the holiday. She explains how Jews remember the ancestors’ journey from Egypt, why the sukkah is built, and the reason for an open roof made of tree branches. Once the building and decorating of their sukkah is finished, Daniel’s quiet anxiety parallels Naomi’s eager excitement through the family’s outdoor dinner. At bedtime, the siblings create a makeshift sleeping area in a corner of the sukkah. In the dark, scary nighttime noises and shadowy images disturb Daniel to the point where he begins to go inside. But to his surprise, Naomi, who has a touch of the heebie-jeebies herself, encourages him to stay and look up through the branches of the sukkah’s open roof. He sees a sky full of stars, or “night lights,” as they glosed for the ancestors thousands of years ago. Soft paintings provide a contemporary view of a White Jewish family with some parallel historical scenes of the forbearers making their way through the desert. The interwoven explanation of the holiday within the context of the story is enhanced with an afterword that references today’s refugees, who must live under precarious circumstances in temporary shelters.

A child’s fear is sweetly tempered by the support of an older sister’s comforting, natural solution. (Picture book. 5-7)

The Day Saida Arrived
Gómez Redondo, Susana
Illus. by Wimmer, Sonja
Trans. by Schimel, Lawrence
Blue Dot Kids Press (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-73312-125-5

When Saida, an immigrant, arrives in her new school, she doesn’t say any words because she doesn’t speak the language, in this Spanish import.

Determined to be Saida’s friend, the narrator, a classmate, searches for the new girl’s lost words everywhere: in the park, “inside the pockets of all the coats,” and between the curtains. She draws her a welcome sign, and the newcomer draws a smile back. The narrator’s parents tell her that Saida comes from Morocco, a land of bazaars and colorful tiles, where people speak Arabic and where their family’s language “wouldn’t work either.” The girls embark on a mutual learning journey, of words, letters, and sounds. The dreamy, sometimes larger-than-life illustrations portray their creative and playful explorations. Arabic and English words and letters they’re learning fly around on laundry, in the wind, and through strands of hair, accompanied by helpful English transliterations of Arabic texts. Remarkably, the exchange between the two new friends presents the two languages and cultures as equal and the learning as reciprocal, offering a great resource for learning about immigration and cultural difference. Standard Arabic is used for the words presented rather than the Moroccan spoken dialect, which is probably not what a real-life Saida would have consistently employed to teach her new friend. However, it is the more helpful version for Arabic language learners. Saida has brown skin and long, wispy dark hair; the narrator has pale skin and a red pageboy.

A lyrical, playful book about immigration, respect, learning, and friendship across cultures. (Picture book. 4-9)

Kondo & Kezumi Visit Giant Island
Goodner, David
Illus. by Tsurumi, Andrea
Little, Brown (80 pp.)
$14.99 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-368-02577-5
Series: Kondo & Kezumi, 1

Two friends embark upon a high-seas adventure.

Kondo, a large lemon-colored creature with wide round eyes, spends his day on his island home with his best friend, tangerine-hued Kezumi. Together, they frolic on their idyllic isle picking berries (tall Kondo nabs the higher fruit while Kezumi helps to retrieve the lower) while surrounded by tiny “flitter-birds” and round “fluffle-bunnies.” One day, Kezumi finds a map in a bottle that declares “WE ARE NOT ALONE.” Inspired by visions of a larger world, Kondo and Kezumi fashion a boat from a bathtub and set sail. The pair visits fantastical islands—deliciously cheese-laden Dairy Isle, the fiery and fearsome Fireskull Island—until they eventually settle upon the titular Giant Island, where they meet Albert, a gigantic gray talking mountain who is—obviously—unable to leave. Enthralled by his new friends, Albert wants them to stay forever. After Albert makes a fraught decision, Kondo and Kezumi find themselves at a crossroads and must confront their new friend. Goodner and Tsurumi’s brightly illustrated chapter book should find favor with fans of Kate DiCamillo and Chris Van Dusen’s similarly designed Mercy Watson series. Short, wry, descriptive sentences make for an equally enjoyable experience whether read aloud or independently. Episodic chapters move the action along jauntily; the conclusion is somewhat abrupt, but it promises more exploration and adventures for the best friends. (This review was originally published in the June 1, 2019, issue. The book data has been updated to reflect changes in publisher and date of publication.)

A story of friendship that is both lively and lovely (Fantasy. 6-8)
A cat and a bear working on a picture book find familiar stories in the forest.

Fern, a bear, and Otto, a cat, have a busy and full life together in a cozy seaside treehouse they share as best friends. When Fern tries to write and illustrate a book about their friendship, Otto suggests they go out into the forest for more exciting material, such as unicorns, dragons, or wish-granting genies. Instead, the pair come across stories in progress that’ll be familiar to most young readers, such as “The Tortoise and the Hare,” “The Three Bears,” and, most frightening, the witch from “Hansel and Gretel.” It’s all a “little too exciting for me,” Otto finally admits, “I really would love a story about two friends who live in a cozy house on a hill, far away from wolves and witches.” Graegin’s follow-up to her first authored picture book, Little Fox in the Forest (2017), trades that wordless experience for a more convoluted story that seems a little beside the point, as Fern and Otto neither affect the fairy tales nor are much affected by them until the final fright. But the soft illustrations of the forest adventure, with dozens of beautifully rendered critters and kids (many of color) and a rapturous depiction of the duo’s treehouse in the moonlight, make up for any narrative missteps. (This book was reviewed digitally with 8.7-by-23.2-inch double-page spreads viewed at 87.7% of actual size.)

The fairy tales aside, there’s plenty of cozy warmth in Fern and Otto’s friendship itself. (Picture book. 3-7)

LEIF AND THE FALL
Grant, Allison Sweet & Grant, Adam
Illus. by Liddiard, Merrilee
Dial (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-984815-49-1

A leaf fearful of falling experiments with safety ideas. Leif, an oak leaf, knows leaves fall in the fall, as the other leaves tell him over and over. But still, he is afraid he’ll be hurt when it happens. An understanding laurel leaf friend that seems also to be growing on Leif’s tree commiserates, and the two of them try out ideas to make the fall easier or even prevent it altogether. They make a net with twigs and a kite out of moss, among other ideas, but nothing works, and Leif tosses each attempt away, “feeling as if he has failed.” He hasn’t of course, as the ending-with-a-twist reveals. The narrative is written in present tense—a clever choice to underscore the immediacy of Leif’s anxiety—and is crisp and taut, moving the plot along just enough to build a satisfying bit of tension. The illustrations, which leave plenty of white space to accentuate the idea of the space Leif will be falling through, are done in a palette of soft greens and browns and use basic leaf shapes with simple facial expressions drawn on them. In a few of the illustrations, an image of real moss is shaped and always seen in profile with an inquisitive, wide-eyed look and a bright orange beak. Child readers who see in themselves the same desire to be independent, if only occasionally, may find solace in the story’s conclusion—that loved ones care enough to be there and console him when he feels lonely. (This book was reviewed digitally with 8.7-by-23.2-inch double-page spreads viewed at 87.7% of actual size.)

A simple home-and-back-again tale of friends as a safety net. (Picture book. 4-8)
The birthday present is a magical train full of talking animals—and a new job.

On Kate’s 11th birthday, she’s surprised by the arrival of rich Uncle Herbert. Uncle Herbert bears a gift: a train. Not a toy train, a 102.36-ton steam engine, with cars that come later. When Kate and her brother, Tom, both white, play in the cab of the Silver Arrow, the train starts up, zooming to a platform packed with animals holding tickets. Thus begins Kate and Tom’s hard work: They learn to conduct the train and feed the fire box, instructed by the Silver Arrow, which speaks via printed paper tape. The Silver Arrow is a glorious playground: The library car is chocka-block with books while the candy car is brimful of gobstoppers and gummy bears. But amid the excitement of whistle-blowing and train conducting, Kate and Tom learn quiet messages from their animal friends. Some species, like gray squirrels and starlings, are “invaders.” The too-thin polar bear’s train platform is drowned. Their new calling is more than just feeding the coal box—they need to find a new balance in a damaged world. “Feeling guilty doesn’t help anything,” the mamba tells them. Humans have survived so effectively they’ve taken over the world; now, he says, “you just have to take care of it.” (Illustrations not seen.)

Both cozy and inspiring, this eco-fable conveys both grim truths and a defiant call to action. (Fantasy. 8-10)

Two flies go to war over a pile of dog poop.

The buzzing adversaries end up friends, swathed in bandages and lying side by side in bed—but neither the war nor its resolution offer much fiber to digest. Hardly has Lola, “the flittiest of all flies,” planted her flag on the freshly laid mound than along comes Fiona, “the laziest and most loudmouthed of all flies,” to challenge her claim. The two proceed to engage in a dance-off that ends at sunset with the two bedding down on opposite sides of the pile. Next morning, instead of resuming hostilities, the weary warriors unilaterally decide that there’s enough room for all...just as an oblivious gardener’s big boot comes down to obliterate the muffin of contention. Though the Argentine illustrator draws his light-skinned, anthropomorphic flies so casually that he sometimes forgets how many legs they’re supposed to have, he gives the pair stylish eyes that look like outsized sunglasses and comically irascible expressions (they’re still scowling even as they lie in bed holding hands in the penultimate scene). That all humor adds a piquant whiff to aparable that falls otherwise on the bland side despite the redolent mise en scène. The Spanish-language original publishes simultaneously. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9.8-by-19.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 74% of actual size.)

A muddled parable likely to leave readers scratching their...heads. (Picture book. 6-8) (Esta caca es mía! 978-84-17673-87-1)

Personal-space invaders are not popular—as narrator Oliver soon finds out.

He can’t understand why what works so well for Mac and Cheese, the classroom guinea pigs, does not work at all for his classmates. Nina does not want him squeezing in close as she snacks. Pedro does not appreciate Oliver’s snuggling on his reading pillow, and Dustin definitely does not want Oliver’s face rubbing against his shoulder. Mrs. López helps the boy by suggesting he use a hula hoop to understand the concept of personal distancing. Oliver’s “space project” earns the class the essential point required for a field trip. Gutiérrez’s simple story, sprinkled with a few Spanish words from the teacher, lacks the context needed to explain why this young, apparent middle grader has no socialization skills, introducing his difficulty with the simple line “I’ve always wondered how to be a good friend.” The author’s note discusses how acceptable personal-space boundaries can vary culturally and individually but does not illuminate Oliver’s particular challenges further. Bell’s retro illustrations run the gamut from cute—a guinea pig sneaking almonds at snack time—to alarming: Mrs. López fails either to use the inside of her elbow when sneezing or to cover her mouth in time. The sketches in future-scientist Oliver’s notebook help to add some warmth to the proceedings. Oliver has glasses and beige skin; his classmates are diverse.

Insufficient context leaves the message obscure. (Picture book. 5-8)
This glossy book shines with cheery, colorful artwork highlighted by clever juxtapositions of everyday baby life with episodes of derring-do.

**SUPERHERO BABY!**

*Hegarty, Patricia*
*Illus. by Willmore, Alex*
*Kane Miller (32 pp.)*
$14.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-68464-049-4

This bright pop of a children’s book has a plot twist in store for young readers. While her “perfect little brother” appears quiet and well-behaved, Superhero Baby (really more a toddler than a baby, but OK) rescues kittens from trees with a cleverly pinned diaper, plugs dangerous water-main ruptures with a spare teddy bear, and even rescues her father and the family dog from domestic dangers. She manages to fit it all into a busy baby day, with time for wailing over unwanted diaper changes and naps. But after she is called upon to rescue a stranded dinghy, readers may begin to wonder what could account for quite so much need for superhero rescues? Is there a villain to blame? Young readers will enjoy watching Superhero Baby solve the mystery—and then going back time and time again to find all the clues planted in the illustrations. This glossy book shines with cheery, colorful artwork highlighted by clever juxtapositions of everyday baby life with episodes of derring-do. Quatrains rhyme in an abcb pattern: “It’s time for Baby’s nap now, / but heroes never sleep! / (Unlike her perfect brother / who doesn’t make a peep.)” They combine with a catchy refrain of “GO-GO BABY POWER” for an effortless read-aloud. The brown-skinned protagonist’s family is portrayed as an interracial one, with Black-appearing mom and White-appearing dad.

Little listeners will be chanting right along with the book: “Go-go baby power!” *(Picture book. 4-8)*

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**THE HOUSE BY THE LAKE**

*The True Story of a House, Its History, and the Four Families Who Made It Home*

*Harding, Thomas*
*Illus. by Tecentrup, Britta*
*Candlewick Studio (48 pp.)*
$17.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-5362-1274-7

Between 1927 and 1999, a house sees four families move in and depart in a picture book adapted from the author’s 2016 book for adults of the same name.

As in Virginia Lee Burton’s classic *The Little House* (1942), the house itself is the story’s hub. Perched lakeside near Berlin, this house alternately feels “happy,” “abandoned and unloved,” and “alive.” Descriptions of the residents are similarly romantic: “a kind doctor and his cheery wife”; “the musical family”; “a man with a fluffy hat.” How jarring, then, for the families to be coming and going due to events such as genocide, and how much more jarring for those events to be only vaguely implied. Little boys grow from playing in the sand to wearing Hitler Youth uniforms, but the uniforms aren’t identified. World War II and the Berlin Wall go unnamed too, while Nazis are called only “angry men.” The fluffy-hatted man “spies on his neighbors”—huh? Why? This evasive piece sidesteps atrocities and even bare historical details. Readers who already know enough pertinent historical context to understand Harding’s subtle allusions aren’t the same readers who’d enjoy a lakeside house’s seasonal and emotional cycles. An author’s note supplies names and dates but still never delves into explaining the Nazis, Hitler Youth, or the Berlin Wall; it identifies which families were Jewish but never says why that’s relevant. Tecentrup’s textured artwork is similarly allusive, including a terrifying scene of aerial bombardment and grayscale and, fittingly, green), and vignettes further decorate the pages. Characters default to White.

Aims for charm and historical import but achieves neither. *(Informational picture book. 6-9)*

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**CROAKED!**

*Harkrader, Lisa*
*Yellow Jacket (256 pp.)*
$17.99 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-1-4998-0973-2

Following *Crumbled* (2019), a second outing for fairy-tale mystery-solver Nobbin, Prince Charming’s assistant.

Though Nobbin’s entertained by Prince Charming’s prince lessons, Charming’s younger sister, Princess Angelica, bores quickly of being a damsel stand-in, asking hard-hitting questions like: If a prince climbs a damsel’s hair to get up a tower, “how can he carry her and still use her hair to climb down?” In response to her tomboyish ways, the sinister adviser to the king (a guy so sketchy that the characters, when suspecting him of villainy, ask if he is “suspicious suspicious? Or just his everyday suspicious?”) hatches a scheme to have her schooled in courtly manners by Queen Ermintrude, who promptly arrives with her son, Prince Figbert, to take her away. Nobbin and company try to help Angelica maintain her comportment while rotten Figbert baits her with aggressive rudeness. The arrangement falls apart when the contract’s fine print calls for a royal betrothal, Angelica proclaiming she “would rather kiss a frog.” When Figbert turns into a frog overnight, Nobbin leads the charge to find the culprit and a way to restore Figbert. There’s a secondary mystery about the queen’s motivations (and missing valuables). Both gently humorous gender and genre critiques and delightful language and wordplay elevate plotlines. Each chapter opens with a full-page illustration (in grayscale and, fittingly, green), and vignettes further decorate the pages. Characters default to White.

A charming tale that balances feeling classic and fresh. *(Fantasy. 8-12)*

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**SUPERHERO BABY!**

*Hegarty, Patricia*
*Illus. by Willmore, Alex*
*Kane Miller (32 pp.)*
$14.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-68464-049-4

This bright pop of a children’s book has a plot twist in store for young readers. While her “perfect little brother” appears quiet and well-behaved, Superhero Baby (really more a toddler than a baby, but OK) rescues kittens from trees with a cleverly pinned diaper, plugs dangerous water-main ruptures with a spare teddy bear, and even rescues her father and the family dog from domestic dangers. She manages to fit it all into a busy baby day, with time for wailing over unwanted diaper changes and naps. But after she is called upon to rescue a stranded dinghy, readers may begin to wonder what could account for quite so much need for superhero rescues? Is there a villain to blame? Young readers will enjoy watching Superhero Baby solve the mystery—and then going back time and time again to find all the clues planted in the illustrations. This glossy book shines with cheery, colorful artwork highlighted by clever juxtapositions of everyday baby life with episodes of derring-do. Quatrains rhyme in an abcb pattern: “It’s time for Baby’s nap now, / but heroes never sleep! / (Unlike her perfect brother / who doesn’t make a peep.)” They combine with a catchy refrain of “GO-GO BABY POWER” for an effortless read-aloud. The brown-skinned protagonist’s family is portrayed as an interracial one, with Black-appearing mom and White-appearing dad.

Little listeners will be chanting right along with the book: “Go-go baby power!” *(Picture book. 4-8)*
Andrewson’s distinctive illustration style is well matched to Hoffmann’s story.

THE NUTCRACKER AND THE MOUSE KING

Hugdell, Bethany
Illus. by Deas, Michael
Viking (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-0-593-11562-6

There’s nothing that brings a family together with excitement and energy quite like sports.

This bedtime routine is anything but boring as the coaches (also known as parents) help their kids get ready for bed. As soon as the family enters the house it is a rush to complete the sports-themed Sunday-night bedtime routine. Each page incorporates sport terms and, often, football plays as they hustle. They need to get clothes from the laundry (Dad hikes an armful through his legs to an enthusiastic youngster), brush their teeth (in unison, to a stopwatch), take a bath (which begins like a Gatorade dunk), and of course tidy up (all in record time, of course). The family dog even plays a special part in making sure the team gets the ball over the goal line—watch out for “unnecessary roughness.” Sports fans will love the idea of gathering the family together for a “Story-Time-Out” as they settle their children for a nap or at night. Most of the sports terms incorporated are football-related, but an occasional basketball or hockey term helps keep up the frantic pace. Deas’ movement-filled cartoons depict a Black-appearing mom, a White-appearing dad, their two brown-skinned kids, and a shaggy black mutt making happy mayhem in this comfortable, middle-class home. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-16-inch double-page spreads viewed at 41.5% of actual size.)

A cute read for any family that is missing out on sports (or needs a change-up in their bedtime reading). (Picture book. 4-8)

THE LAST TIGER

Horáček, Petr
Illus. by the author
Eerdmans (36 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-0-8028-5552-7

A tiger tale.

Stunning, mixed-media illustrations in vibrant jewel tones declaim the simple story of a tiger learning the value of his freedom. Backed by straightforward text, painterly spreads of cut paper, pastel, and gouache provide the emotional heavy lifting for a familiar story that falls just short of a fable. A tiger lives fearlessly in the jungle until his hubris find him entangled in nets, and he is brought to an unnamed city behind bars. Realizing “his strength and power meant nothing anymore,” the tiger wastes away until he is small enough to slip between the bars of his cage and escape back to the jungle. The architecture and clothing of this space in the city read European, and almost all humans depicted are White, giving the book a vague but unresolved anti-colonialist edge for readers searching for a moral or metaphor. Without any real conflict or climax, author/illustrator Horáček’s uncomplicated story may underwhelm, but confident and clear mastery of color and composition keeps the pages turning, shining through every page well enough that readers will be transfixed and, for many adults, bringing William Blake’s “The Tyger” to mind unprompted.

Emotional impact wastes away with the titular tiger, but luminescent illustrations will keep readers of all ages engaged. (Picture book. 2-7)
With advice and love, harsh realities and encouraging words, We Rise, We Resist, We Raise Our Voices (Anthology. 10-adult) Crown (128 pp.) $18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Aug. 11, 2020 978-0-593-12161-0
978-0-593-12162-7 PLB

This star-studded collection of #own-voices authors calls readers in for necessary reminders in service of everyday actions that we must pursue to cultivate real change.

This collection is right on time. As many people reach for undifferentiated anti-racist reading lists to catch up to the Black-led front lines of today’s social movements, the Hudsons take an approach for young readers that emphasizes intergenerational relationships, familial intimacy, and intersectional justice. These are “real conversations,” both in that many of them draw from true personal experiences and also in the sense that they revel in depth and substance. The editors put it this way: “With advice and love, harsh realities and encouraging words, the talks offered in this anthology...embrace honest ways of thinking that help expand ourselves and others in a complex and diverse society.” Each contribution has its own unique viewpoint paired with arresting grayscale illustrations; together they take on a diversity of forms including prose, poems, and comics.

Race plays a central role, yet the conversations expand beyond a Black-White binary to be inclusive of Asian, Latinx, and Native American experiences as well. An all-star list of authors and illustrators appears throughout the pages—an embarrassment of literary riches. Backmatter includes explanatory notes from some of the authors, and biographical notes on all the contributors. It’s a perfect sequel to the Hudsons’ critically acclaimed collection We Rise, We Resist, We Raise Our Voices (2018).

The ingredients are all here. May this magnificent collection inspire us to move from dialogue to deep action. (backmatter) (Anthology. 10-adult)

THE TALK
Conversations About Race, Love & Truth
Ed. by Hudson, Wade & Hudson, Cheryl Willis
Crown (128 pp.)
$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Aug. 11, 2020
978-0-593-12161-0
978-0-593-12162-7 PLB

An empathetic Spanish import.

After a long winter, Cricket is excited to venture out and go for a walk in his neighborhood. He first comes across Ladybug, who is frantically looking for a newly washed spot that had been hanging up to dry and has disappeared from the line. Cricket proclaims: “I don’t wear any spots. I don’t think they’re that important,” and leaves without helping. Next, he sees Bee, who has gotten her wing tangled with fishing line. Cricket scoffs: “I hardly ever use my wings. I don’t think they’re that important,” and continues to walk. Spider is desperately trying to finish making silk before he opens his store for business. Cricket huffs: “I never buy balls of silk. I don’t think they’re that important.” Cricket realizes his mistake. It would be easy to slide into a predictable, pedantic conclusion, but Isern instead chooses an earnest, heartwarming turn. Rigaudie’s illustrations are a perfect foil to the text—well composed and finely detailed. The insects’ ungrounded setting (readers will wonder, among other things, how a mausoleum, a scene disappointingly undermined by a nebulous, ungrounded setting (readers will wonder, among other things, just how big it is). The three regroup and rewrite their lines in the performance. Just as the witches are interchangeable with one another, the protagonists are indistinguishable, unoriginally moaning over boys and disliking math. Characters default to White.

A weak and unsatisfying story. (Horror. 8-12)

PUT YOURSELF IN MY SHOES
Isern, Susanna
Illus. by Rigaudie, Mylène
Trans. by Daradatly, Ben
nubeOCHO (40 pp.)
$15.95 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-84-17673-37-6


After a gotcha opening in which hideous witches stir up a foul brew (using the freshly severed finger of a preteen boy) is revealed to be the first act of a play in rehearsal, there’s a long dry patch while the plot is established. Melissa, Jo, and Jenny play the roles of three witches in the school play. Oh Spirits Obey Us. When a furious Jenny blows off steam by wishing harm on the school bully—who promptly breaks both legs and falls into a coma—the girls realize that lots of their up-until-now-mild wishes have been coming true. They decide it’s connected to the play and determine to pay a visit to the playwright’s conveniently nearby grave. The girls are separated at the cemetery. Melissa and Jo receive a woodenly expository speech from the playwright’s ghost, warning that unless they sabotage the play they’ll conjure up the witches for real on opening night. Meanwhile, Jenny encounters the witches in a mausoleum, a scene disappointingly undermined by a nebulously ungrounded setting (readers will wonder, among other things, just how big it is). The three regroup and rewrite their lines in the performance. Just as the witches are interchangeable with one another, the protagonists are indistinguishable, unoriginally moaning over boys and disliking math. Characters default to White.

Empowers children to stop and consider others. (Picture book: 3-7) (Ponte en mi lugar: 978-84-17673-36-9)
Fifteen-year-old Nate Crocker has his wallet stolen by someone dressed as Ludwig von Beethoven in the courtyard of a luxury building in Vancouver, British Columbia.

As consolation, he is invited to be the building’s resident pianist by the smarmy owner. Nate uses his access to the building to snoop around to find the thief, teaming up with another victim, Zandi Singh, who protests there daily against gentrification and housing displacement caused by the building’s construction. Nate also befriends a boy with autism who loves his music. Over time his impressions of his boss change as his boss expresses derogatory opinions about people with disabilities and Nate comes to understand his exploitation of people displaced by his business activities. Jackson’s book is fast paced, something accentuated by Nate’s nonlinear thought processes. He jumps from idea to idea with little explanation as to how he arrived at each conclusion. The transitions in the narrative are erratic as well. Jackson’s imagery is confusing, leaving readers unable to conjure up clear visions of the story. While Nate is presented as a promising musician, this element of the story feels underdeveloped, and the cast of secondary characters adds little to the story. A publisher’s note indicates the font was chosen to accommodate readers with dyslexia. Nate and most other characters are assumed to be White; Zandi’s name cues her as South Asian. Unfortunately, a broad generalization about people with autism is not interrogated.

A summer sleuth story that disappoints. (Mystery. 10-12)

A retelling of the famous Norwegian fairy tale “The Three Billy Goats Gruff.”

The “famous” Brothers Gruff are Big Billy Goat, Middle Billy Goat, and Little Billy Goat. They are famous, the text explains, because of a “loudmouth bully boy” who lives under a mountain bridge, the ugly and fearsome Troll. The Gruff brothers, having eaten all the grass on their side of the mountain, realize that the grass is literally greener on the other side and make their way across the bridge, escaping—or, in the case of Big Billy Goat, head butting—the very hungry Troll. Despite the subtitle promising “The Full Story,” this rendition does not stray far from the original. In fact, some of the only differences between this picture book and the traditionally told fairy tale are the presence of the Gruff brothers’ cousins, to whom they retell the story of how they overcame the troll under the bridge, and the way the text embellishes the familiar show-downs between Gruffs and Troll. The traditional repetition of the “trip-trap” of the goats’ hooves is retained, giving children opportunities to participate, and Tillotson’s bright and cheerful illustrations, which paint Troll as a red, snaggletoothed, horned creature, are certain to be appealing to a young audience. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11.8-by-17.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.)

Entertaining and visually appealing but not particularly original. (Picture book/folktale. 3-6)

“I had a blank canvas to fill with extraordinary possibilities.”

Told in graphic-novel format with first-person narration, this engaging selection traces geologist Marie Tharp’s life from childhood through the loss of her mother, her development as a student and scientist, her attempts to find a job that allowed her to use her knowledge and skills, the process she used to map the ocean floor, and her excitement at discovering evidence of continental drift theory to the gradual acceptance of her groundbreaking depiction after it was initially dismissed as “girl talk.”

Full of energy and excitement, the text and illustrations merge smoothly to provide depth and interest; most spreads feature paragraphs that present the general plot; they are perched atop multiple-panel sequences that allow for scientific detail, conversation, and reflection. In an inventive design choice, Tharp’s actual maps were the inspiration for the textural backgrounds featured throughout. A strong sense of both the time period and the struggles Tharp faced as a woman working in science are incorporated nicely; the pacing and format will entice both engaged and reluctant readers; and the exhilaration of a new discovery is captured with a sense of wonder that is sure to inspire children and draw attention to the world of science. The depicted cast is an all-White one. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9-by-22-inch double-page spreads viewed at 55.7% of actual size.)

A winning combination of lyric description, accessible explanation, scientific history, feminism, and accomplishment. (author’s note, bibliography, source notes) (Picture book/biography. 7-10)
A timely book to combat stereotypes and encourage the celebration of skin colors of Black and brown people.

BROWN

James, Nancy Johnson
Illus. by Moore, Constance
Cameron + Company (32 pp.)
$15.95 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-944903-98-5

A colorfully whimsical perspective on just how varied skin tones can be in a single Black family.

In this rhyming picture book, the protagonist describes the skin color of the whole family: mama, daddy, brother, sister, auntie, uncle, cousins, and grandparents. Some of these skin tones resemble copper, desert sand, and polished pine, and the narrator likens nearly half of the colors to flavorful foods such as chocolate, cinnamon, and brown sugar. Each double-page spread features two lines of simple verse on flavorful foods such as chocolate, cinnamon, and brown sugar. Flavored on the other side, set against a white background. In most of the portraits, the relative looks straight out at readers, providing a direct visual address that invites readers to see and appreciate brown skin of many hues. “Auntie’s brown is desert sand, / A dark and fragrant blend.” The last page of the story includes an illustrated list of all of the skin colors, and these swatches require exact, frequently ingenious placement of figures on both the same and neighboring pages to make them work. As Mister Invincible explains to one mystified witness, “It’s just the incredible magic of comics, ma’am.” The episodes in this French import, all drawn cartoon-style (with colors by Croix) in rows of squared-off panels, run one to 15 pages each. Mister Invincible presents White; there is a handful of secondary characters of color. Chock full of inventive narrative tweaks. (Graphic adventure. 8-11)

THE BRUSHMAKER’S DAUGHTER

Kacer, Kathy
Second Story Press (120 pp.)
Sep. 22, 2020 | $10.95 paper
978-1-77260-138-1

It is Berlin in 1941, and the Nazis have further escalated their search for Jews to deport to the concentration camps. Lillian Frey and her father, who is blind, run through the night to a promised safe place at Otto Weidt’s factory, which is contracted to supply brushes to the army. His employees are blind Jews. Weidt is not Jewish, but he too is blind and at risk of deportation or murder by the Nazis for this disability. The factory contains a secret room where the workers, who have developed close friendships, can hide in an emergency. Weidt arranges for safe housing, where Lillian and her father are fed and well cared for by their kind landlady. But their safety remains precarious at best, for the Gestapo is always watching. When the workers are brought to the trains for deportation, all seems lost. Weidt uses every possible means to rescue them, threatening to report the Gestapo agents for endangering the army and providing bribes to secure their release. Kacer creates the fictional Freys and has 12-year-old Lil- lian narrate the events in a voice that is true, strong, and wise beyond her years. In a detailed afterword the author presents the biographies, backgrounds, and outcomes of Weidt and several of the real workers. Otto Weidt’s compassion, strength, and bravery have led to his recognition as Righteous Among Nations at Yad Vashem, and with this novel, Kacer brings him to life for children.

The unimaginable is made alive, heart-wrenching, and reachable for modern young readers. (Historical fiction. 10-14)
Cora and her Whatifs have a charming appeal beyond their focus on tackling anxious thoughts, making an enjoyable read-aloud for wide audiences.

**THE WHATIFS**

Kilgore, Emily  
Illus. by Persico, Zoe  
Little Bee (40 pp.)  
$17.99 | Aug. 25, 2020  
978-1-4998-1029-5

Worrier Cora is plagued by the Whatifs until she learns a new way to tackle her anxieties. Cora has a problem reminiscent of Shel Silverstein’s poem “Whatif.” As she goes about her days, the Whatifs clamor for her attention. These embodied worries are presented as needling little monsters that range from silly and annoying to frightening. They become especially distracting in the lead-up to her big piano recital. Despite all her preparation, the Whatifs latch on and won’t let go. Just before her big performance, though, an older girl notices Cora’s distress. Stella encourages turning around the Whatif worries, a tactic drawn straight out of the cognitive behavioral therapy playbook. By reframing and pondering alternative and optimistic Whatifs, Cora is able to tackle her anxiety and succeed. Both Cora and Stella have dark hair and eyes and peachy complexions; Cora’s classmates and community appear fairly diverse. Cora and her Whatifs have a charming appeal beyond their focus on tackling anxious thoughts, making an enjoyable read-aloud for wide audiences. In her author’s note, Kilgore describes her own anxiety disorder. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9-by-18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 51% of actual size.)

A thoroughly welcome addition to growing collections of socio-emotional development materials. (Picture book. 3-8)

**NEWTON AND CURIE**

Kirk, Daniel  
Illus. by the author  
Abrams (40 pp.)  
$17.99 | Aug. 11, 2020  
978-1-4997-5748-0

Furry-tailed but not furry-headed, brother and sister Newton and Curie set out to conquer their world with science. A nearby school for humans provides all the impetus needed to discover what makes everything work. From comprehending the amazing combo of force, mass, and gravity required for playground swings to the secrets of seesaws and pulleys, the intrepid experimenters can’t get enough. They test ideas using trial and error to refine their science projects. The children’s teacher, a woman of

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**DEE THE BEE**

Keaveney, Dolores  
Illus. by the author  
Starfish Bay (32 pp.)  
$15.95 | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-1-76036-096-2

Follow a honeybee on her pollination journey.

A honeybee guides readers across colorful pages as lyrical text introduces various pollination sources. The rhyming text (set in a distracting display type) reads aloud well, but the story’s internal logic suffers, as the beginning suggests the narrator wishes to be a bee and ends with the declaration that the narrator is a honeybee. The text also states that bees are silent, which is untrue. These quibbles aren’t alone. The narrator recites a list of greenery that can be pollinated, from obvious examples like apples and cucumbers to the more obscure, such as turnips and radishes. The implication is that honeybees are responsible for pollinating all of the plants mentioned when, in many cases, different bee species or the wind are some plants’ primary means of pollination. The story also loses some of its buzz a few pages in when readers notice that the illustrations of the bee and other objects seem to be digitally duplicated from page to page. It’s an unfortunate shortcut, as the illustrations are otherwise attractive and accurate. Casual readers may find the book pleasing, although beekeepers and gardeners may find themselves saying, “Yes, but...” repeatedly. A list of pollinator-friendly flowers, some not native to North America, is appended along with an explanation of pollination.

Serviceable at best. (Informational picture book. 4-8)

**YOGA ANIMALS IN THE FOREST**

Kerr, Christiane  
Illus. by Green, Julia  
Kane Miller (32 pp.)  
$12.99 | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-1-68464-087-4

Bear makes her way through the forest, learning yoga poses from friends and inviting readers to practice them too.

When Bear wakes up yawning from a “long, deep sleep,” Rabbit shows her a pose to help her to feel more awake. Bear feels more awake, but she’s still “a little grouchy,” so Bird shows her a pose to make her feel happier. Bear needs a stretch and then a plan, and then to look for some food; later, she needs to stand still, to be grateful, and to calm down. All along the way, from the beginning of her day until night, she encounters friends who model what they do to achieve the states of mind or physical feelings they seek. Each spread shows Bear encountering a friend with a need and copying the friend’s suggestion, and it ends with a panel titled “Can you do it, too?” which shows a human child practicing the pose, with clear, step-by-step instructions. The book works both as a story and as an instructional manual for the mind-body connection sought in yoga. The illustrations are child friendly, but the book will work best when shared by an adult who is already familiar with the poses. A final spread lists the physical and emotional benefits of each pose.

A sweet introduction to yoga and self-care for adults to use with the very young. (Picture book. 3-9)
color, introduces diagrams of simple machines to a diverse group of grade school children. The information is not lost on the spying squirrel siblings, who apply the principles to return a fallen nest of four (miraculously intact) robins’ eggs to their relieved parents’ tree. How do birds defy gravity when flying? Newton and Currie can’t wait to find out! Kirk’s simple STEAM-driven text seamlessly leads readers from one tenet of physics to another as it’s applied to common objects. Kirk’s use of the schoolroom whiteboard to educate the squirrels is a clever visual aid. The anthropomorphic characters’ clothing reflects the casual dress of the students, and the bright palette is a perfect attention-getter for the story’s targeted audience. Repeated images of simple machines cover the endpapers, and the backmatter includes an introduction to some basic laws of physics, a detailed glossary, and links to science websites. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10.5-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.)

A positive and fun-filled challenge to recognize and apply the underlying principles of science in everyday life. (Picture book: K-2)

**GLORK PATROL ON THE BAD PLANET**
Kochalka, James
*Illus. by the author*
Top Shelf Productions (40 pp.)
$9.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-60309-475-7
Series: Glork Patrol, 1

A goofy warrior and his crew learn a lesson about prejudging when they land on a new planet.

The Glorkian Warrior, a bumbling blue-jumpsuited, bubblégum–pink, three-eyed space traveler, crash-lands on a new planet after trying to steer his ship with his tongue. With his companions, Baby Gonk and Super Backpack, the doughty adventurer explores their surroundings. When the Glorkian Warrior spies a rock he believes to be wrongly colored, he deems the entire planet “bad.” Soon, Baby Gonk is separated from the Glorkian Warrior and meets baby Gloo Gloo, who has wandered away from his relieved parents’ tree. How do birds defy gravity when flying? Newton and Currie can’t wait to find out! Kirk’s simple STEAM-driven text seamlessly leads readers from one tenet of physics to another as it’s applied to common objects. Kirk’s use of the schoolroom whiteboard to educate the squirrels is a clever visual aid. The anthropomorphic characters’ clothing reflects the casual dress of the students, and the bright palette is a perfect attention-getter for the story’s targeted audience. Repeated images of simple machines cover the endpapers, and the backmatter includes an introduction to some basic laws of physics, a detailed glossary, and links to science websites. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10.5-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.)

A positive and fun-filled challenge to recognize and apply the underlying principles of science in everyday life. (Picture book: K-2)

**THEY THREW US AWAY**
Kraus, Daniel
*Illus. by Cai, Rovina*
Henry Holt (256 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-250-22440-8
Series: Teddies Saga, 1

The journey to find a child becomes an existential quest for an abandoned teddy bear.

Buddy is not just any stuffed bear, but a blue Furrington Teddy with a Real Silk Heart. So why did he wake up in a landfill with other Furringtons of varying hues? A more pressing matter, however, is escaping Trashland and its murderous gulls and bulldozers. Yearning to connect with a child and achieve a state of peaceful Forever Sleep, Buddy and his new friends of differing temperaments and gifts set out on a harrowing journey through the city to find children who will want them. As they encounter other Furringtons in disarray, this opener in The Teddies Saga series becomes a mystery about why these teddies are being harmed in the first place. While the visceral narrative follows the teddy troupe’s adventurous challenges and survival, its focus is on Buddy’s inner struggles as he ponders identity, leadership, and other existential dilemmas. Kraus doesn’t shy away from anger, fear, death, and other dark subjects; instead they become opportunities for growth in difficult environments. Cai’s intense, slightly nightmarish grayscale illustrations add immeasurably to the text. Reminiscent of Watership Down in theme and structure, the novel’s intermittent teddy creation stories also become parables of a moral code and extend the epic story arc. A cliffhanger ending sets the scene for the next installment.

Reflective children will revel in this thought-provoking world. (Fantasy: 9-12)

**WILDLIFE ON PAPER**
Kundu, Kunal
*Illus. by the author*
West Margin Press (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-51326-435-6

Globally vulnerable animals are presented in this picture book.

While there are plenty of picture books introducing readers to endangered animals, the illustrations in this one make it stand out. Author/illustrator Kundu uses crumpled paper to form the animals and then places them within digital environments and photographs the whole. The results—such as an eastern imperial eagle that soars through amber skies and a bulky polar bear on a floe—are striking. A few are not entirely successful: The snow leopard’s tongue licking its chops makes it look like it’s wearing red wax lips; the orangutan’s arms don’t...
The facts are more generalized informational tidbits rather than a cohesive narrative, although they are uniformly interesting. Eating habits, physical characteristics, and habitat, among others, are presented in a loose fashion—the selection process seeming to be what is unusual or distinctive, which is not a bad way to get young readers interested on a basic level. Backmatter contains more sources (mostly websites). The narrative has a few rough spots (“most unique”; some awkward phrasing) that mar its polish slightly. A final double-page spread showing a map of the world places the animals within their habitats.

Intriguing illustrations are matched with an interesting, generalized narrative. (map, works cited, organizations to support) (Informational picture book: 5-10)

THE WORLD’S POOREST PRESIDENT SPEAKS OUT
Ed. by Kusaba, Yoshimi
Illus. by Nakagawa, Gaku
Trans. by Wong, Andrew
Enchanted Lion Books (40 pp.)
$16.95 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-1-9270-289-3

A picture book imported from Japan and based on a speech given by José Mujica, president of Uruguay, at the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

In June 2012, the United Nations brought governments, international institutions, and major groups together to agree on a range of measures that would bring about sustainable and fair use of resources. When it came time for the president of Uruguay to speak, he presented the problem of sustainability and climate change differently from previous speakers. Mujica posited that the real problem is not climate change but “how we have come to live our lives” in a vicious cycle “where we sell things to make money, which we use to buy whatever we want, and then buy some more.” He challenged listeners to consider whether “we were born…to pursue economic growth and progress [or rather] to live in such a way as to find happiness on this planet.” Mujica’s thought-provoking argument then is just as valid today. The illustrations accompanying the text play with design and perspective, capturing Mujica’s words in ways that give them great immediacy and vividness. This book is a translation from the original 2014 Japanese publication.

An ideal vehicle to engage children in a discussion on the meanings of poverty, having enough, and social justice. (Informational picture book: 5-10)

YOU ARE A BEAUTIFUL BEGINNING
Laden, Nina
Illus. by Garrity-Riley, Kelsey
Roaring Brook (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-250-31183-2

Page after page of gentle affirmations to support self-acceptance and resolve self-doubts.

After drawing an imagined adventure, a slicker-clad elementary-age kid leaves a house nestled in a small community and journeys to a nearby woodland. Soothing sentence pairs follow a predictable pattern: “It is not how far you traveled. / It is the journey that you took.” Along the way, the protagonist, who has brown hair and light beige skin, is joined by two neighbors, a brown-skinned child with glasses and black curly hair tucked under a hat and an extremely pale White kid with blond hair. Throughout the day, they plan, scavenge, build, and finally enjoy a clubhouse under a huge tree. “It is not being a hero. / It is being part of a team. / It is not putting up walls. / It is about building a dream.” All the while, the children are surrounded by trees shown in richly colored realistic images—with just a touch of fantasy—standing out against a white background. Fairies, gnomes in pointed hats, and anthropomorphic rocks, flowers, animals, and insects are never far from the action. (Humanoid figures are diverse.) At the end of the day, the children’s story emphasizes a positive sense of self and optimism for what the journey tomorrow will bring. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 92% of actual size.)

On discouraging days, this book will help readers find their place in the world with greater love for themselves and others. (Picture book: 4-8)

The seventh in the My Happy Life series, translated from Swedish and imported from New Zealand.

The story opens with a mystery: Where is Dani? She hasn’t been to school for seven weeks, and now, no one is home at her house. Her school friends assume she’s in Northbrook with best friend Ella for Easter break. But Ella is at her family’s house on the island and hasn’t seen Dani either. The storyline segues to Ella, who insists she is responsible enough to watch her little sister, Miranda, while their mother takes the little boat to pick up “Ella’s extra father,” Paddy. But Ella gets distracted and Miranda...
Lee’s compositions achieve a pleasing harmony between the emotional clarity of her caricature linework and softer effects in her panoramas.

BYE, PENGUIN!

Lee, Seou
Illus. by the author
Levine Querido (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-64614-021-3

This nearly wordless narrative traces a penguin chick’s solo voyage around the world.

The opening scenes depict a frozen, black, white, and gray world populated by penguins of various sizes and dispositions. The protagonist, not a fuzzy chick but a bit smaller than the adults, stands alone on the other side of the gutter near the water, orange beak grasping a fish. All heads turn toward the sound “Snick!” whereupon firm land becomes an ice floe, and the young one drifts off, crying out in distress. While the current is unstoppable, the unwilling traveler is soon distracted by the green southern lights that suddenly fill the sky. The penguin is eventually greeted by the outstretched arms of the Christ the Redeemer sculpture in Brazil and, a page turn later, the Statue of Liberty in America. The dappled Mediterranean light fills the background as the floe passes a blue-domed church in Greece before mingling with sailboats near the Sydney Opera House. (Locations are not identified, but the impact of miles covered is felt.) Lee’s compositions achieve a pleasing harmony between the emotional clarity of her caricature linework and softer effects in her panoramas. When the hero, bedecked with a lei, glides home on an orange-red surfboard and the page turn reveals a brown-skinned surfer contemplating an ice sliver, the subtle message of global warming is left to readers to discuss or not.

Children will relate to the pangs of separation and rejoice in the sweetness (and humor) of reunion. (Picture book. 3-7)

MAGGIE’S TREASURE

Lappano, Jon-Erik
Illus. by Hatanaka, Kellen
Groundwood (32 pp.)
$18.95 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-77306-237-2

Maggie collects “treasure” until her home is bursting with it, then figures out a creative way to share its joys.

People in her neighborhood think Maggie is picking up trash; her neighbor, the city workers, and even the mayor thank her for service. But when her treasure grows beyond a box to fill a drawer and then the cupboards and even the yard, people in the neighborhood begin to talk. But only when her parents have had enough and Maggie herself sees that it’s too much does she start thinking what she can do about it. She works at her idea for days and finally invites people to come take “free riches.” From her bits and pieces, she has created beautiful things, like jewelry and painted rocks, as well as useful things, like telescopes and music makers. Her neighbors come and take her creations home; they learn the value of “treasure,” and Maggie learns that she doesn’t need it all. Bright colors, lanky, stylized bodies in dramatic gestures, and pages busy with collections of objects combine to form an engaging set of pictures for young readers to pore over. While the premise of the story may give some adults pause, the gentle message, dynamic illustrations, and endearing protagonist make this title a winner. Maggie is brown-skinned like her father; her mother appears to be White. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-16.8-inch double-page spreads viewed at 67.5% of actual size.)

A wise and satisfying read. (Picture book. 4-9)
The rhyme keeps things moving while the illustrations, reminiscent of Oliver Jeffers’ style, enchant.

**WHAT A BEAUTIFUL NAME**

*Ligertwood, Brooke; Ligertwood, Scott; Fielding, Ben & Fielding, Karalee* 
*Illus. by Ligertwood, Scott*  
*WaterBrook (40 pp.)*  
*$19.95 | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-0-593-19270-2*

Oliver and his monkey, Leo, set off on a quest to discover a mysterious, beautiful name in this picture book inspired by the chart-topping worship song of the same name.

When young Oliver hears his mother singing one day, the lyrics of the song “What a Beautiful Name” noodle into his brain. Who or what is this beautiful name? It can only mean one thing: time for an adventure. In their bright yellow rocket ship, Oliver and his trusty sidekick, Leo, jet off over mountains, an ocean, a jungle, a desert, and into outer space and back in search of the mysterious name. Along the way they discover that the name must be not only beautiful, but wonderful and powerful as well. Yet the name they seek is found not in the glory of creation but safe at home in Oliver’s very own Bible. The use of a rocket as their primary mode of transport is a somewhat confusing choice given their largely terrestrial destinations. It is also not entirely clear how Oliver comes to understand the wonder, power, and beauty of the name of Jesus on the basis of his journey. Nevertheless, the rhyme keeps things moving while Scott Ligertwood’s illustrations, reminiscent of Oliver Jeffers’ style, enchant. Oliver presents White, so the choice of an unspeaking monkey sidekick is a regrettable one, given stereotypical associations of monkeys with Black people. Aftermatter prints the lyrics in full and includes a note for parents and scriptural references for those lyrics. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 9.5-by-19-inch double-page spreads viewed at 18.5% of actual size.)*

The book lacks the engaging hook of the popular song, but the illustrations (mostly) charm. *(Picture book: 3-6)*

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**THE FAILURE BOOK**

*How 22 Extraordinary People Persisted To Beat the Odds and How You Can Too* 
*Lilly, Karen & Lilly, Chad*  
*Behrman House Publishing (64 pp.)*  
*$14.95 paper | Oct. 1, 2020  
978-0-87441-977-1*

Fear of failure keeps many from pursuing challenges in life, but these profiles of successful people from a variety of fields may affirm and inspire the reluctant.

The 22 activists, artists, athletes, entrepreneurs, heads of state, and scientists profiled all experienced numerous failures before achieving success. The text is formatted as a game, with readers encouraged to guess from a listing of their failures who the subject is. The following page has a picture of the person, a brief profile of their accomplishments, and a few quotes. Among those profiled are Albert Einstein, who did not learn to...
Williams endured a crowd that “booed and screamed insults” at actual size. (That these were racist insults goes unmentioned). There are no source notes, bibliography, or suggestions for further reading.

Sometimes history is chronicled in years. Sometimes it’s chronicled in minutes.

Almost anyone who has been to Hebrew school and many who haven’t know the basic facts of Anne Frank’s life: Her family hid for two years in a tiny annex. The Nazis found them, in spite of all their secrecy. Anne left a diary that ensured generations of readers would never forget the lives lost in the Holocaust.

This new biography mentions each of those facts, but it focuses on smaller moments: Anne’s learning to walk, and then sashay, in high heels. Anne’s decorating the walls, comically, with pictures of chimpanzees. The book focuses in particular on Miep Gies, the gentle woman who helped them and then found the diary, and some of the details about her childhood are startling. An Austrian refugee, she was taken in during World War I by Dutch strangers who then raised her. (Gies and all of the historical figures depicted have pale skin.) The focus on details is both the book’s value and its chief flaw. It describes the moment-to-moment experience of life in an attic. Some of those moments are deeply moving, but some are mundane, a catalog of pots and pans and dirty clothes. Readers may find the book a bit less heartbreaking than others on Frank because the larger history is so familiar. The main facts have been told many times in many books. Toro’s illustrations, however, make every scene haunting, with dark shadows on the Franks’ faces, as though they’re covered with ash. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 83% of actual size.)

The story’s familiarity takes away only some of its power and its urgency. (historical notes, bibliography, suggested reading) (Picture book/biography. 7-11)

In the wake of Everything Awesome About Dinosaurs and Other Prehistoric Beasts (2019), Lowery spins out likewise frothy arrays of facts and observations about sharks, whales, giant squid, and smaller but no less extreme (or at least extremely interesting) sea life.

He provides plenty of value-added features, from overviews of oceanic zones and environments to jokes, drawing
instructions, and portrait galleries suitable for copying or review. While not one to pass up any opportunity to, for instance, characterize ambergris as “whale vomit perfume” or the clownfish’s protective coating as “snot armor,” he also systematically introduces members of each of the eight orders of sharks, devotes most of a page to the shark’s electroreceptive ampullae of Lorenzini, and even sheds light on the unobvious differences between jellyfish and the Portuguese man-of-war or the reason why the blue octopus is said to have “arms” rather than “tentacles.” He also argues persuasively that sharks have gotten a bad rap (claiming that more people are killed each year by...vending machines) and closes with pleas to be concerned about plastic waste, to get involved in conservation efforts, and (cannily) to get out and explore our planet because (quoting Jacques-Yves Cousteau) “People protect what they love.” Human figures, some with brown skin, pop up occasionally to comment in the saturated color illustrations. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 45% of actual size.)

An immersive dunk into a vast subject—and on course for shorter attention spans. (bibliography, list of organizations) (Nonfiction. 7-10)

**ONCE I WAS A BEAR**

Luxbacher, Irene  
Illus. by the author  
Scholastic (40 pp.)  
$18.99 | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-1-338-35633-5

When is it time to shed one’s fur?

Luxbacher offers a metaphor for the way past experience remains part of oneself. A young brown bear, fuzzy and big-eyed, plays in a sunlit forest, with spring green leaves and bright, slightly abstract flowers in bloom. “Once I lived in a forest of tall trees,” the narrator bear explains. “A bright circle in the sky”—the sun—gave shape to the day. “I was never afraid.” The full-color, edge-to-edge art is dreamy and gently whimsical. As the air grows colder, something happens: The little bear hibernates, dreams, and emerges in “a different kind of wildness.” This new environment has a human adult, a house, tall buildings, a classroom where “a different circle”—a clock—tells when to rest and play. The bear’s classmates look like human children, but wild creatures in the same clothes hover over some of them. On the last page the small bear in a yellow shirt has become a human child with white skin and brown hair, playing with a child with brown skin and hair, and a bear and a deer play together in the background. The transformation is a bit abrupt but nevertheless rings metaphorically true, encouraging the appreciation of one’s own story and recognizing different experiences of loss and change. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9-by-18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 19.8% of actual size.)

**Imaginative and poetically resonant. (Picture book. 3-7)**

**THE HAUNTED LAKE**

*Lynch, P.J.*  
Illus. by the author  
Candlewick (48 pp.)  
$17.99 | Sep. 8, 2020  
978-1-5362-0013-3

Love, loss, and ghosts are featured in this picture book for older readers.

When a dam is built, the ensuing lake floods the village of Spetzia, whose residents have moved to new homes they were given in the big town below the dam. Jacob and his father, Reuben, however, stay. Their cottage, formerly on the hillside, is now on the lakeshore, and Reuben won’t leave Jacob’s mother, who is buried in the flooded village’s cemetery. The lake is considered haunted, but Reuben and Jacob fish it for their living, selling their catch at the market. When Jacob meets young Ellen, they fall in love and make plans to marry. But one fateful evening, Jacob goes fishing and fails to return. As Ellen mourns Jacob, she stays at Reuben’s cottage and helps out, unwilling to leave Jacob behind. Then one day, she sees a face under the frozen lake. This comfortably eerie ghost/undying-love story is unvarnished and competently told, but the illustrations make it sublime. Created with watercolor and gouache—a choice that embraces the story’s watery setting—each illustration, whether single-page, quarter-page, or double-page spread, exhibits a distinctive perspective, an expert palette of warm and cool colors, and skilled draftsmanship to create both ambiance and movement. The book’s large format allows readers to luxuriate in the gorgeous illustrations. All characters are illustrated as White.

Satisfying and visually superb. (Picture book. 8-12)

**BIBBIT JUMPS**

*Lynn, Bei*  
Illus. by the author  
Trans. by Wang, Helen  
Gecko Press (78 pp.)  
$18.99 | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-1-776572-77-9

A young frog who loves to jump embarks on prosaic adventures, undertakes a heroic journey, and celebrates homecoming in this episodic outing.

In this quaintly illustrated chapter book featuring talking animals, Bibbit and friends are exuberant in their outdoor play. They build a frog pyramid, enjoy a picnic, and celebrate Little Rabbit’s birthday. Hopping from scene to scene, the story occurs in somewhat haphazard order. Readers discover Bibbit’s main obstacle (he has forgotten how to swim and wants to learn again); his outstanding talent and passion (jumping, which he practices physically and philosophically); character traits including ingenuity (seen in banana picking) and perseverance (seen in finishing a bad-tasting apple). Bibbit’s younger sister, Little Frog, is his ally, prompting him to adopt new perspectives and to confront his fears, leading him into the city via a river...
Markle’s long experience in writing about science for young readers shows in the careful crafting and pacing of her exposition.

**THE GREAT BEAR RESCUE**

and on to new heights. Though faithful in preserving the original work’s episodic structure along with most of its content, this English translation does not do so with the quirky, humorous chapter titles that uniformly mention “The Day…” As it is, the narrative logic is a little fuzzy, including how space and time operate in this story world: Consider the English “No Jumping” versus the Chinese “The Day With No Jumping at All.” If the thematic thread is somewhat lost in textual translation, the original illustrations capture the story’s spirit.

*Overall, a fun, energetic read.* (Fantasy. 6-9)

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**DON’T TURN OUT THE LIGHTS**

_A Tribute to Alvin Schwartz’s Scary Stories To Tell In The Dark_

_Ed. by Maberry, Jonathan_

_Illus. by Compiet, Iris_

_Harper/HarperCollins (416 pp.)_

*$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020_

*$978-0-06-287767-3_

Inspired by the contributions to the genre by Alvin Schwartz and presented by the Horror Writers Association, this anthology features 35 original spooky tales.

**THE GREAT BEAR RESCUE**

_Saving the Gobi Bears_

_Markle, Sandra_

_Millbrook/Lerner (40 pp.)_

*$9.99 | Sep. 1, 2020_

*$978-0-593-11702-6_

A highly endangered strain of grizzly bears, protected and supported by the Mongolian government in their Gobi Desert home, may slowly be coming back.

Markle clearly and efficiently introduces a bear unfamiliar to most North American readers, its equally unfamiliar environment, and an international effort to save a species. Her long experience in writing about science for young readers shows in the careful crafting and pacing of her exposition. She frames her narrative with an individual bear’s difficult choice: between feared humans and essential water. She provides the necessary background (including three helpful maps), describing the bears, their desert world, and the international team of Mongolian and Western researchers and citizens who have worked to preserve habitat and provide food. Thoughtful design helps readers track the exposition and identify the side topics. Well-chosen and -captioned photographs from a variety of sources show the bears, other native wildlife, researchers, local farmers and children, and even the “ninja miners” (as they’re known in Mongolia) whose illegal search for gold threatens the progress that’s been made to save a species uniquely adapted for this harsh environment. (There may be only 40 Gobi bears remaining.) The writer concludes with a quote from scientist Harry Reynolds (a White American researcher), who describes his work as “continuing to give the bears a chance,” and a single page reminding readers that “Polar Bears Need Help Too.”

_Not a story of salvation but a work in progress, ably explained.* (author’s note, timeline, glossary, source notes, further information, index, photo acknowledgments) (Non-fiction. 8-12)

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**THIRTEENS**

_Marshall, Kate Alice_

_Viking (240 pp.)_

*$17.99 | Aug. 18, 2020_

*$978-0-593-11702-6_

Three preteens uncover the secret, supernatural history of their Oregon town. Following her mom’s disappearance in a fire, Eleanor relocates to too-perfect Eden Eld to live with relatives. She devises a “How To Be Normal” plan to give herself a fresh start: don’t talk about Mom or things that aren’t there, go to school, and smile. But, when Eleanor meets classmates Otto and Pip, she almost immediately starts to stray...
Jeram’s spacious, pale-toned, naturalistic outdoor scenes create a properly idyllic setting for this cozy development in a tender child-caregiver relationship.

WILL YOU BE MY FRIEND?

Two children bravely go on an imaginative search for a tiger together.

While the limited text doesn’t have its rhythmic, rhyming cadence, there are echoes of Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury’s *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt* (1989) in this playful story. Two children, one with brown skin and short, curly brown hair and the other with light-brown skin and straight, black hair, are in a treehouse when one asks the other, “Did you know there’s a tiger out there?” Then they go in search of it in the yard, reassuring each other along the way. The dialogue-only text is presented with no speech bubbles or tags, sometimes italicized and sometimes not, so it’s sometimes difficult to discern who is speaking. Nor is the relationship between the children ever defined. They could be friends, cousins, or siblings in a mixed-race family. Such details ultimately aren’t important, because what’s clear is that these two kids are as devoted to each other as they are to their imaginative play. The closing text reads: “...we’re together. And nothing scares us. / Never ever! Cross our hearts.” It’s set beside a picture of the two children back in their treehouse, their arms around each other and a toy stuffed tiger on their laps. The illustrations look like collage, with a happy hodgepodge effect that further grounds the story in child’s play. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9.5- by-19-inch double-page spreads viewed at 56% of actual size.)

There’s a storyline in there. (Picture book. 3-6)
wondering whether he'll ever see Tipps again. As it turns out, it
doesn't take long to find out, since she has followed him. “Now,
where on earth did she come from?” wonders Big Nutbrown.
“Her name is Tipps,” Little Nutbrown proudly replies, “and she’s
my friend.” Jeram’s spacious, pale-toned, naturalistic outdoor
scenes create a properly idyllic setting for this cozy develop-
ment in a tender child-caregiver relationship—which hasn’t lost
a bit of its appealing intimacy in the more than 25 years since its
first appearance. As in the first, Big Nutbrown Hare is ungen-
dered, facilitating pleasingly flexible readings.

Readers are likely to love it to the moon and back. (Picture
book: 3-7)

WHILE WE CAN’T HUG
McLaughlin, Eoin
Illus. by Dunbar, Polly
Faber & Faber (32 pp.)
$15.95 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-0-5713-6558-6
Series: Hedgehog and Tortoise Story

The two creatures who fulfilled each
other’s yearning for physical contact in The Hug (2019) find
alternative ways to connect in a time of social distancing.
Blushing and smiling and looking every bit as sweet as they
did in their original meet-cute, Hedgehog and Tortoise respond
to Owl’s reassurance that “there are lots of ways to show some-
one you love them” by standing on opposing pages and sending
signals, letters, dances, air kisses, and songs across the gutter.
Demonstrating their mutual love and friendship, they regard
each other fondly across the gap through sun and storm, finally
gesturing air hugs beneath a rainbow of colors and stars. “They
could not touch. // They could not hug. // But they both knew
/ that they were loved.” In line with the minimalist narrative
and illustrations there is no mention of the enforced separa-
tion’s cause nor, aside from the titular conjunction, any hint of
its possible duration. Still, its core affirmation is delivered in a
simple, direct, unmistakable way, and if the thematic connec-
tion with the previous outing seems made to order for a market-
ing opportunity, it does address a widespread emotional need
in young (and maybe not so young) audiences. (This book was
reviewed digitally with 9.8-by-19.6-inch double-page spreads viewed
at 78% of actual size.)

Precious—but timely and comforting all the same. (Pic-
ture book: 3-7)

GIVE IT!
McLeod, Cinders
Illus. by the author
Nancy Paulsen Books (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-984812-43-8
Series: Moneybunny

Another young resident of Bunnyland learns a lesson about money.
Chummy’s grandmother gives him 10 carrots for his birthday (carrots, of course, being currency in
Bunnyland) along with a piece of advice: “Spend some on your-
self, dear, and some on helping others.” Chummy has the perfect
plan. He will buy a superhero costume and “save the world!” In
bright blue overalls, using a twig for a sword, Chummy is ready
to slay dragons, soaring through the air in his imagination. Gran
wonders if maybe he should reconsider. After all, there aren’t
many dragons in Bunnyland. How else could he help? Gran, tee-
ering on a ladder while picking apples on the farm, suggests
helping the bumblebees. Chummy mulls over his options, laid
out graphically by McLeod: If he spends all 10 carrots on the
costume, he will have no carrots left to help the bees. But if he
buys only the cape, he will still have 5 carrots left to purchase
some flowers. Or, if he doesn’t buy anything at all for himself, he
would have 10 whole carrots for the bees. It is a tough decision.
Young financial analysts will certainly have an opinion while
reading and weighing the choices, making this a solid jumping-
off point for discussions about charitable giving. (This book was
reviewed digitally with 10.5-by-16-inch double-page spreads viewed
at 51.3% of actual size.)

A sweet tale about the path to generosity. (Picture book: 3-7)

LOLA BENKO, TREASURE HUNTER
McMullen, Beth
Aladdin (304 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-1-5344-5669-3
Series: Lola Benko, Treasure Hunter, 1

Lola, with the help of two friends
and their clever STEM projects, sets out
to rescue her father and uncover secre-
tive operations.

When agents visit Lola in San Francisco with news that
her father, a famous archaeologist, has died overseas while on
the hunt for the magic Stone of Istenanya, Lola doesn’t believe
them. She would sense if he were gone, and besides, the stone
is straight from a fairy tale. Lola launches her own search, but
her questionable attempts only lead to an impressive rap sheet.
Tech giant Mr. Tewksbury, her most recent target, offers her
a choice: juvenile detention or local private school Redwood
Academy. Lola chooses Redwood, where she hooks up with
new friends Jin Wu-Rossi and Hannah Hill. Three heads are
better than one, and these whiz kids make STEM cool as they

LOCATIONS
outmaneuver the mysterious Shadow for the stone—which turns out to actually exist—and try to free Lola’s dad. Lola narrates with spunk and dry humor, and the trio’s capers take them through notable San Francisco landmarks as they try to discover the identity of the Shadow and uncover Lola’s father’s secret mission. Most characters are White by default; Jin is cued as biracial (Chinese/Italian).

**An accessible, colorful romp that ends with an alluring hint of another treasure hunt to come.** *(Fiction. 11-14)*

**THE FUZZY APOCALYPSE**
Messinger, Jonathan
Illus. by Bitskoff, Aleksia
Harper/HarperCollins (128 pp.)
978-0-06-293214-3 paper
Series: The Alien Adventures of Finn Caspian, 1

When a planet that hosts a nonhuman civilization is doomed, can explorer Finn Caspian save the day? Finn Caspian, the first child born in space and the Chief Detective for Explorers’ Troop 301, lives aboard the Famous Marlowe 280 Interplanetary Exploratory Space Station. This first offering in a proposed series drops readers right into the action as Finn and his friends and troopmates Abigail Obaro, Elias Carreras, Vale Gil, and Foggy the robot are tasked with preventing the imminent explosion of a planet inhabited by nonhuman individuals with four eyes apiece, no mouths, and translucent heads. The kids are soon split between two factions on the doomed planet and unsure whom to believe. Will the group manage to resolve their rift and work together again? Inspired by the podcast of the same name, this heavily illustrated, fast-paced, and plot-driven tale is high on action but slim in character development, perhaps gone missing in translation from one medium to another. Finn, who presents White, is the oldest member of the group but not its leader; dark-skinned, decisive Abigail is. Even though she’s the captain, Abigail doesn’t receive much attention from the author, leaving her a one-dimensional vehicle who constantly propels Finn. Elias and Vale also appear to be kids of color. **Sequel The Accidental Volcano publishes simultaneously.**

**A clever concept that falls flat.** *(Science fiction. 7-10) (The Accidental Volcano: 978-0-06-293218-1, 978-0-06-293217-4 paper)*

**BEATRIX POTTER, SCIENTIST**
Metcalf, Lindsay H.
Illus. by Wu, Junyi
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-88448-780-7
Series: She Made History

The scientific passions of a beloved children’s-book creator.

Beatrix Potter is revered for her classic children’s tales, but many will be unaware of her love of science. Soft, smudged pictures in Potter’s palette accompany informative prose infused with a childlike wonder at the natural world, and together they depict young Beatrix’s fascination with the landscape of Scotland, various animals, and, later, the study of mushrooms. Unsupported by her family, largely self-educated, and armed with microscope, paper, and pencil, Potter works with Scottish naturalist Charles McIntosh for years, exchanging samples and artwork until she is among the first to sprout spores in Britain. Initially rejected due to sexism, Beatrix struggles to make her findings known through a male colleague, is told that more work is required, and then mysteriously ceases her work. “What makes her stop? Does she suspect she will never be taken seriously as a scientist? Does she begin to doubt herself? Like pages ripped from a book, history holds those secrets,” the text wonders. While Peter Rabbit and company might never have come into being had Potter not switched her focus, readers and listeners will see how the ambitions of a budding woman scientist were effectively quashed, perhaps leading them to object to the unfairness of her treatment and to wonder what other discoverers go unmentioned due to inequality. All characters are White.

**An unusual combination of women’s history and science that shows not all questions can be answered.** *(Biographical note, timeline, acknowledgments, bibliography, source notes, further reading) (Picture book/biography. 6-10)*

**I AM DARN TOUGH**
Morelli, Licia
Illus. by Diaz, Maine
Tilbury House (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-8448-780-7

A runner’s high is an exhilarating mix of relief and tenacity.

Running is largely a solitary and quiet activity, combining muscle memory and mental strength. A race puts this book’s protagonist, who has light-brown skin and straight, black hair in a ponytail, together with other runners; all present female. She lines up at the start, runs at her own pace, and finishes strong. Her friends and teammates, a merry band of casually diverse girls, are supportive, yet the text understands that the girl’s race is hers alone. What Morelli and Diaz do remarkably well is show what the girl thinks about and sees with each step and how that fuels her to keep going and not give up. **Diaz’s**
A young boy imagines being sequestered with Noah and all the animals on the ark.

When the story begins, the protagonist is distracting his stuffed animal friends with a story as they shelter in a blanket tent during a “big rainstorm.” In the story, Noah (his family is absent in text and illustrations) welcomes the boy onto the ark. Some of the narrator’s tasks on the ark are predictable, like bathing the animals, sweeping, and mopping, but others, such as building a diving platform on the ark so bored animals can play in the sea, are unexpected and entertaining, if not in keeping with the usual Bible story. The boy imagines learning “how to speak / Every animal’s language / So we’d understand one another. / At times we would argue. / But mostly we’d play. / I’d be like an animal brother.” That’s a good thing, since Noah and the protagonist need the animals to help fix a leak in the ark, and later, to “hand out the tissues and tea” to a boatload of sick animals. Brightly colored animals with cuddly stuffed-animal appeal fill the pages. Even the snake and toothy alligator seem friendly. Finally, a speck of land is sighted and confirmed, but the animals love the boy so much that he must encourage them to leave the ark and build new homes. Both boy and Noah have pale skin. An author’s note explains the mitzvah of treating animals and one another kindly.

A playful peek into Noah’s Ark that will spark a compare-and-contrast conversation about the traditional Bible story.

(Picture book. 3-6)
A revolutionary representation of joy and self-expression.

**MY RAINBOW**

has brought peace. While the author may not be a household name, her parents (Jennifer Lopez and Marc Anthony) are, yet despite her famous family the book is endearingly down to earth. Figueroa’s cartoons depict E in a comfortable but fairly unremarkable suburban setting; readers will enjoy seeing E’s sloth-themed décor as well as dog Lady and bunnies Nibble and Skittles. The everyday activities that inspire E’s prayers are sure to resonate with many readers, as will the encouraging message to trust God with the small stuff. The full text of the traditional bedtime prayer “Now I lay me down to sleep” appears at the end. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 30.5% of actual size.)

An accessible and even fun book of useful prayers for the modern kid. (Picture book. 4-7)

**SADIQ WANTS TO STITCH**

*Nainy, Mamta*  
*Illus. by Wadia, Niloufer*  
*Karadi Tales (40 pp.)*  
$13.95 | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-81-933889-1-4

In this book that looks at gender stereotyping from a male perspective, young Sadiq loves to stitch, like his mother.

Unfortunately, in his community, only women and girls embroider beautiful patterns on rugs, while men and boys tend to their sheep and goats. How can Sadiq convince Ammi of his passion for stitching? Sadiq is a nomadic Bakarwal goatherd in the mountainous region of Kashmir in India. This picture book gives an authentic peek into the lush meadows and high mountains where his tribe travels to find the best grass for their herds, sipping their noon-cha (tea with milk, salt, and baking powder) to keep warm. It also highlights gender stereotypes in his community, which allow only women to work on the unique free-form embroidery that Sadiq loves—so he stitches in secret. When Ammi falls ill and is unable to complete a commission, Sadiq surprises her with a rug he embroidered, causing her to reverse her position abruptly to support his needlework ambitions. Colorful watercolor illustrations show expansive landscapes, vibrant embroidered rugs, and the dark-haired, dark-eyed, fair-skinned Muslim Bakarwal people wearing traditional clothes and headgear. The author’s note at the end of the book gives a few more details about this small shepherding community. There is no glossary or pronunciation guide for young readers unfamiliar with the culture.

Defying gender stereotypes, this book touches upon important topics. (Picture book. 4-8)

**THE SUITCASE**

*Naylor-Ballesteros, Chris*  
*Illus. by the author*  
*HMH Books (32 pp.)*  
$17.99 | Sep. 29, 2020  
978-0-358-32960-2

When a sad and tired-looking stranger arrives hauling a big suitcase, the animals that greet him are curious. What will they make of him and the contents of his suitcase?

Right from the start readers know the creature doesn’t belong in the same surroundings as the three familiar-looking earthy-toned animals that greet him: a fox, a bunny, and a bird. The stranger has an unidentifiable shape, and his skin is a pretty shade of teal. He tells them the suitcase contains a teacup, a wooden chair and table, “and there’s a little kitchen in a wooden cabin where I make my tea. That’s my home.” Naturally, the animals don’t believe that’s possible. When the tired stranger curls up to rest, they look inside the suitcase. What they find is indeed what the stranger claimed—but not quite. In a two-page spread that will break readers’ hearts the contents are revealed: a broken teacup and an old photo of the stranger’s home, exactly as he’s described it. The suitcase makes a poignant metaphor for the stranger’s memories of a home left behind. The tension builds as the animals make sense of their discovery and the stranger dreams of the hardship and loss he has endured before finally waking up, all depicted in beautiful, gestural lines and delicate application of color. In a show of empathy and understanding, the animals glue his teacup back together and re-create his old home. The stranger, no longer a stranger, has found friends and a new home.

A heartwarming lesson in empathy and kindness. (Picture book. 4-7)

**MY RAINBOW**

*Neal, Trinity & Neal, DeShanna*  
*Illus. by Twink, Art*  
*Kokila (32 pp.)*  
$17.99 | Oct. 20, 2020  
978-1-984814-60-9

A loving mother helps her daughter express herself and feel like a rainbow.

Trinity, an autistic, Black, transgender girl, wishes she had long hair. But growing it out is a struggle because she hates hair touching her neck. Seeing her daughter’s sadness, Trinity’s mom, a Black cisgender woman with natural hair cropped close, listens to Trinity’s concerns. At first, she tries to reassure Trinity that girls can wear their hair short, but Trinity still doesn’t feel happy. Honoring the truth that Trinity knows herself best, Trinity’s mom puts her love and devotion into creating a curly, teal, pink, and purple wig for Trinity, with some help from Trinity’s older sibling. Richly colored and invitingly detailed full-spread illustrations that complement the story’s title and theme accompany the text. The narrative centers
a Black family whose members are depicted in the illustrations with skin that is a range of rich browns. In the midst of Trinity’s struggle with her gender expression, her mom models listening and affirmation. She acknowledges that her own experiences with societal expectations of gender expression as a cisgender woman are different from Trinity’s. Even as the story shifts to show Trinity’s cisgender mother’s perspective, Trinity’s feelings remain the focus and her happiness the motivation. Apart from the use of person-first language (“kids with autism”) instead of identity-first language, Neal and Neal emphasize that all aspects of Trinity’s identity deserve celebration and make her a masterpiece. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10.8-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 60.9% of actual size.)

A revolutionary representation of joy and self-expression. (Picture book. 4-7)

SHE RIDES LIKE THE WIND
The Story of Alfonsina Strada
Negrescolor, Joan
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Soutar, Jethro
Little Gestalten (48 pp.)
$19.95 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-3-89955-853-1

Dedicated in part to “every woman who refuses to yield,” this Portuguese import (via Germany) depicts the childhood and rise to fame of pioneering cyclist Alfonsina Strada.

Front endpapers introduce the town in which Alfonsina lives in what appears to be the late-19th or early-20th century (no dates are provided, but wagons make an appearance), with peasants and a general with an “imperial mustache.” Cycling posters are in Italian, placing the story in Europe. Alfonsina’s father trades a basket of chickens for a large bike. It’s too big for her daughter, and children in town taunt her (one even mooning her) and call her “tomboy” for riding it. She dons men’s clothing and eventually masters the bike, winning her first race at 13.

“Faster than the wind” and in appropriate riding gear as an adult, she races in cities across Europe, earning the name “the Pedal Queen.” The posterlike illustrations have an almost constructivist aspect, primarily depicted in the book’s copper shade, are often depicted with no facial features, the focus being on the small girl on the oversized bike, learning to master it but often wreaking havoc in crowds. The absence of any backmatter leaves readers wondering precisely how Strada was so groundbreaking and eventually masters the bike, winning her first race at 13. The absence of any backmatter leaves readers wondering precisely how Strada was so groundbreaking and will have curious children seeking additional information about the Italian cyclist elsewhere.

An incomplete introduction to a trailblazing athlete. (Informational picture book. 5-10)

OUR LITTLE INVENTOR
Ng, Sher Rill
Illus. by the author
A & U Children/Trafalgar (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 1, 2020
978-1-76052-356-5

A young girl is determined to help the people in a land plagued by pollution.

Lush, atmospheric paintings show Nell, a little inventor from the Cheng family, loading up her plant-powered breathing machine to bring to the city. Wearing her simple Chinese-style peasant’s clothing and a breathing mask, Nell finds herself in a oppressively polluted Dickensian city complete with dandies in top hats, women wearing high-necked gowns, and street urchins. Inside an imposing building shrouded in gray, she presents her invention to the “people in charge,” a group of White men in suits huddled in a dark, wood-paneled hall. They are not interested in her machine. Nell returns home, dejected but determined, having received encouragement from Mrs. Li, who works in the men’s building. Nell builds a bigger, better machine and heads back to the city. Unfortunately, Ng’s serviceable text is unequal to the masterful and evocative artwork, which uses both large spreads and small panels to convey the breadth of the setting and the details of the story. Every page is saturated with visual subtext, such as class and cultural differences and the patriarchal structure. There is so much this parable could have conveyed with some follow-through, but the book abruptly ends in the middle of the climax, leaving readers quizzically looking for more pages and scratching their heads in disappointment. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11.5-by-18.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 43.0% of actual size.)

Despite masterful visual storytelling, this environmental and societal parable ultimately falls short. (Picture book. 4-8)

HATCH
Oppel, Kenneth
Knopf (416 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-984894-76-2
Series: The Overthrow, 2

In this sequel to Bloom (2020), half-alien/half-human teenagers Anaya, Petra, and Seth continue to fight an alien invasion while grappling with their own rapidly changing bodies.

After helping discover an herbicide that delayed the aliens’ initial attempt at colonization—seeding the Earth with deadly plant life—the three friends shelter on Deadman’s Island with Anaya’s and Petra’s parents and Dr. Weber, a scientist who becomes their ally and offers to be parentless Seth’s foster mother. The teens feel safe until Col. Pearson, the head of operations on the island, discovers their secret: that Seth has feathers, Anaya has claws, and Petra has a tail, all as a result of
A WHALE OF THE WILD
Parry, Rosanne
Illus. by Moore, Lindsay
Greenwillow Books (240 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-06-299592-6

After a tsunami devastates their habitat in the Salish Sea, a young orca and her brother embark on a remarkable adventure.

Vega’s matriarchal family expects her to become a hunter and wayfinder, with her younger brother, Deneb, protecting and supporting her. Invited to guide her family to their Gathering Place to hunt salmon, Vega’s under-water miscalculations endanger them all, and an embarrassed Vega questions whether she should be a wayfinder. When the baby sister she hoped would become her life companion is still-born, a distraught Vega carries the baby away to a special resting place, shocking her grieving family. Dispatched to find his missing sister, Deneb locates Vega in the midst of a terrible tsunami.

To escape the waters polluted by shattered boats, Vega leads Deneb into unfamiliar open sea. Alone and hungry, the young siblings encounter a spectacular giant whale and travel briefly with shark-hunting orcas. Trusting her instincts and gaining emotional strength from contemplating the vastness of the sky, Vega knows she must lead her brother home and help save her surviving family. In alternating first-person voices, Vega and Deneb tell their harrowing story, engaging young readers while educating them about the marine ecosystem. Realistic black-and-white illustrations enhance the maritime setting.

A dramatic, educational, authentic whale of a tale. (Animal fiction. 8-10)

LILLYBELLE
A Damsel NOT in Distress
Pastro, Joana
Illus. by Ortiz, Jhon
Boyds Mills (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-63592-296-7

A damsel-in-training saves her own skin.

LillyBelle adores tea parties, but she is not the standard student at Lady Frilly’s School for Damsels. She enjoys playing loud music and baking absurdly tall cakes. LillyBelle also refuses to accept Lady Frilly’s lesson that damsels are meant to be kidnapped and saved, never to properly fend for themselves. One day, while out playing hopscotch, LillyBelle is abducted by a witch, but LillyBelle isn’t afraid. Instead of waiting for a prince or a knight or a wizard to save her, LillyBelle takes matters into her own hands to decide her own fate. But for LillyBelle, escaping the witch is just the beginning of a long journey back home that finds her using her baking skills, fondness for loud music, and even Lady Frilly’s deportment lessons to return home unharmed. Pastro effectively uses both the traditional rule of three and oft-seen fairy-tale characters to subvert a particularly pernicious fairy-tale trope. The picture book’s lessons of self-empowerment, the importance of dialogue, and the value of understanding are efficiently rendered, aided by rounded, earth-toned illustrations that create a grounded fairy-tale world little readers will enjoy. LillyBelle has beige skin and fluffy black hair; her classmates are somewhat diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 13% of actual size.)

An empowering fairy tale. (Picture book. 4-7)

THE MOOSIC MAKERS
Pindar, Heather
Illus. by Batori, Susan
Maverick Publishing (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-84886-649-2

Animal musicians learn to play together.

Farmer Joni loves to sit on the porch of her farmhouse, listening to the cows make music in the barn. Celery’s voice is “round and mellow like an old apple barrel.” Nutmeg provides accompaniment on the mandolin. Most of the other animals enjoy it, but donkey Billy and sheep Esme grouse a bit about being excluded from the music-making. When a storm destroys the roof of the barn, the animals decide to help fund the repairs. Nutmeg and Celery busk and busk, with Esme and Billy assisting with collection. Who should arrive but slick promoter George Smarm, in a striped purple suit? He promises fame and fortune if they just change from “MOO-grass” to “DisCOW” music. The DisCOW duo is a big hit, arriving by “liMOOsine” to play “megadromes.” But they never see a paycheck and, feeling homesick, hitchhike back to the farm. Joni still lacks the money to fix the roof, so Nutmeg and Celery propose a fundraiser, which Billy insists on

the alien DNA they hadn’t known they were carrying until the Earth became covered in intergalactic flora. Pearson sends the teens to a military base housing 23 other young people with alien DNA. The three are relieved to meet others like them—until they realize that the scientist running the facility has nefarious plans to study them. As the teens’ bodies transform, so do their loyalties: Should they help earthlings, who are mistreating them, or the aliens who gave them their special powers? The book’s character arcs are nuanced and believable and the prose, gorgeously rendered. Oppel’s chillingly beautiful, detailed world is the perfect backdrop to the action-packed plot. Unfortunately, the human characters largely lack any kind of diversity.

Riveting. (Science fiction. 10-14)
Thoroughly satisfying, with a cliffhanger ending that’s sure to hook readers.

LIGHTFALL

The Girl & The Galdurian

Probert, Tim
Illus. by the author
HarperAlley (256 pp.)
$22.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-06-299047-1

A chance meeting between Bea, a fiercely loyal human girl, and Cadwal-lader, a lost Galdurian, ignites a friendship that could change them—and their world—forever.

This lively graphic novel introduces readers to Irpa, a world in which humans live and work alongside anthropomorphic animals, the sun no longer exists, and an ancient, forgotten terror is stirring. When the sun was extinguished 500 years earlier, the Galdurians invented and built floating Lights to ward off the overwhelming darkness, and now, though the Galdurians are believed to be extinct, the Lights shine on. Beatrice lives in the forest with her porcine adoptive grandfather, Alfirid, better known as the Pig Wizard. Their predictable life of studying, foraging, and potion-making is upended when forgetful Alfirid takes off to fulfill a risky commitment, leaving a worried Bea to bring him home. She is not the only one seeking the Pig Wizard: Cad, who resembles a bipedal, gray-skinned axolotl, believes Alfirid can translate information written in Galdurian that may help him find other Galdurian survivors. The immersive, full-color illustrations employ a range of perspectives and angles to reflect Bea’s awe and delight as she travels beyond her home as well as her recurring anxiety, which is thoughtfully and effectively depicted as dark ribbons twining around her body. Bea is White; other human characters have varying skin tones.

Thoroughly satisfying, with a cliffhanger ending that’s sure to hook readers. (Graphic fantasy. 8-12)
the world.” Still, the book is full of fascinating tidbits about animals that most children do not know. Some explanatory paragraphs emphasize size; others concentrate on eating, breeding habits, or other behaviors. All mention habitat. There are no maps. There is a useful chart that classifies the animals by type: mammals, vertebrates, birds, invertebrates, amphibians, and fish. Despite the busy layout and small type, kids who have any interest in animals will dip into this book again and again. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11.8-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 29% of actual size.)

With enticing chapter headings, attractive pictures, and unusual animals, this volume will keep readers browsing. (glossary) (Nonfiction. 7-10)

**THE BLUE TABLE**
Raschka, Chris
Illus. by the author
Greenwillow Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-0-06-293776-6

A blue table symbolizes and facilitates the connections among family members and between friends.

Raschka creates his narrative in two straightforward sentences. His paintings reflect the action and objects described while adding nuance and detail. The story, like most days, begins with breakfast. Food, drinks, and other objects stand in for the characters. “A child” is represented by a glass of milk. Two parents drink from a teacup and a mug; a plate of pastries and a fish. Despite the busy layout and small type, kids who have any interest in animals will dip into this book again and again. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11.8-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 29% of actual size.)

A charming and cozy celebration of the places and routines that anchor and connect us. (Picture book. 3-6)

**ESCAPING ORDINARY**
Reintgen, Scott
Crown (376 pp.)
978-0-525-64673-0 PLB
Series: Talespinners, 2

In this fast-paced sequel to Saving Fable (2019), protagonist Indira Story and her friends must save their world from a powerful force before it destroys them.

Following the completion of her first story, Indira is looking forward to a vacation. At Protagonist Prep, however, Brainstorm Underglass has other plans: She sends Indira on a quest tutorial titled “Hero’s Journey” to teach her the art of complementary teamwork. Her assigned teammates include: Allen Squalls, a boy who was so traumatized by the ousted Brainstorm that he needs to recover his confidence; Indira’s best friend, Phoenix, who might be a potential romantic interest in her next story; and Gadget, a talented girl who needs to learn to focus on the story rather than on the technology in front of her. Although Indira and her companions begin their quest in the town of Ordinary, they are interrupted by an unexpected, all-powerful entity who threatens to destroy their world, and it is up to the team to save their world...again. In many ways, this outing is far more compelling than its predecessor. While both novels revel in witty literary humor, Indira’s second adventure has an evenly paced plot and characters that are better developed and more accessible. Brown-skinned Indira’s name suggests that she is Indian, but her cultural identity is not plumbed; her teammates seem to default to White.

A delightful read. (Fantasy. 8-12)

**ON ACCOUNT OF THE GUM**
Rex, Adam
Illus. by the author
Chronicle (56 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-4521-8154-7

A series of silly and mostly unsuccessful solutions for removing a blob of bubble gum.

Conversational rhyme, cascading action, and dramatic page turns create a story of early-morning, get-ready-for-school chaos. Gum-wrapper endpaper illustrations collaged under a bubble gum–pink wash set the tone for escalating silliness that begins before the title page with illustrations of a kid falling asleep after blowing a bubble and ends a page turn after the last words. A narrator, never seen but ever helpful (“Okay: / We went on some websites. / And all of them swear...”) and increasingly harried (“All right, let’s get serious — / this is the plan: / We blow the gum out with a powerful fan. / Plus every few seconds we’ll pop a balloon”), will try anything to get the gum out: grass, a cat,
noodles and bacon, a vacuum cleaner, a steaming pot of chili, and more. Full-page headshot illustrations capture the child's reactions, including priceless eye rolls, fearful bug-eyes, and glassy-eyed resignation, until an unexpected solution stops the chaos in its tracks. The kid presents White, as do many depicted family members, but one, an older sibling perhaps, has brown skin. The punchline—that it’s school-picture day—arrives just in time to generate a fresh gale of giggles as the protagonist sits sans gum but with everything else still entangled in that hair.

A gloriously giggly tale glued together by a glob of very gooey gum. (Picture book. 4-8)

**FART QUEST**

Reynolds, Aaron  
Illus. by Kendall, Cam  
Roaring Brook (288 pp.)  
$13.99 | Sep. 15, 2020  
978-1-250-20636-7  
Series: Fart Quest, 1

Three children set out on a quest to prove they can be heroes. Bartok, a 12-year-old Black boy, was nicknamed Fart by the master he apprentices under after choosing Gas Attack as his first spell to learn. He wants to be an exalted mage instead of an average human. Fart and his group—Pan Silversnow, Moxie Battleborne, and their respective masters—are only three months into a yearlong journey. They must prove they can survive the wilderness of the Fourteen Realms while helping others and defeating evildoers in order to graduate from Krakentop Academy for Heroes. When the masters are obliterated before their very eyes, Fart insists that they should use the opportunity to demonstrate their bravery. After taking their masters’ belongings, the trio defeat a hagoboblin then set off in search of heroic escapades. Chaos ensues as the group comes up against giant bees, ogres, and other mythical creatures. Though the story is told from Fart’s perspective, Moxie and Pan are just as important as the three learn to work as a team and recognize each other’s strengths. The humorous writing, wacky names, lively, cartoonlike illustrations, and simple text will especially appeal to reluctant readers. Pan is an elf who is cued as Asian; Moxie is a dwarf who appears White.

A good questing novel for readers seeking a simple, light-hearted adventure. (Fantasy. 8-11)

**OUR ANIMAL NEIGHBORS**

Compassion for Every Furry, Slimy, Prickly Creature on Earth  
Ricard, Matthieu & Graubl, Jason  
Illus. by Hall, Becca  
Bala Kids/Shambhala (32 pp.)  
$17.95 | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-1-61180-723-3

A picture book about compassion for the animals that share the planet.

The story starts with a double-page spread showing a diversity of humans all jumbled together facing readers, relaying the idea that humans come in different shapes, sizes, and colors (and dispositions and beliefs) yet are all neighbors, planetary speaking. The page turn then extends this idea to the diversity of animals and, not unpredictably, shows a double-page spread of a jumble of different animals facing readers. In the same back-and-forth vein, the story continues by pointing out that humans use “intelligence” to survive while animals have different, other skills to help them—an off-key anthropocentric viewpoint that assumes animals aren’t intelligent. This off-key note continues with a confusing illustration that attempts to highlight animals’ and humans’ “wildly different likes and needs,” wherein humans are shown using aids to accomplish what animals do naturally. But, in a pivot, it seems we don’t have such “wildly different likes and needs” after all, since the story concludes, “you have more in common with your neighbors than you think,” and lists those common needs: “food and water…clean air and shelter…family and friendship,” among others. The book’s intention is good-hearted, but the execution is messy, and that extends to many of the illustrations, which are flat in their colors and unnuanced in their line and interpretation. The backmatter unsubtly advocates for vegetarianism.

Simplistic and heavy-handed. (resources) (Informational picture book. 5-8)

**THE DARE SISTERS**

Rinker, Jess  
Imprint (224 pp.)  
$16.99 | Sep. 8, 2020  
978-1-250-21338-9

The hunt for a legendary treasure begins.

Savannah Dare, age 11, always loved listening to her Grandpa tell stories about the history of their small community on Ocracoke Island. Located off the North Carolina coast, it was the past haunt of several pirates, most notably the infamous Blackbeard. Grandpa’s recent death has definitely left a hole in her and her family’s lives. Sav cherishes all the artifacts around their house from Grandpa’s treasure-hunting days. However, lingering expenses mean the family will likely have to sell everything, including the house,
something Sav staunchly refuses to accept. Besides, she’s got a plan: Their grandpa left Sav and her two sisters, 13-year-old Frankie and 6-year-old Jolene, a treasure map and other clues to find what might be Blackbeard’s long-lost treasure hoard. In true adventure/detective form, the sisters work to break codes, try to contact Blackbeard’s spirit, and consult Grandpa’s notebooks, all while avoiding a shady man who keeps popping up around town. The story incorporates real-world pirate history, and, with its 1996 setting, the girls’ research is done without the assistance of the internet. As the main protagonist, Sav struggles with paying attention at school, doesn’t have much of a filter to temper her passionate feelings, and her grief makes it all even harder. This treasure-hunt chronicle will pique the curiosity of young explorers. All characters are White by default.

Ahoy, me hearties! (pirate glossary, author’s note) (Fiction. 8-13)

CONSTRUCTION SITE MISSION: DEMOLITION!
Rinker, Sherri Duskey
Illus. by Ford, A. G.
Chronicle (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-4521-8257-5

Why should the act of construction get all the fun? Time to break it all down.

The beloved characters from Goodnight, Goodnight, Construction Site, illustrated by Tom Lichtenheld (2011), return for yet another outing, this time delving deep into the process of destruction. An old building needs to come down, and the trucks are more than eager to oblige. Everyone plays a part: the crane wielding the wrecking ball, the excavator bashing in walls, the little skid steer breaking rocks apart. Unlike many other books about demolitions, this one takes time after every destructive sequence to note that as materials are wrenched asunder, they’re also sorted for recycling purposes. After a hard day’s work, it’s only natural that it end with the vehicles bedding down after, “Another good day. Now, goodnight.” Expect established fans to thoroughly enjoy both the familiar faces (like the excavator, crane, and dump truck) as well as newer types (like the front-end loader); readers new to the series will likely want to seek out earlier volumes. Ideal as a read-aloud, the rhyming text offers plenty of chances for adult readers to accentuate the onomatopoeia—“KA-BOOM!”; “SMASH!”; “Honk! Honk! Roar!”; and more—for their enthralled tykes. As with previous books in the series, there are both male and female trucks, though the “he”s outnumber the “she”s, and there are no clearly identified nonbinary trucks. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10.4 by-20.8-inch double-page spreads viewed at 26.7% of actual size.)

A knock-down knockout in more ways than one. (Picture book. 2-5)

TALKING IS NOT MY THING
Robbins, Rose
Illus. by the author
Eerdmans (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-0-8028-5549-7

In this companion to Me and My Sister (2019), a nonverbal, anthropomorphic critter describes a day with her brother and grandmother.

Via thought bubbles, the narrator—a yellow, doglike animal with triangular ears—explains, “I don’t speak.” But she “still like[s] to be included,” and in warm, wonderfully ordinary ways, she is. After enjoying some messy spaghetti, she watches TV with her brother and grandmother. Her brother reads to her; she teaches her brother “a guessing game with drawing.” Picture flashcards help her express needs, such as going to the toilet. At bedtime, she’s dismayed to discover her beloved stuffed bunny is missing, and to her family’s alarm she runs outside—where Bunny waits where she’d left her. When she finds her brother’s toy car beneath her blanket, the siblings exchange happy high-fives. With bold lines, large figures, and minimal background, Robbins’s cartoon illustrations smoothly support the simple, direct narration. The narrator’s emotions are readily communicated, such as her wobbly grimace when dinner noises make her want to “turn [her] ears off” and her beaming “happy dance” when she and Bunny are reunited. Her infectious expressions, dragon-shaped toothbrush, and bunny-patterned PJs convey plenty of personality, cheerfully reminding readers that speech isn’t the only way to express oneself. Though the narrator’s disability is unspecified, her noise aversion and pictoral communication will likely lead readers to place her on the autism spectrum.

A cozy, inclusive look at neurodiversity and sibling bonds. (Picture book. 3-6)

A ZOMBIE VACATION
Rose, Lisa
Illus. by Ruiz, Ángeles
Apples & Honey Press (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-68115-537-9

Zombies, it turns out, are a lot like Oscar the Grouch.

The undead Israeli narrator of this picture book hates Luna Park in Tel Aviv because the roller coaster has “too many happy people” and the Israel Museum because it has “too many beautiful things.” Zombies, it seems, prefer to vacation in crumbling hotels full of roaches and bedbugs. Grouchy readers, or anyone who’s sick of conventional travel guides, will love the vacation suggestions. The main character goes to see endangered species—they’re “almost dead”—and spends several pages visiting the Dead Sea. In fact, the book turns into an odd sort of advertisement for that site, with a two-page afterward answering questions
A marvelous antidote to message-driven “it’s mine” tug-of-war dramas.

THE WALK

This wordless Spanish import features a dog and human companion out for a stroll; one of them spies a stick. The adult is of indeterminate race. Like the color of the dog and the approaching birds, the body appears to have been created with a black implement (a pencil?) on a textured surface, developed with areas of shadow and light. After the blue stick is thrown several pages away, distractions delay the curious hound. Finally ready to retrieve, the dog notices a bird poised upon the other end. Children will look carefully, flipping back and forth to check their interpretations of the ensuing pages. Sacido has done a masterful job of inviting focus and showing movement with splashes of color, changes in texture, and the judicious use of motion lines in her compositions. Understated, uncluttered spreads, printed on smooth, heavy (and ecologically friendly) paper, never feel empty. There are crown-shaped plantings, an occasional tree, and one glorious spread of birds gazing at viewers in a green field with yellow flowers. When the bird soars off with its flock and stick and the canine returns to the bemused owner with a flower, readers are left to imagine what the dog and person are thinking and feeling. This narrative is a marvelous antidote to the message-driven “it’s mine” tug-of-war dramas often encountered in literature for the young.

A satisfying, uplifting discovery. (Picture book: 3-6)

THE WALK
Sacido, Celia
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Brokenbrow, Jon
Caento de Luz (32 pp.)
$16.95 | Sep. 1, 2020
97884-16733-80-4

A sloth and an interfering fox vie for control of the book.

Lento, a sloth, strides across the opening page, announcing, “This is MY BOOK,” but before there’s time to tell the story, a “little nap” intervenes. Seizing the moment, Fox boldly swings across the gutter on a rope, challenging the inert Lento for the book’s ownership, yelling, “You snooze, you lose, sloth,” initiating instant rivalry. Ignoring Lento’s claim that Fox and his takeover are not part of the script, Fox insists the book needs a more dynamic lead character. Protest ing vehemently, Lento proceeds to compete with Fox to prove who’s the best lead. Lento yodels. Fox blasts out of a canon. Fox soars in a hot air balloon only to be felled by Lento in a plane. Warning Fox in an O.K Corral–style showdown that “this book ain’t big enough for the both of us,” Lento devises a plan to get Fox out of the book—maybe. Presented in bold, individualized type in the dialogue-only text,
Lento and Fox’s contest to control the book becomes the story. Their hilarious, attention-getting, action-filled antics play out in simple, eye-catching red, green, yellow, black, and white shapes and backgrounds. Slow Lento’s distressed, anguished, and determined expressions and body language prove the perfect foil for nimble Fox’s mercurial demeanor, outrageous behavior, and arrogant bravado.

Very clever in concept and execution. (Picture book. 3-6)

**JUDY LED THE WAY**  
Sasso, Sandy Eisenberg  
Illus. by Lucas, Margeaux  
Apples & Honey Press (32 pp.)  
$17.95 | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-1-68115-559-3

Judy Kaplan loves to ask all kinds of questions. Scattered on the pages as if they are written notes, many of her questions are profound and posed to her rabbi father concerning beliefs and traditions of Judaism, even the existence of God. She is particularly disturbed that during services in the synagogue, women sit separately from men, no women read from the Torah, and only boys become bar mitzvah when they turn 13. It is the 1920s, and women in the United States have both recently won the right to vote and are working at jobs once held only by men. Women are even driving cars. Judy is completely surprised when her father announces that there will be changes in his synagogue. With fears of failure and ridicule, and with only one day to study and practice, 12-year-old Judy will become bat mitzvah. She will read a portion of the Torah and sing the blessings at the Saturday morning services. She carries it off beautifully and earns the approval of the whole congregation. Basing her story on true events and with personal knowledge of the Kaplan family, Sasso tells the tale in straightforward, direct syntax, with a hint of admiration. Lucas’ strongly hued illustrations enhance the text and provide carefully delineated images of time, place, and Jewish traditions. Readers who are not familiar with these traditions might need some additional explanations. Judy, her family, and the congregation are all depicted with pale skin.

Judy is a force for change. Lovely. (author’s note, biographical note) (Picture book/religion. 6-10)

**THE CIRCUS OF STOLEN DREAMS**  
Savaryn, Lorelei  
Philomel (304 pp.)  
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-0-593-20206-7

A circus of dreams seems like a wonderful escape for a grieving girl, until it turns into a nightmare. Shortly after their parents’ divorce, Andrea’s little brother, Francis, vanished during the night. Three years later, Andrea still feels constant sadness and guilt. When a magical circus called Reverie appears in the woods, she learns it is a place where she can forget her troubles. She simply has to give up a dream as the price of admission for one night. Inside, circus tents are filled with other children’s dreams, from the excitingly magical to the thrillingly scary. When she discovers a tent with her brother’s recurring nightmare, Andrea begins to suspect something isn’t right and the man in charge, the Sandman, is not who he seems. As the dream world becomes a nightmare, Andrea has to remember and face her pain if she is ever to get out. Although this debut is full of appealing elements, the story as a whole falls as flat as its characters. Dreamy prose is sometimes evocative but mostly overwritten, bogging down the pace. Worldbuilding is underdeveloped, and, as in dreams, it doesn’t always make sense. Reverie is filled with children from all over the world, but main characters all present White.

The magic just isn’t there. (Fantasy. 9-12)

**I TALK LIKE A RIVER**  
Scott, Jordan  
Illus. by Smith, Sydney  
Neal Porter/Holiday House (40 pp.)  
$18.99 | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-0-8234-4559-2

A young boy describes how it feels to stutter and how his father’s words see him through “bad speech day[s].” Lyrical, painfully acute language and absorbing, atmospheric illustrations capture, with startling clarity, this school-age child’s daily struggle with speech. Free verse emulates the pauses of interrupted speech while slowing down the reading, allowing the words to settle. When coupled with powerful metaphors, the effect is gut-wrenching: “The P / in pine tree / grows roots / inside my mouth / and tangles / my tongue.” Dappled paintings inspire empathy as well, with amorphous scenes infused with the uncertainty that defines both the boy’s unpredictable speech and his melancholy. Specificity arrives in the artwork solely at the river, where boy and father go after a particularly bad morning. Scenery comes into focus, and readers feel the boy’s relief in this refuge where he can breathe deeply, be quiet, and think clearly. At this extraordinary book’s center, a double gatefold shows the child wading.
in shimmering waters, his back to readers, his face toward sunlight. His father pulls his son close and muses that the boy “talk[s] like a river,” choppy in places, churning in others, and smooth beyond. (Father and son both appear White.) Young readers will turn this complex idea over in their minds again and again. The author includes a moving autobiographical essay prompting readers to think even further about speech, sounds, communication, self-esteem, and sympathy.

An astounding articulation of both what it feels like to be different and how to make peace with it. (Picture book. 4-8)

THE MONSTER WHO WASN’T
Shelley, T.C.
Bloomsbury (272 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-5476-0456-2

Born of the union of an old man’s last sigh and a baby girl’s first laugh, an imp emerges in the depths of The Hole, a vast and terrifying underground kingdom of fantastical creatures.

Horrified by the sight of the ogre king, Thunderguts, the newly hatched imp—who strangely enough looks human—runs away, assisted by his new gargoyle friends, Wheedle, Bladder, and Spigot. When Daniel, an angel, helps the imp flee from the ogre king’s goblin and troll henchmen, he takes the imp into the human world, to the Kavanagh family’s wake for their grandfather, Samuel. Everyone is struck by how much the imp looks like Samuel as a young man. The family decides to take the imp to their home, and they name him Samuel. Everything in the human world is new to Samuel, and he savors it all completely. However, the day after Samuel’s arrival, baby Beatrice is kidnapped. Devastated, Samuel returns to The Hole to look for her, convinced that her disappearance is his fault and determined to rescue her. Shelley creates a lavish tapestry of monsters, bringing together frightening creatures from a range of traditions. Her choice of language is taut and precise, filled with gorgeous metaphors and unexpected plot twists that will keep readers engaged. Limited physical descriptions point to a White default for human characters.

Evocatively contrasts the strange, unexpected beauty of human life with the macabre, suffocating world of monsters. (Paranormal. 9-14)
question the biblical story of Creation, since it is obvious to her that fossils have been buried in the Earth for a long time. Anning faces many obstacles; she is poor, female, working class, and has to work to ward off starvation. By chance encounters through the sale of her wares, she learns from the famous geologists of the day and begins to understand the real significance of her discoveries. Her discovery of the ichthyosaur sets her on the path to fame and a better standard of living, but she remains cynical and bitter about ever becoming recognized for her achievements. Anning's rebellious spirit and fascination with science will resonate with curious readers.

Fascinating portrait of a great role model for adventurous youth who are interested in science. (Biographical notes, fossils and fossil-hunting, information about girls in STEM) (Biography. 9-14)

STUCK TOGETHER

Smith, Brian “Smitty”
Illus. by the author
HarperAlley (64 pp.)
$12.99 | $7.99 paper | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-06-298117-2
978-0-06-298116-5 paper
Series: Pea, Bee, & Jay; 1

A green pea, a bumblebee, and a blue-jay become fast friends in this charming early graphic novel.

Pea lives in a pod with his mother and grandfather. Feeling stifled by his family, Pea is excited to go rolling with his other round-ish farm friends (a blueberry, strawberry, cherry, and other peas). Soon their fun escalates into a dare to roll off the farm and procure a red leaf from a far-off oak tree, and Pea is eager to meet the challenge. But as soon as he starts his journey, Pea is caught in a rainstorm that washes him away, leaving him lost and stranded off the farm! There he meets Bee, a solitary bumblebee, and soon the duo stumble upon Jay, an unassuming orphaned bluejay who never learned how to fly. The trio decide to team up, combining their unique skills and personalities to outwit an army of bumblebee guards, bush full of raspberry-blowing raspberries, and a predatory fox to return Pea to his home. In a satisfying conclusion, all three discover that family and community weren't far beyond their reach after all. Simple, expressive full-color illustrations are friendly and easy to parse. Combining these visual elements with a sweet, straightforward plot makes this a perfect graphic novel for newly independent readers; that it kicks off a series makes it all the sweeter. Volume 2, Wannabees, publishes simultaneously.

Readers will “bee” delighted by this earnest and endearing tale. (Graphic fantasy. 6-10) (Wannabees. 978-0-06-298112-0) 978-0-06-298119-6 paper

WHEN WE ARE KIND

Smith, Monique Gray
Illus. by Neidhardt, Nicole
Harper (32 pp.)
$19.95 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-4598-2522-2

Distinctive illustrations amplify a pointed moral lesson in this Native picture book for kids.

An intergenerational Native family sits in a drum circle on the cover, suggesting the importance of cooperation and community that is elucidated in the pages that follow. What does it mean to be kind to your family, your elders, your environment, and yourself? In simple, repetitive language, Smith (who is of mixed Cree, Lakota, and Scottish heritage) explores how our behavior with generosity toward others makes us feel happy in return. By helping with laundry, walking the family dog, sharing with friends, and taking food to our elders, we learn that the gift of kindness involves giving and receiving. The first half of the book is constructed entirely on the phrase “I am kind when,” while the second half uses “I feel.” Strung together, the simple statements have the resonance of affirmations and establish a clear chain of connectedness, but there is no story arc in the conventional sense. What the book lacks in plot, it makes up for with its illustrations. Drawing on her mother’s Diné traditions, Neidhardt prominently features Navajo hair buns, moccasins, and baskets; a panoply of Indigenous characters—including one child who uses a wheelchair—is featured in rich detail. A French edition, translated by Rachel Martinez, publishes simultaneously.

A visual feast for families interested in seeing the Native world through small, kind deeds. (Picture book. 3-5) (Nous sommes gentils. 978-1-4598-2520-2)

MY WORDS

Snider, Grant
Illus. by the author
Harper/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-0-06-290780-6

A young child develops a love for vocabulary.

Ava tells readers, right away, “I love words.” With bright chalk the white, pigtailed writer scrawls basic words like “yes,” “happy,” “cat,” and “rain” in green, blue, yellow, and pink. The narrator takes readers through the process of language acquisition, first as an infant who “started with no words,” expressing baby talk like “ooooh eee gaga yaa” while absorbing real words (“book /uh-oh / dog / no”), finally saying “ba!” while pointing to a ball. As the story proceeds, Ava gains more and more language, learning to talk to friends in marvelous ways,” culminating in writerly ambitions; the last page shows the pink-dressed, cowboy-booted child holding taped-together pages entitled “Ava’s Book,” reading aloud to an assortment of toys and stuffed animals. The prose rhymes loosely, bouncing ahead in a rhythm that is a pleasure to read aloud. Unfortunately, while the
With nothing more than stark white pages, bold black circles with one black dot apiece within them, and two scraggily black lines, defiance blazes forth.

THE STARING CONTEST

Solis, Nicholas
Illus. by the author
Peter Pauper Press (48 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 23, 2020
978-1-4413-3506-7

Who's the baddest? Can your eyes do a diagonal split?

Maybe they can master the dreaded “criss-cross”? Or how about beadily staring “all...day...LONG!” Go ahead, take a breath—you'll need it. Remember, no cheat—a pleasant-enough narrator, but there's little here to hook child readers beyond, perhaps, pure identification.

Probably more for adults than for the children in their lives. (Picture book. 4-7)

THE MOUSE'S APPLES

Stickley, Frances
Illus. by Litten, Kristyna
Andersen Press USA (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-72841-580-2

Mouse teaches a lesson to “the naughty bear who doesn’t share.”

While her “tummy roll[s] and rumble[s],” Mouse “scamper[s] down the hill” to forage and is lucky enough to find four delicious apples. Just as Mouse is about to take her first bite, the bear that attentive readers will have seen lurking in previous illustrations looms large. “Apples, boomed the bear, ‘are my favorite tasty treat. And I've been here all winter / without anything to eat.’” (Since apples generally ripen in summer and fall, Bear's— or Stickley's—sense of seasons seems grievously off.) When Mouse offers to share the apples, Bear refuses and instead threatens to eat Mouse. Instead of just yielding the apples, Mouse devises a clever plan to trick Bear, and a double-page spread divided into three horizontal panels illustrates Bear's long journey home while Mouse is secretly getting “fat and happy” on the apples. An astonished, angry Bear soon discovers the trick, but when Mouse offers the last apple to him, Bear abruptly and unrealistically realizes how good it feels to share, and the two become friends. Alliteration ("red and rosy"; “green and gleaming”) and the potential for dramatic voices for Mouse and Bear make the book fun to read aloud, though the rhythm has a few rough spots. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-19-inch double-page spreads viewed at 35.6% of actual size.)

Fun wordplay balances heavy-handed moralizing. (map) (Picture book. 3-6)

A VOTE IS A POWERFUL THING

Stier, Catherine
Illus. by Dawson, Courtney
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-8075-8498-9

Why voting matters.

After learning about the history and importance of voting in her elementary school classroom, narrator and protagonist Callie is smitten by the possibilities of the vote. When her teacher tells the class they will be voting on their class field trip—a choice between the cookie factory (free samples!) or the wilderness park—Callie campaigns for the wilderness park. The park is very important to Callie because it is where she saw her “first swallowtail butterfly,” her “first turtle in a pond,” and even a great horned owl. Additionally, Callie knows that the park's budget is up for a townwide vote because her grandmother has been out campaigning for the funding. Callie thinks that if the class visits the park, her classmates will experience the beauty of nature and will encourage their families to visit (and support funding) it. Some classmates who have never been to the park don't see why it would be more fun than a cookie factory, but Callie does her research and makes her presentation. Another classmate makes a presentation for the cookie trip. Then comes the vote...The story unfolds smoothly, and the agreeable but undistinguished illustrations feature people of many skin colors, people who use wheelchairs, and a woman in a hijab. Narrator Callie has pale skin and brown hair. Backmatter pages give further voting information (who, how, history timeline) and resources.

Gets the job done. (Picture book. 5-10)
A vivid, sensitive exploration of invisible disability, family bonds, and the complex reality of happily-ever-after.

**BUTTS ARE EVERYWHERE**

Stutzman, Jonathan  
Illus. by Fox, Heather  
Putnam (32 pp.)  
$16.99 | Sep. 29, 2020  
978-0-525-51451-0

An informational hymn to your handsome heinie.

Yes, butts are everywhere, and everyone has one: your fellow family members, your friends, even famous people. Butts have many names: “haunches,” “cheeks,” “keister,” “caboose,” “booyt,” “patootie,” and many more, each one rendered in its own style on a double-page spread devoted to this particular set of synonyms. However, your “can” is more than just something to laugh at (or to not mention in polite society). “Your gluteus maximus will propel you into the air if you jump, and your buns will catch you if you fall.” Many animals have butts. Some that don’t include whales, worms, and jellyfish. And animals use their butts for varied activities: Dogs learn about other dogs with a sniff; turtles breathe with their rears, and manatees “toot” to swim faster. And speaking of the fantastical fart, everyone does it, from bees to elephants (humans are no exception!). Yes, there are billions of buttocks in the world, but everyone’s is unique and perfect as it is. Stutzman’s occasionally rhyming text gets the poots—er, points across handily. Little listeners may giggle (a lot), but, in the tradition of Taro Gomi’s Everyone Poops (1993), this cleverly informs on a topic all and sundry may not be completely comfortable talking about and entertains in the process. Fox’s colorful cartoon illustrations of joyous butt-owners of many skin tones displaying their derrieres double the fun. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-17-inch double-page spreads at 61.4% of actual size.)

Young readers will be happy to read and reread this dynamic data on their duffs. (Picture book. 2-8)

**TUNE IT OUT**

Sumner, Jamie  
Atheneum (288 pp.)  
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-1-5344-5700-3

A vivid, sensitive exploration of invisible disability, family bonds, and the complex reality of happily-ever-after. (Fiction. 8-12)

A 12-year-old girl navigates sensory processing disorder and complicated emotions when she’s removed from her mother’s care.

Lou Montgomery hasn’t attended school in over a year. Instead, she and her mother scratch out a nomadic living, performing in casinos and diners and sleeping in their worn-out truck as her ambitious mother scouts the country for Lou’s “next big gig.” Lou loves singing; her voice “makes me feel stronger than I am,” she tells readers. But she hates performing; loud sounds hurt “like knives” and leave her screaming, and light touch makes her flinch. When her mother is investigated for neglect and Lou’s sent to live with her wealthy aunt and uncle, Lou’s new world—regular meals, a fancy private school, and a diagnosis of sensory processing disorder—overwhelms her even more. Her voice alternately wry, naïve, and wise beyond her years, Lou confronts sensory overload, self-consciousness, and her simultaneous love for and anger toward her mother in poetic, poignant prose. The way she contrasts poverty and privilege is thought-provoking; her dread of being labeled a “special-needs kid” is realistic. Though Lou’s friendship with quirky theater classmate Well sometimes feels too good to be true (would that all kids were so endearingly and instantly accepting of neurodivergence), Sumner realistically avoids fairy-tale endings while still closing on a hopeful note. Most characters, including Lou, default to White; Well’s mother is Japanese American.

A vivid, sensitive exploration of invisible disability, family bonds, and the complex reality of happily-ever-after. (Picture book. 4-6)

**LITTLE FOX AND THE WILD IMAGINATION**

Tacone, Jorma  
Illus. by Santat, Dan  
Roaring Brook (40 pp.)  
$18.99 | Sep. 8, 2020  
978-1-250-21250-4

Beware the imagination that cannot be contained.

When Poppa Fox comes to pick his son up after school he finds Little Fox a complete grump. Happily, Poppa Fox knows just the way to perk up his kiddo. One minute they’re pretending to be race cars, the next they’re dinos on the bus, and then later they’re blasting off to outer space to grab some ice cream. Unfortunately, all that sugar before dinner means that Little Fox’s imagination is now primed to go haywire. Now he’s a robo squid destroying a broccoli forest (rather than eating his dinner), then a shark devouring his dad, who is driving a mail truck (that is, splashing way too much in the tub). Things calm down by bedtime, but when Poppa Fox tells his son he will pick him up again the next day, Little Fox already has big plans. As books built on the power of imagination go, this story starts out strong but loses steam about the time Little Fox loses his focus. Santat’s art does more than its fair share of the heavy lifting, particularly when Little Fox’s imagination is supposed to go off the rails. Madcap adventure never looked this fun. Yet the book can’t quite nail the landing, shifting tone from one page turn to the next, leaving readers ultimately unsatisfied. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 33.8% of actual size.)

Aims high but just doesn’t get there. (Picture book. 4-6)
OUR LITTLE KITCHEN
Tamaki, Jillian
Illus. by the author
Abrams (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-4197-4655-0

We come together to feed our own in this upbeat picture book.

Tamaki’s latest is a delight for the senses, bursting with bright colors, enticing scents, and effervescent prose. There’s not really a story here, nor much gastronomic wisdom—and that’s precisely the point. Instead, readers shadow a diverse group of people who come together every Wednesday to prepare a meal for their neighbors using whatever materials are at hand. Their garden is far from perfect, but it yields plenty of produce; leftovers and community contributions fill in the gaps. Whether donated, grown, or saved from the fridge, all foodstuffs are welcome—this is no place for premium ingredients or brand names! The kitchen’s warmth emanates not only from the oven, but from the cacophony of voices and cascade of culinary noises sustaining it. It’s a place for gratitude and camaraderie, not gripes and complaints—a disposition evident in Tamaki’s sing-song, occasionally rhyming first-person plural prose. Onomatopoeic actions—“glug glug glug / CHOPCHOP-CHOP / Sizzzzzzzze” —and volunteers’ hearty exclamations pop in spreads characterized by Tamaki’s trademark fluidity and playfulness. Nib-and-ink linework swooshes across the pages, emulating the controlled frenzy and depicting a thoughtfully diverse cast of warmhearted people. Endpapers offer simple recipes for vegetable soup and apple crumble; adults familiar with Lucy Knisley and Samin Nosrat will swoon at the sight of recipes for vegetable soup and apple crumble; adults familiar with Lucy Knisley and Samin Nosrat will swoon at the sight of these graphically rendered recipes. An author’s note explains the real-life experience that inspired the project. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 38.2% of actual size.)

Simply delectable! (Picture book. 4-8)

PROBABLY A NARWHAL
Thomas, Shelley Moore
Illus. by Harney, Jenn
Boyd Mills (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-62979-581-2

Narwhals paint on walls—don’t they?

With its long twisted horn (actually a canine tooth), this member of the whale family is not very familiar to most children. The bespectacled kid narrator who has just created an enormous mess declares that “a narwhal is a rainbow-painting, elephant-sized, purple polka-dotted, flying pie maker” in an attempt to shift responsibility for the havoc on to the bluish mammal with the flippers and the horn who just happens to be in the house. Well, the narwhal begs to differ. How does the kid know about narwhals? The narwhal manages to convince the kid that it is the real deal, a fact confirmed by a check on the kid’s smartphone. Conceding, the narrator starts cleaning up the mess, but the action doesn’t stop there. When the narwhal plays a sneaky trick, is the kid fooled? The usual happy ending for a silly picture book takes place, and the kid and the narwhal end up becoming friends. Different typefaces are used for the two characters’ speech (there is no narrative text); the scratchy cartoon pictures are amusing and full of action; and the introduction of a rare mammal makes for a somewhat original twist on the silly picture book. Unfortunately, the setup is too over-the-top to sustain engagement with what is in the end a fairly thin gag stretched out over many pages. The kid has peppy skin and long, straight, black hair. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 37.4% of actual size.)

Send this one back out to sea. (Picture book. 5-7)

SECOND BANANA
Thornburgh, Blair
Illus. by Berube, Kate
Abrams (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-1-4197-4234-7

The Food Is Fun Healthy Eating Good Nutrition Pageant is great...unless you are the Second Banana.

All 15 of Mrs. Millet’s students are excited each year for the pageant. Each gets to play a different healthy food, but this year there are 16 students. When everyone is assigned a role, it turns out there will be two bananas. The narrator is not pleased. This kid wants to be the only banana. Mrs. Millet is consoling, but she doesn’t understand. And the little Second Banana’s family doesn’t even sympathize—they just make banana puns. The class rehearses all month long, and throughout, the Second Banana fumes at getting only half a line and half as much time on stage! Two days before the pageant, the kid realizes that First Banana doesn’t seem happy either. It turns out First Banana doesn’t want to be onstage at all. Second Banana tries to cheer up First, but to no avail. Thinking fast, the narrator has a bright idea for a new show finale and ends up with a new friend. Thornburgh’s school story about making the best of a less-than-optimal situation and showing kindness and empathy for a new friend will ap-peel (sorry) to young readers and listeners, who will easily identify. Berube’s expressive cartoons are a good match—those food costumes are pretty funny. Both bananas have pale skin, Mrs. Millet is a woman of color, and the rest of the class is diverse and includes one child who uses a wheelchair. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 83.6% of actual size.)

No rotten bananas here. (Picture book. 5-8)
SKUNK AND BADGER
Timberlake, Amy
Illus. by Klassen, Jon
Algonquin (136 pp.)
$18.20 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-64375-005-7
Series: Skunk and Badger, 1

Badger’s definitely not ready for his new roommate, Skunk.

The sole resident of his aunt Lula’s brownstone, Badger devotes his days to a life befitting for a rock scientist. Naturally, the semirecluse spends his day in his rock room, where he can do all of his Important Rock Work. Then someone’s knocking politely at the door one day. It’s Badger’s new roommate, Skunk, along with his red suitcase. (If Badger had read those letters from Aunt Lula, he would’ve known...) Skunk swiftly makes himself at home, disrupting Badger’s Important Rock Work in the process. Sure, Badger spends some sweet moments with Skunk, including a discussion of Shakespeare’s Henry V. Skunk even apologizes for the abrupt changes to the living arrangements. Then the chickens arrive, all hens and no roosters (though Skunk does invite Larry), infuriating Badger. When a stoat-shaped menace appears at the door, Badger reacts with little consideration for Skunk or his flock. Badger’s left alone and unsure. “It would never work out! But Skunk certainly has his moments,” he ponders.

Exceptionally sweet. (Fantasy. 8-12)

FEATHERED SERPENT AND THE FIVE SUNS
A Mesoamerican Creation Myth
Tonatiuh, Duncan
Illus. by the author
Abrams (40 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-4197-4677-2

The elders say that humanity currently resides in the fifth tonatiuh, or sun. Here’s the story of how humans came to be.

The preceding four tonatiuh bore witness to failed trials. First, the gods covered sacred bones with mud, but these giant humans proved too fragile, becoming mountains in the end. The second set of humans, smaller than the first, developed into fish. Under the third tonatiuh, the enraged gods turned the rebellious humans into monkeys. The fourth tonatiuh resulted in the latest, lazy humans assuming the form of birds. At this point, the gods conceded any hope of creating humans, all except for Quetzalcóatl, the Feathered Serpent. Taking along his staff, shield, cloak, and shell ornament, Feathered Serpent travels to Mictlán, the underworld, to retrieve the sacred bones from Mictlantecuhltli, the lord of the underworld. To reach where Mictlantecuhltli dwells, Feathered Serpent journeys through nine regions, each region a test of his bravery and perseverance. Accompanied by a dog spirit guide named Xólotl, Feathered Serpent succeeds in his journey. Full of warm landscapes bathed under the sun’s light, multicolored night skies set against stars, and cavernous walls of rugged brown, Tonatiuh’s artwork—familiar in form, electric in spirit—astonishes in this retelling of a Mesoamerican creation story. Told with succinct clarity and a hint of mischief, this rendition begs for rereads. Klassen’s muted, wistful artwork, meanwhile, invokes sweeping sentiments during key events.

Simply spellbinding. (author’s note, glossary, select bibliography) (Picture book/cosmology. 6-9)

EVERYONE GETS A SAY
Twiss, Jill
Illus. by Keller, E.G.
Harper/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-0-06-293375-1

Democracy comes to the forest.

When a diverse group of forest creatures starts to squabble over an unused patch of land, a quiet snail named Pudding introduces the idea of democracy, specifically through voting. The story’s tone emphasizes cooperation and inclusion, but it also has nuanced layers that provide educators or caregivers room to introduce additional themes and interweave contemporary moments into the tale if they so choose. Opportunities also arise to talk about the food web and biology, as the various friends want to use the land for legitimate, if somewhat self-serving reasons: Toast the butterfly wants to grow flowers, and Jitterbug wants a mudslide to the lake, and goose Geezer wants land for edible greens. The text is enhanced by illustrations that have the look of watercolor, and the balance of white space on some page spreads reviewed at 77.1% of actual size.

We vote yes. (Picture book. 4-8)
The author’s growth is inspiring, her story is fascinating, and her wisdom is priceless for young entrepreneurs.

**BEE FEARLESS**

**Dream Like a Kid**

Ulmer, Mikaila

Putnam (240 pp.)

$16.99 | Aug. 18, 2020

978-1-984815-08-8

Child entrepreneur Ulmer shares the story of how she became a business owner, philanthropist, and environmental activist.

Ulmer and her family loved spending time outside, but when she was stung by a bee twice in the span of a week, she became afraid to go outside. She was only 4, and her parents encouraged her to learn about bees instead of letting her fear prevent her from doing things she loved. What Ulmer learned about bees fascinated her—and concerned her. Endangered bees meant an endangered food supply. Ulmer wanted to do something about that. She had seen kids selling lemonade for Austin Lemonade Day, and she decided to start saving the bees by raising money through a lemonade stand. Her passion for her business and for the bees, her parents’ support, her attention to every opportunity, and careful use of every bit of knowledge that came her way all carried her from weekly lemonade stands to bottling her lemonade for sale at one local pizza parlor, then an offer from Whole Foods, regional expansion, Shark Tank, and beyond. In sharing her story, this talented Black girl breaks down not only each opportunity and decision she and those who supported her had to make along the way, but also the lessons about business that she learned in the process, making this a manual as well as a memoir. Her growth is inspiring, her story is fascinating, and her wisdom is priceless for young entrepreneurs.

**Gift this to every aspiring and beginning entrepreneur; they will thank you.** *(Nonfiction. 7-16)*

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**BINNY’S DIWALI**

Umrigar, Thrity

Illus. by Chanani, Nidhi

Scholastic (40 pp.)

$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020

978-1-338-36448-4

It’s Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, and Binny can’t wait to tell her class about her favorite holiday.

On their way through their North American suburb to school, Binny’s mother wishes her luck and reminds her to tell her class about the oil lamps that are a central part of their family’s Diwali tradition. But when Binny’s teacher, Mr. Boomer, invites her to share, Binny freezes, overcome with shyness. Taking a deep breath, she remembers her mother’s advice. The thought of the world filled with light—symbolizing the triumph of good over evil—gives Binny the strength she needs to tell her family’s Diwali story. While the book is thorough in its description of traditions like wearing new clothes, eating sweets, lighting lamps, and decorating floors and sidewalks with colored powder, the prose is clunky and clumsy, and Binny’s conflict is resolved so quickly that the story arc feels limp and uninteresting. Other elements of the text are troubling as well. Calling Binny’s new clothes an “Indian outfit,” for example, erases the fact that the kurta she wears is typical of the entire South Asian subcontinent. The use of most fireworks, which the author treats as an essential part of the holiday, is now banned in India due to concerns about pollution and child labor. Most problematically of all, the author continually treats Diwali as a Hindu holiday celebrated by “everyone,” which is untrue in India or in diaspora and which dangerously equates Hindu and Indian identity. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-20-inch double-page spreads reviewed at 39% of actual size.)*

**A simplistic, outdated take on Diwali for young children.** *(Picture book. 2-5)*

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**MY PENCIL AND ME**

Varon, Sara

Illus. by the author

First Second (48 pp.)

$18.99 | Sep. 29, 2020

978-1-59643-589-6

In this metafictive picture book, the illustrated version of the actual author/illustrator is stymied—she’s got to start a new book but doesn’t have any ideas. Cleverly opening with three back-to-back double-page spreads that function like a camera zooming out, it shows the metafictive author sitting at her worktable, staring into space. She admits to her dog, Sweet Pea, that she has no ideas. The dog sagely replies, “Why didn’t you just ask your pencil for help?” And, voilà, pencil springs to assistance. With the pencil encouraging her, “You could start by drawing some recent adventures,” the two begin to create their story. That is, until the imaginary characters take over. The book’s design, black-outlined illustrations often within panels and with dialogue bubbles for characters’ speech, has the look of a simple graphic novel. There are cute sight gags, and the dialogue bubbles are lively and often funny. The insertion of narrative conflict (which the pencil says a story needs and Sweet Pea rejects, insisting they’re all friends) is slyly effective. The ending, though, is disappointing, failing to bring the story to a conclusion that is likely to satisfy readers, though the protagonist and Sweet Pea are happy with it. The protagonist has beige skin and brown hair; other human characters are illustrated with both lighter and darker skin. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 33% of actual size.)*

**A mostly entertaining romp, but the ending underwhelms.** *(Picture book. 5-10)*

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The narrative should spark many a conversation about race and protest.

**THE TEACHERS MARCH!**

The First Fire
*A Cherokee Story*

Wagon, Brad
Illus. by Stephenson, Alex
7th Generation (40 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Aug. 27, 2020
978-1-939053-27-5

The animals need the fire, but how will they get it?

According to Cherokee tradition, when the animals needed fire to keep them warm during cold nights, Great Thunder and his sons, the Thunder Boys, invoke a lightning bolt to strike and light fire to a lone sycamore tree. Seeing that the tree is located on a tiny island in the middle of a lake, the animals have a meeting to decide how to bring the fire back across the water. Raven tries, but his white feathers are scorched black in his unsuccessful attempt. Screech Owl, Hoot Owl, and Horned Owl all try, but the smoke nearly blinds them, permanently affecting their eyes. Racer Snake and Great Black Snake are also unsuccessful. Finally Water Spider, a tiny savior, boldly creates an ingenious way to bring fire back to the animal community, the bowl she weaves with her silk to carry an ember back becoming a permanent marking on her back. Black-outlined characters have a friendly, Saturday morning–cartoon look that nevertheless carries the story’s gravitas well. Moments of humor—Racer Snake swimming with a comically determined look on his face—balance painful ones. The animals sitting in solemn counsel are a combination of recognizable North American critters and some that are not so familiar, emphasizing that this is a story of creation. Wagon is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, and therapist Stephenson serves the Cherokee Nation.

A heartwarming tale of kinship and community. (Picture book/cosmology. 5-8)

The Teachers March!
*How Selma’s Teachers Changed History*

Wallace, Sandra Neil & Wallace, Ricb
Illus. by Palmer, Charly
Calkins Creek/Boyd’s Mills (44 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-62979-452-5

In 1965, a group of 104 teachers led by the Rev. F.D. Reese peacefully marched to the Dallas County Courthouse in Selma, Alabama, demanding Black citizens’ right to register to vote.

Reese, a science teacher at R.B. Hudson High School as well as pastor at Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church, got the idea of a teachers march while walking the halls of his school. After a recent march at which he and several other participants were beaten and turned away from the county courthouse, he decided that the way to make people take notice was to have teachers, the “somebody somebodies of the community,” stand up and fight for their rights. After seeing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on television, Reese wrote a letter to Dr. King asking him to come to Selma to speak, and he did. After Dr. King’s address before 700 people at Brown Chapel, the teachers took to the streets protesting for their right to vote. This little-known march during the civil rights era is considered the catalyst for the other marches that shortly followed. This book does a masterful job of detailing the impetus for the teachers march. It is clearly communicated that the march was not spontaneous but carefully thought out—down to the teachers’ packing food and toothbrushes in case they were arrested. Palmer’s brushy paintings are full of color, detail, and emotion. The narrative is well paced and will work brilliantly as a read-aloud for patient, older preschoolers and early elementary–age children, and it should spark many a conversation about race and protest. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 75% of actual size.)

An alarmingly relevant book that mirrors current events. (author’s note, illustrator’s note, timeline, bibliography, sites to visit) (Informational picture book. 5-8)

Round

Ward, Jennifer
Illus. by Congdon, Lisa
Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-5344-3119-5

A rhyming glimpse at round shapes in nature.

“Nature all around is round,” begins this exploration of shapes round or partially round in nature, beginning with a tiny bird and ending with the planets in our solar system. The pair of two-word phrases in each illustration, each dyad ending with “round,” rhymes: “Glowing round. / Growing round,” reads the text in a spread that features fireflies encased in rings of lights and a crescent moon. In a spread featuring a frog, the creature hangs on tight to a lily pad caught on a small current (“Cling round”) and then jumps into the water, creating ripples in the water that “Ring round.” Some pairings will prompt discussion more than others, such as an empty nest that is “Nest round” paired with a nest filled with bird eggs that is “Best round.” Children will notice that the shapes featured aren’t all circular in nature; some have merely rounded edges, such as the budding leaves on a tree, raindrops, and clouds. Most phrases are modified nouns, such as “Flake round,” though one is a full sentence (“Make round” for a snowman on the same spread), and some are modified verbs. The primarily earth-toned, uncluttered spreads provide a simplified, close-up look at the natural elements and animals named as round. Readers would be better served by Joyce Sidman’s and Taeun Yoo’s Round (2017), in which all shapes are circular. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.)

A clever, if not new, concept with uneven execution. (Picture book. 3-8)
Imagine taking an early morning walk to a sea garden—
the intertidal habitats cultivated by First Nations peoples to
increase biodiversity and provide sustainable seafood
harvesting.

“If you want to visit a sea garden... / ...you’ll have to get up
really early.” Using gentle, second-person narration, Weisman
describes what readers would find if they were lucky enough to
visit one of these reefs, which have existed for thousands of years
along the Pacific Northwest coast. The sights and sounds of the
shore are rendered in poetic detail throughout the text, from
the “symphony of clams...exhaling” to the barnacle-encrusted
rocks. Most compelling are the descriptions of the human com-
munity that has gathered around them: “generations of First
Peoples who...have come here to build and care for the sea gar-
den, harvest and clean clams, and share knowledge and stories.”
The sea gardens’ significance to First Nations peoples is at the
heart of this story, shining a light on Native brilliance and their
appreciation for the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest.
Families who value ownvoices stories will be glad to learn that the manuscript was vetted by Kwaxsistalla
Wetalthla Clan Chief Adam Dick and illustrated by renowned
Indigenous artist Vickers, whose heritage includes Tsimshian,
Haida, Heiltsuk, and English ancestors. (This book was reviewed
digitally with 8.5-by-11.5-inch double-page spreads viewed at 100%
of actual size.)

A lyrical story for nature-loving readers, told with rever-
ence for the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest.
(author’s note, acknowledgements, photographs) (Informational
picture book. 4-8)

WHOOO KNEW?
The Truth About Owls
Whipple, Annette
Reycraft Books (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 30, 2020
978-1-4788-6962-7

Everything you always wanted to know about owls, from
their peculiar eating habits to their unique vision, hearing, and
how they raise a family.

Transcending the usual clichés we all know about owls—“the
unforgettable call. The glowing eyes. The fierce beak”—this
elegantly designed picture book skillfully reveals the diversity
and variety intrinsic to the order. High-quality, detailed photos of
a number of different species of owl are thoughtfully juxtaposed
with pertinent questions, scientific information, and a
cartoon great horned owl who provides humorous “Whooo
Knew?” factoids. The power of this fascinating predator really
comes across in the superb color photos of owls snatching and
swallowing prey, vomiting up pellets, spinning their heads (yes
they can do this because they have 14 neck vertebrae!), and
engaging in other characteristic behavior. Each double-page
spread asks a pertinent question: “What’s for dinner?”; “How
do owls hunt?”; “Do owls puke?” (no, they just regurgitate pel-
lets); “Do owls sleep all day?”; “Do owls see in the dark?”; “What
good are feathers?”; “What do owl babies do?” Ever wondered
what owl tufts are for? (They’re not ears but mood indicators.)
There is an environmental message embedded in the book, and
a section on building owl-friendly habitat offers suggestions for
how readers can help. Backmatter features a brief primer on
owl anatomy; instructions on how to dissect an owl pellet, and
a glossary. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11.5-by-8.5-inch double-page spreads viewed at 94.2%
of actual size.)

A mawkish, unremarkable story. (Picture book. 4-8)
**SOMETIMES A WALL...**

*White, Dianne*

*Illus. by Barroux*

Owlkids Books (52 pp.)

$17.95 | Oct. 15, 2020

978-1-77147-373-6

Rhyme, rhythm, and simple art—all including references to walls—show children expressing different emotions and behaviors.

The pages are sturdy and shiny, with plenty of bright-white negative space for the colorful artwork and sparse words. All words are printed in spindly, black capitals in a typeface that emulates hand-lettering. The text scans well and uses a fairly complex rhyme scheme, with each “verse” moving across several pages of artwork. The text cleverly begins by showing literal kinds of walls: “chalk wall / spill wall / rock wall / hill wall.” As it progresses, figurative meanings of walls appear. Loose, thin black lines and bright watercolors show racially diverse people throughout, initially happily engaged in activities involving walls. The text is already predicting trouble ahead on a double-page spread that shows children cooperatively designing and building what eventually becomes a life-sized castle of gray brick. If careful attention is not given to the art’s details, it is easy to miss the growing tension between the light-skinned kid in the shirt with vertical blue stripes and the ruddy-faced kid in the shirt with horizontal blue stripes. The latter child apparently enlists others in cruelty to the former, but the bully’s increasing megalomania leads eventually to loneliness and isolation. There is an interesting balance between the fantasy of children building a life-sized castle and the reality of their feelings and behaviors. The end reassures readers that reconciliation is possible.

**Mending walls for the nursery crowd.** *(Picture book. 2-4)*

**UNICORNS ARE THE WORST**

*Willan, Alex*

*Illus. by the author*

Simon & Schuster (40 pp.)

$17.99 | Sep. 29, 2020

978-1-5344-5383-8

A goblin is completely unimpressed with unicorns, especially now that they’re neighbors.

This goblin protagonist has been living in peace for hundreds of years until unicorns “move into the meadow next door.” Unicorns aren’t the only magical creatures out there, the narrator reminds readers tartly. Goblins can do magic spells, like turning slugs into socks, while unicorns just frolic around and play their harps. And there’s always “SO. MUCH. GLITTER!” Someone needs to be serious about the work of magic, and it isn’t the unicorns. Caught up in complaining, the goblin fails to notice a pair of glowing eyes lurking in the forest. In times of great danger, unicorns prove that the things the goblin didn’t like are unicorns’ greatest strengths. Through humor, action, and, yes, glitter, the goblin learns not to make assumptions and judge others. The goblin’s evident hurt feelings at not being invited to unicorn tea parties also convey its own subtle message. The goblin’s irascible narration, conveyed largely in dialogue balloons, is delightfully funny and perfect for reading aloud. The colorful and eye-catching illustrations add to the hilarity of the text, with startling shifts in compositional perspective aiding the goblin’s own perspective change. The unicorns are whimsically candy-colored while the comically noseless goblin, more practical and serious, is portrayed often in shadow or against duller backgrounds. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 62.6% of actual size.)*

A fun, fresh take on unicorns—oh, and goblins, too. *(Picture book. 4-8)*

Anyone who beats him risks being sent to the dungeon—either the “nicer dungeon,” where “you can smell cinnamon buns but not eat them,” or the “worst dungeon,” with “sad clown paintings.” Fortunately for readers, another key character is less frenetic, a jaded monster named Narra who’s lost faith in the human race—with good reason. If Eeyore were a gigantic yellow Pokemon, he’d be Narra. The artwork, with its bold colors, actually resembles the Pokemon cartoons, but the characters are even cuddlier. They’re defiant enough, though, to appeal to cynical readers, and the story ends with a revolution. *(The king is White, but the rebels and the other human characters are racially diverse.) And the jokes are both subversive and hilarious.*

**This story is funny enough to get away with being utterly adorable.** *(Graphic fantasy. 6-11)*

**MELLYBEAN AND THE GIANT MONSTER**

*White, Mike*

*Illus. by the author*

Razorbill/Penguin (208 pp.)


978-0-593-20280-7 paper

978-0-593-20254-8

The characters in this graphic novel are so exhausting that it’s endearing.

Melly the dog looks exactly the way a cartoon character is supposed to. Small, scruffy, and black, she has bright eyes and a head the same size as her body. She wants to play every game—wrestling, fetch, tug of war—even when everybody else is trying to take a nap. The cats in her house are not fond of her. They’re almost relieved when she falls through a hole, Wonderland-style, into another world. The land is ruled by one of the few people with as much energy as Melly, a king who’s constantly posing for statues and competing for trophies.

The unicorns are whimsically candy-colored while the comically noseless goblin, more practical and serious, is portrayed often in shadow or against duller backgrounds. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 62.6% of actual size.)*

A fun, fresh take on unicorns—oh, and goblins, too. *(Picture book. 4-8)*
Using spare and lyrical language, Woodson skillfully portrays the confusion, fear, and sadness when a family member suffers from brain injury.

**ALICE’S FARM**

A Rabbit’s Tale

Wood, Maryrose

Illus. by Denise, Christopher

Feiwel & Friends (368 pp.)

$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020

978-1-250-22455-2

With the future of their valley home at stake, two brave young rabbits take up farming.

The farm’s newbie human owners include the Harvey parents, country enthusiasts newly liberated from office life; son Carl, 10, who misses Brooklyn; daughter Marie, 1; and the family’s shiba inu, Foxy. When an intimidating local developer drops by, hoping to pressure the naïve Harveys into selling, young Alice and her brother, Thistle, two rabbits, overhear the sales pitch. After Lester, a burrow elder who’s eaten his way through farm catalogs, tells them that development will destroy their valley, Alice hatches a plan to make the Harveys’ farm succeed. Challenges quickly mount. To obtain and plant seeds, weed, and keep hungry critters away from them when they sprout, Alice must incentivize interspecies cooperation. Recruits, wild and tame, are needed: a fox, bald eagle, chipmunks, voles, Foxy, baby Marie (an adept interspecies interpreter), and Carl, providing human cover for the rabbit farmers. The effort will eventually ensnare neighbors, ornithologists, and locavore chefs along with the editors of Hipster Farmer magazine. Like the denizens of E.B. White’s Charlotte’s Web, these characters—animal and human, predator and prey—are lovingly observed. They are a deeply engaging, mostly endearing bunch whose natures may put them at odds but who share a world. Human characters follow a White default.

Stoutly non-speciesist, this is an effervescent delight. (author’s note) (Animal fiction 8-12)

**BEFORE THE EVER AFTER**

Woodson, Jacqueline

Nancy Paulsen Books (176 pp.)

$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020

978-0-399-54543-6

An African American preteen finds his world upended when his father, a retired professional football player, displays symptoms of traumatic brain injury. Twelve-year-old Zachariah “ZJ” John-son Jr. loves his dad but wonders who he would be if his dad was not a famous athlete. Although his dad is in the spotlight, he is full of love and attention for ZJ and his friends. And fortunately, ZJ has three friends who see him and not his father’s shadow. “Zachariah 44” was a fearless player who suffered many concussions during his playing career. The changes in his father begin slowly and intermittently. Soon the headaches and memory lapses grow increasingly frequent and scary for ZJ and his mom, since the doctors do not seem to have any answers. As his dad slips further away, ZJ’s memories of better times grow closer than ever. Using spare and lyrical language for ZJ’s present-tense narration, which moves back and forth through time, Woodson skillfully portrays the confusion, fear, and sadness when a family member suffers from brain injury and the personality changes it brings. Readers see Zachariah Sr. through ZJ’s eyes and agonize with him as the strong, vibrant athlete begins to fade. The well-rounded secondary characters complete a mosaic of a loving African American family and their community of friends. The tale is set in the early 2000s, as awareness of chronic traumatic encephalopathy and its catastrophic consequences was beginning to emerge.

A poignant and achingly beautiful narrative shedding light on the price of a violent sport. (author’s note) (Historical fiction 10-14)

**THE LIFE OF ANNE FRANK**

Woodward, Kay

Firefly (48 pp.)

$19.95 | $19.95 PLB | Sep. 1, 2020

978-0-2281-0289-2 PLB

An informative volume created with the assistance of the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam places Frank’s diary in context. Archival photos give faces to the Frank family, the other inhabitants of the Secret Annex, and the brave non-Jewish Dutch citizens who assisted the eight Jews to hide for over two years in a few small rooms in the heart of their city. Woodward includes background information on Hitler’s rise to power and the German takeover of the Netherlands as she also details Anne’s early life in Germany (where she was born), then the pre-war years in the Netherlands, and finally the fraught years after life began to change due to the Nazi restrictions on Jewish life. Taken all together, the text will help young readers understand the situation that necessitated the move into the rooms behind Anne’s father’s office. They will learn that the Frank family had been trying to leave for the United States since 1938 but, like many others, were prevented from doing so by the difficult process of getting the proper visa. The succinct but meaty two-page spreads are filled with photos of people, a model of the Annex, and artifacts from the period; excerpts from the diary appear in many pages. With the help of this book, the words of Anne’s diary will come alive. The retail edition is sold in a slipcase with both the book and a separate folder with photo reproductions of some of the items Frank had with her in the Annex; the library edition does not include slipcase or folder.

An effective complement to an enduring chronicle of the Holocaust. (timeline, index) (Nonfiction 11-13)
Through adorable illustrations that exude humor and warmth, this portrait of intergenerational affection is also a tribute to life in Chinatown neighborhoods.

**MY DAY WITH GONG GONG**

*See, Sennab*  
Illus. by Chen, Elaine  
Annick Press (36 pp.)  
$18.95 | Sep. 8, 2020  
978-1-77321-429-0

Spending a day with Gong Gong doesn’t sound like very much fun to May. Gong Gong doesn’t speak English, and May doesn’t know Chinese. How can they have a good day together? As they stroll through an urban Chinatown, May’s perpetually sanguine maternal grandfather chats with friends and visits shops. At each stop, Cantonese words fly back and forth, many clearly pointed at May, who understands none of it. It’s equally exasperating trying to communicate with Gong Gong in English, and by the time they join a card game in the park with Gong Gong’s friends, May is tired, hungry, and frustrated. But although it seems like Gong Gong hasn’t been attentive so far, when May’s day finally comes to a head, it is clear that he has. First-person text gives glimpses into May’s lively thoughts as they evolve through the day, and Gong Gong’s unchangingly jolly face reflects what could be mistaken for blithe obliviousness but is actually his way of showing love through sharing the people and places of his life. Through adorable illustrations that exude humor and warmth, this portrait of intergenerational affection is also a tribute to life in Chinatown neighborhoods: Street vendors, a busker playing a Chinese violin, a dim sum restaurant, and more all combine to add a distinctive texture.

A multilayered, endearing treasure of a day. (glossary)  
*(Picture book. 4-8)*

**INTERRUPTING COW**

*Tolen, Jane*  
Illus. by Dreidemy, Joelle  
Simon Spotlight (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | $4.99 paper | Aug. 25, 2020  
978-1-5344-5424-8  
978-1-5344-5423-1 paper

Series: Interrupting Cow

A cow comedian seeks out a willing audience for her signature knock-knock joke.

While the other cows in the barn graze on hay for breakfast, Daisy—known to the others as Interrupting Cow—begins her routine. “Knock, knock,” she says. “Who’s there?” they reply. And so the back-and-forth goes until Interrupting Cow interrupts “Interrupting Cow wh—?” with a loud “MOO!” She falls “onto the barn floor in helpless giggles” while the other cows run away. She follows them, but the cows ignore her and refuse to play. So Interrupting Cow gives up and visits the duck pond instead. She tells her joke from start to finish, falling “backward into the water with helpless laughter” when she reaches the punchline “MOO!” But when Interrupting Cow recovers, the ducks are gone. The same thing happens with the horses, the chickens, the pigs, the goats, and even the lone donkey. What gives? Her joke isn’t that bad, is it? Yolen’s sidesplitting early-reader series opener cleverly personifies the misunderstood subject of the classic joke. (*Interrupting Cow and the Chicken Crossing the Road* is due out in December 2020.) Dreidemy’s full-color illustrations add to the hilarity with expressive cartoon character designs. With a total vocabulary of fewer than 200 words—including lots of synonyms—and at most nine lines per page, the text stays accessible to emerging readers. The most difficult word, “interrupting,” is even spelled out phonetically. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 9-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.)*

A barrel—or, rather, a barn—of laughs. (Early reader. 5-7)*

**ONE MEAN ANT WITH FLY AND FLEA**

Torinks, Arthur  
Illus. by Ruzzier, Sergio  
Candlewick (48 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct. 13, 2020  
978-0-7636-8395-5

The irritable ant and amiable fly introduced in *One Mean Ant* (2020) return, and this time they meet someone new.

As the book opens, the two are stuck in a spider web, their lives in danger. The fly panics but then spots a “spot” in the web. It’s a flea-circus escapee who is so skilled in acrobatics that his jumping releases all three from the web. The fly and the flea are injured, so the ant must pull them on a leaf by a strand of the spider’s web in order to leave the scene. Unfortunately, Big Jim—of Jim’s Flea Circus—scoops them up (only his pale hand is featured) and forces them to perform. Much of the book’s humor comes from the characters’ banter (when the ant uses idioms, the fly takes them literally, as when he asks the fly to “face the music” and the fly responds with “I don’t hear any music”) and wordplay (a stretch of dialogue in which the characters discuss how the flea “fled the flea circus” undoes the ant but will have readers giggling). There’s also inherent comedy in the duo’s Abbott and Costello–like repartee, with the cantankerous ant as the straight man—er, bug—and the fly as the dimwitted joker. Ruzzier returns to the same pastel hues of the first book and nails the characters’ expressive faces and body language. A cliffhanger wraps up the story, one that perhaps will resolve itself in the final book of the trilogy.

Entertaining, especially for fans of wordplay. (Picture book. 4-8)
MY LITTLE ONE
Zullo, Germano
Illus. by Albertine
Trans. by Kitamura, Katie
Elsewhere Editions (80 pp.)
$24.00 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-939810-66-3

The parent becomes the child in this sparsely worded French import.

The illustrations, done by 2020 Hans Christian Andersen Illustrator Award winner Albertine, rest in copious white space. They are spare, delicate line drawings in what appear to be pencil (no other color is applied) of a short-haired, dress-clad adult, as white as the page. All drawings appear on the recto; if one were to flip the book’s pages, the drawings would appear animated. The adult exclaims, “Here you are... // Finally!” and then cradles a minuscule but fully mature-looking adult, who appears to have emerged from the heart of the speaker. “I’ve been waiting for you,” reads the text. As the adult speaks fondly to the child (“my little one!”), telling them “our story,” embracing them, and even swinging them around in the air, the child grows tall. Gradually, the child is as tall as the parent once was while the parent shrinks in size. The parent becomes the child in this addressing sociodevelopment.

With 11 categories of anatomical adaptations illustrated with roughly 27 different species per physical trait, there are nearly 300 weird and wonderful animals presented in this book. One animal in each set also features the characteristic that defines the subsequent group. The stylized but recognizable creatures are arranged, in varied size and proportion, on saturated, monochromatic backgrounds, each animal lovingly labelled in painstakingly neat yet vexingly tiny print. Dark letters on dark backgrounds prove especially difficult. A child who can remember the animals’ names or who reads independently can and will spend hours revisiting every animal in the book. Caregivers, especially the visually challenged, might be forgiven if they lack the endurance to name every beast at a sitting.

Alas, not different enough to distinguish it from better, similar titles. (Picture book 2-4) (Worry!: 978-1-68464-122-2)

CREATURE FEATURES
Illus. by Durley, Natasha
Big Picture/Candlewick (24 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-1-5362-1043-9

Meet a plethora of fascinating fauna, fancifully sorted by distinguishing physical characteristics.

This whimsical foray into alternative taxonomy will introduce children to an enormous assortment of strange and startling beasts, fish, and fowl and induce eyestrain and fatigue in many doting caregivers. “Animals come in all shapes and sizes,” informs the text, adding that “most of the time, they are grouped into big families, like all the birds together and all the fish together. But there are other ways you can group them—like those with big noses and those who have antlers!” Extensive double-page groupings of creatures follow: “Enormous Eyes,” “Nice Noses,” “Excellent Ears,” “Terrific Tails,” “Dreaded Defenses,” “Huge Horns,” etc. With 11 categories of anatomical adaptations illustrated with roughly 27 different species per physical trait, there are nearly 300 weird and wonderful animals presented in this book. One animal in each set also features the characteristic that defines the subsequent group. The stylized but recognizable creatures are arranged, in varied size and proportion, on saturated, monochromatic backgrounds, each animal lovingly labelled in painstakingly neat yet vexingly tiny print. Dark letters on dark backgrounds prove especially difficult. A child who can remember the animals’ names or who reads independently can and will spend hours revisiting every animal in the book. Caregivers, especially the visually challenged, might be forgiven if they lack the endurance to name every beast at a sitting.

Engaging, exhaustive, and (for grown-ups) slightly exhausting. (Board book 3-7)
This book may be nominally for babies, but its audience is an adult one. Kendi makes this clear in the first two double-page spreads: “Antiracist Baby is bred, not born. / Antiracist Baby is raised to make society transform. // Babies are taught to be racist or antiracist—there is no neutrality. / Take these nine steps to make equity a reality.” Although this board book hardly substitutes for *How To Be an Antiracist* (2019), Kendi’s exploration of the topic for adults, it does serve to remind caregivers that raising an antiracist child is a conscious process. Importantly, points No. 1, “Open your eyes to all skin colors,” and No. 2, “Use your words to talk about race,” aim to correct anxious, usually White caregivers’ tendencies to “deny what’s right in front of you” when their children point out people who look different from them. To these and Kendi’s next seven points, Lukashevsky pairs bold, thickly outlined cartoons of babies and adults of many different skin tones, gender presentations, and body types. A couple of the depicted caregivers have tattoos; one wears the hijab. Several sets of parents can be read as LGBTQ+. The bright colors should keep babies and toddlers engaged while adults work to master the couplets, which do not always scan evenly. Some points are harder than others: “Confess when being racist,” for instance, may require several reads to internalize.

*Antiracism’s starting point.* *(Board book. 6 mos.-3)*

Animal parents declare their love for their offspring through rhymed puns and sentimental art.

The title sets the scene for what’s to come: The owl asks the owlet as they fly together, “WHOO loves you?”; the kangaroo and joey make each other “very HOPPY”; and the lioness and cub are a “PURRRFECT pair.” Most of the puns are both unimaginative and groanworthy, and they are likely to go over the heads of toddlers, who are not known for their wordplay abilities. The text is set in abcb quatrains split over two double-page spreads. On each spread, one couplet appears on the verso within a lightly decorated border on pastel pages. On the recto, a full-bleed portrait of the animal and baby appears in softly colored and cozy images. Hearts are prominent on every page, floating between the parent and baby as if it is necessary to show the love between each pair. Although these critters are depicted in mistily conceived natural habitats and are unclothed, they are human stand-ins through and through.

*The greeting-card art and jokey rhymes work for the baby-shower market but not for the youngest readers.* *(Board book. 6 mos-2)*

This installment in the new Once Before Time series revisits “Sleeping Beauty,” with all the characters played by dinosaurs.

This pleasant but hardly essential adaptation is loose at best; the dinosaurs are cute and expressive. The wishes bestowed by “fairy friends” upon the protagonist princess, Bronty, are threefold: a long neck, a long tail, and a long life. The final wish comes from a selfish, evil-looking fairy named Rhonda. Rhonda wishes for Bronty to prick her tail on a thorn and fall into a deep sleep, allowing Rhonda to become queen in her stead. The story’s simple declarative statements are easy for little listeners to grasp, though lacking in fairy-tale magic. “Bronty grew up. She had a long neck. She would be queen soon! / One day Bronty went for a walk. She met a new friend. He did not have a long neck. He did not have a long tail. He did have a lunch basket.” Bronty’s friend, the prince next door, makes a spicy, hiccup-inducing five-bean chili; happily, the chili has no other magical properties. There is a friendship but no love theme; chili and hiccups wake Bronty, not a kiss, medicinal, consensual, or otherwise.

*Absent the romance and magic, fun but slight.* *(Board book. 1-5)* *(Pterapunzel: 978-1-5248-5823-0)*
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Every generation of young people experiences events that prove to be pivotal in shaping their lives, whether they are personally touched by what is going on or simply part of conversations in their families and communities. Though they may not realize it at the time, these turning points, conflicts, cultural shifts, and societal upheavals echo through time, shaping the choices these young people will make, the opportunities that will be available to them, and the stories they will tell the generations to follow.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter protests are undoubtedly among the most, if not the most, influential news stories this generation's youth will live through. Many parents, librarians, and teachers are actively seeking books to help young people better understand these transformative times, and we are lucky to have a growing list of excellent titles to choose from.

However, learning about history can also be invaluable in offering perspective; knowing that countless others have survived great challenges and sweeping changes helps us feel less alone and increases awareness of all the ways humanity has wrestled with similar questions throughout time. The following middle-grade historical fiction titles all stand as testaments to the ability of youth to navigate upheaval and find meaning in difficult circumstances. Many of them will appeal to teens and adults as well.

*War Is Over* by David Almond; illustrated by David Litchfield (Candlewick, May 12): World War I may be taking place far from John’s home in the north of England, but its impact can be felt everywhere around him. His father is away fighting, and his mother, worryingly, works at the munitions factory, where deadly accidents are a real hazard. By writing to an imagined German boy, John tries to make sense of the conflicting messages he receives from those around him, including an outcast conscientious objector, in this haunting and poetic tale whose vivid illustrations add to the feeling of surreal dislocation.

*The Blackbird Girls* by Anne Blankman (Viking, March 10): The Chernobyl nuclear disaster of 1986 is the backdrop for a memorable story that explores the lives and relationship of two fifth grade girls from very different families. Oksana reluctantly travels to Leningrad with underdog Valentina, who is Jewish and bullied at school; there, they take shelter with the grandmother Valentina knows little about. The story takes an environmental disaster and shows its human impact on an intimate scale while also demonstrating how traumatic events from the past continue to affect families in profound ways.

*Finding Langston* (Holiday House, 2018) and *Leaving Lymon* by Lesa Cline-Ransome (Holiday House, Jan. 7): These companion volumes introduce readers to two Black boys from the South—Langston from Ala-
bama and Lymon from Mississippi—who end up crossing paths in 1940s Chicago as part of the Great Migration. Although in the first book Lymon picks on Langston, who discovers the joys of the public library and the pleasures of reading poetry, the second one shows the difficult path that Lymon has trod, from a personal struggle with an undiagnosed learning disability to an unkind teacher and family tragedies. The boys are well-developed and sympathetic characters for whom readers will develop a strong attachment.

**A Place To Belong** by Cynthia Kadohata (Caitlyn Dlouhy/Atheneum, 2019): After being unjustly incarcerated, 12-year-old Hanako and her family join other Japanese Americans who choose to leave the U.S. following World War II. Moving to the outskirts of a war-battered Hiroshima to live with Hanako’s paternal grandparents, adjusting to a local school, coping with extreme hunger, and coming to understand the horrors of the atomic bomb all prove to be great challenges for a girl who has already endured so much loss and change. The story is grounded in a well-evoked sense of place with strong character development.

**The Night Diary** by Veera Hiranandani (Dial, 2018): The Partition of India, which led to the displacement of approximately 14 million people, is here described through the eyes of sensitive, observant Nisha, a 12-year-old whose late mother was Muslim and whose father is Hindu. She and her family must leave behind their home and community—the place that holds memories of her beloved mother—and embark on a harrowing and dangerous journey across a new, artificial border. The portrayal of sibling dynamics—Nisha has a twin brother who is her opposite in many ways—adds greatly to this powerful tale.

Laura Simeon is a young readers’ editor.
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

1789 by Marc Aronson & Susan Campbell Bartoletti...................... 149
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GARDEN OF THORNS AND LIGHT
Addante, Shylah
Month9Books (270 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-951710-36-1

Amethyst is a growing teen. The question is, what is she growing into?
Something is wrong with Amethyst: Her skin is sprouting spiky green thorns,

SISTERS OF THE WAR
Two Remarkable True Stories of Survival and Hope in Syria
Abouzeid, Rania
Scholastic Focus (288 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-338-55112-9

As the conflict that will eventually claim more than 500,000 lives erupts in Syria, this account follows two real families on different sides of the political divide who end up in similar circumstances.

Eight-year-old Hanin is at first oblivious to the conflict. Her father is certain that the early small protests will be squashed by the Syrian regime. Her family, like that of President Bashar Hafez al-Assad, belongs to the country’s Alawite religious minority, whose members support the government and hold military and security power. Nine-year-old Ruha’s acute awareness of the struggle for justice in Syria begins with a raid on her home during the peaceful uprising in 2011. Subsequently, her town gets shelled and school is no longer safe. Her community is Sunni Muslim, like the country’s majority. Lebanese Australian journalist Abouzeid illustrates the complexity of the Syrian conflict over six years while reporting on and quoting the two families. Both girls’ families suffered in unspeakable ways due to the conflict. Their stories, juxtaposed in alternating chapters, focus heavily on their identities, favoring an account of warring religious groups at the expense of delving into systemic government suppression, competing international interests, and the struggle (sometimes armed) for rights. The detailed documentation of the conflict also eerily leaves out Assad’s role in enabling Islamist fighters and gains due to their assistance.

While presenting powerful true stories of survival, the book could leave a distorted impression of the Syrian conflict. (cast of characters, map, author’s note) (Nonfiction. 12-18)
Amethyst was mesmerized by tiny, floating lights that whispered her name, and she followed them into the midnight woods, where a monster attempted to kidnap her. When she regained consciousness, she learned her mother had vanished. Now her father and therapist give her an ultimatum to deal with her intense anxiety: Spend a summer with her estranged grandmother or be committed to an inpatient facility. Deciding on time with Gran, Amethyst is welcomed to town by the handsome and charming Ben, who helps her dig up information on her mother. Their search results in Amethyst’s meeting the mysterious and dangerous fairy Absynth, her mother’s twin sister who lives in the woods nearby. After learning that she too has fairy blood, Amethyst has to make a decision: stay fully human and let her love for Ben blossom or become a full fairy, leaving her human life behind forever. Though some of her decisions seem rushed, Amethyst grows in ways that will be familiar and comforting to readers, and both worlds, fairy and human, are fully developed. Human characters are White; fairies have varying skin tones.

This supernatural page-turner with twists will leave readers wishing they had fairy wings. (Paranormal. 12-18)

1789

Twelve Authors Explore a Year of Rebellion, Revolution, and Change

Ed. by Aronson, Marc & Bartoletti, Susan Campbell

Candlewick (208 pp.)

$22.99 | Sep. 1, 2020

978-1-5362-0873-3

As they did in 1968 (2018), Aronson and Bartoletti examine a single year through many different angles, focusing particularly on liberty, subjugation, and the question of who counts as a person.

Tanya Lee Stone opens the volume with the fishwives of Les Halles marching on Versailles. Bartoletti tells the story of Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun, who painted Marie Antoinette wearing a casual cotton chemise—a small act of rebellion. Meanwhile, formerly enslaved West African Olaudah Equiano publishes his autobiography in London; the Swedish king, Gustav III, enacts a surprising degree of social equality; Jurij Vega, a soldier in Belgrade, calculates pi to 140 digits; and a Scottish geologist called James Hutton begins to understand the true age of the Earth.

In the conclusion to the Mirage duology, identity and self-acceptance are inextricably tied to revolution and the dismantling of colonial oppression and power.

Having spared a rebel assassin and broken princess Maram’s trust, body double Amani must now obey orders to disrupt the food chain during World War II. In San Francisco’s Japantown, a group of teens has grown up together and become like family. But life in America after the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor is dangerous for them. They and their families are taken to the Topaz incarceration camp in Utah, where the harsh conditions and injustices they experience turn their worlds upside down. They draw some comfort in being together—however, a government questionnaire causes rifts: Loyalties are questioned, lines are drawn, and anger spills over, threatening to destroy the bonds that once held them together. The teens are forced apart, some enlisting in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team while the No-Nos (those who refuse to serve in the U.S. military and swear allegiance solely to the U.S. government) are relocated to the Tule Lake camp, and others, whose families passed background checks, are allowed to resettle in locations around the country. This is a compelling and transformative story of a tragic period in American history. Written from the 14 young people’s intertwining points of view, each character fills in a segment of time between 1942 and 1945. The styles vary, including both first- and second-person narration as well as verse and letters. Each voice is powerful, evoking raw emotions of fear, anger, resentment, uncertainty, grief, pride, and love. Historical photographs and documents enhance the text.

An unforgettable must-read. (author’s note, further reading, image credits) (Historical fiction. 13-18)

COURT OF LIONS

Daud, Somayya

Flatiron Books (320 pp.)

$18.99 | Aug. 4, 2020

978-1-250-12645-0

Series: Mirage, 2

In the conclusion to the Mirage duology, identity and self-acceptance are inextricably tied to revolution and the dismantling of colonial oppression and power.
Takes the standard chosen-one formula and tips it on its head, then wrings what’s left for all it’s worth.

**THE ART OF SAVING THE WORLD**

The newsroom is Cat’s home away from home, and now, as a high school senior, she is finally editor-in-chief of the school paper. Not that anyone reads it: Her earnest exposés of an unhealthy student culture don’t sit well with many. Her sister, Angeline, is a multiple character of color show up, both in important roles, such as Hazel’s biracial half sister, Carolyn, and Chinese adoptive father, and as background characters, like some of Hazel’s classmates. The representation of mental health issues is at times so painfully accurate that the novel becomes difficult to read but at the same time, impossible to put down. Refreshingly, Duyvis finds time to discuss painful periods and what an endometriosis diagnosis means for a teenage girl. A midnovel twist takes the standard chosen-one plot formula and tips it on its head, then wrings what’s left for all the angst and existential crises it’s worth.

A compelling narrative based around the subversion of generic fantasy and science fiction fodder. (Science fiction. 15-18)

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**LEGENDBORN**

Deonn, Tracy
McElderry (112 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-4344-4160-6
Series: Legendborn, 1

Sixteen-year-old Black whiz kid Bree Matthews battles grief and demonic forces on her college campus.

After her mother dies in an accident, Bree begins a residential program for enterprising teens at her mother’s alma mater and, soon after her arrival, witnesses a magical attack that triggers hidden memories about the evening her mother was killed. Haunted by the fact that their final conversation was an argument, Bree begins a redemptive quest to uncover the connection between her mother’s death and the university’s secret society, the Order of the Round Table, joining their ranks as an initiate and unwittingly stumbling into a centuries-old supernatural war. While competing in the tournament that determines entry to the society, Bree discovers the truth about her heretofore unknown magical abilities, unwinding a complex history that showcases the horrors chattel slavery in the American South perpetuates on the descendants of all involved. Push through clunky expositions and choppy transitions that interrupt the cohesion of the text to discover solid character development that brings forward contemporary, thoughtful engagement with the representation, or lack thereof, of race in canonical Arthurian lore and mythologies. Representation of actualized, strong queer characters is organic, not forced, and so are textual conversations around emotional wellness and intergenerational trauma.

Well-crafted allusions to established legends and other literary works are delightful easter eggs. Don’t look over sea or under stone, this is the fantasy novel for all once and future fans of suspense-filled storytelling. (author’s note) (Fantasy. 14-18)

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**SOURCES SAY**

Goldstein, Lori
Razorbill/Penguin (352 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-0-593-11740-8

Politics, ethical journalism, and social media intertwine in this contemporary story of two sisters with a strained relationship.

The newsroom is Cat’s home away from home, and now, as a high school senior, she is finally editor-in-chief of the school paper. Not that anyone reads it: Her earnest exposés of an unhealthy student culture don’t sit well with many. Her sister, Angeline, is a
popular social media influencer who has worked hard to make her YouTube channel, “Ask an Angel,” a success, even though Cat dismisses the work and focus that go into being a vlogger. The upcoming student council election sees Angeline and her ex-boyfriend, Leo, running for class president in a very public battle. While Angeline starts by making campaign promises based on popular demands, she comes to realize there are real problems that need to be addressed. Meanwhile, Cat’s reporting skills and journalistic ethics will face their greatest challenge against the competition of social media and the danger of fake news. Alternating chapters between Angeline and Cat, this fun and provocative novel sees the sisters growing in their relationship while dealing with thorny issues of accountability, truth, enacting change, and the systemic sexism prevalent in their school. Cat and Angeline are cued as White; Leo is the son of Venezuelan immigrants, and there is diversity among the supporting characters. Entertaining, thought-provoking, and heartwarming. (Fiction. 14-18)

IGNITE THE SUN
Howard, Hanna C.
Blink (352 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-0-310-76973-6

In a sinister world of perpetual darkness, only Siria the sunchild can bring back the light.

Siria Nightingale has grown up reciting the mantra of Gildenbrook, a posh girls boarding school and incubator for the queen’s courtiers: “The Light was dangerous and destructive. Thank Her Highness the queen, the Darkness protects us now.” From the beginning, Siria knows she is different. Her red hair stands out, and she radiates extreme heat at the slightest provocation. At the Choosing Ball in Queen Iyzabel’s obsidian castle she is outed as the escaped sunchild and thus as the archenemy of the wicked queen. Siria explores with destructive solar energy, sending the court into confusion and releasing her from the castle. She is rescued by her parents’ humble servants, Yarrow, a wise old mage, and his grandson, Linden, a hunky young wood nymph and Siria’s best friend. The excitement of constant transformations, battles, and terrifying escapes is sustained throughout the long narrative. During a grueling journey to reach the northern rebel stronghold where she can experience the vernal equinox, Siria comes to terms with her true identity and learns to utilize her solar powers for good and, ultimately, to destroy the Darkness. Her metamorphosis from an insecure teenager to a compassionate and powerful individual will appeal to readers struggling with self-esteem. Siria is White, and Linden is brown-skinned. An absorbing tale of triumph and self-discovery. (Fantasy. 14-18)

GROWN
Jackson, Tiffany D.
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-06-284035-6

An aspiring singer is taken advantage of by a superstar.

Since moving to the suburbs from Queens, 17-year-old Enchanted has been suffering. Although her Grandma’s apartment was cramped with everyone all together, Enchanted got to do the things she loves the most—swimming in the ocean, hanging out with her Grandma, and singing. Now, neither her new neighborhood nor her new private school is diverse, and she has to spend her free time watching her siblings. However, she does join the school swim team, and water is used as a powerful metaphor throughout the book. When Enchanted catches the eye of a 28-year-old music superstar at a singing competition, she pushes doubt and her parents’ misgivings aside and goes on tour.
with him. Enchanted is a naïve protagonist, but the decisions she makes in order to launch her career are plausible. As the relationship turns abusive, Enchanted must find the courage to escape. The narrative unfolds in nonchronological order, and toward the end, as the timelines merge, it feels a bit clunky, but the storytelling overall is captivating. The novel shines light on biases against young Black women and the victim-blaming that so often occurs when a predator has power, fame, and money. Major characters are Black.

Compelling; Jackson excels in writing books steeped in social commentary. (author's note, resources) (Fiction. 13-18)

THE YEAR SHAKESPEARE RUINED MY LIFE
Jansen, Dani
Second Story Press (304 pp.)
$13.95 paper | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-77260-121-3

Give her your hands, if you be friends; and Alison shall restore amends.

Alison Green has a mission. She intends to graduate as valedictorian and will do whatever it takes to get there. When a teacher asks her to help produce the school's spring play, A Midsummer Night's Dream, she jumps on the opportunity, thinking it'll help boost her scholarship applications. But she quickly finds herself overwhelmed by the challenges of producing “Ye Olde Shakespearean Disaster,” from uncompromising artistic egos to funding troubles to relational tangles and triangles that seem pulled directly from the pages of the script. And if that weren't enough, she still needs to make valedictorian. Any reader who has ever struggled with overcommitment will recognize quirky, quiet Alison's struggle to keep her newly hectic life in check. The constant balancing act between a need for assertiveness and the drive to please everyone provokes responses—and sometimes negative consequences—that feel keenly relatable. Alison's first-person narration is pensive and raw, capturing well the circuitous, flighty nature of her anxious thought process. Her flickering confidence and glee over small victories imbue the pages with warmth, making the pain of setbacks and new complications all the more poignant. Jansen crafts a tale both modern and timeless, exploring as it does sexuality, friendship, family relations, and trust. Alison is White and lesbian; there is diversity in supporting characters.

In the words of the Bard himself, most wonderful. (Fiction. 12-18)

CLOUD HOPPER
Kephart, Beth
Illus. by Sulit, William
Penelope Editions (332 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-73422-590-7

Teenagers try to solve a mystery and help a girl who won't speak.

Sophie Blanchard, named after the famous French balloonist, lives with her Grandma Aubrey in a rural farming area known for its hot air balloons. Her grandmother, who suffers from multiple sclerosis, stepped in when Sophie's mother abandoned her. Wyatt and K, Sophie's best friends, also know deep loss, though, like Sophie, they don't speak much about it. One day, the three witness a one-person balloon, or cloud hopper, meeting with a terrible accident. They rush to save the life of the girl piloting it and then—when she will not speak and no one shows up to claim her—try to discover her identity. Backed up by suspicions as to why she is keeping quiet, the three embark on a mission to help the girl and, along the way, find that they may have also helped themselves. Evocative, slightly surreal, charcoal-like illustrations are scattered through the text, and the prose is poetic as it delivers harsh truths about dealing with grief and loss while facing frightening circumstances. This novel touches on family, immigration, and leading with compassion. Readers will quickly get a feel for the characters, even secondary ones, and empathize with their complex, sometimes lightly unearthed stories. Main characters are White by default; some secondary ones are Latinx.

A moving story about what makes a family and making a home wherever you end up. (Fiction. 13-18)

THE BRIDGE
Konigsberg, Bill
Scholastic (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-338-32503-4

Multiple realities explore the butterfly effects of two attempted teen suicides.

Each of the narrative's alternate timelines starts the same way: Aaron Boroff and Tillie Stanley meet by coincidence at the George Washington Bridge. Both contemplate leaping into the Hudson River to end their lives—“facing each other like they’re playing a deadly game of dare.” Aaron, a White gay boy with a Christian mom and a Jewish dad who dreams of viral internet success as a singer/songwriter, feels he is a failure both musically and romantically. Tillie, a fat, adopted, Korean girl, has had enough of feeling out of place in her White family and being bullied at school. From there, the four linear timelines (presented one after the other) diverge into four possible outcomes: only Tillie jumps, only Aaron jumps, they both jump, or neither jumps. No outcome
is presented as the true story, leaving readers to come to their own conclusions. Drawing from personal experience, Konigsberg’s portrayal of depression is raw, honest, and nuanced. The deftly navigated third-person-omniscient narration powerfully evokes spiraling, obsessive thoughts and manic episodes. In addition to the focal teens’ inner monologues, secondary characters—from family members to classmates—are sharply drawn and complicated. Though some plot points only happen in certain timelines, the text’s careful construction hints that the best possible outcome is the teens’ survival.

A heartbreaking bridge into depression supported by a strong foundation of hope. (author’s note, resources) (Fiction. 14-18)
FROM RIVALS TO LOVERS: TWO TEENS EXPLORE SEATTLE AND FIND THEMSELVES IN SOLOMON’S NEW NOVEL

By Laura Simeon

Today Tonight Tomorrow (Simon Pulse, July 28) features a group of new high school graduates on an elaborate scavenger hunt around the city of Seattle. Rowan Roth, who is Latinx and Jewish, and her longtime frenemy, Neil McNair, who is White and—unknownst to Rowan—has a Jewish mother, end up working together despite their yearslong, intensely personal competition. Author Rachel Lynn Solomon and I spoke over Zoom; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

As a fellow Seattleite, I so enjoyed experiencing the city through this book. It’s been the best hearing reactions from other Seattle people. When I started writing this there were things that I knew I wanted to include that don’t exist anymore, so it’s sort of like a dream version of Seattle; a mishmash of old and new Seattle.

As a huge fan of the romance genre, Rowan surely must know the enemies-to-lovers trope, so it’s hilarious to see how long it takes her to realize how she feels about Neil.

One of my favorite things to write and to read is when it is so clear that the reason a character is fixating on another character is because they’re into them. My favorite example with [Rowan] is she would sit in a student council meeting and just stare at [Neil] and count his freckles—like this is a normal thing to do when you hate someone! For me, a trope like that is all about the journey: Even if the reader knows where it’s going to end up, there’s just so many fun ways that you can play with that tension along the way.

I also appreciate the fact that she’s prickly at times, not always “nice.” I really enjoy writing girls that aren’t nice. I don’t know what it says about me that they’re easy to write! I just think that girls don’t get as much permission or as much forgiveness to be this range of different things. There’s so much more freedom for male-centered, SF action—[yet] a lot of it has the same plot and the same kinds of characters.

The sex-positive element of the story is powerful and handled so well.

A lot of what I’m writing is to combat harmful things that I saw as a teen or things I’m still seeing in YA. There is just such a taboo when it comes to talk-
ing about not just desire, but women’s bodies, and I want to discuss that to the extent that I can.

One of my favorite parts was when Rowan thinks about how Judaism is both something she loves and also what isolates her. The book really explores the richness that comes from belonging to a marginalized culture.

I personally have a complicated relationship with [being Jewish]. I wanted to show that [Rowan and Neil] have the positive things that they take from their identities and it’s something that is a source of pride for both of them, but they’re also both deeply aware that it is something that people hate about them for absolutely no reason and something that causes them pain on occasion. I’ve always felt this intense connection with other Jewish people, and I wanted to explore that as well, especially because [Neil is] a secret Jew. I loved writing that reveal and just giving them another level on which to connect. When they talk about being Jewish, it is quite long, and I remember thinking my editor is probably going to have me cut this. But when we got to line edits, at the end of the conversation she wrote, “I love this,” which was so nice. I remember joking to my friends, “I just completely stopped the book for five pages so they can talk about being Jewish!”

The book handles microaggressions very skillfully—and probably a lot of non-Jewish people would be surprised to find the characters encounter anti-Semitism somewhere like Seattle.

Growing up [in a suburb of Seattle], I was the only Jewish kid in all my elementary school classes. Every December, it was, “Rachel, do you want to stand up and tell everyone about Hanukkah?” And it was so humiliating. I’m 4’10,” and I was always the tiniest kid in class; I was painfully shy, and I dreaded it. There were a few more Jewish kids in junior high, and then, funnily enough, I dated the only other Jewish guy in my grade in high school. Then I dated the only Jewish guy in the grade below me! You find each other. I think that’s true of a lot of marginalized communities because you have those shared experiences or those shared emotions, like Rowan and Neil do; they just immediately “get” each other on that level.

YA has allowed me to excavate uncomfortable moments in my past that I’ve never fully recovered from. With regard to this [book], I rediscovered a memory that I had locked away for a long time: I was friends with someone in elementary school, and as soon as she found out I was Jewish, I was not allowed to go over to her house anymore. It was very traumatic watching Holocaust films in high school and afterward the teachers expecting you to have a certain opinion about them.

Your book explores how little respect romance often gets as a genre.

That came from what was presented to me: This is the kind of literature that you look down on. These older books, that are all written by the same type of person, are the kind that you put in a library and collect and [that] have value. It wasn’t until after college that I started going back to YA and picking up romance and realizing that I still loved it and wondering why—if it brought me so much joy and wasn’t harming anyone—why should people be judged for it?
A thoughtful portrayal of determined multinational teens balancing authenticity with pursuing their dreams.
(Fiction. 14-18)

HORRID
Leno, Katrina
Little, Brown (336 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-316-53724-7

A spooky New England town gets a couple new residents. Jane arrives in Bells Hollow, Maine, hoping to rebuild her life in the wake of her father's unexpected death. After selling their California home to settle debts, Jane's mother, Ruth, has relocated the small family to the childhood home left to her by her estranged parents. The house, North Manor, is the subject of whispers and rumor in the small town. Jane makes friends at school and gets an after-school job in a bookstore that contains a coffee shop, but all the while there's a creeping dread in the back of her mind: Something is very wrong with this place, and her mother isn't being completely honest with her. As Jane stumbles through anxiety, mystery readers will itch for the big reveal. The author crafts spooky set pieces and an intriguing cast of supporting characters, but Jane's repetitive cycle of grief, dread, anxiety, repeat comes very close to wearing out its welcome. Luckily, just when it reaches the boiling point, secrets are revealed and twisted upon, serving up an explosive finale that reframes the slower bits and ends the book on a high note. Main characters are White; Jane's school friend Susie and her boss, Will, are Black.

A deliberately paced thriller with a frightful twist. (Thriller. 13-17)

GOLD WINGS RISING
London, Alex
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (480 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-374-30689-2
Series: Skybound Saga, 3

Feathers fly in this conclusion to the Skybound Saga trilogy.
The war between earth and sky continues as hundreds of ghost eagles terrorize the Six Villages. Pieced-together nets and caves offer some protection, but the Six Villages have become overcrowded. Enemies are trapped in the same metaphorical cage, fighting for food and territory as Uztari society verges on collapse. Though everyone seems to be a pawn or prey in the ghost eagles’ game, twins Kylee and Brysen are at the center of it all. The birds communicate with the siblings through nightmares and visions, eventually leading them to find the giant egg of a black eagle. Brysen wants to protect it. Kylee wants to destroy it. Whoever gets their hands (or talons) on it, will it really bring an end to this war? Following the battle-heavy Red Skies Falling (2019), this final entry effectively ties up many of the loose threads while maintaining a constant wingbeat of danger and intrigue. As in previous books, London’s omniscient third-person narration glides in and out of characters’ heads to keep the intricate plot moving. Readers expecting compelling character arcs may come away disappointed, as the twins start to feel like broken records. The biggest disappointment, however, is the ending. While the revealed fantasy history draws strong emotional parallels to real-life history, the conclusion ultimately nose-dives into mixed messages about justice.

A skittering end to an ambitious series. (Fantasy. 13-18)

THE GAME
Miller, Linsey
Random House (240 pp.)
$9.99 paper | Aug. 4, 2020
978-0-593-17978-9

High schooler Lia is thoroughly prepared to try to win Assassins, the secretive game the senior class plays every year. Small teams receive email messages from the mysterious Council identifying their targets, whom they must “execute” with water pistols while avoiding their own stalkers. Lia, unlike her older brother and friends, has never been a star. Winning this highly competitive game will finally be her turn to shine, so she’s been keeping tabs on many of her classmates’ schedules. Her BFF, Gem, is amused when Devon, the guy Lia wishes were her boyfriend, ends up on their team along with Ben, whose sister Gem crushes on. But then students start dying, beginning with Lia’s first target. It looks like an accident, but Lia heard something suspicious and she’s not sure. Other deaths follow, and even as Lia’s relationship with Devon deepens, evidence starts to point to her as the culprit. With Lia’s parents unsupportive and the police suspicious of her, it falls to her and her surviving friends to identify and stop the killer. A brisk pace and short chapters keep the plot moving relentlessly forward, sustaining suspense, and if the details and lack of character development don’t quite bear up under close examination, it’s easy to overlook those shortcomings. Lia seems to be White; brown-skinned Gem uses they/them pronouns, and Devon is cued as Latinx.

A fine vacation read—quick, deadly, and surprisingly entertaining. (Mystery. 12-18)
EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO ACE GEOMETRY IN ONE BIG FAT NOTEBOOK

Needham, Christy
Workman (624 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-5235-0437-4
Series: Big Fat Notebooks

This study guide offers extensive notes to supplement high school geometry courses.

Styled as a notebook filled with clear, concise class notes, this volume covers 10 units of progressively more complicated geometry concepts over the course of more than 600 pages. Beginning with the basics—points, lines, planes, and angles—the chapters work through triangles, quadrilaterals, and polygons; right angles and trigonometry; and area and volume, among other topics. Large, clear text that resembles handwriting on blue-lined paper presents information that is organized in tables, lists, definitions, extensive diagrams, and step-by-step sample problems. Capital letters, bold font, highlighting and colored text, and diagrams make important concepts stand out against the ample white space so it is easy to locate specific topics during study sessions, whether flipping through pages or using the table of contents or extensive index. Each chapter ends with a quiz with answers immediately following. The explanations of concepts are clear, sometimes using everyday examples to make the ideas accessible. The skills are carefully scaffolded with sample problems for straightforward digestion and practice, though the more complicated topics may require repeated exposure for retention. As with other books in the series, this notebook is intended as a supplement to a traditional textbook and course, and it serves this purpose well.

A reference work that makes high school geometry a little easier to learn. (index) (Nonfiction. 14-18)

EVERY IF WE BREAK

Nijkamp, Marieke
Sourcebooks Fire (336 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-4926-3611-3

A murder-mystery role-playing game becomes real when its players gather in a remote mountain cabin.

In their elaborate fantasy world of Gonfalon, five disparate high schoolers can safely be themselves, solving murders and exploring new identities. But now, painful rifts threaten their friendship. As a last-ditch effort to reconcile before heading out into the world, they meet in the Arizona mountains for one last game. But soon, players start dying for real, and the killer knows their worst secrets. Are the ghost stories about the mountain true, or is the killer all too human? In alternating chapters, the teens reflect on their lives while fighting to survive. Finn, a trans boy who has arthritis and walks with forearm crutches, loathes asking for help. Ever, who’s trans and nonbinary, struggles to support their working-class family. Maddy, who’s autistic, grapples with pain and trauma after a car accident. Wealthy Liva is beholden to her family’s expectations, and Carter feels unappreciated. Author Nijkamp, who identifies as queer, disabled, and nonbinary, thoughtfully examines the intricacies of neurodivergence, chronic pain, addiction, and belonging. Unfortunately, repetitive, expository narration bogs down the pacing and diminishes suspense. Characters are distinguished more by their respective challenges than by full-fledged personalities, and dialogue is often stilted. However, Ever and Finn’s romance is touching. The teens are White.

Despite the characters’ refreshingly intersectional diversity, the thrills fall flat. (Thriller. 14-18)

MAKING FRIENDS WITH ALICE DYSON

Nwosu, Poppy
Walker US/Candlewick (304 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-5362-1478-9

Alice Dyson has spent her high school career perfecting the art of invisibility—until the day she unexpectedly befriends Teddy Tanalai, and suddenly she’s all anyone can talk about.

A studious loner living under immense pressure from her mother’s unrealistic expectations, Alice avoids everyone except her best friend, May, whom she’s known since kindergarten. But then Teddy inserts himself into her life, and Alice finds herself opening up in ways she never has before, including romantically. Alice isn’t the only one changing: After years on the sidelines, May craves popularity and begins to act in ways Alice can’t understand. As Alice grows closer to Teddy and drifts away from May, she must make choices about who her friends are—and about the kind of friend she wants to be. Alice’s voice is charmingly open, honest, and kind, and her loyalty to her friends combined with her deep insecurity render her character fascinatingly layered. At times, Teddy’s pushiness feels toxic, and Alice’s willingness to return to him seems both unhealthy and out of character. While her relationships with May and Teddy are complex, Alice’s relationship with her parents is barely explored, leading to an ending that feels too tidy to be believable. Other than Teddy, whose name and dark skin may cue him under her unrealistic expectations, Alice avoids everyone except her best friend, May, whom she’s known since kindergarten. But then Teddy inserts himself into her life, and Alice finds herself opening up in ways she never has before, including romantically. Alice isn’t the only one changing: After years on the sidelines, May craves popularity and begins to act in ways Alice can’t understand. As Alice grows closer to Teddy and drifts away from May, she must make choices about who her friends are—and about the kind of friend she wants to be. Alice’s voice is charmingly open, honest, and kind, and her loyalty to her friends combined with her deep insecurity render her character fascinatingly layered. At times, Teddy’s pushiness feels toxic, and Alice’s willingness to return to him seems both unhealthy and out of character. While her relationships with May and Teddy are complex, Alice’s relationship with her parents is barely explored, leading to an ending that feels too tidy to be believable. Other than Teddy, whose name and dark skin may cue him as Samoan, most of the characters in the book are White.

An entertaining teen romance with a problematic approach to consent. (Romance. 14-18)
In 2016, Francisco X. Stork’s response to rising calls to “build a wall” was to write a book.

*Disappeared* was the story of Sara and Emiliano Zapata, a young Mexican journalist and her teenage brother forced to flee their native city, Ciudad Juárez, after exposing a human trafficking ring. With henchmen in hot pursuit, the siblings make the harrowing journey across the border and into the United States.

“I started writing *Disappeared* at the time of the last presidential election, when there were so many caricatures of immigrants out there,” says Stork, 67, who was born in Mexico and moved to El Paso, Texas, with his mother and adoptive father when he was 9.

The ubiquity of anti-Mexican, anti-immigrant, and anti-refugee sentiments revealed during the election both surprised and angered him. “What was so powerful to me was to see so many people who felt that way,” he tells Kirkus by phone from his home in Massachusetts. “There’s a certain anger that I had….I had to work with it, to transform that anger into something creative. To create complex characters, complex situations, which approximate the real.”

Realistic fiction depicting Latinx teens’ unique lives are Stork’s stock in trade. The celebrated YA author’s eight novels include Chicano/Latino Literary Prize winner *The Way of the Jaguar* (2000), *Marcelo in the Real World* (2009), and *The Memory of Light* (2016). A graduate of Harvard University and Columbia Law School, he practiced at a number of private law firms and public agencies while pursuing his calling to write.

“I usually leave books in a kind of hopeful place,” says Stork, who intended *Disappeared* to be a stand-alone novel. But several months after filing the manuscript, Sara and Emiliano remained at the forefront of his mind. “This was one of the few times that I felt that there was more to their story, more that they needed to resolve in their own lives.”

In *Illegal* (Scholastic, Aug. 4), Book 2 of the Disappeared series, Sara and Emiliano are forced to contend with the realities of seeking refuge in the United States. For complicated reasons, Sara chooses to surrender to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents. She’s incarcerated at the Fort Stockton Detention Center, awaiting approval of her asylum application.

Emiliano remains in Texas, harbored by a kind stranger, carrying a cellphone whose contents could bring down cartel members and power players on both sides of the border. He must decide whether to continue north, to
reunite with their estranged father in Illinois, while figuring out how to access and deploy the incriminating information.

Throughout the book, Sara and Emiliano grapple with what it means to be a moral agent in the face of many fraught and dangerous situations. To do so, they discover, is never as simple as following the law of the land.

“There’s this whole concept of the United States being a nation of laws,” Stork says. “But then, how are those laws created? Just because it’s a law doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s just. Even if the law is just, it doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s justly implemented.”

Illegal alternates between Sara’s and Emiliano’s points of view, marking a departure from the earlier book’s third-person narration. The effect, Kirkus writes, is “a biting indictment of the U.S. government’s immoral apathy to the refugee crisis within its borders. Strong character development, however, reigns supreme.”

“I was able to access Sara’s mind better in the first person,” Stork says of the sequel. “I wanted to capture what I guess you would call a ‘loss of faith’ that she goes through in the book, of the belief that the United States still has the best system of laws, and it was difficult to capture that intimacy in the third person. The same thing with Emiliano, with the more kind of intimate things—can he forgive his father, observations about his travels in this country—it just seemed like the first person was doable.”

Stork deftly presents Illegal’s weighty subject matter with humor and heart. And in moments of grace and gratitude, his characters discover that where we come from is not always the same as where we belong.

“To me, coming from Mexico, living in the United States, there’s always a sense of a paradox,” Stork says. “I’m appreciative of the opportunities that this country gave me but also [have] a hollow feeling in my heart. There’s always been a search for belonging.

“I never quite fit in, which is probably not a bad thing,” he says. “It happened to me in the profession of law, when I was working as a lawyer, and I didn’t quite feel like that was the right fit for me. That feeling of not belonging kept me searching and, eventually, led me to try to be a writer. To find a place of belonging, at least, in what I was doing with my life.”

Megan Labrise is the editor at large and host of Kirkus’ Fully Booked podcast.
GUARDIANS OF LIBERTY
Freedom of the Press and the Nature of News
Osborne, Linda Barrett
Abrams (208 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-1-4197-3689-6

“Knowing the story of why freedom of the press was important to the founding fathers...and how it has stayed a strong principle in American law and culture can help us understand its value today.”

This efficient text (an introduction and nine short chapters, buttressed by a timeline) offers an excellent foray into the hows and why's of U.S. press freedom, beginning just prior to nationhood. The accessible, mostly chronological text is full of short quotations from both primary and secondary sources. It includes excellent definitions, informative sidebars, and archival photographs. The ebb and flow of press freedoms over the course of the country’s history are combined with succinct history of the means of communication, from printing on paper all the way through to today’s social media. Careful scholarship links big questions about balancing transparency and national security to wartime reporting, the Pentagon Papers, Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning, and more. The text warns about today’s citizens’ reading and listening only to outlets that support their own views and how that endangers democracy. President Donald Trump’s media provocations are discussed along with the murder of Jamal Khashoggi and the work of Reporters Without Borders. Two cases involving high schoolers’ freedoms are explored. A particularly noteworthy sidebar offers guidance on how readers can determine the accuracy of their news. For optimal use, readers should first have a rudimentary understanding of U.S. civics, which perhaps makes it better suited to middle and high school than elementary readers.

Timely, essential reading. (index, select bibliography)
(Nonfiction. 12-16)

EACH OF US A DESERT
Osbico, Mark
Tor Teen (432 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-250-16921-1

What does it mean to come into your own power by letting go of it?

The villagers of Empalme devoutly pray to Solis, the feared higher power who unleashed La Quema, or fire, on humanity for its ills of greed, war, and jealousy. As the village cuentista, Xochitl listens to and receives the villagers’ stories into her body, clearing their consciences, preventing the manifestation of their nightmares, and releasing them to Solis in the desert. Having diligently played this role since childhood, she is now a deeply lonesome 16-year-old whose only comfort comes from cherished poems. Worn weary by her role, she leaves on an odyssey in search of another way to exist. In their sophomore novel, Oshiro deftly weaves an intricate, allegorical, and often gory tale within a post-apocalyptic desert setting that readers will feel so viscerally they may very well need to reach for a glass of water. It is a world parallel to ours, rife with Biblical references and the horrific traps that Latinx immigrants face while seeking better lives. Xochitl’s first-person, questioning narration—interlaced with terrifying eventos that she receives on her journey—is the strongest voice, although secondary and tertiary characters, both human and mythical, are given a tenderness and humanity. All main characters are Latinx, and queer relationships are integrated with refreshing normality.

A meditation and adventure quest offering solace to anyone bearing an unfair burden. (Fantasy/horror. 14+8)

AS THE SHADOW RISES
Pool, Katy Rose
Henry Holt (496 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-250-21177-4
Series: Age of Darkness, 2

Five characters face a prophesied Age of Darkness in this epic fantasy sequel. As the world starts to crumble under a dangerous cult whose political power increases as they persecute the magical Graced, the final pieces of the last prophecy finally align: Gambler Anton, the Last Prophet, has finally been revealed, and together with warrior Jude, the Keeper of the Word and Anton’s protector, he must follow the path set by his visions in order to stop the world ending. Meanwhile, Prince Hassan—the Deceiver—risks everything he holds dear in order to regain his throne just as Ephyra, the ruthless assassin known as the Pale Hand, grows increasingly dangerous as she searches for Eleazar’s Chalice, the relic that will save her revenant sister, Beru, who just may be the last harbinger herself. Adventurous relic-hunting, mind-blowing twists, budding love, and terrible betrayals feature in this multiple-narrator, character-driven study of power, agency, and identity and the ways these are affected by the interwoven threads of both history and legend. The promised rising darkness sees its characters facing their inner turmoil in preparation for their roles in the impending apocalypse, often making poor decisions and skirting the line (and, in at least one case, fully crossing it) between villainy and heroism in a story with plenty of empowered brown and queer characters.

A strong sequel that deftly avoids middle-book syndrome and sets the stage for a promising finale. (Fantasy. 14-adult)

160 | 15 JULY 2020 | YOUNG ADULT | KIRKUS.COM |
Points fingers at despicable zealots and applauds resilient queer kids.

SURRENDER YOUR SONS

NEVER LOOK BACK

Rivera, Lilliam

Bloomsbury (320 pp.)

$18.99 | Sep. 1, 2020

978-1-63583-061-3

An otherworldly Latinx retelling of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth set in the South Bronx.

Pheus visits his father in the Bronx every summer. The Afro-Dominican teen is known for his mesmerizing bachata music, love of history, and smooth way with the ladies. Eury, a young Puerto Rican woman and Hurricane Maria survivor, is staying with her cousin for the summer because of a recent, unspecified traumatic event. Her family doesn’t know that she’s been plagued since childhood by the demonlike Ato. Pheus and Eury bond over music and quickly fall in love. Attacked at a dance club by Sileno, its salacious and satyrlike owner, Eury falls into a coma and is taken to el Inframundo by Ato. Pheus, despite his atheism, follows the advice of his father and a local bruja to journey to find his love in the Underworld. Rivera skillfully captures the sounds and feels of the Bronx—its unique, diverse culture and the creeping gentrification of its neighborhoods. Through an amalgamation of Greek, Roman, and Taíno mythology and religious beliefs, gaslighting, the colonization of Puerto Rico, Afro-Latinidad identity, and female empowerment are woven into the narrative. While the pacing lags in the middle, secondary characters aren’t fully developed, and the couple’s relationship borders on instalove, the rush of a summertime romance feels realistic. Rivera’s complex world is well realized, and the dialogue rings true. All protagonists are Latinx.

This fresh reworking of a Greek myth will resonate. (Fiction, 14-adult)

THE CAT I NEVER NAMED

A True Story of Love, War, and Survival

Sabic-El-Rayess, Amra with Sullivan, Laura L.

Bloomsbury (352 pp.)

$19.99 | Sep. 8, 2020

978-1-63583-043-1

Now a professor in the U.S., Sabic-El-Rayess was 16 when the Serbian siege on her city of Bihać, Bosnia, began in 1992. Overnight, her life changed. She went from being a typical teenager, excited about her new volleyball shoes and seventieth birthday cake, to fleeing bullets. It felt as if overnight Sabic-El-Rayess went from attending her multiethnic STEM school to learning that the Serbs in her life, including her best friend and her favorite teacher, had fled; having received advance warning, they left Muslims, like her family, and Catholics behind to endure the impending siege. Sabic-El-Rayess’ innocence was soon swept away by the realities of war. She witnessed homes being blown up, bombs killing her childhood friends, and deprivation turning people against each other. Sabic-El-Rayess found unexpected solace in adopting Maci (“cat” in Bosnian), a stray calico who followed a Muslim refugee family into town. Maci quickly became a source of comfort for the family, who even credited her with saving their lives. The story boldly tackles the rawness of human emotion in times of severe distress, putting on full display the ways war brings out both the best and worst in people. Sabic-El-Rayess’ viewpoint as an adolescent girl juxtaposes her dreams of the future against fears of losing loved ones, rape camps, and starvation. The crude realities of war are animated by the combination of both graphic scenes of violence and intimate displays of affection and warmth.

Unforgettable. (additional information, author’s note, resources) (Memoir, 14-18)

SURRENDER YOUR SONS

Sass, Adam

North Star Editions (392 pp.)

$17.99 | Sep. 15, 2020

978-1-63583-061-3

A hardscrabble antihero’s coming out lands him in an off-the-grid conversion camp.

Connor Major of Ambrose, Illinois, has quite a mouth on him. But when it comes to the right-of-passage revelation to his single, hardcore Christian mother that he’s gay, he can’t find his words. At the behest of his boyfriend, Ario, Connor begrudgingly comes out, which is where the book begins. His rocky relationship with his mother is disintegrating, his frustration with exuberantly out Ario grows, accusations of being the absentee father of his BFF’s baby boy haunt him, and he gets violently absconded to a Christian conversion camp in Costa Rica. And that’s all before the unraveling of a mystery, a murder, gunshots, physical violence, emotional abuse, heat, humidity, and hell on Earth happen in the span of a single day. This story points fingers at despicable zealots and applauds resilient queer kids. Connor’s physical and emotional inability to fully find comfort in being gay isn’t magically erased, acknowledging the difficulty of self-acceptance in the face of disapproving homophobes. Lord of the Flies–like survival skills, murder, and brutal violence (Tasers, spears, guns) fuel the story. And secret sex and romance underscore the lack of social liberty and self-acceptance but also support the optimistic hope of freedom. Connor is White, as is the majority of the cast; Ario is Muslim.

Hard-to-read story, hard-to-stop-reading writing. (Fiction 14-18)
This richly layered yarn is liberally sprinkled with bits of Yiddish and a wry, sparkling humor.

**THE WAY BACK**
Savit, Gavriel
Knopf (368 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-984394-02-5

A Jewish boy and girl journey to the Far Country on the other side of the cemetery seeking to find that which they lost. The story begins in a shtetl called Tupik, where a boy named Yeheuda Leib and a girl named Bluma each have unexpected encounters with Death, setting them both on separate journeys through the cemetery on the edge of the village and into the Far Country, seeking the House of Death to reclaim what they lost. On their way, they pass through the town of Zubinsk, where the holy Rebbe's granddaughter is about to be married in a highly anticipated wedding that draws not only Hasidim and visitors from all over, but also all manner of demons and spirits seeking an audience with the revered Rebbe. Bluma's and Yeheuda Leib's winding paths cross until they finally band together to defeat their mutual foe with the help of some unlikely allies they meet along the way. Though their cleverness, grit, and dastardly alliances may get them far in the Far Country, they may not ultimately be enough to defeat Death itself. Lyrical and fantastic, this richly layered yarn is liberally sprinkled with bits of Yiddish and a wry, sparkling humor that balances its darker tendencies with sympathy and warmth.

Steeped in the rich traditions of ghost stories and Jewish folklore, this remarkable feat of storytelling is sure to delight. (Fantasy. 13-adult)

**SMASH IT!**
Simone, Francina
Inkyard Press (336 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-335-14650-2

Inspired by Shonda Rhimes’ *Year of Yes* (2015), a teenager makes a list to change her life. Olivia Johnson is a 17-year-old Black girl tired of living her life in the background. Spending most of her time with her two best friends, Eli and Dré, as their No. 1 supporter despite more-than-platonic feelings for one of them, and navigating a complex relationship with her mom, Olivia has her fair share of reasons for feeling she is better off hiding in the shadows. An unfortunate experience with being the only one not wearing a costume at a Halloween party due to self-consciousness about her body and being afraid of standing out leads her to making a list of things she wants to do and opportunities she wants to embrace in order to experience a fuller life. It begins with doing the thing that scares her most: auditioning for the school musical. Following her list spurs welcome changes and unwelcome drama in her life, and Olivia finds she has to rise to the challenges despite feeling unprepared for all of it. Simone's prose masterfully crafts an honest and likable voice in Olivia that is bolstered by the cast of diverse supporting characters and combines that with compelling, well-paced plot points. Readers will find themselves rapt with anticipation and excitement and filled with compassion for Olivia’s journey to self-acceptance and self-love.

Stellar. (Fiction. 14-adult)

**MEME**
Starmer, Aaron
Dutton (368 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-0-7352-3192-4

Four high school seniors take matters into their own hands when one of their friends becomes dangerously unhinged. It starts with bad-boy Cole's murder and secret burial in a grave that will soon be covered by Vermont's winter snow. This is the final step in Logan, Meeka, Holly, and Grayson's solution to Cole's increasingly violent threats toward his ex-girlfriend, Meeka. The friends believe that killing Cole was the only way to stay safe, to prevent something terrible from happening to them or others. And to ensure none of them would betray the rest, they record a video confession on old phones they were no longer using which they bury with Cole. But a few days later their faces are all over social media, plastered on a new meme based on a screenshot from their video confession. But how was the picture leaked if their phones were as dead and buried as Cole? Did one of them betray the group, or is Cole somehow still alive? Self-serving, unsympathetic characters struggle with suspicion, paranoia, and guilt throughout this taut psychological thriller about the dangers of the internet and the alt-right movement, but the attempt to engage with a promising thematic core is as superficial as the overall character development. All characters are assumed White apart from Meeka, who is adopted and ambiguously cued as a person of color.

An unconvincing, skin-deep psychological thriller. (Thriller. 14-18)

**THE GIFTED, THE TALENTED, AND ME**
Sutcliffe, William
Bloomsbury (336 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-5476-0420-3

When Sam's family makes a drastic move from humdrum suburban Stevenage to fast-paced, upscale Hampstead, everyone's lives are disrupted.
Motivated by a midlife crisis, his mother moves them into a house she fills with vintage furniture and enrolls all three siblings in the trendy North London Academy for the Gifted and Talented. Older brother Ethan, a wannabe musician, finds a ready group of admiring girls and more opportunities to show off his talents on the guitar. Little Freya finds a place where she can fully express her artistic skills, currently limited to drawing unicorns, kittens, and rainbows. The narrator, 15-year-old Sam, is a fish out of water. Unlike his siblings, he loved Stevenger and resents being taken away from his friends. When he finds that his only passion, soccer, is not permitted in his new school, he is determined to be miserable. His mother’s change of personality is disorienting, too. She no longer prioritizes cooking and taking care of the family but dives deeply into multiple personal projects, including a blog about parenting. Sam’s wry observations on family conflicts and his own social angst are roll-on-the-ground funny. A cleverly revealed dramatic talent coupled with a new understanding of the thorny business of romance set Sam on the path toward urban cool and greater happiness. Main characters present White; there is some diversity in minor characters.

**Pitch-perfect and hilarious. (Fiction. 12-16)**

**EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO ACE CHEMISTRY IN ONE BIG FAT NOTEBOOK**
Swanson, Jennifer
Workman (528 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-6235-0426-1
Series: Big Fat Notebooks

This guide to high school chemistry is formatted as if it were a notebook containing notes written by the top student in class.

This resource is divided into twelve units of two to five sections each. The subsections cover basic topics like conducting experiments, lab safety, and states of matter as well as more advanced topics like quantum theory and laws of thermodynamics. The page design mimics handwritten text, with colored sidebars for important facts, highlighting and bold headers for important words, underlined lists, colored figures, and diagrams. Each unit ends with a quiz to test retention; answers are listed on the following page. While most of the explanations and definitions are clear enough to comprise a primary study source, a few of the definitions may require backup or secondary sources for thorough understanding. The spacious, easy-to-read layout makes this an efficient reference book: Finding specific topics is easy (made easier with a lengthy index), and reviewing the content feels like reading through class notes. While not sufficient in itself to substitute for a chemistry text, paired with a class and a conventional textbook, this guide should go far in helping students master high school level chemistry.

**A useful supplement for studying and test preparation. (index) (Nonfiction. 14-18)**

**SOMEBODY GIVE THIS HEART A PEN**
Thakur, Sophia
Candlewick (112 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-5362-0992-1

British performance artist Thakur reflects on coming-of-age and coming into one’s own.

Beginning quietly, a prologue describes the process of a heart—to grow, to wait, to break, to grow again—stages echoed by the sections of the book. In “Grow,” free-form poems are a deep breath in, calling for introspection, expansion, and loving recognition of self: “Pull your voice from your toes up / Let it grab and hold onto your fear / Open your mouth and drag it out.” In “Wait,” that breath is held, exploring the struggle for survival, the hush of uncertainty, and the painful onset of love: “Do you listen to the mind or the heart / to get the right thing done?” The exhale that comes in “Break” is the one that follows a swift fist; an overflow of exhausted stanzas and pained lines rush in relief from broken barriers of doubt and self-effacement: “Be with yourself for a moment. / Be yourself for a moment.” And at last, in “Grow Again” comes a new breath, new steps forward: “When the world denies you / Find your power / And write.” The torrent of Thakur’s spoken word poetry storms the page to flow, feed, and flood in this thunderous debut with broad reader appeal. Thakur, who is of Indian, Sri Lankan, and Gambian descent, offers a love letter to Black and brown readers that offers, at once, the intimacy of the self exposed and the universal power of story shared.

A deluge of verse to dance in. (Poetry. 14-adult)

**CEMETERY BOYS**
Thomas, Aiden
Swoon Reads/Macmillan (352 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-250-25046-9

A gay, transgender brujo with burgeoning powers seeks answers about his cousin’s death.

Sixteen-year-old Yadriel also wishes for acknowledgement from his community but unexpectedly finds himself entangled in the unresolved wishes of a strong-willed, good-looking spirit. He descends from a long line of brujo who have been granted magic power by Lady Death to heal the living and to guide spirits into the afterlife. Although he’s grown up surrounded by a close-knit community, Yadriel feels alone, excluded indefinitely from a sacred rite of passage because he is transgender. When he senses that his cousin Miguel has died suddenly but the family can’t locate him, Yadriel sees an opportunity to prove to everyone he’s a true brujo by solving the mystery and releasing his cousin’s lost spirit. His plan quickly falls
apart, as he accidentally summons the spirit of Julian Diaz, a boy with unfinished business who died the same day as Miguel. Both the romance and mystery burn slow and hot until the climax. Stakes begin high, and the intensity only increases with a looming deadline and a constant risk that Julian might lose himself, turning maligno. The cast of characters represents a diversity of Latinx identities sharing a community in East Los Angeles. Julian is Colombian while Yadiel is Cuban and Mexican. Their romance provides joyful, ground-breaking representation for gay, transgender boys.

Heart-pounding. (Fantasy. 14-18)

WHO I WAS WITH HER
Tyndall, Nita
HarperTeen (352 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-06-297838-7

Rival cross-country high school athletes Corinne and Maggie are lovers but have kept their relationship a secret; when Maggie dies, Corinne is left to grieve alone.

Corinne and her parents moved to North Carolina from Colorado two and a half years before this, her senior year. It’s been a culture shift for Corinne, made more difficult by her parents’ divorce due to her mother’s alcoholism. Running has been a way for her to fit in, and she shares that love with her best friend, Julia. What she hasn’t shared with Julia—or anybody else—is her relationship with Maggie. However, Maggie’s brother, Dylan, did know and, after her death, introduces her to Elissa, an ex-girlfriend of Maggie’s. As Corinne grieves, she must also grapple with her future and whether she wants to come out. The story is told in alternating before/after timelines, so readers experience Corinne’s romance with Maggie as well as the aftermath of her death. Suspense is ramped up well as the plot develops to reveal who else knew about but kept their relationship a secret, why, and at what cost. Clever typography makes delightful small prose poems within the text. The focus on bisexuality is welcome, and asexuality is discussed. Corinne and Maggie are White; several secondary characters are brown-skinned (one is cued by name as South Asian).

Love and death, secrets and honesty: a highly readable love story of two girls. (Fiction. 13-18)

FAR FROM NORMAL
Wallace, Becky
Page Street (350 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-64567-056-8

An embarrassing run-in with a soccer star starts off Maddie’s summer on the wrong foot.

Seventeen-year-old Maddie McPherson has gotten the nickname CalaMaddie since things tend to go wrong when she’s around. She hopes to change the odds this summer when her aunt gets her an internship at a Chicago marketing agency—and if all goes well, a good recommendation will help her get into her dream college. The internship consists of coffee runs and answering phones, until she’s unexpectedly assigned to a big project to improve the reputation of 19-year-old hard-partying Italian soccer star Gabe Fortunato. This doesn’t make her popular with the other interns, but Maddie’s determined to prove herself. She needs Gabe to open up so that she can create original, likable social media content, and of course once he does, she can’t help falling for him. But is he interested in her too, or is it all an act? With insecurities of never being good enough, both ordinary Maddie and famous Gabe feel realistic and engaging. When photos of Maddie and Gabe together make the rounds and trolls attack her appearance, the book presents an important indictment of women taking down other women. Mishaps abound and keep the pacing tight in this utterly charming tale. All main characters are presumably White.

A satisfying romance that will please Sarah Dessen fans. (Romance. 12-18)

FREEDOM SUMMER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
Watson, Bruce
Adapt. by Steffoff, Rebecca
Triangle Square Books for Young Readers (400 pp.)
$22.95 paper | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-64421-010-9

Idealists seeking a more racially just America met the deeply seated racism of Mississippi during Freedom Summer.

In 1964, hundreds of mostly college-aged students, many of them White, were drawn to work alongside local African Americans seeking voting rights and better education for their children. Based on Watson’s adult title Freedom Summer (2010) and adapted by Steffoff, this is a searing account of the difficulties of affecting change in a state that persistently held onto racial inequality and division. The volunteers who would register voters and operate Freedom Schools were carefully trained and
organized, and an additional goal was challenging Mississippi’s Democratic Party leaders to seek political involvement that reflected the state’s population. Resistance was often violent, as shown by the murders of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman. This is also the story of civil rights activists—including Bob Moses, Stokely Carmichael, and Fannie Lou Hamer—who worked tirelessly, often at great personal risk. The compelling narrative highlights national leaders, such as President Lyndon Johnson and Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who pushed legislation but balked at providing protection to citizens in hostile situations. Moving personal stories of volunteers who wanted to make a difference and found themselves changed forever round out this narrative that provides a valuable level of intimacy for readers.

An in-depth look that contributes to understanding a violent painful chapter in recent history. (source notes, further reading, image credits) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

A window into a uniquely magnificent and terrifying life. (photo credits) (Verse novel. 13-18)
fun action scenes, though the town's mild reaction undercuts its impact) to unintentional Summit gate-crashing by both Janis and Pig (and everything that goes wrong while hiding them). Though the storylines themselves tend to be easily guessed (and with stakes that could use a little more clarification), the jokes and clever banter land easily (barring the occasional too-dated reference), and the story maintains an easy, breezy clip. The expanded cast adds further racial and sexual-orientation diversity (joining Black non-Sitter Janis and Esme and Cassandra, described in the previous title as White and Mexican, respectively) and expands the mythos before leaving teases for the next book.

A popcorn read that fans of the first will eat up. (Fantasy. 12-18)

THE SNOW FELL THREE GRAVES DEEP
Wolf, Allan
Candlewick (416 pp.)
$21.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-0-7636-6324-7

In the spring of 1846, a large caravan set out from Springfield, Illinois, seeking land and fortune in California.

Some of the families knew each other; most of them did not. They traveled together for safety and tolerated each other as individual personalities and ambitions become apparent on the trip. The narrators are so numerous that it is difficult to keep track of them all; among them are three members of the Reed family—teenage Virginia, dubbed “the Princess”; young Patty, “the Angel,” whose sections are addressed to God; and their father, James, who set his sights on leadership and faster travel via a shortcut. Other characters include a woman dubbed “the Scholar,” who is attached to her books; an orphan teen who joins the party along the way; and a German man who loses his faculties as one of the last survivors. Another narrator who outlasts the rest is the impersonal Hunger, whose familiarity with human longing explains the extreme behavior of the travelers. This historical narrative reads like a thriller, with nature, arrogance, ignorance, and greed as the villains, and it focuses on White settlers without glorifying them. The two Miwok vaqueros who serve as guides for a portion of the journey leave readers wanting more Indigenous voices; their presence, though, adds to the title’s poignancy as an exploration of the inhumanity involved in Westward expansion.

This mature corrective to cultural mythology horrifies and edifies. (maps, author’s note, historical notes, glossaries, additional reading) (Versa historical fiction. 14-18)
**THE POWER OF THANKSGIVING**
A Blueprint for Contentment, Fulfillment, and Well-Being Through Gratitude
Addo-Atuah, Joyce Self (186 pp.)
$9.98 paper | $2.99 e-book
Nov. 25, 2018
978-0-9600075-1-6

A writer looks at the importance of giving thanks in a Christian walk of faith.

In her well-designed nonfiction debut, Addo-Atuah stresses the vital roles of gratitude and obedience in the lives of her fellow devout Christians. The author asserts that salvation, justification, and redemption form the “three-step package” of Jesus’ mission among his followers. For Addo-Atuah, Jesus is the key to this process since he is “the only Person of the Triune God who is capable of redeeming mankind because He is the One who is fully God and fully Man.” This stance will be immediately recognizable to many of her readers even though there are some Christians in the world who would disagree. The author’s focus throughout her work is on the importance of being grateful to “the loving God…who hates sin but loves the sinner,” the God who, after the fall of humankind from grace, created a way for mortals to restore fellowship with him. This gratitude also extends to the people God puts in the lives of the faithful to serve as “conduits of blessings,” although someone with “an envious, jealous, or hateful heart may suppress divine promptings and thus fail to accord us the assistance that we need.” This communal aspect of her faith is important to the author, who illustrates it with examples of the many individuals—friends, loved ones, and even strangers—she’s known who’ve helped at various points in her life to strengthen her faith, and it’s the most emphatic strand running through the book. Occasionally, Addo-Atuah’s enthusiasm can lead her astray—sometimes into historical inaccuracies, as when she says G.K. Chesterton is “thought to be the greatest writer and thinker of the 20th century” (perhaps only Chesterton himself ever believed this). But in general, the work’s powerfully worded calls to humility will resonate with Christians who are sometimes discouraged by a self-centered world.

A passionate and readable account that supports humility and gratitude as paths to God.
GRITTY GRAPHIC NOVELS

Graphic novels offer an astonishing range of determined protagonists—from plucky mermaids to apocalypse survivors—battling creepy villains that include the walking dead. Indigenous teenagers, a Mars private eye, and a special counsel appear in genre works recently reviewed by Kirkus Indie.

Warren Hammond and Joshua Violia’s Denver Moon: Metamorphosis, which earned a Kirkus Star, focuses on a chilling case of robocide on Mars. Denver, a private investigator, hunts for clues and ends up at Blevin’s Mine, where a dangerous figure from her past seeks retribution. According to our reviewer, “the skilled, perpetually poised detective shines brightly” in this SF tale while Aaron Lovett’s “exemplary artwork makes the white-haired Japanese heroine look both formidable and chic.”

Two Indigenous Canadian teens plan to work on a school project in Tasha Spillet’s Surviving the City. But Dez, an Inninew, worries that her diabetic grandmother may need to have her foot removed. Late one day, Dez visits a park alone and curls up on a bench after her cellphone dies. Illustrated by Natasha Donovan, the YA tale tackles the problem of “Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People.” The “engrossing” story “remains a tribute to the missing and murdered and a clarion call to everyone else,” our critic writes.

In The Mueller Report Graphic Novel, author/illustrator Barbara Slate provides excerpts of the Russia investigation’s findings and cartoonish images of the key players, including Vladimir Putin. Conducted by special counsel Robert Mueller, the probe looked at Moscow’s involvement in the 2016 presidential election. The Mueller Report finally came out in April 2019. The novel’s highlights include Donald Trump’s quirky tweets, Russian spies on Facebook, and a notorious meeting in Trump Tower. Our reviewer calls the book “a well-crafted visual depiction” of the report’s “troubling contents.”

Myra Forsberg is an Indie editor.

LIFE AND OTHER SHORTCOMINGS
Adjmi, Corie
She Writes Press (170 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $9.95 e-book
Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-63152-713-5

Adjmi’s debut collection of 12 linked short stories explores women’s lives from varying perspectives.

Characters recur in these tales, but each stands on its own. They take place in a range of eras from the 1970s to the present and take readers to various cities in the United States and Spain. All are succinct, slice-of-life stories, and at least half feature characters from the three couples introduced in the opening story, “Dinner Conversation,” which is set in New York City in 1998. The six diners are close friends who call themselves “The Sixers,” but despite their long history, they each have insecurities that will ultimately destroy their relationships. All the women in these stories navigate treacherous journeys through landscapes rife with misogyny and physical and psychological abuse. Many of the women have internalized their fears of growing older, as expressed by Kelly, the narrator of “The Drowning Girl”: “I WAS ONCE YOUNG AND PRETTY. THIS, WHO YOU SEE NOW, IS NOT ME.”

Adjmi conjures convincing portraits of a variety of female characters with economical language and biting dialogue. Their relationships with men are not enviable, as most of the male characters are angry, belittling, and erratic. With piercing clarity, the author often offers an unexpected payoff in the final sentence. In “The Devil Makes Three,” for instance, Iris, an Orthodox Jew, prepares for a mikvah, a monthly ritual bath for women, before resuming marital relations. The engaging description of this arcane process is coupled with an account of Iris’ chaste online dalliance with a non-Jewish man. Readers can admire her adherence to the faith, see how restricted her life is, and end up with a sense of the sensual joy that she shares with her husband. However, not every story lands as well; some are a tad too cryptic. In the fablelike “Happily Ever After,” man loves car, woman loves man, woman destroys car, and man’s personality disintegrates. Adjmi’s take on reality is more satisfying.

A compelling collection that captures the mystery and menace beneath love and family life.
Amini’s debut memoir chronicles her parents’ lives in Iran, their journey to America, and her own coming-of-age.

As the American-born author grew up in New York City, she heard intriguing stories from her immigrant mother, Hana, who married her father when she was just 14 and he was 34. The couple had secretly lived as Jews in the city of Mashhad, where Hana wore the chador in order to pass as Muslim. Upon arriving in the United States, Hana swapped the chador for Oscar de la Renta gowns and her diffidence for unbridled candor, often at the expense of her husband’s pride. However, the author apparently didn’t inherit her mother’s verbosity or sartorial ostentatiousness; instead, Amini struggled to find her voice in a household that didn’t value the education or autonomy of women. This is a memoir of Amini’s extraordinary journey and of her unflappable love for her family, even when their actions threatened to hinder her dreams—particularly her pursuit of a college education. The author deftly unpacks the complexities of her devout and volatile father, who told her, “It is my responsibility as your father to protect you from Americans and not allow you to become one.” But although he was a formidable figure, he’s also shown to have exhibited moments of tenderness when Amini was sick as a child or when she married the love of her life. The author weaves a central theme of concealment and visibility throughout her book with a fine sense of nuance. In a prologue, she asks, “How could I be unseen when seen…could I disappear upon demand?” And toward the end of the memoir, she writes in her journal, “What does it mean to claim me…to make me mine?” She describes how, ultimately, her love of literature, art, and social work allowed her to answer the latter question and finally find her voice. Here, that voice yields a quiet power, examining her world with unflinching curiosity and care.

A moving, engaging investigation of culture and family.

Bigotry and emotional trauma scar African Americans and their relationships in these poems.

Amos’ blunt language probes racism’s legacy in the minds and hearts of Black men and their loved ones. In the title poem, he notes “the stereotypes linked to the sequences of our genes” that leave Black people “programmed to not love ourselves” while in “Black Deficiency,” he challenges White society to confront its culpability, asking “will you continue to be implicit / in your reinforcement of a supremacist system?” In “Masculinity so Fragile,” he explores how Black men’s insecurities spill over into the mistreatment of women: “Lying. / Cheating. / Using, and abusing, / and yet she still manages / to support us / despite our habits. / Why are belittling names used to identify her social / status?” Probing deeper, “To Be Heard” calls out the conflation of emotional expressivity with unmanliness—“Listen to me complain like a ‘punk’, / ‘wimp’, / or other suggestive terms / that describe my ‘weakened state’”—and extols the possibility that “Love is genderless, / Pure, / Divine.” Several poems plumb the complexities of romance. In the luminous “Synthesis,” love is as foundational as physics—“You’ve become the gravity to my soul / …Our wavelengths intersect for the creation of a new spectrum”—while the plangent “Restrained” charts a drift into mutual incomprehension. “We were once on the same page, / The same sentence, / The same word; /…Then we parted paragraphs, / Sheets, / And now we’re no longer in the same genre.” The author’s depression poems, like the suicidal “Break Up,” get very bleak indeed—“I saw death approaching, / It turned the other way. / I initiated the pursuit, / and now we’re in a chase”—but he recovers a purpose, fatherhood, in “Nothing Else Matters.” “When I was 19… / I was shedding tears because you weren’t born yet, / too eager and desperate to meet up with you.” Amos’ searing verse is direct and plainspoken but studded with incisive metaphors. His critique of racism can be strident at times, but his confessional poems, like “Mechanism of Injury”—“Every time I restructure myself, I get broken and / separated. / I don’t know if I will make it. / Ashamed. / Vulnerable. / Naked”—have a gripping rawness that will resonate with any reader.

Intense, intimate, self-lacerating poetry about unhealed social and psychic wounds.
ON THE TRAIL OF THE RUTHLESS WARLOCK
Armstrong-Jones, Lynne
Tellwell Talent (236 pp.)
$13.99 paper | $1.49 e-book
Oct. 31, 2019
978-0-228-82173-1

Heroes strive to fulfill a prophecy and defeat an evil warlock in this fantasy debut.

Sister Creda is a sorceress from the Tower of Giefan. While traveling to the Hidden Caves of Abu-fan for her magical Tests and Completions, she plans to visit Carlida, her sister who lives with a nomadic tribe. On the trail, however, she finds a slain nomad. Using her amulet, she “reads” his blood and learns that raiders attacked Carlida’s tribe and took prisoners. Creda must reach the Tower, in the city of Espri, before dark and before she stumbles on the raiders herself, but her donkey isn’t cooperating. Luckily, a warrior named For-nico (nicknamed “Nico”) approaches and agrees to escort her. At the Tower, the Four Superiors summon the Great Seer for advice on confronting the “ruthless man of magic” who commands the raiders and supposedly drinks his victims’ blood. The Seer says that “No man can defeat this warlock! But there is a One.” Prince Yurmar asks for volunteers to hunt the warlock down. Nico signs up, as do Creda, Superior Veras, and several soldiers, including a young woman named Ferren. From the Witch of the Great East Wood, the group learns that pieces of a talisman must be retrieved to overcome the warlock’s power. But if the One is not a man, who among the heroes can deliver the killing blow? Armstrong-Jones offers a debut fantasy that plays with and subverts the genre’s tropes while never trying to break the mold of heartwarming fantasy classics such as The Hobbit. She wryly portrays Nico, who represents decades of Conan-style heroes, as a “blasted, arrogant man” who’s never wrong. Creda, who’s ostensibly the protagonist, cares little about possibly being the One. She instead develops her power to psychically commune with animals, which brings Baru, a wolf, into the group. Although the prose is suitable for teenagers, much of the action is interior—such as Creda’s and Veras’ energy exchanges—and younger audiences may be rooting for an ending with “Prince Yurmar himself kissing [the One’s] hand in gratitude.” Armstrong-Jones delivers a finale that’s pleasantly unexpected, and the fantastic last line blows readers a final kiss.

A sweet, genuine fantasy novel about finding family in unlikely situations.

TORO
Avner, Andrew
Black Rose Writing (142 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Sep. 17, 2020
978-1-68433-523-7

A debut children’s book stars a bull and a heifer determined to follow their hearts and their dreams.

The season for the Running of the Bulls at the Feria del Toro in Pamplona, Spain, is quickly approaching. Only the finest bulls are selected for this prestigious event. The mother and sisters of Diego Del Toro are counting on him to bring honor to their herd. But Diego has other plans. His greatest desire is to become a rodeo bull. Meanwhile, on the other side of the ranch, there is another offspring of a great bull who wishes more than anything to run in Pamplona, to be considered “noble y bravo.” Unfortunately for Alicia Catalina Cortés, she is female. Swifter than her brothers, she is nonetheless forbidden by her father from going to Pamplona. Heifers are not allowed to participate in the Running of the Bulls. Even worse, Alicia’s father wants her to marry Don Julián Hernández, a frightening older bull. In front of Don Julián and Don Murciélago, Alicia falsely declares that she loves another, casually pointing her horns toward the field where Diego, whom she has yet to meet, is grazing. And in that moment of defiance, Alicia unknowingly unleashes a series of events that lead to adventure, romance, and almost certain death. Avner has a well-honed sense for both the dramatic and the humorous in this enchanting fantasy. When a domineering Don Julián meets the feisty and independent Alicia in a field, she so angers him that he charges her, knocking her into the air. As she lands, Diego happens to come running around the bend and collides with Don Julián, knocking him out. The two lovers-to-be run away, bickering, bantering, and sharing their dreams. In true Hollywood fashion, each has a best friend to aid in the coming misadventures. Diego has the irrepressible Jesús de los Jabalíes, an Iberian hog, and Alicia has the imperious Doña Madonna de Doñana, an Iberian lynx. Both are delightful secondary characters. Everyone winds up in Pamplona, where the action scenes become riveting. The appealing story has plenty of animated film potential.

A charming and engaging fantasy with characters readers will love and a strong positive message.
Berkman’s stories are grounded in a realism made poetic.

THE GIRLS OF JERUSALEM AND OTHER STORIES

Berkman, Marsha Lee
Manuscript (451 pp.)

Jewish families pull apart under the strain of war, persecution, and longing in Berkman’s story collection.

This set of stories explores the Jewish experience in a wide variety of historical settings. “Passion” paints a plangent yet exuberant portrait of 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza, whose rationalist questioning of Scripture gets him banished from Amsterdam’s synagogue. Several stories follow Eastern European Jews enmeshed in early-20th-century disasters. In the harrowing “Vilna,” two brothers in World War II-era Lithuania separate; one escapes to America while the other weathered the Nazi occupation as it destroys the local Jewish population. “In the Time of Dreams” follows a woman living in the Soviet Union’s Jewish colony in Siberia in the 1930s as it devolves from socialist idealism to a Stalinist nightmare; and in Miracles: A Novella, a family of Ukrainian Jews flees a pogrom to New York City—a strange new world that makes them seem like strangers to one another. A suite of stories are set in post-war California among middle-class Jewish suburbanites; for them, the Holocaust is a distant memory that barely shadows their comfortable but discontented lives. In “Ghosts,” a woman who fled Nazi Germany in childhood is estranged from her adopted daughter and mentally ill son; in “Grisha,” a son reconnects with his cantankerous mother after she moves to Jerusalem, where she finds her roots and a soul mate; and in the title story, a young mother’s affair with her rabbi upends two families but enables her to discover her true self. Berkman’s characters are wanderers—often physically, as they migrate to escape poverty and violence (“we said good-bye as though we would never see each other again,” is a typical refrain), but also spiritually, as they pursue desires that run up against social expectations or fraying relationships. Her stories are grounded in a realism made poetic, but they also have an aching sense of evanescent mystery, as in “Ghosts”: “There was a shadow family and shadow cousins and aunts and uncles, and a shadow place with a strange name where her mother had grown up.” The result is an engrossing fictional world with real literary depth.

Luminous tales of exile and loss that bequeath new life.

THE FORGOTTEN CHOICE
Using Your Inner Decisions To Shape Your Outer World

Bence, Brenda
Global Insight Communications
(182 pp.)

An executive coach introduces her internationally tested personal success system.

Bence, author of several self-help and business books, including Master the Brand Called YOU (2014), says she applied “the power of thoughts and beliefs” to her own life and shared her learnings with her clients and audiences around the world. In this engaging book, she explains her success system, which is anchored by a central idea—“to consciously choose the Joy of Possibility over fear,” or as she calls it, “The Forgotten Choice.” The volume begins with several chapters that explore the concept of choice, why people generally focus on exterior rather than interior causes of unhappiness, and why “our ability to take charge and master the intangibles” is key to personal success. One of the author’s compelling core concepts revolves around a pyramid that demonstrates the interrelationship of four essential components of self-determination: “Think-Feel-Behave-Results.” Bence does an excellent job of explaining each of these elements in detail. Using concrete examples, she shows how the pyramid can be applied to decision-making. Perhaps the most intriguing part of the book is the author’s profession that there are essentially just two “thought-systems”—one is fear and the other is the “Joy of Possibility.” Bence offers a lucid and at times riveting discussion of the aspects of fear, contrasted with an uplifting explanation of the Joy of Possibility. Again, several solid examples are employed to illustrate both of these thought systems. Other concepts in the volume, including the “Inner Coach” and “Mind Leadership,” demonstrate ways to help shift one’s thinking to achieve positive, high-growth potential. Some of the material covered in the work is recognizable; for example, the emphasis on living in the present and using creative visualization to think positively will undoubtedly be familiar to readers of other motivational self-help books. Still, multiple concepts coalesce here in a way that makes the overall presentation meaningful and memorable. Bence’s argument may occasionally rely too heavily on the power of individual choice, but it is hard to disagree with her contention that “we’re not thinking big enough.”

Enlightening, inspirational, and self-empowering advice.
What drives the engrossing book's second half, the hunt for White & Partners is their best bet, their go-to. But after & Partners suffers, big time. And on top of this, he knows that & Partners, a tremendously successful public relations firm in Mark's eyes, so the narration is a vivid part of it. Mark is a keen student of his surroundings and his own troubled soul, introspective almost to a fault. Here is part of his bitter reverie on perspective: “I saw nothing unusual at all.” He describes his own numb travels (and travails) as continually “traversing the continent on United’s weary fleet.” What drives the engrossing book’s second half, the hunt for redemption portion, is Mark’s affection for his son, a genuine love even if it is saturated with guilt. Readers will be fervently hoping for the hero to triumph, silently cheering him on. Colin is preternaturally wise as father and son try to work together to save themselves.

A family tale for modern times—detailed, thorough, and thoughtful—that rings true throughout.

In this middle-grade debut, a girl leaves her country home for the city and learns about a secret faction of mischief-makers.

Patience Fell has seven siblings. On her 12th birthday, she leaves the family farm to lighten the burden on her parents and to find her place in the world. Armed with only a broom, she rides a turnip cart to the bustling town of Whosebourne. In an alley beside The Crock and Dice inn, she finds a girl crying on a kitchen stool. When Patience asks if she can help, the girl cryptically replies, “You’re all mad and I won’t fix it!” Suddenly, a whirlwind of trash approaches. While the girl runs away, Patience tries to fend off the trash with her broom. An extended battle reveals a “tiny filthy man” inside the whirlwind. This is the offaltosser. Patience is spared too much thought on this strange phenomenon by the inn’s cook, Miss Alys, who hires her as broom girl. Her first task is to bring breakfast to Miss Crowquill, a poet who lives in the attic. The madwoman possesses a book called The Chaos Court by Johnny Factotum, which describes the offaltosser and other strange creatures. A week later, Patience is picked up by a man in fancy-but-frayed dress named Reynard, who drives her to Pennywhack Manor. She meets the man who runs Whosebourne, the intimidating Keyreeve. In his office, under glass, is “The Key to the Town.” He also owns a copy of The Chaos Court. As far as Patience’s seeing the offaltosser, Keyreeve insists that she repeat, “I saw nothing unusual at all.”

Burnett brings a bit of Dickensian flair to his fantasy novel, creating silly names that are a joy to stumble across, like Shivtickle and Cobblemaule. These flights of verbal fancy hint at the deep strangeness ahead, which may remind readers of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, albeit with one foot more firmly in reality. At first, Reynard appears to be a sympathetic companion for Patience. That role soon falls upon Linus Penywack, Keyreeve’s nephew and a blossoming young scientist. Though the narrative isn’t overtly concerned with romance, when Linus shows Patience the stars through his telescope, the characters’ mutual enchantment is palpable. The collective comings and goings of magical creatures serve as a fantastical tide that regularly swells over Whosebourne, as in the scene in which Patience and Linus bounce across the rooftops with the gabledancers. Patience is a charming, determined hero, with an adorable catchphrase uttered in excitement (“Fox in a bonnet!”). Fabulous turns of phrase populate every chapter, like when we meet the unscrupulous Coinquaff, “who’d make a wolf walk the long way round to steer clear.” But Burnett also educates his younger audience by defining challenging terms well. “A hypothesis,” Linus explains, is “a guess about how things might be that you can test by investigating.” The story’s main theme of finding one’s “place in the world” is echoed in the goofy Chaos
Cherington’s memoir presents a persuasive account of her effort to reckon with the past.

**POETIC LICENSE**

A Memoir
Cherington, Gretchen
She Writes Press (388 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $8.99 e-book
Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-63152-711-1

A poet’s daughter examines her father’s legacy.

The American poet Richard Eberhart, who died in 2005 at the age of 101, was the recipient of many of the literary world’s greatest accolades. A long-term poet-in-residence at Dartmouth College, an inductee of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the United States Poet Laureate under Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, and the recipient of both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, Eberhart was a highly lauded poet of his age. As his daughter, Cherington, recounts in her memoir, he operated at the center of a large literary circle that included such legendary poets as Allen Ginsberg, Richard Wilbur, and Anne Sexton. The author recounts her own novel experiences with these poets while also reflecting on her father and the challenges that she says that she faced after a childhood spent under his roof. Cherington’s portrait of her father is unsparing, and it includes a disturbing description of an instance of sexual abuse when she was 17; she also writes of other, earlier instances when she was physically abused by a family friend. Cherington writes that she worked throughout her life to process these events in addition to trauma associated with her mother’s epilepsy, and she recounts this effort with grace and clarity. Drawing from her own experiences as well as Eberhart’s ample archive at Dartmouth’s Rauner Library, the author offers compelling anecdotes and analysis. Her writing on her mother’s illness is particularly potent, as Cherington interweaves scenes of childhood terror with an adult awareness of the stifling silence that made her fear impossible to soothe. Her narrative is occasionally muddled by scenes of her professional life as a consultant and moments of awkward conversation; one such instance occurs in an otherwise charming scene in which the author goes dancing with a romantic partner. At the end of the evening, she whispers in his ear the clichéd phrase, “How’d we ever find each other in this godforsaken town?” Despite this, Cherington’s memoir presents a persuasive account of her effort to reckon with the past.

A contemplative memoir that talks about abuse and its aftermath.

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**CONFUCIUS AND OPIUM**

China Book Reviews
Cook, Isham
Magic Theater Books (265 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $3.99 e-book
Mar. 1, 2020
978-1-73227-742-7

This collection of cultural and literary criticism examines the ways the West and China have viewed each other over the centuries.

China has always had a complex relationship with the West, shaping foreign visitors even as it has been molded by them. Cook takes this exchange as his subject, particularly the books that have dealt with it (largely from a Western perspective). In the eponymous first essay, the author appraises the evidence of whether or not opium was in use in Confucius’ time before launching into a larger investigation of the possible influence that imported entheogens—naturally occurring psychedelics—had on the development of Chinese philosophy. In “Living the Taiping,” he evaluates a little-known 19th-century rebellion that was one of the deadliest conflicts in world history and yet one that is largely ignored in Chinese textbooks. Other essays deal with topics such as the demolition of Shanghai’s city wall, 19th-century Western travel narratives, historical true crime set in China, and evaluations of modern Chinese literature and Western novels with Chinese backdrops. Cook, an American expatriate who has lived in China for 26 years, is in some ways a living participant in the sorts of exchanges he examines. He’s a Westerner writing about China and the other Westerners who have portrayed the country in books. The texts he describes include historical novels, travelogues, popular histories, and more. His reviews move from one volume and subject to the next, adeptly drawing out common themes or compelling threads that hint at larger trends in Chinese history. The author himself is a peculiar personality, and his idiosyncratic (and occasionally off-putting) views sometimes bleed into the work. “For the right concurrence,” he admits during a discussion of the historical practice, “I would pay. I think you would too. Say you encounter the woman of your dreams—one with your ideal ‘10’ body. I mean the kind of body that would make you cheat on your wife or girlfriend (or husband or boyfriend) for the very first time.” Such moments aside, readers will learn much about Chinese history and will walk away with quite a long reading list of books to explore.

An offbeat, erudite work of China-centered literary criticism.
August Summers
An attorney-turned-author brings romance to the courtroom

By Lauren Emily Whalen

August Summers woke up one morning in 2014 and said to herself, “I want to write a book.” By this time, she had almost 15 years of legal experience and had transitioned from criminal courtroom law to civil litigation. However, writing motions and briefs was suddenly no longer enough. “[The idea to write a book] haunted me while driving to work,” says Summers via phone from her Pacific Palisades home. “Not just a passing thought in my mind, but far more pressing and urgent. It consumed me.”

Summers wasted no time. After greeting her administrative assistant, she remembers, “I asked her, ‘What kind of book should I write?’ [My assistant] said, ‘You used to be a DA; you should write crime!’ And I said to her, ‘Do you know how many years it took me to forget about crime?’ ” When the assistant suggested romance, Summers knew she’d found her genre.

That evening, when she returned from work, Summers began penning a love story that incorporated crime. “I went home at 6 p.m. and sat down to write, and I kept writing until 4 in the morning,” she said. “On weekends, I’d get up at 4…and write until midnight.” An avid reader of John Grisham’s courtroom dramas and Danielle Steele’s sweeping romances, Summers was easily able to transition to writing. “You know the way that you love to read a good book, and real life interrupts you, and you just want to get back to the book?” she asks. “I had the same feeling for what I was writing. I had to know what happened next.”

This all-consuming project became A Brush With Love, a Brush With the Law, Summers’ first novel. Even after completing the book, she only saw writing as “a hobby” and a means of connection. “I didn’t want to be an author,” she says. “I published [the book] for the purpose of letting friends who lived in [other] states read it.” However, she began to reconsider when a stranger approached her at a party. “My friend had given [this woman A Brush With Love] to read,” Summers recalls. “It came up that I was the author, and she became so excited and said, ‘You wrote this? I’m so star-struck!’ ” The encounter drastically altered Summers’ perspective on her own writing. “It’s not just my friends complimenting me anymore; it’s a complete stranger who loved this book so much,” she says. “I thought, ‘I have to rework everything. There’s got to be a plan for this.’ ”

Part of that plan was a spinoff of A Brush With Love that picked up where happily-ever-after left off. “There’s a villain who’s arrested at the end of the book,” Summers explains. “I thought if there’s an arrest, there has to be a trial. I started to envision the trial while driving to work and was compelled to write… about it.” The result, White Jr’s Trial, follows these legal proceedings through the eyes of Jack Wayne, a character featured in A Brush With Love. “I could envision a fun and great story revolving around him, so that naturally developed,” she says.

In White Jr’s Trial, senior prosecutor Jack smells a rat when the case, involving a young man of privilege and the attempted murder of a former sex worker, is assigned to an inexperienced underling. Suspecting his boss is in cahoots with the defendant’s wealthy father, Jack is determined to locate Sarah Cartwright, the
deputy district attorney (and heroine of *A Brush With Love*), who got Richard White Jr. arrested before disappearing. Courtroom intrigue abounds throughout:

All eyes fixated on White Jr....The twinkling eyes of eager journalists, salivating at White Jr.’s potential demise, were worse than the prosecuting attorney’s determined face. As soon as White Jr., reached counsel table, his team of defense lawyers encircled him; and he felt much safer. He knew his father was going to get him out of this.... But Katelyn Kruz had other plans for White Jr. She planned to make a name for herself convincing the judge, against all odds, and against a legendary defense team, to deny bail and order that White Jr. be held in jail, pending trial.

*Kirkus Reviews* calls *White Jr.’s Trial* “an engaging courtroom tale...some high-action danger adds unexpected excitement.” Though this review was posted in April, none of Summers’ books are currently available, and there’s a reason for that: “I unpublished *A Brush With Love* in 2014 after less than a year,” she says. “I know that I can write, but I’m not an expert in the business [of writing], mainly marketing. I think there’s a benefit to working with people who do it as their living.” She’s now pursuing traditional publishing by querying literary agents. “The quarantine has let me do that,” Summers says. “I’m at the point in my life where I can give it a lot more attention.”

In the meantime, Summers has completed *The Suspect*, which is about Jack Wayne’s post-trial life on the run, and she’s working on a fourth novel featuring a secret passage Wayne discovers that ends in the home of a reclusive art collector in the south of France. Summers is in no hurry to abandon the characters she first created in 2014. “It’s fun to [include] a little tidbit that occurs in my first book, that readers come across in one sentence in my fourth book! Little dots of connections make the readers happy.”

After completing this series, Summers plans to keep writing both crime and romance, “sometimes mixing [the genres] and sometimes keeping them independent,” she says. “I know that...readers gravitate toward one genre, [but] there’s definitely an audience who will like an interweaving of the two.” No matter the genre, Summers prides herself on writing for women. “I put the feminine touch on a John Grisham novel.”

In the meantime, Summers hasn’t stopped litigating, writing, and getting inspired. For the last, she has a specific place: “my blue velvet armchair that sits right in front of my window that faces the ocean,” she says. “I sit there, and the ideas just float to me.”

Lauren Emily Whalen lives in Chicago and is the author of two YA novels.
ON CIVILITY
Restorative Reflections
Curtin, John-Robert
Illus. by Chan, Ting Kit
Old Stone Press (94 pp.)
$24.95 paper | $9.99 e-book
Aug. 18, 2020
978-1-938462-42-9

A paean to civility that couldn't come at a better time.

In 1744, when he was 13, future president George Washington famously wrote out 110 rules of civility, which generally involved propriety and decorum; for example, his 15th rule reads, “Keep your nails clean and short, also your hands and teeth clean.” Curtin, the executive director of the 4Civility Institute, a conflict-management consultancy, cites Washington in his poems on civility, but he has grander aims in mind. Although civility may still have something to do with “manners,” as the author sees it, the concept also encompasses “compassion, dignity, human value, human worth, forgiveness, and self-dignity.” Overall, the book is both an exploration and a celebration of these fundamental values. For the author, one of the key competencies of civility is “listening to understand,” and he devotes multiple poems to how one may develop this skill; in one he writes, “The real gift comes through / abandoning listening to respond / and learning to listen to understand. / I learn very little when my lips are moving, except / perhaps what I already know.” He makes clear in this and in other pieces that listening—and civility in general—is about building genuine, empathetic connections with other people. It’s only through such connections, the author says, that one can come to recognize others as indispensable, which is foundational to Curtin’s understanding of civility: “The day that you decide that no one should / ever be considered disposable is the day you / change your thinking about everything.” In these days of division and acrimony, the author’s message is more valuable than ever, and its call is only amplified by Chan’s gorgeous illustrations, which mingle color photographs of natural and human-made surfaces with inkblots—a visual narrative that harmonizes well with Curtin’s verse.

A vital discussion of a crucial virtue.

MISS HAVILLAND

Daly, Gay
The Sager Group (352 pp.)
$15.95 paper | $9.99 e-book
Apr. 22, 2020
978-1-950154-03-6

A mathematician finds her life upended by World War I in this historical novel.

Daly, the author of Pre-Raphaelites in Love (1989), recounts the events that led her protagonist, Evelyn Haviland, away from her Northern California hometown and eventually back home. The book opens in 1919 as Evelyn accompanies her shellshocked cousin, Billy, home from Europe, where he was a nurse during the war. In flashbacks, readers learn of Evelyn’s youth as a mathematical prodigy in a working-class home, where she has a contentious relationship with her mother. She goes on to study at Stanford University and becomes a cryptographer during World War I; along the way, she has a romance with a Boston Brahmin and fellow cryptographer named Arthur Bayard. Evelyn hopes to move to the East Coast to marry him and pursue her own career, but, later, her loyalty to her aging parents and to Billy, who’s still suffering from his traumatic wartime experiences, keeps her in California. She takes a job teaching math at her old high school, and although she and Arthur attempt to make their relationship work, he ends up marrying a fellow Bostonian while Evelyn remains single. A later reunion, however, puts lingering questions to rest. Daly does a fine job of capturing her main character’s challenges as she balances familial loyalty and personal independence. (Evelyn is based on the author’s distant relative.) Arthur is a strong romantic foil, and despite what he and Evelyn go through in their relationship, he’s never portrayed as a villain. Even Evelyn’s mother, the most hostile character in the story, is presented sympathetically. The book also ably grapples with the realities of war, particularly when middle-aged Evelyn sees her own students become casualties. Overall, this book is thought-provoking without being excessively contemplative, and the solid plot offers a satisfying resolution.

An enjoyable work that explores one woman’s path to adulthood.

THE SCIENTIST, THE PSYCHIC, AND THE NUT

Dietz, Charlene Bell
Quill Mark Press (246 pp.)
Sep. 27, 2019
978-1-945212-55-0
978-1-945212-56-7 paper

A life-changing revelation finds an amateur sleuth juggling another mystery and her strained marriage as she embarks on a search for her biological father.

Dietz’s third book, a sequel to her series debut, The Flapper, the Scientist and the Saboteur (2016)—her second work was a prequel featuring the flapper character—picks up at the funeral of Kathleen McPherson. The adopted Beth Armstrong believed this “redoubtable” woman was her aunt only to learn she was actually her mother. “My aunt’s my mom and my mom’s my aunt and they’re both dead,” Armstrong laments, and she becomes consumed with finding out “who in the world is my father.” Other mysteries immediately present themselves: Is she being stalked by the driver of a beat-up old truck? Who was the unannounced woman playing saxophone at Kathleen’s funeral? Armstrong’s husband, Harold, can be forgiven for feeling let down when he discerns her true agenda after she suggests the pair take an impromptu Caribbean vacation on St. Thomas. “I
Finkielman’s novel is rich in history, particularly specifics about Northern Ireland’s political unrest.

STARVING MEN

In this debut thriller, a psychiatrist in Northern Ireland enlists a professional killer to exact long-awaited revenge on behalf of his country.

Dr. Michael Gleeson, whose father was an active member of the Irish Republican Army, counsels individuals with ties to the decommissioned IRA. His latest patient is Turlough O’Sullivan, an admitted killer suffering from problems like OCD. Michael offers Turlough a paying gig: find and kill John Bingham, aka Lord Lucan, who fled London decades ago under suspicion of murdering his wife and a nanny. Michael’s motive is surprising: one of Lord Lucan’s ancestors evicted citizens from their homes during Ireland’s Great Famine. Michael has other targets for Turlough as well—descendants of powerful men whose actions resulted in the deaths of over a million Irish people. Over in London, Irish police detective Maggie O’Malley, on temporary assignment to Scotland Yard, investigates Lord Lucan’s murder. When she connects three recent homicides, she may discover a familial link to Michael. But it may be worse for Michael if the “organization” he works for makes the same connection, as the murders would likely derail attempts at peace in Northern Ireland. Complicating matters even further is Michael’s hit list, still with some names not crossed off. Finkielman’s novel is rich in history, particularly specifics about Northern Ireland’s political unrest. Characters from that country are largely sympathetic, their ancestors having endured many atrocities. But the author

Some devout fishermen compare Jonathan to Old Testament figures like Jonah and David, and Angelina sometimes mentions the heavenly hosts ranking above her. But there is little of the lengthy sermonizing that is the hallmark of such spiritual fantasies as The Shack. Jonathan does question why a benevolent God would allow a universe to host evil entities like the Greys, but he broods just as much over the secular pitfalls of being a workaholic dad who made business meetings a priority over his wife and kids. Angelina registers less as a channel for holy thoughts or Scripture quotes than as a superhero type, restricted in her powers by her half-human side as well as the rule that she is forbidden from using her supernatural powers to smite or kill a foe. (Plus her dialogue, full of wise remarks and spunky patter, would be right at home in a comic book.) The two alien races may scheme like Cold War antagonists, but they have enough imaginative touches and exotic cultural details to merit genre respect, say on a Star Trek series level. While it’s the first installment of a series, this volume wraps up its story threads more neatly than other SF sagas, not leaving readers stranded in a ninth circle of cliffhanger hell.

Aliens, angels, and an action-hero dad star in a rousing genre mishmash.

THE RETURN OF TAU

Dwyer, Dan
BookBaby (345 pp.)
$2.99 e-book | Apr. 10, 2020

This series opener finds a businessman trying to save his family during a war between two extraterrestrial races that threatens Earth.

In Dwyer’s SF fantasy, business executive Jonathan Prescott wins instant fame by being the lone survivor of a terrorist attack. The reason: He has a real guardian angel, the beautiful Angelina, who is at least 50% human, switching between divine and mortal forms. Her Capra-esque mission requires her to undergo various trials before becoming a full angel in heaven.

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Jonathan has an alliance with TAU, a Kronogon military overlord who has tried to manipulate a succession of American presidents in a fight against enemy ETs called Nardomons. Nardomons are actually the bulbous-headed “Greys” who abduct and mutate inhabitants of Earth and other worlds. In short order, Jonathan has faced many attempts to kill him—by the terrorists, rogue forces in the American government, even some of TAU’s ruthless Kronogon comrades. Finally, TAU, Angelina, and some prominent humans have gotten past mutual distrust to team up. But Jonathan’s wife, Janet, and their children are slain. TAU’s cohorts bring the ensemble to their “Star City” to resurrect Jonathan’s loved ones (Kronogon science can do that), but a Grey raid kidnaps the comatose Prescotts. It seems the terminal cancer afflicting Jonathan’s son appeals to the Greys in their cruel conquest strategies.

The author is adept at keeping things moving and throwing cinematic-level twists into the Robert Ludlum–sized narrative to maintain reader interest. Most miraculously of all, for a story co-starring an angel (with a supporting role by the pope), the inescapable religious elements are kept at a fairly low volume.

An engaging family tale with a strong cast.

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certainly doesn’t champion the protagonist’s deeds. Enhancing the tale is a rock-solid murder mystery. As Lord Lucan left behind notes professing his innocence, Maggie scrutinizes the unsolved crime, which pushes her closer to Michael. This whodunit has a discernible, enthralling narrative arc that reaches a gratifying resolution before the end. And though the story is more character-driven than action-oriented, Finkelman’s pithy writing gives it an unwavering momentum.

An absorbing tale brimming with politics, historical details, and mystery.

TO THE MAN IN THE RED SUIT
Poems
Fulton, Christina
Rootstock Publishing (86 pp.)
$14.95 paper | May 5, 2020
978-1-57869-027-5

A collection of poems explores the aftermath of a father’s suicide.

This volume was a finalist for the Anne Sexton Poetry Prize and the Lauria/Frasca Prize for Poetry, and several pieces have been previously published in literary magazines. As a note from Fulton explains, her father committed suicide in 2011, followed a day later by the catastrophic tsunami in Japan. Images of watery disruption and disaster—seawater, tears, amniotic fluid—weave throughout the book. The opening poem, “The Transcontinental Flight of My Father’s Ghost,” explicitly links personal and geological upheavals: “The nuclear mucus / of a shared pain / was the rift / between our two faults.” This linkage is underscored by words that chime or repeat sounds: nuclear mucus; aftermath/afterbirth; disenchanted/disinfected. A flood-stranded man “looked like you. / Soaking in the salty bits / of weightless doubt.” Similarly, double meanings and mysterious correspondences haunt many poems. In “Magazine Shreds,” for example, the father’s boating magazine and his death have spooky resonance with his descent into darkness, emphasized by lines that stair-step down the page (“Dive, / Dive, / Dive”), while the final line, “in your wake,” again combines the watery and the funereal. Alongside the poet’s grief is her sardonic anger, as in “Snippets,” in which the speaker’s mother phones for “my husband’s / autopsy report.” Perhaps she’s in the kitchen, one inhabited by betrayal: “Bad faith lives in an ice cube tray.” The report’s clinical tone and the kitchen’s nurturance find confluence in the poet’s “egg shell nipples” over her “left ventricle,” hinting at what’s cracked open. In another egg reference, the father’s abandonment of his family “was over easy”—the familiar phrase made scathingly bitter by its context. Yet, as Fulton makes powerfully clear throughout this book, her pain is as true as her anger.

A fine collection that gives grief the tonic sting of saltwater.

GARRUBBO GUIDE
The Importance of Eating Italian
Garrubbo, Edwin
Self
$24.95 paper | $24.95 e-book
Jun. 1, 2020
978-0-9890291-2-4

A comprehensive introduction to Italian cuisine by an expert.

If traveling to Italy isn’t in the cards, there’s always this sunny, satisfying armchair tour of Italian cuisine and history. Garrubbo, the Italian American author of Sunday Pasta (2014) and the editor of the Garrubbo Guide website, distills decades of immersion in Italian cooking into his new book. He takes an appropriately broad view of his topic: The book’s first part covers Italian geography, culture, and history, and Garrubbo stresses the integral role that food traditions play in Italian life. A section titled “The Six Ms” details the roles that mothers, memory, and time-tested methods of food preparation play in this dynamic. Garrubbo explains the structure of an Italian meal from aperitivo to digestivo, and then highlights each specific element. One entire section is devoted to pasta and another to the wines of Italy. There’s also a review of the country’s engaging regional traditions. The prose is clear, as are the helpful and well-organized tables and illustrations. This isn’t a dry textbook; Garrubbo’s passion for his subject is apparent in the compelling details that he scatters throughout the book, including appetizing tidbits about the regional origins and history of popular types of Italian breads. For instance, he notes that pane carasau, a thin, crisp Sardinian bread, is also called carta da musica because its paperlike texture is reminiscent of sheet music. And although this volume isn’t a cookbook, it still succeeds as a helpful kitchen reference; for instance, chapters on olive oil and vinegar offer specifics on how these condiments are used in cooking. There’s also a chart of the most commonly used spices that includes the Italian and English names for each herb.

Overall, Garrubbo is the best sort of tour guide—enthusiastic, entertaining, and emotionally involved in his subject. A glossary and bibliography further enhance the work.

An inspiring and informative guide to the foods of Italy.

CUBAN SON RISING
Gomez, Charles
Koehler Books (244 pp.)
$26.95 | $17.95 paper | $7.99 e-book
Apr. 17, 2020
978-1-64663-050-9 paper
978-1-64663-052-3 e-book

In this memoir, a journalist recounts his long career and his struggles with his identity as an HIV-positive gay man.

The son of Cuban immigrants, Gomez was the first Hispanic on-air journalist ever hired by CBS News.
The novel is a delightfully satirical exploration of the intersection between the quotidian and the absurd.

WAITING FOR THE MESSIAH

Greene, Sheldon

BookBaby (248 pp.)

$15.00 paper | $2.99 e-book
Oct. 15, 2019
978-1-5439-7374-7

In Greene's novel, the director of a new Jewish boarding school rankles the community with his offbeat style—and there are rumors that he might be the Messiah.

Nudelman, a successful and irrepresible truck salesman, proposes a novel idea to the Synagogue Board in the Jewish community in Bolton, a small town in Western Pennsylvania: starting a Jewish boarding school. Although they initially reject the proposal, Nudelman wins them over, suggesting that an old retirement home has plenty of room to house incoming students, and the endowment that sustains it is considerable enough to be partially repurposed. The board hires a Russianschool director, Lev Kyol—"tall, angular man, weathered as an unpainted barn"—whose resume boasts experience as a school superintendent in Moscow. Although he impresses everyone with his "aura of self-possession and strength," he also shocks the board with a series of surprising decisions; he admits a Palestinian boy to the school, inaugurates a celebratory Palestinian Day, and organizes a fundraiser for a Catholic hostel. Some members of the community are apoplectic—teacher Martin Schweig schemes to get Lev deported—while others think that he's the Messiah. Greene, the author of The SeedApple (2016), hilariously entertains this latter notion in the narration by Mendel Traig, the community center administrator: "Lev had suddenly become a diabolical, socialist dupe, a naive and irresponsible idealist, and a courageous advocate of brotherly love and understanding." Mendel earnestly tries to figure out the newcomer while also dreaming of a romantic relationship with his best friend, Estelle Cantor. The author's artful brew of farcical comedy and theological provocation may remind readers of the work of Booker Prize-winning novelist Howard Jacobson. Overall, it's a delightfully satirical exploration of the intersection between the quotidian and the absurd. Lev is a particularly memorable character; it turns out that when he said "superintendent," he actually meant "janitor," and he neither encourages nor repudiates the strange notion that his arrival is the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Throughout, Greene wisely explores the salutary power of faith, which Mendel calls a "kind of spiritual walker for the psychologically disabled."

A profoundly funny meditation on how one can find strength in religion.

A compact treatise advances the notion of servant leadership.

Harris, a former pharmaceutical executive and the author of Leader Board (2019), believes it's time for "a new revolution" that revolves around something he calls "servant leadership." Drawing on the writings of numerous leadership experts, including Jim Collins, Stephen R. Covey, and Patrick Lencioni, Harris weaves together their thinking with his own beliefs to make a case for servant leaders—those who listen intently, promote teamwork, and generously share credit for success. The book moves from defining servant leadership and identifying its principles to implementing the concept. This involves building personal leadership effectiveness, learning how to use influence and "positive psychology," developing a strong team, defining the right mission, and becoming a model leader. Each of the first seven chapters is brief but packed with insightful advice and examples. Chapter 8 reviews the key points covered and relates them to other sources. This is as much a motivational work as it is instructional. Harris frequently encourages readers to embrace servant leadership as the best way forward: "You will gain more energy, enthusiasm, positivity, proactivity, intensity, and resilience to take on greater challenges and reap the rewards of doing so." Given the plethora of books on leadership,
it is no easy task to break the mold, and many of the maxims in this volume will no doubt be recognizable to readers. Still, the author’s enthusiasm for the subject is infectious, and some of his observations are noteworthy, such as “Exceptional leaders...where they are going, and what it will take to get there.” In addition to strongly promoting the development of effective teams, Harris correctly suggests that leaders and their companies should be laser-focused on serving customers: “Creating customer value is the key to sustainable, long-term performance....Remember: the people who serve the customer are precious.” In an age where some may view leadership as increasingly autocratic, if not dictatorial, the humanistic view expressed by the author is reassuring.

Carefully researched, tightly written, and timely leadership advice.

THE BAREFOOT SPIRIT
How Hardship, Hustle, and Heart Built America’s #1 Wine Brand
Houlihan, Michael & Harvey, Bonnie with Kushman, Rick
Footnotes Press (272 pp.)
May 21, 2013
978-0-9995042-0-8

Novice winemakers upend the industry’s pretensions while taking on the jungle of the retail beverage sector in this rollicking business saga.

Houlihan and Harvey recount their adventures as founders of Barefoot Wine, which began in 1986 as a shoestring venture and swelled to a 600,000–cases-per-year success before being bought by E. & J. Gallo Winery. The book is in part a story of innovative marketing around a new image of fermented grape juice: a tasty, cheap, reliable wine that ditched haughty connoisseurship in favor of a friendly, approachable brand image—“California in a bottle”—aimed at harried supermarket shoppers. In addition to the oftbeat brand name, the authors came up with a label with an iconic footprint logo instead of curlicued pseudo-French designs. They also created goofy but effective sales aids, like footprint decals marching across liquor store floors straight to the Barefoot shelf, and pioneered a “Worthy Cause Market-ing” strategy of donating wine to charitable events in order to build brand awareness and goodwill. (Priceless free advertising came, they recall, when the elite French vineyard Château Lafite Rothschild threatened to sue over Barefoot’s printing “Château La Feet” T-shirts; the ensuing media hoopla sent sales soaring.) But it’s also a revealing look at the demanding slog of the mass market beverage business. The authors spent years making sales calls at mom-and-pop stores and trying to force their way into supermarket aisles that are usually closed to unknown brands. Houlihan and Harvey, assisted by amanuensis Kushman, distill from their experiences perennial business lessons along with tips on everything from negotiations to employee compensation, all wrapped in an entertaining, anecdotal picaresque. (“After Michael read the card carefully, he looked up and gave a slight bow, then presented Mr. Matsumoto with his Barefoot card, the one with the foot and the title, ‘Head Stomper.’”) Houlihan and Harvey make the wine trade seem a little less glamorous but a lot more interesting.

An irreverent, eye-opening business memoir.

DYNAMICIST
Hunt, Lee
Self (320 pp.)
$16.00 paper | $9.99 e-book
Feb. 20, 2020
978-1-9990935-0-1

In this fantasy debut, a young farmer attends an elite school for those skilled in manipulating the laws of thermodynamics.

Eighteen-year-old Robert Endicott of Bron has been chosen for Duchess Lady Brice’s “Applied Mathematics and Physics” program at the New School. Though his parents are dead, Robert lives with loving grandparents. Finlay, his Grandpa, experienced a “heraldic” dream that confirmed the teen would be accepted and so he moves to Vercors, the capital. Uncle Arrayn escorts Robert on the journey; and they stop in the town of Nyhmes, where the teen witnesses grain futures exchanged and ponders the advantages of his Grandpa’s heraldry. In Vercors, two young women threaten to steal his baggage. They are Eloise Kyre and Koria Válcourt, fellow classmates at the New School, who only tease him. On campus, Robert meets dorm mates Davyn Daly, Lord Gregory Justice, and Heylor Style, among others. While he hopes to enjoy a forward-looking career as a student and innovator, Robert nevertheless becomes embroiled in his classmates’ questionable behavior. He discovers quickly that one of them is a compulsive thief and another, a misanthropic drunk. One night, a student is sexually assaulted, and the fallout threatens to derail the program. The upside to this chaos is that Robert falls in love with Koria, who reciprocates. There’s little danger, it seems, that he’ll become like the title character of his favorite book, *The Lonely Wizard*.

Hunt’s series starter offers a grounded, scientifically detailed answer to the Harry Potter universe. “Wizards and dynamicists do the same thing,” instructor Keith Eyun says. “One has an intuitive, spontaneous gift, the other a managed, quantitative process.” This premise makes for occasionally dense prose that genre fans may need patience navigating. The most captivating plot element, murmuring in the background, is that of Nimrheal, a supposedly vanquished demon who kills those who innovate. Extensive flashbacks sometimes disrupt the tale’s flow, like the one immediately following Eloise and Koria’s introduction. But narrative hiccups are balanced by excellent lines like “Perhaps people would rather the world was changed than change themselves.” A disturbing heraldic dream ably sets up the sequel.

A philosophically minded series opener that deftly merges science, fantasy, and college life.
The novel’s resolutions and reconciliations are effectively explored and have an undercurrent of religious ardency.

ALL THE RIGHT MISTAKES
Jamison, Laura
She Writes Press (328 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $9.95 e-book
Aug. 4, 2020 978-1-63152-709-8

A novel focuses on the choices and challenges of five 40-year-old women who formed friendships as motivated Dartmouth undergraduates.

The book’s main characters are affluent, highly intelligent, married women with children. Their stories are narrated in alternating chapters with the exception of Heather Hall, the “supernova” of the group and a pivot for the other four. Heather is the COO of a hot, new tech company. Wealthy and generous, she always hosts their annual girls’ weekends. As the story opens, she is preoccupied with her book launch, so she is hosting in absentia this year. Self-involved and oblivious to her friends’ problems, Heather relentlessly sends texts, tweets, and emails exuding mania positivity. The remaining four are Carmen Jones, Martha Adams West, Elizabeth Smith, and Sara Beck. Carmen was a brilliant student whose career plans were torpedoed by an unplanned pregnancy and resultant marriage. Her dreams for more children never materialized, and her life is unfulfilling. Elizabeth, an exacting “big firm attorney” with a 3-year-old son and a loving but distracted stay-at-home husband, desperately wants a second child. With four young kids and a full-time position as a lawyer, Sara is exhausted by the demands of her job and angry that she is responsible for all of the household management. Martha, a physician, is at home after having two children and getting pregnant with a third. Married to a successful doctor named Robert, she is conflicted about returning to work after her baby is born. As trying as their situations are at the start, the friends are in store for a lot more pain. Unfortunate, terrible, and tragic incidents occur, and all the women must reevaluate their situations and decisions.

Heather’s blockbuster book serves as a catalyst for the four when they realize that each represents one of the titular Four BIG MISTAKES of Women Who Will Never Lead or Win. Mistake No. 1: Opting Out (Carmen); Mistake No. 2: Ramping Off (Martha); Mistake No. 3: Half-Assing It (Sara); and Mistake No. 4: Ignoring the Fertility Cliff (Elizabeth). The four are blindsided by Heather’s simplistic and cruel assessment of their lives. But they are at critical junctures, and some of Heather’s criticisms hit close to home. The complexities of the issues are often subsumed by Jamison’s prosaic analyses. For example, during a school conference for one of her sons, Martha is stung by the dean’s dismissal of her desire to return to practicing medicine.

In another piece, the ethereal imagery of downtrodden egg- and worm-eaters’ rising up to reach a dispassionate white angel remains striking in its symbolism. With the exception of a heart-stirring eulogy for a lost friend, the book often feels the most personal in works that focus on religion. A piece dedicated to the author’s shakubuku mother, the woman who introduced her to Buddhist nam-myoho-renge-kyo chanting, is a portrait of words that skillfully brings the person to life: “She looked like my real mother / thirty years back: their large lips ochre-beautiful petals blossoming beneath their

is engrossing and the stories unfold at a satisfying pace. The husbands are mainly contrivances who serve to highlight the intriguing issues of the five women. The resolutions and reconciliations are effectively explored and have an undercurrent of religious ardency. Heather eventually acknowledges that her four friends “are using their resilience, optimism, courage, and persistence to create lives that are perfect for them.”

A compelling and enjoyable ride with five women who supposedly have it all.
loopy lidded eyes / ...her womanscent, / pussy-sharp in pungent spirals.” This same passion can be as heartbreaking as it is wondrous, as in a piece about an ailing father, willing to chant with Juanita at home, who refuses to enter a San Pablo, California, temple as he nears the end. On the subject of Christianity, the volume is considerably more critical, calling out Roman Catholic hypocrisy and seeing Jesus in the legions of White homeless, begging and defecating in the streets. Modern and historical hallmarks of social justice are present throughout, from Donald Trump’s rise and Harvey Weinstein’s crimes to the acquittal of O.J. Simpson, Sarah Palin’s “babymommadrama,” and the Gulf War. The author champions the causes of Hurricane Katrina survivors and examines police victims and tragedies like the fatal shooting of Atatiana Jefferson in Texas.

Unsettling, important, and unforgettable poetry.

THE BATTER’S BOX
A Novel of Baseball, War, and Love
Kutler, Andy
Warriors Publishing Group (324 pp.)
$2.99 e-book | Mar. 12, 2019

A rising baseball star volunteers to serve overseas in World War II and later struggles to bear the weight of what he witnessed in this novel.

Professional baseball star Will Jamison is an unsolved mystery, a historical enigma. A talented up-and-coming player for the Washington Senators, he’s “on top of his game, with money, fame, women.” Then, in response to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, he enlists in the Army despite being given ample opportunity and the promise of a considerable payoff from the Senators’ owner, Clark Griffith, to continue to play. In fact, even once he’s a soldier, Will is offered a chance to avoid the perils of combat and play ball for the 84th Infantry Division. Yet again, he eschews the easy way out and chooses to become an anonymous soldier, a “common infantryman.” He distinguishes himself in war, fighting in the Battle of the Bulge and earning a Silver Star. When he returns to the United States, he rejoins the Senators, and only a month into the season, his skills beginning to regain their former luster, unceremoniously quits, subsequently vanishing forever from the public eye. Kutler suspensefully unravels the puzzle that is Will’s life and the burdensome emotional pain he shoulders in the aftermath of the war.

While the author’s book is fictional, the rigorous historical research he must have done to achieve such an impressive sense of period authenticity is evident on virtually every page. Kutler vividly portrays the excitement of American baseball, but the best sections of the work are devoted to the depiction of the war and the horrors that were committed in its name. Will’s trauma is powerfully described—forced to helplessly witness unspeakable barbarism, he is forever changed, his experience “etched in his memory for eternity.” The author also gives readers some intelligently conceived insights into Will’s past, especially his “tenuous childhood.” Similarly, his love for Kay Barlow as well as his struggle to reconnect with her following the war are poignantly described: “I love her. He knew because every time he found himself in a shadowy corner since returning from the war, mired in despairing emotions and haunting memories that plagued him since he left Belgium, he thought of her.” Kutler’s prose is consistently lucid, but he can strain a bit laboriously to elicit an emotional response from readers, a tendency that flirts with lachrymose manipulation. For example, the author takes gratuitous pains to demonstrate, in long, drawn-out scenes, Will’s honorable resistance to using his celebrity to avoid military service. In addition, the insertion of a “historical note” further explicating the Battle of the Bulge is more intrusive than clarifying—it has the effect of lifting readers out of the story, suspending a complete literary immersion. Nonetheless, this is an emotionally affecting story, both heart-rending and thrilling, as dramatically captivating as it is historically edifying.

A war tale that delivers an impressive blend of historical research and narrative drama.

NEVER AN AMISH BRIDE
London, Ophelia
Entangled: Amara (400 pp.)
$7.99 paper | $5.99 e-book
Jun. 30, 2020
978-1-64063-906-5

A lovelorn woman connects with a disreputable man and undergoes a crisis of faith in London’s latest romance. Esther Miller, a 23-year-old Amish woman living in the village of Honey Brook, Pennsylvania, has been mourning the death of her fiancé, Jacob, for two years as her friends and sisters get married, and she chafes at the tension between her dreams and Amish “plain living.” (She has a flourishing business selling handmade, floral-scented soap, but the “English” women who buy it crave stronger fragrances that could run afoul of Amish strictures against perfume.) Then she encounters Lucas Brenneman, Jacob’s handsome brother, who disappeared 10 years ago during his Rumspringa; he’s come home to work as a physician’s assistant and has adopted a new lifestyle, complete with pickup truck and satellite dish. Esther and Lucas feel drawn to each other and commence a tacit courtship, consisting mainly of long talks about family secrets, God, and their mutual sense of not fitting in; Esther even flirts and dines alone with Lucas and experiences a buggy crash that scandalously ends with him lying on top of her. Can they possibly have a future together? In this series starter, London paints a warm, vivid portrait of Amish life, centered on big farm families, kitchen chores, dressmaking, and caretaking of mules, goats, and children. It’s all couched in limpid prose with flashes of Austen-ite wit; when tried by her vain sister’s demands, for instance, “Esther inwardly sighed and tried to remember what her mother said about keeping her word, and what the preacher said last Sunday about showing unbridled charity toward others, and what the Bible said about not killing.” Esther’s life is replete with conundrums that may sound
A young woman achieves her dream of becoming a magician with the help of her rabbit in this children's book.

Holly Foster, a brown-skinned, freckled, curly-haired woman, loves performing magic with her white rabbit, Buddy. “I wish we could do this every day,” she tells her companion after a children's show. In a flashback to Holly's childhood, readers see that she has loved magic from a young age, admiring her Uncle Bob, a magician. When told girls “can only be a magician’s assistant” by a boy in her class, Holly ignores his comment, pulling a coin from behind his ear. Uncle Bob gives her Buddy and, when he retires after an “Indian Rope Trick” gone awry, leaves her his magician's trunk. Buddy wants to help Holly become a full-time, professional magician. He reads Uncle Bob's books and plans a way for her to perform an exceptional trick at the “Night of the New Magicians” event. Holly creates a perfect illusion, allowing her to realize her dream. While the story of a supportive anthropomorphic rabbit and a talented magician works well, Maret leaves readers with some key questions. There are no answers as to why Holly struggles to become a full-time magician and why there are so few female practitioners. And her day job, hinted at, is never described. At one point, Buddy leaves their apartment to enlist neighborhood animals for assistance, but the final trick he and Holly execute involves no extra creatures. When Holly performs her fancy illusion, Buddy initially waves the wand, making it seem as though she is functioning as the assistant, a role she rejected as a child. These quibbles aside, the author's accessible text and calm, repeated refrain about Buddy's “rabbit-y way” of helping will appeal to young would-be magicians.

Behrend's oil pastel illustrations, which feature a diverse array of magicians and audience members, match the book's tone. They capture the whimsical, beautiful finale in a way that feels like magic. Behrend also sneaks in images of the covers of her title The Survivor Tree (2017) and Maret's The Cloud Artist (2017) in a classroom where Holly performs a trick.

An engaging celebration of ambition and the imagination with magical illustrations.
**SOLDIERS OF FREEDOM**
Marquis, Samuel
Mount Sopris Publishing (430 pp.)
$16.99 paper | $0.99 e-book
Mar. 23, 2020
978-1-943593-27-9

A historical novel focuses on the final Allied push to vanquish the Nazis in Germany during World War II.

This fifth installment of a series from Marquis tells the story of the war in Europe in 1944 and 1945 from a number of different perspectives. One chunk of the narrative is told through the viewpoint of Sgt. William McBurney, a young Black man who becomes a gunner in the “Black Panthers” of the 761st Tank Battalion, the first African American tank unit. Another portion centers on Gen. George Patton, the famous leader of the 3rd Army that did so much of the lightning combat in the last year of the war in Europe. And a third shard of the narrative centers on Angela Lange, a fictionalized teenage resistance fighter in Germany, one of the “Edelweiss Pirates” risking their lives to overthrow Nazi rule in Cologne. All three of these protagonists face separate trials—McBurney against the ingrained racism of the United States armed services, Lange against the divided loyalties of a terrified people, and Patton against the tenacious forces of a battlefield enemy. Marquis bases his tale on scrupulous research, an admixture that makes this World War II series a thoroughly engaging example of heavily factual historical fiction. And perhaps inevitably, this reliance on historical documentation tends to make Patton the best drawn and most memorable of the book’s characters, although the author is a bit susceptible to hero worship in these segments (“He had long made it a point to dress with military spit and polish, and as he gazed out at the wreckage of war spread across the rolling French tableland, he appeared particularly colossal”). Counterbalancing Patton’s perspective with those of McBurney and Lange allows Marquis to make insightful commentary on the weird dualities of war. McBurney witnesses a human side of the fighting that tends to be missed by the more gung-ho Patton. All of these threads are rendered with a genuinely gripping forward momentum.

A granular and engrossing tale about the last months of World War II’s European theater.

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**LISTENING TO OUR STUDENTS AND TRANSCENDING K-12 TO SAVE OUR NATION**
Ostrom, Alec; Hack, Brian & Prentice, Don
XlibrisUS (438 pp.)
Jan. 5, 2020
978-1-79607-856-5
978-1-79607-855-8 paper

A wide-ranging proposal advocates a complete overhaul of the United States education system.

Veteran educators and organizational theorists collaborate on a new educational paradigm in this public policy book. Ostrom, Hack, and Prentice argue that the current K-12 system does not successfully serve students or the public. They recommend creating what they call a “Digital Age Learning System Model” that is flexible and individualized, providing students with wide-ranging opportunities for self-motivated learning and incorporating practical and vocational skills in addition to traditional academic subjects. The book outlines the “DALS Centers for Lifelong Learning” that would replace traditional schools, with a 50-item list of topics that will be covered by the new curriculum. The work also addresses the frustrations many teachers feel within the current education system and presents an overall vision of life under the proposed scheme. Appendices make up nearly half of the volume’s content and include statistics, articles previously published by the authors, and an extensive series of anecdotes from the perspectives of teachers in a fictional, dysfunctional school setting. Using the framework of applied systems thinking, the authors do a superb job of reimagining the structure of an education system and presenting a plausible case for their DALS plan. The most illuminating sections of the book explore the proposed changes. The descriptions of the existing system as “completely dysfunctional, outdated, and broken” are valid but often repetitive, especially in the lengthy stories told by the fictional teachers. The ubiquity of registered trademark symbols in the text—used for every instance of DALS and related terms—at times gives the work the appearance of a promotional brochure, and the frequent notes indicating that a discussion of source material is “not a quote” become distracting. The book’s generally strong arguments are also hampered by the use of unsubstantiated statistics, particularly the frequent assertion that 85% of cases conform to a given description. But setting these criticisms aside, the volume delivers a thoughtful and impassioned call to revamp the education process for the benefit of all those involved.

An effective argument in favor of education reform.
Both writers excel at describing their cultural and linguistic mishaps.

**THE ROAD TO VILLA PAGE**

A married couple recall their misadventures while buying and renovating a house in France in their debut memoir. After years of working as TV writers in Hollywood, Cynthia and William Royce were ready for a new adventure. While on vacation in the charming Dordogne region of southwestern France, William proposed that they realize his long dream of living in Europe by buying an inexpensive property to fix up. “This is when his dream started to really scare me,” Cynthia writes. As chapters alternate between their two perspectives, the couple tell the story of their shuttling between Los Angeles and the quaint villages of Périgord Noir, where they searched for a house while also trying to adopt an infant they didn’t want to raise in Hollywood. They eventually settled on the idyllic Villa Page, a 200-year-old former hunting lodge with a private island, but humorous misunderstandings, often linked to their lack of fluency in French, plagued the purchase and eventual remodel. A cranky architect suggested that their Parisian real estate agent was a gangster, the former owner’s homespun electrical work left exposed wires, and their friendly neighbor casually revealed that the warped floors probably resulted from the year Villa Page didn’t have a roof. Just as things started coming together, they received the happy news from California that they could adopt a baby girl, who soon joined their family. Cynthia and William mine the he-said, she-said structure for plenty of comedic irony—Cynthia refers to a property as “a ruin” while William describes it as part of a “dream…taking flight”—but the device never becomes cloying. While long descriptions of the renovation can be less interesting, both writers excel at describing their cultural and linguistic mishaps, from mixing up numbers to having to pantomime “lawn mower.” The first installment in a planned memoir series about their move, the book includes dozens of pages of high-quality, uncredited color photographs of Villa Page and its environs. Throughout, they pepper their story with just enough French vocabulary, wine, and cheese to give the entire book that certain je ne sais quoi.

Two expatriates take a lighthearted and well-structured look at trans-Atlantic cultural differences.

**PHOENIX PEOPLE**

Pauw, Jan

Self (380 pp.)


A graduate student writes her dissertation about a billionaire real estate developer imprisoned for securities fraud in this debut novel.

K.T. “Katy” Alvarez is working toward a Ph.D. in forensic psychology at the University of Washington when she hears of Mark Kauffman. In a classic rags-to-riches scenario, Kauffman went from spending his childhood in a converted chicken coop to owning a real estate empire valued in the billions. Mark is now in prison for fraud, and Katy, for her dissertation, wants to determine whether he has any mental illnesses or personality disorders that may have influenced his crimes. Mark declines the offer but later reconsider's and tells Katy the story of his life. He assures her he isn’t a criminal and his only intention was to be nice to friends and family, but Katy views him as spoiled and arrogant. As the two get better acquainted, Mark realizes that Katy has endured unbelievable hardships and her academic success did not come easily. Mark’s real estate concerns began with a $6,000 home purchased in Seattle in the 1960s and grew to astronomical heights, so much so that he was able to easily fund his son’s biotech startup. But certain financial maneuvers got the attention of the Securities and Exchange Commission, and Mark’s whole world began to unravel. Pauw’s mostly epistolary storytelling is always captivating and is peppered with enough knowledge of finance and law to give the novel a good deal of credibility. On the emotional side, Katy’s tale about life with a troubled mother adds an important layer to the device never becomes cloying. While long descriptions of the renovation can be less interesting, both writers excel at describing their cultural and linguistic mishaps, from mixing up numbers to having to pantomime “lawn mower.” The first installment in a planned memoir series about their move, the book includes dozens of pages of high-quality, uncredited color photographs of Villa Page and its environs. Throughout, they pepper their story with just enough French vocabulary, wine, and cheese to give the entire book that certain je ne sais quoi.

Two expatriates take a lighthearted and well-structured look at trans-Atlantic cultural differences.

**THE ROAD TO VILLA PAGE**

A He Said/She Said Memoir of Buying Our Dream Home in France

Royce, Cynthia & Royce, William James

Sunbury Press (151 pp.)

$29.95 paper | Mar. 1, 2020

A married couple recall their misadventures while buying and renovating a house in France in their debut memoir.
Robbers dressed as the Three Stooges on Halloween. Later, after a shootout in the parking lot of a Barnes & Noble, the couple decide that they “need to get out of California for a while,” so they set off on a drug-fueled cross-country restaurant-robbery crime spree. Rubinstein’s prose is frenetic and gritty, capturing the increasing pressure under which Paul finds himself: “I shook my head, trying to clear it. Come on, what are you gonna do? You say it’ll work out, right? How? Go get a job? Where? And looking the way you do? With your work history…? Your daughter’s hungry now.” However, the book is far too long—in part because it spends too much time laying out a comprehensive history of the couple’s relationship. Even so, Rubinstein manages to create characters whom readers can truly feel for, despite their poor decision-making skills and generally grungy ethos. Paul inevitably compares himself and Alice to infamous criminals Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow, and it’s a comparison that’s not too far off the mark. Buried within this method-out epic is a very old story about vicious cycles—and the young Americans who lack the resources to find their way out of them.

A dirty, chatty, and sometimes-brutal love story for the rap-rock set.

This Issue’s Contributors

ADULT

Mazie Adjarian • Jeff Alfonso • Mark Athaia • Amy Boaz • Jeffrey Burke • Tobias Carroll • Miranda Cooper • Dave DeChristopher • Kathleen Devereaux • Melanie Dragger • Eispersi Dayton • Daniel Dyer • Lisa Elliott • Celeste Ezines • Harvey Freedenberg • Jenna Friebel • Michael Griffeth • Jason Haradya • Peter Heck • Karina Nidus Holm • Jessica Jermain • jawsuree Kamble • Matt Keeley • Bath Langdon • Tom Lavete • Judith Leith • Cheeza Lee • Peter Lewis • Don Mcleese • Gregory McNamee • Clayton Moore • Sarah Morgan • Laurie Muchnick • Molly Makkos • Jennifer Nabors • Christopher Navratil • Niki Newirth • Therese Purcell Nielsen • Mike Oppenheim • Ashley Patrick • David DeChristopher • Kathleen Devereaux • Melanie Dragger • Elspeth Drayton • Daniel Alana Abbott • Kent Armstrong • Hannah Bonner • Charles Cassidy • Michael Deagler • Stephanie Dohle • Steve Doogue • Lynnie Hefley • Justin Hickey • Ivan Kaerenka • Daniel Leibenzon • Barbara London • Rhett Morgan • Randall Nichols • Joshua T. Pederson • Noor Qasim • Matt Raucher • Sarah Regget • Nomi Schwartz • Jerome Shey • Barry Silverstein • Lauren Emily Whalen

THE LAST CRYSTAL

Schoonmaker, Frances

Aucus Publishers (422 pp.)
$29.00 | $22.00 paper | $8.99 e-book
Dec. 23, 2019
978-1-73278-825-1
978-1-73278-824-4 paper

Past and present merge as four children embark on a deadly quest for an object of power.

In this final volume of a fantasy trilogy for middle schoolers, four siblings in the 1940s are catapulted into North America’s long-ago past for a danger-filled wilderness adventure. Their quest: locate the powerful “Last Crystal” in hopes that its magic can heal their father, a wounded World War II Army Air Forces pilot. As in the first and second books, The Black Alabaster Box (2018) and The Red Abalone Shell (2018), historical elements, including racial and ethnic issues and how ancient Native peoples lived, are integral to the narrative. In 1944, the children board a train in Kansas City, bound for Los Angeles. The oldest Harrison sibling is responsible J.D.; the youngest is Grace, who sees things others don’t—and who is the third generation of girls named Grace to play a central role in the continuing plot. In between are Mary Carol, a magic believer, and observant skeptic Robert. Also on board: wicked Celeste, who needs a child to retrieve the Last Crystal to maintain her youth and beauty and who is delighted to discover Grace Harrison, whom she intends to bend to her will. (In the context of good and evil and in the part children play in it, there is an echo of C.S. Lewis’ The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.) Escaping Celeste, the kids leap off the train into grassland thousands of years in the past, and Schoonmaker’s riveting narrative deepens into a sobering tale of high-stakes survival. Over their monthslong ordeal, the children, following a mysterious map to the crystal, sustain injuries, suffer extreme thirst and hunger, learn to rely on one another, and discover their individual strengths. The immersive plot, created with both authentic realism and imagination-stirring mysticism, includes an encounter with a Grace hidden from Celeste long ago in an ancient Chumash village where she is the resident shaman. Old Shep, an ageless, enigmatic returns; so do Uncle James and two immortals: good Mr. Nichols and evil Sandastros.

A gripping fantasy perfect for young characters meeting life-threatening challenges.

INDIE

Alana Abbott • Kent Armstrong • Hannah Bonner • Charles Cassidy • Michael Deagler • Stephanie Dohle • Steve Doogue • Lynnie Hefley • Justin Hickey • Ivan Kaerenka • Daniel Leibenzon • Barbara London • Rhett Morgan • Randall Nichols • Joshua T. Pederson • Noor Qasim • Matt Raucher • Sarah Regget • Nomi Schwartz • Jerome Shey • Barry Silverstein • Lauren Emily Whalen
Romance writer Summers creates a vibrant setting in Pecan Valley that ably supports the story.

IN TWILIGHT’S HUSH

Stevens, Laurie
FYD Media (394 pp.)
Apr. 4, 2020
978-0-9970682-7-7

In this fourth installment of a thriller series, Los Angeles police detective Gabriel McRay reluctantly works with a psychic to close a missing person cold case.

Gabriel has a troubled history, and most recently, he suffered through torture by a serial killer. In an effort to give him a bit of a break, his superiors hand him a 30-year-old case involving the disappearance of teenager Nancy Lynn Lewicki in 1988. He’s just diving in and reexamining the evidence when he gets an offer of help that he doesn’t want after celebrity TV psychic Carmen Jenette convinces Nancy’s parents to hire her. Although Carmen believes in her own abilities, she feels that her fame has made people think she’s a charlatan, and she hopes that solving Nancy’s case will remedy that. Gabriel, however, remains skeptical even after Carmen insists that he’s a “conduit”—that Nancy is somehow reaching out to the detective from beyond the grave. After Carmen mentions the investigation on her show, someone attacks her, although she’s able to fend them off. Gabriel soon has a break in the case, which leads him to a person of interest, but he eventually realizes that Carmen could prove to be an invaluable asset. Stevens’ character development is exceptional in this installment. Although Carmen initially comes off as pretentious and Gabriel acts callously toward her, they’re both shown to be devoted to resolving the mystery. Gabriel’s scene-stealing medical examiner fiancee, Ming Li, and Nancy’s mother, Pauline, whose unwavering optimism counters the protagonist’s somber past, add to the enjoyment. Best of all, the author usefully limits Carmen’s gift—it’s helpful, but it doesn’t simply reveal the culprit. As in preceding installments, Stevens’ concise prose keeps the investigation in the foreground, and plot turns will keep readers’ interest until the final page.

An engaging series entry with sensational characters and a focused mystery.

GOOD WORK DONE BETTER

Improving the Impact of Community-Based Non-Pros

Watts, Sam
FriesenPress (97 pp.)

A Canadian executive delivers a clarion call for community-based nonprofit organizations to up their games.

The mission of community-based nonprofit organizations is often to serve the most vulnerable groups of people in a local or regional area. Watts, the executive director of a Montreal-based CBNP, acknowledges that these organizations pursue a noble cause but “may be metaphorically stuck in the mud.” This provocative premise is explored in a sensible, forthright way in a debut book clearly intended for CBNP CEOs and board members.

The volume begins with a discussion of why and how the good work CBNPs do can be made better. Next, the author debunks four myths about the typical recipients of care and support provided by CBNPs. For example: “Emergency shelters are just a patch and can contribute to the creation of a lifestyle of homelessness.” Here, Watts demonstrates a keen awareness of the complexities of serving a
socially disadvantaged constituency. Following the myths is an insightful, high-level discussion of “misunderstandings” about CBNPs and “indicators” that suggest whether or not an organization “is likely to deliver a return on investment.” A chapter on leadership helpfully identifies four styles of leadership typical in CBNPs. A subsequent chapter, perhaps one of the most valuable, thoroughly examines the responsibilities and typical deficiencies of CBNP boards. The chapter includes an authoritative overview of governance, the strengths and weaknesses of various board types, and a highly instructional discourse that covers five symptoms of board “dysfunctionality.” The volume’s final two chapters concentrate on forward-looking content. One chapter challenges CBNPs to become “the disruptors rather than the disrupted.” The second provides a kind of road map to reinvention by outlining four specific opportunities CBNPs can pursue to go beyond traditional thinking. As Watts suggests in his afterword, “rather than trying to do more of what they have been doing,” CBNPs “must aim to achieve better outcomes for the people they serve.” Recognizing good stewardship but with an eye toward continuous improvement, the author artfully challenges his CBNP compatriots to strive for excellence.

Eloquent tough love for nonprofit leaders.

**BRODY THE LION**

*Sometimes I Roar!*

Wegner, Kristin

Illus. by Garcia, Alexandra

Autism and Behavior Center (36 pp.)

$23.00 | $11.99 paper | $3.99 e-book

Apr. 27, 2020

978-1-73465-541-4

978-1-73465-540-7 paper

A lion cub learns to calmly handle unexpected situations in this debut picture book.

For his third birthday, Brody the Lion is planning a party, inviting all his friends: Snake, Hippo, Bear, and Monkey. When the guests don’t arrive precisely on time, Brody gets upset, roaring “NO! THIS IS NOT RIGHT!” But his mother reminds him to practice his relaxation technique: Take a deep breath, count to two, and blow it out. Then he’s able to wait patiently for his friends. During the party, several situations test Brody’s serenity, such as a present he doesn’t want, overly noisy guests, and losing a game. Each time, his mother or father coaches him to breathe and count, and by the party’s end, Brody can practice the technique himself without prompting. In her work, Wegner—a therapist for special needs children—offers a simple method to help kids cope with surprises or disappointments. The situations that challenge Brody are ones every child can understand, and repetition helps drive the message home. An appendix includes helpful information for parents on utilizing the book and expanding the concepts. Debut illustrator Garcia provides amusing pictures that help illuminate the technique.

A useful and approachable primer on emotional regulation for kids.
INDIE

Books of the Month

THE MIT MURDERS
Stephen L. Bruneau
A sharp-witted detective hunts a psychopath schooled in murder; highly recommended.

ENGAGED
Amy M. Bucher
Destined to become a seminal work on innovative digital design.

ROOT AND BRANCH
Preston Fleming
A shrewdly written tale with a robust cast of characters and a frightening intifada in the U.S.

THE MAGICAL APPEARANCE OF EARTHWORMS
N.A. Moncrief
Observant, affecting writing about an Australian childhood.

THE ENGAGED
Amy M. Bucher
Destined to become a seminal work on innovative digital design.

THE MAGPIE’S RETURN
Curtis Smith
An affecting futuristic tale that manages to feel both urgent and timeless.

IN THE DARK, SOFT EARTH
Frank Watson
A dazzling and intriguing poetic examination of the wonders of the universe.
NEW KAZUO ISHIGURO NOVEL COMING NEXT YEAR
Nobel Prize–winning British author Kazuo Ishiguro will release his first novel since 2015 next year.

Alfred A. Knopf will publish Ishiguro’s Klara and the Sun on March 2, 2021, the publisher said in a news release. “The novel tells the story of Klara, an Artificial Friend with outstanding observational qualities, who, from her place in the store, watches carefully the behavior of those who come in to browse, and of those who pass in the street outside,” Knopf said. “She remains hopeful a customer will soon choose her.”

It will be Ishiguro’s first novel since The Buried Giant, which was released to mostly positive reviews in 2015. A reviewer for Kirkus called the book “lovely: a fairy tale for grown-ups, both partaking in and departing from a rich literary tradition.”

Jordan Pavlin, Knopf’s editorial director, called Klara and the Sun "a thrilling book that offers a look at our changing world through the eyes of an unforgettable narrator, and one that explores the fundamental question: what does it mean to love?"

RENI EDDO-LODGE TOPS U.K. BESTSELLER CHARTS
Reni Eddo-Lodge has become the first Black British author to top the U.K.’s bestseller charts, the Guardian reports.

Eddo-Lodge’s Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race, born out of a viral blog post the author wrote six years ago, argues that White people need to examine their own privileges in order to dismantle racism. A reviewer for Kirkus called the book “sharp, compelling, and impassioned.”

“Feels absolutely wild to have broken this record,” Eddo-Lodge wrote on Twitter. “My work stands on the shoulders of so many Black British literary giants—Bernadine Evaristo, Benjamin Zephaniah, Zadie Smith, Andrea Levy, Stella Dadzie, Stuart Hall, Linton K. Johnson, Jackie Kay, Gary Younge—to name a few.”

The last Black author to have a book top the Nielsen BookScan U.K. Top 50 was Michelle Obama, who scored the No. 1 spot in 2018 for Becoming, her blockbuster memoir.

KRAKAUER TORN OVER REMOVAL OF INTO THE WILD BUS
Author Jon Krakauer says that he’s torn about the removal of the famous bus made popular by his book into the Wild.

Krakauer’s 1995 book told the story of Chris McCandless, a young man who traveled to the Alaskan wilderness in 1992, eventually living in an abandoned Fairbanks city bus. His body was found inside the bus in September of that year; the cause of death was ruled to be starvation.

The vehicle, which McCandless called “the Magic Bus,” was moved out of a dangerous area in Alaska by the state’s Army National Guard, who used a helicopter to remove it and bring it to a secure location, the Associated Press reported. The move was meant to dissuade fans of the book and its 2007 film adaptation from venturing into the wilderness to visit it.

Many adventurers who have taken pilgrimages to the bus have had to be rescued; two died after drowning in the nearby Teklanika River. Krakauer said he feels responsible for its relocation. “I wish the bus could have remained how it was,” he said. “But I wrote the book that ruined it.”

Michael Schaub is an Austin, Texas–based journalist and regular contributor to NPR.
Mason Locke Weems, whose *The Life and Memorable Actions of George Washington* (1800) was one of the first bestsellers in the annals of American publishing, enjoyed a good yarn even when the facts didn’t support it. So do the rest of us.

Nearly 200 years after Weems’ death, most veterans of the American school system—at least of a certain age—believe that young George chopped down one of his father’s cherry trees and confessed to the deed with the immortal words, “I cannot tell a lie.”

The arboricide never happened. It’s just one of many stories that make up the old Manichaean picture of the American Revolution, when good battled evil and stalwart Continentals saved the nation from sneering royalists and loyalists.

David McCullough complicates the black-and-white picture considerably in *1776*, published in 2005. Like Kevin Phillips’ *The Cousins’ Wars* (1999), it sees the Revolution as a civil war that looked particularly unpromising for the rebels in the first year of the conflict. By McCullough’s account, for instance, King George III wasn’t such a bad fellow, and long into a costly struggle, he remained popular at home. He was also well liked by at least a third of his subjects in the American Colonies, a second third being on the side of the rebels, the last third indifferent to the outcome of the war. (It’s a pattern that hasn’t changed much—in the last election, somewhere around a third were for the currently sitting president, a third against, and a third, give or take, apathetic.) George, McCullough adds, seemed confused at the thought that Americans should be agitating for liberty when to be a British subject was to be free by definition.

“He was a young man,” McCullough told me when I interviewed him on the publication of *1776*. “They were all young. It was a young man’s war.” Green and untested, the colonials weren’t very impressive. They considered washing clothes to be women’s work, for instance, and they wore the same filthy clothes until they rotted off their backs. They sometimes showed up drunk for battle and broke and ran with disconcerting speed as their officers, “instead of attending to their duty…stood gazing like bumpkins.”

And yet they won. “What *1776* is about,” McCullough continued, “is the hard, painful struggle, the suffering, that the people who fought with Washington endured. The grand statements of the Declaration of Independence would only have been words on paper if it had not been for those people.”

“The story of the Revolution,” McCullough said, “confirms what the Greeks believed, that character is destiny.” And concentrating on character makes for a very good story. Some scholars have dismissed the work of McCullough and other popularizers as “History Lite,” but most historians seem grateful that, thanks to them, Americans are increasingly reading history, albeit not the heavily footnoted kind.

Indeed, McCullough has been so far ahead of curves that he has created them: His biography of Theodore Roosevelt, *Mornings on Horseback* (1981), set off a boom in Teddy-related books while *John Adams* (2001) inspired a popular HBO mini-series and new attention to the Revolution that resulted years later in *Hamilton*—book, play, and soon-to-be-released movie. Readers have good cause to be grateful—and, in this dispiriting time, to add *1776* to their summer reading lists.

Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor.
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