FALL PREVIEW

Your Guide to the Most Exciting Books Coming Out This Fall, Including Lauren Groff’s Ambitious Novel *Fates and Furies*
“She was so tired of the old way of telling stories, all those too worn narrative paths, the familiar plot thickets, the fat social novels,” Lauren Groff writes in her forthcoming novel *Fates and Furies* (Sep. 15). “She needed something messier, something sharper, something like a bomb going off.” The character Groff is referring to is Mathilde, whose story fills the second half of *Fates and Furies* (the Furies half; the first half of the novel, the Fates half, tells her husband Lotto’s story). There, in two sentences, is the reason we placed the book jacket image of *Fates and Furies* on the cover of the Fall Preview, because we think Groff, who had a hit with *Arcadia* in 2012, actually achieves the thing Mathilde desires: a vital novel. We gave *Fates and Furies* a starred review in the July 15 issue, and our revealing interview with Groff appears on p. 4.

Besides the Best Books of 2015 issues that we’ll publish later this year, this issue may be the most difficult for our editors to create simply because they have to choose which titles to cover in the Fall Preview from one of the richest publishing seasons in recent memory. (Check out their columns on pages 8 [fiction], 22 [nonfiction], and 46 [children’s-teen] for more details.) There are so many fall books by well-known writers to be excited about that it’s easy to list the writers by last names: Rushdie (Sep. 8), Twain (Oct. 15), Ferrante (Sep. 1), Blanco (Nov. 3), Pamuk (Oct. 20), McCann (Oct. 13), Maguire (Oct. 20), Dawkins (Sep. 29), Grafton (Aug. 25), Franzén (Sept. 1), Eco (Nov. 3), Crosley (Oct. 6), Mitchell (Oct. 27), Gilbert (Sep. 22), Schiff (Oct. 27), Steinem (Oct. 27), Clegg (Sep. 8), Karr (Sep. 15), Winchester (Oct. 27), Danticat (Sep. 1), Theroux (Sep. 29), Selznick (Sep. 15), Smith (as in Patti, Oct. 6), Daneshvari (Oct. 20), Gaiman (Sep. 22), Hughes (as in Langston, Sep. 1), and Willems (Oct. 13), for starters. That list doesn’t include celebrities who are publishing thoughtful books this fall: Mary Louise Parker (Nov. 10), Elvis Costello (Oct. 13), Wendell Pierce (Sep. 8), and Carrie Brownstein (Oct. 27).

We’re going to be so busy reading this fall that it’s going to be hard to get our editing and other duties done. Look for us on a couch, hammock, or other comfortable reading spot.
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Lauren Groff’s first novel, *The Monsters of Templeton*, was about a town of under 2,000 people. Her second, *Arcadia*, focused on an even smaller community: a commune. “I asked myself, what is the smallest possible community that one could write about?” Groff says. “I came up with marriage, because it’s a community of two.”

*Rates and Furies*, Groff’s third novel, follows Lancelot, aka Lotto, and Mathilde from their marriage at 22—when they’ve known each other for just two weeks—over the course of the next two-plus decades. The first half of the novel, “Fates,” gives us Lotto’s perspective, while “Furies” follows with Mathilde’s.

“The more I thought about it, the more ambivalent I felt about marriage as an institution,” Groff says. “I say that with as much generosity as possible, because I’ve been married for nine years, and I’m very happy in my marriage. But as an institution, it’s very complicated, and you never really can 100 percent know the other person.”

Lotto is a man of privilege: white and male and raised in wealth. But his father dies early, and his mother sells the house for a tiny pink one on the beach: trauma, destabilization. He falls in with a not-so-good crowd and is sent off to boarding school. By college, at Vassar, he is a tall, attractive—aside from poor skin—aspiring actor who is extraordinarily successful with women. He sees the light in every lady, is conspicuously promiscuous. (“A girl screws around like Lotto and she’s, like, diseased. Untouchable,” a friend of his wryly notes. “But a guy can stick it a million places and everyone just thinks he’s doing what boys do.”) And then he meets Mathilde, and he is committed. He loves her, and we can feel it.

Mathilde’s own back story remains shadowy until we switch perspectives halfway through the book. The revelations infuse things we’ve taken at face value with a darker shade. It is as though Lotto’s, and thus our, understanding of his wife and his life was drawn in outline, and it took Mathilde’s perspective to fill it in. But we understand the same would have been true were the stories told in reverse. “Paradox of marriage: you can never know someone entirely; you do know someone entirely,” Groff writes. Or, later: “He knew her; the things he didn’t know about her would sink an ocean liner; he knew her.”

Lauren Groff, *Fates and Furies*
Fates and Furies is full of such contradictory statements that are simultaneously true, especially where intimacy is concerned: “We are all bundles of contradictions,” Groff says. One of the book’s driving explorations is of the separation between people and how traumatic and also necessary it is to recognize that we are, ultimately, alone. Lotto realizes this in early childhood in a gorgeous passage: “From his nest of towels, Lotto, tiny, watched his gold-banded mother and had an inkling. She was over there; he was here. They were not, in fact, connected. They were two, which meant that they were not one. Before this moment, there had been a long warm sleep, first in darkness and then in gradual light. Now he had awoken. It came out of him in a squawk, this awful separateness.”

This theme is echoed repeatedly as Lotto and Mathilde navigate their bonds (or lack thereof) with their parents, their childhood selves, and each other. Mathilde, who has a particularly fraught relationship with who she was as a kid, has a keen ability to see the child encased within the people she meets. (In one man, “she could see the sad, fat child in the mismatched jowls and thin shoulders.”) But she remains intensely conflicted about this issue. Pregnancy—the literal representation of this metaphysical concept—spurs her to disgust: “Horrible to think that inside a human being there could be a human being. A separate brain thinking its separate thoughts.” Mathilde remains unable to reconcile adult-her with child-her, for reasons we come to understand.

Marriage, of course, is the ultimate staging ground for this tension between separation and merger. When Mathilde and Lotto consummate their marriage, “their separate selves had elided”—but then they pull away again. But despite our increasing sense of what Lotto and Mathilde don’t know about each other, we never doubt that they are also truly and deeply intimate. The book is full of breath-catching moments: “Lotto turned to her and silently docked his head on her shoulder for two moments. Recharged, he turned to face the others.” Their bond is real; they love each other particularly; they know and are known. And, again, their separation is not a detriment to this connection but an inevitable and necessary component of it.

Groff’s drilldown into these two characters involves a deep exploration of creativity. After pursuing an acting career for years, Lotto feverishly writes a play in the dark of night; Mathilde, on discovering it (and, we learn, editing it), determines that this is his calling. She supports his pursuit, largely unseen, as his renown jumps into the stratosphere. Mathilde has her own private creative pursuits, but she doesn’t have Lotto’s drive to be universally known and loved—doesn’t think of herself as warranting that attention, doesn’t have the sense of desperate emptiness that feeds it. “What was this mania for universal adoration?” she wonders of Lotto near the end of the book. Or, as Groff writes earlier on: “The balls it took to proclaim a creative profession, the narcissism.”

Is this Groff’s genuine belief peeking through? “Yes! I believe that it’s probably deeply narcissistic,” she says. The book is, in part, “a slightly twisted apology to my own husband for a lot of the things that I have done as someone who’s trying to create space to make things.” Sometimes she won’t talk at dinner with her husband and their two kids, for example, because she’s so involved in thinking through a story. “There are times when I do get incredibly, solipsistically invested in what I’m thinking about in the moment, to the exclusion of my family.”

But while there are seeds of Groff in Lotto, he is not her. Characters are never the people who wrote them—even nonfictional self-representations take on different dimensions as they are committed to the page. When Lotto considers his first manuscript in the morning light, he sees this metamorphosis: “Characters who were him but also not, Lotto transformed by the omniscient view.” By the end of the book, we understand this on two levels: as an outgrowth of the creative act and, simultaneously, the result of Mathilde’s involvement.

“I wanted this to be a meditation on creativity,” Groff says. “Who gets to create? Who gets to steal other people’s lives, and is it OK to do that?”

“I would not have written a single book without my husband even though he has almost no impact upon the text at hand,” she adds. “He’s the one who pays the bills. He’s the one who gets up with the boys in the mornings so that I can work. All of this is sort of invisible. His name should be on my
books as much as my name is.” Creativity, then, is communal, too. “It became something I had to look at, because I felt like I was taking it for granted. I wasn’t being kind in feeling my books are my own and only mine.”

But the literal work of the novel is Groff’s: the result of many, many hours spent in her studio in Gainesville, Florida. Groff is prone to researching books heavily—many times, this is how she generates ideas—but little research went into *Fates and Furies*, which instead involved focusing intensely on the characters. Groff is an active and athletic person (she rowed crew in college; she runs; her sister is, in fact, an Olympic triathlete), and her writing process is also very physical. “Most of my books are written in my head as I’m frustrated and going running,” she says. In her studio, she spends little time sitting and typing—she uses longhand and a standing desk for the majority of the process. For *Fates and Furies*, she lined two opposite walls with butcher paper: one for Lotto, one for Mathilde. “Activity is related to writing very deeply in me,” she says.

Another contradiction, then: the physical writer, the practitioner of an inward-focused, physically bound profession who loves to run free. But, like her characters, Groff has found the harmony here. She’s found peace, too, in her wish to be more like Mathilde and less like Lotto. “I would love to be as secretive and judgmental and badass as Mathilde, but I really am not,” she says. “I really am more golden retriever, and she’s more jungle cat.” But, like Lotto, Mathilde grew out of her.

And, anyway, Lotto—the simpler of the two—is nonetheless his own bundle of shading, nuance, mystery. “Being human means suffering. Even people who we consider incredibly privileged, like Lotto, do suffer,” she says. “On the inside, people are human and they’re flawed and they’re often very sad and they’re often very existentially lonely. “A part of that suffering is incredibly beautiful, too,” she adds. “I wouldn’t want to be alive without feeling that pain.”

*Jessica Gross is a writer based in New York City.*

*Fates and Furies* received a starred review in the July 15, 2015, issue.
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EARLY ONE MORNING
Baily, Virginia
Little, Brown (400 pp.)
978-0-316-30039-1
978-0-316-30041-4 e-book

Vivid and freshly cast family drama that draws on the experience of civilians who came to the aid of Italy’s Jews during the Nazi occupation.

Though other points of view enter the narrative, it’s spry, chain-smoking, never-married Signora Chiara Ravello—reliably sturdy, inwardly doubting—who holds close the cards a reader most cares about. In October 1943, while preparing to evacuate Rome with her mentally impaired sister, Chiara saved a Jewish boy (with his mother’s collusion) from almost certain death under the very noses of German police who were rounding up his family for deportation. Flash-forward to the 1950s, when Daniele, the boy she rechristened and raised as her own kin, enters rebellious puberty and stumbles on Chiara’s other secret—a terrible one. Before she can form an acceptable explanation, he’s gone from her life. As the narrative zigzags between past, near-past, and present, we’re introduced to a colorful legion of minor characters, only two of whom have an inkling of Chiara’s involvement with anti-fascist partisans, her wrenching wartime sacrifice, or the reason for Daniele’s disappearance: Father Antonio, Chiara’s old friend and colleague at the pontifical library where she works as a translator; and charismatic, intellectual Simone, her dead father’s former mistress. Enter Maria, a British teenager who claims to be Daniele’s child and has found Chiara’s phone number on a letter. When the girl begs to spend the summer as the signora’s lodger in Rome to improve her Italian, 60-something Chiara recognizes a possible path of reprieve from actions weighing on her soul: above all, she wants her life “not to be one where his name is never spoken...and this girl will be the key.”

At a moment when families around the globe are being upturned by organized aggression and civil war, Baily offers a poignant, not-too-sappy fable about surviving war’s cruelties and crushing losses and the near-miraculous feats of bonding humans are sometimes capable of. (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)
The theme for this fall’s fiction is “big”: big authors, big books. With so many major writers publishing this season, we didn’t have room for them all in the Fall Preview; you’ll find reviews here of new novels by Umberto Eco, Jonathan Franzen, Mary Gaitskill, Oscar Hijuelos, David Mitchell, Orhan Pamuk, and Salman Rushdie (among others), but you should also be on the lookout for books by Margaret Atwood, Michael Cunningham, John Irving, Jane Smiley, and more. And some of our favorite fall books aren’t included in this issue because they appeared in our special BEA/ALA preview, including Geraldine Brooks’ The Secret Chord, Lauren Groff’s Fates and Furies (whose book jacket appears on our cover this issue), and Grant Risk Hallberg’s City on Fire.

If you don’t like to read a series until it’s complete, you’re in luck this season: Italian author Elena Ferrante will publish the last volume in her Neapolitan series, The Story of the Lost Child. When you’re finished with Ferrante, you can pick up Ancillary Mercy, the conclusion of Ann Leckie’s multi-award-winning Imperial Radch trilogy, which our review says “deliberately and deliciously flouts classic space-opera tropes.”

Some books are big—physically—though their authors aren’t famous yet. City on Fire fits into that category (unless you mean famous among people in publishing), and so does Paul Murray’s The Mark and the Void, which clocks in at 480 pages. But sometimes the most exciting thing is to discover a seemingly modest book by an author you’ve never heard of, such as Amy Witting, an Australian novelist who died in 2001 and whose wonderfully titled Isobel on the Way to the Corner Shop will be published for the first time in the U.S. in October; our review calls it “a compassionate masterpiece.” Or The Story of My Teeth by Valeria Luiselli, a “lively, loopy experimental novel.” It’s going to be a great season; happy reading. —L.M.

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.

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**THE PRIZE**
Bialosky, Jill
Counterpoint (325 pp.)
$25.00 | Sep. 15, 2015
978-1-61902-570-7

A respected New York art dealer feels his reputation and the ideals he’s lived by falling out of his grasp in this novel by celebrated poet and memoirist Bialosky (The Players, 2015, etc.).

"Art should transport the seer from the ordinary to the sublime": these words from Edward Darby’s father, a Romantic scholar, are always at the back of his mind. Both driven and haunted by his father’s constant search for deeper meaning, Edward has built his career on finding the artists who are reinventing their mediums, creating art that has "the power to suggest that the most ordinary spaces of human life could be made special." He gets his big break with fragile-but-brilliant artist Agnes Murray, who, in focusing on images from 9/11, has taken the anguish of that day and expressed it on canvas in a way that makes the public look—and, more important, feel. "Art must capture what we’re afraid of most," Agnes says to Edward, quoting her mentor-turned-husband, Nate Fisher, a provocative megastar of the art world. Bialosky’s writing mirrors these qualities that determine “great work”; she captures in everyday moments the fears that consume us and have the power to either drive us forward or bring us to the brink of collapse. Feeling more and more distant from his wife and, perhaps more disturbingly, his passion for art, Edward finds himself drawn to sculptor Julia Rosenthal, a woman he first met long ago, who stirs up old memories and reinvigorates his appreciation for beauty in all forms. But Edward is aware that “one could not embark upon the new without giving up something in return.” And for someone whose life is built around finding the significance in the smallest of moments—moments which Bialosky captures with such powerful insight—there is much at stake for him to lose. In the end, after betrayals and loss and sadness, Bialosky asks her hero to consider what he holds most dear.

Like Edward feels upon discovering a transcendent piece of art, this book finds that little opening at the edge of your soul and seeps in.

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**THE LOWER QUARTER**
Blackwell, Elise
Unbridled Books (272 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Sep. 21, 2015
978-1-60953-119-5

A man arrives in post-Katrina New Orleans, looking to solve the mystery of a missing painting and a related murder. What he finds is nothing less than love, sacrifice, survival, genius, depravity, and hope.
The talented Blackwell (An Unfinished Score, 2010, etc.) weaves an elaborate web for her four major characters. Elizam, recently released from prison for theft, is hired to find a stolen Belgian masterpiece after two paintings by the same artist are discovered in a hotel room beside a dead man. His investigation quickly leads him to Johanna, a beautiful art restorer with a painful past and a debt owed to Clay, a New Orleans blue blood with creative sexual tastes. Marion, an artist/bartender, begins a relationship with Clay and hires Johanna to restore some of her art, damaged by the recent hurricane. The novel is smoothly and expertly plotted and the characters layered, but at the core lies the city itself: seething, wounded, garish, and unstoppable. Blackwell includes the reader in New Orleans' sordid, beautiful past and present with sentences such as “This nourished an understanding that a history can be adopted, that the history of the city could be her history and that she could become part of its history, regardless of where she'd been born or how recently she'd arrived. After all, that was what New Orleans had always been: a receiver of outsiders and immigrants, a blender, a granter of new identities, a place where you could disappear and then resurface under new terms.” In this novel, Blackwell has created a vibrant amalgamation of mystery, classic noir, erotica, and ekphrasis. The novel's greatest strength is how it imbues both the loftiest and the seediest moments with grandeur and pathos without being overwrought or overwritten.

An artful, gritty love story, eulogy, and survivor narrative for the city of New Orleans post-Katrina. (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**The Clasp**

_Croyle, Sloane_

_Farrar, Straus and Giroux (384 pp.)

$26.00 | Oct. 6, 2015

978-0-374-12441-0

This debut novel from a bestselling essayist follows an interconnected circle of friends on a quest to find a priceless necklace and regain an even rarer treasure: a genuine connection.

This trenchant first novel from the author of I Was Told There'd Be Cake (2008) and How Did You Get This Number (2010) is about a necklace; Guy de Maupassant's classic short story, "The Necklace"; and an interconnected circle of friends from college who, like beads on a broken necklace, have dispersed and rolled off on different paths. Some of these young people have gotten lost—or lost some essential part of themselves—along the way as they hurtle toward their 30s, watching their 20s blur by and disappear in the rearview mirror. While the luckier (wealthier, more successful) of them marry and move toward parenthood, three of the pals—hapless, unemployed data-crunching Brooklynite Victor; charismatic yet not quite successful LA screenwriter Nathaniel; and clever, sprite-like Kezia, whose job working for an offbeat jewelry designer in Manhattan is, she fears, hardening her soul—all single, are beginning to wonder if they're wasting their lives pursuing goals as false and worthless as a paste gemstone. Croyle's smart, sardonic, sometimes-zany, yet also sensitive story is told from the alternating perspectives of these three linked characters, taking the readers along as they reunite first for a friend's wedding in Miami and then again for a road trip in France, setting off from Paris in pursuit of, yes, a priceless necklace but also of things far more valuable: the truth about themselves and one another, a genuine sense of purpose (or, at least, an antidote to their approaching anhedonia), and, perhaps most precious of all, a connection to one another.

This novel about a chain of interlinked friends on the brink of their 30s has a few overly manufactured plot elements but overall is a real gem. (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**The Last September**

_de Gramont, Nina_

_Algonquin (320 pp.)

$25.95 | Sep. 15, 2015

978-1-61620-133-3

A mood murder mystery infused with love and grief—and a fascination with Emily Dickinson.

"Because I am a student of literature, I will start my story on the day Charlie died. In other words, I'm beginning in the middle." This is Brett Mercier, named by her English-professor parents after Hemingway's Lady Brett Ashley and herself a scholar of American Renaissance poetry. She meets her future husband at college in Colorado through his brother Eli, a premed student, her good friend. After one unforgettable night of love and cross-country skiing, Charlie disappears. The next year, she loses Eli too, when he's sucked under by schizophrenia. By the time the brothers reappear in her life, Brett is in grad school, engaged to someone else. De Gramont's (Gossip of the Starlings, 2008, etc.) latest boasts lovely, understated writing, sharply drawn settings—Boulder, Amherst, and Cape Cod—and, once again, characters who are irresistibly attractive, flawed, and dangerous. “This wasn't a murder mystery,” Brett announces to the reader late in the novel. It is a murder mystery, actually, as is any book that starts with a homicide and ends by revealing the culprit. But it is also an emotionally intense study of how a transcendent love becomes a fraying marriage, buckling under the weight of financial troubles, early parenthood, Brett's frustration at having no time to work on her research, and Charlie...just being Charlie. By the time crazy ol' Eli shows up for an unwanted visit, setting in motion the events of the horrible day, the couple and their baby are living in a ramshackle beach house borrowed from the brothers' dad. Eli is in the yard freaking out when Brett arrives and finds the body, then he runs. He must have done it, right?

A fine literary whodunit from an accomplished storyteller. (This review was originally published in the 07/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)
A hack and ghostwriter, Colonna (whose name means "column"), dacts, always know much more than winners....The more a person dal, and innuendo, is so obviously a vehicle for misinformation— a Potemkin village of a newsmagazine, funded by a magnate who and even blackmail? Those are modest mysteries compared to a

time is June 1992—meaningful to Italian readers as the inaugura-


The sun is shining, the world is spinn-

ing, and the great Italian novelist and semiotician has a new book—which means that a conspiracy theory must be afoot somewhere close by.

Working territory much resembling that of Foucault's Pendu-
tum, Eco (The Prague Cemetery, 2011, etc.) spins a knotty yarn. The time is June 1992—meaningful to Italian readers as the inaugu-

ation of an ostensibly clean period in a notoriously corrupt politics. A hack and ghostwriter, Colonna (whose name means "column"), is long on brains if short on talent; as he says, "Losers, like autodi-
dacts, always know much more than winners....The more a person

knows, the more things have gone wrong." Ah, if he only knew the half of it, for just when it seems that he has no prospects left, he’s summoned to pen a memoir by a journalist who’s cooking up a Potemkin village of a newsmagazine, funded by a magnate who keeps secret the fact that Domeni (tomorrow) will never actually hit the newsstand. Say what? Why write a book for a writer? Why

staff a paper at much expense when it’s not really real? And why keep at it when the paper, stuffed with celebrity romances, scan-
dal, and innuendo, is so obviously a vehicle for misinformation— and even blackmail? Those are modest mysteries compared to a larger one that implicates Italian history and society. Suffice it to say that much of the brouhaha concerns a certain baldheaded, square-jawed former dictator who brought Italy to ruin long before Colonna’s wheels ever started spinning, overlapping into the seamy sordidness of the Tangentopoli, or “bribegate,” of the

square-jawed former dictator who brought Italy to ruin long

before Colonna’s wheels ever started spinning, overlapping into the seamy sordidness of the Tangentopoli, or “bribegate,” of the narrative present. For all that, Eco draws in contemporary politi-
cal figures, and dead popes, and assassination attempts, and ter-
orists, and banking scandals—well, it helps to know a bit about recent Italian history to keep up with what’s going on, especially when it’s often turned on its head.

But then, to read Eco well, it helps to know about every-

thing. Not quite as substantial as The Name of the Rose but a smart puzzle and a delight all the same.

THE STORY OF THE LOST CHILD

Ferrante, Elena

Translated by Goldstein, Ann

Europa Editions (464 pp.)

$18.00 paper | Sep. 1, 2015

978-1-60945-286-5

Series: Neapolitan Novels, 4

Inexorable seismic changes—in society and in the lives of two female friends— mark the final volume of Ferrante’s Neapolitan series.

Elena and Lila, the emotionally entwined duo at the center of Ferrante’s (Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay, 2014, etc.) unsentimental examination of women’s lives and relationships, advance through middle age and early old age (perhaps) in this calamitous denouement to their saga. The more fortunate Elena, an author who struggles to assert herself in the misog-

ynistic world of 1970s and ‘80s Italy, is drawn back to Naples and its internecine bloodshed; Lila, who has stayed in the city of their youth, is at odds with its controlling families. Elena’s “escape” and attempts at personal and familial fulfillment, on her own terms, hint at the changing roles of women in that era, but it’s Lila’s daily struggle in a Camorra-controlled neighborhood that illuminates the deep fractures within contemporary Italian society. The paths to self-determination taken by the life-

long friends merge and separate periodically as the demands of child-rearing, work, and community exert their forces. The far-

reaching effects of a horrific blow to Lila’s carefully maintained equilibrium resonate through much of the story and echo Fer-

rante’s trademark themes of betrayal and loss. While avid devotees of the Neapolitan series will be gratified by the return of several characters from earlier installments, the need to cover

ground in the final volume results in a telescoped delivery of some plot points. Elena’s narrative, once again, never wavers in tone and confidently carries readers through the course of two lives, but the shadowy circumstances of those lives will invite rereading and reinterpretation.

The enigmatic Ferrante, whose identity remains the subject of international literary gossip, has created a mythic portrait of a female friendship in the chthonian world of postwar Naples. (This review was originally published in the 06/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)
Eleven-year-old Velvet has a soft name, but there’s nothing even remotely plush about her life in a rough part of Brooklyn.

A young Dominican girl from the mean streets of Brooklyn forges a relationship with a white woman living in a bucolic upstate town and learns to love horses and respect herself.

Eleven-year-old Velvet has a soft name, but there’s nothing even remotely plush about her life in a rough part of Crown Heights, Brooklyn. Abused (mostly, but not only, verbally) by her mother, a tough immigrant, Velvet has little to call her own (she keeps her treasures objects—a shell, a dried sea horse, a broken keychain doll—in an old cotton-ball box in the back of a closet) and few friends, almost no one she can trust. Velvet’s mother clearly prefers her 6-year-old son, Dante, singing him to sleep at night with her back to Velvet in the family’s shared bed. Instead of comfort and cuddles, Velvet gets the message that when her mother has a tender moment with her child, Velvet is left behind. Velvet’s mother believes she is doing what’s best for her child, but to Velvet it’s as if her mother has abandoned her. Velvet’s mother has given up on her and her daughter, but Velvet hasn’t given up on herself. She has found a way to make her life bearable. She has found a way to make her life meaningful. She has found a way to make her life worthwhile.

Until she meets Ginger, a gentle, kind, and empathetic woman who takes Velvet under her wing and shows her the love and care she so desperately needs. Ginger is a retired social worker who has dedicated her life to helping others. She sees something in Velvet that others don’t. She sees the potential in Velvet that others have missed. Ginger is determined to help Velvet find her way back to happiness. Velvet is determined to make Ginger proud of her. Velvet is determined to become the woman she knows Ginger wants her to become. Velvet is determined to make Ginger’s dream come true. Velvet is determined to make Ginger’s dream come true.

And emotional manipulation. But he’s not the only one Franzen dunks into the psychosexual stew. Andreas’ friend Tom, a controlling ex-wife who detests her father’s wealth; Tom’s lover (and employee), Leila Helou, is a muckraker skilled enough to report on missing warheads but fumbling at her own failed marriage to Charles Blenheim, a novelist in decline. In Freedom, everybody was eager to declaim moral certitudes; here, Franzen is burrowing deep into each person’s questionable sense of his or her own goodness and suggests that the moral rot can metastasize to the levels of corporations and government. And yet the novel’s prose never bogs down into lectures, and its various back stories are as forceful as the main tale of Purity’s fate. Franzen is much-mocked for his primacy in the literary landscape (something he himself mocks when Charles grouses about “a plague of literary Santorini” or “a plague of literary Santorini”). But here, he’s admirably determined to think big and write well about our darkest emotional corners.

An expansive, brainy, yet inviting novel that leaves few foibles unexplored. (This review was originally published in the 06/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

PLAYING WITH FIRE
Gerritsen, Tess
Ballantine (288 pp.)
978-1-101-88434-8
978-1-101-88435-5 e-book

A suspenseful thriller about mysterious music and a violinist’s fear of her child. Julia Ansdell is a violinist with a 3-year-old daughter, Lily. While in Italy, Julia buys an old piece of sheet music titled Incendio by an L. Todesco, whom she’s never heard of. When she plays the composition at home in the U.S., Lily appears to go crazy, killing their cat, stabbing Julia in the leg with a shard of glass, and causing her to fall down a flight of stairs. Does the music possess an evil quality? Or does the problem lie within Julia herself, as her husband, Rob, thinks? “I know how absurd I sound,” she says, “claiming that a 3-year-old plotted to kill me.” Afraid Rob wants her committed, she flies to Italy to try to learn more about the music’s origin. In a parallel story, Lorenzo Todesco is a young violinist in 1940s Italy. He practices for a duet competition with 17-year-old cellist Laura Balboni. They play beautifully together and know they will win—perhaps they’ll even marry one day. But this is Mussolini’s Italy, and a brutal war is on. As the plotlines converge, people die, and Julia places herself and others in mortal danger. In fact, the stakes are even higher than she knows. A friend tells Julia, “The seasons don’t care how many corpses lie rotting in the fields; the flowers will still bloom.” This stand-alone novel has no bearing on the author’s Rizzoli & Isles series, but the crafting is equally masterful. For example, the musical descriptions are perfect: “The melody twists and turns, jarred by accidentals....I feel as if my bow takes off on its own, that it’s moving as if bewitched and I’m just struggling to hang on to it.”

Clear your schedule for this one—you won’t want to put it down until you’re finished.
Ari Xanakis used two years ago to ransom a Turner painting back.

Henry Pitts, Kinsey’s ancient landlord, is the icing on the cake.

field, the son she had when she was only 15. Kinsey makes a few
calls, rings a few bells, tracks down the address, and sends it on
to the client, only to discover that everything Hallie told her,
from her name to her relationship with Satterfield, was false. To
dig up dirt that would impeach the testimony of Taryn Sizemore,
was, insisted on paying Kinsey is one of the same bills wealthy
Ari Xanakis used two years ago to ransom a Turner painting back
for $25,000 from his ex-wife, Teddy, who’d taken it upon herself
to add it to the divorce settlement. Meanwhile, Kinsey’s gotten
involved in another equally messy case, driven by her unwel-
come suspicion that her late colleague Pete Wolinsky—a hired
years ago by salesman Ned Lowe’s attorney, Arnold Ruffner, to
dig up dirt that would impeach the testimony of Taryn Sizemore,
who’d accused him of harassment and stalking—had cast his net
further and decided to blackmail either Lowe or someone else
connected with the case. Showing as much initiative as Hallie
and Pete and a lot more rectitude, Kinsey resolves to close the
case. As much initiative as Hallie or Pete and a lot more rectitude, Kinsey resolves to close the
book on Pete’s shadowy game and to return a pair of sentimen-
tal religious keepsakes she’d found hidden in Pete’s files to their
rightful owner. A droll drought-driven subplot revolving around
Henry Pitts, Kinsey’s ancient landlord, is the icing on the cake.

Grafton’s endless resourcefulness in varying her
pitches in this landmark series (W Is for Wasted, 2013, etc.),
graced by her trademark self-deprecating humor, is one of
the seven wonders of the genre. (This review was originally published in the 06/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

THE SCRIBE
Guinn, Matthew
Norton (320 pp.)
$25.95 | Sep. 14, 2015
978-0-393-23929-4

Graphic gothic horror and 19th-century American caste politics meld with
unsettling force in this (often literally) scorching whodunit.

It is the autumn of 1881 in the American South. President James Garfield
is dead, and so is Reconstruction. The city of Atlanta wishes
to mark its gradual ascent from the ashes of its Civil War
ravishment-by-fire with its International Cotton Exposition, which may even include a visit of reconciliation from its one-
time scourge, Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman himself. But just
before the festivities begin, police find grotesquely mutilated
corpses of African-American entrepreneurs with capital letters
carved into their foreheads. Desperate for a quick, timely solu-
tion, a cabal of prominent businessmen, known as “the Ring,”
discreetly hires a discredited, disillusioned ex-Atlanta detective
named Thomas Canby to investigate these bizarre serial killings.
Since the Ring’s suspicions settle primarily on the city’s segre-
gated black population, Canby is aided in this task by pious,
prim Cyrus Underwood, Atlanta’s first duly authorized consta-
ble of color, who Canby soon finds is a lot steelier than he seems.
And they both soon find that there’s far more to this gory series
of murders than meets the eye, as white corpses, each with fore-
heads bearing bloody single letters, join the black ones in what
another character likens to a accused “spelling bee.” Guinn’s previous period mystery, last year’s The Resurrectionist,
was an Edgar finalist for its thoroughbred-racing momentum, and with
his conscientious attention to historic detail, and vividly ghoul-
ish imagery, he could conceivably cross the finish line with this
ripsnorting follow-up, an intricately woven page-turner whose
psychic reinforces James Joyce’s assertion of history being the
true nightmare from which it’s impossible to awaken.

Imagine a sequel to Birth of a Nation as conceived, writen,
and directed by David Lynch. Too much of a stretch?

TWAIN & STANLEY
ENTER PARADISE
Hijuelos, Oscar
Grand Central Publishing (480 pp.)
978-1-4555-6149-0
978-1-4555-6150-6 e-book

Posthumous publication of an ambitious, atypical historical novel by the
Pulitzer Prize–winning author.

When Hijuelos (The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love, 1989, etc.) died of a heart attack in the fall of
2013, he had been working for more than a dozen years on this
19th-century epic concerning the unlikely but close friendship
of two of the most famous men in America. They had met work-
ning on a riverboat, a couple of aspiring writers, well before one
would become a beloved humorist under the pen name of Mark
Twain. Since Hijuelos has long been known for voluputary nar-
ratives of Cuba and Cuban America, filled with song and sex, the
Victorian primness of the various tones he employs here stands
in stark contrast (though a trip to Cuba proves pivotal). The novel encompasses long stretches of unpublished manuscripts
purportedly written by Stanley and his wife, as well as extended
correspondence between each of them and Twain. Stanley had
Leckie creates a grand backdrop to tell an intimate, cerebral story.

**ANCILLARY MERCY**

Ann Leckie
Orbit/Little, Brown (368 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Oct. 6, 2015
Series: Imperial Radch, 3

In the conclusion to Leckie’s multi-award-winning trilogy (Ancillary Justice, 2013; Ancillary Sword, 2014), Fleet Captain Breq Mianaai directly confronts Anaander Mianaai, the interstellar ruler who blew up *Justice of Toren*, the ship that housed Breq’s consciousness.

The Lord of the Radch, divided as she is across thousands of bodies, is at war with herself. The more reactionary faction is preparing to invade Athoek Station, even while the Station is experiencing civil unrest; can Breq, her crew, and whatever allies she can gather overcome overwhelming odds and establish peace and a new social order? Leckie deliberately and deliciously flouts classic space-opera tropes. Rather than epic clashes between starships, there’s just one determined, embodied Artificial Intelligence with a very powerful gun, a stubborn space station, espionage, and some very persuasive talking.

Leckie creates a grand backdrop to tell an intimate, cerebral story about identity and empowerment. She devotes as much attention to the characters’ personal relationships and their mental and emotional difficulties as she does to the wider conflict. What Leckie is saying is that individual people matter. Personhood matters, whether that personhood is expressed by an ordinary human, a sentient space station, a human raised by aliens, the remains of a spaceship AI inhabiting a human body that once belonged to someone else, or a 17-year-old whose previous personality was evicted by a ruling hive mind. Regardless of the situation in which one finds oneself, a person’s right to be herself without interference is all that matters. And a small group of people can have a gigantic impact, with the right leverage. That message could so easily be hackneyed or too painfully obvious, but Leckie’s delivery is deft and meaningful.

Wraps up the story arc with plenty of room to tell many more tales in this universe. Let’s hope Leckie does. (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

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**THE STORY OF MY TEETH**
Luiselli, Valeria
Translated by MacSweeney, Christina
Coffee House (184 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $12.99 e-book
Sep. 15, 2015
978-1-56689-409-8
978-1-56689-410-4 e-book

A lively, loopy experimental novel rich with musings on language, art, and, yes, teeth.

Each section of the second novel by Mexican author Luiselli (*Faces in the Crowd*, 2014) opens with an epigram about the disconnect between the signifier and signified. If you dozed off during lectures on semiotics in college, fear not: though the author is interested in the slippery nature of description, this novel’s style and tone are brisk and jargon-free. The narrator, Gustavo, has decided late in life to become an auctioneer (“to have my teeth fixed”), a job he thrives at in part by skillfully overhyping the values of the objects on offer. Not that he’s immune to being oversold himself: did the new set of teeth he buys at auction really once belong to Marilyn Monroe? The skeletal plot focuses on Gustavo's hosting an auction to benefit a church outside Mexico City, his hoard of prized objects, and his reunion with his son. But the book lives in its offbeat digressions, like an extended discussion of literary eminences’ lives via their teeth. (St. Augustine was inspired to write his *Confessions* due to a toothache; G.K. Chesterton had a marble-chewing habit; false teeth were recommended to calm Virginia Woolf’s inner turmoil.) But all this dental chatter isn’t precisely the point. “We have here before us today pieces of great value, since each contains a story replete with small lessons,” Gustavo tells a group of auction attendees, and the whole book is a kind of extended commentary on how possessions acquire value largely through the stories we tell about them. (In an afterward, Luiselli explains that this “novel-essay” was inspired by such questions and was first written for workers in a factory outside Mexico City that has a gallery connected to it.)

A clever philosophical novel that, as the author puts it, has “less to do with lying than surpassing the truth.” (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)
A brilliant and nicely off-kilter reading of the children's classic, retrofitted for grown-ups—and a lot of fun.

THE TSAR OF LOVE AND TECHNO

Stories

Marra, Anthony
Hogarth/Crown (356 pp.)

978-0-7704-3643-8
978-0-7704-3644-5 e-book

Communists, oligarchs, and toxic landscapes from Siberia to Chechnya define this collection of tightly linked stories from Marra (A Constellation of Vital Phenomena, 2013).

In fact, let’s go ahead and call it a novel; though the individual stories bounce around in time and are told in different voices, they share a set of characters and have a clear narrative arc. More importantly, they share a command of place and character that strikingly reimagines nearly a century of changes in Russia. In the opener, “The Leopard,” a communist censor in 1937 secretly inserts his disappeared brother’s face in the photos he retouches—a fact that re-emerges in later stories and also serves as a symbol for how what’s lost in Russia never quite disappears. (An oil painting of a bland Chechnyan landscape plays a similar role.) From there, the story moves to chilly Kirovsk, a cancer-ridden industrial town that’s struggled to adjust to the fall of Communism, and hometown of Galina, a middling actress who’s risen to fame thanks to her marriage with Russia’s 13th wealthiest man. In Chechnya, we meet her childhood boyfriend, Kolya, who’s been taken prisoner after becoming a soldier. Marra’s Russia is marked by both interconnection and darkly comic irony; Kolya’s stunt in captivity is “the most serene of his adult life,” while elsewhere a man is roped into trying to sell mine-ridden Grozny as a tourist destination. (“For inspiration, I studied pamphlets from the tourist bureaus of other urban hellsces: Baghdad, Pyongyang, Houston.”) As in his previous novel, Marra is deft at managing different characters at different points in time, but the book’s brilliance and humor are laced with the somber feeling that the country is allergic to evolution: KGB thugs then, drug dealers and Internet scammers now, with a few stray moments of compassion in between.

A powerful and melancholy vision of a nation with long memories and relentless turmoil.

THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING

McCann, Colum
Random House (256 pp.)

978-0-8129-9672-2
978-0-8129-9673-9 e-book

A superbly crafted and deeply moving collection of fiction, with a provocative back story.

The Irish-born, New York–based McCann (who won the 2009 National Book Award for Let the Great World Spin) here offers four pieces of fiction that focus on the process of writing and the interplay between art and its inspiration. As he writes in a concluding Author’s Note, “Every word we write is autobiographical, perhaps most especially when we attempt to avoid the autobiographical. For all its imagined moments, literature works in unimaginable ways.” He provides literary framing with the title, evoking the oft-cited Wallace Stevens poem. As for autobiography: the title novella’s multilayered narrative evokes an incident that—amazingly—happened to McCann after he wrote the story, in which he was cold-cocked on the sidewalk by a stranger in a seemingly senseless attack. The story’s protagonist is an aged judge of failing body but nimble mind who has just had dinner with his boorish son when he’s assaulted on the street. The story is told in the third person, but most of it hews closely to the judge’s point of view. As he ponders his mortality, he muses, “Give life long enough and it will solve all your problems, even the problem
Who knew reading about communists could be so much fun?

MRS. ENGELS

McCrea, Garin
Catapult (368 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $10.99 e-book
Oct. 13, 2015
978-1-936787-30-2 e-book

Irish-born McCrea’s stellar debut imagines the lives of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, not men usually associated with romance, through the eyes of Engels’ illiterate common-law wife, Lizzie Burns.

Lizzie’s voice—earthy, affectionate, and street-smart but also sly, unabashedly mercenary, and sometimes-scheming—grabs the reader from the first sentence and doesn’t let go. As the novel opens in 1870, Lizzie is moving with Frederick to London as his live-in lover. He wants to be closer to Marx, whom he has long supported financially. The author’s first collection of shorter fiction in more than a decade underscores his reputation as a contemporary master. (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

THE EDUCATION OF A POKER PLAYER

McManus, James
BOA Editions (320 pp.)
$16.00 paper | $9.99 e-book
Oct. 13, 2015
978-1-938160-86-8 e-book

A boy copes with Catholicism, nuns, and such forbidden fruit as girls and gambling in a collection of closely related stories.

In these seven probably autobiographical tales, McManus (Cowboys Full: The Story of Poker, 2010, etc.) follows the thoughts and urges of Vincent Killeen as he ages from 9 to 17 in the 1950s and ’60s. Vince is initially devoted enough to feel he may have a “calling” to the priesthood, which would delight his grandmother and spare the entire family any time in purgatory, according to Catholic lore. He also appreciates baseball and language, tales of an older relative’s hitch in the navy, the provocative lyrics of “Louie Louie,” the sight of Laura Langan’s bare legs, two pews ahead of him at Sunday Mass, and the first inklings of his skill at poker. McManus’ writing is deceptively artless: mundane details related in Vince’s slowly maturing voice track the unexceptional life of a middle-class Irish-American Catholic family in a Chicago suburb, with the obligatory JFK portrait on the wall and the obliging production of numerous offspring. Yet the author gradually forms these common facets of simple people into a sharp, intimate portrait of an intelligent, inquiring mind embracing, then questioning, and inevitably pulling away from the beliefs and strictures of home life. McManus, a novelist and nonfiction writer, has played poker for high stakes in Las Vegas, and in Positively Fifth Street (2003), he wrote a classic about the game with riveting descriptions of poker hands. He achieves that again here in two sessions that have Vince facing very different opponents and challenges. The ironic and irreverent humor mined from Catholic arcana may bemuse the ultimately matter.

Who knew reading about communists could be so much fun? (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)
Ingenious, scary, and downright weird.

**SLADE HOUSE**

*Mitchell, David*

Random House (240 pp.)

$26.00 | Oct. 27, 2015

*978-0-8129-9868-9*

At the end of life, does a writer’s every word flash before his or her eyes?

One might be forgiven for wondering just that on reaching the last page of *Mitchell’s* (*Cloud Atlas*, 2004, etc.) delicious ghost story—which is more than just a ghost story, it being Mitchell’s world in which readers are merely living, and more than delicious, too. When we meet sensitive, confused 13-year-old Nathan, a target painted on him for every schoolyard bully and hauled from place to place by a Valium-popping, near-berserk, newly divorced mum, he’s fretting about having to dress up for a fancy do: “If Gaz Ingram or anyone in his gang sees me in this bow-tie,” he mopes, “I’ll find a poo in my locker, guaranteed.” Perhaps better a poo than what awaits Nathan at Slade House, where possibly malevolent, certainly eldritch doings are not the most interesting part of this book. The more compelling aspect, for Mitchell fans, is to watch him shape-shift and narrator-shift across the body of his work, beginning with circumstances reminiscent of *Black Swan Green* and ending with bursts of language befitting *Cloud Atlas* (“This system o’ the Grayers, it won’t run off the mains. It runs off o’ psychovoltage. The psychovoltage of Engifteds!”). There are even a few characters who drift in from other books, including Marinus from *The Bone Clocks*, who turns out to be a nervous Nellie in the face of the banjax suckers....

Though there’s something of an inside joke happening on every page, Mitchell serves up a story that wouldn’t be out of place alongside *The Turn of the Screw*. Ingenious, scary, and downright weird.

**THE MARK AND THE VOID**

*Murray, Paul*

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (480 pp.)

$27.00 | Oct. 20, 2015

*978-0-86547-755-1*

A darkly comic, lightly metafictional tale about a banker seeking love and a novelist seeking wealth amid the fall-out from the financial boom and bust in Ireland.

Claude Martingale, a well-paid analyst in the Bank of Torabundo’s Dublin office, finds his routine upset when a man named Paul asks if he can trail Claude as research for his next novel. It isn’t long before Claude discovers the research actually entails casing his bank, one of several moneymaking schemes Paul undertakes. Still, the two men form a cautious friendship, and Paul tries to help shy Claude talk up the Greek waitress Ariadne, while Claude tries to prod Paul back to the writing he’s fled since his first novel was panned. Murray (*Skippy Dies*, 2010, etc.), the real and well-reviewed novelist named Paul, offers his alter ego’s scams as humorous microcosm to the avaricious inventions still common in the financial world two years after Lehman Brothers collapsed. Other parallels abound. Just as fictional Paul has a delightfully profane Russian sidekick, the bank’s hedge fund chief relies on a Russian math whiz and his “providential antinomies” that “monetize failure.” Ariadne has a rant on Greece’s financial chaos as preview for where Ireland is headed. A writer quits that trade to become an artist who turns his written pages into art within a frame. So Murray creates the novel his other Paul is meant to produce at the urging of a guilt-ridden banker and another character who asks, “when are our writers going to address the banking crisis?” The speaker is the powerful critic who slammed fictional Paul’s debut.

Murray manages the trick of being thoughtful and entertaining. His creative energy sends the book in many directions, making it a little loose and lumpy, but the same may be said of Dickens, with whom real Paul also shares wit, sympathy, and a purposeful sense of mischief.

**UNDER THE UDALA TREES**

*Okparanta, Chinelo*

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (352 pp.)

$26.00 | Sep. 22, 2015

*978-0-544-00344-6*

In 1968, during the second year of the war between Biafra and Nigeria, 11-year-old Ijeoma is sent away from her home in Ojoto for safety by her mother, Adaora. Ijeoma’s father, Uzo, is dead, destroyed in a bombing raid that nearly decimated their village, and her mother is quickly unravelling, unable to cope with the ongoing war and famine. But Adaora’s love for her daughter is limitless; when Ijeoma was born early, for example, Adaora gave herself headaches learning about nutrition to make sure her baby grew healthy. Okparanta is masterful at articulating the pressures living through endless violence has on each of her characters’ psyches; Adaora crumbles under the harshness of the ongoing war. Her plan is to go to her parents’ house in Aba and see if things are better there while Ijeoma stays with friends in Nnewi; she’ll send for the girl to join her when it’s safe. But Ijeoma feels this separation is prompted less by necessity than by the fact that Adaora now finds her daughter an impossible burden. Alone in Nnewi, Ijeoma falls in love with another displaced girl, Amina. But when their relationship is discovered, Ijeoma is sent back to her mother, who is determined to teach Ijeoma that two girls can’t be romantically involved. In the years following, Ijeoma must reconcile her feelings toward women with the pressure to marry a man and be accepted in a country that makes being gay punishable by death. In language both sparse
and lyrical, Okparanta manages to articulate a child's wide-eyed understanding of the breakdown of the world around her. We see, too, a detailed rebuilding of that world along with Ijeoma's maturity into womanhood. Here is writing rich in the beautiful intimacies of people who love each other—and wise about the importance of holding onto those precious connections in a world that is, more often than not, dangerous and cold.

*Written with courage and compassion, this debut novel by Okparanta* (Happiness, Like Water, 2013) **stunningly captures a young girl’s coming of age against the backdrop of a nation at war.** *(This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)*

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**AFTER THE PARADE**

*Ostlund, Lori*

Scribner (532 pp.)


978-1-4767-9010-7

978-1-4767-9012-1 e-book

A middle-aged man leaves his partner of more than 20 years for an uncomfortable new life, where he’s forced to confront the nuances of his past in this debut novel by Flannery O’Connor Award–winning Ostlund (The Bigness of the World, 2009).

Realizing he’s no longer in love with Walter—a man he’s known and been with for almost his entire adult life—Aaron Englund packs his bags, leaves their Albuquerque home in the middle of the night, and drives to San Francisco. There, he lives in a garage beneath a warring couple, teaches at a dilapidated ESL school, and plumbs deep wells of his own memories: the death of his abusive father, a police officer who fell from a lurching parade float; a childhood in an isolated Minnesota town with his ghostlike mother; and the many souls he encountered in his odd, solitary youth. The narrative departs from his present life in small doses and large swaths, carrying the reader through levelling toward a kind of reveal, a moment of personal history he’s told alongside all the others.

An example of realism in its most potent iteration: not a neatly arranged plot orchestrated by an authorial god but an authentic, empathetic representation of life as it truly is. *(This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)*

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**ORHAN PAMUK**

A STANGESENESS IN MY MIND

Pamuk, Orhan

Translated by Oklap, Ekin

Knopf (624 pp.)


978-0-307-70029-2

978-1-101-87583-4 e-book

Nobel laureate Pamuk (The Museum of Innocence, 2009, etc.) sets a good-natured Everyman wandering through Istanbul’s changing social and political landscape.

Tricked by his scheming cousin Süleyman into writing impassioned love letters for three years to Rayiha, Mevlut finds himself eloping with the older sister of the girl whose dark eyes intoxicated him at a relative’s wedding. (Süleyman gave him the wrong name because he wanted the beautiful youngest for himself.) This being Turkey in 1982, and Mevlut being easygoing in the extreme, rejecting a woman who has compromised herself by agreeing to run away with him is unthinkable. The young couple prove to be well-matched and quite happy, although Mevlut doesn’t make much money. His checkered day jobs in food services, selling rice with chickpeas from his own cart and ineffectually managing a cafe among them, give the author a chance to expatiate on Istanbul’s endemic corruption, both municipal and personal. Pamuk celebrates the city’s vibrant traditional culture—and mourns its passing—in wonderfully atmospheric passages on Mevlut’s nightly adventures selling boza, a fermented wheat beverage he carries through the streets of Istanbul and delivers directly to the apartments of those who call to him from their windows. Although various characters from time to time break into the third-person narration to address the reader, this is the only postmodern flourish. If anything, Pamuk recalls the great Victorian novelists as he ranges confidently from near-documentary passages on real estate machinations and the privatization of electrical service to pensive meditations on the gap between people’s public posturing and private beliefs. The oppression of women is quietly but angrily depicted as endemic; even nice-guy Mevlut assumes his right to dictate Rayiha’s behavior (with ultimately disastrous consequences), while his odious right-wing cousin Korkut treats his wife like a servant. As Pamuk follows his believably flawed protagonist and a teeming cast of supporting players across five decades, Turkey’s turbulent politics provide a thrumming undercurrent of unease.

Rich, complex, and pulsing with urban life: one of this gifted writer’s best.
Do the math, and Rushdie’s title turns into a different way of counting up to 1,001 nights. Small wonder that the first characters we encounter are an exceedingly wise philosopher named, thinly, Ibn Rushd, “the translator of Aristotle,” and an exceedingly beguiling supernatural being in the form of a girl of about 16 who harbors numerous secrets, not just that she’s Jewish in a place overrun with Islamic fundamentalists (and where it’s thus best to live as “Jews who could not say they were Jews”), but that she is, in fact, one of the jiniri, “shadow-women made of fireless smoke.” Got all that? In the span of, yes, 1,001 nights, Dunia gives birth to three broods of children who, being jinn, can do all sorts of cool things, such as fly about on magic carpets or slither hither and yon like snakes. Dunia is studiously irreligious, which is perhaps more dangerous than being Jewish, inclined to say of Ibn Rushd’s explanations of all the wonderful things God can do, “That’s stupid.” Her endless children are inclined to favor the secular over the divine as well, a complicating factor when the dimensions turn all inside out and the jinn, now in our time, are called on to battle the forces of evil that have been hiding on the other side of the metaphorical wall between—well, civilizations, maybe. Rushdie turns in a sometimes archly elegant, sometimes slightly goofy fairy tale—with a character named Bento V. Ellenbein, how could it be entirely serious?—for grown-ups: “A fairy king,” he writes, and he knows whereof he speaks, “can only be poisoned by the most dreadful and powerful of words.”

Beguiling and astonishing, wonderful and wondrous. Rushdie at his best. (This review was originally published in the 07/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)
practically everyone was thin now."

The callow Luz Dunn, 25, a former model from Malibu, has hooked up with nice-guy Ray Sandlin. He is a WWII vet and has been married to his wife for 20 years. They have two children, a daughter and a son. The family is living in a small apartment in downtown Los Angeles. Ray is a recovering alcoholic and has been in therapy for the past year. Luz is a former beauty queen and is now working as a waitress at a local diner. She is trying to get her life back on track and is hoping to start her own business one day.

On each page she spikes her novel with a ticking, musical intelligence: the title is a list of what drew people to California; an international prizes for Battleborn (2013), 10 short stories that burrowed into Reno, Nevada, its history, and her own. Now she sees the clear bar of public expectation with a story set in a desiccated future where "practically everyone was thin now." The callow Luz Dunn, 25, a former model from Malibu, has hooked up with nice-guy Ray Hollis, a surfer and AWOL soldier from "the forever war." A former model from Malibu, has hooked up with nice-guy Ray Sandlin. He is a WWII vet and has been married to his wife for 20 years. They have two children, a daughter and a son. The family is living in a small apartment in downtown Los Angeles. Ray is a recovering alcoholic and has been in therapy for the past year. Luz is a former beauty queen and is now working as a waitress at a local diner. She is trying to get her life back on track and is hoping to start her own business one day.

Despite plot pieces that fit together a little too snugly, Sandlin blends pathos, humor, and poetic prose in a strong debut. (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**GOLD FAME CITRUS**

Wattins, Claire Vaye

Riverhead (352 pp.)

978-1-59463-423-9
978-0-69819-594-3 e-book

A tour-de-force first novel blisters with drought, myth, and originality.

Wattins drew gasps of praise and international prizes for Battleborn (2013), 10 short stories that burrowed into Reno, Nevada, its history, and her own. Now she sees the clear bar of public expectation with a story set in a desiccated future where “practically everyone was thin now.” The callow Luz Dunn, 25, a former model from Malibu, has hooked up with nice-guy Ray Hollis, a surfer and AWOL soldier from “the forever war.” A large swath of the United States has gone “moonscape with sinkage, as the winds came and as Phoenix burned and as a white-hot superdune entombed Las Vegas.” In “laurelless canyon,” the couple squats in the abandoned mansion of a Los Angeles starlet, dodging evacuation roundups. When Luz and Ray stumble across a strange towheaded toddler, they—gingerly—form an ersatz family. But cornered with no documentation, Ray and Luz decide to scoop up the child and hit the road, seeking a rumored desert commune. It doesn’t go well. A sand dune the size of a sea begins barely beyond LA. The little girl keeps asking “What is?”—a device through which Wattins drops clues. On each page she spikes her novel with a ticking, musical intelligence: the title is a list of what drew people to California; an entire chapter hums with sentences beginning with “If she...” The territory is more alluring and dystopian than Mad Max’s. Wattins writes an unforgettable scene with a carousel; another in a dank tunnel where the couple seeks contraband blueberries. The author freckles her fiction with incantations, odd detours, hallucinations, and jokes. Praised for writing landscape, Wattins’ grasp of the body is just as rousing. Into the vast desert she sets loose snakes and gurus, the Messianic pulse of end times. Critics will reference Annie Proulx’s bite and Joan Didion’s hypnotic West, but Wattins is magnificently original.

**ISOBEL ON THE WAY TO THE CORNER SHOP**

Witting, Amy

Text (336 pp.)

$14.95 paper | $12.95 e-book
Oct. 13, 2015
978-1-925095-64-7 e-book
978-1-922182-71-5

The ghost of John Muir meets a touch of Terry Gilliam. (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

The ghost of John Muir meets a touch of Terry Gilliam. Isobel Callaghan, a struggling young writer with a difficult past, collapses on the way to buy provisions at the corner store and soon finds herself—much to her surprise—recovering from tuberculosis in the self-contained society of Mornington Sanatorium.

Australian writer Witting’s (I it is for Isobel, 1989, etc.) quietly brilliant novel was first published in her own country in 1999 and is appearing in the U.S. for the first time; it’s set in the middle of the 20th century. Anxious, poor, and isolated, Isobel is worried she’s losing her mind. She’s quit her job (translating German mail at an importers) in a rage and, buoyed by the encouragement of a highbrow editor, has taken an attic room in a Sydney boardinghouse to write fiction. Now, overridden by social anxiety and rapidly running out of money, Isobel has begun to deteriorate in a way she doesn’t understand. Upon collapsing in the street, she’s taken to a local hospital; her madness, it seems, is better known as tuberculosis. “How could she explain the relief she felt at learning that this thing had a name and a location, that there were people whose business it was to deal with it?” she wonders. Surrendered to her new circumstances—a material improvement, all things considered—Isobel finds herself falling into the sanatorium’s rhythms. Though the patients are all bedridden, to varying degrees, the place has a social scene of its own, with the doctors, nurses, and patients forming a parallel universe outside of space and time. Witting’s characterizations are staggeringly sharp—it is hard to imagine a novel more keenly observed—simultaneously heartbreaking and (subtly) hilarious, not because they’re exaggerated, but because they are so unsettlingly, overwhelmingly true: Isobel’s pathologically self-centered roommate (“You’re not one of those people who read all the time, are you?”); her beloved Dr. Wang; the birdlike Miss Landers, who runs the sanatorium’s knitting-based occupational therapy program. But as Isobel recovers, she must come to terms with her life outside the confines of this miniature world—and here, too, Witting is as astute and unsentimental as ever.

A compassionate masterpiece.
Polish journalist Bikont (editor: *And I Still See Their Faces: Images of Polish Jews, 1996*) delivers a daring exposure of the crimes of her countrymen in the first week of July 1941.

At the time, the deaths of the Jews of Jedwabne and those of Radziłów and Wasosz were glossed over, until a book commemorating them appeared just before the 60th anniversary. Jan Tomasz Gross based her book *Neighbors* (2001) partly on the *Jedwabne Book of Memory*, edited by rabbis Julius and Jacob Baker. It was the first time the testimony of eyewitness Szmul Wasersztejn was published, a good first step for Bikont to begin her search for witnesses. Sixty years after hundreds of Jews were herded into a barn that was then burned to the ground, the author found a host of disturbing reactions from the local residents. There are blatant denials that any Poles took part and assurances that it was the Germans who forced locals to participate. Many told Bikont that since it occurred so many years ago, she should just leave it alone. Her persistence in chasing down those who might tell her the facts took her all over Poland and to Israel, the United States, Cuba, and Costa Rica. Her most shocking discovery was the still-virulent anti-Semitism in the area. For years, the Catholic Church had preached against the Jews, so when neighbors were exiled to Siberia during the Russian occupation of 1939-1941, the Jews were the best scapegoats, and it was a good excuse for the beginnings of the pogroms. The elements of competitive suffering that the author uncovered in her interviewees appear to be just more excuses.

Bikont’s fearless research—she even confronted the brothers known to have led the Jedwabne murders—makes this a fantastic book. It was first published in Poland in 2004, and the European Book Prize it won in 2011 (for the French version) should be only the first of many awards for this significant work. *(26 b/w illustrations. This review was originally published in the 05/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)*
A disarming candid look at the highs, lows, and true grit of a culinary star.

Cooking as Fast as I Can

From the acclaimed first female Iron Chef, a heartfelt memoir of a loving family, a passion for food, and the challenges of career and personal life.

After graduating from the Culinary Institute of America, Cora blazed a trail for women in a field dominated by men, joining a cadre of celebrity chefs with cookbooks, TV shows, and food and cookware brands. The author describes an idyllic childhood in Jackson, Mississippi, building forts with her brothers in the “fairy-tale piney woods” behind their house. Cora, whose grandfather owned a restaurant, comes by her love of cooking naturally. From “Grandmom Alma,” who came to take care of the family while Cora’s mother was away getting her doctorate, Cora learned to make the creamiest of cheesecakes. Her parents had a passion for food and entertaining, serving such dishes as her father’s Greek kokta kapama. This near-perfect childhood was marred when a son of family friends sexually abused her. The abuse stopped when her parents found out, but it was years before they acknowledged the deep trauma it caused, thinking she was young and would get over it. Instead, she was haunted by guilt and shame well into her adult life. Cora draws readers into her world with frank, conversational writing. What the prose lacks in style is overcome by the strength of her story. She recounts her family’s support but also their fears for her when she came out as a lesbian in the conservative South. Driven and ambitious, she went from culinary school to apprenticeships at Michelin-starred restaurants in France and from sous and executive chef positions in increasingly prestigious restaurants to a Food Network regular. Career demands took a toll on her personal life. Along with success came some heartache, until she found a balance with her spouse and their four sons, realizing at last that she didn’t have to be perfect.

A disarming candid look at the highs, lows, and true grit of a culinary star. (This review was originally published in the 06/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)
A few issues ago, I lamented the lack of intriguing books released in the summer months, particularly July. With the fall season, we have the opposite problem, as an abundance of big names grace the pages of publishers’ catalogs over the next few months, including, among dozens of others, Simon Winchester, Richard Dawkins, Stacy Schiff, Gloria Steinem, Susan Cheever, Jay Winik, Elizabeth Gilbert, and even Mark Twain. Check out our Fall Preview for full reviews of 30 nonfiction books to pay attention to this fall, three of which I’m particularly excited to read:

*Empire of Self: A Life of Gore Vidal*  
by Jay Parini  
From renowned literary scholar and biographer Parini comes this unblinking exploration of Gore Vidal, acerbic, enigmatic author extraordinaire. In a starred review, we called it a “superbly personal biography that pulsates with intelligence, scholarship, and heart.”

*Objective Troy: A Terrorist, a President, and the Rise of the Drone*  
by Scott Shane  
New York Times journalist Shane, who has covered terrorism for more than a decade, chronicles Barack Obama and the American government’s pursuit, and eventual drone killing, of Islamic militant Anwar al-Awlaki. Our starred review noted, “Shane’s reporting is superb, and the way he frames the public policy debate makes the narrative compelling from start to finish.” It should be a perfect bookshelf companion for Lawrence Wright’s *The Looming Tower*.

*M Train* by Patti Smith  
In the follow-up to her National Book Award–winning *Just Kids*, her chronicle of her relationship with artist Robert Mapplethorpe, the punk poet laureate “articulates the pensive rhythm of her life through the stations of her travels.” Though not as revelatory as *Just Kids*, our reviewer wrote, it’s still “an atmospheric, moody, and bittersweet memoir to be savored and pondered.” —E.L.

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.

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**BRIEF CANDLE IN THE DARK**  
*My Life in Science*  
Dawkins, Richard  
Ecco/HarperCollins (416 pp.)  
$27.99 | Sep. 29, 2015  
978-0-06-228843-1

The second volume of the acclaimed evolutionary biologist’s autobiography.  
Dawkins (*An Appetite for Wonder: The Making of a Scientist*, 2013, etc.) begins this installment with the bewildering experience of attending a celebration of his 70th birthday when he still felt, at least spiritually, like a 25-year-old. At the close of the first volume, he had just published his groundbreaking book *The Selfish Gene* (1976). His metaphorical personification of the gene as the agent of natural selection raised a furor at the time and is still controversial. As Dawkins is at pains to explain, his intention was not to suggest that they replace the function of individual, decision-making organisms but rather to apply the method of cost-benefit analysis used in economics to the process of natural selection. The author also explicitly distances himself from genetic determinists who attempt to explain human behavior mechanistically—e.g., attributing a specific behavior to a genetic predisposition, as might be the case with a putative aggressive gene. Dawkins refers readers to his 2004 book *The Ancestor’s Tale: A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Evolution*, in which he discussed his recent views about higher-level genetic cooperation. *The Selfish Gene* and his spirited defense of atheism, *The God Delusion* (2006), are his most controversial works, and many readers will welcome his belated attempts to heed criticisms of his unnecessarily abrasive style when debating religious opponents. However, Dawkins justifiably boasts about his publishing success: “through nearly 40 years, not one of my twelve books has ever been allowed to go out of print in English.” Though the narrative could have used some pruning, the author provides an entertaining portrait of his life and times, including the quaint customs still in practice at Oxford.  
An impressive overview of Dawkins’ life’s work, written with the freshness of youthful vigor. (*This review was originally published in the 06/15/15 issue of Kirkus.*)
A MIGHTY PURPOSE
How Jim Grant Sold the World on Saving Its Children
Fifield, Adam
Other Press (368 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 13, 2015
978-1-59051-603-4

A biographical commemoration of a powerful champion of children’s health.

Under the 15-year directorship of James Grant (1922-1995), the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund grew into a “propulsive global advocate” for children throughout the world. Fifield (A Blessing over Ashes: The Remarkable Odyssey of My Unlikely Brother, 2000), a journalist who served as deputy director of editorial and creative services at the U.S. Fund for UNICEF, interviewed more than 80 people, including Grant’s colleagues and family members, for this richly detailed life of a man who “turned red tape into ribbons,” persuaded dictators and tyrants to accede to his requests, and worked obsessively to achieve his goals. Grant, writes the author, “radiated a messianic zeal” fueled by “his undeniable moral urgency.” Although some found him insufferable—“an agitator, a pest, an irritant extraordinaire”—they discovered that opposing him “was like wrestling with an angel.” Throughout his tenure, Grant worked tirelessly to achieve two goals: to spread the use of oral hydration powder (a simple mixture of sugar and salt) to combat diarrhea, the greatest killer of children in developing countries; and to increase immunization for polio, tetanus, diphtheria, and whooping cough. He had no qualms about negotiating with dictators in Haiti, Sudan, Central America, Syria, and Turkey.

“Recruiting despots became a Grant trademark,” writes Fifield. “It is much easier to work through a dictatorship” than to deal with committees, Grant found. “Things just get done.” Nor did battles, military coups, or natural disasters deter him. During El Salvador’s “vicious civil war,” Grant brokered “Days of Tranquility,” a truce that allowed health workers to carry out immunizations. In 1989, he terrified a Sudanese general into protecting a train carrying food into the starving south. Sadly, liver cancer cut his career short. At his funeral, 2,500 people gathered to honor him; since then, he has been largely forgotten. Fifield ably brings him back into focus.

This fine, engrossing portrait reveals Grant’s unstoppable passion and remarkable achievements. (This review was originally published in the 07/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

ATMOSPHERE OF HOPE
Searching for Solutions to the Climate Crisis
Flannery, Tim
Atlantic Monthly (256 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-0-8021-2406-7

Flannery (An Explorer’s Notebook: Essays on Life, History, and Climate, 2014, etc.) argues for renewed optimism in human capabilities to reverse the destabilizing effects of climate change.

For years, the author has been in the forefront of spreading the warning of climate change’s dire consequences to a broad audience. “This book describes in plain terms our climate predicament,” he writes, “but it also brings news of exciting tools in the making that could help us avoid climate disaster.” Flannery sees a decided change in governmental responsibility since the Copenhagen Accord of 2009, which suggested the possibility of international political cooperation, and the marginalization of the deniers, whom he finds “perverse. Even grotesque.” The author makes it abundantly clear where we stand—that we are far from achieving the 2 percent solution to global warming—but that there is also diverse, effective, and innovative activity toward cutting carbon dioxide emissions. This is occurring on the individual front—through digital interconnectedness and direct action such as disinvestment campaigns—and through the adoption of a long-view, “third way” of implementing projects that stimulate natural systems to draw the gas out of the air and oceans at a faster rate than we produce it. Flannery crisply outlines what is now known and conjectured about the human influence on climate change, exploring the long ragweed season, the nutritional degradation of crops, and the acidification of the oceans. There are roadblocks to alternative energy sources—as Ralph Nader noted, “the use of solar energy has not been opened up because the oil industry does not own the sun”—but Flannery also finds that money will drive the wind and solar power sources as they rapidly become more efficient. He also puts fracking under great scrutiny, and he makes an intriguing case for the capture and storage of the byproducts of the damage already done.

A sharp summary of energy potentialities, where the good and the bad reside in human hands, hearts, and minds. (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)
BIG MAGIC
Creative Living Beyond Fear
Gilbert, Elizabeth
Riverhead (588 pp.)
$24.95 | Sep. 22, 2015
978-1-59463-471-0

The bestselling author of Eat, Pray, Love reflects on what it means to pursue a creative life.

At the beginning of her latest book, Gilbert (The Signature of All Things, 2013, etc.) writes that creativity is “the relationship between a human being and the mysteries of inspiration.” Then the author explains how individuals can live that relationship on a daily basis. First and foremost, she writes, people seeking to live creatively and pursue the things that bring them satisfaction must be prepared to live courageously. Only then can they “bring forth the treasures that are hidden within [them].” Gilbert also suggests that the ideas on which all creative acts are based do not come from a person: they are “disembodied, energetic life-form[s]” that seek human hosts who can make them real. This is part of what the author believes makes creativity itself a “force of enchantment—not entirely human in its origins.”

To actually manifest ideas requires what Gilbert sees as the ability to give oneself permission to engage in creative acts regardless of what anyone else may think. It also requires persistence and being able to stomach the many “shit sandwich[s]” of disappointment and frustration that so often go along with creative endeavors. Having a burning passion for the work involved—the intensity of which Gilbert likens to a “hot...extramarital affair”—is also crucial. So is trusting in the creative process—not matter how eccentric and/or nonlinear it may seem—and in the idea that “the work wants to be made, and it wants to be made through you.” Not all readers will embrace the New-Age way in which Gilbert discusses the creative process, but the sincerity, grace, and flashes of humor that characterize her writing and insights should appeal to a wider audience.

Not earth shattering but warmly inspirational. (This review was originally published in the 06/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

THE FIRST KING
OF HOLLYWOOD
The Life of Douglas Fairbanks
Goessel, Tracey
Chicago Review (560 pp.)
$34.95 | Oct. 1, 2015
978-1-61373-404-9

A lively biography of a lauded actor. Douglas Fairbanks (1883-1939) and his wife Mary Pickford (1892-1979) reigned as Hollywood royalty in the 1920s, when she was “America’s Sweetheart,” and he, the “top male star of his generation,” was featured in dozens of movies, notably Robin Hood and The Mark of Zorro.

Although film historians have largely ignored Fairbanks, Goessel, in this hefty, well-researched biography, defends Fairbanks’ reputation as one of the most significant stars of his time. Besides a prolific acting, directing, and producing career, he co-founded the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and United Artists; “innovative, fearless, and deep pocketed,” he was an early backer of Technicolor. Goessel chronicles his ardent romance with Pickford and his “bromance” with Charlie Chaplin, who was such a close friend that he had his own bedroom at the couple’s estate, Pickfair. Though he traded on his suave looks and athleticism, Fairbanks was also hardworking and quickly achieved success, attracting crowds of fans wherever he appeared. When he and Mary arrived in Copenhagen, for example, they were greeted by mobs so large that they disrupted tramway service. In 1927, though, dogged by rumors of infidelity; their marriage began to unravel. Each had affairs, and they reunited, separated, and finally divorced in 1936. By then, however, Fairbanks’ fame had plummeted; neither he nor Mary flourished in the age of talkies, whose advent Goessel examines in detail. For Fairbanks, talkies ended “the romance of motion picture making.” Partly, Goessel argues, the fault lay with the studios, which did not know what to do with the new technology nor how to incorporate sound to enhance actors’ performances and plot. Fairbanks married English model and socialite Sylvia Ashley, but, Goessel believes, loved, and longed for, Mary. He died of a heart attack in 1939. Mary, who had been an alcoholic even during their marriage, deteriorated over the next four decades.

An informative, engaging life of a film icon. (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

ISLAM AND THE FUTURE
OF TOLERANCE
A Dialogue
Harris, Sam & Nawaz, Maajid
Harvard Univ. (120 pp.)
$17.95 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-0-674-08870-2

Can an American atheist who has said that “the West is at war with Islam” and a secular, former Islamist Muslim find common ground?

This book is written as a “dialogue” rather than a debate between the bestselling Harris (Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, 2015, etc.) and the activist author Nawaz (Radical: My Journey Out of Islamist Extremism, 2013, etc.), who went from imprisonment for his extremist recruiting to co-founding and directing the London-based Quilliam, “the world’s first counter-extremism organization.” The exchange is civil and marked by mutual respect, more informative (particularly from the latter) than argumentative. The two agree on far more than they don’t; seeing pluralism and secularism as the paths to tolerance and condemning ”liberal apologists [who equate] any criticism of Islamic doctrines with bigotry, ‘Islamophobia’ or even ‘racism.’ ” Those are the words of Harris, frequently tagged as such for his criticisms of Islamic
violence. Nawaz calls such apologists “regressive leftists” and “reverse racists.” The primary illumination of the exchanges in the book are Nawaz’s clarifications for those who—like Harris, perhaps—tend to paint Islam with too broad a brush, to see the religion as monolithic and bent on war against Western values. “Islam is just a religion,” he explains. “Islamism is the ideology that seeks to impose any version of Islam over society. Islamism is, therefore, theocratic extremism. Jihadism is the use of force to spread Islamism.” He further explains how conservative Muslims may in fact be anti-jihadis while still opposing the liberal freedom of the secular West and how al-Qaida was the result of Islamic extremism, not the cause. Even when Harris offers a surprising semidefense of the Crusades, Nawaz refuses to take the bait, seeming more concerned with promoting understanding than winning points.

A wider range of viewpoints might have made this discussion even more valuable, but readers with a knee-jerk opinion of Islam will learn a lot. (This review was originally published in the 07/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

NEGROLAND
A Memoir
Jefferson, Margo
Pantheon (356 pp.)
$25.00 | Sep. 8, 2015
978-0-307-37845-3

From a Pulitzer Prize–winning theater and book critic, a memoir about being raised in upper-class black Chicago, where families worked tirelessly to distance themselves as much from lower-class black people as from white people.

Born in 1947, Jefferson (On Michael Jackson, 2006) has lived through an era that has seen radical shifts in the way black people are viewed and treated in the United States. The civil rights movement, shifting viewpoints on affirmative action, and the election of the first black president, with all the promise and peril it held: the author has borne witness to changes that her parents could only have dreamed about. Jefferson was born in a small part of Chicago where a “black elite” lived, to a father who was the head of pediatrics at Provident, the country’s oldest black hospital, and a socialite mother. The author describes a segment of the population intent on simultaneously distinguishing itself from both white people and lower-class black people and drawing from both groups to forge its own identity. She writes about being raised in a mindset that demanded the best from her and her family; while she also experienced resentment regarding the relative lack of recognition for the achievements they had earned. Jefferson tells a story of her parents seeing Sammy Davis Jr. on stage, early in his career, when he hadn’t yet established himself enough to completely let his own unique style shine through. Her parents could see the change coming, though—the self-assuredness in his performance—and they saw that as emblematic of their own rise.

Jefferson swings the narrative back and forth through her life, exploring the tides of racism, opportunity, and dignity while also provocatively exploring the inherent contradictions for Jefferson and her family members in working so tirelessly to differentiate themselves. (This review was originally published in the 07/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

THEN COMES MARRIAGE
United States v. Windsor and the Defeat of DOMA
Kaplan, Roberta
Norton (320 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 5, 2015
978-0-393-24867-8

A key litigator who argued and helped defeat the Defense of Marriage Act describes the process, the politics, and the history behind the watershed Supreme Court ruling.

In 2009, private attorney Kaplan agreed to represent Edith Windsor, a former computer programming whiz whose wife of 44 years, Thea Spyer, had recently died. Though the couple had married legally in Canada, their union was not recognized in the United States, leaving Windsor owing thousands of dollars in estate taxes as the sole heir to her late wife’s holdings. Kaplan personalizes the narrative with an account of her coming-out process in 1991 as a Harvard and Columbia University graduate and the daughter of a homophobic mother. The author openly shares the timeline of her own marriage to political activist Rachel Lavine as well as a “rainbow coalition” of gutsy LGBT legal advocates and the many cases incrementally paving the way toward equal rights. Kaplan also fondly recognizes the extraordinary connection she’d previously had with Spyer, who had been her psychotherapist when she was a young lesbian. As the heavily publicized lawsuit proceeded against DOMA, which essentially considered the couple “legal strangers,” Kaplan’s oral arguments before Supreme Court justices, bolstered by Windsor’s affidavits, proved a victorious combination and opened the door for further same-sex equality measures. Equally engaging is the story of the genesis of Windsor and Spyer’s four-decade romance, a love that persevered despite the cloistered 1950s era from which it emerged. Published on the heels of the 2015 landmark Supreme Court same-sex marriage legalization ruling, Kaplan’s narrative is accessible and provides a greater understanding and valuing of the great strides and sacrifices made on behalf of same-sex civil rights.

Kaplan delivers a well-rounded, informative, and illuminating perspective on the complexities of nontraditional marriage. (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)
With masterful narrative control, Moser reveals the narrowness of perspective as well as the limitations of memory.

WE WERE BROTHERS

LIGHTS OUT
A Cyberattack, a Nation Unprepared, Surviving the Aftermath
Koppel, Ted
Crown (272 pp.)
$26.00 | Oct. 27, 2015
978-0-553-41996-2

Award-winning journalist and long-time Nightline anchor Koppel (Off Camera: Private Thoughts Made Public, 2000, etc.) sounds the alarm over the likelihood of a devastating cyberattack on the infrastructure of the United States.

“We remain distracted to this day by the prospects of retail terrorism when we should be focused on the wholesale threat of cyber catastrophe,” writes the author. His concern is an attack on America’s three “surprisingly vulnerable” electrical grids, which link some 3,000 electric power companies to distribute electricity nationwide. Taking down a grid would leave millions in a desperate search for light and power. Such an attack can be launched from anywhere, would be difficult to trace, and might involve China or Russia (the greatest threats), terrorist groups, or rogue states. In his engaging account, Koppel draws on interviews with cyber and national security experts as well as the several individuals who have served as homeland security secretary, all of whom concede the likelihood of a cyberattack on the grid—and that there is no federal plan for the aftermath. The book sometimes reads like a litany of conflicting risk assessments by national experts, many of whom insist immediate concern (from natural disasters to conventional terrorism) demand higher priority than speculative threats. The possibility of serious infrastructure damage is made all the more likely because the grid lacks resiliency, with many smaller power companies unwilling to share information critical to disaster planning because of their privacy and liability concerns. Koppel includes excellent sections on the hindrances to replacing power transformers (they are huge, expensive, made abroad, and difficult to transport) and the steps that “preppers” are taking, especially in self-reliant Western states, where Mormons offer a model for disaster preparedness.

Koppel’s case for the cyberthreat is strong; government officials seem (perhaps justifiably) preoccupied by other matters, or clueless, or both. (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

WE WERE BROTHERS
A Memoir
Moser, Barry
Illus. by the author
Algonquin (204 pp.)
$24.95 | Oct. 20, 2015
978-1-61620-413-6

This boyhood memoir reveals much more than it ever explicitly states, with its tight focus on boyhood, brotherhood, estrangement, and reconciliation.

An art professor and National Book Award–winning illustrator (Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, 2011), Moser writes that his older brother, Tommy, was actually the better artist of the two. He was also more troubled, though when Tommy gets the climactic chance to speak (or write) in his own words, a different perspective emerges. “Most of my memories of that time have the visual qualities of dreams: the images are slightly out of focus and dissolve at the edge,” writes the author. “The palette is muted and nearly void of color.” With a prose style that is precise, understated, and that rarely veers toward sentimentality, Moser describes coming of age in Chattanooga in an era permeated by racism and where any sign of oddness or weakness encouraged bullying. Both boys carried a “chip of inferiority”—the author was fat, dyslexic, and not athletic; his brother had developmental problems that kept him behind in school. With his brother as instigator (in the author’s memory), they fought so hard that the police once were summoned. Tommy dropped out of military school, remained an apparently unrepentant racist, and enjoyed more of a successful life than one might have expected. The author rejected the racism of his upbringing, studied theology, and became a preacher before he found renown as an artist (his illustrations highlight the chapters). Yet the narrative isn’t simply that black and white—their mother’s best, lifelong friend was black, and both boys enjoyed playing with a black friend—and a climactic exchange of letters suggests how deeply each brother had misjudged the other through their extended estrangement of adulthood. Before Tommy’s death, they enjoyed eight years of a brotherhood they had never known before, and the author describes the book as “an homage to him as well as a history of our burdened brotherhood.”

With masterful narrative control, Moser reveals the narrowness of perspective as well as the limitations of memory. (This review was originally published in the 06/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)
Nestle (Nutrition, Food Studies, and Public Health/New York Univ.; Why Calories Count: From Science to Politics, 2012, etc.) calls for a campaign to regulate and tax the multibillion-dollar soda industry modeled on the successful anti-smoking campaign.

There is a proven correlation between the rises in obesity, Type 2 diabetes, and tooth decay and the increasing amounts of sweetened sodas consumed in the United States and globally. We must address this health hazard, writes the author, by doing “everything possible to discourage the marketing, promotion, and political protection of sugary drinks.” As Nestle implores, “everyone interested in health should be taking a closer look at who, when, where, and to whom soda companies are marketing their products.” The current marketing juggernaut is a result of a series of long-running, major campaigns by the significant players in the industry. For example, “in the early 1990s,” writes the author, “Coke and Pepsi began to offer large sums to colleges and universities for the right to sell only their company’s products on campuses.” At the end of the decade, similar arrangements were made with “high schools, middle, and even elementary schools.” Efforts by municipal and federal governments to rein in the industry—e.g., in New York City, a subway-poster campaign coupled with a proposed soda tax and limit on portion size—have been consistently watered down or defeated by the industry, which uses “marketing, lobbying, partnerships, and philanthropy to promote sales, regardless of how their product might affect health.” Sponsorships of sports events, celebrity endorsements, and high-profile disaster-relief efforts also foster brand allegiance and maintain popular support for brands such as Pepsi and Coca-Cola. Nestle reports that health advocates have achieved some success in reducing soda consumption in the U.S., but much remains to be done. In 2014, Coca-Cola diversified into “highly caffeinated energy drinks recently associated with the deaths of several young people.”

A hard-hitting, exceedingly well-documented call for action. (130 illustrations. This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

An intimate but unblinking look at Gore Vidal (1925-2012), the gifted essayist, playwright, novelist, and public personality, who, for a time, seemed ubiquitous in the popular culture.

Poet, novelist, and biographer Parini (English/Middlebury Coll.; Jesus: The Human Face of God, 2013, etc.) met his subject in the mid-1980s, and he begins his chronicle with that encounter. They became fast friends as well as professional colleagues, though Parini continually reminds readers of Vidal’s often difficult personality. Petty, jealous, judgmental, and imperious—all applied to him. But so do others, as the author ably shows: Vidal was generous, brilliant, assiduous, and innovative. Like many other fine artists, Vidal worked until he could no longer do so. Parini precedes each chapter with a vignette, a focused memory from his own experiences with Vidal. They range from amusing to deeply moving. Parini is a wise general biographer of a literary figure. He tells us about each of Vidal’s major works (and the major reviews thereof) but never in prose choked with jargon or self-importance. The goals are exposition and elucidation, and he achieves them gracefully. Like other critics, Parini believes Vidal’s essays surpassed his other work. We learn some quirky details about the writer, as well—his fascination with Billy the Kid (and, later, with Timothy McVeigh), his fondness for celebrities of all sorts, his discomfort with academics, and his rivalries with Norman Mailer (with whom he reconciled) and William F. Buckley Jr. (with whom he didn’t). There is also a lot about Vidal’s sexuality (he preferred anonymous sex with male partners) and his drinking problems. Finally, the author examines Vidal’s sad decline and death. Parini uses detail in agile, unobtrusive fashion—though he erroneously reports that John Brown was killed at Harpers Ferry (he was hanged later in Charles Town).

A superbly personal biography that pulsates with intelligence, scholarship, and heart. (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

An award-winning actress’s collection of never-sent literary missives to the men who have most influenced her personal development.

In this accomplished debut, Parker, who has won Tony, Emmy, and Golden Globe awards, traces her life story through a series of essays that she addresses to the “manly creature[s]” who have made her into...
Readers will benefit from a front-row vantage point without encountering a myopic perspective.

DOOMED TO SUCCEED

A Storm, a Play, and the City That Would Not Be Broken

Pierce, Wendell
Riverhead (336 pp.)
$27.95 | Sep. 8, 2015
978-1-59463-323-2

A star of The Wire and Treme debuts with the twin stories of his rising career and the slow return of his native New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Pierce begins with a 2007 New Orleans street production of Waiting for Godot (he played Vladimir), a play, he argues, with profound relevance for the struggling city. From this play—more than 300 pages later he tells us more—the author returns to his slave ancestors and gradually brings us the stories of his father and mother, who are the real heroes here. His father worked two jobs to keep them in their neighborhood of Pontchartrain Park (later destroyed by the hurricane), and his mother, Tee, emerges as a towering character. The author comments continually about the importance of family, community support, and high expectations; he believes these were the principal factors in his early life, factors that helped him win a slot at Juilliard and a successful acting career. But we also see Pierce animated by Katrina’s devastations. He has become deeply involved in community restoration—he was able to get his parents back in their storm-ravaged home—and has some sharp words for the politicians and their cronies, many of whom complicate things. It’s appropriate that Pierce’s work is something of a gumbo—a mix of memoir, social psychology, literary analysis, and political and religious philosophy. Oddly missing is even the faintest whiff of anything about his personal life. Yes, we know about his roles, his intellectual and literary passions (the works of August Wilson among them), his friendships (Wynton Marsalis’ tribute to Pierce’s mother is an extraordinarily moving segment of the text), and his family history, but we learn nothing about any of his relationships—lovers? spouse? children?

An affecting account of a driven man, a sturdy family, and a resilient community. (This review was originally published in the 07/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

DOOMED TO SUCCEED

The U.S.-Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama

Ross, Dennis
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (496 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 13, 2015
978-0-374-14146-2

A history of the sometimes-fraught, occasionally tense, but always essential relationship between the United States and Israel.

Ross is not only a recognized expert on Middle Eastern affairs. He also worked in the George H.W. Bush State Department as director of policy planning and has served as Bill Clinton’s Middle East Peace envoy and a special assistant to President Barack Obama. So when he writes about American politics in the Middle East, readers should pay attention. The author provides a largely dispassionate history of American policy toward Israel, from President Harry Truman, who was present at Israel’s birth as a nation-state, to the seemingly contentious relationship the Obama administration has cultivated with Benjamin Netanyahu’s Israel. Yet Ross sees more continuity than disjunction in the relationship between the two countries, especially after presidents Truman and Eisenhower struggled to find a way to reconcile Israel’s place in both Middle Eastern and Cold War politics. For the author, when foreign policy has shifted slightly away from its most Israel-friendly moorings, the purpose has been a concern for relations with the rest of the region. Ross sees this approach as being both shortsighted and ineffective. Yet he also points out that Obama is hardly as hostile to Israeli interests as some have painted him, even while the tensions between the two countries seem to have heightened. Throughout this illuminating book, the author writes clearly and elucidates the complexities of not only the U.S.-Israel relationship, but of the larger Middle Eastern picture. He comes neither to bury nor praise the administrations in which he has worked or those in which he did not; as a consequence, readers will benefit from a front-row vantage point without encountering a myopic perspective.
Ross provides a learned, wise template for understanding the long-term relationship between two countries tethered to one another out of shared self-interest and geopolitical necessity and yet with sometimes-conflicting senses of the way forward. (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

THE PRIZE
Who’s in Charge of America’s Schools?
Russakoff, Dale
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (356 pp.)
$27.00 | Sep. 8, 2015
978-0-547-84005-5

The story of Chris Christie, Cory Booker, Mark Zuckerberg, and the $100 million grant for fixing New Jersey—and possibly all American—schools.

Go back five years, before Booker moved on from his post as mayor of Newark to join Congress; before Christie had fumbled his momentum over some petty payback involving a bridge; before...well, OK, Zuckerberg was already plenty wealthy—wealthy and interested in finding a way to enable major shifts in education reform. Booker was a popular mayor, and Christie was a popular governor. Both had aspirations for higher office, and both wanted to get there by instituting major change in New Jersey. So what better arena than the school system of Newark, with its vertigo-inducing rates of dropouts, crumbling school buildings, and shameful academic standings?

In her first book, expanded from a serialized New Yorker article, former Washington Post reporter Russakoff tells the story of how Christie leveraged his political power, Booker provided the charisma and inspiring speeches, and together they netted Zuckerberg’s amazingly shortsighted faith in the level of control the politicians wielded; and the families caught up in the whirlwind, trying to find a reason to believe in the government’s plans for their schools. An appendix lists all the recipients of the grant money and other funds.

An absorbing entry into the burgeoning genre about necessary education reforms. (This review was originally published in the 06/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

THE WITCHES
Salem, 1692
Schiff, Stacy
Little, Brown ($32.00 | Oct. 27, 2015
978-0-316-20060-8

The Pulitzer Prize–winning biographer provides an account of a foundational American tragedy of mass hysteria and injustice.

At its best, the latest work from Schiff (Cleopatra: A Life, 2010, etc.) ably weaves together all the assorted facts and many personalities from the 1692 Salem witch trials and provides genuine insight into a 17th-century culture that was barely a few steps away from the Dark Ages. Religious belief and superstition passed for reality, science had no foothold whatsoever, and both common folk and their educated ministers could believe that local women rode broomsticks, turned into cats, and had the power to be in two places at once. Furthermore, it was a world in which an accusation was as good as a conviction, where seemingly possessed girls flailed and contorted themselves in court, while judges bore down upon helpless defendants with loaded questions. The accused, under the spell of their own culture, could likewise turn on themselves—and not just to save their skin. “Confession came naturally to a people who believed it could likewise turn on themselves—and not just to save their skin.”

As history, The Witches is intelligent and reliable; as a story, it’s a trudge over very well-trod ground. (16-page color insert)
Al-Awlaki grew up in an educated Yemeni family. When his parents obtained their educations in the United States, he was born a citizen. He grew up in Yemen and returned to the United States at age 10. Obama was also born in the United States to a foreign father who was a secular-minded Muslim. Then Obama resided in Indonesia, returning to the United States at age 10. Due to 9/11, the superficial similarities between Obama and al-Awlaki became more meaningful. One would react by becoming an elected politician, the other by becoming a Muslim holy man who initially spoke for the moderate wing of his religion. But by the time Obama reached the presidency in 2008, al-Awlaki had unexpectedly become a militant calling for the death of the “infidel” Americans. Obama began to explore whether he had the authority as commander in chief of the military to send a drone into Yemen to kill al-Awlaki, even though the cleric had not been charged with a crime. By the time the book ends, al-Awlaki is dead, as is his teenage son. Shane became obsessed about learning how Obama, a former constitutional law professor, justified the drone strikes, especially given his opposition to the conduct of the war on terror created by his predecessor, George W. Bush. The author was equally intrigued by the change in philosophy adopted by al-Awlaki, which required a return to Yemen, as something of a fugitive, despite a privileged life in the U.S. In addition to following his two principals, the author examines the drone technology that gave Obama the remarkable ability to target someone thousands of miles away.

Shane’s reporting is superb, and the way he frames the public policy debate makes the narrative compelling from start to finish. (8-page b&n photo insert. This review was originally published in the 06/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

In Queens and indulgently purchasing a ramshackle bungalow there, the property was destroyed by Hurricane Sandy—though she vowed to rebuild. In a hazy, often melancholy narrative, the author synchronizes past memories and contemporary musings on books, art, and Michigan life with Fred. Preferring to write productively from the comfort of her bed, Smith vividly describes herself as “an optimistic zombie propped up by pillows, producing pages of somnambulistic fruit.” She spent seasons of lethargy binge-watching crime TV, arguing with her remote control, venturing out to a spontaneous and awkward meeting with chess great Bobby Fischer, and trekking off to interview Paul Bowles in Tangiers. No matter the distance life may take her, Smith always recovers some semblance of normalcy with the simplistic pleasures of a deli coffee on her Gotham stoop, her mind constantly buoyed by humanity, art, and memory.

Not as focused as Just Kids, but an atmospheric, moody, and bittersweet memoir to be savored and pondered. (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

MY LIFE ON THE ROAD
Steinem, Gloria
Random House (304 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 27, 2015
978-0-8129-9562-0

A respected feminist activist’s memoir about the life lessons she learned as a peripatetic political organizer.

Until she was 10 years old, Steinem (Moving Beyond Words, 1993, etc.) grew up following two parents who could never seem to put down roots. Only after her stability-craving mother separated from her restless migratory father did she settle—for a brief time until college—into “the most conventional life” she would ever lead. After that, she began travels that would first take her to Europe and then later to India, where she began to awaken to the possibility that her father’s lonely way of traveling “wasn’t the only one.” Journeying could be a shared experience that could lead to breakthroughs in consciousness of the kind Steinem underwent after observing Indian villagers coming together in “talking circles” to discuss community issues. Once she returned to the United States, she went to New York City, where she became an itinerant freelance journalist. After observing the absence of female voices at the 1963 March on Washington, Steinem began gathering together black and white women to begin the conversation that would soon become a larger national fight for women’s rights. In the 1970s and beyond, Steinem went on the road to campaign for the Equal Rights Amendment and for female political candidates like 1984 vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro. Along the way, Steinem began work with Native American women activists who taught her about the interconnectedness of all living things and the importance of balance. From this, she learned to walk the middle path between a life on the road and one at home: for in the end, she writes, “[c]aring for a home is caring...
Music impresario Rick Rubin serves as Strauss' guiding light, for one's self.” Illuminating and inspiring, this book presents a distinguished woman's exhilarating vision of what it means to live with openness, honesty, and a willingness to grow beyond the apparent confinement of seemingly irreconcilable polarities.

An invigoratingly candid memoir from a giant of women's rights. (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**THE TRUTH**
*An Uncomfortable Book About Relationships*

Strauss, Neil
Dey Street/HarperCollins (448 pp.)
978-0-06-089876-2

Rolling Stone scribe and infamous Lothario Strauss (Everyone Loves You When You're Dead: Journeys into Fame and Madness, 2011, etc.) chronicles a luscious seesaw battle between monogamy and debauchery.

For years, sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll seemed to be the author's mantra, even his very reason for being. The Game, Strauss' notorious 2005 book about the art of seducing beautiful women, helped to catapult the journalist to the heights of literary fortune and fame. But after traveling the globe partying with rock stars and fashionistas in a nonstop thrill ride of overindulgence, Strauss met Ingrid, a woman so wonderful in his eyes that he determined to bury his libertine ways forever and dedicate himself to her exclusively. Of course, he immediately screwed up, reverted to his hound-dog ways and discovered that the only possible way of salvaging Ingrid's affections was to check into a high-priced rehab clinic for sex addicts. Strauss' dark humor and intelligence illuminate his (seemingly useless) initial efforts to get with the program, and the encounters with tightly wound psychologists and hapless addicts like himself are both entertaining and thought-provoking. Unable, or unwilling, to accept monogamy, Strauss again reversed course, ditched therapy, and rededicated himself to the pursuit of a polyamorous lifestyle. What follows is an oddly tedious odyssey of orgiastic excess that appears doomed to everyone except Strauss himself. Still, the edgy author's relentless introspection and willingness to openly navigate the landscape of his sex-soaked psyche are compelling, if often frustrating for readers. "It's a lot to take in and I struggle to understand it all. Then I decide I don't need to understand it," he writes. "I just need to do it." Music impresario Rick Rubin serves as Strauss' guiding light, intermittently popping in and out with sage advice.

Some readers may have no sympathy for the author, but he delivers an emotionally charged, provocative memoir of a man learning to confront his sexual demons.

**THIRTY MILLION WORDS**
*Building a Child's Brain*

Suskind, Dana
Dutton (420 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 13, 2015
978-0-525-95487-3

New research demonstrating the importance of communicating with your child right from birth.

Founder and director of the Thirty Million Words Initiative at the University of Chicago, Suskind provides an extensive analysis of why it is imperative to speak to your child from the moment he or she is born. Using research data to support her concepts, the author shows that “the essential wiring of the human brain, the foundation for all thinking and learning, occurs largely in our first three years of life... optimum brain development is language-dependent.” Based on her investigations, Suskind and other research scientists have determined that a child who hears a vast amount of language during the critical first three years of life will have a higher IQ and score higher on tests and excel in science, technology, engineering, and math over children who hear less conversation. After giving ample scientific evidence to back her ideas, the author provides readers with the basic three-step method she devised for her institute to help parents and others involved in early childhood development implement this concept, as well as sample conversations to help parents get started. This process involves tuning in to the child and his interests — talking with a child, not just to him — and engaging in an actual conversation with the child. According to Suskind, even babies who haven’t learned to speak can be engaged, and it is vital to begin this process from the baby’s earliest moments. The author also emphasizes how important it is for children to learn a second language, if possible; it accounts for an entire industry.

Informative, exciting new data that confirms the significant benefits gained by talking to your child. (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**SUPERFORECASTING**
*The Art and Science of Prediction*

Tetlock, Philip E. & Gardner, Dan
Crown (336 pp.)
$28.00 | Sep. 29, 2015
978-0-8041-3669-3

Superforecasting — predicting events that will occur in the future—is not only possible; it accounts for an entire industry. World-renowned behavioral scientist Tetlock (Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know, 2005, etc.) explains why some people are so good at it and how others can cultivate the skill.
Global forecasting is hardly limited to predicting the weather. In fact, much of it has significantly higher stakes: everything from the potential of conflict in the North China Sea to the 2016 presidential election is at play. Legions of intelligent, well-educated, and well-paid analysts digest data and attempt to make hundreds of nuanced predictions each year. Remarkably, in his seminal 20-year study, the author established that, on average, these “experts” are “roughly as accurate as a dart-throwing chimpanzee.” On the other hand, the superforecasters Tetlock has recruited are far more accurate: his team handily beat their competitors in a forecasting tournament sponsored by a U.S. government agency, providing more accurate answers than even those with access to classified files. And here’s the rub: his all-volunteer team is composed entirely of so-called ordinary people with ordinary jobs. In this captivating book, Tetlock argues that success is all about the approach: foresight is not a gift but rather a product of a particular way of thinking. Superforecasters are open-minded, careful, curious, and self-critical. They make an initial prediction and then meticulously adjust this prediction based on each new piece of related information. In each chapter, the author augments his research with compelling interviews, anecdotes, and historical context, using accessible real-world examples to frame what could otherwise be dense subject matter. His writing is so engaging and his argument so tantalizing, readers will quickly be drawn into the challenge—in the appendix, the author provides a concise training manual to do just that.

A must-read field guide for the intellectually curious.

(This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**Autobiography of Mark Twain, Volume 3**

**The Complete and Authoritative Edition**

Twain, Mark

Griffin, Benjamin & Smith, Harriet E.—Eds.

Univ. of California (792 pp.)

$45.00 | Oct. 15, 2015

978-0-520-27994-0

In which the greatest of American writers goes into the night—and not such a good night at that, and not at all gently. Covering just the last couple of years in Twain’s long life, this is the concluding volume of the masterful University of California edition of his autobiography: unexpurgated, cross-referenced, and richly annotated. (Few modern readers would understand, for instance, that Twain was alluding to a Thackeray story in calling one unfortunate fellow “Jeames.”) The swan song reinforces things well established by its predecessors. For one, Twain lived a whirlwind life, interested in almost everything, particularly when it was cool, modern, and gadgety; he was always investing in tools and toys, sometimes losing his shirt thereby. For another, Twain, cynic though he appeared to be, tended to trust people, sometimes at great cost. A large section of this volume is devoted to an aggrieved account of a yearslong episode in which members of Twain’s staff bilked him of money, land, and jewels, taking advantage of the old man. Even when angry, though, the author puts humor to work, writing of one of them, “the first thing I ever noticed about Miss Lyon was her incredible laziness. Laziness was my own specialty, & I did not like this competition.” Elsewhere, Twain, a jet-setter before jets, writes with both humor and a certain archness of people like Theodore Roosevelt and Andrew Carnegie, the latter of whom he sends up for philanthropy from the supposed kindness of his heart: “He has bought fame and paid cash for it,” Twain writes, “he has deliberately projected and planned out this fame for himself; he has arranged that his name shall be famous in the mouths of men for centuries to come.”

Of considerable interest to all readers of Twain but especially to working writers following Twain’s habit of tracking his astonishing writing income—even though, as he writes, “if I should run out of all other nourishment I believe I could live on compliments.”

**The Horse: The Epic History of Our Noble Companion**

Williams, Wendy

Scientific American/Farrar, Straus and Giroux (320 pp.)

$26.00 | Oct. 27, 2015

978-0-374-22440-0

An enthusiastic history of and appreciation for all things horse.

In this “scientific travelogue...biography of the horse...and worldwide investigation into the bond that unites horses and humans,” one of the only elements Williams (Kraken: The Curious, Exciting, and Slightly Disturbing Science of Squid, 2011, etc.) doesn’t address is how to ride a horse. But there’s more than enough to teach readers how to approach a horse and how it will communicate its feelings. The author begins by asserting that horses had their beginnings in the New World rather than the long-held belief that Europeans introduced them to the Americas. When the land bridges were available, horses could travel through Asia to Europe, and Williams notes that horses are not only herd animals, but that they don’t stray far from their environments. As she traces their evolution, she makes it clear that horses tend to adapt to their surroundings rather than move away in search of comfort. The evolution of their hooves, from three to four toes, was caused by the change from marshy ground, where toes helped balance, to dry grass plains. In an equally thorough manner, Williams explains the changes to the animals’ eyes and teeth, which changed with their diet as grasslands formed and they required teeth that could grind effectively. Horses are also red-green colorblind because their eyes only have two types of cones, whereas humans have three. That, as well as the placement of their eyes, affects their acuity and depth perception. The author also explores how horses’ eyes moved back in their heads, allowing wider vision. This made room for larger teeth,
A complex history rendered with great color and sympathy.

1944

which evolved to adapt to the grass that appeared due to changes in global temperatures caused by tectonic plate movement and changing ocean currents.

Anyone with a love of horses will treasure this book, which provides scholarly yet accessible insight into a beautifully constructed animal that has chosen to domesticate man, just as dogs have. (This review was originally published in the 07/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

The preternaturally curious writer about everything from the Oxford English Dictionary to volcanoes to the Atlantic Ocean (Atlantic: A Vast Ocean of a Million Stories, 2010, etc.) returns with a series of high-resolution literary snapshots of the Pacific Ocean.

Winchester, who now lives in Massachusetts, does not do the expected: there is no chapter about the geological history of the ocean, followed by a slow chronology. Instead, realizing the difficulty of his own task, the author focuses on 10 aspects of the ocean and its inhabitants—isolanders, those on the shores—and uses them to illustrate some historical points. He issues dire warnings about the damage we’re doing to the natural world and about the geopolitical forces—especially the military rise of China—that threaten us all. Occasionally, Winchester makes what seem to be odd pairings (a chapter on both a volcano in the Philippines and the rise of China) and uses them to illustrate some historical points. He issues dire warnings about the damage we’re doing to the natural world and about the geopolitical forces—especially the military rise of China—that threaten us all. Occasionally, Winchester makes what seem to be odd pairings (a chapter on both a volcano in the Philippines and the rise of China) and narrative choices (a chapter on both Jack London and the Beach Boys; and the author examines America’s egregious abuse of islanders during above-ground nuclear testing. Deep worries abound, as well: the dying coral reefs, climate change, and military posturing of the superpowers. The author ends with a hopeful but probably doomed wish for international fraternity.

Winchester’s passionate research—on sea and land—undergirds this superb analysis of a world wonder that we seem hellbent on damaging. (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

1944

FDR and the Year that Changed History

Winik, Jay

Simon & Schuster (624 pp.)

$35.00 | Sep. 22, 2015

978-1-4391-1408-7

An accomplished popular historian unpacks the last full year of World War II and the excruciatingly difficult decisions facing Franklin Roosevelt.

Allied military victories during 1944 assured the eventual surrender of Nazi Germany, accounting for what Winston Churchill called “the greatest outburst of joy in the history of mankind.” And yet Winik (The Great Upheaval: America and the Birth of the Modern World, 1788-1860, 2007, etc.) asks whether, by focusing so wholly on winning the war, Roosevelt missed “his own Emancipation Proclamation moment,” the chance to make the war about something bigger, specifically “the vast humanitarian tragedy occurring in Nazi-controlled Europe.” FDR’s failure to address unequivocally the Holocaust, the millions of deaths that left “a gaping, tormenting hole echoing in history,” has frustrated historians for decades. More in sorrow than in anger, Winik explains this apparent moral lapse by the world’s foremost humanitarian. Preoccupied with his 1944 re-election and mollifying various political constituencies, supervising the invasion of the European continent, holding together a contentious alliance, and intent on destroying Hitler, Roosevelt was also in extremely precarious health. Moreover, a sluggish, indifferent government bureaucracy, likely tinged with anti-Semitism—here, Secretary of State Cordell Hull and the War Department’s John J. McCloy take a beating—either ignored or thwarted any plan to relieve or rescue refugees or liberate prisoners in the death camps. Still, as Winik vividly demonstrates in a number of set pieces featuring escapees, underground leaders, and government advocates for relief, surely by 1944 FDR knew: about the camps, the atrocities, the desperate refugees, and, as one memo sternly warned, “the acquiescence of this government in the murder of Jews.” Still, beyond the belated establishment of the War Refugee Board, the president faltered. The author’s fair assessment of the evidence, detailed scene-setting, deft storytelling, and sure-handed grasp of this many-stranded narrative will inspire any reader to rethink this issue. Do we ask too much of Roosevelt or too little?

A complex history rendered with great color and sympathy. (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)
When the sun goes down on the savanna, the lion cub wants to play. Why doesn't anybody else?

Mama lion is stretched out on a tree branch, as lifeless as a rug. Her cub's scratches and roars can't wake her. A couple of male lions stay stubbornly asleep as well. Time to roam. When the cub roars at the hippo, it burps in response. But a second, bigger roar sends the hippo and its whole family fleeing. The cub next tries a herd of giraffes, all erect but sleeping, their necks poking up through the leaves of a broad tree. When the cub roars, they also flee, in a flurry of "Eeek!"s (in myriad typefaces). The disappointed cub lies down on the ground, tail unthinkingly drooped down a hole that happens to be home to a family of rabbits. To one restless gray rabbit, the tail looks just like a carrot: "CHOMP!" Understandably, the cub lets out an enormous "ROAR!" followed by an even bigger "MORE!!" from the delighted rabbit. And the two new friends romp for hours...and pages. Bayless tells her story in the pictures, mostly double-page spreads with a few graphic-style panels; the only text—mostly "roar"s and "more"s—appears in sound bubbles. Her digitally colored pencil illustrations have an appealing crispness; the slightly stylized figures stand out evocatively against their deep blue, nocturnal backgrounds.

A fresh and funny friendship tale. (Picture book. 3-6)
George employs a minimalism that establishes an effective foil to the eventual blossoming of Henry’s interior world.

**THE POWER OF HENRY’S IMAGINATION**

House as the sun rises, wander benign city streets and play in parks while their brother works, then pick her up at the end of the day to return home in “the plum blush of dusk.” He doesn’t confine himself to simply mirroring the poem’s abundant visual images, instead adopting a kaleidoscopic approach that uses the sun’s diagonal rays to control compositions. Some double-page spreads are multiply fractured, capturing the nation’s busyness, while others are solemn and contemplative, as in a low-angle, blue-dominated image of the children from waist down that accompanies the lines commemorating “the empty desks of twenty children marked absent / today, and forever.” Trucks, school buses, and bridges form visual leitmotifs; a saturated, pastel palette modulates with the poem’s moods; cityscapes are made welcoming with softly rounded horizon lines; the seasons change with the text of the poem across this “one today,” taking readers from spring to winter.

When it was read, the poem was instantly acclaimed; Pilkey’s visual interpretation fully—and joyfully—honors it. (Picture book. 4-8) (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**THE HUNTER’S PROMISE**

*An Abenaki Tale*

Bruchac, Joseph
Illus. by Farnsworth, Bill
Wisdom Tales (32 pp.)
$16.95 | Sep. 1, 2015
978-1-937786-43-4

An Abenaki retelling of a traditional story of various indigenous nations of the Northeast that centers on loyalty and humans’ relation to nature.

Long ago, a young man travels north to hunt throughout the winter. One day, as he is following the tracks of a moose, he realizes he is lonely and wishes out loud for a partner. Returning to his lodge, he finds a fire burning and food waiting, but there is no one there. This goes on for days; on the seventh night he finds a woman waiting inside. The young man and woman develop a relationship based on respect and loyalty, and the hunter promises to always remember her. When he returns to his village in the spring, he finds himself pressured to take a wife. This tension eventually leads the hunter to live a double life, testing his devotion to and respect for the “great family of life.” Through his scenic paintings, Farnsworth evokes the light, seasons, and life in the forested mountains of the Northeast, supporting Bruchac’s words and achieving a striking visual depiction of the environment of Abenaki peoples. The narrative itself is elliptical, offering literal readers a story of loyalty but founding it on a subtle exploration of the spirit world and its relation to ours.

Bruchac and Farnsworth honor the Indians of the Northeast, the written versions of the tale, and the elders and Wabanaki tellers who keep this story alive. (Author’s note) (Picture book/folk tale. 6-8) (This review was originally published in the 06/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**MADAME EIFFEL**

*The Love Story Behind the Eiffel Tower*

Brüe-Hayquet, Alice
Illus. by Cail
Translated by Hobeika, Noelia
Little Gestalten (32 pp.)
$19.95 | Nov. 1, 2015
978-3-89955-755-8

Will the young engineer Eiffel save his pretty wife from slipping into oblivion?

“Eiffel is a happy engineer / young, successful, and in love. / The prettiest girl in Paris is his wife. / Her name is Cathy, and she has a thirst for life.” Early in the simple tale, Cathy becomes mysteriously ill, and Eiffel works feverishly to create her desire: “Cathy tries to laugh and tells Eiffel with a wink / ‘You could build us a railway / that takes us up to the clouds in a blink.’ ” The internal rhymes and graceful, syncopated rhythm are the perfect match for exuberant, quirky line drawings, accented sparingly with the color pink. The people in the book—including the beloved couple—are depicted with large, oval heads atop tiny, slender bodies that sport carefully detailed clothing. The aerial views of Paris include hundreds of tiny rooftops and windows, with comical birds in the sky and complementary fish in the Seine. Appropriate for an engineer’s story, art and layout make wonderful use of grids as well as numerous, varying angles and viewpoints, including a double-page spread of the eponymous tower, which requires a 90-degree rotation to view properly. The artwork and text combine to create a delightful fairy tale that, alas, has little basis in reality: Eiffel’s 15-year marriage ended when his Marguerite died of pneumonia, 10 years before completion of the Eiffel Tower. It’s a pity there is no note that helps readers clarify this conflict.

Pure joie de vivre but a bit less joie de vérité. (Picture book. 3-7)
Reflecting Danticat’s own childhood, this picture book sheds light on an important reality rarely portrayed in children’s books.

**MAMA’S NIGHTINGALE**

surface that shifts across a spectrum, from gold to charcoal. In the opening scenes, a leafy branch, striped shirt, and muffin with jelly are among the collaged elements creating interest along the borders. As the theater of the child’s mind takes over, photographs of landscapes—filtered, to align with the subdued palette—are inserted. Then, artfully arranged salt concocts a snowcapped cave in which the boy and pet cook dinner; clothespins turn into crocodiles in a sea of fabric. Distracted with the pleasure of make-believe, the child even drifts off to sleep sans rabbit, although a special nocturnal delivery ensures a satisfying conclusion.

Choice words and creative visuals combine to celebrate and inspire the mind’s eye. *(Picture book. 4-7) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)*

**THE BEAR’S SURPRISE**

Chaud, Benjamin
Illus. by the author
Chronicle (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 15, 2015
978-1-4521-4028-5

Little Bear has an exciting experience in store when he follows Papa Bear to work.

In their two previous outings, *Bear’s Song* (2013) and *Bear’s Sea Escape* (2014), it’s been Papa Bear chasing after his errant offspring. Here the tables turn: waking from hibernation to find Papa gone, Little Bear gallops in pursuit down a long, winding road that leads him through teeming woodlands, an equally populous underground, and at last to an immense circus tent! There, he sees his dad on the high wire, gets to be blasted over, photographs of landscapes—filtered, to align with the two figures (Elliot and Mouse) in Elliot’s frame, Curato’s palette and style are reminiscent of Edward Hopper. The lone elephant appears in an open window, the sole figure in a double-page spread depicting rows of closed, opaque panes in a brown facade near a barren tree: “The house was quiet. And empty.” Subdued greens and reds predominate, and while some of the figures in the multiethnic neighborhood scenes are in groups, others are hidden behind newspapers or shadows, adding to the sense of isolation. Employing a restrained text, Curato mines the visuals for emotional impact, as when he portrays Elliot among a sea of empty chairs inside the cinema, tearfully watching a family film. The black-and-white movie connects to reality when the protagonist exits into a nocturnal snowfall. All is well when Mouse, having missed Elliot, invites him back to the candlelit attic feast. Playful endpapers mimic fine art and family portraits, with one very large addition.

Young children will easily relate to Elliot’s experience of loneliness and his relief at inclusion, both convincingly captured in this elegant tale. *(Picture book. 3-6) (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)*

**MAMA’S NIGHTINGALE**

Danticat, Edwidge
Illus. by Staub, Leslie
Dial (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2015
978-0-525-42809-1

A tale of triumph that occurs only because a young girl picks up her pencil and writes to people who can help make change.

Saya, a child of Haitian descent, and her father live together in the United States without Mama because the immigration police arrested her one night at work. For the past three months, Mama has been in the Sunshine Correctional facility, a prison for women without immigration papers. Emulating her father, who writes regularly to the media and politicians on his wife’s behalf, Saya writes a letter that is published by the local paper. When the media get involved, phone calls and letters from concerned citizens result in a hearing before an African-American judge, who rules that Mama can go home with her family to await her
papers. Visually unifying the story are blue and pink nightingales (a Haitian bird and Saya's nickname) and hearts with faces and wings or arms and legs. The stories Mama tells help to sustain both Saya and her father through bouts of sadness. Saya's lifelike stuffed monkey companion seems to perceive what she's feeling and also helps her to remain strong. Reflecting Danticat's own childhood, this picture book sheds light on an important reality rarely portrayed in children's books.

**A must-read both for children who live this life of forced separation and those who don't.** *(Picture book. 5-8) (This review was originally published in the 07/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)*

**I AM A BEAR**
*Dumont, Jean-François*
*Ilus. by the author*
*Translated by Mathews, Leslie Eerdmans (34 pp.)*
*$16.00 | Sep. 8, 2015 978-0-8028-5447-6*

A sensitive portrait of a lonely, home-less...bear, sort of.

The hulking narrator, swaddled in a heavy coat so that only a bear's head and hairy but human hands and feet are visible, has no name, no history, no memories. “At first, I didn't know that I was a bear. But when I tried to speak to this little lady who was passing by, and I saw her reaction, I started to understand.” That reaction, of fear changing to outright hostility, leads to the bear’s being chased down the street, thrown out of a store, forced to pick through garbage cans for food, and left to huddle amid piles of cardboard and newspapers, ignored by everyone who passes. Until, that is, a child stops to comment frankly that he smells bad but looks like a “teddy bear,” later comes back for a hug that it is his loud, boisterous enthusiasm that scares the birds away. He quiets down...and is suddenly the birdie magnet he has always wanted to be. Esbaum’s sweet tale of a friendship-seeking bigfoot is a good title to hand to those not quite ready for chapter books. The relatively lengthy yet still simple text will keep them interested without unduly challenging their new reading skills. Wragg’s adorable, snaggle-toothed bigfoot is the real star here; his black-dot eyes and wide grin will easily charm the kids (and birds).

**KOALA HOSPITAL**
*Esterbas, Suzi*
*Photo by the author*
*Owlkids Books (48 pp.)*
*$17.95 | Oct. 15, 2015 978-1-77147-140-4*
*Series: Wildlife Rescue, 1*

This book, abundant with color photographs, takes readers into the world’s only hospital solely for koalas.

Both a table of contents and brightly colored banners throughout the book help readers home in on their particular interests. However, the text is short and accessible enough so that the book can be read in a single sitting. The hospital nurses of koalas that are sick, injured, or orphaned, and it releases them into the wild whenever possible. The text clearly states that most of the problems koalas experience stem from their having to share habitat with humans; lest anyone be misguided when they see koalas in an Australian’s backyard, “actually, it’s people who are living in the koalas’ backyards: Scientists have found koala fossils in Australia that are 20 million years old. That’s long before people lived there!” All of the text has a conversational, matter-of-fact tone that allows readers to effortlessly pick up facts about common threats to koalas—including dog bites—and about the tender care the rescued koalas receive from the time they enter the “koala ambulance” to the time they are released back into the wild. Readers will likely feel a gentle tug of responsibility for the cuddly marsupials, so they’ll appreciate the closing information about how kids can help preserve wildlife. The photographs are crisp, informative close-ups.

**A good read for animal and conservation enthusiasts.** *(Nonfiction. 7-12) (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)*
**JUMPING OFF LIBRARY SHELVES**

Hopkins, Lee Bennett—Ed.  
Illus. by Manning, Jane  
Wordsong/Boyds Mills (32 pp.)  
$16.95 | Sep. 8, 2015  
978-1-59078-924-7

The title of this book of 15 poems will immediately grab the attention of teachers and librarians.

All together, the listing of titles in the table of contents forges a lyrical look at what libraries mean to individuals. Many of the poets are well-known in children’s literature, and the poems are personal and heartfelt. “Enchantment,” by Jane Yolen, revels in the power of a library card; “Internet Explorer,” by J. Patrick Lewis, makes a metaphorical nod at the integration of computers into library services; “The Poetry Section” by Alice Schertle, celebrates “that poetry sound”; “I’d Like a Story,” by X.J. Kennedy, consists of the energetic plea of an eager reader to a helpful librarian. The page composition and text placement add playfulness, while the gouache-and-pencil illustrations are buoyant and imaginative. Wispy backgrounds and splotches of color add ebullience. Hopkins, a master anthologist, has compiled an excellent collection and includes one of his own poems, a tribute to distinguished librarian and storyteller Augusta Baker (whom he knew personally). The overall effect is an endearing accolade for fellow book and library mavens.

The final stanza of Cynthia S. Cotten’s “My Card” says it all: “My library card / unlocks the world / and more / with a single / scan.” Amen. (Picture book/poetry 5-12) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**AMAZING PLACES**

Hopkins, Lee Bennett—Ed.  
Illus. by Soentpiet, Chris & Hale, Christy  
Lee & Low (40 pp.)  
$18.95 | Oct. 1, 2015  
978-1-60060-653-3

This companion to Amazing Faces (2015) is a tribute to United States landmarks and adds illustrator Hale as a collaborator.

Eleven states are highlighted, ranging from Alaska to Kansas to Massachusetts. San Francisco’s Chinatown, the Grand Canyon, the State Fair of Texas, and the Oneida Nation Museum are among the American treasures featured alongside poetry penned by an eclectic representation of treasured Americans of many ethnicities. The selections’ wide appeal invites inter-generational sharing, particularly in the classroom or at family gatherings. For example, in addition to the reader-engaging playful visual formatting of Prince Redcloud’s “Niagara,” this poem also lends itself to multivoice readings: “falls / and / falls / forever-ever / flowing / falling / falling / cascading / crashing / dipping / dropping / plunging / tumbling / stop...” Soentpiet and Hale’s exceptional pencil-and-digital illustrations reinforce the word pictures evoked by the poetry. Light and shadow, skilfully rendered with the look of watercolor paint, play across the scenes. A historical glossary is appended, and the map of the United States indicating each landmark’s location is included on the endpapers.

Amazing, indeed: American readers will come away both proud of what the country has to offer and eager to visit the sites in person. (Poetry 6-11)

**SAIL AWAY**

Hughes, Langston  
Illus. by Bryan, Ashley  
Atheneum (40 pp.)  
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2015  
978-1-4814-3085-2

Hughes’ pen is paired to Bryan’s sculpting scissors, making a rich, poetic picture book indeed.

“Literature is a big sea full of many fish. I let down my nets and pulled. I’m still pulling.” Thus ends Langston Hughes’ autobiography, The Big Sea (1945), and here begins the subject of Bryan’s compilation. He chooses both familiar poems, such as “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” and less-well-known ones, such as “Sailor,” to explore all things aquatic, both domestic and international. Reflecting Hughes’ adventures seeing the world via its waterways, the poems feature mermaids, waves, bridges, meeting merchants from all over, and more. Bryan’s intricate and colorful cut-paper collage illustrations breathe new life into the poems. The artist also pays homage to his mother, including photographs of her sewing and embroidering scissors on the endpapers—the same scissors he used to cut the images for these illustrations. Readers don’t have to have ever heard Bryan’s unforgettable, theatrical recitation of “My People” or other Hughes poems to understand the depth of the artist’s appreciation of and admiration for Hughes and his poetry: he opens the poems up visually here in the same way that he opens them auditorily when he performs them live.

Like Hughes, Bryan, at 91, can also boast, “I’m still pulling.” (Picture book/poetry 5-12) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)
Subdued illustrations with cool colors and rounded shapes evoke the comforting softness of a threadbare, beloved toy.

**TOYS MEET SNOW**

Three toys make their way out into their first snow. Lumphy (the stuffed buffalo) has so many questions about all that white; StingRay (the, um, stingray) and Plastic (the ball) offer up answers both fantastic and factual, respectively. When Lumphy asks, “I mean, what is a snowflake?” StingRay responds immediately, “A snowflake is a tiny ballerina,” while Plastic asserts, “No, it’s just really tiny frozen water...I read that, too.” Plastic reads a lot. The wonderfully idiosyncratic trio responds immediately, “A snowflake is a tiny ballerina,” while Plastic asserts, “No, it’s just really tiny frozen water...I read that, too.” Plastic reads a lot. The wonderfully idiosyncratic trio works brilliantly together, playing with equally exciting imaginary and realistic hypotheses about snow, their unique personalities and intellectual strengths jiving all the while. Subdued illustrations with cool colors and rounded shapes evoke the comforting softness of a threadbare, beloved toy. Amusing vertical and horizontal paneled sequences show these toys working together fervently: opening a door, building a snowman, discerning a snow-laden tree and a strawberry sunset. Children come away seeing the value, pleasure, and benefits of different outlooks and sensibilities. They also see that questions, elaborately unusual answers, and unearthed facts can cohere into one swirling, whirling, dazzling snowstorm of discovery.

Snow never left you feeling warmer inside. (Picture book. 2-6) (This review was originally published in the 07/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**MOLETTOWN**

Kuhlmann, Torben
Illus. by the author
NorthSouth (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Oct. 1, 2015
978-0-7358-4208-3

The evolution of a city built beneath a green meadow by anthropomorphic moles is narrated visually. The industrious moles build their elaborate, busy civilization without paying much attention to the natural world—with predictably bad consequences—in a largely wordless allegory about the downsides of progress. Kuhlmann’s art for the underground city is richly done in earthy tones, with the gray-blue of the moles’ coveralls and the glow of lamps, screens, and lightbulbs punctuating the sense of being constantly indoors, electricity in use everywhere. Bits of telephones and gaming handsets decorate the moles’ compact living and working spaces. Underground trains ferry commuters in all directions, including up and down. The city’s development proceeds to the point where vehicles packed end to end crowd the square of a heavily stacked city as mole-oriented signage looms over the streets: “smutch,” “sand,” “soil.” The devastation that has been wrought on the surface above them appears in a double-page spread just after this: the formerly green meadow is a wasteland of derricks and piles of bare earth. It’s only on the rear endpapers that hope appears, with thumbnail black-and-white “photos” showing a wind farm rising above the bare-dirt meadow and a mole enjoying a bit of fresh air.

Kuhlmann’s detailed art will pull in readers who like to see how things fit together, while his message is abundantly clear for everyone. (Picture book 3-7) (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**THE BOY WHO FELL OFF THE MAYFLOWER, OR JOHN HOWLAND’S GOOD FORTUNE**

Lynch, P.J.
Illus. by the author
Candlewick (64 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2015
978-0-7636-6584-5

A much-longer-than-typical picture book about the Mayflower’s first landing in America and its aftermath, told through the eyes of one of its passengers.

Based on historical fact, this feast of a book, the first illustrator Lynch has authored as well, will captivate readers from its opening double-page spread. Lynch’s masterful watercolor and gouache illustrations—harkening back to the grand style of Howard Pyle and N.C. Wyeth—bring to life the true story of indentured servant John Howland, who sailed on the Mayflower with his master in 1620. Howland’s narration relates the difficult ocean crossing and how, in a storm, he is swept overboard but miraculously rescued. Once land is reached, however, Howland and the other settlers find their difficulties have begun in earnest. Winter weather, lack of food, sickness, and aggression toward the native peoples all contribute to the demise of more than half the original settlers. But spring comes, the native people offer help, and the familiar Thanksgiving story is broached. What sets this book apart from myriad Pilgrim stories is Howland’s personal point of view, which helps readers enter into the tenor of the time, when the settlers’ religious faith both motivated and sustained them, and the dramatic illustrations with their expert play of expression, composition, and light.

Sweeping and grand, this personal take on a familiar story is an engaging success. (bibliography, author’s note) (Picture book 6-14) (This review was originally published in the 07/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)
Pinkney shows light-skinned, African-American Owen battling tsunami-sized waves, submerged and tossed in swirling water amid an onomatopoeic “who000osh.”

**ON THE BALL**

Failing to keep his eye on the soccer ball, a player finds himself on an eventful chase to catch the runaway plaything.

Owen loves playing soccer, but he isn’t a star. One day, while sitting on the bench during a game, he takes his eye off the ball, and it escapes—almost literally, rolling away through a nearby hole in the fence. Determined to retrieve the ball, Owen chases it across a stream, tracks it into underground tunnels, and returns to the game—where he now handles the ball like a pro. The strategically placed minimalist text belies the breathtaking visual rendition of Owen’s quest to catch the rogue ball. Sprightly watercolor illustrations in loose, fluid brush strokes and calligraphic lines generate a dynamic energy relentlessly propelling Owen from page to page across double-page spreads. Pinkney shows light-skinned, African-American Owen battling tsunami-sized waves, submerged and tossed in swirling water amid an onomatopoeic “who000osh.” Reaching the shore, Owen morphs into a bold tiger, bouncing and pouncing the ball through the brush to the cliff’s edge, where he suddenly sprouts wings and acrobatically dives and swoops to capture the ball. He returns triumphantly to the game as a “floating, fierce, and flying free” soccer player who always keeps his eye “ON THE BALL!”

An inspired, exhilarating portrait of the transforming power of imagination, with special appeal for aspiring soccer stars. (Picture book. 5-8) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**THE IMPOSSIBLE VOYAGE OF KON-TIKI**

Bucking expert opinion, a young Norwegian anthropologist sets out on a balsa log raft to show that pre-Columbian voyagers from South America might well have traveled to the Pacific islands.

**MY NAME IS AVIVA**

The mean kids at Aviva’s school are cleverer than the mean kids in most neighborhoods. When students at Aviva’s school want to make fun of her name, they call her “Amoeba” and “Viva La France.” This requires a certain level of sophistication. (A really cruel kid might have called her “Bieber,” but then the book would be instantly out of date.) Aviva is ready to change her name to Emily until her parents tell her why they chose that particular name. Even the youngest Jewish readers will probably guess the secret the moment Aviva’s parents start talking about her great-grandmother Ada, an immigrant from Russia who “studied the English newspaper every night to learn her ABCs” and sewed stitches “as fine as spider webs.” Stories about Ada run throughout the book—arguably, at least one story too many. The parents are reminded of a story every time they do something she did: sew on a button or pick up a book. The device is contrived and repetitive, but the stories are often moving and do lead finally to the information that Ada’s Hebrew name was Aviva. And Jatkowska’s illustrations are charming. They look like patchwork dolls, pieced together from items found around the house.

This book could have used a little trimming, but it’s clever enough to make kids curious about their own given names. (Picture book. 5-8) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**ON THE BALL**

Pinkney, Brian
Illustrated by the author
Disney-Hyperion (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2015
978-1-4847-2329-6

**MY NAME IS AVIVA**

Ray, Deborah Kogan
Illustrated by Jiangsun Jung
Charlesbridge (40 pp.)
978-1-58089-620-7

**THE IMPOSSIBLE VOYAGE OF KON-TIKI**

Newman, Lesléa
Illustrated by Jatkowska, Ag
Kar-Ben (32 pp.)
978-0-545-16669-0

**ZEN SOCKS**

Muth, Jon J.
Illustrated by the author
Scholastic (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 29, 2015
978-0-545-16669-0

Stillwater, the wise panda from Muth’s Zen picture books is back. Brother and sister Leo and Molly and their cat, Moss, have moved to a new neighborhood and find that their neighbor is a giant panda named Stillwater. Readers of Muth’s earlier books will be familiar with Stillwater’s serene grace as he delivers messages of life’s essence to young friends. In this book, filled with light-infused watercolors of uplifting hues, Stillwater teaches Molly, a dancer, the value of patience with his story of Banzo’s sword. The Zen story is encapsulated within the bigger story, set off by brushed-ink illustrations and ivory paper. When Leo visits Stillwater, wishing to play good-guy–bad-guy robots with him, Stillwater shows rather than tells what a bad guy is (by hogging all the cookies)—a graceful reminder to readers that no one is immune to selfishness. One day they all ride their bikes to the beach (the rather loose connection to the dancer-and-robot storyline is that they are all friends and do things together), where they discover starfish stranded as the tide goes out. As they begin to throw the seemingly endless starfish back into the water, they are rewarded at the end of the day by a beach empty of starfish and a sky filled with stars.

Lessons of patience, compassion, and sharing, delivered gently. (Author’s note) (Picture book. 4-10) (This review was originally published in the 06/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**ILLUS. BY THE AUTHOR**

Kirkus.com | Fall Preview Special Issue | Picture Books | Kirkus.com
Thor Heyerdahl’s 1947 voyage moved the dial from “impossible” to “possible,” but not to “probable,” and as the author herself admits in an afterword, there is still little credible evidence of any sustained westward migration. Nonetheless, the tale of that 4,300-nautical-mile journey makes a grand one. Ray’s prose describes how he sailed with his crew of five from Peru without escort through seas calm and wild, supplementing stored provisions with caught fish, braving months of sudden rogue waves and damaging storms on the way to a final shipwreck on a Polynesian reef. Ray uses watercolors to create soft-edged views of the raft and its small crew, varying her perspectives and her palette as much as possible to avoid potential monotony. One sunset image with the raft in the distance and a school of flying fish in the foreground is particularly effective. She heads her matter-of-fact narrative with quotes from Heyerdahl’s bestselling account on each page, closing with further commentary and a biographical note.

A low-key tribute to a now little-remembered expedition that is still capable of catching the imagination. (map, notes, resource lists) (Informational picture book. 7-9) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**AWAKE BEAUTIFUL CHILD**
Rosenthal, Amy Krouse
Illus. by Lam, Gracia
McSweeney’s (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Nov. 17, 2015
978-1-938073-92-2

An alphabetical look (of the first three letters) at childlike activities throughout the day.

Beginning with a morning stretch and ending with a flick of the bedroom light switch, readers follow various children in their daily routines. The entire text is composed of three-word phrases that begin with the consecutive letters A, B, and C. Some are simple lists: “Apples, Bananas, Cantaloupes” at the breakfast table, or “Ants, Butterflies, Caterpillars” during a walk. But others are beautiful reminders (“Always Be Curious”) or silly words of wisdom (“Avoid Blinking—Cheese!” during a photographic session). Each word is no doubt carefully chosen, but the illustrations perfectly capture the pull and tug of high philosophy and low humor (stepping in dog poo is the quintessential early-grade chuckle, after all). The boy’s voice captures gentle humor pervades this father-son tale in the nicest way. (Picture book. 4-9) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**WHEN DAD SHOWED ME THE UNIVERSE**
Stark, Ulf
Illus. by Eriksson, Eva
Translated by Marshall, Julia
Gecko Press (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2015
978-1-9272-7181-0

A small boy and his father take an evening walk in this Swedish import first published in 1998 but only now translated and published in the United States.

Dad thinks it’s time to show his son the universe. They put on warm socks and get provisions (chewing gum), then walk past the closing shops into the night air to a field the boy recognizes as a place where folks walk their dogs. The boy sees the universe in a snail, a blade of grass, a thistle, but his father wants him to look up. Stars! His father knows all their names and holds the boy up to see the ancient light from stars long gone—and steps into something left by a dog. “So how was the universe?” asks the boy’s mom. “It was beautiful,” he replies. “And funny.” The winsome illustrations perfectly capture the pull and tug of high and low humor (stepping in dog poo is the quintessential early-grade chuckle, after all). The boy’s voice captures gentle humor pervades this father-son tale in the nicest way. (Picture book. 4-9) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**MY DOG, BOB**
Torrey, Richard
Illus. by the author
Holiday House (32 pp.)
$16.95 | Sep. 1, 2015
978-0-8234-3386-5

A little boy narrates a story about his dog, Bob, who can do amazing things around the house but can’t accomplish standard dog tricks.

Bob is an unassuming sort, just a midsize, white dog with floppy ears and a big nose. His talents, however, are undeniable, as he can cook breakfast, drive the family to work and school, play golf, and help an archaeologist excavate a dinosaur bone. When the narrator meets a snobbish little girl in the park, her equally snobbish poodle shows off some standard dog tricks.

Bob can’t handle, such as fetching a stick and sitting on command. The snooty little girl declares her dog the winner of her self-styled contest and flounces off in search of someone else to impress. Bob apologizes for his shortcomings, the boy gives him a pat, and they head home to get something to eat—homemade pizza made by the talented dog. Though the story is short and...
understated, its gentle, ironic humor and quiet acceptance of individual strengths sends a powerful message. Not everyone has the same abilities, and sometimes one who is less than successful on the playground may be a star at home in the family constellation. Cartoon-style illustrations in watercolor and oil pencil use simple shapes and uncluttered backgrounds to effectively complement the restrained feeling of the succinct text.

Quiet and clever, just like Bob. (Picture book. 3-7) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

PUSSYCAT, PUSSYCAT
van Hout, Mies
Illus. by the author
Lemniscaat USA (32 pp.)
$19.95 | Oct. 1, 2015
978-1-935954-48-4

Colorful illustrations and simple nursery rhymes with an accompanying audio CD make up this picture book. On each double-page spread of this portrait-format picture book, colorful type tells a simple nursery rhyme, and the subject of the rhyme is illustrated with ample white space surrounding it. As a stand-alone picture book, it’s a bit rote, even if van Hout’s carefree, doodlelike illustrations about the centipede is delightfully silly. The last rhyme, about a on the playground may be a star at home in the family constellation. Cartoon-style illustrations in watercolor and oil pencil use simple shapes and uncluttered backgrounds to effectively complement the restrained feeling of the succinct text.

Quiet and clever, just like Bob. (Picture book. 3-7) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

B IS FOR BEAR
A Natural Alphabet
Viano, Hannah
Illus. by the author
Little Bigfoot/Sasquatch (32 pp.)
978-1-63217-039-2

Viano interprets the letters with dramatic paper cuttings in a sophisticated, artistic style.

Each page is bordered in black with stylized images that resemble poster art of the early 1900s, but they are crafted with a contemporary graphic style with striking results. The words chosen for the letters all relate to nature, as the subtitle suggests. Most of them will be familiar to young readers such as “clandellion,” “fawn,” “grass,” “lightning bug,” and “violet.” Pleasingly, K is for “kids,” underscoring the importance of the outdoors to child development. Viano’s liberal approach makes the typically difficult letters relatively easy: there is “Queen Anne’s lace,” “underground,” and “lynx” (for X). The top of each page cites a capital and lowercase letter, with the key word opposite and descriptive sentences running across the bottom that often offer tantalizing information at the end of the book, but unfortunately the centrally placed illustrations suffer from being bisected by the gutter. It’s not terrible, but it is visually distracting.

Lighthearted fun with a warm, musical touch. (Picture book/poetry. 2-6)

Empowering affirmations and playful illustrations will inspire both children and adults to slow down and strike a pose. (Picture book: 3-9) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

I AM YOGA
Verde, Susan
Illus. by Reynolds, Peter H.
Abrams (32 pp.)
$14.95 | Sep. 8, 2015
978-1-4197-1664-5

A young girl overwhelmed by her hectic world calms herself by practicing yoga. Drawing on her experience as a children’s yoga instructor, author Verde reunites with Reynolds in their third collaboration (You and Me, 2015, etc.). Verde approaches yoga as more than mere physical exercise. Written in first person, the book flows with a young girl as she shifts from turmoil to self-regulated calm through a series of poses. The girl begins with the grounding deep breaths of mountain pose and continues through a complete yoga sequence, ending it with a restful savasana (relaxation pose). Her confident declarations that accompany each pose connect her body’s movements with her inner emotions. Reynolds’ expressive yet soothing watercolors transform each pose beyond its physicality into a full mind-body experience. “I can touch the sky. I am so tall,” reads the text, while the girl, colored all in green, adopts the tree pose, flanked by real trees. The combination of Verde’s tranquil words and Reynolds’ playful interpretations will encourage young readers to mirror each pose before turning the page. Children will learn how yoga can be a tool to guide their emotions even when the outside world is beyond their control. An appendix illustrates the 16 poses from the book with detailed instructions that also include visualization exercises.

Rate this book with an A and an O for awesome and outstanding. (Alphabet book. 3-8) (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

The nature of art, the nature of transformation, and where all those lost items go are spun into the gold of philosophy and puckishness.

**Loula and Mister the Monster**

Villeneuve, Anne  
Illus. by the author  
Kids Can (32 pp.)  
$16.95 | Sep. 1, 2015  
978-1-77135-326-4  
Series: Loula

Loula fears Mama might have had it with their family’s drooling, wagging, lunging, gargantuan Great Dane, Mister.  
The little girl decides to refine the hound’s etiquette through a series of lessons, all of which go terribly (and predictably) awry. Draped in Papa’s necktie, Mister smashes plates, teacups, and saucers, splashes merrily in a burbling park fountain, and dashes through a museum chasing a squirrel—spewing spittle the whole time. Discouraged, Loula heads home, her longtime chauffeur and friend, Gilbert, at her side. Ink-and-watercolor illustrations convey the clumsy, constant movement of a loping, energetic dog. Action and motion stream through breezy, loose artwork: leashes stretch, tails and whiskers quiver, leaves flutter, statues...fall! While Mister’s bulging eyes and slapstick stances yield easy laughs, Villeneuve’s lines (subtly gestural and with varied weights and thicknesses) as well as her strategic placement of vignettes across stark, white spreads account for much of this book’s comedic success. Small readers will also find the aid of collegiality Gilbert offers little Loula immensely pleasing, as few adults work happily alongside children as unmitigated equals. But Mama and readers both know that Mister is no monster, and the real focus of her frustration, revealed on the final page, serves up a satisfying finishing laugh.

**Bad Pirate**

Winters, Kari-Lynn  
Illus. by Griffiths, Dean  
Pajama Press (32 pp.)  
$19.95 | Sep. 1, 2015  
978-1-9274-8571-2

Wicked smart pacing and playful art tell the tale of a pirate too doggone loyal for her own good.  
Capt. Barnacle Garrick may be the scurviest cur (literally—he’s a springer spaniel) to sail the seven seas, but his blue-eyed daughter Augusta is kind, considerate, and caring. In short, she’s a very bad pirate indeed. Disgusted—she’s more inclined to tuck her bunkmates in than to commit basic forms of piracy—her father admonishes her to “be saucy...bold....But most important, me sea pup, yez gots to be SELFISH!” Augusta tries by purloining a fellow shipmate’s peg leg, but when a squall and a torn mainsail mean almost certain sinking, the feisty sea pup teaches her father and his crew that sometimes it pays to be saucy, bold, and selfless. In a story so packed with piratical jargon and growls that even the most staid and sorry landlubbers will become salty dogs while reading it, it’s Griffiths’ art that takes the wave-swept narrative to another level. Augusta’s charm goes far, and each breed of canine is rendered with a loving hand. Even more delightful are the tiny details. From Augusta’s surreptitious carving of a new peg leg to Garrick’s battles with uniformed mice in an early vignette, young readers will see something new with each turn of the page.

Arrrrrqually the best piratical dogfight you’ll ever sink your teeth into. (Picture book. 4-6) (This review was originally published in the 07/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**Some Things I’ve Lost**

Young, Cybèle  
Illus. by the author  
Groundwood (32 pp.)  
978-1-55498-339-1  
978-1-55498-340-7 e-book

“Where there’s an end / there’s a beginning. / Things grow. / Things change.”  
Twelve figures are each placed singly on a white page: a change purse; Mom’s glasses; sister’s headphones. On the recto, which is always a foldout, is a simple description: a number (“Fig. 8”), the name of the object (“Guitar case”), a “last seen” note (“Hillcrest Park—birthday party”). Opening the foldout marks the beginning of the magic. A series of photographic images on the same white background show the transformation of the object into something rich and strange, if not always recognizable. A blue umbrella transmutes into a jellyfish in four steps. Dad’s messenger bag metamorphoses into a spiny sea creature. Amazingly, a set of keys and their ring become a tropical garden. Even more amazingly, each object in each multiple incarnation is made entirely of Japanese paper sculpture. All of them are displayed in a double-page spread at the end on a pale azure background, and the book closes with a photograph of the artist so readers can see how small these fabulous creations are. The nature of art, the nature of transformation, and where all those lost items go are spun into the gold of philosophy and puckishness.

Perhaps more an artist’s book than a children’s book but universally mesmerizing. (Picture book. 4-6) (This review was originally published in the 07/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)
THE CASE OF THE LONELY ONE
Allison, John
Illus. by the author
Oni Press (136 pp.)
978-1-62010-212-1
Series: Bad Machinery, 4

A group of students at a British school all become friends with a strange new boy who eats onions; one student suspects something odd's afoot and must discover the truth before it's too late.

Shauna, Lottie, and Mildred are all second-years at Griswals Grammar, ready to tackle a new term. This year, however, a new student—orange-haired, onion-eating Lem—has arrived, and despite his aloofness and strangeness, he's slowly winning over the student body. In fact, soon Mildred and Lottie have fallen under his spell. Shauna is instantly suspicious, since every student befriended by Lem identically affirms that Lem is a "right good laugh when you get to know him." She takes up her cause with a group of bespectacled loners, and suddenly Lem and his secrets might not be her biggest problem. This small-press charmer, based on an ongoing webcomic, is a stylish jumble of pop-culture references, sly humor, eye-catching characters, mystery—and, oddly enough, aliens. As the fourth volume in the series, the mystery itself stands alone well enough, but an abrupt and ambiguous ending may frustrate new readers who aren't already invested in the series.

Funny and clever, but most likely to only satisfy fans who have been with the gang since the beginning. (Graphic mystery/sci-fi. 12-16)
Bertolucci’s illustrations are nothing short of breathtaking, portraying both the beauty and destruction of nature.

LOVE: THE FOX

THE RAIN WIZARD
The Amazing, Mysterious, True Life of Charles Mallory Hatfield
Brinmer, Larry Dane
Calkins Creek/Boyds Mills (120 pp.)
978-1-62979-435-8 e-book

In December 1915, San Diego’s reservoirs were nearly empty, so the city turned to Charles Mallory Hatfield, whose skills at making rain were legendary.

Hatfield, who claimed no supernatural powers, had perfected a method of sending a concoction of evaporating chemicals into the atmosphere to make rain fall. The San Diego City Council contracted with Hatfield to fill the Morena Reservoir to overflowing, for which he would receive $10,000 if successful. A light drizzle quickly turned into torrents, resulting in flooded roads, washed-out bridges, burst dams, widespread property damage, and several fatalities. Blaming Hatfield for the disaster, the City Council refused to pay him. Hatfield was more than compensated for his lost fee by the publicity, and he continued his rainmaking work into the 1930s. When he died in 1958, Hatfield took his rainmaking chemical formula with him. His success in making rain remains a mystery. In plain English, Hatfield’s method of making rain were legendary.

Diego controversy. Readers will not find an explanation of how Hatfield acquired his knowledge of chemical processes or his methods of experimentation. The generously leaded text is set within wide margins and accompanied by copious archival illustrations; both decisions keep the relatively complex text accessible.

An engaging, intriguing story of a fascinating man. (author’s note, bibliography, source notes, index) (Biography. 9-12) (This review was originally published in the 06/15/15 issue of Kirkus)

THE BOYS IN THE BOAT
The True Story of an American Team’s Epic Journey to Win Gold at the 1936 Olympics
Brown, Daniel James
Viking (240 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 8, 2015
978-0-4514-7592-3

Adapting Brown’s bestselling work of the same title (2013), Mone streamlines the true story of nine young men from the University of Washington who, against all odds, won the gold medal in rowing at the 1936 Olympics.

The Husky Clipper was “a graceful needle of cedar and spruce,” a racing shell manned by an eight-oar crew very different from their Ivy League counterparts. They were the sons of farmers, loggers, and fishermen, hardy young men fully up to the rigors of training, each committed “to being part of something larger and more powerful and more important than himself.” Against the backdrop of the Great Depression and the rise of Nazi Germany, the inspiring tale of young Joe Rantz and his teammates is also about the many people who helped to make them heroes—the coaches, parents, fundraisers, girlfriends, and boat builders. Offering a model of masterful nonfiction writing, Brown expertly balances the leisurely pacing of the protagonists’ back stories with the exciting race scenes, related with concrete nouns, lively verbs, and short sentences, selected and adapted for this edition by Mone. Many photographs, an easy-to-read timeline, and notes on “The Art of Rowing,” complete with a diagram, add visual appeal.

A fine companion to Laura Hillenbrand’s Unbroken (2014), also about the 1936 Olympics and also adapted for young readers. (Nonfiction. 10-14) (This review was originally published in the 07/01/15 issue of Kirkus)

LOVE
The Fox
Brrémaud, Frédéric
Illus. by Bertolucci, Federico
Magnetic Press (80 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 15, 2015
978-1-942367-06-2 Series: Love, 2

In the midst of an unnamed wild, the seasons are changing from a blazingly rubicund autumn to a strikingly pallid winter. With a scar running vertically through one eye, a fox skulks along, hunting prey and avoiding other animals. How swiftly and completely and that the fox traverses in appears larger and more powerful and more important than himself. A one-eyed fox must fight its way through a dizzying array of dangers to return to what it holds dear.

In the midst of an unnamed wild, the seasons are changing from a blazingly rubicund autumn to a strikingly pallid winter. With a scar running vertically through one eye, a fox skulks along, hunting prey and avoiding other animals. However, when a volcano suddenly and violently explodes, the lone vulpine hero must now contend with the scorching lava as well as larger beasts, among them a killer whale, a Kodiak bear, and an albino Alaskan brown bear (according to the backmatter; it looks an awful lot like a polar bear). The crimson fox is continuously making its way to something or someone, and against all odds, with love as a driving force, it eventually reaches its destination. Without use of words, Brrémaud and Bertolucci evoke a visually arresting tale of survival and reunion. Bertolucci’s illustrations are nothing short of breathtaking, portraying both the beauty and destruction of nature. Although the book is gorgeous and the panels, breathlessly paced, readers must account for a dash of poetic license in a landscape that changes climate so swiftly and completely and that the fox traverses in apparently so little time. This fallacy aside, this is a visceral offering whose beauty can’t help but dazzle.

Visually lavish and unforgettable. (Graphic adventure. 6-11)
I DON’T KNOW HOW THE STORY ENDS
Cheaney, J.B.
Sourcebooks Jabberwocky (288 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-1-4926-0944-5

The early days of cinema change a young girl’s perspective on war. To escape the Seattle rain and the gloom caused by her physician father’s departure to serve in World War I, 12-year-old Isobel’s mother packs the family (including 5-year-old sister Sylvie) off to visit Aunt Buzzy, who’s recently married and moved to a small California town called Hollywood. Buzzy’s stepson, Ranger, is obsessed with the town’s nascent film industry and quickly pulls Isobel, whom he tags for his leading lady, into a series of escapades, including nearly drowning Sylvie, impersonating a Boy Scout in a war bonds parade, and pretending to be a real movie extra, all so he can create a movie that will impress his favorite director. Isobel is intrigued by the way film allows stories to be created from small scenes shot out of order; she begins to love the art of moviemaking. When her father returns home badly damaged, Ranger’s movie becomes a way to express the family’s love and grief. The novel is packed with cameos by Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, and Charlie Chaplin (most of whom will be unfamiliar to young readers but will nonetheless tantalize), fascinating tidbits about the early days of film, and a relentless series of action scenes. Set dressing and quick pace aside, as narrated by Isobel, the story relies on—and delivers—solid characterization to drive it forward.

Impressive on all fronts. (Historical fiction. 8-12)

THE ASTOUNDING BROCCOLI BOY
Cottrell Boyce, Frank
Walden Pond Press/HarperCollins
(384 pp.)
Sep. 8, 2015
978-0-06-240017-8
978-0-06-240020-8 e-book
978-0-06-241497-7 PLB

Not even Rory Rooney’s mum’s book Don’t Be Scared, Be Prepared can ready her son for the sandwich-squashing, kickboxing bully “Grim” Komissky. Worse still, there’s not a word in the handbook about what to do when a student’s skin turns broccoli green on a school field trip to Wales. Rory is the puniest boy in year seven, so, sadly, he’s used to bullying. But he’s of Irish-Guyanan descent, with “dark normal” skin, and decidedly not accustomed to being green. When he finds himself in the isolation ward under scientific scrutiny in London’s Woolpit Royal Teaching Hospital, he suspects that due to his newly minted “200 percent brain” he might suddenly be a superhero like the Green Lantern, an
agreeable fantasy marred only by the fact that his archenemy Grim is also green...and locked up with him. The slow-growing friendship of the “Broccoli Boys” (who repeatedly escape at night and roam the London streets in hypoallergenic pajamas to wreak havoc or right wrongs) is both hilarious and touching. The snappy dialogue, gorilla encounter, truck theft, and take-charge girl sidekick named Koko Kwok keep it hopping.

Cottrell Boyce, of Millions (2004), mocks neurotic adults, the quinoa craze, and media fearmongering in this funny, sentimental, thematic smorgasbord of a novel that serves up equal helpings of satire and compassion. (afterword) (Fiction. 9-14) (This review was originally published in the 07/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

Below-average middle schoolers Jonathan and Shelley have one ability that makes them, well, not stand out but rather blend in: they are utterly unremarkable.

It is this quality that makes them ideal recruits for the top-secret League of Unexceptional Children, an organization of kid and teen spies dedicated to protecting national security. As recruiter Hammett explains, “You are right there in the world’s blind spot.” So it is that these preteens bravely answer the call of duty to find the culprit who has kidnapped the vice president of the United States and, with him, the code that could bring destruction to all, no matter how dull or exceptional. With this promising premise, Daneshvari delivers hilarious shenanigans and moments of verbal delight, as when giving a very specific order to a fast-food cashier (“a double dog with a side of mustard, two sides of relish, a can of diet Fanta, fourteen packets of ketchup, two straws, and seven napkins”) yields the protagonists entry to an oversized fridge, pushing on the back of which allows them into the league’s HQ; as Shelley puts it, “It’s kind of like Narnia, only with a lot of pork products.” These moments will help readers past the occasional odd jerks of the plot that make the story at times difficult to follow.

This humorous new series is sure to appeal to fans of Daneshvari and other lovers of the ludicrous. (Adventure. 8-12) (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)
The text happily borrows familiar genre elements but wraps them in an entirely fresh package.

**THE GIRL WHO COULD NOT DREAM**

**MY NAME IS RIVER**

Downer, Ann
Twenty-First Century/Lerner (88 pp.)
$33.32 PLB | Sep. 1, 2015
978-1-4677-3739-5

Defining intelligence as “the ability to benefit and learn from experience and to apply that information to new situations,” the author of *Elephant Talk* (2011) provides fascinating examples of mindfulness, memory, and learning in a wide variety of invertebrates from earthworms to dragonflies and spider wasps. She includes chapters on jumping spiders, octopuses, honey bees and paper wasps, Argentine ants, mantis shrimps, box jellyfish and slime molds. Text boxes set off on yellow backgrounds offer fast facts about each species described and clear explanations of complicated concepts. Readers accustomed to the smooth storyline of narrative nonfiction may find Downer’s exposition demanding, but this fact-filled text has intriguing examples and surprising, memorable details. Picture Darwin’s family gathered together to play music to earthworms; slime molds mapping the best routes between U.S. urban areas; using the sound of a file on a wooden stake to attract fish bait (a method called “worm grunting”); experimenters playing tug of war with octopuses unwilling to give up their LEGO blocks. Ample backmatter supports the information, making this an ideal starting place for research on any one of these species.

Science facts more surprising than science fiction for teen readers. (endnotes, glossary, bibliography, further reading) (Nonfiction. 12-16) (This review was originally published in the 06/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**THE GIRL WHO COULD NOT DREAM**

Durst, Sarah Beth
Clarion (384 pp.)
$16.99 | Nov. 3, 2015
978-0-544-46497-1

Sophie, whose overprotective parents run a bookshop but have a risky, secret side business collecting and selling people’s dreams, suddenly faces, on her 12th birthday, all the dangers of the dream trade.

As the cover art suggests, this fantasy tale is cinematic and madcap. Because her parents want to keep their daughter as inconspicuous as possible, Sophie’s only friend has long been Monster—a cuddly animal rescued from a nightmare and possessed of soft fur, tentacles, and a penchant for cupcakes and self-improvement. Monster has to keep an even lower profile than Sophie, but an unexpected visitor exposes both of them to possible harm from an entity called the Night Watchmen. Also, Sophie’s marginal involvement with certain classmates now endangers them as well. Sophie’s parents discuss the situation behind closed doors: “But what if the Watchmen—’Mom cut herself off, then said loudly and clearly, ’Sophie and Monster,
if you are up there listening at the door, I will revoke all book privileges so fast, you will have whiplash.’ ” With similar humor throughout, the book lets readers know that, however dire the situation, Sophie will be all right—but will Monster? Readers will not want to stop reading this quirky, fast-paced adventure until reaching its satisfactory, heartwarming conclusion. The text happily borrows familiar genre elements but wraps them in an entirely fresh package.

Funny, warm, and highly imaginative. (Fantasy. 8-12)

(This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

THE SLEEPER AND THE SPINDLE
Gaiman, Neil
Illus. by Riddell, Chris
Harper/HarperCollins (64 pp.)
978-0-06-239824-6

Is it fair to expect a masterpiece when Gaiman and Riddell work together? Probably.

The two men have collaborated on a number of books published in the U.K., to great success. The illustrations in Fortunately, the Milk are a marvel of draftsmanship, and Coraline and The Graveyard Book are considered classics. Other artists illustrated the books in the U.S., quite beautifully, but the British editions are objects of envy for many fans. This new collaboration is a spectacular art object. Almost every page is decorated with gold leaf. Even the page numbers have gold filigree. The story combines two fairy tales, and it contains two startling ideas. Snow White, after years in a sleeping spell, might not be affected by the enchantment placed on Sleeping Beauty. And, more important, after her adventures in the woods, Snow White might find sitting on a throne as dull as lying in a glass coffin. The villainess, unfortunately, distracts from those ideas. She’s just another sorceress in a fantasy book, one in a long line of evildoers who want youth and power—but this is a fairy tale, after all. The gorgeous, art nouveau-inspired black-and-white drawings, many of which seem to consciously echo such divergent talents as Arthur Rackham and Robert Lawson, however, are magnificent, and a few sentences describing sleepwalkers who speak in unison may haunt readers for years.

If this book isn’t quite a masterpiece, it’s certainly a treasure, and that’s more than enough. (Fairy tale. 11-18)

(This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)
marginalized group like Mimi and her interracial family—drag her back to Earth. Spar... never take you back now. We are your only family.” He escapes and discovers otherwise, but the trauma stays with him through flight to a refugee camp in Uganda and immigration to a strange, snowy country. In her large, paneled illustrations Dávila steers clear of explicit violence, using facial expressions to convey vividly the rebels’ brutality, the shock of their child captives, and the narrator’s emotional scars. His initial impression that North America’s young people seem preoccupied by trivial concerns ultimately broadens into a hopeful note as he goes on to become a speaker and activist. Further information about his work, plus a Q-and-A about child soldiers worldwide and annotated lists of organizations and other resources close this affecting but not strident call to action.

The visual element gives this memoir particular immediacy for audiences who “don’t understand what is happening right now, to kids just like them.” (Graphic memoir. 10-14) (This review was originally published in the 05/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

An ex-child soldier tells his horrifying tale, beginning with being kidnapped at the age of 5 and forced to kill his best friend. Graphic in format but not detail, co-author Chikwanine’s narrative begins with his arrival in Canada, then flashes back to the early 1990s and happy childhood days in the Democratic Republic of Congo. These quickly end in terror as a ragged band of militia snatch him up with schoolmates, blindfold him, put a gun in his hands, and cajole him into pulling the trigger. “Your family will never take you back now. We are your only family.” He escapes and discovers otherwise, but the trauma stays with him through flight to a refugee camp in Uganda and immigration to a strange, snowy country. In her large, paneled illustrations Dávila steers clear of explicit violence, using facial expressions to convey vividly the rebels’ brutality, the shock of their child captives, and the narrator’s emotional scars. His initial impression that North America’s young people seem preoccupied by trivial concerns ultimately broadens into a hopeful note as he goes on to become a speaker and activist. Further information about his work, plus a Q-and-A about child soldiers worldwide and annotated lists of organizations and other resources close this affecting but not strident call to action.

The visual element gives this memoir particular immediacy for audiences who “don’t understand what is happening right now, to kids just like them.” (Graphic memoir. 10-14) (This review was originally published in the 05/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

Easy to read and strong on sibling devotion, with frustratingly mixed messages about personal responsibility. (Verse fiction. 9-12) (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

This review was originally published in the 06/15/15 issue of Kirkus. (Glossary, pronunciation guide) (Verse/historical fiction. 8-12) (This review was originally published in the 05/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

HOUSE ARREST
Holt, K.A.
Chronicle (304 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-1-4521-3477-2

A boy works desperately to keep his sick little brother safe. Twelve-year-old Timothy has a probation officer, a court-appointed psychologist, and a yearlong sentence of house arrest. He also has a 9-month-old brother who breathes through a trach tube that frequently clogs. Heavy oxygen tanks and a suction machine as loud as a jackhammer are their everyday equipment. Timothy’s crime: charging $1,445 on a stolen credit card for a month of baby Levi’s medicine, which his mother can’t afford, especially since his father left. The text shows illness, poverty, and hunger to be awful but barely acknowledges the role of, for example, weak health insurance, odd considering the nature of Timothy’s crime. The family has nursing help but not 24/7; the only person home to do so. His court sentence requires keeping a journal; the premise that Holt’s straightforward free-verse poems are Timothy’s writing works well enough, though sometimes the verses read like immediate thoughts rather than postevent reflection. A sudden crisis at the climax forces Timothy into criminal action to save Levi’s life, but literally saving his brother from death doesn’t erase the whiff of textual indictment for lawbreaking. Even Mom equivocates, which readers may find grievelessly unjust.

Easy to read and strong on sibling devotion, with frustratingly mixed messages about personal responsibility. (Verse fiction. 9-12) (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

CLAYTON STONE,
AT YOUR SERVICE
Jones, Ena
Holiday House (192 pp.)
978-0-8234-3389-6
978-0-8234-3515-9 e-book

Thirty-six hours and one intercepted phone call from the president of the United States is all it takes for 12-year-old Clayton Stone to go from an average, lacrosse-playing seventh-grader to secret agent for the U.S. Special Service.

It turns out that his knack for covert operations shouldn’t come as a total surprise; as Clayton quickly discovers, it’s in his blood. Not only were his parents and grandfather Special Service agents, but his grandmother, as Clayton is shocked to discover, once headed up the entire organization. Now, with a
In his debut, Merritt shows both a knack for evocative phrasing and a deft hand at crafting flamboyantly icky monsters in creepy settings.

**THE DREADFUL FATE OF JONATHAN YORK**

In his debut, Merritt shows both a knack for evocative phrasing and a deft hand at crafting flamboyantly icky monsters in creepy settings.

senator’s wife and daughter kidnapped by the infamous “mall napper,” the president has reinstated her as chief and asked Clayton to help them crack the case. Juggling his top-secret life against school and athletic responsibilities isn’t easy; but it provides plenty of opportunities for action and fun. Though the mall-napper storyline is a bit thin, there are plenty of cool gadgets and action-packed predicaments to keep middle-grade readers entertained. However, what really makes this take on the kid-turned-spy story special is that it has a heart. At its core, this is a story about family. For Clayton, this means both the family he was born into and also his family of teammates.

Clayton’s endearing senses of loyalty to and responsibility for both family and friends is the undercurrent that gives this story depth and sets it apart from the rest. (Thriller. 8-12) (This review was originally published in the 06/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)
WHEN BOYS AND GIRLS ARE USED IN WAR

The first graphic novel in the CitizenKid™ collection, Child Soldier is the harrowing true story of Michel Chikwanine, forced into warfare in Central Africa at the age of 5.

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- This Child, Every Child
  - HCJ 978-1-55453-466-1 • $18.95
ebook available

CitizenKidCentral.com

KidsCanPress.com

We acknowledge the assistance of the OMDC Book Fund, an initiative of Ontario Media Development Corporation.
War Horse

Morpurgo returns to the World War I of his much-lauded War Horse in a beautifully crafted, multivoiced novel about the sinking of the Lusitania.

LISTEN TO THE MOON

Morpurgo, Michael

Feiwel & Friends (352 pp.)


978-1-250-04204-0

Enjoyably campy horror set in a small town with, plainly, dark secrets aplenty yet to discover. (Mystery/fantasy. 12-15) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

A devastating drought has every- one's nerves on edge, so when a new pastor arrives, pointing to unrepentant sinners as the cause of the drought, local resi- dents begin seeking whom to blame for their misfortunes. Judd, Shiloh's former abusive owner, is one of the easiest targets. So,

A SHILOH CHRISTMAS

Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds

Atheneum (256 pp.)


978-1-4814-4151-3

978-1-4814-4154-4 e-book

Series: Shiloh Quartet, 4

A new school year brings new friends, new blessings, and new tragedies for the beagle Shiloh and his family.

A devastating drought has everyone's nerves on edge, so when a new pastor arrives, pointing to unrepentant sinners as the cause of the drought, local residents begin seeking whom to blame for their misfortunes. Judd, Shiloh's former abusive owner, is one of the easiest targets. So,
Disguises and surprises reveal that what one sees is not always what is true.

THE MARVELS

Selznick, Brian
Illus. by the author
Scholastic (672 pp.)
$32.99 | Sep. 15, 2015
978-0-545-44868-0

In the final volume of a trilogy connected by theme, structural innovation, and exquisite visual storytelling, Selznick challenges readers to see.

Starting in 1766, the first portion unfolds in nearly 400 pages of pictures, rendered in pencil. A ship in shadows, a luminous angel, an abandoned baby in a basket—these are among the phenomena affecting five generations of London actors. Disguises and surprises reveal that what one sees is not always what is true. Fast-forwarding to the 1990s, the author describes in prose a runaway who peers longingly into a house (where scent, sound, setting, and the motto “You either see it or you don’t” transport visitors to 18th-century London), Selznick provides a sensory equivalent throughout his eloquent

THE HIRED GIRL

Schlitz, Laura Amy
Candlewick (400 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 8, 2015
978-0-7636-7818-0

Joan runs away from home at age 14 to become a hired girl in 1911.

Life with her unpleasant father and brothers on their farm in Pennsylvania is rough. Knowing she is not loved, she sees escape when she learns that the going rate for a hired girl in the city is $6 a week. She lands in Baltimore over her head and is rescued by the Rosenbachs. A large young woman, Joan presents herself as Janet, 18, impressing Mrs. Rosenbach with her love of reading, quickly making herself indispensable to the aging housekeeper, and landing a job as a hired girl and “Shabbos goy.” Joan is smart, hardworking, and naive, but most of all, she’s romantic, thanks in large part to all those novels. The Rosenbach’s thirty son David seems to love her both for her mind and—as an aspiring artist—her looks. “Tall and robust and wholesome looking. You’re like one of Michelangelo’s Sibyls—a grand, bareheaded creature.” Trouble ensues, but a happy ending awaits, with friendship and the awesome glint of an independent life. The diary format allows Joan’s romantic tendencies full rein, as well as narrative latitude for a few highly improbable scenarios and wildly silly passion.

Tons of period details, especially about clothing, round out a highly satisfying and smart breast-clutterer from this Newbery-winning author. (Historical fiction. 10-14) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

THE CASE OF THE SNACK SNATCHER

O’Donnell, Liam
Illus. by Grand, Aurélie
Owlkids Books (128 pp.)
$15.95 | Oct. 15, 2015
978-1-77147-069-8
Series: West Meadows Detectives, 1

His atypical brain helps an aspiring, autistic sleuth crack a case.

Asked to write an acrostic of his name, Myron can’t think of anything beyond the first word, “Mysteries.” Myron is autistic, he tells a girl in his new class for kids with special needs; it means his brain works differently. It makes his head buzz when he’s upset; it makes perfume and new situations overwhelming. It also makes him a persistent detective. Luckily, he encounters (Mystery. 7-9)

illust. by the author

Selznick provides a sensory equivalent throughout his eloquent

Disguises and surprises reveal that what one sees is not always what is true.

THE MARVELS

Acrostic: M.Y.O.R.N. (Mysteries)

When a fire destroys several homes, Marty and his family jump in to help all the victims, including Judd, rebuild their lives and their reputations. But a more difficult problem arises when Marty and his friend discover Rachel, one of the pastor’s daughters, locked up in the family’s toolshed. Marty’s parents must decide where the line between punishment and abuse lies. In the end, lessons from Judd’s painful past point the way for both parents and children alike. This artfully wrought story of restoration manages to be both hopeful as well as authentic. Shiloh’s move from abused pup to well-loved pet is an ideal metaphor for the plot’s various redemption stories, which culminate on Christmas day.

Perfect for longtime fans of the series and newcomers alike, this Christmas story can be enjoyed year-round. (Fiction. 8-12) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

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and provocative text. The poetry of Yeats and references to *The Winter’s Tale* add luster. Carefully crafted chapters pose puzzles and connect to the prior visual narrative. In poignant scenes, the teen learns about his uncle’s beloved, lost to AIDS but present through the truths of the home’s staged stories. A powerful visual epilogue weaves threads from both sections, and the final spread presents a heartening awakening to sight.

*Time, grief, forgiveness, and love intersect in epic theater celebrating mysteries of the heart and spirit.* (Notes) *(This review was originally published in the 07/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)*

**THE ODDS OF GETTING EVEN**

*Turnage, Sheila*

Kathy Dawson/Penguin (368 pp.)

$16.99 | Oct. 6, 2015

978-0-803-73961-1

Series: *Mo & Dale Mysteries, 3*

Folks from Tupelo Landing, North Carolina, lay on the colorful phrases thick as gum molasses in the wintertime, with character and personality as plentiful as okra at a Southern wake.

However, it’s no wake that brings together the whole town in this second follow-up to *Turnage’s* award-winning debut, *Three Times Lucky* (2012), it’s the trial of Tupelo’s century. And sixtysixth grader Mo LeBeau and her detecting partner, Dale Earnhardt Johnson III, are once again at the center of it all. Turnage continues to delight with her mix of homespun humor, well-plotted mystery, and delicious characterization. At 342 pages, the novel is longer than its two predecessors, but readers probably won’t notice. Lavender, Dale’s brother and Mo’s unknowing intended (in just seven more years), is in mortal danger, and Dale and Lavender’s no-good daddy, Macon, is on trial, so there’s more than enough to fill a book and keep the founding members of the Desperado Detective Agency occupied. The fun is in the telling, and Turnage’s telling shows alacrity as well as aplomb. The author gracefully weaves a laundry list of characters with a plot that has a lot of moving pieces, and she does it with charm and humor, hitting the sweet spot for young readers searching for more-complex tales but not ready to leave the silly behind.

*As always, Turnage’s tale is full of heart and perfect for reading on a front porch.* *(Mystery, 8-12)*

**A BLIND GUIDE TO STINKVILLE**

*Vrabel, Beth*

Sky Pony Press (288 pp.)

$16.99 | Oct. 6, 2015

978-1-63450-157-6

When Alice and her family move to Sinkville, South Carolina, the town’s nickname of Stinkville feels particularly apt. In Seattle, everyone accepted 12-year-old Alice’s albinism and blindness. Her best friend guided her through school, and her mother told her stories. In Stinkville, she doesn’t know anyone, her brother won’t guide her, and her mother’s depression worsens. As if that weren’t enough, her parents want her to attend the Addison School for the Blind. With trepidation and humor, Alice decides to “advocate for [herself]” and enter the Sinkville Success Stories essay contest. Her research leads her, white cane and (decidedly nonservice) dog in tow, to make friends with the townsfolk and peace with her visual impairment and family upheaval. Some subplots feel contrived, and some characters are stock—the kindly waitress who knows everyone’s orders, the whittling old man, the bully who hides her own vulnerability—but their effect is cozy. Most commendable is Vrabel’s focus on compromise and culture shock. Disorientation encompasses not only place and attitude, but also the rarely explored ambivalence of being disabled on a spectrum. Alice’s insistence that she’s “not that blind” rings true with both stubbornness and confusion as she avails herself of some tools while not needing others, in contrast to typically unambiguous portrayals.

*Readers who worry about fitting in—wherever that may be—will relate to Alice’s journey toward compromise and independence.* *(Fiction, 9-12) *(This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)*

**WHAT’S THE BUZZ? KEEPING BEES IN FLIGHT**

*Wilcox, Merrie-Ellen*

Orca (48 pp.)

$19.95 | Sep. 22, 2015

978-1-4598-0960-4

Series: *Orca Footprints*

Author and hobbyist beekeeper Wilcox presents a cheery introduction to honeybees and their wild cousins. Wilcox covers a lot of territory in a brief book, notably including quite a lot of information about bumblebees and other undomesticated bees as well as a healthy helping of facts about honeybees. From an overview that distinguishes between bees and wasps and then among types of bees and a bit of honeybee history, Wilcox moves on to bees as pollinators, both those used in commercial agriculture and specialist bees that focus on just certain types of blossoms, such as the squash bee. She covers bee behavior and roles, swarming, and...
THE STORY OF DIVA AND FLEA

Willems, Mo
Illus. by DiTerlizzi, Tony
Hyperion (80 pp.)
978-1-4847-2284-8

A large cat and a small dog strike up an unlikely friendship in this early chapter book.

Set in Paris—a setting charmingly brought to life in DiTerlizzi’s illustrations—the book introduces readers to Flea and Diva. Flea is a large cat who is also a flâneur: “someone (or somecat) who wanders the streets...of the city just to see what there is to see.” Flea’s flâneur-ing is how he chances to discover Diva, a very small dog who guards the courtyard of the grand apartment building where she lives. At first Diva is afraid of Flea (as she is most things) and yelps and runs away. This makes Flea laugh, and he visits the courtyard daily. Eventually Diva strikes up the courage to ask Flea if he enjoys hurting her feelings, and Flea feels ashamed. The two become friends. Clever plot twists are woven into the storyline, as is the occasional French word, including the chapter headings. Willems’ adroit storytelling is on display as Flea encourages Diva to try flâneur-ing herself and helps her overcome her fear of feet, while Diva encourages Flea to try indoor living complete with regular Breck-Fest—a novelty in Flea’s scavenging street life—and helps him overcome his fear of brooms.

The message—about the value of trying new experiences and learning to trust—lies lightly on this lively tale. (author’s note, illustrator’s note) (Animal fantasy. 6-8) (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)
SYMPHONY FOR THE CITY OF THE DEAD
Dmitri Shostakovich and the Siege of Leningrad
Anderson, M.T.
Candlewick (464 pp.)
$25.99 | Sep. 22, 2015
978-0-7636-6818-1

The epic tale of the siege of Leningrad and its native son, composer Dmitri Shostakovich, whose seventh symphony comforted, consoled, and rallied a population subjected to years of unspeakable suffering.

Anderson vividly chronicles the desperate lengths residents went to, including acts of cannibalism, to survive the Wehrmacht’s siege, a 3-year-long nightmare that left more than 1 million citizens dead. The richly layered narrative offers a keen-eyed portrait of life in the paranoid, ruthlessly vengeful Stalinist Soviet Union, its citizens living under a regime so capriciously evil that one could be heralded a hero of the motherland one day and condemned as a traitor the next. The storytelling is captivating, describing how Shostakovich began composing the symphony under relentless bombardment in Leningrad and later finished it in Moscow, its triumphant performance in Leningrad during the siege, and how it rallied worldwide sympathy for Russia’s plight. Music is at the heart of the story. As Anderson writes in the prologue, “it is a story about the power of music and its meanings,” and he communicates them with seeming effortlessness in this brilliantly written, impeccably researched tour de force.

A triumphant story of bravery and defiance that will shock and inspire. (photos, author’s note, sources notes, bibliography, index) (Biography. 14 & up) (This review was originally published in the 07/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)
FROM NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR ELEANOR HERMAN COMES BOOK 1 OF THE EPIC YA SERIES, BLOOD OF GODS AND ROYALS

“FANTASY JUST THE WAY I LIKE IT.”
—Cinda Williams Chima, New York Times bestselling author of The Seven Realms series

“Herman [puts] the ‘epic’ in epic fantasy!”
—Maria V. Snyder, New York Times bestselling author of The Study Series

“Reminds [me] of Outlander.”
—Anne Allin, Lake Forest Book Store

“This could easily be the next big saga.”
—Jackie Blem, The Tattered Cover Bookstore

“It won’t let go until the very end.”
—Rachel, Fiktshun Blog

“READERS WHO LOVE MYTH AND MAGIC WILL DEVOUR IT!”
—Alex Flinn, #1 New York Times bestselling author of Beastly

“A richly detailed world.”
—Amy Ewing, author of The Jewel

“Reading this title is a ton of fun!”
—VOYA

“Action and fantasy lovers will gobble it up.”
—School Library Journal

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Refreshingly, the author takes the racial difference as a matter of course, not a literary public-service announcement about interracial relationships.

**THE MASKED TRUTH**

*Armstrong, Kelley*

 Doubleday Canada/Random House Canada (984 pp.)


 Book review: 

 A weekend therapy camp becomes a living nightmare for a group of troubled teenagers when it is taken hostage by masked gunmen.

 Riley Vasquez has suffered from PTSD since the parents of a young girl she was babysitting were brutally gunned down in their home while Riley hid upstairs with the child. Max, recently diagnosed with schizophrenia, is acutely aware that he cannot always trust that his subjective experience matches reality. The two become each other’s best hope for survival as the violence and chaos progressively escalate. The novel begins with a punch of adrenaline, and the pace rarely slows as Riley and Max race to unravel who is truly behind the murderous plot. As they struggle to stay alive, they also grapple with their own psychological conflicts, revealed largely from Riley’s first-person point of view and occasionally from Max’s third-person perspective. The violence in this thriller is not for the faint of heart; there is a substantial body count by the story’s end. However, the dry wit and gentle compassion exchanged between the two protagonists help to keep the tension from becoming overwhelming. Riley’s trauma and Max’s mental illness make them fragile, but the teens are not broken. In each other they find the understanding and the strength they need to survive.

 Action-packed suspense from beginning to end. * (Thriller. 14-18) (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**FEMME**

*Armstrong, Kelley*

 Doubleday Canada/Random House Canada (984 pp.)


 Book review: 

 The novel isn’t a treatise about queer identities, so it doesn’t offer an answer on what this complicated concept means. But it’s a great introduction to how gender identity means. But it’s a great introduction to how gender identity can be a segue for a love that, even in 2015, cannot speak its name. * (Fiction. 14-17) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**UNGODLY**

*Blake, Kendare*

 Tor (368 pp.)

 $17.99 | Sep. 22, 2015

 Series: Goddess War, 3

 Book review: 

 The Goddess War trilogy concludes. It isn’t tidy, but everything resolves in this final act for the Greek gods, led by Athena with help from Hermes, Calypso, Ares, and Aphrodite, who are all dying of maladies appropriate to their individual natures. Heroic mortals Cassandra, Hector, Odysseus, and Andromache have been reincarnated as modern teenagers—all of whom Achilles is bent on destroying, as are other enemies. In *Mortal Gods* (2014), the group broke up when they attacked Olympus. Now three small groups travel independently, still trying to find the cause of their imminent mortality. With help from Thanatos, the god of death, they finally discover who is behind it all. Like Rick Riordan before her, Blake has clearly had a good time modernizing the gods and heroes, but the difficulty in the imaginative series lies in the too-large cast. Given mostly equal weight, the characters banter and quip their ways through their adventures, each speaking in much the same modern and rather cynical voice. While readers can care about them, especially Athena and Hermes, the cast is simply too numerous and the threat, too abstract for a strong focus. Still, readers can enjoy the journey and the hip dialogue, punctuated by a few brief fights.

 Nevertheless, it’s an above-average addition to the updated-mythology genre and a satisfying conclusion for the series’ fans. * (Paranormal adventure. 12-18) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**FEMME**

*Armstrong, Kelley*

 Doubleday Canada/Random House Canada (984 pp.)


 Book review: 

 Refreshingly, the author takes their racial difference as a matter of course, not a literary public-service announcement about interracial relationships. Nor does she frame Sofie’s changing views on her shifting relationships with Paul, Clea, and even her mom with heavy-handedness: Sofie’s shift regarding her present love and future life come from a healing touch, a clarifying word, and some tough conversations.

 The novel isn’t a treatise about queer identities, so it doesn’t offer an answer on what this complicated concept means. But it’s a great introduction to how gender identity can be a segue for a love that, even in 2015, cannot speak its name. * (Fiction. 14-17) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**UNGODLY**

*Blake, Kendare*

 Tor (368 pp.)

 $17.99 | Sep. 22, 2015

 Series: Goddess War, 3

 Book review: 

 The Goddess War trilogy concludes. It isn’t tidy, but everything resolves in this final act for the Greek gods, led by Athena with help from Hermes, Calypso, Ares, and Aphrodite, who are all dying of maladies appropriate to their individual natures. Heroic mortals Cassandra, Hector, Odysseus, and Andromache have been reincarnated as modern teenagers—all of whom Achilles is bent on destroying, as are other enemies. In *Mortal Gods* (2014), the group broke up when they attacked Olympus. Now three small groups travel independently, still trying to find the cause of their imminent mortality. With help from Thanatos, the god of death, they finally discover who is behind it all. Like Rick Riordan before her, Blake has clearly had a good time modernizing the gods and heroes, but the difficulty in the imaginative series lies in the too-large cast. Given mostly equal weight, the characters banter and quip their ways through their adventures, each speaking in much the same modern and rather cynical voice. While readers can care about them, especially Athena and Hermes, the cast is simply too numerous and the threat, too abstract for a strong focus. Still, readers can enjoy the journey and the hip dialogue, punctuated by a few brief fights.

Nevertheless, it’s an above-average addition to the updated-mythology genre and a satisfying conclusion for the series’ fans. * (Paranormal adventure. 12-18) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**FEMME**

*Armstrong, Kelley*

 Doubleday Canada/Random House Canada (984 pp.)


 Book review: 

 Refreshingly, the author takes their racial difference as a matter of course, not a literary public-service announcement about interracial relationships. Nor does she frame Sofie’s changing views on her shifting relationships with Paul, Clea, and even her mom with heavy-handedness: Sofie’s shift regarding her present love and future life come from a healing touch, a clarifying word, and some tough conversations.

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Nevertheless, it’s an above-average addition to the updated-mythology genre and a satisfying conclusion for the series’ fans. * (Paranormal adventure. 12-18) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)
Rory narrates the first half of the book and Lula, the second, and both voices are crisply and intimately drawn. Minor characters are equally vibrant.

**Weird Girl and What’s His Name**

**AN INHERITANCE OF ASHES**
Bobet, Leah
Clarion (400 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-0-544-28111-0

When a supernatural war reaches her farm, Hallie fights to defend her land while struggling with familial estrangement.

The elder sibling always inherits Roadstead Farm, so despite a surprising will left by her late father stating that Hallie and her older sister, Marthe, each own half, Hallie lives with the constant fear that she’ll be kicked out. Recent times are especially upsetting. Although the local men marched to war against the Wicked God Southward and returned victorious, they came home wounded and damaged. It turns out the peculiar war isn’t finished after all: Twisted Things—the Wicked God’s hybrid animal-monsters that scorch and smoke against anything they touch, even air—fall out of the sky to land on Roadstead Farm. Bobet tenderly braids together an enigmatic hired man, a neighbor family sharing the warmth that Hallie and Marthe have lost with each other, and an agricultural setting that at first appears fictional but emerges as a post-apocalyptic North America in which cities fell and machines “went dark.” The story’s deep and sobering core is about family, blame, misunderstanding, and the nature of home. Despite the clear possibility of utter destruction, the pace of Hallie’s narration is unhurried and reflective rather than speedy or suspenseful. A marriage between two men is organic and unremarked-upon. Other things in common: their outcast status and their love of the 1990s paranormal TV series The X-Files.

The X-Files, the details of which both Lula and Rory lovingly recount, provides a strong common language and set of symbols throughout.

Carefully and subtly imagined. (Fiction. 14-18) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

**TRAIL OF THE DEAD**
Bruchac, Joseph
Tu Books (400 pp.)
$19.95 | Oct. 1, 2015
978-1-62014-261-5
Series: Killer of Enemies, 2

In Volume 2 of this post-apocalyptic series, Lozen leads survivors of the insurrection against Haven’s technically augmented human rulers through gemod-infested wilderness to the hidden valley her Apache family once called home—it doesn’t go as planned.

As Lozen’s powers to read the now-unwired world around her have grown, so have the responsibilities and stresses of leadership. Her companions try to protect her, but it’s a lonely journey. Even as she senses the resourceful, implacable enemy pursuing them and closing in, her past acts and memories of those she dispatched—animal, genetically modified, and human alike—distract and weaken Lozen. Her Chiricahua heritage and mother’s guidance help Lozen resist, yet her sickness grows. To unravel and heal her PTSD requires confronting the toll that killing takes on warriors, however noble their motives or those of the leaders who’ve ordered it. Death-dealing has given her enemy superpower strength. Lozen’s own powerful allies include Coyote (though tricksters bear watching) and a small Lakota group with sentient gemod horses. Superheroes rarely obsess over the beings—evil or merely dispensable—they encounter and dispatch before moving on to the next challenge. Bruchac’s focus on these consequences adds welcome emotional depth to Lozen and to the story itself, while her search for healing and wholeness highlights the strengths of a cultural heritage that is up to the challenge.

This second act offering deeper characterization and resonant themes enriches an already compelling tale. (Post-apocalyptic fantasy. 12-18) (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

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In a small town in North Carolina, a close friendship between two eccentric high schoolers breaks apart, leaving a rift.

Lula and Rory have always had two things in common: their outcast status and their love of the 1990s paranormal TV series The X-Files. Rory is generally overlooked by his classmates. Lula’s “weird girl” moniker comes from her being both bookish and outspoken and taking after her equally headstrong grandfather. Rory who is out to Lula as gay, nevertheless keeps secret his illicit relationship with his middle-aged boss, Andy, an equivocal divorcé who continually deflects Rory’s questions about their future. One night, after one of Rory and Andy’s many fights, Lula discovers the relationship and confronts Rory. Later that night, she disappears. The void left by Lula’s disappearance is palpable and leads both estranged friends down surprising paths. Rory narrates the first half of the book and Lula, the second, and both voices are crisply and intimately drawn. Minor characters are equally vibrant, particularly Walter, Lula’s rugged but kind stepfather, and Seth, the school’s unexpectedly wholesome and gentle quarterback. The X-Files, the details of which both Lula and Rory lovingly recount, provides a strong common language and set of symbols throughout.

Carefully and subtly imagined. (Fiction. 14-18) (This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)
VIVIAN APPLE NEEDS A MIRACLE
Coyle, Katie
HMH Books (304 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2015
978-0-544-39042-3

Vivian Apple survived one Rapture in Vivian Apple at the End of the World (2015); now, can she survive a second?
In a not-too-distant America in which the effects of climate change are obvious and palpable, the Earth is in a slow, foreseeable decline. Self-proclaimed prophet (and largely unstable) Beaton Frick and his corporate sponsor, the Church of America, gave the country hope by promising its Believers would be Raptured. Now it’s been thrust into zealous bigotry that thrives on oppression and capitalism since only a small number have been taken. Vivian and her best friend, Harp, weathered the Rapture and no longer believe their families have ascended to heaven, though they still seek answers to lingering questions. When the Church predicts a second Rapture, the country goes into a religious frenzy. Vivian, Harp, Viv’s boyfriend, Peter, and Vivian’s newly discovered family members seize their chance to take down the Church and expose its sinister motives, but taking down a corporation can prove difficult when all of America is searching for you. This genre-bending story has elements for every reader: a realistic world with a healthy smattering of sci-fi and romance, along with liberal dashes of humor and satire. Coyle adeptly handles characterization is uneven (Lucas is a cipher, while Sophie’s no-nonsense grandmother steals every scene she is in), Farish spins an atmospheric plot with lyrical language.

Readers willing to take their time will enjoy this earnest cross-cultural meditation on love and family. (Fiction. 13-17)

WILLFUL MACHINES
Floreen, Tim
Simon Pulse/Simon & Schuster (368 pp.)
978-1-4814-3277-1
978-1-4814-3279-5 e-book

Same-sex dating is tricky when your dad is a right-wing political figure. Then there’s that whole robot-fueled terrorist attack thing threatening to directly strike at any second.
In the not-so-distant future, robotics enthusiast Lee Fisher is the closeted son of the ultra-conservative U.S. president. With only one kiss under his belt, Lee has earned his nickname, Walk-In (as in closet). His father has a strict moral agenda to steer the country back to ancient ideals, proselytizing the dangers of technology; indeed, Lee’s mother was murdered by an “artificially conscious” robot named Charlotte who is now plotting a terrorist attack. Lee, tailed by the Secret Service and scrutinized by the media, wants to keep a low profile. When svelte, charismatic, Chilean Nico Medina arrives at Lee’s stuffy prep school, the stakes change. Lee decides to explore romance even if Nico might not be who he says he is—and even if Charlotte has Lee in her cross hairs. Many au courant topics are challenged: equal rights, conservative closed-mindedness, terrorism, global acceptance of same-sex couples, the stickiness of coming out. From a first-person perspective, Lee fumbles from self-deprecation to self-confidence. As varied as his opinions are of himself, so too is the landscape, mixing technology with gothic settings à la Poe and Stoker.

Gothic, gadget-y, gay: a socially conscious sci-fi thriller to shelve between The Terminator and Romeo and Juliet. (Science fiction. 12-17) (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)
WHAT WE SAW
Hartzler, Aaron
HarperTeen (336 pp.)
978-0-06-233874-7
978-0-06-233876-1 e-book

In a fictional analog of the 2012 Steubenville, Ohio, rape case, allegations of gang-rape at a high school party expose a small town’s ugly truths.

Star basketballer John Doone’s party inspires soccer player Kate and her childhood friend Ben to admit their long-held feelings for each other. The party also—if cheerleader Stacey Stallard is to be believed—saw several prominent members of the basketball team rape Stacey while she was incapacitated. The arrests of Doone and three other boys in the cafeteria spark both a media frenzy and a schoolwide rally to defend the alleged rapists. Ben stands up against the worst of his teammates’ behavior at school, but as Kate’s romance with him deepens, so does her need to know the truth. Kate, who listens more than she talks, makes an ideal narrator, observing her friends’ dismissals of Stacey’s story with increasing uncertainty. Even minor characters here are carefully conceived, and every bit of dialogue and social media activity is chillingly note-perfect. Classroom scenes and conversations offer frameworks for understanding what has happened and why, but the touch is so light and the narrative voice so strong that even a two-page passage breaking down the sexism in Grease! avoids seeming didactic.

A powerful tale of betrayal and a vital primer on rape culture. (Fiction. 14-18) (This review was originally published in the 06/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

JUNIORS
Hemmings, Kauí Hart
Putnam (320 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 22, 2015
978-0-399-17360-8

Moving to Hawaii and enrolling at prestigious Punahou midyear, Lea feels isolated and, despite her island roots, uncertain where she fits in the complex cultural mosaic; everything changes when her mother, Ali, accepts Eddie and Melanie West’s offer of their guesthouse in upscale Kahala. Lea misses easygoing, windward Oahu, where her longtime summermate friend, Danny, Punahou senior and, like her, part-Hawaiian, lives, but it’s hard to argue with free housing—school fees eat a big chunk of her mother’s TV-acting income. As her friendship evolves with the Wests’ kids, Will and Whitney, also at Punahou, Lea benefits from Whitney’s status at school, but she’s unsettled by Whitney’s rapport with Danny—and unbalanced by her own attraction to Will, who has a girlfriend. Eddie, Ali’s old flame, takes a perplexing interest in Lea, while Melanie makes adroit social use of Ali’s celebrity, dragging her to parties and wangling access to her co-stars. As in The Descendants (2007), Hemmings turns her plot on intergenerational family complexities and contradictions, secrets and revelations. Appealing and volatile, Lea’s quintessential teen, by turns hypersensitive and hypercritical, impulsive and cautious, insightful and clueless, Hawaii, Hemmings’ closely observed home turf, is more than interesting wallpaper; details of island life (including tensions among natives and newcomers, locals and vacationers) resonate with theme and plot.

Wryly funny, generous-hearted, garnished with sun, surfing, and shave ice—a genuinely literary beach read. (Fiction. 14 & up) (This review was originally published in the 07/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

LEGACY OF KINGS
Herman, Eleanor
Harlequin Teen (464 pp.)
978-0-373-21172-2

Herman, best known for nonfiction about what royalty get up to in (and out of) the bedroom (Sex with Kings, 2004, etc.), changes direction to enter the teen-cross-over field with straight-up historical fantasy.

Drawing on Alexander of Macedon and throwing in some additional magic and mayhem, Herman has created an ensemble cast of teens poised to conquer or be conquered: historical figures Alexander, Hephaestion, and Cynane, original characters Katerina, Jacob, and Zofia. Unsurprisingly, things start slowly, with a large number of people to put in place and a world to build, but once most characters are in Alexander’s Pella (other than Persian Zofia), the plot starts crackling: Alexander’s mother, Queen Olympias, is evil; his half sister Cynane is not much better, seducing Heph to break up a friendship and cast a spell of power. Country girl Katerina has unexposed power and strength, and country boy Jacob finds himself allied with the egotistical, zealous, and thoroughly unpleasant Aesarian lords, Macedon’s most immediate enemy. Mixed with the plot and counterplot are genuinely sexy (though graphically tame) scenes, plenty of historical-fact-dropping (only occasionally obvious), and hints that magic is waking up in the world after a long dormancy.

Both thoroughly researched and absolutely modern, this harkens back to the slightly soapy but still reasonably intelligent mass-market historicals of an earlier era, updated just right for today’s audience. (author’s note, author Q-and-A, discussion questions) (Historical fantasy. 14 & up) (This review was originally published in the 06/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)
The design’s creative visuals take advantage of the nontraditional format, which gracefully juggles document types, foreshadowing, clues, voices, and characters.

**ILLUMINAE**

Kaufman, Amie & Kristoff, Jay
Knopf (608 pp.)
Oct. 20, 2015
978-0-553-49911-7
978-0-553-49912-4 e-book
Series: Illuminae Files, 1

In the wake of an interstellar incident, a post-mortem dossier comprising interview transcripts, memos, instant-messaging transcripts, diary entries, and more is assembled in this mammoth series opener.

Teenage colonists and exes Kady’s and Ezra’s lives are rocked by the 275 assault on the Wallace/Ulyanov Consortium’s illegal mining colony by their corporate rival, BeiTech Industries. They are among the lucky ones who manage to evacuate—Kady to the science vessel Hypatia and Ezra to the United Terran Authority’s battlecarrier Alexander. The latter escorts both Hypatia and the freighter Copernicus in a monthslong race to safety while pursued by a BeiTech dreadnought, one likely to win should the ships engage again. Ezra’s recruited as a fighter pilot. Kady avoids conscription by flunking tests and highlighting her defiant personality, which allows her freedom to hack the ships. What she discovers disturbs her and leads her to communicate with Ezra again—both for more information and because of their unfinished business. The two teenagers—a focus of the dossier due to their sleuthing—share and uncover disturbing information about an incident with Copernicus, the damage sustained by Alexander’s artificial intelligence system, and a terrifying virus. The design’s creative visuals take advantage of the nontraditional format, which gracefully juggles document types, foreshadowing, clues, voices, and characters. As the characters’ time runs out, the story ambushes readers with surprises. The account completes the incident’s history but not its fallout.

**Ambitious, heartbreaking, and out-of-this-world awesome. (Science fiction. 13 & up)** *(This review was originally published in the 07/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)*

**EDGE**

Collected Stories
Kerr, M.E.
Open Road Integrated Media (200 pp.)
Sep. 15, 2015
978-1-5040-0991-1
978-1-5040-0989-8 e-book

Family, honesty, and status emerge as themes in a collection of prolific author Kerr’s short stories for teens.

A girl’s ne’er-do-well adopted brother returns to her as a ghost. A Holocaust survivor understands her lesbian granddaughter better than the girl’s mother fears. A school outcast visits an inmate at the town prison, pretending to be his son, and thinks he’s lucked into a fortune. Most stories here were originally published in the 1990s, but despite occasional dated preoccupations, the subject matter still feels fresh and the telling, crisp. Each piece is tautly constructed and economical, the longest clocking in at 16 pages. A couple are gently speculative, like wry opener “Do You Want My Opinion?” in which kissing and sex are engaged in casually, but philosophical conversation is intimate and risqué. Most, however, draw out subtle, everyday conflicts and experiences. As it’s been many years since Kerr has written actively for teens, more introductory material than the current plot-based teasers would have provided valuable context for readers new to her work. A biographical note at the end, however, complete with black-and-white photographs, gives readers background on Kerr’s life, career, and multiple pseudonyms.

**Expertly crafted, with enduring relevance. (Short stories. 12-18)** *(This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)*
Calvin’s voice, bewildered, frustrated, sometimes tragic, but always determined and surprisingly insightful, provides counterpoint to alter ego Hobbes.

**HUNTER**
Lackey, Mercedes
Hyperion (384 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2015
978-0-374-38073-1

Joyeaux Charmand is a young Hunter, chosen from her village to join the Hunter corps of Apex, protecting its Cits from the Othersiders—a fantastical, menacing creatures—and also protecting the secrets and people of her village back home.

Joyeaux has the arduous task of figuring out the rules of her new environment while showing that she is worthy of her position. She also discovers that there will be cameras almost every step of the way, televising her journey to millions of eager fans. Before she even arrives, her skills are put to the test: Othersiders are breaking barriers thought to be impenetrable and using tactics that they were unknown to have. Even worse, someone or something is helping them, and Joyeaux decides to try to find the source. Armed with wit as quick as her reflexes, her magic, and her equally enchanting Hounds, Joyeaux embarks on a journey that sets her questioning the motives of every person she comes in contact with as well as the larger system that was built to keep people protected. Lackey builds this magically post-apocalyptic world briskly: some 250 years after the nuclear catastrophe that caused the pole-reversing Diseray, bits and pieces of our Earth, both geographical and cultural, remain. Joyeaux’s narration is spellbinding, the prose easily balancing the technology of the future with the traditions of the past.

**CALVIN**
Leavitt, Martine
Margaret Ferguson/Farrar, Straus & Giroux (192 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 17, 2015
978-0-374-38073-1

Calvin’s personality seems to have been destined: he was born on the day comic strip “Calvin and Hobbes” ended, his grandfather gave the infant a Hobbes-like tiger toy that was his constant childhood companion, and his best (and only) friend was always Susie.

But now important senior-year assignments are going undone, Susie has abandoned him for more popular kids, and suddenly Calvin is convinced that Hobbes is right there with him. It’s schizophrenia. Calvin is placed on a locked ward for treatment. He decides his last, best hope is to go on a dangerous pilgrimage—to hike all the way across frozen Lake Erie from his Canadian home to Cleveland, where the comic-strip creator lives. Watterson could, perhaps, save him if he’d just agree to write one last comic strip featuring a healthy Calvin and no Hobbes. Susie, loyal still in spite of her previous behavior, accompanies him. The evolving relationship between the two shines a light on Calvin’s unbroken soul. Hobbes’ biting commentary keeps Calvin grounded enough to make most things work, as Calvin’s voice, bewildered, frustrated, sometimes tragic, but always determined and surprisingly insightful, provides counterpoint to alter ego Hobbes.

Equal parts coming-of-age tale, survival adventure, and love story, this outstanding novel also sensitively deals with an uncommon but very real teen issue, making it far more than the sum of its parts. (Fiction. 12-18)

**DREAM THINGS TRUE**
Marquardt, Marie
St. Martin’s Griffin (336 pp.)
978-1-250-07045-6 | 978-1-4668-8024-5 e-book

Alma and Evan are teenagers living drastically different versions of the American dream in the southern United States. Opportunity is handed to Evan, White, wealthy, and the nephew of a U.S. senator, he wants for little. However, appearances matter: the script of who he will become is written largely by what his family expects. Alma is an extremely bright student with plenty of potential, but as an undocumented immigrant, her options for life beyond high school are limited. As the unlikely pair falls in love, immigration authorities begin raiding their small Georgia town, arresting and deporting many people in Alma’s community—even her family. Various aspects of undocumented immigration are explored: the economic factors influencing the decision to come to the United States, the often harrowing journey, and the political factors that influence policy. However, the lack of nuance in the character development softens the power of the plot. In Evan’s world of privilege, the adults and young people alike are ethically challenged and image-obsessed. Meanwhile, Alma’s world is filled with suffering that it seems no amount of hard work or piety can overcome. Supporting characters fit neatly into the box of either “friend” or “foe.”

A flawed yet worthy examination of undocumented immigration in the American South through the lens of young love. (Fiction. 13-17) (This review was originally published in the 06/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)
It’s not easy being normal when the Chosen One goes to your high school. High school senior Mikey Mitchell knows that he’s not one of the “indie kids” in his small Washington town. While they “end up being the Chosen One when the vampires come calling or when the Alien Queen needs the Source of All Light or something,” Mikey simply wants to graduate, enjoy his friendships, and maybe, just maybe, kiss his longtime crush. All that’s easier said than done, however, thanks to his struggles with anxiety, his dreadful parents, and the latest group of indie kids discovering their “capital-D Destinies.” By beginning each chapter with an arch summary of the indie kids’ adventures before returning to Mikey’s wry first-person narration, Ness offers a hilarious—and perceptive—commentary on the chosen-one sto- ries that are currently so popular in teen fiction. The diverse cast of characters is multidimensional and memorable, and the depiction of teen sexuality is refreshingly matter-of-fact. Magical pillars of light and zombie deer may occasionally drive the action here, but ultimately this novel celebrates the everyday heroism of teens doing the hard work of growing up.

Fresh, funny, and full of heart: not to be missed. (Fantasy. 13 & up) (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus)

Jim, convicted of raping two female classmates in High Heels and Lipstick (2013), now looks to move forward and to confront his own history.

Work boots and tees

No longer welcome in either of his parents’ homes, Jim catches a break when Delia, a cousin he has never met, offers to take him in. In Michigan with Delia, Jim works at Delia’s art-supply store but largely keeps to himself, certain that others would reject him if they found out about his past. Meanwhile, thoughts and memo- ries of the sexual abuse Jim endured as a child at the hands of his mother’s boyfriend begin to surface. Should Jim tell anyone about the abuse? Is Jim gay, and if so, did his mother’s boyfriend cause it? Doesn’t what Jim did to Chastaine and Maryellen make him just as bad as the man who abused him? These questions are explored thoughtfully as Jim meets with therapists, builds trust with Delia, and keeps his distance from a boy eager to befriend him. The issue of how to move forward after one has caused serious harm is an important one, and though not all readers will agree that Jim should receive the benefit of the doubt from new acquaintances, his remorse here is genuine and sympathetic.

Embraces Jim’s humanity without letting him off the hook. (Fiction. 14-18)

A fictionalized account of the life of Matthew Henson, the black American who reached the North Pole before Robert Peary, told in graphic form. While history has credited Peary with the discovery of the North Pole, it has largely forgotten his companion, Henson, who not only participated in Peary’s polar expeditions, but actually arrived at the North Pole hours before him in 1909. Henson

WORK BOOTS AND TEES

Ramsey, Jo
Harmony Ink (58 pp.)
Oct. 1, 2015
978-1-61372-834-5
978-1-61372-911-3 e-book

Reimagining Matthew Henson

Schwartz, Simon
Illus. by the author
Graphic Universe (160 pp.)
$14.99 paper  |  $31.99 PLB
Oct. 1, 2015
978-1-4677-8106-0
978-1-4677-5842-0 PLB

Rowena Joy Jones isn’t supposed to be dead.

When a Grim Reaper named Gideon mistakenly collects 17-year-old RJ’s soul, RJ demands he send her back; however, returning to the land of the living isn’t as simple as hopping on the next Soul Mover. First, the beautiful, popular, and cruel RJ must face a Tribunal of angels who will decide her fate. As sending RJ back means rewinding time and altering the chain of events leading up to her accidental death, RJ needs to prove she can change her ways, becoming worthy of returning to Earth to live out her remaining days. If she fails the tasks set forth by the Tribunal, she’ll be forced to hang around the Afterlife until her official death date, at which time she can be “processed,” face Judgment, and move on to Heaven—or that other place. The Afterlife is a fully realized world comprising a mix of Judeo-Christian belief and Greek mythology, and it is populated by a colorful host of characters: sarcastic Guardian Angels, a hunky St. Peter, a soul-gobbling, three-headed dog, and even Death Himself. RJ’s first-person narration is alter-nately facetious and reverent. The novel’s only weakness lies in not giving readers enough of RJ’s mean-girl background to con-trast with the effort she puts into redeeming herself.

Fun, funny, and full of life. (Fantasy. 12-18)
notably forged connections with the Inuit and inspired the figure Mahri Pahluk in their stories. Schwartz attempts to rectify this oversight with his highly laudatory retelling of Henson's life. Though he draws upon historical reports as well as Inuit legends, he also takes considerable artistic license with some details, eliding some less-flattering ones. A chronology at the end of the book helps clarify the historical record. Bold artwork in a cool palette of white, gray, black, and pale blue will remind readers of Marjane Satrapi's. Some illustrations feature a highly abstracted style reminiscent of Inuit art, while the other, more-realistic drawings often shift subtly between time periods. The panels featuring the older Henson are almost entirely silent, reflecting how his achievements were largely suppressed by Peary's fame.

A welcome profile of a little-known African-American explorer, despite its somewhat heavy-handed embroidery of the facts. (introduction, chronology, selected bibliography) (Graphic historical fiction. 13 & up)

MOST DANGEROUS

Daniel Ellsberg and the Secret History of the Vietnam War
Sheinkin, Steve
Roaring Brook (384 pp.)
978-1-59643-952-8

Following his award-winning World War II-era volumes Bomb (2012) and The Port Chicago 50 (2014), Sheinkin tells the sweeping saga of the Vietnam War and the man who blew the whistle on the government’s “secret war.”

From 1964 to 1971, Daniel Ellsberg went from nerdy analyst for the Rand Corp. to “the most dangerous man in America.” Initially a supporter of Cold War politics and the Vietnam War, he became disenchanted with the war and the lies presidents told to cover up the United States’ deepening involvement in the war. He helped to amass the Pentagon Papers—“seven thousand pages of documentary evidence of lying, by four presidents and their administrations over twenty-three years”—and then leaked them to the press, fueling public dissatisfaction with American foreign policy. Sheinkin ably juggles the complex war narrative with Ellsberg’s personal story, pointing out the deceits of presidents and tracing Ellsberg’s rise to action. It’s a challenging read but necessarily so given the scope of the study. As always, Sheinkin knows how to put the “story” in history with lively, detailed prose rooted in a tremendous amount of research, fully documented. An epilogue demonstrates how history repeats itself in the form of Edward Snowden.

Easily the best study of the Vietnam War available for teen readers. (bibliography, source notes, index) (Nonfiction. 12-18) (This review was originally published in the 7/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

EDGEWATER

Sheinmel, Courtney
Amulet/Abrams (336 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 8, 2015
978-0-545-54133-6 e-book
978-0-545-54131-2

Grey Gardens meets teen family drama. Lorrie Hollander is used to a trust fund that never runs dry and summers at an exclusive horse camp, but everything changes when Lorrie is discharged from camp after her guardian, her erratic aunt, Gigi, neglects to pay the tuition. Crestfallen, Lorrie heads home to Edgewater, the Hollander family estate, once an impressive and elegant home but now fallen to ruin of health-risk proportions and a constant source of shame for Lorrie. When Lorrie confronts her aunt about the missed payment, Gigi, who doesn’t care for life’s minutiae (like paying the electric bill), tells her she moved the money; its whereabouts are none of Lorrie’s concern. However, Lorrie is used to assuming adult responsibility in the absence of competent adult care, and she takes it upon herself to locate the trust fund. Her search reveals family secrets that go much deeper and farther back than the missing money. At times, Lorrie seems more concerned with her budding romance with Charlie, the local senator’s heartthrob son, than locating the money (and being able to pay the bills), but she’s still a teenager, after all. Astute readers will realize what’s going on before Lorrie does, but the how and the why are so intriguing they’ll read until way past bedtime.

Riveting and heartbreaking. (Fiction. 12-18) (This review was originally published in the 7/15/15 issue of Kirkus.)

YOUNG MAN WITH CAMERA

Sher, Emil
Photos by Wyman, David
Levine/Scholastic (240 pp.)
978-0-545-54133-6 e-book
978-0-545-54133-6 e-book

A young street photographer with burn scars on his face is terrorized by brutal, manipulative bullies.

The narrator introduces himself simply as T—. “I don’t like to write out my name,” he explains with characteristic eloquence, simplicity, and wisdom, “because I know someone will come along and twist a normal name into something not-normal.” Readers learn immediately why T— takes such a self-effacing defensive stance: charismatic Ryan, along with his sycophantic henchmen, targets T— relentlessly. Ryan’s favorite tactic is causing destruction and making sure T— takes the fall, using his own charm and others’ prejudice against T—’s appearance to full advantage. T— gets a brief moment of triumph when Lucy, a homeless woman he has befriended, thwarts Ryan and his stooges’ attempt to harass her and embarrasses them in the process. Ryan’s revenge, however, is vicious.
Stratton masterfully constructs a creepy gothic setting.

THE DOGS

Stratton, Allan
Sourcebooks Fire (240 pp.)
978-1-4926-0938-4
978-1-4926-2101-0 paper

Cameron Weaver’s father tried to kill his mother, and now they are on the run, again.

Cameron and his mother have moved into a “creep house” in Wolf Hollow, a house perhaps haunted and rumored to have been the site of murders and bodies never recovered. What seems to be known is the former owner of the house, Mr. McTavish, was an abusive husband and father, and some believe he murdered his son, wife, and her lover. Cameron seems to see the ghost of young Jacky McTavish, and his active imagination begins concocting murder scenarios, such as bodies wrapped in plastic and hanging from a rafter in the nailed-shut attic.

Stratton masterfully constructs a creepy gothic setting, using italicized interior monologue to show Cameron’s mind at odds with himself, and readers will soon suspect that Cameron may well be unhinged as they try to discern what is real and what is the product of Cameron’s “thinking like a lunatic.” A monstrous, stalking father, unhinging nightmares, a ghostly boy, wild dogs, and a moldy basement add creepy deliciousness to a murder mystery and tale of a boy who, in trying to solve a mystery, may just discover what a loving family might be.

An engrossing blend of murder mystery and family story. (Suspense. 12-16) (This review was originally published in the 07/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

PULL

Waltman, Kevin
Cinco Puntos (216 pp.)
978-1-941026-26-7
978-1-941026-27-4 paper
Series: D-Bow’s High School Hoops, 3

It’s junior year, and Division I schools are lining up to stake their claims to Indianapolis b-ball phenom Derrick Bowen. D-Bow is certainly older and a little bit wiser than in his first two outings, Next (2013) and Slump (2014). This year he begins without irrepressible teammate Moose, now graduated, and beautiful and brilliant Jasmine is growing ever distant, eyes on her prize. Best friend Wes, too, is pulling away, hanging with bangers and blazing up, and little brother Jayson is withdrawing. On the bright side, there’s the fine Lila Stone, in whom D-Bow might find a balanced relationship. Readers who have followed D-Bow through his first two years at Marion East will find themselves slipping effortlessly back into his life, his candid, present-tense narration comfortably familiar. Punctuating the now-typical rhythms of
his basketball season—tension with gruff coach Bolden, the realignment of the starting five with the new year, D-Bow’s increasing responsibilities as a team leader, and, of course, lovingly described hoops action—are the letters and phone calls from college coaches eager to sign D-Bow’s unquestioned talent. Though Waltman has given his protagonist enormous advantages, he doesn’t make life easy on him; D-Bow’s success is not assured, and both he and readers finish the year genuinely wondering if high-level college ball is really in his future.

Waltman continues to keep it both real and fresh for D-Bow. (Fiction. 14-18) (This review was originally published in the 08/01/15 issue of Kirkus.)

Dual stories of strength and resilience illuminate the effects that war has on individuals and on father-son relationships, effects that stretch in unexpected ways across generations.

**THE EMPEROR OF ANY PLACE**
Wynne-Jones, Tim
Candlewick (336 pp.)
978-0-7636-6973-7

After the shock of his father’s sudden death and the arrival of a grandfather he was taught to hate but never met, Evan must unravel a family mystery:

His father, Clifford, had been reading a peculiar, leather-bound memoir of a Japanese soldier who was marooned on an island during World War II. An accompanying letter suggests that it’s somehow connected to Evan’s grandfather Griff, a military man with “steel in [his] backbone.”

Evan knows that his father never got along with Griff, whose very presence irritates Evan as well, especially when he calls him “soldier.” Not wanting to reveal anything to Griff, whose presence irritates Evan as well, especially when he calls him “soldier.” Not wanting to reveal anything to Griff, Evan starts to read Isamu Oshiro’s memoir and finds himself mesmerized by the haunting journal addressed to Isamu’s fiancee. This book within a book, with its monsters, ghost children, and mysterious glimpses of the future, is as tightly written as Evan’s modern-day story. Evan’s resistance to his grandfather, colored by his father’s poor relationship with him, slowly adjusts the deeper he gets into Isamu’s memoir. Dual stories of strength and resilience illuminate the effects that war has on individuals and on father-son relationships, effects that stretch in unexpected ways across generations as Evan and Griff make their ways toward a truce.

An accomplished wordsmith, Wynne-Jones achieves an extraordinary feat: he illuminates the hidden depths of personalities and families through a mesmerizing blend of realism and magic. (Fiction. 13-17)
When six characters have their lives changed forever by an act of piracy, they must decide who is to blame—and what can be forgiven.

Daniel and Vanessa Parker are a wealthy, successful couple who have drifted apart. When their only son, Quentin, gets into some trouble at school, father and son undertake an epic sailing trip in the Pacific Ocean, leaving their flawed lives back in Annapolis. Their idyll is spoiled when their sailboat is overtaken by seven Somali pirates, led by the intelligent but desperate Ismail, who will do anything to secure his younger sister’s rescue from the clutches of her extremist husband. The government’s top hostage negotiator, Paul Derrick, is brought in to work against the pirates’ increasing agitation with an aggressive U.S. military—and with each other. Addison (The Garden of Burning Sand, 2014, etc.) juggles six different perspectives in this suspenseful, sprawling story and moves back and forth between Africa and America to cover the kidnapping, negotiations, and subsequent trial. As with his previous two novels, Addison’s attention is focused squarely on the larger message behind the story and on instructing the reader about Somali culture in order to humanize those who are brought low by the war and terror of its recent history. This novel’s push to teach readers a lesson is perhaps overly evident throughout; at one point Derrick says, “He may be an enemy. But that doesn’t make him less of a human being.” This can result in Addison’s stretching his readers’ belief for the sake of creating sympathetic characters, especially in the novel’s courtroom climax. And while these characters, especially the Americans, all feel slightly interchangeable—they are all well-educated and gifted musicians who drink fancy wine and drive fancy cars—the conclusions they reach about the importance of forgiveness and the need for cross-cultural understanding could not be more timely.

A fast-paced thriller that puts its humanitarian moral at the forefront.
GRAND MENTEUR
Ab-Sen, Jean Marc
Bookthug (200 pp.)
$20.00 paper | Oct. 20, 2015
978-1-77166-130-0

A young Mauritian immigrant attempts to dissect her father’s criminal past.

This debut novel by Ab-Sen, a Toronto writer who comes from a family of Mauritian winemakers, may tell an interesting tale, but the actual storytelling is so messy and unfocused that the style is distracting. We hear the story of Sergeant Mayacou, a member of a secretive street gang called the Sous, through the eyes of his daughter between the years 1965 and 1980. Sergeant is known by his cronies as “The Grand Menteur,” a designation which translates to “big liar,” while his comrades carry colorful nicknames like the Black Derwish, Ti Pourri, and Bowling Green. When a policeman friend of Sergeant’s gives the daughter a codex laying out the mysterious workings of the Sous Gang, it gives her some insight into the nature of her painfully secretive father and her own tendencies toward crime and violence. Unfortunately, that revelation doesn’t do squat for the reader, since it’s never really revealed just what criminal activities this flamboyant band of misfits gets up to. The daughter ultimately ends up working at St. Alban’s, a homeless shelter in Toronto, where she seeks shelter for herself after years of drifting to get by. This tale is meant to shine a light on the unique plight of a specific group of immigrants, but there’s nothing compelling in its telling. “Yet wherefore the enduring survival of our derelict people?” the narrator bemoans late in the tale. “To what grace the raw power of these schemers? Where else but the many children, siblings, acquaintances, comrades willing to abet the happiness of their devoteds, kith and kin who comprised the enablers, sympathizers and even enemies. All points of discourse intersecting into a lightning array of action and inertia.” The story told here is culturally interesting with its melting pot of Mauritian mythology, British class influences, and the awkwardness of being a stranger in a strange land. It’s too bad the writing that propels it is as twisty and hard to point of discourse intersecting into a lightning array of action and inertia.” The story told here is culturally interesting with its melting pot of Mauritian mythology, British class influences, and the awkwardness of being a stranger in a strange land. It’s too bad the writing that propels it is as twisty and hard to unravel as a Gordian knot.

DINNER
Aira, César
Translated by Silver, Katherine
New Directions (96 pp.)
$13.95 paper | Oct. 6, 2015
978-0-8112-2108-5

Leave it to the avant-garde Aira (The Musical Brain, 2015, etc.) to combine a meditation on relevance with a full-on zombie apocalypse.

In this characteristically slim but linguistically cagey story, Argentinian novelist Aira combines a comically observant depiction of an awkward dinner with a truly bizarre account of the dead returning to life. The unnamed narrator is a 60-year-old confirmed bachelor who finds himself bankrupt, depressed, and living with his caustically judgmental mother. One night the man and his mother are invited to dinner by a friend, who regales them with stories of his travels, a tour of his fantastical trinkets, and over-the-top vignettes. “All the stories he told us could have been illustrated with story-book pictures,” says the narrator. “Even those he told in parentheses or as digressions, as when he explained why he couldn’t use the sage he grew in his own garden for the meal. It turned out that an 88-year-old dwarf had fallen on the planting bed from a great height and had crushed his delicate herbs. Was that not astonishing?” Returning home, his mother retires to bed while our narrator descends into his usual unemployed habit of surfing the television. “It didn’t even have the charm of the ridiculous,” Aira writes. He lands on a channel showing a young woman and her cameraman chasing adventure through the late night when they stumble upon reports that the dead are rising from the grave. The narrator plays out the gruesome scene, which only ends when the village’s elders start calling out the names of the dead, who return quietly to their graves. What does this mean? The author is coy on resolution but he does offer up a resounding note of hope. “You have to know how to see beyond the interests of survival and make the decision to give something to the world, because only those who give, receive,” he writes.

An outlandish but absorbing meditation on being alive among the dead.

COLLECTED STORIES
Barth, John
Dalkey Archive (800 pp.)
$32.95 | Oct. 15, 2015
978-1-62897-095-1

A monumental assemblage of this antic author’s short fiction, most of it steeped in the literary history and postmodernist contortions of “that peculiarly American species, the writer in the university.”

Each of the four collections gathered here has stories closely related by characters, themes, and stylistic high jinks, accommodating the preference Barth (Every Third Thought, 2011, etc.) notes in his introduction for the long form of the novel. They also reflect the writer’s constant parsing and playing with narrative conventions in metatextual outings that began with the Borges-influenced, multilayered confections of his first collection, Lost in the Funhouse (1968). “Menelaid,” for tortuous instance, retells some of the Troy legend with mind-boggling embedding of multiple narrators like matryoshka dolls. On With the Story (1996) dials down the meta moments while including a Barth avatar who alludes to Funhouse. The story titled “Waves,” by Amien Richard, is fairly straightforward as two travel writers seek a good snorkeling site while painfully avoiding a shared tragedy. The Book of Ten Nights and a Night (2004) nods to all Barth’s favorite
tale-tellers—Homer, Scheherazade, and Boccaccio—while a
writer named Graybard and his Muse discuss “narrative” in sec-
tions linking the book’s actual narratives—including four pages
that look like musical notations for a song containing the one
word “help.” That the 11 nights are those following the terrorist
attacks on 9/11 shows Barth venturing out of the ivory ziggurat
and contemplating a “nation in shock.” More conventional are
the stories of a Maryland gated community in 2008’s The Devel-
opment. They have a comic take on community and an intimate
sense of aging—Barth was almost 80 at that time. Still, he can’t
resist his bookish japes, as with a writing student who presents
one project in text written all over her young flesh.

As part of Barth’s challenging postmodernist corpus,
the short stories offer smaller doses of the odd pleasures
and strains of a restless intelligence and its relentless gam-
ing of the literary system.

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BROKEN SLEEP
Bauman, Bruce
Other Press (474 pp.)
$18.95 paper  |  Oct. 27, 2015
978-1-59051-448-1

Secret family histories drive this
hefty novel encompassing rock music,
the art world, leftist politics, the long
reach of the Holocaust, and more.
The second novel by Bauman (And
the Word Was, 2006) turns on three figures
with complex pasts. Moses Teumer, a history professor, is seek-
ing a bone-marrow donor to treat his leukemia when he discov-
ers he’s the half brother of Alchemy Savant, a Bono-esque rock
star with messianic political ambitions; their shared mother is
Salome Savant, a celebrated counterculture artist with a history
of mental breakdowns. The Pynchon-esque character names
provide a hint about the sensibility of the novel, which is rife
with clandestine relationships and glimpses into the loopy but
earnest LA demimonde of sex, music, and limousine liberals. Under those glitzy surfaces of money and art, Bauman argues, blood connections are more truly influential: Moses must reckon with his discovery that his father is an unrepentant Nazi soldier, while Salome shares the same urge for attention and seclusion that defined her mother, Greta Garbo. At more than 600 pages, the novel is too baggy to sustain its lead characters without contrivance; the closing sections, which move into the near future to describe Alchemy’s climb to the political stage, are a speedy but wearying recycling of riffs on media culture, family drama, and American surveillance politics that were already established early on. And the story’s tragic climax is less powerful for being revealed early. Bauman does have the virtue of writing well in multiple registers. Salome’s perspective is free-wheeling and dreamlike, Moses’ sagely, and Alchemy is seen largely via tough-talking band mate Ambitious Mindswallow, who rises from a Queens street kid to member of the world’s biggest band. He’s a key allegorical figure in Bauman’s portrait of characters who are somewhat thinly fleshed in their biblical accounts, such as Batsheva, Yoav, Avner, and even Avshalom—for, as Brooks sagely writes, “David, who so often saw so clearly, who weighed men to a fine grain, was utterly blind to the failings of the men he begat.”

A skillful reimagining of stories already well-known to any well-versed reader of the Bible gracefully and intelligently told. (This review was originally published in the BEA/ALA 2015 issue of Kirkus)

THE HOURS COUNT
Cantor, Jillian
Riverhead (368 pp.)
826.95 | Oct. 20, 2015
978-1-59463-318-8

Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, caught by the Cold War.

In her last novel, Cantor (Margot, 2013, etc.) imagined Anne Frank’s sister surviving the Holocaust and living in Philadelphia. Now she turns her attention to the Rosenbergs, who were executed in 1953 for conspiring to commit espionage. As she writes in her Author’s Note, after reading about the case and the couple’s lives, Cantor became convinced they were victims of America’s vicious hunt for communists in the 1950s. Her view is represented by sheltered, lonely Millie Stein, the Rosenbergs’ neighbor in a Manhattan apartment house. Millie is married to Ed, a taciturn Russian immigrant who barely acknowledges her existence, except for sex, and who ignores their autistic son, David. Millie is devoted to the boy, guilt-ridden when the family doctor insists she’s caused his behavior by her coldness. Isolated with David, starved for affection, it’s no wonder she falls for warm, handsome Jake, who befriends her at a gathering hosted by the Rosenbergs. He tells her he’s a psychotherapist with experience helping children like David, and Millie agrees to meet him, with David, twice a week. Although Ethel warns her not to trust him, and although Millie repeatedly suspects that he’s lying, she fantasizes about running off with him, leaving her boorish, elusive, and secretive husband. In a rare gesture of independence, she agrees to a tryst at a cabin in the Catskills and, after one night of chastely described sex (buttons are slowly undone), finds that she’s pregnant. Millie’s naiveté about politics is barely believable, and when the Rosenbergs are accused of being traitors, she knows in her heart that they’re innocent: Ethel is such a good mother; Julius, such a loving husband.

Plot twists tease the reader into wondering who’s telling the truth, who’s working for the KGB or the FBI, but despite its historical context, the book reads like a predictable, although engaging, love story.
Capote might have become another Flannery O’Connor had he stuck to his home turf, but instead he relocated to New York.

**THE EARLY STORIES OF TRUMAN CAPOTE**

*Capote, Truman*

Random House (192 pp.)


978-0-8129-9822-1

978-0-8129-9823-8 e-book

Gathering of the great American prose stylist’s earliest pieces, published for the first time.

Some of those pieces are very far from Park Avenue. In the first, a teenage Capote (*Summer Crossing*, 2005, etc.) serves up an odd vignette concerning a young hobo and his older, wizened friend of the road. “Ma an’ them don’t know I been bummin’ around the country for the last two years; they think I’m a traveling salesman,” the youngster says, just before the older man helps himself to a ten-spot his companion has been guarding against the day that he can wash up, buy a suit, and head home. The moment of their parting is worthy of de Maupassant. So it is, too, when Capote, Alabaman by upbringing if not inclination, turns in another Southern-fried piece, this one involving a gaggle of kids, a snakebite, and a chicken or three. “The ulcers were burning like mad from the poison,” Capote writes in a fine closing, “and she felt sick all over when she thought of what she had done.” Capote might have become another Flannery O’Connor had he stuck to his home turf, but instead he relocated to New York, and several of the later stories here reflect that change of venue. Now his characters are more urbane and decidedly more privileged: “The girl had had excellent letters from the Petite Ecole in France and the Mantone Academy in Switzerland.” Excellent letters or no, the story in question marks what will become a typical Capote ploy, a scenario of roiling jealousies and intrigue under a superficially calm cover. Another reveals Capote’s trademark strangeness, too: “It’s one thing to lose a leg,” harrumphs one character, “but it’s too much to lose an election because of someone else’s stupidity.” Amputations, petty larceny, and noblesse oblige: it’s all of a piece, and all that’s missing are the chameleons.

Students of both Capote and the short story will find this instructive and entertaining—and, if somewhat unformed still, very readable all the same.

**CHRISTMAS BELLS**

*Chiaverini, Jennifer*

Dutton (336 pp.)


978-0-525-95524-5

978-0-698-40709-1 e-book

Preparing for Christmas in Cambridge, Massachusetts, church members face challenges aided by faith and friends and inspired by the eponymous poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow—who, in an alternate storyline, fights despair as he confronts personal tragedy and the Civil War.

Christmas is fast approaching, and St. Margaret’s Catholic Church is a hub of activity. The children’s choir, under Sophia’s talented guidance, is practicing its program, which includes “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day,” the lovely carol based on the poem by Cambridge’s own Longfellow. Sophia is determined to remain optimistic this season, despite her recently broken...
engagement and the threat of losing her job next spring. After all, these children lift her spirits, and she can always depend on Lucas, the saintly accompanist, to be there for her. Particularly talented are the red-haired siblings, serious Charlotte and precocious Alex, whose father is serving with the National Guard in Afghanistan and whose mother is overwhelmed by the crushing news that her beloved husband is missing, a fact she’s trying to keep secret. Father Ryan loves his calling and his congregants and is doing his best to aid them in their trials even as he navigates his own fractured family. The odd but cheerful, elderly Sister Winifred offers help and reassurance with eerily perfect timing and perception. Meanwhile, in a separate historical storyline that is lightly attached to the contemporary one, we follow Longfellow through the Civil War and the life-altering events that tested his faith and nearly crushed his spirit. Chiaverini stitches together a series of lightly interlocking contemporary vignettes in an intriguing way and manages to tuck away all the ragged edges in the emotionally satisfying conclusion. In the background are Longfellow’s tragic Civil War-era experiences, which, while poignant, feel emotionally distant.

A gentle exploration of tragedy, hope, the power of Christmas, and the possibility of miracles.

OUR SPOONS CAME FROM WOOLWORTHS
Comyns, Barbara
New York Review Books (224 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Oct. 27, 2015
978-1-59017-896-6

A Depression-era artist struggles with crippling poverty and sexism in bohemian London; the result is a surprisingly charming and funny novel (first published in 1950).

Sophia meets her future husband, Charles, on a train; both are 20 years old and carrying portfolios. When they marry against their families’ wishes, Charles’ father cuts off his allowance, leaving them with nothing to live on but what Sophia earns working at a commercial studio. To their dismay, she soon finds herself pregnant: “I had a kind of idea if you controlled your mind and said ‘I won’t have any babies’ very hard, then most likely they wouldn’t come. I thought that was what was meant by birth-control.” Fired for her pregnancy, she cobbles together something less than a living as a model, while Charles paints, parties, schemes to have their son sent to an orphanage, and—typical of the men in Sophia’s life—does almost nothing to support them or care for the household. In the years that follow, Sophia allows Charles to talk her into one abortion and later refuses to have another, losing a child to sickness brought on by “stupidity and poverty.” She describes her early conversations with a man who will become her lover: “When I talked he listened most intently to every word I said, as if it was very precious. This had never happened to me before, and gave me great confidence in myself, but now I know from experience a great many men listen like that, and it doesn’t mean a thing; they are most likely thinking up a new way of getting out of paying their income tax.” Frequently too poor to buy food, Sophia often has to choose between keeping her children at home and sending them away to unpleasant relatives who can afford to feed them.

Much of the story revolves around issues of reproduction, housework, and economic opportunity that contemporary feminists would see as questions of justice. But Sophia narrates a story of fairy tale—like fatality, casting an amused, self-deprecating light on even the most painful moments.

INTO THE FOREST
Danielewski, Mark Z.
Pantheon (816 pp.)
978-0-375-71496-2
978-0-375-71497-9 e-book
Series: The Familiar, 2

A young girl quests for a cat. And no, it’s not Alice in Wonderland.

What is Danielewski’s (The Fifty Year Sword, 2012, etc.) latest about? Might as well ask what the Coriolis effect is about: the world spins, and air blows, and that’s the way it is, much as this oversized, overstuffed book spins and—well, further the story begun last spring with One Rainy Day in May. Pre-adolescent Xanther is brainy, confused, and petulant: “Mom, like I hate the supermarket?” “You do?” “Oh, uhm, I love hanging around stuff I can’t have!” Xanther, whose favorite typographic symbol is an often sarcastic but sometimes genuinely puzzled question mark, is also cat-crazy, and ailurophiliac moments abound. Cats and their kin are just some of the animals that pass through these pages. So do many human types, from LA gangsters to Asian yuppies to Turkish cops to homegrown geeks. Miley Cyrus, too, one of many figures and tropes from pop culture to turn up. Match a herky-jerky narrative and multiple protagonists with nested-parenthetical stream-of-consciousness to do Joyce proud, and you’re in tall postmodern cotton, and with literary and subliterary allusions to match, tucked away among the tangled storylines: “A single piece of paper inside, with a fiery orange paperclip holding nothing together, makes it clear Warlock is no Connelly or Nesbo.” All fine and well, though there’s some iffy syntax (“Xanther’s scream calls to life the house”) and some odd attempts at Chinglish and other dialects (“at entrance jingling see he the damn pah chiao one”). But no worries, if you can make out clauses such as this: “sleeps the little one [a blind little lamb -ever a question mark <of a different kind (kind!)>]>]."

Readers with an interest in the latest in literary experimentalism will thrill at Danielewski’s approach and clamor for the 25 volumes planned to follow in the Familiar series. Others, not so much.
NAUGHTIER THAN NICE
Dickey, Eric Jerome
Dutton (320 pp.)
$25.95  |  Oct. 27, 2015
978-0-525-95520-7

The McBroom sisters return in this steamy tale of lustful women troubled in love.

Oldest sister Frankie is eagerly planning not only an extravagant wedding, but also a baby with Franklin Carruthers, a wealthy renovator of classic cars. After yet another night of mind-blowing sexual acrobatics, however, Frankie receives a call that demolishes the whole house of cards: Franklin is already married. Meanwhile, middle sister Livvy is trying to make sense of her life following her husband’s infidelity and her own retaliation with a menage a trois. Youngest sister Tommy has man troubles of a different kind: she can’t decide whether to stay with her longtime fiancé, Blue. She loves his daughter, Monica, who’s come to see Tommy as her mommy, despite having had enough of his ex-wife’s interference in their lives. But Blue has had a vasectomy without even consulting her. She’s tempted to return to Beale Street, her former boss, her former lover, and a globally worshiped writer. Things begin to turn even messier for the McBroom sisters when Frankie realizes she has a stalker whose pranks escalate from moving the furniture in her house to life-threatening high jinks. Erotic, salacious, yet often simply crude, Dickey’s (One Night, 2015, etc.) tale develops through sexual encounters: every bedroom romp ratchets up the levels of guilt or desire motivating the sisters. Although Dickey sets his characters in a world rich with material possessions, several oddly placed items create discord; for example, Frankie and Franklin’s erotic play requires wine, candles, the Kama Sutra, and, weirdly, blue Gatorade. Despite some grisly plot twists, everything is tied up neatly in the end, with the wicked soundly punished and the McBroom family triumphant.

Dickey’s fans will rejoice.

WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE
Fink, Joseph & Cranor, Jeffrey
Perennial/HarperCollins (416 pp.)
978-0-06-235142-5

All hail the glow cloud as the weird and wonderful town of Night Vale brings itself to fine literature.

Creators Fink and Cranor offer fans of their (occ)ult podcast Welcome to Night Vale a fantastic addition with a stand-alone tale of the mysterious desert town that also offers loyal listeners some interesting clues about the nature of the place. Readers who are unfamiliar with the podcast shouldn’t be put off—they still get an eccentric thriller with a specific sense of humor that mimics the omnipresent spookiness of Twin Peaks. Artist Kate Leth, who collaborates on the podcast, once described the project this way: “It’s like Stephen King and Neil Gaiman started building a town in The Sims and then just...left it running. For years.” Fortunately, the writers are firmly confident in their creation. “Look, life is stressful,” the book tells us. “This is true everywhere. But life in Night Vale is more stressful. There are things lurking in the shadows. Not the projections of a worried mind, but literal Things, lurking, literally, in shadows. Conspiracies are hidden in every storefront, under every street, and floating in helicopters above. And with all that there is still the bland tragedy of life.” The main plot largely centers on two characters and their search for a hidden city. Perpetually 19-year-old Jackie Fierro runs the local pawn shop and is perplexed when A Man in a Tan Jacket gives her a note reading simply “King City.” Meanwhile, PTA mom Diane Crayton loses her teenage son and must join forces with Jackie to find this mysterious place. It’s all pretty far out there on the weird-ometer, but the novel is definitely as addictive as its source material. The book also pays fan service by punctuating its chapters with original broadcasts.
by Night Vale narrator Cecil Gershwin Palmer and cameos by fan favorites like Old Woman Josie, Carlos the sexy scientist, and the aforementioned Glow Cloud.

A delightfully bonkers media crossover that will make an incredible audiobook.

THE WAR REPORTER

Fletcher, Martin
Dunne/St. Martin’s (320 pp.)
978-1-250-07002-9
978-1-4668-7992-8 e-book

Award-winning NBC News special correspondent Fletcher (Jacob’s Oath, 2013, etc.) returns with an action-packed thriller where love and honor save the day.

American journalist Tom Layne may have trained for combat and learned how to stay alive in practice drills, but real-life capture was never on his agenda. While covering the wars in Bosnia and Serbia, Layne is captured and, after his release, falls prey to post-traumatic stress disorder. More than a decade later, a reinvigorated Layne returns to the Balkans on a documentary film project. His mission is to expose the war criminal responsible for destroying innocent lives—and Layne’s once-promising love affair with a woman caught in the crossfire. Fletcher's experience as a reporter adds authenticity to the fictional pursuit of Ratko Mladic, the criminal wanted for genocide by many but hunted by few (and who in real life was arrested in 2011). Mladic is in hiding and under protection from Serbian fighters. Layne’s documentary, however, opens the door for those who are willing to talk and lead the journalist in the right direction. His struggle is not merely physical nor even strictly political. Layne faces an internal fight as he battles terrible dreams and flashbacks to the nightmare that happened years earlier. This is where Fletcher’s best writing comes under the spotlight. While the novel avoids traditional chapter breaks, Layne’s journey is mirrored in sections that project action, passion, defeat, confusion, and triumph. On the surface, Layne exudes confidence and self-control in his pursuit of redemption. In his dreams and in quiet romantic moments, however, he lets his guard down, and his vulnerability demonstrates as much inner conviction as he projects on the outside. Fletcher is masterful at portraying realistic combat and showcasing the survival skills of working journalists.

A fast-paced thriller that depicts the life-or-death realities of war correspondents.

FREEMAN’S

The Best New Writing on Arrival

Freeman, John—Ed.
Grove (304 pp.)
$16.00 paper | $16.00 e-book
Oct. 6, 2015
978-0-8021-2441-8
978-0-8021-9084-0 e-book

First in a new semiannual series from critic, editor, and author Freeman (Tales of Two Cities, 2014; How to Read a Novelist, 2013).

Freeman’s writing has appeared in the New York Times Book Review, the Guardian, and the Wall Street Journal, among other publications. As the editor of Granta, he worked with writers like Jeanette Winterson, Kenzaburo Oe, and George Saunders. It can safely be said that Freeman is a guide whom a savvy subset of passionate readers trust. His plan for this new project is simple: twice a year, he’ll present “a collection of writing grouped loosely around a theme.” This first installment of poems, stories, and narrative nonfiction does not disappoint. There’s excellent work by literary luminaries and popular favorites—Lydia Davis and Haruki Murakami, Louise Erdrich and Dave Eggers—as well as work from writers who will be new to many. The geographic range represented here is impressive, with authors from such far-flung locales as Iceland, Sudan, and the West Bank. Freeman’s first theme is “arrival,” and part of the pleasure of exploring this volume is discovering the various ways in which contributors interpret the concept. David Mitchell describes an encounter with one of Hiroshima’s ghosts. Garnette Cadogan offers a quietly devastating meditation on wandering the streets of Kingston as a boy and the impossibility of being a black flâneur in America, where the perception that he’s a threat exposes him to real danger every time he steps outside. In Helen Simpson’s “ARIZONA,” an acupuncturist and an academic imagine life beyond menopause. And, in one of the most satisfying entries in this collection, Laura van den Berg tells the story of a woman who becomes unmoored—wonderfully so—when her husband leaves her to sail around the world.

A diverse and diverting anthology for fans of short fiction, verse, and long-form essays.
EYES

Novellas And Stories
Gass, William H.
Knopf (256 pp.)
978-1-101-87472-1
978-1-101-87473-8 e-book

A set of stories about senses and sensory deprivation from contemporary American literature’s longtime laureate of disillusionment.

Gass (Middle C, 2013, etc.) has always been a love-hate proposition. He’s an exquisite maker of sentences, weighing his prose like a poet for rhythm, consonance, and intellectual heft. (“Color is a lure. Color is candy….Color is oratory in the service of the wrong religion….Color is camouflage.”) But his fiction is a tough sell, built as it is out of storm clouds and fury at a humanity that has forever fallen short. The two novellas that anchor this collection reveal the upsides and downsides of that approach. The excellent, punningly titled “In Camera” is set in a photography gallery whose holdings are carefully guarded by its owner and whose acquisition processes may not be strictly legal. That question gives the story its drama, but Gass is more interested in exploring the ways photographs can render (and in a way surpass) reality, closing with a dry but artful riff on Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave.” “Charity,” a story almost entirely without paragraph breaks, explores one man’s lifetime of exasperation with pleas for donations, from cookie-schlepping Girl Scouts to junk mail to telemarketers; the feeling of oppression Gass creates is palpable if static; its dour mood rarely shifts. The remaining stories are shorter (if not necessarily lighter) experiments in form and style: a story told from the perspective of the prop piano in Casablanca, another about a man who communicates solely with his hands, a man recalling his childhood in fragmented prose that evokes stray puzzle pieces. It says something about Gass’ talent and flexibility that he can write an effective story that’s narrated by a barber-shop folding chair. But this is Gass’ universe, and here, even folding chairs don’t get off easy.

Glum fun.

ROGUE LAWYER

Grisham, John
Doubleday (352 pp.)
978-0-385-53943-2
978-0-385-53944-9 e-book

Another by-the-numbers legal procedural, at once gritty and lethargic, by longtime practitioner Grisham (Gray Mountain, 2014, etc.).

“There are plenty of people who’d like to kill me right now,” grumbles Sebastian Rudd, the rogue lawyer in question. He carries a gun, works out of his car, and sleeps in a different hotel room every week, precisely because he runs up against so many bad guys who mean him harm. Some of them are cops. Why? Because Sebastian, though jaded and cynical, as literary lawyers are required to be, apparently still believes in justice, for which reason, accompanied by a bodyguard named Partner (“a hulking, heavily armed guy who wears black suits and takes me everywhere”), he finds himself in a podunk burg where a client is fighting for his life against the charge that he’s brutally murdered two little girls in a spectacularly gruesome crime. Natch, spectacular gruesomeness being another sine qua non for the bestselling crime novel. Indirection and misdirection abound, with lots of talky exposition, the requisite maverick-y norm-flouting (“At this precise moment, I am violating the rules of ethics and perhaps a criminal statute as well”), and the usual sarcastic world-weariness (“The jurors don’t believe any of this because they have known for some time that Gardy was a member of a satanic cult with a history of sexual perversion”). All this is to be expected in a genre bound by convention as tightly as our perp bound the ankles of his victims, but the reader can see most of the mystery coming from a long way off, making the
For most writers, the year following the publication of an acclaimed novel, a year that brings home the Pulitzer Prize, would be filled with joy. Not so for Adam Johnson. The 2012 publication of Johnson’s gripping novel *The Orphan Master’s Son* won him the award in 2013. In that same span of time, doctors diagnosed his wife, Stephanie Harrell, with breast cancer.

Harrell, a fellow writer, would not talk about her illness; Johnson is drawn to subjects that are “half-seen.” It was the mystery of North Korea, after all, that fueled his pursuit of *Orphan Master*. “It took me a while to wrap my head around the fact that even in my own house there was a story that couldn’t be told,” Johnson says. “There’s some voice that must exist but we can’t hear. Only fiction, only creation can get to that human thing.”

Against his wife’s wishes, Johnson wrote a story from her perspective titled “Interesting Facts,” one of the more powerful pieces in his new collection, *Fortune Smiles* (Aug. 18). Emotionally bracing, meticulously detailed, and at times flat-out fearless, these six stories are everything fans of Johnson could hope for.

The collection takes readers to exotic places and stark situations—East Germany after the Berlin Wall fell, back to the Korean Peninsula, hurricane-ravaged Louisiana. By contrast, “Interesting Facts” stands out. The locale is Johnson’s home, and the premise is one that more than 200,000 Americans experience each year. But familiar setting and stakes aside, “Interesting Facts” shares the key component of Johnson’s work: there was a story that couldn’t be told, and there was work to be done to reach inscrutable truths.

“I don’t think I write anything that’s easy,” Johnson says. “A good story feels like it costs something. It matters if you don’t get it right. This one, to me, mattered more than most that if I got it wrong I would be a real failure.” (Harrell is currently cancer-free.)

If Johnson has a mantra, it’s likely this: do justice to others’ experiences. Research is critical in all his work. For the story “Nirvana,” he studied message boards on a rare degenerative nerve disorder. For the haunting “Dark Meadow,” he interviewed prison counselors who oversee pedophiles. For “Hurricanes Anonymous,” he rode along with UPS drivers in post-Katrina Louisiana. “Those voices are in your head, and when you’re writing, it’s like that’s the standard,” he says. “You hear their voices and you say, ‘Oh no, that is not good enough.’ ”

With Johnson’s diligent research and penchant for emotional subject matter, what sometimes gets lost in assessments of his work is that it’s made of page-turners. This is no accident. It’s a result of Johnson’s love for what he calls “old-timey story telling.” When asked for some specific examples, rather than mentioning writers, he recounts how he worked construction in the Arizona heat for a few years before college in the 1980s.

Johnson worked with “ex-cons, killers, veterans, and roustabouts”: global drifters. “All day long they just told stories of running drugs off Miami and knife fights in bars and bombs going off in Da Nang,” he says. “I suppose I was supposed to say it was Chekov or something, but it was all these guys I worked with.”

Sean Rose is a former crime reporter and current Clark House Writer-In-Residence with Texas State University. *Fortune Smiles* received a starred review in the June 15, 2015, issue.
yarn less effective than most. And the cliché’s pile on a bit too thickly, from the large-breasted moll to the bored judge who dozes at the bench.

One wonders if Grisham weren’t sleeping through some of this as well. Whatever the case, one of his lesser cases.

SUBMISSION
Houellebecq, Michel
Translated by Stein, Lorin
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (356 pp.)
978-0-374-27157-2
978-0-374-71448-2 e-book

The controversial pan-European bestseller arrives in English.
Houellebecq’s (The Map and the Territory, 2012, etc.) newest antihero is a literature professor whose specialty is a writer few Americans and not so many modern French readers know: the pseudonymous J.-K. Huysmans, who wrote the definitive decadent novel, Au rebours, way back in the pre-Proustian, post-impressionist day. That Huysmans turns up less than a dozen words into the narrative is an important cue, for François is decadent, too, in the same sense that an overripe cantaloupe is, sliding irreversibly into decay and rot. So are the careerist academics around him, and so are his students, the females among whom he gladly sleeps with when he’s not filling his eyes with pornography. Houellebecq’s book was implicated in the Charlie Hebdo murders of Jan. 7, the day it was published in France, as an insult to Islam, and indeed Houellebecq paints with the widest brush: in order to fend off a challenge from the right, France’s ruling Socialist Party comes to an accommodation with a strict Islamist political faction that accordingly rises to power and immediately fires all professors who aren’t Muslim and fundamentally inclined—but rewards converts with multiple veiled wives and salaries triple what the generous French welfare state had already been paying. Adieu Huysmans, bienvenue Al-Fatiha. Houellebecq isn’t patently anti-Islamic so much as anti-everyone, a fierce moralist of an Orwellian bent—and this book shares more than a few points with Nineteen Eighty-Four—who finds us all wanting.

MR. KAFKA
And Other Tales From the Time of the Cult
Hrabal, Bohumil
Translated by Wilson, Paul
New Directions (160 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Oct. 6, 2015
978-0-8112-2480-2

An often powerful and occasionally unnerving collection of stories from a half-century ago.

The “time of the cult” to which the subtitle refers is “the cult of personality” through which Stalin’s postwar dictatorship extended into Czechoslovakia. Published for the first time in English, the stories in this slim collection represent an era, a country, and an author who are all long gone, yet the timelessness of the best of these stories attests to a human spirit undimmed by the darkest of circumstances. “Life, strangely enough, is constantly being reinvented and loved....” writes Hrabal (Harlequin’s Millions, 2014, etc.) in “Beautiful Poldi,” the elegiac story that closes the collection and brings the narrative of the titular Mr. Kafka full circle. “It is still magnificent as long as one maintains the illusion that a whole world can be conjured from a tiny patch of earth....Life is fidelity to the beauty that is exploding all around us even, at times, at the cost of our own lives.” The industrial Prague he depicts here finds women who are convicts or prostitutes (or both) relying on their powers of seduction, while men who are merchants, artists, or madmen (or all three) speak of ideals at odds with the survivalist instincts of the animals they have become. In “Ingots,” a doctor of philosophy proclaims, “I believe in people who wrestle with their fate,” while a woman suffers a brutal, dehumanizing gang rape. The psycho-political slapstick of “Betrayal of Mirrors” pivots around the obsessive repetition of a pair of mantras: as an artist insists (mainly to himself), “Can’t stop now! Must keep going!” while a stonemason laments, “It’s not easy being a decent communist these days.” The inscrutability of the opening “Mr. Kafka” leaves the reader off balance, but readers and characters alike adjust to a world gone askew.

The bleak humor of the surrealism finds a crack in the Iron Curtain.
Margio dispatched Anwar Sadat by ripping out the man’s throat. Kurniawan’s commitment to economy means that potentially fascinating episodes—like Margio’s decision to join the circus and the supernatural. Another is the way in which the author and most obvious is the porous boundary between the natural and the supernatural. Another is the way in which the author borrows formal elements from folklore and oral tradition. But, where Beauty Is a Wound is sprawling and disorderly, this novel is succinct and disciplined. This evolution in style doesn’t work to the book’s benefit, though. The narrator’s voice is gossipy and close to the action—often the case in folklore—but the characters are almost never allowed to speak for themselves. And, although the story begins in medias res, the bulk of the book is a retrospective account of events leading up to the murder. Both stylistic choices keep the reader from getting close to Margio, Anwar Sadat, and their tragically intertwined families. And Kurniawan’s commitment to economy means that potentially fascinating episodes—like Margio’s decision to join the circus in order to learn from the tiger tamers—are reduced to a sentence or two. The readers most likely to be disappointed are those intrigued by the paranormal creature promised by the title: tiger sightings are few and far between.

Lackluster effort from a talented young author.

When familial love and loyalty collide with racism and classism, tensions mount. Leary’s debut novel examines the ties that bind three generations of women in the Barton family—and the divisions that keep them apart. Nancy is the family matriarch, a stern woman with clear ideas about propriety. Her two daughters are polar opposites. Andrea is single, a Chicago-based social worker who deals with refugees and lives in a cramped apartment with her adopted daughter, Pearl, Joanne is a suburban, married, stay-at-home mom. That Pearl is African-American and the Bartons white gives the novel multiple issues to grapple with and raises important concerns about transracial adoption. Unfortunately, the book is only partially successful. Pearl is a cliché—a self-sabotaging, angry black girl who acts out sexually—and Andrea is so clueless she’s almost a caricature. In one particularly glaring scene, she asks teenage Pearl if her friends are in a gang. What’s more, there are plotlines that sputter. For one, Nancy has kept a huge personal secret for most of her life. As readers, we’re in on it, but it’s unclear if her daughters discover their mother’s hidden past when they rifle through her papers after her death. That this is left unresolved is unfortunate. Still, the novel exposes class antagonisms in the tony private school Pearl attends with cringe-worthy accuracy. Similarly, its portrait of a mixed-race family illustrates the parallel worlds inhabited by black and white Americans and the damage that needs to be repaired before we can truly call ourselves a post-racial country.

A timely but ultimately disappointing family drama.

As a wildfire threatens a Colorado town, two old friends confront their own dangerous home fires—one is on the brink of divorce, the other suspects her teenage son of arson.

The novel opens with a domestic bombshell when Elizabeth asks Ben for a divorce. Years of happiness have been followed by failed attempts at having a child and now endless bickering. The urgency of their crumbling marriage is momentarily forgotten when a wildfire begins to encroach on their upscale Rocky Mountain town. Though she now handles investigations for the town’s prosecuting attorney, Elizabeth used to suit up and battle wildfires; with her expertise, she’s become involved with the investigation. She begins by interviewing John Phillips, whose house, the believed locus of the fire, has burned down. He tells her about a group of teenagers who have been harassing him for months; it’s mostly taken the form of harmless pranks, but they have been making a habit of drinking beer around his fire pit. One of the boys may be Mindy’s son, Angus. Though once best friends, Elizabeth and Mindy haven’t spoken since a hurtful argument broke their friendship. Now it feels to Mindy that only Elizabeth can save her son. As Elizabeth gets closer to the truth about the fire, down-to-earth Mindy and her pretentious friends, bitingly depicted, arrange for the annual Fall Fling fundraiser to benefit John Phillips—that is, if he really is a victim. Although
McKenzie crafts a well-paced story (and a mystery as to who started the fire), Elizabeth's failing marriage, the emotional heart of the novel, feels underdeveloped, especially so when a surprise brings husband and wife together.

A solid if uninspired drama with a bit of criminal intrigue thrown in.

**ICARUS**

*Meyer, Deon*

Atlantic Monthly (352 pp.)

$26.00 | $26.00 e-book | Oct. 6, 2015

978-0-8021-2400-5

978-0-8021-9091-8 e-book

Sex, lies, and a lot of alcohol are the key elements in Meyer’s (**Cobra**, 2014, etc.) latest thriller featuring Detective Captain Benny Griessel of the leading South African investigative team known as the Hawks.

Griessel himself is incapacitated for most of the story: after two years as a recovering alcoholic, he’s been shaken by a murder/suicide involving a colleague and has fallen off the wagon. While Griessel struggles to keep his life from falling apart, Ernst Richter, owner of the notorious website Alibi, turns up strangled. True to its name, Alibi promises airtight excuses for clients cheating on their spouses, but it seems that Richter hasn’t honored his promise to keep his clients’ identities secret. In a parallel storyline, Cape Town winemaker Francois de Toit outlines his troubled family history during a government investigation, a story that includes growing up with a psychopathic brother. De Toit has his own secret: he’s become involved in a fraud scheme, in which his bottles of South African wine are sold internationally as high-priced Chateau Lafite Rothschild. The connection between these two stories won’t become clear until Griessel can get his head out of the Jack Daniels. Complicating matters further, investigators in each of the cases find themselves falling in love with the possible suspects they’re interviewing.

Unlike previous Griessel volumes, this one makes only passing references to the political and racial climate of post-apartheid South Africa. But the surprising plot twists and the wealth of juicy subplots make this a standout entry in a superior series.

**LESSONS IN RELATIONSHIP DYADS**

*Mirolla, Michael*

Red Hen Press (200 pp.)

$15.95 paper | Oct. 15, 2015

978-1-59709-427-6

Duos of all kinds knock up against one another in this collection from Mirolla (**The Giulo Metaphysics III**, 2013, etc.). Relationships are fraught, complicated creatures, whether they’re between lovers, family members, or friends. In this collection, these couplings are explored one pairing at a time: sister and sister, sister and brother, brother and brother, daughter and father, father and son, and so on. In “Sons and Mothers,” an unreliable man self-reports his own family history while a psychiatric expert analyzes testimonies from the patient’s friend and mother. Two cohabiting sisters are on a crash course over a man in “Sister and Sister.” In “Daughters and Fathers,”
the daughter of a famous writer, from whom she is estranged, wastes away in an asylum. There is much to admire about a good formal constraint, a collection with a tight unifying theme, thematic subheadings, use of artifacts, and metafictional flourishes. But while this collection includes all of these elements and more, the result is less high-wire artistry and more fragmented mess. Occasionally there is a lovely detail, a paragraph of character and action, or an interesting thought, but then everything—including the relationships that should be the beating hearts of the stories—is washed away by the author’s voice. That voice dominates and consumes the narrative, flattening each story’s potential life. As a result, they all sound the same. There is quite a bit of wordplay, including an irritating tic where an idea is stated and restated (sometimes more than once) for no apparent reason, but these moments of cleverness rarely work and never seem to match the mood or characters. Some books demand more of their audience than the average text, but this book demands too much; it rejects and rebuffs the reader at every turn.

A muddled, undercooked collection that does not live up to the promise of its conceit.

**THE LAKE HOUSE**

*Morton, Kate*

Atria (512 pp.)

$28.00 | Oct. 20, 2015

978-1-4516-4932-1

A suspected kidnapping, a once-proud manor house, and a disgraced police officer all figure in Morton’s latest multigenerational Cornish saga.

In 2003, Sadie is put on administrative leave from her post with the London police force for getting too involved in a child-abandonment case. She retreats to her grandfather’s house in Cornwall, and there, while jogging, she happens upon the ruin of what locals inform her is Loeanneth, the ancestral lakeside manse of the deShiel family. The story ricochets among 2003, 1911, and 1933 as we learn that Eleanor deShiel, who inspired a children’s book reminiscent of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, became the chatealaine of Loeanneth thanks to a *Downton Abbey*-esque plot twist in which, due to the *Titanic* disaster, new husband Anthony Edevane inherits enough money to reclaim her birthright from creditors. But when Anthony goes to war, he returns shell-shocked and prone to unpredictable outbursts. Meanwhile, their children, Deborah, Alice and Clemmie, frolic on the grounds, oblivious to their parents’ difficulties. Alice, 16, is a budding mystery writer (whose future fame will equal Agatha Christie’s), but in 1933 she’s nursing a teenage crush on Ben, an impecunious gardener. As a lark, she concocts a hypothetical scenario which might have prompted Ben to kidnap Theo, her baby brother. Flashbacks reveal that Deborah and Clemmie also have reason to blame themselves for Theo’s disappearance during an all-night Midsummer’s Eve party—he was never found and his fate remains unknown. At loose ends, Sadie investigates this cold case, developing several theories. As the various skeins intersect, the story becomes unwieldy; using multiple narrators, Morton can believably withhold information to build suspense, but when such selective nondisclosure is carried to extremes, frustrated readers may be tempted to practice their skimming.

An atmospheric but overlong history of family secrets and their tormented gatekeepers.

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Moyes is at her most charming writing with a sense of humorous affection about family dynamics.

**AFTER YOU**

*Moyes, Jojo*

Pamela Dorman/Viking (352 pp.)

$26.95 | Sep. 29, 2015

978-0-525-42659-2

Moyes’ sequel to her bestselling *Me Before You* (2012)—which was about Louisa, a young caregiver who falls in love with her quadriplegic charge, Will, and then loses him when he chooses suicide over a life of constant pain—examines the effects of a loved one’s death on those left behind to mourn.

It’s been 18 months since Will’s death, and Louisa is still grieving. She’s settled in a London flat purchased with money Will left her and taken a dreary waitressing job at an airport pub. After falling off her apartment roof terrace in a drunken state, she momentarily fears she’ll end up paralyzed herself, but Sam, the paramedic who treats her, does a great job—and she’s lucky. Louisa convalesces in the bosom of her family in the village of Stortfold, and Moyes is at her most charming here, writing with a sense of humorous affection about family dynamics among working-class Brits. When Louisa returns to London, a troubled 16-year-old named Lily turns up on her doorstep saying Will was her father though he never knew it because her mother thought he was a “selfish arsehole” and never told him she was pregnant. Louisa also joins a formulaically familiar support group that adds little to the story except as a device for her to reconnect cute with paramedic Sam, who stops by to pick up a group member Louisa assumes is his son. While developing wonderfully nuanced characters like Will’s grieving parents—particularly his mother, who forms a surprisingly deep bond with Lily—Moyes weakens the novel with stock villains like Lily’s narcissistic upper-middle-class mom. As the love interest, handsome, patient, sensitive Sam is too good to be true. Narrator Louisa is not quite as much fun this time around, but the optimistic final pages hint that her adventures may continue into another book.

*Moyes* is a Maeve Binchy for the 21st century, and she has the formula down pat: an understanding of family dynamics, a nod to social issues, plenty of moral uplift, and a sentimental streak, all buoyed by a rollicking sense of humor.
Izzy undertakes to solve the puzzle of his father’s life or death. Mexico, where his mother and stepfather had been provid-
ences to Jewish folktales and the Talmud, and an epic
Storm results in an updated noir providing a glimpse of the
forces a young priest to confront his own
A teenage girl’s demonic possession
Reading this book will offer a perverse comfort to those who think
our screen-infested culture curtails any possibility of genuine mystery.
WHAT YOU SEE
THE SEA BEACH LINE
Nadler, Ben
Fig Tree Books (344 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $10.99 e-book
Oct. 13, 2015
978-1-941493-08-3
978-1-941493-09-0 e-book
Stories both ancient and contemporary lurk beneath the surface of this New York saga of discovery and revelation. Izzy Edel, narrator of Nadler’s (Har-vitz, As to War, 2011) new novel, embarks on an odyssey of a peculiar sort after he’s expelled from Oberlin for overenthusiastic use of hallucinogens. A cryptic postcard from Izzy’s long-estranged father, Alojzy, and a mysterious letter from someone named Semyon Goldov reporting that Alojzy is missing and perhaps dead—received two days apart—prompt Izzy to leave New Mexico, where his mother and stepfather had been providing him with rest and rehabilitation, for his father’s world of Brooklyn and downtown New York. Upon arrival in New York, Izzy undertakes to solve the puzzle of his father’s life or death. When he steps into Alojzy’s role selling books from a cart in Greenwich Village and takes up residence in his storage unit, the gritty realities of his father’s hidden life are perplexingly revealed. Rayna, a fragile young woman with mysterious ties to a shadowy Hasidic sect in Borough Park, aids Izzy’s bookselling and detective efforts but hides secrets of her own. As more of Alojzy’s dubious business dealings are revealed, Izzy descends further into a world of questionable activity and finds that the answers to his father’s mystery are as complicated as the circumstances he finds himself in.
The confluence of a byzantine plot, intriguing references to Jewish folktales and the Talmud, and an epic storm results in an updated noir providing a glimpse of the Brooklyn and downtown Manhattan hidden from tourists and hipsters alike.

THE CASE AGAINST SATAN
Russell, Ray
Penguin (160 pp.)
$15.00 paper | $9.99 e-book
Oct. 13, 2015
978-0-14-310727-9
978-0-14-310728-6 e-book
A teenage girl’s demonic possession forces a young priest to confront his own crisis of faith in this rediscovered piece of pulp theology. Russell (Absolute Power, 1992, etc.) is perhaps best known for the screenplays of X: The Man With the X-ray Eyes and Mr. Sardonicus (adapted from his own short story), though his novels and stories earned him a 1991 World Fantasy Award for lifetime achievement. This novel—his first—begins when young Father Gregory is called to take over a parish from an abruptly departed predecessor. He’s barely settled when one of his new parishioners brings in his teenage daughter, telling tales of the girl’s rebelliousness. Gregory, a believer in psychoanalysis and the author of magazine articles that have troubled his superiors, is reluctant to believe what his bishop immediately apprehends: that the girl is possessed by the devil. Many of the plot elements—young female victim; older priest stalwart in his belief; younger colleague’s faith imperiled by his acceptance of contemporary rationality—turned up in William Peter Blatty’s The Exorcist, and it may be that Blatty’s lashings of gore and sexualized violence were his shrewdest innovation. For too much of its brief length, Russell’s novel reads like a theological debate, and a dusty one at that. The whodunit element grafted onto the denouement is a clumsy concession to storytelling.

There’s no doubt that Russell got to demonic possession before Blatty and Ira Levin, but that alone isn’t enough to possess anyone to read this book.

WHAT YOU SEE
Ryan, Hank Phillippi
Forge (384 pp.)
978-0-7653-7495-0
978-0-7653-7498-1 e-book
Think all those surveillance cameras in public places will keep you safe and solve every crime? An intrepid Boston journalist and her police detective boyfriend find out that they probably won’t.

Veteran TV reporter Jane Ryland and homicide cop Jake Brogan have seen a lot in their respective careers. And they still see each other as often as they can, even though both work to keep their romance relatively quiet since cops and reporters aren’t allowed to fraternize. Even so, the hours they spend apart are especially hectic and unnerving in Ryan’s latest mystery-thriller (Truth Be Told, 2014, etc.). To begin with, there’s a fatal broad-daylight stabbing in Curley Park near City Hall. Lots of cameras are around, but Jake and his colleagues can’t quite figure out who’s been killed and who the perp or perps might be. And one young woman working with the city’s digital camera system can’t understand why her boss cuts off her attempt to retrieve video of the incident. The peripatetically employed Jane, meanwhile, is dispatched to the scene by one of the local TV stations just to “gather facts” and is pestered by a wannabe paparazzi who claims to have some pertinent pictures of what happened. And in the middle of this chaos, Jane gets a phone call from her soon-to-be-married sister saying her fiancé’s 9-year-daughter from a previous marriage, who’s supposed to be their flower girl, is missing. The clock’s ticking on both cases, which, despite their differences, have darker forces of extortion, abduction, and corruption in high places lurking beneath their surfaces. Ryan, writing her fourth Jane Ryland novel, displays her trademark flair for knotty plotting, though it sometimes seems she’s taking on more details than she can easily handle—just like her appealing protagonists. As the dual narratives rumble toward
their respective climaxes, you somehow feel as though you’re pushed too hard and strung along too much at the same time. Still, this novel retains enough craftiness and jaunty humor to make it worth a night or two of breakneck reading.

Reading this book will offer a perverse comfort to those who think our screen-infested culture curtails any possibility of genuine mystery. Looks can still deceive in the digital age.

ONE OUT OF TWO
Sada, Daniel
Graywolf (88 pp.)
$14.00 paper | Nov. 3, 2015
978-1-55597-724-5

Comic novella from an acclaimed Mexican author (Almost Never, 2012).

The Gamal sisters are twins, and more than twins. After the death of their parents in a car accident—the girls were 13—they began to grow increasingly indistinguishable. Now in their 40s, they live together, they dress the same, they wear their hair in the same style. The slight differences in their personalities are obscured by the fact that they sometimes trade names. Then Constitución meets Oscar Segura, a “slender man of interesting age.” Suddenly, the Gamal sisters are no longer identical. Gloria grows bitter and silent. Constitución considers teasing her hair into a beehive and penciling her eyebrows to make herself into a new person, an individual. She abandons these thoughts, though, as she considers her sister’s heartbreak. Instead, she arrives at a radical solution to their predicament. Oscar has no idea that Constitución has a twin sister. What’s to stop them from taking turns in the role of Oscar’s sweetheart? Thus, both twins enjoy a taste of romance. There are, of course, problems with this plan, practical and existential. What follows is screwball comedy and melodramatic meditations on desire, dreams, and life’s dualities. The plot, like the book itself, is slight, and there is very little action. This tale is composed mostly of rumination, and the narrator emerges as the dominant character. Sada, who died in 2011, was known for his playfully extravagant style, a mix of earthy colloquialisms and fancy syntax. Here, he’s crafted a narrator that’s equal parts town gossip and armchair philosopher, a biographer and a fabulist, a storyteller who recruits the reader as a co-conspirator.

Slight, but disarming.

WRATH OF THE FURIES
Saylor, Steven
Minotaur (320 pp.)
978-1-250-01598-3
978-1-250-02607-1 e-book

In Saylor’s (Raiders of the Nile, 2014, etc.) newest novel of the ancient world, Mithridates, who styles himself Shahansha—King of Kings—has conquered Roman colonies from the Euxine Sea to Persia.

That doesn’t trouble Gordianus, a young Roman who’s living comfortably outside Alexandria with his beautiful slave, and lover, Bethesda. Sadly, during Egypt’s civil war, Gordianus lost touch with his beloved tutor, Antipater of Sidon. Thought “the greatest of all living poets,” Antipater joined Mithridates’ court and was soon trapped in internecine machinations. Now, he’s known as Zoticus of Zeugma, a spy. Then Gordianus receives a cryptic scroll suggesting that Antipater’s in peril. The poet is in Ephesus, the jewel of the east, and Gordianus sails off to help him; to escape detection as a Roman, he pretends to be mute, with Bethesda acting as his interpreter. Once in Ephesus, his muteness is perceived as evidence of a prophecy. Trapped in the maelstrom of back-stabbing royal intrigue, Gordianus is a hero to root for, but other characters are stock, with Mithridates in particular having minimal back story. While the relentless action and subtly drawn settings keep the pages turning, the book is a bit heavy on royal court politics. With a plot driven by the place of Roman and Greek gods in ancient societies, Gordianus must deal with the Grand Magus and Great Megabyzoi, and he learns that the Furies, those troublesome winged sisters older than Zeus, must be appeased with a virgin sacrifice. Only then can Mithridates approach the goddess Artemis to bless his evil scheme.

Religious war, ethnic cleansing—everything new is old again in the era of swords, togas, and defeated generals executed by being forced to swallow molten gold.

THE BRITISH LION
Schumacher, Tony
Morrow/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$25.99 | Oct. 27, 2015
978-0-06-239459-0

In this second novel set in 1940s Nazi-occupied Great Britain, Schumacher (The Darkest Hour, 2014) traps English war hero John Rossett between duty, loyalty, and morality.

Isolationist Charles Lindbergh is president of the U.S. and sycophant Joe Kennedy is ambassador to the U.K., but spy Allen Dulles doesn’t believe “America needs Hitler.” Dulles is running a clandestine operation to kidnap SS Maj. Ernst Koehler’s wife and daughter, and he wants Ruth Hartz, genius theoretical and applied physicist,
in exchange. Hartz, a Jew, has special dispensation to work on a superweapon at a Cambridge laboratory. Koehler’s gotten Rossett out of more than one scrape, and so the German major knows the police inspector will help him. Rossett and Koehler drive the tale, with the proverbial flawed hero Rossett, burned out and sickened by Nazi anti-Semitism, struggling to be a better man. He sees helping Koehler reunite his family as an honorable choice. Within this foggy moral atmosphere—Rossett himself once participated in rounding up English Jews—Schumacher creates a believable yet depressing occupied England, frozen and snow-covered. Rossett fights his way to Cambridge to find Hartz. Koehler is stranded in London, floundering in a swamp of intrigue. Royalist restoration partisans are led by an aristocrat, Sterling, “a manipulator, a plotter, a survivor...but a friend to none,” who reluctantly cooperates with ruthless Ma Price, “a proper villain, a nasty piece of work,” a crime-family queen-turned–depraved resistance leader. Hartz, understanding the importance of her science, proves a character to cheer for, perhaps even as Rossett’s redeemer, before one betrayal too many.

Believable alternate history laced with multiple gunfights, turncoat duplicity, and an ending sure to propel the British Lion back into action.

CORRUPTED
Scottoline, Lisa
St. Martin’s (368 pp.)
978-1-250-02793-1
978-1-250-02794-8 e-book

Twelve years after a Kids-for-Cash scheme ends the childhood of two boys, Philadelphia lawyer Bennie Rosato must defend one of them on a charge of murdering the other.

It’s nothing but a childhood fight, really, but the judge throws the book at both Jason Lefkavic, who draws 90 days in a juvenile prison, and Richie Grusini, who gets off with 60 days because his uncle, Declan Mitchell, was a state trooper. Bennie, responding to the pleas of Jason’s father, Matthew, hikes out to Mountaintop, Pennsylvania, in hopes of springing Jason, who hasn’t been properly advised of his right to counsel. In the course of her investigation, the famously abstemious Bennie falls for Declan, and their liaison gets her fired just as her legal strategy she methodically pursues as her cross-examination picks holes in the testimony of one witness after another. And then, as things seem to be looking up for Jason, a bombshell makes them look much worse for Bennie.

As so often for the firm of Rosato & DiNunzio (Betrayed, 2014, etc.), the ending, logical but woefully underprepared, is a serious disappointment. Fans eager to see Bennie’s courtroom mettle won’t care a bit.

THE PATHLESS SKY
Sen, Chaitali
Europa Editions (320 pp.)
$16.00 paper | $9.99 e-book
Oct. 27, 2015
978-1-60945-291-9
978-1-60945-301-5 e-book

Reeling from personal tragedy, a young couple struggles to navigate political violence in their unnamed homeland and rebuild their marriage.

“It mattered to him that he woke up alone,” Sen’s debut novel begins. John is upset and angry to find his wife, Mariam, once again asleep on the floor of the empty nursery that was supposed to house their stillborn baby daughter. Mariam’s ongoing pain is, to John, a personal affront that is splitting their marriage apart. But when the militia storms their workplace and Mariam is kidnapped, John’s only concern is for her safety. This present-day drama then flashes back to the story of young John and Mariam at university—their chance meeting on a bridge, growing connection, and John’s regretted detour into a relationship with Mariam’s friend Nina. Mariam and John soon marry and move back to his hometown. Life for the newlyweds moves along smoothly as John finishes his dissertation and advances in his career—complicated only by the denial of Mariam’s passport in the middle of the growing violence of the military state. Desperate to travel overseas, John decides to purchase forged papers for the family. But the loss of their newborn baby devastates Mariam; John, feeling abandoned, begins to think he and Mariam should separate. Here, the novel’s past catches up to the present and jumps back into the story of Mariam’s disappearance. This debut novel is a searingly vivid portrayal of the depths of human emotions—from the first glow of young love to the deeper strength of middle-aged commitment. Although the flashback structure—in which the bulk of the novel occurs in the past—leaves the reader hungry for the present-tense storyline of Mariam’s kidnapping, this device does create a suspenseful mystery which haunts the narrative.

A poignant and sophisticated work couched in lyrical, effervescent prose.
MENDOCINO FIRE

Stories
Tallent, Elizabeth
Harper/HarperCollins (272 pp.)
978-0-06-241034-4

This collection of stories in the American realist tradition has an adventurous, untethered feeling, with wide-ranging locales and points of view.

The first thing you notice about Tallent's first book in more than 20 years (Honey, 1993, etc.) is its breadth of subject matter. Set on university campuses, in the hardscrabble backwoods, or among much-divorced families, these stories feature emotionally wrenching situations and dramatic landscapes. Tallent probes different points of view—a young man struggling with his dad in a working-class California fishing community; an academic having an erotic encounter with her female student; an aging activist dealing with his multiple-ex-wives problem. These stories explore different genders, sexualities, and settings with skill and subtle intelligence. Next you notice Tallent's, er, talent as a prose stylist—she writes in long sentences pulsing with images and insights. In a story about a woman painfully and suddenly divorced, Tallent describes the woman's thoughts when scrutinizing a photograph of her husband's lover: “The mouth is done in a lipstick of a crude, carnal, trashy red, a third-world mouth, a Cuban mouth, and Ximena can't help wondering if the lover feels the need to mitigate her whiteness, if the ethnification of her mouth is owed to competitiveness with Ximena, about whom [her husband] must tell stories....” Or an academic observing her student, for whom she's developed an overwhelming attraction: “Under Clio's hot gaze the knot of passionate hair at the Beloved's nape, screwed so tight in its coil, releases red-gold strands flaring with electricity.” Tallent's assured voice is a pleasure to follow through this book. Occasionally, she tries to cover too much ground within one story, and the reader loses the thread, as confusing gaps of time occur and important characters recede. But mostly, Tallent is in control as she navigates her shifting landscapes.

An ambitious and wide-ranging set of stories that creates empathy for most of its characters due to Tallent's generous imagination.

THE SILENT BOY

Taylor, Andrew
HarperCollins (448 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 20, 2015
978-0-00-813135-7

In Taylor's newest historical crime novel (The Scent of Death, 2014, etc.), Edward Savill, home in London after working for the American Department in New York during the Revolutionary War, must deal with a shocking personal crisis.

Savill has left government to work as a property agent for foreign investors, but then comes unexpected news from Rampton, the former American Department head: he says his niece, Savill's long-estranged wife, Augusta, has been killed in revolutionary Paris. She's left a 10-year-old son, Charles, father unknown, who's been brought to England and left at Charnwood, near Bath, under the care of French refugees Fournier, a former cleric who may be an atheist; Count de Quillon, who “dabb[led] with the Revolution when it suited his purpose”; and their physician, Dr. Gohlis. Rampton, who's chief of the mysterious Black Letter Office, tells Savill he wants him to fetch the boy, an important task because there are “elements that have to do with the safety of the kingdom and the impending war with France.” Savill is a cautious, intelligent protagonist, but he turns relentless after Charles is kidnapped and taken to London. Taylor's mystery is a true puzzler, but it's his mastery of life in chaotic Paris and London in 1792 that dazzles, and his portrayal of Charles, who was struck mute after his mother's killers terrorized him, is empathetic. The boy counts compulsively—“measurements make a fortress of facts that protects him as he sleeps”—and adopts an écorché, a corpse transmuted into an anatomical model, as a friend. Motives pull and push. The count claims to be Charles' father. Rampton wants an heir. Savill feels a moral obligation to the child of a woman he once loved. As characters travel across England on nearly impassable muddy, rutted roads and stop at crude inns serving chicken, chops, and sherry, Taylor offers a readable take on social mores, class interactions, and great houses populated by aristocrats “icily elegant, ambitious to the point of ruthlessness.”

A touch of intrigue, a soupçon of espionage, wrapped in tense and suspense-laden mystery.
In retrospect, it makes perfect sense that Julia Heaberlin, author of *Black-Eyed Susans* (Aug. 11), would write thrillers. For starters, Heaberlin, who grew up in the tiny Texas town of Decatur, spent much of her childhood in the old jailhouse. Granted, it was a jailhouse that had been converted into a library, but still, jails are like bridesmaids’ dresses: you can try to perk them up, but it’s hard to forget what they once were.

“It was so hot in the summer,” remembers Heaberlin. “If I was bored I had two choices—walk to the library or pick weeds. I always chose the library.” At the library, apart from breathing in the dregs of criminality lurking in the ether, Heaberlin acquired a voracious and varied literary appetite. As an adult, a successful journalist, Heaberlin was drawn to stories of crime and their lingering impact. “I was always fascinated by the stories of what happened to the families years after the crime had been committed,” says Heaberlin.

Like the suspense novelists she admires—Gillian Flynn, Stephen King, Thomas Harris—Heaberlin writes thrillers with meat on the bones, stories propelled by plot but anchored by larger societal issues. *Black-Eyed Susans* is about a woman found barely alive in a grave full of bones and no idea how she got there. The book opens with a chilling quote from Tess, the victim and protagonist: “Thirty-two hours of my life are missing.”

You might think that an author would need her own horrific closet of secrets to conjure stories like that. For Heaberlin, it’s the opposite. “I have a very happy life,” says the wife and mother. “I think it makes me able to go into these dark places in my mind when I write.”

*Kirk Reed Forrester is a writer based in Birmingham, Alabama. Black-Eyed Susans was reviewed in the May 15, 2015, issue.*
In Thornton’s debut novel, the “overeager, impatient, and optimistic” (and fictional) Thoms is inserted into history as the chauffeur who innocently piloted Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie, to their assassination in 1914. A sparkling student, when he gets to college he makes friends and begins a love affair with Lorelei Ribeiro, whose husband had “found a watery grave with the Titanic the previous year.” Then his schoolteacher father descends into a mad obsession with Pythagoras and the boy must find work. He becomes an occasional driver for Oskar Pitiorek, an Austrian general based in Sarajevo, and the die is cast. After Franz Ferdinand’s death, a guilt-mad Thoms rescues Cicero, a dying orphan; wanders to Portugal’s Lands End; meets Hemingway, Orwell, and Dorothy Parker during the Spanish Civil War; anonymously writes successful novels about “The White Kilted Brigadier”; and eventually grows into “an exquisite old man” seeking a “wormhole in the space-time continuum.” Thornton’s arcane references and wordplay dazzle—Thoms’ “slow foreplay with the books” of the Kama Sutra, for instance—and his voice has echoes of Gabriel García Márquez (sans magical realism).

Chaos theory as erudite fiction: a bleak yet comic odyssey exploring and expiating human frailties. Read it slowly and savor it.

FOOD WHORE
Tom, Jessica
Morrow/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
978-0-06-238700-4

The Devil Wears Prada goes gourmet in this debut novel.

Tia Monroe has big dreams of becoming a food writer. As a grad student in NYU’s Food Studies program, her ultimate goal is to intern with cookbook author and food superstar Helen Lansky. After a chance run-in with New York Times food critic Michael Saltz, Tia’s convinced the internship with Helen is a sure thing. Instead, she’s disappointed to be assigned to the coat check at an upscale restaurant. However, when Michael visits the restaurant and is very interested in her opinions, Tia gains a whole new opportunity. Michael’s lost his sense of taste, but he doesn’t want to lose his job—so he needs Tia to taste everything for him and essentially ghostwrite his reviews. Tia readily agrees, but her undercover gig is more work than she thought it would be. She has to keep her new job a secret from everyone, including her school, her internship, her friends, and her boyfriend. Tia loves the perks of her glamorous lifestyle, like unlimited shopping sprees and the attention of a sexy chef, but when things start to catch up to her, she begins to wonder if she’s made a mistake. The book speeds along with enough intrigue and excitement to keep any reader hooked. The ending is tied up a bit too neatly, but the deliciously detailed food descriptions are a bonus.

A fun and compulsively readable look at a woman’s journey into the underbelly of the New York food scene.
A crack shot, Billy Sinclair leads his Marine unit’s sniper team as they enter Fallujah in 2004, where Iraqi insurgents wait, but he carries a heavy burden: the unexplained suicide of his best friend the day before Sept. 11, 2001, two blows that drove him to enlist.

Readers of Vandenburg’s *The Home Front* (2015) will discover another story of a dedicated soldier who can’t escape a tormented family. A skilled writer who has done her homework, Vandenburg not only immerses herself in her characters, but seems to accept their rather black-and-white worldview: Iraqi insurgents are suicidal fanatics. Marines are a band of brothers. Civilian leaders in Washington, cowed by our Al-Jazeera-dominated media that loves tales of American atrocities, hamstring troops with impossible rules of engagement. The Iraqis themselves are a disappointment: civilians refuse to believe our noble intentions; Iraqi units, supporting our side, run away. As the Marines advance, Vandenburg delivers a meticulous description of elite troops clearing an enemy city. At first, the houses are empty. Then they are not. Murderous firefight break out. Innumerable insurgents and some civilians die. Marines begin to fall. Billy achieves an epiphany about his responsibility for his friend’s death. It does not end well, but neither did the first battle of Fallujah. This is good, popular war fiction with convincing battle scenes and a mildly flawed hero. A killing machine with a conscience, Sinclair is a carbon copy of Bradley Cooper in the recent film *American Sniper*.

Readers should enjoy the fireworks and not think too deeply about the underlying theme, which is that the real victims in Iraq are our guys.

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If readers were intrigued by the introduction of acid-tongued, supernaturally gifted Miriam Black in Wendig’s last novel, this book will really sink its teeth into them. She’s recovering after the traumatic events of *Blackbirds* (2015), holed up in an old Airstream trailer owned by the truck driver who saved her life. But she’s getting itchy, and the visions she’s having of a dark entity she calls “The Trespasser” aren’t helping. Eventually she’s introduced to Katey, an English teacher at an exclusive all-girls prep school. Katey thinks she’s dying, and Miriam quickly confirms this truth. But when she accidentally bumps into young Lauren “Wren” Martin, a much darker vision occurs to Miriam. “Here’s the poop, little bird,” she says. “I have this power. Like a psychic power? Except not your everyday psychic hoo- doo. I can’t levitate shit, I wouldn’t know palm reading from a pile of donkey guts, and tarot cards weird me out a little. But what I can do is touch a person and see how they’re going to die. I saw how you’re going to die. And I don’t want that to happen.”

With each turn of the screw, the book pushes readers deeper into the dysfunction of a small town and ratchets up the horror, both paranormal and startlingly human. As before, Miriam isn’t for everyone; she’s extremely profane, her creator absolutely punishes her physically, and she’s not exactly someone to root for. But it’s apparent that Wendig is getting more skilled at his craft here, using better characterization and the same whiplash prose to carve out a story that is not only creepier and equally propulsive, but is also pushing its heroine toward even worse events in future installments.

*Lurid but wildly entertaining urban horror that falls somewhere between Flowers in the Attic and Joe Hill.*

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*Shakespeare did a pretty good job with his plays, but Hogarth Press is putting out a series of rewrites.*

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*THE GAP OF TIME*

Winterson, Jeanette

Hogarth/Crown (240 pp.)


978-0-8041-4135-2

978-0-8041-4136-9 e-book

Shakespeare did a pretty good job with his plays, but Hogarth Press is putting out a series of rewrites by contemporary novelists. This is Winterson’s version of *A Winter’s Tale*.

Winterson says the play “has been a private text for me for more than 30 years. By that I mean part of the written wor(l)d I can’t live without; without, not in the sense of lack, but in the old sense of living outside of something.” The play does have a thematic resemblance to Winterson’s novels (The Daylight Gate, 2015, etc.) and memoir (Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?, 2012), with its autocratic father, hints of incest, passionate love shaming into abuse, foundlings, and redemptive innocents. Shakespeare’s telling reads like a fairy tale: a jealous king, convinced his wife is having an affair with his best friend, has his baby daughter set adrift. She washes up on the coast of the friend’s kingdom, Bohemia, where a shepherd finds her. Meanwhile, the Delphic Oracle vindicates the queen, who (supposedly) drops dead, only to reappear years later as a statue who comes to life once the lost princess is allowed to marry the Bohemian prince. Winterson changes the king into a London hedge fund tycoon, the queen into a French pop star, the shepherd into a black musician in New Orleans, Louisiana, the queen’s loyal scold of a serving woman...
into a Jewish executive assistant spouting Yiddish proverbs, and so on. It generally works well, but the transformation drains the story of some of its fairy-tale magic: for example, the statue business shows up only as a video game and a metaphor (“Every day she finds another carving, another statue and she imagines what it would be like if they came to life. And who trapped them in stone? She feels trapped in stone”). Winterson’s most interesting addition is to make the king-king-queen love triangle explicitly sexual: here the two men are not just best friends, but boyhood lovers.

Ponderous comic sections are redeemed by flights of epigrammatic lyricism that twist cynicism into hope.

THE UNFORTUNATE DECISIONS OF DALIA MOSS
Wiestone, Max
Redhook/Orbit (304 pp.)
$20.00  |  Oct. 20, 2015
978-0-316-38597-8

A hapless 20-something is surprised to find that online gaming is good for something after all—and that something is catching a real-world murderer.

Dahlia Moss has been going on hopeless job interviews for more than a year without any luck, and her life has become a boring and ramen-filled one. So she’s surprised when she finally does get a job, which is $2,000 to recover a stolen virtual weapon from a massive multiplayer online role-playing game called Kingdoms of Zoth. This seems to be easy work for the former geek, but when her employer dies before he can pay her the second half of her fee, Dahlia is pulled into a murder mystery. On- and offline, an odd cast of characters floods into her life, from the former guild mates of the recently deceased to a detective who may know more than he lets on about gaming, and her life quickly goes from boring to dangerous. She may have even found love, though she suspects it may be with a murderer. Wirestone’s writing is funny and quite nerdy—though while practicing geeks will find many jokes hidden in the story for them, non-geeks will not feel left out. The many clever references are a nice accompaniment for Dahlia’s complex voice, which is winning even when she’s being a bit of a loser. Wirestone combines the traditions of several genres to great effect here, such that a mystery reader will enjoy the book as much as an MMORPG aficionado. Though the whodunit is not particularly hard to solve, the book is more focused on the journey than the destination. Even the acknowledgments are fun to read.

A clever mystery featuring a delightful amateur detective. Or, in online parlance: Dahlia Moss FTW!

FOREIGN AFFAIRS
Woods, Stuart
Putnam (320 pp.)
$27.95  |  Oct. 27, 2015
978-0-399-17467-4

A former New York Mafioso who’s fled home to Italy kidnaps the latest inamorata of the redoubtable Stone Barrington (Hot Pursuit, 2015, etc.). Big mistake.

Stone’s flown the Atlantic at an hour’s notice, flirting en route with painter Hedy Kiesler, to vote in favor of opening a new Arrington Hotel in Rome. No sooner have the contracts been signed than trouble erupts. The unfinished hotel already standing abandoned on the site is torched; Stone’s borrowed car is stolen and set alight as well; he gets several increasingly overt threats encouraging him to go home and forget the deal; and it’s clear that they’re coming from Leonardo Casselli, the patriarchal mobster who just hates being called Leo. Packing Hedy off from his hotel bed in Rome to another bed in Paris, Stone stays just long enough to read the riot act in response to Casselli’s suave luncheon offer of extortionate “protection,” threatening him with the extensive resources of Massimo Bertelli’s Italian Anti-Mafia Investigative Department; Stone’s unfathomably wealthy business partner Marcel duBois; his buddy Mike Freeman’s company, Strategic Services; his even closer buddy Commissioner Dino Bacchetti’s New York Police Department; and President Katharine Rule Lee, another close personal friend. Then he hastens back to Rome, leaving Hedy in his Paris house, from which she’s promptly abducted. Stone soon finds out that Casselli’s holding Hedy in an impregnable house on the Amalfi coast; Casselli soon finds out that Stone wasn’t kidding about all those connections.

Apart from all the big names tossed in to cow Casselli, Woods mostly soft-pedals the usual gratuitous inflation and extraneous subplots, keeping things simple, straightforward, and pleasantly predictable.
**M Y S T E R Y**

### PLAYING WITH FIRE

*Anderson-Dargatz, Gail*

Raven Books (320 pp.)

$9.95 paper | Oct. 28, 2015

978-1-4598-0840-9

A journalist hovers between two suitors while tracking down an arsonist.

Claire Abbott, a reporter and photographer for a small-town weekly newspaper, returns exhausted to her office after spending most of the night covering a story that involves a vision she had. It’s a first for Claire but not for her mother, who’s always been considered a little nutty because of her visions. When Claire saves a girl from a kidnapper, handsome volunteer firefighter Trevor Bragg is annoyed not just because her absence has ruined their planned date, but because she’s spent hours talking to Matt Holden, the search-and-rescue manager for the area. The town has been suffering through a series of minor cases of arson. Now the firebug seems to be progressing to more dangerous blazes. Claire’s vision of the latest one involves a young man, a young woman, and a gas can. The pair turn out to be none other than Trevor’s younger brother and his girlfriend, both of whom deny setting any fires. So Claire resolves to take enough time away from her two jealous suitors to prove her visions really do lead to the truth.

Part of the Rapid Read series, this short and easily solved mystery leaves little room for Anderson-Dargatz (Search and Rescue, 2014, etc.) to develop characters, clues, or anything else.

### A BLOSSOM OF BRIGHT LIGHT

*Chazin, Suzanne*

Kensington (368 pp.)

$25.00 paper | $11.99 e-book

Oct. 27, 2015

978-1-61773-635-3

978-1-61773-636-0 e-book

A feeling of guilt spurs on a detective in a murder case.

Detective Jimmy Vega is in a relationship with Adele Figueroa, a Harvard-trained attorney who gave up the law to run La Casa, a Latino community center. Always on call, they have to steal moments to be together. So when Adele gets a call that well-known alcoholic Zambo claims to have seen the baby Jesus in the arms of the Virgin Mary near La Casa, Jimmy talks her out of checking the unlikely story. Soon enough, a dead baby is found in the woods behind La Casa. Vega catches the case and works with the Lake Holly department in the search for the baby’s mother, who’s soon found equally dead wearing a hoodie that belonged to Vega’s daughter, Joy, who lives with her mother and wealthy stepfather. Meanwhile, Adele’s been offered a wonderful job in Washington, D.C., with a congressional candidate. Ambivalent about the offer, she hasn’t told Vega about it, and he’s devastated when he finds out on his own. Caught up in the case of a Mexican widower with three young children who’s about to be deported, Adele soon sees how ugly politics can be when her candidate refuses to help because it might lose him votes. Vega, certain that his daughter is no baby killer, digs deeper into the Latino community’s secrets and the nasty world of politics. The answers to his questions will rock the community and put Adele in danger.

Chazin’s latest (*Land of Careful Shadows*, 2014) again deftly weaves some difficult and topical subjects into a police procedural.

### SHADOWED EVIL

*Clare, Alis*

Severn House (240 pp.)

$28.95 | Oct. 1, 2015

978-0-7278-8320-3

A visit to a treasured childhood home involving Sir Josse d’Acquin and his wife, Helewise, in yet another murder.

In February 1212, Josse and Helewise (*The Winter King*, 2014, etc.) have undertaken a frigid journey to visit his elderly Uncle Hugh, his mother’s brother. Josse spent many happy periods at Southfire Hall as a youth enjoying the company of his cousins, especially the daring Aeleis. Although they are warmly welcomed, the pair soon notice that the family is very tense indeed. The trouble seems to be caused by Cyrille de Picus, the wife of Herbert, Josse’s oldest cousin Isabelle’s son. Cyrille is cold, bossy, and cruel to Olivar, her son from a former marriage, whom Herbert, lacking any male offspring, means to adopt as his heir. The arrival of a young man injured nearby in a riding accident creates a mystery when Josse discovers that the man, who calls himself Peter Southey, has in his possession a carved chess figure that Josse is certain belongs to Aeleis, who ran off after refusing to marry an older man Hugh had chosen for her. He remembers well that Aeleis found the figure while she and Josse were investigating the undercroft of Southfire Hall, parts of which date back to Roman times. Peter seems to be improving, so when he suddenly dies, Josse and Helewise grow suspicious. The atmosphere in the house is increasingly uncomfortable. Olivar continues to have terrifying nightmares; Cyrille becomes even more unpleasant. Uncle Hugh may hold the answer to some of Josse’s questions, but his drifting in and out of lucidity leaves Josse and Helewise to solve the riddle on their own.

Of all Clare’s charmingly mystical looks at life and death in 13th-century England, this one-sitting read is by far the purest mystery.
FLIPPED FOR MURDER
Day, Maddie
Kensington (304 pp.)
978-1-61773-925-5
978-1-61773-926-2 e-book

A new restaurant owner is beset by murder and other troubles.
Robbie Jordan has moved from California to South Lick, Indiana, the town where her mother grew up, to open Pans 'N Pancakes, a restaurant and store featuring antique cookware. Robbie's aunt Adele lives nearby, and she's also made quite a few friends, including her handsome lawyer, in the time it's taken to renovate the old store and upstairs apartment. But not everyone is happy with Robbie's new endeavor. Neither the owner of a restaurant in a nearby town nor a strange character who wanted the store for himself is celebrating. When the mayor's snoopy assistant, Stella Rogers, is found murdered, Robbie becomes a person of interest and decides she needs to do some snooping of her own to clear her name. Apparently Stella had been blackmailing a good number of people for years, so there are plenty of other suspects. Robbie never knew who her father was, but her investigation into the murder is sidetracked when she turns up a likely candidate—a handsome Italian exchange student who romanced her mother and whom she greatly resembles. Robbie contacts her possible father in Italy while she continues to dig for dirt at home and finds enough to motivate several attempts on her own life.

Day's series debut provides some quirky characters and red herrings along with the obligatory romantic interest and recipes.
When Deidre, who insists that Dandy was dognapped, turns up dead, apparently from an accidental overdose, her daughter, Desdemona, begs Liss, formerly a professional Scottish dancer, to finish the show, which is about to anoint the champion of champions. With her business in the winter doldrums, Liss agrees and moves into the hotel at the Five Mountains Ski Resort along with the other contestants, a jealous bunch vying with each other to win. When someone starts playing dirty tricks on the group, Liss goes into sleuthing mode and carefully guards the Scotties. Discovering that Deidre's death was indeed murder makes her wonder whom she can trust while she begins to find the killer.

Dunnett's latest (Ho-Ho-Homicide, 2014, etc.) is full of local color, suspicious characters, and adorable fur-babies. What's not to like?

**DARK RESERVATIONS**
Fortunato, John
Minotaur (352 pp.)
978-1-250-07419-5
978-1-250-07420-1 e-book

A disgraced police officer catches a cold case whose political overtones make it red hot.

Joe Evers' life has been a mess since his wife died. Drinking made him botch a case, and his boss at the Bureau of Indian Affairs had demanded that he retire in three months when the remains of Congressman Arlen Edgerton's car are found on the Navajo reservation, creating a firestorm of media interest. Edgerton, his secretary, Faye Hannaway, and his driver vanished more than 20 years ago. Now his wife, Grace Edgerton, is running for governor of New Mexico. She's lived down the speculations that her husband ran off with Faye after collecting a bundle of dirty money, but new rumors threaten to sink her campaign. What's left of the car has some bullet holes, and with help from the FBI, Joe, Navajo liaison Officer Bluehorse, and some search dogs find a body hidden nearby in a shallow grave. Tests show that the victim is the driver, leaving it still possible that Edgerton and Faye did run off. Joe tries to hold his life together for the sake of his daughter, a college student. But he finds it hard to quit drinking, and his team at BIA, even his old partner, has lost all trust in him. Because the case has piqued his interest and everyone seems anxious to see him fail, Joe becomes determined to find the truth. When Bluehorse is killed in an ambush meant for Joe, he digs even deeper into a morass of crooked politicians, missing artifacts, wealthy collectors, and police officers on the take.

A fine debut from Fortunato, an FBI special agent who knows his way around police work. Plenty of red herrings, dark horses, and quirky characters hold your interest from beginning to end.

**SACRIFICE**
Freeman, Philip
Pegasus (192 pp.)
$24.95 | Oct. 15, 2015
978-1-60598-889-4

It's druids versus Christians in a series of ritual murders that rend sixth-century Ireland.

Although Deirdre became a nun after the death of her young son, she still retains her status as a druidic bard. She's worked to find a balance between being a sister of holy Brigid and her allegiance to her beloved grandmother, a well-respected seer who raised her in druid traditions. But not everyone is happy with Deirdre's double loyalty. Sister Anna, the abbess of St. Brigid's monastery, seems even more mistrustful when Sister Grainne, an elderly hermit, is found in a bog, garroted with the lanyard of her own cross and with her throat slit. Father Ailbe, who doubles as a physician and rattles off medical terminology with the ease of a modern forensic scientist, reports that Grainne was drugged with mistletoe juice and was in a peaceful coma before her death. Hers is only the first of many murders of nuns, all killed according to rituals of druidic sacrifice. One of the victims is the daughter of a powerful clan leader who demands revenge on the druids. Fearing a rift between Christian and druid and outright warfare among the clans, King Dúnlaing turns to Deirdre, who not only has a foot in both religious camps, but also lives in Kildare, midway between the eastern and western clans. As his designated detective, she has more time to follow his orders (and apparently to invent the Irish alphabet) after Sister Anna expels her from the monastery. When Deirdre's cousin, another solitary nun, is attacked, she denounces her assailant as the murderer. He doesn't deny it, even if it means being burned at the stake. But just when Christians and druids alike think it's safe to
leave their daub-and-wattle huts, another murder proves how wrong they are—and Deirdre must summon all her courage to face the threats to herself, her family, and her community.

Despite Freeman’s earnest enthusiasm for his subject, this sequel to St. Brigid’s Bones (2014) works marginally better as a mystery than as a historical novel.

**ANADARKO**

Holm, Tom

Univ. of Arizona (248 pp.)

$17.95 paper | Oct. 1, 2015

An Irish private eye and his Cherokee assistant step into a hotbed of racism and crime when they look for a missing person in Prohibition-era Oklahoma.

J.D. Daugherty, a former Chicago cop who’s set up as a PI in Tulsa, and World War I veteran Hoolie Smith, whose services he often uses, arrive in the town of Anadarko looking for Frank Shotz, a geologist who’s supposed to be securing grazing leases on Indian land but who’s more likely looking for oil or gas. After he’s nearly shot on the street while attempting to talk to two Indian men, Hoolie learns that Sheriff Wynn and Police Chief Collins are fighting over the bootlegging business in the county. Another player is Violet Comstock, who not only owns a restaurant, but has interests in hotels and a brothel and, together with the mayor, wants to force out the sheriff and chief and take over the hooch business. They offer J.D. money to create a war between the two so the governor will be forced to send in troops. As it turns out, Shotz’s mutilated body was found and buried by the Kiowa Charging Horse family, who fear they’ll be accused of his murder. The Ku Klux Klan practically runs Oklahoma, but some of J.D.’s powerful friends in the oil industry are fighting its abhorrent influence. When J.D. is called back to Tulsa to help find the kidnapped daughter of a black leader whom he met in a former case (The Osage Rose, 2008), Hoolie stays in Anadarko to sort things out. Instead, he and his friends are falsely accused of murder. Clearly, they’ll have their hands full trying to discover the shadowy figure behind all the trouble in Anadarko.

A nasty picture of how far the Klan reached into everyday life, reflections on Native American culture and religion, and a gallery of fascinating characters are all woven into a complex mystery.

**CARTER & LOVECRAFT**

Howard, Jonathan L.

Dunne/St. Martin’s (320 pp.)


A former cop delves into the supernatural when he’s teamed with one of H.P. Lovecraft’s descendants to solve a crime.

Detective Dan Carter’s biggest case is his last: his partner blows his own brains out after they’ve apprehended a serial killer. Unnerved, Dan leaves the force and turns private eye. His eminently predictable caseload is dominated by assignments to follow cheating husbands—until a lawyer turns up and tells Carter that someone named Alfred Hill has left him a bequest that turns out to be a bookstore in Providence. Carter finds this strange, since he’s never heard of Alfred Hill. The bookstore is staffed by Hill’s niece, Emily Lovecraft, whose other ancestors include the master of supernatural horror. Emily, who hasn’t seen her uncle Alfred for seven years, certainly hasn’t anticipated an ouster from her place as owner-in-absentia. No worries: Dan takes a shine to Emily and promises to share bookshop responsibilities with her, though he soon gets wrapped up in a local case of his own. A college professor seems to have drowned in his car without a drop of water in sight. Stumped, local police are ready to write it off as an idiotic asphyxiation. But Dan can’t stop thinking about it, especially because the last number the professor’s phone called was his own. He’ll have to open his mind to a world beyond what’s in front of him if he hopes to solve the professor’s murder.

Fans of the original Lovecraft will have their rewards—Cthulu (spoiler alert) makes an appearance—but this series debut from Howard (Nightclubbing, 2015, etc.) shines brightest when keeping to his characters’ easy banter and creepy deaths.

**RETURN TO DUST**

Lanh, Andrew

Poisoned Pen (308 pp.)

$26.95 | $15.95 paper | $9.99 e-book

$23.95 Lg. Prt. | Oct. 28, 2015

Did she jump or was she pushed? That’s what Amerasian college instructor/detective Rick Van Lam’s client wants to know.

Although the Connecticut detective agency in which Rick (Caught Dead, 2014) is a partner deals mostly with insurance companies, he occasionally takes outside cases. He barely knows Karen Corcoran, who wants to hire him, but her recently deceased aunt, Marta Kowalski, was his cleaning lady, so he
agrees to investigate her death, which the police have dismissed as suicide. Well-known in Farmington, Marta was an argumentative, often grumpy, deeply religious Catholic who nevertheless flirted with men, frequented bars, and took trips to Vegas. Although she appears to have leaped from a bridge, Karen is convinced she was murdered. Rick gets some help from his former student Hank Nguyen, whose Vietnamese-immigrant family has all but adopted Rick, who spent his early years in an orphanage in Ho Chi Minh City. Although Rick is still scorned by some Vietnamese for being of mixed race, Hank’s family provides an entry into the community. He learns that one of the people Marta fought with was a refugee who did lawn care for Joshua Jennings, a patrician college professor Marta dreamed of marrying. It might seem that Jennings’ death and the sale of his ancient house, which Marta adored, pushed her over the edge. The more Rick digs into her surprisingly complicated life, however, the more convinced he grows that she was murdered.

Lanh delves into the problems facing many in the Vietnamese community while providing a tantalizing look at the way a woman’s obsessions led to her death.

MRS. ROOSEVELT’S CONFIDANTE
MacNeal, Susan Elia
Bantam (968 pp.)
$15.00 paper | $9.99 e-book
Oct. 27, 2015
978-0-8041-7870-9
978-0-8041-7871-6 e-book
In 1941, Christmas offers hope for a beleaguered Great Britain but no peace for an English spy.

Now that Japan has attacked the U.S., President Franklin Delano Roosevelt can declare war on the Axis, and Winston Churchill has made a secret trip to Washington to discuss strategy. After starting as Churchill’s secretary, brilliant math major Maggie Hope has graduated to become an accomplished spy. Raised in Boston by her American aunt after the supposed deaths of her parents, she now knows that her father is a codebreaker for Great Britain and her mother’s a Nazi spy imprisoned in England. Arriving at the White House, she’s sucked into helping Eleanor Roosevelt when they go check up on Mrs. Roosevelt’s missing secretary, Blanche Balfour, a Southern belle whose boyfriend is urging her to help him create a scandal. Maggie and Eleanor find Blanche dead in her bathtub, her wrists slit.

The setup screams suicide, but Maggie is suspicious enough to remove a writing pad from Blanche’s room. Judicious use of a pencil shows that a letter written on the pad accused Eleanor of trying to kiss Blanche. Maggie also becomes involved in the cause of Wendell Cotton, a black man on death row in Virginia, whom an all-white jury has convicted of murder and sentenced to die. Mrs. Roosevelt is eager to save him, but her husband refuses to interfere because he needs Southern support for the war effort. While Churchill and Roosevelt huddle, Maggie’s former lover, Flight Lt. John Sterling, another of Churchill’s aides, is sent to California to drum up publicity and work with Walt Disney on a cartoon Sterling created. Maggie remains in D.C., assisted by a reporter who was once her old college friend, to wrestle with Blanche’s murder and Cotton’s fate.

MacNeal (The Prime Minister’s Secret Agent, 2014, etc.) paints an engrossing portrait of a country on the verge of war, with many laws suspended and prejudice rife—a world not that much different from today.
DEVIL OF DELPHI
Siger, Jeffrey
Poisoned Pen (276 pp.)
$26.95 | $15.95 paper | $9.99 e-book
$23.95 Lg. Prt. | Oct. 6, 2015
978-1-4642-0430-2
978-1-4642-0432-6 paper
978-1-4642-0433-3 e-book
978-1-4642-0431-9 Lg. Prt.

When Greek police go after the counterfeit-wine industry, they stir up a hornet’s nest of syndicate counteroffensives and unleash a psychopath.

Kharon, a young man with a criminal record that was expunged because of his youth, is hitchhiking in Delphi. After the driver who picks him up puts a move on him, Kharon directs them to a secluded place, where he brutally kills the driver. Meanwhile in Athens, Chief Inspector Andreas Kaldis, head of the Greek Police’s Special Crime division (Sons of Sparta, 2014, etc.), is asked by a trio of colleagues to tackle the illegal wine industry, which undermines the reputation of local producers and harms tourism. While he and detectives Kouros and Petro gather information, Kharon’s aggression and reputation among local criminals gets him noticed. In short order, he makes his way to the local kingpin, a disarmingly direct and low-key woman known as Teacher. She gives him a shot at being her enforcer. Kharon learns her violent bona fides from Jacobi, a midlevel criminal. Because mutual trust is scarce in her line of work, Teacher finds it challenging to control her volatile new pit bull. The apparently casual murder of the daughter of a renowned Greek politician right in front of her brother puts the police on a different trail, one that leads back to Teacher.

Though the reader is always several steps ahead of the police here, Siger’s sublimely malevolent villains make the book a page-turner.
When they attend a dinner party at the home of the Barringtons, Milo, of murder (Murder at Brightwell, 2014), the couple has fully point out to the investigating officers. Ben knows better form of an inspector she met in the Brightwell case, ask for her help. Despite remaining deeply in love with Milo, who insists that the latest episode is all a misunderstanding, she also contemplates divorce. Clearly, this dangerous adventure will either bring them closer or put paid to their marriage.

Fans with fond memories of Georgette Heyer’s mysteries set in the same period will be delighted with the gallery of suspects and the edgy romance.

Curious about the flight patterns of circling vultures, Ben speaks with the family through B’alam’s younger brother, Ichik, who’s equally invested in understanding the crime. As he conscientiously provides many ecological and historical details in his first-person narration, Ben investigates possible motives and peppers the tale with thankfully vague innuendo about his relationship with Rebecca. Each theory Ben considers is interesting and plausible, making the big reveal a little less big and revealing. You can be sure a protagonist like Ben would never cross the line into actual danger.

You’re nerdy uncle gets creepy, transforming his vacation travelogue into Raiders of the Lost Ark meets Eyes Wide Shut. Worth reading only if that uncle is your hero.
The actor William Shatner, who wrote the book’s Afterword, describes Beaumont’s early death from a form of dementia as “like a science fiction story he would have written. Charlie Beaumont, wonderful, active, virile, creative writer, dies of old age in his thirties.”

Each with its satisfying twist, often surprisingly surprising, these stories charm and entertain while mapping out the landscape of (white, male) American anxieties in the middle of the last century.

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<th>WAKE OF VULTURES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bowen, Lila</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orbit/Little, Brown (320 pp.)</td>
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<td>978-0-316-26431-0</td>
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A fantasy set in a Wild West populated by plenty of vicious monsters—and one unwilling heroine.

Nettie Lonesome isn’t a slave. Not exactly. But the people she calls Pap and Mam don’t treat her like their daughter, either. So when a stranger shows up, attacks her, and then poofs into a pile of sand when she stabs him in the chest with a twig, she has no one to turn to with her questions or her fears. And when her friend Monty gives her a chance to join the bronco wranglers at a neighboring ranch, she jumps at the opportunity to change her life. But the hidden world that stranger introduced her to won’t leave her alone, and she soon finds herself on the run from...
all manner of monsters, trying to live up to a destiny she isn’t too keen on. Nettie is a lively, ornery, unconventional heroine who rises to each fresh challenge with a believable mix of fear and determination. Half-black, half-Indian, and wholly confused about her gender and sexuality, she’s a misfit who has to learn how to trust others—and herself. Debut novelist Bowen has created a fascinating, textured Wild West world. The monsters are gruesome, the battles are bloody, and the pace of this story never flags.

Readers will love this absorbing fantasy adventure (the first in a planned series) and its strong, dynamic heroine.

OUR LADY OF THE ICE
Clarke, Cassandra Rose
Saga/Simon & Schuster (432 pp.)
$25.99 | Oct. 27, 2015
978-1-4814-4426-2

A sci-fi mystery involving robots and revolutionaries.

Lady Marianella Luna is a rich, beautiful woman with a problem, one she can’t bring to the cops. Instead, she takes her dilemma to a private eye, Eliana Gomez. Eliana eagerly accepts Lady Luna’s case—and her money—and begins chasing clues into the city’s underbelly. From this familiar opening, Clarke invites readers into an uncommon place: Hope City, an improbable metropolis built on the Antarctic ice and kept alive by a protective glass dome. In this alternate Earth, Hope City began as a Victorian-era amusement park, staffed by humans who immigrated to Antarctica as well as androids built for the park. The park closed in the 1940s and deactivated most of its androids, but the city endured. Now many citizens want to move back to the mainland, including Eliana: solving Lady Luna’s case will give her the funds to leave. Luna’s mystery quickly deepens, introducing Eliana to the city’s different elements (including gangsters and an Antarctic separatist movement) and to Sofia, an android that’s surreptitiously broken free from human control. The novel’s worldbuilding is phenomenal: Hope City’s past and present unfold effortlessly. At the same time, its female characters are particularly well-rendered: Eliana and Lady Luna forge a tentative friendship that feels real, while Sofia’s story is a refreshing take on whether an android should love or hate the humans around her. Unfortunately, what should have been a thrilling tale of detective work and sentient robots is dragged down by an unbearably lethargic narrative. Although each subplot is ingenious, the story lumbers from one story arc to another—conversations are drawn out for pages on end, characters examine their every passing thought—perhaps leading readers to feel they, too, are trapped in ice.

An ambitious novel set in a richly imagined world but impeded by its glacial pace.

BLACK WOLVES
Elliott, Kate
Orbit/Little, Brown (832 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Nov. 1, 2015
978-0-316-36869-8

Elliott (Cold Steel, 2013 etc.) kicks off an intriguing new fantasy trilogy with—what else?—a doorstopper. King Anjihosh now rules the land known as the Hundred, having wrested it away from fearsome demons (they are strong, all but unkillable, and have the ability to manipulate human memories) in battle. His elite troops, the Black Wolves, operate mostly in secret, and of these the most trusted is Capt.
Kellas. Princess Dannarah dreams of becoming a reeve—royal scouts and messengers who pair-bond with and ride ferocious giant eagles—and resists being married off to cement a foreign alliance. But then her brother, Prince Atani, overhears something he shouldn’t have and runs away. Sent in pursuit, Kellas too learns more than is good for him. The narrative abruptly leaps 44 years into the future. Anjhosh is long dead. Kellas served his successor, Atani, until the latter was treacherously murdered, whereupon Kellas was retired in disgrace and the Wolves disbanded. Now, King Jehosh, fearing a power struggle with his mother, Queen Chorannah, recalls an old but still hale Kellas. Dannarah, once marshal of the reeves but deposed by Jehosh in favor of incompetent sycophants, and Kellas, united in their loyalty to the late Atani, trust the monarchs not at all—and the mystery of Atani’s death rankles. Sophisticated, multifaceted worldbuilding sparked by original flourishes, populated by characters we quickly come to care about and whose motivations drive intricate, absorbing conspiracies—the whole vehicle mired in the kind of ugly, messy structure designed largely to conceal what’s going on from readers and characters alike.

One seriously annoying flaw detracts from what otherwise is a stellar performance.

DEPARTURE
Riddle, A.G.
Morrow/HarperCollins (320 pp.)
978-0-06-243166-0

Survivors of an unusual plane crash race to understand a strange new world.

Harper Lane has a big decision to make when her flight from New York lands in London. Except it doesn’t. It crashes—and that’s just the beginning of the surviving passengers’ troubles. Even though Nick Stone, another passenger, immediately takes charge of the situation and organizes a rescue operation to get people out of the tail section of the plane, plenty of troubling unanswered questions remain. Such as, why is it that no rescue personnel have showed up, nobody’s cellphone works, and most importantly, where exactly are they? Propelled by these mysteries, and plenty of action, the opening chapters of this novel gallop along. Unfortunately, the answers to all these questions don’t quite fulfill the promise of the strong opening. Once Harper and Nick start to figure out where they’ve landed, with help from the no-nonsense doctor Sabrina Schroder and Yul Tan, who won’t stop working on his laptop even in a broken-apart plane, the narrative starts to get bogged down in lengthy explanations, and the characters stop feeling like living, breathing people and start feeling like devices for advancing the plot. The novel wants to raise good questions about how our decisions shape our futures, but the conspiracies and counterconspiracies our heroes find themselves embroiled in simply don’t ring true.

This sci-fi mystery starts strong, but the tangled plot that follows ultimately fails to satisfy.

THE BOLLYWOOD BRIDE
Dev, Sonali
Kensington (352 pp.)
$15.00 paper | $10.99 e-book
Sep. 29, 2015
978-1-61773-015-3
978-1-61773-016-0 e-book

When Bollywood star Ria Parkar returns to Chicago for her cousin’s wedding after having been away for 10 years, she must face Vikram, the boy she abandoned, who believes she chose a life of wealth and fame over him.

As a child, Ria savored summers at her beloved Aunt Uma’s home in Chicago, spent with her cousin Nikhil and his cousin Vikram. She and Vikram both considered Uma’s home a refuge, but that was before the shameful family tragedy that compelled Ria to turn her back on their love to protect him, allowing him to believe her capable of betrayal in order to follow fame and fortune with a Bollywood career. Now, a decade later, traveling back to Chicago for Nikhil’s wedding is a minefield of memories, both good and bad, and a reminder of what normal looks like after superstardom in India. Navigating her wounded heart, her Ice Princess facade, a nearly forgotten sea of family love from her childhood, and an angry, beloved boy-turned-man who both wants her and hates her make for a complicated trip, especially once the secrets bubble to the surface, threatening her career and her happiness. Vikram has always been the boy who rescued her, but maybe the time has come for her to confront the past and save them both. Dev’s exquisitely written second novel seamlessly integrates the explosive tension of Ria and Vikram’s love story with the universal complications of family, identity, and feeling like an outsider, even in your own skin. The modern Indian-American setting offers a glimpse of a rich culture and enhances the book’s overt and subtle messages of love, compassion, hope, and common ground.

A bright, beautiful gem.
COLD-HEARTED RAKE
Kleypas, Lisa
Avon/HarperCollins (416 pp.)
978-0-06-237181-2

Inheriting an earldom riddled with debt, Devon Ravenel intends to sell everything off and sink back into his feckless life—until he sets foot on the land and feels the seductive pull of responsibility and meets the beautiful widow trying to hold everything together.

Devon detested his cousin Theo, the Earl of Trenear, but he's extremely annoyed when Theo dies and he inherits the title and the ramshackle estate that goes with it. Determined to get every cent he can from his inheritance and then turn his back, he's stunned to discover that he feels an unwelcome responsibility toward his legacy. Figuring out how to save Ever-sby Priory becomes an exhausting burden, but working toward a difficult goal has a positive effect on him and on his brother, West, who takes on the unofficial role of estate manager. Both men, who had previously avoided emotional attachments, quickly become connected to their three young female cousins who live on the estate and to Kathleen, Theo's widow, who has been running things with graceful competence since her husband's death. Devon spends most of his time in London, but when he's involved in a devastating train accident on his way back to Hampshire for Christmas, Devon and Kathleen admit to a sizzling attraction despite the fact that she's in mourning and he is resolved to never marry. Kleypas begins a new historical romance series with two damaged characters who might find happiness if they can ever learn to trust themselves and one another. Intricately and elegantly crafted, intensely romantic, and with secondary characters and an epilogue that will leave readers anxiously awaiting more.

A gratifying series starter from a not-to-be-missed romance author.
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

HUNGER MAKES ME A MODERN GIRL by Carrie Brownstein .... 105
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HUNGER MAKES ME A MODERN GIRL
A Memoir
Brownstein, Carrie
Riverhead (256 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 27, 2015
978-1-59448-663-0

I AM EVELYN AMONY
Reclaiming My Life from the Lord's Resistance Army
Amony, Evelyn
Univ of Wisconsin (240 pp.)
978-0-299-30494-2

The author reclaims not only her name, but also her identity and sense of purpose in this survivor’s testimony of kidnapping and survival in Uganda.

As a title in the Women in Africa and the Diaspora series, this memoir focuses less on political complexities than on the plight of one girl, abducted into Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army. “How can I be your wife when up until this point you have called me your child?” she asked when he began to make his sexual intentions clear when she was 14. She tried to escape when he said they would share a bed that night, but her recapture was swift and her punishment, severe. “After they were done beating me,” writes the author, “Kony felt that it was my parents’ fault for giving birth to such a beautiful girl.” Then known by the alias Betty Ato, she became Kony’s 11th wife after serving as babysitter and all but a slave to his first wife, who was violently jealous. She also bore him multiple children, one of whom disappeared in the bush more than a decade ago, leaving her mother with no idea whether that daughter is still alive. In her ambiguous position, she experienced threats from both those aligned with Kony and the military forces opposing him. In one plot of insurrection, “they said that for Kony’s assassination to be easy, they should first do away with me or maybe recruit me to kill Kony myself.”

When peace negotiations allowed her to return home, she found herself under suspicion as one who had shared Kony’s goals as well as his bed, as if her marriage was anything more than rape and child abuse. Her own mother said, “You should have died while still in the bush.” Vindicated, she became chairperson of the Women’s Advocacy Network.

Within the academic framing and footnoting, there’s a survivor’s story that is all the more harrowing for its matter-of-fact understatement.
**COMIN’ RIGHT AT YA**

_**How a Jewish Yankee Hippie Went Country, or, the Often Outrageous History of Asleep at the Wheel**_

_Benson, Ray & Menconi, David_

_Univ. of Texas (172 pp.)_

_$24.95 | Oct. 1, 2015_

978-0-292-75658-8

Affable, easygoing, sometimes almost-too-mellow memoir by the noted evangelist of Western swing music and driver of Asleep at the Wheel.

“I guess it was inevitable that I’d wind up a slow-moving hippie,” writes Benson—and not just because he was born on a Friday, and Friday’s child, in the old nursery rhyme, is “loving and giving.” Usually, but not always: “Yes, I was an asshole a lot of the time, and I regret a lot of the toes I stepped on, but there were some things I had to do to make it work,” he writes. The “it” was converting a bunch of dope-smoking college buddies from local heroes in Paw Paw, West Virginia, into world-class champions of country music in the Bob Wills tradition—an unlikely transformation for a nice Jewish boy brought up on the British Invasion. Still, Benson recalls, it wasn’t such an unusual choice after all: he loved country music, and among his jazz-loving, radical, longhair pals, there was plenty of appreciation for the thought of country as the music of the people. Fast-forward out of the West Virginia—and, occasionally, Washington, D.C.—music scene, and Benson has transported his merry band to Texas, where the Wills sound began, and into a (mostly) benevolent dictatorship to get the sound he wants. The usual suspects are there, of course: Willie with his doober, Johnny Paycheck with his growl, Bill Clinton with his—well, his chicken plucking. And the usual tropes are there, for though it ain’t rock ‘n roll, there was plenty of sex and drugs in Benson’s corner of the country. “I’m not sure anybody is ever in control of their cocaine habit,” he writes with a certain quiet pride, “but I was probably as close as you can get.” Spinning through jazz, blues, country, and rock, giving boosts to the likes of George Strait and Lyle Lovett, the author genially recounts a merry and generally mayhem-free life in music.

A pleasure for fans of Benson and the band. (22 b&w photos)

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**THE COURT AND THE WORLD**

_**American Law and the New Global Realities**_

_Breyer, Stephen_

_Knopf (400 pp.)_

_$27.95 | Sep. 15, 2015_

978-1-101-94619-0

A liberal Supreme Court justice takes on a conservative bugbear.

Associate Justice Breyer (Making _Our Democracy Work: A Judge’s View_, 2010, etc.) notes that consideration of the decisions of foreign courts in Supreme Court opinions has recently “sometimes evoked strongly adverse political reactions,” even though references to foreign decisions appear from the court’s earliest days. The author attempts to allay such concerns by placing the court’s modern engagement with foreign law in the context of a global economy. “The objections of critics,” he writes, “do not reflect the reality of today’s federal court dockets....It is not the cosmopolitanism of some jurists that seeks this kind of engagement but the nature of the world itself that demands it.” Breyer argues that as American government and business become more closely enmeshed with foreign governments and with international organizations and commercial interests, federal courts cannot function effectively without taking perceptive account of the decisions and underlying reasoning of other nations’ courts. While he acknowledges concerns that decisions based in part on foreign law may lack political legitimacy, particularly in the context of determining what constitutes unacceptable “unusual” punishment under the Eighth Amendment, he dismisses these cases as a sideshow. Breyer illustrates the plethora of international issues confronting the court by examining at length a number of cases involving, for example, the geographical reach of the Securities and Exchange Commission rule prohibiting fraud in securities sales and the interaction between a treaty on a foreign defendant’s consular access and American criminal procedure. Breyer’s style and exposition are remarkably clear. His summaries of cases are sufficiently detailed to highlight the complexity and subtlety of the issues presented for decision without being entirely daunting to readers outside the legal profession. Nevertheless, few but lawyers will likely have the patience to work through the arguments.

A carefully reasoned plea for a continuing engagement of the American judiciary in establishing a worldwide rule of law.
Unlike many rock star memoirs, there’s no sense that this book is a chore or a marketing effort....On the page as in her songs, Brownstein finds the right words to give shape to experience.

HUNGER MAKES ME A MODERN GIRL

THE FEMINIST UTOPIA PROJECT
Fifty-Seven Visions of a Wildly Better Future
Brodsky, Alexandra & Nalebuff, Rachel
Kauder—Eds.
Feminist Press (360 pp.)
978-1-55861-900-5

A few dozen female writers envision a more balanced world.

This collection illuminates a potential new environment in which women, girls, and the entire realm of feminism are subjects that are revered and honored instead of denigrated and/or pushed into the background. As editors Brodsky and Nalebuff write, “it’s so easy to internalize the limitations imposed on us by American electoral politics today. Our hopes for progress are confined by what (usually male) politicians tell us we can and can’t have.” In order to define what a better realm might look like if women had more influence on the ways their lives are governed and treated, the editors offer these essays, interviews, and art, which explore a vast array of topics concerning inequality, the present-day norm. In these optimistic viewpoints, women can take up to five years of parental leave after the birth of a child, the Constitution is rewritten to reflect a female perspective, boys can wear pink, teen moms can attend high school while their child is enrolled in the on-campus day care, and transgender people are accepted like everyone else. Some of the pieces look far into the future, showing that a certain amount of time has passed before government and society have advanced enough to embrace these ideas, while other thoughts could be easily obtained if given enough support. The editors have done a solid job balancing the seemingly impossible with ideas that should already be in place, which only emphasizes how important it is that women continue to speak their minds in defense of their bodies and beliefs. The contributors include Jill Soloway, Sheila Heti, Janet Mock, Maya Dusenbery, Jenny Trout, and Julie Zeilinger.

Wildly creative ideas from intelligent females who want more for women, regardless of race, religion, or sexual preference.

HUNGER MAKES ME A MODERN GIRL
A Memoir
Brownstein, Carrie
Riverhead (256 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 27, 2015
978-1-59448-663-0

First-class account of the life and times of an essential riot grrrl and the band she helped create.

In this debut memoir, Brownstein, co-founder of the iconic punk band Sleater-Kinney, traces her evolution from the daughter of a secure but secretly unhappy home—closeted gay father, anorexic mother—to a gawky teenage rock fan and, ultimately, to becoming an artist in her own right. (She does not delve into her work on Portlandia.) The story of her life is also, inevitably, the story of her own band: meeting (and having a close but tortuous relationship with) co-founder Corin Tucker, the endless process of writing and...
co-writing songs and guitar leads, firing drummers (they went through three before striking gold with Janet Weiss), and the way life on the road both forges and fractures relationships. For Sleater-Kinney fans, the book is an absolute must, as it not only describes the rise of the band, but also delves into the making of every album. Furthermore, for a band in which song authorship has never been perfectly clear, Brownstein gives some insight as to who wrote what. More than that, the book is deeply personal, an act of self-discovery by a writer both telling her story and coming to understand herself at the same time. “In Sleater-Kinney,” she writes, “each song, each album, built an infrastructure, fresh skeletons.” The author writes focused and uncluttered prose, choosing the best, most telling details, as she recounts stories that show what it means to perform for the first time and what it means for a woman to be both a fan and a star in a staunchly male-dominated world.

Unlike many rock memoirs, there’s no sense that this book is a chore or a marketing effort. It’s revealing and riveting. On the page as in her songs, Brownstein finds the right words to give shape to experience. (8-page b/w photo insert)

**SPEED KINGS**  
**The 1932 Winter Olympics and the Fastest Men in the World**  
Bull, Andy  
Avery (304 pp.)  
$26.95 | Oct. 20, 2015  
978-1-59240-909-9

**Guardian** senior sportswriter Bull recounts the history of modern bobsledding and the four men who led the American team to victory at the 1932 Winter Olympics.

The late-19th-century development of the automobile primed popular taste for speed in both the United States and Europe. At this time, bobsledging became a craze on both sides of the Atlantic. By the early 20th century, it had gone from an “enjoyable pastime” to an activity that caused countless injuries and many deaths. Bobsledging also became a sport that helped revitalize the moribund tourist economy of St. Moritz, a Swiss Alpine resort that opened the first bobsled track in 1902. As sleds became faster and more dangerous, the sport became increasingly popular among spectators and sportsmen looking for the ultimate winter thrill. Against this backdrop, Bull tells the story of four individuals—Billy Fiske, the speed-loving son of an American banker, Jay O’Brien, a New York bon vivant, Eddie Eagan, a champion boxer, and Tippy Gray, a silent film star—who became some of the greatest heroes of early competitive bobsledging. He intertwines the story of their exploits with the behind-the-scene intrigues and boardroom politicking that characterized the 1932 Lake Placid Olympics, the first to ever be held on American soil. Part of an international group of 52 bobsledgers dubbed the “suicide club,” the team went on to not only beat local Lake Placid favorites, but also break speed records and win the gold medal. The care Bull demonstrates in developing each of the figures in this engrossing narrative is almost novelistic, but this attention to detail also causes the narrative to digress too much toward the end, where Bull elaborates on the short post-victory life of daredevil team captain Fiske, who went on to become a volunteer fighter pilot for the British and die fighting the Germans in 1940.

**A flawed but well-written and entertaining sports story.**

**ETERNITY’S SUNRISE**  
*The Imaginative World of William Blake*  
Damrosch, Leo  
Yale Univ (336 pp.)  
$30.00 | Oct. 27, 2015  
978-0-300-20067-6

Acclaimed scholar and biographer Damrosch (**Literature/Harvard Univ**; *Jonathan Swift: His Life and His World*, 2013, etc.) brings decades of study to this analysis of William Blake’s art, poetry, religion, and philosophy.

Those with little experience with the 18th-century poet will probably benefit the most from this fascinating work. As the author writes, Blake’s poems are undeniably strange, and his genius has always challenged the focus of his readers (he was overlooked during his lifetime). Especially difficult is tracing the complications of the unpublished poem “The Four Zoas” and their feminine emanations. Blake’s outlooks on the divine, which is contained in all nature, and institutional religion, which he loathed, show in his invented symbols and unique myths. He sought the incarnation of the divine spirit of the human in the everyday, and he looked at conventional marriage as institutionalized prostitution and conventional religion as theatrical performance. In “London,” nothing is sacred as Blake indicts church, law, monarchy, property, and marriage. He produced his own engravings and writings, and those who bought them tended to ignore the text. The author’s study of the man and clear style make this much easier to read and tempt readers to seek out more. Blake was a complicated man, given to visions and paranoia, and he often heard voices, and Damrosch guides us through the paths of Blake’s mind to ease our journey. Blake’s poems and art were used to challenge and inspire, never to preach, and his first works had a social message. His long prophecies were not epics, however; a better analogy is music, as they resembled oratorios with key changes and tempo contrasts. Damrosch expertly navigates Blake’s “question imagination,” which “has never ceased to startle and inspire.”

**General readers looking for a challenge will love this book and will dive into Blake’s work. Many will find him just too far off the beam, but they, too, will enjoy the many color illustrations included in the text.**
In a book with broad appeal, Ephron cogently analyzes the origins and ramifications of a national tragedy he reported on as a young journalist.

**KILLING A KING**

Ephron, Dan
Norton (304 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 19, 2015
978-0-393-24209-6

“Israelis had grown tired of peace conferences. And it wasn’t at all clear whether the extremists, Arabs or Israelis, were declining or ascending.” Those words, describing the situation in the aftermath of Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination, are just as true 20 years later.

In a single moment, the Jewish zealot Yigal Amir derailed the Oslo negotiations and forever altered the destinies of two nations. Former *Newsweek* Jerusalem bureau chief Ephron argues that the murder presaged the rise of the Israeli hard right, and today, with Rabin’s archrival Benjamin Netanyahu serving as...
prime minister and a quarter of the population supporting clemency for Amir, peace with the Palestinians seems as distant as at any time since 1948. In tense, gripping prose, the author dissects Amir's background, describing him as a bright student who, "in his own view...knew God's word better than most Jews, even most rabbis. And he was a doer—the characteristic that defined Amir more than any other, that distinguished him from his peers in school and in the military." In college, he threw himself into activism but “racked up nothing but failures: the failure to draw millions to the streets; the failure to form a serious militia; and the failure to stop Rabin.” The story of Rabin's evolving relationship with Yasser Arafat and Amir's growing militancy unfold in parallel, Amir making repeated attempts to get close to his quarry as he schemed with his brother and harangued his college friends. Amir considered Rabin rodef, a villain who pursues Jews with the intent of killing them, and Ephron makes the solid point that "any honest interpretation of the Talmudic principle he fixated on would have pointed back at him. Amir was the real rodef.

In a book with broad appeal, Ephron cogently analyzes the origins and ramifications of a national tragedy he reported on as a young journalist. (8 pages of illustrations)

SAVING GOTHAM
A Billionaire Mayor, Activist Doctors, and the Fight for Eight Million Lives
Farley, Tom
Norton (304 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 13, 2015
978-0-393-07124-5

A New York City--based saga showing how "saving lives in America today means fighting to protect people from the pervasive marketing of cigarettes, junk food, and other unhealthy products."
The city's bold public health initiatives during the Michael Bloomberg administration were an unmitigated success, but his policies met with plenty of controversy and contention before becoming worldwide models. In the United States, nearly 4 in 10 people die from chronic diseases like heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. During his terms as mayor, Bloomberg—advised by his forward-thinking Health and Mental Hygiene commissioners, Thomas Frieden and Farley (co-author: Prescription for a Healthy Nation: A New Approach to Improving Our Lives by Fixing Our Everyday World, 2005)—committed to battling this preventable epidemic by revolutionizing public health policy. They led a visionary team of doctors and public health experts in passing breakthrough laws that made healthy behaviors easier: they outlawed smoking in bars and banned cooking with trans fats; they required fast-food restaurants to post calorie counts for their menu items, and they barred them from selling outsized sugary drinks. The author, who succeeded Frieden, provides an enthralling insider's view of the high-stakes battle between the administration and the powerful corporations who have made billions selling toxic foods, sodas, and cigarettes. It's not giving anything away to say that the good guys won. As a result, hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers quit smoking, childhood obesity rates slumped, and between 2001 and 2010, life expectancy rose by three years, almost double the nationwide average.

In his informed and inspired retelling, Farley provides plenty of behind-the-scenes access to the negotiations, compromises, and brilliant strategies that shaped this now-historic era.

An inspiring story in which the author demonstrates unequivocally that public health policy can not only save lives; it can change the way we view the landscape of food.

THE OUTSIDER
My Life in Intrigue
Forsyth, Frederick
Putnam (532 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-0-399-17607-4

Acclaimed thriller writer Forsyth (The Kill List, 2013, etc.) delivers a charming autobiography about his real-life adventures around the globe. The author was raised during the Blitz, and he describes a childhood of routine bombardment, constant fires, and a tank parked in his backyard. Forsyth became obsessed with the Royal Air Force, and he eventually enlisted. But he seemed destined to write tales of suspense: he learned several languages, became a foreign correspondent, and traveled the world in search of stories. In Germany, he accidentally shared a drink with a Nazi war criminal. In France, he covered the near-assassination of Charles de Gaulle. In Nigeria, he found himself stuck in the middle of the Biafran War. The book is a patchwork of anecdotes told in the meandering style of an elder Englishman. Forsyth's tales of derring-do are a pleasure to read, especially when coupled with his self-deprecating humor, but his most endearing quality is his ravenous curiosity, which pulled him from one exotic location to another. When he visited the Negev Desert, not long after the 1948 war, he interviewed an aged veteran who had spent decades fighting for the creation of Israel. “He stared for several seconds, then came alive, as if jolted by an electric shock,” writes the author. “I could have filled ten notebooks, but I just sat and listened to an old man who was sixty years of living history and who had seen it all.” Forsyth has also seen it all, and though his sometimes-rambling memoir has no overarching message, he explains how a dreamy London youth ended up writing some of the world's most famous thrillers. When Forsyth recounts the moment he typed the title The Day of the Jackal for the first time, fans may find themselves misty-eyed.

Reading The Outsider is like listening to a grandfather recount his exploits in front of the fireplace: the narrative is occasionally long-winded and self-satisfied, but after living such an exciting life, Forsyth has earned his bragging rights.
THE MAD FEAST
An Ecstatic Tour Through America’s Food
Frank, Matthew Gavin
Liveright/Norton (448 pp.)
$35.00  |  Nov. 9, 2015
978-1-63149-073-6

A journey in search of America’s tastes. Frank (Preparing the Ghost: An Essay Concerning the Giant Squid and Its First Photographer, 2014, etc.), a former restaurant worker, eats his way across the United States with a few questions in mind: “What does a typical foodstuff associated with said state mean? How do state and history and foodstuff relate?” His “spastic, lyrical anti-cookbook” devotes a chapter to each state, a collage of impressionistic fragments that are alternately interesting and exasperating: personal anecdotes, history, geography, botany, zoology, food lore—and ending with a recipe. In Oregon, for example, besides relating the creation of the hybrid Marionberry, beloved by Oregonians, the author considers cannibalism, inspired by his discovery that the state’s motto was written by a settler whose wagon train companions headed for California, doomed to become the infamous Donner Party. Among myriad other historical details, readers will learn that Rhode Island was named by the explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano because he believed it resembled the island of Rhodes. Enough water pours over Niagara Falls every minute to make 640 million cups of coffee. New Mexico’s official state butterfly is named the Sandia hairstreak for its “zippy flight.” As for food, in South Carolina, where “racist white men...make the state’s best barbecue sauce,” the author finds perloo—“sister to jambalaya, brother to pilaf, cousin to paella, to risotto, biryani”—based on rice imported, along with slaves, from Africa. In Iowa, Frank extols the Loosemeat Sandwich, which, unlike a hamburger, “begins its life closer to being chewed and swallowed,” an appropriate dish for a landscape often chewed up by tornadoes. Boiled bread, a bagel expert tells the author, began in the Middle Ages, when Jews were forbidden to bake dough. During the Black Death, they strung boiled bread rings onto rope and fled the pestilence.

Although Frank’s riffs occasionally recall Gertrude Stein’s dizzyingly obscure Tender Buttons, overall, he’s produced a surprising, entertaining look at what Americans eat and why. (50 illustrations)
What is a ship, in fact, but a great skyscraper turned upon its side and set free?” Prostitution, advertising, art, music, dirt, transportation, civil unrest: all this and more figure in these overstuffed pages. For all its cleverness, a little goes a long way—and there’s way more than a little to reckon with in the 900 pages Goldsmith has assembled. There are also curious lacunae and many missing or underused voices: Kazan, Sontag, Ferlinghetti, Melville, Grogan. ...Still, there’s already an embarrassment of riches here, so much so that one hopes a collagist across the water is pulling together a complementary volume for Paris.

Big Apple–phile collectors will want to have this, of course, but it helps to think of it as more of an art installation than a book.

DISPATCHES FROM PLUTO
Lost and Found in the Mississippi Delta
Grant, Richard
978-1-4767-0964-2

Calling himself “a misfit Englishman...with a taste for remote places,” the author of God’s Middle Finger: Into the Lawless Heart of the Sierra Madre (2008) buys a former plantation house, deep in the Mississippi Delta, and thus commences an education—his and ours.

When journalist and TV host Grant decided to move to Holes County, “the poorest county in America’s poorest state,” neither he nor his girlfriend, Mariah, had ever been to the region. Nonetheless, they bought their place near the Yazoo River in an area called Pluto and immediately begin receiving tutelage from nature and neighbors. The author provides accounts of battles with cottonmouths, armadillos, and biting insects, of deer hunting (Mariah, once a vegetarian, changed her tastes), of struggles with heat and humidity and remoteness. They were stunned to discover the generosity of neighbors, both black and white. The Delta, which is more than 80 percent black, still manifests—as Grant repeatedly shows—many lingering troubles from slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and beyond. Among the most useful early advice he received: compartmentalize. "Continually, we hear the views of locals, the author, and Mariah, and we discover that corrosive racism is still alive and well."

An appealing stew of fecklessness and curiosity, social psychology and social dysfunction, hope and despair.

MASSIVE PISSED LOVE
Nonfiction 2001-2014
Hell, Richard
978-1-59376-627-6

The storied punk rocker, autodidact, and memoirist (I Dreamed I Was a Very Clean Tramp, 2013) careens among a host of lit- and culture-crit topics.

The best parts of Hell’s collection of essays, taken from various publications over the last couple of decades, concern himself. Why punk? “I wasn’t choosing doubt and suspicion and despair,” he writes, “I was taken there by reality.” The author nods at intellectual ancestors: some are the usual suspects, such as Rimbaud, Warhol, and the Velvet Underground (“the first completely hitless rock and roll band to end up in everyone’s short-list pantheon of all-time best groups”), while some are less obvious—e.g., Robert Bresson and Nathanael West. Most of his scattered pieces work, as with a lovely meditation on the sometimes-unlovely graffiti found in the infamous CBGB bathroom and a muscular if unlikely celebration of muscle cars. (But does anyone really need to hear, at length, that Orson Welles was a genius?) Sometimes wistfully, sometimes nostalgically, even though he would certainly disavow such sentimentality, Hell limns an aesthetic that, like the New York scene of the mid-1970s, is part dumb and part profound. Though he takes The Ramones down a peg or two by calling them the cartoon, Bay City Rollers–ish creation they were (“they conceived of themselves as a boy band and a brand... more than anything else”), he praises tutelary spirit and partner in crime Patti Smith for a moment of punk brilliance in a book the two worked on called Merde: “She drew some pictures for it and one of them was just the penciled word ‘There’s not enuf time’ (she first wrote ‘enough’ and changed it to ‘enuf’ which was better.” Punk, he adds, is subversive, snotty, and adolescent—and, he adds from a wizened point of view, “a good idea.”

Fuel for Hell’s minions, a fan’s notes for fans.
THE AGE OF ASPIRATION

Power, Wealth, and Conflict in Globalizing India
Hiro, Dilip
New Press (400 pp.)
$28.95 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-1-62097-130-7

An insider’s economic report on the perils and scandals of India’s precipitous drive into a market economy over the last decades.

Since 1991, India’s New Industrial Policy—reducing the “license raj” and encouraging private companies in banking, insurance, telecommunications, and air travel—has enriched many and impoverished many in the world’s largest democracy. London-based author Hiro (A Comprehensive Dictionary of the Middle East, 2013, etc.) looks at the impact of globalization both on villagers and on the institutions involved, thus encompassing both the small and big pictures. Narendra Modi, the chief minister of the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party, has led with the neoliberal pro-investment “Gujarat Model,” since 2001, despite being darkly tarnished by the spate of anti-Muslim violence that broke out in Godhra, North Gujarat, in 2002. Running on the slogan “India Shining,” the BJP underscored a new era of “illicit gains” by politicians and the “exponential growth in sleaze, which was related to the acceleration in deregulation and privatization.” Recently rehabilitated, Modi trounced the traditional Nehru-Gandhi dynasty of the Congress Party in 2014, ensuring a continued policy of swadeshi, or self-reliance, regarding the global economy, becoming the darling of the United States and feeding the deep chasm between the haves and have-nots. Hiro pointedly explores the miraculous growth of the satellite town of Gurgaon—at least in terms of land and property values, as it still lacks in basic public services and infrastructure (the sad but all-too-familiar “Dickensian underbelly” that is the byproduct of globalization). In subsequent chapters, Hiro examines India’s need for massive loans from Western banks, encapsulated in the Tata Group story; the incredibly powerful Indian diaspora in Silicon Valley; the “scandalous neglect of India’s agriculture”; the rise of slums; and the continued role of the Maoist Naxalites and the grass-roots efforts to combat corruption.

As comprehensive and knowledgeable as Hiro’s earlier Inside India Today (1977; reissued 2013).

THE RISE OF GERMANY, 1939–1941

The War in the West, Volume 1
Holland, James
Atlantic Monthly (656 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-0-8021-2397-8

A lively study of the first part of World War II that moves along operational and tactical lines.

Concentrating on the beginning salvos of war in the West, British historian and novelist Holland (Dam Busters: The True Story of the Inventors and Airmen Who Led the Devastating Raid to Smash the German Dams in 1943, 2012, etc.) sticks close to the nuts-and-bolts angle of the various flare-ups, beginning with complacent American isolationism in mid-1939 and the rise of extremism in Germany and Italy in reaction to struggling economies. The author returns throughout this engaging narrative to several key players for an intimate look: Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Galeazzo Ciano, who caught the rise of Benito Mussolini, married his daughter, and stood at the heart of discussions with the new Axis partner, Germany, intent on regaining the Danzig Corridor; Capitaine André Baufre, the French staff officer chosen for work in diplomacy, who had grave doubts about the French army’s preparedness; and Edward Spears, member of the British Parliament and Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s personal representative, who would observe the horrific fall of France. (Holland provides a terrific “cast list” as well as comprehensive maps throughout.) The author follows the earnest work for diplomacy, the U-boat danger in the North...
Sea, the Battle of Britain and vacillation over Norway, the justification for the widening war in the Mediterranean, and—most importantly—just how all those ships, tanks, and artillery were fabricated and delivered. Germany faced huge obstacles, including a fuel shortage and the superior manpower numbers of France and Britain. Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union, was the only way to remedy the chronic shortage of resources, but it was incredibly risky—and, as Holland notes, “nothing less than total victory would suffice.”

A sturdy, readable resource that regards the Blitzkrieg as no magical matter.

**NEVER BROKEN**

*Songs Are Only Half the Story*

Jewel  
Blue Rider Press (384 pp.)  
$27.50 | Sep. 15, 2015  
978-0-399-17433-9

A multiplatinum recording artist chronicles her life so far.

When Jewel (A Night Without Armor: Poems, 1999, etc.) first broke onto the scene in 1995, few probably looked upon the golden tresses and ethereal beauty staring back at them from the cover of “Pieces of You” and thought: “hard-assed Alaskan hick.” The cherubic voice on the recording suggested a rarified existence rather than the hardscrabbled reality the author actually endured growing up on the fringes of “the fishing village of Homer, Alaska.” Jewel was the product of an often cruel and dispassionate father and eccentric and absentee mother. Rather than just focusing on her rise as an artist, her career highlights, or music business machinations, Jewel renders an intimate portrait of a young woman who, although immensely talented, has spent her life “surviving and recovering and problem solving since being a toddler.” The autobiography is lushly descriptive, chronicling the author’s earliest days on the old “homestead,” singing in saloons, busking in Mexico, and later living out of broken-down automobiles while trying to make a living in the music business. The author mines her psyche for the benefit of both herself and anyone else embroiled in profound emotional crisis. Without being intrusive, selected lyrics and poems provide further insight into her worldview. Although critical of both parents, the author reserves the lion’s share of her unresolved heartbreak for her mother, who skittered on the periphery of her daughter’s autonomous childhood before eventually returning again as the de facto business manager who swiftly plunged the wildly successful singer and songwriter into crushing debt. “I would never get an apology,” she writes. “I would never get a hug. And I would have killed for just a hug.”

A moving musical essay that should strike all the right notes with a wide selection of readers.

**STARS BETWEEN THE SUN AND MOON**

*One Woman’s Life in North Korea and Escape to Freedom*

Jang, Lucia & McClelland, Susan  
Norton (288 pp.)  
$26.95 | Oct. 26, 2015  
978-0-393-24922-4

One woman’s life in, and desperate escape from, North Korea.

North Korea is so removed from the commerce of the digital age that when a story emerges from behind the candied gloss of government-produced video clips, the world eagerly pays attention. Hence the recent spate of memoirs from those brave souls who have escaped the restrictive country. Here, with the help of award-winning journalist McClelland, Jang (the name she later chose when safely in Canada) reveals the trials of growing up in 1970s Chosun (another term for North Korea) for one born into a family out of favor with the regime. At a young age, Jang learned that her mother’s grandfather and uncle had committed the worst atrocity possible by sympathizing with Americans during the war and fleeing to the south afterward. This action banned subsequent generations from ever joining the party and relegated them to harsh living conditions. Jang repeatedly describes the widespread poverty and starvation that were constants of daily life in this caste society. Her hunger was so deep that at one point she swallowed a handful of uncooked rice she stole to supplement a diet of weeds. In fact, scarcity of food was one of the main contributing factors that impelled Jang to slip back and forth to China to trade seafood for other staples to help support her family. And yet, when Kim Il-sung died, Jang and her mother didn’t think twice about taking earnings from a day’s sale of hard-boiled eggs to purchase chrysanthemums to honor his passing. Such ironies of North Korean life blaze through this refugee’s memoir. Despite being a survivor’s tale of unimagined affliction involving human trafficking, rape, imprisonment, the loss of a child, and exile, it is riddled with regime-inspired themes of guilt and self-deprecation. The book includes a translator’s note and an afterword by Korea-Pacific Studies professor Stephan Haggard.

A courageous tale of physical and mental endurance sure to bring to further light conditions in North Korea.
A skillful historian demonstrates how courage and hope characterized the last act of the great campaign to bring peace to Europe 70 years ago.

AFTER HITLER

The Last Ten Days of World War II in Europe
Jones, Michael
NAL Caliber/Berkley (400 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-0-451-47701-9

A detailed account of the final 10 days of World War II in Europe depicts, in full color, the collapse of the Nazi war machine and, with it, the genesis of the Cold War.

Noted British military historian Jones (Total War: From Stalingrad to Berlin, 2011, etc.) presents a microcosm of the fight against Germany, beginning with Hitler’s suicide and ending with the two official victory celebrations—May 8, 1945, for the Western Allies, the next day for the Russians. The Russians, who bore the brunt of the war in Europe, loom large in the author’s story, as they must. Privileged to enter Berlin first, the Red Army impelled the defeated German troops to scatter westward, seeking capture by the Americans. Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, whom Jones lauds for his fair dealing, was hard-pressed to maintain the Grand Alliance. In the 10 days that thrilled the world, sporadic fighting was suppressed, cease-fires implemented, and communities liberated. An anti-Bolshevik Russian unit had fought for the Germans and then switched sides. The book’s most moving passages describe the liberation of Mauthausen, Auschwitz, and other concentration camps. The author provides numerous historical flashbacks and copious extracts from contemporary records, diaries, and memoirs by writers ranging from Churchill, Stalin, and Eisenhower to little-known combatants, displaced persons, and arrogant functionaries. They serve to heighten the effect of the story the author brings to life with secure, professional expertise. Unlike connoisseurs of military history, casual readers may not be concerned with martial unit designations and some of the gritty details of battle formation, but the exploits of the men and women they represented are engrossing, sometimes even heartbreaking.

A skillful historian demonstrates how courage and hope characterized the last act of the great campaign to bring peace to Europe 70 years ago.
For Manhattanites, surely, and for anyone who’s visited and been either charmed or overwhelmed by the grid.

**CITY ON A GRID**

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**SCIENCE OF THE MAGICAL**

**From the Holy Grail to Love Potions to Superpowers**

Kaplan, Matt

Scribner (256 pp.)

$26.00 | Oct. 27, 2015

978-1-4767-7710-8

How myths and magical beliefs may provide the first glimmers of scientific discovery.

Economist science correspondent Kaplan (Medusa’s Gaze and Vampire’s Bite: The Science of Monsters, 2012) begins with a provocative comparison of the Bible to the popular X-Men comics series. “The parting of the Red Sea in Exodus,” he writes, might reflect frightening “natural events like earthquakes, floods, or storms that our ancestors witnessed but could not understand.” The author’s intent in making the comparison is not to deride religious belief but to illustrate how, by presenting the impossible as real, they record “information about what people were experiencing at the time when these stories were created.”

This is exemplified by the theme of the X-Men, the fight for the rights of mutants. The comic was first published in 1963, one year after the Cuban missile crisis, when fears of nuclear radiation were high and the Civil Rights Act was soon to be signed into law. The author suggests that the well-documented healing benefits from positive thinking and the placebo effect may account in part for the popularity of pilgrimages in search of a cure. Similarly, astrology may contain hidden gems of wisdom. Our destiny is unlikely to be shaped by the stars, but disturbances of our circadian rhythms by jet lag or working alternating day and night shifts do affect mood and alertness. Also, shifts in the migratory patterns of birds may indicate changing weather patterns and predict the onset of infectious diseases—e.g., new strains of the influenza virus, which they carry. More fascinating is Kaplan’s explanation of why prophecies based on reading the entrails of sacrificial animals were not entirely fanciful. The shape and color of an animal’s liver reveals information about the environment. With a host of fun examples, Kaplan shows how “science and magic are not as much at odds with each other as we tend to think.”

*A charming romp through the history of science.*

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**MJ**

**The Genius of Michael Jackson**

Knopper, Steve

Scribner (432 pp.)

$27.00 | Oct. 20, 2015

978-1-4767-3037-0

A critical biography of the King of Pop that tries to keep the art at the forefront.

By the end of his life, Michael Jackson (1958–2009) served as more of a punch line than an embodiment of genius. In this fine book, *Rolling Stone* contributing editor Knopper (Appetite for Self-Destruction: The Spectacular Crash of the Record Industry in the Digital Age, 2009) does not shy away from prurient details, but he keeps his eye firmly on the reasons why Jackson was revered for so long by so many. Tracing Jackson’s life and career, from his upbringing in Gary, Indiana, to the Jackson 5, solo fame, and through his death, the author reveals a complicated, workaholic, tortured, sensitive soul, a peerless performer who had conquered the entertainment world in the 1980s, especially in the wake of his epochal album “Thriller,” but who by the new millennium had seemingly lost all contact with reality, beset with economic woes and accusations of pedophilia. The musician’s father, Joe Jackson, comes across especially poorly, while Knopper debunks or challenges some of the ugliest myths and rumors surrounding Jackson’s life, especially in his later years. One of the book’s clear strengths is its immediacy, the result of more than 400 interviews. Its biggest weakness is a lack of an introduction or any effort to lay out an analytical framework or explicate an argument. The author is also occasionally sloppy with chronology. Nonetheless, Knopper writes with verve not only about the music business, but also about music and performance. He conveys Jackson’s drive and brilliance while also being cleareyed about his demons. He also captures the inherent tragedy of the arc of Jackson’s biography, something that will come through especially clearly for readers who will almost certainly want to revisit Jackson’s back catalog.

**Michael Jackson was, indeed, a genius. But he was undoubtedly a troubled genius, as this sweeping biography reveals. (8-page b/w photo insert)**

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**CITY ON A GRID**

**How New York Became New York**

Koeppel, Gerard

Da Capo/Perseus (336 pp.)

$29.99 | Nov. 1, 2015

978-0-306-82284-1

A popular historian examines the origin and development of Manhattan’s famous grid.

Given exclusive power and broad discretion, charged with uniting “regularity and order with public convenience,” the three-man state commission appointed in 1807 took four years to come up with the rectilinear grid—150 parallel streets, 12 parallel avenues, 2,000 almost identical blocks—that continues to order the daily life of Manhattan. Their design, likely cribbed from earlier maps and surveys, short on “beautifying embellishments,” and long on simplicity and efficiency, accomplished (along with the roughly contemporaneous construction of the Erie Canal) precisely the goal of town fathers: to turn New York into the nation’s leading city. Though he focuses on the commission and their design and the controversies and criticisms arising over the next 10 years as chief surveyor John Randel Jr. executed their vision, Koeppel (Bond of Union: Building the Erie Canal and the American Empire, 2009, etc.) also tells a pre-grid, streets-and-roads parallel streets, 12 parallel avenues, 2,000 almost identical blocks—that continues to order the daily life of Manhattan. Their design, likely cribbed from earlier maps and surveys, short on “beautifying embellishments,” and long on simplicity and efficiency, accomplished (along with the roughly contemporaneous construction of the Erie Canal) precisely the goal of town fathers: to turn New York into the nation’s leading city. Though he focuses on the commission and their design and the controversies and criticisms arising over the next 10 years as chief surveyor John Randel Jr. executed their vision, Koeppel (Bond of Union: Building the Erie Canal and the American Empire, 2009, etc.) also tells a pre-grid, streets-and-roads
story of Colonial-era Manhattan, bringing readers up through
to the political rivalry of Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton,
whose battles helped set the stage for the commission's work.
As he follows the relentless grid's progress, from the edges of
the settled old city all the way uptown, delightful detours pop
up: about the anomaly that is Broadway, about the creation of
Central Park ("the grid's unimagined saving grace"), and about
20th-century proposals to fill in the East River or to add three
levels to the too-few avenues to relieve congestion. Scattered
throughout the narrative, well-chosen, lively comments from
writers, poets, politicians, architects, and scholars either roast
or toast the commission's creation. Koeppel delivers all this
with great verve and humor, leaving readers to decide whether
the grid is the brilliantly democratic, effective plan its archi-
tects thought or the dull and ugly manifestation of unimagina-
tive minds ruled by commerce.
For Manhattanites, surely, and for anyone who's visited
and been either charmed or overwhelmed by the grid.

POUND FOR POUND
A Story of One Woman’s
Recovery and the Shelter
Dogs Who Loved Her Back
to Life
Kopp, Shannon
Morrow/HarperCollins (288 pp.)
$25.99 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-0-06-237022-8

A memoir that attempts to weave
together two themes of deep interest to
the author: her eating disorder and her love for dogs, especially
pit bulls.
As a teenager, Kopp, an animal welfare advocate and nov-
ice writer, suffered from bulimia, binging and purging in an
attempt to achieve the body she thought would make her lov-
able. Warning to readers with a low queasiness threshold: the
author does not spare details of her disorder, recounting in full
color hiding in bathrooms and shoving her fingers down her
throat to induce vomiting. Woven into this growing-up part of
her memoir are stories of her alcoholic father ("Dad wasn’t angry
or unpredictable when he drank. He was angry and unpre-
dictable when sober") and of her own sexual misadventures. Kopp
describes somewhat sketchily her experiences later at live-in
rehab centers and at open support meetings for people with eat-
ing disorders, but she lavishes her greatest narrative attention
on damaged or doomed dogs at animal shelters. Working first at
an animal shelter in San Diego and then one in Los Angeles, the
author discovered that the unconditional love of animals was
the key to her redemption. Despite relapses, the author’s heal-
ing continued as her connection with shelter dogs grew. The
emotional attachment between human and beast eventually led
to recovery of her health and to her becoming an animal welfare
activist, working to find loving homes for abandoned dogs. Pit
bulls figure largely in her story, and an afterword features a plea
for greater public understanding and acceptance of the breed
("my four-legged sanctuaries, my therapists, my healers, my
beefy love-bugs..."). Unfortunately, the author’s writing chops
leave much to be desired, and the narrative is often rambling
and sometimes self-indulgent.
More maudlin than inspirational, though ardent dog
lovers may be touched by certain scenes and find Kopp’s
story satisfying.

"An analysis of racism
that not only explains it,
but could contribute
to its diminishment."
- Kirkus Reviews
A woman and her family canoe the waterways of America.

At the age of 10, Leaf (A Love Affair with Birds: The Life of Thomas Sadler Roberts, 2013, etc.) had her first view of a canoe as it skimmed across Lake Alexander in Minnesota. From those moments, a desire to own and paddle a canoe of her own grew; at 14, she defied her father and headed out in a neighbor's boat. From that moment, she was hooked, eager to plunge into the waterways of Minnesota, where she could immerse herself in nature. As she grew older, the author sought a relationship with someone who shared her passion for canoeing. In these short essays, Leaf combines her joy of paddling and of being in the great outdoors with lyrical descriptions of the natural waterways she and her family have paddled over the course of 40 years. From the Boundary Waters region to the Mississippi River to the Little Missouri River, Leaf chronicles the ups and downs of life on the water; the thrill of seeing a new species of bird to add to her list; setting up camp on a historic site once used by Lewis and Clark; the peace and quiet found on remote waterways; the feeling of anxiety as a storm rages overhead; the fear of falling out of a canoe in the middle of rapids; and the mixed emotions of realizing that many others have discovered the joys of paddling, to the point that some sites are overrun with people. Leaf ably interlaces her personal narratives with historical facts and natural details of the more than 25 lakes and rivers she has paddled. However, a series of maps would have been a helpful addition.

Pleasant outdoors stories that will appeal to nature lovers, avid canoeists, and armchair travelers.

**WASHINGTON**

A History of Our National City

Lewis, Tom

Basic (544 pp.)

$35.00 | Oct. 13, 2015

Lewis (English/Skidmore Coll.; The Hudson: A History, 2005, etc.) follows the evolution of the symbolic place of Washington, D.C., in the consciousness of Americans.

Before it was ever the capital of the United States, the city was the subject of fierce debate and a compromise distasteful to most involved. Thomas Jefferson and James Madison wanted a Southern capitol, away from the Northern mercantilism. The only way they could achieve that goal was to allow Alexander Hamilton to assume states’ Revolutionary War debt. Congress didn’t provide funding for building, and there were labor problems and a string of inept architects. Peter Charles L’Enfant, with his brilliant master plan, was so arrogant that Washington fired him within two years; his plan was ignored, redrawn, and set aside. Congress declared itself the governing body of the district and continually ignored the populace’s frustrating attempts at self-rule. Neither did it provide for defense, leading to the burning of the city in 1814. The author stresses that it was a Southern city in geography as well as culture. The treatment of freedmen and blacks in general...
was decidedly Southern well into the 20th century. Eschewing a historical narrative, Lewis explains the character of the city, how it developed, the daredevil building mistakes, and how a few particular characters helped define it. Those few were responsible for bringing life to the city: William Corcoran, Oliver Howard, Alexander Shepherd, and Alexander Cassatt, to name a few. What brought about a return to L'Enfant’s plan was the formation of the Senate Park Commission in 1901, made up of Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Daniel Burnham, and Charles McKim.

Lewis amply shows how close D.C. came to being an ugly patchwork town, and he cites the congressmen who fought to keep it Southern and the Gilded Age men who used their money for its good. Those who enjoy the city will enjoy this book. (43 b/w images; 8-page color gallery)

COMMON PEOPLE

In Pursuit of My Ancestors

Light, Alison
Univ. of Chicago (328 pp.)
$27.50 | Oct. 1, 2015
978-0-226-33094-5

A British nonfiction writer and critic explores the story of her family’s past and its place within the larger narrative of 19th- and 20th-century British history.

Light (Mrs. Woolf and the Servants: An Intimate History of Domestic Life in Bloomsbury, 2008) began the quest to discover her roots when her father was ill with cancer. With one parent’s death imminent, the author became alarmingly aware of both the passage of time and her own ignorance about a family past that had left few tangible traces. She began her research with visits to parish registers and other local and national archives. As Light became acquainted with her ancestors, she also sought to contextualize their lives. The more data she acquired, the more she realized that “without local history to anchor it, family history is adrift in time.” The picture that emerged on both sides of her family tree was of working-class men and women whose migrations across England had been “shaped and limited” by the Industrial Revolution. Light’s forebears—most of whom worked as bricklayers, needle-makers, servants, farmers, and sailors—were among the most impoverished in Britain. Yet some branches of her family’s history are adrift in time. The picture that emerged on both sides of her family tree was of working-class men and women whose migrations across England had been “shaped and limited” by the Industrial Revolution. Light’s forebears—most of whom worked as bricklayers, needle-makers, servants, farmers, and sailors—were among the most impoverished in Britain. Yet some branches of her family’s history are adrift in time.

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It also provides a new, more historically nuanced way of thinking about family history.

An intelligent, thoughtfully researched memoir. (31 halftones)

THE LION OF THE SENATE

When Ted Kennedy Rallied the Democrats in a GOP Congress

Littlefield, Nick & Nexon, David
Simon & Schuster (484 pp.)
$35.00 | Nov. 10, 2015
978-1-4767-9615-4

Through the story of Ted Kennedy (1932-2009), the authors deliver a primer on how the governmental sausage was made not so long ago.

When the Republicans took over Congress in the wake of the 1994 midterm elections, most savvy political observers assumed it meant the death knell of President Bill Clinton’s domestic agenda and possibly of his presidency. However, Kennedy was among the Democrats unwilling simply to roll over for Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich’s “Contract with America.” Instead, Kennedy used his grasp of the congressional process, his interpersonal relationships across the aisle, and his tenacity to fight to forestall, moderate, and ameliorate the Republican governing agenda, emerging in the process with a few of his own legislative goals intact. In this book, readers receive an inside glimpse at how politics happen, especially from the vantage point of the minority party. The narrative comes primarily from the perspective of Littlefield, Kennedy’s longtime aid and chief domestic policy adviser. His copious notes from his own involvement in these events drive the text, and he wrote the book until he fell seriously ill and Nexon, Kennedy’s senior health policy adviser, stepped in to complete the project. The authors provide a fine rendering that deserves a wide readership, but in this age of heightened partisanship and ideology, it likely won’t reach much beyond a Democratic audience, especially because the portrait they paint of Kennedy is so laudatory. This is an indictment of our age, not of this book, which admires its subject but also takes its topic, the political process, seriously. Littlefield and Nexon reveal a man unafraid of fights but also one willing and able to reach across the aisle to colleagues who often opposed him but nearly universally respected him.

Readers willing to accept this book as more than hagiography will find a penetrating exploration of how the legislative process works—or at least worked in the recent past.
INTERVIEWS & PROFILES

Greg Grandin

HENRY KISSINGER: BRILLIANT STATESMAN, AMORAL STATESMAN
By Scott Porch

Greg Grandin laughs when I ask how he got from a book about Ford Motor Company building a utopian enclave in the Amazon jungle in the 1930s (Fordlandia) to a history of a slave revolt on the high seas that inspired Herman Melville (The Empire of Necessity) to now writing about—of all people—Henry Kissinger. And then he connects the dots.

“I think with all of the books I’m trying to look at different aspects of the United States and the Americas—the New World,” Grandin says. “I’m interested in the experience of America and defining the United States’ expansion.”

In Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford’s Forgotten Jungle City (2009), a Pulitzer Prize finalist, Grandin told the story of Ford’s bizarre effort to establish a South American colony, which ultimately failed because of the enormous differences between the United States’ and Brazil’s terrains, business climates, and cultures. In The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World (2014), a Bancroft Prize winner, Grandin uncovered the slave revolt that Melville depicted in Benito Cereno and that showed America with a growing global influence as early as 1805.

Grandin’s new book, Kissinger’s Shadow: The Long Reach of America’s Most Controversial Statesman (Aug. 25), is a take on the hubris of America’s efforts to bend the world to its will during the Vietnam War. The book shares Fordlandia’s lesson of best intentions gone awry and Empire of Necessity’s uncloaking of the dark side of American imperialism. Kissinger’s Shadow depicts a brilliant thinker who pushed Richard Nixon to unnecessarily prolong American involvement in Vietnam at the cost of tens of thousands of lives.

“I’m looking at his political philosophy as capturing something essential about the United States,” Grandin says, “and looking at his career and linking Vietnam to this current moment of endless war and the national security state. Critics of Kissinger focus on his specific actions as being transgressive, illegal, and inhumane. I think those things are true but miss the point of his career and success.”

Rather than an exhaustive biography of the German-born diplomat—that will come in late September with Niall Ferguson’s Kissinger: The Idealist, 1923-1968, one of the fall’s most anticipated biographies—Kissinger’s Shadow is a focused examination of Kissinger’s reckless, amoral approach to diplomacy and war as raw expressions of American power.

“Ideology was very important to Kissinger,” Grandin says. “He had a very clear ideological conception of what he was doing. One way he justified a lot of his action is the idea that we have limits to our power to act in the world, but he uses that humility toward history to justify the need to take bold action to establish power. There’s a contradiction in his ideology that I think captures a contradiction about American power in the world.”

Kissinger’s approach to diplomacy and war was to operate largely in secret and without the pretense of the need for or the effort to develop a consensus with Congress and the American public. Kissinger’s statecraft, as Grandin describes it, was critical to the intellectual foundation for the Iraq War.

“Kissinger was always clear that you have to act before you have all the information, that too much information could actually be paralyzing,” Grandin says. “All of these things that we associate with neoconservatism—pre-emption, the need to take action to establish legitimacy, the need to act before all of the information is in—these are all inherent in Kissinger’s grand strategy.”

Scott Porch is an attorney and contributes to Kirkus Reviews and the Daily Beast. He is writing a book about social upheaval in the 1960s and ’70s. Kissinger’s Shadow was reviewed in the June 1, 2015, issue.
WITCHES OF AMERICA
Mar, Alex
Sarah Crichton/Farrar, Straus and Giroux (288 pp.)
$26.00 | Oct. 20, 2015
978-0-374-29137-2

A self-avowed skeptic investigates the shadowy world of modern witchcraft.

In this literary companion to the 2010 documentary American Mystic, which she directed, former Rolling Stone editor Mar dynamically illustrates her adventures journeying across America in search of witches, mystics, and polytheistic pagans. A cynical native New Yorker drawn to fringe communities “whose esoteric beliefs cut them off from the mainstream but also bond them closer together,” the author first traveled to Northern California’s Santa Clara County, where a “Feri priestess” named Morpheus has constructed the Stone City, a sanctuary for congregating covens to perform ritualistic ceremonies. While Mar outlines witchcraft’s history as a movement through the celebrated work of Englishman Gerald Gardner, the “godfather of Wicca,” the core of her book comprises profiles of the many witches she encountered. None of them are as fascinating as Morpheus, whom the author befriended deeply and honestly and who becomes an increasingly formidable influence. Though frequently overwhelmed, Mar’s fascination with the occult suffuses the narrative via in-depth explorations of intensive Feri witch rituals, a weeklong Spirit Gathering in a forest clearing in rural Illinois, participation in the annual pagan Pantheacon conventions, trial-and-error Feri training, and witchcraft circles hosted in a New England castle. The author initially approached craft rituals involving “circling, trancing, banishing personal demons, and bumping up against the dead” with dubiety and great hesitancy, yet once familiarized with her surroundings, she was enveloped in the wonder and the enlightenment each group imparted. A wide-eyed observer governed by an unshakable curiosity, Mar’s immersion in the multifaceted world of witchcraft (including a particularly chilling encounter with a necromancer) collectively broadened and enhanced her perspective about the craft itself—and will surely do the same for her readership.

An enchanting and addictive report shedding much-needed light on a spiritualistic community obfuscated by historical misinterpretation and pop-culture derision.

HOME IS BURNING
Marshall, Dan
Flatiron Books (320 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 20, 2015
978-1-250-06882-8

In his first book, a 20-something recounts his battles with caring for a mother fighting cancer and a father with Lou Gehrig’s disease.

As a young professional newly graduated from college, Utah native Marshall was on top of the world. Not only did he and his siblings come from wealth and live with “the proverbial silver spoon jammed firmly up our asses”; he also had a job and girlfriend he loved in Los Angeles, a city he enjoyed for its “traffic and pollution and assholes speeding around in BMWs.” The one shadow on his good fortune was having a mother sick with cancer. But even that difficulty was one Marshall and his family had overcome thanks to his father, a man who had held chaos at bay with his unflagging devotion to them all. Then one day, Marshall learned that his father had been diagnosed with ALS, a disease that was “a real ugly motherfucker and...pretty much a death sentence.” At first, the family tried to carry on their lives as though nothing had changed. However, less than a year after the diagnosis, Marshall’s siblings told him that he needed to come home to help care for both parents. It was then he realized that “life [wasn’t] all about gin and tonics and sunsets.” For the next year, Marshall watched as his once healthy and active father declined into near total helplessness and his traumatized mother reeled from chemotherapy and drugs that addled her brain. Relationships between him, his siblings, and his friends strained to the breaking point. Marshall then had to face his own personal losses, which included the end of a long-term relationship he believed would culminate in marriage. Though the author’s potty-mouthed profanity can be trying, the book is funny, heartbreaking, and unapologetically crude. Strangely enough, as Marshall is forced into awareness of life’s harsher realities and grows up, his linguistic coarseness gives way to a narrative that manages to be quite touching.

A poignantly provocative memoir.
An important book that warrants a place at the forefront of Prohibition histories. General readers will love it, and scholars will find much to ponder.

**THE WAR ON ALCOHOL**

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**A NATURALIST GOES FISHING**

*Casting in Fragile Waters from the Gulf of Mexico to New Zealand’s South Island*

McClintock, James

Palgrave Macmillan (272 pp.)

$26.00 | Oct. 27, 2015

978-1-137-27990-3

Personal and professional lives come together for McClintock (*Lost Antarctica: Adventures in a Disappearing Land*, 2012), an Antarctic marine biologist and passionate sport fisherman.

The author is especially worried about the growing threat to fish posed by the increased acidification of the world’s oceans, caused by the absorption of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. A fishing trip to the Chandeleur Islands off the coast of Louisiana evokes concern about the health of the habitat for the redfish and speckled sea trout that have drawn him and his fishing buddies to the area on yearly visits for more than a decade. This “portion of the Breton National Wildlife Refuge, the fifty-mile chain of uninhabited islands, is a naturalist’s dream,” writes the author. He has personally witnessed the effects of dredging, coupled with pollution and the impact of global warming, all of which are depleting the number of fish and reducing their size. Nonetheless, McClintock writes with relish about his adventures as a sport fisherman. He opens with a story of chasing redfish and speckled sea trout. After a 40-minute battle with a “big red” hooked on his tackle but putting up a strong fight, the fish got away. His brother was luckier in his battle with a trout, which was caught, held up proudly for a photograph, and then released back to the sea. The author also writes of a four-day stay in a fishing lodge north of Manitoba in Canada, where there is “some of the best lake trout and pike fishing in the world.” His accounts of these and other fishing adventures—in the Gulf of Mexico, the Bahamas, Costa Rica, and more—provide a lively backdrop for concerns about the effects of climate change.

Enjoyable reading for sport fishermen and other outdoor enthusiasts who can look past any issues regarding cruelty to animals.

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**THE WAR ON ALCOHOL**

*Prohibition and the Rise of the American State*

McGirr, Lisa

Norton (352 pp.)

$27.95 | Nov. 11, 2015

978-0-393-06695-1

The surprising ways in which a failed social experiment helped shape modern America.

In this splendid social and political history, McGirr (History/Harvard Univ.; *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*, 2001, etc.) offers a vivid account of Prohibition (1920-1933) and its “significant but largely unacknowledged” long-term effects on the United States. Writing with authority and admirable economy, the author traces the decades-long effort to discipline the leisure of urban immigrants, led by Protestant clergyman driven by “a powerful animosity toward working-class drinking in the saloon.” With support from temperance groups and businessmen (“Until booze is banished we can never have really efficient workmen,” said one manufacturer), the 18th Amendment banning the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages not only gave rise to the familiar Prohibition story of bootlegging, violence, and speakeasies but also had diverse, wide-ranging consequences that resonate to this day. Drawing on archival research, McGirr shows most importantly how the war on alcohol greatly expanded the role of the federal government, especially with regard to policing and surveillance. Prohibition awakened the nation’s religious right, spurred the electoral realignment that resulted in the New Deal, and served as a “cultural accelerator” that began with the emergence of urban nightlife and drinking by women and youths and spread “ideals of self-fulfillment, pleasure, and liberation” across the country. These and other perceptive insights are contained in a bright, taut narrative that covers everything from the growing popularity of jazz to the selective enforcement of Prohibition in places from Chicago to Virginia to the tenor of everyday American life in these years. McGirr’s discussions of the class aspects of the “dry” crusade will leave many feeling that booze—and the supposed criminality of the saloon—was the least of the problems.

An important book that warrants a place at the forefront of Prohibition histories. General readers will love it, and scholars will find much to ponder. (8 pages of illustrations)
NO SUCH THING AS A FREE GIFT
*The Gates Foundation and the Price of Philanthropy*
McGoey, Linsey
Verso (304 pp.)
$26.95 | October 20, 2015
978-1-78478-083-8

McGoey (Sociology/Univ. of Essex) probes the business motivations of contemporary philanthropic organizations.

“One of the most acute ironies concerning the size of today’s philanthropic foundations,” writes the author, “is that the emergence of well-financed, politically powerful behemoths is rooted in a political philosophy that cautioned against using the centralized power of states to plan or develop economic growth.” McGoey charges that philanthropy does not necessarily help the underserved and poor, and it often undermines taxation and preserves both wealth and inequality. The author exemplifies her argument by concentrating on Bill Gates and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Business and philanthropy have always been related, she insists; the giving of Andrew Carnegie and John Rockefeller was driven by a desire to counter hostile public opinion. The author takes up the question of “whether a self-interested action can ever be truly philanthropic,” and she draws attention to “a new, pugnacious, explicitly commercial form of philanthropy.”

As the author notes, current charity law does not prevent philanthropists—and their organizations—from donating to for-profit private companies, as long as the “grant is used for solely charitable purposes.” Gates, a hands-on leader, oversees donations and their effects, and in 2013, his organization became “the largest single donor” to the World Health Organization. This provides considerable political clout, and experts have questioned the effectiveness of his polio and HIV/AIDS programs abroad. In the U.S., his funds have gone largely to education, but when initiatives are deemed failures and shut down, recipients have little recourse. There is a public interest, as McGoey acknowledges, in both health and education, where accountability and continuity are primary concerns. Private initiative, tainted by corporate entanglement, often lacks accountability and can cause stability to be replaced by personal whims. The author stresses that much good has been accomplished, as well, but questions continue to accumulate.

Picking up the cudgels wielded by Ida Tarbell and her fellow trustbusters, McGoey produces a startling report.

THE OTTOMAN ENDGAME
*War, Revolution, and the Making of the Modern Middle East, 1908-1923*
McMeekin, Sean
Penguin Press (576 pp.)
$35.00 | Oct. 13, 2015
978-1-59420-532-3

Thought-provoking historical study of the closing years of the Ottoman Empire and the concurrent rise of the modern Middle East.

McMeekin (History/Bard Coll.; *July 1914: Countdown to War*, 2013, etc.) observes early on that there’s much more to that story than the smoothly duplicitous diplomacy that makes up the last hour of *Lawrence of Arabia* and much more than T.E. Lawrence himself. Certainly there is more than the Armenian genocide, horrible though it was. If there’s news in this scholarly treatise, it might be found in the author’s explanation for how that still-controversial event unfolded, an explanation likely to satisfy neither side precisely because it’s evenhanded. Without offering an apology or rationalization, McMeekin describes the exhaustion the Turks felt on fighting a multifront world war, “coming as it did after three years of war against Italy and the Balkan League” and so exhausting Ottoman resources that the military leader who would become Kemal Ataturk instituted the draft for non-Muslims and allowed men up to 55 to enlist. Thriving on untold stories, McMeekin looks at the punctuated collapse of the Ottoman Empire in Eastern Europe and its momentary successes following the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, which had the effect of exposing rivalries between the Ottomans and their German allies that almost resulted in war on yet another front. The author also gives a lucid account of the geneses of secular governments in what became Turkey and those of more theocratically or autocratically inclined ones in the neighboring former provinces. A particularly surprising note is the lobbying on the parts of numerous powers, not least the Turks, for postwar U.S. mandates over the Middle East—thwarted only by the fact that “the Americans themselves wanted no part of them.”

Though the book is mostly of specialist interest, it is vigorous and accessible and helps explain some of what’s going on in today’s headlines.
Much of the narrative is set in a time of Jewish immigration and the concomitant efforts to keep an anchor in the Old World by means of traditional food, Merwin closes at the end of that arc, with an assimilated Jewish culture that has both introduced the mass market, does a solid job of locating the delicates-sen—a German Jewish thing, helped along by Ashkenazi leanings and the cured meats of the Alsace—as a cultural and culinary center of New York Jewish life. Merwin delights in oddments of a sociological bent, as when he looks at the claims for the deli as an institution reinforcing marriage: a wife who might work outside the home could still have dinner waiting at the end of the day, leading to domestic tranquility; as one wag whom Merwin cites put it, “the secret of a good marriage...was to live near a delicatessen...if the range were stolen from some of his customers’ kitchens, it would take a month before they would notice the theft.” Much of the narrative is set in a time of Jewish immigration and the concomitant efforts to keep an anchor in the Old World by means of traditional food, Merwin closes at the end of that arc, with an assimilated Jewish culture that has both introduced the deli into wider ethnic circulation but also lost its insularity and adherence to the old ways, especially the insistence on keeping kosher— even if the treat on hand is kosher tapas.

Less comprehensive and more impressionistic than Hasia Diner’s Hungering for America (2002), but a nice, tasty nosh all the same.

A pleasing exercise in culinary and cultural history, evoking some favorite New York-centric comfort foods.

Forget the Big Apple: it’s all about meat. Pastrami. Bologna. Sausage. Corned beef. “Judaism has almost always revolved around meat,” writes Merwin (Religion and Judaic Studies/Dickinson Coll.). And if the apple represents forbidden fruit, well, that pile of steaming meat, just the right amount of fat and just the right amount of lean, represents...well, it’s spoiling the fun to tell too much. Suffice it to say that the author, steering a sometimes-difficult course between academia and the mass market, does a solid job of locating the delicates-sen—a German Jewish thing, helped along by Ashkenazi leanings and the cured meats of the Alsace—as a cultural and culinary center of New York Jewish life. Merwin delights in oddments of a sociological bent, as when he looks at the claims for the deli as an institution reinforcing marriage: a wife who might work outside the home could still have dinner waiting at the end of the day, leading to domestic tranquility; as one wag whom Merwin cites put it, “the secret of a good marriage...was to live near a delicatessen...if the range were stolen from some of his customers’ kitchens, it would take a month before they would notice the theft.” Much of the narrative is set in a time of Jewish immigration and the concomitant efforts to keep an anchor in the Old World by means of traditional food, Merwin closes at the end of that arc, with an assimilated Jewish culture that has both introduced the deli into wider ethnic circulation but also lost its insularity and adherence to the old ways, especially the insistence on keeping kosher—even if the treat on hand is kosher tapas.

Less comprehensive and more impressionistic than Hasia Diner’s Hungering for America (2002), but a nice, tasty nosh all the same.

CEO of a company that works with patients to get the best possible care—not only from the best possible physicians (though that often factors in), but also through guiding them through the process described in this book, one that shifts the role of care director over to the patient. The author was in high school when his father was told he needed open-heart surgery. Terrified at the idea of losing his father, he called another hospital and somehow finagled a second opinion with the chairman of cardiology, who went on to discover that Michelson’s father’s heart was fine. The author addresses our fragmented health care system by essentially moving the system over into the hands of the patient. Akin to becoming an expert on yourself, the patient takes an account of his entire medical history and learns the best ways to empower doctors to deliver the most accurate care. Michelson balances cautiously on the fine line between empowering patients to direct their care and empowering them to know what’s best. Sensitive to the volumes of misinformation that are just a Google search away, he advocates for a measured approach, pulling in support and information from a range of medical professionals. Michelson advises using not only personal wisdom, but also the skills and insights of others in a coordinated effort to reach the best outcome.

As the author notes early on, health care is one of the few areas where people willingly cede control over to others, but with this useful book, patients can have more say over what direction treatment takes rather than just going along for the ride. (First printing of 200,000)

A primer on making the right moves as an active participant in your health care. Whatever your opinion on the Affordable Care Act, there’s an argument to be made that the American health care system is still a confusing mess, driven by cost-cutting, managed care initiatives, and conflicting information. Michelson is the CEO of a company that works with patients to get the best possible care—not only from the best possible physicians (though that often factors in), but also through guiding them through the process described in this book, one that shifts the role of care director over to the patient. The author was in high school when his father was told he needed open-heart surgery. Terrified at the idea of losing his father, he called another hospital and somehow finagled a second opinion with the chairman of cardiology, who went on to discover that Michelson’s father’s heart was fine. The author addresses our fragmented health care system by essentially moving the system over into the hands of the patient. Akin to becoming an expert on yourself, the patient takes an account of his entire medical history and learns the best ways to empower doctors to deliver the most accurate care. Michelson balances cautiously on the fine line between empowering patients to direct their care and empowering them to know what’s best. Sensitive to the volumes of misinformation that are just a Google search away, he advocates for a measured approach, pulling in support and information from a range of medical professionals. Michelson advises using not only personal wisdom, but also the skills and insights of others in a coordinated effort to reach the best outcome.

As the author notes early on, health care is one of the few areas where people willingly cede control over to others, but with this useful book, patients can have more say over what direction treatment takes rather than just going along for the ride. (First printing of 200,000)
imaginations” spend days there. Space scientists “become” the distant rover. (“It’s...some kind of weird, man-machine bond,” says one.) Predator pilots, based in air-conditioned control rooms, experience identity crises as they engage in distant warfare “mediated by technology.” Geologists, accustomed to working directly with materials, often feel threatened professionally when engaged in remote undersea exploration. Yet humans are not abdicating to robots, writes Mindell. They are adjusting to new roles and using the robots. Indeed, the human factor—“human decisions, presence, and expertise”—remains more crucial than ever in working with robots. General readers will wish the author had offered more examples of the unusual man-machine interactions in the words of people who experienced them, but Mindell certainly dispels any notion that these robots are completely autonomous and leaves us with a better understanding of what lies ahead for our daily lives.

A lucid counterbalance to the menacing view of robotics long depicted in science fiction.
Remember that time you got so upset about something it hijacked your thoughts for hours or days? That’s what Brené Brown calls a facedown moment. Whether it’s a crushing event like discovering a partner’s infidelity or simply reacting to a snide remark someone made at the office, Brown says these emotional “shit-storms” are actually our first-class tickets to peace of mind—if we’re willing to reckon with them. But reckoning isn’t the go-to response for most of us.

“We tend to offload emotion instead of recognizing it and getting curious about it,” says Brown. “We push it down, we blame, we avoid. I think there’s a line in the book—one that I think about all the time for myself—that it’s easier to inflict pain on other people through anger, blame, or shaming, than it is to actually feel anger or pain ourselves.”

Brown is a research professor at the University of Houston’s Graduate College of Social Work; the book she’s referring to is her newest release, Rising Strong (Aug. 25), which debuts on the heels of her No. 1 New York Times bestseller, During Greatly. Rising Strong builds upon Brown’s extensive research on shame and vulnerability and introduces a three-part approach that’s designed to help tow us out of the emotional ditches we all too often find ourselves in.

To be sure, Brown’s blueprint for wholehearted living isn’t for the faint of heart. She’s explicit about the fact that rumbling with emotion is sometimes painful and messy; she actually calls curiosity a “shit-starter.” So why would anyone deliberately want to stir stuff like that up? “You can either stir it up and walk through it, or you can live in it,” says Brown. “Better to stir it up and walk out of it than to just stay in it. There’s no other alternative.”

Laura Jenkins is a writer/photojournalist based in her hometown, Austin, Texas. Rising Strong was reviewed in the June 15, 2015, issue.
An endlessly surprising foray into the current mother of physics’ many knotty mysteries.

**SPOOKY ACTION AT A DISTANCE**

The Phenomenon that Reimagines Space and Time—and What It Means for Black Holes, the Big Bang, and Theories of Everything

Musser, George

Scientific American/Farrar, Straus and Giroux (304 pp.)

$26.00 | Nov. 3, 2015

978-0-374-29851-7


Locality was the bedrock of physics for centuries. “It means that everything has a place. You can always point to an object and say, ‘Here it is.’ If you can’t, that thing must not really exist,” writes the author in this anything-but-simple story of nonlocality. Einstein understood locality as both separability—things in separate places have independent existences—and local action: objects interact by striking one another or intermediately. Musser covers the evolution of physics’ method of physical inquiry, “driven by the conviction that the universe is within the human power to understand,” with comprehensible rules and a history of systematic investigation for reference: from Zeno and Democritus to Newton, who turned inquiry—and locality—on its head. Newton couldn’t explain gravity, but his equations proved out. Now, writes Musser, “modern physicists think of any theory as having two separate functions. First, the theory should provide a mathematical description...Second, the theory should provide an ‘interpretation’ of the formulas: a compelling picture of what’s going on...” But the second part is flexible enough that physicists can “kick away the interpretation and let the equations stand on their own.” Much the same can be said about the entire quantum revolution and certainly nonlocality: locality may be a precondition for relativity, but there are enough instances of flabbergasting nonlocality to suggest that space is simply a convenient notion to describe order. With brio and dash, Musser navigates the difficult science and also introduces interesting characters such as Michael Heller, “a physicist, philosopher, and priest” at Krakow’s Pontifical Academy of Theology, and theorist Nima Arkani-Hamed, winner of the 2012 Fundamental Physics Prize.

An endlessly surprising foray into the current mother of physics’ many knotty mysteries, the solving of which may unveil the weirdness of quantum particles, black holes, and the essential unity of nature. (13 b/w illustrations)

**YES, MY ACCENT IS REAL And Some Other Things I Haven’t Told You**

Nayyar, Kunal

Atria (250 pp.)

$26.00 | Sep. 15, 2015

978-1-4767-6182-4

An amiable collection of reminiscences by the Indian actor about girls, school, jobs, family, and acting. Though Nayyar is best (or even only) known for his comic role in the television series *The Big Bang Theory*, this book debut isn’t a collection of extended bits and sketches, like so many by comedians are. The author doesn’t try too hard to be funny, which is part of his charm. Nayyar admits from the outset that he hasn’t lived long enough or accomplished enough to justify a memoir: “I’m not a president, or an astronaut, or a Kardashian. This is a collection of stories from my life.” Its target readership is fans of the series and his geeky character featured on it, but its conversational tone will also appeal to anyone who wants to read about a regular guy, Indian style. Even there, his life was saturated with American media, as reflected in the opening essay, “Everything I Know About Kissing I Learned from Winnie Cooper,” which tells how watching *The Wonder Years* and becoming infatuated with its young actress while growing up prepared him for his own first kiss and how life came full circle when his acting career gave him the chance to kiss the real actress. When he pursued his education in America, he initially majored in business and planned a marketing career, though he dabbled in acting in order to meet girls. As the author tells it, his romantic life existed mainly in his head, though his first real girlfriend was an acting student who was the love of the campus, and his marriage to a former Miss India ends the book. Yes, Nayyar’s been a lucky guy whose first real audition resulted in the big break that brought him to TV and resulted in this book, but his explanation reflects his experience: “Every person has a different journey. But no one has an easy one.”

Nice guy; nice book.
ALEX HALEY
And the Books that Changed a Nation
Norrell, Robert J.
St. Martin’s (272 pp.)
$26.99 | Nov. 10, 2015
978-1-328-27960-6

The making of the author of “the two most important works in black culture in the twentieth century.”

Alex Haley (1921–1992) rose to fame with two books, The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1965) and Roots (1976), the basis of a miniseries viewed by as many as 130 million. Norrell (History/Univ. of Tennessee; Up From History: The Life of Booker T. Washington, 2009, etc.) brings a broad background in African-American history to this well-researched portrait of a controversial writer. Haley's early publications appeared in Reader's Digest, for which he wrote profiles of “talented African Americans who had overcome great obstacles and remained humble, unchanged by great success.” His breakthrough project, however, focused on a far different man: Malcolm X, the incendiary spokesman of the Black Muslims. Malcolm allowed Haley to write his autobiography, subject to his approval. “A writer is what I want, not an interpreter,” Malcolm declared. Malcolm's biographer, Manning Marable, described Haley as “opportunistic, bourgeois, and politically conservative” compared to his subject, and Norrell agrees that Haley aimed “to maximize both its sensational value and its commercial success.” Praised by most reviewers, the book sold 2 million copies in its first years. Still, Haley was always in debt, eager for publishing contracts and speaking gigs “to address his financial woes.” He once proposed a self-help book aimed at white readers called “How to Co-Exist with Negroes.” A more salable project was his own family’s history, beginning with their roots in Africa. Haley’s editors at Doubleday questioned whether the book was fact or fiction since some passages “were based on Haley’s guessing about facts and eliding evidence.” The decision to call it non-fiction, Norrell asserts, was a mistake and opened Haley up to charges of misrepresentation. The scandal that ensued dogged him for the rest of his career.

An evenhanded assessment of “a likable narcissist” who, the author maintains, changed Americans’ perceptions of racial history. (8-page b/w insert)

FIND A WAY
Nyad, Diana
Knopf (288 pp.)
$26.95 | Oct. 20, 2015
978-0-385-35361-8

A celebrated endurance swimmer’s account of her life in the water and the attempts that led to her successful 2013 swim from Cuba to Florida.

Nyad's future as a swimming star seemed fated. On her fifth birthday, her stepfather revealed that the last name he had given her not only meant water nymph, but also champion swimmer. Four years later, her mother pointed across the Straits of Florida and observed that the island that produced the culture Nyad had fallen in love with was so close “you could almost swim there.” She began training at age 10 and was soon competing at national championships. As much as she loved swimming for the highs it gave her, it was also an activity that helped her overcome the trauma of sexual abuse she faced from both her father and, later, a trusted swimming coach. By the time she had graduated high school, Nyad was a world-class swimmer, but she missed qualifying for the 1968 Olympics. She turned to open water marathon swimming in her early 20s. Fascinated by the idea of crossing from Florida to Cuba, she made one unsuccessful attempt to navigate the dangerous waters between Cuba and Key West in 1978; two years later, she ended her swimming marathon career to become a sports broadcaster and journalist. In 2010, at age 60, she began the first of four more attempts to swim between Cuba and Florida. Three years later, wearing a special protective suit and mask to protect against jellyfish stings, she managed the crossing in 53 hours. What makes Nyad’s story so remarkable, beyond the harrowing trials she faced at sea—unpredictable currents and weather, deadly sea animals—is the strength of a resolve that would not admit defeat and knew no boundaries. “Whatever your Other Shore is,” she writes, “whatever you must do...you will find a way.”

Inspiring reading for anyone who has ever dared to dream the impossible.

GREAT SOUL OF SIBERIA
Passion, Obsession, and One Man’s Quest for the World’s Most Elusive Tiger
Park, Sooyong
Greystone Books (272 pp.)
$37.95 | Nov. 10, 2015
978-1-77164-113-5

A memoir from a researcher who tracks rare and elusive wild beasts. Documentary filmmaker Park has been studying Siberian tigers for more than 20 years, following their traces across nature reserves and spending frigid winter months in underground earthen bunkers, his camera trained
Anticipating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation...Pettegree offers a cogent and authoritative overview of Martin Luther and of the burgeoning printing industry that disseminated his ideas.

BRAND LUTHER

How an Unheralded Monk Turned His Small Town into a Center of Publishing, Made Himself the Most Famous Man in Europe—and Started the Protestant Reformation

Pettegree, Andrew

Penguin Press (400 pp.)

$29.95 | Oct. 27, 2015

978-1-59420-496-8

Anticipating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, Royal Historical Society vice president Pettegree (Modern History/Univ. of St. Andrews; The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know About Itself, 2014, etc.) offers a cogent and authoritative overview of Martin Luther (1483-1546) and of the burgeoning printing industry that disseminated his ideas.

Railing against clerical corruption, Luther gained renown through his prolific writings. Pettegree contends that Luther “invented a new form of theological writing: short, clear, and direct, speaking not only to his professional peers but to the wider Christian people.” In 1517, when Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of the Wittenberg church—a common place for announcements to the community—he was an unknown monk who had rarely published. His document, harshly critical of the selling of indulgences that duped Christians into believing they could buy salvation, was widely circulated; “thanks to print,” the author contends, “the indulgence controversy” became “a public matter.” Four years later, after publishing prolifically, Luther was declared a heretic and excommunicated. By the time he died, he was a bestselling author whose works included anti-Semitic (On the Jews and Their Lies) and violently abusive tracts. Pettegree attributes Luther’s fame both to his ideas—and—a bit repetitiously—to his shrewd use of publishing. Although he acknowledges that “a large proportion of the population could not read, even in relatively sophisticated urban societies such as the German imperial cities,” readership among the clergy and intelligentsia was enough to warrant massive printings of Luther’s pamphlets, catechisms, and vernacular translation of the Bible. His friend and ally the artist Lucas

on the snow-covered landscape. In evocative prose, the author recounts his search for several of these naturally secretive animals: a female he named Bloody Mary and her cubs, whose territory covered more than 500 square kilometers of treacherous terrain. As he sadly notes, Siberian tigers are threatened with extinction by poachers, who can get more than $30,000 for a wild animal. A population that was once 10,000 is now merely 350; at the same time, the number of indigenous Ussuri also has been reduced from several hundred thousand to 10,000, a woeful decimation of culture. Hunters, fishers, and root-gatherers, the Ussuri, Park writes, “see this world as a place where spirits pass through eternal cycles,” where “everything in the world is a living thing that gives and receives energy.” Their animistic beliefs lead them to feel a special bond with birches and willows and to worship tigers; they call the strongest male tiger the Great King. Tracing prints, claw marks, urine markers, droppings, and the remains of prey, Park closes in on Bloody Mary. But tigers, he knows, are crafty and smart. “They figure out human intentions based on behavior, expressions, and the energy radiated by people and take precautions or even attack accordingly,” he writes. They can distinguish between an herb collector’s satchel and a hunter’s rifle, between the smell of cigarettes or cosmetics. Living in solitary confinement during the brutal winter months, waiting patiently for Bloody Mary to appear, Park felt he had gained access to “the intimate depths of nature,” and he shares this intimacy with readers.

A heartfelt memoir that reflects the author’s respect and love for a wild and pitiless world. (16-page color insert)
Cranach designed attractive title pages highlighting Luther’s name, an innovation that contributed to the creation of what Pettigrew calls “Brand Luther.”

An informative history of a man of “adamantine strengths and...very human weaknesses” who incited a theological revolution.

THE EDUCATION OF KEVIN POWELL
A Boy’s Journey into Manhood
Powell, Kevin
Atria (384 pp.)
$26.00 | Nov. 3, 2015
978-1-4391-6368-9

A noted African-American journalist’s account of his hardscrabble youth and its consequences in later life.

Poet, journalist, and essayist Powell (Barack Obama, Ronald Reagan, and the Ghost of Dr. King, 2012, etc.) grew up the son of a struggling single mother who dreamed he would become “somebody important.” Though loving and encouraging, his mother was also ferociously strict and often beat Powell to keep him on the straight and narrow. Between her brutality and the poverty and violence he faced in the New Jersey ghettos where he grew up, Powell felt as though he were living in a “concrete box” from which there was no escape. Despite the many obstacles he faced and his flirtation with a life of petty crime, he still excelled academically. Yet his suppressed rage and sadness often erupted at unexpected moments and led to arrests and his expulsion from high school. Powell still managed to gain tuition-free acceptance into Rutgers University, where he became involved with black student activists. After the university suspended him for pulling a knife on a fellow student in a fit of frustration, Powell left for New York determined to make a living as a writer. His experiments in poetry and journalism eventually led to a job writing about hip-hop music and culture for Vibe. But his anger at working for two white editors at a black magazine caused him to eventually be fired. Powell’s life spiraled into an abyss of alcoholism, depression, and dysfunctional relationships, one of which ended after he physically attacked his lover. After two unsuccessful runs for Congress, Powell went to Africa, where he finally began to experience personal healing. The author’s story is powerful and unsparing. By the end, his narrative bears witness not only to the life of one black man, but to an American society still bound to a tragic history of racism.

Raw-edged honesty at its most revealing and intense.

THUNDER & LIGHTNING
Weather Past, Present, Future
Redniss, Lauren
Illus. by the author
Random House (272 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 27, 2015
978-0-8129-9317-2


This is a terrific celebration of weather as an elemental force in not only our daily lives, but in our global stories, myths, history, and cultural identities. It is part powerful graphic novel (with impeccable color sense) and part meteorological text. The author divides the book into chapters such as Cold, Rain, Sky Heat, Dominion, Profit, and Forecasting, and within each chapter is an array of anecdotes and factoids, vest-pocket biographies, and elegant place descriptions. After an introduction to the Arctic explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Redniss discusses the demographics of the far-north Svalbard archipelago (“Today, Svalbard has a population of approximately 2000 people and 3000 polar bears”). Then she moves on to a lightshow in South America’s Atacama Desert: “in the shifting light, the Atacama’s sands turn gold, orange, and violet. In the shadows, the landscape is blue, green, violet. Treeless, plantless expanses of stark grandeur roll out like a Martian landscape.” Redniss details what we know about the dynamics of lightning and why lightning often gives us the shivers. “Lightning can charge out of a bright blue sky,” she writes, “traveling horizontally 10 or more miles from a nearby storm. Lightning can, and does, strike twice.” The author also looks at the meteorological effects of the death of Kim Jong II as reported by North Korea’s official news outlets (“winds were stronger, waves higher, and temperatures the coldest of the season”), the money to be made off ice at Walden Pond, and Benjamin Franklin, who “was a proponent of air baths, the practice of sitting naked by an open window.” This book is not simply a collection of oddments and odd fellows, but rather a genuine demonstration of weather as a phenomena and how it is fantastical on both the symbolic and systematized levels.

A highly atmospheric, entertainingly earnest, and intimate engrossment with the world’s most popular topic of conversation.
SAVING CAPITALISM
For the Many, Not the Few
Reich, Robert B.
Knopf (288 pp.)
$26.95  |  Oct. 1, 2015
978-0-385-35057-0

An accessible examination of how the “apparent arbitrariness and unfairness of the economy [has] undermined the public’s faith in its basic tenets.”

Since leaving the cabinet of the Bill Clinton administration, in which he served as secretary of labor, Reich (Beyond Outrage: What Has Gone Wrong with Our Economy and Our Democracy and How to Fix It, 2012, etc.) has worked a populist vein of protest against corporate excess. In this nontechnical economic manifesto, he opens with the nostalgic vision of an American past in which ordinary people could afford to buy a home and pay for college on a single income, a time long gone precisely because the economy has been reorganized for the benefit of the wealthy at the expense of the laboring and middle classes. Reich holds that government, long despised as the problem and not the solution, actually has a role, if abrogated, “in setting the rules of the economic game.” In the absence of sufficient government oversight, the rich have been setting those rules, and—no surprise—an ideally level playing field tilts in such a way that they get all the goals. The author takes a measured view even as he argues against free market orthodoxies, insisting, “rules create markets,” rules set by governments and not individuals. Reich examines key problem areas such as antitrust regulation and the tightening corporate stranglehold over intellectual property, and he arrives at some innovative reforms—e.g., paying all Americans a guaranteed annual income, a thought not quite as radical as it might seem and backed by an odd-bedfellow assortment of libertarians and conservatives. He also suggests making Americans shareholders of the intellectual property market, requiring a payment of royalties into the public domain as the cost of holding a patent.

Reich’s overriding message is that we don’t have to put up with things as they are. It’s a useful and necessary one, if not likely to sway the powers that be to become more generous of their own volition.

THE ONLY STREET IN PARIS
Life on the Rue des Martyrs
Sciolino, Elaine
Norton (300 pp.)
$25.95  |  Nov. 2, 2015
978-0-393-24237-9

After taking a tart look at her adopted country in La Seduction (2011, etc.), Sciolino shows a softer side in this affectionate portrait of her Ninth Arrondissement neighborhood.

Not that the veteran foreign correspondent for the New York Times and Newsweek indulges in unbridled sentimentality. Yes, the author fell in love with her apartment when she walked into its cobblestoned courtyard and “was transported back to
the first half of the nineteenth century,” and she praises the shop-lined rue des Martyrs 500 feet from her front door because it “has retained the feel of a small village.” But in an early chapter lamenting the closing of a family-run fish store, Sciolino acknowledges that the frozen fish sold for half the price at the local supermarket is actually pretty good. She still misses the chance to linger and talk fish at the old poissonerie. She relishes the formal intimacy of relationships with the merchants, and her brisk, lucid prose conveys the charm of unspoken rules that govern all interactions: newcomers must prove they know the code before they too get the freshest piece of fish cut in the back room or the loan of a book they can’t afford to buy. Sciolino understands this mindset, because her Sicilian-American grandfather had the same distrust of strangers. Over the course of five years she became accepted enough to throw the wildly successful party bringing together the street’s two halves: the more gentrified lower portion in the Ninth, and the tawdrier, cheaper stretch that runs through Montmartre. “Le Potluck” closes the book on an elegiac note, but chapters in between also chronicle darker moments: a columnist who survived the January 2015 attack on Charlie Hebdo lives on the rue des Martyrs, and a high school down the way annually commemorates 19 students and one teacher killed by the Nazis.

A pungent evocation of the conflict and compromise between tradition and innovation that define modern urbanism. (25 photos)

AND THEN I DANCED Traveling the Road to LGBT Equality
Segal, Mark
Open Lens/Akashic (320 pp.)
$29.95 | $16.95 paper | Oct. 6, 2015
978-1-61775-410-4
978-1-61775-399-2 paper

The life and times of an intrepid gay rights activist.

Segal’s swiftly written debut memoir looks back at his coming-of-age years in New York City through his achievements both personal and political, which have made him the “dean of American gay journalism.” Growing up isolated in the 1950s with “the only Jewish family in a South Philadelphia housing project,” the author, son of a decorated war hero, set his sights on New York (“the center of everything”) while passing his childhood years with eyes glued to the men’s underwear section of the Sears catalog and bonding with his civil rights advocate grandmother, who “celebrated diversity before it was fashionable.” Segal’s first interest in newspapers manifested as a young door-to-door salesboy, and then he branched out in later years as a founding journalist of the Philadelphia Gay News. He went on to chair political movements and lobby for LGBT anti-discrimination legislation with learned diplomacy and the launch of a series of nonviolent, press-frenzying “zaps,” which included crashing the sets of the Tonight Show and the CBS Evening News. Amid schisms within the gay community and the beginning of the nightmarish “deadly war” on AIDS, Segal fearlessly pressed onward, befriending pivotal politicians like Barney Frank and spearheading the development of LGBT senior housing projects. In other sections, the author vividly describes his firsthand experience as a teenager inside the Stonewall bar during the historic riots, his participation with the Gay Liberation Front, and amusing encounters with Elton John and Patti LaBelle. In a fitting coda to a vigorous life story, Segal, now 64, writes of finally wedding his longtime partner and of finagling a coveted photograph together with Michelle Obama.

A jovial yet passionately delivered self-portrait inspiring awareness about LGBT history from one of the movement’s true pioneers. (16 pages of full-color photos)

LITTLE RICE
Smartphones, Xiaomi, and the Chinese Dream
Shirky, Clay
Columbia Global Reports (130 pp.)
$12.99 paperback
October 13, 2015
978-0-9909763-2-5

A compact report on the world’s biggest economy, told through the story of the third-largest global manufacturer of smartphones.

Prominent technology writer Shirky (Journalism and Interactive Telecommunications/New York Univ.; Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age, 2010, etc.) spent a year in Shanghai researching the hyperlucrative communications market, which has exploded in popularity and demand. This has created an unmatched “teledensity” rate: even poverty-stricken populations retain a mobile phone penetration factor of upward of 58 percent—three phones for every five people. Building on this data, the author focuses his attention on the booming startup software firm Xiaomi Tech (“little rice” in Mandarin) since its unassuming Beijing inception in 2010 by now-billionaire Lei Jun. Much more than just another Chinese export operation, Shirky contends that this industry innovator not only offers flexibility and freedom from an autocratic society, but openly challenges modern China’s closely scrutinized governmental control over its citizens’ online activities. Documenting a guided tour of the company’s offices, the author concisely documents Xiaomi’s beginnings from offering carefully prototyped consumer hardware to its MIUI operating system. Shirky also viewed the firm’s intricate cluster of “advertising” programmers, who were busy producing unique internal tools to communicate with users. The company soon branched out to further embrace and capitalize on the colossal smartphone revolution with its Mi-phone series, alongside advanced industrial design and online services. Shirky condenses both the history of the “Chinese Dream” and more contemporary notes on Chinese commerce and politics without criticism, leaving the determination up to readers whether the direction technology is taking consumers, both inside and
outside of China, is beneficial or otherwise. Still, as Xiaomi continues to openly compete with other world-class designers and electronic originators, the Chinese-borne caveat remains that “the forces of conservatism and corruption always threaten to freeze progress.”

A compact, accessible, and intelligently delivered update on China’s evolving economic and political front via one particularly accomplished electronics venture.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS
Women Work Family
Slaughter, Anne-Marie
Random House (336 pp.)
$28.00 | Sep. 29, 2015
978-0-8129-9456-8

One woman’s vision on how to create gender equality for men and women.

After New America Foundation CEO Slaughter’s (The Idea that Is America, 2008, etc.) 2012 Atlantic article, “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All,” created a whirlwind of debate on both sides of the issue, she realized the “fifty-year-old conversation about what true equality between men and women really means” was still open to definition. In this comprehensive analysis, the author interweaves thoughts about the necessity of equal time at home and at work with her personal story of juggling a career as the first female director of policy planning, reporting directly to then–Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and her deep desire and need to be at home with her sons. Slaughter skillfully breaks down old myths and offers useful advice on how, with slight twists and tweaks, the old theories can be reinvented into methods that are readily accessible and actionable. With strong research, the author outlines the inherent problems that still exist in the workplace, which create an unequal atmosphere, particularly for women, who are often seen as “giving up” a career if they elect to spend more time with their children. She offers solid advice on how these disparities can be changed, allowing workers to have more flexibility. Her advice includes using at-home independent contractors and freelancers, using OpenWork (“a platform and movement...a way of working, a spirit and set of values that animates a particular workplace”), and focusing on results rather than on the steps to get there. Although much of this is common sense, the fact that men and women do not yet share equal pay for equal work or receive fair treatment in regard to time off for child care only underlines the need for this kind of ongoing conversation, a discussion over which Slaughter eloquently presides.

Informative guidance on how men and women can come together in the workforce and at home.

CROSSING THE PLAINS WITH BRUNO
Smith, Annick
Trinity Univ. Press (224 pp.)
$17.95 paper | Nov. 10, 2015
978-1-59534-669-8

Exploring the Midwest, the past, and the passing of time on a road trip with a chocolate Lab named Bruno.

A two-week solo road trip across the Great Plains is a journey that can be approached in two different ways: as an unsavory short-as-possible trek of necessity or as an opportunity that provides miles of uninterrupted reverie, a chance for the mind to luxuriate in all manner of memories. For writer and filmmaker Smith (In This We Are Native, 2002, etc.), a founding board member of the Sundance Institute, it was more the latter that appealed to her, with one minor change: her traveling companion, Bruno. In the preface, the author discusses the losses that followed her journey. While still reworking the book, Bruno became ill, and the veterinarian was unable to save him; Smith’s mother, the lodestar of the story in ways both physical (she was going to help her mother with moving) and spiritual, passed away. Furthermore, the start of her trip occurred in the same month as the anniversary of the death of Smith’s husband. Before embarking, the author entered the date, mileage, and time of departure in her journal. Then the numbers mostly faded into the background. She holds her life and the choices made—by her and for her—up to the light cast by her relationships with friends and family. She also tenderly shares the details of some of the losses in her life and examines what happens to hopes when they are fulfilled differently than one might expect and when the person doing the hoping finds herself looking backward to find her way forward. “One twist of the kaleidoscope at memory’s core causes the shards to fragment and re-pattern,” writes the author, “but they are always the same shards.”

Bruno is a silent partner, often unmentioned for pages at a time, but Smith relates their experiences in a deliberate, thoughtful way.

TRAGIC ENCOUNTER
A People’s History of Native Americans
Smith, Page
Counterpoint (420 pp.)
$30.00 | Nov. 10, 2015
978-1-61902-574-5

Rejecting an idealized version of American tribal life, a historian tells a complex story.

Smith (1917-1995), winner of the Bancroft Prize for a biography of John Adams, is best known for his eight-volume A People’s History of the United States (1976-1987). In the years before he died, the author recognized that the relationship between Euro-Americans and tribal peoples had become, as
When his mother, Natasha Litvin, died in 2010 at the house in St. John’s Wood, the Miami had waged war for 100 years with the Iroquois, for example, were traditional enemies of the Sauk and Foxes; by 1775, the Miami had waged war for 100 years with the Iroquois, who counted among their many enemies the Potawatomi. During the American Revolution, the British drafted Indians as mercenaries, unleashing them against settlers, especially along the frontier, where “a ruthless and barbarous total war” caused more casualties “than Washington’s Continental Army suffered in all its major engagements.” Once the new nation was formed, tribal strife impeded negotiations and treaties. As the government began its policy of Indian removal, fierce fighting broke out between small groups of whites and Indians, sometimes incited by American militaries that were often “disorderly and undisciplined.” While Smith admires some elements of tribal life, such as a sense of the sacredness of the natural world, he cautions against idealizing Indian culture.

As this abundantly detailed history shows, no one evades blame for the bloody past.

A frank memoir of Spender’s problematic poet father and his emotionally remote pianist mother.

Growing up among a generation of brilliant, creative British men who had to overcome enormous obstacles to their embrace of homosexuality left poet Stephen Spender’s only son, sculptor and writer Matthew, with both a deep reverence for the creative act and a nose for self-deception. When his mother, Natasha Litvin, died in 2010 at the house in St. John’s Wood where she had lived for nearly 70 years, the author recognized that he felt angrily ambivalent about his father, who died in 1995. In his tremendously honest memoir, Spender explores his mother’s absurd attempts to keep up appearances whiles her husband’s work was devoted to truth, both in word and in politics, into which he plunged with his magazine Encounter. Spender traces the early life and career of his father and his important friendships with W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, who all influenced each other. Dallying with communism briefly and between romances with men and an early marriage, the poet married the classically trained Natasha in 1941. A pianist “who lived on her nerves,” according to her son, she was continually devastated by her husband’s dalliances with men, which began to dawn on the son when he read his father’s autobiography: Gaps and silences pervaded the household, especially when his mother took off to care for Raymond Chandler in Palm Springs and his father took up with a young Reynolds Price. In the latter part of this touching memoir, the author looks at his father’s political naïveté over the CIA’s bankrolling of Encounter and his own youthful romance with Maro Gorky, whose elusive father would become the subject of his first book, From a High Place: A Life of Arshile Gorky (1999).

A pointed family memoir from a writer keenly attuned to and reverent of genius. (27 b&w illustrations)
A wondrous mix of races, ages, genders, and social classes, and on virtually every page is a surprise. (color photos throughout)

WHAT WE’RE FIGHTING FOR NOW IS EACH OTHER
Dispatches from the Front Lines of Climate Justice
Stephenson, Wen
Beacon (240 pp.)
$24.95 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-0-8070-8840-1

An environmental scolding by climate activist Stephenson.

Yes, we’ve trashed the planet. Yes, we’re too busy doing our own thing to care. Yes, “it’s homicidal. It’s psychopathic. It’s fucking insane.” From a pulpit alongside Walden Pond, former Atlantic and Boston Globe editor Stephenson preaches these things righteously. The problem is, as he recognizes, that anyone likely to read this book is already likely to be converted, and it’s not the choir that needs the sermon. So it is that the author enlists other voices, climate and environmental activists who are doing interesting and useful things in the world, such as a New Orleans activist who has been chronicling the legacy of environmental racism along what’s called Cancer Alley and a Harvard Divinity student who’s done jail time for his direct actions. The project could have been a nicely Terkel-ian oral history, and such a book is much needed, but Stephenson is inclined to interpolate to the point that, most often, a paragraph of talking is followed by a paragraph of gloss. That gets tiresome, and it’s unfortunate, since some of the (mostly young) people being profiled have much to say, including one who quite rightly notes that many environmental issues pack more than one problem: racial injustice, economic inequality, food insecurity, and other issues often go hand in hand and resist easy solutions. Stephenson is to be commended for bravery in offering case studies that may well inspire monkey-wrenching, if not the constitutional convention one activist hopes for. He also risks being ridiculed for a few rhetorical stretches, as when, a stack of qualifiers to the side, he likens the environmentalists of today to the abolitionists of 1850s America. He gets points for acknowledging those stretches but demerits for having committed them in the first place.

Earnest and well-meaning but unlikely to sway climate deniers, Monsanto lobbyists, and others in need of convincing.

THE AMERICAN SLAVE COAST
A History of the Slave-Breeding Industry
Sublette, Ned & Sublette, Constance
Chicago Review (752 pp.)
$35.00 | Oct. 1, 2015
978-1-61374-820-6

A sprawling study of the lucrative slave economy of the South, from importation to breeding.

In 1808, the importation of slaves was banned in the United States for protectionist rather than humanitarian measures, signaling a changeover to a domestic slave trade. This husband-and-wife team of accomplished authors and researchers—Ned (The World that Made New Orleans, 2008), and Constance, aka novelist Constance Ash—see that year as key in the transformation of African-American culture. The authors exhaustively delineate the many layers of this horrific story, and they focus on what the numbers reveal: while about 389,000 kidnapped Africans reached the ports of the United States, mostly before independence, by 1860, the number of enslaved persons had grown to 4 million African-Americans. The scramble for labor spurred a slave-breeding economy—epitomized by the fictionalized “stud-farm plantation” in the wildly popular work Mandingo—in which women were breeders (“each prime field wench produced five to ten marketable children during her lifetime”) and men, the “stock Negro,” where children and parents were separated and frequently resold, and many were trafficked into new territories southward and westward. “Increase” was the message on the plantations, in all senses of the word. In a work of ambitious breadth, the authors first look at the realities of this breeding economy, in which people were money and children were interest. Then they delve into the early evolution of slavery into the Chesapeake and the Lowcountry and study how all the necessary accoutrements allowed slavery to prevail, including the running of newspaper ads for sales and runaways, the rise of the Jacksonian “democracy” promising poor whites the possibility of becoming slave owners one day, and specific companies and businesses that profited mightily. This well-documented, occasionally choppy book will be valuable to historians and scholars but may prove daunting for general readers.

A massive story of impressive research presented in sometimes-erratic fashion. (63 b/w photos)
Talbot shares his extensive knowledge and intense investigations of American politics with a frightening biography of power, manipulation, and outright treason.

**THE DEVIL’S CHESSBOARD**

**Allen Dulles, the CIA, and the Rise of America’s Secret Government**

Talbot, David

Harper/HarperCollins (704 pp.)


978-0-06-227616-2

Former Salon founding editor-in-chief Talbot (Season of the Witch: Enchantment, Terror and Deliverance in the City of Love, 2012, etc.) shares his extensive knowledge and intense investigations of American politics with a frightening biography of power, manipulation, and outright treason.

The story of Allen Dulles (1893-1969), his brother John Foster, and the power elite that ran Washington, D.C., following World War II is the stuff of spy fiction, but it reaches even further beyond to an underworld of unaccountable authority. Dulles’ career began in the New York law firm of Sullivan & Cromwell, where he built a powerful client list. During wartime in Switzerland, he worked to protect his clients’ corporations and build his own organization. In direct opposition to Franklin Roosevelt’s policy, he sought a separate peace with the Germans to use them to fight communism. Talbot delivers a variety of thrilling stories about Dulles that boggle the mind, from skimming funds from the Marshall Plan to using Richard Nixon as his mouthpiece in Congress. It is really about the power elite, the corporate executives, government leaders, and top military officials who controlled the world. They protected corporate interests in Iran, Guatemala, and elsewhere, and they fomented revolutions, experimented in mind control, and assassinated those who got in their way. With John Foster as secretary of state, this “fraternity of the successful” enforced a Pax Americana by terror and intimidation, always invoking national security and often blatantly disobeying policy guidelines. The author asserts that the Bay of Pigs was an intentional failure, meant to engage American citizens should read this book and have their eyes opened. (16-page b/w photo insert)

**PROUST**

**The Search**

Taylor, Benjamin

Yale Univ (224 pp.)

$25.00 | Oct. 27, 2015

978-0-300-16416-9

A sensitive study of literature’s favorite neurasthenic.

The French Jewish novelist Marcel Proust (1871-1922), writes Taylor (Graduate Writing Program/New School; Naples Declared: A Walk Around the Bay, 2012, etc.), was sickly and of course really sick, physically and emotionally. Yet even before he locked himself into a cork-lined room and bid high society adieu, he labored endlessly, putting sickness to good use. At 15, for instance, he read endlessly. “Much of the literature that would be most important to Proust was internalized during this period of insatiable reading,” writes Taylor, a reading list that included huge and ambitious novels by Tolstoy, Balzac, Dostoyevsky, and George Eliot. Against the backdrop of essentially private activity, Taylor does good work in locating Proust among more or less privileged contemporaries, gay and straight and indifferent, and against a time that saw the emergence of a nationally tolerated anti-Semitism in events that Proust followed carefully and incorporated into his books. But for all the strength of his cultural historicizing, the author is best as a reader of Proust alone—and an observer of Proust at work writing A La recherche du temps perdu, complaining bitterly to his publisher about the agonies of editing (“The struggle to read four thousand pages of proofs,” Taylor sagely notes, “was exhausting and enraging”), and howling, “I cannot cut the book as easily as a lump of butter.” Readers of Proust will be fascinated to find clues as to who his characters were in real life, and they should be moved to appreciate by Taylor’s assessment of Proust’s accomplishment, capturing nothing less than time itself, that thing that, if it turns us into dust, “also makes us giants.” And not only that, but capturing time in “a moral accounting as comprehensive as Dante’s...”

Though brief, a densely packed and rewarding book.

**COVENTRY**

**November 14, 1940**

Taylor, Frederick

Bloomsbury (368 pp.)

$30.00 | Nov. 14, 2015

978-1-6286-197-9

Taylor (Exorcising Hitler: The Occupation and Denazification of Germany, 2011, etc.) exposes one of the 20th century’s most savage military innovations, aerial bombing, in a well-researched, engaging book about a vicious Luftwaffe bombing in England at the beginning of World War II.

On the clear, moonlit night of Nov. 14, 1940, Luftwaffe bombers, armed with a new location system, began to drop incendiaries on the city of Coventry. The bombing continued...
with impunity until dawn, long after anti-aircraft defense ran out of ammunition. With almost nonexistent fighter defense, the bombing ended only when the Luftwaffe decided it was over. Britain had radar technology at the time, but their onboard radar didn’t work. The Nazi goal was to break England’s backbone of resistance, believing that “terror-bombing” the middle classes in the center of the defense industry would lead to negotiations to end the war. The author refutes the long-held belief that the government’s knowledge of plans for Coventry was withheld for secrecy. A downed German pilot’s overheard conversation provided some of the details, and England’s attempt to locate the origins of the radio waves and to jam their signals became the so-called “battle of the beams.” Unfortunately, the forewarning could only be a few hours, time only to create a panic. With sufficient personal stories to drive the horror home, Taylor proves Hitler right in thinking Coventry was the stronghold of the English. “The bombing of Coventry reveals...not just another city exposed to and devastated by new and ever more deadly military technology.... Tradition-rich historic city and rapidly growing armaments-industry boom town in one,” writes the author, “Coventry represented quite a particular, and rare, place.” What Hitler didn’t understand was how they’d react: sadness, fear, regret, defiance, and stoic determination to carry on.

A superb portrait of some of the realities of World War II and the increasingly destructive technology created during that time.

THE AGE OF CLINTON
America in the 1990s
Troy, Gil
Dunne/St. Martin’s (384 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-1-250-06372-4

A contextual reassessment of the Bill Clinton presidency.
Troy (History/McGill Univ.; Moynihan’s Moment: America’s Fight Against Zionism as Racism, 2012, etc.), who has written extensively about presidential politics, “seriously” reconsiders the era of the Clinton White House, apart from the media’s obsession with Bill’s and Hillary’s “character flaws.” Bill Clinton dominated the 1990s as Ronald Reagan dominated the 1980s, and in an extraordinarily complex decade that embraced the Internet and what Troy calls “virtual prosperity,” the Clintons were the first baby boomers in the White House to meld their 1960s sensibilities with the modern age. Clinton rode into power on the self-righteous reaction to the daunting domestic challenges that President George Bush preferred to ignore in favor of dealing with the end of the Cold War—namely, racism, sexism, and homophobia. The 1992 election was “a true generational culture clash,” writes the author, and the challenge that the Clintons took up successfully was presenting a program that combined “Wal-Mart populism and Ivy League progressivism.” Recovering from major stumbles during the first year of his presidency and benefiting from a steep learning curve, Clinton managed to build a stable policy foundation on “common ground,” such as a global economy and welfare reform, without expanding the reaches of government. Blessed with heavy-handed enemies who often self-destructed (Newt Gingrich), the Clintons effectively attacked their critics and recast themselves constantly—Bill as the “good father” and Hillary from vilified White House enforcer to the rehabilitated author of It Takes a Village (1996). With plenty of detail, Troy depicts the underlying tensions of this conflicted decade, from the Rodney King beating to the advent of the 24-hour Fox News Channel to the “manufactured miracles” of Silicon Valley.

Both sympathetic and fair-handed, a solid examination of the “Adversarial Supercouple” before the slide toward scandal and impeachment. (16-page color photo photo insert)

RECLAIMING CONVERSATION
The Power of Talk in a Digital Age
Turkle, Sherry
Penguin Press (464 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-1-59420-555-2

The founding director of the MIT Initiative on Technology and Self explores the danger that text messaging is replacing in-depth, face-to-face conversation. Divided attention has become the new norm as we shift our attention back and forth between our mobile devices and present companions whenever there is a lull in the conversation. “Fully present to each other, we learn to listen...[and] develop the capacity for empathy,” writes Turkler (Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other, 2011, etc.), but “these days...we find ways around conversation.” Throughout this eye-opening book, the author cites some amazing statistics: “average American adults check their phones every six and a half minutes”; “Most teenagers send one hundred texts a day.” An even more insidious problem is that “online communication makes us feel more in charge of our time and self-presentation,” than speaking to one another. It affords the opportunity to edit what we want to say. Turkler shares an amusing anecdote of how the etiquette of text messaging requires the use of punctuation marks to indicate emotional tone. Adhering to the new norms, she texted her 21-year-old daughter with a brief message to set up a meeting for morning coffee, but her daughter was alarmed. By omitting punctuation, Turkler had inadvertently signaled distress. A more proper message would have been, “Hey...am swinging by the Square tomorrow :) on my way to a meeting later!!!!...do you have time for an early breakfast??” Henrietta’s Table? Not dorm food??” Online connections with friends and family can also change the tenor of communications, as we edit our posts to encourage positive feedback. More importantly, digital devices encroach on family time, and teenagers are not the only culprits. All too frequently, children complain of the difficulty of gaining their parents’ full attention. Turkler also

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Wisely acknowledges the benefits we receive from our digital devices. “It is not a moment to reject technology,” she writes, “but to find ourselves.”

A timely wake-up call urging us to cherish the intimacy of direct, unscripted communication.

**FAST FORWARD**
*How Women Can Achieve Power and Purpose*
Veerve, Melanie & Azzarelli, Kim K.
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (356 pp.)
$24.00 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-0-544-52719-5

Two organizers of the contemporary global movement for women’s rights demonstrate how they build networks and focus activities to create opportunities for women to exercise their rights.

Hillary Clinton provides the foreword to this account of building partnerships among government agencies, large and small corporations and foundations, grass-roots organizations, and individual activists. Veerve, who worked with Clinton during her husband’s presidential terms, accompanied the then-first lady to the U.N.’s Fourth International Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, which marked a new departure for their ventures. She assisted Clinton and then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in organizing women’s leadership and promoting the Vital Voices of Democracy Institute within the State Department. Later, she headed its not-for-profit reincarnation, Vital Voices. The spinoffs of their public and private efforts for women provide the framework for this memoir and handbook.

For years, attorney Azzarelli has led campaigns to protect women from violence of all forms, and she co-founded the Avon Global Center for Women and Justice at Cornell University to help toughen laws, and their enforcement, around the world. Abuse, domestic violence, trafficking, sexual slavery, and genital mutilation are among the issues that they confront.

Other leaders—including International Monetary Fund managing director Christine Lagarde, Coca-Cola CEO and board chairman Muhtar Kent, and Gates Foundation director Melinda Gates—advocate for the expansion of women’s economic activity as a means to dramatically increase new profit sources. Veerve and Azzarelli also reference other corporations as well as local organizations involved with refugees, immigrants, and education aimed at qualifying girls scientifically and technically. The authors also provide useful discussions of research contributions into the benefits derived from increasing diversity at all levels of responsibility. Appendices feature information about relevant international organizations, further research, and a tool kit for moving “from anecdote to action.”

A durable contribution to the continued efforts to effect change for women.

**BLACK FLAGS**
*The Rise of ISIS*
Warrick, Joby
Doubleday (368 pp.)
$28.95 | Sep. 29, 2015
978-0-385-53821-3

Crisply written, chilling account of the personalities behind the emergence of the Islamic State, or ISIS.

Pulitzer Prize–winning Washington Post reporter Warrick (*The Triple Agent: The al-Qaeda Mole Who Infiltrated the CIA, 2011*) confidently weaves a cohesive narrative from an array of players—American officials, CIA officers, Jordanian royalty and security operatives, religious figures, and terrorists—producing an important geopolitical overview with the grisly punch of true-crime nonfiction. Initially, he focuses on Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a sullen thug who discovered Muslim fundamentalism while incarcerated in the 1990s and turned it into a framework for savagery against other Muslims. Against the backdrop of the bungled American invasion of Iraq, al-Zarqawi stoked a Sunni-Shiite civil war and normalized horrific tableaux like the suicide bombing of the United Nations mission. Soon, “Islamist media were awash in Zarqawi-inspired gore,” effectively increasing his support, until he overstepped with a hotel bombing in Jordan. Although the U.S. military killed al-Zarqawi in 2006, Syria’s civil war provided a second front for the remnants of al-Zarqawi’s jihadis. His successor, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who transformed the group into ISIS, “was not a violent troublemaker like Zarqawi or an adventurer like Osama bin Laden.” Indeed, Warrick notes, “had it not been for the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the Islamic State’s greatest butcher would likely have lived out his years as a college professor.” Yet, ISIS achieved rapid military success across Iraq and Syria beginning in 2013 and revived their emphasis on terrorist atrocity, with Baghdadi’s goals clear, as a U.S. official noted: “He was talking about physically restoring the Islamic caliphate in a way that nobody else did.” The author focuses on dramatic flashpoints and the roles of key players, creating an exciting tale with a rueful tone, emphasizing how the Iraq invasion’s folly birthed ISIS and created many missed opportunities to stop al-Zarqawi quickly.

Warrick stops short of offering policy solutions, but he provides a valuable, readable introduction to a pressing international security threat.
INFECTIOUS MADNESS  
The Surprising Science of How We “Catch” Mental Illness  
Washington, Harriet A.  
Little, Brown (304 pp.)  
$28.00 | $14.99 e-book  
$25.98 | Audiobook | Oct. 6, 2015  
978-0-316-27780-8  
978-0-306-27779-2 e-book  
978-1-4789-7961-6 Audiobook

A pitch for infections as a major cause of mental illness, arguing for a paradigm shift from mainstream psychiatric doctrine. 

Journalist Washington (Deadly Monopolies: The Shocking Corporate Takeover of Life Itself—And the Consequences for Your Health and Our Medical Future, 2011, etc.) champions the work of E. Fuller Torrey and colleagues. As a young man, Torrey was appalled when his sister was diagnosed with schizophrenia attributed to “family problems.” It was a time when “schizophrenogenic mothers” were all the fashion. Torrey became a psychiatrist and started his infection-oriented research. It’s unquestionable that some severe mental illness is rooted in infections—e.g., syphilis, rabies, Sydenham’s chorea, the World War I flu that led to encephalitis lethargica, and, more recently, Creutzfeldt-Jakob, and mad cow disease. However, Torrey and his colleagues see infectious causality in a much wider variety of mental illnesses, including schizophrenia, bipolar disease, obsessive-compulsive disorder, Tourette syndrome, autism, and anorexia. The evidence is scant, largely based on association studies such as finding evidence of infections in blood or spinal fluid or a seasonal increase in some disorders that could be a sign of a viral infection. Furthermore, conjecture abounds. Do children really pick up the parasite Toxoplasma gondii from cat urine in park sandboxes and later develop schizophrenia? For all that infections are touted, researchers cite genetics, stress, and trauma as making a difference in whether disease will manifest. A better case is made regarding strep throat, after which a few children develop OCD seemingly overnight. In a small study, their symptoms were reversed when their blood was filtered to remove strep antibodies. In making the infectious pitch, Washington rightly argues that it strengthens the case for abandoning the Cartesian dualism that separates mind from body and leads to stigma and fear. It’s acceptable to study how infection and immunity affect the brain, but only as part of a larger agenda to understand the brain in all its plasticity and complexity.

Conclusion: an unproven but undoubtedly provocative case. Expect dissent and discussion.

THE PROMISE OF FRANCIS  
The Man, the Pope, and the Challenge of Change  
Willey, David  
Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster (320 pp.)  
$26.00 | Sep. 8, 2015  
978-1-4767-8905-7

A topical look at Pope Francis and his effect on the Catholic Church. 

BBC Vatican correspondent Willey (God’s Politician: Pope John Paul II, the Catholic Church, and the New World Order, 1992, etc.) adds to the collection of works on Pope Francis with an inside view from the Vatican. In a narrative alternating among biography, journalistic report, and historical analysis, the author examines the church Francis has inherited as well as his early effects on the church as a global institution. Willey focuses on specific issues facing the church or arising from the Francis papacy. After a short discussion of who Francis is and how he came to this role, the author dives right into the money crises facing the church in recent years, namely the corrupt and secretive nature of the Vatican bank. He moves on to discuss Francis’ views about women, demonstrating that in this vein, at least, the reformer has shown little signs of budging from the status quo. Willey goes on to address the worldwide sexual abuse scandal by Catholic priests and the pope’s mixed reactions toward it. Other issues discussed include the pope’s knack for communicating, both one-on-one and through mass media; his responsibility for the Vatican art collection; the church’s response toward homosexuals and divorced persons; and the future of the global church, with an emphasis on Asia. Readers looking for an introductory biography should search elsewhere; Willey’s goal is to present a more comprehensive look at the church and Francis together. His work is laden with historical discussions providing background for modern circumstances—for instance, several paragraphs are dedicated to explaining the intriguing history of Vatican Radio as background for understanding the pope’s current use of mass media. Willey’s take on the pope is certainly positive, and his views on the topics presented are always clear.

An interesting page-turner for the armchair Vatican-watcher.
BOUNDLESS
Tracing Land and Dream in a New Northwest Passage
Winter, Kathleen
Counterpoint (272 pp.)
$26.00 | Oct. 13, 2015
978-1-61902-567-7

Literate, luminous travels in the far north.

“Why read The Wind in the Willows when you can be Ratty or Mole?” It’s not quite on the order of “because it is there,” but it’s a good enough rationale for adventure and a fine note on which to begin. British-Canadian novelist and essayist Winter (Annabel, 2010) confesses to having harbored desires to wander in the great white north since landing in Newfoundland with her father. He longed for something that we might call freedom, writes the author, whereas what she was looking for was even less tangible: “a glimmering, a beckoning; something in the ice, something promising in the Arctic light.” Going to places that are well away from any tourist track and even the paths of most outdoor thrill-seekers, Winter finds that beckoning in such things as revelations about the differences between Greenlandic and Canadian Eskimos and the glimmering behind the eyes of people zapped by the endless light and space of the circumpolar vastness. Sometimes Winter’s exercises in self-awareness verge on overly New Age–y (“I walked, ran, and wept in those trails in the woods, asking sky, alders, and water to talk to me, to bring me back that hint of something majestic and all-encompassing”). But more often, Winter finds just the right note of learned wonder, taking on big philosophical questions as she roams across the land: when a geologist makes a map, does he or she kill the place being mapped before the first drill is sunk? Is it possible to live apart from and independent of the land, even in a place like New York City? Is a life without contradiction worth living?

With the eye of a poet and the stamina of an Amundsen, Winter proves a delightful guide into unexplored realms. Worthy of shelving alongside Barry Lopez’s Arctic Dreams (1986).

UNDER THE AFFLUENCE
Shaming the Poor, Praising the Rich and Sacrificing the Future of America
Wise, Tim
City Lights (300 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Oct. 1, 2015
978-0-87386-693-5

Acclaimed inequality essayist and community activist Wise (Dear White America: Letter to a New Minority, 2012, etc.) reports on the damage being incurred in America whereby “the have-nots and have-lessers are dehumanized while the elite are venerated.”

In describing how modern society has become a “culture of cruelty,” as past attempts to sympathize and support those less fortunate have collapsed beneath the weight of classism and racism, the author explores the framework and the consequences of the nation’s economic crisis. He lucidly ponders its genesis as well as the ramifications of wealth inequality, including the rampant demonization of the poor and the valorization of the rich by way of what he refers to as “Scroogism.” Wise’s extensive experience as an anti-racism activist and a longtime member of the radical left greatly informs his text, which demonstrates, through facts and case histories, that America’s enduring racial divide continues to be directly tied to its economic problems. His well-rounded scholarly discussion benefits from the varying intellectual perspectives he offers, including opinions on the damaging effects of blind corporate obeisance to the “myth of meritocracy.” What is apparent, he believes, is the need for solutions to achieve the kind of “culture of compassion” necessary for true redemption and a dismantling of social stratification. Wise recognizes that this achievement is a tall order to fill, particularly in the presence of the current elite economic oligarchy possessing the capital and the influence to trounce equality efforts. Sharp and provocative—though often distressingly cynical and uncompromising—the book concludes with hope that his analysis and those like it will spur a counter-narrative outwardly challenging the false notion that both the wealthy and the poor “deserve” their places within our culture’s economic stratum.

An impassioned, intellectual, and vigorously dense report on the repercussions of severe socioeconomic imbalance in the United States.
**BOOK**

**My Autobiography**

Agard, John
Illus. by Packer, Neil
Candlewick (144 pp.)
978-0-7636-7236-2

Book chattily narrates its memoir, as “transcribed” by Guyanese-English poet Agard.

From oral storytelling to e-books, Book provides a succinct overview of the past 5,000 years of its development. Referring to itself alternately in the third person and the first, it covers cuneiform, hieroglyphics, and the rise of alphabets, along with tracing the technological advances that took it from clay tablets through papyrus and parchment to paper and through scrolls to the codex. Though Book waxes lyrical about Western innovations (“I was flying on the wings of Gutenberg’s movable type”), it takes pains to give credit to the many other cultures of the book, including the Aztecs, the Kashmiri, and the Chinese: “from Cai Lun’s mushy mash, presto, paper was born.” Packer’s witty, black-and-white graphics complement Book’s story, offering images that range widely, including botanical drawings of plants used in the making of paper and delicate towers of type. Occasional book-related quotations punctuate Book’s account: from Emily Dickinson, Bertolt Brecht, Malorie Blackman, and others. It’s a highly idiosyncratic account, and it’s not a little twee—Book is not beyond self-aggrandizement—but for all its brevity, it covers a lot of territory accurately and with verve. Book includes a bibliography but not specific direction for readers who’d like to know more about, for instance, rotary presses or bookbinding.

A pleasing visit with an occasionally—if justifiably—immodest world-changer. (Nonfiction. 10 & up)
Gabriel Sandro Fuentes, 11-year-old ambassador of Earth, fends off an alien invasion.

The superb conclusion to this two-part tale of space diplomacy restarts Gabriel’s tale at the very moment Ambassador (2014) concluded: when he meets the shockingly human child ambassador of the nomadic, spacefaring Kaen. The Kaen are still out for Gabe’s blood, Earth is threatened by the species-destroying Outlast, and (no less world-shaking) Gabriel’s father’s been deported from the United States to Mexico. Gabriel convinces the Kaen ambassador that he’s her best ally against the Outlast, so he joins her on Kaen territory. The Kaen’s jaguar-shaped shuttlecraft, Olmec-style spacesuits, and terrible tamales perturb Gabriel, though his fear that aliens may have been responsible for Mayan civilization prove unfounded. In the fascinatingly familiar craft, Gabriel and Kaen join with Ambassador Nadia, the previous child ambassador of Earth, who flew into a time dilation when she tried to fight the Outlast—in 1974. Soviet Nadia and modern American Gabe get on swimmingly, despite the culture clash; after all, they’re both diplomats. Nadia has a vision disability, which Alexander handles with welcome nuance. Though Gabriel’s not all that believable as an 11-year-old, he’s thoroughly credible as an empathetic hero. With Nadia and Kaen, he relies on one hope to stop the Outlast: “Communication is possible. Communication is always possible.” Maybe that’s true on Earth, as well.

Alexander is clearly passionate about science, space exploration, and social justice, but he never allows that passion to shortchange the crackerjack adventure. (Science fiction. 11-14)

**A SONG FOR ELLA GREY**

Almond, David

Delacorte (272 pp.)


Oct. 13, 2015

978-0-353-53359-0

978-0-353-53360-6 PLB

Award-winning British novelist Almond (Kit’s Wilderness, 1999; The Fire Eaters, 2004, etc.) mines the tragic Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in this modern-day love story, told in the voice of Claire Wilkinson, a 17-year-old poet.

Claire loves her childhood friend Ella Grey, and they are “young and bright and free” with their kisses and sleepovers until...“Ha!” Everything changes one spring day when Claire encounters Orpheus, a wild, black-haired, lyre-playing wanderer in a purple coat and Doc Martens, on Northumberland’s Bamburgh Beach. Claire calls Ella on her cellphone from the booby-bacchanalian beach party so her friend can hear the mesmerizing songs that Orpheus plays, enchanting the dolphins, the sea, even the pebbles and sand...and soon wishes she hadn’t. When Orpheus sings for Ella Gray, she falls madly in love with him, sight unseen. “Go to Hell, Orpheus,” Claire whispers. The rest of the tale mirrors the myth: Ella and Orpheus marry, Ella dies by snakebite, and Orpheus enters the beastly Underworld to rescue her from Death, a section of the book effectively distinguished by black paper with white type.

Almond brings his hypnotic lyricism to this darkly romantic tale that sings of the madness of youth, the ache of love, and the near-impossibility of grasping death. (Fiction. 14 & up)

**THUMBELINA**

Andersen, Hans Christian

Illus. by Vivanco, Kelly

Simply Read (48 pp.)

$17.95 | Oct. 9, 2015

978-1-927018-73-6

The adventures of a tiny girl amid flora and fauna in an imaginary land are again presented for young readers.

The text is acceptably adapted and accessible, but the illustrations, thickly textured and deeply colored, are laden and rely on fashion rather than magic for their distinctiveness. The illustrator veers back and forth distractingly in her depiction of clothing, from the traditional 19th-century peasant dress with apron and kerchief of the field mouse to the 1920s look of the three female June bugs (cockchafers in some versions) who declare Thumbelina’s utter unsuitability as a mate for the big June bug who tries to capture her. The ugly toad who first steals her from her walnut-shell bed for her own tray his wealth. Thumbelina wears simple white dresses, symbolizing her purity, but there is a lack of the magical lightness even the pebbles and sand...and soon wishes she hadn’t. When Orpheus sings for Ella Gray, she falls madly in love with him, sight unseen. “Go to Hell, Orpheus,” Claire whispers. The rest of the tale mirrors the myth: Ella and Orpheus marry, Ella dies by snakebite, and Orpheus enters the beastly Underworld to rescue her from Death, a section of the book effectively distinguished by black paper with white type.

Almond brings his hypnotic lyricism to this darkly romantic tale that sings of the madness of youth, the ache of love, and the near-impossibility of grasping death. (Fiction. 14 & up)
Antony’s use of only two colors in his illustrations creates a bold contrast between the two adversaries.

GREEN LIZARDS VS. RED RECTANGLES

![Image of lizards and rectangles]

The green lizards and the red rectangles are at war, but neither can defeat the other.

Antony tackles war and peace in his latest picture book. The hand-drawn green lizards may look soft and huggable, but they have strength in numbers. The shiny red rectangles, with their stiff, sharp edges, are much too smart for the lizards. The two are evenly matched yet continue to fight. When one lone lizard bravely questions why they are fighting, he’s crushed by a red rectangle. Their biggest battle yet ensues until a tiny rectangle calls for a truce. Soon the opposing sides find a creative way to live in peace. Antony’s use of only two colors in his illustrations creates a bold contrast between the two adversaries. The juxtaposition of the monolithic, overlapping rectangles next to the small, individually drawn lizards heightens their differences. Inventive compositions provide variety and neatly evoke the chaos of war. Antony cleverly uses these same elements to illustrate the rivals’ reconciliation. Young readers will enjoy the push and pull of the lizards and rectangles’ battles and delight in their clever solution, though they will wonder why the lizards and rectangles were fighting in the first place.

A visually entertaining story of war and peace. (Picture book: 3-5)

GREEN LIZARDS VS. RED RECTANGLES

Antony, Steve
Illus. by the author
Scholastic (32 pp.)
978-0-545-84902-9

UPROOTED

Banks, Lynne Reid
Harper/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Nov. 3, 2015
978-0-00-813235-4

British novelist Banks presents her wartime memories in novel form.

In the summer of 1940, Lindy Hanks, her mother, and her slightly older cousin Cameron travel from England to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, to stay for the duration of the war. Initially not allowed to receive money from home (England feared a loss of needed resources), they are fostered with the Laines, a childless couple who welcomes them with uncomfortable enthusiasm. Lindy enters sixth grade as fiction, with dialogue and a novel's pacing, this has the feel of a memoir. Twice Banks breaks from Lindy’s perspective to keep events in order, and her brief postscript brings the small family through the end of the war. Banks’ clear affection for her foster country shines through Lindy’s equally real anxiety.

Lovingly written, the story opens a window to a long-ago world. (Historical fiction. 8-12)

UPROOTED

Lindy Hanks, 18, isn’t your average art student; she does anatomical studies and wants to attend school to become a medical illustrator. She feels her only chance is winning a scholarship by drawing from life—or rather death—a biomedical fieldwork experience. While doing so, she finds enough purpose for all of them. Though written

A first-rate adventure with a powerful message. (author Q-and-A) (Fiction. 12-17)

THE ANATOMICAL SHAPE OF A HEART

Bennett, Jenn
Feiwel & Friends (304 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 3, 2015
978-1-250-06645-9

Take a contemporary San Francisco, add an undertone of classic Romeo and Juliet, some grit and viscera, and this story of two remarkable teens is the result.

Beatrix, 18, isn’t your average artist; she does anatomical studies and wants to attend school to become a medical illustrator. She feels her only chance is winning a scholarship by drawing from life—or rather death—a

A HEART

Bennett, Jenn
Harper/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
$12.95 paper | Oct. 1, 2015
978-0-00-88995-511-0

A teen classical guitar prodigy finds new fame as an Internet blogger until cyberaddiction nearly kills him in this coming-of-age novel.

Indio McCracken, half Canadian, half Mayan, leads what appears to be a privileged life as the son of the owner of a gold mine. But behind the 10-foot wall and armed guards of his family’s Guatemalan home, Indio leads a lonely, isolated life dominated by hours of guitar practice dictated by his overbearing father. When Indio discovers the computer lab at school and begins blogging about his guitar playing, he quickly develops a following—and a dependence on the attention. The gold mine’s exploitation of the indigenous Mayans brings trouble and forces the family back to Canada—a place Indio knows nothing about. He stops playing guitar and falls into a depression that is only cured by his mother’s gift of an iPhone. He invents a new persona, Ian—a true blue Canadian—and begins another blog. Soon, blogging takes over his life. Indio’s narration is completely believable throughout as he wrestles with identity and belonging. Bastedo gives readers who may be inclined to scoff at the addictive-cyberdevice premise the space to assess Indio’s actions and reasoning and reach their own conclusions, all the while keeping the tension and pace high.

A first-rate adventure with a powerful message. (author Q-and-A) (Fiction. 12-17)
Young readers have a chance to get in on Grizzle Grump’s action, as, much like a dog lying down for a nap, he has a routine for settling in that involves lots of scratching, teetering, wobbling, and flopping.

GOODNIGHT, GRIZZLE GRUMP!

real cadaver. Bex is intensely focused, but then she meets Jack, and her focus expands. Jack is also an artist, notorious for his beautifully executed graffiti—and wanted by the police. Beatrix is intrigued by his wit, Buddhist beliefs, and “retro-rockabilly” looks. However, there’s a sorrowful secret in Jack’s family that, to Bex’s initial consternation, causes him to be mercurial. Their romance flourishes as understanding grows into a deepening respect for one another. When the relationship becomes sexual, they are careful to spend time tenderly discussing it first. Bex narrates in a trenchant past tense, her wit on display in both dialogue and exposition, and art becomes both a point of connection for the two lovers and their weapon. In the face of family opposition to their relationship, Beatrix and Jack strive to convey that art is meaningful and healing for both creator and beholder.

A thought-provoking exploration of art as an expression of love and pain. (Fiction. 14+18)

SUPER BUNNY
Blake, Stephanie
Illus. by the author
NorthSouth (38 pp.)
$15.95 | Oct. 1, 2015
978-0-7358-4223-6

Super Bunny wields a pink gun and wears a cape and mask as he sniffs out villains.

Though the cat scoffs at his boasts, and his mother squints at him knowingly; Super Bunny is certain of his superpowers. Fearless, he enters a hollow tree and gets stabbed by a splinter. He drops the gun and screams all the way home, where his mom removes the offending object with a sterilized needle and praises him for his bravery. Super Bunny—who would have been better served by a stick—takes the splinter (which he now imagines to be a sword) and charges forth to once again do battle against the bad guys. The long-eared hero appears to be a younger version of Simon the Super Rabbit from I Don’t Want To Go to School (2009). The humor in this French export is a bit out of sync, denying readers adequate buildup and drawing out the splinter removal over several pages. In spite of the contrived, truncated story, young readers will be attracted to Blake’s familiar, cartoonlike drawings. The oversized black type set against bold colors is easy to read, but the visual flow of the sentences is disrupted by the central alignment of the text.

Underwhelming. (Picture book. 3-5)

GOODNIGHT, GRIZZLE GRUMP!

Blecha, Aaron
Illus. by the author
Harper/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 20, 2015
978-0-06-229746-4

One bear’s quest for a quiet place to hibernate is thwarted by lots of noisy critters.

Armed with his tiny blue-and-white polka-dot blanket and a pillow, Grizzle Grump, though undoubtedly large and possessing claws and teeth, doesn’t exactly match the menace of the opening spreads. Granted, his “polite YAWN” does snap trees and send small animals flying, but he’s just looking for a place to rest his head. Young readers have a chance to get in on Grizzle Grump’s action, as, much like a dog lying down for a nap, he has a routine for settling in that involves lots of scratching, teetering, wobbling, and flopping, and the woodpeckers, beavers, and frogs give him plenty of reason to find new spots to sleep. And when he finally gets his message across to the other woodland animals and falls deeply asleep, his noises drive them away. Blecha’s Photoshop illustrations will remind more than one reader of Melanie Watts’ Scaredy Squirrel series; his characters have pop eyes, and exaggerated facial expressions and body language. Strangely, a gray squirrel follows Grizzle Grump around, sometimes seeming a friend, other times appearing afraid of the big bear.
This is a good choice for read-alouds and great fun, especially for those readers who can appreciate a good nap. (Picture book. 4-8)

**GHOSTLY THIEF OF TIME**

**Bolling, Ruben**

Illus. by the author

Andrews McMeel (140 pp.)

$12.99 | Nov. 3, 2015

978-1-4494-5710-5

Series: EMU Club, 2

The discovery that time actually does move more slowly in the back of a classroom than in the front puts a trio of amateur sleuths on the trail of even more startling revelations.

It looks like the Exploration-Mystery-Unbelievable Club’s search for a new mystery to investigate is going nowhere, until school starts and club president Stuart’s complaint that the afternoons really seem to drag leads to a surreptitious experiment with an astonishing result. As it turns out, the maintenance closet adjacent to the back wall is a time portal, and new custodian Mr. Hartoonian is a traveler sent from the future to prevent an upcoming world war. Unfortunately, the club’s interference not only derails his mission, but leaves him stranded in this era with a broken time machine. Even with help from Stuart’s dog, Ferdinand, who is, as readers of *Alien Invasion in My Backyard* (2015) will know, an alien robot, getting said mission back on track and saving the Earth (once again) isn’t going to be easy. Bolling casts his officious narrator as a legend in his own mind, surrounds him with smarter allies, trucks in a particularly lamebrain bully, and presents the headlong caper as a hand-lettered “official report” on graph paper with taped-in cartoon “photographs.” An appendix offers basic information about actual emus and briefly outlines the “butterfly effect.”

A pleaser for Wimpy Kid fans as well as any students who find the last few minutes before the bell rings an eternity. (Graphic/hybrid mystery. 8-10)

**PERSUASION**

**Boone, Martina**

Simon Pulse/Simon & Schuster (464 pp.)


978-1-4814-1125-7

978-1-4814-1127-1 e-book

Series: Heirs of Watson Island, 2

Following *Compulsion* (2014), Barrie juggles future plans with handsome Eight while dealing with the possibility of ending the Colesworth curse.

When Barrie returns from San Francisco after her godfather’s death, her home’s been besieged by paranormal investigators drawn to the Fire Carrier legend. Worse, Eight knew but didn’t tell her. Also straining their romance is his decision about what college to attend (will he follow his dream of going far away or stay local for Barrie?), and Barrie must decide if he loves her or if he’s being compelled by his Beaufort gift. Multiple encounters with shadowy, mysterious Obadiah—who reveals a personal connection to the gifts and Colesworth curse—lead Barrie reluctantly to her treacherous cousin Cassie. But Obadiah’s of uncertain trustworthiness, and the magic he unleashes has unexpected consequences. Meanwhile, Cassie’s desperate to save her home by finding its legendary buried treasure and brings in an archaeological team. She also experiences the onset of PTSD as a result of a traumatic incident in her past—one echoed in a ghostly flashback she and Barrie experience of the Colesworth plantation during the Civil War, a painful moment in the family’s history. While the multiple storylines and subplots help perk up the slow pace, they’re unbalanced and result in a lackluster climax that doesn’t resolve the more interesting questions.

Uneven but also atmospheric and packed with magic and mysteries. (Paranormal romance. 14 & up)
**DARKTHAW**

Boorman, Kate A.
Amulet/Abrams (316 pp.)
$17.95 | Oct. 13, 2015
978-1-4197-1663-8
Series: Winterkill, 2

The heroine of *Winterkill* (2014) leaves her tiny village to find settlers moving into the post-apocalyptic wilds. Though Emmeline's settlement no longer suffers under a religiously based reign of terror, she's more than ready to leave. The allies she's made among the First Peoples visitors are itching to get home, and Em is determined to travel with Matisa, her beloved First Peoples friend, who found Em through their shared dreams. Despite their urgent need to move quickly, their party keeps growing: Matisa and her First Peoples family; Em's sweetheart, Kane; and others from their mixed Anglophone, Francophone, and Métis community. The journey is nowhere near as fast or as safe as they expect. After generations during which the western lands were populated only by First Peoples, settlers have been arriving from the European-descended Dominion in the east—and many of them are violent, lawless thugs. It seems the Dominion is no longer afraid of the Bleed, the horrifying disease that struck the continent generations ago. Matisa holds the band of travelers together as best she can, but disaster strikes so frequently readers may find themselves recalling the game “Oregon Trail,” with disease, kidnapping, and gruesome, bloody murder. Survival is so difficult that it overcomes Em's relationship drama, with the happy result that she builds a family with fellow travelers.

A philosophical, ruminative adventure for fans of the CW network's *The 100*. (Alternate history. 13-15)

**THE FIRST FLUTE**

Whowoahyahzo Tohkahya
Bouchard, David
Illus. by Oelze, Don
Translated by Goodwill, Wayne
Red Deer Press (40 pp.)
$22.95 | Oct. 1, 2015
978-0-88995-475-5

As he has in the past, Bouchard (*The Song within My Heart*, 2015, etc.) joins talents with a multicultural team, in this case New Zealand–American illustrator Oelze, Kalapuya flautist Jan Michael Looking Wolf, and Dakota translator Goodwill, to present an uplifting tale. Audiences will quickly become immersed in the combination of storytelling, music, and artwork. Dancing Raven has many skills, but his passion, dancing, is not recognized until Grandfather Cedar shows him the path of love and gifts him a flute. A prologue explains that this telling has been handed down from Looking Wolf’s uncle. Their tribal affiliation is not indicated within the book, nor are source notes for other versions of the story provided, so those unfamiliar with Native American folklore and cultures must trust and enjoy the experience as presented. Text appears in English and Dakota, while CD tracks in English, French, and Dakota invite a wide audience. Those who have never heard it will be fascinated by the sound of the Dakota language, which is recorded by an older, gravelly voice that resonates with gravitas (the narrator is not named). Looking Wolf’s music is atmospheric and moving. Masterful paintings—lush, vibrant, frequently suffused with sunlight—do not so much extend the text as accompany it, as if selected after the fact rather than crafted for it.

*A beautiful and creative exploration of size and relativity.* (Picture book/ folktale. 3-7)

**BIG BEAR LITTLE CHAIR**

Boyd, Lizi
Illus. by the author
Chronicle (36 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-1-4521-4447-4

Examples of “big,” “little,” and “tiny” produce unexpected juxtapositions. Opening with “Big Bear / little chair,” the lean text introduces a series of seemingly unrelated pairings of “big” and “little,” such as a big plant and a little cocoon, a big bird and a little umbrella, a big zebra and a little broom. A second series of “big” and “little” pairings begins with “Big Chair / little bear” and includes a big owl on a little branch, a big meadow with a little salamander, a big lion with a little wagon. Both big and little bear return for the final series, where a “tiny” element’s added to the “big” and “little” combinations: a big mouse, a little bus, and a tiny driver; a big ladder, a little turtle, and a tiny book. Font changes, trim, and illustrations reinforce the textual focus on size. The tall, skinny format alerts readers to expect the unexpected, while large, small, and tiny font sizes mirror the text. Stylized illustrations rely on subdued blacks, grays, and whites with pops of bright red, along with flat patterns, repetitive lines, and lots of whimsy, to illuminate each distinctive visual vignette. The absence of any obvious rationale (other than size) linking these vignettes invites readers (big, little, and tiny) to imagine their own connections.

*A beautiful and creative exploration of size and relativity.* (Picture book/ folktale. 3-7)
It’s been 42 days since the Monster Apocalypse began, and 13-year-old Jack Sullivan, a self-proclaimed “zombie-fighting, monster-slaying tornado of cool” is on a quest to find and rescue his not-so-secret crush, June Del Toro, whether she needs it, wants it, or not.

Jack cobbles together an unlikely but endearing crew, including his scientist best friend, Quint Baker; Dirk Savage, Parker Middle School’s biggest bully; and a pet monster named Rover, to help him save the damsel in distress and complete the “ULTIMATE Feat of Apocalyptic Success.” Middle-grade readers, particularly boys, will find Jack’s pitch-perfect mix of humor, bravado, and self-professed geekiness impossible to resist. His sidekicks are equally entertaining, and it doesn’t hurt that there are also plenty of oozing, drooling, sharp-toothed monsters and zombies and a host of gizmos and gadgets to hook readers and keep them cheering with every turn of the page. Holgate’s illustrations play an integral role in the novel’s success. They not only bring Brallier’s characters to life, but also add depth and detail to the story, making plain just exactly how big Rover is and giving the lie to Jack’s “killer driving.” The marriage of text and illustration serves as a perfect example of what an illustrated novel can and should be.

Classic action-packed, monster-fighting fun. (Horror. 8-12)
AARON AND ALEXANDER
The Most Famous Duel in American History
Brown, Don
Illus. by the author
Roaring Brook (32 pp.)
978-1-59643-998-6

The peculiar enmity between founding fathers Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton culminated in an infamous duel.

Brown takes a broad, evenhanded, and pared-down look at the lives of Burr and Hamilton. Both were orphaned as children, both were slender, bright, and determined. After serving in the Revolutionary War, they became lawyers—even occasional colleagues—and developed political passions. They look similar in the quick strokes of Brown’s pen-and-wash illustrations: in gray coats and white cravats, their foreheads high and faces narrow. Panels and dialogue balloons create motion to match the brief, informative narrative. The irascible Hamilton frequently insulted Burr during Burr’s 1800 presidential bid against Jefferson. When, in 1804, Burr ran for governor of New York, Hamilton struck an intolerable blow. Hamilton scowls, pen in hand, as the word “Despicable” appears in a thought balloon above his head. On the page opposite, Burr grimaces as he reads the word aloud, and it appears above his own head. This illustration is evoked at the climax, in which two hands holding pistols face off across the opening, smoke and blood-red fire spitting from the barrels, the word “BANG!” below each. The final page sums up the result for Burr, the survivor: regret and lost reputation. An author’s note for older readers adds texture; the bibliographical notes well-execute history for a young audience. (Informational picture book. 6-10)

THE MANY LIVES OF
JOHN STONE
Buckley-Archer, Linda
Simon & Schuster (544 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 20, 2015
978-0-545-80425-7

What happens when a girl meets a man who has been alive for centuries? Stella, who calls herself “Spark,” takes an internship with an attractive man who lives in an odd, secluded mansion in England. Her job is to organize old journals written in a cipher that she cannot read. Her employer, John Stone, lives rather mysteriously with a housekeeper, Martha, and a groundkeeper, Jacob, who both behave oddly. Martha seems unfamiliar with electricity and cooks on a woodstove. Joseph acts with constant hostility toward Spark. The book alternates between Spark’s story and John Stone’s diaries. Readers learn early that Stone, although he still looks young, is nearly 350 years old and moved at the age of 15 to Louis XIV’s court in 1685, becoming a confidant of the king and falling in love with Isabelle, a girl who seemed forever out of his reach. John Stone’s story, in his earlier identity as Jean-Pierre, works well as a separate narrative, involving intrigue court intrigues that can have severe consequences for himself and for Isabelle. Spark’s story is less successful, seeming almost pointlessly until she finds a connection between herself and Stone very late in the book. Although the book seems nearly as lengthy as Stone’s life (only one, despite the title), Buckley-Archer paints an absorbing portrait of the court of Versailles.

Good historical fiction with a paranormal twist. (Paranormal historical fiction. 12-18)

BIRD & SQUIRREL ON THE EDGE!
Burks, James
Illus. by the author
Graphix/Scholastic (144 pp.)
Oct. 27, 2015
978-0-545-80426-4 paper
978-0-545-80427-1 e-book
Series: Bird & Squirrel, 3

Best friends Bird and Squirrel embark upon a new graphic-novel adventure, in which they make a new friend and find the dynamics of their friendship changing.

Sky-blue, acorn-hatted Squirrel is nervous. He’s afraid of everything—even dust. His best friend, the lemon-yellow, aviator-goggled Bird, is fearless. One day, on a stroll through their woodland home, they spy a bear cub cornered by a vicious pair of wolves. Bird can’t stand to see two against one (“that’s not fair,” he declares), so he hatches a plan to pel the lupine bullies with pine cones. Timid Squirrel however, misfires and accidentally beams poor Bird, knocking him out. Now Bird cannot remember who—or what—he is, and Squirrel is left to protect Bird from the ferocious wolves. The pair’s established dynamics have now reversed, leaving Bird now fearful and unsure and Squirrel having to step up and must her courage. Although it’s a rather gentle story of animal amity, Burks has adroitly managed to infuse it with a rollicking pace, cutey quirky characters, and lively illustrations that practically leap off the page, creating a subtle complexity that is usually missing from such buddy tales.

A bright medley of friendship, problem-solving, and identity ideal for emerging readers looking for the next step up from leveled readers. (Graphic fiction. 7-12)
The celebrated picture-book artist enthusiastically joins the nonsense tradition. Carle’s nearly 50-year career has produced myriad concept books about counting, the alphabet, and colors, as well as simple, original stories, retellings of fairy tales, and picture books that push the physical boundaries of the form. This latest proves that Carle can reinvent himself as a creator in the field, as he now revels in the absurd, eschewing any pretense of teaching a concept or even engaging with story. Instead, spread after spread uses nonsensical text and sublimely ridiculous pictures to provoke laughter and head-shaking delight. In addition to the book’s title, art immediately cues the book’s silly tone: the cover displays one of Carle’s signature collages against an empty white background; it depicts a duckling emerging from a peeled-back banana peel. The title-page art presents a deer sprouting flowers rather than antlers from its head. When the book proper begins, and language joins illustration, readers are ushered into a series of situations and scenarios that upend expectations and play with conventions. “Ouch! Who’s that in my pouch?” asks a kangaroo with a little blond child instead of a joey in her pouch. Another scene shows two snakes, joined at the middle and looking for their respective tails.

A picture book made to incite pleasure and joy. (Picture book 3-7)

A frothy mystery that trips over its desire for social relevance. (Thriller 12-16)
Debut British-American author Clark creates a tale with mythic largesse.

TELL THE STORY TO ITS END

Clark, Simon P.  Illustr. by Denwood, Ellie
St. Martin’s Griffin (208 pp.)
978-1-250-06675-6
978-1-4668-7464-0 e-book

A boy whose life is turned upside down by paternal scandal finds solace with an imaginary creature who preaches the power and value of storytelling.

It’s summer, and 12-year-old Oli is confused when Mum makes it clear that just the two of them will be leaving London for the countryside and staying at his grandmother’s house for a time. When Oli realizes that his Dad won’t be joining them because he’s at the center of a high-profile political scandal and that his Mum isn’t being forthcoming about any of it, he retreats more and more into encounters with Eren, a beast in the attic not unlike a literary vampire, whose existence desperately depends on stories. Debut British-American author Clark creates a tale with mythic largesse, laced with narrative offerings from Oli’s friends and supporters. Each chapter begins with italicized encounters between Eren and Oli, as the book explores the relationship between truth and fiction, the essence of story, and the urgency of putting dreams and experiences into words “to fire imaginations and break worlds.”

Savvy readers and would-be writers will love this exploration of story as an art form, a panacea, and an endless part of life. (Fantasy. 10-14)

THE LIZARD PRINCESS

Davies, Tod  Illustr. by Madrid, Mike
Exterminating Angel (304 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Nov. 1, 2015
978-1-935259-29-9
Series: History of Arcadia, 3

A philosophy lecture disguised as a fairy tale, this third series entry both recapitulates and reinterprets the previous titles (Smotty Saves the Day, 2011; Lily the Silent, 2012). A curse transforms Arcadian princess Sophy, barely 15, into the eponymous half-reptile. Desperate for a cure, she flees her bucolic realm for a decadelong quest, winding over mountains and through the ruins of technocratic Megalopolis to both moons. She encounters angels and centaurs and mermaids, tumbles into a passionate affair with her younger half brother, Joe, lights upon a quieter romance with a female enemy general, infiltrates the household of her diabolical grandmother Livia, and finally reunites with Joe after his death to conceive their child and retrieve the mystical Key that will at last enable her to reign as Queen Sophia. Yet this phantasmagoric journey, employing lush prose and stunning imagery, twisting backward and forward through time and across worlds, only serves as a framework for Sophy’s endless, didactic ruminations about life, death, nature, power, love, and so forth. Despite Sophy’s self-deprecating caveats, her gynocentric gnostic Platonism with a New Age varnish is presented as revealed truth, accepted by nearly every character except the most cartoonishly villainous.

If handed to exactly the right reader at the right time, this has the potential to be revelatory, even life-changing; but most will find it baffling, irritating, or deadly dull. (Fantasy. 14 & up)

I AM HENRY FINCH

Deacon, Alexis  Illustr. by Schwarz, Viviane
Candlewick (40 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2015
978-0-7636-7812-8

Can thinking change the world? Just ask Henry Finch!

One quiet night Henry—depicted, like the rest of his relentlessly chatty flock, with a red fingerprint and a few expressive black lines—startles awake with the realization that he is self-aware. Moreover, he can think. Lots of different things! He likes it! “I could be great,” he thinks. Spotting the crocodilian Beast who has chowed down on so many of his relatives and recklessly thinking that the time for greatness has arrived, he attacks. This turns out to be a mistake, but heading down the Beast’s gullet, reasoning his way from “I am” to broad cycles of birth and death, he hears the Beast thinking about its own family and needs. Not only does he persuade it to change its diet and release him and the other small creatures trapped in its gut, he flies up to free all of his fellow birds from their clouds of unknowing. Off they soar on ambitious quests of their own, leaving Henry smiling a “finch smile.” Using only very simply drawn figures and changing the color field for “interior” shots to white on solid black, Schwarz conveys Henry’s simple outer and rather more complex inner worlds with a visual boldness that amplifies the exhilaration of his Cartesian epiphany. Henry will be a hero, and not just to readers of a philosophical feather.

Small bird, big thoughts. Greatness achieved. (Picture book. 6-8)

PETE THE CAT AND THE BEDTIME BLUES

Dean, James & Dean, Kimberly  Illustr. by Dean, James
Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-0-06-230430-8
Series: Pete the Cat

After a fun-filled day at the beach, Pete and his friends decide to continue the fun with a sleepover, but if they can’t sleep, will it still be fun?
Gus, Alligator, and Toad join Pete at his house, and it’s all fun and games until the lights go out for bedtime. “Clap! Clap! Clap!” Toad doesn’t want to sleep—he wants to clap. Another round of good nights and the lights go out. “Rat-a-tat-tat!” Gus wants to jam. And then, “Munch! Munch! Munch!” Alligator is hungry. What can Pete do to get a little shut-eye? Maybe his favorite bedtime book holds the answer. As in the rest of the tales featuring Pete, the characters are heavy-lidded and expressionless. Even a day surfing at the beach and a sleepover with friends can’t elicit smiles from this group. And Pete, though readers assume that he’s increasingly frustrated with his noisy friends, never bats an eyelash or expresses his feelings. Words like “gang,” “groovy,” “far-out,” and “cool cat” try too hard to appeal to Beat Generation wannabes.

Much better books about not being able to sleep abound—skip these bedtime blues. (Picture book. 4-8)

**Lucy’s Light**

*del Mazo, Margarita*

*Illus. by Álvarez, Silvia*

*Cuento de Luz (32 pp.)*

$16.95 | Nov 10, 2015

978-84-16147-00-7

Lucy, “the youngest member of a family of fireflies,” must overcome an irrational, moon-induced anxiety in order to leave her family tree trunk and glow.

The first six pages pull readers into a lush, beautiful world of nighttime: “When the sun has set, silence falls over the Big Forest, and all of the nighttime animals wake up.” Mixed media provide an enchanting forest background, with stylized flora and fauna eventually illuminated by a large, benign moon, because the night “doesn’t like to catch them by surprise.” Turning the page catches readers by surprise, though: the family of fireflies is decidedly comical and silly-looking. Similarly, the text moves from a lulling, magical cadence to a distinct shift in mood as the bugs ready themselves for their foray into the night: “They wave their bottoms in the air, wiggle their feelers, take a deep, deep breath, and sing, ‘Here we go, it’s time to glow!’ ” It’s an acceptable change, but more unevenness follows. Lucy’s excitement about finally joining the other bugs turns to “sobbing” two nights in a row. Instead of directly linking her behavior to understandable reactions of children to newness, the text undermines itself by making Lucy’s parents’ sweet reassurances impotent and using the grandmother’s scientific explanation of moonlight as an unnecessary metaphor. Further detracting from the story, the text becomes ever denser and more complex over the book’s short span.

Too many bugs, figuratively. (Picture book. 4-6)
the game—including safety concerns, then and now—and the building of dynasties, such as the strings put together by Alabama and Notre Dame. Doeden has fun with celebrated plays, highlighting perhaps the most famous of all: Roy “Wrong-Way” Riegels’ dash to the wrong end zone, incurring a two-point safety that proved to be the losing margin in the 1929 Rose Bowl. Doeden ends on two critical issues, both altogether unrelated to championships: the concern about brain injuries and the rules regarding player compensation. As Doeden notes, football is headed for some big changes, and not just in how the champ is crowned.

An enjoyable if unfocused walk through football history. (Nonfiction. 10-15)

SPARE PARTS
Emberley, Rebecca
Illus. by Emberley, Ed
Neal Porter/Roaring Brook (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 3, 2015
978-1-59643-723-4

Robot love.

Because he can’t get his secondhand, gear-driven heart started one morning, lonely Rhoobart hobbles off on mismatched mechanical limbs to the Spare Parts Mart in fruitless hopes of finding a replacement. Eventually, hope gives way to despair, and he collapses: “His zipper lips chattered, / He rattled and clattered. / Now he was sure NOTHING mattered.” Enter Sweetart, “an energetic bit of metal / With just the right amount of tarnish,” who assures him that “you don’t need a new heart, you / just need a jump start!” So it proves, as sparks fly, and with Rhoobart’s heart thumping and rattling again, off they go together, singing a silly love song: “We’re all spare parts. / We’ve got secondhand hearts, / It’s true. / We go together like pickles and glue. / You stick to me, / I’ll stick to you.” Harmonizing with the brief narrative’s clanky rhymes, this plainly metaphorical encounter is set in a junkyard composed of jumbled masses of bent machinery, loose gears, and torn flat bits bearing obscure strings of numbers or battered words. Though likewise loose, the robotic figures are anthropomorphic enough for younger viewers to pick them out against the broken backdrop.

Children aren’t really the natural audience for this heartfelt tale of second chances; save it for over-40s just starting out again. (Picture book. 4-8)

WAKE UP, SPRING
Ferrier, Katherine & Ferrier, Florian
Illus. by Ferrier, Katherine
Translated by Burrell, Carol Klio
Graphic Universe (40 pp.)
$7.99 paper | $26.65 PLB | Nov. 1, 2015
978-1-4677-8648-5
978-1-4677-8584-6 PLB
Series: Hotel Strange, 1

The diminutive staff members of Hotel Strange find themselves dismayed when their guests all show up on opening day—March 21—and they are both completely unready and still swathed in snow.

And “strange” really is the order of the day. Many of the creatures in this graphic novel look as though they’re made of yarn, especially the Grouchies, tall, shaggy things who are shaped like bowling pins. That’s the joy of the book: none of the character designs makes any concession to reality. There’s a character who looks like a mushroom with antlers and a character whose face looks like an inkblot. Nothing in the book is more plausible than it needs to be. The Grouchies carry the wind around in a bag, and Winter is a large, bearded man who rides through the snow on a toboggan. The plot—what there is of it—has to do with the search for Mr. Spring, who’s gone missing. Readers after plot will find that the story has a satisfying beginning, middle, and end. But there’s almost more enjoyment in the small details, like Mr. Winter sitting in a room filled with cuckoo clocks, knitting a scarf. Some readers may just stare at the pictures, counting the dozens of tiny creatures in every scene, which is a satisfying experience all by itself.

This daffy adventure kicks off a series, and readers will be hoping for a speedy return to Hotel Strange. (recipe for sponge cake) (Graphic fantasy. 7-11)

THE MOUNTAIN JEWS AND THE MIRROR
Feuerman, Ruchama King
 Illus. by Kosec, Polona & Calderón, Marcela
Kar-Ben (32 pp.)
Oct. 1, 2015
978-1-4677-3894-1
978-1-4677-3896-5 paper
978-1-4677-8846-5 e-book

Newly married Yosef and Estrella move from a small Moroccan mountain village to Casablanca so that Yosef can earn a living.

Life in the big city is diametrically different from life in the Atlas Mountains. Relatives provide work for him, living quarters, and furnishings, including a mirrored wardrobe. This last causes great anxiety for the bridal pair. Each sees other, more beautiful, mate-stealing intruders in the mirror’s misread reflection—new spouses far superior to innocent “mountain Jews.” The rabbi is summoned, but he, also an innocent, sees
The return of familiar characters, added Mus back story, atmospheric illustrations, and romance for Hopper should delight readers.

RETURN OF THE FORGOTTEN
Fiedler, Lisa
Illus. by To, Vivienne
McElderry (320 pp.)
978-1-4814-2094-5 e-book
Series: Mouseheart Trilogy, 3

In this final volume of the Mouseheart Trilogy, warrior mouse Hopper seeks his estranged brother while a new traitor threatens the peace of underground Atlantis.

Since defeating the feral cats, Hopper and his rat friends, Zucker and Firren, have rebuilt Atlantis in Brooklyn's subway tunnels into a visionary rodent colony. Hopper's the proud godfather of Zucker and Firren's daughter, Hope, and his sister, Pinkie, ruler of the Mus, has mellowed. However, his embittered, younger brother, Pup, avowed enemy of Atlantis, has vanished. Unaware that Pup regrets his past behavior and seeks forgiveness, Hopper and Pinkie organize a search party. Meanwhile, Pup's captured by Devon, one of Pinkie's elite guards. Consumed with a thirst for vengeance against Firren for past deeds, Devon kidnaps Hope and threatens to use her and Pup to punish Firren. When Pup and Hope discover Devon's dark plan, they escape and journey aboveground for help from Hopper's old pals. As Hopper and his friends rally, Pup and Pinkie make their way across the East River to confront Devon. While Volume 3 focuses on Pup's redemption and Devon's despicable deeds, the return of familiar characters, added Mus back story, atmospheric illustrations, and romance for Hopper should delight readers.

A satisfying, exciting, and fitting finale to a memorable mouse saga. (Animal fantasy. 8-12)

OPERATION JOSH TAYLOR
Fitzpatrick, Melody
Dundurn (144 pp.)
Oct. 27, 2015
978-1-4597-3134-9
978-1-4597-3136-3 e-book
Series: Hannah Smart, 1

When 13-year-old Hannah Smart's parents refuse to buy her concert tickets to see her pinup idol, superstar singer Josh Taylor, she and her genius best friend, Rachel Carter, must come up with a way to earn the money themselves.

This story, the first of a trilogy about Hannah, has a strong comic premise, but it's not as developed as it might be. The road to riches and concert tickets is bumpier than the girls imagine, though many of their obstacles have an arbitrary or manufactured feel. Initially, their goal is hampered by a lack of business opportunities, and later they are thwarted at every turn by a mean-girl classmate, who, for reasons that never become completely clear, lives to throw hurdles in Hannah's way. Hannah, who narrates the story, has a big, brash personality that leans toward self-centeredness, though the love she feels for Rachel shines through. The girls, who turn out to have an entrepreneurial flair, do manage to bar away the majority of their obstacles, though the story abruptly changes course when Hannah finds out she must move to Maine with her family.

Hampered by generic characterizations, this amusingly voiced but not-quite-funny comedy of errors is enjoyable but fails to dazzle. (Fiction. 8-12)

THE TOURNAMENT AT GORLAN
Flanagan, John
Philomel (384 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-0-399-16361-6
Series: Ranger's Apprentice: The Early Years, 1

Lord Morgarath, the baron of Gorlan, has been systematically dismantling the Ranger Corps, a band of soldiers appointed to protect the kingdom of Araluen. Crowley, a young Ranger, and Halt, a wicked bowman with a mysterious history, decide to re-establish the corps. However, with the king hiding in Castle Gorlan under the dubious protection of Morgarath, their only hope is Prince Duncan. Unfortunately, if the rumors are to be believed, the prince is too busy leading parties of drunken soldiers on illegal raids to be bothered with the business of ruling. However, Halt and Crowley soon learn that Morgarath's plan is far more complicated than they first surmised. Soon their goal is to save not only the corps, but the entire kingdom of Araluen. Flanagan revisits his epic
An extra-large format and bright, cheery illustrations in citrus shades provide visual appeal, but the simple plot is predictable.

**GO TO SLEEP, MONTY!**

*Geyer, Kim*
Illus. by the author
Andersen Press USA (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 1, 2015
978-1-4677-9311-7

In this British import, a little boy named Max acquires his first pet, a large puppy named Monty.

As the story opens, Max is holding his favorite stuffed animal, a blue dog named Snuffy Poo. Max's parents tell him that he is old enough now to have a real dog, but he will have to care for his new pet himself. Max chooses the largest puppy available, an energetic black-and-white dog as big as Max himself. Monty the pup is full of energy during the day and doesn't want to sleep in his dog bed on his first night in his new home. Max tries repeatedly to get Monty to sleep, employing tactics similar to those used by parents to get their children to sleep. The exhausted boy finally crawls into the dog's bed (along with the family cat) to cuddle up together with the big puppy. The final spread shows boy and cat asleep, with Monty still awake and winking at readers. And that's pretty much it. An extra-large format and bright, cheery illustrations in citrus shades provide visual appeal, but the simple plot is predictable and the text, less energetic than the exuberant puppy deserves.

Attractive illustrations don't make up for a less-than-compelling story. (**Picture book: 3-6**)

**SLEEPING BEAUTY**

*Sage, Alison—Adapt.*
Illus. by the adaptor
Whitman (32 pp.)
978-0-8075-7351-8

Borders of lacy wisteria and thorny wild roses add elegant atmosphere to this sweet version of the classic tale.

*Sage* and *Gibbs’* rendition, based on the Grimm’s “Briar Rose,” ends with the marriage and goes for the empty calories, equally careless with details and eager to leave behind the grimmer aspects of the original. The “spindles” ordered burned in the wake of dark-skinned Malevola’s curse are spinning wheels in the pictures, as is the item on which Princess Rosebud at last (somehow) pricks her finger; when Prince Florizel arrives a century later, he wakes her (by kissing her hand). The joyous couple goes off to a happily ever after, thus avoiding the rape, secret marriage, and cannibalism featured in old versions of the story. Gibb makes effective use of silhouettes and also of a wordless spread to underscore the tale’s more melodramatic moments. Elsewhere, Rosebud and her royal parents, along with a flutter of tiny gossamer-winged fairies, float and gesture gracefully in sumptuous pink and pastel settings framed by lush (if sometimes thorny) floral garlands.

A sugary take, distinguishable only in minor ways from those illustrated by Maja Dusíková (2012), Kuniko Craft (2002), and a fairy coachful of like romantics. (**Picture book/fairy tale: 6-8**)

**THE CHESS QUEEN ENIGMA**

*Gleason, Colleen*
Chronicle (360 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-1-4521-4317-0
Series: Stoker & Holmes, 3

The intrepid detective/vampire-slayer team of *Stoker* and *Holmes* returns for a third diverting steampunk mystery (The Spiritglass Charade, 2014, etc.).

*Evaline Stoker* and *Mina Holmes* have collaborated on solving mysteries before. Action-oriented *Evaline* is a hereditary slayer of UnDead while *Mina* is a condescending mistress of deduction, much like her famous uncle. Or, as *Evaline* says, “I’m not the one who finds out things....I’m the one who does things.” The girls react with dismayed pride when asked to enter-•

The mystery moves at a glacial pace, as does the romantic build, despite the setup. The reappearance of Olympia Babbage (“granddaughter of some famous inventor”) is, sadly, a mere side note.

These squabbling BFFs will continue to please their fans, though they are unlikely to win new ones. (**Steampunk: 12-14**)

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FIRE FIGHT
Guest, Jacqueline
7th Generation (128 pp.)
$9.95 paper | Sep. 1, 2015
978-1-939053-11-4
Series: PathFinders

Kai Hunter will not go to foster care. When her grandmother dies and leaves her all alone, she runs away from the Stoney Reserve near Calgary, Alberta, to make a new life for herself.

The brevity of this book hurts it. Part Navajo, part Stoney Nakoda, all attitude, Kai sheds her old life so quickly, even leaving on her vintage motorcycle before her grandmother’s funeral, that readers have little time to get to know her. When Kai reaches Banff, Alberta, her problems are conveniently solved without any effort on her part. After “scoring a job in the first fifteen minutes of arriving in town,” Kai then falls in love. Other Nakoda, all attitude, Kai sheds her old life so quickly, even leaving on her vintage motorcycle before her grandmother’s funeral, that readers have little time to get to know her. When Kai reaches Banff, Alberta, her problems are conveniently solved without any effort on her part. After “scoring a job in the first fifteen minutes of arriving in town,” Kai then falls in love. Other

Despite the compelling premise, this latest book from Guest falls short of its potential. (Fiction. 14-18)

WISTERIA JANE
Harris, Amber
Redleaf Lane (32 pp.)
978-1-60554-411-3

A little girl who takes telling the truth too far learns to temper her tongue and make up with a friend.

Wisteria Jane’s curly blond hair is a wild tangle, which reflects her thoughts perfectly. Her mom always tells her, “I named you after the most beautiful flower I’d ever seen, because you were the most beautiful baby I’d ever seen.” Wisty’s baby pictures reflect that, so she gets to thinking what her friend Ella’s baby pictures might look like. It’s a quick jump from the wrinkled newborn she sees to telling Ella that her full name must be Elephant, as she was a “wrinkly mess.” Well, that doesn’t go over too well, and Wisty’s mom has a chat with her about hurting her friends’ feelings and knowing when it’s better to keep her mouth shut than to tell the brutal truth. Wisty gets practice when she brings her apology picture—a rainbow unicorn—to Ella. Her face gets red, her mouth turns down, her eyes bug, her fists clench, but taking a deep breath and blowing it out slowly help her regain her cool and not say what she thinks. Hoyt’s loose, cartoonlike illustrations are bright and cheery, and the facial expressions and body language are highlights. A valuable lesson about tact for any age. (Picture book. 3-7)

THE AUGUST 5
Helland, Jenna
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (320 pp.)
$16.99 | Nov. 10, 2015
978-0-374-38264-3

The daughter of a rebel leader and the son of a powerful feudal politician evaluate their potential roles in a revolution.

Aeren’s governance is based on a feudalistic caste structure in which privileged, land-owning Zunft largely exploit the working-class cottagers. The novel opens as Tamsin Henry follows her father’s command—just like a real preschooler. The day after, the crisis du jour is the missing yellow boot. Luckily, a Very Little Prince and his mommy save the day, making things even better with a play-date and a boot trade. In her watercolor-and-ink illustrations, Heap gets Very Little Cinderella’s facial expressions and body language down to a T, from the hug she gives to her found yellow boot to her tantrum. Her resolute baby talk, on the other hand, is likely to polarize adult readers.

Those going through their own independent phases—and their caregivers—may enjoy this take on a favorite fairy tale. (Fairy tale. 3-6)
revolution. In the process she's injured, and when Tommy, the son of a high-ranking politician, finds her unconscious in the woods, he rescues her, exposing his cottage sympathies. Soon the initial revolution fails, and the leaders, including Tamsin's father, are held in jail as civil unrest continues to grow. When Tamsin is sent to recuperate in the capital city, where Tommy renders her completely giddy, and she dreams that he'll emerge when a new exchange student seems bent on stealing Penny's boyfriend.

Penny's darn busy—when she's not at school, she's working at her mother's cupcake shop or helping her best friend, Tally, with odd jobs in order to raise funds to save the local animal shelter from closing. Meanwhile, her burgeoning relationship with Marcus becomes more giddy, and she dreams that he'll be her first sweet kiss. But when Penny sees Marcus hanging out with Esmeralda, the gorgeous, new Parisian foreign exchange student, and Tommy's bland friendship with some fellow students. The early-industrial setting—newspapers are printed with presses, and no modern means of communication exist—includes a few steampunk flourishes that add little to the worldbuilding.

A mean-girl story with a big heart and soul. (Fantasy. 12-15)
The book’s forte is the outstanding multimedia illustrations that combine lithography and watercolors.

**THE CROW’S TALE**

Howarth, Naomi  
Illus. by the author  
Frances Lincoln (32 pp.)  
$18.99 | Oct. 1, 2015  
978-1-84780-740-3

Colorful and eye-catching artwork accompanies this rhyming story of bravery and kindness.

It is winter, and seemingly never-ending snow has covered the land where the animals live. Filled with tidium and frozen to the bone, the animals decide on a plan: their bravest one should embark on a journey to bring the Sun’s warmth to provide them heat. They choose Rainbow Crow with “radiant feathers and sweet singing voice,” to “battle through ice, wind, and snow.” The courageous crow flies toward the Sun and begs for relief; the Sun gives him a burning branch to take back to land, but its soot turns his feathers black. The crow is despondent, but the other animals convince him that his good deed is evidence that the Sun’s warmth is needed. In the end, the drama of the dog’s bravery and devotion and conveys the difficult circumstances of the family. Large-format watercolor illustrations bring the Yorkshire village and countryside to life, with particularly appealing depictions of bright-eyed Lassie. A helpful map of England and Scotland on the book’s first page shows the journey that Lassie takes from northern Scotland back home to Yorkshire.

**An irresistible treat for dog lovers.** (Picture book. 4-8)

**HOCKEY HERO**

Hyman, Zachary  
Illus. by Pullen, Zachary  
Tundra (40 pp.)  
978-1-77049-630-9

In hockey, there is a tradition: win or lose, you rise to the challenge.

Tommy is the youngest in a hockey family, but he is too shy to take to the ice for his development-league team—testified by his nervous stutter, for which he is teased mercilessly by a clutch of bullies. But his grandpa, who played on a Stanley Cup–winning Detroit Red Wings team, nurtures Tommy’s talent with one of the greatest of pleasures: pond hockey. He also regales Tommy with stories of Maurice Richard, Bobby Orr, and Gordie Howe, all of whom elevated the game to a near-sublime level. During the boys’ championship game, the bench is short players, and the coach asks Tommy if he will take to the ice. And Tommy finally does. Though Hyman’s writing can sometimes be as hokily wooden as an old hockey stick—“Tell you what, kid—you score and they’ll never forget you!...You’ll be a real-life legend!” —and Pullen’s faces have a slightly startling, rubbery look, the story has an ingenious wisdom. And Grandpa is just kooky enough—painting his face red and white for games and throwing octopuses onto the ice, a weird old Red Wings custom that Hyman ought somehow to have explained—to remind readers that sports, first and foremost, should be fun.

**A heartfelt debut.** (Picture book. 6-9)

**ALL ABOUT THE PHILIPPINES**

Stories, Songs, Crafts and Games for Kids  
Jimenez, Gidget Roceles  
Illus. by Dandan-Albano, Corazon Tuttle (64 pp.)  
978-0-8048-4072-9

Three cousins representing the diverse cultural groups who inhabit the Philippines take readers on a tour of the many islands that make up the archipelago.

Mary, Jaime, and Ari are the offspring of three sisters from the Ifugao people of Luzon, but their fathers are of Chinese, Spanish, and Muslim Arab descent. This device lends an artificial, idealized spin to the diversity question, but it gets the job done. No mention is made of the contemporary rise of Muslim separatists, although the section on history notes that the Americans “imposed their style of democratic authority.” The emphasis is on cultural activities, including religious holidays, and favorite foods (with recipes for pancit, a noodle dish; polvoron, a candy made from powdered milk; and halo-halo, a combination of fruits and beans with ice, sugar, and milk). There are descriptions of games including sipa, which is similar to hacky sack, with directions for making your own sipa, and sungka, also known as mancala in Africa and the Middle East. Unfortunately, instructions are not clear enough to really play. The only craft is a modified parol, a Christmas decoration. A creation myth and one song are included, but the book’s real strength is the description of activities and life in different parts of the country.

The large format and attractive, cartoonlike illustrations provide an inviting look at a country not often included in many other resources for children. (websites, index) (Nonfiction. 7-10)
GEORGE IS THE INSPIRING STORY OF A FOURTH-GRADER WHO BEGINS TO TELL HER SECRET

By Rebecca Rubenstein

Ten years ago, if you’d walked into a bookstore or library, you’d have been hard-pressed to find transgender narratives written for and about youth. They were virtually nonexistent, and for the same readers who went on oft-disappointing quests to seek these books out, it’s nothing short of heartening and profound to observe the difference a decade can make. We are now witnessing a welcome sea change in the landscape of children’s literature—not only in the teen category, but for early and middle-grade readers, as well—and it is both exciting and a relief to see a remarkable book like Alex Gino’s *George* (Aug. 25) riding this current, much-needed wave.

Written for ages 9 to 12, *George* was born from this absence: a lack of published stories about young children questioning their assigned gender identities, figuring out safe ways to reveal internalized truths to those around them, and, often, taking steps toward transition. *George* diverges from the narratives we’ve come to expect by placing its reader alongside a protagonist who already, at the novel’s beginning, knows she’s a girl. The book’s main source of tension, rather, is how Melissa, known throughout the book as George (her given name at birth), will prompt others to view and understand her the way she understands herself. As a child of the digital age and fortunate enough to grow up during a time when transness is visible in the media, Melissa has the tools and language she needs to recognize that she isn’t alone and is part of a larger community. But *George* is also smart enough to convey that it isn’t enough to know something better is out there, waiting—that it is difficult to be a child and even more difficult to be a child living in secret, and the need for support and acceptance from the parents, teachers, and peers one already has relationships with is more immediate and crucial.

“Ten years from now is a lifetime away, and that’s not enough,” Gino says, emphatic about the gap between childhood and adulthood. “There have to be parts that are OK now. There have to be outlets now.”

This includes, of course, the availability of transgender narratives for young readers. When asked what propelled them along their 12-year journey of writing *George*, Gino, who has a background in education, notes an ongoing love of middle-grade books and says, “The story is different when it comes from the inside. It was really important for me to get trans voices talking about transfolk out there.”

Another important aspect of the book is the concept of allying. Gino isn’t sure which party will ben-
efit from George more—trans- or cisgender readers—but they “wanted to give models of what it looked like to ally and that it’s not about being perfect.”

“The ways that you ally,” Gino adds, “are you listen and you accept and you trust that what the other person is saying is real for them.”

Gino currently splits their time between writing middle-grade fiction about marginalized individuals, performing other types of activism—they are just finishing a board term with the queer, body-positive organization NOLOSE and will be joining We Need Diverse Books as a team member in the fall—and hoping George finds the readership that needs it most.

“My hope is that it be in every library in the country, that kids be able to get their hands on it,” Gino says. “I want it to be a book that someone passes to someone and says, ‘You have to.’”

Rebecca Rubenstein is the editor-in-chief of the online literary magazine Midnight Breakfast and a bookseller in San Francisco. George received a starred review in the June 1, 2015, issue.
The pacing is perfect.

TIP Toe TA pi R S

definite need of a trim or at least a comb, Jack seems to have stepped from some manga to pose theatrically amid late-autumn sprays of mist and dramatic, cloudy curlicues. Nonetheless, the children’s elegant, Edwardian dress and references to a lost Golden Age in the mannered narrative intensify the retro atmosphere common to this series.

As ever, the force of nostalgia is strong; the force of narrative, not so much. (Fiction. 6-8)

HOW TO OUTFOX YOUR FRIENDS WHEN YOU DON’T HAVE A CLUE

Keating, Jess
Sourcebooks Jabberwocky (320 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Oct. 6, 2015
978-1-4926-1794-5
Series: My Life Is a Zoo, 3

When your best friend lives on the other side of the world, it can be hard to stay best friends.

When Liv comes back to town to visit, Ana’s sure everything will go back to the way it was before Liv moved, and they will be as close as ever. Unfortunately, they’ve both changed far too much for that to happen. Ana is no longer horribly shy and in constant battle with Ashley; in fact, they’re good friends. And Liv has purple hair and a new friend in New Zealand that she insists on texting, even when she and Ana are hanging out.

Can the two overcome the distance they’ve traveled and create a new, stronger friendship out of the remnants of the old one? Keating’s sharp focus is on one of the most crucial relationships of a 13-year-old’s life: friendships. With her trademark kid-oriented wit and lighthearted touch, Keating leads readers through the daily emotional ups and downs of the typical just-turned-teenager who is trying to juggle hormones, parents, schoolwork, and, most importantly, her friends. Ana’s voice is refreshingly distinct: “It was actually sort of nice not to think about how I looked, unlike in school where I felt like we were all walking some pretend runway.”

A sweet reminder that being a middle school girl is about far more than boys and makeup. (Fiction. 9-13)

TIP TOE TA Pi R S

Kim, Hamin
Illus. by the author
Translated by Lee, Sera
Holiday House (32 pp.)
$16.95 | Oct. 15, 2015
978-0-8234-3395-7

Tapir’s courage and quiet steps show a leopard how to change his ways and avoid a human hunter.

This charming pourquoi tale is set in a Southeast Asian jungle where tapirs, rhinos, hornbills, apes, crocodiles, porcupines, and leopards coexist. Ably translated from the original Korean, the text is spare, gentle, and repetitive. “The leopard ran with loud, heavy steps. / THUD, THUD, THUD. / Tapir ran with soft, silent steps. / Hush, hush, hush.” In the art, created with watercolor, drawing ink, and marker pen, most animals have a distinctive color. Tapir is gray and white, while Little Tapir is a pleasing reddish brown. The jungle is more suggested than shown in these allusive images, reminiscent of Korean landscape paintings, and the figures and text both are set on an expanse of white. The placement of text and picture varies, sometimes together, sometimes opposed on a spread, but each spread is a self-contained idea until the climactic page turns of the leopard attack. The pacing is perfect. There is humor in the tiptoeing animals, the dancing rhinoceros and elephant, and Little Tapir’s dream of a birthday mud cake, but it is gentle, befitting the overall quiet tone of this appealing import.

Exquisite. (Picture book 3-7)

THE FANTASTIC FERRIS WHEEL

The Story of Inventor George Ferris

Kraft, Betsy Harvey
Illus. by Salerno, Steven
Christy Ottaviano/Henry Holt (40 pp.)
978-1-62779-072-7

Heeding the call to “make big plans” for the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, George Ferris designed—and built—the giant observation wheel that now bears his name.

Kraft’s clear narrative sets the stage for the Columbian Exposition. Following on the 19th century’s spectacular achievements in architecture and engineering, a sense of competition prevailed: the fair’s organizers stood in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower, erected for France’s 1889 World’s Fair. Ferris’ friends and Chicago’s fair organizers doubted his plans for their sheer scale: how could a 26-story-tall wheel with 36 cars, each designed to carry 60 passengers, be safely constructed and operated? Ferris found investors and refined his plans. Finally, in December 1892—just 4 1/2 months before the opening—the committee gave Ferris the nod. The engineering challenges, coupled with the harsh Chicago winter, lend drama to the text; Salerno’s richly detailed compositions extend it. Using traditional mixed media as well as Adobe Photoshop to layer, compose, and add color, the artist’s full-bleed pictures exhibit dizzying perspective and inventive composition, adding plenty of detail, including fairgoers in period dress. A color palette of blue, green, and ochre evokes vintage postcards. Withstanding a tornado in Chicago, Ferris’ wheel served again at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair before its eventual scrapping. Kraft credits Ferris’ enduring feat, a tall gatefold depicts the London Eye.

An absorbing read for young makers and dreamers. (Biographical note, sources) (Informational picture book 5-9)
HEARTACHE AND OTHER NATURAL SHOCKS

Leznoff, Glenda

Tundra (384 pp.)

Oct. 13, 2015
978-1-77049-836-5
978-1-77049-837-2 e-book

She said, she said, with a dose of Shakespearean intrigue.

Julia's cozy, stable life is upended when her parents announce that she and her brother are moving with their mother to Toronto while their father stays behind in Montreal with the family store. Carla's barreling through adolescence with an equal mix of sass and sex appeal when Jules moves in next door. Both girls are knocked for a loop when Ian, the bad boy with the come-hither eyes, rolls into town on his motorcycle. As they take turns telling the story of their disastrous grade 11 year, quiet, brainy Jules and brazen, mouthy Carla square off in the time-honored tradition of vicious high school rivalries.

SPINNING STARLIGHT

Lewis, R.C.

Hyperion (336 pp.)

978-1-4231-8515-4
978-1-4814-1648-1 e-book

Lewis follows up Stitching Snow (2014) with another entry into the burgeoning genre of fairy-tale adaptations, rifing romantic space opera off Hans Christian Andersen's "The Wild Swans."

While hardly the spoiled party girl portrayed by the ubiquitous electronic paparazzi, 16-year-old Jantzen heiress Liddi isn't a technological genius like her dead parents or eight overprotective elder brothers, either—and she feels it keenly. When her brothers disappear and Liddi herself barely escapes a botched kidnapping attempt, she uncovers a plot that threatens not only her family, but all seven inhabited worlds. Now she's stranded on the supposedly mythical eighth planet, without her connections, her tools, her identity, even her voice...or a clue as to how to save them. Liddi is a terrific heroine, equal parts insecure, perfect, their sweet, their sweet, their sweet, and good, but it relegates the text to the domain of adult ventriloquists, which undermines its status as "the children's version." In a mildly clever call-back to the prior books about going to sleep, the closing lines admit failure in nourishing the fussy child and then say, "But on the bright side, maybe this is the night / You seriously just go to sleep." Will this series be put to bed now? Or will other parenting travails provoke yet more cathartically outrageous and good, but it relegates the text to the domain of adult ventriloquists, which undermines its status as "the children's version." In a mildly clever call-back to the prior books about going to sleep, the closing lines admit failure in nourishing the fussy child and then say, "But on the bright side, maybe this is the night / You seriously just go to sleep." Will this series be put to bed now? Or will other parenting travails provoke yet more cathartically crass titles and toned-down companions?

SERIOUSLY, YOU HAVE TO EAT

Mansbach, Adam

Illus. by Brozman, Owen

Akashic (32 pp.)

$15.95 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-1-61775-408-1

Cleaned-up vocabulary makes You Have to Fucking Eat (2014) palatable for a child audience—but it's still a picture book for adults. Just as Mansbach followed up on the success of Go the Fuck to Sleep (2011) with its tamer companion, Seriously, Just Go to Sleep (2012), this title is billed as "the children's version" of its more colorfully titled counterpart. While the absence of f-bombs will make most adults more inclined to share it with their finicky progeny, the voice remains one of adult exasperation, not childish agency or transformation. The ethnically diverse children depicted in Brozman's digital illustrations doggedly refuse all entreaties and pleas to eat—not one caves and tries something or decides to like it, à la Sam I Am's antagonist in Seuss' picky-eating classic, or otherwise takes the story's reins. That's all well and good, but it infuriates the text to the domain of adult ventriloquists, which undermines its status as "the children's version." In a mildly clever call-back to the prior books about going to sleep, the closing lines admit failure in nourishing the fussy child and then say, "But on the bright side, maybe this is the night / You seriously just go to sleep." Will this series be put to bed now? Or will other parenting travails provoke yet more cathartically crass titles and toned-down companions?

STRICTLY NO ELEPHANTS

Mantchev, Lisa

Illus. by Yoo, Taejun

Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Oct. 27, 2015
978-1-61775-408-1
978-1-61775-409-8 e-book

After a little boy and his tiny elephant are barred from the Pet Club, they befriend other children with unusual pets.

Their drama class's production of Hamlet sets the stage for both complications and satisfying plot twists. Jules' profound introspection and Carla's utter lack thereof make them fitting, often comic, foils for each other as the tension between them—and for each of them, with Ian—grows higher with each chapter. Along the way, the supporting characters are sweetly if somewhat broadly drawn, coming off mostly true to type. The story is grounded in the sense of place created by Leznoff's descriptions of Montreal and Toronto.

Steepled in the history of the Quebecois separatist movement and 1970s fashion and pop culture, this isn't groundbreaking stuff, but it is a refreshing break from contemporary teen fiction. (Historical fiction. 14 & up)
A PARROT DOES MORE THAN SQUAWK IN A NEW PICTURE BOOK

When I call Meg Medina and Angela Dominguez, we forge through a fickle cellular connection (and a street musician setting up shop next to me) to discuss Mango, Abuela, and Me.

Written by Medina and illustrated by Dominguez, Mango is about Mia, whose Spanish-speaking abuela leaves “a sunny house that rested between two snaking rivers” to live with Mia and her parents in, presumably, New York City. Mia convinces her mother to buy a parrot named Mango to cheer up Abuela. Through teaching Mango a bilingual vocabulary, Mia and her grandmother improve their communication with one another.

What begins as translation evolves into conversation as Mia and Abuela begin to understand each other. “Language is something that can connect us as families but is something that is also an obstacle,” says Medina. “The fact is that language acquisition should really be something beautiful and exciting, not something shameful like being made to let go of a language to belong.”

Dominguez’s illustrations show an urban setting with a palette of tangerine, lime, and saffron, not unlike Abuela’s former home. “I knew this was a personal story to Meg, and I wanted to set it in the place that I thought she was envisioning,” says Dominguez.

Medina says that cities get a bad rap, but she promotes them as places filled with “corners of experience.” “I often write about kids who come from more challenging economic classes in the city or in families where money is an issue. I like to give healthy representation of folks all along the spectrum.”—G.W.

Gordon West is a writer and illustrator living in Brooklyn. He is at work on his own picture book and a teen novel. Mango, Abuela, and Me was reviewed in the May 1, 2015, issue.

The first-person narrative has a quiet, contemplative feel: “The trouble with having a tiny elephant for a pet is that you never quite fit in. / No one else has an elephant.” His pet is shy of sidewalk cracks: “I always go back and help him over. That’s what friends do: lift each other over the cracks.” Embodying dejection after the two turn from that large, titular sign on the door, a double-page spread—a Photoshop-augmented linoleum block print—depicts a dark teal cityscape slashed with raindrops and bobbing with black umbrellas. The Caucasian boy, his pet (in matching red scarves), and a little African-American girl in cornrows and a red-and-orange striped dress are the bright spots in this poignant tableau. Turns out that this girl—a pet skunk curled on her lap—has been turned away too. “He doesn’t stink,” she says. “No, he doesn’t,” concurs the boy and then suggests, “What if we start our own club?” Observant children will spot a porcupine, penguin, and giraffe peering from brownstone windows along the way; they and their children join others with equally exotic pets. Yoo’s concluding scenes depict a treehouse occupation (its restrictive message changed to “ALL ARE WELCOME”) and multiethnic, multispecies harmony.

Sweet and affirming. (Picture book 3-7)

THE GREAT MONKEY RESCUE

Markle, Sandra
Millbrook/Lerner (48 pp.)
$30.65 PLB | Oct. 1, 2015
978-1-4677-8030-8

Markle chronicles the amazing efforts to save a tiny (and adorable) species.

In 1960 there were only an estimated 200 golden lion tamarins in the wild. Their habitat along the coast of Brazil was being destroyed by logging. In 1975 there were about 122 in captivity, but they weren’t breeding; when they did, the young died. After laying out this grim reality, the economical text goes on to describe how zoologist Devra Kleiman discovered that golden lion tamarins had a different family structure than chimps and other primates. When the tamarins were housed appropriately, their populations in captivity skyrocketed, reaching 500 in the ’80s. Efforts then began to reintroduce them to the wild. Initial attempts failed, but mixing wild-born tamarins with zoo-born worked; then came the push to expand their available habitats. Markle does her usual excellent job presenting information in a page-turning narrative young zoologists will not be able to put down. Varied page layouts, vibrant photographs, and charming monkey mugs boost appeal. Contextual definitions of difficult or new concepts and fine backmatter, including further resources (both Web and print), a glossary, and a timeline, make this a must for nonfiction collections seeking more than just-the-facts series animal titles.

An animal conservation tale with a happy ending (3,200 estimated in the wild today) and a must-read for monkey lovers. (Index) (Nonfiction 9-12)
EAT YOUR U.S. HISTORY HOMEWORK
Recipes for Revolutionary Minds
McCallum, Ann
Illus. by Hernandez, Leeza
Charlesbridge (48 pp.)
$15.95 | Oct. 13, 2015
978-1-57091-923-7

After encouraging kids to eat their math and science homework (2011 and 2014), McCallum and Hernandez this time pair six recipes to the history of America from 1620 to 1789.

The historical highlights include the Mayflower, the Pilgrims, Plymouth, and the first Thanksgiving (Thanksgiving Succotash); life in the original 13 Colonies (Colonial Cherry-Berry Grunt); the French and Indian War (Lost Bread); slavery (Southern Plantation Hoe Cakes); the Boston Tea Party and the increasing enmity toward England (Revolutionary Honey-Jumble Cookies); and the Declaration of Independence and the Revolutionary War (Independence Ice Cream). Each period is summarized in a single page of general background. The recipe follows on a double-page spread, and then a further double-page spread gives more (and more specific) information. An introduction includes a timeline of the entire period and some cooking tips (“Please ask an adult to assist you, especially when things are sharp or hot”), which include pointing out that the recipes have been modernized. The book ends with a brief review of each period, glossary, and index. The cutey cartoon artwork visually represents some aspect(s) of the learning and goes nicely with some of the corny puns the author adds in. The recipes themselves include pretty basic ingredients, and

forced upon her. Though more horrors await her, Grace quickly decides she’ll never leave. When young Dr. Thornhollow, a specialist in lobotomies, arrives at her lowest moment, Grace begs him to set her mind free. But he recognizes a rare cleverness in her and offers to spirit her away to assist him in his new endeavor: catching murderer. However, she must pretend to be insane to remain safe. Grace soon constructs a new identity among the maddest of characters. Though mired in moments of unthinkable cruelty, Grace’s story shines. Every person she encounters, mad or trapped by the label of madness, feels achingly real. Readers will wish they could watch her and Thornhollow solve murders for pages and pages more.

A dark study of the effects of power in the wrong hands, buoyed by a tenacious heroine and her colorful companions. (Historical thriller. 14 & up)

THE ADVENTURES OF MISS PETITFOUR
Michaels, Anne
Illus. by Block, Emma
Tundra (144 pp.)
978-1-77049-502-9 e-book
978-1-77049-500-5

Miss Petitfour is a quirky, creative, charming, magical cat lover.

The narrator speaks directly to readers in a schoolmarmish sort of voice, first introducing the heroine and each of her 16 cats. Each odd, whimsical adventure involves Miss Petitfour’s ability to use carefully selected tablecloths as a means of flying around her village, with her cats forming a kind of kite tail or ballast. There is nothing normal about this village or any of its inhabitants. There are handsome, giant-sized shop signs and delightfully named villagers who are perfectly accepting of Miss Petitfour’s aeronautic abilities. Michaels employs a rhythmic syntax that provides long descriptive lists of everything from the items in a jumble sale through the rare stamps in an album to silly book titles. The names of each of the 16 cats are repeated again and again. Woven through the tales are instructions on the techniques of storytelling. Examples of digressions and key phrases that move the story along, such as “fortunately” and “then one day,” are explained and demonstrated. A multitude of words that tickle the tongue—“gesticulating,” “propitious”—are defined within the stories. These words and phrases are flagged with italics or uppercase letters and printed in colored ink. Block’s charming, full-color illustrations complement the tales in a decidedly mid-20th-century modern style.

An homage to classic fantasies for an audience willing to suspend all disbelief and just go along for the ride. (Fantasy. 8-11)
Moreau’s graphically flat paintings, done with gouache, have simple lines and a primitive perspective, but they’re full of things to look at and some surprising details.

**MY WILD FAMILY**

*Murasaki, Laurent
Illus. by the author
Chronicle (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 3, 2015
978-1-4521-4423-8*

“I have a very special family,” claims the unnamed narrator shown in the cover family portrait.

Indeed she does. Each double-page spread in this oversized album shows a different member of this girl’s family as a wild animal. Her older brother is an elephant, her little brother’s a sparrow, her mother’s a giraffe, and so on. Her two best friends are included, as well. Each portrayal is a separate scene in which the nonanthropomorphic animal is pictured among humans in a realistically rendered setting: a playground, a classroom, a busy city street. Moreau’s graphically flat paintings, done with gouache, have simple lines and a primitive perspective, but they’re full of things to look at and some surprising details. At the far end of the dinner table over which a hungry bear (“my uncle”) presides, a child is feeding the dog. On the bus, her grandfather (an antlered stag) “always gets up so ladies may have a seat.” But is that a rat running alongside? Liberal use of red outlines adds energy. These images show well from a distance, making this an especially good choice for preschool storytime. Moreau’s graphically flat paintings, done with gouache, have simple lines and a primitive perspective, but they’re full of things to look at and some surprising details. At the far end of the dinner table over which a hungry bear (“my uncle”) presides, a child is feeding the dog. On the bus, her grandfather (an antlered stag) “always gets up so ladies may have a seat.” But is that a rat running alongside? Liberal use of red outlines adds energy. These images show well from a distance, making this an especially good choice for preschool storytime. Published in France in 2013 as *Ma Famille Sauvage*, this welcome import crosses the Atlantic with ease.

Sure to inspire young readers and listeners to comparisons of their own. (Picture book 3-5)

**NICHIREN**

*Murasaki, Masahiko
Illus. by Tanaka, Ken
Middleway Press (272 pp.)
$12.95 paper | Oct. 1, 2015
978-0-9779245-7-8*

A graphic-novel treatment of the life and Buddhist teachings of Nichiren, a real-life 13th-century Japanese priest.

In ancient Japan, the inhabitants suffer greatly; alongside natural disasters such as drought and earthquakes, corruption runs rampant. The peaceful priest Nichiren, however, is unafraid to speak his mind against abuses of power and to help the people find hope in an otherwise difficult time. He is revered by the masses but hated by those in power. Other priests and officials continually plot his exile and demise, but Nichiren, with his wisdom and patience, always manages to prevail and garner more followers. Though fictionalized, Murakami and Tanaka’s Nichiren is a fascinating figure; unfortunately, readers are given little background information or supplemental sources for further investigation, save for one website (the publisher’s). His mantra, “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo,” is repeated often but inadequately explained, offering little to readers at a valuable moment when their attention is rapt. However, Nichiren’s life is compelling nonetheless and smartly interpreted by Tanaka with black-and-white manga-style illustrations, which should easily draw an audience to material that they may have otherwise overlooked. Readers unfamiliar with Buddhism who give this a try will be pleasantly surprised—and hopefully piqued enough to do some of their own research into this provocative teacher.

An intriguing imagining that is both edifying and enlightening and that makes an ancient figure easily accessible to a modern audience. (Graphic historical fiction. 13 & up)

**MONSTER**

*Myers, Walter Dean
Adapted by Sims, Guy A.
Illus. by Anyabwile, Dawud
Amistad/HarperCollins (160 pp.)
Oct. 13, 2015
978-0-06-227501-0 e-book
978-0-06-227500-4 paper
978-0-06-227499-1 paper

A faithfully adapted graphic-novel retelling of the first Printz Award winner. If ever a novel lent itself to a graphic adaptation, it is Monster (1999). Written in a screenplay format interspersed with first-person journal entries, it practically adapts itself into a visual presentation. Fortunately Sims and Anyabwile are smart enough not to mess with a good thing, and they stick closely to the original to tell the story of New York teenager Steve Harmon’s trial for felony murder. Myers’ admirers will be pleased to see much of the original dialogue and narration preserved, though neatly edited in places to keep the pace brisk. Meanwhile, Anyabwile’s black-and-white illustrations do more than simply interpret the original’s camera directions and descriptions. They also add subtle layers to the courtroom accounts and journal entries, all while maintaining the narrative suspense and ambiguity that’s made this story linger with a generation of readers. It’s not any clearer in this version what role Steve truly might have played in the crime. Black gutters between panels and heavy shading create an appropriately oppressive atmosphere. Though the overall effect can be muddy, it generally suits the darkness of the story and the bold lines of Anyabwile’s figures.

It’s not easy for an adaptation to please both old and new readers, but this respectful one pulls off that trick. (Graphic adaptation. 13 & up)
Manitoba teens Jess and Sara Jean both know the terrible feelings of loss and doubt a child faces from having a parent abandon them.

Both are torn between staying put in the communities they have grown up in and playing the roles they have dutifully played all their lives, and leaving all they’ve known behind to explore what else the world has to offer. This is where their similarities end. Sara Jean is a Caucasian young woman who dreams of going to university and following her dream of writing. Jess is a Métis young man with a history of arson, for which he is serving the titular 250 hours of community service, starting with cleaning up Sara Jean’s family’s garage. Forced together, these two discover clues to secrets that may lead to answers both their communities need to move on in harmony, and they must decide whether to stand up for what they believe in. The saving grace of the narrative—the truth of the town’s past that supposedly becomes unraveled at the end—is overshadowed by the forced star-crossed-love story of Jess and Sara Jean. The dialogue between characters feels as contrived as the chemistry between the leads, a failing that goes hand in hand with uneven storytelling that is at times heavy-handed and at other times not powerful enough to drive home its point.

A potentially intriguing tale hampered by a romance that never really lights a spark. (Mystery. 14-18)

Historium
Nelson, Jo
Illus. by Wilkinson, Richard
Big Picture/Candlewick (112 pp.)
$35.00 | Sep. 1, 2015
978-0-7636-7984-2
Series: Welcome to the Museum

An oversized album of archaeological treasures, from an early Stone Age hand ax to a 19th-century tiki pendant.

Inviting readers to take a sort of virtual museum tour, Nelson gathers over 140 representative artifacts into geographical “galleries.” She presents them with both broad opening overviews of their cultural contexts and individual descriptive notes on their features and anthropological significance. The large illustrations are not photos but digital images that are drawn in painstaking detail, colored in subdued or neutral hues, and reproduced on smooth but not polished paper. With further antique formality of design, the dimly but evenly lit objects are suspended against monochrome backgrounds, often several to a “plate,” and well-separated from the text. Though the focus is largely on defunct civilizations—Egypt and Mesopotamia to Olmec, Korean Silla, and the Vikings—the author acknowledges survivors such as the Pueblo and indigenous Australians. Readers on this side of the pond may feel slighted, as the gallery devoted to the Americas is the smallest and contains nothing from South America, but both the Torres Strait Islanders and several Polynesian cultures receive nods in the Oceania section. Moreover, rather than usual suspects like the Rosetta Stone or the so-called “Mask of Agamemnon,” the objects on display are often less familiar funerary, religious, or decorative objects. Many of the artifacts, particularly the gold ones, look drab, though, and none are either shown to scale or consistently accompanied by measurements. Furthermore, there are no maps or leads to further information.

An arbitrary assortment of relics not likely to furnish either the insight or the glimpses of wonder that elevate companion volume Animalium (2014). (timeline, index) (Non-fiction. 10-14)

Sitting Bull
Lakota Warrior and Defender of His People
Nelson, S.D.
Illus. by the author
Abrams (64 pp.)
$19.95 | Nov. 3, 2015
978-1-4197-0731-5

A reverent tribute to the great Hunkpapa chief and holy man, cast as a memoir with a rich array of new and contemporary illustrations.

Nelson also pays tribute (as he has elsewhere) to ledger-book art, with scenes done in that simple style. Here they depict, along with mystical symbols and traditional hunts and battles, a steamboat, a busy city street, the slaughter of women and children at Killdeer Mountain, Custer’s death (depicted as a suicide) at Little Big Horn, and Sitting Bull’s murder by a Lakota police officer. Sitting Bull himself, aptly named for a buffalo that would never back down, retraces in dignified language his early years, long struggles with the “wasichus” over invasions and broken promises, and his end. His is a strong voice, whether scorning subservient “Hang-Around-the-Forts” or commending his great contemporaries—an of Crazy Horse: “He fought like a thunderstorm. I liked that man.” He closes with a stirring exhortation to “honor those traditions that still serve our people,” to “Brave up!” and to “go forth with a good heart.” The first-person narration makes this problematic as nonfiction, but the backmatter provides a wealth of information. Along with period photos distributed throughout and a detailed timeline of Lakota history up to Wounded Knee, Nelson’s lengthy closing notes on Lakota practices and spiritual beliefs will leave readers with a rich picture of this noble figure’s personal and cultural context.

Solidly historical and far more heartfelt than those on the overcrowded shelf of assignment-fodder profiles. (end-notes, bibliography, index) (Historical fiction. 10-13)
A wildlife photographer's images and accompanying descriptions of individual Asian moon bears from animal-rescue centers in Vietnam and China introduce these appealing creatures.

At his publisher's behest and fresh from his work in the far north for Polar Bears (2011), Newman went to Asia to photograph moon bears rescued by the Animals Asia Foundation. The result is this unusual introduction, which names individual bears and describes moon bears' physical features, habits, and habitats in a two-level text. In large display type, a simple sentence includes the animal's name and a statement: “Poppy's big, round ears help her hear what's happening around her.” A paragraph in smaller type connects the detail about the specific animal to more general characteristics of the species. Some color photos fill just a portion of a page or double-page spread, while others are full-page images, black-and-white vignettes, or even some color snapshots. Variations in format and arrangement of text and images provide enough visual pop to keep readers engaged. Wisely, given his target audience, the author makes no mention of bile bear medicinal (if it is a tall tale). Paley sets a breathless pace that keeps readers guessing. The tale is told by a nostalgic witness, and it captures a strong sense of neighborhood pride. Boyd's bright illustrations move right along with the action and depict a multicultural community from a variety of panoramic and close-up perspectives. An afterword tells of the author's Philadelphia childhood and provides information about tall tales.

Luigi isn't the biggest or strongest boy in his city neighborhood, but he is most certainly the fastest. Summer on Philadelphia's Regent Street means enjoying barefoot racing, a favorite activity, possibly unique to the neighborhood. Children race each other endlessly, and Luigi is the acknowledged and unbeaten champion. When Mikey Muldoon, a kid from another neighborhood, loses to Luigi, he is angry in defeat and proposes another contest, this time against his unnamed best friend. The anticipation turns to disbelief and shock when Mikey's best friend turns out to be everyone's worst nightmare, Mean Max, who is so scary he doesn't even appear in the illustrations. A terrified Luigi will not go back on his word, and the race is on. It is very close, with first one then the other in the lead. And the winner is Luigi. He has beaten the fiercest opponent of all, but the race spawns a new rule, one that will have readers wondering whether this really happened, or is it a tall tale? Paley sets a breathless pace that keeps readers guessing. The tale is told by a nostalgic witness, and it captures a strong sense of neighborhood pride. Boyd's bright illustrations move right along with the action and depict a multicultural community from a variety of panoramic and close-up perspectives. An afterword tells of the author's Philadelphia childhood and provides information about tall tales.

Cheers for Luigi. (Picture book. 4-9)
the chicken coop is partly covered in vines. Lehman’s illustrations, outlined in pen and colored with watercolor and gouache, have a simple, graphic-novel feel. A Curtis Jenny stamp, a fragment of an encyclopedia, and the girl’s drawings tell the story of her plan: to fly to Saturn. The story is nearly wordless, with a single changing word appearing in bold text on some pages: plan becomes plane, then plane becomes planet as the girl demonstrates to her dog, with toys, how they might travel. She finds a key that is Pa’s—and a look through a photo album becomes a discovery of a barnstorming poster in the attic: a teleidoscope, endnotes, index) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

THE COLOR THIEF
A Family’s Story of Depression
Peters, AndrewFusek & Peters, Polly Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2015
978-0-8075-1273-9

With photographs and sidebars, a narrative account of the United States LGBT movement’s highlights in the 20th and 21st centuries.

LGBT history before the 20th century gets only a chapter-long summary, but its powerful message shines through: “For as long as there has been human civilization, LGBT people have played a part.” Subsequent chapters chronicle historical and cultural events as well as notable LGBT people, from poet Langston Hughes to “transgender superstar” Christine Jorgensen to sharp-tongued AIDS activist Larry Kramer. This is the story of people more than movements; many segments begin with an individual story (“In the fall of 1995 Kelli Peterson, a senior at East High School in Salt Lake City, turned in her paperwork for a new afterschool club: the Gay-Straight Alliance”). The portrayal of the movement as a series of personal stories creates lively and engaging prose, though it sometimes leads to oversimplification. Controversies within the movement are presented as part of the narrative, but readers are not encouraged to think critically about which side they support. Activities presented in sidebars sometimes seem thought-provoking—asking an adult about their experience with boycotts—and sometimes less so—building a “teleidoscope,” a sort of kaleidoscope invented by the Mattachine Society’s founder.

Overall, informative and appealingly told. (resource list, endnotes, index) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

DEAD INVESTIGATION
Price, Charlie Farrar, Straus and Giroux (336 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 20, 2015
978-0-374-30227-6

A psychic 17-year-old learns to talk to the living, while an adult detective catches a serial killer in this sequel to Dead Connection (2006).

Murray’s only friends are the dead teenagers who talk to him at the cemetery and Pearl, the cemetery caretaker’s daughter, who befriended him when she helped him use his ability to speak with the dead to solve a murder in the previous book. Pearl’s father, Janocek, allows Murray to live in a cemetery shed since the boy’s unwilling to live with his prostitute mother. But despite the friendship
Georgia’s investigation will force readers to wonder about their own possible biases against taking the concerns of mentally ill people seriously.

(IF YOU’RE LUCKY)

of Pearl and Janocek, Murray is introverted and shy. While Pearl angrily pushes him to further develop his psychic powers, Murray develops an attraction for a dead girl, a cute-as-a-button dancer he’d seen from a distance while she was alive. Meanwhile, Murray’s old ally/antagonist, Deputy Gates, seeks clues about a rash of missing homeless people. Along with his fellow officers and a social-worker girlfriend, Deputy Gates does legwork worthy of a police procedural. In interwoven segments of choppy, fragmented prose conveyed in shifting points of view that give all the characters a similarly odd, adult voice, Deputy Gates, Murray, Pearl, and Janocek observe these two scarcely intersecting storylines. The sense of fragmentation is heightened by infodumps about social work, homelessness, domestic violence, and the criminal justice system. The resolution owes more to adult efforts than to Murray’s powers.

Better as a mystery than a coming-of-age tale but not even fully successful as that. (Paranormal mystery. 15-18)

(IF YOU’RE LUCKY
Prinz, Yvonne
Algonquin (288 pp.)
$17.95 | $17.95 e-book | Oct. 20, 2015
978-1-61620-554-6 e-book

A deeply intuitive teen struggles to discover the truth behind her brother’s death.

Georgia, a 17-year-old aspiring pastry chef in Northern California, hero-worshiped her carefree, globe-trotting older brother, Lucky, whose death in a surfing accident in Australia comes as a world-shattering event. It triggers an emotional avalanche for Georgia, whose life goes from routinized and responsible to grief-stricken, unspooling into paranoia. Prinz carefully plants allusions to events in Georgia’s past and to her present medication schedule, so that the revelation of her schizophrenia diagnosis is not at all surprising. When one of Lucky’s friends, a handsome charmer introducing himself as Fin, shows up for a memorial party and stays, everyone waves away her suspicion as just so much “weird” behavior. As Fin gets a job in town, starts taking Lucky’s dog for walks, and even woos Lucky’s girlfriend, Georgia questions Fin’s presence and grows convinced that he is responsible for Lucky’s death. Her investigation—including an unwise insistence on discontinuing her medication against her doctor’s orders and relying on the ensuing auditory and visual hallucinations to guide her—will force readers to wonder about their own possible biases against taking the concerns of mentally ill people seriously. An author’s note provides further information and resources on schizophrenia.

Prinz produces a solid page-turner. (Thriller. 14-18)
of leaves and branches on the ground but his best friend. After a long hug, Michael puts Monkey Moon on his shoulder, and the trio hap-pity-hops home. Pulford’s story seems like an excuse for Wilkinson’s acrylic illustrations, which capture night’s beauty with elegance and depth. The measured prose is a good match, but the book is far more mood piece than plot.


CREEPY, CRAWLY CREATURES

Rake, Matthew
Illus. by Mendez, Simon
Hungry Tomato/Lerner (32 pp.)
$7.99 paper | $26.65 PLB | Nov. 1, 2015
978-1-4677-7624-4
978-1-4677-6362-2 PLB
Series: Real-Life Monsters

Ten of nature’s little horrors, presented in a gallery of close-up photo portraits with all-too-detailed commentary.

From the evocatively named tongue-eating louse to the green-banded brood sac, which moves between hosts by crawling up inside a snail’s eyestalk to mimic a caterpillar so that a bird will eat it, these “tiny terrors and mini-monsters” are well-chosen to give even the most hardened browsers the heebie-jeebies. Mendez’s dramatic photorealistic portraits and more schematic views of each parasite or predator in action join a selection of close-up stock photos, and Rake describes behaviors or symptoms with indecent relish. “One [Indian red scorpion] sting can cause humans excruciating pain, vomiting, breathlessness, convulsions, and sometimes major heart problems. Oh, and if that isn’t enough, it can also turn a victim’s skin blue and make them froth at the mouth with pink, slimy mucus.”

The co-published Creatures of the Deep offers like delights for 10 sea creatures, from the goblin shark to the blobfish and the sarcastic fringehead (yes, really!). Each volume closes with a summary “Rogues’ Gallery” and further notes on selected entries.

Browsers’ delights, but definitely not for the squeamish. (Nonfiction. 8-10) (Creatures of the Deep: 978-1-4677-6360-8, 978-1-4677-7643-1 paper)

BLUE VOYAGE

Renn, Diana
Viking (464 pp.)
978-0-670-01559-7

A teen exiled to Turkey for the summer gets wrapped up in a deadly game of smuggle-the-priceless-artifact.

After her father, a Massachusetts gubernatorial candidate, is caught having an affair, 16-year-old Zan Glazer takes to drinking and shoplifting. To escape negative press, Zan and her mother join Zan’s recently widowed aunt for a cruise on the gorgeous Turkish Riviera. Zan, the only person under 18 on a boat full of geezers, is happy to make friends with sophisticated American exchange student Sage Powell, but when Sage exits the tour without warning, Zan finds herself in possession of several valuable—and stolen—pieces of antiquity. Unfortunately, the items are part of a larger smuggling network, and the criminal element believes Zan knows Sage’s whereabouts—and the location of a priceless urn. In a world where heroes might be villains (and the latter might be the former, with satisfying twistiness), Zan can only trust herself to find the missing urn and get to the bottom of a family mystery that may be connected to the larger picture. Almost imperceptibly, Zan, who is used to disguises, both for her father’s sake and to hide the vitiligo slowing taking over her body, learns to be her authentic self in her fight to survive, a believable character arc that suits the plot nicely.

A solid choice for readers hungry for an absorbing mystery. (Thriller. 12-up)

THE LIGHTNING QUEEN

Resau, Laura
Scholastic (336 pp.)
978-0-545-80084-6
978-0-545-80086-0 e-book

A celebration of grandparents’ wisdom, cross-cultural friendship, and the idea that nothing is impossible.

In present-day Oaxaca, young Mateo visits his Grandpa Teo in his ancestral Mixteco hometown, the Hill of Dust, for the summer. Grandpa Teo shows Mateo a shiny string of coins and begins a story “of marvels. Of impossible fortunes....Of a girl who gathered power from storms and sang back the dead.” The lyrical narrative then rewrinds to the 1950s, when a young Teo—a grandson of the village’s healer—first meets “Gypsy” girl Esma, who arrives with her family’s caravan to sing, show movies, read fortunes, and change his life. Taken with her beautiful voice and “aliveness,” Teo strikes up a friendship with “Queen of Lightening” Esma that her fortuneteller grandmother predicts will not only last a lifetime, but also extend to their own grandchildren. Each year, the Romany return, and Teo and Esma resume sharing secrets, rescuing wounded animals, and even saving each other’s lives. Inspired by the author’s time living among the Mixteco and the Romany as well as glossaries and pronunciation guides for Mexican Spanish, Mixteco, and Romany words and phrases used in the text.

This vibrant, intergenerational tale is nothing short of magical. (Magical realism. 8-13)
ALL AMERICAN BOYS
Reynolds, Jason & Kiely, Brendan
Caitlyn Dlouhy/Atheneum
(320 pp.)
978-1-4814-6333-1 e-book

Two boys, one black and one white, act out an all-too-familiar drama when the former is brutally beaten during an arrest and the latter witnesses it.

Rashad wasn’t trying to steal that bag of chips, but Officer Paul Galuzzo beats him to a pulp rather than hear him out. Quinn doesn’t know that, but he does know that no one should be treated the way he sees family friend and surrogate father Paul whaling on that black kid. Day by day over the next week, each boy tells his story; Rashad in the hospital, where he watches endless replays of the incident, and Quinn at school, where he tries to avoid it. Soon Rashad’s a trending hashtag, as his brother and friends organize a protest he’s not sure he wants. Meanwhile, Quinn negotiates basketball practice with his best friend—Galuzzo’s little brother, who expects loyalty—and Rashad’s, who tells him bluntly, “White boy like you can just walk away whenever you want.”

In a series of set pieces, Rashad contemplates his unwanted role as the latest statistic, as his brother and friends organize a protest he’s not sure he wants. Meanwhile, Quinn negotiates basketball practice with his best friend—Galuzzo’s little brother, who expects loyalty—and Rashad’s, who tells him bluntly, “White boy like you can just walk away whenever you want.” In a series of set pieces, Rashad contemplates his unwanted role as the latest statistic, and Quann at school, where he tries to avoid it. Soon Rashad’s a trending hashtag, as his brother and friends organize a protest he’s not sure he wants. Meanwhile, Quinn negotiates basketball practice with his best friend—Galuzzo’s little brother, who expects loyalty—and Rashad’s, who tells him bluntly, “White boy like you can just walk away whenever you want.”

If the hands and agenda of the authors are evident, their passion elevates the novel beyond a needed call to action to a deeply moving experience. (Fiction. 12-18)

GO GREEN!
Reynolds, Paul A. Illus. by Reynolds, Peter H.
Charlesbridge (48 pp.)
$12.95 | Oct. 13, 2015
978-1-48089-677-1 Series: Sydney & Simon

In their second STEAM-powered exploration (Full STEAM Ahead!, 2014), mouse twins Sydney and Simon investigate the problem of garbage.

Sydney’s foray into trash tracking starts with a field trip to the aquarium, where a green sea turtle is recuperating after eating plastic. It doesn’t take much of a leap for Sydney to make a connection: “The more trash we make, the more there’s a chance that some of that trash could end up in the ocean.” The two keep a tally of their family’s trash for a week, and the results are eye-opening. Their school is an even larger garbage generator. Ms. Fractalini helps the twins use science, technology, engineering, arts, and math to come up with a way to raise awareness and encourage the community to participate in a solution. A sculpture of Greenie the turtle made out of trash and a song about going green are the start of a communitywide movement to reduce, reuse, and recycle. Along the way, readers will learn lots about decomposition, how quickly garbage adds up, and ways to reduce trash. Ink-and–watercolor-wash illustrations help break up the text and put pictures in readers’ heads that will stick with them, making them likely to want to get on the green bandwagon.

Though STEAM is not emphasized as much as it was in the first book, that’s not a bad thing, as it helps readers to focus on Sydney and Simon’s problem-solving, which they are likely to see as quite doable in their own communities. (glossary, author and illustrator’s note) (Fiction. 7-10)

WHERE DO BABIES COME FROM?
Our First Talk About Birth
Roberts, Jillian Illus. by Revell, Cindy
Orca (32 pp.)
$19.95 | Oct. 13, 2015
978-1-4598-0942-0 Series: Just Enough

A child psychologist offers simple answers to a perennial question.

Opening with the statement “Nature has given every living thing a way to make a baby,” the author goes on to explain that babies come from a mother’s body, from her womb, “just below the stomach.” The combination of a sperm and an egg from a father and mother, whose “bodies fit together,” creates the seed that will become a baby. Going on to discuss a baby’s nourishment via the umbilical cord, she makes a nice connection, pointing out that the child reader has a belly button, too. When the baby is ready to be born, it exits via the mother’s birth canal, at home or in a hospital. Colorful cartoon-like digital illustrations link human children and the wide world of growing things in a variety of scenes including a growth chart measured by fruits and vegetables. These illustrations show families of different ethnicities; in one case two women carry a baby from a hospital. The backmatter—questions and answers in a smaller font without illustration—addresses more-complicated issues, using words like penis, vagina, in vitro fertilization, conception, fertility, Cesarean section as well as mentioning adoption and non-traditional families.

Far less detailed than most such explanations, this title in the Just Enough series for the very young is best as a conversation starter. (Informational picture book. 2-6)
Riddell’s fluid watercolor-and-pencil illustrations bring a grace to each poem, no matter what its subject, and he depicts many ethnicities of children (in addition to animals and non-scarey monsters).

**A GREAT BIG CUDDLE**

*Poems for the Very Young*

Rosen, Michael

Illus. by Riddell, Chris

Candlewick (80 pp.)


978-0-7636-8116-6

Short poems and accompanying illustrations make up this word-format poetry anthology for little ones.

Thirty-five poems run the gamut from high-spirited wordplay for very young listeners ("Kippy-cuppy / Kippy-cuppy / Cup, cup, cup") to relatively more complex ideas ("I’m a very, very, very slow train / And I’m very, very late again"). Some poems validate the strong emotions all children feel at some time, such as "I Don’t Want," "I Am Hungry," and "I Am Angry," while others nestle into their private worlds: "You fell off the table / And landed on your head. / I picked you up / And put you to bed," with the accompanying illustration showing a teddy bear tucked into bed. Riddell’s fluid watercolor-and-pencil illustrations bring a grace to each poem, no matter what its subject, and he depicts many ethnicities of children (in addition to animals and non-scarey monsters). The text changes size and color with each page and often within the poem itself, a fine detail in this well-designed book. Some poems are strange ("Why did the man bend down low? / Why did the man eat some snow?"), reflecting the bemusement very small children feel at the doings of adults. The poem titled "Don’t Squash" shows an elephant who’s just designed a book. Some poems are strange ("Why did the man eat some snow?"), reflecting the bemusement very small children feel at the doings of adults.

**THE TALE OF RESCUE**

Rosen, Michael J.

Illus. by Fellows, Stan

Candlewick (112 pp.)


978-0-7636-7167-9

A cattle dog rescues a family caught in a blizzard in this middle-grade adventure.

One of the first things readers will notice is the story’s thoughtful and deliberate third-person narration, sounding much like a timeless tale told ‘round the hearth and quite distinct from the many chatty, casual narratives popular in current middle-grade fiction. Adding to the traditional storytelling tone, the members of the family in the story—a 10-year-old boy and his parents—are not given names, and the name of the dog who saves them is not revealed until the end. But this somewhat formal narrative style doesn’t mean it isn’t an exciting tale of adventure. Rosen portrays the dog’s attempts to save the family so astutely that readers will feel the dog’s determination and exhaustion, and his somber, parsed descriptions of the blizzard and the family’s subsequent disorientation in the whiteout bring their cold and fear close. The writing is matched by Fellows’ superb watercolor illustrations—expertly rendered scenes that are, thankfully, liberally sprinkled throughout. When the rescued family leaves the farm the dog leads them to without even learning the name of the dog or meeting her again, readers may cry foul, but the epilogue sets things right as the story comes full circle.

A fine, superbly illustrated tale of adventure, bravery, and loyalty. (Adventure. 8-13)

**MEG GOLDBERG ON PARADE**

Rosenbaum, Andria Warmflash

Illus. by Lyles, Christopher

Kar-Ben (32 pp.)


Oct. 1, 2015

978-1-4677-3907-8 paper

978-1-4677-3907-8 e-book

An eager spectator happily becomes an enthusiastic participant in a New York City parade.

On a bright Sunday, rosy-cheeked and pigtailed Meg and her parents cross the George Washington Bridge from New Jersey to New York to attend the Celebrate Israel Parade. Meg does not want to just stand by and watch; instead she wonders if she can be of assistance to any of the performers. She then imagines herself walking with the mayor, floating above the crowds and tossing out samples of Israeli food, dancing, and carrying an Israeli flag. Aliyah-niks invite her for a visit to Israel as she continues on her way performing "Hatikvah," Israel’s national anthem, on bagpipes—possibly a musical fist. Best of all, she is crowned Grand Marshal. Dreams over and back at home, Meg falls happily asleep while her mother discovers a "shiny, gold CROWN!" that will make readers wonder whether Meg wasn’t imagining everything after all. Rosenbaum’s rhyming couplets establish a light and festive mood, while Lyles’ digitally enhanced collage art presents cheerful scenes of Fifth Avenue and parade participants.

Readers in search of an upbeat slice of New York City life will find it here. (glossary, author’s note) (Picture book. 4-7)

**KIKI AND JACQUES**

Ross, Susan

Holiday House (144 pp.)


978-0-8234-3427-5 e-book

Soccer becomes a cultural bridge for a Franco-American boy and a newly arrived Somali family in a Maine mill town.

Jacques Gagnon and his father have lived with Jacques’ grandmother since his mother died, his father sinking into alcohol-fueled depression while Grandmère Jeannette supports the family. Middle
Rubin succinctly captures the genesis of West Side Story for confirmed young fans while no doubt hastening the rush of others to listen to the music and attend revivals.

SONDHEIM

The Man Who Changed Musical Theater
Rubin, Susan Goldman
Neal Porter/Roaring Brook (192 pp.)
$21.99 | Nov. 3, 2015
978-1-59643-884-2

With a deft hand and unbridled admiration for her subject, Rubin presents the career of a musical theater giant.

Stephen Sondheim’s life as composer and lyricist is the stuff of legends, starting with his fabled apprenticeship with Oscar Hammerstein, moving on to his Broadway beginnings with West Side Story, and his subsequent successes (and some failures) in the coming decades. Much has already been written for adults about the collaborative process for West Side Story, but Rubin succinctly captures the genesis of the production for confirmed young fans while no doubt hastening the rush of others to listen to the music and attend revivals.

She then moves on to describe Gypsy, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, Company, Follies, A Little Night Music, Pacific Overtures, Sweeney Todd, Merrily We Roll Along, Sunday in the Park with George, and Into the Woods. Readers will come away with an understanding of the difficulties involved in creating Broadway shows and an appreciation of the many, many talents required to finally reach opening night. Photographs and snippets of lyrics add to the whole package.

Musical-theater lovers, whether front-of-curtain, backstage, or audience, will revel in this journey in which “Every moment makes a contribution / Every little detail plays a part.” (list of shows, film scores, bibliography, videography, discography, source notes) (Biography. 12-18)

SANDRIDER
Say, Allen
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (480 pp.)
978-0-06-227248-5
978-0-06-227250-8 e-book
Series: TodHunter Moon, 2

Alice TodHunter Moon, Apprentice to the ExtraOrdinary Wizard Septimus Heap, will need both her Magykal and PathFinding abilities to retrieve a lost Orm Egg from the evil sorcerer Oraton-Marr before it hatches. The Orm Egg timer is counting down the hours until the hatching. But other than a vague idea that the Egg must be somewhere warm, the Wizards are at a loss for where to find it. When a young girl stumbles onto one of the Ancient Ways and bursts right into their midst, Tod is the first to recognize that she might hold the information they are all seeking. But the Egg is only one of Tod’s concerns. Being the ExtraOrdinary Apprentice carries a great deal of responsibility and expectations. Somehow she needs to find the Egg, win the Apprentice Race, escape from the Wendron Witches, and defeat Oraton-Marr—all while keeping her friends safe.

This second installment in the TodHunter Moon trilogy is packed with quirky details, rich settings, and lovable characters. The fast-paced plot filled with surprising twists, dangerous foes, and one wily dragon will enthrall longtime fans. However, the large cast of characters and intricate worldbuilding require that readers start at the beginning of the series or risk losing the path.

A fully satisfying—some might say ExtraOrdinary—sequel. (Fantasy. 8-12)

THE INKER’S SHADOW
Say, Allen
Illus. by the author
Scholastic (80 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 29, 2015
978-0-545-43776-9

In this continuation of Say’s graphic memoir, Drawing from Memory (2011), he travels to the United States and receives a decidedly mixed welcome.

Arriving in southern California in 1933, 15-year-old Allen first settles in a military academy but is soon asked to leave because his sponsor comes to believe that he won’t be (as Say’s own openly hostile father puts it) “a wholesome American.” Never quite fitting in, he goes on to acquire an apartment and a job, take art classes, and, after high school graduation, set off in relief for San Francisco. “I will never,” he concludes empathically, “come back.” Though his personal voice, his gratitude for the support he does receive, and occasional flashes of rueful humor are evident enough, overall his sense of isolation from people and events around him colors his entire experience. The many quick sketches, caricatures, practice pieces, and even the relatively finished scenes of significant incidents or encounters
with which his account is interspersed, though, add life and feeling in abundance to the often spare narrative. Moreover, all along the way, his determination to become a cartoonist never fades, and at low moments Kyusuke, the free-spirited alter ego created for him back in Japan by his mentor and sensei, Noro Shinpei, pops into view to remind him that it’s all an adventure.

This small but firm step on an artist’s journey is both inspiration to his fellows and an informative window into a particular slice of the nation’s history. (afterword, with photos) (Graphic memoir. 10 & up)

**DEWEY BOB**
Schachner, Judy
Illus. by the author
Dial (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 8, 2015
978-0-8037-4120-1

The creator of Skippyjon Jones leaves behind, at least temporarily, her bestselling Siamese kitten’s Frito Bandito–speak for pure corn pone in her new story of a little hoarder raccoon.

As the book opens, young Dewey Bob sets out to find a home big enough for his burgeoning collections: of buttons, of experiences (stored in glass jars), and other stuff. Moving into a hollow tree, he immediately goes out “shopping” at the dump, where he fills his cart with a small mountain of oddments that he turns into a found-art sculpture. Lonely, he then moves on to collecting fireflies (he releases them), then manically tosses “every critter too slow to get out of my way” into his cart as potential friends. The “li’l rascal” is unfazed when everybody promptly bolts but for a kitten who can’t leave due to injured hind legs, a condition Schachner forces readers to infer from the illustrations. This meandering and tendentiously cute story is crammed into 32 pages with little regard for story arc, transition, or coherence. Schachner’s mixed-media illustrations are eye-catching, and Dewey Bob looks adorable, but they background a text that feels written around such self-consciously down-home declarations as “I’m a mean, clean, washin’ machine!” Indeed, so committed is Dewey Bob to cleanliness that his habits yield the technically accurate but wildly incongruous simile “as clean as a bucketful of bleached bones.”

An undisciplined mess. (Picture book. 3-7)

**I CAN’T WAIT!**
Schwartz, Amy
Illus. by the author
Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster (40 pp.)
978-1-4424-8231-9
978-1-4424-8232-6 e-book

Periodically, a publishing season yields titles on a common theme. This year, coincidentally, three artists explore dimensions of waiting.

Schwartz depicts three impatient preschoolers who are helpfully distracted by other characters. Headings create five segments within the longish text. William enjoys riddles; he drops clues to neighbors, whose silly guesses pass the time until Papa arrives. Anxious Annie rattles off reasons (to Puppy) why Eddie probably doesn’t like her anymore. Then he appears, wondering where she’d been. Thomas helps Grandma choose names for a new sister—until a brother is presented. Cheerful gouache and ink vignettes in a plethora of colorful patterns against a white background carry the flavor of a bygone era: wash hangs outside, batter is licked while baking, a child waits on a porch stoop. After group play, William “can’t wait” until tomorrow. By contrast, Kevin Henkes’ *Waiting* (2015) celebrates the joy in the moments themselves—the serendipity and sense of community with others who are present. In Antoinette Portis’ *Wait* (2015), a child repeatedly urges his mother to stop (and look)—with manifold rewards. Both titles feature sparse text and rich visual narratives motivating readers to draw their own conclusions—and return.

Although listeners will relate to the difficulty of waiting as presented in Schwartz’s straightforward plot, there is not more to glean. Henkes and Portis offer deeper pleasures in more succinct packages. (Picture book. 4-5)

**HOLD THIS!**
Scoppettone, Carolyn Cory
Illus. by Alpaugh, Priscilla
Islandport Press (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-1-939017-68-0

A toddler and her dad take a walk in the woods, where there is much to behold and to hold.

A “sparkling stone,” a “spiny spiral pine cone,” and a “bumpy brittle brown twig”: each find summons the titular imperative from Mika to her father. He reminds her that she’s a big girl and can hold her treasures herself. A stumble causes her to lose them, but with a kiss from dad, she’s ebulliently looking around them again. Here, swirling display type accentuates her renewed enthusiasm as she lights upon leaves, a stream, and a frog, all gathered (the stream in a cupped leaf), all lost again. Mud and a mushroom are next. (Either dad is a mycologist and recognizes it as harmless, or he is secure in the knowledge she won’t eat it, for no parental warning issues forth.) A rotten log is an immediate fail, but Mika has distracted herself (rather abruptly) with a fairy house. On the way home, a final “Hold this!” finds hands joined in companionship. Alpaugh illustrates Scoppettone’s brief, onomatopoeic text with bright watercolors. Mika has East Asian features, while her father is a blond Caucasian. Their relative sizes may give some readers pause—very young Mika seems at times quite big—but this serves to visually unite them. Small animals play fancifully in the background; at one point, mice float by on inner tubes.

A sweet celebration of sharing in the outdoors. (Picture book. 2-5)
I USED TO BE AFRAID
Seeger, Laura Vaccaro
Illus. by the author
Neal Porter/Roaring Brook (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 29, 2015
978-1-59643-631-2

Standard Seeger ingredients of careful die-cuts, lush painting, and child-centered text combine in her latest picture book.

A striking cover shows a wide-eyed girl, her mouth agape, looking to the right and seeming to dread the book’s opening. The title page doesn’t reveal what’s scared her, increasing readers’ anticipation as the girl cowers behind a chair. Subsequent pages relate that she “used to be afraid of” spiders, shadows, and the dark; each fear is then followed by a double-page spread that resolves it with the line “but not anymore” and a picture that uses integral die-cuts to renegotiate the once-scary thing. For example, the scary spider is not-so-scary when the girl gazes in wonder at its web. Other, more abstract fears—of making a mistake, change, and being alone—are then articulated, deepening the emotional resonance of the character’s experiences. Concluding spreads show her running from her big brother, who wears a scary mask. In a clever and honest twist, this fear isn’t so easily resolved. “I used to be afraid of my big BROTHER / and I STILL AM!” she declares. Seeger saves the best for last, though, with the last page slyly adding “Sometimes” as the girl tries on the mask behind her unsuspecting brother, and then closing endpapers deliver a pleasing coda of sibling play.

The ingredients may be standard, but the recipe yields a fresh, new dish that’s outstanding in every way. (Picture book. 3-6)

THE SLEEPWALKER TONIC
Segel, Jason & Miller, Kirsten
Illus. by Kwasny, Karl
Delacorte (368 pp.)
Sep. 8, 2015
978-0-385-74427-0
978-0-385-38404-9 e-book
978-1-4926-2250-5
Series: Nightmares!, 2

Charlie Laird faces a dire threat to the Netherworld and the Waking World.

Having conquered his fears of the Netherworld (Nightmares!, 2014), Charlie has little to worry about besides a summer job and his growing attraction to his best girl friend, Paige. But things in Cypress Creek never stay quiet for long. A mysterious tonic is making residents in the next town over, Orville Falls, walk the Earth like mindless zombies. The solution lies somewhere between the Waking World and the Netherworld, and Charlie, his stepmother, and his little brother, Jack, set out to solve the problem. The authors dutifully shine a light on some of the murky waters left over from the series opener, and this book’s big villain is introduced in a nifty way. Unfortunately the main threat of the novel is a bit of a bust. The zombielike creatures just aren’t a very interesting threat. These books are so concerned with the internal lives of its characters that an opponent that has nothing going on emotionally falls flat. Readers will be far more involved with Charlie and Jack’s sibling rivalry or Charlie’s growing fondness for his stepmother than the zombie element, which is a bit of a drag by comparison. Still, the story finishes strong, wrapping up the central mystery with a smart resolution and supplying a great tease for the next installment. This second installment may be doing little more than killing time, but at least it kills time effectively.

A solid-enough sequel that slips here and there but leaves readers’ goodwill intact. (Fantasy. 8-12)

DREAM ON, AMBER
Shevah, Emma
Illus. by Crawford-White, Helen
Sourcebooks Jabberwocky (272 pp.)
$12.99 | Oct. 6, 2015
978-1-4926-2250-5

Overwhelmed by a new school and worried about her little sister, Amber draws a lively Dream Dad to give her fatherly advice.

Originally published in England, Shevah’s funny yet poignant first novel makes its American debut. Eleven-year-old Londoner Amber is half-Japanese and half-Italian, but her Japanese father has not been in touch since she was young. Her younger sister, Bella, writes a letter to invite their father to her birthday party. Feeling protective, Amber responds as their dad, inadvertently convincing Bella that their father will attend her party. In addition, Amber does not fit in with the other girls in her middle school, she has a crush on a boy, and a teacher forces her to enter the school’s art contest. Drawing and creating art is Amber’s refuge, but she’s afraid to show anyone her work. During a fit of sadness, she sketches a Dream Dad and shares all her fears with her drawing. With art as her therapy and witty Dream Dad on her side, Amber realizes that she doesn’t need to navigate life on her own. Shevah tenderly captures the void of growing up without a father yet manages to create a feisty, funny heroine. Crawford-White’s whimsical pen-and-ink illustrations line the margins, as if Amber herself has added the doodles. Chapters are numbered in English, Italian, and Japanese, reflecting Amber’s multicultural identity, but refreshing, that identity does not drive the plot.

A gutsy girl in a laugh-out-loud book that navigates tough issues with finesse. (Fiction. 9-12)
The imagery of dreams and nightmares is unusual and vivid, and a web of romances and arranged marriages among the spies adds emotion and intensity.

**DREAMSTRIDER**

Livia, a girl from the poor tunnels beneath the Barstadt Empire, is hired to work as a government spy because her valuable ability to possess people through their dreams.

To dreamstride, readers learn as the suspenseful first chapter unfolds, Livia moves through the shared dream world of Oneiros and lets her soul inhabit another sleeper’s body. Once inside, Livia moves her borrowed body through the waking world, gleaning information from the sleeper’s consciousness and from whatever actions she takes while posing as the sleeper. This form of espionage puts Livia and her fellow elite operatives in considerable peril, both in the waking world and the dream world. Livia performs missions with the memory of having let her friends down in an incident whose details are revealed slowly, and her ashamed certainty that she is unworthy of her position is deeply sympathetic. The central mission here involves three different cultures, and the ways of Barstadt in particular, where dreams are woven into religion, politics, and intimate conversation, are lushly imagined. The imagery of dreams and nightmares is unusual and vivid, and a web of romances and arranged marriages among the spies adds emotion and intensity.

**Tense action and rich worldbuilding make for thrilling reading.** (Fantasy, 14-18)
COLORS
Steggall, Susan
Illus. by the author
Frances Lincoln (32 pp.)
$17.99  |  Oct. 1, 2015
978-1-84780-742-7
Series: First Wheels

Another contribution to the crowded field of big-truck picture books, with a focus on color. This offering combines an introduction to colors with depictions of a progression of vehicles, two per double-page spread: “red dump truck / red digger // orange digger / orange roller // yellow roller / yellow bulldozer,” and so on through trucks, cement mixers, cars, and vans, coming full circle back to a red dump truck and a red digger. Pink, white, gray, and black join the basic rainbow colors. The vibrant, paper-collaged illustrations are overlaid on plain, brightly colored, contrasting backgrounds; red painted vehicles appear on yellow and blue pages, yellow on tan, purple on yellow. While the images are clear and skillfully constructed, they appear static, belying their intrinsic quality of motion, and resemble a manufacturer’s catalog rather than a children’s picture book. The concept appears to be one of unadorned simplicity. Apart from a smattering of sea gulls, there are no living creatures, and the vehicle cabs look strangely empty. An opportunity to include some interesting, diverse women and men drivers has surely been missed here. Endpapers show a collection of wheels and a repetition of the truck drawings.

Aside from the spinnable color wheel insert at the end of the book, there is little here to hold the attention of even the most digger-crazy toddler. (Picture book. 2-5)

THERE’S A LITTLE BLACK SPOT ON THE SUN TODAY
Sting
Illus. by Völker, Sven
NorthSouth (40 pp.)
$19.95  |  Oct. 1, 2015
978-0-7358-4238-0

An artist’s visual interpretation of Sting’s song “King of Pain” was inspired by seeing his own son struggle through a difficult illness and find solace in its lyrics.

“That’s me / I am the king of pain” the boy, Malo, tells his father after hearing the song. Völker briefly recounts his son’s story in a prologue and accompanies both it and the song lyrics with minimalist, geometric forms intended to evoke the pain, worry, and sadness of a parent and child grappling with the child’s illness and painful treatment. Some comfort comes in naming the pain—“What does your pain feel like? Can you tell me?”—and the responses come in Sting’s lyrics with their own images of “a butterfly / trapped in a spider’s web” and “a skeleton / choking on a crust of bread” and, of course, “a little black spot / on the sun today.” The conclusion showing “the king of pain” looks like a joyful picture—does this mean that pain is conquered? Or that the king of pain is more powerful than the individual moments of suffering? It’s a bit hard to determine. The very personal story doesn’t quite end up supporting a visual narrative through combination of lyrics and art.

Heartfelt but so oblique it’s unlikely to connect with many readers. (Picture book. 7-10)

FOREVER RED
Stohl, Margaret
Marvel Press (400 pp.)
978-1-4847-2643-3
978-1-4847-3002-7 e-book
Series: Black Widow, 1

A homeless Ukrainian girl, a suburban American boy, and a world-famous superheroine save the world.

Eight years ago, Natasha Romanov rescued a little girl from Natasha’s own evil father figure, Ivan the Strange, and promised the child she’d always be there for her. Then Natasha—the Avenger known as the Black Widow—vanished from Ava Orlova’s life, leaving her in the questionable care of the government agency S.H.I.E.L.D. Now Ava is a fiercely independent teen living in the basement of a Brooklyn YWCA. Ava has free fencing lessons and her ongoing dreams of a mysterious tattooed boy she calls Alexei Manorovsky; what else does she need? When her best friend convinces her to join a fencing tournament, she chances upon both her tattooed dream boy and the Black Widow. The Black Widow insists Ava is in danger and must be protected; Alex Manor,entranced by Ava, demands to help. In the ensuing explosion-packed adventure, Alex spouts pop culture (“Fifty points for Ivanclaw”), all three protagonists get their own overwrought dramatic arcs, and cameos from Marvel characters such as Tony Stark and Phil Coulson enhance the fan appeal. Unfortunately, the plot development is largely incoherent, and worldbuilding feels phoned-in. The portrayal of Ukrainian culture owes more to Cold War comics than reality, and evil Ivan’s mad-scientist bunker laboratory could be recycled from almost any other action-movie commie supervillain’s.

Fans of the Marvel Universe aren’t by definition stupid, and even though they will be jazzed by the schmaltzy heroic high jinks, they still deserve better than this. (Adventure. 11-14)
The painterly illustrations are charmingly rendered in strongly saturated colors that add an earthy feel and make them wholly appropriate to the story.

**FIVE NICE MICE BUILD A HOUSE**

Tashiro, Chisato
Illus. by the author
Minedition (36 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 1, 2015
978-988-8240-39-5

Five mice build a house, and what a house it is!

First introduced to these five adorable mice in *Five Nice Mice & the Great Car Race* (2014), readers now find them worrying about their present living circumstances. “Our neighborhood is getting scary, and I don’t like it!” says Abby. “There are two new cats in our building!” says Bon Bon. And so they set off to find a new place to live. After searching and searching, they find themselves in front of a mountain filled with things that people have thrown away. With extraordinary detail, Tashiro illustrates the ingenious ways the mice put to use the discarded objects. It’s recycling and reusing at their best! They bathe in a contraption made out of an old flowerpot that collects rainwater, which is then fed into the house via pipes that lead to a teacup to soak in; it’s a masterpiece of engineering. They work until it is all finished, but when they settle in for a well-deserved rest: “MMMMEEEOOOOWWW!” Has all their work been wasted? Readers now see the mice are not just clever, but they are indeed, as the title says, nice. The painterly illustrations are charmingly rendered in strongly saturated colors that add an earthy feel and make them wholly appropriate to the story.

Readers will want to move in with these mice. (Picture book 4-8)

**SCRAP CITY**

Thorton, D.S.
Illus. by Bowater, Charlie
Capstone Young Readers (352 pp.)
$12.95 | Oct. 1, 2015
978-1-62370-297-7

While accompanying his father and uncle on a real estate venture to the local junkyard, 11-year-old Jerome Barnes discovers an underground town filled with sentient creatures made from discarded items.

Jerome’s scavenging leads him to Arkie, a boy fashioned out of an ice chest, an old coffee can, and other assorted objects. The two become fast friends. The odd companionship is a welcome one for Jerome, who is still grieving over the recent tragic death of both his mother and his younger brother. Arkie is equally pleased to have someone to accompany him on his adventures both aboveground and below. When the Lifestream, the force that gives life to the recycled residents of Smithytowne, is corrupted, Jerome and Arkie must work together to save the homes of humans and Scrappers alike. The premise is delicious, and the underlying message that warns against consumerism and consumption is admirable, but formulaic characters, an obvious mystery, and clunky dialogue undermine its impact. The story is further plagued by a series of plot twists that serve only to prolong the story. And while Jerome holds promise as a hero, the over-the-top villain is more cartoonish than truly frightening, destroying any real tension.

Lacks energy, finesse, and focus. (Fantasy 8-12)

**THE DOG THAT NINO DIDN’T HAVE**

van de Velde, Edouard
Illus. by Van Hertbruggen, Anton
Translated by Watkinson, Laura
Eerdmans (34 pp.)
$17.00 | Oct. 8, 2015
978-0-8028-5451-3

Nino and his imaginary dog are inseparable companions—until a tangible pet comes along.

“Nino had a dog that he didn’t have,” van de Velde writes. A dog that chases squirrels and jumps into Nino’s great-grandma’s lap, listens to phone calls from a faraway parent, and licks up saltwater tears. The illustrations depict a rumpled-looking lad roaming through a blended setting of pine woodlands, muddy yards, and rustic interiors hung with mementoes of far-off places with a dog visible as an unfilled outline. A glance at them will quickly clue in children who might be confused by the narrative conceit. But the diaphanous dog disappears one day when another dog arrives: it’s “soft. And sweet. And obedient. And naughty. And small. And everyone can see it.” This dog is afraid of Great-Grandma and can’t listen on the phone. But it’s all good, because Nino suddenly realizes that along with the much-loved dog that he does have, he can still have one, or many, that he doesn’t—and other creatures too, from a make-believe bear to a “not-hippopotamus.” Still, even surrounded by his selectively invisible menagerie, he remains a solitary figure, and his grave, lonely expression lends a poignant undertone to closing scenes of daytime play and nighttime dreaming.

A sensitive reminder that imagination can provide comfort, though not in unlimited quantity. (Picture book 6-8)

**YOUNG CHARLOTTE, FILMMAKER**

Vaca, Frank
Illus. by the author
MoMA (40 pp.)
$18.95 | Sep. 15, 2015
978-0-87070-950-0

Tiny, bespectacled Charlotte is a young filmmaker who has discovered the joy of black-and-white cinematography.

In fact, color gives her a headache. Using her very black cat, Smudge, as a model, she shoots lots of monochrome footage, which is not always understood by her classmates. At the
Museum of Modern Art, she encounters an artistic soul mate named Scarlet, who works in the film department. Scarlet introduces Charlotte to old black-and-white classics and arranges a screening of Charlotte’s film at the museum. The film is shown to great acclaim; she is the talk of the town, and even her classmates “embrace Charlotte in all her black-and-whiteness.” Mirroring the sophistication of Charlotte’s artistic ambitions, Viva’s design is funky and graphic, mostly monochrome and tan with touches of fuchsia, often for skin tones. He has a lot of fun with Manhattan signage, which pops out of the black endpapers and appears throughout the book. Surrealist figures populate the streets and peer out of windows. Aftermatter offers further information on the MoMA’s film department as well as brief bios of Lotte Reiniger and Jean Arp.

Similar in tone and feel to Young Frank, Architect (2013), this companion acts as both promotion for the MoMA and an encouragement to budding artists to think outside the box and pursue their dreams. (Picture book, 7-10)

The two-year journey of a giraffe from Sudan to Paris in the first quarter of the 19th century is exotic enough to have been told a number of times. This version is told from the deeply anthropomorphized point of view of the giraffe herself. The giraffe is captured by men with ropes and spears, carried on camelback and loaded onto a ship, where the giraffe becomes something of a media star. All of this is illustrated in lush, full-page, digitally produced art that resembles oil painting and gives a giraffe to Charles X of France.

In 1825, the Ottoman viceroy of Egypt gave a giraffe to Charles X of France.

The year two journey of a giraffe

Walsh brings back her trademark mice for another concept book (Balancing Act, 2010, etc.). Jumper has disappeared. His mice friends look inside and outside a cave, below the fallen tree and up among the branches, and even down in Mole’s tunnel. No Jumper! Is he playing hide-and-seek, or has a sneaky weasel got him? Wait, something moved underneath the leaves...and out pops their friend. The book has two levels: one is an engaging mouse story about friendship, and the other is a simple grammar tutorial that incorporates prepositions into the story. As the five mice scurry about, the descriptions of their actions are carefully composed of prepositions. Preschoolers won’t care about parts of speech; they’ll simply enjoy the mice adventure. However, language teachers will find this a clever device and a springboard for kids to craft their own stories using prepositions. Walsh’s familiar collage artwork keeps the tale, like her character, jumping. Children will enjoy spotting bits of Jumper concealed by rocks and leaves on their second and third trips through the book.

Walsh has a knack for creating illustrations and text that seem ever so simple yet have plenty of acumen, emotion, and pure fun. More mice, please. (Picture book, 4-8)

What emerges isn’t a case of sugarcoated hardship but a story that acknowledges the harsh realities of many children’s lives while also finding the grace within them.  

**TODAY IS THE DAY**

**TODAY IS THE DAY**

Walters, Eric
Illus. by Fernandes, Eugenie
Tundra (32 pp.)
978-1-77049-648-4

A different sort of birthday celebration is at the bighearted center of this picture book.

Mutianu lives in an African orphanage. She and the other children are excited about the arrival of a special day when all of them are celebrated with a birthday party. This inclusive, joyful day allows those children (including Mutianu) who don’t know their actual birth dates to be celebrated alongside those who do, and as endnotes explain, it also helps give them legal standing as Kenyan citizens. After the children do daily chores, visitors arrive, presents are distributed, and Mutianu’s most anticipated moment comes with cake and the singing of the birthday song. In a sensitive acknowledgement of complex circumstances, Mutianu’s beloved grandmother is one of the visitors, and other children welcome extended family members, too. Text and colorful art with expressive line combine to depict the orphanage as a place of care and safety for the children, who still have ties to family despite significant losses and difficulties. What emerges isn’t a case of sugarcoated hardship but a story that
acknowledges the harsh realities of many children’s lives while also finding the grace within them. Endnotes ground the story in its inspiration from a real orphanage in Kenya while also explaining to more privileged Western children how someone might not know his or her birthday.

Both deeply important and purely joyful. (Picture book. 4-8)

WEBSER

**Tale of an Outlaw**

White, Ellen Emerson  
Aladdin (256 pp.)  
978-1-4814-2201-7  
978-1-4814-2203-1 e-book

A theatrical introduction to human anatomy, as well-choreographed as it is informative.

In 11 “Acts” hosted con brio by a skeletal impresario (“Bring out the lungs!”), Wicks parades a revue of body systems across a curtained stage. It’s a full program, with a teeming supporting cast from Dopamine to Diaphragm, Golgi Body to Gastroenteritis joining more-familiar headliners. The presentation opens with a zoom down to the cellular and even molecular levels to lay foundations for later macro and micro views of digestion, infection, and disease. Following this, the five senses (only five), the “dance of the oxygen fairies,” allergic reactions, and other anatomical processes that make up each system’s major components, most sporting cheery emoji-style faces, expressively demonstrate their respective functions. The reproductive system’s named parts deliver a frank but visually discreet turn with descriptions of erections and fertilization but no direct depictions, and it stops with the onset of puberty. The performances are enhanced by labeled diagrams, pitches on relevant topics from the importance of immunization and proper nutrition to synonyms for “fart,” and lists of important words and further resources. A few miscues aside (no, the speed of sound is not invariant), it’s a grand show, with a logically placed intermission following a peek into the bladder and a literal “wrap” at the end as the emcee puts herself together from inside out.

It’s a lot to take in at one sitting, but this anatomical extravaganza really gets to the heart of the matter. Not to mention the guts, nerves, veins, bones.... (glossary, bibliography) (Graphic nonfiction. 12-14)

PAPER HEARTS

Wiviott, Meg  
McElderry (368 pp.)  
978-1-4814-3983-1  
978-1-4814-3985-5 e-book

The Holocaust: a time of unimaginable horror, with moments of incandescence. Following her picture book with Josée Bisaillon, *Benno and the Night of Broken Glass* (2010), Wiviott’s debut for teens, a novel in (largely excellent) verse, tells the fictionalized but carefully researched story surrounding one of those incandescent moments. In Auschwitz-Birkenau, Zlatka and Fania, Polish, Jewish, and determined to survive, become friends and replacement sisters. In each other, and in their small group of friends, they find strength. The titular heart is a tiny thing: a
folded and stitched card penciled with birthday wishes that Zlatka creates for Fania for her 20th birthday, two years after she was captured trying to pass as Aryan. It is also a massive act of rebellion for every girl involved. It is, in the end, “A reason to take risks. / A reason to keep living.” If the heart were not an actual artifact (on display in Montreal), its metaphoric aptness might seem schmaltzy, but it is real, as are the transcribed wishes interspersed among the poems. Even in the darkness, light and love can survive, as Wiviott makes abundantly clear by picking a single thread from the millions of stories that occurred and stitching in context and facts to make both the larger horror and the smaller grace shine through.

An incredible story, told with respect and love, this deserves a wide readership. Just have the tissue box handy. (glossary, historical note, bibliography) (Historical fiction/verse 12 & up)

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Cheery commercial scripts, news transcripts, and other ephemera of this plastic society punctuate Zoë’s narration, bearing witness to her grim environment, which, heartbreakingly, has no defeatable villain.

A TOWER OF GIRAFFES

Peters, Alexander

Atheneum (448 pp.)

$17.99 | Oct. 27, 2015

978-1-4814-1983-3 e-book

$10.99 e-book

Reeling from their widowed father’s sudden death, Tess and Axel are whisked from rural Baldwin, New York, to Helsinki by Jaana, the stern Finnish grandmother they’ve just met, to live in their grandparents’ tiny condo—a prospect dismaying to all, including the children’s long-dead mother, who has her own agenda.

While young teen Tess and Jaana engage in a battle of strong wills, Axel, 10, has other worries. Like his grandfather Otso, an otherwise healthy wheelchair user, and his mother, Alex has a rare form of muscular dystrophy with an uncertain prognosis. Saara died giving birth to him, and Axel himself is in fragile health. Lately, he’s been haunted by a wheelchair only he can see and that follows him everywhere. That’s not all. Tess also saw the bear and the Keeper back in New York, but Axel doesn’t know how to convince her the bear is their mother, who’s set them a difficult task. Style and
characterization are strengths, along with diverse, evocative settings, including Baldwin, a seedy trailer in Florida, Finnish cottage country, and the magical path connecting them. The plot becomes confusing when realistic elements increasingly clash with Kalevala-infused fantasy. While the point of view alternates between both kids, Axel is the center of gravity; his choices increasingly drive the action until the startlingly abrupt ending.

A thoroughly original tale with plenty of appeal for older middle-graders through teens. (Fantasy. 11-16)

HOTEL RUBY
Young, Suzanne
Simon Pulse/Simon & Schuster (388 pp.)
978-1-4814-2302-1 e-book

Audrey knows her father is grief-stricken over the death of her mother, but abandoning her and her brother at the home of a grandmother they hardly know is almost unforgivable.

So when the family stops to rest at the luxurious and extravagant Hotel Ruby, Audrey makes the most of her last night of freedom. She sneaks into the hotel’s “anniversary party”—an invitation-only event—where she meets and falls head over heels for the charming Elias Lange, a longtime resident of the Ruby. But Audrey’s passion for Elias isn’t enough to distract her from the nagging feeling that things at the Ruby just aren’t quite right: haunting music drifts down the corridor of the 13th floor, where Audrey is staying; the concierge is both ominous and seemingly omniscient; and some guests are not enthusiastic about attending the invitation-only anniversary parties that seem to occur every night. The haunted-hotel plot is not entirely original, and some readers may predict the ending after reading the first 30 pages. However, Young accurately captures each resident’s grief, and diverse, evocative set-pieces, including Baldwin, a seedy trailer in Florida, a Finnish cottage country, and the magical path connecting them. The plot becomes confusing when realistic elements increasingly clash with Kalevala-infused fantasy. While the point of view alternates between both kids, Axel is the center of gravity; his choices increasingly drive the action until the startlingly abrupt ending.

A thoroughly original tale with plenty of appeal for older middle-graders through teens. (Fantasy. 11-16)

NINA BABY
Zeltser, David
Illus. by Goode, Diane
Chronicle (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Nov. 3, 2015
978-1-4521-3542-7

Ninjas have appeared recently in day cares as well as dojos, but how does a toddler ninja react when she meets the ultimate Kung Fu Master?

Nina was born a ninja, a fact apparent when she karate-chops the doctor who gives her bottom a gentle, welcoming thump. In no time she’s mastered the arts of the sneak attack (purloining doughnuts), vanishing (scaling the mobile above her crib), and hand-to-hand combat (diaper changes—need we say more?). All is more or less well until time goes by, and another ninja baby enters the home. Nina notes that the baby is clearly a Master by the way he disarms his captors and makes them carry him everywhere. After a quick tantrum, Nina realizes that she has a thing or two to learn from her equal in the ninja arts. Parents will naturally understand Zeltser’s wry metaphor, but the book is also an original take on the ways in which children may cope with new baby siblings (in this case, emulating their siblings’ more cuddly aspects). All the while, Goode’s sublime ink-and-watercolor drawings keep the violence in check and render even the most malicious tantrum nothing short of a magnificent exercise in technique. The image of Nina and the baby standing together, fists up for combat, is both hysterical and adorable.

Niveling undetected into your heart, this book effectively feeds the ninja need. (Picture book. 4-7)

PROMISES I MADE
Zink, Michelle
HarperTeen (304 pp.)
978-0-06-232717-8 e-book
Series: Lies I Told, 2

In this sequel to Lies I Told (2014), Grace tries to atone for the major theft she helped her adoptive parents commit. Grace and her big brother, Parker, were adopted out of the foster-care system by a con-artist couple who taught them the art of grifting. As an outwardly normal-looking family, they planned and pulled off cons on wealthy neighbors. Last year, however, they stole a hoard of gold from the family of Logan, Grace’s boyfriend. Parker was captured, and Grace now ditches her adoptive dad, Cormac, to return to the scene of the crime and try somehow to get Parker out of prison. She meets a former grifter who has a beef with Cormac, and they team up to try to catch him so that Grace will have ammunition for a plea deal with the prosecutor. However, finding Cormac may prove to be difficult. Zink keeps pages turning as Grace tries to stay undercover even as she contacts a detective she thinks she can trust. With every choice she makes, she seems poised on the edge of a cliff, and readers will feel that vertigo all the way through. Grace’s struggle with her guilt and her desire to stay free so she can help Parker lends even further tension to the story.

Riveting. (Thriller. 12-18)
CONTINUING SERIES

LOST AND FOUND
Adderson, Caroline
Illus. by Shiell, Mike
Kids Can (128 pp.)
$15.95 | Sep. 1, 2015
978-1-77138-014-0
Jasper John Dooley, 5
(Fiction. 7-10)

STANLEY’S DINER
Bee, William
Illus. by the author
Peachtree (32 pp.)
$14.95 | Sep. 1, 2015
978-1-56145-802-8
Stanley the Hamster
(Picture book. 3-7)

DO YOU KNOW THE RHINOCEROS?
Bergeron, Alain M. & Quintin, Michel & Sampar
Illus. by Sampar
Fitzhenry & Whiteside (64 pp.)
$9.95 paper | Sep. 1, 2015
978-1-55455-354-9
Do You Know...?
(Nonfiction. 7-11)

DO YOU KNOW TIGERS?
Bergeron, Alain M. & Quintin, Michel & Sampar
Illus. by Sampar
Fitzhenry & Whiteside (64 pp.)
$9.95 paper | Sep. 1, 2015
978-1-55455-355-6
Do You Know...?
(Nonfiction. 7-11)

OUT OF BOUNDS
Bowen, Fred
Peachtree (144 pp.)
$14.95 | $5.95 paper | Aug. 1, 2015
978-1-56145-845-5
978-1-56145-894-3 paper
Fred Bowen Sports Stories, 11
(Fiction. 7-12)

CLIFFORD CELEBRATES HANUKKAH
Bridwell, Norman
Illus. by the author
Scholastic (32 pp.)
$3.99 paper | Sep. 29, 2015
978-0-545-82334-0
Clifford the Big Red Dog
(Picture book. 3-5)

MONSTER NEEDS YOUR VOTE
Czajak, Paul
Illus. by Grick, Wendy
Mighty Media Kids (32 pp.)
$16.95 | Aug. 25, 2015
978-1-938063-63-3
Monster & Me, 5
(Picture book. 5-7)

SECRET OF THE CHANGELING
Donbavand, Tommy
Illus. by the author
Candlewick (128 pp.)
$5.99 paper | Aug. 4, 2015
978-0-7636-5764-2
Scream Street, 12
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FLAME OF THE DRAGON
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Illus. by the author
Candlewick (128 pp.)
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978-0-7636-5765-9
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ARCTIC FREEZE
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978-0-545-77355-3
Race the Wild, 3
(Adventure. 7-10)

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Falcone, L.M.
Illus. by Smith, Kim
Kids Can (96 pp.)
$12.95 | $6.95 paper | Sep. 1, 2015
978-1-77138-355-0
978-1-77138-019-5 paper
Ghost and Max Monroe, 3
(Mystery. 6-9)

NOT WHAT I EXPECTED
Friedman, Laurie
Illus. by Shalovelli, Natasha
Darby Creek (176 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 1, 2015
978-1-4677-5888-4
Mostly Miserable Life of April Sinclair, 5
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Our preview of books first published overseas
By Catherine Hickley

Beauty Is a Wound
Kurniawan, Eka
Trans. by Tucker, Annie
U.S.: Sept. 8, 2015 | New Directions
Indonesia: 2002 | Gramedia Pustaka Utama

A rare opportunity to read an Indonesian novel in translation arrives this fall with the publication of Kurniawan’s exuberant saga weaving politics, magic, folklore, sex, and violence to grotesque, comic, and tragic effect. The beautiful prostitute Dewi Ayu opens the novel by returning from the dead to find the daughter she had prayed would be born hideous. Kurniawan’s characters are roughly drawn, and his depiction of relations between the sexes is depressing and simplistic. But his portrayal of the upheavals and indignities suffered by Indonesia in the 20th century is powerful, making his colorful, fast-paced novel absorbing and insightful despite its shortcomings. Beauty Is a Wound received a starred review in the July 1, 2015, issue.

Private Life
De Sagarra, Josep Maria
Trans. by Newman, Mary Ann
Spain: 1932 | Anagrama

Josep Maria de Sagarra is considered one of the great writers of Catalan literature and translated works by Dante, Shakespeare, Molière, and Gogol into his native language. Yet his own novel, which caused a scandal when it was published more than 80 years ago, has never before been translated into English. It opens with the insufferably selfish Frederic de Lloberola waking with a hangover in the bed of an ex-lover, realizing he has made a mistake and fretting about his desperate financial straits. The book is a damning critique of the decadence and moral corruption of Barcelona between the wars, its aristocratic characters mired in economic and sexual scandal. Private Life received a starred review in the July 15, 2015, issue.

We That Are Left
Clark, Clare
U.K.: April 2, 2015 | Harvill Secker

An elegiac story capturing a time of great turbulence and loss, We That Are Left focuses on the fortunes of a wealthy English family before, during, and after World War I. Oskar Gruenewald, the son of a German composer, spends summers with his widowed mother at the Melville family’s country home, a Victorian folly that the baronet is determined to keep in the family despite the death of his heir at the front, inheritance taxes, and daughters who have other plans. Clark mingles melancholy for a lost generation of young men and the erosion of the landed gentry’s privileges with excitement for progress: Einstein’s new theories and suffrage for women.

Tristano Dies: A Life
Tabucchi, Antonio
Trans. by Harris, Elizabeth
Italy: 2004 | Feltrinelli

It’s a sweltering August, and Tristano, a hero of the Italian resistance, is dying. He calls a writer to his bedside to recount his life, in between doses of morphine administered by a German woman who cares for him. This short novel is a stream-of-consciousness look back on his decisions, defining moments, loves, and betrayals with digressions about the Elgin Marbles, chocolate cake, the next morphine dose, and elephant funerals. Tabucchi died in 2012 in Portugal, where he spent much of his life. He won many accolades in his lifetime, including being named Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres by the French government.

Catherine Hickley is a Berlin-based arts journalist. Her first book, The Munich Art Hoard: Hitler’s Dealer and His Secret Legacy, will be published by Thames & Hudson (except in North America) on Sept. 21.

By Catherine Hickley
In Bakutis’ debut epic fantasy, a young mage discovers the return of a great evil while she attempts to save her mother and friends.

Nineteen years ago, Xander woke up paralyzed and heard two people discussing how to deal with his dangerous unborn daughter—perhaps even killing her. Surprisingly, these two people are his father and grandmother, and they have good reason (so they think): unborn Kara has special heritage, and she’ll be the target for the demonic Mavoureen. When readers meet Kara 19 years later, she has no memory of her real father, Xander, or of the role she might play in the battle with the Mavoureen. Now an accomplished mage at the Magic Academy of Solyr and on a quest for magical ingredients to save her mother from a horrible disease, Kara finds an amnesiac man who knows her name and has some strange powers of his own. She also seeks the position of Royal Apprentice and ends up fighting for it with the rich jerk student. These mysteries and schoolyard fights lead into a more epic fight, involving the gods who made the world, a vengeance-seeking mage who has given her allegiance to the demons, and a potential war between provinces that Kara and her friends race to stop. This may sound typical of modern fantasy, but the result is an entertaining debut that avoids many missteps. While there’s a lot of info about the world, Bakutis nicely uses the students and the amnesiac man to serve up these details, helping the information feel less like an undigested lump of worldbuilding notes. Plus, the world largely holds together and doesn’t brim with stuff merely because the author thought it was cool. The characters are largely engaging, each with his or her own story to tell, from the healer who faces a terrible choice to the aforementioned rich jerk who turns out to have a more noble side. Toward the end, the power level and cast size both seem to increase, and Kara seems sometimes to be buffeted by other characters rather than making her own choices. Perhaps the sequel will help refocus.

An entertaining fantasy debut.
DEATH BY ARBITRAGE OR LIVE LOW DIE HIGH
Barthel, Urno & Chester, Art
Manuscript

This third volume in a series of techno-thrillers pits Chester and Urno’s (Death by Tech, 2014, etc.) scientist/sleuth against murderous inside traders. Halsted Aeronautic Lab scientist and amateur detective Evan Olsson’s latest string of misadventures begins at the Beverly Hills Hotel. He and girlfriend Lissa Larson are enjoying a magical evening when a fire alarm clears the building. Evan keeps the blaze in mind when he begins working with FBI agent Matt Emerson on a nationwide system to catch inside traders. Intending to be more thorough than the Securities and Exchange Commission, they begin by considering “traders who always seem to get it right, who act in advance of public information.” After a corporate jet for the K-Works company goes down, Evan and Matt are alerted to profitable trading activity by Raptor Holdings, run by Festron Bordick. While working this case, Evan juggles a tricky love life: the woman he desires, Lissa, is artistic but distant; the woman who desires him, Holly, is an emotional manipulator (and also Lissa’s stepsister) who insists on meddling in his relationship. Complicating Evan’s world further is his very own Moriarty, Chet Parsons, a former colleague who likes to drop in and try to kill him. Authors Chester and Urno pepper this sophisticated blend of finance, technology, and mystery with heavy doses of dry wit. Evan’s narration pops: “The loss of the shirt pained me, though not as much as second-degree burns would have.” Explanations of trading data are clear and frequently excellent, as is the psychology driving the scientific mind: “I am always looking for simplifications, ways to explain two different observations with a single underlying principle.” Most remarkable is the balance achieved among the novel’s many winding plotlines. Al, Evan’s artificially intelligent best friend, helps keep him sane during quiet moments, and in a masterful twist, the villains use Evan and Lissa’s penchant for vacations in the final gambit. Whether or not you’ve read the first two Evan Olsson mysteries, his newest is an engrossing romp filled with bleeding-edge surprises.

An extremely clever thriller that dazzles on every level.

SHARKIE AND THE HAUNTED CAT BOX
Bergmann, Daniel
CreateSpace (46 pp.)
$10.25 paper  May 6, 2015
978-1-5005-9123-6

In his latest picture book, Bergmann (The Curse of the Baskervilles, 2015, etc.) challenges readers to guess the surprise that frightens a brave cat on a stormy night.

Everyone’s got a story, and, as editors at a book review magazine, we’ve read most of them. Among the 4,500 or so books Kirkus Indie reviews a year, various storylines, characters, and even plot twists have become a little too familiar. Usually it’s the result of trend-chasing (mercenary or not), the author getting overly comfortable in a genre, or simply a lack of imagination. Whatever the reason, we’ve become experts in cliché. So it’s refreshing to read twists on tropes and an author who, knowing the cliché, beats it.

R.R. Reynolds has done it twice, first in his starred Masters’ Mysterium: Wisconsin Dells, then in also-starred Masters’ Mysterium: Las Vegas. We said the sequel “takes the angels-vs.-demons genre—one filled with mind-numbing stereotypes and clichés—and creates a profound new mythos.”

In her starred novel, In a Vertigo of Silence—we called it “a quiet yet powerful saga of imperfection and the struggle for family connection”—Miriam Polli finds new ground in “an intricate web of family secrets as they are created, buried, and discovered.” “The story grows honestly and organically,” we said, borrowing a phrase from one of the female leads, and “emotional exploration feels cathartic without becoming cliché.”

Of course, we don’t expect each book to redefine its genre. Fortunately, as we’re sometimes reminded, there’s still plenty of room to maneuver. —R.L.

Ryan Leabey is an Indie editor.
A fierce thunderstorm wakes Sharkie the cat in the middle of what turns out to be “the most terrifying night of my life.” With all the hubbub, “no sense in trying to go back to sleep now,” he thinks. Sharkie stumbles through a dark house lit only in flashes by the lightning, making his way to his litter box on the first floor. Despite the noise of the storm, the burned-out light, and the icy cold floor, he insists he’s not scared, not until he feels something grabbing him with its claws. Sharkie races back to his owner’s bedroom, determined not to let the thing get him. He’s even ready to sacrifice his owner to the monster—“maybe it will take him instead!” Bergmann’s story demands to be read aloud, with plenty of sound effects highlighted in bold: the ka-boom of the thunder, the rat-a-tat-tat of rain hitting the window, even the buzzzzzz of the fluorescent light. Soriano’s full-color art complements the text, infusing the rooms Sharkie passes through with spooky, cartoonish atmosphere. Kids will giggle at the creepy photos decorating the hallway and the poor, bedraggled dog shut outside in the storm, pawing at the door to come in. (They may feel sorry for him, too, although Sharkie certainly doesn’t.) Sketches of rain and lightning against a teal background enliven even the pages without illustrations. As for whatever is chasing Sharkie, that’s left out of the picture until the very end, giving kids and grown-up readers alike the chance to guess what it could possibly be. (It’s quite a surprise.) The interactive element makes the book even more fun to read, and while the visual punch line at the end may mildly gross out some parents, it will likely leave young readers giggling.

**A fun read-aloud for the kindergarten set.**

**FLIRTING WITH TROUBLE**

Bhaskar, Sita

Rookwood Press (288 pp.)

$22.95 paper | Jan. 1, 2015

978-1-886365-32-2

A novella and short stories interconnect in Bhaskar’s (*Shielding Her Modesty, 2006*) strong collection set in India and the United States.

The title novella begins with a young Tamil couple, Kasturi and Nagaraj, who are working to establish themselves in life. Simply applying for a job means a scramble to scrape up enough small coins for a postal order. As time goes on, their fiery, willful daughter, Subhadra, gets arrested after organizing a student strike; her father, too, is jailed overnight during an Indian national emergency. Subhadra immigrates to America with her new husband, and years later, her assimilated teenage son, Abhi, gets into drug-related trouble and is sent to India for a reformatory visit. Initially dismissive of the idea, he eventually gains a new perspective on family ties. The remaining 11 short stories mostly have links to the novella through place or family. They’re also linked in their themes of the powerful and the powerless, culture clashes, and the emigrant experience. Bhaskar writes with subtlety, wit, and strength in these excellent pieces, particularly when pointing out the Orwellian nature of power and its narratives. In “Bring Democracy to Islam,” for example, an emigrant Sikh praises America to his wife: “You can be what you want in this country...” Serala noticed he did not say as much when they drove past American Indian reservations, only that he was silent for several miles after that. In “Swayamvaran,” police round up confused male and female workers for unclear reasons and follow the event with a hurried ceremony. A policeman finally explains: “You got married. Didn’t you know?...The number of couples married equals the chief minister’s age. Where can we produce so many couples on such short notice?” A policewoman’s final comment sums up the attitude that’s needed to survive in such a world: “Fate has given you a wife who can turn a political farce into an auspicious occasion. What more can a man ask for?” Bhaskar’s deft, sympathetic, but unsentimental characterizations of such people as a Chicago teenager or a street vendor add further dimension to the collection.

Engaging stories that illuminate the contradictions and beauty of the Indian experience.

**CODE NAME: TRACKER**

Blum, Art

CreateSpace (228 pp.)

$12.99 paper | Apr. 21, 2015

978-1-5114-5216-8

Blum’s supernatural thriller features a bogus psychic who may hold the key to rescuing captive children and thwarting an imminent terrorist attack.

Ryan Gordon is making a decent living as the self-described “Psychic to the Stars.” It’s all for show, though; he’s just using intuition and info fed through an earpiece. So when CIA agents secure Ryan to a chair and demand he use his ability to stop a terrorist strike called the Flower Garden, he chalks it up to a hallucination; he is off his meds. Other issues surface, however, like former CIA assassin Seth Roemer, who knew Ryan as a boy; and Sen. Zachary Karbin, who’s sure Ryan can find his kidnapped daughter, Jackie. Ryan may actually be “super psychic” Kenny Vickers, whom the CIA had worked with years ago. He also could help save the Crystal Children, psychics the agency has imprisoned to use as weapons and impede the terrorists’ plan. Much of the author’s plot consists of past events, and Ryan spends a good deal of time denying his power or trying to recall apparently repressed memories. But Blum retains interest by gradually revealing vital details, like the initial mystery surrounding Ryan’s parents; his half brother, Arthur, who might not be as dead as he thought; and men who tried to take young Ryan and ended up in pieces. The supernatural elements are notable: most of the Crystal Children have telepathy, but Ryan has a few more things in his arsenal, including telekinesis and astral projection. Yet the plot outside the paranormal is equally worthy. The terrorist cell, for example, led by the Undertaker, is an undeniable threat, while a powerful someone orders the liquidation of the program, Starburst, which contains the Crystal Children and...
basically anyone who knows about them. There’s also a never-ending and immensely enjoyable shifting of alliances, as when a good guy or two, out of self-preservation, lend a hand to the baddies. The ending ties everything up in a nice, tight bow; it’s convincing but unfortunately marks the end for several curious characters, like Ryan’s stepmom/manager, Maria, who didn’t get enough of the spotlight.

A beefy, diverting plot with a compelling protagonist to match.

In this debut memoir, a retired cop shares his life experiences and insights that contributed to his helping hundreds of people decide against suicide.

As a highway patrol officer, Briggs’ beat included San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge—a top suicide destination. Unhappy people are, just like tourists, drawn to the iconic landmark’s beautiful setting and mysterious fogs. “I know that every ten days or so, someone walks on the Bridge and never comes back,” writes Briggs of his two decades working the bridge, during which he lost only two people to suicide and helped to save more than 200. (A suicide-deterrent net is expected to be completed this year.) Now retired, Briggs is an advocate for suicide awareness and prevention. When he began, however, he had no training in such matters; what he did have was an awareness of his own losses, as well as severe health problems, grief, and depression, as detailed here with openness and honesty.

The connections between verses and images are sometimes less than obvious, however, while the lack of punctuation can introduce mild confusion, as in “Don’t cling / let go / say / the ones who / don’t know / you can’t cling / to not clinging.” Conversely, “Whose Skin Is River Skin” is a beautifully coherent run-on sentence listing the oxbow’s species richness, with the affectionate refrain “you are / mine.” There are only eight pages of prose—a shame since it’s almost more poetic than the untitled poems alternate with color photographs. The photos find unusual angles—looking up at birds or grasses—or zoom in for extreme close-ups of shadows, leaves, and fungi. A few are so blurred as to resemble abstract paintings, compensating for a few less original images, like a red rose or Canada geese standing on one leg. The accompanying free verse poems, which often provide commentary on the photos (or vice versa), are haiku-like in their brevity and rhythm: “Tonight a winter / moon over the bosque / for once the raccoons / are silent” runs one in its entirety. There are only eight pages of prose—a shame since it’s almost more poetic than the untitled poems alternate with color photographs. The photos find unusual angles—looking up at birds or grasses—or zoom in for extreme close-ups of shadows, leaves, and fungi. A few are so blurred as to resemble abstract paintings, compensating for a few less original images, like a red rose or Canada geese standing on one leg. The accompanying free verse poems, which often provide commentary on the photos (or vice versa), are haiku-like in their brevity and rhythm: “Tonight a winter / moon over the bosque / for once the raccoons / are silent” runs one in its entirety. 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The accompanying free verse poems, which often provide commentary on the photos (or vice versa), are haiku-like in their brevity and rhythm: “Tonight a winter / moon over the bosque / for once the raccoons / are silent” runs one in its entirety.
Lady Dorothy Boone grew up knowing she was different from the family's stellar reputation. When he screws up a prisoner-transfer job, cop dad Harris gives Wes one last chance by reassigning him to the Witches Protection Program. Before Wes can utter doubt of witches' existence, he and new partner Alistair Verne have a case. Witch Junie "Baby Fat" Meadows suspects something sinister is happening at Pendragon Cosmetics. There's a lot of secrecy surrounding the release of a new face cream, and according to Morgan, the niece of CEO Bernadette Pendragon, the cream's formula includes a bit of witches' DNA. Wes, Alistair, and Morgan try to stop Bernadette from using the beauty product to influence others' thoughts. The spirited novel establishes its rules right away. The program, for example, protects only the Davinas, the good ones, while the Willas are the dark witches who thrive on mayhem. Cash revels in his deliberately old-school approach: witches cook spells in a pot; they ride brooms; and their spells rhyme, like Morgan's hilarious chant of "No time to waste, give me speed, slide down forty floors on my ass, indeed." Readers will breeze through this quick read, and the cast adds to the fun: Bernadette is a villain so powerful she can take down a helicopter with ease; Wes may be a skeptic, but he doesn't waste time discounting the things he sees—especially when it's a woman transforming into a panther and using his foot as a chew toy. Wes is a fascinating protagonist whose biggest hurdle, it seems, is dyslexia, or what his gruff father flipantly calls "that reading thing." The short, action-laden novel speeds past any nuances from developing characters' relationships, but Cash does leave room for a couple of surprises. The story's case is more or less wrapped up by the end, with a lingering impression that this could be the first of many to come.

Cleverly offbeat, often cheeky, and loads of fun.

**Witches Protection Program**
Cash, Michael Phillip
CreateSpace (238 pp.)
$10.69 e-book | May 14, 2015

An agent's newest assignment finds him facing off against a nefarious witch hellbent on world domination in Cash's (*The After House*, 2014, etc.) thriller-comedy.

Wes Rockville hasn't been living up to his law enforcement family's stellar reputation. When he screws up a prisoner-transfer job, cop dad Harris gives Wes one last chance by reassigning him to the Witches Protection Program. Before Wes can

**The Mind of the African Strongman**
Cohen, Herman J.
Vellum (218 pp.)
$34.00 | $24.00 paper | May 5, 2015

Retired diplomat Cohen (*Intervening in Africa*, 2000) provides insight into the tension between dictatorship and democracy in post-colonial Africa.

With his extensive diplomatic experience—he served as director for Central African Affairs and George H.W. Bush's assistant secretary of state—Cohen is well-placed to comment on African politics for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training-DACOR Diplomats and Diplomacy series. He met and negotiated with many African leaders, and he relies on these personal anecdotes rather than stats for context and background. Subjects are helpfully grouped according to their commonalities—Francophone, British Commonwealth, or military chiefs. The work also contrasts recent pairs of leaders in Congo, Liberia, and South Africa. Cohen's sharp eye reveals dictators' fascinating and bizarre behavior: Albert-Bernard Bongo of Gabon, a 5-foot-1-inch lothario, tried to change the law so...
Taking the long view both geographically and chronologically, (genetic material) and RNA (epigenetic material) collaborate for instance, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe “may be Africa’s last true-believing Marxist-Leninist”; Mobutu Sese Seko “straddled two worlds—the traditional African village culture and Western ways.” Taglines heading each chapter exemplify this ability to encapsulate a politician’s legacy, like “Ibrahim Babangida—Nigeria: The General Who Found Democracy Inconvenient.” Although military coups and illegitimate leadership continue, Cohen is optimistic about Africa’s future, particularly since Obama is willing to show the necessary “tough love.” Sixteen black-and-white images, some of which feature Cohen meeting with the leaders, including Leopold Sedar Senghor and Felix Houphouet-Boigny, accompany the text.

This often entertaining survey of recent African political history should interest both scholars and laypeople.

A CONVERGENCE OF TWO MINDS
Origins of Self-awareness and Identity
Croxton, Randolph R.
Palustris Press (161 pp.)
Aug. 30, 2015
978-0-9961176-0-9

In this nonfiction work, Croxton argues that modern humans succeed through the interaction of the distinctly male and female hemispheres of the brain.

There have always been traits that genetics cannot explain, which are frequently ascribed to environmental conditions—that is, the concept of “nurture” rather than “nature.” Croxton disagrees and says that he believes that one’s personality traits are also products of nature. They’re unique and original to each person, he argues, and they stem from an ongoing genetic process expressed as a blend of ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’ in the respective hemispheres of the brain: our ‘two minds.’ ” Essential to his theory, he says, is understanding the way that DNA (genetic material) and RNA (epigenetic material) collaborate to create a species that’s shaped by the past yet retains flexibility for future development. Croxton bolsters his assertions by taking readers through a psychological history of civilization, from Neolithic warfare and societal organization to the rise of self-awareness and religion. Along the way, he charts the neurological traits of “male” and “female,” describing how their symbiotic interaction shaped the ascendency of man from an ape of the plain to the master of the Earth. Some readers may take issue with the designation of the right hemisphere as female and the left as male. But although this distinction isn’t entirely semantic, people may miss Croxton’s engaging larger point if they focus solely on such gender-political issues: by elevating the creative, trusting right brain to the level of the destructive, dominating left brain, he says, Homo sapiens was able to pull ahead of other left-brain–dominant hominid groups. Croxton pursues this argument with recent findings from the fields of neurology, psychiatry, and anthropology. His strategy is wonkish and minutiae-based, and readers may sometimes feel lost in all the data. Even so, this book offers a thoughtful presentation of an intriguing theory.

A thought-provoking explanation for the origins of personality.
old and had never seen rain"). Her descriptions of small details of daily life will allow readers to easily picture the world that she encountered 40 years ago.

An engaging, readable depiction of the foreign-aid worker experience.

**THE OFFERING**

el Moncef, Salah

CreateSpace (432 pp.)

$15.99 paper | May 7, 2015

978-1-5008-5944-2

El Moncef (Sleepwalking, 2012, etc.) offers a psychological thriller in which one man must solve the terrible secrets of his own past.

Tariq Abbassi, frustrated poet and restaurateur, is desperately attempting to reconstruct his memory following a terrible accident. Hospitalized at a remote care center in rainy Brittany, Tariq struggles to sort the true facts of his life from those he has merely imagined: the “monstrous” death of his children; a traumatic brain injury; the ambiguous role of a police commissaire; his work with a holistic psychiatrist and a hypnotherapy team; “The redeeming role of my mother’s letter—for all its unspoken terrors, its deliberately naïve swiftness and platitudinous illusions of closure”; and his close friend Zoé Selma Brahmi—“the terrible things that will happen to and through her.” From the Tunisian of his childhood to the Paris of his student days, from the difficult family to his failed loves and lost sons, Tariq must confront the nature of guilt and determine what exactly he is guilty of—and why. El Moncef’s prose startles with quiet brilliance. “Even in my Sorbonne days I used to find the narrow lanes behind the Panthéon sad and strange at the end of a summer day: there was always a resigned and melancholy feeling about those moments, when the buildings east of the Place took on the last flush of sunset—a short-lived miracle of enchantment on the facades of pale stone, too fickle and passing to be true.” The nature of truth and deception (willing and otherwise) is ever at the forefront, and the way el Moncef weaves his story, subtly accruing suspense through the accumulation of Tariq’s memories, creates a reading experience that is simultaneously weighty and invigorating. El Moncef seeks to explore what it is that we may construct with our pain and what it is we may have buried beneath it. The result is a literary enigma of the highly satisfying variety.

An immersive, finely wrought mystery of tragedy, loss, and recovery.

**FORGIVING EFFIE BECK**

Fitzjerrell, Karen Casey

WKMA Publishing (250 pp.)

$16.00 paper | $4.99 e-book

Jul. 15, 2013

978-0-9847768-1-8

Fitzjerrell’s (The Dividing Season, 2012) engaging tale depicts a Texas town during the Great Depression.

Mike Lemay was recently hired by the Federal Writers Project to interview and write about the people suffering in this hard time. He himself feels guilty for leaving his surviving family in North Carolina, but he needs whatever work he can get so he can send money home. He winds up in Cooperville, Texas, and immediately confronts the mysterious disappearance of the town eccentric and loner, Effie Beck. After renting quarters with the Travises—widowed Cora Mae and daughter Jodean—Mike is quickly drawn in. Cora Mae, with her chronic headaches, is a classic manipulator, and everyone seems to see Jodean as a good daughter but damaged goods. Why? And does that somehow involve Effie Beck? Such questions form the backbone of the novel as Mike and Jodean fall in love slowly, warily, predictably. Groups and minor characters pop in throughout the story. Though the town is suspicious of any outsiders, a crew from the Works Progress Administration is building a bridge over the Medina River—a bridge that, at book’s climax, might be washed away. The menacing sheriff and his beautiful wife (aka the richest couple in town) contribute a subplot, and the historically factual “orphan train” plays a major role. The story is as much about Mike’s coming to terms with himself and his disgust at the Depression and his situation as it is about his solving the mystery of Effie Beck. Fitzjerrell packs a lot in, and her pacing is impressive. Characters are real and detailed, and the town feels like a real place, not a stage. Small wonder that the book already won the Will Rogers Gold Medallion.

Stellar fiction about hard living during the Depression.

**SKULLY, PERDITION GAMES**

Fraser, L.E.

Self (304 pp.)

$12.66 paper | Jun. 21, 2015

978-0-9947742-0-0

Kidnapping, murder, and mind games are afoot in Fraser’s (Simon Says, 2014) latest thriller, which revisits PI Sam McNamara as she tackles a new case.

It’s July 1980, and pregnant Nina LeBlanc has been having a strange nightmare: she repeatedly dreams of abandoning her 5-year-old daughter, Gabriella, in the forest. Her husband, Quentin, says it’s nothing, but Nina is convinced she’s inherited her Scottish grandmother’s prophetic vision and that something terrible is going to happen to Gabriella. Her premonitions turn out to
INTERVIEWS & PROFILES

Hugh Howey

AN INDIE TRENDSETTER TALKS ABOUT THE SECRETS OF HIS SUCCESS

By Poornima Apte

Bestselling sci-fi author Hugh Howey, who has a devoted fan base and just might see his famous Wool series make it to the big screen, is a huge devotee of indie publishing, and he encourages beginners to adopt this route. “If you are a chef in a busy restaurant, and most patrons are coming for your cooking, you have a choice,” he says. “You can collect a wage and make someone else a lot of money, or you can take a risk, learn a few things about running a business, and open a restaurant of your own.” As for his movie casting preference, Howey would love to see Charlize Theron as Jules, who is suddenly thrust into the role of frustrated leader (but since she nailed her role in Mad Max: Fury Road, she’s probably done with dystopian works for now, he says). Howey spoke to Kirkus about why indie publishing makes sense for new authors and why all lovers of literature need to encourage fan fiction.

Why did you decide to self-publish rather than publish traditionally? When did you get started?

It wasn’t an easy decision to self-publish. But I saw a few trends around the corner. The most important was that books were never going to go out of print again. Ever. Print on demand and e-books changed all that. As a bookseller, I saw the cycle publishers pushed, with books churned out one after the other. Whatever didn’t stick got dropped. There was no long-term commitment or slow build.

What’s been the most pleasing or revelatory aspect of self-publishing for you?

Knowing who my customer is. When I worked at a bookstore, I saw the messy relationship between publishers and readers. Which is to say: one didn’t exist. We, as booksellers, were the matchmakers.

What has been the most difficult aspect of self-publishing?

Patience. The patience to not hit “publish” too soon and to give the book more time to make it perfect. I do seven or eight revisions of every work and then rounds of editing and beta reading.

What is your advice to other writers considering self-publishing?

Congratulations. You are making a wise choice. It used to be that self-publishing was the end of a writer’s career. It was the last choice you made, and there was no going back. Now, the opposite is true.

If self-publishing is better, then why would anyone go with a major publisher? Or rather, why did you? Is there something major publishers can offer that is worth this cost?

For me, it was primarily the experience. I wanted to see what it was like to work with a major publisher. I was willing to give up quite a bit to test the waters. I learned a lot. The only reason I was able to sign a deal with Simon & Schuster in the U.S. for the print edition of Wool was the limited time of the deal. After another three years, the rights to that print edition revert to me.

Your stories have generated quite a bit of fan fiction. How does that help your image and books?

Fan fiction isn’t about me or my sales. It’s about the readers having the freedom to express themselves. I’ve never gotten the snobbery over fan fiction. Literature began as fan fiction, with stories told orally, revised, and then retold by others. All the other arts do it. It’s time for readers, reviewers, and editors to stop taking themselves so seriously and help foster fan fiction as a source for new readership and new great writers.

Poornima Apte is a Boston-area freelance writer and book reviewer.
be all too true: Gabriella goes missing during the family’s vacation to a remote cabin and isn’t found until later, having killed the man who was physically and sexually abusing her. Ten years later, Quentin can tell there’s something wrong with Gabriella; his worst fears are confirmed when Isabella, her younger sister, is pushed from a treehouse. The story then flashes forward to the present day, when private detective Sam McNamara meets the adult Gabriella, not realizing they used to live next door to each other as children. Sam and her boyfriend, Reece, are reluctantly drawn into Gabriella’s life after she disappears, leaving nothing but a trail of blood and a 911 call saying her husband tried to kill her. Now, Sam and Reece must discover whether Gabriella is alive or dead—and who might have tried to murder her. Fraser’s second entry in the Perdition Games series is much stronger than the first. The writing throughout is taut and focused, capturing the reader’s attention and constantly upping the stakes as Sam tries to untangle the mystery that is Gabriella. Sam is a more compelling character this time around, too; as she wades through Gabriella’s past, she discovers things about her own that drive a wedge between her and Reece, allowing her to explore her own shortcomings and grow as a person. Although the novel gives away the answer to the mystery too soon, it still delivers a good dose of entertainment and moral ambiguity along the way.

A fast-paced mystery featuring plenty of excitement.

DEAR JEFF
A Father Seeks Reconciliation with His Son in Letters Rich in Hope, Joy, Despair and Grief
Gough, Kerry
CreateSpace (204 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Feb. 1, 2015
978-1-5033-0437-6
Following the untimely death of his adopted African-American son, a father seeks posthumous reconciliation in this affecting collection of personal letters by Gough.

Jeff and his fraternal twin, Shelia, were 7 years old when they were adopted. The author and his wife, Judy, spotted the photographs of “two black kids available for adoption” in the local newspaper. At the end of the 1960s, attitudes toward racial integration in America were changing, marked by the repeal of anti-miscegenation laws, yet racial tensions remained high in many states. The author, who describes himself as living a “white Anglo-Saxon lifestyle,” was all too aware of having spent the summer of 1965 working as a civil rights volunteer in Mississippi. Each of the letters in this book is addressed to deceased Jeff, gently explaining the background to his adoption into a white family. Jeff is described as a charismatic yet defiant child; his actions, in part, related to him being physically and emotionally abused during the first six years of his life. He remained naturally defensive, twisting away from his adoptive father’s embrace. As he grew older, he began to steal, beginning with what seemed an innocuous piggy bank heist but in later years turning into car burglaries, joyriding, and petty theft. Evidently beyond his father’s physical control and emotional guidance, Jeff’s life rapidly spiraled downward, and as a young man he spent time between the YMCA and jail, heading toward a tragic end. The author’s stylistic approach is admirably succinct and frank: “you came into our family as a child who had learned to take because nothing was given.” The book may fail to fully reflect the emotional viewpoints of Jeff’s sister or his adoptive siblings, who remain muted throughout, yet that’s excusable given how this is essentially a monologue from father to son. While more broadly exploring the bonds and strains of interracial adoptive parenthood, the brave, cathartic writing also offers a window to street-level racial tensions during the civil rights movement.

A personal, heart-rending story of struggle and anguish in the face of unconditional love.

BAGHDAD BLUES
Hajdu, Laszlo
CreateSpace (148 pp.)
$7.99 paper | May 1, 2015
978-1-5084-5427-4
In Hajdu’s (The Spirit of Palm Springs, 2005, etc.) latest novel, the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq is told by the men and women of the U.S. Army’s 3rd Infantry Division.

“April 9, 2003, was the day Baghdad fell,” Hajdu writes, “yet the war wasn’t over; the most difficult part of the job was still ahead and total victory years away.” It is now known that the invasion of Iraq, lasting only 21 days, failed to predict the challenges Allied forces would encounter during the formation of a new Iraqi government. In addition to the occupation of Iraq and the anxieties of combat, Hajdu focuses on the American home front. For example, Pvt. Jake Nevitzky, in Iraq, and his father, Harry, in a U.S. hospital, struggle to maintain communication after Harry suffers a stroke and attempts to regain his short-term memory. Meanwhile, in Iraq, Cpl. Levente Laszlo is taken prisoner during an ambush and interrogated by Ahmed al Libya, a Western-educated Iraqi soldier. Also in Iraq, Jake and his boyhood friend David Johnson serve together in the 3rd Infantry Division. Three years after the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom, they travel home to Phoenix, Arizona, from their second tour. “The young soldiers were treated like rock stars,” Hajdu writes. “People came up to them, thanking [them] for their service, and they didn’t have to walk over to the USO lounge to find hospitality; at the bar, the free drinks were flowing.” Later, however, David’s mother confides in Jake that her son is suffering from depression. Emotionally unavailable, David must learn to coexist with the horrific memories of war without destroying himself. Ultimately, Hajdu illuminates the soldiers’ returns to society without relying on sentimentality or over-the-top patriotism. Romance between Sgt. Mario Alvarado and embedded reporter Dana Jensen, for instance, acts...
Arkansas, he reportedly began performing manual farm labor. In Thought and Action (2011, etc.) was a freshman in 1952, he participated in a track meet in which, he says, Leon became “the first high school athlete to put the 12-pound shot over 60 feet in competition.” As he reveals in the afterword, this connection led to his own sporadic interest in Leon's story over many decades and, ultimately, his desire to present a full, nuanced portrait of this larger-than-life figure. Together with his wife and co-author, Janice, he ably shapes a wide range of source material into a coherent narrative. The trump card here is their professional curiosity and partly out of a sense of responsibility to find who killed Vinnie, Heller should be able to get a lot of mileage out of such a case. She's tough, noirish, and Chicago through and through. She's a great character and supporting cast. Heller pulls off a neat stunt, tying together all the different crimes—Vinnie getting framed on a federal charge in the 1970s, the burning of the migrant camp, investigation of the Kern County landscape: “Terrain becomes sloping and hilly there, looking most of the year like the tan, muscular shoulders of resting cougars.” California has attracted many shoulders and admirers of the Golden State may not know.

A well-researched, historically contextualized biography.

**THE SOMEFILE**

Heller, Jean
CreateSpace (362 pp.)
Dec. 8, 2014
978-1-5058-8033-5

A gripping narrative that explores the consequences of Operation Iraqi Freedom and the camaraderie and perseverance of America’s veterans.
Jacobson’s stories revolve around the inherent conflict between his own experiences and his dreams. His life at a U.S. missile test-range facility from 1964 through 1972, where he spent three tours as an engineer working on alert status, was both a personal journey and a reflection of the culture of the U.S. defense apparatus. Using unaffected, often witty prose, Jacobson easily brings his tales to life, whether within Jacobson’s tours. Still, a lucid impression emerges of the extreme geographic isolation—the closest population center of any real size was Guam, over 1,300 miles away—and the financial advantages of working there, Kwajalein was the center of a tightknit but often eccentric community. Many of Jacobson’s stories revolve around the inherent conflict between the heavy U.S. military presence and the more maverick community of scientists and engineers. As an engineer, Jacobson’s sympathies are clear, but his humor and affection for his time there prevent his demonizing any particular group. The book sounds confusing, that’s because it is. Keaton works in a fast and loose style, so readers seeking a straightforward narrative devoid of surprises should steer clear. However, those who are excited by cult-movie references (such as Night of the Hunter), tattoos of all sorts, and a world in which authority figures and those looking to subvert them run amok will find this an inviting read. Although it lacks the more polished psychotic insanity of classics such as Stephen Wright’s Going Native (1994), the novel traffics in a similar world of degenerate modern culture. This world of wild fiction is also rapidly paced and loaded with humor, as when Larry fights a senior citizen and comments, “Damn, old man fights like a puma. A puma in a wheelchair anyway.”

A loopy, appealing mix of popular culture and thoroughly crazy people.

CONKERS
British Twins in Nazi Germany
Lambert, Ken
CreateSpace (420 pp.)
$18.50 paper | May 15, 2015
978-1-5029-5519-7

Lambert artfully converts his coming-of-age journals into a thrilling survivor’s story.

In his third-person autobiographical account, Lambert and his twin brother, Ron, were raised in World War II-era Germany, the sons of a British diplomat and an Austrian mother. They led a normal, happy life until Hitler and the Nazi Party consolidated their power. Initially, the twins were intrigued by the idea of joining the Hitler Youth: “Wouldn’t mind getting into that mob,” Ron said. “Did you see the knives they all had on their belts?” Ken responded. All that changed when their private school became militarized and the Lambert twins were forcibly enlisted into the Young Folk, the youngest group involved in Hitler’s plan to create perfect Aryan youth. And they had no idea what happened to their parents. The twins became disillusioned with Nazi brutality, particularly when it came to the persecution of Jews. After seeing a family of Jews forcibly removed from their home, the author told his brother, “They are Jews...poor buggers. What have they done to be treated like this?” The Lambert attempted to hide within the Nazi infrastructure at their school, but eventually
they, along with their best friend, Hans, and their platoon leader, Dieter, decided to escape. "We have to run now," Lambert said, "before the army call-up gets us." The quartet lived on the run for the rest of the seemingly endless war, first using their outdoor skills to live in a secluded rural valley, then becoming proficient black marketeers in their hometown of Munich, all while largely eluding the SS and the Gestapo. Lambert skillfully explores the conditions that allowed Hitler to rise to power as well as what it was like to be caught inside the fanaticism. The memoir is stuffed—almost overstuffed—with details of life during wartime; tighter editing would help shorten or eliminate unnecessary anecdotes that sap some of the book's momentum. Lambert, his brother, and their friends are nevertheless sympathetically drawn characters caught in chaos beyond their control, and the lengthy narrative will have readers rooting for them to survive these most trying of circumstances.

A riveting story that blends World War II history and tales of growing up.

**SIMMER AND SMOKE**

*A Southern Tale of Grit and Spice*

Lampman, Peggy

CreateSpace

$12.36 paper

978-1-5084-9884-1

A poor country girl and a fashionable city woman learn about life in a tasty novel that blends romance and recipes.

Alabama native Lampman has experience in the gourmet-food industry and previously wrote a food column for the *Ann Arbor News* and *MLive*. In her debut novel, she presents likable Georgia characters who have a similar love for culinary delights. The chapters alternate to recount the dreams and worries of two women who have nothing in common other than their appreciation for quality ingredients. Twenty-four-year-old Shelby Preston barely gets by in the small town of Coryville, a couple of hours outside of Atlanta, as she raises her 6-year-old daughter, the charming, one-eyed Miss Ann. She lives with her 44-year-old mother and her mother's lover, and, as she says, "We are the living, breathing stereotype of a white trash family; as common as pig tracks." But Shelby was the best student in her high school English class (a rather unconvincing explanation for how she writes and speaks so well) and has an ambition to become a chef. Meanwhile, in Atlanta, the wealthy 38-year-old divorcée Mallory Lakes writes a food blog, which she sees as a refuge after being fired from the *Atlanta Sun* newspaper. She pines for her former beau, Cooper, who dumped her, and often pals around with her friend Catherine, nicknamed "Irchy," who works at an upscale grocery called Grasso's. Shelby snags a job there, and she follows a convoluted path to her desired "future self." She confides to readers in turn in first-person segments, but occasionally Miss Ann's refreshing voice pipes up as well. Lampman also beefs up the text by weaving nearly two dozen Southern dishes into the story ("Hoppin' John," "Chicken Gumbo Ya-Ya," etc.) and provides their recipes in an appendix.

A sweetly told saga bubbling with appealing characters and food-related talk.

**THE LIFE BALANCE PLAYBOOK**

*Seven Steps to the Life You Deserve*

Landau, Laura

In this debut self-help guide, a former longtime Microsoft employee discusses how to make decisions and trade-offs that honor one's priorities in life. Although she worked for Microsoft for 16 years, Landau was no Microserf (à la Douglas Coupland's 1995 novel). "I made the uber-competitive, corporate environment work for me, not just work for the company," she declares at the start of this book, which offers up her seven steps to achieving better "life balance." She intentionally uses this term because "Work is a part of our lives, not a distinct entity that should get first, or even equal, billing." Landau organizes her system under the catchy handles of "Design the Life You Want," "Diagnose Where You Are Today," "Deal with Yourself," "Determine the Roles of Others," "Decide Smarter," "Do What It Takes," and "Defend Your Progress" and offers an array of exercises to showcase and support her action-ideas. For example, she suggests ranking one's priorities in life (adventure, career, family, and so on), assessing how well one's daily calendar reflects this ranking, and imagining, by writing a bio and/or obituary, one's desired "future self." She cautions readers about a "saboteur" inner voice and the "dangerous duo" of procrastination and perfectionism and provides many fill-in charts, including how to assign what "VIP privileges" to give others and "identify when you're making a tradeoff (hint, always)" in any decision. Landau concludes by urging readers to practice "Life Balance Defense" and set regular review sessions regarding this always-challenging quest. "It's time to get practical and tactical," she notes at one point, and this philosophy infuses this slim book. Although readers may hunger for more details on how Landau took charge of her own career, she still offers a lot of clear-eyed advice and nifty tips to navigate one's existence, making a point to note that you can't always have it all. Her "Family Fold Fest," the weekly "party" during which her husband and kids fold their own clothes after she does the laundry, is just one example of her life-balance savvy (indeed, genius). Overall, a positive, proactive how-to debut.

Pragmatic, inspiring advice on time/life management.
Inspired by his own travels, screenwriter and author LaPoma’s narrative is raw and edgy, effectively anchored by two protagonists whose brio and “same sense of adventure” keep the story alive.

DEVELOPING MINDS

BECAUSE
Langdijk, Jack A.
CreateSpace (388 pp.)
978-0-9937586-1-4

A caring counselor with all the answers is sent into a tailspin after a tragic climbing accident on Mount Everest. When Roberto Sanchez is first introduced, he’s a surly, bitter shell of a man, unable to cope with the horrible loss of his legs—the grim result of surviving a sudden avalanche on the world’s highest mountain. Each day the man wheels into his therapist’s office, he appears darker and more despondent than the day before. His loving wife, Monique, and steadfast daughter, Jenny, are at wit’s end, fearing that although Roberto has survived death, he remains stubbornly locked in the icy clutches of a life-sapping grief. Only when his journal is cracked open, and stories of his many encounters with at-risk kids emerge, is Roberto’s true identity revealed. Despite the nihilism that seeped into his battered and traumatized heart, Roberto was one of the most upbeat and insightful human beings anyone would ever want to meet. Through his work, Roberto practically single-handedly rescued scores of marginalized children from the depths of the bleakest despair. Langdijk’s dialogue-heavy narrative comes alive during these often profoundly moving and genuinely touching vignettes. For instance, Kong, an overweight loner mentored by Roberto, moonlights as an anonymous online angel for other depressed kids like himself while also meticulously describing his efforts to connect in the real world. “I don’t know if you remember,” he tells Roberto, “but purple, purple is where someone says hi or even waves or nods. Well, I don’t know if you noticed but when I first did this I never had any purple, but now every day—purple...Purple!” If that doesn’t loosen a tear, there’s the story in Roberto’s journal of a cheerful doorman named Aaron, who started life as boy-soldier in Joseph Kony’s ghastly Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda. Aaron isn’t actually one of Roberto’s young clients, but like Kong and the rest of Roberto’s former charges, he helps the maimed counselor reclaim his passion for life. Langdijk has lots to say about courage, compassion, redemption, and self-worth. Although those life lessons are more compelling than the actual drama unfolding around Roberto’s post-Everest experience, they more than make the journey with him worthwhile.

Meditations on some of life’s biggest questions as told through some harrowing experiences.

DEVELOPING MINDS
An American Ghost Story
LaPoma, Jonathan
Laughing Fire Press (352 pp.)
$17.95 paper | Sep. 14, 2015
978-0-9674922-9-2

Two unlikely friends learn about life and hard work through the students they teach. Driving to Miami on a whim, 20-something Luke Entelechy and best friend Billy Lalina, both recent college graduates, embark on a life-changing journey in search of worthwhile jobs in education. Billy is beyond excited to flee southwest and away from a teaching assignment at a menacing school in New York City. It’s likewise for Luke, an aspiring writer who became mired in a series of stagnant substitute positions in Buffalo. Initially, both men love Miami for different reasons: Billy, who is gay, enjoys the Cuban eye candy around the notorious City of Sex, and Luke appreciates the fresh start. Things get rocky quickly, but the men adapt. Billy scores a teaching position at highly ranked Little Havana Elementary, while Luke settles on a job at a lower-accredited inner-city school with high instructor turnover and classrooms full of rude, violent students. A trip to Key West refreshes him—a good thing, considering the coming weeks of trial and error Luke sees in his troublesome classroom of rowdy students who eventually (and miraculously) acquiesce to the idea of learning and succeeding as a cohesive group. Meanwhile, Billy frets that his homosexuality will cause a rift in his own employment as both men socialize with some of the more unrestrained teachers, like “Hurricane Margo.” Luke enjoys an unexpected, long-distance romance in Mexico and attempts to make the best of their time in Miami even though, working in the public education network, “every day was psychological warfare, and if you didn’t stay sharp, the system would grind you into human pencil shavings.” Inspired by his own travels, screenwriter and author LaPoma’s narrative is raw and edgy, effectively anchored by two protagonists whose brio and “same sense of adventure” keep the story alive. Luke, who principally narrates the novel, will resonate most with readers who sympathize and respect today’s teachers, who guide a greatly distracted generation of impressionable minds.

Entertaining and authentic look at the troubled American educational system, courtesy of two men propelled by perseverance and adventuresome spirits.
In his sixth Johnny Donohue Adventure, Mason (Havana Moon, 2012, etc.) sends his sleuth after a treasure supposedly lost in the wake of World War II.

Software entrepreneur Johnny and his easygoing girlfriend, Carmen, are enjoying Florida’s summer waters in his Catalina sailboat. Upon docking, Johnny receives a phone message from Jane Haggerty, his former love in Long Island: her father has died. Johnny travels back home to Westhampton Beach for the funeral of Willie Haggerty, a brilliant mathematician/physicist who worked with Alan Turing to break the codes of Germany’s Enigma Machine during WWII. Johnny’s friend and ex-cop Lonnie Turner tells him that Turing supposedly hid bars of Nazi silver in the woods near Bletchley Park. Eventually, Johnny also learns that Willie was in perfect health (for an 88-year-old) and was found dead inside his Mercedes-Benz, which he’d brought home from the war. Meanwhile, Jane’s new boyfriend, investment banker Mason Goodwyn, rubs Johnny the wrong way.

Lonnie discovers his criminal past involving the IRS and Securities and Exchange Commission—as well as a dead business associate. Willie’s grandson, Jason, later informs Johnny that the mathematician somehow paid Jason’s law school tab and set him up living in New York. Perhaps those silver bars aren’t as lost as everyone thinks.... Whether you’ve read all or none of these nautical mysteries, Mason presents his laid-back tough guy with breezy panache that requires little catch-up. There’s a hint of wistfulness, though, as Johnny remembers growing up with Jane; their childhood was “way too brief like a flat stone skipping across the bay and disappearing just below the surface of the water.” Generally, Johnny’s narration is quip-filled, including welcome notes of self-deprecation: “strange situations... seem to drop into my life like bad movies from the nineteen forties.” Readers also learn about Alan Turing’s tragic life, his fascinating code-decryption methods, and the beginnings of the modern computer. Willie’s later work to limit the proliferation of nuclear weapons provides noble commentary to this pivotal Johnny Donohue adventure.

Thrilling, with a perfect mix of brains and bravado.

Neuffer offers a study of Helen Andelin, author and founder of the controversial Fascinating Womanhood movement in the 1960s and ’70s.

In 1961, discontented Mormon housewife Andelin discovered a set of advice booklets written in the 1920s. Called The Secrets of Fascinating Womanhood, they advised women to fulfill traditional gender roles in order to find happiness in love and motherhood. Andelin credited them with saving her marriage, so much so that she repackaged them as Fascinating Womanhood, a book that went on to sell 2 million copies (as Neuffer notes, Andelin never admitted to copying the booklets). Andelin and her movement became cultural phenomena of the 1960s and ’70s, a counterbalance to the second-wave feminism of Betty Friedan. Despite harsh criticism from many of her contemporaries, Andelin’s ideas would shape succeeding generations of female commentators, including Phyllis Schlafly, Laura Schlessinger, and comedian Roseanne Barr (who appropriated, albeit satirically, Andelin’s ideal of the “Domestic Goddess” for her stand-up routine). Neuffer demonstrates how “the views and goals of both Andelin and her FW movement were both more complex and more distinct than her critics conceded. Moreover, they endured. In fact, Andelin built a substantial and lasting following simply by addressing the immediate, felt needs of many women at a crucial moment in history when other reform movements did not.” Raised in the Mormon Southwest during the height of the movement—her mother was, for a time, a teacher of FW classes—Neuffer was granted unprecedented access to Andelin in the last decade of her life; in addition to Andelin’s personal papers, Neuffer’s interviews with Andelin make up the bulk of the book’s sources. While Neuffer is appropriately skeptical of Andelin’s teachings (and willing to present evidence that suggests Andelin plagiarized most of her material), she treats her subject with patience and respect as she attempts to accurately describe the deeper causes and effects of Andelin’s career. An understanding of Andelin’s wide appeal as both a religious and political leader can augment the fast-expanding discussion about women’s strategies to cope with—and shape—political and social change,” she writes. Indeed, Andelin’s story has much to teach us about dissenting voices in the pursuit of progress.

A fascinating study of an icon and the era that created her.
**THE FREEDOM TO KILL**

Nicholas, J. W.
Copperthwait Books (302 pp.)
$11.99 paper | Feb. 27, 2015
978-0-692-31384-8

A legal novel of corrupted ideals in past and present Detroit.

“Nicholas Winterstein returned many years later to the house where he had been born and raised, and he committed three murders there.” So begins this story of race, anger, and the law that plays out over many years in the tragedy-plagued city of Detroit. In the present, Winterstein is an accomplished, if amoral, defense attorney who sees the law as a means to profit. There’s a reason for his current lack of legal partners: “Nick approached a case one way, and the partners approached it from the opposite end. The impact became economic. He now worked alone.”

His ruthless proficiency brings him to the attention of former judge Goodwin Marshall, an aging civil rights leader who finds himself accused of insider trading. The case involves a number of other ghosts from the civil rights movement, and women, though, under the circumstances, nobler intentions seem difficult. Staccato chapters leap forward and backward in time, drawing the reader ever deeper into the repressed, generational pain that created Winterstein and continues to shape his actions. The book flirts with political critique—one central character is a thinly veiled stand-in for pure storytelling, the novel is quite satisfying. Its structure and voice are fresh, and Nicholas admirably hides its trajectory. This book may be the opposite of heartwarming, but it attaches itself to the reader’s psyche all the same.

A harsh yet alluring novel of compounding tragedy.

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**A BEGINNER’S LIFE**

*The Adventures of Tom Phillips*

Phillips, Tom
Full Court Press (240 pp.)
$16.00 paper | $9.99 e-book
Mar. 20, 2015
978-1-938812-53-8

A former CBS newsman recalls his experiences as a journalist and spiritual seeker.

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**SANGRE DE CRISTO: THE BLOOD OF CHRIST**

*Volume One of the Rio Grande Series*

Redfield, Wesley
CreateSpace (294 pp.)
$12.00 paper | Jan. 29, 2015
978-1-4910-0595-8

Redfield’s debut work of historical fiction is a compelling journey into New Mexico’s early history.

The year is 1821, and 17-year-old Joshua Kincaid is on a perilous adventure. Leaving behind his childhood in Missouri, he joins a trading expedition, led by the seasoned Lerocque, which travels across the western United States into the contested region of New Mexico. The territory is potentially ripe for trading, as Spanish authority has come to an end and New Mexico is now under Mexican rule. But in the unforgiving desert, the money may not be worth it, because Kincaid is in jeopardy on multiple fronts, including the constant threat of Indian attack as well as the hostile men within the trading party itself. After a
vicious run-in with Lerocque’s son, he courts more danger when he strikes out on his own. Kincaid finds a tenuous home thanks to help from an unexpected ally, Manuel, a buffalo hunter from New Mexico. He falls in love with Manuel’s daughter, Maria, and begins to plan a future that involves leading his own trading trip into the territory, which cries out for goods from back East. 

Kincaid’s moral principles are challenged when he comes face to face with a culture that condones the capture of Indian children as slaves. Yet Kincaid’s participation in this practice will help save Manuel’s family—including Maria—from being sold into servitude and is encouraged by the church. He struggles to understand the concept of cultural relativism as he embarks on both a tangible and metaphorical journey. The likable, sympathetic protagonist travels miles across the United States, though his passage from boy to man is arguably more difficult and painful expedition. Redfield explores themes of race and religion and their influences on the settlement of New Mexico through the eyes of Kincaid, Manuel, and Kincaid’s African-American friend Joe. In the first book of his Rio Grande series, Redfield challenges his audience with difficult historical facts and tangled relationships, inviting reflection on our nation’s occasionally sordid history. Vivid descriptions of the wide-open American West—especially the view from the back of a good horse—beautifully set the stage.

Will leave readers eagerly anticipating a sequel and wondering about the fates of its characters.
Schwartz’s text recalls the days of bustling newsrooms where “everyone seemed to be smoking, drinking or growling—some simultaneously.”

**THE FINE PRINT**

**My Life as a Deskman**  
Schwartz, Jack  
CreateSpace (402 pp.)  
$17.00 paper  |  May 29, 2015  
978-1-5116-3732-9

Vivid personal dispatches from the heyday of print journalism.  
Veteran journalist Schwartz started his career in the late 1950s. His passionately penned memoir spans the world of New York City newspapers from his first job as a college student and part-time copy boy at the *Mirror*, the Hearst flagship paper in Manhattan, to the *New York Times*. Youthful vigor and determination carried him through a grueling schedule of taking day classes at City College, editing the school paper, and working at the *Mirror* until well past midnight. Schwartz’s fledgling newspaper experience broadened with subsequent positions at the *New York Post*, an inaugural reporter gig at the *Long Island Press* (for $85 a week), and a charmed extended tenure with *Newsday*, where his “tabloid heart” chased celebrities for the entertainment section. A stint with the Grey Lady soon followed. With a storyteller’s verve, Schwartz meticulously describes these positions and their associated historical moments; e.g., the blackout of 1965 and the 1973 Nixon regime “unraveling.” The writer’s early admiration for an editor’s “sixth sense for where the story was—and wasn’t” bled into his future managing style. A chatty raconteur, Schwartz writes vividly of the hazing rituals of new copy boys, the “blue collar pragmatism” prevalent among journalists, egotistical columnists, and varied interactions with storied media notables like Walter Winchell, Lee Mortimer, and much later, Michaelangelo Signorile, and author Nelson DeMille, who both failed to appreciate Schwartz’s pioneering spadework as book review editor for *Newsway Books*, which included enlisting Christopher Hitchens’ “scriptural prose” and reviewing LGBT titles during the AIDS epidemic. Schwartz’s prose exudes a palpable affinity for the written word, and his text recalls the days of bustling newsrooms where “everyone seemed to be smoking, drinking or growling—some simultaneously.” Readers interested in how the pre-Internet newspaper business was run in the mid-to-late 20th century will find Schwartz’s memoir educational as well as charmingly anecdotal.

A fond, nostalgic celebration of a decadeslong career in media.

**GREY DAZE**

**A Lance Underphal Mystery**  
Scott, Michael Allan  
CreateSpace (306 pp.)  
$11.99 paper  
978-1-5027-0565-5

Psychic investigator Lance Underphal pulls double duty in Scott’s (*Flight of the Tarantula Hawk*, 2014, etc.) latest thriller, facing manslaughter charges and investigating a possible murder. Lance may not be able to help his friend Callie, who’s worried about her unreachable uncle Harold. Lance, a psychic, is arrested for manslaughter and has a heart attack soon thereafter. His sister-in-law Hilde claims that Lance is responsible for his wife Sonja’s death from a car wreck several years ago. Sonja assures him this isn’t true—he has frequent conversations with his dead wife—but that doesn’t stop the charges or Hilde’s subsequent civil suit. Callie, meanwhile, enlists PI Jake Jacobs to check on her uncle, who, it turns out, is dead. Cops write it off as a natural death, but Lance, Callie, and Jake suspect murder. Lance tries to make sense of his psychic dreams to find a killer and also prove his innocence. Scott takes a curious approach to the third book in his series, relegating protagonist Lance to what’s essentially a supporting role. It’s a wise choice, since the story centers on the more intriguing murder mystery, with Jake handling nearly all the investigating. Lance does have his own mystery to solve—why Hilde has suddenly turned on him or if someone else is behind the legal assault—but he has only a modicum of input in the murder investigation, even if his vision sprouts a substantial clue. Jake could easily carry the story on his own. The former SEAL is an exemplary detective, zeroing in on the murderer’s motive. He excels at footwork—e.g., scanning license plates in a parking garage to find Harold’s missing car—and is good under pressure, dodging bullets when a baddie takes offense at Jake trailing him. Lance nevertheless remains an engaging character, his dreams often dark and tortuous. His relationship with Sonja is stronger than any connections to the living, and one dream in particular, in which he floats in clouds with Sonja—and momentarily thinks he’s dead—is a welcome tender moment.

A worthy blend of psychic visions and good old-fashioned detective work.
A longtime environmentalist looks at the state of the world and our prospects for surviving the future.

In this book on the environment and humans’ role in shaping the world, Seidel (2009: A Story of Our Future, 2009) criticizes many aspects of modern life, from population growth to the spread of misinformation. He also offers a list of methods for combating the negative outcomes he sees as likely to result from current practices. A lengthy appendix, written by Gary Gardner of the Worldwatch Institute, supplies data and analysis to substantiate the points Seidel discusses in more general terms. It’s often a bleak picture of humanity in which the tendency toward irrational and misguided behavior on both individual and group levels seems to be unstoppable: “We are clearly on a path headed for catastrophe, and although there is abundant information about what’s wrong and what we can do about it, we are failing to respond in a rational, responsible way.” Seidel looks not only at damage to the physical environment, but at violent tendencies throughout history, the fates of past civilizations, and the psychological distance that can limit the impact of widespread but impersonal suffering. Although Seidel predicts a gloomy future if current practices continue, he has many suggestions for bringing about positive change, from the psychological (understanding thought processes in order to change them) to the practical (improving science education) to the radical (“Associations of economists, environmentalists, scientists, geographers, and historians could develop and give tests” requiring candidates for public office to prove their knowledge).

While frustration occasionally gives way to hyperbole—“Global warming and other environmental problems were not even discussed in the 2012 U.S. presidential campaign”—the book’s statements are usually based on evidence documented in a substantial list of citations. Seidel’s blend of pessimism and idealism brings intellectual heft to this unconventional approach so that we might “move beyond our current stalemate and make real progress towards sustainability.”

An astute look at the many negative influences currently shaping our world, along with ideas to overcome them.

DANCING WITH A BAPTIST
A Love Story in Poems
Stott, Libby
BookBaby (139 pp.)
978-1-61927-667-3

Fine verse about falling in love, falling back out, and coming of age.

How many reams of poetry have been written on the theme of unrequited desire? What would William Shakespeare be without his dark lady? Dante without Beatrice? William Butler Yeats without Maud Gonne? The story’s much the same in Stott’s deft collection, which tells of stunted yearning and unfulfilled, unreturned love. Yet the roles here are filled by new players. The lover is Eliza, a young poet lusting after a Baptist deacon who was once her professor. The older man is married, but he accepts his student’s advances—innocently at first, then less so. Their decades-spanning relationship is initially chaste—then less so—but when the flame gets too hot, the professor flees, retreating to his spouse with his tail between his legs. It’s a tale as old as time but no less moving for its age. Stott breathes new life into the “lunacy of love” with the help of her poignant, unpretentious verse. Thus there’s Eliza pining in the classroom: “It’s impossible, perhaps, / to love a man / for the richness of his hands: / for things they’ve scribbled across a board.” Then there’s his regard, turning to her, “Last night, you circled me with your arms / gone brown from years of loving the sun. / What’s gotten into me, if not / a carnival of love.” Finally, seemingly inevitably, there’s his betrayal: “now your talk’s grown holy: / ‘sacred matrimony.’ / Sound of locusts; your strict voice / crying in our wilderness.... / Sermon overdone.” Stott’s poetic form throughout this finely told tale is like a fisherman’s net: structured but flexible. The mortar that holds the bricks of her verse together is the Western canon—from Dante to Danae and from Khayyam to the Quran. Her default stanza is short—a couplet or triplet—but evocative even in its concision. Her language is precise but unaffected—a difficult balancing act that she pulls off with seeming ease.

Sweet, crisp poetry about loving a man one shouldn’t.
DARE TO BE YOUR OWN BOSS
Follow Your Passion, Create a Niche
Sullivan, Maya
Synergy Books, LLC (344 pp.)
$22.99 paper | Mar. 26, 2015
978-0-9907542-0-6

This combination self-assessment and idea starter should spark the interest of anyone with entrepreneurial drive.

Debut author Sullivan, herself an entrepreneur and small-business trainer, enters a crowded category but sets her work apart with its good intentions. Rather than supply the how-to advice commonly found in most be-your-own-boss books, Sullivan explores the motivational aspects of pursuing the entrepreneurial dream while also providing a wealth of business ideas. In the book’s first section, Sullivan offers such entries as “10 traits for entrepreneurial success,” “six benefits and six drawbacks” of being your own boss, and “14 keys to ignite your enthusiasm and passion.” Part 2 digs into the details of where an entrepreneur’s passion may lie. Here, Sullivan walks the reader through “12 areas of opportunity,” including both general and specific conceptual ideas. For example, the first two chapters in this section make a useful distinction between focusing on selling to consumers versus selling to businesses, while another chapter addresses selling to governments.

Other areas key in on current trends that suggest possible areas of business opportunity: e.g., food and family farms, pets and companion animals, assisting seniors and people with disabilities, and “promoting a sustainable future.” A chapter entitled “Serving Needs of the Global Population” puts forth the concept of “social entrepreneurship.” The book’s final section concerns the entrepreneur’s assessment of the viability of a chosen idea. She includes a helpful multipurpose spreadsheet that can be used to rate areas of interest and ends with an extensive resources section. Sullivan applies a refreshing amount of altruism to her choice of categories that should give would-be entrepreneurs a sense of purpose as they consider what direction to take.

Clearly and cogently written, a thought-provoking book that provides useful guidance to entrepreneurial risk-takers as well as a treasure trove of potential business ideas.

OBAMA’S CHALLENGE TO CHINA
The Pivot to Asia
Wang, Chi
Ashgate (330)
July 1, 2015
$119.95 hardcover
978-1-4724-4442-4

Wang (The United States and China Since World War II, 2013, etc.) offers an analysis of Obama’s China policy and the continuing points of contention in the Chinese–American relationship. A number of recent economic trends in both the United States and China brought about a new era in the historically wary relationship between the two nations. As Wang outlines early in his book, “China has become more assertive of its ‘core interests’ but has been slow to adopt what America views as its international obligations. Meanwhile, America’s vulnerability after the financial crisis, coupled with the specter of an ambitious China, has made U.S. policymakers eager to stake out America’s position vis-à-vis China.” While the fraught security relationship between the nations is, in some ways, reminiscent of that between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, the U.S. and China have highly connected economies that make for a state of codependence. Wang outlines the way President Obama has navigated this simultaneously antagonistic and symbiotic relationship. While Obama’s strategy is believed to be one of both deterrence and reassurance, Wang feels that the balance has shifted toward deterrence and that this, in turn, has put China on the defensive. After a brief history of the evolving relationship, Wang breaks down the major Chinese–U.S. happenings since Obama took office, followed by an analysis of the major Chinese–U.S. issues. Wang also offers a look into how U.S. policies are perceived in China, a perspective that isn’t often considered in the Western media. Wang’s highly accessible prose is geared toward readers with little background in Chinese–U.S. diplomacy. His focus on the Obama administration offers a manageable entry into the situation and reveals a policy that may surprise those who haven’t been paying attention. Wang includes a deep bibliography of interviews, studies, and statements by the Obama administration; readers interested in the repercussions of an emergent China and the way it’s shaping American policy will come away with a solid understanding of the players, issues, and stakes.

An informative, persuasive look at the current state of Chinese–American relations.
Each poem offers a perfectly observed moment as seen through a slightly distorted lens, featuring personality, heartbreak, and the desire to bridge distances that can’t be named.

**SPECTRUM OF MIND**  
*An Inquiry into the Principles of the Mind and the Meaning of Life*  
Yang, J. Michael  
HINT Press (252 pp.)  
$19.99 paper | Apr. 28, 2015  
978-0-692-37949-3  

Far-reaching exploration of science, the mind, and the meaning of life.

Yang ambitiously tackles some of life’s biggest concepts, including knowledge, science, and religion, among others. He displays an impressive level of knowledge in an array of fields as well as keen sensitivity toward the topics presented. Despite many positives, the main drawback to Yang’s work is a high level of technical language—a probable put off for lay readers. He begins with a discussion of knowledge and how it is obtained. After this exploration of epistemology, Yang moves to a wide-ranging discussion of science. In fact, a section called “Lights from Science”—featuring quantum mechanics, thermodynamics, nonlinear and complex systems, etc.—is so detailed and expansive that he suggests readers less interested in science skip the chapter or read only the conclusion. Yang moves on to an equally impressive discussion of the human mind, dabbling in biology, psychology, and other aspects of the science behind thought. Eventually, the conversation moves on to applications for this knowledge, namely the philosophies of belief and religion. It is here that Yang gets to the heart of his inquiry, as he invites the reader to consider how knowledge and science are applied to life in all its certainty and uncertainty. However, Yang’s writing often seems too opaque and technical for most audiences. Few will follow along in a discussion about faith that concludes, “These concepts for metareality, either the archetypes in the psyche, or unknown parts of the world, are often collectively referred to in Western culture as God.” Yang avoids judging religion and ends with a look at one of humanity’s most important and intractable questions: what is the meaning of life? Though he doesn’t provide an answer, he invites the reader to continued consideration of the question.

Great depth and breadth for subject matter that calls for nothing less.

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**BENEDICTION FOR A BLACK SWAN**  
*Poems*  
Zollars, Mimi  
She Writes Press (128 pp.)  
978-1-63152-950-4  

A debut collection of poems exploring love, art, and loss.

Some poets focus on the mechanics of poetry, such as intonation and rhythm, and neglect passion. This isn’t the case with Zollars, whose debut collection is a masterful study of how words can be sparingly hewn to create stunning, long-lasting emotional scenes—from a child’s fraught relationship with an alcoholic mother to the cold reality of professional beauty. In “the moderns,” the author writes in a spare style of a dressmaker and his model’s unrequited love for him: “she becomes / a shimmering / goddess / swathed / in silk satin,” and they later adjourn to an “old hotel bar / drinking / sazeracs / elegant / blushing patrons / surreal / conversations // she loves / the effect / of bourbon / of him / of life / resembling / art.” In “center point,” a child remembers her mom’s heavy drinking: “she became a mystery / the children were incapable of solving / distressing...terrible in her destruction.” Zollars’ elegantly limned language and visual use of space create a vivid volume that’s a genuine pleasure to read. She arranges the collection into four discrete parts, prefacing each section with quotes from a variety of sources, including contemporary television shows (with a somewhat self-serving quote from *Masters of Sex*: “If you want to know more about the nature of femininity, you will have to consult the poets”). These quotes are the weakest part of what’s otherwise a strong, powerful collection, simply because they’re not in the author’s voice and ultimately serve as distractions. However, there’s no question that Zollars is an inspiring, notable talent; she accomplishes more with a poem of 50 words than some other poets accomplish in 50 pages. She achieves this by being attuned to nuance but not repetitive detail; emotion but not sentimentality; and, finally, rhythm but not noise. Each poem offers a perfectly observed moment as seen through a slightly distorted lens, featuring personality, heartbreak, and the desire to bridge distances that can’t be named.

A set by a brilliant new poet, featuring exquisite emotional nuance and an impressive mastery of craft.
WHERE IS PIDGE?
Michelle Staubach Grimes
A funny story, a reassuring message, and a clever, creative design; highly recommended.

DARE TO BE YOUR OWN BOSS
Maya Sullivan
Clearly and cogently written, a thought-provoking book that provides useful guidance to entrepreneurial risk takers as well as a treasure trove of potential business ideas.

THE SHANTYMAN
Rick Spilman
A fabulously gripping sailor’s yarn.

THE INCONVENIENCE OF THE WINGS
Silas Dent Zobal
Haunting images and poetic prose flood this noteworthy collection.
“[I] got real choked up and had to stop when [Scout] said that Jem had died. That I wasn’t ready for; that just hit me so hard.”
—Mary Badham, who played Scout in the film adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), on reading Harper Lee’s *Go Set a Watchman* for the first time, at the 92Y in New York.

“[If] you’ve read [The Daughters], you probably have a sense that I’m very interested in genealogy and the connection between parents and children throughout generations…and the way that history and personal history and personality and spirit pass down from person to person…while there’s something unique about every individual, too. The anticipation that there are all of these new people who we don’t know and can’t know, who are still coming, who deserve a little bit of thought as we live our day-to-day lives making choices that can potentially affect them—remembering that is precious.”
—Adrienne Celt, who celebrated her debut novel, *The Daughters*, with a series of drawings, released on Tumblr, entitled “Badass Women of Polish Mythology.” Trishna (pictured) is the goddess of corpses and protector of graves. If Celt were a badass woman of Polish mythology, she says, she’d protect the spirits of children to come.

“We’d probably like to think that this kind of next-level tackiness is soundly in the past, along with the other things we shuffled off at the turn of the decade—namely Spencer Pratt and Crocs. But necessity is the mother of ludicrousness, and for past-their-prime industries like book publishing, where standard advertising, word of mouth, and even the media are generally disinterested, creative marketing is the one and only imperative.”
—Kaitlyn Tiffany commenting at *The Verge*, on literary “tatvertising”—specifically Hachette Australia’s solicitation of a woman to receive a permanent, full-sized Lisbeth Salander dragon tattoo and serve as the “back” of its *The Girl in the Spider’s Web* ad campaign without receiving additional compensation. Perceptions of tatsploitation generated a tattaclysmic media response. To avoid further tattas-trophe, Hachette canceled the contest and issued an apology.

“May the gods of literature welcome Annie Liontas into their august ranks.”
—Arthur Flowers, novelist, essayist, and performance poet, offers a blessing for debut author Annie Liontas at the *Let Me Explain You* launch event at the Strand in New York. Flowers, who taught Liontas in the MFA program at Syracuse University, blew the conch horn and played the kalimba (thumb piano) in accompaniment.

Submissions for Field Notes?
Email fieldnotes@kirkus.com.
Two strangers meet on a train. They fall to talking. In no time at all, they have planned the perfect murder. Two murders, in fact.

Two strangers meet in a bar. One wants help. The other wants—well, as it turns out, the world. In no time at all, bodies pile up.

Patricia Highsmith had a famously low opinion of people, seeing in our kind mostly an endless capacity for venality and mayhem. The survivor of a childhood harsh enough to make Charles Dickens weep, she had been subsisting on income from writing comic books for the suspect masses when, thanks to a happy accident, she met Truman Capote. Young and barely known himself, Capote encouraged her to redraft the on-again, off-again manuscript that became *Strangers on a Train*, a book that bowed in in 1950 and soon became a hit Alfred Hitchcock film.

Flush with movie money, Highsmith spent the next few years on two books, the first a lesbian novel that she published under a pseudonym, the other a darkly pessimistic book called *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, published in 1955. Young Tom Ripley is talented indeed: he can throw a voice, forge a signature, charm a snake, sell ice at the North Pole. He can sing and do stand-up comedy. But he is damaged, and we’re never quite sure why, and he is lethally envious of anyone born with more privilege than he, which makes for a large pool of candidates. He can even fly a helicopter, he tells a future victim. What’s more, he boasts, “No matter how drunk I get, I can always tell when a waiter’s cheating me on a bill.”

As *The Talented Mr. Ripley* opens, our eponymous antihero, who hints that he’s been working for the IRS, is recruited to rein in the wayward son of a wealthy boat builder. Dickie Greenleaf has been dividing his time among sailing, painting, and squiring beautiful young women on the coast of Campania. Spoiled beyond belief, he’s the hippest of the proto-hipster set, and he lives the life that Tom wants. Highsmith does more than hint that Tom wants Dickie as well, and at the end of a book marked with one killing after another, Tom is regretful about a love gone unfulfilled: “If only he hadn’t been in such a hurry and so greedy...then none of this would have happened, and he could have lived with Dickie for the rest of his life, traveled and lived and enjoyed living for the rest of his life.”

*Ripley* has been filmed twice, most recently in 1999 with a disarmingly but appropriately boyish Matt Damon as the globe-hopping psychopath. Damon does a fine job of showing just how ordinary and at once extraordinary Ripley is, a born weeder of the 1 percent class who walks among us unnoticed and with definite malice aforethought. He is now 60 years old, but his moves haven’t suffered for age, and he hasn’t lost the power to break a heart and snap a neck. It’s a cheerless book for a cheerless world, and *The Talented Mr. Ripley* rightly stands as a classic of literary crime.

*Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor.*
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