Featuring 382 Industry-First Reviews of Fiction, Nonfiction, Children's and YA books

KIRKUS REVIEWS

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Fall Preview

SPECIAL ISSUE!
150 of the Biggest, Best Releases This Season
FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK:

A Different Kind of Fall

BY TOM BEER

It’s safe to say this will be a fall like no other.

A pandemic, caused by the coronavirus first identified at the very end of last year, is still with us, causing widespread illness, death, economic hardship, and dramatic changes to our daily lives. A remarkable national reckoning with racism carries over from the summer, spurred by mass protests over the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and too many other Black Americans. And a frighteningly momentous presidential election is just on the horizon.

The book world has been buffeted by these events, like every other affiliated community and economic sector. Bookstores and libraries shut their doors, shifting traffic online. Publishers rearranged their schedules, hop-scotching publication dates across the calendar. (We at Kirkus scrambled to keep up.) Books about race and racism—by Robin DiAngelo, Ibram X. Kendi, Eddie S. Glaude Jr., and others—dominated the bestseller lists. So did books about Donald Trump by John Bolton and Mary Trump.

Now fall is almost here along with some of the most anticipated releases of the year. In this, our annual Fall Preview issue, we recognize 150 outstanding titles in fiction, nonfiction, picture, middle grade, and young adult books. We also shine a spotlight on some of the genres and themes—debut novels, books about race, veteran authors, international stories for young readers—that merit special attention. At the back of the issue, you’ll find our regularly scheduled reviews along with profiles of authors Shruti Swamy, Mary Trump, and many others.

Our editors highlight a number of noteworthy titles in their columns for this issue, but let me point out a few more that I’m especially excited about.

Pulitzer Prize–winning playwright Ayad Akhtar returns to fiction (his 2012 debut novel, American Dervish, is wonderful) with Homeland Elegies (Little, Brown, Sept. 15). This novel, featuring a narrator with the same name and biographical details as the author, is less a narrative than a dizzying series of episodes and character portraits firmly rooted in America between 9/11 and the Trump presidency—a dense, multilayered consideration of what it means to be a Muslim American today. It’s also enthrallingly well written.

A book that similarly defies categorization is Claudia Rankine’s Just Us: An American Conversation (Graywolf, Sept. 8). Rankine, known for her award-winning 2014 book, Citizen, here delivers a wide-ranging consideration of White privilege in America and her negotiations with it as a Black woman poet and scholar. Comprised of poems, essays, artwork, and copious notes and “fact checks,” Just Us calls on Americans to do the difficult but essential work of talking to one another about race and the ways in which racism stubbornly persists in our society. It couldn’t be arriving at a better time.

Finally, a book I haven’t read yet: Jerry Craft’s Class Act (Quill/Tree Books/ HarperCollins, Oct. 6), the sequel to his middle-grade graphic novel, New Kid. I inhaled New Kid on the plane to Austin for the Kirkus Prize ceremony last October, and I disembarked a complete evangelist for this book, which went on to win the Young Readers Prize the following evening. Class Act will continue the story of cartoonist Jordan Banks, one of the few Black students at Riverdale Academy Day School, as he navigates middle school, family, and friendships. It’s one of many fall books I can’t wait to dive into.
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SILENCE IS MY MOTHER TONGUE
Addonia, Sulaiman
Graywolf (208 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-64445-033-8

A headstrong young woman and her brother attempt to rebuild their lives in a refugee camp.

At the opening of Addonia’s novel, court is in session. For the refugees in a Sudanese camp for those fleeing Eritrea, trials are held in the ersatz cinema where skits are sometimes put on with cardboard figures. The accused is a young woman called Saba; her alleged crime, incest with her mute brother, Hagos. As Saba awaits her verdict, the novel takes us back in time to illuminate how so many in the community have turned on her. Stubborn, intelligent, and bold, Saba excelled at school and wanted to attend university before her life was uprooted. She also has complicated ancestry: half-Eritrean, half-Ethiopian, “half from an occupied country and the other half from the occupying....Half of her was at war with the other half.” Saba’s more traditionally masculine qualities are balanced by Hagos, who is “the girl [their] mother had always wanted,” taking care of the domestic work and taking an interest in Saba’s hair, makeup, and clothing. Unable to understand either sibling’s unorthodoxies, the growing community in the camp attempts to police their adherence to traditions. As more refugees arrive, Saba and Hagos draw increasing scrutiny until these outside forces threaten to overwhelm their seemingly unbreakable bond. Addonia’s greatest strength is the arresting image, imbued with symbolism—as when a man tears a newspaper into pieces and the crowd scatters “in different directions with broken sentences” or when a girl is sentenced to physically carry the man she allegedly seduced on her back through the camp as punishment—while the novel’s vignette structure underscores the fragmentary, hallucinatory quality of trauma and memory.

A memorable chronicle about “the bitterness of exile” and the endurance of the spirit.
Addressing race, risk, retreat, and the ripple effects of a national emergency, Alam’s novel is just in time for this moment.

LEAVE THE WORLD BEHIND

Alam, Rumaan
Ecco/HarperCollins (256 pp.)
$27.99  |  Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-06-266763-2

An interrupted family vacation, unexpected visitors, a mysterious blackout—something is happening, and the world may never be the same.

On a reassuringly sunny summer day, Amanda, an account director in advertising; Clay, a college professor; and their children, Archie, 15, and Rose, 13, make their way from Brooklyn to a luxury home (swimming pool! hot tub! marble countertops!) in a remote area of Long Island they’ve rented for a family vacation. Shortly after they arrive, however, the family’s holiday is interrupted by a knock on the door: The house’s owners, a prosperous older Black couple—George Washington and his wife, Ruth—have shown up unannounced because New York City has been plunged into a blackout and their Park Avenue high-rise apartment didn’t feel safe. Soon it becomes clear that the blackout is a symptom (or is it a cause?) of something larger—and nothing is safe. Has there been a nuclear or climate disaster, a war, a terrorist act, a bomb? Alam’s story unfolds like a dystopian fever dream cloaked in the trapings of a dream vacation: Why do hundreds of deer show up in the house’s well-maintained backyard or a flock of bright-pink flamingos frolic in the family pool and then fly away? What is the noise, loud enough to crack glass, that comes, without warning, once and then, later, repeatedly? Is it safer to go back to the city, to civilization, or to remain away, in a world apart? As they search for answers and adjust to what increasingly appears to be a confusing new normal, the two families—one Black, one White; one older, one younger; one rich, one middle-class—are compelled to find community amid calamity, to come together to support each other and survive. As he did in his previous novels, Rich and Pretty (2016) and That Kind of Mother (2018), Alam shows an impressive facility for getting into his characters’ heads and an enviable empathy for their moral shortcomings, emotional limitations, and failures of imagination. The result is a riveting novel that thrums with suspense yet ultimately offers no easy answers—disappointing those who crave them even as it fittingly reflects our time.

Addressing race, risk, retreat, and the ripple effects of a national emergency, Alam’s novel is just in time for this moment.

HOMELAND ELEGIES

Akhtar, Ayad
Little, Brown (368 pp.)
$28.00  |  Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-316-49-642-1

A playwright and novelist, the son of Muslim immigrants from Pakistan, explores his conflicted place in U.S. society in a searing work of autofiction.

The narrator of this novel, like its author, is named Ayad Akhtar. The real Akhtar achieved acclaim—and notoriety—with his 2012 play, Disgraced, winner of the Pulitzer Prize. The fictional Akhtar, too, has written a controversial drama in which an “American-born character with Muslim origins confesses that as the towers were falling [on 9/11], he felt something unexpected and unwelcome, a sense of pride.” Over the course of eight chapters—some narrative, some nearly essaylike, all bookended by an “overture” and a “coda”—Akhtar explores family, politics, art, money, sex, religion, and prejudice in vivid, bracingly intelligent prose. Along the way, the reader encounters a range of memorable characters: Akhtar’s father, an immigrant doctor who supports the presidential campaign of Donald Trump; his mother, a melancholy woman who pines to be a Muslim American today.

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A profound and provocative inquiry into an artist’s complex American identity.

CUYAHOGA

Beatty, Pete
Scribner (272 pp.)
$27.00  |  Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-982155-55-1

A rambling shaggy dog tale of the frontier that, 200-odd years ago, lay just across the Appalachians.

In the winter of 1828, chronicles native son Beatty, Cleveland lay on the eastern shore of the Cuyahoga River while on the bluff opposite lay the wild territory called Ohio City. Its champion is a Paul Bunyan-esque character called Big Son, “his shoulders wide as ox yokes,” who “drank a barrel of whiskey and belched fire….Ate a thousand pancakes and asked for seconds. Drained swamps and cut roads etc. More feats than can be numbered to count up.” So relates his younger brother, Medium Son, who lives in Big’s shadow and recounts his many adventures and misadventures while living some of his own, unfolding in a narrative reminiscent of Thomas Berger’s Little Big Man and Charles Portis’s The Dog of the South, both parodic and earnest. The other residents of Ohio City are legendary in their own rights, including grizzled Revolutionary War veterans, swaggers and swindlers, rival titans, and a certain John Appleseed Chapman, who “dressed in such rags that you could see through to his privates” and is exceedingly careless of both personal hygiene and ordinary decency. Meed, as the younger
There’s a lot to look forward to this fall—at least in the world of books. To begin with: a new Elena Ferrante! *The Lying Life of Adults* (Europa, Sept. 1) introduces another teenage girl from Naples, but Giovanna lives in a more privileged neighborhood than Elena and Lila of the earlier series. (Since it’s embargoed, we weren’t able to review it for this issue.) Marilynne Robinson has a new novel, *Jack* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Sept. 29), which returns to the world she created in *Gilead*. After her sensational debut, *Homegoing*, which followed a family for seven generations, Yaa Gyasi dives deep into the life of one woman in *Transcendent Kingdom* (Knopf, Sept. 1).

Two National Book Award winners return with their first novels since winning the prize: Sigrid Nunez with *What Are You Going Through* (Riverhead, Sept. 8) and Phil Klay with *Missionaries* (Penguin Press, Oct. 6). There’s a new Tana French, *The Searcher* (Viking, Oct. 6), which finds a retired Chicago cop moving to Ireland—and discovering, of course, that he hasn’t left crime-solving behind.

Something strange is happening in Rumaan Alam’s *Leave the World Behind* (Ecco, Oct. 6), and if you haven’t figured it out before you finish reading, you’ll get a second chance when it comes to Netflix as a movie starring Julia Roberts and Denzel Washington.

The narrator of Ayad Akhtar’s *Homeland Elegies* (Little, Brown, Sept. 15) is a man named Ayad Akhtar who, like the author, is a playwright. Our review calls it “a profound and provocative inquiry into an artist’s complex American identity.” *Silence Is My Mother Tongue* by Sulaiman Addonia (Graywolf, Sept. 8) tells the story of a young woman living in a refugee camp in Sudan.

Last year, Bryan Washington made a splash with his debut story collection, *Lot*, and he hasn’t made us wait long for his first novel, *Memorial* (Riverhead, Oct. 27), which our review calls “a subtle and moving exploration of love, family, race, and the long, frustrating search for home.” Susanna Clarke did make us wait for her second novel, *Piranesi* (Bloomsbury, Sept. 15)—it’s been 16 years since the phenomenal *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*—and our review says it’s “weird and haunting and excellent.”

After conquering the Young Adult shelves with his Eragon fantasy series, Christopher Paolini has turned to science fiction in his first novel for adults, *To Sleep in a Sea of Stars* (Tor, Sept. 15). V.E. Schwab’s *The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue* (Tor, Oct. 6) follows a woman through 300 years of living like a ghost, unremembered by anyone she meets, after making a deal with the devil. Jonathan Lethem’s *The Arrest* (Ecco, Nov. 10) is a post-apocalyptic road trip starring two former Hollywood writers.

Keep a lookout for two excellent books set in hospitals, which couldn’t be more timely. The protagonist of Emma Glass’ *Rest and Be Thankful* (Bloomsbury, Dec. 1) is a nurse in a London pediatric ward, as is Glass herself, while Ellen Cooney’s *One Night Two Souls Went Walking* (Coffee House, Nov. 10) follows a chaplain on her rounds during one long night. Don DeLillo has a short, vivid new novel, *The Silence* (Scribner, Oct. 20), about a couple who survive a plane’s crash landing. Bobbi Ann Mason’s *Dear Ann* (Harper, Sept. 8) is “a beautifully written homage to the 1960s by a mature writer at the top of her literary power,” according to our review. There are new books by Danielle Evans, Ken Follett, David Leavitt, Sue Miller, Nick Hornby, Jess Walter, and *Nick*, a prequel to *The Great Gatsby* by Michael Farris Smith. Happy reading!

*Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.*
brother is known, records his brother’s Herculean deeds in
every weather—“He somehow took sick with the hog cholera
himself and puked enough to drown a horse,” he relates, which
he allows is a lesser feat than the usual boulder-tossing and ele-
ment-wrassling that fills his pages. The lighthearted tale takes a
serious turn when Big builds a messy bridge across a river that,
says Meed, “is mostly water with some dirt and fishes mixed in,”
a bridge that lets settlers swarm like fleas on the far shore and
sets a plot in motion to undo Big’s creation, adding mayhem to
a narrative that constantly threatens to spin out of control but
that Beatty guides to a satisfying, surprising end.

An improbable, downright preposterous yarn ably spun
and a great entertainment for a time in need of laughter.

In a Taiwanese immigrant family, secrets and myths are indistinguishably intertwined.

This debut novel is told from the alternating perspectives of three generations of women from the same family: Ama, the grandmother, who emigrated from Taiwan with her war-addled husband and two children, leaving three other daughters behind; Mother, who remembers both Taiwan and the Arkansas chicken farm where they arrived through the lens of poverty and struggle; and the daughter, born in this country, who serves as a link between her mother and grandmother which both would be more comfortable severing. From the beginning, the story is

“A visceral book that promises a major new literary voice.”

—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

Joanna Eleftheriou

Deesha Philyaw

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY PRESS

“Intimate and a touch mournful, most powerfully so when the
author writes about her sexuality. . . . These essays reveal an
impassioned and hard-fought sense of self and place.”

—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

THE SECRET LIVES OF CHURCH LADIES

678-1-949199-73-4

“This Way Back

Deesha Philyaw

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY PRESS

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—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

Joanna Eleftheriou

THE SECRET LIVES OF CHURCH LADIES

“A collection of luminous stories populated by deeply moving
and multifaceted characters. . . . Tender, fierce, proudly black and
beautiful, these stories will sneak inside you and take root.”

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one of internalized violence. Agong, the family patriarch, was a soldier from the Chinese mainland, 20 years older than Ama when she married him at 18, already a widow and mother of three. In their second life in America, Agong has lost the thread of his memories and forgotten his name, the faces of his children, and the place where he buried the family gold—in spite of Ama’s best efforts to beat it out of him. Mother, in an attempt to escape Ama’s violence, has married another man from the Chinese mainland and struggles instead to shield her children from her husband’s abuse. Meanwhile, the daughter navigates both the demands of her American community to assimilate and the need of her immigrant family to preserve the cultural memories of a place she has never known. The magic of these origin myths is very much present in all their lives. When the daughter and her brother dig a series of holes in the rank soil of their backyard, the holes become mouths, open and hungry. When the daughter is beaten for this infraction by her mother—enacting a violence more typical of Ama—a tiger tail with its own vituperative will grows from one of the scabs. And when the daughter’s lover, Ben, a girl from Ningxia who could “spit a watermelon seed so far it skipped the sea and planted in another country,” gets the idea to feed the daughter’s tail to one of the backyard holes, what emerges are letters from Ama that tell not only the secret at the root of her violence, but the secret at the root of all their entangled lives.

A visceral book that promises a major new literary voice.

**PIRANESI**

_Susanna Clarke_  
Bloomsbury (272 pp.)  
$27.00 | Sep. 15, 2020  
978-1-63557-563-7


The narrator of this novel answers to the name “Piranesi” even though he suspects that it’s not his name. This name was chosen for him by the Other, the only living person Piranesi has encountered during his extensive explorations of the House. Readers who recognize Piranesi as the name of an Italian artist known for his etchings of Roman ruins and imaginary prisons might recognize this as a cruel joke that the Other enjoys at the expense of the novel’s protagonist. It is that, but the name is also a helpful clue for readers trying to situate themselves in the world Clarke has created. The character known as Piranesi lives within a Classical structure of endless, inescapable halls they were teenagers. But when she arrives in California, her friend reveals he will be touring with his band for the summer, leaving Clara with an unexpected roommate, Josh Darling. Feeling too humiliated to return home, she decides to spend the summer in LA after being offered a temporary job at her aunt’s PR firm. Josh is a porn star, and he firmly corrects Clara’s misconceptions—and those of readers—about the adult entertainment industry. Clara is worried that her association with Josh will cause a scandal, but she loves the freedom of her new life too much to worry. They develop a close friendship but agree to ignore the sizzling attraction between them. Clara is outraged when she discovers that the powerful porn company Josh works for, Black Hat, is trying to blackmail him into a new contract. They decide to strike back at the company by creating a website with unabashedly sex-positive video tutorials that center women’s pleasure. Clara and Josh are likable characters trying to make the world a better place. Danan’s debut is a staunch rejection of societal shame about sex and pleasure—one that will speak to romance readers young and old.

_A deliciously fresh romance with strong characters and feminist themes._

**THE ROOMMATE**

_Rosie Danan_  
Berkley (336 pp.)  
$16.00 paper | Sep. 15, 2020  
978-0-593-10160-5

A woman from a staid Connecticut society family moves to LA and falls in love with her roommate.

Clara Wheaton grew up in a household beset by scandal, and it turned her into a creature of habit and duty. As a young girl, Clara vowed to live quietly and never cause anxiety for her long-suffering mother. Now she’s 27 with a Ph.D. in art history and no idea what to do with it, so she moves to LA in a last-ditch attempt to win over the friend she’s had a crush on since they were teenagers. But when she arrives in California, her friend reveals he will be touring with his band for the summer, leaving Clara with an unexpected roommate, Josh Darling. Feeling too humiliated to return home, she decides to spend the summer in LA after being offered a temporary job at her aunt’s PR firm. Josh is a porn star, and he firmly corrects Clara’s misconceptions—and those of readers—about the adult entertainment industry. Clara is worried that her association with Josh will cause a scandal, but she loves the freedom of her new life too much to worry. They develop a close friendship but agree to ignore the sizzling attraction between them. Clara is outraged when she discovers that the powerful porn company Josh works for, Black Hat, is trying to blackmail him into a new contract. They decide to strike back at the company by creating a website with unabashedly sex-positive video tutorials that center women’s pleasure. Clara and Josh are likable characters trying to make the world a better place. Danan’s debut is a staunch rejection of societal shame about sex and pleasure—one that will speak to romance readers young and old.

_A deliciously fresh romance with strong characters and feminist themes._

*978-0-593-10160-5*
A London pediatric nurse struggles not to let her job consume her.

REST AND BE THANKFUL
Glass, Emma
Bloomsbury (160 pp.)
$18.00 | Dec. 1, 2020
978-1-42660-107-0

A London pediatric nurse struggles not to let her job consume her.
Laura is trying to make it through a week of night shifts at the hospital children’s ward. She has time off coming up, if she can just fight her way through the exhaustion to get there. But as the novel begins, Laura’s world is falling apart. The man she lives with—a home health care aide, has plummeted into a second severe depression, and their family pastor has dispatched the limp animal who believed he had transcended his Kingdom, as one of the doctors and other nurses she works with, and a cluelessly cheerful med student. She is beset by poor sleep and haunted by nightmares. Worst of all, she is seeing things: a woman in black like the specter of death itself, appearing in the Tube, the hospital, and in Laura’s dreams. As things continue to deteriorate, Laura is less and less sure that her nightmare, waking or otherwise, will ever end.

A heart-wrenching and poetic look at a profession that deserves more literary attention. (This review is printed here for the first time.)

THE SEARCHER
French, Tana
Viking (464 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-73-522465-0

A retired cop takes on one last case in this stand-alone novel from the creator of the Dublin Murder Squad.
Originally from North Carolina, Cal Hooper has spent the last 30 years in Chicago. “A small place. A small town in a small country”: That’s what he’s searching for when he moves to the West of Ireland. His daughter is grown, his wife has left him, so Cal is on his own—until a kid named Trey starts hanging around. Trey’s brother is missing. Everyone believes that Brendan has run off just like his father did, but Trey thinks there’s more to the story than just another young man leaving his family behind in search of money and excitement in the city. Trey wants the police detective who just emigrated from America to find out what’s really happened to Brendan. French is deploying a well-worn trope here—in fact, she’s deploying a few. Cal is a new arrival to an insular community, and he’s about to discover that he didn’t leave crime and violence behind when he left the big city. Cal is a complex enough character, though, and it turns out that the mystery he’s trying to solve is less shocking than what he ultimately discovers. French’s latest is neither fast-paced nor action-packed, and it has as much to do with Cal’s inner life as it does with finding Brendan. Much of what mystery readers are looking for in terms of action is squeezed out, but this glimpse into the world of nursing feels like a true literary rarity. Glass wants readers inside Laura’s body, tasting seawater in her nightmares of drowning, feeling her limb-heaviness as she falls asleep at a friend’s kitchen table. Such richness makes all of Glass’ writing stand out, but this glimpse into the world of nursing feels like a true literary rarity. Glass, a nurse herself, takes both standard nursing tropes and revelations about the work and brings them all to shimmering life. “We are cotton buds sucking up the sadness of others,” Laura says of nurses, “we are saturated, we are saviors.”

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A heart-wrenching and poetic look at a profession that deserves more literary attention. (This review is printed here for the first time.)

TRANSCENDENT KINGDOM
Gyasi, Yaa
Knopf (288 pp.)
$27.95 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-525-67818-4

A scientist weighs the big questions that her private trauma bequeaths her.
After Homegoing (2016) swept through seven generations, Gyasi’s wise second novel pivots toward intimacy. It unspools entirely in the voice of watchful, reticent, brilliant Gifty, 28, nearly finished with her doctorate in neuroscience at Stanford’s School of Medicine. Her formidable mother, a home health care aide, has plummeted into a second severe depression, and their family pastor has dispatched the limp woman toward Gifty via airplane from Huntsville, Alabama, “folding her up the way you would a jumpsuit.” The first episode, when Gifty was 11, arrived after an opiate overdose stole the life of 16-year-old Nana, the firstborn son and more cherished child. Both times the Ghanaian matriarch has crawled mutely into the last third of the novel, and the morally ambiguous ending may be unsatisfying for some. But French’s fans have surely come to expect imperfect allegiance to genre conventions, and the author does, ultimately, deliver plenty of twists, shocking revelations, and truly chilling moments.

Slow moving and richly layered.
**FALL SPOTLIGHT:**

**STORY COLLECTIONS**

By Laurie Muchnick

**The Secret Lives of Church Ladies** by Deesha Philyaw (West Virginia University Press, Sept. 1): In her debut collection, Philyaw invites us in, sits us down, and introduces her “deeply moving and multifaceted characters, the Black girls and women who sit in traditional church pews and discover their own unique ways to worship...No saints exist in these pages, just full-throated, flesh-and-blood women who embrace and redefine love, and their own selves, in powerfully imperfect renditions.”

**Each of Us Killers** by Jenny Bhatt (7.13 Books, Sept. 8): This debut collection is full of “exquisitely crafted stories about longing, striving, and learning what we can control,” according to our review. “Creating a rich array of Indian immigrants, students abroad, repatriates, and people who have never left their villages, Bhatt skillfully probes the fault lines where desire shears against limitation, revealing the complex mix of luck, history, circumstance, and grit that determines which side will dominate.”

**Truth telling: Stories, Fables, Glimpses** by Lynne Sharon Schwartz (Delphinium, Oct. 6): At 81, Schwartz is a veteran novelist due for a rediscovery. This collection of stories about New Yorkers ranges from realistic tales that “chronicle the sweetness of long marriages and the lingering pain of death and divorce” to more experimental fables that “are deliciously absurd while also building to startling revelations.”

**Collected Stories** by Shirley Hazzard (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Nov. 3): Hazzard, who died in 2016, is best known for her ravishing novels The Transit of Venus and The Great Fire, but in the 1960s she also wrote a number of stories that were published in the New Yorker and collected in two volumes, Cliffs of Fall and People in Glass Houses. These have now been combined, along with a number of uncollected pieces, in a volume that’s a must-have for fans of precise, devastating fiction.
Sharply intelligent, nuanced, precise, and subtly hilarious.

COLLECTED STORIES
Hazzard, Shirley
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
(688 pp.)
$28.00 | Nov. 3, 2020
978-0-374-12648-3

Hazzard, who died in 2016, is best known as the author of two magnifi-
cent, intricate novels, The Transit of Venus (1980) and The Great Fire (2003). The stori-
es collected here offer a perfect intro-
duction to her astringent sensibility.

Born in Australia to a Welsh father and Scottish mother, she grew up in Sydney as well as Hong Kong, Italy, New Zealand, and New York, where she worked for the United Nations for 10 years. There are two entire books included here—Cliffs of Fall (1969), which features men and women searching for love but more often finding incomprehension, and People in Glass Houses (1967), a collection of linked stories set at the Organiza-
tion, a not-even-thinly-disguised U.N.—as well as a number of unpublished or uncollected stories. Hazzard's characters are yearening for intimacy and perfect understanding and are not quite resigned to their inevitable disappointment: “Marriage is
like democracy—it doesn't really work, but it's all we've been able to come up with.” Whether they’re in Tuscany, the Greek Islands, or the suburbs of New York, they search for truth and are devoted to beauty; Hazzard's writing is formal, and even the dialogue is elegantly mannered: “Why, even religion—even the law, than which, after all, nothing could be more unjust—takes account of extenuating circumstances,” one man improbably
muses after a dull dinner party. The stories set at the U.N. are
tartly satirical as Hazzard buries her bureaucrats, no matter how
idealistic, under a blizzard of papers such as “the Provisional Report of the Working Group on Unforeseeable Contingencies” and
checklists “painstakingly devised to avoid anything resem-
bling a personal opinion.” They feel like an up-to-the-minute
tale of love and beauty in the face of brutality. Samuel and Isai-
iah are two young men enslaved on a Mississippi plantation
known as Empty. Isaiah is haunted by fragmented memories of
the mother he was stripped from as a child; Samuel became Isai-
iah's first friend on the plantation when he was brought there
in chains, and their relationship has bloomed into a love affair
that sets them apart from the other slaves and disrupts the planta-
tion's functioning. The plantation's owner is Paul, a White man
who forces his slaves into having sex so the women will produce
new slaves. Samuel's and Isaiah's sexuality throws a wrench in
Paul's cruelty, and the consequences of their love send ripples
through the novel's vast cast of vividly rendered characters.
There's Essie, for instance, the female slave Isaiah can't impreg-
nate and who eventually is raped by Paul. She becomes preg-
nant with Solomon—whom she can't bring herself to love—and
this infuriates Amos, an older slave who loves her and schemes
to turn the plantation against Isaiah and Samuel for what he
thinks of not only as their selfishness, but their unnatural love.
“There was no suitable name for whatever it was that Samuel and Isai-

An ambitious, imaginative, and important tale of Black
queerness through history. (This review is printed here for the first time.)
Two former Hollywood pals find themselves at odds with one another. Lethem is an odd duck on the best of days, so it’s no wonder his new novel imagines the end of the world through a peculiar lens. After his Big Lebowski–esque version of noir in The Feral Detective (2018), here he takes on the end of the world in a strange amalgamation of ‘70s disaster movie, ‘80s yuppie comedy, and seemingly whatever else came out of the kitchen sink. The lead here is Alexander “Sandy” Duplessis, who, in the wake of a major disaster called the Arrest that wiped out (gasp!) Hollywood and then eventually the internet and all contemporary communications, became essentially a modern version of David Brin’s The Postman (1985), here called Journeyman. Our guy divides his time between making deliveries and studying under the local butcher. The Journeyman got stuck in rural New England when everything went to hell, visiting his sister Maddy’s farm in what seems to have become a feudal community. Things go sideways when Sandy’s Yale roommate and Hollywood writing partner Peter Todbaum turns up in a nuclear “supercar” called The Blue Streak—modeled on the vehicle out of the old ‘70s post-apocalyptic movie Damnation Alley—that can apparently tunnel underground and operate underwater, among other things. The backstory is that the two men were working on a project in Hollywood (“Todbaum the bullshitter, Journeyman the hands on the keyboard”). But then something uncomfortable happened between Todbaum and Journeyman’s sister. Lethem is certainly capable of having gone full-on Cormac McCarthy here, but instead this is pretty much a sly play on post-apocalyptic fantasies, with the operative word being play. Superminimalist writing, short chapters, interstitial images from the Journeyman’s scrapbook, and Lethem’s
unusual perspective make for odd bedfellows, but it’s a decent distraction from the real world right now. A meditation on a dystopian future that maintains a careful balance between social satire and purposeful provocation.

A GIRL IS A BODY OF WATER
Makumbi, Jennifer Nansubuga
Tin House (560 pp.)
$27.95 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-951142-04-9

A young girl comes of age in 1970s Uganda.

Makumbi’s latest book is a luminous and sprawling bildungsroman set in Uganda under the rule of Idi Amin. Kirabo, a smart and willful girl, is growing up with her grandparents in a rural village. Her father is off in the city, and Kirabo doesn’t know who her mother is. Worse, no one is willing to tell her. Kirabo starts visiting the local witch, Nsuuta, hoping to learn something. There’s another issue to address, too. Sometimes Kirabo seems to fly outside her own body, to observe herself from without. “Listen,” Nsuuta tells her. “You fly out of your body because our original state is in you.” What is that original state? Nsuuta tells Kirabo that it was “the way women were in the beginning,” when “we were not squeezed inside, we were huge, strong, bold, loud, proud, brave, independent. But it was too much for the world and they got rid of it.” The novel is a magnificent blend of Ugandan folklore and more modern notions of feminism. Eventually, Kirabo finds herself admitted to an elite girls school, where she learns from the older pupils not to shrink inside herself but to take pride in herself and in her body. Kirabo is a wonderful character, as are her best friend and Nsuuta. But Sio, the boy in whom Kirabo takes an interest, never comes fully to life. Occasionally, dialogue between the characters can feel flat, as though the author were inserting her own political beliefs into their mouths. These are relatively minor flaws: As a whole, the novel is a vivid, rambling delight. Makumbi’s prose can be musical and rhythmic or calmly informative, as her narrative requires.

In its depiction of both singular characters and a village community, this book is a jewel.

BOX HILL
A Story of Low Self-Esteem
Mars-Jones, Adam
New Directions (112 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-8112-3005-6

In a cruisy, pastoral spot, a young, inexperienced gay man trips over the “long and insolently extended” legs of a mysterious older gay man and falls, quite literally, into a new life.

It’s 1975, south of London, and clumsy, pudgy Colin is turning 18 on a Sunday, the day the bikers hang out at Box Hill in Surrey. Colin is so self-conscious about his weight and looks that he doesn’t understand that sexy, 6-foot-5 Ray—after an initial bit of sex in the fields near the pub where the bikers congregate—is taking possession of him by moving him into his home and controlling almost every aspect of his life. But that control is something Colin yearns for. Told by Colin years after the relationship has ended, Mars-Jones’ trim, poignant novel humanizes the intricacies of a dominant-submissive gay relationship. “If there are to be leaders then there must be followers, and I had followership skills in plenty,” Colin confides. Some aspects of their six years together are shocking: Colin learns to prefer sleeping on the floor and doesn’t ever learn Ray’s last name, occupation, or birthday. Since the novel is narrated by Colin, and since Colin loves the mystery of being with Ray, the potential pitfall here is that the mystery man will remain a cipher to readers. But Mars-Jones uncovers revealing details about Ray, like the fact that although he always heads up the motorcade of bikers, he’s not all cocky swagger; he’s a real stickler for speed limits and is courteous to pedestrians. Their relationship may end in tragedy, but it’s a joy to learn that Colin conquers the pejorative assessment in the novel’s subtitle, A Story of Low Self-Esteem.

A relationship that could seem profoundly unfair blossoms into a revelation of love and magic.

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

A Cinderella story set in Ghana.

“I think I would have been less apprehensive if Eli himself had been present.” Probably so, since this is Afi’s wedding and Elikem is the groom, whom she has barely met. This delightful debut novel from Medie, who was born in Liberia, educated in Ghana and the U.S., and teaches at the University of Bristol in England, is anything but academic. As it begins, Afi—gorgeous, talented at sewing, dirt poor, and very country—is being married in a traditional ceremony to an absent young man whose wealthy and
Fall Spotlight: Debut Novels

By Laurie Muchnick

His Only Wife by Peace Adzo Medie (Algonquin, Sept. 1): Our review calls this novel “a Cinderella story set in Ghana.” Beautiful but poor Afi is selected as a bride for handsome, rich Elikem, who only wants to be left alone with his girlfriend and their daughter. “Medie subtly develops Afi’s character as she...goes from being an innocent, awestruck village girl to a sophisticated, confident woman, accustomed to privilege and luxury, set on a creative career...and mad as hell.”

The Roommate by Rosie Danan (Berkley, Sept. 15): “A deliciously fresh romance with strong characters and feminist themes,” this novel tells the story of Clara, who moves to California and falls in love with the last person she would have expected: her roommate, Josh, who’s a porn star. Our review calls it “a staunch rejection of societal shame about sex and pleasure—one that will speak to romance readers young and old.”

Missionaries by Phil Klay (Penguin Press, Oct. 6): After winning the National Book Award for Redeployment, a collection of short stories about U.S. soldiers in Iraq, Klay returns with a first novel in which “a host of journalists, mercenaries, soldiers, and well-meaning innocents are thrust into a quagmire in Colombia...giv[ing] his concerns about intractable violence a broader scope.”

The Prophets by Robert Jones Jr. (Putnam, Jan. 5): This epic novel tells the story of Samuel and Isaiah and the way their love disrupts life on the Mississippi plantation where they’re enslaved. Our review says, “Jones spins a sprawling story of jealousy and passion that foregrounds Black queerness, asserting that queerness has always been part of the Black experience—not just in the slave past, but the African one as well....An ambitious, imaginative, and important tale.”
Dryly funny and deeply tender; draining and worth it.

WHAT ARE YOU GOING THROUGH

Nunez, Sigrid
Riverhead (224 pp.)
$26.00 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-0-593-19141-5

A woman is enlisted to help a dying friend commit suicide in Nunez’s latest novel, which—true to form—is short, sharp, and quietly brutal. Nunez returns to many of the topics she mined in The Friend, which won the National Book Award for Fiction in 2018: the meaning of life, the nature of death, writing, the purpose of friendship. This is hardly a criticism; in fact, what else is there? The novel, spare and elegant and immediate, often feeling closer to essay than fiction, is as much about its unnamed narrator’s thoughts as the events of her life (is there a difference?). To the extent there is a “plot”—less a “plot” than “circumstances to inspire thinking”—it is this: A writer in late middle age goes to another city to visit an old friend who is sick. Later, when it becomes clear that the friend’s condition is terminal, she enlists our narrator to assist her in ending her life. Not to help with the actual dying part—“I know what to do,” she quips. “It’s not complicated”—but rather with everything that should happen in the interim. What she wants is to rent a house for the end, nothing special, “just somewhere I can be peaceful and do the last things that need to be done.” And she would like our narrator to be there. “I can’t be completely alone,” she explains. “What if something goes wrong? What if everything goes wrong?” She will, she promises “make it as much as possible.” Reluctantly, the narrator agrees. Most of the novel, though, is not about this, or at least not directly. Instead, the narrator considers her past and her present. She attends the doomsday climate lecture of an ex-boyfriend. She thinks about the trauma of aging, for everyone, and especially for women. The novel is concerned with the biggest possible questions and confronts them so bluntly it is sometimes jarring: How should we live in the face of so much suffering?

Dryly funny and deeply tender; draining and worth it.
TO SLEEP IN A SEA OF STARS
Paolini, Christopher
Tor (880 pp.)
$20.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-250-76284-9

A curious scientist stumbles on mysterious ruins in the opening chapters of this science fiction epic. Things are really turning around for Kira Navárez. A xenobiologist, she's finishing up a stint doing research on the large moon Adrasteia with a small team of other scientists, and her boyfriend, Alan, has just proposed to her. Instead of continuing to spend months apart, working on different planets and waiting until they can be together, they'll be able to ask their employers to make them part of a colony as a couple. As Kira performs a few routine last-minute checks before their team leaves the system, something strange catches her eye. She decides to check it out, just to be thorough, and finds herself in the middle of an ancient structure. When her curiosity gets the better of her and she touches a pedestal covered in dust, a bizarre black material flows out and covers her entire body. She passes out as she's being rescued by her team, and when she comes to, she seems to be fine, and the team reports her findings to the government. But soon a kind of strange, alien suit takes over her body, covering her with black material that lashes out violently against Alan and the other scientists, forming spikes that jump out from her skin. A military ship comes to collect what's left of the team and investigate the reports of an alien discovery. When Kira performs a few routine last-minute checks before their team leaves the system, something strange catches her eye. She decides to check it out, just to be thorough, and finds herself in the middle of an ancient structure. When her curiosity gets the better of her and she touches a pedestal covered in dust, a bizarre black material flows out and covers her entire body. She passes out as she's being rescued by her team, and when she comes to, she seems to be fine, and the team reports her findings to the government. But soon a kind of strange, alien suit takes over her body, covering her with black material that lashes out violently against Alan and the other scientists, forming spikes that jump out from her skin. A military ship comes to collect what's left of the team and investigate the reports of an alien discovery. When an alien species attacks the ship, presumably because of Kira's discovery, Kira will have to learn to harness the suit's strange powers to defend herself and the rest of the human race. Paolini, best known for the YA epic fantasy series The Inheritance Cycle, makes his adult debut in another genre that welcomes long page counts. This one clocks in at close to 900 pages, but the rollicking pace, rapidly developing stakes, and Paolini's confident worldbuilding make them fly by. Perhaps not the most impressive prose, but a worthwhile adventure story.

A fun, fast-paced epic that science fiction fans will gobble up.

THE SECRET LIVES OF CHURCH LADIES
Philyaw, Deesha
West Virginia Univ. Press (192 pp.)
$18.99 paper | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-949199-73-4

In a collection of luminous stories populated by deeply moving and multifaceted characters, the Black girls and women who sit in traditional church pews discover their own unique ways to worship. Though each of these nine stories carries a strong female voice, or voices, from a different region, life experience, and time, the church and its profound influence on Black communities is a complex character in itself. In “Eula,” two 40-year-old lifelong friends battle each other in defining the parameters of a relationship that had turned sexual years earlier. Tension mounts between the women on New Year’s Eve 1999, the last day of the 20th century, when Caroletta, the narrator, wants Eula to admit they could be more than occasional lovers while Eula refuses to let go of her dream of a traditional churchly life with a husband and child. Meanwhile, in “Jael,” a woman raising her orphaned great-granddaughter finds the 14-year-old’s diary and reads about her erotic obsession with the preacher’s wife, struggling with her own judgment that the child she raised might be an ungodly abomination. In “How To Make Love to a Physicist,” a middle school teacher embraces therapy; still taboo in many communities of color, to work her way through fears stoked by her rigid mother and give herself over to an unexpected love. The strongest story in a collection of gems is “Peach Cobbler,” which finds a teenage girl reckoning with her mother’s coldness and years-long affair with their pastor. No saints exist in these pages, just full-throated, flesh-and-blood women who embrace and redefine love, and their own selves, in powerfully imperfect renditions.

Tender, fierce, proudly Black and beautiful, these stories will sneak inside you and take root.

BLACK BOTTOM SAINTS
Randall, Alice
HarperOne (384 pp.)
$26.99 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-0-06296862-3

The last testament of an African American showbiz insider is here rendered as an impassioned, richly detailed, and sometimes heartbreaking evocation of Black culture in 20th century Detroit and beyond.

Joseph “Ziggy” Johnson (1913-1968) was a real-life nightclub impresario, dance studio instructor, and entertainment columnist for the Michigan Chronicle, an African American newspaper based in Detroit. As this book begins, Ziggy is near death and also near completion of what he characterizes as a “book of saints,” a collection of profiles and reminiscences of more than 50 personalities, famous, obscure, and in-between, who “whispered encouragement and clapped...forward” him and generations of those soul-nourished and otherwise entertained in the book’s legendary “Black Bottom” neighborhood during the ascendancy and boom years of the city’s auto industry. At its outset, this hybrid of portrait gallery, cultural history, and dramatized biography seems to resemble a grand literary equivalent of a “Youth Colossal,” one of Ziggy’s annual Father’s Day nightclub recitals that one of his saints, the poet Robert Hayden, likens to “a W.E.B. DuBois pageant.” But as the portraits accumulate and grow in depth and breadth, they make up an absorbing and poignant account of a glittering age in the life of a once-thriving metropolis. The portraits are punctuated by celebratory
When you deal with the darkness, everything has a price.

THE INVISIBLE LIFE OF ADDIE LARUE

"libations," some of which have so much hard liquor and sugar cubes as to make one fear diabetic shock. Included among Ziggy's saints: heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis; funeral parlor tycoon and political leader Charles Diggs Sr.; NFL Hall of Fame defensive back Dick "Night Train" Lane, who had "come up all kinds of hard, but [whose] ambition was green and vibrant"; UAW negotiator Marc Stepp; actress Tallulah Bankhead (whom Ziggy describes as "the lady who knows no color"); theater director Lloyd George Richards; dancer Lucille Ellis; Sammy Davis Jr., who pops up throughout the narrative, characterized by Ziggy at one point as a "little genius"; Maxine Powell, who taught Motown Records' stable of emerging stars how to comport themselves on- and offstage; and, at the tail end, Ziggy himself, whose narrative voice is seasoned with such idiosyncrasies as referring to Black folks in general as "sepians" and characterizing Black factory workers who made up his readers and audiences as "breadwinners." This last tribute is likely the work of the unofficial collaborator whose own story and embellishments enhance this tapestry. She is referred to throughout as "Colored Girl," but one suspects she is a surrogate for Randall, a Detroit native whose experiences writing country music likely account for the lyricism, pathos, and down-home humor in her narrative.

If Randall's book at times gets carried away with its emotions, it also compels you to ride along with your own.

JACK
Robinson, Marilynne
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
(320 pp.)
$27.00 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-374-27930-1

A sometimes tender, sometimes fraught story of interracial love in a time of trouble.

"I have never heard of a white man who got so little good out of being a white man." So chides Della Miles, upbraiding John Ames Boughton at the opening of Robinson's latest novel, set in an unspecified time, though certainly one of legal racial segregation. Jack hails from Gilead, Iowa, where so many of Robinson's stories are set, and he has a grave waiting there that he seems in a headlong rush to occupy: He drinks, he steals, he wanders, he's a vagrant. Now he's in the Black part of St. Louis, an object of suspicion and concern, known locally as "That White Man That was found dead." So desperate that she didn't notice the sun going down. And so she made a deal: For freedom, and time, she will surrender her soul when she no longer wants to live. But freedom came at a cost. Adeline didn't want to belong to anyone; now she is forgotten every time she slips out of sight. She has affairs with both men and women, but she can never have a comfortable intimacy built over time—only the giddy rush of a first meeting, over and over again. So when she meets a boy who, impossibly, remembers her, she can't walk away. What Adeline doesn't know is why Henry is the first person in 300 years living like a ghost, unable even to speak her own name. He is Presbyterian by birth, she Methodist and sister all separately tell Jack to leave her alone, and once, when Jack's landlady finds out that Della is Black, she demands that he leave. The reader will by this time doubtless be pulling for them, though also wondering how the proper Della puts up with the definitively scruffy Jack, even if it's clear that they love each other without reservation. Robinson's storytelling relies heavily on dialogue, more so than her other work, and involves only a few scene changes, as if first sketched out as a play. The story flows swiftly—and without a hint of inevitability—as Robinson explores a favorite theme, "guilt and grace met together."

An elegantly written proof of the thesis that love conquers all—but not without considerable pain.

THE INVISIBLE LIFE
OF ADDIE LARUE
Schwab, V. E.
Tor (448 pp.)
$26.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-7653-8756-1

When you deal with the darkness, everything has a price.

"Never pray to the gods that answer after dark." Adeline tried to heed this warning, but she was desperate to escape a wedding she didn't want and a life spent trapped in a small town. So desperate that she didn't notice the sun going down. And so she made a deal: For freedom, and time, she will surrender her soul when she no longer wants to live. But freedom came at a cost. Adeline didn't want to belong to anyone; now she is forgotten every time she slips out of sight. She has spent 300 years living like a ghost, unable even to speak her own name. She has affairs with both men and women, but she can never have a comfortable intimacy built over time—only the giddy rush of a first meeting, over and over again. So when she meets a boy who, impossibly, remembers her, she can't walk away. What Adeline doesn't know is why Henry is the first person in 300 years who can remember her. Or why Henry finds her as compelling as she finds him. And, of course, she doesn't know how the devil she made a deal with will react if he learns that the rules of their 300-year-long game have changed. This spellbinding story unspools in multiple timelines as Addie moves through history, learning the rules of her curse and the whims of her captor. Meanwhile, both Addie and the reader get to know Henry and understand what sets him apart. This is the kind of book you stay up all night reading—rich and satisfying and strange and impeccably crafted. Spanning centuries and continents, this is a darkly romantic and suspenseful tale by a writer at the top of her game.
**TRUTHTELLING**

**Stories, Fables, Glimpses**

Schwartz, Lynne Sharon  
Delphinium (240 pp.)  
$24.95 | Oct. 6, 2020  
978-1-883285-92-0  

A grab bag of realist and experimental stories, each one a treasure.

Subtitled “Stories, Fables, Glimpses,” Schwartz’s collection is mostly populated by New Yorkers firmly rooted in their lives—for better and for worse. The realistic stories chronicle the sweetness of long marriages and the lingering pain of death and divorce. In “A Taste of Dust,” selected for The Best American Short Stories 2005, a woman spends the day with her ex-husband and his wife. She wants to believe her husband is miserable, with his teenage daughters and younger wife who mock him, but her feelings of pity abruptly turn to self-pity as she leaves. In “Truth telling,” a long-married couple rekindles their desire when they reveal their lies and indiscretions over the years. And in “The Golden Rule,” an O. Henry Prize winner, a widow contemplates whether she’s helping an unlikable elderly neighbor out of kindness or simply acquiescing to the “cunning tyranny of the weak” and whether this difference even matters. In the experimental stories, or fables, which evoke Lydia Davis loosened from logical precision, Schwartz, who’s 81, dissect the human condition.

These forays into fabulist situations—a minor actress is miss-dated, a woman lets her “Faux-Me” take over for a day—are deliciously absurd while also building to startling revelations. In “Golden Rule,” an O. Henry Prize winner, a widow contemplates whether she’s helping an unlikable elderly neighbor out of kindness or simply acquiescing to the “cunning tyranny of the weak” and whether this difference even matters. In the experimental stories, or fables, which evoke Lydia Davis loosened from logical precision, Schwartz, who’s 81, dissect the human condition.

Wise, wry, and witty—theses stories in all their stylistic variations are perfect.

**A CERTAIN HUNGER**

Summers, Chelsea G.  
Unnamed Press (240 pp.)  
$26.00 | Dec. 1, 2020  
978-1-951213-14-5  

Think Eat, Pray, Love if the narrator were a wildly articulate and charming cannibal.

“Why, I wonder now, did I kill him?” ponders Dorothy Daniels from her prison cell. Imprisoned for life (plus 20 years), she fondly recounts a decade of killing her lovers, starting with the last unsuspecting victim, whose grisly demise begins with a delicious duck confit and abruptly ends with an ice pick to the neck. “Maybe he was my middle-aged madness, my little red Corvette, my last great gasp before I headed off into menopause.” Summers’ narrator is far from your stereotypical psychotic serial killer. She’s a 51-year-old bestselling author, revered food writer, and James Beard Award winner. Her work has been published in glossy magazine spreads “as slick as oiled thighs,” but those days have come and gone, and her “inevitable slow ebb into obscurity” with the rest of print media is looming. Instead of quietly succumbing to her fate, she discovers a new interest: “Giovanni. I killed him and ate his liver.” Like a lecherous M.F.K. Fisher sprinkled with the beguiling depravity of Hannibal Lecter, Dorothy travels the world, eating its food and its men, relishing every bite along the way—including a rump roast made out of...you know. Part culinary travelogue, part campy horror, Summers’ debut is nothing if not wholly original.

Though at times it can become a little tiresome reading from the point of view of a full-blown sadoiopath, the book offers a perspective hardly explored: that of a woman who’s not just angry, but violent. In a literary canon rife with novels glorifying sadistic men, that alone is worth applauding. Unabashedly and full-heartedly living out her id, Dorothy balances her most revolting qualities with a caustic wit, a kind of wink and a nod to readers when things get ghastly that it’s all in good fun. After all, she argues, “Power is the ultimate aphrodisiac.”

**The Devil and the Dark Water**

Turton, Stuart  
Sourcebooks Landmark (480 pp.)  
$26.99 | Oct. 6, 2020  
978-1-72820-602-8  

After an outbreak of ghastly events aboard the Saardam, a merchant vessel returning from the East Indies to Amsterdam in 1634, fear spreads that an evil spirit is responsible.

Before the ship’s departure, a leper issued a stark warning about the “merciless ruin” that awaited it—and then burst into flames. Only prisoner Sammy Pippins, an alleged British spy with uncanny powers of deduction, took the threat seriously. Soon enough at sea, on a vessel populated by “murderers, cutpurses and malcontents,” throats are slit, bodies are stashed, and dark secrets are exposed. Ultimately, a monster storm upends the Saardam and destroys two other ships in the fleet. Amid the evil doings, human decency is largely limited to Sammy’s bodyguard, Arent Hayes, a physically imposing specimen with a kind soul and a “poisoned” past, and healer Sara Wessel, abused wife of soulless Governor General Jan Haan, who happens to be Arent’s uncle. With their congenial Holmes and Watson act, Sammy and Arent seem on track to emerge as the heroes of this perpetually revealing tale. But Turton, who brings a pointed social conscience to bear in his commentary on the ill
A subtle and moving exploration of love, family, race, and the long, frustrating search for home.

MEMORIAL

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

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

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

treatment of women and the exploitation of the lower class, has something else in mind. With all its characters, hidden identities, and backstories, this epic sometimes sags. As one character declares, "There are too many damn secrets on this ship, and I swear all of them are marching toward him with swords in their hands." But Turton, whose brain-twisting first novel, The 7 1/2 Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle (2018), posed knotty challenges for readers, has a colorful tale to tell and does so in highly entertaining fashion.

A devilish sea saga that never runs out of cutthroat conspiracies.

HENCH

Walschots, Natalie Zina
Morrow/HarperCollins

$27.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-0-06-297857-8

An aggrieved Millennial henchwoman sets out to prove that not all heroes are super in poet Walschots' fiction debut. Shortly after freelance "hench" Anna Tromedlov lands a full-time job entering data for Electrophorous Industries, her boss—a minor supervillain known as the Electric Eel—offers her some fieldwork. Anna is nervous but excited—until she discovers that she's simply female set dressing for the Eel's latest press conference. When her employer publicly announces that he's holding the mayor's son for ransom, Supercollider—an A-list superhero—crashes through the window, saving the boy but killing multiple henchmen and shattering Anna's femur in the process. Upon learning that her surgically repaired leg will take six months to heal, a laid-off Anna moves in with her best friend, fellow hench Mike, and helps him run his bar through their relationship is strained. Benson and Mike are on the verge of breaking up, but their passion for each other keeps them from being able to fully pull away. Both men have families they feel distant from: Benson's father is an alcoholic who never fully accepted his son's homosexuality, and Mike's divorced parents have both left Houston for their native Japan. At the start of the novel, Mike's mother, Mitsuko, flies to Houston to visit him at the same time that his father, Eiju, falls seriously ill back in Osaka. Mike picks Mitsuko up from the airport, leaves her with Benson, then flies across the ocean to visit Eiju, whom he hasn't seen in years. Neither Benson nor Mitsuko is happy about being stuck with each other, but they slowly develop a relationship that's not quite friendship and not quite family. They both love the same man, and that's enough to help them understand each other. In Osaka, Mike cares for his sick, grumpy father and helps him run his bar though their relationship is strained. Mike isn't rushing to forgive his homophobic father for leaving the family in Houston, and Eiju is cold and distant. Both Mike and Benson fall into relationships with other men while they're apart, and ultimately, both have to decide how to forgive the people closest to them. Washington's novel is richly layered and thrives in the quiet moments between lovers and family members. Benson and Mike know they could hurt each other, hurt their families, hurt themselves, or they could say words to heal and bring people together. As Mike says, "How did everything come to such a turning point between us? Quietly, I guess. The big moments are never big when they're actually fucking happening." There is passion in this novel—fight scenes, sex scenes, screaming matches, and tears—but it reaches a deep poetic realism when Washington explores the space between characters. When so much is left unsaid, that's when this novel speaks the loudest.

A fiendishly clever novel that fizzes with moxie and malice.
A probing history of the CIA’s evolving role from the outset of the Cold War into the 1960s, viewed through the exploits of four American spies.

On the heels of Germany’s defeat in World War II, European leaders and intelligence agents were shifting focus to the Soviet Union’s dominance over Eastern Europe and threatening pursuit of influence in Asia. Under a recently sworn-in President Harry Truman, the American government was slower to gauge early signals but eventually responded with often disastrous covert tactics. Anderson delivers a complex, massively scaled narrative, balancing prodigious research with riveting storytelling skills. He tracks the careers of four agents. In the Philippines, Edward Lansdale was instrumental in combatting the Hukbalahap uprising, lining up Ramon Magsaysay, the secretary of defense, to become president in 1954. Peter Sichel, a German Jew whose family escaped the Nazis, ran the CIA’s Berlin office for more than a decade. Former naval officer Michael Burke headed the paramilitary operations in Albania and elsewhere. Frank Wisner, the CIA’s deputy director of plans, had key roles in the Office of Policy Coordination until its full merging with the CIA in 1950. Though all four men began their careers with the strong desire to defend American freedom, the author engagingly demonstrates how their efforts were undermined by politically motivated power grabs within the U.S. government; poorly planned covert operations; and duplicitous scheming by the likes of J. Edgar Hoover and Sen. Joseph McCarthy, who were espousing anti-communist rhetoric to advance their own careers. “By the end of Eisenhower’s second term,” writes Anderson, “the geographical spread of governments that his administration had undertaken to overthrow or otherwise subvert suggested an almost purposeful design, as if it sought to alienate the citizenry of most every region and subregion of the globe.” Over the course of the narrative, the author amply shows how the CIA was increasingly pushed to function as an instrument of politically charged ambitions.

An engrossing history of the early days of the CIA.
Arsenault reflects on her serene hometown and the cloaked environmental corruption plaguing it.

The author, a National Books Critics Circle board member and book review editor at Orion, grew up in Mexico, Maine, a small town fortified by the Androscoggin River. She writes poignantly of growing up in a large nuclear family surrounded by the town's dense forestlands. Her father and grandfather worked at the local paper mill, an entity that economically grounded the town and employed a large percentage of its residents, many of whom remained blind to the ever changing world around them. “Monumental philosophical ideas,” writes Arsenault, “were surfacing across America—feminism, environmentalism—however, there were no movements in Mexico but for people walking across the mill’s footbridge to work.” Underneath Mexico’s serene veneer festered a secret that the author began to investigate with steely determination in 2009. While visiting to attend a funeral, Arsenault dug into the town’s history and the Arsenault family tree, both of which were riddled with cancer deaths. Expanding her research outward, she scoured town documents and interviewed family, childhood friends, and surviving townspeople to uncover proof that Mexico and the surrounding area had been dubbed “cancer valley,” with generations of families suffering terminal illnesses. Arsenault disturbingly chronicles how the paper mill released carcinogenic chemicals into the atmosphere and dumped them at the edge of the river, and she shows how the malfeasance was buried in bureaucratic red tape, EPA coverups, and outright lies even as Mexico continued to suffer a “never-ending loop of obituaries.” In this masterful debut, the author creates a crisp, eloquent hybrid of atmospheric memoir and searing exposé. She writes urgently about the dire effects the mill’s toxic legacy had on Mexico’s residents and the area’s ecology while evocatively mining the emotional landscape of caretaking for aging parents and rediscovering the roots of her childhood.

Bittersweet memories and a long-buried atrocity combine for a heartfelt, unflinching, striking narrative combination.

A Black journalist gives Trump supporters a powerful lesson in history and truth.

“Trumpland,” writes Bailey, “includes places throughout the United States where white people overwhelmingly support Trump in spite of—or maybe because of—his open bigotry and racism. They are places where black people have for decades been forced to swallow racist bullshit in order to respect the wishes and wants and feelings of racists, as well as those who excuse and apologize for the racists.” Black denizens of Trumpland have felt compelled to forgive and respect those who believe that the “illusion of civility” is more important than racial equality. The narrative is an incisive “corrective to banal commentary” on race in America from those who “scold people of color for...complaining about Trump too much.” Through a combination of poignant memoir and social and cultural analysis, Bailey tackles range of hot topics as well as his own prior complacency. A masterful storyteller, the author introduces us to a White police officer who regrets not shooting a Black man in the head during what began as a routine traffic stop. Due to his decision not to shoot, he was derided by his fellow officers and lost a promotion. “The comfort level of cops,” Bailey observes, “is more important than black life.” From Dylan Roof’s slaughter of nine Black parishioners in a Charleston church to the horror of racial bias in the criminal justice system, Bailey pulls no punches, and he debunks the myth that White working-class “economic angst”—rather than racism and White supremacy—propelled Trump into office. Furthermore, White Evangelical Christians’ continued support of Trump is fueled by their “political and moral hypocrisy” and disregard for the well-beings of Black and brown communities. By no fault of Bailey’s, die-hard Trumplandians aren’t likely to be swayed; conscientious Americans will come away from this book further enraged by the pernicious, persistent pattern of racial injustice in this country.

Brilliant, searing, and surprisingly vulnerable. (This review is printed here for the first time.)
At Kirkus, it’s all books, all the time, and I don’t think my colleagues would mind if I labeled us all book nerds. As a self-professed nerd, some of my favorite books are those about...well, books—and authors, the creative process, the writing life, etc. Like every year, the 2020 Fall Preview is a tried-and-true guide to the most significant titles releasing in the next four months. Among the 30 standouts I have chosen for nonfiction, there are a few that dig into that wonderfully amorphous world of “literature.”

Harold Bloom, *Take Arms Against a Sea of Troubles* (Yale Univ, Oct. 13): Arguably the most recognizable literary critic and English professor of the past century, Bloom taught at Yale for more than 60 years, authoring more than 50 books during that time. While he received his own fair share of criticism over the years, his first posthumous publication is vintage Bloom. “In 16 dense, erudite, and surprisingly intimate essays,” writes our critic in a starred review, “Bloom (1930-2019) offers a sweeping overview of major Western poets, from Homer to contemporary African American Jay Wright, whom Bloom praises as ‘among the best American poets of whatever origin or complexion.’ As well as celebrating beloved writers, Bloom also reassesses his own work.”

David Karashima, *Who We’re Reading When We’re Reading Murakami* (Soft Skull, Sept. 1): This one is definitely for the nerds, especially those of us in the audience who work in the publishing industry, as the author follows one of the world’s most beloved authors through his many rounds of translation into English. “In this admiring work, first printed in Japanese in 2018,” writes our critic, “Karashima ‘travels back in time to tell the stories of the colorful cast of characters who first contributed to publishing Murakami’s work in English.’ ” While it may be overkill for general readers, translators and other “readers interested in Murakami will enjoy learning about the challenges and trade-offs involved in translation, from the different styles of his translators to his philosophical acceptance of the changes the *New Yorker* made to his work.”

Delphine Minoui, *The Book Collectors* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Oct. 20): Though my passion for books is strong, it likely pales in comparison to that demonstrated by the dedicated book lovers in war-torn Syria. As our reviewer writes in a starred review, “Minoui, a Middle East correspondent for *Le Figaro*, opens with the story of a photograph she saw in 2015 on a Facebook page called Humans of Syria. Taken in Istanbul, it shows two young Syrian men standing in an enclosed room with thousands of books on shelves all around them. Their city, Daraya, was surrounded by Bashar al-Assad’s troops and was being regularly bombed; yet here was a secret, underground library....The author tells two stories: one about the library and the other about a city that had been starved and attacked since 2012 and whose population went from 250,000 to 12,000....It’s an agonizing tale, but readers will be appreciative that Minoui has brought it to light.”

Margaret Randall, *My Life in 100 Objects* (New World Library, Sept. 15): OK, so this one isn’t just about books, but it’s my list, so stick with me. In this entertaining, transporting book, which we call “a heartwarming celebration of the author’s compelling life,” Randall describes a number of objects that are book- or author-related, including an Old Royal typewriter from the 1940s, her first self-published book of poems, *The Joy of Cooking*, red-lacquer doors at Hanoi’s Temple of Literature, a book bag from City Lights in San Francisco, and a cork rollerball pen she uses at book signings.

*Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.*
Considering her youthfulness, Barnett has accomplished more reform than most individuals could accomplish in two lifetimes.

A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT

A MEASURE OF BELONGING
Twenty-One Writers of Color on the New American South
Ed. by Barnes, Cinelle
Hub City Press (192 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Oct. 4, 2020
978-1-938235-71-9

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

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

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

A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT

A Story of Hope, Justice, and Freedom
Barnett, Brittany K.
Crown (336 pp.)
$28.00 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-0-525-55258-0

A welcome new addition to the groaning shelves of books about the critically flawed U.S. legal system.

For the first 90 pages, Barnett, born in 1984, focuses on her youth as a Black female in rural East Texas whose drug-addicted mother ended up in prison. In the remainder of the book, the author mixes straightforward memoir with inspiring accounts of her crusades for social justice. Determined to avoid her mother’s fate, Barnett worked diligently to graduate from college, after which she found work at a top accounting firm and then earned a law degree. The author is painfully aware of the racism built into the criminal justice system, including the absurd prison terms handed down to Black drug users and dealers—the most egregious being “the 100-to-1 crack-to-powder-cocaine sentencing ratio.” Though corporate law was her initial goal, while studying for a criminal law course, Barnett learned about Sharanda Jones, who had received a life sentence for a first-time drug offense. The author poignantly writes about how she was able to identify with families torn apart by such heavy-handed sentences. After obtaining a job in the finance and banking group of a corporate law firm in 2011, Barnett devoted her spare time to advocacy. She hoped to win the release of Jones and others in similar situations through reversals in the appellate courts. When that avenue failed, the author decided that seeking clemency from the president was the only option, no matter the long odds—especially given Barack Obama’s general reluctance to grant pardons. Eventually, however, Obama granted clemency to Jones and other pro bono clients of Barnett’s. In 2016, the author left her corporate career to follow her passion for representing “all those suffering under draconian drug-sentencing laws.” Among her impressive not-for-profit initiatives are the Buried Alive Project and the Girls Embracing Mothers project.

Considering her youthfulness, Barnett has accomplished more reform than most individuals could accomplish in two lifetimes.

TAKE ARMS AGAINST
The Power of the Reader’s Mind Over a Universe of Death
Bloom, Harold
Yale Univ (656 pp.)
$35.00 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-0-300-24728-2

The eminent scholar revisits his literary passions.

In 16 dense, erudite, and surprisingly intimate essays, Bloom (1930-2019) offers a sweeping overview of major Western poets, from Homer to contemporary African American Jay Wright, whom Bloom praises as “among the best American poets of whatever origin or complexion.” As well as celebrating beloved writers, Bloom also reassesses his own work. “If you live ninety years,” he admits, “you will be a battered survivor. Your own mistakes, accidents, failures at otherness beat you down.” To assuage those feelings, he advises, “Rise up at dawn and read something that matters as soon as you can.” He reconsiders his argument in The Anxiety of Influence (1973), analyzing ways in which writers respond to their predecessors. Now, he reveals, the anxiety of influence “seems to me literary love tempered by
ambivalence, as all love is.” Throughout, Freud looms large as “a major essayist in the tradition of Montaigne and Emerson, and not as a supposed scientist”, not as “the master of dream interpretation (where I doubt him) and certainly not the would-be therapist (talking cures) but the pessimistic seer of the human condition.” Bloom’s visceral connection to poets results in vivid, vigorous portraits, whether of poets he knew—Auden, Frost—or those he has read for so long that “it scarcely seems reading anymore.” As he writes of Wallace Stevens, “I am now perpetually on oxygen yet still have the sensation that I breathe the clear air of Stevens.” Early on in this astute collection, the author marks his terrain: “What you read and how deeply you read matters almost as much as how you love, work, exercise, vote, practice charity, strive for social justice, cultivate kindness and courtesy, worship if you are capable of worship. The mind is an activity and will decay into dark inertia if not sustained by the sustenance of reading.”

Reading, this stirring collection testifies, “helps in staying alive.”

**EAT A PEACH**

* A Memoir

Chang, David & Ulla, Gabe

Clarkson Potter (304 pp.)

$28.00 | Sep. 8, 2020

978-1-5247-5921-6

The debut memoir from the star chef and restaurateur.

It would be unfair to label Chang’s book as the Korean American *Kitchen Confidential*, but the similarities in tone and attitude certainly invoke the late Anthony Bourdain. The author, probably best known for his now-global Momofuku culinary brand, is no slouch as a writer, with a style that features a refreshingly defiant attitude and some of the best inessential footnotes since *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*. Chang whisks readers through the steps it takes to be a successful restaurateur, and he makes it clear that there are few ventures harder to pull off. During his first years in the restaurant trade, the author was the beneficiary of family money, a fact that he is not ashamed to admit: Chang’s father gave him a generous loan for the financial foundations of his series of restaurants. “There were no apologies or heartfelt conversations, only the money and the particulars of starting a business,” he writes. “[My father] was vulnerable. I was vulnerable. We were leaning on one another, just as a family might.” Following his early success, Chang began making TV appearances (he now has his own show on Netflix). Of course, there’s always a price for success. After moving to Australia and opening a restaurant, he began to feel the stress of managing his many global culinary assets, and a hepatitis scare in one of his restaurants put his business in danger. There’s also the inevitable chapter on his addictions: The author was a heavy drinker for years, and he also struggled with anger issues. Chang’s memoir eventually becomes a smorgasbord of random recall, covering everything from contemplating the ideal volume of the music in his restaurants to his extended bouts with depression and anxieties about his open-ended future in food.

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

**THE BADDEST BITCH**

* IN THE ROOM

A Memoir

Chang, Sophia

Catapult (320 pp.)

$26.00 | Sep. 8, 2020

978-1-64622-009-0

A blend of music industry 101, hip-hop history, and memoir from the Wu-Tang Clan’s muse.

For decades as a manager, marketer, and A&R rep, Chang helped talented men tell their stories through hip-hop and R&B. Now it’s her turn to tell her story: How did a “Korean Canadian French lit major” end up working with a who’s who of heavy hitters in the music industry—and getting relationship advice from Method Man? From a chance meeting with Joey Ramone as a college student in the late 1980s to working with the Wu-Tang Clan, one of the greatest rap groups of all time, Chang has a storied history in the industry. Her love for hip-hop—the music and the artists—comes through loud and clear in this deeply personal memoir. Now in her 50s, she reflects on her experiences, including her stint as head of a marketing department at Atlantic Records just two years out of college and working with artists like A Tribe Called Quest, KRS-One, Too Short, and Raphael Saadiq. It’s clear why Chang gained a reputation for being hard and no-nonsense, and that comes across in the narrative. But she also shows her more vulnerable side: enduring the highs and lows of love and loss, reclaiming her sexual confidence after the end of a 12-year relationship, and learning to embrace her Asian heritage. The author writes wisely about erasure and fighting to be seen professionally as a woman of color. Unfortunately, aside from a vague mention of a Black woman friend calling her out on her privilege, she doesn’t address being embraced and respected as a non-Black woman within a music culture that often objectifies and denigrates Black women. This is a disappointing omission in an otherwise thoughtful and revealing story.

An intimate, entertaining, and engrossing read for hip-hop fans.
The former executive editor of the Washington Post reflects on his long, distinguished career and how the newspaper business has continued to evolve.

In 1972, the Post's investigation of Watergate led not only to Richard Nixon's resignation, but also to the establishment of reporters Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward as major authors and the elevation of former executive editor Ben Bradlee to legendary status. The paper's coverage of the scandal also redefined the role of investigative reporting in the future. Though much has been written about Watergate, Downie, who oversaw much of the Watergate coverage as deputy metropolitan editor, has his own story to tell. Over his 40-plus years at the newspaper, Downie, who started as a summer intern, advanced through many prominent positions before replacing the retiring Bradlee as executive editor in 1991, a position he would hold until 2008. Under his leadership, the Post provided major, award-winning coverage (25 Pulitzers) on many international events—e.g., 9/11 and the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as investigations into political controversies such as the Clintons' Whitewater investment connections and the Monica Lewinski scandal. “The rules had changed,” writes Downie of the scandal. “Adultery would never again be off limits in decisions about how to report on politicians—from the White House to statehouses to city halls. Veracity, trust, judgment, and all the other elements of, yes, character, would also come into play.” Throughout, the author provides a compelling up-close perspective of running a news organization and intriguing details about the coverage surrounding each event. While he doesn’t shy away from highlighting his leadership accomplishments, he eagerly acknowledges the efforts of his hardworking reporters. He also candidly admits to personality and leadership differences between he and the more gregarious Bradlee, comfortably remaining something apart from the celebrated spotlight.

An absorbing career memoir and an illuminating history of the Post’s news coverage during the last 50 years.

Veteran biographer and gay rights activist Duberman assesses the life and thought of the combative radical feminist.

Andrea Dworkin (1946-2005) was among the most controversial figures in the second-wave feminist movement, caricatured by her critics as a man-hating lesbian who believed all heterosexual sex was rape. Duberman, who knew her personally, paints a much more nuanced picture, pointing out that Dworkin lived for 40 years in a nonexclusive, occasionally sexual relationship with a devoted male partner and that she was ahead of her time in seeing gender as a social construct that denied the fluidity of human sexual behavior. His account of Dworkin’s childhood and youth depicts a precocious rebel with a deep commitment to social justice and a theatrical, confrontational personality that brooked no compromise or evasions. When she was subjected to a brutal and humiliating vaginal exam after being arrested at a sit-in protesting the Vietnam War, 18-year-old Dworkin wrote to every newspaper in New York City describing her ordeal and the conditions at the Women’s House of Detention. It was the beginning of her lifelong battle to make the world face the fact that women were routinely mistreated and abused, culminating in her famous crusade against pornography. Duberman persuasively argues that Dworkin’s position was misunderstood as a call for censorship when in fact what she advocated was the right of women who had been harmed by pornography to sue its purveyors—and their obligation to prove their case in court. Her response to free-speech absolutists gives a good sense of both her belligerence and her searching intelligence: “People have no idea how middle-classed and privileged their liberal First Amendment stuff is—how power and money determine who can speak in this society.” These words resonate even more strongly today, and Duberman notes that after years of opprobrium, there is now “a modicum of acknowledgment of Andrea’s insistent bravery, her mesmerizing public voice, her generosity of spirit.”

A sympathetic, cleareyed portrait that gives Dworkin her due without smoothing over her rough edges.
FALL SPOTLIGHT:
RACE IN AMERICA

By Eric Liebetrau

**A Knock at Midnight** by Brittany Barnett (Crown, Sept. 8): “For the first 90 pages, Barnett, born in 1984, focuses on her youth as a Black female in rural East Texas whose drug-addicted mother ended up in prison. In the remainder of the book, the author mixes straightforward memoir with inspiring accounts of her crusades for social justice.... Considering her youthfulness, Barnett has accomplished more reform than most individuals could accomplish in two lifetimes.”

**Just Us** by Claudia Rankine (Graywolf, Sept. 8): “A cross-disciplinary inquiry into race as the determining construct in American life and culture—and how it is perceived and experienced so differently by those who consider themselves White....Rankine resists being pigeonholed, particularly by White critics....In this genre-defying work, the author...combines poetry, essay, visuals, scholarship, analysis, invective, and argument into a passionate and persuasive case about many of the complex mechanics of race in this country—especially how White people barely acknowledge it...while for Black people, it affects everything.”

**Why Didn’t We Riot?** by Issac J. Bailey (Other Press, Oct. 6): “A Black journalist gives Trump supporters a powerful lesson in history and truth.... By no fault of Bailey’s, die-hard Trumplandians aren’t likely to be swayed, and conscientious Americans will come away from this book further enraged by the pernicious, persistent pattern of racial injustice in this country.”

**White Tears/Brown Scars** by Ruby Hamad (Catapult, Oct. 6): “Journalist Hamad picks up where her 2018 article left off, delving into why White women’s comfort is prioritized and their tears ‘weaponized’ to further marginalize women of color....With scholarly but highly engaging prose, Hamad details White women’s roles in oppression across continents, a much-needed history lesson for those inclined to reduce racism to individual behavior....An extraordinary book for anyone who wishes to pay more than lip service to truly inclusive, intersectional feminism.”
An extraordinary book for anyone who wishes to pay more than lip service to truly inclusive, intersectional feminism.

**WHITE TEARS/BROWN SCARS**

*How White Feminism Betrays Women of Color*

Hamad, Ruby

Catapult (224 pp.)

$16.95 paper | Oct. 6, 2020

978-1-948226-74-5

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

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

A valuable portrait of authoritarianism in action and its more-than-willing adherents.

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**LIAR’S CIRCUS**

*A Strange and Terrifying Journey Into the Upside-Down World of Trump’s MAGA Rallies*

Hoffman, Carl

Custom House/Morrow (272 pp.)

$26.99 | Sep. 1, 2020

978-0-06-300976-9

Travels among Trumpian true believers.

Hoffman, the author of outstanding books that blend travel, history, and anthropology such as *Savage Harvest* (2014), turns his eye on Donald Trump’s MAGA rallies. The author racked up thousands of road miles over many months going into Trumpian strongholds, meeting people such as “a fifty-nine-year-old self-employed house painter and dog breeder, a former Marine, big boned and goateed, who walked with a rolling gait and traveled with a bottle of whiskey, a battery-operated bullhorn, several large flags, and banners exalting Donald Trump.” That fellow vies to be first seated in the front row at any Trump rally, but he’s skunked by a young cancer survivor who has turned to both the Bible and the Donald. Early on, Hoffman validates Godwin’s law: namely, that these days, in any conversation involving politics, someone will soon compare one of the players or subjects with Hitler. Sure enough he does, citing Hitler’s observation nearly a century ago that “great movements are...volcanic eruptions of human passions and emotional sentiments.” That’s abundantly evident, and the quote is apposite. Hoffman often shakes his head in wonderment but rarely condescends, and he approaches his subject with scholarly vigor, sometimes quoting from heady philosophical and sociological sources while retaining a sense of fraught adventure: “If Trumpism was a place, then it was a place I could travel to just as surely as a village in the swamps of New Guinea or the huts of nomads in the rain forests of Borneo.” What he discovered speaks volumes about economic uncertainty, racism (“almost no one admitted to being a racist...but none of them wanted blacks living next door to them or to share any power with them”), xenophobia, fundamentalism, and other populist dog whistles that “lay at the heart of Trump’s message and his power.”

A valuable portrait of authoritarianism in action and its more-than-willing adherents.
CLUTTER
An Untidy History
Howard, Jennifer
Belt Publishing (192 pp.)
$26.00 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-948742-72-6

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

A keen assessment of one of society’s secret shames and its little-understood consequences.

WHO WE’RE READING WHEN WE’RE READING MURAKAMI
Karashima, David
Soft Skull Press (384 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-59376-589-7

A lively account of the many people involved in bringing Haruki Murakami’s writings to English-speaking readers. Literature originates with an author’s imagination, but the final product is the work of a team of professionals, from agents and editors to marketing staff and cover designers. The task of bringing the work of an author who writes in another language to English-speaking audiences is even more complex. In this admiring work, first printed in Japanese in 2018, Karashima travels “back in time to tell the stories of the colorful cast of characters who first contributed to publishing Murakami’s work in English.” The vibrancy of those colors varies from person to person. Among the subjects are Murakami’s first translator, Alfred Birnbaum, an American who came to Japan with his family at age 5, got a job translating for Kodansha International, “one of the leading publishers of Japanese literature in English translation,” and translated A Wild Sheep Chase in 1987, when Murakami was unknown outside Japan; Elmer Luke, a Chinese American editor who, in Murakami’s words, “started the engine” when he sold his work to the American market; editors at the New Yorker, including former editor-in-chief Robert Gottlieb, who, Karashima argues, “may have been pivotal to Murakami’s career” by publishing his early stories; and later translators such as Jay Rubin and Philip Gabriel. Parts of the book are extraneous; there’s little point in quoting someone whose response to a question about the U.S. publication of A Wild Sheep Chase is to say he doesn’t recall any details. But readers interested in Murakami will enjoy learning about the challenges and trade-offs involved in translation, from the different styles of his translators to his philosophical acceptance of the changes the New Yorker made to his work because that publication “has a large number of readers and they also pay really well.”

A fascinating glimpse into the inner workings of publishing.

OUR BODIES, THEIR BATTLEFIELDS
War Through the Lives of Women
Lamb, Christina
Scribner (320 pp.)
$17.00 paper | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-5011-9917-2

The chief foreign affairs correspondent for the London Sunday Times shows the horrific effects of the mass rape of women and girls in conflict zones around the world.
Lamb's editors have put “Disturbing Content” warnings atop some of the stories she’s filed about hot spots from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. “Disturbing” is too mild a word for this superb exposé of the use of mass rape as a “systematic weapon of war.” Crisscrossing the globe to interview survivors, the author makes it abundantly clear that the devastating effects of rape transcend borders. She chronicles her discussions with Nigerian women kidnapped as schoolgirls by Boko Haram and forced to serve as the terrorists’ “bush wives.” She met Yazidis abducted by the Islamic State group and used as sex slaves or sold through online forums that “advertised women along with PlayStation consoles and second-hand cars.” She spoke to female survivors of the Rohingya genocide and of a “rape camp” where Bosnian Serbs raped Muslim women “all night every night to the point of madness.” Legal justice mostly eludes these and other victims. The International Criminal Court has made only one conviction for rape as a war crime, overturned on appeal, and some cases have had a similar fate elsewhere, often because male judges or prosecutors “do not see sexual violence as a high priority compared to mass killings.” Some victims have been ignored until championed by celebrities like Angelina Jolie or Denis Mukwege, the Congolese physician and co-winner of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize whose hospital the author visited despite the risks of Ebola and dangerous militias in the area. To tell some of these stories, Lamb clearly has put herself in peril, and it’s difficult to overpraise her courage or a book that—for the breadth and moral force of its arguments—is perhaps the most important work of nonfiction about rape since Susan Brownmiller’s Against Our Will (1975).

A searing, absolutely necessary exposé of the uses of rape in recent wars and of global injustices to the survivors.

**IF THEN**

An in-depth history of “Cold War America’s Cambridge Analytica.”

A staff writer for the New Yorker and Harvard professor, Lepore knows how to spin out a winning historical study. Here, she dives deep into matters that have seldom attracted scholarly attention, delivering a story that hinges on the discovery, in the late 1950s, that computers and languages such as FORTRAN, based on an endless series of “IF/THEN” statements, “an infinity of outcomes,” could be used to gauge and influence voter preferences. The Simulmatics Corporation melded the worlds of Mad Men advertising and high-tech geekery of the UNIVAC set, leveraging what would eventually be called artificial intelligence to sway campaigns and elections. Among other achievements, the company “claimed credit for having gotten John F. Kennedy elected president.” Lepore’s narrative features some unlikely players, such as the novelist Eugene Burdick of The Ugly American fame, who began his professional life as a political scientist—though one who really wanted to be James Bond. The other principals of Simulmatics were cynical, hard-drinking men whose marriages dissolved with distressing regularity but who believed in the unerring power of numbers. Founded in 1959, Simulmatics went bankrupt just a decade later, as Lepore deftly shows, its faith in numbers led it to plot bombing runs and body counts in Vietnam, “waging a war by way of computer-run data analysis and modeling.” The company even attempted to do probabilistic forecasts of when and where race riots would occur. That was all heady
**FALL SPOTLIGHT:**

**CAN’T-MISS VETERAN AUTHORS**

By Eric Liebetrau

**Twilight of the Gods** by Ian Töll (Norton, Sept. 1): “The final volume in Töll’s fine Pacific War Trilogy….There is no shortage of accounts of the brutal island-hopping invasions (Peleliu in September, the Philippines in October, Iwo Jima in February 1945, Okinawa in April), but Töll’s takes second place to none.”

**Andrew Dworkin** by Martin Duberman (The New Press, Sept. 8): “Dworkin was among the most controversial figures in the second-wave feminist movement….Duberman, who knew her personally, paints a much more nuanced picture, pointing out that Dworkin lived for 40 years in a non-exclusive, occasionally sexual relationship with a devoted male partner and that she was ahead of her time in seeing gender as a social construct….A sympathetic, cleareyed portrait that gives Dworkin her due without smoothing over her rough edges.”

**If Then** by Jill Lepore (Liveright/Norton, Sept. 15): “Lepore knows how to spin out a winning historical study. Here, she tells a story that hinges on the discovery, in the late 1950s, that computers and languages such as FORTRAN…could be used to gauge and influence voter preferences. The Simulmatics Corporation melded the worlds of Mad Men advertising and high-tech geekery of the UNIVAC set, leveraging what would eventually be called artificial intelligence….A fascinating, expertly guided exploration of a little-known corner of the recent past.”

**This Time Next Year We’ll Be Laughing** by Jacqueline Winspear (Soho, Nov. 10): “In her first book of nonfiction, the author sheds light on the inspiration for Dobbs and her stories as she reflects on her upbringing during the 1950s and ’60s. She focuses much attention on her parents’ lives and their struggles supporting a family, as they chose to live far removed from their London pasts….An engaging childhood memoir and a deeply affectionate tribute to the author’s parents.”
stuff back in the age of Robert McNamara and the RAND Corporation, but it didn’t play well toward the end. Still, as Lepore also convincingly demonstrates, the work of Simulmatics paved the way for later manipulators of psychology and public opinion such as Facebook. As she writes of those heirs, the founders of Simulmatics “would have understood, even if they could only dream about its gargantuan quantity of data or the ability to run simulations in real time, dynamically.”

A fascinating, expertly guided exploration of a little-known corner of the recent past.

**ADrift**

*How Our World Lost Its Way*  
Malamouf, Amin  
Trans. by Wynne, Frank  
World Editions (336 pp.)  
$18.99 paper | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-1-64286-075-7

The Lebanese-born French author offers a pensive, lyrical meditation on a dying world.

The author of brilliant novels and books of essays such as *Disordered World*, Maalouf announces his theme at the outset: “I was born hale and healthy into the arms of a dying civilization, and I have spent my whole life feeling that I am surviving, with no credit or blame, when around me so many things were falling into ruin.” At first, he means the vanished civilization of the Levant, where Christians, Jews, and Arabs once lived together but that has since collapsed in ethnocidal battles and sectarian wars. “The Levantine ideal,” writes Maalouf, “as my people experienced it, as I have always wanted to live it, demands that each person assume full responsibility for his own, and a little responsibility for others.” No more. Born in Beirut in 1949, a Maronite Christian, Maalouf lived in the Egypt of Gamal Abdel Nasser, “the last colossus of the Arab world,” who ultimately failed in his mission to unite it; in adulthood, Maalouf moved to Paris, where he has lived for decades. Egypt, he writes, “was doomed to crumble,” while Lebanon’s ecumenical gave way to narrow self-interest and appeals to outsiders of one’s own ethnicity for support—Arabs calling for Arabs and Jews for Jews, which Maalouf likens to various Swiss cantons calling on their German, French, and Italian neighbors for intercession, which would spell doom for the Swiss Confederation. The analogy is apposite, for the rest of the world is also suffering collapse. “In the era in which we live,” writes the author, “despair can sweep across oceans, scale walls, cross any frontier, physical or mental, and it is not easily contained.” Ideals of democracy, citizenship, environmental health, world peace, and the like now fall before nationalism, authoritarianism, and the decline of private life in the Orwellian present.

A Camus for our time, Maalouf urges that civilization is “fragile, shimmering, evanescent”—and perhaps doomed.

**WAR**

*How Conflict Shaped Us*  
MacMillan, Margaret  
Random House (336 pp.)  
$30.00 | Sep. 22, 2020  
978-1-984856-13-5

An analysis of war throughout history. Because Canadian historian MacMillan specializes in the 20th century, the scope of her latest is a stretch, and she is also entering a crowded field that includes plenty of excellent overviews. Despite the competition, however, MacMillan acquits herself well. She begins with the traditional warning that, despite its popularity in books and media, the concept of war is not taken as seriously as it deserves. Moralists correctly denounce its miseries but err in claiming that it is an aberration and that peace is the normal state of affairs. That prehistoric humans lived in harmony with each other was an article of faith until advances in archaeology and anthropology revealed that they led a violent existence (“humans, certainly by the time of the later Stone Age, made weapons, ganged up on each other and did their best to finish each other off”). Although the usual wars make their appearances, this is not a history of particular conflicts but of their influence on society. MacMillan emphasizes that humans grew better at making war as states evolved: “War was...an integral and necessary part of the emergence of the nation, as sanctifying it even, and the military wore a particular halo as its defenders and saviors.” In ancient Greece and early Rome, only full-fledged citizen landowners were entitled to take up arms. All cultures but one, the Chinese, have venerated their warriors and placed military values (courage, tenacity, self-discipline) above civilian (virtue, scholarship, wisdom). In nine thoughtful chapters, the author examines how increasingly sophisticated central governments gradually suppressed small-scale bloodshed—e.g., tribal conflicts, private armies, banditry, ordinary murder—in favor of efficient, large-scale warfare. With only a nod to politics and technology, MacMillan tackles broad issues such as the reasons nations go to war, the cult of the warrior, the effect of war on civilians and on women, efforts (barely two centuries old) to make laws for war, and its influence on art, literature, and national memories.

An insightful and disturbing study of war as an aspect of culture.
An extraordinary story about the passion for books in war-torn Syria.

Minoui, a Middle East correspondent for *Le Figaro*, opens with the story of a photograph she saw in 2015 on a Facebook page called Humans of Syria. Taken in Istanbul, it shows two young Syrian men standing in an enclosed room with thousands of books on shelves all around them. Their city, Daraya, was surrounded by Bashar al-Assad’s troops and was being regularly bombed; yet here was a secret, underground library. “Amid the bedlam,” writes the author, “they cling to books as if to life.”

How was this possible? Minoui contacted Ahmad, the photographer and one of the “cofounders of this secret haven.” He told her about his devastated, bombed-out city and the books found in destroyed buildings. The author tells two stories: one about the library and the other about a city that had been starved and attacked since 2012 and whose population went from 250,000 to 12,000. In 2013, Ahmad and some friends began collecting books and hiding them underground in a damaged building. They built shelves and organized the books. “From the ruins,” writes Minoui, “a fortress of paper would arise,” an oasis that became popular not just for the books on all kinds of subjects—including much-needed medical textbooks—but as a place for people to gather, talk freely, and learn. They even started a small magazine. More bombs fell, some loaded with sarin gas. The building housing the library was hit, damaging the books, but the dedicated keepers glued pages back in. After 1,350 days of siege, they were struck with napalm. In 2016, the city surrendered, and its people evacuated. The library was pillaged, the books sold “for cheap on the sidewalk of a flea market in Damascus…Four years of saving Daraya’s heritage swapped for a few coins.” It’s an agonizing tale, but readers will be appreciative that Minoui has brought it to light. Shelve this one next to *Reading Lolita in Tehran.*

Heartbreaking, inspiring, and beautifully told.

A sociologist recounts her family’s journey in gender creative parenting, a relatively new and misunderstood concept.

During her time as an educator, Myers became well versed in the research related to gender stereotypes and inequality. When she got pregnant, she and her husband decided to not disclose their child’s sex or assign a gender and to use only the gender-neutral pronouns “they/their” when discussing their child, Zoomer. As the author explains, “many of the physical, emotional, and verbal differences we see between boys and girls are largely socially constructed and reinforced through stereotypes.” By raising Zoomer without exposure to these stereotypes and expectations, they hoped they would have the freedom to discover their interests “outside the pressures of a restrictive binary” and to later self-identify. As they arose, Myers and her husband would be there to “answer their gender-related questions consciously, age appropriately, and inclusively.” Without much information available regarding gender creative parenting, the author and her husband had to trust their instincts and dig deep into what information they could find. To help others in similar situations, Myers began documenting their journey online, and she describes the encounters, both positive and negative, that they have had with family, strangers, and the media. Throughout, the author is frank and compassionate. “Stepping into the spotlight as a public advocate for gender creative parenting was terrifying,” she writes. “But I had such a conviction that gender creative parenting could contribute to changing the world for the better that I knew I had to spread the message as often and as far as I could. Being a part of this movement—being a part of creating a more inclusive world that celebrates diversity and relentlessly fights for equality—would be my greatest achievement.” Jill Soloway provides a brief foreword.

An enlightening, much-needed resource for parents hoping to raise their children without limitations.
A poet celebrates the wonders of nature in a collection of essays that could almost serve as a coming-of-age memoir.

The daughter of an Indian father and Filipino mother, Nezhukumatathil was often the only brown face in her class - a rapturous rendering of monsoon season in her father's native India to her formative years in Iowa, Kansas, and Arizona, where Nezhukumatathil was never the only brown face in her class - a rapturous rendering of monsoon season in her father's native India to her formative years in Iowa, Kansas, and Arizona, where Nezhukumatathil was often the only brown face in her class. She shares those lessons throughout these frequently enchanting essays. Take the axolotl, from whom the author learned the “salamander smile”: “If a white girl tries to tell you what your brown skin can and cannot wear for makeup, just remember the smile of an axolotl. The best thing to do in that moment is to just smile and smile, even if your smile is thin. The tighter your smile, the tougher you become.” Nezhukumatathil's investigations, enhanced by Nakamura's vividly rendered full-color illustrations, range across the world, from a rapturous rendering of monsoon season in her father's native India to her formative years in Iowa, Kansas, and Arizona, where she learned from the native flora and fauna that it was common to be different. The corpse flower guided the author when she met her future husband, helping her to “clear out the sleaze, the unsavory, the unpleasant—the weeds—of the dating world” and “find a man who’d be happy when I bloomed.” Nezhukumatathil's investigations, enhanced by Nakamura's vividly rendered full-color illustrations, range across the world, from a rapturous rendering of monsoon season in her father's native India to her formative years in Iowa, Kansas, and Arizona, where she learned from the native flora and fauna that it was common to be different. The corpse flower guided the author when she met her future husband, helping her to “clear out the sleaze, the unsavory, the unpleasant—the weeds—of the dating world” and “find a man who’d be happy when I bloomed.”

The writing dazzles with the marvel of being fully alive.

**MY LIFE IN 100 OBJECTS**
*Randall, Margaret*
New Village Press (250 pp.)
$24.00 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-61332-114-0

The poet, feminist, and activist reflects on the objects that have shaped her life.

Inspired by Neil MacGregor’s *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, Randall (b. 1936) began looking at her life in terms of the objects that have shaped it. Often involved in struggles for social justice, she has lived a “turbulent, sometimes endangered” life. This thought made her realize that places, as well as objects, have made her who she is today. A prolific writer, Randall’s aim for this book is to journal her “life to date, through objects, places, and the moments in which these converge.” She continues, “objects and places come with their histories. Together they give tangible form to mine. And as they have done so, that task has superimposed itself upon each individual item, imbuing it with a collective power that references identity, time, and place.” Her collection includes poignant reflections on her father’s metronome; a portable typewriter that she learned to use during her extensive travels around the world; a faded pair of Levi’s and turquoise earrings, which have “become part of my everyday uniform” at home in Albuquerque; and the gold wedding bands she and her wife gave to each other when they were able to legally marry after living together for 28 years. Each entry begins with a full-color photo, and interspersed throughout the collection are poems written to commemorate certain objects. Randall’s hope was to show us “how the objects and places that move us breathe their life into ours.” In this, she certainly succeeds.

A heartwarming celebration of the author’s compelling life.

**JUST US**
*An American Conversation*
*Rankine, Claudia*
Graywolf (352 pp.)
$30.00 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-64445-021-5

A cross-disciplinary inquiry into race as the determining construct in American life and culture—and how it is perceived and experienced so differently by those who consider themselves White.

Rankine—a Yale professor, renowned poet, and MacArthur fellow whose groundbreaking book *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award—resists being pigeonholed, particularly by White critics. “Another white friend tells me she has to defend me all the time to her white friends who think I’m a radical,” she writes. “Why? For calling white people white?…Don’t defend me. Not for being human. Not for wanting others to be able to just live their lives. Not for wanting us to simply be able to live.” In this genre-defying work, the author, as she did so effectively in *Citizen*, combines poetry, essay, visuals, scholarship, analysis, invective, and argument into a passionate and persuasive case about many of the complex mechanics of race in this country—especially how White people barely acknowledge
it (particularly in conversation with other White people) while for Black people, it affects everything. Rankine writes with disarming intimacy and searing honesty about pointed exchanges with White friends and colleagues, fissures within her marriage, and encounters with White strangers who assume some sort of superiority of rank. Throughout this potent book, the author ably conveys the urgency of the stakes regarding race in America, which many White people fail to acknowledge as an issue. The way she challenges those close to her, risking those relationships, shows readers just how critical the issues are to her—and to us. Rankine examines how what some see as matters of fact—e.g., “white male privilege” or “black lives matter”—seem to others like accusation or bones of contention, and she documents how and why this culture has been able to perpetuate itself.

**KEEP MOVING**

**Notes on Loss, Creativity, and Change**

*Smith, Maggie*

One Signal/Attra (224 pp.)

$24.00 | Oct. 6, 2020

978-1-9821-3207-1

Words of encouragement from an award-winning poet.

A couple years ago, following the end of her marriage, Smith, the author of *Good Bones* (2017) and other poetry collections, took to Twitter to share a daily affirmation, implored herself and her readers to #keepmoving. Combined with original short essays, those tweets demonstrate that social media can be a source of wisdom, as the author allows her own story of grief and transformation to inspire. Drawing on her experience as a writer, Smith views the self through the metaphor of a composition, one the “author” must constantly tend to: “Accept that you are a work in progress, both a revision and a draft: you are better and more complete than earlier versions of yourself, but you also have work to do. Be open to change. Allow yourself to be revised.” She continues later, “revise the story you tell yourself about rejection. All that tells you is what you were worth to someone else—not what you are worth.” Whether or not we are the authors of ourselves in any real sense, the metaphor is a powerful one that encourages the agency it takes to positively reframe pain and disappointment as opportunities for growth. If this sounds like self-help, it is. Even the book’s interior design has more in common with a fancy greeting card than with a traditional book, poetry or prose. But self-help needn’t be a slur derived from the worst instances of the genre. Smith offers a reminder of what self-help can be at its best: intelligent, honest, uncompromising, and, most importantly, helpful. The author’s frequent references to the writing life may mean the book resonates most deeply with her fellow artists, but for anyone who has known struggle—i.e., everyone—it will resonate plenty.

**YOU CAN KEEP THAT TO YOURSELF**

A slim, sharp, satirical guide to preventing racial microaggressions against Black people at work, written by a fictional Black colleague.

Daquan, “the Black coworker you are referring to when you claim to have Black friends,” has something to say. He can always spot the moment when a White person becomes aware they are interacting with a “full-on BLACK PERSON.” Their eyes “take on a mad gleam,” and both revulsion and attraction play on their faces. They simply cannot help themselves; they must speak about it, abandoning appropriate topics like work, weather, and sports for dicier conversation peppered with African American vernacular. Microaggressions ensue. Fed up, Daquan offers a list of slyly disrespectful comments he would rather “people of pallor” kept to themselves. Organized from A to Z and presented with no filter, entries include “articulate” (not a compliment); “dark” (stop using it as a synonym for bad or evil); “ghetto” (“sits next to ‘urban’ in the dog-whistle drawer”); “hair” (don’t touch it without consent); “quiet” (Black people have a right not to be); “voted for Obama” (“if the last time you respected a Black person was 2012, probably you should keep that to yourself”); “you’re different” (no, but White people often have limited understanding and experience with Blackness); and all manner of subtle discrimination and affronts in between. Smyer delivers the directives with heaping sarcasm, cutting humor, and some web lingo. Best avoided by would-be White allies who demand to be treated gingerly, this book lets loose the frustration of being Black in majority White spaces. Less a guide for White people than a palliative for the daily indignities suffered by real-life Daquans, the book is a balm for tongues bitten and comments swallowed that is guaranteed to leave some Black folks chuckling in recognition while White colleagues cringe in embarrassment.

A bitingly humorous compendium of the absurd subtle racism of the American workplace.
TWILIGHT OF THE GODS
War in the Western Pacific, 1944-1945
Toll, Ian W.
Norton (864 pp.)
$40.00 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-393-08065-0

The final volume in Toll’s fine Pacific War Trilogy.
The author begins with the July 1944 Honolulu meeting of the key American figures. He rocks no boats in his evaluations of Franklin Roosevelt (canny if slippery politico), Adm. Chester Nimitz (brilliant but colorless technocrat), and Gen. Douglas MacArthur (military genius with a massive ego). At the meeting, American officials reached a decision to invade Japan by way of the Philippines rather than Formosa. By 1944, Japanese leaders knew that victory was impossible but also believed that they were unconquerable. Once Americans, whom they considered technically advanced but soft, realized that every Japanese soldier, civilian, and child would fight to the death, they would lose heart and agree to a compromise peace. “There was a difference between defeat and surrender,” writes the author, a meticulous historian, “between losing an overseas empire and seeing the homeland overrun by a barbarian army.” Ironically, the first part of the Japanese strategy worked. Convinced that the Japanese preferred death to surrender, American military leaders did not quail but simply proceeded with that in mind. There is no shortage of accounts of the brutal island-hopping invasions (Peleliu in September, the Philippines in October, Iwo Jima in February 1945, Okinawa in April), but Toll’s take second place to none. Accompanying the Philippine invasion was the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the largest naval battle in world history. The most effective submarines of the war were not Hitler’s but America’s, which crippled Japan’s economy and sank a torrent of warships. Toll’s account of the coup de grace, the atomic bomb, barely mentions the debate over its use because that began after the war. At the time, a few administration figures protested but did not make a big fuss, and it turned out to require two bombs and the Soviet invasion before Japan decided to surrender.

A conventional but richly rewarding history of the last war that turned out well for the U.S. (32 photos; 20 maps)

THE FOLLIES AND THE GLORY
America, Russia, and Political Warfare 1945-2020
Weiner, Tim
Henry Holt (336 pp.)
$29.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-62779-085-7

Under Putin no less than Stalin, Russia represents America’s greatest threat, according to this unnervingly insightful history by the Pulitzer Prize–winning historian.

After 1945, unwilling to risk nuclear Armageddon, the U.S. and Soviet Union confined themselves to political warfare, meaning, as George Kennan wrote, “employment of all the means at a nation’s command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives.” This is not the same as nonviolence. As illustrated in Weiner’s National Book Award–winning history of the CIA, Legacy of Ashes (2007), America’s first decades after the war featured elaborate, covert military actions, most of which flopped. After the news got out in the 1970s, the CIA dialed them back, but it was always true that CIA money and propaganda achieved far more than dirty tricks. To this point, the author’s account breaks little new ground; not so after the 1989 collapse of the Soviet Union. Weiner’s uncomfortably convincing opinion is that the U.S. screwed up royally, rubbing Russia’s nose in their failures and proclaiming that democracy had demonstrated its superiority. Aware that expanding NATO to the east would infuriate Russia’s new leaders, in 1990, Secretary of State James Baker promised never to do so—and then broke that promise. Ironically, Stalin’s paranoid vision of the West conspiring to surround his nation with enemies became true. Putin took power in 2000 with the aim of making Russian great again. Unable to match America’s massive military, he created an immense intelligence and cyberwarfare establishment that, after flexing its muscles by crippling nearby nations, has concentrated on the U.S. Weiner then delivers a dismaying account of the avalanche of hacking, disinformation, and social media manipulation that began in 2014 with the object of sowing dissent. The author astutely observes that this strategy involves keeping Trump in office, and there’s no doubt of Trump’s fervent and frightening subservience to the Russian leader.

A gripping history of 75 years of Russian-American conflict with the dismal conclusion that we seem outmatched.
Highly recommended. Zoellner will acquaint you with byways, and mores, you never knew existed.

**THE NATIONAL ROAD**

**Dispatches From a Changing America**
Tom Zoellner
Counterpoint (304 pp.)
$26.00 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-64009-290-7

America is a vast and daunting prospect, and Zoellner thirsts for more. Longing for a kind of national cultural citizenship, the author knows that absorbing even the barest fraction of a country's everyday majesty, and tribulation, is the work of a lifetime. He seems up to the task. In addition to his seven previous books, Zoellner, the politics editor of the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, teaches at Chapman University and Dartmouth College. The principal inspiration for this collection was journalist John Gunther's *Inside U.S.A.* (1947), which Zoellner calls "a staggering achievement and the best tome about this nation ever written." Taking on a similar task, Zoellner wonders how an increasingly fractured nation of such disparate lands and peoples remains united, however tenuously, in a consensus informed by the Constitution. The author's diverse, penetrating essays, some previously published, can only answer that question in part, but his effort is valiant, deeply moral, and often moving, based on observations gleaned from 30 years of crisscrossing the country, frequently by car. Zoellner grasps all the touchstones and knows all too well the challenges and depredations, be they cultural or ecological. He also traverses the fault lines, from the income, opportunity, and urban-rural divides to immigration and the growing distrust of key liberal values by those inhabiting "zones of exclusion." He also vivifies many historic emblems, including the mythic scaffolding of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or how King Philip's War in Puritan New England was a tragic template for the destruction of Native lands in America. Zoellner exposes naiveté, foolishness, and malfeasance with equal clarity, but he is evenhanded and sometimes produces a piece of sardonic humor, haunting beauty, or melancholy that pulsates on the page. He is both a first-rate reporter with years of newspaper and magazine work behind him and a skilled stylist who makes you want to come back for more.

Highly recommended. Zoellner will acquaint you with byways, and mores, you never knew existed.

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**THIS TIME NEXT YEAR WE’LL BE LAUGHING**
Jacqueline Winspear
Soho (314 pp.)
$27.95 | Nov. 10, 2020
978-1-64129-269-6

The bestselling author recalls her childhood and her family's wartime experiences.

Readers of Winspear's popular Maisie Dobbs mystery series appreciate the London investigator's canny resourcefulness and underlying humanity as she solves her many cases. Yet Dobbs had to overcome plenty of hardships in her ascent from her working-class roots. Part of the appeal of Winspear's Dobbs series are the descriptions of London and the English countryside, featuring vividly drawn particulars that feel like they were written with first-hand knowledge of that era. In her first book of nonfiction, the author sheds light on the inspiration for Dobbs and her stories as she reflects on her upbringing during the 1950s and '60s. She focuses much attention on her parents' lives and their struggles supporting a family, as they chose to live far removed from their London pasts. "My parents left the bombsites and memories of wartime London for an openness they found in the country and on the land," writes Winspear. As she recounts, each of her parents often had to work multiple jobs, which inspired the author's own initiative, a trait she would apply to the Dobbs character. Her parents recalled grueling wartime experiences as well as stories of the severe battlefield injuries that left her grandfather shell-shocked. "My mother's history," she writes, "became my history—probably because I was young when she began telling me...Looking back, her stories—of war, of abuse at the hands of the people to whom she and her sisters had been billeted when evacuated from London, of seeing the dead following a bombing—were probably too graphic for a child. But I liked listening to them." Winspear also draws distinctive portraits of postwar England, altogether different from the U.S., where she has since settled, and her unsettling struggles within the rigid British class system.

An engaging childhood memoir and a deeply affectionate tribute to the author's parents.

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HIGHLY RECOMMENDED FOR READING AROUND THE TABLE

**FALL PREVIEW SPECIAL ISSUE | NONFICTION | KIRKUS.COM**
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

SHAPE UP, CONSTRUCTION TRUCKS! by Victoria Allenby ....... 37
I AM EVERY GOOD THING by Derrick Barnes; illus. by Gordon C. James ................................. 37
THE BARNABUS PROJECT by Terry Fan & Eric Fan with Devin Fan ........................................ 39
A MYSTERY IN THE FOREST by Susanna Isern; illus. by Daniel Montero Galán; trans. by Jon Brokenbrow .............. 40
THE PAPER BOAT by Thao Lam ........................................................ 43
EVERY NIGHT IS PIZZA NIGHT by López-Alt, J. Kenji; illus. by Ruggiero, Gianna ........................................ 44
EVELYN DEL REY IS MOVING AWAY by Meg Medina; illus. by Sonia Sánchez .................................................. 44
MY RAINBOW by Trinity Neal & DeShanna Neal; illus. by Art Twink .......................................................... 44
I TALK LIKE A RIVER by Jordan Scott; illus. by Sydney Smith ...................... 47
FEATHERED SERPENT AND THE FIVE SUNS by Duncan Tonatiuh ............................................................ 48
LITTLE FOX by Edward van de Vendel; illus. by Marije Tolman; trans. by David Colmer ........................................ 48
ROBOBABY by David Wiesner ......................................................................... 49
THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THING by Kao Kalia Yang; illus. by Kboa Le .............................................................. 49
MY DAY WITH GONG GONG by Sennah Yee; illus. by Elaine Chen ................................................................. 50

FEATHERED SERPENT AND THE FIVE SUNS
A Mesoamerican Creation Myth
Tonatiuh, Duncan
Illus. by the author
Abrams (40 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-4197-4677-2

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

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

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

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

**IF YOU COME TO EARTH**

Blackall, Sophie
Illus. by the author
Chronicle (80 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-4521-3779-7

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

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

**ANOTHER BOOK ABOUT BEARS.**

Bunting, Laura
Illus. by the author
Kane Miller (32 pp.)
$14.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-68464-084-3

A story about a bear begins...but the bear has had enough.

The “old brown bear” derails the story, much to the narrator’s perturbation, and proclaims that bears are exhausted by constantly having to “perform” all these stories whenever “you” open a book, when they’d rather be “sleeping, snozz- ing or napping.” Bears quit! At first, the narrator gets even by reciting ridiculous antics for the bear to act out, like wearing a tutu while riding a tiny bicycle. The bear makes an offer—get another, “better” animal star. But the narrator dismisses all the candidates the bear puts forth, citing certain flaws for each. An echidna’s “too spiky,” a dodo “too extinct,” a star-nosed mole
THE BARNABUS PROJECT

Fan, Terry & Fan, Eric with Fan, Devin
Illus. by the authors
Tundra (72 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-7352-6326-0

This epic tale of escape and liberation, set in a clandestine underground lab producing genetically engineered Perfect Pets, stars courageous Barnabus, half mouse, half elephant.

Along with a collection of creatures, Barnabus is a Failed Project, dubiously destined, according to cockroach pal Pip, to be “recycled.” Barnabus and his roommates—Light-Up Lois, Mushroom Sloth, and others—spend banal days imprisoned in bell jars, fed, prodded, and prodded by the Green Rubber Suits. With their fates sealed, Barnabus avows, “We need to escape!”

Discovering that his elephantine trumpeting can break glass, Barnabus frees the others. The brave misfits, pursued by their creators and captors, escape through venting, emerging into another lab. The band works together to free a fellow captive, an enormous, cyclopian marine creature, releasing a flood of tank water that sweeps them out of the building’s depths and into the pet shop above the lab. The escaped company, discovering the wide world foretold by Pip, finds a lake, sunshine, grass, and trees: “a place that might be home.” The Fan brothers (Eric and Terry, joined for this project by Devin) generate copious precisely rendered, action-packed illustrations that capture the lab’s sinister labyrinth, the poignant features of the “failed” creatures, and moonlit cityscapes whose skyscraper “mountains” reach “all the way to the sky, lit with their own stars.”

A heartfelt, timely allegory celebrating diversity, bravery, and solidarity. (Picture book. 4-9)

SHORT & SWEET

Funk, Josh
Illus. by Kearney, Brendan
Sterling (40 pp.)
$16.95 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-4549-3427-1
Series: Lady Pancake & Sir French Toast, 4

A technological treatment goes awry for these fan favorites, creating monstrously good fun.

When Sir French Toast and Lady Pancake start to turn green with decay (gaspl!), a new treatment offered by Professor Biscotti malfunctions, turning them into children. Baron von Waffle, their enemy-turned-friend from previous episodes, is struck with remorse for recommending the procedure and tampering with nature. But the shrunk versions of Toast and Pancake do not remember him. Thinking he is a monster, von Waffle, their enemy-turned-friend from previous episodes, is struck with remorse for recommending the procedure and tampering with nature. But the shrunk versions of Toast and Pancake do not remember him. Thinking he is a monster, von Waffle, their enemy-turned-friend from previous episodes, is struck with remorse for recommending the procedure and tampering with nature. But the shrunk versions of Toast and Pancake do not remember him. Thinking he is a monster, von Waffle, their enemy-turned-friend from previous episodes, is struck with remorse for recommending the procedure and tampering with nature. But the shrunk versions of Toast and Pancake do not remember him. Thinking he is a monster, von Waffle, their enemy-turned-friend from previous episodes, is struck with remorse for recommending the procedure and tampering with nature. But the shrunk versions of Toast and Pancake do not remember him. Thinking he is a monster, von Waffle, their enemy-turned-friend from previous episodes, is struck with remorse for recommending the procedure and tampering with nature. But the shrunk versions of Toast and Pancake do not remember him. Thinking he is a monster, von Waffle, their enemy-turned-friend from previous episodes, is struck with remorse for recommending the procedure and tampering with nature. But the shrunk versions of Toast and Pancake do not remember him. Thinking he is a monster, von Waffle, their enemy-turned-friend from previous episodes, is struck with remorse for recommending the procedure and tampering with nature.

When Sir French Toast and Lady Pancake start to turn green with decay (gasps!), a new treatment offered by Professor Biscotti malfunctions, turning them into children. Baron von Waffle, their enemy-turned-friend from previous episodes, is struck with remorse for recommending the procedure and tampering with nature. But the shrunk versions of Toast and Pancake do not remember him. Thinking he is a monster, they run away over various obstacles made of other foods. In this fourth installment of the adventures of these clever fridge friends, the syncopated text shines, building the suspense and pace with rhyming couplets. The illustrations continue their
gastronomic creativity, with Fjords of Farfalle and Bran Canyons and buildings created out of everyday foodstuffs for each picture. In the end, Waffle cooks up a sweet solution for returning the shrunken Toast and Pancake to normal. The underlying theme about fixing problems one has created is subtle, and forgiveness reigns among the entire royal cast. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 30.5% of actual size.)

The quality remains consistently high for this series, linking edibles and emotions with excitement and ease. (Picture book. 4-8)

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**THE DAY SAIADA ARRIVED**

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

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

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

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

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**LITTLE BIRD VISITS THE BIG CITY**

Granata, Domenico
Illus. by the author
Minedition (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-988-8342-03-7

Little Bird lives in a little forest but longs to see the nearby city.

When he decides to set out on an adventure, his mother suggests his friends accompany him, but he wants to travel alone. “How good it feels,” he thinks, soaring over the forest and feeling not so little anymore. But once he’s in the city, he finds it overwhelming with its “strangely-shaped metal contraptions,” other alarming things he can’t quite name, and birds that won’t share. He misses his friends, especially when a curious, kind child with pale skin and straight, black hair watches him from a distance. He is in tears only to turn around to see that two of his bird friends have followed him on his journey. Disguised in leaves, they have been “keeping an eye on him the whole time.” Warm rust colors—yellows, oranges, and reds—mark the strong emotions of Little Bird, but subtle touches of turquoise and green bring about a soothing balance. The simple shapes will appeal to young readers; Little Bird himself, a black bird, is oval-shaped and always seen in profile with an inquisitive, wide-eyed look and a bright orange beak. Child readers who see in themselves the same desire to be independent, if only occasionally, may find solace in the story’s conclusion—that loved ones care enough to be there and console him when he feels lonely. (This book was reviewed digitally with 8.7-by-22.4-inch double-page spreads viewed at 87.7% of actual size.)

A simple home-and-back-again tale of friends as a safety net. (Picture book. 4-8)

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**A MYSTERY IN THE FOREST**

Isern, Susanna
Illus. by Montero Galán, Daniel
Trans. by Brokenbrow, John
Cuento de Luz (32 pp.)
$16.95 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-84-16733-92-7
Series: Whispers in the Forest

Deer, who has a talent for treats, tracks down a disruptive force in this Spanish import.

When his routine of collecting ingredients in the quietest part of the forest and turning them into sweet jams, cakes, and pies for a daily feast is disrupted, Deer must investigate. Who would be so rude as to run roughshod over the forest area where Deer goes every day, to break into Deer’s home, and, most egregiously, to take his Secret Recipe Book? The chef’s anxiety-inducing journey leads him to the home of Rabbit, who turns out to be a nervous, lonely creature. Even after Deer shouts at him, the pitiful rabbit still wishes he could bake like Deer so
that “more people would come to see me. I thought I could be like you!” What happens next in Isern’s follow-up to The Lonely Mailman (2017) hinges on an act of kindness so perfect it would be a different kind of crime to spoil it here. As in Mailman, Montero Galán’s illustrations capture the lives of these anthropomorphic animals with warm, natural hues, whether it’s the darkening sky of sunset after a frustrating day or the winding path taken through all the neighbors’ homes by the aroma from Deer’s kitchen. Rabbit’s emotions, in particular, are heartbreaking as rendered, the huge orange eyes practically twitching off the page.

This lovely book about forgiveness shows that friendship can form even in the most unlikely situations. (recipe) (Picture book. 4-8)
Fall Spotlight:
Informational Picture Books

By Vicky Smith

Author/photographer Victoria Allenby takes two preschool picture-book standards, the shape book and the big-machine book, and combines them in Shape Up, Construction Trucks! (Pajama Press, Sept. 15). Dazzlingly crisp photos and rhyming text ask readers to find shapes in the various construction equipment depicted, clean graphic overlays ensuring that tots will have no trouble identifying them.

There’s a Skeleton Inside You! (Roaring Brook, Sept. 8): Two extraterrestrials who do not have skeletons discover this amazing fact when they crash-land on Earth and ask readers for help with repairs to their ship. Author Idan Ben-Barak and illustrator Julian Frost use these two characters, a blob and a cloud, to explore the human skeletal and muscular systems, imparting an impressive amount of information with a maximum of playfulness.

Jason Chin packs the cosmos into 40 mind-blowing pages as he helps readers understand Your Place in the Universe (Neal Porter/Holiday House, Sept. 1). Starting with four kids, he challenges them to cast their vision outward, from an ostrich that is twice as tall as them in ever expanding steps all the way to the edge of the universe and back, gorgeous paintings illustrating each part of the journey.

Even if they read April Pulley Sayre’s newest photo-essay in a desert, readers will Feel the Fog (Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster, Sept. 15) as they turn its pages. Her spare text engages the senses as her stunning photos capture her subject, droplets visible and almost tangible, and even as she moves into the science of the weather phenomenon she never loses her sense of poetry.
This wordless picture book renders a harrowing experience through clever uses of paper craft.

THE PAPER BOAT

paragraphs that present the general plot; they are perched atop multiple-panel sequences that allow for scientific detail, conversation, and reflection. In an inventive design choice, Tharp's actual maps were the inspiration for the textual backgrounds featured throughout. A strong sense of both the time period and the struggles Tharp faced as a woman working in science are incorporated nicely; the pacing and format will entice both engaged and reluctant readers; and the exhilaration of a new discovery is captured with a sense of wonder that is sure to inspire children and draw attention to the world of science. The depicted cast is an all-White one. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9.75-by-22-inch double-page spreads viewed at 55.7% of actual size.)

A winning combination of lyric description, accessible explanation, scientific history, feminism, and accomplishment. (author's note, bibliography, source notes) (Picture book/biography. 7-10)

MY FIRST BOOK OF THE COSMOS
Kaid-Salab Ferron, Sheddad
Illus. by Altarriba, Eduard
Button Books (66 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-78708-077-5
Series: My First Book of Science

Take a deep dive into the creation, arrangement, and composition of the universe.

This book covers a wide range of material, including gravity, the Big Bang, the shape and age of the universe, stars, planetary bodies, black holes, dark matter, and the cosmic calendar. Less-common topics include space-time, gravitational lenses, wormholes, and dark energy. The narrative style is conversational and makes sure to include logical steps and multiple references for readers to follow. Altarriba's early–Space Age design is the book's real strength, however. It visually conveys the information in supereffective ways, promoting interest without ever growing too busy. The pages show great compositional diversity, utilizing illustrations, graphs, diagrams, sidebars, and more. Perhaps surprisingly, the book contains only one photo (of cosmic background radiation). Although many terms are defined when introduced and there are some cross-references, there is no readily accessible glossary, and the text presupposes a certain level of conceptualization and theoretical thinking, belying the "First" in the title. Readers with an established general understanding of scientific and/or cosmological concepts, such as mass and revolution, as well as good reading comprehension skills and/or a more knowledgeable co-reader to work through the pages with them will find plenty to hold their interest. In addition, there is no bibliography or further reading, so curious thinkers will need to do their own outside research.

A practical survey of cosmic undertaking. (Nonfiction. 8-13)

NICANOR’S GATE
Kimmel, Eric A.
Illus. by Matsuri, Alida
Kar-Ben (24 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 1, 2020
978-1-5415-7452-6 paper

Anyone looking for a definition of "miracle" could look to this picture book.

The miracle Nicanor witnesses couldn't be more straightforward. He's hired the finest artisans to build a gate for the Temple in Jerusalem, two colossal doors made of metal. But as soon as they're placed on a transport ship, a storm begins. It sinks one of the doors—and very nearly the ship—to the bottom of the sea. But just as the precious cargo seems to be lost, the law of gravity appears to reverse itself, and the door is suddenly floating on top of the water. It would be difficult to find a clearer example of deus ex machina. But if the plot is unsurprising (at least to people who believe in miracles), the story still manages to convey a sense of wonder. This is due largely to Massari's illustrations. The text describes the doors: "cast from Corninthian gold, a rare mixture of copper, gold, and silver that gleamed like the sun." The colors in her pictures are so rich that the metal really does look like gold. (The characters’ skin tones are equally rich and varied shades of brown.) The marvels also contrast beautifully with the bleakness of the story. When hope seems lost, one character responds with both faith and resignation: "We do what we can. The rest is in God's hands." (This book was reviewed digitally with 9.75-by-20.5-inch double-page spreads viewed at 84% of actual size.)

This story will take away, and immediately restore, readers' belief in miracles. (Picture book/religion. 4-10)

THE PAPER BOAT
A Refugee Story
Lam, Thao
Illus. by the author
Owlkids Books (40 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-77147-363-7

A refugee story features distinctive artwork honoring courage, kindness, and memory.

A child-centered retelling of one family’s escape from Communist-ruled Vietnam, this wordless picture book renders a harrowing experience through clever use of paper craft. From the outset, a visual motif of ants is key in unfolding the story. Close-up views of a single child are juxtaposed against others of preoccupied adults standing by the same dinner table. No one eats; armored tanks drive past, hastening the family’s departure. Mother and child navigate darkness and heart-stopping moments, becoming lost, until ants appear in the moonlight and lead them to a body of water. As they await passage, mother folds a paper sailboat to distract the child. Later, ants board this
Sánchez’s artwork is as lively and full of movement as the two girls.

**EVERY NIGHT IS PIZZA NIGHT**

López-Alt, J. Kenji
Illus. by Ruggiero, Gianna
Norton Young Readers (48 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-324-00525-4

A pizza-loving girl pits her favorite food against other multicultural offerings in her neighborhood to determine the best food ever!

First, she visits Eugene and tries Korean bibimbap. It smells stinky, and it tastes spicy! She loves it—but “is it better than pizza?” she wonders. Pipo goes on to sample Farah’s Moroccan tagine, red beans and rice in Dakota’s kitchen, and hot, juicy dumplings from Ronnie and Donnie’s food truck. All these foods are new to her and very tasty! Through this around-the-world culinary journey in her own neighborhood, Pipo discovers that while pizza is best, “it’s not the only best.” (Her recipe is appended.) Bold, bright colors, dynamic illustrations, repetitive refrains, and catchy, well-paced text make this book utterly rereadable. And while the theme is a little obvious, it may still help convince picky eaters to try new foods. Pipo has pale skin and straight black hair, and the cast is appropriately, robustly diverse.

A delightful culinary ode to the multicultural world we live in. (Picture book. 4-8)

**MY RAINBOW**

Neal, Trinity & Neal, DeShanna
Illus. by Twink, Art
Kokila (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-1-984814-60-9

A loving mother helps her daughter express herself and feel like a rainbow. Trinity, an autistic, Black, transgender girl wishes she had long hair. But growing it out is a struggle because she hates hair touching her neck. Seeing her daughter’s sadness, Trinity’s mom, a Black cisgender woman with natural hair cropped close, listens to Trinity’s concerns. At first, she tries to reassure Trinity that girls can wear their hair short, but Trinity still doesn’t feel happy. Honoring the truth that Trinity knows herself best, Trinity’s mom puts her love and devotion into creating a curly, teal, pink, and purple wig for Trinity, with some help from Trinity’s older sibling. Richly colored and invitingly detailed full-spread illustrations that complement the story’s title and theme accompany the text. The narrative centers a Black family whose members are depicted in the illustrations with skin that is a range of rich browns. In the midst of Trinity’s
struggle with her gender expression, her mom models listening and affirmation. She acknowledges that her own experiences with societal expectations of gender expression as a cisgender woman are different from Trinity’s. Even as the story shifts to show Trinity’s cisgender mother’s perspective, Trinity’s feelings remain the focus and her happiness the motivation. Apart from the use of person-first language ("kids with autism") instead of identity-first language, Neal and Neal emphasize that all aspects of Trinity’s identity deserve celebration and make her a masterpiece.

A revolutionary representation of joy and self-expression.

(Picture book. 4–7)
On *The Day Saida Arrived* (Blue Dot Kids Press, Sept. 15), the unnamed narrator is distressed to see her new classmate has lost her words and determines to help Saida find them. In this luminous book by Susana Gómez Redondo, illustrated by Sonja Wimmer and translated by Lawrence Schimel, readers see what’s too rarely shown: the growth of a friendship of equals, as Saida teaches the narrator Arabic and the narrator responds in kind.

Thao Lam uses the metaphor of *The Paper Boat* (OwlKids Books, Sept. 15) to tell the story of one family’s escape from Vietnam, the terror and danger of the journey presented unflinchingly but at a surreal remove to communicate what too many children have experienced and still endure. There are no words, allowing children to sink into the illustrations again and again, extracting more meaning with each visit.

What’s in *The Suitcase* (HMH Books, Sept. 29) that the Seussian blue creature hauls behind him? The animals who greet him wonder at his response: a teacup, a chair and table, and, somehow, a kitchen. It can’t be—but it is, as they realize in Chris Naylor-Ballesteros’ touching book. The stranger may have left his physical home, but he’s brought his memories along with him.

Issa Watanabe invites readers to accompany a group of *Migrants* (Gecko, Oct. 6) as the anthropomorphic animals wordlessly make their way by foot and by boat. Death accompanies them too, literally, and readers see the group shrinking in number as it navigates peril and privation. It’s beautiful and harrowing, challenging readers to think.
Dappled paintings inspire empathy.

I TALK LIKE A RIVER

Lyrical, painfully acute language and absorbing, atmospheric illustrations capture, with startling clarity, this school-age child’s daily struggle with speech. Free verse emulates the pauses of interrupted speech while slowing down the reading, allowing the words to settle. When coupled with powerful metaphors, the effect is gut-wrenching: “The P / in pine tree / grows roots / inside my mouth / and tangles / my tongue.” Dappled paintings inspire empathy as well, with amorphous scenes infused with the uncertainty that defines both the boy’s unpredictable speech and his melancholy. Specificity arrives in
Told with succinct clarity and a hint of mischief, this rendition begs for rereads.

FEATHERED SERPENT AND THE FIVE SUNS

the artwork solely at the river, where boy and father go after a particularly bad morning. Scenery comes into focus, and readers feel the boy’s relief in this refuge where he can breathe deeply, be quiet, and think clearly. At this extraordinary book’s center, a double gatefold shows the child wading in shimmering waters, his back to readers, his face toward sunlight. His father pulls his son close and muses that the boy “talk[s] like a river,” choppy in places, churning in others, and smooth beyond. (Father and son both appear White.) Young readers will turn this complex idea over in their minds again and again. The author includes a moving autobiographical essay prompting readers to think even further about speech, sounds, communication, self-esteem, and sympathy.

An astounding articulation of both what it feels like to be different and how to make peace with it. (Picture book. 4-8)

WHEN WE ARE KIND
Smith, Monique Gray
Illus. by Neidhardt, Nicole
Orca (32 pp.)
$19.95 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-4598-2522-2

Distinctive illustrations amplify a pointed moral lesson in this Native picture book for kids.

An intergenerational Native family sits in a drum circle on the cover, suggesting the importance of cooperation and community that’s elucidated in the pages that follow. What does it mean to be kind to your family, your elders, your environment, and yourself? In simple, repetitive language, Smith (who is of mixed Cree, Lakota, and Scottish heritage) explores how our behaving with generosity toward others makes us feel happy in return. By helping with laundry, walking the family dog, sharing with friends, and taking food to our elders, we learn that the gift of kindness involves giving and receiving. The first half of the book is constructed entirely on the phrase “I am kind when,” while the second half uses “I feel.” Strung together, the simple statements have the resonance of affirmations and establish a clear chain of connectedness, but there is no story arc in the conventional sense. What the book lacks in plot, it makes up for with its illustrations. Drawing on her mother’s Diné traditions, Neidhardt prominently features Navajo hair buns, moccasins, and baskets; a panoply of Indigenous characters—including one child who uses a wheelchair—is featured in rich detail. A French edition, translated by Rachel Martinez, publishes simultaneously.

A visual feast for families interested in seeing the Native world through small, kind deeds. (Picture book. 3-5) (Nous sommes gentils: 978-1-4598-2659-2)

FEATHERED SERPENT AND THE FIVE SUNS
A Mesoamerican Creation Myth
Tonatiuh, Duncan
Illus. by the author
Abrams (40 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-4197-4677-2

The elders say that humanity currently resides in the fifth tonatiuh, or sun. Here’s the story of how humans came to be.

The preceding four tonatiuhs bore witness to failed trials. First, the gods covered sacred bones with mud, but these giant humans proved too fragile, becoming mountains in the end. The second set of humans, smaller than the first, developed into fish. Under the third tonatiuh, the enraged gods turned the rebellious humans into monkeys. The fourth tonatiuh resulted in the latest, lazy humans assuming the form of birds. At this point, the gods conceded any hope of creating humans, all except for Quetzalcóatl, the Feathered Serpent. Taking along his staff, shield, cloak, and shell ornament, Feathered Serpent travels to Mictlán, the underworld, to retrieve the sacred bones from Mictlanteuctli, the lord of the underworld. To reach where Mictlanteuctli dwells, Feathered Serpent journeys through nine regions, each region a test of his bravery and perseverance. Accompanied by a dog spirit guide named Xólotl, Feathered Serpent succeeds in his journey. Full of warm landscapes bathed under the sun’s light, multicolored night skies set against stars, and cavernous walls of rugged browns, Tonatiuh’s artwork—familiar in form, electric in spirit—astonishes in this retelling of a Mesoamerican creation story. Told with succinct clarity and a hint of mischief, this rendition begs for rereads. Here’s a new high-water mark for the artist. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9-by-22-inch double-page spreads reviewed at 77.1% of actual size.)

Simply spellbinding. (author’s note, glossary, select bibliography) (Picture book/cosmology. 6-9)

LITTLE FOX
van de Veldel, Edward
Illus. by Tolman, Marije
Levine Querido (88 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-1-64614-007-7

An exuberant young fox plays joyfully among birds and animals, not always paying attention to possible dangers.

He cannot resist racing behind two purple butterflies, causing him to zoom past the edge of an overcropping, falling heavily. His story is first told wordlessly in detailed illustrations that continue as text begins while he is unconscious, narrating a dream in which he recalls his development from birth, playing with his brothers and sisters, being cared for and taught by
his parents, and having adventures in the world around him. A human child on a bicycle appears, whose activities are presented wordlessly. The narration picks up Fox’s dream again and comes full circle with the child finding Little Fox and returning him home safely to his fox family. Van de Ven’s text describes the action in carefully constructed stream-of-consciousness, always exactly complementing Tolman’s remarkable illustrations, which are rendered in a mesmerizing variety of forms and techniques. (Production notes at the end provide insight into their creation.) They invite readers into a beautiful, fully realized dreamscape. Backgrounds are gray-green, white, and soft tan, with birds and animals accurately drawn and softly hued. Little Fox and his family are seen in the brightest possible shade of orange, and the kind human child, who is White, also has bright orange hair and clothing. Readers will cheer Little Fox’s full recovery while they study each page to find every glorious detail.

A tender, brilliant tour de force from the Netherlands. (Picture book 4-9)

Everything you always wanted to know about owls, from their peculiar eating habits to their unique vision, hearing, and how they raise a family.

Transcending the usual clichés we all know about owls “the unforgettable call. The glowing eyes. The fierce beak”—this elegantly designed picture book skillfully reveals the diversity and variety intrinsic to the order. High-quality, densely detailed photos of a number of different species of owl are thoughtfully juxtaposed with pertinent questions, scientific information, and a cartoon great horned owl who provides humorous “Whooo Knew?” factoids. The power of this fascinating predator really comes across in the superb color photos of owls snatching and swallowing prey, vomiting up pellets, spinning their heads (yes they can do this because they have 14 neck vertebrae!), and engaging in other characteristic behavior. Each double-page spread asks a pertinent question: “What’s for dinner?”; “How do owls hunt?”; “Do owls puke?” (no, they just regurgitate pellets); “Do owls sleep all day?”; “Do owls see in the dark?”; “What good are tufts?”; “What do owl babies do?” Ever wondered what owl tufts are for? (They’re not ears but mood indicators.) There is an environmental message embedded in the book, and a section on building owl-friendly habitat offers suggestions for how readers can help. Backmatter features a brief brief first on owl anatomy, instructions on how to dissect an owl pellet, and a glossary. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9 by 22.75-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.)

Whooo knew? Owls are awesome. (Informational picture book 6-10)

Robo-parents Diode and Lugnut present daughter Cathode with a new little brother—who requires, unfortunately, some assembly. Arriving in pieces from some mechanistic version of Ikea, little Flange turns out to be a cute but complicated tyke who immediately falls apart…and then rockets uncontrollably about the room after an overconfident uncle tinkers with his basic design. As a squad of helpline techies and bevies of neighbors bearing sludge cake and like treats roll in, the cluttered and increasingly crowded scene deteriorates into madcap chaos—until at last Cath, with help from Roomba-like robodog Sprocket, stages an intervention by whisking the hapless new arrival off to a backyard workshop for a proper assembly and software update. “You’re such a good big sister!” warbles her frazzled mom. Wiesner’s robots display his characteristic clean lines and even hues but endearingly look like vaguely anthropomorphic piles of random jet-engine parts and old vacuum cleaners loosely connected by joints of armored cable. They roll hither and thither through neatly squared-off panels and pages in infectiously comical dismay. Even the end’s domestic tranquility lasts only until Cathode spots the little box buried in the bigger one’s packing material: “TWINS!” (This book was reviewed digitally with 9 by 22-inch double-page spreads viewed at 52% of actual size.)

A retro-futuristic romp, literally and figuratively screwy. (Picture book 5-7)

A deep and moving reflection on enduring hardship and generational love. Kalia’s grandmother holds a revered place among her Hmong family. Her origins feel almost mythic in stature as Kalia recounts how no one knows Grandma’s true age and how, as a young girl, she escaped a tiger in the jungle. Grandma is a survivor; the struggles of raising her orphaned siblings and immigrating across the world have only made her stronger. Despite a life of adversity, Grandma continues to smile and live with a deep and moving reflection on enduring hardship and generational love. Kalia’s grandmother holds a revered place among her Hmong family. Her origins feel almost mythic in stature as Kalia recounts how no one knows Grandma’s true age and how, as a young girl, she escaped a tiger in the jungle. Grandma is a survivor; the struggles of raising her orphaned siblings and immigrating across the world have only made her stronger. Despite a life of adversity, Grandma continues to smile and live with a deep and moving reflection on enduring hardship and generational love. Kalia’s grandmother holds a revered place among her Hmong family. Her origins feel almost mythic in stature as Kalia recounts how no one knows Grandma’s true age and how, as a young girl, she escaped a tiger in the jungle. Grandma is a survivor; the struggles of raising her orphaned siblings and immigrating across the world have only made her stronger. Despite a life of adversity, Grandma continues to smile and live with a deep and moving reflection on enduring hardship and generational love. Kalia’s grandmother holds a revered place among her Hmong family. Her origins feel almost mythic in stature as Kalia recounts how no one knows Grandma’s true age and how, as a young girl, she escaped a tiger in the jungle. Grandma is a survivor; the struggles of raising her orphaned siblings and immigrating across the world have only made her stronger. Despite a life of adversity, Grandma continues to smile and live with a deep and moving reflection on enduring hardship and generational love. Kalia’s grandmother holds a revered place among her Hmong family. Her origins feel almost mythic in stature as Kalia recounts how no one knows Grandma’s true age and how, as a young girl, she escaped a tiger in the jungle. Grandma is a survivor; the struggles of raising her orphaned siblings and immigrating across the world have only made her stronger. Despite a life of adversity, Grandma continues to smile and live with a deep and moving reflection on enduring hardship and generational love. Kalia’s grandmother holds a revered place among her Hmong family. Her origins feel almost mythic in stature as Kalia recounts how no one knows Grandma’s true age and how, as a young girl, she escaped a tiger in the jungle. Grandma is a survivor; the struggles of raising her orphaned siblings and immigrating across the world have only made her stronger. Despite a life of adversity, Grandma continues to smile and live
lush florals and foliage, these images capture both the magic and constancy of Grandma’s love. Nods to the importance of fabric in Hmong culture are represented with beautiful paj ntaub–style endpapers symbolizing family and the embroidered designs on Grandma’s clothing. She is the only character pictured in these traditional fabrics, representing her honored matriarch status and the legacy she passes along: an ability to bloom even in the toughest conditions.

Poignant storytelling with stunning visuals. (pronunciation guide, glossary) (Picture book/biography. 5-9)

MY DAY WITH GONG GONG
Tee, Sennab
Illus. by Chen, Elaine
Annick Press (36 pp.)
$18.95 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-77321-429-0

Spending a day with Gong Gong doesn’t sound like very much fun to May. Gong Gong doesn’t speak English, and May doesn’t know Chinese. How can they have a good day together? As they stroll through an urban Chinatown, May’s perpetually sanguine maternal grandfather chats with friends and visits shops. At each stop, Cantonese words fly back and forth, many clearly pointed at May, who understands none of it. It’s equally exasperating trying to communicate with Gong Gong in English, and by the time they join a card game in the park with Gong Gong’s friends, May is tired, hungry, and frustrated. But although it seems like Gong Gong hasn’t been attentive so far, when May’s day finally comes to a head, it is clear that he has. First-person text gives glimpses into May’s lively thoughts as they evolve through the day; and Gong Gong’s unchangingly jolly face reflects what could be mistaken for blithe obliviousness but is actually his way of showing love through sharing the people and places of his life. Through adorable illustrations that exude humor and warmth, this portrait of intergenerational affection is also a tribute to life in Chinatown neighborhoods: Street vendors, a busker playing a Chinese violin, a dim sum restaurant, and more all combine to add a distinctive texture.

A multilayered, endearing treasure of a day. (glossary) (Picture book. 4-8)

MY LITTLE ONE
Zullo, Germano
Illus. by Albertine
Trans. by Kitamura, Katie
Elsewhere Editions (80 pp.)
$24.00 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-939810-66-3

The parent becomes the child in this sparsely worded French import. The illustrations, done by 2020 Hans Christian Andersen Illustrator Award winner Albertine, rest in copious white space. They are spare, delicate line drawings in what appear to be pencil (no other color is applied) of a short-haired, dress-clad adult, as white as the page. All drawings appear on the recto; if one were to flip the book’s pages, the drawings would appear animated. The adult exclaims, “Here you are... // Finally!” and then cradles a miniscule but fully mature-looking adult, who appears to have emerged from the heart of the speaker. “I’ve been waiting for you,” reads the text. As the adult speaks fondly to the child (“my little one!”), telling them “our story,” embracing them, and even swinging them around in the air, the child grows tall. Gradually, the child is as tall as the parent once was while the parent shrinks in size. The child now cradles the parent until, bringing the story full circle, the parent seemingly disappears into the heart of its own offspring. The sense of movement on static pages is compelling—all in the form of fine, simple lines and dynamic page turns. This elegant story may tug more at the hearts of adult caregivers, but it surely provides food for thought for more-contemplative children, who may wonder at the notion that both characters at different times are the subjects of the book’s title. (This book was reviewed digitally with 12-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.)

A playful and poignant take on parenthood. (Picture book. 5-12)
 These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

RISE OF THE HALFLING KING by David Bowles; illus. by Charlene Bowles ........................................... 51

FINISH THE FIGHT! by Veronica Chambers & the staff of the New York Times ........................................... 51

GIRL GIANT AND THE MONKEY KING by Van Hoang; illus. by Nguyen Quang & Kim Lien .......................... 53

BLOOD AND GERMS by Gail Jarrow ........................................... 54

THEY THREW US AWAY by Daniel Kraus; illus. by Rovina Cai .... 55

ALL’S HAPPY THAT ENDS HAPPY by Rose Lagercrantz; illus. by Eva Eriksson; trans. by Julia Marshall ............................ 55

TRISTAN STRONG DESTROYS THE WORLD by Kwame Mbalia ........................................... 55

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WHO GIVES A POOP? by Heather L. Montgomery; illus. by Iris Gottlieb ........................................... 56

EVERYTHING SAD IS UNTRUE by Daniel Nayeri ........................................... 57

EVERYTHING COMES NEXT by Naomi Shihab Nye; illus. by Rafael López ........................................... 57

BECOMING MUHAMMAD ALI by James Patterson & Kwame Alexander; illus. by Darwud Anyabwile ............................ 57

LIGHTFALL by Tim Probert ........................................... 59

THE BARREN GROUNDS by David A. Robertson ........................................... 59

HOW WE GOT TO THE MOON by John Rocco ........................................... 59

FLYING OVER WATER by N.H. Senzai & Shannon Hitchcock ...... 60

TUNE IT OUT by Jamie Sumner ........................................... 61

BEFORE THE EVER AFTER by Jacqueline Woodson ........................................... 63

THREE KEYS by Kelly Yang ........................................... 64

**ALONE IN THE WOODS**
Behrens, Rebecca
Sourcebooks (320 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-4926-7337-8

The complexity of middle school friendships is explored against the backdrop of a gripping wilderness survival story.

Alejandra and Jocelyn—or Alex and Joss—have been best friends since kindergarten, forming the inseparable Team Alexlyn and spending glorious summer vacations together at Joss’ family cabin in the Northwoods of Wisconsin. The cabin trips are steeped in tradition, from doughnuts at Paul Bunyan’s Cook Shanty to the first lake jump of the summer. As the summer before eighth grade winds down, however, this year’s cabin trip feels different. There’s a new distance between Alex and Joss that neither girl wants to acknowledge, and Joss can’t figure out why her best friend feels like a complete stranger. A river tubing trip seems like a good time to reconnect, but when a series of mishaps leave Alex and Joss wandering lost in the woods, the girls are faced with challenges that will test their strength and ability to survive. Told from the alternating first-person points of view of each girl, the story examines the complicated evolution of childhood friendships and the limits of human endurance. Alex and her family are Latinx; all other characters are assumed White.

Fully developed characters and a brisk plot take readers along on a dangerous journey (Thriller 9-13) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

**RISE OF THE HALFLING KING**
Bowles, David
Illus. by Bowles, Charlene
Cinco Puntos Press (64 pp.)
$12.95 paper | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-947627-37-6
Series: Tales of the Feathered Serpent, 1

A halfling child challenges a cruel king for the throne.

Almah, an apprentice witch in Kabak, a city in the Yucatan Peninsula, receives from the elfin beings known as Aluxes a magic stone and a drum that “will announce the true king of Uxmal.” As years go by, Kinich Kak Ek takes the throne in Uxmal, but the sorcerer Zaatan Ik prophesies a
As I write this on a hot and steamy summer’s day, the idea of trading punishing humidity for crisp autumn air sounds pretty good. But looking forward to this fall seems way more fraught than in years past, when children could reliably count on going back to school, fall sports, and seasonal fun.

This year we’ve got millions of students and teachers who don’t know whether they will be seeing one another in person or online—and even if they start in person, it’s anyone’s guess how long that will remain the case. Then there are the anxieties swirling around children and adults alike, including what feels like the most consequential presidential election of all our lifetimes and the enormous, terrifying unknown of Covid-19 as it continues to play havoc with our health and economy.

At least we can be certain there are some good books middle-grade readers can look forward to; here are some suggestions to take them through the first several weeks of this very weird fall season.

Cree author David A. Robertson combines cultural tropes in *The Barren Grounds* (Puffin/Penguin Random House Canada, Sept. 8) when he sends Cree foster kids Morgan and Eli through a portal not into Narnia but into Misewa, the animal inhabitants of which are struggling to survive the White Time. This original Indigenous fantasy kicks off a series.

In *Land of the Cranes* (Scholastic, Sept. 13), Aida Salazar gives readers a memorable protagonist in Betita Quintero. Even though she and her family live in the “sanctuary state” of California, her father is taken by ICE, throwing their tenuous stability into doubt. The fourth grader is a budding writer, and her love of words shines through in Salazar’s verse chapters.

Rena Barron’s title character in *Maya and the Rising Dark* (HMH Books, Sept. 22) always thought her father’s stories were made up—till she finds that they’re all too real and that she must use the power she derives from her newfound West African orisha heritage to heal the veil that keeps the shape-shifting darkbringers from preying on this world. Abundant twists and turns will keep readers glued to the pages.

African American sharecropper Loretta Little Looks Back (Little, Brown, Sept. 29), and so do her brother and his daughter in this unusual sequence of monologues from Andrea Davis Pinkney, illustrated by Brian Pinkney. As the three characters speak their stories to readers, they escort children through episodes of little-covered history over an unforgettable four-decade span.

Being the only Vietnamese American kid in her new Georgia school is hard enough; Thom’s mysterious new superstrength just makes everything worse. Could the Monkey King be her salvation? Author Van Hoang and illustrator Nguyen Quang take Thom and readers on a trip through Vietnamese tradition in their modern fantasy, *Girl Giant and the Monkey King* (Roaring Brook, Oct. 6).

For 18 days in the summer of 2018, 12 young Thai soccer players and their coach were trapped in a flooded cave in northern Thailand. In *All Thirteen* (Candlewick, Oct. 13), Christina Soontornvat relates their extraordinary survival and rescue, providing contextualizing information on geology, geography, Buddhism, hydraulics, and diplomacy while keeping readers on the edges of their seats.

Lamar Giles brings back Otto and Sheed, heroes of *The Last Last-Day-of-Summer* (Versify/HMH, 2019), for a multiverse-disrupting adventure on the other side of *The Last Mirror on the Left* (Versify/HMH, Oct. 20). Readers who have not yet met the Legendary Alston Boys of Logan County are lucky to have not one but two novels with this pair of smart, likable Black boys.

Vicky Smith is a young readers’ editor.
A fantastic tale of adventure, humor, and mischief.

**GIRL GIANT AND THE MONKEY KING**

By Hoang, Van

Illus. by Quang, Nguyen & Lien, Kim

Roaring Brook (368 pp.)

$16.99 | Oct. 6, 2020

978-1-250-24041-5

Desperate to get rid of her abnormal strength and live a normal life, Thom turns to the trickster Monkey King for help.

How, Thom Ngho has become incredibly strong. Strong enough to break windows and doors, strong enough to kick a soccer ball right through the goal’s netting. She has no idea how this came about or how to put an end to it, so she hides her powers, letting her soccer coach bench her, which is really be true. With the dubious help of the Monkey King and a dragon who claims to be her protector, Thom sets out on a journey through Vietnamese folklore and mythology while simultaneously juggling school life and her relationship with her mother. Spinning a fantastic tale of adventure, humor, and mischief, Hoang also incorporates portrayals of racism, belonging, identity, and intergenerational differences that ring true, crafting a fantasy for the modern age with enough complications to hint at more to come. Charming spot art enhances the wonder of the fantasy elements.

*At its core, a tale of magic and family strongly grounded in contemporary reality. (Fantasy. 9-12) (This review is printed here for the first time.)*

**FINISH THE FIGHT!**

**The Brave and Revolutionary Women Who Fought for the Right To Vote**

Chambers, Veronica & the staff of the New York Times

Versify/HMH (128 pp.)

$16.99 | Aug. 18, 2020

978-0-358-40830-7

FINISH THE FIGHT!

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Versify/HMH (128 pp.)

$16.99 | Aug. 18, 2020

978-0-358-40830-7

An illustrated introduction to many women of color and queer women responsible for voting rights in America.

Beginning with the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, whose historic territory was the site of the Seneca Falls convention, and ending with Dakota Sioux activist Zitkála-Sá, this friendly primer highlights the lesser-known heroes whose fight for their right to vote did not end with the ratification of the 19th Amendment. Chambers and her co-authors from the New York Times strike an authoritative yet colloquial tone: “[T]here are tons of women beyond Susan [B. Anthony] and Elizabeth [Cady Stanton]’s demographic who helped make suffrage a reality for all women,” they write. Well-chosen quotes and engaging biographical information about such activists as Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Mary McLeod Bethune, Angelina Weld Grimké, Mabel Ping-hua Lee, and Jovita Idár are interspersed with trenchant observations from contemporary women working in service to their ancestors’ ideals, including Louise Herne, Charlotte Brooks, and Vilma Martínez. White and straight women are supporting characters, either as allies or barriers. Ornate, colorful page layouts also include playful doodles, at times somewhat distracting atop historical images. Stories like that of Susette La Flesche Tibbles, who had to stand up to several White government officials before she could become the first Native woman to teach on her reservation, emphasize the theme that rights require constant advocacy.

**BENBEE AND THE TEACHER GRIEFER**

Holt, K.A.

Chronicle (344 pp.)

$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020

978-1-4521-8251-3

Series: Kids Under the Stairs, 1

A foursome of rising seventh graders, three boys and one girl, are sentenced to summer school.

Three of them failed a Florida academic assessment test and the other has no scores since he was home-schooled and recently moved to the state. All share a
BLOOD AND GERMS

The Civil War Battle Against Wounds and Disease

Jarrow, Gail
Calkins Creek/Boyds Mills (176 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-68437-176-1
Series: Medical Fiascoes

For those interested in the history of medicine or fascinated by the Civil War, Jarrow’s latest offering astutely combines both topics.

The Civil War (1861-1865) was a bloodbath of epic size. Beyond the battlefield toll, boys who had never traveled far from home were gathered into huge armies and exposed to numerous diseases for which they had no immunity, leading to lethal epidemics and a huge further cost in young lives lost. Making outstanding use of period photographs, in-depth research, and firsthand accounts, this effort chronicles the inadequate, sometimes almost farcically deficient medical care delivered during the war. Highlighting primary topics in a series of brief chapters, it follows soldiers through the typical responses to being wounded (or falling ill), from frontaline interventions through field hospitals, then, via torturous ambulance journeys, to immense pavilion hospitals that both Union and Confederate sides were forced to establish. Medical training, nursing care, the Union’s Sanitary Commission, types of infections, prisoner-of-war mistreatment, and a discussion of medical advances that resulted from the war are also covered. The descriptions are sometimes graphic, connecting tragic statistics to individual soldiers. Sidebars neatly fit into the presentation, never interrupting the flow but enhancing the story with valuable additional information. Outstanding backmatter, more typical of what might be found in fine adult nonfiction, rounds out this stellar presentation.

A fascinating example of excellence in juvenile nonfiction. (glossary, multiple source lists, detailed index) (Nonfiction. 10-15)

WHITE FOX
Dilah and the Moon Stone

Jiatong, Chen
Illus. by Wang, Viola
Trans. by Feeley, Jennifer
Chicken House/Scholastic (288 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-338-63337-9
Series: White Fox, 1

A fantastical animal adventure. (A Legend From the World of White Fox, author’s note) (Fantasy. 8-12) (This review is printed here for the first time.)
THEY THREW US AWAY
Kraus, Daniel
Illus. by Cai, Rovina
Henry Holt (256 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-250-22440-8
Series: Teddies Saga, 1

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

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

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

TRISTAN STRONG DESTROYS THE WORLD
Mbalia, Kwame
Disney-Hyperion (320 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-368-04238-3
Series: Tristan Strong, 2

Tristan Strong is back in this sequel to Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky (2019). A month’s passed since rising eighth grader Tristan’s first adventure in Alke, the world where African American folktale heroes are gods who live alongside African deities. Tristan’s now an Ananseem, “a carrier and spreader of stories,” and after the Shamble Man, a new foe, kidnaps his grandmother and takes her back to Alke, he follows, determined to rescue her. Tristan heads off on an adventure that will challenge his reluctant hero-ness (realistically, this aspect of his character hasn’t changed) and force him to reckon with the truth: Though he saved Alke, he was also the reason Alke was in danger in the first place. Fans of the first book will cheer the return of old friends, like capable, reliable Ayanna; the ever quippy Gum Baby (who steals the show, as per usual); and cell-phone-bound trickster Anansi, and appreciate the new characters. The ending is nothing short of earth-shattering, promising a fascinating next entry. Well-paced—just like the previous installment—this sequel focuses on themes such as the meaning of diaspora and the effects of trauma, making for a more nuanced and stronger story than the first. The human characters are Black with varying shades of brown skin. Packs a punch. (Fantasy. 10-14) (This review is printed here for the first time.)
NO PLACE FOR MONSTERS
Merritt, Kory
Illus. by the author
HMH Books (984 pp.)
$14.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-358-12853-3
Series: No Place for Monsters, 1

Children are snatched from their beds and erased from all memory.
Levi and Kat often feel like they’re the only ones out of place in their small suburban town of Cowslip Grove. The two children feel a slight remove from their classmates and families; the one thing binding them together is their ability to see what everyone else cannot: Children are disappearing. And no one else seems to remember these children ever existed. After Levi’s younger sister, Twila, is taken by this evil force, Levi and Kat embark on a journey into the town’s sinister past to try to save her and stop the monster once and for all. The spooky tale is complemented by ink illustrations that will give even the bravest reader a case of the willies. The narrative is smartly structured, moving the characters forward at a perfect pace that balances the tricky trifecta of thrills, exposition, and character development. The ending will leave some in tears and others enraged—or simply gobsmacked. This is one well-stirred slurry of facts and fun for strong-stomached “poop sleuths.” (index, activities, synonym chart, annotated bibliography) (Nonfiction. 11-14)

WHO GIVES A POOP?
Surprising Science From One End to the Other
Montgomery, Heather L.
Illus. by Gottlieb, Iris
Bloomsbury (176 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-61620-547-3

A biologist digests her own observations and those of other researchers studying poop’s properties, products, and potential.

“Once I put my poop goggles on,” the author writes, “I found fecal fun everywhere.” Picking up more or less where her Something Rotten: A Fresh Look at Roadkill (2018) left off, Montgomery continues to convey her devotion to decomposition with breezy visits to labs and landfills, conversations with scat specialists, and thoroughly detailed up-close and personal notes on encounters with dead animals, guts, and writhing intestinal fauna. Piling evocative chapter heads like “Hunk of Tongue” and “Stool to Fuel” atop essays redolent with puns and double-entendres, she adds unusual nuggets of insight to her disquisitions on fertilizers and fecal transplants; the significant role dinosaurs and other prehistoric “megapoopers” played in seed dispersal, hints that certain parasitic worms may be as good for us as certain species of intestinal bacteria, and the notion that artificially preserving endangered species isn’t automatically a good thing. Along with occasional diversions to, for instance, point out the environmental impact of palm oil’s near ubiquity in our food and consumer goods, she further indulges her wide range of interests in footnotes on nearly every page and a closing resource list bulging with analytical commentary. Neither the scanty assortment of photos nor Gottlieb’s decorative pen-and-ink vignettes include human figures.

“‘poop sleuths.’” (index, activities, synonym chart, annotated bibliography) (Nonfiction. 9-12) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

THE SCREAMING HAIRY ARMADILLO
And 76 Other Animals With Wild, Wacky Names
Merritt, Matthew & Merritt, Steve
Illus. by Benbasat, Julie
Workman (176 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-5235-0811-2

Would a rose by any other name taste as delicious as a chocolate dip damselfish sounds?
The sparklemuffin peacock spider, the headless chicken monster, the fried egg jellyfish, and the bone-eating snot flower worm are just a few of the distinctively named creatures explored in this informative, fun, and funny look at animal names. Through the lens of how and why animal species get their names—whether funny, fierce, magical, delicious-sounding, or just plain weird—it highlights the features leading to these names while explaining the common and scientific naming process and exploring animal taxonomy. In catalog style, each featured animal’s description ties its defining features to its common name with illustrations and photos. Text sidebars include scientific name, habitat, and a particular fact for each creature. Knowing what will likely fascinate their audience, like yet crabs eating the bacteria that grows on their hairlike spines or unicorn fish eating other animals’ poop (not as magical a behavior as the name sounds), the authors adopt an engaging and casual tone, filled with humor that matches the book’s focus, but never sacrifice information for a joke. Included are extension activities on how readers might go about discovering a new animal species, a name generator that could keep one busy for hours, and resources focused on conservation.

Like its title, this is sure to be a scream. (glossary, further reading) (Nonfiction. 9-13)
The language is evocative: simple yet precise.

**EVERYTHING SAD IS UNTRUE**

**EVERYTHING SAD IS UNTRUE**

*(A True Story)*

Nayeri, Daniel
Levine Querido (368 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-1-64614-000-8

“Every story is the sound of a storyteller begging to stay alive.”

Khosrou, the child, stands before his class in Oklahoma and tells stories of Iran, lifetimes’ worth of experiences compressed into writing prompts. Daniel, the adult, pieces together his “patchwork” past to stitch a quilt of memory in a free-wheeling, layered manner more reminiscent of a conversation than a text. At its most basic level, Nayeri’s offering is a fictionalized refugee’s memoir, an adult looking back at his childhood and the forced adoption of a new and infinitely more difficult life. Yet somehow “memoir” fails to do justice to the scope of the narrative, the self-proclaimed antithesis of just another “poor me” tale of immigrant woe.” Like Scheherazade, Nayeri spins 1,001 tales: In under 400 pages he recounts Persian myth and history, leads readers through days banal and outstanding, waxes philosophical on the nature of life and love, and more. Not “beholden” to the linear conventions of Western storytelling, the story might come across as disjointed, but the various anecdotes are underscored by a painful coherence as they work to illuminate not only a larger story, but a life. And there is beauty amid the pain as well as laughter. The soul-sapping hopelessness of a refugee camp is treated with the same dramatic import as the struggle to eliminate on Western toilets. The language is evocative: simple yet precise, rife with the idiosyncratic and abjectly honest imagery characteristic of a child’s imagination. *(This review has been updated to clarify that the book is a work of fiction.)*

A modern epic. *(author’s note, acknowledgments)* *(Historical fiction. 10-18)*

**EVERYTHING COMES NEXT**

**EVERYTHING COMES NEXT**

*Collected and New Poems*

Nye, Naomi Shihab
Illus. by López, Rafael
Greenwillow Books (236 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-06-301345-2

Young People’s Poet Laureate Nye explores childhood, conflict, and connectivity through over 100 of her poems, both new and classic.

In the opening section, “The Holy Land of Childhood,” she draws from her childhood and those of others, often speaking from the child’s perspective, striking notes of loneliness, fear, and playfulness. Writing was her refuge from desperately boring early readers while a school assignment to write from the perspective of a kitchen implement turned her into “a sweet sifter in time.” Sad vignettes of her childhood home sit alongside humorous memories. Personal images of war, displacement, and loss pepper the second section, “The Holy Land That Isn’t,” in which Nye focuses on her Palestinian immigrant father’s loss of his Jerusalem home, crystallized in his longing for the figs of his childhood. In a poem dedicated to the great Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai, she pleads for peace for “every ancient space” and, in another, observes “red poppies sleep beneath / dirt and stones” beside the homes of fearful Arab and Jewish children living only “one mile apart.” The final section, “People Are the Only Holy Land,” stresses similarities between diverse peoples, invoking a vision of a world where “it is only kindness that makes sense anymore.” López’s evocative art perfectly captures and enhances the mood of dreaming and yearning. Emotionally resonant and stirring, this is a must-have title.

**BECOMING MUHAMMAD ALI**

Patterson, James & Alexander, Kwame
Illus. by Anyabwile, Dawud
Jimmy Patterson/HMH Books (320 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-0-316-49816-6

Series: Becoming Ali, 1

Two bestselling authors imagine the boyhood of the man who became the legendary boxing icon Muhammad Ali.

Cassius was a spirited child growing up in segregated Louisville, Kentucky. He had a loving home with his parents and younger brother, Rudy. Granddaddy Herman also was an important figure, imparting life lessons. His parents wanted him to succeed in school, but Cassius had difficulty reading and found more pleasure in playing and exploring outdoors. Early on, he and Rudy knew the restrictions of being African American, for example, encountering “Whites Only” signs at parks, but the brothers dreamed of fame like that enjoyed by Black boxer Joe Louis. Popular Cassius was especially close to Lucius “Lucky” Wakeley; despite their academic differences, their deep connection remained after Lucky received a scholarship to a Catholic school. When Cassius wandered into the Columbia Boxing Gym, it seemed to be destiny; and he developed into a successful youth boxer. Told in two voices, with prose for the voice of Lucky and free verse for Cassius, the narrative provides readers with a multidimensional view of the early life of and influences on an important figure in sports and social change. Lucky’s observations give context while Cassius’ poetry encapsulates his drive, energy, and gift with words. Combined with dynamic illustrations by Anyabwile, the book captures the historical and social environment that produced Muhammad Ali.

A stellar collaboration that introduces an important and intriguing individual to today’s readers. *(bibliography)* *(Biographical novel. 8-12)* *(This review is printed here for the first time.)*
Author/illustrator Paige Braddock and colorist Kat Efird bring dog Crackers, cat Butter, and puppy Peanut to readers in *Puppy Problems* (Viking, Sept. 22). Established house pets and fast friends Crackers and Butter find their lives upended with the arrival of Peanut in the home. In a classic storyline of resentment and repentance, the two older animals cope with the impossible cuteness and disruption the lovable puppy brings.

Pea (a green pea), Bee (a bumblebee), and Jay (a bluejay) star in *Stuck Together* (HarperAlley, Sept. 1), Brian “Smitty” Smith’s series opener. Pea gets the story rolling, literally (it’s his mode of locomotion), when his thirst for adventure finds him lost and far (for a pea) from home. In fairly short order he makes friends with Bee and Jay, and their mostly mild-mannered adventures unfold according to a gently loopy internal logic.

In *Sherlock Bones and the Natural History Mystery* (Etch/HMH, Sept. 22), Renée Treml introduces an unlikely detective, the skeleton of a tawny frogmouth who resides in a natural history museum. He has a sidekick, of course: Watts, a taxidermic Indian ringneck parrot. Their adventures begin when the emergency alarm announces the theft of the Royal Blue Diamond, and the game’s afoot.

With *Mellybean and the Giant Monster* (Razorbill/Penguin, Oct. 13), Mike White introduces scruffy little mutt Mellybean, who digs a hole into another dimension while playing a game the cats call Hide the Shoe. She plunges through and lands on the head of Narra, a humongous yellow monster with a single horn. White milks the differences in size and temperament for all they’re worth even as the duo goes about fomenting revolution.
A chance meeting between Bea, a fiercely loyal human girl, and Cadwalader, a lost Galdurian, ignites a friendship that could change them—and their world—forever.

This lively graphic novel introduces readers to Irpa, a fiercely loyal human girl, and Cadwalader, a lost Galdurian, ignites a friendship that could change them—and their world—forever.

A dramatic, meticulous record of the U.S. space program’s greatest achievement (so far).

Systematically describing major components of the Saturn V and Apollo capsules, each onboard instrument, and the central NASA support facilities, Rocco orchestrates a grand overview that mingles analyses of daunting challenges and technical problems with appreciative nods to some of the 400,000 scientists and industrial workers who faced and solved them. Tucking in explanations of orbital physics and other background along the way from Sputnik to Apollo 11 (the other Apollo missions are summarized at the end), he highlights both techno-triumphs, from humongous rockets to the icky but ingenious in-flight Fecal Collection System, as well as the crucial but unsung labors of capsule designer Max Faget and dozens of others. Wary of turning the heavily illustrated pages into busy thickets of extraneous detail, the Caldecott honoree mixes his own cleanly drawn conceptualizations and cutaway views with repainted (mostly color) versions of period photographs, documents, portraits, and renowned shots like Earthrise. With a main narrative composed in the present tense, the result gives the insights, events, disasters, and near disasters of over a half-century ago not only visual unity, but an immediacy that will sweep readers along—and serve as a constant reminder that the participants, from well-known names like Katherine Johnson to geologist Farouk El-Baz and seamstress Ellie Foraker, weren’t all White men or remote historical figures.
A soaring tribute. (author’s notes, sources, further reading, acronyms, index, map) (Nonfiction. 10-14) (This review is printed here for the first time)

THE LOST WONDERLAND DIARIES
Savage, J. Scott
Shadow Mountain (352 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-62972-786-8

Wonderland is in danger, and two unlikely heroes must work together to save it.

San Jose eighth graders Celia and Tyrus have barely just met at the library when they find the lost diaries of Charles Dodgson—aka Lewis Carroll, narrator Celia’s great-great-great-uncle—in which the author recorded his very real travels into the parallel world of Wonderland. When the kids accidentally open a doorway to Wonderland, they discover it has changed a lot since the time Carroll visited, and the place is a much darker, more dangerous world for its unhappy inhabitants, who live under the threat of a nefarious hauntstrosity. Tyrus is a bookworm and wordsmith while Celia is a math and logic whiz, and the story puts their newly minted friendship to the test as they learn to work together and use their skills to solve puzzles and riddles, running against time to save Wonderland and get back to their own world. Savage pays homage to Carroll’s world with imagination as well as a notable love for math and literature while adding his own ingenious twists to the original. Both Celia and Tyrus struggle with bullying back home, and Celia’s dyslexia is a constant source of frustration when other kids underestimate her intelligence, and the book ultimately offers a message of empowerment and self-love. Tyrus is brown-skinned and Celia is assumed White.

A fun and clever return to Wonderland. (Fantasy. 10-14)

FLYING OVER WATER
Senzai, N.H. & Hitchcock, Shannon
Scholastic (272 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-1-338-61766-5

The Alwan family arrives in Tampa, Florida, in 2017 after the war in Syria destroys their lives in Aleppo and forces them into a crowded refugee camp in Turkey.

But their arrival coincides with Trump’s Muslim ban and a sharp rise in anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim hate crimes across the county, including in Tampa, where a mosque is set on fire soon after the family settles in. Frustrated and afraid yet determined to make the best of it, Noura begins seventh grade in her new American school. But she and her twin brother soon realize not all the students are like Jordyn, Noura’s kind, supportive school ambassador who becomes a good friend. Some are like Nick, who calls immigrants terrorists and draws a cartoon of Noura’s hijab being ripped off. But Noura insists on being strong and pushing forward by overcoming her worst fears and inspiring those around her to stand up for their values; she believes that hate can only be overcome with unity, conviction, and compassion. The novel seamlessly transitions between the perspectives of Noura and Jordyn, who is a White, upper-middle-class champion swimmer learning to cope with anxiety after her mother’s recent miscarriage. The girls quickly realize they share a lot in common and can help one another overcome their fears: Noura’s of swimming and Jordyn’s of panic attacks.

Movingly highlights a generation of youth at the center of progressive change. (Fiction. 8-12) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

LIGHTNING MARY
Simmons, Anthea
Illus. by Weston Lewis, James Andersen/Trafalgar (272 pp.)
$9.99 paper | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-78344-829-6

Mary Anning rocks on in this down-to-earth retelling of the unusual life story of the 19th-century fossil hunter extraordinary.

Anning’s strong, idiosyncratic personality bursts forth from the opening pages of this bold first-person narrative. Anning despises typical feminine pursuits and prefers to go “fossicking” with her father on the treacherous Blue Lias clay cliffs near Lyme Regis in Dorset in the south of England. Her grit and determination give her a head start in locating and extracting many valuable fossils, which she sells to boost the family budget. Her Dissenter father causes her to question the biblical story of Creation, since it is obvious to her that fossils have been buried in the Earth for a long time. Anning faces many obstacles; she is poor, female, working class, and has to work to ward off starvation. By chance encounters through the sale of her wares, she learns from the famous geologists of the day and begins to understand the real significance of her discoveries. Her discovery of the ichthyosaur sets her on the path to fame and a better standard of living, but she remains cynical and bitter about ever becoming recognized for her achievements. Anning’s rebellious spirit and fascination with science will resonate with curious readers.

Fascinating portrait of a great role model for adventurous youth who are interested in science. (Biographical notes, fossils and fossil-hunting, information about girls in STEM) (Biography. 9-14)
Sumner realistically avoids fairy-tale endings.

**TUNE IT OUT**

A 12-year-old girl navigates sensory processing disorder and complicated emotions when she's removed from her mother's care.

Lou Montgomery hasn't attended school in over a year. Instead, she and her mother scratch out a nomadic living, performing in casinos and diners and sleeping in their worn-out truck as her ambitious mother scouts the country for Lou's "next big gig." Lou loves singing; her voice "makes me feel stronger than I am," she tells readers. But she hates performing; loud sounds hurt "like knives" and leave her screaming, and light touch makes her flinch. When her mother's investigated for neglect and Lou's sent to live with her wealthy aunt and uncle, Lou's new world—regular meals, friendship with quirky theater classmate Well sometimes feels too good to be true (would that all kids were so endearingly and instantly accepting of neurodiversity), Sumner realistically recognizes themselves in a child's fears and growing empathy. (Historical fiction. 9-11) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

**MR. PENGUIN AND THE CATASTROPHIC CRUISE**

Feathered fussbudget Mr. Penguin and friends return in a third middle-grade adventure, tossing every nautical trope into a gleeful omnishambles.

The celebrated Mr. Penguin has embarked upon a much-anticipated (and, he hopes, very nonadventurous) luxury cruise with his devoted chums Colin, a kung fu-fighting spider; Edith Hedge, a usefully equipped human; and Gordon, a very peculiar pigeon. Shenanigans inevitably ensue, and soon the quartet are up to their eyeballs in coded messages, possible pirates, steam-punk mechanisms, and pantoworthy disguises—not to mention a mysterious island, a sea monster, a trench-coated secret agent, and red herrings galore. It's all gloriously silly, as the (extremely British) humor runs the gamut from groan-inducing puns to subtext meta-textual drollery; but the twisty roller coaster of a plot doesn't lack for genuine suspense. The pear-shaped Mr. Penguin—prone to panic and a fish-finger sandwich aficionado—is a delightful protagonist, and each of his companions (yes, even Gordon!) gets an opportunity to save the day. The over-the-top cast is cheerfully varied, with several human characters of color. The copious black, white, and orange illustrations reminiscent of Quentin Blake lend the story a daffy verve, and the short chapters with cliffhanger endings make for a perfect read-aloud. Readers need not be familiar with earlier volumes to appreciate this one.

Ridiculously charming. (Adventure. 6-11) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

**BENI'S WAR**

When a 12-year-old's tiny country is invaded, everyone is touched by war.

Beni doesn't like his new home on the moshav in this Israeli farming community. He misses Jerusalem, and he's bullied by the other boys. But everything changes on the Yom Kippur holiday in 1973 when his country is unexpectedly invaded. Beni lives only a 10-minute drive from the border with Syria, and his home takes heavy fire from mortar shells. After hours in a shelter, Beni emerges to rubble and burning fields. Evacuated to his grandparents' house, he can't stop worrying about his brother, Motti, headed to the Egyptian front in a tank. But life goes on, even in a national crisis.
By Laura Simeon

Summer vacation separates 13-year-old best friends Monique and Rasheeda in Paula Chase’s *Turning Point* (Greenwillow, Sept. 15). Rasheeda is stuck at home, made to attend endless church activities and conform to strict behavioral expectations, while Monique is off at a summer ballet intensive where there are few other Black girls and she’s continually made to feel different. Each must draw on her inner strength to navigate new challenges without her friend by her side.

A cruel dictatorship casts a long shadow in *The Maps of Memory* by Marjorie Agosín, illustrated by Lee White and translated by Alison Ridley (Caitlyn Dlouhy/Atheneum, Sept. 22). Fourteen-year-old Celeste and friends are grateful peace has come to Chile, but the disappearances of loved ones mean there is still work to be done even as crushes, a friendly donkey to look after, and tasty pastries add sweetness. Facing difficult truths, she turns pain into action.

The titular character in *Yara’s Spring* by Jamal Saeed and Sharon E. McKay, illustrated by Nahid Kazeimi (Annick, Oct. 13), is a girl from Aleppo who is caught up in the traumas of war. Ordinary joys—dance classes and treats from the family bakery—give way to living with never-ending uncertainty before, at last, Yara and her surviving family members become refugees seeking a new home. This is a story of fierce courage and survival.

The Boys in the Back Row by Mike Jung (Levine Querido, Oct. 6) is full of hilarity and hijinks—and pushes back against toxic masculinity and racism. Matt and Eric, best friends who play drums in the school marching band, sneak away without permission to meet their favorite author at a comic con. The boys stand up to the homophobic bullying they receive due to their closeness, serving as the geek heroes we all need.

Laura Simeon is a young readers’ editor.
A poignant and achingly beautiful narrative shedding light on the price of a violent sport. (author’s note) (Historical fiction. 10-14)

**AMAZING WOMEN OF THE MIDDLE EAST**
25 Stories From Ancient Times to Present Day
*Tarnowska, Wafa’*
Illus. by Esteves, Margarida; Hadadi, Hoda; Haghgoo, Sahar; Halal, Christelle & Meza, Esteli
Crocodile/Interlink (112 pp.)
$19.95 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-62371-870-1

A compilation of short biographies of 25 Middle Eastern women, all trailblazers in their fields, and their achievements, from ancient times to the modern day.

Each chapter (about four pages long) introduces one woman, highlighting her achievements on the first page, which faces an illustration in a range of styles but with saturated colors that complement the page backgrounds. The second spread goes into further detail about each subject’s life. Some of the women included from long ago include Empress Theodora, Queen Nefertiti, and poet Rabia’s al Adawiyya. Among the present-day women are Manahel Thabet from Yemen, a scientist, economist, and mathematician; Malha al Balushi, an Omani pilot and activist; May Ziadeh, an Egyptian writer and feminist; and Amal Clooney, a Lebanese British human rights lawyer. A variety of different accomplishments and careers are introduced, particularly for present-day women. Tarnowska defines terms, identifies present-day areas where some of these women live or lived, and writes about how each woman succeeded and what she has done to change the world. Many, ranging from Cleopatra to Zahra Lari, an ice skater from Abu Dhabi, followed their dreams, whether or not they were supported by family, friends, and community. These biographies will both inspire readers and correct misconceptions and stereotypes about women from the Middle East. There is a glossary but no bibliography or list of resources. A map serves to define the region.

Courageous leaders, activists, creators, and pioneers guaranteed to inspire. (map, glossary) (Collective biography. 9-12)

**DESSERT DIARY**
Japanese American Kids Behind Barbed Wire
*Tunnell, Michael O.*
Charlesbridge (444 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-62371-871-8

A look into a third grade class’s daily diary while imprisoned.

In December 1941, one year after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, those of Japanese ancestry, or Nikkei, living on the West Coast were torn from their homes and sent to prison camps. By 1943, 8-year-old Mae Yanagi and other Japanese American children were starting school in Topaz Internment Camp in Utah. Mae’s third grade class started an illustrated diary of their daily life at camp. Diary entries included details about positive things, like schoolwork, sports, pets, and holidays. Often entries also mentioned injuries, illnesses, and goodbyes experienced by the students and the other captives. Quotes from prisoners of all ages are interlaced throughout, allowing their voices due prominence. By highlighting the children’s classroom diary, Tunnell gives today’s young readers a primary source from the perspectives of their peers. Images of diary pages fill in the gaps of the archival photos that too often hid the injustice. One entry notes that several blocks lost their running water; another records the loss of a roof to a storm. The selections throughout carefully balance harsh experiences with incredible resilience. An author’s note shares the heartwarming story of how he was able to meet and interview many of the children who wrote the diary; an editor’s note discusses the decision not to use the terms internment camps or internees.

Informative, moving nonfiction that allows the Topaz detainees to share their story. (glossary, source notes, selected bibliography, index) (Nonfiction. 9-12)

**BEFORE THE EVER AFTER**
Woodson, Jacqueline
Nancy Paulsen Books (176 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-399-54543-6

An African American preteen finds his world upended when his father, a retired professional football player, displays symptoms of traumatic brain injury. Twelve-year-old Zachariah “ZJ” Johnson Jr. loves his dad but wonders who he would be if his dad was not a famous athlete. Although his dad is in the spotlight, he is full of love and attention for ZJ and his friends. And fortunately, ZJ has three friends who see him and not his father’s shadow. “Zachariah 44” was a fearless player who suffered many concussions during his playing career. The changes in his father begin slowly and intermittently. Soon the headaches and memory lapses grow increasingly frequent and scary for ZJ and his mom, since the doctors do not seem to have any answers. As his dad slips further away, ZJ’s memories of better times grow closer than ever. Using spare and lyrical language for ZJ’s present-tense narration, which moves back and forth through time, Woodson skillfully portrays the confusion, fear, and sadness when a family member suffers from brain injury and the personality changes it brings. Readers see Zachariah Sr. through ZJ’s eyes and agonize with him as the strong, vibrant athlete begins to fade. The well-rounded secondary characters complete a mosaic of a loving African American family and their community of friends. The tale is set in the early 2000s, as awareness of chronic traumatic encephalopathy and its catastrophic consequences was beginning to emerge.

A poignant and achingly beautiful narrative shedding light on the price of a violent sport. (author’s note) (Historical fiction. 10-14)
THREE KEYS
Yang, Kelly
Scholastic (288 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-338-59138-5
Series: Front Desk

Sixth grader Mia Tang returns to battle racism in this thrilling sequel to the Asian/Pacific American Award–winning Front Desk (2018).

The Tangs, who emigrated from China when Mia was little, are now the proud owners of the Calivista Motel. Mia works the front desk along with her friends Lupe Garcia, who is Mexican, and Jason Yao, who is Chinese. Her world quickly becomes clouded by the upcoming election, in which California’s Prop 187, which would ban undocumented immigrants from access to health care and public schooling, is on the ballot. The author’s note highlights personal experiences with racism and provides additional information on this historic vote. The storyline expertly weaves together the progress and setbacks Mia experiences as her family continues to work, seemingly endlessly on the edge of poverty. Lupe reveals that her family is undocumented, creating a portrait of fear as her father is jailed. The impending vote has significant consequences for all immigrants, not just the Garcias, as racial threats increase. With the help of a cast of strong supporting characters, Mia bravely uses her voice and her pen to change opinions—with family, friends, teachers, and even voters. The lessons she learns helping her friends become the key to addressing racism, as one wise friend advises: “You gotta listen, you gotta care, and most importantly, you gotta keep trying.”

Don’t miss this brave hero as she confronts anti-immigrant hatred in a timely historical novel. (author’s note) (Historical fiction. 8-12)

SÉANCE TEA PARTY
Yee, Reimena
Illus. by the author
Random House (272 pp.)
$20.99 | $12.99 paper | $23.99 PLB
Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-593-12532-8
978-1-984894-15-1 paper
978-1-984894-16-8 PLB

As a girl struggles to navigate adolescence, she finds support from an unlikely source.

In this graphic novel, 12-year-old Lora Xi finds herself increasingly isolated. While her best friend and her classmates seem obsessed with parties, boys, and texting, her interests have remained fixed on witches, ghosts, and nostalgic activities of childhood. While throwing herself a séance tea party in the attic, she discovers a ghost, a girl about her age, named Alexa. The two become fast friends, with Alexa gently prodding Lora to reach out to peers and slowly engage in more social events. The energetic, flowing graphics embellished with colorful details reveal complex narratives for both characters. With the help of some old friends, Alexa eventually discovers more about her long-forgotten past, having lived in the same town 50 years prior. Lora finds the courage to participate in more social events while staying authentic. But the two friends gradually find their goals diverging, which leads to an emotional climax. While this is Yee’s middle-grade debut, she is a veteran of comic books, and it shows. She artfully balances complex character arcs and suspense while bringing a touch of fantasy and wonder without overcrowding the plot. Lora is of Chinese descent, and Alexa is White; Lora’s middle-class North American community is vibrantly diverse.

A coming-of-age tale that is both comforting and wonderfully peculiar. (author’s note) (Graphic fantasy 9-12)
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

COME ON IN edited by Adi Alsaid .....................................................65
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THESE VIOLENT DELIGHTS
Gong, Chloe
McElderry (464 pp.)
$19.99 | Nov. 17, 2020
978-1-5344-5769-0

COME ON IN
15 Stories About Immigration and Finding Home
Ed. by Alsaid, Adi
Inkyard Press (256 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-335-14649-6

Fifteen noted YA authors offer powerful slice-of-life reflections about immigration and its emotional complexities.

Alsaid edits an extraordinary anthology featuring exquisite writing and offering a genuinely diverse collection on the richly layered topic of immigration. International in scope, the cross-section of voices is refreshingly diverse while also unified by emotional vulnerability. Nafiza Azad sets the tone in the opening story “All the Colors of Goodbye,” through the grieving voice of a 17-year-old Indian Fijian girl who has been told she must emigrate unexpectedly following a coup, though her older brother must stay because officials in their new country deem him too old to be a dependent. In Misa Sugiuara’s story “Where I’m From,” Eriko reveals in painful snapshots the omnipresent Otherness she feels as the child of Japanese immigrants to America, both as a child and later a college freshman in the U.S.—and also when visiting Japan with her mother. The stories reveal how immigration policies not only affect families, but also friendships, as in Lilliam Rivera’s “Salvation and the Sea,” in which a Guatemalan/Puerto Rican best friend duo on a road trip in California undergo a polarizing experience at a random immigration checkpoint. In the closing story about Jewish émigrés to Argentina, Alsaid pays homage to the ancestors who paved the way for our very existence. The overall result is moving and deeply relevant to our contemporary world.

A must-have antidote to xenophobia and a much-needed, compassionate mirror for many. (Anthology. 13-18) (This review is printed here for the first time.)
The fall publishing season always brings an exciting array of reading options, and 2020 is no exception. Below are some not-to-be-missed titles—in addition to the 30 YA releases highlighted in our special Fall Preview issue and the 8 nonfiction and globally diverse books in our two themed YA lists.

Those looking to explore different realities can't go wrong with these books that are set in our world—but with elements of magic, science fiction, or dystopia:

*Daughters of Jubilation* by Kara Lee Corthron (Simon & Schuster, Oct. 13) introduces a world in which Black women and girls have survived through the magical powers of Jubilation. Living in the Jim Crow South, Evvie must learn to wield her newfound gifts when danger surfaces.

*Never Look Back* by Lilliam Rivera (Bloomsbury, Sept. 1) gives the ancient Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice a fresh makeover infused with Taino cultural elements, Afro-Latinx characters, and the perennial appeal of a summertime romance—with high-stakes tension.

*Sanctuary* by Paola Mendoza and Abby Sher (Putnam, Sept. 1) takes readers into the surveillance society of an increasingly oppressive and xenophobic United States. Colombian immigrant Vali and her family are attempting to reach California before it secedes and the border closes.

*Time Travel for Love and Profit* by Sarah Lariviere (Knopf, Oct. 13) tells the story of Greek American Nephele, a math geek who is ridiculed by her classmates. Hoping to start ninth grade over—and get it right this time—she invents a time travel app.

*The Valley and the Flood* by Rebecca Mahoney (Razorbill/Penguin, Oct. 27) follows a White teen with PTSD who is stranded in an odd desert town where people believe her arrival prophesies impending doom...and where the line between the real and the surreal is not always clear.

Biographies and memoirs also make a very strong showing; the following are especially worthy of notice:

*Beauty Mark: A Verse Novel of Marilyn Monroe* by Carole Boston Weatherford (Candlewick, Sept. 8) shows how the life of a long-ago icon can feel fresh and relevant as the forces she grappled with remain all too familiar in these days of social media scrutiny. Monroe’s story is related here with compassion and respect.

*God Loves Hair: 10th Anniversary Edition* by Vivek Shraya, illustrated by Juliana Neufeld (Arsenal Pulp Press, Sept. 15), enhanced with a fresh cover and foreword by Cherie Dimaline, gives readers a glimpse into the multitalented trans artist’s childhood as she reflects on incidents that shaped her sense of self across multiple dimensions.

*Kiyo Sato: From a WWII Japanese Internment Camp to a Life of Service* by Connie Goldsmith with Kiyo Sato (Twenty-First Century/Lerner, Sept. 1) extends familiar stories about this time in history to show how one woman went on to pursue a life of activism, service to others, and educating young people about the dangers of human rights violations.

*Strongman: The Rise of Five Dictators and the Fall of Democracy* by Kenneth C. Davis (Henry Holt, Oct. 6) shows how much modern democracies can learn from the lives and terrible impacts of Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Saddam Hussein. Their stories are cautionary tales we cannot afford to ignore.

*When They Call You A Terrorist: A Story of Black Lives Matter and the Power To Change the World* by Patrisse Khan-Cullors and asha bandele (Wednesday Books, Sept. 22) is a remarkable collaboration in which journalist bandele helps Black Lives Matter co-founder Khan-Cullors tell her life story, actively inviting readers to learn, reflect, and act.

—L.S.
As the week moves on, readers learn more about Aiden and his diverse peers—Laila, and the rest of their team—Zofia, Enrique, and Hypnos, are later joined by some unexpected cohorts, to explore the art of Forging, except for Laila's ability to read objects with her hands, still seems vague. Themes, including visibility, grief, and sacrifice, permeate the story, driving it to breathtaking highs and heartbreaking lows. As before, the characters are richly diverse in ethnicity and sexual orientation; Zofia exhibits signs of being on the autism spectrum.

Lavish and thrilling—a reward for readers who have awaited its release. (Historical fantasy. 14-adult)

The last week at Scouting camp highlights accomplishments and humiliations that last a lifetime. Aiden, a fat, biracial (Filipino and White), soon-to-be high schooler, is in his last week of Boy Scout camp in 1995. Each day documents events, from bonding over fireside songs and learning important skills to the micro- and macroaggressions that follow an adolescent boy of color who presents as effeminate and is queer. As the week moves on, readers learn more about Aiden and his life, from his stressful home with an emotionally abusive father to his love of Catholicism and being an altar server. The stress drive Aiden to a breaking point, one that's familiar to many young people. The monochromatic illustrations, sometimes highlighted with red, orange, and yellow, are timeless moments of a remembered childhood. The use of red to highlight the tangible (firelight, a Swiss Army knife) and represent the intangible (passion, sorrow, and hope) is a master class in simplicity. But the true star of this book is the writing, which describes a boy who could live in any decade on his journey of self-discovery. This is a story that will be read and reread, and for some, it will be the defining book of their adolescence.

Buy it. Read it. Share it. (afterword, resources) (Graphic fiction. 12-18)
WALK TOWARD THE RISING SUN
From Child Soldier to Peace Activist
Duany, Ger
Make Me a World (320 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-5247-1940-1

Actor, model, and activist Duany's tale of going from being a Sudanese child soldier to becoming an activist for Sudan. Trying to survive in a time of constant war in southern Sudan, exposed to monumental trauma and loss, Duany became a child soldier. After facing death in more ways than he could cope with, Duany made it to a Kenyan refugee camp and then to America, where he found that things were harder than he anticipated. He encountered embedded racism and learned that PTSD meant he could not escape his ghosts by running away. Eventually, Duany became a model and later an actor. Despite having known constant instability and many years as a refugee with no sense of permanence, Duany has never forgotten his homeland and gives back to his family and home country in part by sharing his childhood experiences and talking about the realities of life for many in what is now South Sudan. With co-author Thomas, Duany tells his life story, naming many of the folks who impacted him along the way through honest, detailed, straightforward prose. The book explores survival, hope, and the meaning of kinship—whether forged by blood, friendship, or shared experiences of war. An intimate look from a refugee's perspective at the toll war takes. (Memoir. 12-18)

WHITE FOX
Faring, Sara
Imprint (416 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-250-30452-0

Ten years ago, enigmatic film star Mireille Foix disappeared from Viloxin, her Mediterranean island home, leaving her pharma tycoon husband and two young daughters bereft. Eighteen-year-old Manon and 17-year-old Thaïs have lived with their aunt in New York City ever since, and their father's death the previous summer still stings. Tai is puckish and effervescent, with "beautiful gemstones of stories that she's sharpened to points" and musical laughter that hides deep insecurity. Noni, on the other hand, is a bookish and unabashedly melancholy young woman. When they get an invitation to return to Viloxin, the "Eden" of their childhood, as guests of honor at a retrospective of their mother's work, they can't pass it up. Soon after their arrival, Tai discovers White Fox, a legendary unfinished script penned by her mother. The screenplay, which is nestled in between Tai's and Manon's narratives as well as that of Boy, a darkly mysterious third narrator, may hold the key to Mireille's fate. Desperate for the truth, Tai and Noni are enticed into an eerie and darkly seductive puzzle box of enigmatic clues, revelations, and danger. Faring, an imaginative, tactile, and immensely quotable wordsmith, explores the complexities of sisterhood and grief with a deft hand, and her unusual island setting, with its futuristic touches, draws readers in with a sensuous warmth that belies the sharp teeth beneath its surface. Most main characters seem to be White. A lush and hypnotic modern fairy tale. (Mystery. 14-18)
HUSH
Farrow, Dylan
Wednesday Books (384 pp.)
$18.99  |  Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-250-23590-9

A stubborn small-town girl uncovers earth-shattering secrets as she tries to solve a murder.

Following her brother Kieran’s death from the Indigo Death, aka the Blot, an ink-borne plague, 17-year-old Shae and her Ma have lived as outcasts outside dusty, dying Aster. In Montane, only the black-robed, warrior Bards—tax-collectors, magic-users, executioners—from High House may read or write, and stories about or icons of the mythical kingdom of Gondal are forbidden. When a visit from three Bards ends in death, disaster, and a coverup, Shae abandons her only real friend, Fiona, and rejected suitor, Mads, to sneak into the Bards’ stronghold and training academy. Predictability follows, as Shae proves magically powerful, one of the few females with the gift of Telling, and both pawn and pariah. Also unsurprisingly, Shae’s small, personal quest threatens the whole system. Farrow’s first foray into young adult literature has a message, but its foundations are underdeveloped: Lacking specificity and context, for the first time.)

A rare and special read. (liner notes, section notes, note about the art) (Verse memoir. 12-18) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

APPLE
(Skin to the Core)
Gansworth, Eric
Illus. by the author
Levine Querido (352 pp.)
$18.99  |  Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-5344-5769-0

Native American identity issues are explored in this ambitiously structured memoir in verse.

Gansworth (Onondaga) grew up among Tuscaroras. A minority on his reservation, his identity was further complicated by tribal intermarriage and the fact that three of his grandparents suffered forced assimilation in Indian boarding schools. Fascinated with Batman and masks, his boyhood was spent looking for a costume that would reveal his true self. His mother warned “it’s a white man’s world” while also acknowledging that Gansworth himself seemed destined for more. The memoir is high concept, structured like a palimpsest over the Beatles’ oeuvre. The title alludes to the Beatles’ Apple Records as well as the Native slur that implies someone is “red on the outside, white on the inside.” Written in a nostalgic tone, the book emphasizes cultural dislocation: “So much of my culture feels on the verge of vanishing. I wonder what part of that I’m contributing to with my own lack of knowledge.” Gansworth’s take on his great-uncles “erasing themselves too fully to ever come home” complicates his efforts to reclaim the pejorative. From his childhood to his life as a college student and writer, the book skims over a lifetime; feelings of intimacy and emotional intensity are variable even as the elliptical voice is unique. Black-and-white reproductions of Gansworth’s paintings and family photographs enhance and extend the text in a work originally conceived of as a visual arts project.

A standard fantasy with substandard development. (Fantasy. 12-18)
FALL SPOTLIGHT: NONFICTION FOR TEENS

By Laura Simeon

1789: Twelve Authors Explore a Year of Rebellion, Revolution, and Change edited by Marc Aronson and Susan Campbell Bartoletti (Candlewick, Sept. 1) is a valuable corrective to the narrow way that history is often taught. This absorbing volume conveys the interconnectedness of people, places, and ideas—and the critical relevance of past events to the present day. The diverse emphases and viewpoints presented will intrigue readers interested in math, the arts, social justice, and more.

The graphic book Redbone: The True Story of a Native American Rock Band by Christian Staebler and Sonia Paoloni, illustrated by Thibault Balahy (IDW Publishing, Sept. 22), tells the story of influential musicians and activists who left their marks on the 1960s and ’70s music scene as well as on the struggle against the erasure and oppression of Indigenous peoples. The dynamic illustrations and conversational tone make this information-packed offering a page-turner.

The effectiveness of poetry in conveying complex emotion is well highlighted in Concrete Kids by Amyra León (Penguin Workshop, Oct. 13), a short collection of verse drawn from the life of a young Black woman who has been aware from an early age of the obstacles facing her growing up in foster care in New York City. She wrestles here with questions of self, family (chosen and birth), belonging, and hope.

The updated edition of Surviving the Angel of Death: The True Story of a Mengele Twin in Auschwitz by Eva Mozes Kor and Lisa Rojany Buccieri (Tanglewood Publishing, Oct. 15) stands out thanks to the power of Kor’s remarkable personality. This account of surviving the Holocaust is a chilling cautionary tale, as a cosseted childhood gave way to the worst kind of nightmare. Kor’s later life in the U.S., including her ceaseless efforts to educate younger generations, is memorably recounted.
When nightmarish creatures attack, the fate of humanity rests in the hands of a 10-year-old girl.

It is Halloween night, and all young Mona wants to do is trick-or-treat, but her parent is unable to take her. In the dark and gloom of night, monsters descend, and Mona finds herself absorbed into a motley but friendly crew of creatures: tween vampire Ringley, creepy living doll Robert, teenage ghoulish Shirley, and Banjo the wereopossum. The nightmarish monster scourge has been unleashed by the presumed death of the Phagocyte, a magical being who keeps the balance between worlds. Can Mona and her friends find the Phagocyte’s heir before the monsters devour all of humanity? In this spectacularly wrought graphic offering, writer and artist Howard’s illustrations are unquestionably striking, utilizing a perfect mood-setting black-and-white pen-and-ink scheme and grabbing its reader with both the scope of its imagination and its clever use of perspective, including fish-eye shots. Despite its prepubescent protagonist, this is not a middle-grade tale; Howard has a keen eye for creative gore that may deter the squeamish, however, those who forge on will be utterly captivated by its unexpected heart and dark humor. Although Howard’s first volume in a proposed series is a hefty doorstop at nearly 450 pages, expect readers to blaze through it at wildfire speed and absolutely demand more. Mona’s parent is nonbinary; most characters appear to be White.

A comic horror tour de force. (character list, reader questions, guide to making a comic) (Graphic horror. 14-18)
Jung’s background as a K-pop star informs this world of catty, sabotaging antagonists.

SHINE

Jung, Jessica
Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-5344-6251-9

Korean American teen Rachel Kim has spent six years in Seoul as a K-pop trainee for one of the city’s biggest entertainment agencies. Many will hone their talents, spending 24/7 invested in K-pop, but only a handful will make it. It’s been years since DB Entertainment has debuted a girl group, and as a senior trainee, this is Rachel’s last shot. When she felt the sting of racism as a young girl in the U.S., she turned for solace to K-pop. And despite the viciousness of trainee life—with its uber-talented teens, nonstop gossip, and the reality that she is seen as an American outsider in Korea—Rachel is determined to make it and hold onto the joy music brings. After a disastrous audition with Jason Lee, DB’s golden boy, Rachel will need some bold moves to redeem herself. Further conflict arises as the double standards female stars face in contrast to their male counterparts become hard to ignore. Debut author Jung’s background as a former Korean American K-pop star informs this world of catty, sabotaging antagonists; elite private school classmates; and parental pressure. An embarrassing, banter-filled meet-cute adds to this fast-paced, entertaining romp. Local details and the integration of Korean—both romanized and in Hangul—smoothly immerse readers in Rachel’s world. While most of the supporting characters are Korean, Jason is biracial (Korean/White Canadian), and Rachel’s best friend and fellow trainee, Akari, is Japanese.

Shimmering. (Fiction. 14-18)

THE BRIDGE

Konigsberg, Bill
Scholastic (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-338-32503-4

Multiple realities explore the butterfly effects of two attempted teen suicides. Each of the narrative’s alternate timelines starts the same way: Aaron Boroff and Tillie Stanley meet by coincidence at the George Washington Bridge. Both contemplate leaping into the Hudson River to end their lives—“facing each other like they’re playing a deadly game of dare.” Aaron, a White gay boy with a Christian mom and a Jewish dad who dreams of viral internet success as a singer/songwriter, feels he is a failure both musically and romantically. Tillie, a fat, adopted, Korean girl, has had enough of feeling out of place in her White family and being bullied at school. From there, the four linear timelines (presented one after the other) diverge into four possible outcomes: only Tillie jumps, only Aaron jumps, they both jump, or neither jumps. No outcome is presented as the true story, leaving readers to come to their own conclusions. Drawing from personal experience, Konigsberg’s portrayal of depression is raw, honest, and nuanced. The deftly navigated third-person–omniscient narration powerfully evokes spiraling, obsessive thoughts and manic episodes. In addition to the focal teens’ inner monologues, secondary characters—from family members to classmates—are sharply drawn and complicated. Though some plot points only happen in certain timelines, the text’s careful construction hints that the best possible outcome is the teens’ survival.

A heartbreaking bridge into depression supported by a strong foundation of hope. (author’s note, resources) (Fiction. 14-18)

WATCH OVER ME

LaCour, Nina
Dutton (272 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-593-10897-0

When she ages out of foster care, Mila takes an internship on a haunted farm outside Mendocino.

After being abandoned by her single mother, Mila was placed in foster care. The family she lives with now wants a baby and won’t adopt her, so Mila gets a farm internship after high school graduation. Mila is a quiet, beautifully written character; LaCour is a master at depicting loneliness. The farm is run by Terry and Julia, whose focus is on rebuilding the lives of youth impacted by foster care. Although the farm is in a remote rural area, Mila is determined to make it her new home. In addition to the seven foster children and two other interns, ghosts live there. The sense of place is strong, and readers will be transported to the rocky, coastal hills shrouded in fog and full of secrets. When mementos from her past begin to appear, Mila must decide if she is strong enough to remain at the farm. The pacing of the book is excellent; readers won’t get a full picture of the physical and emotional trauma Mila suffered until she herself is ready to process and confront it. Mila’s journey to reclaim herself and find independence is tense and powerful. Mila and Julia are White, Terry is Black, and the interns and children are ethnically diverse.

Gripping; an emotion-packed must-read. (Fiction. 12-18)
Elle does have traits that set her apart: She has inherited the Centers and Lipan Apache stories. This groundbreaking introduction to the fantasy genre remains relevant to Native histories even as it imaginatively looks to the future. A brilliant, engaging debut written by a talented author, it seamlessly blends cyberstalking with vampire citizenry with paranormal twists.

( Speculative fiction. 13-18 )

A teenager with supernatural gifts must solve her cousin’s murder before it’s too late.

Aside from the fact that she owns a ghost dog named Kirby, Ellie is like any other comic book-loving, ice cream–eating Lipan Apache teenager. Her non-Native friends include her childhood buddy Jay, who is White, and her cousin Trevor’s Latinx wife, Lenore. Yet Ellie does have traits that set her apart: She has inherited the talents of Six-Great-Grandmother, her powerful Lipan Apache forebear, and plans to skip college to work as a paranormal investigator. When Trevor dies in what appears to be a car accident, his ghost appears to her briefly, begging that she protect his wife and child. Ellie must call upon her strong lineage to solve her cousin’s murder before it’s too late.

The Story family is full of secrets—three cousins will unearth them. Once inconsequential Gull Cove Island off the coast of Massachusetts was transformed into a luxurious getaway. In the early 1980s, narrated in present tense, and told through Emma’s perspective as well as others’ (including the Butcher’s), the tightly plotted story moves inexorably forward with shocking twists alongside clear, applicable descriptions of the cognitive behavioral strategies Emma uses to navigate her PTSD. The narrative is critical of law enforcement work, emphasizing its psychological toll, and the ‘80s cultural references are handled tightly plotted story moves inexorably forward with shocking twists alongside clear, applicable descriptions of the cognitive behavioral strategies Emma uses to navigate her PTSD. The narrative is critical of law enforcement work, emphasizing its psychological toll, and the ‘80s cultural references are handled with a light touch. Emma is White while Travis is cued as biracial (Mexican American and White); although most secondary characters appear White, two key figures are people of color.

Vivid, chilling, and important. (author’s note) ( Fiction. 13-18 )

Two 18-year-olds with traumatic pasts become entangled in a high-stakes manhunt for a serial killer targeting teenagers.

Emma Lewis isn’t your average psychology undergrad (and not just because she has a buzz cut). Two and a half years ago, she escaped a serial killer’s clutches and then helped the authorities apprehend him. Now a student at Ohio State, she’s been recruited for her unique qualifications by an agent in the FBI’s Behavioral Science department to spend the summer interviewing juvenile offenders. Alongside trainee Travis Bell, whose late father was killed while apprehending one of their subjects, Emma reluctantly ventures into the minds of teenage killers—and must confront her own past when one of the subjects offers unexpected insight into the motives of a new killer known as the Butcher. Set in the early 1980s, narrated in present tense, and told through Emma’s perspective as well as others’ (including the Butcher’s), the tightly plotted story moves inexorably forward with shocking twists alongside clear, applicable descriptions of the cognitive behavioral strategies Emma uses to navigate her PTSD. The narrative is critical of law enforcement work, emphasizing its psychological toll, and the ‘80s cultural references are handled with a light touch. Emma is White while Travis is cued as biracial (Mexican American and White); although most secondary characters appear White, two key figures are people of color.

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Several decades later, the three Story grandchildren—Milly, Aubrey, and Jonah—receive letters from the grandmother they’ve never met, inviting them to spend the summer working at her island resort. Sensing an opportunity to regain entry into their mother’s world, Allison, Adam, and Anders force their respective children to accept her invitation. Upon their arrival at Gull Cove Island, where the Story family is a hot topic of gossip among the locals, it’s clear that the family’s past is darker than the cousins imagined. Not only is someone trying to get them to leave, but their grandmother was not expecting them. In classic McManus fashion, perspectives shift, providing insights into the three cousins’ distinct stories and personal motives while maintaining a steady pace that leaves readers flipping pages. Every twist is gasp-inducing, and the ending will satisfy some and make others yearn for a sequel. The main cast is White except for Milly, who is biracial (White and Japanese).

Another McManus novel worth pulling an all-nighter for. ( family tree ) ( Thriller. 14-18 )

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Vivid, chilling, and important. (author’s note) ( Fiction. 13-18 )
Like Spilled Water by Jennie Liu (Carolrhoda Lab, Sept. 1) is a character-driven story that introduces readers to a Chinese family in the city of Taiyuan that is grieving a sudden death. Nineteen-year-old Na loved her younger brother, Bao-bao, even as she felt frustrated with the way her parents prioritized his education over hers. But when he dies and she starts going through his belongings, she realizes how much more there was to him than she realized.

Fans of British humor—and anyone who’s ever felt out of their element—will be charmed by William Sutcliffe’s The Gifted, the Talented, and Me (Bloomsbury, Sept. 22), in which hapless middle child Sam is forced out of a life he enjoys very much and made to start over at a new school in London. Throw in a mother who starts blogging indiscreetly about her offspring and you have a recipe for both angst and laughs.

From the co-author of the wildly popular Engelsfors series, Swedish import The End by Mats Strandberg, translated by Judith Kiros (Arctis Books, Oct. 6), takes readers into a frightening pre-apocalyptic world in which people have only a month left before Earth is destroyed by a comet. This intense novel will grip readers as they follow the main characters, former boyfriend and girlfriend Simon and Lucinda, who are coping in very different ways with impending doom.

Off Track by Tamika Gibson (Blouse & Skirt Books, Oct. 25) tells the story of runners Kayla and Joel, who hope to represent their home of Trinidad and Tobago at the regional games, where they could compete against the Caribbean’s finest for life-changing opportunities, including a shot at the Olympics. This hopeful, richly textured coming-of-age tale centers on two young people whose lives intersect as they figure out their dreams.
A meditation and adventure quest offering solace to anyone bearing an unfair burden.

**EACH OF US A DESERT**

Oshiro, Mark
Tor Teen (432 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-250-01973-6

What does it mean to come into your own power by letting go of it?

The villagers of Empalme devoutly pray to Solís, the feared higher power who unleased La Quema, or fire, on humanity for its ills of greed, war, and jealousy. As the village cuentista, Xochitl listens to and receives the villagers’ stories into her body, clearing their consciences, preventing the manifestation of their nightmares, and releasing them to Solís in the desert. Having diligently played this role since childhood, she is now a deeply lonesome 16-year-old whose only comfort comes from cherished poems. Worn weary by her role, she leaves on an odyssey in search of another way to exist. In their sophomore novel, Oshiro deftly weaves an intricate, allegorical, and often gory tale within a post-apocalyptic desert setting that readers will feel so viscerally they may very well need to reach for a glass of water. It is a world parallel to ours, rife with Biblical references and the horrific traps that Latinx immigrants face while seeking better lives. Xochitl’s first-person, questioning narration—interlaced with terrifying cuentos that she receives on her journey—is the strongest voice, although secondary and tertiary characters, both human and mythical, are given a tenderness and humanity. All main characters are Latinx, and queer relationships are integrated with refreshing normality.

A meditation and adventure quest offering solace to anyone bearing an unfair burden. (Fantasy/horror. 14-18)

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**THE LEFT-HANDED BOOKSELLERS OF LONDON**

Nix, Garth
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (416 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-0-06-268325-0

A girl searching for her father finds a whole secret world in 1980s London.

Eighteen-year-old Susan Arkshaw goes up to London ahead of her studies so she’ll have time to hunt down the identity of the father she’s never met. Her first night in London, dangerous encounters pull her into the wild world of the booksellers—in between selling books, they’re tasked with policing interactions between what we know as reality and the more mythic levels of existence. Her guide is Merlin, an attractive gender-questioning boy (for now). As the Old World of magic seems to be targeting Susan, Merlin and the booksellers take interest in her as well, especially in helping to solve her mysterious parentage. The worldbuilding is exquisite, hopping from an ’80s punk aesthetic and Margaret Thatcher references to wide-ranging supernatural threats and the customs they uphold; the bookstores themselves are sure to please readers. While certain plot elements may be somewhat expected—Susan’s special by way of birth; Merlin has a personal mystery that eventually ties in to the main plot; and there’s a conspiracy storyline that becomes quickly apparent—the broad, immersive world and the specific rules for types of booksellers maintain a sense of discovery, and Susan and Merlin, the heroic protagonists, have vibrant, entertaining personalities (and a realistic romantic storyline). Susan and Merlin are White; the booksellers are ethnically diverse.

Readers will beg for more adventures in this London. (Fantasy. 12-adult)

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**CHARMING AS A VERB**

Philippe, Ben
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-0-06-282414-1

A charismatic 17-year-old boy used to hustling his way through life meets his match.

Henri Haltiwanger, who is Haitian American, has a face for everyone—the wealthy owners of the dogs he walks under his guise of a business, the rich kids he attends Fine Arts Technical Education Academy with on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, and anyone else who can help further his dream of attending Columbia University. He takes pride in his charm until Corinne—classmate and neighbor—blackmails him into helping her fix her reputation for being excessively intense and lacking in social graces. This is the last thing he needs after the disappointment of a lackluster Columbia interview, but Henri agrees, knowing their friendship can be mutually beneficial. As the pair grows closer, he realizes that he could fall for Corinne. Under the enormous pressure that befalls many first-generation Americans, Henri will do whatever it takes for a dream he is beginning to question, leading him to take a risk that just may cost him everything. This humorous, first-person narrative with a conversational, almost conspiratorial, tone will captivate readers even with the almost-too-neat ending. The author breathes life into each character, giving those in Henri’s circle depth and investing readers in their stories. The novel demonstrates the pressure many face to be accepted into their dream colleges and thrive after high school. Corinne is Black.

A satisfyingly amusing read. (Romance. 14-18)
Humor and moments of pathos elicit empathy and connection.

**EARLY DEPARTURES**

Reynolds, Justin A.
Katherine Tegen/ HarperCollins (480 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-0-06-274840-9

Estranged friends are given a chance to patch up their differences before one of them dies—again.

Seventeen-year-old Jamal Anderson has not had a meaningful conversation with his former best friend, Quincy Barrantes, in almost two years. They were almost inseparable: always at each other’s homes, even developing a comedy show on social media together. But two years ago, Jamal lost his parents, and he blames Quincy for the accident. His grief over their deaths permeates every relationship as well as his ability to focus in school. Despite his sister’s efforts and the love of his girlfriend, Autumn, he is drifting until the night Quincy dies trying to save someone’s life. When a mysterious man offers Quincy’s mother a chance to bring him back through experimental technology, it seems far-fetched. But Mrs. Barrantes and Jamal now have the opportunity for a few more weeks with Quincy. Like everything else in Jamal’s life, this circumstance offers more questions than answers and forces him to confront why he allowed the breach in their relationship to continue. This is a page-turning narrative with a cast of fully realized characters and realistic dialogue. The skillful use of flashbacks and social media content fully engages readers. Despite the seriousness of the story, humor and moments of pathos will elicit empathy and connection. Jamal and Autumn are cued as Black and Quincy as Latinx.

This thoroughly satisfying novel of love, loss, and reconciliation is not to be missed. (Fiction. 14-18)

**NEVER LOOK BACK**

Rivera, Lilliam
Bloomsbury (320 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-5476-0373-2

An otherworldly Latinx retelling of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth set in the South Bronx.

Pheus visits his father in the Bronx every summer. The Afro-Dominican teen is known for his mesmerizing bachata music, love of history, and smooth way with the ladies. Eury, a young Puerto Rican woman and Hurricane Maria survivor, is staying with her cousin for the summer because of a recent, unspecified traumatic event. Her family doesn’t know that she’s been plagued since childhood by the demonlike Ato. Pheus and Eury bond over music and quickly fall in love. Attacked at a dance club by Sileno, its salacious and satyrlike owner, Eury falls into a coma and is taken to el Inframundo by Ato. Pheus, despite his atheism, follows the advice of his father and a local bruja to journey to find his love in the Underworld. Rivera skillfully captures the sounds and feels of the Bronx—its unique, diverse culture and the creeping gentrification of its neighborhoods. Through an amalgamation of Greek, Roman, and Taino mythology and religious beliefs, gaslighting, the colonization of Puerto Rico, Afro-Latinidad identity, and female empowerment are woven into the narrative. While the pacing lags in the middle, secondary characters aren’t fully developed, and the couple’s relationship borders on instalove, the rush of a summertime romance feels realistic. Rivera’s complex world is well realized, and the dialogue rings true. All protagonists are Latinx.

This fresh reworking of a Greek myth will resonate. (Fabitism. 14-adult)

**THE CAT I NEVER NAMED**

Sabic-El-Rayess, Amra with Sullivan, Laura L.
Bloomsbury (352 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-5476-0453-1

Now a professor in the U.S., Sabic-El-Rayess was 16 when the Serbian siege on her city of Bihać, Bosnia, began in 1992.

Overnight, her life changed. She went from being a typical teenager, excited about her new volleyball shoes and seventh grade birthday cake, to fleeing bullets. It felt as if overnight Sabic-El-Rayess went from attending her multietnic STEM school to learning that the Serbs in her life, including her best friend and her favorite teacher, had fled; having received advance warning, they left Muslims, like her family, and Catholics behind to endure the impending siege. Sabic-El-Rayess’ innocence was soon swept away by the realities of war. She witnessed homes being blown up, bombs killing her childhood friends, and deprivation turning people against each other. Sabic-El-Rayess found unexpected solace in adopting Maci (“cat” in Bosnian), a stray calico who followed a Muslim refugee family into town. Maci quickly became a source of comfort for the family, who even credited her with saving their lives. The story boldly tackles the rawness of human emotion in times of severe distress, putting on full display the ways war brings out both the best and worst in people. Sabic-El-Rayess’ viewpoint as an adolescent girl juxtaposes her dreams of the future against fears of losing loved ones, rape camps, and starvation. The crude realities of war are animated by the combination of both graphic scenes of violence and intimate displays of affection and warmth.

Unforgettable. (additional information, author’s note, resources) (Memoir. 14-18)
**THE WAY BACK**

Savit, Gavriel

Knopf (368 pp.)

$18.99 | Sep. 15, 2020

978-1-984894-62-5

A Jewish boy and girl journey to the Far Country on the other side of the cemetery seeking to find that which they lost.

The story begins in a shtetl called Tupik, where a boy named Yehuda Leib and a girl named Bluma each have unexpected encounters with Death, setting them both on separate journeys through the cemetery on the edge of the village and into the Far Country, seeking the House of Death to reclaim what they lost. On their way, they pass through the town of Zubinsk, where the holy Rebbe’s granddaughter is about to be married in a highly anticipated wedding that draws not only Hasidim and visitors from all over, but also all manner of demons and spirits seeking an audience with the revered Rebbe. Bluma’s and Yehuda Leib’s winding paths cross until they finally band together to defeat their mutual foe with the help of some unlikely allies they meet along the way. Though their cleverness, grit, and dastardly alliances may get them far in the Far Country, they may not ultimately be enough to defeat Death itself. Lyrical and fantastic, this richly layered yarn is liberally sprinkled with bits of Yiddish and a wry, sparkling humor that balances its darker tendencies with sympathy and warmth.

**EVER AFTER**

Vieweg, Olivia

Illus. by the author

Trans. by the author

Graphic Universe (288 pp.)

$33.32 | Sep. 1, 2020

978-1-5415-8392-4

Seeking a friend and forgiveness at the end of the world. It’s been two years since the zombie-like outbreak started, but life in the walled city of Weimar, Germany, is relatively safe. The hospital warden dotes on once-blond Vivi, even obtaining pink hair dye for her, but nevertheless sends her to the barricade to help fend off the hungry hordes. After a bite puts a sudden end to a fleeting new friendship, Vivi ends up on the run with irritated (and now infected) fellow fighter Eva. Caught in the wilderness beyond the walls, auburn-haired Eva repeatedly and reluctantly saves the hapless Vivi. Opposites in lethality, both are haunted by the dead—Vivi by those she couldn’t save and Eva by those she’s killed. The palette is vivid and warm, an unusually cheerful choice for a typically bleak subject, with hints of a manga influence. Although the undead—here, blank-eyed biters, some sprouting vines and tendrils—follow the usual zombie behaviors, the tale deviates from some standard tropes, beginning in media res, with characters aware of the infection but not all-knowing, and throwing a curveball of a conclusion. Offering minimal history and concrete context, Vieweg offers an art-house take on a normally gory and typically action-packed subject and focuses on the now, rather than the how, of the apocalypse. Main human characters are White.

A melancholic but multicolored apocalyptic tale told with originality. (Graphic horror. 14-18)
An authentic cast of characters leaves readers thirsting for more.

**LUX**

**The New Girl**
Woodfolk, Ashley
Penguin Workshop (144 pp.)
$15.99  |  Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-593-09602-4
Series: Flyy Girls, 1

A 16-year-old Brooklyn girl struggles to get a fresh start.

Lux Lawson has had a hard year—her father left for another family 10 months ago, leaving her feeling unworthy, and she’s on thin ice with her mother after two expulsions. This is why, after she loses it on Simone, a girl who’s harassed her since she arrived at the third school in a year, she knows she’ll be living with her father and his new family. Faced with no choice, Lux arrives at her father’s swanky apartment knowing she must make the best of this situation if she wants to avoid military school. Lux devises a plan, starting with her acceptance into the Augusta Savage School of Arts in Harlem, where she can hone her photography skills. Lux just needs to stick to her father’s strict demands, stay out of trouble at school, get in with the Flyy Girls—known for being popular, low-profile pranksters—and keep her mistakes from haunting her to get what she wants.

In this short, accessible volume, Woodfolk creates an authentic cast of characters that reluctant readers will engage with from the opening scene. Short chapters and clearly written prose make this first-person narrative a brisk read, and the ending leaves readers thirsting for more. Lux and the rest of the cast are predominately Black.

*A lively series opener.*  (*Fiction. 14-18*)

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**PUNCHING THE AIR**
Zoboi, Ibi with Salaam, Yusef
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins
(400 pp.)
$19.99  |  Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-06-299648-0

Reviving a friendship that goes back almost 20 years, Zoboi writes with Exonerated Five member Salaam, exploring racial tensions, criminal injustice, and radical hope for a new day.

Ava DuVernay’s critically acclaimed *When They See Us* tells the story of Salaam’s wrongful conviction as a boy, a story that found its way back into the national conversation when, after nearly 7 years in prison, DNA evidence cleared his name. Although it highlights many of the same unjust systemic problems Salaam faced, this story is not a biographical rendering of his experiences. Rather, Zoboi offers readers her brilliance and precision within this novel in verse that centers on the fictional account of 16-year-old Amal Shahid. He’s an art student and poet whose life dramatically shifts after he is accused of assaulting a White boy one intense night, drawing out serious questions around the treatment of Black youth and the harsh limitations of America’s investment in punitive forms of justice. The writing allows many readers to see their internal voices affirmed as it uplifts street slang, Muslim faith, and hip-hop cadences, showcasing poetry’s power in language rarely seen in YA literature. The physical forms of the first-person poems add depth to the text, providing a necessary calling-in to issues central to the national discourse in reimagining our relationship to police and prisons. Readers will ask: Where do we go from here?

STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSE’S MOUTH
Alaoui, Meryem
Trans. by Ramadan, Emma
Other Press (304 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-89274-679-5

Moroccan author Alaoui’s debut offers a glimpse into the daily pleasures, frustrations, and even dull moments in the life of a working-class woman in Morocco.

Thirty-four-year-old Jmiaa Bent Larbi has been making a living as a sex worker in Casablanca for nearly 15 years. Ever since her abusive ex-husband, Hamid, abruptly immigrated to Spain, she has been steadily courting clients outside the local market to support herself and her daughter, Samia. Jmiaa works alongside several other women who live in her building, and together they spend evenings drinking, chatting, and arguing as they wait for men to pass by. Jmiaa is unashamed of her life; she’s proud of her knowledge about the profession and her ability to provide for her family. “I’m only explaining the bare minimum to her,” she asserts when asked to help a new recruit. “It took me years to learn what I know; I’m not about to give everything away.” Still, when Chadlia—a young filmmaker Jmiaa calls “Horse Mouth” because of her toothy smile—presents her with an exciting opportunity, Jmiaa jumps on board, and over the next three years, her life changes in ways she never could have imagined. Alaoui depicts Jmiaa’s character with humanity and grace. While certainly not avoiding sex, Alaoui makes the noteworthy choice of decentering this element of Jmiaa’s life. Instead, by digging into her difficult relationship with her mother, the fierce loyalty of her cherished friend Samira, and her fish-out-of-water experience working with Chadlia, Alaoui emphasizes that Jmiaa’s work with clients is simply one part of her story. Throughout, Jmiaa’s narration adds levity and showcases her bold and irreverent nature. At the same time, it is her fiery independence that makes the later chapters—centered on her work in film—feel disingenuous. Following a typical savior narrative, Chadlia swoops in with funding to offer the possibility of a more socially acceptable, glamorous life, and thus the story begins to plunge into the tired trope of the American dream.

A refreshing character study loses steam in a worn-out plot.
A journey across a fictional version of America that’s a few degrees off-kilter.

Baker’s second collection of short stories uses satire and elements of speculative fiction to grapple with the contradictions of life in modern America. The title story is about a small town that secedes from Texas and the United States and names itself “America.” Along the way, the residents fall into bickering about everything from whether capital letters represent an unfair “class system” to whether setting off fireworks on the Fourth of July makes one a traitor to America. The stories take actual social issues and amplify or distort them. In “Rites,” people are expected to choose the means of their own suicide once they are old enough to become a drain on society. The story begins with a woman dousing herself in gasoline, rowing a boat to the center of a pond, and lighting a match while her family cheers her on. Gender identity is mirrored in “The Transition,” which follows a mother struggling to accept her son’s wish to leave his body and upload his consciousness to a computer. In “The Sponsor,” consumerism is satirized in a couple’s desperate attempt to secure an impressive corporate sponsor for their upcoming wedding. The writing is sharp and the scenarios are creative, yet it too often feels like the author is writing toward a thesis. For example, “Appearance” is set in a world where countless, mostly unnamed, unidentifiable people suddenly appeared throughout America. The narrator of the story is part of a family that hates the so-called “Unwanted” because they’re willing to work menial jobs for below minimum wage. The narrator and his grandfather make a habit of kidnapping local Unwanteds and dumping them across state lines. Setting aside the ickiness of comparing undocumented immigrants to identity-less zombies, the parallel to modern immigration debates is all too obvious. Baker is fascinated by modern America, and each story
is an attempt to explore an important issue. However, once the reader gets the satire, the effect of the story and the collection quickly wears off.

A collection of witty, imaginative stories striving to be morality tales.

MR. MURAKAMI'S GARDEN
Bellatin, Mario
Trans. by Cleary, Heather
Deep Vellum (112 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-64605-029-1

An allegorical novella challenges readers to connect the dots and fill in the blanks.

Though the narrative is short, there is plenty to unpack here as the Mexican-born avant-gardist Bellatin conjures an imaginary Japan where convention is under challenge. Institutions seem to be crumbling beneath their smooth surfaces, and marriage is one of them. Mrs. Murakami has all but lost her identity and personality after marriage, with most of the story detailing her formative years as the schoolgirl Izu. She was bright and independent, constricted by the customs concerning single women, beset by her father's health and legal issues. As an art student, she finds herself unwittingly in conspiracy with a charismatic professor and the editor of an influential magazine. The professor assigns her to write an analysis of Mr. Murakami's art collection, which turns out to be a somewhat disparaging appraisal, and the magazine's director wants to publish it. "'Finally, someone dared to unmask a fraud whose collection rests on obsolete criteria,'" the director says. Yet her visit with Mr. Murakami had left him smitten, and despite a chill in the relationship after her piece was published, they married. Even so, his collection had been discredited, and there were rumors of scandal, that he was connected to "a criminal network that purchased used underwear from students at various all-girls schools and sold them to wealthy men." In marriage, the two seem to know little about each other and care less. His death leaves his wife all but destitute, though she still has her garden, which he continues to haunt. Following the frequently footnoted narrative, the text concludes with an addenda of 24 numbered items, questions, and considerations for the reader, including a potential plot twist that suggests that "the true motivations of the story's protagonists will never be known." Bellatin is a playful novelist who isn't trying to hold the mirror to reality, provide allegory or philosophy or life lessons, and reading this provocative novella makes one consider all sorts of assumptions about "why read?" and "why write?" Fiction that explores not only what it means, but why it matters.

THIRST FOR JUSTICE
Boyd, David R.
ECW Press (280 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-77041-240-8

Environmentalist Boyd presents a fictional doctor with a plan to make U.S. power players attend to global water needs, though he may need to sacrifice himself to enact it.

Trauma surgeon Michael MacDuggall is changed forever during a trip to Congo with the International Medical Assistance Foundation. His ongoing quest for purpose and meaning is quashed when, on a trip through the Masisi province, Mai Mai attack his car, killing Laurent, his young Congolese driver, and raping his colleague Anna. On his return home to his wife, Maria, and his work in the emergency ward at Seattle's Harborview Medical Center, Michael experiences the effects of trauma and depression, with difficulty
concentrating and a sense of the meaningless of it all. He’s not brought back to life until his oldest friend, Dominic, agrees to help him launch a foundation that will support developing nations with water, rendering the war for clean water access unnecessary. But months of being brushed off by politicians and potential funders frustrates Michael, who can see that the time for action is now. He develops a plan that’s a bit off the books, and although skirting laws isn’t typically his style, he feels certain that his plan will make people listen. But once it does, there are signs that Michael may be in way over his head, as corrupt honchos at federal agencies play games with the legal system to make him pay.

Fast and fierce, fueled by a knowledge of the legal system that’s equally energizing and disheartening.
Thrills, chills, macabre humor, and engaging heroines to root for: What more could a reader want?

RING SHOUT
Or, Hunting Ku Kluxes in the End Times
Clark, P. Djèlí
Tor (176 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-250-76702-8

What if White supremacy was not only a monstrous philosophy, but was enabled by actual horrific monsters? Clark’s feverishly inventive period adventure imagines this scenario in blunt and grisly detail.

The story begins in 1922 on the Fourth of July, with the

Cursed by Athena
SHERRY CERRANO
Colers possesses a secret that would change the world.

A young woman with an incredible scientific secret seeks help from a skeptical security expert in this debut thriller.

“Cerrano’s novel should appeal to aficionados of Robin Cook’s medical thrillers, although this book has more of an on-the-run chase narrative.”
—Kirkus Reviews

The author also works hard to get into the minds and emotions of the desperate players, who aren’t sure whom to trust or how to protect loved ones. Cerrano’s spirit hearkens back to the days when such character-oriented SF material could be found in the fiction sections of mainstream magazines such as McCall’s.”

ISBN: 978-1-6377-204-4

For information on publishing and film rights, email sherry@sherrycerrano.com - sherrycerrano.com

way. The dead aren’t dead, nor is alive the other half of a simple binary. Instead, Brockmeier’s world has a perpetual hum of oddity, a numinous glow. He’s a master of defamiliarizing the everyday, of what the Russians call “making strange.” Uncanny and unsettling but also consistently amusing, the book shares a title with Robert Schumann’s tortured final work but not that work’s tone. Pachyderms overhear a scientist’s recording of a dead friend and—fooled by this aural ghost—search the savanna for her (“Elephants’”); a commercial logger with a mania for clear-cutting finds that it extends into the afterlife (“A Blight on the Landscape”); a woman communicates with her dead lover by way of their mingled aromas (“Bouquet”). One minor disappointment: It seems that, perhaps to make this feel more like a novel and less like an anthology, Brockmeier has created an elaborate organizational schema. Not only is the book divided into 11 thematic sections (“Ghosts and Time,” “Ghosts and Love and Friendship,” and so on), but there’s also a 20-plus-page “Partial Concordance of Themes.” Ultimately this apparatus seems labored, clunky—but that minor flaw doesn’t detract much.

Varied, inventive, uncanny, and playful: a gifted fabulist’s cabinet of curiosities, his book-length memento mori.

WE WERE LUCKY WITH THE RAIN
Buttenwieser, Susan
Four Way (134 pp.)
$19.95 paper | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-945588-55-6

Families of all sorts—accidental, circumstantial, and intentional—populate 12 short stories that provide glimpses of hard luck and trouble in the rusted-out and mil-dewed parts of contemporary America.

Buttenwieser’s title story recounts the dysthemic details of a road trip to a second-rate attraction taken by a father and his two daughters without the company of their flagrantly faithless wife and mother. An intentional family of sorts is formed by the bar regulars in “Evidence,” which is narrated in the second person (“You always come here by yourself, and while no one quite talks directly to you, you are not left out either”). A dead-end housekeeping job in a dilapidated motel, ironically named after a famous explorer, allows the protagonist of “Nights at the Marco Polo” to observe kindness in the face of situational misery when the manager lets kids from the homeless families being housed there play in the hallways despite rules to the contrary. In “Inside the World of Twilight,” a child gone missing at the zoo creates both panic and an unexpected moment of connection between an estranged father and his adult daughter.

Most of Buttenwieser’s characters seem resigned to their fates—even the ones who had formed an escape plan—and there is little expectation of anything really good happening to them.

Everyone is treading water. A frustrating lack of opportunity permeates virtually every environment in Buttenwieser’s world of lonely voyeurs, children of divorce, and latchkey kids. Rarely do changes in circumstance or attitude occur in the course of any of these stories, creating a flipbook of sad portraits, not family movies.

Buttenwieser’s sketches are more like pathology slides of the human condition than snapshots of happy family picnics.
Ku Klux Klan literally on the march in Macon, Georgia. At first glance, everything looks very much the way it did in real-life history, except it’s clear from the first chapter that there are in this white-hooded crowd of White people both human, garden-variety racist “Klans” and demonic carnivores hiding among them known as “Ku Kluxes.” The task of drawing out, hunting down, and killing the Ku Kluxes before they can wreak havoc falls to three fearless Black women: sharpshooter Sadie, who aims her trusty Winchester rifle from any distance with deadly precision; Cordelia Lawrence, who won her nickname, “Chef,” and her battle regalia while fighting with the Black Rattlers regiment during World War I; and their leader, Maryse Boudreaux, the narrator, whose way with a sword is as fearsome as her ability to commune with spirits. This motley trio has been a bulwark against the army of beasts during the early-20th-century peak of Jim Crow racial segregation and violence. But Maryse’s sixth sense tells her there’s even bigger trouble ahead, and its locus appears to be miles away at Stone Mountain, where both Klans and Ku Kluxes are gathering to mobilize for a near-apocalyptic assault. Clark’s novel is at once rousing, boisterous, and clever. He channels the kitschy motifs of early-20th-century pulp horror into a narrative that both spoofs and exalts that flamboyant tradition. In the process, he cunningly and pithily weaves in African folklore, American history, and sociopolitical tropes that resonate with our present-day racial upheaval. Devotees of Lovecraft Country, Get Out, and other horror adventures with African American themes: Take note.

Thrills, chills, macabre humor, and engaging heroines to root for: What more could a reader want?
Cooney's brief but compelling novel—in which an unnamed chaplain takes readers on her rounds during one night at a large Northeastern hospital—explores issues like mortality, spiritual survival, and human connection.

The 36-year-old Episcopal chaplain, frizzy-haired and pear-shaped, has what her boss calls a natural gift for telling people what they need to hear. Her instinctive ability to soothe becomes increasingly evident as she travels from one patient to another. She is spiritual but practical. While she asks “What is a soul?” in the novel's first line—and returns to the question in different guises throughout—the narrator's spiritual quest does not cause her moral qualms about lying when necessary, whether to soothe a doctor who fears she’s sinned or give hope to a dying chef who expects his former restaurant patrons to visit en masse. Her favorite patients are an elderly, deeply lonely librarian and a 15-year-old boy who's survived a catastrophic accident physically shattered but with his gentle magnetism intact. Less appealing characters, like a lawyer who is rude to the staff, also receive her understanding. Each has a story. Often the stories lead the chaplain to stories from her own past. A subtle plot takes shape almost between the lines concerning the chaplain's unresolved relationship with Plummy, a neuroscientist to years her junior now living in Germany, who's fascinated by out-of-body experiences, what he calls oobs; confronted during her shift with two possible oobs, the chaplain is forced to reexamine the idea of soul yet again but also to reconsider her relationship with Plummy. Those oob walks of the title may stretch credibility, but Cooney does a remarkable job structuring a novel of vignettes and stories within stories into a cohesive whole. Equally remarkable is her portrait of the chaplain as a personification of the potential for human goodness. Though introspective, the narrator is never self-absorbed. Her voice, funny and direct, keeps sentimentality at bay.

The perfect novel to combat pandemic angst.

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A grandfather reveals his past as a resistance fighter for Greece.

A framing prologue sets up the story: A grandson has discovered an old photograph in his grandparents' attic, leading his Papou, a Greek American, to confess a long-held secret. The first half is an episodic slog of military campaigns as the protagonist, 18-year-old Alexei, leaves his small fishing village of Agria to fight invading Italians. Along with his childhood friend Costa and the outnumbered and ill-equipped Greek army, he draws first blood in skirmishes in the hills before defeating Mussolini’s forces in Pogradec, an Albanian town. The boys return home to short-lived triumph. Costa, a lady's man, settles down with Thalia, an older woman, and becomes a father to her son, Nico. Alexei marries Philia after winning the grudging respect of her wealthy father, Giorgios. This brief idyll is interrupted as the Greeks occupy Agria are treated predictably and stereotypically, as victims whom only men can protect—a role 11-year-old Nico prematurely assumes. The combat narrative takes on more urgency and interest as the two friends join a band of resistance fighters led by Koukidis, a fellow veteran of the Albanian campaign (a character based on a legendary Greek fighter). The battle scenes often veer into comic-book territory; however, No shot of any caliber can be fired without accompanying sound effects such as “bang,” “rat-a-tat-tat,” or “kaboom.” According to the book's epigraphs, Hitler
admired the Greeks’ tenacity and Stalin thanked Greece for delaying the German invasion of Russia until winter. Even without such dubious testimonials, this debut novel’s primary message is clear: Without Greece’s sacrifice of 10% of its population in resisting German occupation for 219 days, the Allied victory might have been seriously compromised.

If Hitler and Stalin recognized the Greeks’ courage, it’s about time the world did, too.

MARLENE
Djian, Philippe
Trans. by Polizzotti, Mark
Other Press (224 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Sep. 8, 2020
978-159051-987-5

Four misfits battle their demons and each other.

The characters in Djian’s novel could have stepped straight from the pages of the most melancholy Raymond Carver short story. Dan and Richard are Special Forces veterans of combat in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Yemen, both suffering from PTSD and living in an unnamed town near a military base where their former comrades still depart for and return from war, many of them burdened by the same damage. When Marlene, whose sister, Nath, is married to Richard, arrives unannounced (and newly pregnant) in town, reuniting with Nath for the first time in 18 years, she’s the match that sets fire to the emotional tinderbox in which these characters live. Nath and Richard’s 18-year-old daughter, Mona, has briefly taken shelter with her godfather, Dan, after fleeing her parents’ house for reasons never fully explained. Marlene and Dan drift into a relationship while Nath and Richard’s uneasy marriage risks being undermined by both partners’ infidelity. The novel begins in shades of gray and slides toward black as incidents of petty crime, physical violence, and sexual betrayal mount. Djian situates the relationships of all five of these unsympathetic characters in a cul-de-sac from which it’s obvious early in the novel they lack the ability, or even the will, to escape. That this bleak story culminates in death is utterly predictable, but what’s lacking is any truly tragic sense beyond an obvious regret at the senseless loss of human life. That shortcomings result from Djian’s choice to spend more time creating a moody portrait of working-class despair than he does plumbing his characters’ inner lives in any meaningful way.

A grim tale of infidelity and family dysfunction.

BAD ISLAND
Donwood, Stanley
Illus. by the author
Norton (144 pp.)
$18.00 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-324-00185-0

In this wordless, black-and-white graphic novel, we visit an island surrounded by rough seas and populated by monsters that become increasingly familiar.

Simple but powerful images do all the talking as Donwood stylishly zooms across what looks like a spaghetti bowl of rolling striped waves toward a low-slung island on the horizon. A dense forest awaits onshore, and within its shadows lurks a pair of white pinprick eyes set within a vaguely humanoid shape,
soon joined by a progressive menagerie of nasties—serpentine and dinosaur, seismic and torrential; twisted, technological, and cataclysmic. Donwood’s style is denuded and bold—stark whites and flat blacks, no shading, like a woodcut or stencil. He masterfully moves from one full-page image to the next, speaking in primal symbols (toothsome grins, lightning strikes, storm-tossed branches) that capture the island’s turbulent life cycle in the changes between pages—alternating between devastating and devastated, and haunted by the humanoid shadows with piercing eyes. He lingers on the most contemporary of monsters (deforestation, gathering dark clouds of pollution, downpours of ballistics), perhaps underscoring the depravity of our modern age. For all its terror and destruction, the book allows the faintest hint of optimism—or the worrying promise of a renewed cycle.

A picture book of the damned—devoured quickly and savored for days.

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**CROOKED HALLELUJAH**

*Ford, Kelli Jo*  
Grove (304 pp.)  
$26.00 | Jul. 14, 2020  
978-0-8021-4912-1

An intergenerational story about mothers and daughters struggling to keep their family together in the midst of poverty, illness, and natural disasters in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma and the Red River region of Texas.

Set against landscapes where oil being sucked out of the ground sounds like crying and men are swept into dust storms to disappear forever, the novel shifts primarily between the perspectives of Justine, who got pregnant at 15, and her daughter, Reney, who is torn between loyalty to her family and her aspirations to attend college and create a life of her own. Around this pair orbits a dynamic community of characters whose lives steer the family’s destiny in both direct and subtle ways, including

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**WHAT NELL DREAMS**

*BY ANNE LEIGH PARRISH*

Characters in this collection of short stories and a novella seek to validate their lives while ensnared in unhappy or fractured relationships.

“…these tales are also wonderfully worthwhile courtesy of an indelible voice that leaves a lasting impact.”

“…refreshing, and unforgettable tales from a skillful author.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

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YOU COULD SAY Shruti Swamy’s debut has good bones. With a solid structure, eye-catching details, and plenty of room for readers to explore, A House Is a Body (Algonquin, Aug. 11) confounds expectations of what a short story collection can achieve. Set in India and the U.S., these 12 stories, written over the course of 10 years, explore reality, temporality, and corporeality in strange and wonderful ways: “The fallible characters in Swamy’s ravishing book are always falling into something and bravely grasping what they can on their way down in a frenetic attempt to pull themselves back up,” writes our reviewer in a starred review. The author spoke with Kirkus by phone from San Francisco. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

To me, your prose is lush, lyrical, and resonant. What’s your relationship to poetry?
I definitely have tried to write poetry over the years and have deep respect for it. Sometimes when I’m sitting down to write, the thing that helps me is listening to or reading a little bit of poetry, so I am a reader of poetry. I would love to read even more poetry. I feel like I understand how to browse fiction and find new fiction authors, but poetry is a little bit harder for me. There are definitely poets that I love: Lucille Clifton, Adrienne Rich, Monika Sok, Shamala Gallagher. And I’m not a very good poet.

Really? Here’s the opening sentence of the titular story: “Not the scent of the smoke, but the sight of it, not the sight itself, but the screen through which it altered the sunlight—she couldn’t articulate the change exactly, it’s just that the light seemed odd, like the sour light of a nightmare.” Rhythm, rhyme, repetition, fluidity....
I was recently watching Sesame Street with my daughter, which I watch a lot—big fan—and Maya Angelou was talking to Big Bird. Big Bird was like, “What’s poetry?” She said, “Poetry is”—I’m just paraphrasing—“Poetry is language in rhythm and sometimes in rhyme.” That was a brilliant definition of poetry, because a child could understand it, and it’s actually really profound.

Rhythm in my sentences is very important to me. Sometimes I don’t hear all the words but I know what the rhythm is. That sentence, I worked and worked and worked on. It was originally published in the Paris Review, so I was working with the editor there. Often editors’ impulses are to cut the things that aren’t working, but sometimes I’ll push back, because the rhythm of the sentence, if it’s altered, sounds wrong to me. That sentence is a pretty extreme example of a rhythmic sentence, but I heard it very clearly. I was happy to go back and forth as many times as needed in order to get that rhythm.
Here’s how our review describes the opening story, “Blindness”: “Sudha, an architect and newlywed, struggles with a husband who can’t (and won’t) understand her depression. A dream of an alternate life may be the only cure for her persistent ‘black feeling.’” This story has a dreamlike quality that really makes it stand out. Why did you choose it to go first?

It’s maybe the most difficult story in the collection. I felt like it was the door to the collection. To me, if somebody could walk through that story—I guess it’s maybe more of a corridor—if somebody could walk through that story, [they could navigate the rest].

[As a writer] you do your best. You’re careful. Then there’s a space that we all enter as readers, where it becomes yours, just by walking through that story and making meaning out of it. So if all people get from that story is a kind of feeling...a taste in their mouths from the language, that is also a success to me. They don’t have to bring the meaning out of it that I put in there.

What does “Blindness” mean to you?
The biggest thing I was looking at was the idea of time being a spiral or a circle rather than a line. That’s a very Indian way of looking at things, in terms of karma, in terms of rebirth and what we accrue, looking at trauma, and how trauma echoes through generations. I was interested in looking at those things through my own understanding of Indian culture and Indian mythology.

What do you hope this collection means to readers?
Books can exist just because they’re pleasurable and it feels like a joy to read them. Even if there are other things that this book is doing and interested in, first and foremost, I hope that this book offers my readers some pleasure. If that’s all this book does, it would make me feel very satisfied to know that was their experience.

Megan Labrise is the editor at large. A House Is a Body received a starred review in the June 1, 2020, issue.

Justine’s mother, Lula, who’s devoted to her Holiness church, and Jack, Reney’s awkward but kind supervisor at the Dairy Queen, who envisions a better life for her. In lieu of numbered chapters, Ford organizes the novel into lyrically titled sections, including “Somewhere Listening for My Name” and “What Good Is an Ark to a Fish?” that illuminate the evolution of the characters from the 1970s to the near present. Some of the most dramatic subplots unfold within the lives of minor characters—such as a young neighbor who must defend his adopted family from a home break-in—and never fully resolve, which can feel dissatisfying. Overall, though, the dynamic relationships among the main characters carry the novel across these gaps. Ford’s prose glows brightest in the quiet moments among family members, such as when Reney and Justine free a trash bag full of fish into a lake and they “[shoot] off in every direction like fireworks,” and in its reflections on the fraught, redemptive bonds between mothers and daughters that can feel like “a lost world...re-creating itself.”

A tender and ambitious praise-song of a novel about a family’s fight for survival, love, and home.

WHAT YOU COULD HAVE WON
Genn, Rachel
And Other Stories (276 pp.)
$15.95 paper  |  Nov. 3, 2020
978-1-91150-886-1

The relationship between a divergently motivated man and woman flares and fades—but these aren’t average people.

Astrid is a meteor of musical talent, reminiscent of Janis Joplin or Amy Winehouse. Famous on MTV and recognized internationally, she’s also drug-dependent, and in Henry Sinclair, she has found the perfect package: a drug-supplying boyfriend. But Henry has his own agenda. An ambitious British psychiatrist, he’s hoping, despite conflicts with his boss, to make his reputation with a book and also with a patient he calls BirdBoy. Henry’s self-motivated involvement with bright-burning Astrid drives this fractured contemporary tale that switches between the second person for Astrid—“You have waited and Henry has not come”—and Henry’s first-person point of view. Scenes cut, cross, and interconnect to compose a cubist portrait of the relationship: the couple’s meet-cute at the Eliot Perlman Wellness Center in Manhattan, Astrid’s first paid gig; their prickly camping holiday on a Greek island; her road trip; his laboratory; her visit to a bizarre rehab clinic in Paris. Glimpses of satisfying early moments contrast with Astrid’s neediness and Henry’s chilly limitations: “I am not the kind of man who gets in deep.” This caustic tale of toxic co-dependency comes with copious drug-taking, psychological theorizing, and oblique self-scrutiny: “Soon enough there will be no more easy choices at all and that is a phantom tragedy that escapes these two eyes and breathes only into the future.” Genn, a neuroscientist and artist, displays strength in her intensity and scene painting, like
A tiny Polish village the Nazis somehow missed remains disconnected from the modern world—until an unhappy newlywed tears out of town.

**THE LOST SHTETL**

Gross, Max
HarperVia/HarperCollins (416 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-0-06299-112-6

A tiny Polish village the Nazis somehow missed remains disconnected from the modern world—until an unhappy newlywed tears out of town.

“It would have been intoxicating to anyone who had the least amount of interest in World War II and the Holocaust...to delve into an unambiguously happy [story].” So proclaims a scholar writing about Kreskol, a village in Poland, after it emerges from nearly a century of total isolation and anonymity to become a national cause célèbre. If Gross’ debut novel is not an unambiguously happy story—not only the Holocaust, but the random cruelty of fate and the general stupidity of humankind have fingers in the pie—it is great fun, packed with warmth, humor, and delightful Yiddish expressions. (Only to be expected from the author of the memoir *From Schlub to Stud: How to Embrace Your Inner Mensch and Conquer the Big City*, 2008.) Reaching into the storytelling tradition that stretches from Sholem Aleichem to Isaac Bashevis Singer to Michael Chabon, the author spins an ingenious yarn about the struggle between past and present. The narrator is a nameless townsperson from Kreskol, which as the novel opens seems to be from another era, a sweet Jewish village with matchmakers and farmers and open-air markets, several synagogues and plenty of gossip. But one day a spirited beauty named Pesha

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**WE HEAR VOICES**

Green, Evie
Berkley (384 pp.)
$26.00 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-593-09830-1

Malvolent inner voices plague young pandemic survivors in near-future London.

The J5X virus has killed millions worldwide and—unlike Covid-19—is particularly lethal to children under 10, so when 6-year-old Billy Stevens falls ill, his mother, 43-year-old divorcée Rachel Jackman, braces for the worst. After weeks of steady decline, however, Billy miraculously recovers and soon begins chatting nonstop with an invisible entity dubbed Delfy. Rachel assumes that Delfy is something Billy created to cope with the boredom of his convalescence, but the rest of the family isn't so sure. Rachel's partner, Al, and Billy's 16-year-old sister, Nina, fear Delfy is a post-virus complication. Rachel's mother, Orla, becomes convinced that Billy is possessed after “Delfy” tries to strangle her. Government health insurance doesn't cover child psychiatric care, and Rachel and Al are broke, so when Billy's violent behavior escalates, Rachel persuades her ex-husband, Henry, to pay for a consult with professor Graham Watson, whose website advertises a specialization in “post-flu imaginary friends.” Unbeknownst to Rachel and company, Graham has a secret underground clinic full of kids like Billy. Pseudonymous author Green's debut suffers somewhat for her haphazard incorporation of the J5X outbreak; the characters' cavalier attitude toward disease prevention strains credulity, particularly given current events. Although a subplot that spotlights the affordable housing crisis feels more carefully considered and Rachel's mounting panic rings true, a deeply silly coda undercuts the tale's largely gratifying climax and denouement.

A fusion of horror and social commentary that chills but proves too uneven to truly terrify.
Lindauer decides she cannot put up with the putz she’s recently married for one more minute. “This was not exactly a surprise to most of the people in our town,” says the narrator, who often uses the collective “we” in a way reminiscent of Tova Mirvis’ The Ladies Auxiliary. Pesha is the first person to leave Kreskol in a very long time, and eventually the town elders send the mamzer (technically, bastard) Yankel Lewinkopf after her. Yankel is an unlikely but endearing hero, and his adventures in the world of smartphones and underarm deodorant unfold in unexpected, entertaining, and sometimes very sad ways. “What was the point of freedom in a town like Kreskol, where everyone knows one another’s business and his future was more or less written already?” This seemingly light fable may leave you meditating on serious questions.

Imaginative and philosophical, funny and sad, old and new—mazel tov, Mr. Gross.

**ALL GOD’S CHILDREN**

*Gwyn, Aaron*

Europa Editions (400 pp.)

$18.00 paper | Oct. 20, 2020

978-1-60945-618-4

Three lives intersect in 19th-century Texas in this sprawling adventure novel. In 1827, young Duncan Lammons sets off from his home in Butler County, Kentucky, to stake out a new life in Texas, then part of Mexico. “It’s a peculiar sort of man who needs a fresh start by the age of twenty, but I was always peculiar,” he explains—in part because he’s gay, which has made him the subject of rumors in his county. He befriends another young man named Noah Smithwick along the way, and after a few years the two decide to join the nascent Texian Army to fight for the territory’s independence. Meanwhile, an enslaved Black woman named Cecelia is sold several times to different cruel masters, eventually ending up in Louisiana, where she’s stolen from the man who bought her and freed by Samuel Fisk, who fought alongside Duncan in Texas (and for whom Duncan nurses a significant crush). Gwyn switches points of view between Duncan and Cecelia as the two navigate pre–Civil War Texas, with Duncan remaining a soldier and Cecelia and Samuel raising a child, until a series of violent events threaten the safety of the couple and their son. Gwyn knows how to tell a story—he builds suspense wonderfully, and one long section that deals with Duncan and his fellow soldiers fighting in the 1846 Battle of Monterrey is some of the most thrilling prose readers are likely to encounter this year. But the book’s ending, set at the advent of the Civil War, seems tacked on and unnecessary, and while Gwyn treats Duncan’s homosexuality with real sensitivity, some readers might rankle at the plot involving Cecelia and Duncan, which veers toward White saviorism. Still, readers who enjoyed books like Larry McMurtry’s Lonesome Dove (1985) will find much to admire here.

Gwyn’s book isn’t perfect, but his excellent writing and gift for pacing make this an enjoyable historical novel.

**CONSENSUAL HEX**

*Harlowe, Amanda*

Grand Central Publishing (320 pp.)

$27.00 | Oct. 6, 2020

978-1-5387-5220-3

When Leisl Davis begins her first year at Smith College, she gets a spot in a competitive seminar on the history of witchcraft that turns out to be more practical than she could have ever imagined.

Leisl isn’t doing so well when she moves into her dorm at Smith. She battles with suicidal tendencies and self-loathing and is trying desperately to convince herself that she isn’t attracted to girls. She meets a friendly, handsome Amherst student named Tripp, but when he rapes her, she is denied support or even validation from school or the authorities. Leisl befriends Luna, another of Tripp’s victims, and immediately feels an attraction. They sign up for a seminar led by the enigmatic professor Sienna Weiss, who whittles
Ten artful stories conjure contemporary North Carolina, mouthwatering and matter-of-factly haunted.

IF I HAD TWO WINGS

Kenan, Randall
Norton (224 pp.)
$25.95 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-324-00546-9

Boars, monkeys, adulterers, charlatans, and ghosts all chase the characters gathered here.

The sly soulful Kenan takes his time between books. Now he rewards readers who have waited almost three decades for a return to his fictional Tims Creek, North Carolina, home to the novel A Visitation of Spirits (1989) and the story collection Let the Dead Bury Their Dead (1992)—though this new collection opens with a smile by starting “When We All Get to Heaven” in New York City. A 58-year-old plumber from Tims Creek explores midtown and is improbably swept up into Billy Idol’s entourage. Ed Phelps finds the music silly but the day full, and as he drifts off to sleep, he hears his grandfather’s voice singing. This pitch-perfect ending is evocative of the thin, beckoning veil between the seen and unseen, the quotidian and the preposterous, that Kenan hangs throughout his fiction. Yet appetite—carnal and gustatory—also fuels these stories. In “I Thought I Heard the Shuffle of Angels’ Feet,” the narrator introduces his lover: “Six foot six inches of beige, Portuguese-accented brawn, the Brazilian wunderkind. He moved like a dancer, he spoke like a poet—and Americans are such suckers for accents.” He tops that poem with 15 words to sum up their union: “Ten tumultuous years. It had not been bliss, but mostly happy, usually fun, always interesting.” As this story ends, something new has begun and something old is set right.

“Tims Creek is a place where the fat a thing of pure joy.” It is a feast.

Everything and everybody is larger than life yet somehow smaller than life as well.

CHAOS

Johansen, Iris
Grand Central Publishing (416 pp.)
$28.00 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-5387-1313-6

The latest stand-alone from the chronicler of Eve Duncan and her remarkable family tells the story of an equally remarkable bunch of freelance law enforcers arrayed against a nefarious mercenary.

Jorge Masenak has outdone himself with his latest coup: Stealing a dozen racehorses lodged at Morocco’s St. Eldon’s Academy; kidnapping 59 students from the girls school, passing them around to his confederates, and threatening to execute them if any government agency makes a move against him. Cue the entrance of rogue CIA agent Alisa Flynn, who promptly persuades tech mogul Gabe Korgan to help her rescue the girls. Alisa is particularly close to Sasha Nalano, her official ward, who’s a wizard with horses, and Sasha is especially close to Chaos, an ill-tempered stallion with preternatural speed—so close that girl and horse communicate telepathically. Enlisting soldier of fortune John Gilroy to help with logistics, Alisa and Korgan quickly devise a plan to rescue the hostages. But Masenak escapes, taking Sasha and Chaos, whom he’s determined to have Sasha train on a dramatically accelerated schedule so he can be raced one-on-one against Nightshade, the Triple Crown winner owned by ruthless lumber baron Marcus Reardon. Instead of sweating the details of plotting or characterization, Johansen sets this modern swashbuckler in an alternative reality in which the heroes can infiltrate the villain’s armored strongholds at will, characters compare each other to Wonder Woman and Indiana Jones, and the software has powers as superhuman as the people who develop and use it in the field.

Ten artful stories conjure contemporary North Carolina, mouthwatering and matter-of-factly haunted.
New SF&F publisher Erewhon Books welcomes you to thrilling new worlds!

Erewhon’s stunning speculative fiction books invite you into tales of technology and witchcraft, revolution and romance, future cultures and alternate pasts. Join us on the journey!

Party hard. Hex harder. Read the book Kirkus called a “must-have debut” in a starred review. Loner and witch, Sideways Pike must navigate what it means to have friends after she falls in with the three most popular girls at school and realizes they might be her coven.

From the beloved World Fantasy Award-winning author of Witchmark comes a sweeping romantic fantasy, where a sorceress must balance her desire to become the first great female magician against her duty to her family.

In the debut novel by acclaimed short fiction author Benjamin Rosenbaum, we invite you to a far-future society where biotechnology has revolutionized gender and identity. Here, young Fift must decide whether to conform or carve a new path.

The debut novel of 2011 Astounding Award Winner, E. Lily Yu is the heartbreaking and haunting story about a family’s quest for a new home in an unwelcoming world, told in beautifully economical and intensely lyrical prose.

Revolutions are always red. In a future South Asia, Ashiva and the Red Hand fight for a future for all against an oppressive government eager to sacrifice its poorest in the name of progress. Olivia Chadha’s YA debut is not to be missed!

From the author of Shadows of the Dark Crystal comes the story of two teens in antebellum America. Racing west as riders on the Pony Express, they must navigate a growing war in Faerie, even as America prepares for its own bloody conflict.

@erewhonbooks • erewhonbooks.com
A Christmas wish leads to a Christmas nightmare when one woman gets stuck reliving the holiday season, *Groundhog Day* style.

Things aren’t going as planned for Maelyn Jones. At the age of 26, she’s living with her mom and stepdad, she’s stuck in a dead-end job, and, perhaps most important, she just had an eggnog-filled holiday hookup with Theo Hollis, her family friend and the brother of her unrequited lifelong crush, Andrew Hollis. Maelyn’s spent years waiting for Andrew to notice her as more than a friend, but now she knows she’s screwed things up for good by kissing his brother. The only thing that’s going perfectly in her life is the lovely Park City cabin where her family, Theo and Andrew’s family, and her parents’ other college friends get together every Christmas. But then, on the last day of their vacation, Theo and Andrew’s parents announce that they’re selling the cabin. On the drive to the airport, Maelyn miserably wishes that she could find out what would make her happy…and suddenly, she’s back on the plane to the cabin, pre-Christmas, about to live the whole week over again. With another (and another and another) chance to make things right, will she be able to finally tell Andrew how she feels and discover real happiness? Lauren—the author team behind *The Honey Don’t List* (2020) and countless other romantic comedies—is as reliable as ever with this cheery holiday outing. Down-on-her-luck Maelyn is a likable protagonist, and it’s easy to relate to her desire to fix her life (even if most readers don’t have the benefit of time travel). Her conversations with Andrew are adorably banter-filled, and her relationship with her parents’ friend Benny, an aging, wacky stoner, is sweetly charming.

A classic plot plus Lauren’s trademark snark and steam add up to a winning rom-com full of heart and holiday cheer.
A fine addition to the L’Heureux canon.

THE BEGGAR’S PAWN

L’Heureux, John
Penguin (272 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Aug. 4, 2020
978-0-14-313523-4

A well-to-do couple is challenged by charity in this posthumous novel.

When David and Maggie Holliss, out walking their dog, first meet the aspiring novelist Reginald Parker, it’s 2001, and “they looked like what they were: a couple suspended between middle and old age, happy, wealthy, content. And comfortably godless.” David is a soon-to-retire literature professor at Stanford; Maggie is a minor heiress; and their marriage is “a meeting of minds and hearts that excluded everybody else, even their children.” But when, in 2009, Reginald—still an aspiring novelist—leaps in front of a UPS truck to save their dog’s life and then promptly asks a grateful Maggie for a $200 loan, the Hollisses’ prosperous solitude is unexpectedly imperiled. In addition to his novelistic ambitions, Reginald is a narcissist, petty criminal, and freeloader who feels simultaneously insulted by and entitled to David and Maggie’s ready charity. He cadges the Hollisses for more loans—to support his family, to support his drug habit, and to punish them for their willingness to give. He also embarks on an affair with Claire, the Hollisses’ caustic middle-aged daughter, and eventually deploys his own neglected child, Iris, as a pawn, first to guilt the Hollisses into giving more money, then to punish them for their refusal to give any more of it. Working in Iris Murdoch’s frantically plotted tradition, L’Heureux uses a deft, omniscient narration to highlight the little human hypocrisies within his characters and the blatant miscommunications that define their relationships. The result is a roller coaster of a novel that—despite some missteps—generally treads a careful line between comedy and caricature while engaging in a poignant commentary on the interplay between charity and justice. Early on, when Claire tells the story about how she tried to become a nun but disagreed with the Mother Superior’s emphasis on charitable acts rather than justice—“Justice includes charity because charity has to be earned,” Claire states, “it has to be deserved”—David seems to speak for the reader when he decides he’s “never heard such an exercise in sloppy thinking.” By the novel’s end, however, readers might be wondering whether Claire, unbeknownst to herself, was on to something.

A fine addition to the L’Heureux canon.

THE CIPHER

Maldonado, Isabella
Thomas & Mercer (336 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Nov. 1, 2020
978-1-5420-2247-7

The survivor of a vicious crime confronts her fears in a hunt for a serial killer.

Tossed into a dumpster when she was 1 month old, Nina Esperanza was raised in a series of foster homes. At 16, she was abducted and tortured. At 17, she won legal emancipation and a new surname. At 27, she’s an FBI agent who incarnates the female warrior of her chosen name, Guerrera. After a home video of her besting two assailants goes viral, a murdered runaway in a dumpster refers obliquely in death to Nina. The young victim looks like her—petite, Latina—and shows the same signs of abuse. And a cipher for “hope is dead” makes clear that the man who kidnapped Nina is targeting her again. She’s invited to join the Behavioral Analysis Unit to find
him, though it means working with a BAU specialist she has reason to resent. And despite the exposure of her past during the investigation, Nina’s determination to catch the man now known as the Cipher for his increasingly complex coded messages only grows as he kills again to send her a message: that he won’t stop until he has Nina in his grasp once more.

Forensic analysis, violent action, and a tough heroine who stands up to the last man on earth she wants to see again.

**THE SEVENTH MANSION**

Meijer, Maryse

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (192 pp.)

$16.00 paper | Sep. 8, 2020

978-0-374-29846-3

In this strange, inventive first novel, Meijer examines the ethics of environmental activism through the prism of teenage angst and idealism.

When 16-year-old Xie lands in hot water after liberating minks from a local farm, his despairing father hires a tutor and yields control of their vegan diet to Xie. Ostracized in his Southern town and at school for his radical politics, Xie’s only friends are Leni and Jo, fellow travelers in their three-person punk environmentalist group FKK. Despite his political convictions, Xie is quiet, anxious, and uncertain of himself. Meijer writes in jagged sentence fragments, highlighting Xie’s skittering internal dialogue. At times the effect is lyric and prismatic; at others, Xie’s narrative comes out in heaving gasps—as if he is afraid to reveal his innermost desires even to himself. At the heart of the book lie questions about what it means to live an ethical life under late-stage capitalism, including how best to love others. Leery of physical contact, Xie becomes obsessed with Pancratius, a fourth-century saint martyred for refusing to slaughter a lamb, whose bones he discovers in a local chapel. After Xie steals the skeleton, he begins a spiritual and erotic relationship with P, as he calls the saint, who follows Xie, ghostlike, from tutoring sessions to club dance floors to environmental actions. Late in the novel, Xie must at last confront why he’s driven to environmental action at the expense of his physical and mental well-being.

“Why did you call me here,” Xie implores his ghostly boyfriend. “P’s hands on his hips from behind. That breath that is not breath on his neck. Night heavy on his head. I didn’t call you, beloved. You called yourself.” From the first golden rays of P’s ghostly form to the tragedy and triumph of Xie’s final protest, Meijer spins a contemporary fable of lust, devotion, and transgression that will challenge readers to examine all the ways they move through the world.

A sensitive, nuanced meditation on radical politics, queerness, and the responsibility of care.

**TINY NIGHTMARES**

Very Short Stories of Horror

Ed. by Michel, Lincoln & Nieto, Nadxieli

Black Balloon Publishing (304 pp.)

$16.95 paper | Oct. 13, 2020

978-1-948226-62-2

Forty works of flash fiction guaranteed to inspire nightmares. Michel and Nieto collaborated previously on the story collection *Tiny Crimes* (2018), and here they apply the same basic guidelines—stripping stories down to about 1,500 words—and...
transpose them to the horror genre to fantastic effect. These are achingly brief but exquisitely crafted fragments of horror, some real, some imagined, and some incomplete. Divided into four sections—heads, hearts, limbs, and viscera—the book is delightfully unpredictable. In an elegant introduction, the editors observe, “Fear is also, for better or (more often) worse, the dark force that shapes society. Whether it’s politicians spreading hatred to scare up votes or the passive fear that keeps so many of us from risking change in our lives, our communities, and our world.” The opener, Meg Elison’s “Guess,” features a protagonist who knows how everyone will die. In “Jane Death Theory #13,” Rion Amilcar Scott tackles the horrifying history of people of color who have died from gunshot wounds while arrested, cuffed, and secured in the back of a police car—annotated with real-life examples. There are a plethora of creepy creatures, such as the inhuman thing in “We’ve Been in Enough Places To Know” by Corey Farrenkopf; the demon that lives in the art exhibition in “The Blue Room” by Lena Valencia; or the puppy that morphs into a human baby in Hilary Leichter’s “Doggy-Dog World.” Other horrors are psychological: In “Lone,” by Jac Jemec, a woman who fears men makes a horrifying discovery while camping alone while in Kevin Nguyen’s “The Unhaunting,” a man desperate to be visited by his dead wife is told by an amateur ghostbuster that she doesn’t want to see him. There are plenty of iconic frights here, among them vampires and werewolves, but it’s surprising how very different all of these stories are, especially given their limits. Iván Parra García’s “The Resplendence of Disappearing” is translated from the original Spanish by Allana C. Noyes into spare, brittle English that recalls Cormac McCarthy. “Candy Boii” by Sam J. Miller delves into the dangers of social media, with graceful passages like “The real danger is how we open ourselves up. What we let in, when we believe ourselves to be safe.” There’s quite a lot of body horror, too, so squeamish readers are forewarned, but fans of innovative horror films like Get Out and Her will have a blast.

Sick and twisted and troubling: Reading it is like stumbling on an old horror movie on TV in the middle of the night.
A bittersweet, beautiful story that, improbable though some of it may be, speaks wisely to life’s truths.

RENATO!
Mirabella, Eugene
McPherson & Company
(492 pp.)
$20.00 paper | Oct. 23, 2020
978-1-62054-042-8

Multigenerational novel of a Sicilian clan that leaves a memorable stamp in the old country and the new. Like Pietro di Donato, whose Christ in Concrete is now a largely forgotten classic of the Italian American experience, Mirabella has attracted a small but dedicated readership. His new novel—made up of three parts previously published as The Goddess in Love With a Horse (2008), Renato, the Painter (2012), and Renato After Alba (2016), which have been combined and revised—merits wide attention. The first section is an exercise in magic realism, an improbable genealogy of the Cavallù clan, its name suggestive of horses—and indeed, the progenitor is half horse. Says Angelo, a simple miller, to his astonished bride, “God created horses just to show us what He could do in the way of power and beauty, and when He finished, He admired His handiwork.” Of course, adds Mirabella, that’s perfectly in keeping with the Sicilian bloodline and its mishmash of Carthaginians, Romans, Greeks, Arabs, Jews, and other Mediterraneans. Another young man, swept up in the turmoil of the Garibaldian revolution, entreats a sea goddess to her. “Deep in the grass, I caught glimpses of black shapes, moving quietly. It was the heads of children.”

RENATO!
Oyamada, Hiroko
New Directions (112 pp.)
$13.95 paper | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-8112-2887-9

The narrator of this taut, surreal novel finds herself stranded in a strange rural landscape. As Oyamada’s novel begins, a married couple has decided to move to a rural area because narrator Asa’s husband has been transferred there. His new office is near where his parents live, and they offer the couple the newly vacant house they own next door to their own. It’s an appealing offer, and Oyamada uses the couple’s economic anxieties as a way to keep the book grounded. Before the move, Asa and a friend discuss the specifics of the cost of getting a manicure, and she muses on the difference in compensation between permanent and temporary employees at her workplace. After the move, the couple has only one car, leaving Asa stranded when her husband goes to work: “Except for rush hour, the bus came only once every sixty minutes, and it was a forty-minute ride to the train.” One day, her mother-in-law asks Asa to run an errand for her—a simple task, involving a visit to a nearby 7-Eleven. But on the walk there, Asa encounters a bizarre mammal, which she compares to a raccoon, a weasel, and a dog. “Maybe it had hooves,” she adds. She follows it, then falls into a hole, where she meets a woman who refers to her as “the bride.” Throughout, Oyamada memorably conveys Asa’s dislocation. The prose frequently transforms everyday scenes into something menacing, too: “The hole! I caught glimpses of black shapes, moving quietly. It was the heads of children.”

THE HOLE
Oyamada, Hiroko
Trans. by Boyd, David
New Directions (112 pp.)
$13.95 paper | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-8112-2887-9

A bittersweet, beautiful story that, improbable though some of it may be, speaks wisely to life’s truths.
Jessica favors her daughter, Ted his son, and the children evidently no one but themselves rather than each other. The remorseless progress of Prentiss’ narrative, which rivals Harlan Coben’s suburban thrillers in its scope and mastery, reveals so many unspeakable secrets, most of them withheld from anyone else in the family, that the most urgent question that emerges is which of them is the biggest monster. The fade-out, pitilessly detailing the costs of their survival, is as horrifying as the threats that have been challenging them.

The most ruthlessly contractual account of family life you’ll ever read.

Three
Quin, Ann
And Other Stories (160 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Nov. 10, 2020
978-1-91150-884-7

Quin’s second novel (originally published in 1966) traces the fates of Ruth and Leonard as they settle back into binary monogamy after the death of their mysterious lodger, S, who had briefly been their invigorating third.

Ruth and Leonard are quintessential examples of the British midcentury bourgeoisie. Leonard works somewhat provisionally as a translator, but his real passion seems to be breeding orchids in his inherited weekend home somewhere on the coast of England. Ruth would like to be pregnant but is consistently uninterested in Leonard’s sexual advances. She channels all her eros into games she plays with her own image—considering her reflection in the mirror, trying on outfits, rearranging her body in various dissatisfied poses around their home. The couple is firmly settled in the habits of their middle age, traveling back and forth from their flat in town to Grey House by the coast, unable to break out of the stifling, claustrophobic conformity of their bourgeois repression, surrounded by the inherited clutter of the lives that came before their own. At the novel’s opening, Ruth and Leonard are also in mourning. The spring before, S had become their boarder to convalesce from an ailment that turns out to have been the aftereffects of an abortion. Enigmatic, playful, and keenly observant, S quickly became a stimulating third in their stultified lives, a person whom both Ruth and Leonard desire and confide in. When S disappears in a neighborhood of sidewalks and shade, they devise and confide in. The most ruthless account of family life you’ll ever read.

February evidence to cement Quin’s reputation as one of the most innovative, and most underappreciated, voices of her time.

Out of Her Mind
Ragan, T.R.
Thomas & Mercer (284 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Nov. 10, 2020
978-1-5420-9390-3

An indomitable rookie crime reporter with a deeply troubled past pursues an even more disturbed serial kidnapper.

Sawyer Brooks was orphaned a month ago when her mother, who’d long covered for her abusive, pedophiliac husband, shot him to death and was shot in turn by one of her own daughters—Sawyer’s sister Aria. Growing up in that family, Sawyer has learned to accept her place at the foot of the table—a spot she now fills at the Sacramento Independent, where she survives on the crumbs that fall from the plate of veteran reporter David Lutz. But she can’t let go of the disappearance of 12-year-old Riley Addison. She can’t believe that Riley was harmed by Mark Brennan, the piano teacher from whose doorstep she vanished—even though he grew up in a nearby town that was home to another victim three years ago. When she challenges Detective Perez, whose wrath she already incurred in Don’t Make a Sound (2020), because the blood he found on Brennan’s front steps and matched with Riley’s blood wasn’t there the day before, when Sawyer and Aria interviewed Bren- nan, Perez stares her down. And he demands that she be pulled off the story after a hot lead she supplies about another possible kidnapper turns into an embarrassment and a possible lawsuit against the police. Defying all obstacles, Sawyer presses on, linking Riley’s case to half a dozen other abductions over the years. She’s so sharply focused that she has no idea that her other sister, Harper, is dealing with her traumatic family history in an even more cathartic way: by taking an active role in The Crew, a group of female vigilantes who deal out summary justice to abusers from their pasts.

Too many kidnappings, abusive men, and damaged women spoil the broth.

Nick
Smith, Michael Farris
Little, Brown (304 pp.)
$27.00 | Jan. 5, 2021
978-0-316-52976-1

A dark and often gripping story that imagines the narrator of The Great Gatsby in the years before that book began.

Nick grows up in a Minnesota neighborhood of sidewalks and shade...
trees” and goes to Yale and then to war. On leave in Paris, he’s with a woman he loves for too short a time and loses her. He survives the trenches, the scuttling over no man’s land, the tunnels where a man alone listens for the sound of the enemy setting explosives. On his way home, he makes a detour to New Orleans and finds himself “pry to the secret griefs” (as he says in Gatsby) of a brothel owner and her estranged husband, a war veteran scarred by mustard gas and stifled love. Smith is a talented writer known mainly for his gritty evocations of violence, struggle, and loss in the U.S. South, such as those in Blackwood (2020). Here he creates, in the war and New Orleans, nightmarish worlds where Nick reckons with demons and maybe redemption. These are places far from the staid tension and off-stage deaths of Gatsby. Smith inevitably goes well beyond the sparse biographical details—Yale, the Midwest, the family hardware business, World War I, and bond trading—that F. Scott Fitzgerald provided for his narrator, who exists to bring other lives into view, not expose his own. The new Nick is a man fully realized, with a mind tormented by the war and by a first love that waned too fast to a fingernail moon of bitter memory.

Whatever Smith had in mind when he began this project, he could have many readers wondering in some meta-anachronism how Fitzgerald’s Nick could fail to allude to any of the hell Smith puts him through.

A compelling character study and a thoroughly unconventional prequel.

A COUNTRY FOR DYING
Taïa, Abdellah
Trans. by Ramadan, Emma
Seven Stories (144 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-60980-990-4

In this newly translated work of fiction, the Paris-based Moroccan writer and filmmaker looks at sexuality, desire, and identity in a post-colonial world.

Zahira is a Moroccan woman living in Paris. She gives her friend Aziz, an émigré from Algeria, the new name Zannouba on the evening before the young woman’s gender affirmation surgery. Both are prostitutes. Zahira offers herself to the Muslim immigrants of Paris. Zannouba cultivates a wealthier clientele. Both women dream of a future that is very different from their present, and their accounts are intertwined with those of the men and women they meet. The people depicted here are not so much united by story—there isn’t much in the way of story—as by themes. The French occupations of North African and Southeast Asia cast a shadow over their lives, from the undocumented laborers Zahira takes as customers to another Moroccan prostitute attached to a French army unit in 1950s Saigon. Class and race are also explored here. A man who fell in love with Zahira when she was a girl is enraged to discover that she is not the pure creature he imagined, and his anger is fueled, in part, by the fact that her mother rejected his offer of marriage because he’s Black. When Zannouba first arrives in Paris, she makes her way by presenting herself in the way French men want to see her: “I prostituted myself dressed as a moderately savage Arab boy from over there, Algeria. The clients liked that.” In her private life, she simultaneously emulates and disdains the wealthy, educated men in her orbit. Identity is presented as a fluid concept for the characters. Upon discovering that surgery is not the transformation she hoped it would be, Zannouba loses herself in a surreal reverie about the actress Isabelle Adjani. Another actress—the classic Bollywood star Nargis—is an aspirational figure for the Moroccan woman stranded in Vietnam. None of these characters emerges as a fully formed person, and they all speak with the same fervent, poetic voice. But in these vignettes and monologues, Taïa offers American readers glimpses of lives few of us are likely to see outside of this book.

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Stories about people who are disaffected, apathetic, and bored. The characters in Swedish author Wolff’s latest book are bored by the mundanity of their lives. They cheat on each other or demand violence in the midst of sex. In “Imagine a Living Tree,” Kent finds that his wife’s 20-year-old former lover has come to stay with them “until I’ve figured things out with my girlfriend,” he says. Kent remembers a conversation with his sister. “Men,” she’d told him, “think everything is fine and dandy, and then one day the wife finds someone else and bails. When they talk about it later, the wife will say I’ve had the most boring time with you.” Had his own wife had a boring time? Kent wonders. In another story, a woman hires a detective to follow her husband’s mistress. Then she seduces the detective. Some of the stories are set in Spain while others occur in Wolff’s native Sweden. In one, a young man in a small Swedish village begins an affair with his elderly piano student. This story is intriguingly narrated by a collective “We,” which represents the village as a whole. The village does not approve. Wolff excels with the disaffected and the weird. Her stories, though, have an unfortunate habit of ending just before they begin to delve too deeply into any particular subject. They plumb the surfaces of things but hardly ever the depths.

Wolff’s stories intrigue but often fail to offer fresh insights.

**THE GIFT OF THE MAGPIE**

Andrews, Donna
Minotaur (304 pp.)
$25.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-250-76012-8

Ornamental blacksmith/general do-gooder Meg Langslow’s Christmas activities entangle her with a fellow resident of Caerphilly, Virginia, whose domestic life is even more chaotic than hers. Unlike Meg, who’s surrounded by members of her own cheerfully argumentative family as well as the Shiffleys, Caerphilly’s somewhat more benign version of the Snopeses, Harvey Dunlop has chosen to surround himself with stuff—objects of dubious value he can’t bring himself to throw out. So Meg, her friend Caroline Willner, Meredith Flugelman of Adult Protective Services, and other concerned members of Helping Hands for the Holidays have banded together to strong-arm, er, help and encourage him to go through his house with a shovel and relocate his treasures to an empty building Randall Shiffley owns in the hope of deep-cleaning the house and then urging Harvey to move on without moving his prized junk back in. Except for the unwelcome appearance of Morris, Ernest, and Josephine Haverhill, the cousins who seem to be Harvey’s only living relatives, the preliminaries go well. But when Meg shows up at Harvey’s for the main event in the decluttering marathon, her host is unresponsive, brained with a spittoon in his garage. As Harvey hovers between life and death, Meg plunges into his family history to uncover a motive for the murderous attack. Readers patient enough to wait for any mystery, or for that matter any significant conflict, to develop will be rewarded when their own suspicions about whodunit are proved exactly right.

Andrews lays on the good cheer with a trowel. Even the rabbi’s wife gets a cameo.
DECEPTION BY GASLIGHT
Belli, Kate
Crooked Lane (327 pp.)
$26.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-64385-464-9

In 1888 New York, a society woman's quest for recognition as a reporter leads her to a case of murder.

Despite their eccentric reputation, Genevieve Stewart's family is part of Mrs. Astor's exclusive Four Hundred. After having been jilted at the last moment, Genevieve works as a reporter, though she's not writing the kind of stories that would seem to suit her talents. A thief known as Robin Hood is robbing the rich and sending letters to the press highlighting their sins. Hot on his trail on the Lower East Side, Genevieve is saved from a dangerous encounter in a sordid alley by an exceedingly handsome man. Spotting her rescuer at a ball a few days later, she learns that he's wealthy Daniel McCaffrey, whose past is shrouded in mystery. Daniel's best friend, Rupert Milton, is an impoverished English nobleman who's about to become engaged to Esmerelda Bradley, the daughter of a wealthy family. Suspecting Daniel of being Robin Hood, Genevieve begins to investigate only to find herself drawn to him. Although he does his best to keep his past a secret, his budding trust in Genevieve allows him to open up to her. When Esmerelda's mother is murdered, Genevieve and Daniel investigate a case that involves dirty politics and a scheme to squeeze the poor. Genevieve's sleuthing makes her a target for men from both sides of the tracks who will stop at nothing to advance their schemes.

Gilded Age romance and complex crimes produce welcome surprises in the first of a new series.
A veteran Colorado cop faces the glass ceiling and a series of roadblocks in her first recorded case.

No woman in the Echo Valley Police Department has ever been promoted past the rank of detective—certainly not Jo Wyatt, who’s just been passed over for promotion to sergeant in favor of Cameron Finch, a considerably less experienced officer who also happens to be the husband from whom she’s quietly estranged. When Quinn Kirkwood finds college classmate Tye Horton, who has diabetes, shot to death in his garage apartment, Jo can’t help wondering whether his suicide is actually murder: “Why would a man shoot himself if you could overdose on insulin?” But Echo Valley Police Chief Grimes won’t hear a word about it, so Jo and her mentor-turned-partner, Squint MacAllister, are left on their own. Tye’s senior project, an innovative video game he was developing with Quinn and Ronny Buck, leads Jo to question everyone from professor Frederick Lucas, the instructor who’d tried to steal one of Tye’s earlier projects, to Ronny’s wealthy, powerful father, Xavier Buck, to District Attorney Zachary Walsenberg, whose son, Derek, killed himself a year ago while he was reviewing an earlier version of Tye’s game and whose wife, Alice, was Tye’s landlady. None of them takes any more kindly than Chief Grimes to Jo’s theories, and all of them carry a lot more clout than her. Not surprisingly, retired police captain Browning—who’s previously written as Micki Browning—is best on Jo’s professional frustration with a department that values her labors as long as she doesn’t step out of line.

Thoroughly workmanlike, if not terribly original or surprising.

A light read with a tad less of the panache that marked the series debut.
THE MAN IN THE MICROWAVE OVEN
Cox, Susan
Minotaur (304 pp.)
$27.99 | Nov 3, 2020
978-1-25-011620-8

Theophania Bogart, a fugitive from British high society, finds that her second case takes her outside her circle of friends but not out of her embattled San Francisco neighborhood.

Who could possibly have wanted to shoot attorney Katrina Dermody to death as she sat in the Tesla she’d made sure everyone in Fabian Gardens knew about? Theo, who discovers her body, knows she can start with the fellow tenants who opposed predatory developer Amos Noble’s determined attempt to plant a condo in the neighborhood. Her suspicions intensify when she insinuates herself into Katrina’s office and emerges with a folder documenting the juicy secrets of every tenant from Sabina Talbot, the daughter of anti-condo demonstrators Guillermo and Ruth D’Allessio (child out of wedlock), to wine company owners Jesus and Luis Aguardo (sale of liquor to teen who drank himself to death) to Angela Lacerda (high school abortion) to Theo herself, a photographer who changed her name and fled the press when her father, a noted English portraitist, stabbed her mother to death. As if that weren’t a rich enough field, a visit from priest/spymaster Sergei Wolf alerts Theo to the existence of a venerable espionage organization spanning generations whose members include both her beloved grandfather Clement Pryce-Fitton and Katrina. Where will the complications end? Not even at the Acknowledgments, whose first line identifies a real-life mystery a good deal more light-hearted than the higher-stakes case Theo’s plunged into.

Colorful, bustling, and stuffed to the brim with endless complications and a throwaway killer.

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THE ADVENTURES OF ISABEL
Dorsey, Candas Jane
ECW Press (220 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Oct. 20, 2020
978-1-77041-555-3

An anonymous investigator delves into a MacGuffin of a murder designed to showcase her outrageous lifestyle.

A postmodern girl living in a postmodern world, the unnamed protagonist of Dorsey’s series debut is a social worker who thinks about posting a classified ad for sex work in order to make her rent at Epitome Apartments. Although being ambisexual could double her client base, she’s dragged out of her fantasy when her powers of observation and general free time are called on to solve a crime. Her neighbor and sort-of-friend, who’s nicknamed Hep for her resemblance to Katharine Hepburn, learns that her granddaughter Madeline Pritchard’s body has been found in a river and seeks someone who can get to the bottom of things. An actual sex worker, not just one in her head, Maddie had been busy getting off drugs and trying to make something of herself. Who would’ve wanted to kill someone life had already brought so low? Through a series of facetiously titled chapters—such as “Underwear Is My Baby Tonight?”—the heroine dives into the case, ably supported by the requisite cast of unusual secondary characters. These include her friend and neighbor Denis, described as “the guy the term flaming faggot was invented to describe”; her cat, Fuckwit, whom she tries to rename Bunnywit so as not to offend her relatives; and a homeless woman—turned—potential love interest. The amusement these descriptions inspire may well predict different readers’ enjoyment of the whole story.

A strained but relentlessly clever read.

BROADCAST 4 MURDER
Eaton, J.C.
Kensington (320 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-4967-2456-4

A neurotic Chiweenie displays real detective skills.

Sophie “Phee” Kimball is a bookkeeper at a detective agency run by her boyfriend, Marshall Gregory, and Nate Williams, old friends from Minnesota who’ve moved to the Phoenix area, where Phee’s mother, Harriet, and her mystery-loving friends in Sun City West have involved her in many a mystery. The agency is currently investigating a perplexing case of inventory stolen from Home Products Plus that may draw on Phee’s accounting skills. When a sewing-show host takes time off from Sun City West’s local radio station, Harriet and her pal Myrna Mittleson are thrilled by the chance to do a live talk show. The highlight of their first program on mystery novels turns out to be their on-air description of finding the bloody corpse of program director Howard Buell, stabbed to death with a pair of fancy scissors. Nate and Marshall, who are often called in as consultants by the short-staffed local police, soon join Phee and Harriet’s gossip network of friends on the case. A second murder suggests that the motive is either love or money. At length Phee realizes that the pop-up garage sales selling the stolen goods may be connected to the murders. In the end, though, it’s Streetman, Harriet’s Chiweenie, who helps solve the crimes.

Fans who like their mysteries with a healthy dose of humor will enjoy Eaton’s latest comedy of errors.
An upcoming census upends life in the quiet village of Walmsley Parva. As conventional English ladies will, Edwina Davenport frets endlessly about how to report her unconventional household on her census form. It’s bad enough that she shares her ancestral home, The Beeches, with Beryl Helliwell, an American aviatrix and world traveler. Worse, since Helliwell and Davenport, the inquiry agency she and Beryl run, is barely solvent, the two women rely on subsidies from their gardener, Simpkins, who inherited a fortune from the Colonel Kimberly’s Condiment Company. In recognition of his contribution to the household economy, Beryl installs the irascible and often intoxicated Simpkins in a back bedroom. As Edwina wonders how to describe their platonic ménage-a-trois on their census form, new challenges arise. Soon after Beryl persuades the aging Simpkins to subcontract the physical work of gardening to Irish immigrant Declan O’Shea, O’Shea falls under suspicion of murdering village magistrate Gordon Faraday, who sentenced him to a whopping fine for disorderly conduct. While Edwina and Beryl are trying informally to clear their undergardener, someone steals the messenger bag containing all of Walmsley Parva’s census forms. Fearing reprisals from the pro-union, anti-government Triple Alliance, census officer Gerald Melton hires Helliwell and Davenport to discover the thief. Now Edwina faces an ethical challenge: How hard should she try to recover a set of documents she’d just as soon leave missing? In this clash between conscience and convention, hilarity wins.
DEATH BY FRENCH ROAST

Erickson, Alex
Kensington (320 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-4967-2113-6

A 30-year-old cold case heats up when an amateur sleuth becomes curious.

Krissy Hancock, owner of a book-store/cafe in Pine Hills, Ohio, is no stranger to murder. When her grouchy neighbor Eleanor Winthrow dies, Krissy, who’s helping Eleanor’s daughter pack up the house, learns that Eleanor had long been depressed over the unsolved murder of Wade, her brother. At the time he was killed, the town was up in arms over 30-something Wade’s dating a teenage girl. Wade made so many enemies that nobody was much interested in catching his murderer. That teen is now Krissy’s friend Rita Jablonski, who’s never married or mentioned her past. Krissy decides to investigate to honor Eleanor and help Rita. She learns that Wade had a group of friends who still meet for coffee every morning. Even the current police chief, Patricia Dalton, the mother of Krissy’s love interest, Paul, is reluctant to talk about the past, especially since a former colleague was a suspect. All of Wade’s friends were cleared, but most do not have kind thoughts about him or Krissy. When one of them is murdered just before he’s about to reveal something to her, it becomes clear that the killer is still around and willing to strike again to hide his identity.

Erickson’s intrepid sleuth makes some reckless choices in her determined hunt for a surprising killer.

MIKE JEFFORDS

Kril

by Mike Jeffords

A combat veteran’s nightmare. Sequeled into another hundred years of war in a Matrarchal controlled Universe.

In this deep-space, multidimensional tale, the battle of the sexes devolves into actual warfare in a dystopian world.

“An inventive and enjoyable sci-fi epic that offers a cosmic indictment of war.” — Kirkus Reviews

Coming Soon:
Prequel: Oval, Sequel: Dinarchy;
Marine Corps memoir: Not A Legend

ISBN # 9781530581610

For information on publishing and film rights, email kruitch@hotmai.com • kruitchan2.blogspot.com
Fleishman introduces a seen-it-all LA cop to a few things he’s never seen.
Whatever killed 42-year-old ballerina Katrina Ivanovna didn’t leave a mark on her. And since her body vanishes from the morgue before an autopsy, it’s anybody’s guess what killed her. Nor are the facts about her pre-decease much more definite. It’s clear that she considered her starring role in choreographer Andreas Stein’s new production of Giselle her last chance for a comeback, clear that she worried that her body was no longer equal to the demands of the role, and clear that she popped pills and accepted new sex partners with abandon. But what links might her Kremlin-connected mother have forged to Mickey (ne Mikhail) Orlov, the Hollywood producer whose shadowy past, perhaps including KGB membership, may have involved meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election? And why would anyone want to steal the body Katrina felt had betrayed her?
The detective on the case, the LAPD’s Sam Carver, talks a great game, alternating between laconic dialogue and appealingly quotable reflections as he fights off his memories of Dylan Cross, the woman who escaped after taking him prisoner and confessing that she’d killed two men who’d raped her. But neither Carver nor his creator ever weaves together all the busy lines of the episodic plot, and by the end, he can only conclude: “The case isn’t solved, but the guilty are dead.”

The best review comes early, in the form of a presidential tweet: “LAPD can’t stop illegals, loses ballerina. SAD.”

Murder kicks off a gathering of past and present librarians.
Lucy Richardson loves her job at the Bodie Island Lighthouse Library on North Carolina’s Outer Banks. Happy to help plan the 40th reunion of her boss Bertie James’ college class, she curates a special exhibition of artifacts from libraries of the past. At the group’s welcoming cocktail party, Lucy notices tension between some of the old friends. When the party ends, a small group goes for a stroll on the nearby boardwalk, encouraged by a local woman who claims psychic powers. Separated in the dark, they’re startled by a splash and soon find the body of Helena Sanchez floating in the water, stabbed, most likely with a letter opener from the display. Helena was rude and unpopular, but those qualities hardly seem an adequate motive for murder, and Lucy’s only clue is Helena’s response to a withdrawal card from a book in the display containing the name Jeff Applewhite. Research shows that Applewhite vanished 25 years ago, possibly with an extremely valuable necklace stolen from a local woman. In addition to the ladies on the walk, Lucy suspects Helena’s twin sister, who lives nearby and hated her sibling. But proof that any of them did the deed is hard to come by.

A tricky mystery and charmingly quirky characters.
A GARLAND OF BONES
Haines, Carolyn
Minotaur (336 pp.)
$25.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-250-25792-5

A road trip for informal but professional detective friends mixes business with pleasure when some dangerous pranks require investigation into the local spurned-woman scene.

Sarah Booth Delaney is taking a pre-Christmas break from her beloved ancestral home, Dahlia House, to travel from Zinnia, Mississippi, to the river town of Columbus, Mississippi. Tinkie Richmond, her friend and partner in the Delaney Detective Agency, and her husband, Oscar, have organized a trip to the town’s boutique B&B for their whole gang, including Sarah Booth and her boyfriend, Sheriff Coleman Peters, and their friends Cece, Jaytee, Harold, and Millie. Though Sarah Booth means the trip to be a break from her detective work, especially because Tinkie’s too pregnant to be very active, the women soon find themselves embroiled in a new case. Local femme fatale Clarissa Olson has been implicated in some not-so-harmless pranks, like filling her friend Bricey Presley’s new Cadillac to the brim with cement. Clarissa’s a real piece of work, but Sarah Booth and Tinkie are used to handling even the most high-maintenance cases with their signature Southern charm and sass. The trouble in Clarissa’s crew apparently stems from the womanizing ways of Bart Crenshaw, who gave Bricey the Cadillac, and Sarah Booth confirms that the case has something to do with cheating men when her resident haint, Jitty, follows her to Columbus to reenact all the best love-‘em-and-leave-‘em film lines. Although it’s unclear whether Coleman’s Columbus law enforcement counterpart, Jerry Goode, is on the up and up, Coleman himself is on call to rescue Sarah Booth and Tinkie from trouble, unless they rescue themselves first.

A Southern charmer who’s not quite as clever as she and her author assume.

MURDER IN THE MARGINS
Loudon, Margaret
Berkley (320 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Oct. 27, 2020
978-0-593-09926-1

An American transplant investigates the death of a British busybody.

It looks as if gothic novelist Penelope Parish may turn out to be a one-hit wonder. After realizing modest but genuine success with The Lady of the Moors, Pen finds herself stymied by writer’s block. Fortunately, she’s able to parlay her talents into a stint as writer-in-residence at the Open Book bookshop in the village of Upper-Chumley-on-Stoke. She arrives just in time for Worthington Fest, an annual hoo-hah sponsored by Arthur Worthington, the village’s resident aristocrat. Unfortunately, the Fest is marred by the discovery of Regina Bosworth’s body in the wine cellar of Worthington’s castle. To tell the truth, bossy Regina isn’t much mourned in Upper-Chumley-on-Stoke. Her husband, Gordon, quickly finds solace in the company of barmaid Daphne Potter while Pen’s new friends Gladys Watkins and India Culpepper whisper avidly about the secrets Regina held over the heads of her fellow Chumleyans. It isn’t until Charlotte Davenport, Arthur’s fiancee, asks for help that Pen decides Regina’s murderer really ought to be caught. Charlotte is much envied by the villagers both for her success as a novelist and for her conquest of the village’s own duke, who they think should be marrying an English girl (preferably one of their daughters) rather than an upstart Yank. But Pen, who isn’t envious, agrees to help her fellow American. Soon the inquisitive writer is probing Regina’s past and finding more spice than she’s enjoyed at the local takeaway.

A lively series debut for an engaging heroine.
MURDER AT AN IRISH CHRISTMAS

O’Connor, Carlene
Kensington (304 pp.)
$26.00 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-4967-1906-5

The enduringly tricky problems of meeting new relatives are compounded by murder.

Siobhán O’Sullivan took over parenting her five siblings when their parents died in an accident, giving up her plans for college to become a Garda and help run the family cafe. The six O’Sullivans have now been invited to spend Christmas in West Cork with the family of oldest brother James’ fiancee, Elise Elliot. Elise’s paternal grandfather, renowned orchestra conductor Enda Elliot, plans a Christmas concert at an old mill nearby. The group that gathers to help decorate the mill—including Enda’s third wife, Leah, a world-class violinist; his daughter Moira; and several grown grandchildren—finds the door locked. When Catherine Healy arrives with the keys, they enter and find Enda dead. It looks as if he fell from the balcony, but Siobhán, immediately suspicious, calls the local Garda. Not surprisingly given Enda’s three wives, there’s considerable tension within the Elliot family, but everyone, including the Garda, suspects Catherine’s boyfriend, whom they consider an obnoxious, useless drunk. A security tape shows someone in costume entering the mill before Enda. Siobhán can’t resist investigating, and when someone tries to run her off the road, she knows she’s struck a nerve. Siobhán’s fiance, Garda Macdara Flannery, and his mother arrive, determined to help make the holiday happy for the family even as Siobhán’s equally determined to unearth the many secrets her new relatives are hiding.

A charming combination of Christmas cheer, Irish customs, and a mystery awash in red herrings.

SILENT BITE

Rosenfelt, David
Minotaur (304 pp.)
$24.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-250-25714-7

Andy Carpenter celebrates Christmas by defending a guy accused of killing two guys whose whose once helped convict Andy’s client of manslaughter.

Six years ago, Anthony Birch decked Melvin “G-Bop” Garza, a Blood Dragon gangster who took a swing at him in a bar fight, and Melvin went down for the count. Tony had expected Frankie Zimmer and Raymond Hackett, his own gangbangers in the Fulton Street Boyz, to have his back, but they both testified against him, and he did three years. Emerging from prison, he got a job as a car mechanic and ended up buying the shop from its retiring owner. All would be well if only Frankie Zimmer hadn’t been shot with a gun buried in Tony’s backyard, wrapped in a handkerchief with Tony’s DNA. Worse still, a bunch of dogwalkers soon find the body of Raymond Hackett, also shot in the back of the head by the same gun. The case, as usual for Andy, looks impossible unless he can persuade the jury to look past the evidence prosecutor Stan Godfrey is methodically laying out and get them to buy the alternative theory that Tony’s been framed for a pair of murders that are actually linked to Luther Roman, the Blood Dragons’ badass leader. With indomitable investigator Marcus Clark handling the spadework, Andy’s confident he can go up against the fearsome Luther. But can he produce enough evidence to exonerate his client before every other possible suspect has been murdered?

Though there’s precious little Yuletide cheer, Rosenfelt springs a climactic surprise worthy of Santa.
In an earlier swindle that involved spies and war profiteering, she from her past tries to blackmail her. Although both Gideon and his mother know all about her sketchy past, Elizabeth doesn’t want scandal to ruin their sterling New York society reputations. In an earlier swindle that involved spies and war profiteering, she crossed swords with a man named Oscar Thornton, who thinks she’s dead. He discovers she’s still alive only when Gideon’s friend Logan Carstens returns from the war and his conniving fiancee, Rosemary Westerly, tells a gossip columnist about Elizabeth and Gideon’s engagement, which had been kept hush-hush. Logan tells Gideon that although he’s in love with a girl he met in France, she’s too honorable to ask him to break his engagement. Logan’s wartime sergeant tries cheating him out of money with a poorly executed con that Elizabeth immediately recognizes as the Spanish Prisoner. Then Thornton turns up and threatens Elizabeth with exposure unless she pays him off. In response, her father and half brother help her plan some countermoves that aim to get Thornton jailed as a Bolshevik spy entice Rosemary to break her engagement so Logan can marry his true love, and leave the Bates family with a spotless reputation.

A charming period piece, exciting and amusing in equal quantities.

**CITY OF SCHEMES**

*Thompson, Victoria*

Berkley (320 pp.)

$24.99 | Oct. 27, 2020

978-0-593-18832-3

A family of grifters must execute a series of tricky cons to prevent a life-wrecking scandal in post–World War I New York.

Elizabeth Miles is about to wed lawyer Gideon Bates when a dangerous man from her past tries to blackmail her. Although both Gideon and his mother know all about her sketchy past, Elizabeth doesn’t want scandal to ruin their sterling New York society reputations. In an earlier swindle that involved spies and war profiteering, she crossed swords with a man named Oscar Thornton, who thinks she’s dead. He discovers she’s still alive only when Gideon’s friend Logan Carstens returns from the war and his conniving fiancee, Rosemary Westerly, tells a gossip columnist about Elizabeth and Gideon’s engagement, which had been kept hush-hush. Logan tells Gideon that although he’s in love with a girl he met in France, she’s too honorable to ask him to break his engagement. Logan’s wartime sergeant tries cheating him out of money with a poorly executed con that Elizabeth immediately recognizes as the Spanish Prisoner. Then Thornton turns up and threatens Elizabeth with exposure unless she pays him off. In response, her father and half brother help her plan some countermoves that aim to get Thornton jailed as a Bolshevik spy entice Rosemary to break her engagement so Logan can marry his true love, and leave the Bates family with a spotless reputation.

A charming period piece, exciting and amusing in equal quantities.

**SHAKEUP**

*Woods, Stuart*

Putnam (320 pp.)

$28.00 | Oct. 13, 2020

978-0-593-18832-3

President Holly Barker’s inauguration may be complicated by murder, but it’s all in a day’s work for her lover, attorney Stone Barrington.

Returning to the suite they’ve booked at the Hay-Adams Hotel, Stone and his friends Dino and Viv Bacchetti trip over the body of Patricia Clark. By the time the strangling hits the newspapers, Holly has already friends Dino and Viv Bacchetti trip over the body of Patricia Clark. By the time the strangling hits the newspapers, Holly has already scratched the appointment of Patricia’s soon-to-be ex-husband, billionaire businessman Donald Clark, as Secretary of Commerce, and D.C. police chief Deborah Myers, Clark’s rumored lover, is about to reject Lt. Art Jacoby’s nomination of Clark as the killer and go after Jacoby in that role instead. This plot, as so often in Stone’s adventures, goes nowhere. But at least Stone’s dalliance with aspiring movie actress Lara Parks leads to some satisfying sex, though Lara has to decamp to make room for Holly when she’s able to sneak off to LA to resume her long-running affair with Stone. The execution of the bodyguard Dino has assigned to Jacoby—Dino’s the New York City police commissioner—turns up the heat on Clark and Myers until one of them is murdered too. Eddie Craft, a fortuitous witness who saw the perpetrator of this last crime, hightails it to England, where he’s immediately sucked into a scheme to steal paintings by Stone’s late mother from Stone’s estate in Hampshire. So everything in this daisy chain is more or less connected, though not in any way you might have expected.

More bedmates for the hero, two of them new, and a higher body count than usual, but otherwise the same mixture as before.

**OVER THE WOODWARD WALL**

*Baker, A. Deborah*

Tor (208 pp.)

$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020

978-0-7653-9927-4

What appears to be a typical children’s quest fantasy is more than it seems.

In Seanan McGuire’s Hugo-nominated *Middlegame*, the early-20th-century alchemist Asphodel Baker uses the pen name A. Deborah Baker to write a series of children’s books concealing coded messages to other radical alchemists. Now McGuire has taken on the Baker pen name and actually written the first book. Tangle-haired, adventurous Zib and obsessively tidy, rule-following Avery both climb over a mysterious wall and find themselves in the Up-and-Under, a dangerous and magical land populated by monsters, Crow Girls, giant talking owls, and other fabulous creatures. Their way home lies along the gleaming, elusive, improbable road to the Impossible City, where the Queen of Wands will surely be able to send them home…if the other kings and queens weren’t so determined to strew obstacles in their way. The plot draws heavily on the tropes of a stock 20th-century children’s fantasy, but the sharp and thoughtful perspective of the narrator transforms the book into a 21st-century commentary on such works. It also puts forth a deeply felt and carefully considered exploration of the foolish myths adults teach the next generation and the unpleasant consequences of parents trying to force their offspring to fit into a mold, with an emphasis on the negative effect on those children’s relationships with their peers. These themes link the book to the author’s Wayward Children portal fantasy series, which touches on similar issues. *Middlegame* readers searching for hidden alchemical meaning may not find it beyond the obvious naming of the Kings and
Queens of the Up-and-Under after court cards in the tarot (often linked to alchemy). Selections from the text included in MiddleGame also appear, but the author's history in that novel doesn't quite match up with what's presented here. MiddleGame places Baker as a contemporary of L. Frank Baum and her books as commercial and alchemical rivals with Baum's Oz series. But numerous bits of context and reference within this children's fantasy (planned suburban communities, a woman working in a street repair crew, playgrounds with slides, etc.) place it considerably later than the dawn of the 20th century. Surely that is a deliberate choice on McGuire's part, but what does it portend?

A peculiar but often profound piece of metafiction whose emotional landscape offers more riches than its physical one.

MASTER OF POISONS
Hairston, Andrea
Tor (512 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-984806-13-0

An epic fantasy set in an African-inspired world on the brink of ecological disaster.

Djola, the Arkhysian Empire's Master of Poisons, has a plan to stop the spreading poison desert. Hezram, a powerful priest, offers to use dark blood magic. But Djola believes in his “map to tomorrow” which involves searching for a powerful spell to unravel the cause of the dangerous void-storms. Awa has an affinity with bees and a talent for traveling to Smokeland, the spirit realm. Sold to the Green Elders on her 12th birthday, Awa comes of age on the margins of empire, learning from Yari, the griot (storyteller) of griots. Along the way, she will learn to question much of what she's been taught: about the Elders, about people the Empire calls “savages,” and about “vesons,” who, like Yari, are neither man nor woman. Both Djola and Awa will be tested, and both will make enormous sacrifices to save the people—and the world—they love. This complex story spans years, travels to every corner of a richly imagined fantasy world, and even dips into the minds of elephants, bees, and rivers: “The Bees... dream of pools of nectar, clouds of pollen, and evening dew heavy with flower scent. Why dream of anything else?”

This book’s lyrical language and unsparing vision make it a mind-expanding must-read.

CRAZY STUPID BROMANCE
Adams, Lyssa Kay
Berkley (352 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-984806-13-0

A woman learns the father she never knew needs a kidney transplant. Alexis Carlisle is settling into a quiet life; a few years earlier, she joined several women to reveal they had been sexually harassed by a celebrity chef. Now she owns a cat cafe in Nashville, but she is also committed to providing a safe space for other sexual assault survivors. Alexis assumes a new customer, a shy young woman named Candi, is looking for support, but it turns out Candi has a personal relationship to disclose. A DNA test for an ancestry website has identified Candi and Alexis as probable siblings. Their father has only a few months to live unless he has a kidney transplant, and Alexis is his last hope for a compatible family match. Alexis approaches her best friend, Noah Logan, for advice, but he fears she is yet again rushing in to save others before thinking about herself. Noah has been hiding his love for her for years out of respect for her traumatic past. His best friend, Mack, and the rest of the men in their book club—introduced in Bromance
April struggle with other people’s perceptions of them: *Game of Thrones* will undoubtedly catch the parallels, giving a healthy dose of fan service with a quasi-fix-it feel. Both Marcus and April know everyone views him as vapid while April is often first judged on her weight. While this is a sweet romance that makes it just as beautiful and gentle as the love that blooms between Marcus and April, a beautiful woman in a ball gown trying to hail a cab outside the United Nations, and Gabby insists they pick her up. Her stepmother, Ana Maria is conflicted about her new life as a lady. She loves the fancy gowns but loathes all the suitors interested only in her large dowry. She craves independence and purpose. After Nash, Duke of Malvern, helps her out of two dangerous situations, he insists on teaching her self-defense techniques. Even if he is a behemoth who communicates mostly through grunts, Ana Maria desires him. She expects he sees her like a sister because they grew up together, but Nash’s feelings toward Ana Maria are not of the brotherly sort. However, even though he’s looking to marry, she’s too risky of a choice since he actually cares about her. Nash worries that his abusive, philandering father’s penchant for violence was passed down. When their fighting lessons turn physical in a different way, the pair have to decide if they’re willing to open up to each other enough to create something real and lasting. Narrow in scope, this story homes in on its leads and the internal conflicts that initially keep them apart. Although repetitive and unsubtle, the prose is nonetheless quick-paced and often sharp and funny. With a captivating, easy-to-love couple and deliciously hot scenes, this breezy read will entertain, if not totally enchant.

A solid choice when searching for a light, charming, historical happy-ever-after.

**A PRINCESS FOR CHRISTMAS**

*Holiday, Jenny*

Avon/HarperCollins (384 pp.)

$15.99 paper | Oct. 13, 2020

978-0-06-205207-3

A New York taxi driver picks up a European princess in desperate need of a lift.

Leo Ricci is a young man of 25 with a heavy burden: He became the guardian of his 11-year-old sister, Gabby; after their parents died in a tragic car accident. Leo holds down several jobs in order to make ends meet, including driving a friend’s cab. One day, while he’s driving Gabby home from school, they see a beautiful woman in a ball gown trying to hail a cab outside the United Nations, and Gabby insists they pick her up. Her Royal Highness Princess Marie of Eldovia is in New York determined to kick-start political and economic changes that will improve life in her small European country. Marie appreciates Leo’s charming combination of old-fashioned charm and gentle

**TALL, DUKE, AND DANGEROUS**

*Frampton, Megan*

Avon/HarperCollins (384 pp.)

$7.99 paper | Oct. 27, 2020

978-0-06-286744-5

A duke and a lady who feel out of place in society find a sense of belonging with each other.

Treated as a servant up until the deaths of her duke father and her cruel stepmother, Ana Maria is conflicted about her new life as a lady. She loves the fancy gowns but loathes all the suitors interested only in her large dowry. She craves independence and purpose. After Nash, Duke of Malvern, helps her out of two dangerous situations, he insists on teaching her self-defense techniques. Even if he is a behemoth who communicates mostly through grunts, Ana Maria desires him. She expects he sees her like a sister because they grew up together, but Nash’s feelings toward Ana Maria are not of the brotherly sort. However, even though he’s looking to marry, she’s too risky of a choice since he actually cares about her. Nash worries that his abusive, philandering father’s penchant for violence was passed down. When their fighting lessons turn physical in a different way, the pair have to decide if they’re willing to open up to each other enough to create something real and lasting. Narrow in scope, this story homes in on its leads and the internal conflicts that initially keep them apart. Although repetitive and unsubtle, the prose is nonetheless quick-paced and often sharp and funny. With a captivating, easy-to-love couple and deliciously hot scenes, this breezy read will entertain, if not totally enchant.

A solid choice when searching for a light, charming, historical happy-ever-after.

**SPOILER ALERT**

*Dade, Olivia*

Avon/HarperCollins (320 pp.)

$15.99 paper | Oct. 6, 2020

978-0-06-300554-9

The power of fan fiction becomes the romantic catalyst between an actor and a cosplayer.

Actor Marcus Caster-Rupp has shot his final scene as Aeneas in the TV series *Gods of the Gates*. Though the set has been home to him for seven years, he hasn’t been particularly pleased with the direction the showrunners have taken his character. To work out his frustrations, he’s secretly been writing fan fiction about his own character, giving Aeneas the storyline he deserves. The fanfic writing community has been a boon to him, leading him to “meet” one of his closest friends, Unapologetic Lavinia Stan, also known as Ulsie. Ulsie is really April Whittier, geologist and secret nerd determined to remain secret no longer. For too long, she’s hidden her love of *Gods of the Gates* and is now determined to be outgoing about her fanfic writing and cosplay projects. April starts by tweeting a picture of her self wearing a costume of Lavinia, a character she feels right at home. If not, there’s a terminology learning curve.

**Geek out with this romantic homage to fan culture.**

**Book Club** (2019) and *Undercover Bromance* (2020)—encourage Noah to tell Alexis how he feels. Along with the kidney transplant story, the book has other meaty subplots—the men of the Bromance Book Club are planning Mack’s wedding, Alexis’s business is being targeted by a neighboring merchant with a vendetta, and Noah struggles with strife in his own family. The romance is a third-string plot, and though readers will be happy to see Alexis and Noah transition from friends to lovers, the romance is disjointed and unfocused. The large, unwieldy cast of characters exists to create crises for Alexis and Noah to solve or offer advice on how they can get back together.

**Numerous subplots overwhelm a romance between friends.**

*Avon/HarperCollins (320 pp.)*

978-0-06-286744-5

$15.99 paper | Oct. 6, 2020

978-0-06-300554-9

Dade, Olivia

*Gods of the Gates*.

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**Geek out with this romantic homage to fan culture.**

*Avon/HarperCollins (320 pp.)*

978-0-06-286744-5

$15.99 paper | Oct. 6, 2020

978-0-06-300554-9

Dade, Olivia

*Gods of the Gates*.
An exciting start to a new Regency romance series which promises to highlight new voices from the era.

**HER NIGHT WITH THE DUKE**

Queeny, Diana

Avon/HarperCollins (384 pp.)

$7.99 paper | Sep. 29, 2020

978-0-06-298679-5

A widow’s one-night stand goes from total bliss to total shock.

Leela, better known to society as Lady Delilah Chambers, dowager countess of the Earl of Devon, has settled into her new life as a widow, taking the opportunity to travel abroad and write popular book series about her adventures. After years when she was loved by her husband but loathed by society and her stepson (now Lord Devon) because of her mother’s Arab heritage, she’s grateful to be out of the glare of the ton and not beholden to any man’s wishes. She’s not looking for excitement but finds it anyway in the person of Elliot Townsend, Duke of Huntington, when a rainy night traps them together in the Black Swan Inn. Their sexual chemistry is fierce, and Leela and Hunt agree to one passionate night before heading their separate ways. As a result, both are aghast when they find the next day that their separate ways have led them back to each other—because Hunt is all but engaged to Leela’s stepdaughter, Tori. They try to avoid each other on the Devon estate, knowing that Hunt and Tori’s engagement is the best and most rational choice for everyone given their respective places in society. But their attraction is too strong to resist, especially once it becomes clear that Hunt and Tori aren’t well suited. Leela and Hunt’s amorous scenes are page-turners, but it’s Quincy’s extraordinary ability to convey complex emotions that sets the book apart. Quincy’s own background as a first-generation Arab American also allows her to bring indispensable detail to the story, which is enriched by details of Leela’s journey to learn about, and come to appreciate, her “Levantine” heritage—a welcome addition to the overwhelmingly White ranks of Regency romance.

An exciting start to a new Regency romance series which promises to highlight new voices from the era.
	eering—hell’s the only person who treats her like a woman, not a princess. She hires him to be her driver for the rest of her visit, and both try to resist the powerful attraction they feel. When her trip comes to an end, she impulsively invites Leo and Gabby to Eldovia for Christmas. Holiday is clearly aiming at readers who enjoy Hallmark Christmas movies, which often feature sweet, everyday characters thrust into extraordinary love affairs with royalty. There is depth and nuance in Leo and Marie’s romance despite their vast differences in wealth and status. Marie and Leo are both determined to live with dignity and strive to achieve their individual goals. The novel is charming and self-aware and successfully plays with the conventions of the “commoner falling in love with royalty” script.

Sizzling chemistry and witty banter elevate a common Christmas romance premise into a royally entertaining fairy tale.

**SNAPPED**

Martin, Alexa

Berkley (352 pp.)

$16.00 paper | Oct. 20, 2020

978-0-393-10250-3

A woman examines her own life after landing her dream public relations job with a pro football team.

Elliot Reed is a biracial woman who knows working for the Denver Mustangs will be challenging, but she doesn’t expect to be thrust into the middle of a PR nightmare the first week of the season. Quinton Howard Junior, the team’s new Black quarterback, protests racism in football and society by taping over the league’s name on his uniform and taking a knee during the national anthem. The team’s owner tells Elliot that if she can’t convince Quinton to stop protesting, she’ll eventually lose her job. Elliot understands Quinton’s reasoning, but she decides to use her PR skills to convince him to start his own foundation, hoping it will redirect his energy while placating the team’s owner. The romance is a late-stage and underdeveloped thread in the novel. Instead, the focus is on Elliot’s personal journeys: maintaining her female friendships, struggling to keep her job, dealing with her grief over her father’s death, and learning how racism works. After Elliot’s Black mother died when she was a baby, her White father “raised [her] with the mentality to be color-blind,” and she learns that racism is real from Quinton, his agent, and her White friends. Perhaps Martin’s intent is to teach White readers about racism in sports and in America, but unfortunately this means Elliot is characterized as someone who has spent her entire life ignoring the racial aggressions she has witnessed and experienced. She tells Quinton, “I try to ignore race, and what you’re doing is forcing me to examine things in a way I never have.” The book neuters Quinton’s Colin Kaepernick–like protest, turning it into a cutesy romantic plot device instead of respecting it as a furious, full-throated repudiation of the real injustices faced by Black Americans.

A quarterback’s fight for systemic change in football takes a back seat to his girlfriend’s personal journey.
PROOF OF CORRUPTION
Bribery, Impeachment, and Pandemic in the Age of Trump
Abramson, Seth
St. Martin's (576 pp.)
$32.50 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-250-27299-7

The third volume in a trilogy devoted to recording Donald Trump’s countless misdeeds, civil and criminal.

As an exercise in what Abramson calls “curatorial journalism,” the narrative is often difficult to stomach due to the author’s careful and exhaustive evidence for his contention that the Trump administration exhibits a “perniciously systemic penchant for four types of activity” that are key to the definition of corruption. Three of these are impeachable, and the fourth comprises “nonimpeachable conduct that indicates a president is unfit to serve as a matter of ethics, conformity to democratic norms, and commitment to the rule of law.” A critical question is whether Trump has been so thoroughly compromised as a result of foreign entanglements that he constitutes a security risk—that is, he “cannot be trusted to...put the safety and security of the United States ahead of personal avarice or ambition.” Abramson, of course, answers that question in the affirmative.

At the center of his investigation is the multifaceted matter of Trump’s seeking the assistance of foreign governments in order to provide negative material about his political opponents: Russia, Ukraine, even China. Trump’s machinations, carried out by means of various lieutenants such as Paul Manafort and supported by legal enablers such as William Barr, make for maddening reading. So do his many missteps, including the curious choice to open negotiations with Taiwan in December 2016 for a Trump-branded airport project, the first direct negotiation with the nation on the part of an American president since 1979. Even so, Trump pressed the government of mainland China for information on Joe Biden and his son, which, as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo blithely explained, “is what we do.” That China did not jump to oblige Trump helps explain his labeling of Covid-19—his handling of which, by Abramson’s account, has been both corrupt and inept—the “China plague.”

Treasonous? Perhaps not—but Abramson’s catalog makes a strong case for Trump’s outsized, boundless corruption.

These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

WHY DIDN’T WE RIOT by Isaac J. Bailey..................117
ANCIENT BONES by Madelaine Böhm, et al........120
THE GREAT SECRET by Jennet Conant................129
WE’RE BETTER THAN THIS by Elizah Cummings with James Dale..................131
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TRUMP ON TRIAL by Kevin Sullivan & Mary Jordan.........159
STALIN by Ronald Grigor Suny..............................159
TOO MUCH AND NEVER ENOUGH by Mary L. Trump........161
BLOCKCHAIN CHICKEN FARM by Xiaowei Wang..................162
SPACE 2069 by David Whitehouse...........................163
What’s the song you’d like to exit the stage with? *Money* executive editor Ayers solicited answers from 30 musicians, resulting in an oddly entertaining if morbid anthology.

Perhaps in a bid to forestall the inevitable, The Decemberists frontman Colin Meloy names Van Morrison’s “Astral Weeks,” a song that runs a little longer than seven minutes. Lauren Mayberry, singer for Scottish synth-pop group Chvrches, takes the length down by half with Katy Perry’s “Firework,” and New Pornographers’ A.C. Newman goes with Gerry Rafferty’s “Baker Street,” which he describes as “the most perfectly recorded song.” The collection is full of surprises. For example, the sometimes grim rocker Stephen Malkmus selects Gordon Lightfoot’s sweet-natured “Carefree Highway,” finding a dark cloud to wrap around that silver lining, while Lucinda Williams weeps at the folk standard, “Shenandoah,” a song “just so beautiful, so gorgeous,” even as her own songs are so often about death simply because, as the years roll by, death becomes an ever more constant companion. A pleasingly elusive answer comes from actor and musician Will Oldham, who performs under the name Bonnie “Prince” Billy and who also tries to cheat death a touch by extending the going-out period: “If someone would say, ‘Okay, let’s make a new record.’” The best parts of the narrative, though, which is often prosaic, are the editor’s own listicles focusing on well-known places from Mohenjo Daro to Machu Picchu, there are plenty of places that don’t always figure in the standard texts. The Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump in Alberta is one such venue, a place that hugs the flank of the Rockies and was used for millennia as a place where Paleo-Indians and their later descendants drove herds of bison to their deaths. Chaco Canyon, another North American site, has been the subject of academic argument for generations, and Bahn notes that many archaeologists “now believe that the canyon was perhaps not continuously occupied, but rather it served as a center for when far-flung Chacoan communities temporarily came together for ceremonial, religious, and trading purposes.” Curiously, he does not add that many other archaeologists have a contrary view. Curiously, too, he places Teotihuacan, Monte Albán, Tenochtitlan, Chichén Itzá, and Palenque—all, along with several other sites he describes, located in Mexico—in South America. Machu Picchu indisputably is in South America, as are many places Bahn covers that don’t get much attention, such as Chan Chan and Chavín de Huántar, also in Peru. Strangely, Easter Island, which Bahn eloquently describes, is the last site in the book, following Australian locales instead of being tied to South America (after all, it belongs to Chile). Organizational matters aside, the text is generally well written, the coverage is global, and the color photographs are stunning.

Good reading for the armchair or aspiring archaeologist of the house.

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**INCREDIBLE ARCHAEOLOGY**

*Inspiring Places From Our Human Past*

Bahn, Paul

Smithsonian Books (320 pp.)

$40.00 | Oct. 27, 2020

978-1-58834-692-6

Archaeology magazine contributing editor Bahn serves up a richly illustrated grand tour of the world’s iconic sites.

The current popular interest in archaeology, writes the author, speaks to a couple of things: As evidenced by the proliferation of genealogy websites and DNA tests for origins, people have a fascination with the past, and “answering really big questions such as the origins of archaeology can also be tremendous fun.” The text is full of lightly worn scholarship, and while it focuses on well-known places from Mohenjo Daro to Machu Picchu, there are plenty of places that don’t always figure in the standard texts. The Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump in Alberta is one such venue, a place that hugs the flank of the Rockies and was used for millennia as a place where Paleo-Indians and their later descendants drove herds of bison to their deaths. Chaco Canyon, another North American site, has been the subject of academic argument for generations, and Bahn notes that many archaeologists “now believe that the canyon was perhaps not continuously occupied, but rather it served as a center for when far-flung Chacoan communities temporarily came together for ceremonial, religious, and trading purposes.” Curiously, he does not add that many other archaeologists have a contrary view. Curiously, too, he places Teotihuacan, Monte Albán, Tenochtitlan, Chichén Itzá, and Palenque—all, along with several other sites he describes, located in Mexico—in South America. Machu Picchu indisputably is in South America, as are many places Bahn covers that don’t get much attention, such as Chan Chan and Chavín de Huántar, also in Peru. Strangely, Easter Island, which Bahn eloquently describes, is the last site in the book, following Australian locales instead of being tied to South America (after all, it belongs to Chile). Organizational matters aside, the text is generally well written, the coverage is global, and the color photographs are stunning.

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**THE TANGLED WEB WE WEAVE**

*Inside the Shadow System That Shapes the Internet*

Ball, James

Melville House (272 pp.)

$27.99 | Oct. 6, 2020

978-1-61219-899-6

Expansive look back at fissures and missed opportunities in the evolution of “who wields power and who keeps it in check on the internet.”

As the special projects editor of the *Guardian*, Ball shared a Pulitzer Prize for her coverage of the Edward Snowden revelations. Now the global editor of the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, the author confidently assembles a critical history of the technology, politics, and business of online life, arguing that its appealing spontaneity invited unforeseen consequences, from financial malfeasance to authoritarianism. He keeps this sprawling account lucid, with eight chapters devoted to “The Architects,” “The Money Men,” “The Rulemakers,” “The Resistance,” and so forth. Ball begins with the internet’s birth via the academic-military collaboration of DARPA; its insular, improvised nature led to persistent ambiguities regarding control and security. Though these infrastructural issues were
literally written on napkins, “the protocol they developed is of course the one still in use across the internet today.” Regarding
the more recent web 2.0, the author argues that “the core of
the internet’s harvesting of data is its business model.” This
lies at the heart of today’s social unrest, from privacy erosions
to accelerating disinformation. “The internet giants are viewed
with mistrust, accused of playing a role in spreading misinformation, enforcing censorship and avoiding taxes,” writes the
author. “Its billionaires are scrutinized and condemned for
their working practices. Residents around the palaces of Silicon
Valley have come to resent their corporate neighbours. Has the
internet and the people running it changed so much in such a
short time?” Ball captures the perspectives and backgrounds of
a variety of significant players, from tech pioneers to privacy
advocates; one venture capitalist suggests that time is running
out to avoid a dystopia of class strife. In discussing online adver-
tising, the author navigates the jargon to suggest that “when
everything is data-driven, the advantages go to whoever has the
biggest scale, and so the richest data.”

A rueful, engaging discussion of the internet’s problem-
atic centrality to these difficult times.

LIKE A BOY BUT NOT A BOY
Navigating Life, Mental Health, and Parenthood
Outside the Gender Binary
bennett, andrea
Arsenal Pulp Press (272 pp.)
$18.95 paper | Oct. 20, 2020
978-1-55152-821-2

A National Magazine Award–winning
writer and nonbinary parent explores
“the simultaneously banal but engrossing task of living in a body.”
Born in 1984 in Dundas, Ontario, a small town where “gen-
der roles were binary,” bennett took refuge in the term tomboy.
As an adolescent, writes the author, “I began to identify with
the world of female masculinity best understood and embraced
by queer theory. I pursued masculine-coded work, becoming
a bike mechanic. I grew up and, though I dated men, came to
identify as queer.” The author, who has written one book of
poetry and two travel guides, also found work as a janitor, fact-
checker, baker, and editor at Adbusters (her “second-worst” job,
after Tim Hortons), among many other occupations (37 in all).
In addition to their personal story, the author illustrates their
inclusive ethics via 16 profiles drawn from interviews with
queer-identified millennials born and raised in small towns in
rural Canada. Although their identities range from gay and
trans to bigender and Two-Spirit, these young adults share a
common trajectory from rural to urban life. “Getting to the
city,” observes Kyle, who didn’t come out until he was in his late
20s, “provides some sort of anonymity, and some sort of security
blanket, and the opportunity to meet other queer people.” The
author also offers fresh thoughts on death, mental health (at
18, bennett was diagnosed bipolar II), and process of the birth
of her child. But for all its attention to gender issues, queer
identity and female masculinity, the book’s most effective essay
might be the last, which tackles class issues. “37 Jobs and 21
Houses” conveys the constant upheavals and financial insecu-
rities of working-class life by presenting a linear narrative of the
author’s peripatetic life. Here as elsewhere, bennett’s personal
experiences serve as the roots of their queer politics.

Exploring beyond binary conceptions of gender, bennett
shares fresh perspectives on subjects cerebral and practical.
A polemic against the ongoing dismantling of public education.

Black, a law professor at the University of South Carolina, boasts an unusual background. Though he grew up in a pious, politically conservative, and overwhelmingly White community—“the three categories were so intertwined that I never thought to distinguish them”—he elected to major as an undergraduate in African American studies. If, as Black writes, it was public education that gave him access to the American promise of upward mobility, so should public education serve the same purpose for all Americans. The assault on the system by private individuals, to say nothing of ideological enemies such as Betsy DeVos and the Koch brothers, serves the interest of inequality and has clear racial and anti-democratic components. Arguing that public education may provide the glue necessary to put the country back together after the Trump era, Black embarks on an insistent, sometimes repetitive consideration of its constitutional foundations, noting that education is enshrined as a right in every state constitution—an elevated role that, indeed, was a sine qua non for formal admission into the federal system. It is precisely in the states of the former Confederacy and its satellites that the war against public education has been most pitched, areas in which there are high concentrations of African American students. Black’s argument is persuasive, though too often themes and bits of data are repeated to no real purpose. Still, the author makes a solid and well-founded case for considering public education to be a pillar of American democratic governance and not a commodity to be cheapened, bargained away, and privatized, the apparent goal of the current presidential administration. Instead, Black writes, “states do not need to experiment with public education; they need to fund it.”

Education reformers and public school advocates will find a powerful ally here.

We know a fraction of what we think we know—and, writes journalist Blastland, even that is likely to be wrong. Still, the author makes a solid and well-founded case for considering public education to be a pillar of American democratic governance and not a commodity to be cheapened, bargained away, and privatized, the apparent goal of the current presidential administration. Instead, Black writes, “states do not need to experiment with public education; they need to fund it.”

Education reformers and public school advocates will find a powerful ally here.
of volunteers, then wrote down the opposite of what the respondents said, only to have them passionately and rationally defend the viewpoint exactly counter to their own. We believe what we want to, it seems. Chaos and contingency also help explain the rise of Donald Trump and the success of the Brexit movement, neither of which should ever have happened. The author closes with a dozen useful pointers for navigating uncertainty, including the mandate, “Don’t use probability to disguise ignorance.” Skeptics will be sure of even less after reading Blastland’s book—and that’s a step in the right direction.

ANCIENT BONES

Unearthing the Astonishing New Story of How We Became Human
Böhme, Madelaine & Braun, Rüdiger & Breier, Florian
Trans. by Billinghurst, Jane
Greystone Books (376 pp.)
$28.95 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-77164-751-9

A fascinating forensic inquiry into the origins of humankind.

In this exciting investigation into the long and ancient path of humans, the authors explore the connections among evolution, climate, and environment. It has long been the understanding that the earliest humans evolved in Africa and spread from there to the other land masses. But recent discoveries, aided by advances in genetics and our ability to more accurately read fossil evidence, have suggested many different scenarios. “Europe 14 million to 7 million years ago must have been like a giant laboratory where great apes made huge evolutionary leaps forward,” they write. “Then, as climate conditions became more challenging in Europe and more favorable once again in Africa, these more highly evolved great apes would have returned to Africa.”

The narrative spotlights the authors’ pleasing explanatory style, as they describe the evolutionary process and the mechanisms and geographical spread of changing climatic conditions. The authors energetically highlight major discoveries—e.g., Graecopithecus as “the first potential early hominin” who “was closer to modern humans than to modern great apes” or the 6-million-year-old footprint from a biped discovered on Crete in 2002—and consistently show that there is much more to the story than old bones and radiometric measurements. They re-create entire vanished environments; present a vibrant picture of the hand’s evolution for different functions; propose a scenario for the capture and use of fire; and explore the value of running, language, food, and wanderlust. “Paleoanthropology urgently needs new hypotheses so that the data we now have can be categorized in a way that makes sense,” they write. Throughout this eye-opening book, the authors present a number of them, and any reader interested in the study of early humans and their predecessors will find plenty of material here.

An impressive introduction to the burgeoning recalibration of paleoanthropology.
A gathering of critical responses to the border crisis by Mexican poets, scholars, and activists.

Donald Trump is unquestionably the dark lord of this piece. Writes novelist Boullosa, “his peculiar blend of racism and xenophobia, opportunism and cynicism, foolishness and cunning, cruelty and hypocrisy demands attention.” Yet Trump is not alone. As several of the contributors to this anthology point out, Barack Obama deported more Mexicans than has Trump, though there were more arriving during Obama’s administration. Mexico, as linguist Yásnaya Elena Aguilar Gil points out, has its own brand of xenophobic nativists who wish to block off the country’s southern border. “Fear becomes hatred, and that hatred is given a legal justification, when in reality it’s nothing more than an administrative offense: coming into Mexico without papers is not a crime.” Walls, by the account of several contributors, speak to a failure of imagination, to say nothing of humanity. As Reforma founder and former editor René Delgado writes, the Trumpian wall to the north in particular represents “the deterioration of diplomacy, the perversion of politics, and something even worse: the capitalization of the misfortune of those who are forced to leave their country in search of opportunity.” Under Trump, in the guise of safeguarding the nation from “bad hombres,” the U.S. “has constructed the largest immigration detention infrastructure in the world,” infamous for holding illegal crossers—including many thousands of children—in what are called perreras, or dog pounds. When asked by novelist Valeria Luiselli whether she regretted trying to enter the U.S., one imprisoned woman said, “now I regret it, a thousand times. I think I’d rather die of
one gunshot in my own country than let them kill me slowly in this one.” That one sentence speaks volumes about a system of injustice on both sides of the border that no wall, however high, can contain.

A welcome, necessary rejoinder to critics of border policy on this side of the line.

WHERE I COME FROM
Stories From the Deep South
Bragg, Rick
Knopf (256 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-0-593-31778-5

A collection of slice-of-life columns from a celebrated Southern writer. Like skilled comedians, skilled columnists use the vulnerabilities and idiosyncrasies of their lives to tell stories with universal themes. As you learn about their people and their places, you find new ways to look at your own. In this compilation of previously published columns, the vast majority of which appeared in Southern Living and Garden & Gun, Bragg isn’t out to convince you of anything. The Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist and popular memoirist just wants you to know what it’s like to live in his native South. That means eating sausage gravy in a diner, a po’boy in New Orleans, and hot chicken in Nashville—there’s a lot here about food, and Bragg knows how to make just about any dish sound delicious. It also means driving a Chevrolet, going fishing with your brother, beating back fire ants, hearing stories about a sweet departed aunt, and even having close encounters with Jerry Lee Lewis (Bragg wrote the music legend’s biography). The most poignant of these short works is a piece on a dog called Skinny, so named “because she was two dogs high and half a dog wide.” To be sure, not every piece is as memorable as Skinny’s, and a few are flimsy. Among them, the author writes multiple letters to Santa, and you can only go to that well once—if you should have occasion to go there at all. But such contrivances are the exception. On balance, the columns are clever, unassuming, and, most notably, told in a distinctive voice. They do what good columns do: sometimes tug at your heart, sometimes make you laugh to yourself, sometimes both. You read one and then go on with your day with a better sense of what it’s like to be from somewhere.

A column-per-day prescription for those looking to find a new friend on the page.

WHAT DO ANIMALS THINK AND FEEL?
An Investigation Into Emotion and Behavior
Brensing, Karsten
Pegasus (384 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-64313-554-0

A medley of anecdotes about animal behavior.

Can dolphins think strategically? To answer that question, Brensing, a German biologist and behavioral scientist who has written multiple books about the wonders of animal life, shares the following anecdote: Kelly, a dolphin at the Mississippi-based Institute for Marine Mammal Studies, was trained to collect pieces of litter in her pool and exchange them with her trainer for fish. “One day,” writes the author, “rather than bringing it to the trainer, Kelly chose to hide a little scrap of paper she had found, possibly because she wasn’t particularly hungry” at that moment. More spectacularly, once Kelly decided to exchange her paper for fish, she first tore it into several smaller pieces, so that she could receive a fish for each piece. Brensing’s point is clear: Yes, dolphins can strategize, and they also demonstrate a vast range of eye-opening abilities—as do countless other animals. The book is a compendium of fascinating information, but the narrative is
scattershot and sometimes overly conversational (“Crazy, isn’t it?”). The author’s tendency to energetically jump from topic to topic—Ants can recognize themselves in a mirror! Dogs play games organized by a few polite rules! Masturbation is “widespread in the animal kingdom”—makes for dizzying reading. Furthermore, Brensing often dumbs down his explanations to the point that some of them no longer make sense. “In order to make this experiment comprehensible,” he writes in his discussion of mouse memory, “I need to grossly simplify something that is extremely complex and draw a somewhat dodgy analogy.” Many readers will wonder why. The best science writers describe complex subjects to lay audiences without resorting to “dodgy analogies.” Perhaps Brensing should have had a bit more faith in his readers; he might have ended up with a more satisfying book. Often marred by oversimplifications, the narrative would have benefited from a tighter focus.

A collection of intriguing material presented unevenly.

DECODING THE WORLD
A Road Map for the Questioner
Bronson, Po & Gupta, Arvind
Twelve (352 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-5387-3431-5

A walk on the weird side of biotech and other trends with journalist Bronson, now a partner at venture capital firm IndieBio, and Gupta, who founded the company.

The San Francisco–based company funds stranger-than-fiction projects such as growing hamburger in petri dishes, and much of this book reads like a public relations vehicle for Bronson and Gupta’s “supremely cool” company and its industry. Taking turns narrating, the co-authors meld bromance, corporate history, and dispatches from the wilder shores of five supertrends: “China,” “Climate,” the “Genetic Revolution,” the “War on Truth” and “A.I. & Robots.” Some of the 33 chapters—with titles that consist of bizarre real-life headlines that are sometimes only tangentially related to their contents—e.g., “Meet the Pope’s Astronomer, Who Says He’d Baptize an Alien If Given the Chance”—end with screenshots of the authors’ gnomic text-message conversations. With dizzying leaps, the authors jump from topic to topic: how China is bankrolling global urban development, biotech advances such as a robot drone that plants trees, gene-editing kits used in high school classrooms, and “gummy bears” made from resynthesized proteins of a wooly mammoth. Often, the authors seem too ready to accept iffy claims, some from sources with financial ties to IndieBio. Gupta describes two minutes he spent up to his neck in ice-cold water at the urging of Dutch extreme athlete Wim Hof; Gupta didn’t seriously challenge Hof’s view that Gupta wouldn’t get sick on his flight home because the plunge “fully activated [his] immune cells”—a potentially dangerous idea in a pandemic. Elsewhere, the authors serve up an alphabet soup of scientific terms that may deter anyone who hasn’t memorized the periodic table. The paradoxical result is a book—the first in a trilogy—that may daunt low-tech readers while proving too glib for the more scientifically literate. Let’s hope Bronson returns to form in the second volume.

An awkward mix of hard and soft science from the frontiers of genetics and other fields.
Morgan Jerkins writes that in her family, “No one spoke about the past—the goal was to move forward and never look back.” Jerkins, a senior editor at Zora and author of the essay collection *This Will Be My Undoing* (2018), was born and raised in New Jersey and now lives in New York. But she knew that forebears on both sides had come from the South, joining millions of African Americans on the Great Migration to New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and other northern destinations in the years from 1915 to 1970. For her new book, *Wandering in Strange Lands: A Daughter of the Great Migration Reclaims Her Roots* (Harper/HaperCollins, Aug. 4), Jerkins, 28, hit the road to learn more about the places her people came from, with stops in the low country of South Carolina and Georgia, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Los Angeles. The Kirkus reviewer calls it a “revelatory exploration of the meaning of Blackness.” Jerkins spoke about the book over Zoom; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

The book is very thoroughly reported and researched—you have endnotes for everything—but it’s also very personal. The reader is really making this journey with you. I’m a young woman. I’m only 5 feet tall, I wasn’t carrying a weapon, I was in the Deep South. I was traveling sometimes through “sundown” towns [all-White communities where, historically, Blacks were not welcome after dark]. All I had was my recorder, my cellphone, and gas in the tank—that’s it. When I went into Black communities, I had to really humble myself and say, yeah, we’re Black—our histories are interrelated, but they’re not completely overlapping. I wanted to bring [readers] into this intimate space—my thoughts and feelings—because for a lot of the trip I was alone. You’re sitting in a hotel room, and you’re processing such heavy material—I wanted readers to feel that with me.

How did you approach going into these unfamiliar places and getting people to open up and talk to you about their lives and their histories?

Even though I’m a Black person, I was viewed in certain parts—especially in the Gullah Geechee community [of Georgia and South Carolina]—with a certain hesitation. I’m viewed as a part of the establishment because I was in New York, I had a New York publisher, and I’d written for mainstream publications. I knew that a lot of these communities had a terrible history of people coming in there without a liaison, sometimes interviewing them without their consent, recording them, and it would be part of somebody’s scholarship without giving proper acknowledgement. So I researched people online before I traveled, and I would email them, tell them who my publisher was, give them a link to my website, so they could
see I was legit. And I would talk to them on the phone prior to going there.

In Hilton Head, South Carolina, you see how the Gullah Geechee community, often without formal deeds to the land, has been pushed aside to make way for the tourism industry.

It’s considered one of the most prime vacation spots in the country, and there’s this romantic nostalgia for the South. Anywhere you go, it’s Plantation Café, Plantation Street, Plantation Road, Plantation Grill. What in the world? What does that say to Black people? Any time you turn down a road, when you go into a store, it reminds you of the carnage. Take a look at where you live. Take a look at the landscape. Take a look at the residential communities, and ask yourself what came before it. What was erased for you to be able to vacation in Hilton Head? Who was uprooted? Who’s buried underneath the place where you play golf?

When you were in Louisiana researching the Creole side of your family, you encountered some uncomfortable truths. Could you talk about that?

So much of what I’ve been taught about my Blackness is very streamlined and narrow: Your ancestors were captured from the West African coast, they made the treacherous journey across the Atlantic Ocean, they landed in the Colonies, they were enslaved, they were freed by the Emancipation Proclamation. The civil rights movement. Obama. That’s it. I didn’t know that free people coexisted with enslaved people. I didn’t know that there were free people of color who owned slaves themselves and participated in the plantation economy. That was hard for me, because so much of what I predicated my Blackness on in the American context is subjugation, is oppression. That’s why I kept reiterating in that section: I’m uncomfortable. I’m uncomfortable.

In Oklahoma, you really examine the connections between Indigenous and Black people. It’s a painful history. So many Black people I know will say, I’m part Cherokee somewhere. Nowadays we attribute that to anti-Blackness, attribute that to trauma. Your great-grandmother said that because she didn’t want to say that she was raped by a White man because she was a maid in his house. Sometimes we tell ourselves fables and stories to deal with the real harsh truth. But is everybody’s grandmother lying? Is everybody’s Black grandmother under some collective delusion about their lineage? Then when I did the research—OK, there were five slaveholding [Indigenous] nations. One of them, the Seminole nation, didn’t really participate in chattel slavery, but Black people were in their midst.

And the Cherokee tribe was the largest slaveholding nation in the country. They were based in the South, so when they moved across the Mississippi into Indian Territory, South Oklahoma [on the Trail of Tears], who did they take with them? When you say my mother was part Cherokee, she could have still been Black. But she was a part of the Cherokee Tribe, she made that journey with them.

The final section of the book brings you to Los Angeles. So many people fleeing the Jim Crow South hoped it would be the promised land. But once they get there, they find it’s not so promised, right?

No, it’s terrible. I interviewed a woman who witnessed both the 1965 and 1992 riots. She told me, in America, it’s just the Up South or the Down South. They pushed [Blacks] into these overcrowded projects with bad sanitation and few recreational sources. Even with the LAPD, there were Ku Klux Klan members in so many different California police departments. We went there and the stuff that we fled greeted us in another area code. Nothing changed. It was cyclical. Just like what we’re seeing today with the state violence. That’s cyclical. Same thing.

Morgan, is there anything you want to add that we didn’t touch on?

I will just say that I had privilege in getting this book done. I was able to travel and gather this research because I had the money to do it from my book deal. I often think about Zora Neale Hurston—the reason why she was able to travel and collect these stories in the South and in the Caribbean is because she had a wealthy patron. It’s something I just want to keep in mind. Yes, I felt unfettered in my imagination and I felt like I could really run wild. But the reason why I could run wild is because I had that money.

Wandering in Strange Lands was reviewed in the March 1, 2020, issue.
Solid history and archaeology combines with an understated call to preserve Bears Ears—all of it, not just a sliver.

Behind the Bears Ears
Exploring the Cultural and Natural Histories of a Sacred Landscape
Burrillo, R.E.
Torrey House Press (320 pp.)
$19.95 paper | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-948814-30-0

An archaeologist delivers an in-depth history, stretching thousands of years, of an iconic and embattled Southwestern cultural area.

Archaeologists have long known that the Four Corners area of southeastern Utah is a cultural boundary zone, marking the westernmost extension of the ancient Mesa Verde region. "As archaeology has progressed upward," writes Burrillo, "from consideration solely of artifacts, to consideration of sites, to consideration of communities, to consideration of culture areas...archaeologists have come to appreciate that no accurate portrayal of human sociocultural anything can be fully understood at less than a regional scale. "The Bears Ears area contains hundreds of sites and has been little explored, and though set aside for federal protection by Barack Obama, Donald Trump has decommissioned most of the vast site in favor of oil and gas development. Burrillo is an able interpreter of the place, locating it within a larger story of how archaeologists do their work, especially when it comes to cultural remains that are very old and thus usually very scarce. "Animal skins and ephemeral huts and whatever food they managed to collect or clobber with simple tools" usually don’t have a long shelf life. This has led to considerable speculation and the rise of interesting if controversial theories, including the thought that Chaco Canyon, also allied with Mesa Verde, was ruled by "a series of mighty queens," an interpretation that Burrillo calls "pretty cool." The author points the way toward pit houses, archaeoastronomical sites, petroglyphs, and other features without giving away too much specific information that might guide vandals and artifact hunters to the area. Wisely, he also suggests that ethnographic interpretation be left to Native peoples of the area, whose stories and legends are a form of history: “The deep history of Bears Ears is mostly Indigenous, after all, so the future of its archaeology should be mostly Indigenous as well.”

Solid history and archaeology combines with an understated call to preserve Bears Ears—all of it, not just a sliver.

A Brotherhoood Betrayed
The Man Behind the Rise and Fall of Murder, Inc.
Cannell, Michael
Minotaur (336 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-250-20438-7

A stool pigeon par excellence takes a dive from a high window and a mystery unfolds.

In 1941, writes Cannell, a gangster named Abe Reles was brought to a Brooklyn hotel and sequenced with a few other criminals in protective custody, preparing to testify in the trial of a mob boss named Louis “Lepke” Buchalter. “The police took up a saying: the canary sang, but could not fly,” writes the author. Somehow, though, the canary did fly: Reles supposedly fell from a window while trying to escape, but anyone with a lick of conspiratorial inclination knew that the story was more complicated. Cannell follows Reles back to his youth as a Jewish street tough in Brooklyn who crossed paths with the fearsome Shapiro brothers, all three of whom he eventually murdered, infamously shooting Meyer Shapiro, who “worked all the rackets,” in the face. To gain permission to move against the Shapiros, Reles had to go to Albert Anastasia, a top-rank Mafioso. He rapidly became one of the most feared hit men for the pre–World War II mob, the era of bootlegging and illicit gambling. In one notorious case, a union organizer trying to remove the mob from the longshoremen’s association went missing, courtesy of Reles, who “took other
measures to protect Anastasia’s hold on the docks.” Alas for him, Reles learned that some of his underlings were feeding the police information and followed suit, providing enough information to send Buchalter to the chair—and Anastasia was next.

Cannell stuffs his eventful narrative full of murder and mayhem, featuring a cast of hard-boiled and corrupt cops, extremely nasty gangsters, sleazy politicos, and Reles, a true psychopath. “Who killed Kid Twist?” asks Cannell, using Reles’ nom de crime. It took years and another mob killer to secure the definitive answer, confirmed by none other than Lucky Luciano.

Fans of Mario Puzo–style true crime will revel in Reles’ deviant behavior and his comeuppance.
even the algorithm at fault. It did exactly what it was designed to do.” In other words, the algorithm is returning human biases, just as algorithms do when examining criminal records that often lead to machine-assisted recommendations for sentencing that overwhelmingly give Whites lighter punishments than Blacks and Latinos and color calibration programs for TVs and movie screens that are indexed to white skin. So how to teach machines to be reliable and bias-free? Christian considers models of human learning, such as those developed by Jean Piaget, whom Christian finds off on a couple of key assumptions but still a useful guide. He recalls that Alan Turing wondered why machine-learning programs were geared as if the machines were adults instead of children. Children, of course, learn by mistakes and accidents and by emulating adult doings “that would lead to the interesting result,” but can a machine? On that score, Christian ponders how self-driving vehicles are taught how to be autonomous, making decisions that are logical—but logical to a machine mind, not a human one. “Perhaps, rather than painstakingly trying to hand-code the things we care about,” writes the author, “we should develop machines that simply observe human behavior and infer our values and desires from that—a task easier said than done.

An intriguing exploration of AI, which is advancing faster than—well, than we are.

**THE LIGHT IN THE DARK**

*A Winter Journal*

Clare, Horatio

Elliott & Thompson (208 pp.)

$16.95 paper  |  Oct. 1, 2020

978-1-78396-462-8

Winter’s beauty cannot allay overwhelming despair.

Welsh British travel writer and memoirist Clare suffers from seasonal affective disorder: depression that “kills your power of vision, turning you fatally towards yourself.” In graceful, lyrical prose, the author recounts, in diary form, his descent into darkness, at the same time evoking vibrantly the sparkling wintry landscapes of Wales: swooping birds, silver birches against gray sky, glistening newly fallen snow. “A crow mobs a heron over the valley field, and on the canal Canada geese seem to glow, their soft colours enriched by snow-light,” he writes on Jan. 10. In March, the air seems “blue and dashing.” The contrast of natural beauty and inner turmoil makes Clare’s “heaviness of spirit” palpable. “In daylight,” he writes, “the bare trees reveal the country and its creatures in a clarity the other seasons deny. Cold winters do away with claustrophobia, and they are a gift to birdwatchers.” The author does not dwell on his symptoms (“no reader could have enjoyed them”) but keeps his diary as “a refuge, a thing to do, something to put work and time into, a defence against the hopelessness.” His defense entails reaching for happy memories—of joyful Christmases past, an ebullient childhood visit to Venice in winter, and the birth of his son, who happened to be born in January: “With Aubrey arrived, like a miniature immigrant from another planet, we saw the whole world anew.” Clare knows that others have found survival strategies for seasonal depression—“Bikram yoga, light boxes and counselling. Some dedicate themselves to cooking, cold-water swimming or medication”—but trapped in fear and self-loathing, he decided to seek a medical assessment. Fearing that he was bipolar, he is buoyed to learn that he is cyclothymic, experiencing normal rhythms, and likely to be helped by vitamin D, fish oil—and spring.

A candid memoir of an affliction many readers may share.
THE GREAT SECRET
The Classified World War II Disaster That Launched the War on Cancer
Conant, Jennet
Norton (400 pp.)
$27.95 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-324-00250-5

A revealing history of a 1943 German bombing of Allied shipping that came with unexpected consequences.

Three months after the invasion of Italy, the southern harbor of Bari was busy and almost undefended when the Luftwaffe attacked, sinking 17 ships and producing damage and casualties comparable to Pearl Harbor. Bestselling author and historian Conant begins with a vivid description of the December 1943 raid, an event that proved to be a terrible embarrassment to the Allies, who made a partially successful effort to suppress news of the attack. They were better able to hide what happened over the next days and weeks. Victims appeared burned and blistered, yet their hair and eyebrows were unburned. Their eyes and throat were inflamed, and they often died with what seemed like pneumonia. Ultimately, about 600 were affected. Some doctors suspected that they were seeing symptoms of mustard gas exposure. Conant’s hero in this fascinating and often gruesome story is Lt. Col. Stewart Francis Alexander, the Allied physician in charge of the Chemical Warfare Service. Arriving in Bari at the request of the local doctors, he confirmed their diagnosis and, despite vigorous denials from military officials, determined the source: an American ship carrying a cargo of mustard gas bombs. The Allied high command accepted his report but classified it until long after the war. This suppression did not include results from Alexander’s meticulous research, which included autopsies, blood tests, and tissue samples. He reported that the gas killed victims’ rapidly dividing blood and lymphatic cells. Since cancer cells also divide rapidly, here was a chemical that would destroy them. Alexander returned to private practice after the war, but his findings galvanized the few medical researchers looking for drugs to fight cancer. Smoothly
switching gears, Conant devotes the final third of her book to the early efforts, which were dogged by controversy and disappointment but began achieving permanent cures by the 1960s.

An impressive dual history of a military disaster and a scientific breakthrough.

LOVE HER MADLY
Jim Morrison, Mary, and Me
Cosgrave, Bill
Dundurn (224 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Oct. 10, 2020
978-1-4597-4660-2

More than 50 years later, Cosgrave re-creates what is was like to know Jim Morrison before rock stardom.

Few rock memoirs are based on a more tenuous connection. Now a successful travel entrepreneur, the author was a teenage vagabond from Canada when he went to Florida and connected with Morrison's girlfriend, Mary Warbelow, a “mesmerizing” beauty with a “Bardot pout” and “swanlike neck.” She and her boyfriend then moved to Los Angeles, and Cosgrave joined them. The title refers to the Doors' hit song, but it mainly reflects how the bedazzled author felt about Mary. In these pages, he spends more time with Jim, getting stoned and drunk, talking about everything under the sun on Venice Beach. Chronicling an LSD trip with Morrison, Cosgrave writes, “I feel as if I'm chewing the music, feeling so certain that I have the answer. ‘Hey, Jim, I’ve got it.’ I’m excited. Earnest. ‘It’s all about love, man! That’s it! It’s that simple!’ ”

For die-hard Morrison acolytes only.

THE TIMES I KNEW I WAS GAY
Crewes, Eleanor
Illus. by the author
Scribner (320 pp.)
$25.00 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-982147-10-5

A London-based illustrator’s graphic memoir of embracing her sexual orientation.

“Growing up,” writes Crewes, “I felt like I had a secret deep inside of me.”

As an adolescent, she “liked Goths, rock music, and anything spooky,” and she became “obsessed” with Willow, the Buffy the Vampire Slayer character who later came out as gay. In secondary school, the author began to feel the pressure to assimilate. Like the girls she eventually befriended, Crewes paired off with boys, especially those with whom she shared common interests such as anime and manga. By the time she was 16 and in a “real relationship,” Crewes felt emotionally and physically unable to have sex with her boyfriend. After they broke up, the author decided that it was time to “reinvent myself.” She began a diet and exercise regimen to make herself “cooler.” Only much later did she realize her efforts served as a “subconscious way to redirect myself from the fact that I was gay.”

The end result is a charming, accessible story about self-acceptance that everyone—especially people struggling with their sexuality—can enjoy.

A heartwarming, delightful memoir of self-discovery.

MIDLAND
Reports From Flyover Country
Ed. by Croley, Michael & Shuler, Jack
Tiller Press/Simon & Schuster (256 pp.)
$17.99 paper | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-982147-77-8

Resentments abound in the heartland—and they’re not out of place, according to the journalists in this anthology.

The prevailing narrative of the 2016 electoral post-mortem was that the people of “flyover country” were uneducated voters who cast their ballots for an undisguised con man against
Excellent political memoir by the late Democratic representative from Baltimore, one of the sitting president’s most vocal opponents.

_We’re Better Than This_

My Fight for the Future of Our Democracy

Elijah Cummings with James Dale

Harper/HarperCollins (272 pp.)

$28.99  |  Sep. 22, 2020

Excellent political memoir by the late Democratic representative from Baltimore, one of the sitting president’s most vocal opponents.

The descendant of sharecroppers from the South who moved north in the Great Migration, Cummings (1951-2019) was the first of his family to go to college, from which he graduated Phi Beta Kappa, went on to attend law school, and served 12 terms in Congress. This book is not a self-congratulatory recitation of accomplishments, however. The author often returns to a telling episode: Donald Trump promised Cummings that he would work on a long-standing pet project—to lower prescription drug prices—and then did absolutely nothing about it. “One of the lessons of the street is that your first encounter with a person can tell you all you need to know. If a guy is straight with you, he’ll be okay. If he isn’t, watch out,” writes Cummings, who adds that Trump told the media that Cummings had told him, “You will go down as one of the great presidents in the history of our country.” It was, notes the author, “a flagrant, shameless, bald-faced lie…One of thousands, it turns out.” Trump’s constant mendacity led directly to his impeachment, a process in which Cummings played a key role and was unfazed when Trump responded, as ever, with a lawsuit: “Sorry, but when it comes to intimidation with the hope of us backing off—he had the wrong guy, on the wrong issue.” Cummings provides a pages-long list of Trump’s manifold high crimes and misdemeanors, which resulted in, naturally, a bitter torrent of tweets attacking Cummings and his district, yielding a concise retort, among which was the line, “I know the constitution, Mr. President, even if you don’t.” The author closes with an account of his final moments by his wife, Maya, and a selection of abbreviated eulogies from leaders including Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama.

A thoughtful and inspiring exhortation to do better by a much-missed leader.
WHAT TECH CALLS THINKING
An Inquiry Into the Intellectual Bedrock of Silicon Valley
Daub, Adrian
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (160 pp.)
$15.00 paper | Oct. 13, 2020
978-0-374-53864-4

A skeptical look at the self-congratulatory ideology of Silicon Valley.

Interviewed by often worshipful journalists, tech billionaires invariably describe the philosophy that overcame the obstacles to unspeakable riches. Already familiar with myths, Daub, a professor of comparative literature and Germanic studies at Stanford, dug into the murky motivations of Silicon Valley gurus. The result is this slim volume, and readers who worry that a discussion of ideas by an academic must involve a hard slog will be pleasantly surprised. According to the author, there is less than meets the eye to disruptive and revolutionary, adjectives beloved of tech entrepreneurs for ventures better described as “maybe not legal.” Thus, Uber and Lyft are certainly destroying traditional taxi services by making rides cheaper, but this is largely accomplished by paying employees less, converting them to independent contractors with no bargaining power or benefits. Once significant blemishes on a resume, dropping out and even failure have become cool. However, Daub points out that while a member of the White middle class who drops out of an elite college to get rich will likely fail, the result is not the welfare office but rather a return to college and a degree. For the most part, failure only hurts those who have no safety net to catch them. Tech billionaires often extol thinkers who were widely known a generation ago but are less familiar today. They fare poorly under Daub’s gimlet eye. Marshall McLuhan famously wrote that a communication platform exerts more influence than its content, a concept that is catnip to tech entrepreneurs who make platforms. Those who provide content, “be it reviews on Yelp, self-published books on Amazon, your own car and waking hours on Uber,” earn much less, sometimes nothing. Billionaires also remain enamored of Ayn Rand, who argued that the world is divided into creators and parasites and that the creator is above the law.

Delightful proof that getting rich does not make you a deep thinker.

KILL SHOT
A Shadow Industry, a Deadly Disease
Dearen, Jason
Avery (272 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-593-08578-3

A disturbing dive into a barely regulated area of the pharmaceutical industry.

If you like fast-paced forensic thrillers à la Kathy Reichs, you’ll love this tale of death and mayhem, from the opening exhumation to the final courtroom drama. But in this story, rendered with panache by Associated Press investigative journalist Dearen, the culprit is not a fictitious evil genius but rather an ambitious and greedy entrepreneur named Barry Cadden, who ran the daily operations at New England Compounding Center, which customized “medicines for special-needs patients.” Such companies face little regulation, which can lead to tainted medications. In 2012, the NECC’s fungus-laced drugs led to the awful deaths of 100 people and made another 693 terribly ill. Cadden and his pharmacist sidekick, Glenn Chin, cut every conceivable corner in their dirty “clean rooms” and worked all the loopholes that allow compounders to sell drugs under the regulatory radar. Then they went well beyond mere loopholes. To add famed Mass General Hospital to their client list, they paid a $5,000-per-month bribe to a pharmacy staff member, who “steered orders for a variety of drugs NECC’s way.” The business was humming along until a fungus called Exserohilum rostratum contaminated 17,675 vials of a powerful pain-killing steroid shipped to 76 hospitals and clinics around the nation—and patients started dying. Dearen crafts a tight, vivid narrative based on thousands of public documents and transcripts, 150 interview sources, and reporting in eight states. He swings the spotlight among the drug makers, the victims, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s medical detectives, and the federal attorneys who finally charged Cadden and Chin with racketeering and homicide. The climax of the trial proves anticlimactic: not guilty on the more serious charges. However, if a case in Michigan “is allowed to proceed to trial, both pharmacists could be back in court facing life sentences in late 2020.”

A harrowing, fast-paced tale of blind greed and sloppy science.
Devine argues that coming to grips with a changing climate involves not just environmental matters, but economic ones as well.

The problem of climate change, writes the author, is a market failure, which means that the marketplace is “not optimally allocating goods and services.” Part of the problem is that the marketplace is the arena for buying and selling, whereas the environment provides a great many of its services—the air we breathe, the fish in the sea, the sun that nourishes our crops—for free. The predatory capitalism that has emerged in recent years has made significant efforts to monetize those free services, and, as Devine acknowledges, the poor are the first to suffer from their loss. One of the central goals of the “sustainability economics” that he advocates is an equitable distribution of environmental services and greater effort on the parts of wealthy countries to assist developing nations. It helps to have a command of at least Econ 101 to follow some of Devine’s subsequent arguments, but the text is mostly accessible. Some of the articles of faith of classical capitalist economics falter when put up against this sustainability economics: The marketplace does not know everything, Devine insists, which is anathema to the libertarians in the crowd, and instead—further anathema—some of the heavy lifting in bringing equity to the marketplace and improving the environment falls on government, which, for the author, is not a word to be spat out in contempt. The principal difference between standard “neoclassical” economics and the sustainability model is that “in the former, biophysical reality gets short shrift; in the latter, biophysical reality rules.”

Activists, students, and policymakers stand to learn much from this deep dive into environmental economics.

An academic look at Jewish crafts. In this latest entry in the publisher’s Where Religion Lives series, Eichler-Levine, a professor of Jewish civilization, sets out to provide a book that “examines Jewish material culture with a focus on creativity, gender, and religion in North America. It is a book about
A vividly realized tribute to one of Northern California’s most revered cultural neighborhoods.

SAN FRANCISCO’S CHINATOWN

Evans, Dick & Leong, Kathy Chin
Photos by Evans, Dick
Heyday (208 pp.)
$40.00 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-59714-520-6

A guided tour through the oldest Chinatown district in North America.

Journalist Leong teams up with San Francisco–based photographer Evans in this energetic production spotlighting San Francisco’s Chinatown, a beloved tourist destination attracting more foot traffic than the Golden Gate Bridge. Leong sets the stage: “For the uninitiated, strains of high-pitched music, odd smells, and the myriad of Asian dialects can be overwhelming. For others, the cacophony is thrilling. There’s no doubt that entering San Francisco’s Chinatown is like visiting a foreign country, except that this one is less than a fifth of a square mile.” In three sections, the book covers the tourism industry, the daily life of the Chinese locals, and the spectacular celebrations and cultural festivals in observance of time-honored holidays throughout the year. Leong, an American-born Chinese woman and San Francisco native, generously shares the area’s expansive history, from its beginnings as Tong Yun Fow to a cultural epicenter embracing numerous progressive changes. In the section honoring traditional celebrations, lion dancers from a Chinese New Year parade and Autumn Moon festival performers leap off the page. Many of the images feature the neighborhood’s classically vibrant hues, including the reds of the lanterns swinging high above the streets, the burgundy cherry blossoms in Portsmouth Square, the culturally significant golden monuments and sculptures, and the expressive faces of the street musicians, vendors, and shop owners lining the narrow, busy sidewalks. The book also reflects the diverse range of ages and heritages of the residents, who have helped to foster the Chinatown experience visitors have come to appreciate. As in his previous photo books about the Bay Area, Evans ably captures the essence of the city and its inhabitants. Impressively pairing striking imagery with an informative historical narrative, the book transports readers right into the heart of Chinatown’s thriving streets, festivals, local flavor, and cultural intensity.

A vividly realized tribute to one of Northern California’s most revered cultural neighborhoods.

GEORGE HARRISON

Be Here Now
Feinstein, Barry
Rizzoli (208 pp.)
$45.00 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-8478-6775-2

An intimate selection of rare photos of George Harrison (1943-2001) at the launch of his post-Beatles career.

Harrison’s reputation as the “quiet Beatle” is exemplified by the iconic photo of him on the cover of his 1970 album, All Things Must Pass. He’s pensive, shod in Wellington boots as if he’d rather be gardening, and surrounded by lawn gnomes that almost seem to mock him. Feinstein, who shot that photo, was Harrison’s photographer of choice in the early 1970s, and this collection of his work, much of it previously unseen, nicely complicates Harrison’s legacy. He’s impishly smirking and smiling during the All Things shoot at his verdant manse in the English countryside, by turns meditative and playful during the Madison Square Garden shows recorded for The Concert for Bangladesh, and outright silly during a parody of the Last Supper shot for 1973’s Living in the Material World. (In one photo, he’s wearing a miter and sunglasses while popping open a bottle of champagne, enjoying a bit of the high life the shoot was meant to satirize.) It would have been nice to see more of this side of Harrison during his lifetime, though the images take nothing away from the personality that prevails here: contemplative and possessed of an inner calm that was innate, or born of his interest in transcendental meditation, or both. Unfortunately, insights from Harrison and Feinstein (who died in 2011) are absent; for a bespoke photo book, it’s surprisingly stingy about captioning in general. Harrison’s friend Donovan and gallerist Murray provide some background in their introductory essays, but both are brief and more hagiographic than archival. Harrison’s quietude, it seems, was contagious.

A vibrant and worthy tribute to Harrison, though more context would be welcome.

DEMONIC FOES

My Twenty-Five Years as a Psychiatrist Investigating Possessions, Diabolic Attacks, and the Paranormal
Gallagher, Richard
HarperOne (256 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-06-287647-8

A professor of clinical psychology at New York Medical College chronicles his decades of experience with people who believe they are demonically possessed.

In his foreword, Joseph English, past president of the American Psychiatric Association, writes that this book “may be unique in history: the serious treatment of a long-disputed
“Gallagher was drawn into the world of demons by a priest who asked him to help rule out medical causes for a woman who said she was being beaten by invisible spirits. He’s been working in this field, mostly as an unpaid consultant to Catholic priests, ever since. Gallagher provides helpful context and background, including the history of belief in demons and the role of the Catholic Church in their exorcism, and he explains signs of the presence of demons: superhuman strength, speaking in foreign or archaic languages, abusive attacks, unexplained knowledge of the exorcist’s personal life. The author defines a continuum between demonic possession and oppression (possession is more serious) and describes the suffering of the possessed. He speculates on how victims came to be pursued by demons (several subjects indulged in satanic worship) and analyzes cases where a belief in demonic possession masked true mental illness. Skeptics be forewarned that Gallagher truly believes in demons. A Catholic, he calls them “cosmic” terrorists who despise humans and seek to “negate our loving personalities, destroy us spiritually…even cause our physical death.” The author doesn’t provide an explicit cosmology or theology for the origin of demons. In the name of confidentiality, he changes names and locations of his victims and the priests he worked with and doesn’t provide anchoring dates, making it difficult to further research his account. Nevertheless, this is a cogently written book on a fascinating subject. Believers will love it, unbelievers will relish an argument with its premises, and even the most skeptical will marvel at the mysteries of human behavior it investigates.

An unsettling, absorbing account of the phenomenon of demonic possession by a medical expert.
WHAT BECOMES A LEGEND MOST
The Biography of Richard Avedon
Gefter, Philip
Harper/HarperCollins (656 pp.)
$35.00 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-0-06-244271-0

A welcome life of the noted photographer Richard Avedon (1923-2004), locating him in a broad cultural and artistic context.

Gefter, whose 2014 book, Wagstaff, chronicled the prominent collector, ventures a thesis that he ably defends: Until recently, photography was not considered an art form so much as "something of a utilitarian medium, whether photojournalism, advertising, passport ID photos, family snapshots, or forensic evidence." Avedon did much to elevate photography to an art form. He began as a commercial artist, to be sure, engaged in high-end retailing and particularly fashion photography. Even late in his career, a peer likened him to the French court painter Jean-Honoré Fragonard, saying, "Like many decorative artists, he despised his gift." Regardless, over the years, Avedon developed a trademark look, his backgrounds the plain white field against which he would set such iconic figures as Marilyn Monroe, Andy Warhol, and Henry Kissinger. Gefter sets Avedon among a hyperactive cultural milieu: As someone who started off with the intention of becoming a poet, he was well at home in the midcentury literary and cultural world of Manhattan, "at the center of a profoundly influential group of individuals—Leonard Bernstein, Truman Capote, James Baldwin, Allen Ginsberg, Harold Brodkey, Sidney Lumet, and Mike Nichols." He was a Jew who strived to assimilate, as did so many of his generation. He was also gay, though in the days when it was dangerous to be openly so, he took pains to disguise the fact, marrying Dorcas Marie Nowell, one of his female models. Nowell's son later recalled, "He and my mom were deeply in love and they were deeply close. If it wasn't sexual, though, it was a friendship kind of closeness." Most important, though, Avedon was a brilliant if sometimes controversial artist, and Gefter does much to prove his essential role in raising photographic portraiture to a lofty level.

Revealing, fluent, and very well written—an exemplary biography of an underappreciated artist.

FIXATION
How To Have Stuff Without Breaking the Planet
Goldmark, Sandra
Island Press (232 pp.)
$27.00 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-64283-045-3

A professor of professional practice champions social and political change that will reshape our economies into a circular model that protects the planet—and us.

This is a carefully researched and closely reasoned critique of consumerism, resource depletion, cheap labor, waste, and the ruinous belief in unbridled growth. In 2013, Goldmark employed her skills as a theatrical set and costume designer to open a series of short-term pop-up repair shops in New York City, discovering more sustainable ways of utilizing the "stuff" we too often discard. The author clearly educated herself on the many complex threads of local, national, and global issues involved in the promotion of rampant consumerism. She demonstrates how our linear manufacturing model inevitably creates monumental waste, not just planned obsolescence, and how durability and ease of repair seldom enter the equation. The real environmental tab is the energy we waste and the human costs of cheap labor. Goldmark places responsibility not just with corporations, but also with the consumer. Paraphrasing Michael Pollan's guidelines on eating, she advocates buying well-made, durable products, not too many, mostly reclaimed, caring for them and, when possible, passing them on. Beyond individual behavior, some of the author's proposed systemic solutions are sound. However, she sometimes clouds her arguments with sermons on the myth of the American West and religion, sounding like a left-leaning urban ideologue who brooks no argument with her interpretation of the facts. Some matters are more complicated than she would have it. Insofar as the big picture is concerned—countering excessive consumerism, transforming capitalism's eternal growth ethic into something more reasonable—one fears that the author is up against a tide that will refuse to wane until it's too late. Nonetheless, at least she's trying, as are others, to educate and inspire change. Many of Goldmark's narrative threads are ripe for further study.

A sturdy argument that small choices can lay a foundation for larger collective shifts.
In this aptly titled memoir, pioneering rock photographer Gruen documents a long career behind the lens.

The author recounts decades spent making images of anyone who was anyone in the pop music world—and plenty of musicians who didn’t find success. A product of suburban Long Island, Gruen got into the city as soon as he could, swayed by seeing Dylan go electric at Newport in 1965—a climactic that, due to his lack of funds, Gruen recorded with film he stole from his job at the World’s Fair. He wound up living around the corner from John Lennon and Yoko Ono, with whom he became friends after giving them some photographs he had taken. “Yoko remembered the gesture,” writes the author, “the fact that I hadn’t pushed too hard and hadn’t asked for anything from them.” John and Yoko come and go throughout the text. So do legends such as Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry, who liked a photo of himself so much that he asked Gruen to autograph it. So do the principal players of the punk rock scene, at which Gruen arrived before most. Of doomed Sex Pistol Sid Vicious, he writes, “I have never met anybody with such low regard for personal hygiene.” When Britain’s National Portrait Gallery bought a photograph of Gruen’s for its permanent collection, it was of the very same Sid smeared with mustard and ketchup in the course of stuffing a hot dog down his gullet. While much of Gruen’s narrative, which is sometimes laid-back enough to be soporific, seems an exercise in name-dropping, there are a number of takeaways for aspiring rock chroniclers. Better yet, there’s a constant sense of awe that he’s walked among gods and goddesses for so long: “For me it’s about the moment when everyone is screaming ‘Yea!’ and no one is thinking about paying their rent or anything else.”

It’s not Lester Bangs or Greil Marcus, but rock-history buffs will enjoy Gruen’s reminiscences.
A collection that clearly expresses the passion of musical discovery and lasting legacy.

**LOOKING TO GET LOST**

**Adventures in Music and Writing**

Guralnick, Peter  
Little, Brown (576 pp.)  
$30.00 | Oct. 27, 2020  
978-0-316-41262-9

A career-spanning anthology of profiles by the acclaimed music critic and journalist.

Even before his two-volume work on Elvis Presley and subsequent biographies of Sam Cooke and Sam Phillips, Guralnick had established himself as an incisive enthusiast of blues, soul, and country music. He has always been particularly passionate about music that transcends categorization. He has written often about music rooted in the American South, but he seems to prize most of all the intuitive individuality that distinguishes artistry—what makes a Jerry Lee Lewis, a Ray Charles, or a Merle Haggard (all of whom are profiled here) more than the sum of their influences. “Simply put,” the author writes at the beginning, “this is a book about creativity,” and the sort of creativity that he appreciates in others can be seen throughout his work as well. Some of the book’s richest pieces focus on performers whom Guralnick feels haven’t been given their due or whose music has to be experienced live because it loses something in the studio. Those who haven’t heard of Lonnie Mack, Delbert McClinton, or Dick Curless will be eager to learn more after reading this book. Guralnick is nearly as revelatory when writing about well-known musicians; he invites readers to appreciate Chuck Berry, Johnny Cash, and Ray Charles with fresh ears. (He does the same with two favorite novelists, Henry Green and Lee Smith.) Toward the end of the book, Guralnick notes, “I started writing about the blues with one focus on performers whom Guralnick feels haven’t been given discovery and lasting legacy .

**WHOSE BLUES?**

**Facing Up to Race and the Future of the Music**

Gussow, Adam  
Univ. of North Carolina (336 pp.)  
$28.00 paper | Oct. 19, 2020  
978-1-4696-6036-3

A blues scholar and musician navigates the muddy waters of the genre’s racial divisions.

Blues music, writes Gussow, is “in the midst of a fraught debate between what he calls “Black bluesism,” the notion that only Black musicians have standing to play the music, and “blues universalism,” the idea that the music speaks to themes of heartbreak and loss everybody experiences. The former ideology denies contributions White artists have brought to the genre, the latter blithely ignores the music’s complex relationship to Black history. Gussow doesn’t pick a side, nor does he exactly synthesize the two. Rather, across 12 chapters (cannily called “bars”), he discusses the pervasive mythologies that surround blues music, its role in American literature, and the role of race in programming blues festivals. If it doesn’t quite add up to a cohesive argument, Gussow does do an intriguing job of troubling the waters. He counters ideas that the blues are rooted in Black suffering (blues songs are as much about pleasure as pain), that it was a rural form that migrated to the city (Bessie Smith’s experience suggests it was the other way around), and that W.C. Handy “invented” the blues; it’s more correct to say he established a particular version of it. The author is also insightful on how Black writers like Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, and Zora Neale Hurston all integrated blues music in different ways—though Wright, for his part, was a terrible blues lyricist. Gussow discusses how he’s implicated in this as a White blues harmonica player who has spread the music’s word globally. Though he doesn’t present a sustained grand unified theory about race and blues music, the book’s range proves his point that the blues is an unsettled genre, open to a host of arguments.

An insightful work that connects contemporary culture to an old-school genre.

**WIN AT ALL COSTS**

**Inside Nike Running and Its Culture of Deception**

Hart, Matt  
Dey Street/HarperCollins (416 pp.)  
$28.99 | Oct. 6, 2020  
978-0-06-291777-5

Buckle up for a wild ride through athletics, doping, and the hard-driving company paying $500 million to brand the U.S. track and field team until at least 2040.

Nike, writes freelance journalist Hart, is “possibly the most recognizable brand on the planet, and its co-founder Phil Knight is one of the richest men to have ever lived, with a net worth estimated by Forbes of $35 billion.” The company is a marketing juggernaut particularly adept at getting famous athletes to wear their apparel and gear so the rest of us will buy it. The magic continues to work despite major scandals involving Tiger Woods and Lance Armstrong. There’s a lot going on in this lengthy book—sometimes too much—but for the most part, the author succeeds in telling an exciting story of business and athletic malfeasance. He diligently follows the rise and fall of Alberto Salazar, the coach of the company’s secret running program, the Nike Oregon Project. Despite widespread evidence of doping and abundant whistleblowing, Salazar received only a four-year ban in 2019. Hart is the perfect person to tell
At one point in his career, distance runner Mo Farah was asked to write it up. He recounts the long process of tracking Salazar’s activities, as he continued to stuff his athletes with all manner of drugs while bending the rules to their breaking points—e.g., having them diagnosed with hypothyroidism by his pet endocrinologist so they could take “off-label…prescription drugs as performance enhancers.”

At one point in his career, distance runner Mo Farah was taking 100,000 IU’s of vitamin D per week (recommended weekly intake is 4,200), plus calcitonin, a bone strengthener; ferrous sulfate, an iron supplement; and L-carnitine infusions. Even if the penalty for Salazar was meager, the stakes remain high, and Hart successfully uncovers an unsettling, aggressive corporate culture.

A thorough reconsideration of the legendary Haitian leader, whose deployment of republican ideals of racial equality were radical and transformative—and still resonate today.

As Hazareesingh shows, Toussaint L’Ouverture (1743-1803) possessed remarkable military and leadership skills, which allowed him to effect a “just war for national liberation which absorbed them full and then redeploy them to his own ends that Toussaint’s genius lay” He was a leader behind the scenes, a strategist. He could also be an opportunist, writes the author, who has written multiple books about French cultural history, closely examines the many contradictory accounts of Toussaint’s dealings before and after this key date, as he served as a mediating force between the slaves and the White masters. Hazareesingh emphasizes that it was in his “ability to take existing social and political forms, absorb them full and then redeploy them to his own ends that Toussaint’s genius lay.” He was a leader behind the scenes, a brilliant writer of revolutionary tracts, and an effective military strategist. He could also be an opportunist, writes the author, and eager not to alienate the French and Napoleon in pushing too hard for independence—though he never wavered on his stance for emancipation of the slaves. “Toussaint,” writes the author, “embodied the many facets of Saint-Domingue’s revolution by confronting the dominant forces of his age—slavery, settler colonialism, imperial domination, racial hierarchy and European cultural supremacy—and bending them to his will.”

Though not entirely accessible to general readers, the book is evenhanded in its treatment of Toussaint and will be a useful addition to library collections.

A knowledgeable biography that carefully considers the nuances of Toussaint’s character and the legends that surround him.

**THE LONELY CENTURY**

**How To Restore Human Connection in a World That’s Pulling Apart**

Hertz, Noreena

Currency (304 pp.)

$28.00  |  Oct. 20, 2020

978-0-593-13583-9

An economist and business adviser delves into “the ideological underpinnings of the twenty-first century’s loneliness crisis.”

As Hertz notes, we live in a predominantly lonely world, a condition exacerbated by ever increasing social and economic inequality. When people feel they have only themselves to fall back on—lacking support from employers, the government, or our communities—is it any wonder that loneliness is the result? The situation is so bad that in 2018, the U.K. appointed a Minister of Loneliness for the disconnected, and the elderly in Japan are known to commit petty crimes in order to go to jail, “a sanctuary that provides not only company but also support and care.” With plenty of anecdotes and scholarly referenced footnotes, the author meticulously picks apart our everyday world to reveal the many wellsprings of our loneliness, and she points to helpful first steps to deal with it. The trick, writes Hertz, is “to reconnect capitalism to the pursuit of the common good and put care, compassion and cooperation at its very heart.” Of course, that is quite the undertaking; some readers may even consider it impossible, but many will find some comfort in these pages. Hertz diligently scrolls through the many causes of our existential conundrum, including living alone, the hustle of big-city life (“when confronted with all those people our default is often to withdraw”), contactless commerce, smartphone addiction, openly aggressive urban planning, the surveillance workplace, and a government that fails to prioritize libraries, parks, playgrounds, and community centers. Hertz also touches on the alienation of artificial intelligence and the downsides of co-living spaces, and she offer curative suggestions along the way—e.g., redefining work to deliver not just a salary, but “meaning, purpose, camaraderie and support”; committing to public service; and transforming ourselves “from consumers to citizens, from takers to givers, from casual observers to active participants.”

An alternately dispiriting and bracing dissection of loneliness and how to build community from the ground up.
Of advertising in the online realm as "a marketplace for attention," one that aims to grab your eyes, if even for a moment, and with any luck sells you something—an idea, a product, a political candidate. This marketplace may once have resembled a local fair. However, as the author shows, it has been thoroughly up-scaled, with vast technologies and a commercial realm known as programmatic advertising, which "leverages software to automate the buying and selling of advertising inventory." This automated, algorithmically driven advertising has its creepy dimensions—e.g., you look at an ad for a toaster, and the next day a dozen toaster manufacturers bombard you with their approaches. Human ad-sales teams are rapidly becoming a thing of the past with the advent of this machine-informed advertising, as Google’s sales force discovered when AdWords and AdSense took pride of place. Our attention—the vaunted target of the machine—has thus become "commodified to an extent that it has not been in the past," made part of a massive system. Champions of programmatic advertising hold that it allows for better price transparency, but Hwang argues that it has created “an unsustainable market due for a painful correction” and certainly not one amenable to self-regulation. Online advertising must be regulated in the same way as hedge funds, requiring the intervention of government into an arena beloved of libertarians for its anarchic nature, albeit one that "remains murky and opaque, constantly oversold by an unhealthy ecosystem of conflicted players." That call for regulation alone is likely to make Hwang’s book controversial, but it would help level a playing field that is dominated by a few big actors—Google, Facebook, Amazon, and the like.

Thoughtful citizens of the digital world will want to have a look at Hwang’s intriguing exploration.

**SUBPRIME ATTENTION CRISIS**
Advertising and the Time Bomb at the Heart of the Internet
Hwang, Tim
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (176 pp.)
978-0-374-53865-1

A deep dive into the marketplace that is the internet.
Hwang, the former global public policy lead on artificial intelligence at Google, examines the role

Thoughtful citizens of the digital world will want to have a look at Hwang’s intriguing exploration.
of America to grow, especially among younger people. “In 2013,” writes the author, “the average age of a DSA member was sixty-eight.” By 2017, it was 33. New socialists, Judis asserts, “place a high importance on the ideals of justice as integral to socialism.” The author chronicles the evolution of socialism in the U.S., beginning with Eugene V. Debs and culminating in Bernie Sanders, who calls himself a “Swedish-style socialist,” and Elizabeth Warren, whose platform incorporated many socialist ideals. In the U.K., socialism has been embraced since 1918 by the Labour Party, although it’s recently been undermined by the candidacy of Jeremy Corbyn. New leadership, Judis points out, is essential to instituting needed reforms, including partial public takeover of the health care industry, transportation, and energy production and use; public financing of elections; a guaranteed annual income; and massive investment in public welfare. Contrary to assumptions by some on the left, nationalism is integral to socialism: Any socialist or economically progressive appeal, Judis warns, depends on a “clearly defined” citizenry, “their common commitment to the nation assumed.”

A pragmatic view of systemic social change.

THE GOOD AMERICAN
The Epic Life of Bob Gersony, the U.S. Government’s Greatest Humanitarian
Kaplan, Robert D.
Random House (528 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-525-51230-1

For four decades, a daring American assessed trouble spots throughout the world.

Robert Gersony (b. 1945), the son of Central and Eastern European refugees, spent a productive, interesting career as a special consultant for the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the United Nations, conducting firsthand research on “virtually every war and disaster zone on earth.” Veteran journalist and author Kaplan, who met Gersony in Khartoum in 1985, draws on hundreds of hours of interviews with him, along with abundant additional sources, to create a vividly detailed chronicle of the courageous, challenging life of the ultimate field worker.” Convinced that “evidence... rather than theories” must inform foreign policy, Gersony conducted long, intense interviews with more than 8,000 refugees, displaced persons, and humanitarian workers, exposing the reality of their experiences. “The most sensitive things they told me on their own,” Gersony said. Kaplan recounts Gersony’s work in South America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, from Guatemala in the 1970s to North Korea in 2002. Gersony was passionate about human rights, working long hours in dangerous, sometimes life-threatening conditions, and defiant against policy wonks. Much of American aid, he believed, “is a complete waste of money, since it is not integrated with a plan for governance or business development.” After the Berlin Wall came down and the Soviet Union collapsed, a new optimism arose about the state of the world, which Gersony did not share: “It was another example of Washington elites manufacturing a theory: a theory born with dramatic events in Central Europe that they mistakenly applied to the whole world.” His witnessing of “state failure, rule-of-law breakdowns, genocide, and long-standing ethno-nationalist conflict” sharply contrasted that worldview, but knowledge about the world, Kaplan learned, is gleaned now from consulting groups rather than the kind of research to which Gersony devoted his career.

A life story that reads like an action thriller.

BRAIDING SWEETGRASS
Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants
Kimmerer, Robin Wall
Milkweed (456 pp.)
$35.00 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-57131-177-1

Wisdom about the natural world delivered by an able writer who is both Indigenous and an academic scientist.

“This braid is woven from three strands,” writes Kimmerer, an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation: “indigenous ways of knowing, scientific knowledge, and the story of an Anishinabekwe scientist trying to bring them together in service to what matters most.” The author’s 2013 book of essays on Native folkways concerning plants and their roles in human life is reissued here with new illustrations and design, a handsome production that well serves her engaging text, which will be of interest to readers schooled in the work of writers such as Wendell Berry, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Joy Harjo. In Anishinaabe belief, writes Kimmerer, sweetgrass “was the very first to grow on the earth,” a constant reminder of the creator called Skywoman. It holds a sacred role, and it represents an important component of what the author describes as “global ecosystems,” which speak to the possibility of positive interactions between humans and the natural environment, a welcome optimism given all the counterexamples one might produce of our destructive influences. Rethinking that possibility requires going to first principles. As Kimmerer writes, the English word bay is a noun, trapping a natural thing into a static category best reserved for dead things, whereas the Ojibwe word wiikwegamaa, turning the concept into a verb meaning “to be a bay,” “releases the water from bondage and lets it live.” Indigenous knowledge instructs those who seek healthy relations with their surroundings in many ways. Kimmerer writes of a teacher who directs us to walk in such a way “that each step is a greeting to Mother Earth” while the dread monster called the Windigo speaks metaphorically to our need to consume: “The more a Windigo eats, the more ravenous it becomes.”

A smart, subtle overlay of different systems of thought that together teach us to be better citizens of Earth.
A charming, whimsical tribute to the Anderson aesthetic.

**ACCIDENTALLY WES ANDERSON**

Koval, Wally

Voracious/Little, Brown (304 pp.)

$35.00 | Oct. 20, 2020

978-0-316-49273-7

A charming, whimsical tribute to the Anderson aesthetic.

Practical advice from a director’s long and varied experience.

Kwapis, whose films include *Sesame Street Presents: Follow That Bird*, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, and *He’s Just Not That Into You* and whose TV credits include *The Larry Sanders Show*, *The Office*, and *The Bernie Mac Show*, draws on his nearly 40-year career to offer guidance and encouragement for aspiring directors. Aiming to “explore things that film schools don’t teach you,” the author creates helpful checklists, suggestions, and breakdowns of scenes he has directed or analyzed from others’ work, as well as plenty of lively anecdotes. Among the many directors he cites are Agnes Varda, Ernst Lubitsch, Bernardo Bertolucci, Alfred Hitchcock, Frank Capra, Orson Welles, and Ingmar Bergman. Kwapis considers how to personally connect with the material, nurture morale on the set, “exercise creative muscles,” and stay flexible in the face of setbacks. Without being tyrannical, arrogant,
cocky, or grim-faced, a director should be proactive, maintaining confident leadership and always remaining aware that “you are the only person entrusted to tell this story.” Directors must understand everyone’s job in the complex process of filmmaking. At film school, Kwapis was never offered an acting class—a regrettable omission—so he had to learn on the job how to talk to actors by developing insight into what they do and what suggestions would help them flesh out their characters. The competitiveness of film school, though, did alert him to the destructive impact of negative criticism, and he offers a “code of etiquette about feedback.” Rather than criticize dialogue for being too expositional, for example, it’s more productive to ask, “Do we need this information?” The author’s artistic sensibility emerges throughout the book: for instance, in his observation that “the best landscape a director can photograph is the face of a character in turmoil.”

An entertaining and informative guide for film buffs and filmmakers.

CULTURE WARLORDS
My Journey Into the Dark Web of White Supremacy
Lavin, Talia
Hachette (388 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-0-306-84643-4

A master of “social engineering” probes into the deepest recesses of White supremacy.

“In order to look as deeply as I could into the world of white nationalism,” writes Lavin, she has assumed a wide variety of online personas—e.g., a blond White nationalist from rural Iowa, a factory worker who regained his sense of purpose only after joining a White supremacist crew; and a seductress who broke down the electronic doors of one of the Ukraine’s most virulent neo-Nazi sects. “In real life I’m a schlubby bisexual Jew,” she writes, “living in Brooklyn, with long brown ratty curls, the matronly figure of a mother in a Philip Roth novel, and a brassy personal politic that’s not particularly sectarian but falls considerably to the left of Medicare for All.” For a full year, as she recounts in this skillful memoir, she descended into the hateful world of rightist extremism, delivering highly useful insights: For one, although White nationalist were quite happy to see Donald Trump take the presidency, he was held in suspicion for not acting beyond what they clearly see as mere encouragement and for allowing his daughter to be married to a Jew; one trope of anti-Semitism that plays on old canards but that gained power in the 20th century thanks to the likes of Henry Ford and his “vision of the Jew as world-encircling parasite, source and sustainer of the modern world’s evils.” The extreme right was a pioneer in computer communication, particularly because of the anonymity it offered, but Lavin’s fearless hacking into the Boogaloo crowd, the women-hating incels (“none of these men have seen labia or even a penis entering a vagina,” says one taunting obstetrician), and an extremely nasty 15-year-old girl whose racist rants earned a huge YouTube following have all helped expose the alt-right as a dangerous but largely pathetic bunch.

Righteous indignation meets techie magic to shine light on one of America’s most malignant warts.

BE WATER, MY FRIEND
The Teachings of Bruce Lee
Lee, Shannon
Flatiron Books (224 pp.)
$25.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-250-20668-8

A daughter honors the life and teachings of her father, martial arts legend Bruce Lee (1940-1973).

In this reflective tribute, Lee, who was 4 when her father died, explores many of the philosophical concepts that defined his life. As a child, she was regularly instructed by her mother not to disclose who her father was. Though she obliged, she gradually began to appreciate her father’s legacy and to promote her own heritage with immense pride. The author considers her father one of the most noble, notable philosophers of his century, with an “essential nature” comprised of intelligence, athletic skill, and a drive to cultivate many unique aspects of himself. She hopes by sharing her father’s healing practices and self-actualization philosophies, readers can enjoy the kind of dramatic personal growth and fulfillment she has experienced throughout her own life. These lessons have been essential during times of immense emotional struggle—e.g., coping with the crushing grief following her brother’s untimely death. Those first moments after she saw his body, she writes, were “chaos….

Mapless terrain with no understanding of the landscape.” The narrative is more of an appreciative introduction to her father’s teachings than an intensive meditation, as the author lovingly and respectfully condenses Bruce’s “Be Water” philosophy of flexibility, fluidity, awareness, and mindfulness. During his lifetime, he carefully integrated his exercise fanaticism with the internal discipline he learned as a martial artist and action movie star. Thematically arranged by life lessons, the text is filled with sage instruction on a variety of themes: emptying the mind of judgments, expectations, and rationalizations; life direction and self-empowerment; relationship coaching; and harnessing willpower. Armchair philosophers and readers attuned to their inner selves will best appreciate Lee’s practical tools, mirroring metaphors, and life-affirming meditations on realizing one’s true potential.

An inspirational commemorative for Lee aficionados and those sharpening their personal-growth skills.
Highly revealing, particularly for post-Camelot readers who wonder at the esteem in which JFK is held.

**JFK**

**BIDEN**

*The Obama Years and the Battle for the Soul of America*

Lienemann, David  
Photos by the author  
Voracious/Little, Brown (256 pp.)  
$24.99 | Sep. 8, 2020  
978-0-316-59323-6

A generous photo tribute to the former vice president and current Democratic candidate for president.

Lienemann, a New Mexico–based lifestyle photographer, documented Biden's eight years as vice president to Barack Obama, following him to nearly every U.S. state and more than 60 countries. Here, Lienemann draws from the more than 900,000 photos he snapped during his tenure with Biden. The vast majority of the photos are skillful, and some of the shots are especially memorable: Biden with SEAL trainees, interacting with troops in Baghdad, signing a soldier's flag, golfing with Obama at Joint Base Andrews, visiting Dachau with a Holocaust survivor, mourning the death of his son Beau, and speaking with the staff of Orlando’s Pulse nightclub after the 2016 mass shooting. The primary problem with the book is the text, which would have benefited from a seasoned writer's touch; there's not much spark in the captions either. Aside from sharing the photos as an homage to Biden, what is the purpose of the book? Lienemann seems unsure, especially regarding how much he should appear in the narrative. It would have been interesting to hear more about his relationships with the Bidens and their team during those eight intense years. When he tells us almost in passing that he met his future wife in the White House, leaves us wondering—as we enjoy his terrific photos—what might have happened if Biden was the Democratic candidate in 2016. Biden’s wife, Jill, provides the foreword.

Savor the visual presentation; skim the text.

**TRUMPTY DUMPTY WANTED A CROWN**

*Verses for a Despotic Age*

Lithgow, John  
Illus. by the author  
Chronicle Prism (104 pp.)  
$22.95 | Sep. 29, 2020  
978-1-79720-946-3

Lithgow continues his poetic skewering of “a POTUS whose pants are routinely on fire.”

In this clever follow-up to *Dumpty: The Age of Trump in Verse* (2019), the actor and author unleashes more razor-sharp satirical wit, lampooning the second half of “our distractible,” Twitter-obsessed chief’s presidential term. Lithgow begins with the impeachment in late 2019 and moves through the litany of lies and blunders that have formed the Trump administration’s teetering foundation. Beyond the primary target, the author also draws farcical caricatures of fumbling politicos like senior advisors and Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani (“filled with rage and babbling bluster, / America’s Mayor’ has lost his luster”). Lithgow renders Mitch McConnell as a manipulative, suffocating partisan reptile: “By keeping his party in line and tight-knitted, / The Tortoise prevailed and got Dumpty acquitted / But by treating the trial as a legal blood sport, / He rendered the Senate a kangaroo court.” Political strategist and a man Lithgow calls the “dirty trickster, artful dodger,” Roger Stone gets a full-page poem and makes good company with another Trump blunder: “substituting his Sharpie for science” after mistracking Hurricane Dorian. The cover art and interior line drawings provide suitable graphic accompaniment to the text. As with the first volume, this one is a short, succinct, laugh-out-loud affair, and no one in the Trump administration is above Lithgow’s eagle-eyed scrutiny. Unwilling to leave even readers with limited political knowledge behind, the author also includes brief profiles of the politicians that he eviscerates. All the snarky novelty doesn’t reveal anything new nor untrue; rather, Lithgow whisks the obvious into a creatively brilliant distraction that most readers will enjoy. Even loyal Trumpers may find a stray chuckle for the ridiculousness and the current administration’s political circus.

A hilarious and pertinent parody to help pass the time until the November election decides the nation’s fate.

**JFK**

*Coming of Age in the American Century, 1917-1956*

Logevall, Fredrik  
Random House (816 pp.)  
$40.00 | Sep. 8, 2020  
978-0-8129-9713-2

A comprehensive life of John F. Kennedy (1917-1963), the first of two volumes. Even though Kennedy enjoys “larger-than-life status,” writes Pulitzer Prize–winning Harvard historian Logevall, not many “serious” books have been written about him, especially drawing on the vast corpus of archival material now available. Taking his subject from birth into his years in Congress, the author concentrates closely on World War II, a crucible in many ways. For one thing, his actions as commander of the ill-fated PT-109 exhibited a bravery that went far beyond noble Ses oblige; even Garry Wills, no fan, remarked, “His physical courage can never be questioned.” Kennedy earned the Navy’s highest honor, propelling him to national attention. When Kennedy returned home, he was committed to a life of public service that would manifest itself in electoral politics. Logevall dismantles the standard narrative that the firstborn Kennedy son, Joe Jr., who died in combat, was “the Kennedy
child marked for political stardom.” Though Joe Jr. had many of the necessary attributes—good looks, courage, sociability—he had also been an isolationist and even an admirer of Hitler and Franco in the 1930s, expressed in his Harvard thesis, all copies of which “seem to have vanished in the years following his graduation, suggesting the family perceived the problem.” As early as 1944, Logevall reveals, JFK was meeting with political operatives to identify opportunities; upon entering Congress, he first identified as a rather conservative Democrat, even supporting the infamous anti-communist crusader Joseph McCarthy. He moved toward the center after McCarthy’s downfall, learning the art of the political compromise—which, writes the author, he insisted “can be, should be, at the level of policy, not principle.” More critical than the reminiscences of early aide Theodore Sorensen but appreciative of Kennedy’s complex, thoughtful view of politics, this study casts the “playboy president” in a largely positive light.

Highly revealing, particularly for post-Camelot readers who wonder at the esteem in which JFK is held.

THE SECRET LIFE OF GROCERIES
The Dark Miracle of the American Supermarket
Lorr, Benjamin
Avery (336 pp.)
$27.00 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-0-553-45939-5

Where do we spend 2% of our lives and a big chunk of change? At the grocery store, the object of this diligent investigation.

In his second book, Lorr digs behind the scenes at the grocery store. Much of his discussion centers Trader Joe’s and Whole Foods, his thesis forming as his narrative moves along: “A grocery store is a finely tuned instrument to serve human whim, and the diversity of human whim often allows it to do double duty, serving one through the act of serving another.” Yet a grocery store is also a place where the staff is anonymous and usually not well paid—one man who’s worked a fish counter for years laments that he makes only $15 an hour—and where customer behavior is as spoiled as the ancient bits and pieces of fish and seafood that lie buried under the shaved ice. “One of the first things you realize working retail grocery is that people, in general, are hideous and insane,” writes Lorr in his wide-ranging, entertaining blend of journalism and sociology. The narrative is peppered with interviews with a broad cast of characters, including truck drivers, food entrepreneurs, and cashiers, almost all of them underpaid. The author notes along the way that food prices, in real terms, have fallen by nearly three-fourths in the last century at the expense of food workers. He also looks closely at how stores came to be as they are, with their sometimes-tangled tales—e.g., when “Trader” Joe Coulombe became a wine expert largely so he could ease an alcoholic manager out of his job or how the Memphis-based Piggly Wiggly chain long ago “invited [customers] in to frolic among the abundance” while draining their wallets. In the end, what Kitchen Confidential did for restaurants, Lorr’s book does for supermarkets.

You won’t look at a supermarket shelf the same way after reading this sharp-edged exposé.

HOW GOD BECOMES REAL
Kindling the Presence of Invisible Others
Luhrmann, T.M.
Princeton Univ. (224 pp.)
$29.95 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-0-691-16446-5

A study of the human tendency to find realness in spirituality.

Luhrmann, an anthropologist and psychologist at Stanford and author of the noted When God Talks Back (2012), sets out to show how people of faith, across religions and cultures, manage to see the supernatural as real in their own lives. Commendably, the author examines faith with a level of respect that is rare in most studies of a secular nature. She transcends usual dismissals of religion in order to discover how spiritual beliefs can affect, move, and even change people in an imperfect, often cruel world. Luhrmann looks at religious adherence through two primary lenses: the “faith frame,” which is a way of thinking, and “kindling,” which is a way of feeling. In the faith frame, a person recognizes that “gods and spirits,” as the author puts it, are real, yet not in the sense that a table or chair is real. Thus, faith in a god or spirit takes a level of mental work that faith in, say, gravity does not. “Kindling,” by contrast, denotes the practices through which a person of faith feels and experiences the presence of gods and spirits; this can manifest in calmness, a sense of being loved, and even voices and other tangible elements. “At the heart of the religious impulse,” writes Luhrmann, “lies the capacity to imagine a world beyond the one we have before us.” It is that will of imagining—not necessarily the same as imagination—that the author investigates most engagingly. Drawing on extensive research with such populations as magic devotees in London and charismatic Christians in the Vineyard Church community in America, as well as her deep understanding of religious traditions across the globe, Luhrmann creates a thorough, insightful narrative that will appeal the most to scholars and students.

A generous and erudite study of how people believe.
JOURNEY INTO THE LAND OF THE ZEKS AND BACK

A Memoir of the Gulag

Margolin, Julius

Trans. by Hoffman, Stefani

Oxford Univ. (600 pp.)

$39.95 | Oct. 1, 2020

978-0-19-750214-3

The first English translation of the author’s gulag memoir, composed in Russian in 1947 and first published in France in 1949.

Published long before Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s Gulag Archipelago (1973), Margolin’s fierce exposé was largely ignored after the war. In this new version—featuring maps and glossary, a foreword by Timothy Snyder, and a helpfully contextual introduction by Katherine R. Jolluck, translator Hoffman does a brilliant job rendering Margolin’s sardonic flourishes in his presentation of the senseless cruelty of the Soviet gulag system. Born in Pinsk in 1900, then in Russia’s tumultuous Pale of Settlement, Margolin—a Jew who was trying to return to Palestine, where his family had moved by the time of the invasion of Poland in 1939—was ultimately caught up in the terrible nationalistic dilemma of accepting a Soviet passport or returning to Nazi-occupied Poland. Ironically, those who did return perished in the concentration camps. Margolin was arrested and endured five years in the Soviet prison system. He was taken by “coffin” train to the far northwest, on the northern tip of Lake Onega, where Stalin had established a camp to provide the labor to construct the Baltic–White Sea Canal. With the Nazi invasion, the inmates were moved by foot, walking 12 hours per day to the Kargopol camp, 300 miles east. Via the meticulous day-to-day chronicling of the horrendous conditions and labor, spiritless terrain, meager rations, foul conditions, and sadistic behavior by the hardened, predatory criminals with whom he traveled and worked, Margolin sketches the thoroughly dehumanizing system of Sovietization. “I was never enchanted by the Soviet regime,” he writes, “and I never doubted that its theory was unsustainable and its practice full of cruel human fraud.” Attempting to reveal the truth about the camps, Margolin was met by “a stone wall of indifference and treachery.” The final section, “Road to the West,” delineates his arduous, miraculous return to freedom.

Beautifully written, incredibly detailed and moving—an important historical document.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF STUPIDITY

Marmion, Jean-Francois

Trans. by Schillinger, Liesl

Penguin (384 pp.)

$18.00 paper | Oct. 6, 2020

978-0-14-313499-2

Are people getting dumber, or does it just look that way?

That question underlies this collection of essays by and interviews with psychologists, neurologists, philosophers, and other well-credentialed intellectuals. A handful of contributors have ties to North American universities—Dan Ariely, Alison Gopnik, and Daniel Kahneman among them—but most live in France, and their views have a Gallic flavor: blunt, opinionated, and tolerant of terms in disfavor in the U.S., including, as translated from the French by Schillinger, moron, idiot, and imbecile. Marmion, a France-based psychologist, sets the tone by rebutting the idea that we live in a “golden age of idiocy”: “As far back as the written record extends, the greatest minds of their ages believed this to be the case.” Nonetheless, today’s follies differ in two ways from those of the past. One is that the stakes are higher: “The novelty of the contemporary era is that it would take only one idiot with a red button to eradicate all stupidity, and the whole world with it. An idiot elected by sheep who were only too proud to choose their slaughterer.” The other is that—owing partly to social media—human follies are more visible, whether they involve UFO sightings or “some jerk pressing the elevator button like a maniac when it’s already been pressed.” Social psychologist Ewa Drozda-Senkowska distinguishes between ignorance and stupidity; noting that “stupidity, true stupidity, is the hallmark of a frightening intellectual complacency that leaves absolutely no room for doubt.” Other experts consider whether stupidity has an evolutionary basis, how it erodes morale, and the “very particular kind of adult stupidity” exemplified by Donald Trump. Although not a self-help guide, this book suggests that it rarely pays to argue with blockheads. Unfortunately, notes neuropsychologist Sebastian Dieguez, the “imbecile…doesn’t have the mental resources that would permit him to perceive his own imbecility.”

A smart collection of articles and interviews on stupidity.

THE 99% INVISIBLE CITY

A Field Guide to the Hidden World of Everyday Design

Mars, Roman & Kohlstedt, Kurt

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (384 pp.)

$30.00 | Oct. 6, 2020

978-0-358-12660-7

A user-friendly guide to all the overlooked things that make urban civilization tick.

If you’re an infrastructure nerd, a reader of David Macaulay, Kate Ascher, or Brian Hayes, then you know that under the
sidewalks of your town or city lies an endlessly complex world of pipes, cables, wires, and tunnels. If you want to understand the language spoken in that world, then this book is for you. Building from their popular podcast of the same name, Mars and Kohlstedt explore the occult grammar of the city, much of it hiding in plain sight. What are those boxes at eye level that you see on so many buildings? Well, “firefighters essentially have a skeleton key that opens all of the boxes in their area.” Within a “Knox box” is in turn a copy of the master key for any given building. How is it that one can breathe inside New York City’s Holland Tunnel, which burrows under the Hudson River? The authors explain the process and note that when it was built, using air shafts and aboveground ventilation towers, the air quality in the tunnel was better than that out on the street, adding, “to be fair, that is setting quite a low bar.” Numerous other urban elements are grist for the authors’ amiably churning mill: Those metal stars on the fronts of old brick buildings are the ends of truss rods that prevent the walls from sagging; things are named as they are via complex bureaucratic interactions; the pedestrian-friendly city that allows e-scooters becomes less pedestrian-friendly. Mars and Kohlstedt operate without an agenda other than to share their enthusiasm for urban design (“You can learn so much from reading sidewalk markings—especially when they’re spelled right”), and there’s a pleasant and useful lesson on every page.

The ideal companion for city buffs, who’ll come away seeing the streets in an entirely different light.

**TOO MANY TIMES**

*How To End Gun Violence in a Divided America*

Ed. by Melville House  
Melville House (208 pp.)  
978-1-61219-879-8

A collection of writings that both explain and advocate against the explosion of gun-related crimes and deaths in the U.S.

Few features of the culture separate America from the rest of the world more than gun violence. As Jill Lepore writes, more Americans own guns than citizens of any other nation on the planet; the runner-up is Yemen, which has a gun ownership rate of only half the rate of ownership per capita. “No civilian population is more powerfully armed,” she notes. “Most Americans do not, however, own guns, because three-quarters of people with guns own two or more.” There were clear constitutional reasons to permit gun ownership, writes former Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens, dissenting against a 2008 ruling giving much broader gun rights to individuals: “The stand-alone phrase ‘bear arms’ most naturally conveys a military meaning unless the addition of a qualifying phrase signals that a different meaning is intended.” That there is no qualifying phrase suggests to Stevens that the Second Amendment has been misread. No matter: there are all sorts of misconceptions out there in a culture of mayhem whose tutelary symbol might be Charles Whitman, the “Texas Tower Sniper” whose 1966 spree is one of the first mass killings of civilians in American history. (Said one Texan as the event was happening, “Well, I hope they get him off that Tower pretty quick, because the anti-gun people are going to go crazy over this.”) But there are other villains in the piece, including corrupt and violent police, a subject on which writer Frank Serpico is an unassailable authority: “When police officers do wrong, use those individuals as examples of what not to do—so that others know that this behavior will not be tolerated.” As to how the country became so overrun with weapons in the first place—its initials are NRA. Other contributors include Ibram X. Kendi, Andrew Ross Sorkin, and Shannon Watts.

**Powerful ammunition, so to speak, for advocates of gun control in a time of uncontrolled violence.**
THE WAKE-UP CALL
Why the Pandemic Has Exposed the Weakness of the West, and How To Fix It
Micklethwait, John & Wooldridge, Andrian
HarperVia/HarperCollins (112 pp.)
$18.00 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-06-306529-1

A broad-ranging critique of the failure of the world’s leading states to respond effectively to the pandemic.

The pandemic has exposed many things, write Bloomberg News editor-in-chief Micklethwait and Economist columnist Wooldridge, especially the effectiveness of governments in trying to do something about it. “The arrival of the virus was like an examination of state capacity,” they write, and very few Western governments performed well (Germany, Switzerland, and Greece among them). Better still were nations in Asia: Though China’s initial response was somewhat confused, it borrowed epidemiological regimes from Singapore, perhaps the most successful state in Asia. Though the Chinese communist state is riddled with inefficiencies and corruption, “alongside the thuggish dictatorship there is another China: one that studies where government works and where it doesn’t; that is recruiting a cadre of highly-trained administrators and monitoring them through the Party’s Organizational Department.” These people are called into account every day while Western bureaucrats shunt off responsibility—which all plays into the hands of the authoritarians of the West, with Donald Trump leading the way in incompetency. Trump, with Boris Johnson in the U.K., botches everything to which he turns his hand; write the authors, “Trump and Johnson are undermining the idea that statecraft is a serious business; instead they have treated it as a branch of mass entertainment.” The pandemic may give faltering states the opportunity to retool—and to clean house. The authors decry excessive regulation that stifles innovation as well as a political culture driven by lawyers, as in the U.S., rather than by scientists and engineers, as in China. More likely, therefore, the pandemic, coupled with the ineptitude of Trump and company, will have a broad effect on power dynamics: “in terms of geopolitics, the crisis has left the West weaker and Asia stronger.”

Thought-provoking, somewhat wonky reading for those looking beyond the current plague toward future geopolitical trends.

HATE IN THE HOMELAND
The New Global Far Right
Miller-Idriss, Cynthia
Princeton Univ. (240 pp.)
$29.95 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-0-691-20383-6

A pointed examination of the far right, from the director of American University’s Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab.

As Miller-Idriss notes, internet search algorithms can easily lead from innocent queries to nasty White supremacist corners of the web, and extreme right-wing radicalism has become normalized to the extent that such corners are beginning to seem like the mainstream. The “gateways,” as she calls them, are sometimes surprising: For instance, there are brands of consumer products, especially fashion items, that carry specific right-wing symbolism, whether because the makers are so inclined politically or because “they have discovered... a niche, but profitable, market.” These fashion brands have replaced the bopper boots and leather jackets of old, giving the young men—and it’s almost always young, White men—who sport them a snappy look. Other places in the author’s geography of recruitment include online multiplayer games (a huge surge in right-wing extremism followed Gamergate, when young men attacked women video game designers, a step in the evolution of the incel movement), music venues, and especially mixed martial arts training centers. “The MMA world,” writes the author, “cultivates a set of positive emotions that appeals to youth searching for a sense of meaning and belonging, such as brotherhood, solidarity, loyalty, and community.” Perhaps most surprisingly, a prominent locus of recruitment has become the college campus, centers of what the author calls “entryism,” where mainstream political organizations such as college Republican clubs are taken over by White supremacists. Think tanks, evangelical churches, and publishing houses round out the mix of extreme-right-wing institutions. “Exposure to extremism requires no physical destination at all—its virtual spaces beam right into our homes and schools in social-media memes, imageboards, chatrooms, and online games,” writes Miller-Idriss, but the real world is just as important, and it is in both realms that anti-fascist activists will have to fight.

A timely book that calls for vigilance against extremism in hitherto unexpected corners, online and off.
**LIKE LOVE**
Morano, Michele
Mad Creek/Ohio State Univ. Press (322 pp.)
$21.95 paper | Sep. 25, 2020
978-0-8142-5598-8

A prismatic exploration of the complexities and contradictions of close relationships.

Readers of Morano's *Grammar Lessons* (2007) will be eager to get their hands on this gifted essayist's second book, and they won't be disappointed. The first book was set during the author's year in Spain, and the theme of its widely admired title essay—the frustrations and complexities of love—is again the throughline here. In addition to romantic love, Morano also delves into family love, teacher-student love, best-friend love, and other varieties of less-categorizable love. The deeply immersive pieces about growing up—"Breaking and Entering," "About Wayne," "Boy Crazy," and particularly "Evenings at the Collegeview Diner"—create the feel of a memoir, with the author's relationships with her mother, who briefly explored lesbianism in mid-1970s blue-collar Poughkeepsie, and with her best friend at the center. "All The Power This Charm Doth Owe" both completes the mother-daughter story and introduces Kevin, the author's great love. Other standouts include "Crushed," a funny, fearless, and relatable exploration of a teacher's crush on a 12-year-old student, and "Like Love," a travel vignette that displays Morano's skill in this genre. Oddly enough, the least compelling essays are about "regular" romantic love. "The Law of Definite Portions," about a frustrating platonic relationship, is less resonant and probably should not have opened the collection. "Ars Romantica (Or a Dozen Ways of Looking at Love)" is interesting formally but drags a bit. Here and elsewhere, Morano handles death as a footnote or an aside, an aesthetic choice that suggests an emotional style analogous to other writers' choices to rely on black humor or obsessive focus. In general, the author's prose evokes her experience of the world with clarity and power.

A sharp eye, brave intellect, and satisfying writing make this worth a look even for those who don't usually read essays.

**LAWLESS**
*Lawless: A Lawyer's Unrelenting Fight for Justice in a War Zone*
Motley, Kimberley
Atlantic Books (336 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Oct. 1, 2020
978-1-77063-318-9

An attorney shares riveting stories of practicing law in Afghanistan.

The daughter of a Korean mother and an African American father, Motley grew up poor in Milwaukee, where she later began her career as a public defender. In 2008, leaving her three children and her husband, who was attending law school in North Carolina, Motley accepted a 12-month position with the Justice Support Program in Afghanistan, building the criminal justice system there. While the job was often frustrating, the author found the challenges of practicing law in the country irresistible; when she finished her contract with JSSP, she set up a private practice in Kabul. Although her bread-and-butter work involved consulting and corporate law, she focuses on the cases closer to her heart, often involving abused women and children and imprisoned foreigners. Motley comes across as pragmatic and down-to-earth, sympathetic to her clients' needs but also fascinated with solving the puzzle that constitutes each case. Working within the Afghan system, she has studied the Quran and decides where she needs to bend or break. Many of the pithy chapters are devoted to individual cases, which makes for lively, accessible reading. In one of the more intriguing chapters, Motley's personal life, generally left out of the narrative, intersects with her professional life: Her husband, from whom she was separated, was shot during a carjacking, and she returned to the States to take his case. Motley uses her provocative stories about working in "a profoundly volatile and violent country," one saturated by "continuing and pervasive misogyny," to illustrate in practical terms what she calls "justness" rather than "justice"—"an imperfect but realistic outcome that suits an imperfect situation" and one that, intriguingly, owes more to "the Afghan approach to the law" than to what she learned in law school in the U.S.

A compelling account of a flexible legal advocate in unusual circumstances.

**AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL**
*An Story in Photographs*
National Geographic
National Geographic (400 pp.)
$40.00 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-1-4262-2142-2

A photographic homage to the natural and cultural treasures of the U.S.

This magnificent collection of images was culled from the "more than 20 million photographs from the extensive National Geographic archives and spans more than 100 years of the country's history." In the foreword, Harvard historian and *New Yorker* contributor Jill Lepore, whose 2018 book, *These Truths*, was an excellent one-volume history of the U.S., reflects on the life and travels of American writer and professor Katharine Lee Bates, the author of the lyrics to the titular song, which contains "echoes of Whitman." Organized by region—the West and Pacific, East and Mid-Atlantic, South & Caribbean, and Midwest and Central Plains—the collection also includes tributes from prominent citizens from a wide variety of backgrounds, including Barack Obama ("what's best in me, and what's best in my message, is consistent with the tradition of Hawaii"). Cal Ripken Jr., Benicio Del Toro, Maya Rudolph,
Nayman is an authoritative guide to this treasure trove of all things Anderson.

PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON

Masterworks
Nayman, Adam
Abrams (288 pp.)
$40.00 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-1-4197-4467-9

A deep, gorgeous dive into the acclaimed director's films.

Nayman follows his Coen brothers book with this visually striking, erudite assessment of Paul Thomas Anderson, another unique writer and director, offering insightful, detailed analyses of movie stills and screenplay texts. He admires Anderson’s “heroic—indeed mythic—auteurism.” The author begins with an introductory overview of Anderson's life and oeuvre—eight films since 1996, many garnering Academy Award nominations and wins. Born in Studio City, California, Anderson, one of nine children, was raised by a father whose “shadow looms over his son's career,” which has run from “promise to fulfillment, apprenticeship to mastery.”

Given that the author seeks to “let each film exist on its own terms,” it’s appropriate that he begins with There Will Be Blood, arguably Anderson's most successful, enduring film, a “heady mix of anachronism, allusion and invention” set in late-19th-century New Mexico. Phantom Thread, a “dark-hued comedy of remarriage” set in mid-20th-century England, is last. The Master is “a veiled account of the history of Scientology” while Inherent Vice, a “meta-detective exercise” set in the early 1970s, simultaneously reverses and subverts its source material. “With There Will Be Blood, Anderson showed no compunction about diverging from the work of Upton Sinclair, but his reverence for [Thomas] Pynchon's text, and also for a period closer to his own experience, yielded a sense of fidelity.” After examining the “nostalgia and fetishism” of Boogie Nights, Nayman looks at Hard Eight, both “crime thriller and a character study...also simultaneously an old man's movie and a young man's movie.” Magnolia is “much closer than it initially seems to Boogie Nights...with the television business swapped for the porn industry,” and Punch-Drunk Love is “entirely in [Anderson's] own voice.” Wrapping up this vivid book are a series of revealing interviews the author conducted with Anderson's longtime collaborators and a discussion of his music videos.

Nayman is an authoritative guide to this treasure trove of all things Anderson.
RESETTING THE TABLE
Straight Talk About the Food We Grow and Eat
Paarlberg, Robert
Knopf (368 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-525-65644-9

A perceptive analysis of America’s food system.

Political scientist Paarlberg, who teaches public policy at Harvard’s Kennedy School, levels a well-informed, evidence-based critique of a broad swath of players in food production and consumption: food companies (which process, package, transport, and advertise products), supermarkets, and restaurant chains, all of which have created “food swamps” of unhealthy choices; as well as “advocacy organizations fixated on local food and organic food” and “those who push for agroecology or food sovereignty over green revolution farming.” He debunks food movement activists such as Michael Pollan, Mark Bittman, and Alice Waters, calling their advocacy of preindustrial agriculture elitist. A return to those farming methods, he writes, “can work on a small scale for those with plenty of money to spend, but it will never be a society-wide solution.” Drawing on scientific and economic research, combined with visits to farms and food plants, Paarlberg asserts persuasively that “modern farming protects the environment not only by using less land compared to several decades ago; it also uses less water, less fossil energy, and fewer chemicals.” Analyzing the use of pesticides, fertilizers, and GMOs, the author argues that modern farming protects the environment not only by using less land compared to several decades ago; it also uses less water, less fossil energy, and fewer chemicals.”

A cogent, revealing look at the future of food.

THE RARE METALS WAR
The Dark Side of Clean Energy and Digital Technologies
Pitron, Guillaume
Trans. by Jacobsohn, Bianca
Scribe (288 pp.)
$20.00 paper | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-950354-31-3

An expert account of a poorly understood but critical element in our economy.

Most readers will agree with French journalist Pitron that China is this century’s rising power, but it may be news that it’s the world’s leading producer of 28 vital mineral resources. Some are well known and precious (platinum, palladium, germanium); others are “rare earth metals,” 17 obscure elements with names such as cerium, dysprosium, and yttrium. Taken together, their yearly production is 0.01% that of steel, but they possess dazzling magnetic properties, making them essential in computers, cellphones, rechargeable batteries, and catalytic converters. China produces 95% of rare earth metals. Western leaders have been expressing alarm at the dependence on China for strategic metals, but efforts to self-produce have accomplished little. Pitron delivers a gripping, detailed, and discouraging explanation. During most of the 20th century, American rare metal mines led the world but produced immense chemical and radioactive pollution. The mines were in constant trouble with the EPA. Then, in the 1990s, China offered to sell ore cheaply (actually at a loss). Because American entrepreneurs realized that Chinese labor was cheap and skilled and not subject to environmental regulation, over time, large numbers of high-tech firms moved operations across the Pacific. China once sold Apple the rare metals that make up the iPhone; today, it manufactures the device. China leads the world in renewable technology production—solar panels, wind turbines, electric-vehicle batteries, etc. This not only requires mining, which is not renewable, but leads to massive pollution. Furthermore, experts calculate that the mining, manufacturing, fueling, and operation of clean energy products generates more, not less, greenhouse gas. “Put simply,” writes the author, “clean energy is a dirty affair. Yet we feign ignorance because we refuse to take stock of the end-to-end production cycle of wind turbines and solar panels.”

A well-rendered explanation of further bad news on the clean energy front.
A compelling mixture of memoir and philology.

**THE LANGUAGE OF THIEVES**

*My Family’s Obsession With a Secret Code the Nazis Tried To Eliminate*

Puchner, Martin

Norton (526 pp.)

$26.95 | Oct. 13, 2020

978-1-324-00591-9

An American professor discovers that his grandfather was a Nazi as well as a scholar with an interesting specialty. Born in Nuremberg and now a professor of English at Harvard, Puchner made his discovery 30 years ago while studying at the Widener Library. Recalling that his German grandfather had been an archivist specializing in the history of names, he searched the card catalog for his papers and found a trove, including a 1934 article, “Family Names as Racial Markers,” which discussed Jewish names throughout history. Originally based on the Bible, they soon reflected non-Hebrew sources. Arriving in Germany in the Middle Ages, Jews often adopted German names, usually related to a location. Few chose Nuremberg, which forbade their settlement, but Frankfurter became a common Jewish name. A crucial change came after the 18th century, when nations granted Jews equal rights—“the worst mistake in history,” according to Puchner’s grandfather. En masse, Jews adopted German names, but since German Christians often chose biblical names, it became difficult to tell them apart. The author’s grandfather believed that because Jews sought to blend in to further their nefarious plans, the Reich should consult experts like himself to distinguish Jewish-sounding German names from German-sounding Jewish names. As a scholar in love with words and language, Puchner gives these priority; so his attention wanders, but the digressions are never less than intriguing. He cannot resist exploring the secret languages used by vagrants and criminals. From childhood, he was fascinated by Rotwelsch, a popular argot throughout Europe dating from the Middle Ages that contained terms from Hebrew, Yiddish, Latin, and Romani. It was regularly denounced by establishment figures, from Martin Luther to Puchner’s grandfather. The author also devotes long sections to Rotwelsch’s history, social role, and vocabulary.

A compelling mixture of memoir and philology.
fire speaks volumes about how they live on the land, and what they do to reconcile those firesticks says much about how they live with each other.” The book covers a wide variety of subjects, from the history of humanity’s experience with fire and subsequent wildfires to the complicated philosophies involved in forest management, fire conservancy, environmentalism, and politics. Pyne’s insights remain sound, and he provides a few new ones, as well—e.g., the fact that the spread and intensification of industrial combustion is “the new prime mover of fire on Earth.” Fire is both a gift and a curse for the human race; how we choose to face it can mean all the difference.

More solid work from a fire expert.

THE FRAGILE EARTH
Writing From the New Yorker on Climate Change
Ed. by Remnick, David & Finder, Henry
Ecco/HarperCollins (560 pp.)
$29.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-06-301754-2

Diverse perspectives on the fate of the Earth.

Since the mid-1980s the New Yorker has offered incisive writing on climate change, with essays by Bill McKibben, Elizabeth Kolbert (the magazine’s “leading voice on the environment”), Eric Klinenberg, Ian Frazier, Kathryn Schulz, and many others. In an informative, stimulating collection, Remnick and Finder have gathered 22 pieces that contribute, he hopes, “to a shared sense of urgency—and to a shared spirit of change.” Kolbert writes of her discovery “that large and sophisticated cultures have already been undone by climate change,” a disturbing precedent at a time when much damage to the environment cannot be undone. “Because of the slow pace of deep-ocean circulation and the long life of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere,” she notes, “it is impossible to reverse the acidification that has already taken place. Nor is it possible to prevent still more from occurring.” On land and in the sea, mass extinctions are probable: “By the end of this century as many as half of earth’s species will be gone.” From an island off northwestern Antarctica, Fen Montaigne reports that of 900 breeding pairs of Adélie penguins recorded in 1974, only 11 adults and 7 chicks remain, a situation caused by “the effects of the rapid warming on the formation of sea ice, on the phytoplankton and Antarctic krill that depend on the sea ice,” and on the birds “that rely on the sea ice and the krill.” David Owen makes a case for the “environmental benignity” of densely populated cities. Although many people assume that rural areas are more environmentally sound, Owen reveals that “spreading people out increases the damage they do to the environment, while making the problems harder to see and to address.” As Michael Specter notes, assessing the environmental, social, and economic consequences of one’s choices—what to eat, where to live, how to travel—is complicated.

Top-shelf writers deliver urgent and compelling calls for dramatic change.

POPPY IN THE WILD
A Lost Dog, Fifteen Hundred Acres of Wilderness, and the Dogged Determination That Brought Her Home
Rhyne, Teresa J.
Pegasus (304 pp.)
$25.95 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-64313-542-7

The search for a beloved lost dog.

In her latest, Rhyne, the author of two bestselling books about her love of dogs, tells the story of Poppy the beagle. Since she already owned two dogs at the time, the author planned to foster Poppy, who was rescued from a Chinese dog-meat market, until an appropriate owner could be found. However, from their first meeting, Rhyne was smitten. Sadly, while being watched by others, Poppy escaped and disappeared into a 1,500-acre wilderness park. The author immediately went into rescue mode, doing everything possible to find Poppy before she was hurt or killed. The narrative contains more backstory than necessary, as Rhyne gives minute details of her life with her other dogs, her work, and her husband prior to Poppy’s arrival. The particulars of Poppy’s disappearance make for faster-paced reading, and the tactics she used to find Poppy will be useful for dog owners in similar situations. In fact, some readers may choose to skip to the final section, “Doggone Helpful Tips for When Your Dog Is Gone,” in which the author provides specific, helpful instructions for what to do—and not to do—when searching for a lost dog. Rule 1: “Stop. Stop what you are doing. Stop chasing your dog, stop calling its name. Stop. Know that every part of this will go against your instincts. Your instincts are wrong and are fear-based. Stop and listen to the experts. Your dog’s life may depend on it.” For anyone who loves dogs as much as Rhyne and thinks sharing a bed with a beagle is heaven, this often tender story will hold great appeal. Readers who are not quite as enthusiastic about dogs—or are seeking a true adventure story—should look elsewhere.

A highly detailed account that will be most appreciated by those who enjoyed Rhyne’s first two books.

TRUE BELIEVER
The Rise and Fall of Stan Lee
Riesman, Abraham
Crown (416 pp.)
$28.00 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-593-13571-6

A takedown of the comic-book legend, recapitulating well-worn charges about authorship while adding bits and pieces to them.

Stan Lee (1922-2018) was something of a con man, writes Riesman, who began this book as a profile for New York magazine that, unsurprisingly, incurred the subject’s wrath. He was also easily conned, particularly in his later years, when he was beset by misery—including an allegedly
abusive daughter who seemed intent on spending all of Lee's money and dangers-on who bilked him out of millions. Former associates don't come off much better. Of one, writes the author, "He has little to show for his years of labor other than an endless stream of stories, lots of them about how he was wronged by others (a common refrain, for whatever reason, among men Stan grew close to), but many about seemingly every interaction he and Stan ever had." Most fraught—and a tale well known to students of comic-book history—is the question of authorship of such famed superheroes as Spider-Man, with credit going either to Joe Simon or Jack Kirby (and perhaps both) and not to Lee, who claimed it for his own. Long after Kirby's death, Disney, which owned Lee's Marvel brand, settled with the family for millions in a legal battle that almost went to the Supreme Court; other of Lee's enterprises ended up under investigation. Riesman adds that Lee's own creations were less than heroic, as when he pitched actress Whoopi Goldberg a yarn in which she would play "the offspring of an alien father and a human mother who possesses the ability to be sexually irresistible to men." Goldberg didn't take the gig, and she seems an odd choice if we are to accept Riesman's charge that Lee habitually made "racist, homophobic, and misogynist remarks."

All idols have feet of clay, but, by this unpleasant account, Lee's were more fragile than most.

**GRIEVING**

*Dispatches From a Wounded Country*

Riviera Garza, Cristina

Trans. by Booker, Sarah

Feminist Press (168 pp.)

$16.95 paper | Oct. 6, 2020

978-1-936932-93-1

Pensive meditation on the violence in Mexico that has compelled so many to seek refuge north of the border.

"What we Mexicans have been forced to witness at the beginning of the twenty-first century—on the streets, on pedestrian bridges, on television, or in the papers—is, without a doubt, one of the most chilling spectacles of contemporary horror," writes Riviera Garza, a poet, critic, translator, and professor of Hispanic Studies at the University of Houston. That spectacle includes the mass murder of women in border cities, drug-fueled violence throughout the country, politically motivated killings, and smaller, less systematic incidents, including the femicide of her sister. "Soon after she was pronounced dead," writes the author, "the Mexico City police had gathered enough evidence to issue a warrant of arrest against...an ex-boyfriend who never stopped stalking and threatening her, and who, to this day, has not paid for his crime....The war, this各式各样 named war that still tears us apart, began, for me, on that date. Grieving, too, began its long, mercurial, transformative work." In the face of all this bloodshed, former president Vicente Fox muttered, "Why should I care?" Fox has protection, money, and a walled estate, shields that most Mexicans do not enjoy. For all that, writes the author, everyone should care: "The dead are mine and they are yours." Regrettably, few seem to, leading to the damaging trope that Mexicans are so often seen as "inadequate, passive, or fatalist victims." As Rivera Garza ably demonstrates, so much of the responsibility for the violence can be attributed to the failure of the state. In the end, the slow collapse of civil society amounts to less a revolution than a "structural change" whose consequences are not yet known and "for which a vocabulary to comprehend it does not yet exist."

A compelling work of social criticism that speaks to a desperate time.

**TRAITOR**

*Betrayal From Benedict Arnold to Donald Trump*

Rothkopf, David

Dunne/St. Martin's (240 pp.)

$27.99 | Oct. 27, 2020

978-1-250-22883-3

Rothkopf ranges across American history for confirming examples that hold Donald Trump guilty of treason.

In his new book, *On Treason*, Carlton F.W. Larson, a California law professor, discusses how the crime of treason is bound up in such specific technicalities that it is almost never prosecuted as such. Rothkopf takes a less confining view here, holding that Trump "has repeatedly, indisputably, and egregiously betrayed his country." He has done this through many acts of commission, though the author hits hardest on the Mueller Report’s assertions of actions that favored other countries—especially Russia—over the one Trump ostensibly leads. A president who is a traitor is a highly unusual situation. But as Rothkopf observes, there have been many other Americans who, motivated by money or ideology, have aided the nation’s enemies. The most notorious of them is Benedict Arnold, whose very name is a byword for treason and who attempted to trade away military secrets that might have led to the failure of the American revolutionary cause. Aaron Burr appealed to the British for help in trying to realize his ambitions to power, though they were lukewarm to the idea, and, writes the author, "there is no evidence they sought to break up the United States." John Brown was executed for treason against the state of Virginia, though the charge would not be entertained today. And so forth, on down to the Rosenbergs—who, unfortunately for them, fell afoul of Roy Cohn, later to become Trump’s mentor and "often cited as precisely the kind of lawyer Trump was looking for when he appointed William Barr to be U.S. attorney general, a position Trump saw as primarily existing to protect him from his accusers." There are many questions that lawyers need to ask Trump that concern his disdain for American institutions and fondness for foreign dictators, but Rothkopf’s conclusions are open-ended.

The argument doesn’t cinch the charge, but the book makes for a useful summation of ceaseless and blatant malfeasance.
“All comedians are slightly amazed when anything works.” So writes Seinfeld in this pleasing collection of sketches from across his four-decade career.

Known for his wry, observational humor, Seinfeld has largely avoided profanity and dirty jokes and has kept politics out of the equation. Like other schooled jokesters, perhaps most famously Bob Hope, he keeps a huge library of gags stockpiled, ever fearful of that day when the jokes will run out or the emcee will call you back for another set. “For the most part, it was the people who killed themselves to keep coming up with great new material who were able to keep rising through the many levels,” he recounts of his initiation into the New York stand-up scene. Not all his early material played well. The first piece in this collection, laid out sentence by sentence as if for a teleprompter, is a bit about being left-handed, which comes with negative baggage: “Two left feet. / Left-handed compliment. / Bad ideas are always ‘out of left field.’ / What are we having for dinner? / Leftovers.” He gets better, and quickly, as when he muses on the tininess of airplane bathrooms: “And a little slot for used razor blades. Who is shaving on the plane? And shaving so much, they’re using up razor blades. Is the Wolfman flying in there?” For the most part, the author’s style is built on absurdities: “Why does water ruin leather? / Aren’t cows outside a lot of the time?” It’s also affable, with rare exceptions, as when, taking a brief, fleeting moment of human connection.

Fans of Seinfeld will eat this up, and aspiring comics will want to study how he shapes his seemingly effortless humor.

An up-close and personal look at one of Hollywood’s most successful directors. In his latest, film historian and critic Shone wrote in close collaboration with Nolan (b. 1970), and their longtime friendship (they met in 2001, not long after Memento was released) provides him with unique access to the “most successful filmmaker to come out of the British Isles since Alfred Hitchcock.” This erudite book is packed with extensive, expansive discussions about Nolan’s films, all written or co-written by the director; insights into what he was trying to accomplish with each film; methodologies; and the movies, directors, books, art, architecture, and music that influenced him. Shone calls Nolan a “classicalist” who prefers “to shoot every frame himself.” His films, writes the author, are “variations on a series of themes, repeated in different voices and keys, inverted, slowed down or sped up, creating an impression of ceaseless movement.”

For the stoically inclined, a fine vade mecum come donation time.
written by Mickey Spillane.” Nolan believes that Insomnia, his first studio film with big-time actors (Al Pacino, Robin Williams, Hilary Swank) is the “most underrated” of all his films. His three Batman films, Nolan suggests, trace “what being Batman is costing Bruce Wayne,” and The Prestige, writes Shone, “is the ‘locus classicus of all his themes and concerns.” After the $1 billion box-office take for The Dark Knight, Nolan was free to do anything. He first had the idea for Inception when he was a student. The film, which broke all kinds of conventional notions of cinema, is “possibly Nolan’s greatest feat of structural engineering.” Interstellar “came from a very personal place,” and Dunkirk, notes Shone, “narrowed as it proceeds, like a noose.” The author concludes that “Nolan’s films leave an echo whose reverberations are felt only once it is over.”

Fans of Nolan’s films will find this revealing book invaluable.

A vivid history revealing hidden aspects of supposedly well-known events.
WITCH HUNT
A Traveler’s Guide to the Power and Persecution of the Witch
Sollée, Kristen
Red Wheel/Weiser (256 pp.)
$21.95 | Oct. 1, 2020 978-1-57863-699-0

A historian travels far beyond Salem in search of lingering marks of witchcraft’s past.

In Witches, Sluts, Feminists (2017), Sollée, a writer and curator who teaches gender studies at the New School, offered a quick introduction to centuries of misogyny and the ways in which superficially distinct categories of womanhood overlap. In her latest book, she takes readers on a tour of physical sites with witchy pasts in Europe, the U.K., Ireland, and the U.S. The author provides historical and geographic specificity that is often elided and obscured in popular depictions of witchcraft—including those by self-described witches. Some locales in the book have turned their connections with witchcraft into kitschy pastiches of shops and attractions, but even in those places, Sollée digs into the history that lies beneath the tourist trap. The author’s trip to Germany is emblematic of her journey as a whole. When she climbed the highest peak in the Harz Mountains, she was visiting a place sacred to Saxon pagans, the setting for a diabolical orgy in Goethe’s Faust, and the site of an annual gathering of contemporary witches. In Thale, Sollée went to a theme park where she saw “statues of a naked Devil and witch that children were treating like jungle gyms.” The medieval village of Quedlinburg offers a quiet contrast to the sensational entertainments of Thale, but this storybook town executed so many accused witches that it’s the source for the oft-repeated and ahistorical suggestion that millions of women died during the witch hunts of the early modern era. This is clearly written for a general audience, but Sollée’s judicious use of scholarly sources adds weight to the text and serves as a guide to readers who want to learn more.

A valuable resource for planning a magical itinerary—or exploring the landscape of witchcraft from the couch.

AND WE CAME OUTSIDE AND SAW THE STARS AGAIN
Writers From Around the World on the COVID-19 Pandemic
Ed. by Stavans, Ilan
Restless Books (400 pp.)
$22.00 paper | Aug. 11, 2020 978-1-63206-302-1

Passionate voices ring out from lockdowns around the world.

Mexican American writer and educator Stavans has gleaned powerful responses to the pandemic from 52 contributors who share their experiences in deftly crafted essays, poems, photographs, and artwork. Lines from Dante’s Divine Comedy provide the title for the book and its five sections: “A Mighty Flame Follows a Tiny Spark” focuses on the eruption of the plague; “The Path to Paradise Begins in Hell,” on the need for a road map; “I’m Not Alone in Misery,” on empathy; “Faith Is the Substance of Things Hoped for,” on hope; and “Love Insists the Loved Loves Back” is the door through which we might come outside again and see the stars.” The impressive cast of contributors—Jhumpa Lahiri, Mario Vargas Llosa, Claire Messud, Ariel Dorfman, Rivka Galchen, Daniel Alarcón, and others—reveal feelings of fear, loneliness, and, for some, a surprising sense of connection. As Argentinian journalist Javier Sinay writes, “even though a coronavirus particle is seventeen million times smaller than a human being, in the war of the species, for a moment already too prolonged, it has been able to corral all of humanity with its spikes.” An overwhelming sense of dread is not new to several writers. Quarantined in Copenhagen, political cartoonist Khalid Alibah writes, “I am sorry to break it to you, but your ‘new normal’ has been the ‘old normal’ for billions of Brown and Black people around the world. For many of us, restrictions, repression, and deprivation have been a constant feature of our whole lives.” For Majed Abusalama, who was raised in a refugee camp in Gaza, being locked down in Berlin, where he lives now, “brought back memories from the first Intifada.” Although many look optimistically to the future, for others, the pandemic has laid bare a long plague of inequality and hatreds.

Stirring reflections to illuminate dark times.

BLACK WOMEN, BLACK LOVE
America’s War on African American Marriage
Stewart, Dianne M.
Seal Press (336 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 6, 2020 978-1-58005-818-6

A professor of religion and African American studies offers a compelling look at Black women’s love relationships through a historical lens.

As Stewart notes, 70% of Black American women are unmarried, largely due to circumstance rather than by choice. The author examines the social, economic, and cultural conditions for heterosexual Black women who want to fall in love and get married but have few prospects as a result of historical, systemic problems that have plagued their love relationships and marriage outcomes since slavery. Love, coupling, and marriage among enslaved people were burdened by expectations of fracture due to the sale of a loved one or other separations. In painstaking and painful detail, Stewart chronicles how even after Emancipation, the likelihood of domestic terror in the form of lynchings, torture, and the wholesale massacre of thriving Black communities “haunted Black couples and families well into the twentieth century.” Those who did survive
bore the burdens and restrictions inherent in the systems of patriarchal marriage and unrelenting poverty. Further, abusive federal and state “man-in-the-house” policies targeted Black women, stripping their families of public assistance benefits if boyfriends or husbands were present in the home. Such policies essentially punished Black women for seeking companionship and romantic love, denying them vital sources of “financial and emotional support.” Not surprisingly, Black marriage rates declined significantly in the 1960s and ’70s. But the most pernicious impact on Black love and marriage has been wrought by mass incarceration. More than twice as many Black men were under correctional control in 2013 than were enslaved in 1850. Stewart interweaves such eye-opening statistics with engaging personal narratives of contemporary and enslaved women whose lives (and deaths) are a testament to the complexity of Black women’s quests for love and a celebration of their resilience in the face of daunting odds.

A beautiful, strikingly original work that is both scholarly and deeply moving.

**COUNTING**

*How We Use Numbers To Decide What Matters*

Stone, Deborah

Liveright/Norton (288 pp.)

$26.95 | Oct. 6, 2020

A delightful takedown of our unreasonable worship of numbers.

In 1954, Darrell Huff’s bestselling *How To Lie With Statistics* began a genre that continues to produce numerous books each year. Stone, a professor at MIT and Brandeis whose specialty is political science and social policy, casts an equally critical eye but delves far more deeply into the subject. To Stone, a number is not a fact but a tool, useful only if we know how it works. When the U.S. Census Bureau announces that Whites are becoming a minority, what’s to argue with? Doesn’t the census merely count? However, the Bureau defines White as a person who checks the “White” box on the form—and none of the 13 other boxes. Checking the “Hispanic” box or both the “Hispanic” and “White” boxes makes you a non-White. Children of mixed marriages are never White, ditto with anyone checking “White” and “Other.” It’s a mess. “Numbers don’t speak for themselves but their creators….More often than not,” writes the author, “numbers are part of somebody’s argument.” They can mean whatever their authors want them to mean, so all are “cooked”—not faked but assembled from various ingredients that vary according to circumstances. If you have any doubts, asking the numbers themselves won’t help; you have to address the authors. As Stone lays out her examples of irrational faith in numbers, readers will squirm, but not with disbelief. Founding Father James Madison’s meticulous, if creepy calculation demonstrating that a Black slave is worth precisely three-fifths of a White freeman will certainly put his statues in peril. Graded according to their death rates, the best hospitals perform badly because they deal with the sickest patients. Graded (and promoted or fired) on how well students score on a standardized test, teachers teach how to take the test.

Enthralling evidence that there is less to numbers than meets the eye.

**THE KNOWLEDGE MACHINE**

*How Irrationality Created Modern Science*

Strevens, Michael

Liveright/Norton (352 pp.)

$30.00 | Oct. 13, 2020

978-1-63149-137-5

An exploration of the period, beginning in 1600, “during which empirical inquiry evolved from the freewheeling, speculative frenzy of old into something with powers of discovery on a wholly new level.”

Throughout most of history, writes NYU philosophy professor Strevens, all cultures believed everything worth knowing was already known. Asked to explain the motion of the heavens, the nature of disease, or the makeup of matter, wise men in ancient Egypt, Greece, or China thought deeply and gave answers that were mostly wrong. The great leap forward came about after about 1600 with the scientific revolution, which led to dazzling progress and continues to do so. There is no shortage of explanations of how scientists work. Strevens concisely summarizes the most prominent and gives them credit when he feels credit is due. Central to his thesis is what he calls the “iron rule of explanation,” which denies that knowledge follows from thinking, logic, or infallible authority. Wise men in earlier times would have disagreed because they routinely mixed philosophy with observations, and their work was suffused with teleology: the belief that everything has a purpose. Aristotle taught that objects fall because their natural place is the center of the universe. The iron rule ignores what scientists believe and “makes no attempt to...decide winners and losers.” It does not settle arguments but prolongs them by demanding an empirical test, one that all agree will provide useful evidence. “It is a rule for doing rather than thinking,” writes the author. No political, religious, or philosophical reflection allowed; just the facts. Strevens emphasizes that the rule applies to communicating research findings, generally in a professional journal, and scientists remain free to express personal feelings and find deeper meanings. Many—perhaps too many—take advantage of this, writes the author, who provides a thought-provoking and likely-to-be-controversial explanation of how scientists finally got it right.

One of the better examinations of the origins of the scientific revolution.
TRUMP ON TRIAL
The Investigation, Impeachment, Acquittal and Aftermath
Ed. by Sullivan, Kevin & Jordan, Mary & Luxenberg, Steve
Scribner (576 pp.)
$32.00 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-1-982152-99-4

The work of more than 50 Washington Post journalists quilted together to create a meticulously thorough record of Donald Trump’s impeachment.

Sullivan, Jordan, and Luxenberg team up to produce the latest entry in a series of books based on the esteemed newspaper’s unparalleled coverage of Trump and his many misdeeds. In 56 chapters, beginning with “Watch Your Back” in March 2019 and moving through “Never Over” in the first months of 2020, the text includes extensive original reporting and fleshing-out of a foundation of published work and previous interviews, including that of John Bolton. The giant cast of characters is laid out in a four-page “List of Principal Figures,” and the following pieces create 3-dimensional portraits of the major ones. Nancy Pelosi is one of the strongest: We see her struggling with the pros and cons of impeachment, mourning at her friend Cokie Roberts’ funeral, and ripping up Trump’s speech about Rush Limbaugh on national TV. All through the long haul to the unhappy finish, readers can relive the many shocking moments that seem to occur every day—e.g., Donald Trump Jr.’s dismissing career Foreign Service officers as “jokers” or the manipulated video that made it look like Pelosi gave a speech while intoxicated. Regarding “Fat Jerry,” Trump’s sobriquet for Jerrold Nadler, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee: “The two men shared New York accents but not much else. Trump…was born into wealth. Nadler was the son of a New Jersey chicken farmer who had moved the family to New York City after the farm had gone out of business. In politics, Nadler built a career defending the working class with a style that was more scholarly than flashy. Fighting the loud and showy developer from Queens banished that reputation.” Including 45 pages of footnotes and an exhaustive index, the granular detail of this history makes it a gift to posterity—and to news junkies—but any reader who does not support Trump will find plenty of useful material.

Sets a standard for political storytelling with impeccable research and lively writing.

STALIN
Passage to Revolution
Suny, Ronald Grigor
Princeton Univ. (856 pp.)
$39.95 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-691-18203-2

A comprehensive, deeply researched study of one of the world’s most brutal dictators as he took the paths that would lead him to power.

Joseph Stalin (1878-1953) was a frail boy who willed himself to improvement, physical and mental, with a program that Theodore Roosevelt would have recognized. He was remarkable, writes history professor Suny, but “at the same time quite ordinary, a small man placed in extraordinary circumstances.” Throughout his life, though, Stalin made efforts to excel at all he did, whether singing in a choir or writing poetry. “He was not above correcting his teachers,” Suny notes in his long but well-paced narrative. Without dipping too deeply into psychobiography, the author examines aspects of his home life that might have influenced his emergent defensiveness, and later paranoia, including a violent-tempered, alcoholic father and a mother who, though steely, encouraged her son to excel. Stalin left home for school in a larger city, moved into revolutionary circles that soon took him farther afield, and steadily rose in the ranks of Russian Marxists. Along the way, he used what Suny gently calls “dubious means” to consolidate his power as he aligned ever more closely with Lenin, who was in exile during much of the time that Stalin organized revolutionary activities in Moscow and Petrograd. Stalin was in exile, too, but almost immediately escaped from the remote Siberian town where he was sent. He helped engineer the Bolshevik victory over the post-czarist government and their Menshevik rivals. As Suny writes, “it was the more extreme picture sketched by the Bolsheviks—of the whole of propertied society, liberals, conservatives, and reactionaries alike, as the enemy of the working class—that brought people out of the factories into the streets.” In all that effort—and in his clashes with fellow revolutionaries, notably Leon Trotsky—lay the seed for his later dictatorship.

A portrait of the totalitarian as a young artist, of great interest to any student of modern history.
A fluid, thoughtful contribution to sports literature, reaching far beyond the confines of Michigan’s premier city.

**CITY OF CHAMPIONS**

_A History of Triumph and Defeat in Detroit_

Szymanski, Stefan & Weineck, Silke-Maria

The New Press (416 pp.)

$29.99 | Oct. 13, 2020

978-1-62097-442-1

A history of sports in the Motor City that quickly expands into a history of Detroit itself.

“Sports are and have always been a site of struggles that seemingly exceed them,” write Szymanski, a professor of sports management, and Weineck, a professor of German studies and comparative literature. The authors take an intellectually weighty approach to the business of competitive sports in a city whose economic decline and fall are well documented. The authors name a few heroes whose civic sense has outweighed the trend of exurbanization, such as Little Caesars founder Mike Ilitch, the son of Macedonian immigrants who “became a hero...because he stayed, and with him, his money,” helping fund a sports complex that revitalized the downtown of an urban center. The authors allow that some of the big-ticket franchises have been underperformers since the glory days of Ty Cobb, Al Kaline, and Dutch Clark, but they still have a great effect in building “community and pride.” For all that, some of the best of the city’s athletic enterprises are teams few outside the city have ever heard of—the Roller Derby League, for example, with squads like the Pistoffs (a nice play on the name of the NBA Pistons) and the Detroit City Football Club (soccer), which was “the first American team to sport a uniform featuring rainbow colors in support of the LGBTQ community.” On that theme, the authors point out that racetrack attendance long exceeded that at baseball games “with the single exception of 1948,” even though the state lottery has since displaced track betting. With a palette of sports that includes lacrosse and women’s basketball, however, and with a powerful infrastructure including numerous universities, there’s no reason why Detroit should not be a contender to host a future Olympic Games, “a bit of restitution for the shenanigans of the past.”

A fluid, thoughtful contribution to sports literature, reaching far beyond the confines of Michigan’s premier city.

**KIMIKO DOES CANCER**

_A Graphic Memoir_

Tobimatsu, Kimiko

Illus. by Geniza, Keet

Arsenal Pulp Press (96 pp.)

$16.95 paper | Oct. 6, 2020

978-1-55152-819-9

A queer, mixed-race woman chronicles her experience with breast cancer.

In her first book, human rights lawyer Tobimatsu teams up with Filipina Canadian illustrator and comic artist Geniza, and it’s clear that the two Toronto natives share a common spirit.

Refreshingly, neither the author nor the illustrator attempts to overdramatize the author’s cancer experience. But as they show, even successful treatment and apparent remission can leave lasting emotional and psychological scars. The narrative is chronological and conversational, taking readers through the author’s experiences, and the illustrations reinforce the feeling of matter-of-fact practicality, with subtle tension just underneath the surface. Tobimatsu felt distracted from her work and from many other once-important elements of her life. Her libido suffered, as did her relationship with her girlfriend, and she had sometimes-difficult interactions with her parents, doctors, and other cancer patients. Most of this material will strike a responsive chord with those who have dealt with cancer in some form or another, yet the author’s age at the time of diagnosis (25), her ethnicity, and her sexual orientation brought other issues into play. “The mainstream cancer narrative,” she writes, “was so white, feminized and apotolical; the peppiness appeared to gloss over the way cancer affected people differently based on age and class.” In the aftermath of her radiation treatment, she began experiencing hot flashes and other perimenopausal symptoms more common among women almost twice her age. Ultimately, she was able to cope, but that doesn’t mean everything is perfect. “Fears linger in the background and surface whenever my body feels off...But more than the fear, it’s the daily changes that I fear the most,” Tobimatsu writes in the epilogue. “Pre-cancer, some combination of personality and privilege allowed me to be easy-going, flexible, adaptable. That’s not possible anymore. Now I require so much more to feel comfortable.”

An engaging and inspirational account of dealing with illness and its perception.

**THE ANSWER IS... Reflections on My Life**

Trebek, Alex

Simon & Schuster (304 pp.)

$26.00 | Jul. 21, 2020

978-1-9821-5799-9

A memoir from the beloved host of _Jeopardy_.

In brief chapters copiously illustrated with photographs, Trebek steers clear of deep introspection in favor of amusing anecdotes and fond recollections of a life he insists “was not particularly exciting.” Though the book was clearly prompted by a 2019 diagnosis of stage 4 pancreatic cancer, which the author notes, with typical understatement, “has taken a toll on me,” he doesn’t dwell on his illness. Throughout the book, the tone is upbeat and infused with gratitude and humor. Trebek tells pleasant stories about the illicit distillery his father ran in the basement of the Sudbury, Ontario, hotel where he was a chef; the scrapes the author got into at a Catholic boarding school; the advent of his famous mustache and the repercussions when he precipitously shaved it off; and the jokes played on him while he was working on a newscast at the CBC. Trebek’s firm sense
of what he believes is mostly public knowledge, and it’s clear that much of his personal life is off-limits. Of his parents’ difficult divorce, he writes that they were “ill-suited,” and he only provides a few sentences about the “kind of...resentment” he felt toward his mother for concealing for years the birth of a half sibling born after his parents’ divorce. Jeopardy fans will be pleased to find that much of the narrative covers some of the show’s memorable moments, including Trebek’s musings on some of the big winners, comic interactions with contestants, and lists of celebrities who could have made it as contenders—e.g., Michael McKean, Jodie Foster, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, and Aaron Rodgers. Readers will likely come away from the memoir feeling even more comfortable with the author than they already did.

An amiable, enjoyable series of glimpses into the life of an avuncular figure.

Donald Trump, writes the author early on in this scathing critique, “understands nothing about history, constitutional principles, geopolitics, diplomacy (or anything else, really).” Her account of a night spent at the Trump International Hotel begins with her discomfort at finding her name plastered on every object in the room: “TRUMP shampoo…TRUMP shoe polish, TRUMP sewing kit, and TRUMP bathrobe….I opened the refrigerator, grabbed a split of TRUMP white wine, and poured it down my Trump throat so it could course through my brain.” As readers will quickly realize, there is a fate worse than having Donald J. Trump as president: being related to him. The author describes wandering around her house in shock the morning after the 2016 election. “It felt,” she writes, “as though 62,979,636 voters had chosen to turn this country into a macro business of their bloodstream and hit the pleasure center of my Trump brain.”

The long-awaited tell-all from the president’s niece, a clinical psychologist.

In the last 20 years, writes anthropologist Vine, some 4 million people, combatants and civilians alike, have died in American wars in places such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Yemen. At the same time, some 2.7 million Americans have been “sent to fight wars that have raged continuously since the U.S. military invaded Afghanistan on October 7, 2001.” When asked if this were a “forever war,” a general replied, “Define forever.” Pentagon planners once called it a “long war.” Now, writes the author, they use the term “infinite war,” which in time may come to embrace China and/or Russia as well as the countless small nations that the U.S. has taken on in recent history. In a fluent narrative, Vine extends this infinite war into the past as well, showing that America was founded on a martial culture that has been at war with someone since well before the nation came into being, with a “permanent frontier” and a penchant for ethnic cleansing in the case of Indigenous nations. At one point in history, courtesy of the Andrew Jackson so admired by the sitting president, the country was fighting five wars at once—not just the second war against Britain now called the War of 1812, but also wars against the Indigenous peoples of the Southeast. This frontier notion meant that “by the middle of the nineteenth century, there were 60 major forts west of the Mississippi River and 138 Army posts in the western territories.” The network of American military bases is no less extensive around the world, and the hundreds of bases and many client states the nation maintains today amount to nothing less than an empire, even if we disavow harboring territorial designs beyond our borders.

Vine offers much to ponder about our militarized foreign policy and its deep antecedents.
Engaging travels through a Chinese countryside in which high technology meets the old ways.

In this entry in the publisher’s new FSGO x Logic series, Wang, the creative director at Logic magazine, blends studies of agriculture, anthropology, tech, and digital art. The author opens with a modest protest that while it is easy to both romanticize and overlook the countryside, and especially Chinese farm villages, “many of them are sites of economies and agricultural practices that are foundational to our world.” China is now subject to the same market forces and consumer preferences as Western nations, so that everyone wants nice things such as high-quality organic food. That opens many doors to rural enterprises. As one entrepreneur observes, whereas big corporations such as Nabisco dominated the food world in the past, “hundreds of smaller, fragmented companies will dominate the future, catering to a continuum of different tastes and experiences.” One of the author’s recurrent themes is the use of technology to improve agricultural production, as with the farm of the title, which caters to “upper-class urbanites—people willing to pay a premium on food.” Along the way, Wang takes on science historian Joseph Needham’s famous observation that China ceased to innovate well before Western traders arrived. The author distinguishes innovation from adaptation to show that there is not only plenty of “disruptive innovation” occurring in China, but also an emerging “shanzhai economy instead of an innovation economy.” In this case, shanzhai suggests the process of retooling outside products—an iPhone, say—to make affordable things for a less affluent local market and, in the bargain, “decolonize technology.” Wang's whirlwind discussion, smart and well argued, turns to many other topics as well, from racism in high tech to microlending, trade wars, risk tolerance, and a rapidly changing rural China, with delicious recipes as a lagniappe.

Technology writing with flair looking to a future that’s fast upon us, with China playing a leading role.

An unsettling look at the extraordinarily brutal civil war that has engulfed Syria since 2011.

On one side is Bashar al-Assad, a dictator with support from Iran and Russia. On the other side is a collection of Syrian rebels aided by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the U.S. but also including units from al-Qaida and the Islamic State group. The U.S. abandoned military support in 2017 and now largely confines itself to humanitarian aid. In this highly disturbing yet significant text, Warrick, a two-time Pulitzer-winning journalist for the Washington Post who has spent years investigating the Middle East and national security issues, concentrates on one particularly horrific aspect: the Syrian military’s use of poison gas, locally produced since the 1980s. “By the early 2000s,” writes the author, “the network of laboratories and production centers gradually blossomed into a mature manufacturing complex that encompassed some forty buildings and storage bunkers at two dozen secret locations scattered across the country.” Warrick powerfully describes gruesome details of the first attacks in 2013, during which nerve gas killed thousands, mostly civilians. Despite universal outrage in the U.S., the miserable experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan led to overwhelming opposition to military action. Perhaps as a public relations gesture, Russia agreed that Syria would, under U.N. supervision, dismantle their chemical program. This turned out to be vastly more complex than predicted, and Warrick delivers a vivid account as experts crisscrossed the country to oversee the destruction. By June 2014, trucks carrying 1,300 tons of deadly chemicals had unloaded their cargo onto ships, where complex machinery converted deadly chemicals into merely toxic waste. Almost immediately, Assad’s army turned to chlorine gas, which was available on the commercial market. After a few years, nerve gas reappeared because Assad had kept a few factories in reserve, but by that time, he was near victory thanks to generous Russian and Iranian support. Warrick concludes that America’s intervention in Iraq led to disaster, but refusal to intervene in Syria has done the same.

A journalistic expert on the Middle East delivers more bad news from the region.
A thoughtful, artfully written exploration not just about how music works, but how it makes us feel.

A Montreal-based poet digs into our fascination with music and its relation to our search for meaning.

Outside of her poetic output, Waterman has collected a diverse collection of essays about creativity on her blog, The Mindful Bard. Many of these thought exercises and interviews concern music, but in this book, she writes, “they’re better and make more sense.” The most primal narrative thread is the idea of the “soundquest,” which Waterman defines as “a kind of hero’s journey” with more than a little bit of obsession involved. A soundquest,” she writes, “begins when you hear something mysteriously thrilling, something that drives you to keep tunneling into the genre until you find the quintessence— the performance or the recording representing the culmination of listening pleasure for that genre.” Refreshingly, the author doesn’t limit her illuminating discussions to just Western music, though she does look at Bob Dylan’s influence and the cultural touchstone of Don McLean’s 1971 hit “American Pie.” Physically, intellectually, and spiritually, Waterman travels much further. She analyzes the work of musicians from Brazil, Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco, among many other places, showing what drives these artists to create remarkable music. Waterman also shares the interesting, little-known fact that the mythology of the so-called “dark man at the crossroads” (in America, think Robert Johnson and the devil) reverberates across many cultures: “The crossroads being such a potent symbol of the intersection of the sacred with the profane, the soul standing at that intersection now complete can enter a state of mystical turning that, incorporating all, transcends all.” There’s a patina of New Age–y spirituality to the writing, but Waterman’s insights into the nature of jazz, blues, and other genres, as well as her personal discoveries, are well worth exploring.

A thoughtful, artfully written exploration not just about how music works, but how it makes us feel.

Former BBC science correspondent Whitehouse has done his homework, so technically savvy readers will find little to quarrel with, and there is no chance that his predictions will be worse than those following the Apollo missions. During the exhilaration of the 1969 moon landings, most observers believed that the possibilities for space travel were endless. Older space buffs will remember when, in 1972, Richard Nixon cancelled further Apollo flights and junked the rockets and capsules. No human has been back to the moon since, but the ice is breaking. NASA's scheduled return to the moon in 2028 seems guaranteed because Congress voted to fund the mission. Donald Trump’s 2019 announcement that he wants the landing in 2024 thrilled space buffs, including the author. However, that will require more money, which neither the president nor Congress seems interested in providing. Whitehouse delivers a skillful history of space exploration, paying special attention to the moon and emphasizing problems solved during Apollo and those that still require solutions in order to establish a permanent base. By 2069, he predicts that an international moon base will be up and running. In his scenario, there will also be a separate Chinese base. The author reminds readers that the U.S. banned China from participating in the space station and forbade NASA researchers from collaborating with that nation’s space scientists. China has an energetic space program, and Whitehouse does not doubt that the Chinese plan to avenge that insult. A realist, Whitehouse emphasizes that, without a major breakthrough in rocket technology, travel to Mars will test the limits of human endurance and willingness to bear the expense. His forecast for 2069 is a struggling 18-man international base on Mars. China will have its own.

A fine overview of the past and future of human space exploration.

**SPACE 2069**

**AFTER APOLLO: BACK TO THE MOON, TO MARS... AND BEYOND**

Whitehouse, David

Icon Books (336 pp.)

$27.00 | Oct. 13, 2020

978-1-78578-646-4

Expert speculation on the next 50 years of space travel.
Although not the first, the Neanderthal bones unearthed by German miners in 1856 were the first recognized as different from modern humans. Since some experts insisted that these dirt to retrieve bits of vegetation, chemicals, bone fragments, microfossils, pollen, and trash. High-tech scanners and computers pour out a stream of revelations. Scientists scrape plaque from old teeth, put it under the microscope, and learn what they ate, the parasites they harbored, the tools they built, and the smoke they breathed. Many chapters, including 35 pages on the Neanderthal diet, reveal almost too much, but Wragg Sykes clearly loves her subject, so educated readers will have no trouble absorbing the spectacular revelations of modern anthropology. Solid popular science.

Wragg Sykes has made a career studying Neanderthals, and she skillfully lays out a massive amount of information, much of which has turned up over the past few decades. Although not the first, the Neanderthal bones unearthed by German miners in 1856 were the first recognized as different from modern humans. Since some experts insisted that these were simply a contemporary with bone disease, serious study only began at the end of the century after more discoveries. Despite countless popular portrayals, the average Neanderthal was not a hunchbacked caveman: “Somewhat shorter than average,” writes the author, “with broader chests and little waists, their limb proportions were also slightly different. Beneath massively muscled thighs were thicker, rounder and slightly curved leg bones...unlike countless inaccurate reconstructions they absolutely walked as upright as us.” Dressed properly and passing on a city street, a Neanderthal would attract no attention. Appearing in Europe about 400,000 years ago, Neanderthals possessed impressive hunting skills, a complex social life, and technology as advanced as modern Homo sapiens, who arrived about 50,000 years ago and drove them to extinction 10,000 years ago—for reasons about which Wragg Sykes and her colleagues continue to speculate. Early field researchers carried off bones and tools and discarding everything else. Modern scientists return to old sites and carefully sift through tons of dirt to retrieve bits of vegetation, chemicals, bone fragments, microfossils, pollen, and trash. High-tech scanners and computers pour out a stream of revelations. Scientists scrape plaque upon upon what we read,” Woolf said, “is to destroy the spirit of freedom which is the breath of those sanctuaries.” Reading widely—even books relegated to the “rubbish-heap” of literature—helps one develop discernment and appreciation. “Perhaps the quickest way to understand the elements of what a novelist is doing,” Woolf suggested, “is not to read, but to write; to make your own experiment with the dangers and difficulties of words.” Rather than impose other readers’ standards, Woolf advised becoming an author’s “fellow worker and accomplice.” All readers, the girls in her audience included, exert influence on the creative spirit of the time: “The standards we raise and the judgments we pass steal into the air and become part of the atmosphere which writers breathe as they work.” Heti agrees, sharing ways in which her writing has been shaped by early readers of works in progress. Art is not made by lone artists, Heti writes, but “always made in a community of peers.”

A thoughtful, modest essay by the prolific British author.

KINDRED
Neanderthal Life, Love, Death and Art
Wragg Sykes, Rebecca
Bloomsbury Sigma (400 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-4729-3749-0

Everything you ever wanted to know about our closest relative.

Wragg Sykes has made a career studying Neanderthals, and she skillfully lays out a massive amount of information, much of which has turned up over the past few decades. Although not the first, the Neanderthal bones unearthed by German miners in 1856 were the first recognized as different from modern humans. Since some experts insisted that these were simply a contemporary with bone disease, serious study only began at the end of the century after more discoveries. Despite countless popular portrayals, the average Neanderthal was not a hunchbacked caveman: “Somewhat shorter than average,” writes the author, “with broader chests and little waists, their limb proportions were also slightly different. Beneath massively muscled thighs were thicker, rounder and slightly curved leg bones...unlike countless inaccurate reconstructions they absolutely walked as upright as us.” Dressed properly and passing on a city street, a Neanderthal would attract no attention. Appearing in Europe about 400,000 years ago, Neanderthals possessed impressive hunting skills, a complex social life, and technology as advanced as modern Homo sapiens, who arrived about 50,000 years ago and drove them to extinction 10,000 years ago—for reasons about which Wragg Sykes and her colleagues continue to speculate. Early field researchers carried off bones and tools and discarded everything else. Modern scientists return to old sites and carefully sift through tons of dirt to retrieve bits of vegetation, chemicals, bone fragments, microfossils, pollen, and trash. High-tech scanners and computers pour out a stream of revelations. Scientists scrape plaque from old teeth, put it under the microscope, and learn what they ate, the parasites they harbored, the tools they built, and the smoke they breathed. Many chapters, including 35 pages on the Neanderthal diet, reveal almost too much, but Wragg Sykes clearly loves her subject, so educated readers will have no trouble absorbing the spectacular revelations of modern anthropology. Solid popular science.

FIELD NOTES FROM AN UNINTENTIONAL BIRDER
A Memoir
Zarankin, Julia
Douglas & McIntyre (256 pp.)
$18.95 paper | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-77162-248-6

A Toronto-based writer reveals how a casual bird-watching hobby evolved into an abiding passion.

Zarankin discovered birds after her first marriage and teaching career fell apart and she had begun a new relationship she did not believe she “had the force to sustain.” Her transformation from a bird-watching hobbyist into a dedicated birder who drove hundreds of miles to see a single bird happened slowly. Her adventure began “with a few innocuous Internet searches” for amateur bird-watching clubs in Toronto. After joining a club, Zarankin immediately marveled at the beauty of birds as well as their ancientness: “as close as I’d ever stand to dinosaurs.” She knew then that she wanted to acquire the new language of bird names that her club associates spoke so fluently. Over the next decade, Zarankin immersed herself in the bird-watching books that slowly overtook her bookshelves. The more involved she became with her hobby, the more she began to see herself and her life in them. Observation of the white-breasted nuthatch and black-capped chickadee, two similar-looking birds with different behaviors, helped her appreciate a second marriage to a man who had little in common with her apart from their shared Jewishness and a love of ballet. The author’s study of migratory birds led her to a more nuanced understanding of the “line of [geopolitical] migrants” from which she had descended. After four years of volunteering at a bird research station, she was finally ready to touch a live bird. At the same time, she began dance classes to rectify her earlier, disastrous efforts at ballet. “I’m here to reclaim my childhood,” I told my teacher when he asked about our reasons for signing up for the class.” Life-affirming, thoughtful, and thoroughly delightful, this book celebrates self-acceptance and the joy of living an unexpected life.

An uplifting memoir for birders and nature enthusiasts.
SPACE MAPS
Your Tour of the Universe
Albanese, Lara
Illus. by Rosin, Tommaso Vidus
What on Earth Books (96 pp.)
$30.00 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-912920-56-3

A large-format tour of our solar system and parts beyond.

Along with sailing past the usual spots on the cosmic grand tour, this Italian import ventures up some less–well-traveled byways. The diversions begin at once as, following maps of the “Scientific” (i.e., modern astronomical) skies, alternative versions superimpose sky stories from ancient Greek, classical Chinese, and “South African” (more exactly, San) cultures. Then the ensuing planetary tour highlights select Jovian moons, pairs equally close-up looks at Pluto and its moon Charon (almost the same size), and devotes a full spread to Ceres, the largest of the asteroids. Later stops to explore prominent astro-phenomena in the skies behind Ursa Major and Orion on the way to the Large Magellanic Cloud precede a final section on satellites and observatories, spacesuits, and the International Space Station. Many of Rosin’s big illustrations look like painted versions of space photos, but his portraits of planets and moons are large enough to allow labeling of some surface features that might be hard to make out in a photo. He also depicts racially diverse crews of men and women astronauts as well as adding two children (one with light-brown skin, the other White) plus a comical ET simply as observers throughout. Albanese misclassifies the Milky Way as a spiral galaxy, but her commentary is otherwise stocked with solid, if standard-issue, facts.

Not stellar (except in the literal sense), but a few surprises give the itinerary a bit of extra juice. (glossary, index, selected sources) (Nonfiction. 8–12)

COW BOY IS NOT A COWBOY
Barrington, Gregory
Illus. by the author
Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-0-06-289136-5

Can Goat Girl pass on her excitement to Humdrum Farm’s most unexcitable denizen?
The chickens lay “extraordinarily average” eggs. The pigs roll in the mud only when they absolutely must (and on
schedule, and the goats are content to eat the most boring foods ("paper flavor rice cakes")...but not Goat Girl. She makes exciting food (like ratatouille). She devises her own games when the other goats won’t play. She flies a hot air balloon when the other goats close Lookout Rock for fear of heights. From her balloon she spies Merle, Humdrum Farm’s oldest resident. He wants only to read his Encyclopedia of Dictionaries. When Goat Girl addresses him as “Cowboy,” he assures her though he is a bull, which he defines as “a cow who is a boy,” he is not a cowboy. Goat Girl gives him a pep talk with zero results. But when the chickens indulge their only free-range thought and head for the dangerous road...will Merle help Goat Girl save the day? Barrington’s debut is a fun farm fable with softly modeled cartoons that are full of zip (well, at least when Goat Girl is around) and expressive (mostly expressing boredom) creatures. Little listeners, who’ll be anything but bored, will likely hope for further Goat Girl and Cow Boy adventures. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 69.1% of actual size.)

This chipper tale of an unlikely farm friendship is sure to bring a smile. (Picture book. 2-7)

**EMMY NOETHER**
*The Most Important Mathematician You’ve Never Heard Of*
Becker, Helaine
Illus. by Rust, Kari
Kids Can (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-5253-0059-2

An unsung heroine of math and science.

Born in 1882, when education for women was discouraged and society mostly ignored their intellectual talents, Emmy Noether, a White, German Jewish woman, managed to subsist on a small inheritance while discovering laws of physics and mathematics that changed our understanding of the universe. Clear, straightforward text that is full of drama and excitement and striking, evocative art with a subtle sense of humor portray her unusual life, quirky personality, struggles with sexism and anti-Semitism, and groundbreaking discoveries in clear, easy-to-understand detail. By explicitly presenting both the cultural beliefs of the time and the legal and academic limitations women were subjected to, Becker and Rust allow Noether’s accomplishments to shine all the brighter. The scientific and mathematical concepts she clarified and/or identified, such as the theory of relativity and Noether’s theorem, are explained in an impressively accessible manner. Just enough information on the Nazis’ rise to power is included to relay its danger and significance without taking the focus away from Noether, her brilliance, and her continuous dedication to mathematics, including her mentorship of students. Noether’s single-mindedness and accomplishments are sure to inspire admiration while the injustices she faced and her own quiet rebellion may lead many young readers to further questions and exploration. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11.5-by-17.8-inch double-page spreads viewed at 71.8% of actual size.)

A vivid biographical depiction of history, math, science, and the importance of women in STEM. (author’s note, further reading) (Picture book/biography. 6-10)

**INFINITY**
Bernasconi, Pablo
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Romano, Evelia
Penny Candy (72 pp.)
$16.95 | Nov. 10, 2020
978-1-73422-592-1

An Argentinian author/illustrator invites readers into his gallery and muses on that which is unlimited, endless, uncountable.

Each double-page spread features a full-color, textured composition on the recto; the verso includes an equation (sometimes just a number), a lyrical statement, and, at the bottom, a whimsical drawing incorporating a lemniscate—the symbol of infinity. The opening quote is a snippet from Hamlet: “I could be bounded / in a nutshell, / and count myself / a King / of infinite space...” Depicted holding a swordlike carrot with the mathematical symbol as crossguard, the figure opposite appears in cameos throughout, providing the narrative thread. Some ideas tend toward the unpleasant. Infinity is imagined as “that nightmare / where I’m inside the snow of a television screen, / and I have to sweep it up / with a toothpick.” Others are full of possibility: “It’s / the eye of an artist / just before / he starts drawing.” This line is accompanied by a black pupil surrounded by rings of colored-pencil points. Those with knowledge of math and science will recognize certain equations while other numbers are personal, according to a note with the copyright information. As in the work of Shaun Tan, these pages provide provocations for readers to contemplate, synthesize, and imagine what they will based on their own interests and backgrounds. There is humor and much to stimulate thinking about what could be.

This tantalizing amalgam of the philosophical, artistic, and mathematical offers multiple entrees to an irresistible concept. (Picture book. 9-adult)
Read this before bedtime to ensure a world of sweet dreams.

**MY BED**

*Enchanting Ways To Fall Asleep Around the World*

Bond, Rebecca  
Illus. by Marzor, Salley  
HMH Books (40 pp.)  
$18.99 | Oct. 27, 2020  
978-0-544-94906-5

Children around the globe go to sleep in different kinds of beds in this ingeniously illustrated picture book.  

Fashioned from fabric, beads, wire, and yarn and using embroidery stitches as adornment, the compositions have some depth and use deep colors. All readers will want to return to pore over the details of these imaginative depictions. Each scene features one or two children in their sleeping places: hammocks in Brazil, a courtyard in Iran, a rooftop in Morocco, alcove beds “nestled into walls” in Norway, or mattresses “outside in the fresh air” in Ghana. As befits its international theme, the children and the occasional adult in the pictures are diverse. Each double-page spread includes a fabric-relief picture that fills two-thirds of the spread, and on the left, one half of a rhyming couplet that gives an overview followed by a short description of the scene and its country. An appropriate fabric animal appears: an elephant for India, a rooster for Russia, a koi for Japan. The animals appear on the endpapers, creating a guessing game, and they also show up in the last scene, of a child snoozing in a presumably North American home. Only a map is missing for a complete learning experience. A concluding note about the creation of the illustrations will be fascinating to adults and may prompt them to work with children to make some fabric collages.

**LITTLE THIEF! CHOTA CHOR!**

*Bodach, Vijaya*  
Illus. by Surendranath, Nayantara  
Reycraft Books (32 pp.)  
$17.95 | Sep. 30, 2020  
978-1-4788-6813-2

When Anjali wakes up in the middle of the night, the cold floor makes her wonder if someone has come in the house and left the door open—a thief, perhaps?  

While her mother sleeps soundly, Anjali investigates. There is no food missing from the kitchen, but Anjali soon finds that her sparkly skirt, her mother’s silver comb, and a handful of coins are missing. Panicked, Anjali runs into the street screaming, summoning her neighbors and finally waking up her mother. But when she discovers that her river rocks are also missing, Anjali wonders if the thief is a villain or maybe just a lost little girl looking for treasure. When Anjali and her neighbors finally apprehend the thief, it turns out to be someone—or, rather, something—they never would have expected. Eventually, Anjali falls asleep next to her mother, dreaming of befriending the surprise thief. While the book’s illustrations effectively use bold blocks of color to create a fanciful feel, the text leaves much to be desired. The story meanders, often including superfluous details that are either already in the illustrations or read as a rather belabored explanation of the South Asian setting. Several of Anjali’s actions feel age inappropriate, including lighting a oil lamp with no parental supervision, running through her neighborhood alone in the dark, and feeding a wild monkey a banana. These excitements aside, overall, the story is too scattered and the prose too uneven to hold attention.  

*Whimsical illustrations cannot mitigate the wandering plot and unimpressive prose.*  

**(Picture book. 2-6)**

**THE LAST KIDS ON EARTH AND THE SKELETON ROAD**

*Brallier, Max*  
Illus. by Holgate, Douglas  
Viking (250 pp.)  
$13.99 | Sep. 15, 2020  
978-1-984835-34-5  
Series: The Last Kids on Earth, 6

The monster-fighting gang from Wakefield departs on a post-apocalyptic road trip.  

In this sixth installment of the heavily illustrated, Netflix-adapted series, quirky Jack Sullivan and his friends June, Quint, and Dirk finally leave their creature-ridden town in search of the ultimate baddie, Thrull, who previously deceived them. The quartet takes their tricked-out ride (an armored RV named Bad Mama) onto the open road (with Jack’s Zombie Squad in tow) to find the Outpost, where they believe a certain monster will be able to give them the location of the evil Tower where they believe Thrull now resides. Of course, the journey is littered with all kinds of nightmarish beasts and pitfalls (including an epic water park battle and slime-dripping baby monster), but the kids persist, armed with their endless gadgets and quick thinking. As the group races toward Thrull, the action culminates with an achingly tantalizing cliffhanger; expect audible groans and vociferous demands for the next installment. Fans of this series will revel in this fast-paced escapade with its recognizable black-and-white illustrations and trademark humor. Readers new to the series or those who are only familiar with the animated show may be a bit put off by this later volume that relies heavily on its own language of monsters and weapons. Jack, June, and Dirk are light-skinned; Quint is dark-skinned.

*Good fun with a monster of a cliffhanger.*  

**(Graphic fiction. 8-12)**
Alborozo’s delicately lined cartoons invest old dog with enormous personality.

### THIS OLD DOG

**Brockenbrough, Martha**

*Illus. by Alborozo, Gabriel*

Levine Querido (40 pp.)

$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020

978-1-64614-010-7

Don’t let the title fool you: The dog does not die.

The title introduces the protagonist simply as “old dog,” a gray and shaggy old mutt whose “bones are sore” but whose “heart is strong.” Brockenbrough’s measured text emulates his postures as he stretches and shrugs, dolefully stands, and “drifts to sleep in a stripe of sun” are perfectly doggish. Brockenbrough likewise captures his essence in her meticulously trimmed text. Old dog is never named, and the consistent omission of an article before “old dog” is both universalizing and sweetly particular.

**As comfortable as an old dog snoring.** *(Picture book. 3-6)*

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### COZY

**Brett, Jan**

*Illus. by the author*

Putnam (32 pp.)

$18.99 | Oct. 20, 2020

978-0-593-10979-3

An agreeable Alaskan musk ox embodies that old Ben Franklin adage, “Guests, like fish, begin to smell after three days.”

When Cozy the ox is separated from his herd in the midst of a winter storm, he decides to wait it out. His massive size and warmth attract small animals—a lemming family and a snowshoe hare—desperate to escape the cold. However, as bigger, predatory creatures arrive, Cozy must lay down some “house rules” that grow with each new creature that arrives until they extend to: “Quiet voices, gentle thumping, claws to yourself, no biting, no pouncing, and be mindful of others!” Over time, the guests grow antsy, but at last spring arrives and Cozy can find his family. The tale is not dissimilar to another Jan Brett tale of cold weather

An unexpected love story.

A joyful scarecrow with arms stretched wide and a stitched-rock.” Alborozo’s delicately lined cartoons invest old dog with enormous personality, the blur of his tail thumping the only fast thing about him. His postures as he stretches and shrugs, dolefully stands, and “drifts to sleep in a stripe of sun” are perfectly doggish. Brockenbrough likewise captures his essence in her meticulously trimmed text. Old dog is never named, and the consistent omission of an article before “old dog” is both universalizing and sweetly particular.

**As comfortable as an old dog snoring.** *(Picture book. 4-8)*

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### CROW & SNOW

**Broder, Robert**

*Illus. by Taillec, Olivier*

Simon & Schuster (48 pp.)

$17.99 | Oct. 27, 2020

978-1-5344-4595-6

An unexpected love story.

A joyful scarecrow with arms stretched wide and a stitched-rock.” Alborozo’s delicately lined cartoons invest old dog with enormous personality, the blur of his tail thumping the only fast thing about him. His postures as he stretches and shrugs, dolefully stands, and “drifts to sleep in a stripe of sun” are perfectly doggish. Brockenbrough likewise captures his essence in her meticulously trimmed text. Old dog is never named, and the consistent omission of an article before “old dog” is both universalizing and sweetly particular.

**As comfortable as an old dog snoring.** *(Picture book. 4-8)*

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### TEN WAYS TO HEAR SNOW

**Camper, Cathy**

*Illus. by Pak, Kenard*

Kokila (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Nov. 3, 2020

978-0-399-18633-2

On her way to her grandmother’s, Lina counts the ways she hears snow.

Lina is excited to tell Sitti about the snowstorm and is looking forward to making warak enab with her. Sitti is losing her eyesight, and Lina enjoys cooking with Sitti in her room at the assisted living facility. Bundled up and walking in the snow, Lina thinks about how her grandma must feel, listening to how the world sounds. “Scraaape, scrip, scraaape, scrip,” is the sound of Mrs. Watson’s
“Snyak, snyek, snyuk,” tread Lina’s boots. She sees people brushing off their cars and her friends Rachid and Mariam building a snowman. At Sitti’s, her grandmother instructs Lina how to stuff the grape leaves with the rice and lamb mixture and to roll them up, vignettes showing the different steps. They also have fun afterward, comparing them to “little grape leaf cocoons” and pretending they are mustaches. Using soft, clear, and calming colors, Pak portrays the neighborhood in the aftermath of the snowstorm, visually interpreting the variety of noises and activities the community partakes in. His quiet compositions complement Camper’s words, which beautifully evoke the experience: “The world sounded softer, but the noises [Lina] heard were clear.” Lina’s family seems to be Middle Eastern in origin—her father calls her the Arabic endearment “habibti”—and they all have brown skin. Both the neighborhood and the assisted living home are racially diverse.

Readers will savor this calm, kind, and loving moment between a granddaughter and her grandma. (Picture book. 3-8)

Jordan Banks has returned to the elite Riverdale Academy Day School for eighth grade, and although he still doesn’t smell like an eighth grade boy—much to his dismay—his growth spurt comes in other forms.

Unlike *New Kid* (2019), this sequel offers the perspectives of not just Jordan, but also his best friend, Drew, and his wealthy White friend, Liam. As Jordan navigates what may be his last year at RAD before transferring to art school, he frequently compares his experiences with Drew’s: Both boys are Black, but Drew is taller, more athletic, and has darker skin. Drew also has a new flattop that attracts unwanted touching from non-Black kids. This story focuses on how differently RAD students and teachers treat light-skinned Jordan and dark-skinned Drew and also how middle-class Jordan, working-class Drew, and rich Liam negotiate a friendship of mutual respect and care. RAD administrators and teachers have also realized that they need to work on diversity, equity, and inclusion, but their leadership choice for this initiative results in more microaggressions for the students of color. Jordan’s cartoon “intermissions,” black-and-white pencil sketches, capture his imaginative wit while conveying perceptive observations about race and class that ring true. Each chapter’s title page textually and illustratively echoes popular graphic works for young readers such as Jeff Kinney’s Diary of a Wimpy Kid.

A well-Crafted, visually rich, truth-telling tale for our troubled times that affirms the eternal importance of friends. (author’s note) (Graphic fiction. 9-14)

The cat-centered companion to *Why Do Dogs Sniff Bottoms?* (2020).

Cats have been living with humans for at least 3,500 years according to Crumpton, “cat expert” and zoologist. Crumpton posits that cats were not tamed by humans but rather “domesticated themselves” to be near humans (who often have yummy meals). Each of the 19 double-page spreads deals with a different aspect of cat life or lore, and each begins with a question. In answer to “Why do cats meow?” Crumpton explains that the sound can mean several different things. However, across the spread, readers learn that: Cats make 100 different sounds;
only kittens meow at other cats while adult cats meow only to humans; Siamese are the chattiest; and Maine coon cats chitter at birds. Are cats good or bad luck? Were cats ever worshipped? On several points, they are compared to dogs (cats see red and green, unlike canines; dogs have more scent receptors, but cats can differentiate more smells). With appealingly naïve styling, Snowden-Fine’s double-page spreads offer gentle humor as cats of vastly different species, colors, and sizes interpret the text. Humans depicted are racially diverse. The tone overall is light, but the information is sound, bolstered by a closing glossary of cat vocabulary. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11.9-by-18.2-inch double-page spreads viewed at 42.9% of actual size.)

A good addition to the cat canon. (index) (Informational picture book. 5-10)

THE BREAD PET
A Sourdough Story
DePalma, Kate
Illus. by Verhoeff, Nelleke
Barefoot (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 21, 2020
978-1-64686-064-7

Cora’s uncle JB comes to visit and leaves her with a curious bread pet that nearly takes over the house. It’s a sourdough starter. JB explains how to feed the hungry, bubbling goo that lives in a glass jar, dashing off and forgetting to give her one critical bit of information: to keep the starter in the refrigerator. It keeps growing, and little by little, the house she shares with her mothers sees bread pets burbling in multiple bowls all over the kitchen. Mum eventually convinces Cora that they should bake some of the bread. Even though the first loaf is imperfect, finally they produce a perfect loaf and share it with people at the community hall. The next day, Mum, Mama, and Cora deliver their many jars of gooey starter to the hall so that those who enjoyed the bread can start their own bread pets and eventually bake their own. This exploration into the mysterious world of sourdough starter could not have come at a more appropriate time, as Covid-19 has cooped-up house-dwellers baking bread, with children at home getting in on the process. Cora’s story carefully illustrates the starter and baking processes, preparing junior bakers for their first loaves. In Verhoeff’s comfortably stylized illustrations, Cora and Mama seem to be Black; Mum and JB present White; the folks at the community hall are racially and ethnically diverse.

This timely book will prove useful for home-based lessons in science, math, and, of course, baking. (instructions, recipe, further information) (Picture book. 5-9)

Johnny is having trouble accepting a new classmate, Gabe, who is from Brazil and doesn’t speak English. He dislikes that Gabe is a “crybaby” and makes fun of the fact that “he’s not like us. He can’t even order lunch.” However, the rest of the classmates gradually welcome Gabe to their lunch table and include him on their soccer team while Johnny feels jealous and excluded. One day Gabe teaches Johnny a particularly difficult soccer move, and Johnny realizes that learning another language can be as frustrating as learning a new skill. He befriends Gabe by sharing a carton of chocolate milk, Gabe’s favorite. By focusing her lens on Johnny, Dismondy misses an opportunity to show what it’s like to try fitting into a foreign environment with different cultural and linguistic expectations. Disappointingly, Johnny’s toxic masculinity is not meaningfully interrogated either. Practical modeling of ELL principles are largely absent from the text, though backmatter presents a note for adults. With the exception of “leite” (milk), the Portuguese vocabulary consists of words shared both in Spanish and Portuguese, which is likely to create confusion as to Gabe’s country of origin. Were it not for Farrell’s visual clues—a map charting Gabe’s journey to the U.S. Midwest and Gabe’s soccer jersey—readers might well assume Gabe is from a Spanish-speaking country.

Rather than celebrating diversity, this well-intentioned object lesson underscores the importance of kindness. (Picture book. 5-10)

DREAMS FOR OUR DAUGHTERS
Doyle, Ruth
Illus. by Lindsay, Abbing
Eerdmans (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-8028-3558-9

Girls of various races are encouraged to “dream big,” show courage, and make change.

This companion to the (nearly) simultaneously publishing Songs for Our Sons (Oct. 6) is composed of mostly rhyming verses addressed to a child in the second person, celebrating her existence (“we’ve been waiting for you”) and encouraging her bold individuality (“Be brave and believe in / your own guiding star”). The text is prescriptive, telling the child what to do (“Climb trees, make potions, / run wild, and have fun”) and who to be (a “fearless defender,” “a time-traveler,” “a stargazer,” “a warrior”).
The words offer a countermessage to societal expectations for boys that affirms a spectrum of expression.

SONGS FOR OUR SONS

Doyle, Ruth
Illus. by Lindsay Asbling
Eerdmans (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-8028-5557-2

Rhyming narration gifts words of advice and encouragement to a newborn child.

In celebration of the arrival of a new child, the narrator shares dreams for their future. Whether the child grows up to be “a sequined sparkler” or a “soil-squelching mud sculptor,” the narrator hopes they will be a curious, kind “champion of change” who rejoices in differences, including their own. Throughout, the narrator addresses their words to “you,” which could refer to the “child of moonbeams” born on the first page or to the audience. Many of the lines rhyme, but the text does not sustain a set rhyme scheme. Similarly, no consistent rhythm carries through the lines. The title suggests

In One Ear and Out the Other: Antonia Brico & Her Amazingly Musical Life

by Diane Worthey

“Dr. Antonia Brico was my teacher from the time I was 10 years old. She was a dynamic and amazing woman. Now we have a beautiful book about her life where little children can learn what can happen when you pursue your dreams and do what’s in your deepest heart.” —Judy Collins

Stunning imagery and poetic meditations invite kids and adults to use their imaginations to consider the concept of infinity.

Infinity

Written and illustrated by Pablo Bernasconi

“Wondrous, pensive, and exuberant, Infinity is a dreamlike jewel of magical realism. At first it made me think, and then it helped me smile.”

—Margarita Engle, Newbery Honor-winning author & Young People’s Poet Laureate Emeritus
Author, illustrator, and film concept artist Victoria Ying has always known she wanted to write a graphic novel. So when the idea for *City of Secrets* (Viking, July 28) came to her—at first in a dream—she went through a process of “reverse engineering” the story in all its delightful permutations. The city of Oskars is a constantly shifting world operated by gears, levers, pulleys, and switches, home to orphan Ever and the bright, adventurous Hannah. After visiting Ever where he works, Hannah makes it her goal to befriend him, and during their trials with such villains as the assassin Vash and his cronies, the two make their way through Oskars as it navigates an incipient war with rival city Edmonda. *City of Secrets* is the first entry in a planned duology. We recently spoke with Ying on Zoom; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Did you always want this to be a story for middle-grade readers?

I always knew that I wanted my characters to be middle grade-aged. But I thought if I ever sold it, people would want to age up the characters because the world is quite dark. I liked the idea that they were that age for a number of reasons. One, I really wanted this to be a friendship story and not a romance—that kind of friendship is something that is so well explored in middle grade, and we don’t really get to do that as much in older fiction, so I wanted to push to keep them young. We toned down the violence a bit from the original level into something more palatable. But there are assassins; their goal is to kill a child. So we kept a lot of the really dark stuff. I was really lucky to have everyone at Viking stand by me in my decision to keep them middle grade.

You navigate this world’s technological subtleties so fluently; Ever uses a Rube Goldberg–like array of switches and levers to outsmart his enemies. When did you come up with the mechanisms that operate Oskars?

I wrote it as a prose novel originally because I thought, I don’t want to draw this. This sounds like an absolute nightmare. [Laughs.] Before I started writing this book, I worked in film and television as a concept artist. I worked on Elsa’s ice castle [in *Frozen*], figuring out what that looks like from the outside to the inside, making it all match. So I took that background and put it into building this city out of a model. I took pre-made models of three different clocks, exploded them, and then reconfigured them back together. I drew on top of that 3-D model so I could make sure that when I rotated it or altered it, the actual structure stayed the same.

There are certain gendered expectations of Hannah, paired with the futuristic inventions of Oskars. Does this story exist within a particular time frame for you?

I love the world of Edwardian England, so much of what happens with Hannah and her family is drawn from that
world. Kids nowadays may not have as many gendered ex-
expectations, but when you’re finding your own self, you may
not end up pursuing careers that your family would approve
of. For me, that was art. My family was very supportive—
they sent me to art school—but constantly were asking,
“Are you sure about this?” That’s Hannah’s experience, and
she’s exploring her own ways to solve that problem. I like
having something to hold on to, because if it’s pure fantasy
with nothing grounding it, it’s difficult for me to create a
meaningful, believable world. Part of that is my background
in film and entertainment, where reference is the first thing
you need. I wanted this steampunk, Victorian feeling, and
then what are the issues that a kid would face in that time
period?

Madam and Vash are both such great villains. Did you
have a literary inspiration when creating them?
Dickens is a big one. I really wanted them to feel bad. I love
stories where you understand the point of view of the villain,
but I also love children’s books, and middle grade especially,
because we really do get to have that clear delineation be-
tween good and bad. That villain that you hate is something
that I adore, and Madam—because I went to a Catholic girls
school and was surrounded by these very strict nuns—she
represents this strict adherence to order and control that
has always been fascinating to me, because it feels like that’s
what I’m constantly pushing against. Vash is more about
chaos, a villain who’s completely against order. To have both
of them in the same story has been very fun.

Johanna Zwirner is the editorial assistant. City of Secrets was
reviewed in the April 15, 2020, issue.

A gentle, hopeful dream for a kinder world. (Picture book.
3-7)

Your House, My House
Dubuc, Marianne
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Gbione, Yvette
Kids Can (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-5253-0490-3

One day’s worth of activities—and
some special events—in the lives of
various anthropomorphized animals sharing an apartment
building are described and displayed in this French-Canadian
import.

Each double-page spread, beginning with the cover, shows
a cutaway view of the four-story building. Two to four sen-
tences per view offer dialogue and descriptions, with much
of the straightforward text centering on the Rabbit family.
Several parallel narratives are briefly referred to though they
occur primarily in the illustrations. Friends and family cel-
brate Little Rabbit’s birthday; the Cat family moves in; Mr.
Bear is sick in bed; the Fox family welcomes a new member;
Little Hedgehog eagerly awaits his father’s return; the “rascally
Mouse triplets” raise havoc; an owl attempts to get a good day’s
rest; and a mischievous little ghost takes an unexpected trip to
the first floor before returning to the dark attic. In addition,
several fairy-tale characters make cameo appearances, and
a bird family has their own little adventure, providing even
more reasons to pore over the pictures. Pastel colors and a
relatively limited palette give the detailed illustrations, remi-
niscent of Allan Ahlberg’s and Richard Scarry’s, a light touch
and keep them from feeling too busy. The cozy setting and the
characters’ smiling faces and round red cheeks help to set the
cheerful tone and make the friendly coexistence of predators
and prey believable. (This book was reviewed digitally with 14-by-
22-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.)

Dubuc’s delightful domestic dramas will entertain chil-
dren and adults alike. (Picture book. 4-8)
WHY?
* A Sciencey, Rhymey Guide to Rainbows
Dunne, Billy
Illus. by Jefferys, Rhys
Maverick Publishing (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-84886-648-5

Everything in the world is new and amazing and sparks wonder in young children.

Dad points out a beautiful rainbow as he walks with his little girl and tells her that rainbows are seen when the sun comes out after it rains. His daughter is wonderstruck and curiously asks, “Why?” That’s only the beginning. Dad’s explanations about color, light refraction, wavelengths, and even the “photon quantum field” grow deeper, more scientific and detailed, only to be greeted with yet another “why?” from the child. Dad grows extremely anxious as he sweats with nerves and is driven to tears endeavoring to satisfy his little girl’s endless curiosity while she seems to delight in the information, embracing it with joy even though it is way above her understanding. She becomes aware of his discomfort and lets him know how much she appreciates him. Then she spots something else that readers know will definitely elicit that question again. The book’s subtitle, “A Sciency, Rhymey Guide to Rainbows,” sets the tone and format. All the science is real and played out within a warm, loving father-daughter relationship. Dunne’s rhyming text and Jefferys’ colorful, eye-catching illustrations are totally in tandem, seamlessly meshing the scientific terminology with increasingly intricate diagrams. The characters are depicted as redheads and present White.

A bit of science presented with love and joy. Charming. (Picture book. 5-10)

THE WHALE CHILD
Egawa, Keith & Egawa, Chenoa
Illus. by the authors
North Atlantic (120 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-62317-486-6

A whale child and his mother share a dream of their human relatives.

The whale child has been chosen to turn into human form and teach the lessons of the ocean to his human sister, Alex, who lives in the Pacific Northwest with her Coast Salish mother and Polynesian father. For several days, the whale in boy form leads Alex on an environmental learning journey, taking her on daily walks to educate her about the negative impact that human culture has had on the environment. He teaches Alex about water pollution, overfishing, and climate change that inevitably leads to the extinction of many animal species and the destruction of ecosystems. When he returns to the ocean in his original whale form, it is up to Alex now to teach what she has learned to other humans. Vivid illustrations juxtapose the beauty and scale of the natural world that the children explore. The story is followed by extensive backmatter: a glossary of environmental terms, a brief history of the Pacific Northwest Native cultures, classroom learning activities, and ideas for student projects. Infusing qualities of traditional storytelling into the narrative, Keith Egawa (Lummi) and Chenoa Egawa (Lummi and S’Klallam) offer a perspective on climate change from the lens of Indigenous people. By relating the tale through the eyes of children, the author-illustrator team evokes an empathy that should stir a wide audience.

This necessary read decolonizes the Western construction of climate change. (Fiction. 7-12)

IN THE HALF ROOM
Ellis, Carson
Illus. by the author
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-5362-1456-7

Under a half moon, a glimpse of a half woman in a cottage full of half things invites speculation and puzzlement.

In cadences reminiscent of Margaret Wise Brown’s soothing narratives, Ellis introduces the interior: “Half a window / Half a door / Half a rug on half a floor.” True and near rhymes jostle gently in the lulling text. When “half a knock on half a door” reveals “half a face you’ve seen before,” the half woman—who presents White with freckles and long, carrot-colored hair—is reunited with her other half. After a satisfying “SHOOOOOP” joins the halves together, she revels outside under the moon. Next, the nether end of the pet cat is at the door, sparking two “half cats / in a half-cat fight.” In Ellis’ appealing gouache paintings, the cat halves spar in a series of spot illustrations. A page turn reveals a partial resolution: “Two half cats asleep / Good night.” Young readers might wonder why the cat’s halves don’t “shoop” together at the end, as the woman’s halves had. Perhaps it’s a nod to the consummate self-satisfaction of felines: Ellis’ dedication calls out both her son and her eight cats, past and present. Even as she evokes the coziness of *Goodnight Moon*, Ellis injects a modern, disquieting note by avoiding “shooping” all things whole.

Visually charming and a bit disarming, this invites dialogue between caregivers and young children. (Picture book. 4-8)
Engage Young Readers
with inspiring picture books coming this fall from Annick

My Day with Gong Gong

A day in Chinatown takes an unexpected turn.
“A multilayered, endearing treasure.”
—Kirkus Reviews ★ review
Ages 4–7 / 9781773214290 hc

Swift Fox All Along

If Swift Fox can’t find the answer to being Mi’kmaq, will she ever feel like part of her family?
“Highlights the importance of connections to culture and self.” —Kirkus Reviews
Ages 4–7 / 9781773214481 hc

Why Are You So Quiet?

“A tender challenge for children (and adults also) to be silent observant listeners.” —Storywraps
Ages 4–7 / 9781773214344 hc

The Most Amazing Bird

A young girl discovers nature’s surprising beauty in this tale from a renowned Inuit storyteller.
Ages 4–7 / 9781773214184 hc

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The palette brightens when the librarian’s words stir the imaginations of the children.

The Librarian’s Stories
Falcone, L.M.
Illustrated by Wilson, Anna
POW! (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 17, 2020
978-1-57687-945-0

During a time of oppressive fear, a librarian comforts her community.

The book’s first spread shows a child celebrating a birthday in an apartment in upper panels on verso; in the lower panels and across the gutter readers see the celebration ending in destruction when soldiers bomb the library across the street. The people now live in fear where “crumbling buildings...look like ghosts,” tanks roll by, soldiers stomp, food and water are rationed, and everything—from the streets to townspeople’s moods—seems “frozen” and grim. But sitting on a bench in the apartment square and reading aloud is the intrepid town librarian, the illustrations depicting her words literally flowing through the town. Though the adults fear the soldiers’ responses (“Foolish woman,” Papa mutters), the children gradually step forth to listen, because the librarian helps them remember “what life was like before.” A closing note about the “senseless violence of war” states that this tale was inspired by the cellist who serenaded Sarajevo after the bombing of a bakery and by the destruction of libraries in Baghdad in the 13th century. The book’s palette is primarily a slate gray, light on refugees around the world and includes a call to action to support them. It also provides further information about the Syrian conflict but unfortunately contains significant errors: saying that Turkey supports Assad and calling the Kurds (Syria’s largest ethnic minority) a rebel group; moreover it frames the conflict as one waged against Assad by rebel groups with different agendas and elides the role of civilian resistance to an authoritarian government. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-17-inch double-page-spreads viewed at 38.7% of actual size.)

An unusual refugee story that may open doors for empathy. (Picture book 5-11)

I Am a Capybara
Fabbri, Michela
Illustrated by the author
Princeton Architectural Press (40 pp.)
$17.95 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-61689-945-5

A capybara explains just who he is.
Not to be confused with a dog—or a mouse, a beaver, a bear, or a marmot—this self-proclaimed “tough guy” is a capybara, “the biggest rodent in the world.” Unlike dogs with their many breeds, “capybaras all look the same.” They are “excellent swimmers.” They “have a serious expression.” And they “love cuddles and care.” While this capybara goes on to describe himself collectively, there’s lots of individual personality on display. This capybara likes “observ[ing] things and their poetry,” wearing bow ties to the opera, playfully dressing up as a whale, and sipping a “well-made broth.” He speaks in a candid, conversational monologue, and separating capybara fact from fiction may be tricky for some readers. As further quirks and preferences unfold and anecdotes are shared, the question arises: Is this curious, contemplative nature a hallmark of all capybaras? Fabbri’s soft colored-pencil drawings punctuated with thin ink linework are textured but minimalistic—with the white page as the background, the titular subject remains the focus.

A gentle, offbeat sketch. (Picture book 5-8)

Saving Stella
A Dog’s Dramatic Escape From War
Fakher, Bassel Abou & Blumenthal, Deborah
Illustrated by Kaadan, Nadine
Bloomsbury (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov 3, 2020
978-1-5476-0133-2

In this book, based on a real-life story, Bassel, a young Syrian man, becomes a refugee because of war and escapes his city for Europe, leaving his beloved dog, Stella, behind.

When gunfire wakes Bassel and Stella up at night, he tells her it is OK but knows that’s not true. Soon, living in his war-torn country is no longer safe, and, like millions of others, he must leave. Saying goodbye to family, friends, and Stella, he makes the arduous journey to Europe—on foot and by rubber dinghy, spending months confined in a refugee camp. A Belgian family opens their arms to him, and his host and friends from back home help him reunite with Stella. The dog’s journey will not be easy either, but the story ends on a happy and hopeful note. Both she and Bassel will have two lives now, one “lost” and a new one “found.” Expressive, softly stylized illustrations pay great attention to Bassel’s and Stella’s emotions throughout the book, and notes by the Syrian co-author and illustrator share details about their lives and the war. An afterword sheds more

A gentle, offbeat sketch. (Picture book 5-8)
A chaperone who turns into a dinosaur when she sneezes really complicates a class trip for two young museum visitors.

The unnamed narrator may hope for "no funny business" from her grandma—but hardly have they arrived than a "silver sparkle of museum dust" sets off an extended sneezing fit that sends the narrator and companion Moonie haring off after a small speedster they identify as an eoraptor. Telling the demure dino that she can't run in the museum only makes her sneeze again, turning her into a car-sized zuniceratops. Then an ankylosaurus, and on through 11 more transformations...including a pterodactyl that guide-toting Moonie points out isn't actually a true dinosaur. One final blast brings "regular Grandma" back at last, just in time to board the school bus. O'Toole fills in the backgrounds sparsely, and readers may find themselves wondering exactly what kind of museum this is. Still, neither Grandma nor any of the fairly diverse lot of other visitors and staff look even slightly bothered by all the hubbub, which adds an extra layer of jollity to the views of outsized dinosaurs invading galleries, trying to cut the line at the cafeteria, or bellowing a "moo-roar" ("Where's your indoor voice? You can't yell in a museum!") in the main hall. A dino-key at the end supplies names and a few facts for all 14 iterations of Grandma. Grandma and the narrator present White, and Moonie has brown skin and dark hair.

Readers with embarrassingly rambunctious relatives of their own will moo-roar in sympathy. (Picture book. 5-8)
Well-designed and meticulously detailed, this volume invites caring and activism.

FORESTS
Uncover the Facts. Be Inspired. Make a Difference
French, Jess
Illus. by Mostov, Alexander
Ivy Kids (64 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-78240-952-6
Series: Let’s Save Our Planet

From definitions to personal responsibility, this illustrated book covers our relationship with forests.

The text is organized into short chapters, beginning with descriptions of the different kinds of forests found on Earth; moving to the causes of, effects of, and solutions to deforestation; and ending with what individuals can do to decrease humans’ negative effects on forests and the environment. The text is presented in short paragraphs in a small font with subtitled Smaller sentences placed around each spread give examples and specific details about the contents of the illustrations: animals that live in the different kinds of forests, the workings of a healthy forest, the lifestyles of Indigenous communities, and more. The book is incredibly detailed, and while everything included is fascinating, readers who don’t have the patience or interest to delve deep can learn the basics of the topic by reading only a main paragraph or two on each spread and browsing the pictures. The illustrations are clear, clean, colorful, and attractive, with racially and ethnically diverse people represented. While some of the suggested steps to take are basic and oft-repeated, some concrete suggestions are particularly useful, such as using the Forest Stewardship Council logo to guide purchases. A final page describes many different careers readers can choose to contribute to protecting forests. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11.7-by-18.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 62.8% of actual size.)

Well-designed and meticulously detailed, this volume invites caring and activism. (glossary) (Nonfiction. 5-10)

ROU AND THE GREAT RACE
Fong, Rum
Illus. by the author
Reycraft Books (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 30, 2020
978-1-4788-6952-8

A young girl nurtures nature in spite of her surroundings.

Amid towering buildings and next to a lone metallic tree, a robot posts a sign stating “More city coming soon.” In Rou’s steampunk-y city, children compete in an annual footrace for the chance to pluck and keep a rare bloom. Rou is determined to win and present it to her grandmother, who remembers the time when flowers were abundant, before the Power People hoarded them for themselves. During the chaotic race the precious flower is trampled. Rou rescues the sprout and, the following year, creates her own floral tradition in the spirit of sharing.

Throughout the book, the dusty rose-colored clothing of Rou and her grandmother echo the vivacity of the blooming flowers and warmly contrast against the stark, lifeless gray of the city landscape. Soft edges and shading, as well as playful details such as Rou’s one-eyed, egg-shaped robot, also lighten the emotional tone. This cautionary tale about urban overdevelopment and inequity also highlights how Rou is empowered through her generosity. Rou has pale peach skin, two black pigtails, and dark brown eyes while Grandma has pale peach skin, gray hair, and curved brown slits beneath her glasses. There is some diversity among the other city dwellers, but most are pale-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 30% of actual size.)

Simple but effective. (Picture book. 3-6)

IT’S NOT LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD
Funk, Josh
Illus. by Taylor, Edwardian
Two Lions (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-5420-0666-8
Series: It’s Not a Fairy Tale, 3

The characters don’t cooperate with the narrator in this metafictive spoof on the classic fairy tale.

When the narrator introduces Little Red Riding Hood, she overhears from her home and calls out, “Hey! Someone’s talking about us!” She comments on all of the narration, in fact, and the narrator responds to her in turn while trying, in vain, to maintain control over the story. Red, though savvy, is willing to play along and act out the story. But, to the narrator’s dismay, the Big Bad Wolf is sick and has sent a pirate in its place, and the heroic woodsman couldn’t make it, so Pinocchio shows up instead. The notion of eating Grandma doesn’t sit well with the pirate, so the narrator can only relent as the characters make up their own happy ending. Colorful, dramatic, cartoony illustrations picture Red and her family with brown skin and puffy black hair; Red’s sister, Blue, uses a wheelchair (disappointingly, it’s not depicted as a self-propelled one); the pirate presents White and has a hook prosthesis. The many voices are differentiated by different typefaces, colors, and speech bubbles, giving the feel of a comic or play. Adults may have a difficult time performing them all as a read-aloud, but a child willing to alternate reading with an adult will enjoy the drama, and the jokes will be more fun that way too. Still, many will find this rewrite more thought-provoking than funny, and that’s not all bad either.

Use this wild ride to shake things up with common sense and creativity. (Picture book. 4-9)
An international thief’s daughter starts a new life—and new heist—in this series opener.

Frankie, a White middle schooler, is accustomed to helping on sophisticated heists with her internationally renowned con-artist dad, and she likes it that way. When he is finally apprehended, Frankie’s world is turned upside down, as she’s sent to live with her police-detective uncle in Greenwich, Connecticut, and attend school for the time. Frankie—shrewd, skeptical, and world-wise—is resistant to her new life. Soon, though, she learns of a local millionaire landlord who is abusing his power, keeping his apartments in unlivable conditions and threatening to get many of his tenants deported. Determined to take down the “slumlord,” Frankie decides to execute her first solo con. Much to her initial chagrin, she’s aided by her persistent new friend Ollie, a “slightly pudgy” boy who Frankie guesses is “of Mexican descent” and whose fashion obsession becomes key to the success of their heist. Frankie’s first-person narrative is told in journal format (handwritten, Frankie tells readers, in a lined notebook). This conceit is both unnecessary and inconsistent with her characterization as someone savvy to how recorded information can be used to incriminate her. A lack of engagement with the Latinx and economically marginalized characters so integral to the plot as well as the positioning of Uncle Scotty as an honest cop in contrast to the corrupt justice system places this firmly into White-savior rather than Robin Hood territory.

Don’t fall for Frankie’s con—better heist books exist elsewhere. (Thriller. 9-12)

The novel starts from the tightly focused third-person point of view of a filly being born. Soon named Princess, she’s the last foal out of breeder Roland’s favorite Connemara mare. The perspective then shifts to Rae, a horse-obsessed almost-8-year-old who lives nearby. Rae’s mom is dead; though they live on a small farm, her father can’t afford a pony. Her grandmother, however, encourages her to keep working toward her goal, so, as a few years pass, Rae goes to horse shows, watches frenemy Eden’s riding lessons, and practices on a horse statue her dad makes from scrap metal. Meanwhile, chapters from Princess’ point of view detail how her pampered life amounts to neglect. When Roland suffers a stroke, his cartoon-villain employees abscond with his riches, leaving a field overrun with grassy fields with balloons, splashing in puddles. At times the text skates close to the prosperity gospel: “NEVER let people tell you / your dreams can’t come true / just keep doing those things / that God wants you to do.” They need only follow these interests to find fulfillment, a rather trite and unrealistic message. It’s delivered in an at-times forced rhyme—an unfortunate but typical characteristic of the genre. “This was God’s plan / This was what He designed / Because right from the start / He had you on His mind!” Readers might find themselves praying for prose by the time they get through it. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 25% of actual size.)

Saccharine and cloying, though darling and diverse illustrations lend some charm. (Picture book/religion. 3-6)

Haas has done much better—a disappointment. (Fiction. 8-12)
Spare, declarative text effectively narrates while Reid supplies lively backdrops and incredibly cute characters.

**KITTEN AND DRAGON**

NO READING ALLOWED
*The Worst Read-Aloud Book Ever*
Haldar, Raj & Carpenter, Chris
Illus. by Gladfelter, Bryce
Sourcebooks eXplore (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 1, 2020
978-1-72820-659-2

Homophones in versatile parallel sentences create absurd scenarios.

The pattern is simple but endlessly funny: Two sentences, each illustrated, sound the same but are differentiated by their use of homophones. On the verso of the opening spread a cartoon restaurant scene shows a diner lifting a plate of spaghetti and meatballs to a waiter who removes a dark hair from the plate of noodles: “The hair came forth.” (Both figures have brown skin.) Opposite, the scene shows a race with a tortoise at the finish line while a hare trails the tortoise, a snake, and a snail: “The hare came fourth.” The humorous line drawings feature an array of humans, animals, and monsters and provide support and context to the sentences, however bizarre they may seem. New vocabulary is constantly introduced, as is the idea that spelling and punctuation can alter meaning. Some pairings get quite sophisticated; others are rather forced. “The barred man luted the establishment” stretches the concept, paralleling *barred* as adjectives and *luted* as verbs. The former is an orange-jumpsuited White prisoner in a cell; the other, a brown-skinned musician strumming a lute for a racially diverse group of dancers. Poetic license may allow for *luted*, though the word is glaringly missing from the detailed glossary.

Preposterous situations and farcical sound-alike sentences will elicit groans and giggles. (Informational picture book. 8-12)

OUT THE DOOR
*Hale, Christy*
Illus. by the author
Neal Porter/Holiday House (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-8234-4644-5

Follow a young child who travels to school on the New York City subway and goes about the day.

In short phrases that emphasize directional words—highlighted in different colors—the unnamed narrator gives readers a taste of daily urban experience. The narrator goes “out the door” and through the neighborhood with a parent. Together they approach the stairs “outside the station,” stand “at the booth,” and then go “beyond the turnstile” to the subway train. “Amid the crowd” the two wait, the red-jacketed kid with brown skin and black hair and the parent with the same coloring. Their fellow commuters are diverse. They travel a few stops and exit “into daylight,” going “around the corner” and “inside my school.” Teachers and students are diverse, and one person uses a wheelchair. The school day passes, and the process of going home begins, but the return trip and the evening at home with both parents is compressed into a series of thumbnail panels in one double-page spread. The collage illustrations vary perspective, sometimes showing the travelers clearly while challenging readers to look for them at other times. Two subway scenes are particular striking, one of the travelers waiting from the opposite platform and the other a cutaway of the train passing below the streets. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 25% of actual size.)

**KITTEN AND DRAGON**
Hashimoto, Meika
Illus. by Reid, Gillian
Andrews McMeel Publishing (104 pp.)
$12.99 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-1-5248-6100-1
Series: Kitty and Dragon, 1

A quirky pairing of a dragon and a tabby cat makes for some amusing adventures, told in three vignettes. It all starts when a gray feline simply named Kitty is driven out from the barn where she lives by the unrelenting noise from her farm buddies. She journeys through a downtown lined with magical shops and traverses a forest and hills before scaling a tall mountain. Along the way, various fairies, frogs, and colorfurry giants call out warnings of a “silent dragon” that lives at the top of the mount. Once she summits the peak, an exhausted Kitty finds a warm cave and a friendly red dragon who readily accepts her companionship. In the second chapter, Kitty has come down with a cold, so Dragon springs into action. After some research, he makes a blanket, noodle soup, and some tea, all shown in a series of charming scenes as he nurses Kitty back to health. For the finale, Kitty is frustrated by the messy tendencies of Dragon. Desperate, she buys a “tidying-up” potion from the magic shop downtown. The silly results force Kitty to weigh the top of the mount. Once she summits the peak, an exhausted Kitty finds a warm cave and a friendly red dragon who readily accepts her companionship. In the second chapter, Kitty has come down with a cold, so Dragon springs into action. After some research, he makes a blanket, noodle soup, and some tea, all shown in a series of charming scenes as he nurses Kitty back to health. For the finale, Kitty is frustrated by the messy tendencies of Dragon. Desperate, she buys a “tidying-up” potion from the magic shop downtown. The silly results force Kitty to weigh what she really values. Spare, declarative text effectively narrates while Reid supplies lively backdrops that frequently span double-page spreads and incredibly cute characters; Dragon is nonverbal but still plenty expressive. With just a few short sentences per page, this fits neatly between high-level early readers and more-complex chapter books.

A sweet, comical choice for readers transitioning to chapter books. (Fantasy. 3-8)
SPY PENGUINS
Golden Egg
Hey, Sam
Illus. by Jagucki, Marek
Feiwel & Friends (256 pp.)
$13.99  |  Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-250-18863-2
Series: Spy Penguins, 3

An endearing story for fans of the animated film Ice Age and Kate DiCamillo’s Flora & Ulysses (2013).

In this third installment of Hay’s Spy Penguins series, Jackson and Quigley continue to try to prove that they should be hired by the FBI—the Frosty Bureau of Investigation. After hearing about a prison escapee on their radio transmitter, the duo sets out to track him down only to get derailed when Jackson’s sick mother asks him to compete in the Rookeryville Golden Egg Games with his unhatched sibling, the Egg. When a rare sapphire, the trophy, and the Egg go missing, the sleuths are able—with help from a local news crew and a tracking device Quigley put on the Egg—to capture the criminal and find the Egg just in time for it to hatch. Allusions to popular stories like “Snow White” push the plot forward and provide clues to help readers solve the mystery before the young penguins do. A slew of amusing puns—Snow and Tell, webbed-site, bin-icicles—contribute to the book’s lighthearted charm. Cartoon-like black-and-white illustrations appear every few pages, and a short comic insert in the text explains the origins of the town and the Golden Egg Games. Readers do not need to have read earlier entries in order to enjoy this one. The epilogue sets the series up for a fourth book.

An entertaining romp. (Mystery 7-12)
AAALLIGATOR!
Henderson, Judith
Illus. by Stegmaier, Andrea
Kids Can (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-5253-0151-3

When a boy befriends an alligator, it becomes a problem for the whole town.

What starts as a pleasantly routine walk in the woods turns into a surprising friendship after “the boy,” as he’s consistently called, frees an alligator caught in thick vines. When the mayor declares a ban on alligators, the townspeople rally in secret to find a way to feed and take care of the alligator, going so far as to protect him by hiding him in plain sight. Henderson’s sweet story about a boy saving his friend has a subtle political subtext, as the people find a way to do what’s right even when led by an ineffective, unworthy elected official. There is much to harvest from Stegmaier’s illustrations. The palette of muted earth tones helps connect the worlds of both the alligator and the boy. There are lovely elements of foreshadowing, like the guitar that the boy plays to lull the alligator to sleep appearing pages before its use, sticking out of his backpack. In addition, there are recurring details, like nods to the boy’s love of birds, that readers will enjoy finding. The boy has pale skin and stick-straight black hair, and the mayor is White, looking rather like a beardless Abraham Lincoln. Townspeople are depicted as racially diverse; one uses a wheelchair.

The trope of the unlikely friendship delivered with a traditional feel and a modern message. (Picture book. 4-7)

LIVING FOSSILS
Survivors From Earth’s Distant Past
Hirsch, Rebecca E.
Millbrook/Lerner (48 pp.)
$31.99 PLB | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-5415-8127-2

Over the millennia many creatures have come and gone, but six unusual animals have survived and changed very little.

From numerous possibilities, Hirsch has chosen six examples of animals that could be called “living fossils,” although she makes clear that, like other life on Earth, they’ve evolved over time. In choosing, she also looked for animals with uncommon traits, highlighted in her descriptions. Her selections—horse-shoe crabs from the Atlantic coast, chambered nautilus from the Indian and Pacific oceans, West African lungfish, tuatara from New Zealand, duck-billed platypus from Australia, and selenodon from Hispaniola—are a combination of familiar and surprising. Each animal gets two or three spreads, including a full-page photograph, a nicely written introduction, and a box with fast facts. Photos are nicely captioned, but they don’t always indicate magnification. An introductory chapter covers the theories of evolution and natural selection and discusses the way a living fossil, such as the velvet worm, still so like Aysheaia from the Cambrian era, actually has evolved. It includes a timeline. A final spread reminds readers that living fossils, who’ve survived major extinctions, are threatened again by a human-caused sixth. Well-organized, clearly written, nicely designed, and including new research, this will be welcomed in libraries, even those already owning Caroline Arnold’s Living Fossils: Clues to the Past, illustrated by Andrew Plant (2016), which describes some of the same intriguing creatures. (This book was reviewed digitally with 8.875-by-21.25-inch double-page spreads viewed at 56.6% of actual size.)

A satisfying selection of nature’s survivors for readers intrigued by the animal world. (author’s note, source notes, glossary, further resources, bibliography, index, photo acknowledgments) (Nonfiction. 9-14)

SAVING GRANDDADDY’S STORIES
Ray Hicks, the Voice of Appalachia
Hitchcock, Shannon
Illus. by Page, Sophie
Reycraft Books (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Oct. 22, 2020
978-1-4788-6966-5

A tribute to Appalachian storytelling legend Ray Hicks. Hicks came from an impoverished family in the Blue Ridge Mountains and loved listening to his grandfather’s traditional Jack tales. Growing up steeped in a culture of oral storytelling and folk music, Hicks eagerly shared the stories that meant so much to him with schoolmates, the people he worked with, his own children, and, eventually, wider audiences at the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee. His talents made him a renowned and treasured teller during his lifetime, recognized for his achievements by then-Vice President George H.W. Bush, but he was happiest with his familiar rural life and content living in the place he knew best. Hicks is most worthy of a biographical treatment for young readers, but the main body of this work is devoid of the context that would pique readers’ interest, given the lack of tension in the plot. Those who read the author’s note will learn where he lived (North Carolina), when (1922-2003), and that the Jack tales he told—like his distinctive regional dialect—were part of his family’s cultural heritage extending back to the British Isles. The bright, gently surreal, dioramalike illustrations feel sterile and do not convey the rich texture of the mountain setting or life of a man who was deeply attuned to the natural world around him. With the exception of Hicks’ racially diverse Jonesborough audience, they depict an all-White cast. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9-by-22.8-inch double-page spreads viewed at 46.9% of actual size.)

Fails to do justice to a master spinner of tales. (Picture book/biography. 5-8)
Dazzling new stories from FLYING EYE BOOKS

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GREETINGS AND URGENTLY USE THE NEAREST WIZARD, BUT IT IS OUR DUTY AS GARDENS TO THE HIGH ENTRANCE OF THE TIME WORM TO WARN YOU THAT THE COVERS OF THE FOREIGN COVERS HAVE BEEN WITHHELD FROM THE SEASON 2 PROMOTION TO PREVENT ANY SPOILERS. THE MINISTRY OF MEDIA AFFAIRS FOR THE NORTHERN ELVEN COUNTIES CANNOT BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY GRIEVANCE WITH REGARDS TO THE VIEWING EXPERIENCE OF SAID PARTIES.

GET READY FOR HILDA
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HILDA AND THE TIME WORM
HILDA AND THE WHITE WOLF
HILDA AND THE SPARRWOLF BADGE GUIDE

Published by Flying Eye Books www.flyingeyebooks.com
Distributed by Penguin Random House Publisher Services customerservice@penguinrandomhouse.com | 1-800-733-3000
The angles of the ears tell the story of her feelings to any reader familiar with the body language of cats.

**A CAT STORY**

Unicorns aren't the only thing on which Sophie Johnson is certain she's an expert.

Enthusiastic (and quite overconfident) unicorn expert Sophie Johnson is also a genius at detection (well, in her mind). She has studied (not the books so much as the detective TV shows), and she's ready to solve any crime with the help of her canine assistant, Bella. In Sophie’s opinion though, Bella is not the best assistant. As is her wont, Sophie is, unknowingly, proven entirely wrong. The tail of Sophie’s stuffed lion has gone missing. Sophie sets out to discover the culprit. She interviews the suspects: a dolly, a goldfish, a toddler sibling, and various other stuffed animals. She fingerprints them. She stops for a snack because detecting is hard work. Meanwhile, in the background, Bella catches three actual thieves and gets a commendation from the police…of course Sophie doesn't even notice.

Sophie's unicorn-loving fans will enjoy her outing as a clueless detective. (Picture book. 2-7)

**SAVING ELI’S LIBRARY**

Horowitz, Ruth
Illus. by Jackson, Brittany
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 1, 2020
978-0-8075-1971-4

Eli loves everything about his library. There are friends of all ages who love it as much as he does. One uses the computer to chat online with her sister, who lives far away, while two others play chess. Eli enjoys Big Sam’s yoga class. The books are especially wonderful, and Miss Mudge’s storytime is the best of all. One stormy day Eli and his dad notice the nearby river roaring and rising as they drive to the library. People are stacking sandbags outside, and inside everyone is placing books on the highest shelves. All night Eli worries about his beloved library. The next day they discover high water outside the library and a muddy floor and ruined low shelves inside. But all the books that were placed on the high shelves are safe and dry. Eli, his dad, and all his library friends start the long weeks of cleanup, ending with a reopening parade. Young Eli is thoughtful, earnest, kind, and caring, and Horowitz narrates the tale of community spirit via his thoughts and observations, never allowing it to become overly sweet or preachy. Jackson’s expressive, gentle cartoon illustrations are perfectly in tune with the text, detailing characters’ every emotion. Eli and his dad present White; Miss Mudge and Big Sam are people of color; other library users are diverse.

A delight for all book lovers and friends of libraries. (author’s note) (Picture book. 4-9)

In Malta, a stray kitten seeks a better life.

Cilla the kitten is tired of eating scraps as a dockyard stray. A tale of “the quiet garden” where the humans are kind piques her interest, though all the other Maltese cats laugh at her for believing in fairy tales. Her skeptical best friend, a yellow kitten named Betto, joins Cilla against his better judgement. Their journey takes them through danger and around Malta while the animals they meet speak in philosophical riddles that Cilla takes as literal instruction. The stories that their mentors tell are illustrated as reimagined, primarily European works of art. There’s no particular reason for Cilla and Betto to appear in these works, as they explore the Bayeux tapestry, are protected from Hokusai’s Great Wave, and nap in Vincent Van Gogh’s Café Terrace at Night. But the transformed classic artworks add visual interest to the deceptively simple panels (and for interested readers, a detailed endnote lists most of the works with some artistic context). Cilla’s white cat with striking black markings that accentuate her expressive face, whether she’s disgruntled, scared, despairing, or happy to be with her best friend. The angles of her ears, drawn in simple, cartoonish stokes, tell the story of her feelings to any reader familiar with the body language of cats.

Works equally well as simple animal tale, metaphysical journey, or reimagining of classic artworks. (Graphic fiction. 10-13)
**THE LAST HAZELNUT**

Isern, Susanna  
Illus. by Ruiz Johnson, Mariana  
Trans. by Perez, María  
Barefoot (32 pp.)  
$16.99 | $8.99 paper | Aug. 21, 2020  
978-1-64686-055-5  
978-1-64686-056-2 paper

Animal best friends squabble and then make up.

Tim, a light green squirrel, and Teo, a red rabbit, are friends who believe that “there is nothing better than eating hazelnuts on a mountaintop.” When the last hazelnut disappears, however, each blames the other, and they’re both prepared to end the friendship over it. Luckily, after a day and night of anger, they simultaneously decide to forgive each other for eating the last hazelnut and bring a new bowl of nuts to the scene of the conflict. When it’s discovered that a thieving bird was responsible the whole time, the two animals agree that sharing is a good thing and that they should “roll down the mountain together.” The illustrations are remarkable, pleasantly garish, and detailed, with the animals sporting particularly flamboyant outfits (such as Teo’s black-and-white skin-tight pants with delicate black shoes. The story, translated from Spanish, is rendered in the present tense, not a good choice for this kind of read-aloud. And the animals’ language is stilted and uncomfortable from the first exchange: “Hi, Teo! I was looking for you. I’ve just picked some hazelnuts. Shall we share them?” “What a great idea, Tim! I love hazelnuts!” It goes on to give children monotonous scripts for conflict resolution rather than a story: “You know what, Teo? It feels good to share.” “I totally agree, Tim.”

Enjoy the art, ignore the story. (Picture book. 4-7)

**BIG MOVE TO A TINY HOUSE**

Jacobson, Jennifer Richard  
Illus. by Franco, Paula  
Pixel+Ink (112 pp.)  
978-1-64595-021-9  
978-1-64595-022-6 paper  
Series: Twig and Turtle, 1

There are so many challenging changes in Twig’s world.

Twig and her little sister, Turtle, are facing a first day of school for the third time, and it’s only October. Their parents sold their home in Boston, moved temporarily to live with Grandma in Denver, and now to a new, tiny house in Happy Trails, Colorado, so confining that almost everything had to be left behind, including Bo, a beloved Great Dane. When Grandma tells them she has found a new family for Bo, Twig must find a way to get him back. With the help of new friends and teachers, and a lot of research and planning, Twig comes up with an amazing solution that will bring Bo back into her life, help children with reading, and provide companionship for Mr. Kim, the school custodian (who appears only twice in the action). Readers will find Twig and Turtle delightful, coping with their unusual and interesting obstacles with determination and great resourcefulness. Unfortunately Jacobson’s cast of secondary characters is quite one-dimensional. Upsetting actions at first meetings with classmates are revealed to be completely unintentional and easily explained away. Mom and Dad are loving but distracted. The Social Skills Club leader leads her charges unerringly to self-awareness and happiness. Even Writing Workshop protocols are perfectly aligned with Twig’s success. Twig and Turtle’s family presents White; illustrations reveal a vibrantly diverse student body. Sequel *Toy Store Trouble* publishes simultaneously.

Superficial—but still comforting and reassuring, with problems neatly tied up and solved. (Fiction. 7-9) (Toy Store Trouble: 978-1-64595-024-0, 978-1-64595-025-7 paper)
WHAT WE’LL BUILD
Plans for Our Together Future
Jeffers, Oliver
Illus. by the author
Philomel (48 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-593-20675-1

An adult and child gather tools and prepare for a future together.
Some things they build are rife with symbolism, such as a shelter to store what they value (including some “love” they set aside) and futures they build for each other, depicted as a series of items in blue and pink waves that spring from a wristwatch. Others are more concrete, like the fortress they build to repel “enemies,” whom they later invite in for tea and apologies. Some of what they build is fantastical (a road to the moon). The book is dedicated to the author’s daughter and is considered a companion piece to Here We Are, published in 2017 and dedicated to his son, though the pair here could still be interpreted as having a different type of caretaker-child relationship. Camaraderie between the two is the thematic focus in this affectionate narrative. Portions of the text’s meaning are somewhat vague (the two lie next to a fire that will “keep us warm like when we’re born”), and the rhyming text, with moments of inconsistent meter, occasionally feels forced. Jeffers fills the pages with an odd, giggle-inducing assortment of creatures; the duo’s former foes include a one-eyed pirate, a witch, a Viking, and (in a very poorly timed choice) a white-coated doctor with a surgical mask, and there are a friendly octopus and birds in space helmets. Adult and child both present White. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11- by 19-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.) Though straining in spots, it has the offbeat, sweet style Jeffers’ fans know and love. (Picture book. 4-9)

MEGA-DOGS OF NEW KANSAS
Jolley, Dan
Illus. by Khouri, Jacques
Graphic Universe (144 pp.)
$29.32 | $10.99 paper | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-5415-1733-2
978-1-72841-289-4 paper

Fifty-six light-years from Earth, a young girl and her prodigious pup try to navigate their extraterrestrial outpost.
In the year 2318, Sienna Barlow lives with her parents on New Kansas, in the agricultural settlement of Alexandria. Her father is the mayor, and her mother, Marion, is the head dog trainer. Marion breeds mega-dogs: gigantic canines that help herd the dust crows, a large emu-like bird. Sienna has her own shaggy, good-natured mega-dog named Gus, a constant companion who helps her with her extreme anxiety, which often leaves her unable to talk to the other kids. After a prank perpetrated by a couple other kids goes amiss, a visiting politician deems the mega-dogs dangerous, and Gus is impounded. Sienna and Gus steal a spaceship to run away, but the ship crashes shortly after takeoff. Her survival depends on her ability to work with another young boy named Kevin who had stowed away on their transport. They soon learn that the danger they face may be bigger than they ever imagined. Jolley’s graphic offering is very clever, with its accessible worldbuilding abetted by Khouri’s eye-catching sepia-hued illustrations. Sienna’s social anxiety is palpable on the page, and her struggles are handled in an approachable way. Sienna has olive skin and straight, dark hair; Kevin presents White. Secondary and background characters are racially diverse. An inventive intergalactic romp. (Graphic science fiction. 8-13)

THE BOYS IN THE BACK ROW
Jung, Mike
Levine Querido (272 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-64614-011-4

Two best pals plan the most epic adventure as their last hurrah.
Matthew and Eric have been best friends since meeting in band in fourth grade. Now in sixth grade, the boys learn that their school band will play in the Spring Music Festival at World of Amazement, the biggest amusement park in the state. But that’s not all: DefenderCon, a comics convention, will be taking place nearby at the same time and will feature special guest Jonah Burns, the author of their favorite character, Sandpiper. The boys also learn that as soon as the school year lets out, Eric will be moving across the country to New York for his pastry chef mom’s new job. Out of desperation the two plan a daring final mission: They will sneak off to DefenderCon, meet their hero, and get back to the amusement park before anyone notices they were gone. Naturally, things do not go exactly to plan. The tightly written, humorous narrative takes on serious subjects as Matt faces racism and both boys are on the receiving end of homophobic bullying due to their close friendship. It is both refreshing and reassuring to read a tale that explores a loving friendship between two boys who defy societal gender norms and are simply authentic to themselves and one another. Matt is Korean American, and Eric presents as White.
A lively romp and an honest read. (Fiction. 9-12)
Topics of friendship, peer pressure, factory farms, and activism are adroitly touched on.

**SAUCY**

Kadohata, Cynthia  
Illus. by Raskin, Marianna  
Caitlyn Dlouhy/Atheneum (128 pp.)  
$16.99 | Sep. 29, 2020  
978-1-4424-1278-1

A rescued piglet causes some trouble for her new family.  
Becca wants a “thing,” a thing that makes her Becca. Her three brothers—they are quadruplets—all have a thing: Jammer plays hockey, Bailey has music, and K.C. thinks they all live in a simulation. One night, when the family is out on their nightly walk, Becca finds a sick piglet and is determined to rescue it. Naming it Saucy, Becca pleads to keep her, and soon Saucy becomes a beloved member of the family. As Saucy recovers, she gains pounds and energy, often destroying things in the house. Saucy gets into all sorts of trouble, which creates fun and silly moments that balance sometimes-serious themes: Topics of friendship, peer pressure, factory farms, and activism are adroitly touched on. The relationship between Saucy and the family, especially her bond with Becca, is charming. In Kadohata’s nuanced third-person, Becca faces a lot of self-reflection, wondering about who she is, what her purpose is, and what kind of person she is, making this the ideal book for thoughtful readers. Black-and-white drawings are scattered throughout the generously leaded text, adding context and emotion. Becca’s mother is biracial (Japanese/White), Becca’s dad presents White, and Becca has her White grandfather’s green eyes. Bailey has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair, a detail presented with casual, totally humanizing ease.

A lively, heartwarming family story. (Fiction. 8-12)

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**THE LIEOGRAPHY OF AMELIA EARHART**

The Absolutely Untrue, Totally Made Up, 100% Fake Life Story of a Great American Aviator  
Katz, Alan  
Illus. by Hill, Tracy  
Tanglewood Publishing (100 pp.)  
$7.99 paper | Oct. 15, 2020  
978-1-939100-48-1  
Series: LieOgraphies

All her life, Amelia has only one thing on her mind: flight. At her third birthday party, all her presents are plane-themed. Her fifth grade class laughs at her eagerness to fly. She’s excited to attend a stunt-pilot show but misses it thanks to an out-of-date poster. Through it all, she clings to her pronouncement that “Someday I will fly.” Even when she finally procures a plane, she’s told that girls can’t fly (when proven wrong, the naysaying adult man apologizes). She perseveres and eventually makes big plans for her 50th flight. Katz lards the baldly fictional narrative with absurdities such as metafictive tricks, anachronisms, and gags of convenience. Blessedly, the book closes with “some factual facts” about Earhart’s life, most crucially noting that she apparently had “no particular interest in aviation during her childhood.” Thus, the book is self-admittedly what its title promises. The grayscale cartoons give no indication that any character is any race other than White. Rather, as Christopher Eliopoulos does in his illustrations of Brad Meltzer’s Ordinary People Change the World series, Hill depicts his protagonist the same way no matter her age, which becomes problematic when she’s 17 and still looks like a 3-year-old among tall, adult-proportioned figures. This read is best for those whose senses of irony and humor are developed enough to enjoy the foolishness and then dismiss it. Companion titles about Babe Ruth and Thomas Edison publish simultaneously.

Pure silliness: shelve far, far away from the biographies. (Fiction. 8-11) (The LieOgraphy of Babe Ruth: 978-1-939100-46-7; The LieOgraphy of Thomas Edison: 978-1-939100-47-4)
Here Rowley comes into his own as a driving force.

**ROWLEY JEFFERSON’S AWESOME FRIENDLY ADVENTURE**

Kinney, Jeff  
Illus. by the author  
Amulet/Abrams (224 pp.)  
$14.99 | Aug. 4, 2020  
978-1-4197-4909-4

The Wimpy Kid’s best pal writes an adventure story in this follow-up to *Diary of an Awesome Friendly Kid* (2019).

Rowley Jefferson returns for his second solo outing, this time with the ambition of writing a book. The well-meaning, kindhearted Rowley doesn’t want fame or fortune from his story (he admits he isn’t even particularly interested in getting it published) but instead hopes to make a book good enough for his parents to read to him at bedtime. When Rowley turns to his buddy Greg for editorial assistance with his work in progress, however, Greg sees nothing but merchandising opportunities, big-budget–movie adaptations, and fast-food tie-ins. The book alternates between chapters of Rowley’s adventure story, which features young Roland and his muscleman sidekick, Garg the Barbarian, and editorial sessions with Greg. Kinney’s imagination sparks Rowley’s tale with silly creatures and adventure while the author’s wit peppers the editorial sessions with some solid jokes regarding the children-publishing scene (a Sherlock Holmes cameo may keep the story out of book fairs due to his pipe; a vampire-romance plot will age the book into the lucrative teen market). Rowley’s previous adventure brought new life into the Wimpy Kid franchise, but here Rowley comes into his own as a driving force. This entry improves upon its predecessor in every way: The gags are funnier, the storytelling is sharper, and the characters are crisper. Rowley, Greg, and all Rowley’s characters are white as the paper they’re drawn on.

**COUNTING KINDNESS**

*Ten Ways To Welcome Refugee Children*  
Kurman, Hollis  
Illus. by Barroux  
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)  
$16.99 | Sep. 8, 2020  
978-1-6354-229-0

A family seeking refuge is met with kindness in this simple counting book.

One boat carries an African family escaping war across the sea, two hands lift them out of it “to safety,” three meals calm the children’s hunger, and four beds keep the family and a friend warm at night. The mother, two young children, and a baby continue to be met with kindness. Colorful spreads illustrate their journey and fill the newcomers’ environment with diverse faces, young and old. The simple counting book concludes with further information about refugees and a list of organizations through which readers might help or learn more. In emphasizing kindness and welcome, Kurman undercuts her own mission. Readers may become frustrated with the refugee family’s lack of agency as they receive aid, gifts, and culture from others throughout the book—it is a one-sided relationship. It feels as though the choice of protagonists may have been made with an eye to highlighting only the most uncontroversial as subjects of charity. Some may feel that the choices made throughout the book consolidate refugees’ position as an objectified “other.” Others will notice that the list of recommended organizations is concentrated in the developed world and does not mention community-based ones. The refugees fit in seamlessly in their environment, are grateful, and say “thanks” at the end.

A painfully well-intentioned but just OK addition to children’s literature about refugees. (Picture book 3-5)

**THE POISONED APPLE**

*An A Fractured Fairy Tale*  
Lambelet, Anne  
Illus. by the author  
Page Street (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020  
978-1-64567-060-5

A cheeky riff on “Snow White.”

A witch loathes a princess. There’s no backstory provided, but “this particular princess was getting a little too sweet for her own good”—whatever that means to this witch—and the witch sets out to create a poisoned apple. But she can only collect enough ingredients to poison a single apple, so her plan has only one shot. The scheme starts out fine—hilariously, the witch just hands the apple directly to the princess, who accepts it without question—but it turns into an innocent apple-relay. Princess, dwarfs, deer, and a squirrel pass the apple along, each to the next, in artless generosity to hungry fellow creatures. When the squirrel scrambles up a tree with the apple, the witch, desperate to avoid having “put in all that work for nothing,” climbs up too—and suffers a fall that leads her, via crash-induced amnesia, into the very doom she’d planned for the princess. Above the narrative text, occasional speech bubbles contain pictures that function as the story’s only dialogue, including one swear word (don’t tell!). Everyone seems White; the witch is green-skinned with a stereotypical big nose and moles. The illustrations are clever and offbeat—a fawn rides atop its parent’s back—and highlight hatchings, sharp points (including the witch’s nose), and curves (including the princess’s bodice: Whether by dress design or posture, her back always appears arched).

Merry, with a bit of zest. (Picture book 4-6)
A hug is a powerful thing.
Louis, a stuffed teddy bear, has grievances: His owner, a dark-haired kid with light-brown skin, has mistreated Louis in a variety of ways, including using the bear as a hankie, burying the toy in the sand, and subjecting him to the terrors of the washing machine. After Louis suffers the final indignity—almost being left behind on public transportation—the bear plans to make his escape. Savvy readers may surmise that Louis’ heart isn’t completely in this grand departure, as the teddy delays based on rain, cupcake-filled tea parties, and being the star of show-and-tell due to bravery during the bus incident. When the perfect moment to desert finally arrives, a last-minute hug helps Louis realize how much the kid loves and appreciates him. It’s a charming, genuinely sweet ending to a well-crafted story that leaves lots of openings for Rowan-Zoch’s boldly colored, crisp cartoon artwork to deliver a vibrant pop that will be appreciated in both large storytimes and intimate lap reads. Louis is marvelously expressive, panicking, glaring, and unexpectedly softening by turns. Caregivers and educators may see an opportunity in the story to engage in creative writing or storytelling based on the readers’ own favorite stuffed friends. Louis’ owner’s mom appears in one scene wearing a salwar kameez, suggesting the family is of South Asian heritage.

Like a faithful teddy, sure to become a favorite for many readers. (Picture book. 5-8)

Mermaid-loving Julián is back! Julián and Abuela arrive at an outdoor wedding on a green lawn (discerning eyes will spy the Statue of Liberty in the distance). Both meet friends at the wedding: Abuela, a familiar friend, and Julián, a new one, Marisol. Julián and Marisol are part of the wedding, which the text proclaims is “a party for love.” Julián holds the leash of Gloria, the brides’ dog, and Marisol—whose baseball cap has been swapped out for a flower crown—tosses petals. Later, after Marisol gifts Julián the flower crown, Marisol, Julián, and Gloria run off to the “fairy house,” or weeping willow. Marisol and Gloria have such fun that muddy paws aren’t a thought...until Marisol’s peach-pink dress is covered in paw prints. But never fear, innovative Julián is here! With the help of the fairy house, all’s well that ends well: Marisol’s hat is returned, the brides welcome the pair back, and everyone celebrates love. Love’s media, applied, as in the previous book, on brown paper, create colors that appear simultaneously soft and vibrant. Most of the main characters present Black or have brown skin. As established in the previous book, Julián and Abuela are Afro-Latinx, and Abuela’s friend and Marisol are also cued Latinx.

A celebration of weddings and a subtle yet poignant reminder that gender, like love, is expansive. Lovely. (Picture book. 4-8)
**SPEAK UP, MOLLY LOU MELON**

*Lovell, Patty*

*Illus. by Catrow, David*

*Putnam (40 pp.)*

*$17.99 | Sep. 8, 2020*

*978-0-399-26002-5*

Molly Lou Melon uses her voice to stand up for a new friend 19 years after she learned to stand up for herself.

Molly Lou Melon, “a tiny girl with a big, deep-down heart,” is true to herself, as her mother tells her to be. She accepts people for who they are, and she uses her strong voice to “speak up for anyone who might need [her] help.” At school, when Bettina Bonklehead teases Molly Lou and her friend Ronald with “kissy-kissy boyfriend-girlfriend,” Molly Lou defends their friendship. When Bettina teases the new boy, Molly Lou defends him and asks him to play at recess. After standing up for him ferociously, Molly Lou leads her friends in giving mean Bettina the option of being a friend too. Lovell’s text places this strong protagonist at the centers of a loving family and friend group, making her a role model for readers, with her fearless standing up and speaking out. Catrow’s illustrations are borderline fantastical, with birds riding in toy trains and Molly Lou wearing a backpack thrice her size. The ponytail (sometimes multiple) that sticks out beyond her Afro is a superlatively odd touch. Molly Lou has beige skin, and the very odd-looking new boy has brown skin while the other kids, no more peculiar in aspect than Catrow’s typical kewpie, seem to have pale skin. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 9-by-18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 63.9% of actual size.)*

An encouraging message in a quirky package. *(Picture book. 4-9)*

**SPACE MATTERS**

*Lynn, Jacque*

*Illus. by Nichols, Lydia*

*Clarion (32 pp.)*

*$17.99 | Oct. 13, 2020*

*978-1-328-80147-0*

An exploration of the spaces separating words, outer space, and everything in between.

Following a humongous or—depending on perspective—tiny ladybug, readers are led through explanations of different meanings for the word *space*. Typographical, physical, and chronological spaces are some of the concepts probed in the story. Although space is often visually represented in concrete images, such as the interstices between spilled, uncontained noodles or the gap between teeth, abstract concepts are also transmitted, like the disgust one might feel when there is no space separating pickles and pudding, causing flavors to combine, or the built-up excitement created by a pause, or space, between moments. Readers will be enticed to keep revisiting the book, as it turns into a seek-and-find challenge when the pages are turned. Characters, patterns, and sections of previous spreads appear multiple times from different perspectives, leading readers to continually flip back and forth to locate the original image and to piece the final image together. Masterful page breaks create anticipation to see what is coming in the next spread, the first part of a truncated sentence often begging readers to turn the page to explore its resolution. The simplicity of Nichols’ illustrations are reminiscent of Christian Robinson’s and, with a diverse cast of characters—including both characters of color and disabled characters—evoke joy, and communicate movement, life, and complex concepts.

Beautifully brilliant in its simplicity. *(Informational picture book. 4-7)*

**VOICES OF JUSTICE**

*Poems About People Working for a Better World*

*Lyon, George Ella*

*Illus. by Potter, Jennifer M.*

*Henry Holt (48 pp.)*

*$19.99 | Oct. 13, 2020*

*978-1-350-26520-9*

*Series: Who Did It First?, 6*

Portraits and poems celebrate change-makers. Lyon mixes such stalwarts as Nelson Mandela, Dolores Huerta, Jeannette Rankin, and Shirley Chisholm with emerging heroes such as the Parkland shooting survivors and Greta Thunberg and less well-known people like Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese government official stationed in Lithuania who wrote transit visas for 6,000 Jews during World War II, and Brazilian transgender activist and pastor Alexya Salvador. The unrhymed poems vary in structure, frequently relying on line breaks and spaces within lines to govern reading pace while occasionally indulging in flashier visuals. The Jane Addams poem appropriately resembles a small home with an open door, successfully evoking Hull House, but the poem that celebrates primatologists Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, and Biruté Galdikas is too clever for its own good, lines arranged like the rays around a large, yellow sun and consequently very difficult to read. The language itself is often disappointingly flat, as in these first lines of the Julia Butterfly Hill poem: “Do you like to climb trees? / Would you live in one / for two years to save its life?” With the exception of a compelling James Baldwin, the portraits are too often likewise static. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 57.6% of actual size.)*

Well-intended but undistinguished. *(thumbnail biographies, guide for parents and caregivers, glossary, selected sources) (Picture book/poetry. 8-12)*
Reassurance about the resilience of the natural world.

WE WILL LIVE IN THIS FOREST AGAIN

Marino, Gianna
Illus. by the author
Neal Porter/Holiday House (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-8234-4699-5

When wildfires rage in a California forest, animals flee; they can return when spring brings new growth.

Inspired by her own experiences in the 2017 fires in California, Marino tells this story in the nostalgic but also hopeful voice of one of the forest-dwellers, a deer. The approaching fire comes as a surprise. “I used to think this forest would always be our home,” the narrator says. The gentle foreshadowing works even for her young audience. An unnoticed spark becomes flames. The animals flee; even the mountain lion is not as fierce as the fire. The exhausted animals reach safety, clean themselves, and wait. Creatures that might not normally get along have banded together. Time passes. Eventually there are new leaves and shoots. The forest is returning, and so can they. In Marino’s poetic text the leaves and branches that “crinkled and crunched” in the fall nicely contrast with the new growth that “will be soft and quiet underfoot. In her illustrations, these animals are basically silhouettes with dark eyes and bodies textured by color and shadow. These double-page spreads have the translucence of watercolors and constantly change colors. The yellows and greens of the forest are overtaken by fiery reds and oranges, which turn to sooty gray, then warm brown with, finally, shoots of green. The deer is hopeful. “In time, our forest will return.”

Reassurance about the resilience of the natural world.

FAIRY TALES OF FEARLESS GIRLS

McFarlane, Susannah
Illus. by Norling, Beth; Gifford, Lucinda; Robertson, Claire & Ng, Sher Rill
Aladdin (128 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-5344-7357-7

These four fairy-tale retellings give traditional personality and agency.

Rapunzel is a maker, always building and inventing. When she decides to free herself, she calls out to a young man and asks him to tie one end of her severed braid to a tree, turning it into a zip line she can ride down to freedom. Lucy, known as Little Red Riding Hood, is a naturalist and is lured off the path to Grandma’s house only by the promise of a rare flower. Her keen observation of the wolf that sends her off-track enables her to recognize him in Grandma’s bed and outsmart him. Cinderella’s kindness extends to animals, and she sells her one remaining glass slipper to start an animal sanctuary, where the prince eventually joins her. Thumbelina nurses a sick swallow to health and in return receives a ride to her true home. Each story consists of three to five chapters. Half- or full-page monochrome illustrations in mauve on each page fit the fairy-tale theme. McFarlane does a lovely job reimagining these female leads as active, clever characters, though some of the old tropes remain (the obsession with Rapunzel’s beauty, which is based on her blue eyes and golden tresses; the ball’s purpose is still for the prince to pick a bride). Rapunzel is White; Red Riding Hood is pictured with brown skin and long, wavy hair; Cinderella and her family are White while the godmother and prince are brown. (The illustrations for “Thumbelina” were not seen.)

Not revolutionary, but a considerable improvement. (Fiction. 5-8)

YOU POOP HERE

Meisel, Paul
Illus. by the author
Holiday House (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-0-8234-4601-8

This introductory guide to the wide and wonderful world of potty training is presented through the medium of wildlife.

Cheery cartoons of insects, mammals, birds, and beasts show precisely where they loose their bowels. The simple text reads, “Ant poops on dirt. / And Beetle poops on dirt. // Monkey poops from a tree. / And Squirrel poops from a tree.” Some poop in the air, some under the sea, some on mountains, and some in deserts. The gently anthropomorphized cartoon critters beam out of the page as they deposit their waste hither, thither, and yon. While potty books abound, Meisel’s stands out in its unvarnished directness and respect, simple words and pictures speaking directly at the level of young children. Following the exploration of wild animals’ defecation habits, the book asks: “Where do you poop?” In answer, Meisel shows racially diverse children sitting on different types of potties as the text reads, “You poop here! / (And pee here too!).” Simple facts and trivia about poop appear at the end. A godsend for caregivers on the prowl for potty-training aids, the book does not strive for scientific accuracy in its depiction of animal feces, most of which appear as scribbly brown lumps on the page, or defecation postures. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-16-inch double-page spreads viewed at 28.4% of actual size.)

Birds do it. Bees do it. Even educated toddlers will be able to do it thanks to this gentle guide. (Picture book. 2-4)
Effectively, Annex scenes are squeezed between broad black borders.

I AM ANNE FRANK

A bobblehead avatar of the teenage writer and symbol of the Holocaust presents her life as an inspiration.

From a big-eared babyhood and a childhood spent “writing stories” to fleeing Germany for Amsterdam, Anne’s pre-Annex life is sketched. Narrating in the first person, the cartoon Anne explains that Nazis “didn’t like those of us who were Jewish or other groups who were different from them.” Hitler is presented as a leader “who blamed the Jews for all of Germany’s problems, even though we hadn’t done anything wrong.” Then in short order Anne receives her diary as a birthday present, the family goes into hiding, and Anne finds solace in the attic looking at the chestnut tree and writing. Effectively, Annex scenes are squeezed between broad black borders. Illustrations present four snippets of quotes from her diary, including “I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart.” Narrator Anne says, “You can always find light in the darkest places. That’s what hope is,” as she clutches the diary with Shabbat candles on one side and a menorah burning brightly on the other. In the next double-page spread, an international array of modern-day visitors standing outside the Anne Frank House briefly, in speech bubbles, wraps up the story of the Holocaust, the diary, the Annex, and the chestnut tree. Anne’s wretched death in a concentration camp is mentioned only in a concluding timeline.

I AM ANNE FRANK publishes simultaneously. (This book was reviewed digitally with 7.5 by 11-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.)

A sanitized version of a too-short life. (photos, sources, further reading) (Picture book/biography. 4-8) (I Am Benjamin Franklin: 978-0-525-55591-9)

BIOMIMICRY

When Nature Inspires Amazing Inventions

Menu, Seraphine
Illus. by Eliopoulos, Christopher
Trans. by Waters, Alyson
Triangle Square Books for Young Readers (80 pp.)
$18.95 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-1-64421-018-5

Full-page illustrations and informational text explore various inventions inspired by nature.

Bright, minimalist art presents eye-catching patterns for readers while labored, unfocused paragraphs flit from one pop-science story to another. In one spread, colorful geckos crawl next to rolls of tape as the accompanying text notes that scientists studied gecko toe pads to create adhesives. The text doesn’t take time to explain why or how these toe pads work, and though a single close-up image of them could communicate that concept, the illustration doesn’t either. Even as both text and pictures eschew detail, the reading level is strangely high; words such as ‘autonomous’ or ‘precursor’ and phrases like ‘hits the market’ feel better suited to a corporate presentation than a picture book for children. It’s unclear whether much fact-checking was done; the book reports that whale hearts inspired Jorge Reynolds Pombo to invent the pacemaker in 1958, but other accounts indicate that John Hopps designed and built the first pacemaker in 1950, with no mention of whales. The “LED light bulbs” appearing next to glowing fireflies look suspiciously like incandescent bulbs with wire filaments. While there is adequate racial diversity in illustrations of humans, it’s frustrating that the text names Isaac Newton and Leonardo da Vinci but refers generally to “Japanese scientists.” Its lack of solid information will frustrate avid nonfiction readers, and its abstruse language will alienate reluctant ones. (Nonfiction. 8-10)

CLIMATE CHANGE, THE CHOICE IS OURS

The Facts, Our Future, and Why There’s Hope!

Miles, David
Trans. by Polizzotti, Mark
Bushel & Peck Books (32 pp.)
$14.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-952239-00-7

Climate change presented as an opportunity for choices.

Billed as “interactive,” this title hopes to engage its readers while offering explanations of the causes and potential effects of climate change and choices we can make to fight climate change. The pages are die cut with a uniformly sized central circle, allowing readers to spin an arrow embedded on the inside back cover to answer the decidedly leading question “would you choose it?” Each left-hand page loosely covers a topic; each right-hand page offers choices and actions the arrow can point to (“eat smart & cut emissions / don’t eat smart,” for instance). After explaining the major concepts, Miles goes on to describe effects of climate change on sea levels, weather, agriculture, ecosystems, disease. He shows that forested areas are shrinking and why they are so important in curbing the greenhouse effect. Finally he gives examples of people, young and old and around the world, who have spoken up about a variety of issues, including present-day climate activists. There is plentiful information, presented in short paragraphs and a disturbingly small font, plus definitions of important terms, questions to think about, and potential hands-on activities. The information is responsibly sourced but often rather general. A page on “Countries Working Together” doesn’t mention U.S. plans to withdraw from the World Climate Agreement. Sadly, the presentation concludes with an unsourced and quite-possibly-not “Native American Proverb.”

Choose a less dizzying approach. (notes, further reading) (Nonfiction. 8-11)
OH, THE THINGS WE’RE FOR!
Nagara, Innosanto
Illus. by the author
Triangle Square Books for Young Readers (36 pp.)
$18.95 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-64421-014-7

Rhyming Seuss-esque verse paired with striking posterlike illustrations calls readers to action.

Nagara’s direct, pragmatic approach to activism for a child audience reaches new levels of specificity and real-world application in this book: “Let’s also be clear that harm has been done. / Futures were stolen by sword and by gun. / We can’t flip a switch / and say that we’re there. / A history of injustice / takes more to repair.” Vibrant colors infuse Nagara’s expressive, textured illustrations, which feature a diverse range of humans, protest signs, and symbolic as well as literal depictions of societal issues and potential solutions. A double-page spread composed entirely of overlapping words and phrases such as “DISABILITY ACCESS,” “WILDERNESS PRESERVES,” “CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION,” and “INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNITY!” invites further research and discussion. The cover features a child with chin-length curly black hair, black eyes, and brown skin posed like the iconic Rosie the Riveter, and, although the visual narrative does not center or even name any characters, this child and several other figures do reappear throughout. Observant readers may connect textual examples to current events. The book concludes with a blank page for readers to list their own solutions to further the causes they support; no resources for further reading or discussion are included.

An accessible, all-too-timely manifesto for young activists (and everyone else). (Picture book. 4-10)

GIRL ON A MOTORCYCLE
Novesky, Amy
Illus. by Morstad, Julie
Viking (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-0-593-11629-6

“She dreams of wandering the world.” Striking, light-filled illustrations with the look of mid-20th-century monotone prints and informative, evocative text tell the true story of Anne-France Dautheville, a White journalist who left her home in Paris in 1972 to embark on a decadelong, international motorcycle journey that she depicted in a series of articles and memoirs. While her writing is mentioned, the focus here is on the travels themselves, told with realistic, dreamlike detail from the perspective of a lone woman imbued with a sense of awe and freedom. Obstacles involving falls from and repairs of her bike are included, and the surprise and respect she received from girls along the way help depict the view and position of women during the time period. The use of the word girl in the title is a misnomer as Dautheville was 28 when she began her travels, though this may be a translation issue (the title echoes that of Dautheville’s 1973 memoir, Une demoiselle sur une moto); more disappointing is the use of the word girl throughout the book, from both a feminist perspective and a factual one. Still, word choice aside, this is an exhilarating story of an independent Frenchwoman who challenged prevailing beliefs to follow her heart, to travel, and to observe and describe different cultures and countries (Canada, India, and Afghanistan are highlighted) from a unique, outsider’s point of view. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 67.8% of actual size.)

A poetic, visually stunning depiction of a young woman’s travels via motorcycle with dated descriptors. (Biographical note, author’s note) (Picture book/biography. 6-10)

SULLIVAN, WHO IS ALWAYS TOO LOUD
Ostow, Micol
Illus. by Biggs, Brian
Roaring Brook (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-1-250-30772-9

A youngsters tries to control his thunderous voice.

Sullivan, with a bulbous head and extra-wide mouth reminiscent of the title character of David Shannon’s No, David! (1998), can’t stop yelling. His mom wearily mutters, “Sullivan, I can’t hear myself think!” “YOU’RE NOT SUPPOSED TO HEAR THINKING!” Sullivan roars with his head thrown back and jaw seemingly unhinged. Boisterous Sullivan does feel remorse. He tries to tape pillows over his mouth as a solution, to no avail. The adults in Sullivan’s life are patient; Sullivan just can’t suppress his loud tendencies. “I have loudness. In my body . Bubbling up.

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Even the quietest of readers will see a bit of themselves in this raucous tot. (Picture book. 3-6)
CANCER IS A C WORD
Pal, Sunita
Illus. by Andreasen, Cody
Rebel Mountain Press (32 pp.)
$19.95 | Oct. 15, 2020
978-1-9992416-0-5

A young boy learns about cancer. A brown-skinned tot keeps hearing an unfamiliar word that starts with the letter C. He knows that it makes people sad, but he doesn’t know what it is. His parents explain that it is a disease from which “some get better, but, sadly, some may pass away.” He then goes on to ask other adults in his life—his teacher, other relatives—the multitude of questions swirling in his head. Why can’t they just take medicine to get better? Is it contagious? Pal, an educator, knows precisely what fears and misconceptions a child may have. The rhyming style is a bit constractive and also limits explanation: “There are different kinds of treatments doctors will try. / Surgery, radiation, chemotherapy; big words for a little guy.” But the appended glossary can help to deepen further conversations. The touching twist is that the family goes on to gather other words that start with C that can help someone struggling with cancer, such as community and cuddling. Andreasen’s definitively outlined characters don’t shy away from showing such side effects as hair loss or amputation. The patients are also all different ages and races, stamping out any stereotypical ideas.

This gentle educational primer on a tough topic pushes through fear and lands on love. (Picture book. 3-7)

CONSPIRACY
Nixon, Watergate, and Democracy’s Defenders
Pearson, P. O’Connell
Simon & Schuster (288 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-5344-8003-2

An indubitably timely account of the last time an American president thought the Constitution didn’t apply to him.

Pearson only mentions Trump’s name once, toward the end, but it’s hard to miss the parallels in her portrayal of President Richard M. Nixon as a man who won election through tactics many “would call unfair or underhanded, even criminal” and who used his office to go after perceived enemies, valued personal loyalty above legality, and stubbornly stonewalled both the legal and congressional investigations that proliferated in the wake of Watergate. Posing to fill in necessary background, such as the ins and outs of the federal court system or what investigative journalists do, she strings together events, from the 1970 election’s “dirty tricks” through the climactic “Saturday Night Massacre” to Nixon’s resignation (and pardon)—detailing in a suspenseful way the chains of increasingly disturbing revelations that just kept coming to light in newspapers and on national TV and casting the crisis in ethical terms by damning Nixon and his associates as oath breakers as well as crooks. In line with that stance, she commends those who stood fast in their loyalty to their country and its Constitution as heroes and concludes by stressing that, as citizens, we the people are likewise obliged to inform ourselves and to act and vote responsibly. Smooth, clear writing makes this an appealing and accessible read.

A cautionary episode from a half-century ago that ends up sounding eerily relevant. (bibliography, timeline, cast list, endnotes, index) (Nonfiction. 11-14)

TURTLE WALK
Phelan, Matt
Illus. by the author
Greenwillow Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-06-293413-0

A family of turtles celebrates four seasons with a long walk around its small world.

On the first page, a bright green turtle with a jaunty head decoration, perhaps a leaf or blade of grass, observes two bright butterflies in the sunlight outside a cave. Sleepy turtles—perhaps inside the cave—wake up on the title page. The simple, rhyming text uses very few words. A repeated refrain, “Turtle walk. Nice and slow. / Here we go,” accompanies the little group of four on its journey beginning at the pond by the cave, across a stream, and through a field of flowers. They hurdle in spring rain under a daffodil, walk past sunflowers and children on a sunlit playground; they watch fireflies in the dark. A repeated call and response (“Are we there yet?”/ “No”) familiar to travel families follows the refrain throughout. Phelan’s artwork is lively and visually bright, with rich colors and impressionistic lines; the flat faces of the turtles are expressive, and their round bodies convey personality with a few brush strokes. The turtles pass an apple orchard and a pumpkin patch—including a jack-o’-lantern—as red and yellow leaves begin to fall. The winter return to pond and cave is a spirited, snowy slide. The rhyming text and bright colors will work in toddler storytime as well as for new readers. (This book was reviewed digitally with 8-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 30.1% of actual size.)

Playful and lighthearted. (Picture book. 2-6)

FLY, GIRL, FLY!
Shaesta Waiz Soars Around the World
Pimm, Nancy Roe
Illus. by Bye, Alexandra
Beaming Books (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-0-564-6468-8

At 30, Shaesta Waiz became the first woman from Afghanistan and the youngest woman ever to fly a single-engine aircraft around the world.
Author Pinkney’s writing is alive with imagery.

LORETTA LITTLE LOOKS BACK

Loretta Little looks back
Pinkney, Andrea Davis
Illus. by Pinkney, Brian
Little, Brown (224 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-316-53677-6

Three members of the Little family, as preteens and teens, tell their personal and family stories.

First, Loretta Little speaks, from 1927 to 1930, about her life picking cotton as a sharecropper, watching her father endure degradation under conditions that are less than completely free. Next, Retta’s little brother, Roly, speaks from 1942 to 1950. The family now has their own small plot of land, but terrorists poison their animals to keep them in check. After this heartbreaking, Roly finds love, marriage, and has a child, Aggie B., the final narrator, who brings readers from 1962 to 1968. Aggie is the youngest volunteer in her town’s voter-registration effort, helping Aunt Retta to study for the unfair test and then to save up pennies to pay the poll tax. She is beaten savagely by racists and attends the Democratic National Convention twice, giving readers a front-row seat to history. Author Pinkney’s writing is alive with imagery; the unusual monologue format works ideally: read aloud in pieces and offers rich opportunities for readers’ theater. Each character presents an engaging contrast to the others, and the slow progress from Jim Crow days to the 1960s illuminates a little-examined piece of U.S. history while making it deeply personal. Illustrator Pinkney’s grayscale paintings open and close chapters with rounded frames and expressive features, memorably connecting and highlighting the story’s themes of family and land.

Readers will hear the history come alive. (author’s notes, illustrator’s notes, photos, further reading) (Historical fiction. 9-14)

THE MOST AWESOME CHARACTER IN THE WORLD
Pottle, Adam
Illus. by Sanfelippo, Ana
Reycraft Books (40 pp.)
$18.95 | Sep. 30, 2020
978-1-4788-6812-5

Philomena creates a superhero and goes on a fabulous adventure in her own imagination.

As the story begins, Philomena is exploring a jungle when her father interrupts to insist that she clean up her living-room blanket fort and wear her hearing aids. Her hearing aids are annoying and loud, and she would much rather sign than listen and speak. Philomena, who has light skin and straight black hair, wants to live and play in her own way—not the way others think she should. She doesn’t want to read about a sad deaf woman; she wants to create an awesome superhero! In her room, she imagines a cast of colorful heroes, monsters, and robots to entertain her. The human characters are racially diverse—though one unfortunately plays into Asian stereotypes—and some use wheelchairs. As Philomena daydreams, Sanfelippo’s vibrant illustrations grow to fill the page and bring readers into Philomena’s world. The actual plot is thin, but the lively text and illustrations usher readers from one page to the next. It is a delight to see Philomena unapologetically reject hearing aids and speech and take joy in signing. Pottle shows readers the rich inner life of a Deaf child and directly counters the tragic narrative of deafness while telling a fun story that any young reader could enjoy. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 20.1% of actual size.)

A colorful celebration of creativity and Deafness. (Picture book. 4-8)

A FAMILY FOR FARU
Rao-Robinson, Anitha
Illus. by Patkau, Karen
Pajama Press (32 pp.)
$18.95 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-77278-096-3

Fiction and nonfiction meet as a boy seeks to save an orphaned rhino.

Tetenya, a Black boy living in sub-Saharan Africa, takes care of baby rhino Faru after Tetenya’s mother finds the animal abandoned on the savanna. At his mother’s request, Tetenya picks water berries for lunch, but when the bucket spills, Faru trumps
through them, staining his feet pink and ruining the family’s lunch. Since Tetenya’s mother has been unable to find Faru a new family, Tetenya takes Faru into the savanna to search for a crash of rhinos to adopt Faru, but on their way, they encounter two hunters who kill rhinos for their valuable horns. Tetenya’s quick thinking saves Faru from the hunters, and he also helps secure Faru’s safety for the long term. This picture book offers a colorful portrayal of a gentle rhino and a boy who cares for him and helps him survive. Readers will encounter many other animals throughout the savanna in Patkau’s illustrations, including egrets, giraffes, an ostrich, guinea fowl, and vervet monkeys. Young readers will also enjoy finding small insects, reptiles, and mammals along the journey. The backmatter offers insightful details on the poaching of rhinos, their endangered status, conservation efforts to save them, and Rao-Robinson’s story of her encounter with rhinos in South Africa that inspired the book.

A gentle story that helps children understand why wildlife conservation matters and why they should care. *(Picture book. 5-8)*

**IF DOMINICAN WERE A COLOR**

Recio, Sili  
*Illus. by McCarthy, Brianna*  
Denene Millner Books/Simon & Schuster (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020  
978-1-5344-0179-6

This nostalgic picture book celebrates the author’s Dominican heritage. This poetic picture book sets out to dispel stereotypes and racism around skin color in the Dominican Republic, but it doesn’t quite succeed. The combination of Recio’s extended poem and McCarthy’s richly hued landscapes captures the inherent musicality and vibrancy of the Dominican countryside, coasts, and people. However, the text is sometimes hit or miss, especially when forcing a rhyme: “The shade of cinnamon in your cocoa, / drums beating so fast, they drive you loco,” feels forced. The Afro-Dominican author attempts to extol the different races found on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, elevating the country’s Black roots: “It’d be the curls and kinks / that blend my hair, / the color of charcoal / mixed with the sun’s glare.” In her striving to reclaim colorist language, Recio doesn’t quite succeed, and her use of terms such as “yellow tint” and “the Haitian black / on my Dominican back” feels forced. The Afro-Dominican author attempts to extol the different races found on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, elevating the country’s Black roots: “It’d be the curls and kinks / that blend my hair, / the color of charcoal / mixed with the sun’s glare.” In her striving to reclaim colorist language, Recio doesn’t quite succeed, and her use of terms such as “yellow tint” and “the Haitian black / on my Dominican back” feels at odds with the powerful message she’s trying to convey while inadvertently recalling the racial caste system put in place by Spanish colonialists. McCarthy’s stunning art interprets the text with texture and light, her illustrations portraying the diversity and beauty of the Dominican people. The lush foliage, the impossibly blue skies, and the otherworldly pinks and oranges spring off the page with joy and verve. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-16-inch double-page spreads viewed at 58.1% of actual size.)*

Glowing art can’t entirely overcome uneasy text. *(author’s note)* *(Picture book. 5-9)*

**SNOW SONG**

Riley, A.K.  
*Illus. by Lo, Dawn*  
Kids Can (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020  
978-1-5253-0235-0

Find new friends in a wintry wonderland.

On the title page, a young child with beige skin and short dark hair sits near cardboard boxes still unpacked. On the opening spread, readers see the same child on the building steps, presumably new to the neighborhood. Nevertheless, as the snow begins to fall and children emerge from warm homes with sleds, skates, mittens, and boots, the protagonist soon finds some buddies in a wooded wonderland surrounded by city buildings. Riley’s ebullient, poetic text—“The hills are knitted caps / Of snow”—perfectly captures the ecstatic antics of these bundled children in the “Glittery / Skittery / Tickle me! / Snow.” Then

**BRAVE HEROES AND BOLD DEFENDERS**

*50 True Stories of Daring Men of God*  
Redmond, Shirley Raye  
Illus. by the author  
Harvest House (112 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020  
978-0-7369-8133-0

Brief introductions to Christian men from around the globe who had an impact on the world around them.

Well-known athletes, authors, scientists, missionaries, and more are highlighted alongside lesser-known Christian men in this collective biography. White American football player Tim Tebow is known for kneeling and praying at games. Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara signed exit visas for Jewish refugees in Lithuania to escape the Holocaust. Figures profiled hail from a variety of ethnicities, nationalities, occupations, backgrounds, and time periods, dating back to 1181 with St. Francis. The 50 men are each depicted on a full spread, with a short biography on verso and a one-page full-color illustration on recto. The miniographies give a glimpse into each man’s childhood, hardships he may have encountered, and how he came to be recognized and celebrated. While some men are known worldwide for their contributions, many of these stories bring to the fore men who were mostly active within the Christian community, such as missionaries and evangelists. When focusing on non-White converts, like Cherokee missionary and jurist Jesse Bushyhead, the text emphasizes cultural assimilation. The brief text is a double-edged sword, giving enough to get readers interested but sometimes causing confusion, as with its bland acceptance of Edward Jenner’s testing his smallpox vaccine on his gardener’s 8-year-old son.

A mostly fine collection of short biographies for Christian readers. *(notes)* *(Collective biography. 8-12)*
the pace shifts on the following spread, with long vowels that readers will savor and repeat, lingering on each carefully chosen word. Lo’s evocative spreads often shift visual perspective, depicting the snowy day from a bird’s-eye view as well as from amid the snowy drifts, immersing readers in the protagonist’s experience. The illustrations have an ethereal, childlike quality, using soft lines and pastel colors to depict the glittery joy. One spread in particular shows the four children—each with different skin tones and hair color and texture—close up, lying in the snow, happy to be in one another’s company. An excellent read-aloud that can also offer teachers and librarians poetic and artistic examples. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-18-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.)

A moving-in story for lovers of winter that will last even after the snow has melted. (Picture book 3-7)

DAVID ROBERTS’ DELIGHTFULLY DIFFERENT FAIRY TALES
Roberts, David
Illus. by Roberts-Maloney, Lynn
Pavilion Children’s (90 pp.)
$19.95 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-84365-475-9

Three classic fairy tales given 20th- (and 30th-) century settings.
Originally published separately between 2001 and 2016, the stories are massaged in ways that tone down the violence of pre-Disney versions and show off the illustrator’s chops as a caricaturist. In “Cinderella” (2001), the scenes are filled with flamboyant art deco fashions and details; the fairy godmother creates a snazzy limo to take young Greta to the ball; and rosebud-lipped, pointy-nosed evil stepsisters Ermintrude and Elvira survive unmutilated. Similarly, in “Rapunzel” (2003), the title character escapes her mid-1970s flat to run off with (unblinded) pop musician Roger, and in “Sleeping Beauty” (2016), when 16-year-old science-fiction fan Annabel pricks her finger on the needle of a record player, she falls asleep for 1,000 years. The three female leads project airs of independence but really have no more agency here than in the originals. The all-White casts and conventional relationships of the first two stories do loosen a bit in “Sleeping Beauty,” as Annabel, who seems White, is watched over by an interracial pair of motherly aunts and awakened at long last (albeit with a touch, not a kiss) by Zoe, who has light-brown skin and long, black hair. Notes following each tale draw attention to the period details, and even the futuristic city at the end has a retro look. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10.5-by-22-inch double-page spreads viewed at 70% of actual size.)

The tweaks deliver no real alterations, but the clothing and hairstyles may amuse. (Fairy tales 8-10)

NASLA’S DREAM
Roamiguère, Cécile
Illus. by Rea, Simone
Princeton Architectural Press (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-6689-990-9

This French import about a child’s nighttime coping mechanisms asks, why grow up too fast?

Young Nasla has decided she is old enough to sleep without her favorite plush animals and toys. But at night, she sees a yellow dot in the darkness and a shadow above the wardrobe, where her father put her toys. Could that dot be her toy turtle? And when the shadow moves, she discovers it’s Timboubou, her toy elephant, who appears as a flesh-and-blood elephant in Nasla’s nocturnal visions. Nasla repeatedly tries to talk herself into an independence that the illustrations make clear she is not ready to accept. She may remind herself that she’s a “big girl now” and that night is for sleeping (not playing), but she admits that she wants to dance with the Moon, who appears in three forms (yellow, red, and silver) on human legs, and she dreams of her old toys. The delightfully bizarre, dreamlike illustrations of the girl’s fantastical night visions possess a simple elegance. And there’s a poignancy to Nasla’s decision, after she imagines ominous, long-armed ghosts and giant squids and hears “breathing in the dark,” to cling to a small blanket her mother gave her when she was a baby (her “secret charm”)—to keep herself safe from the yellow eyes (their source is revealed as feline at the book’s close) and the eccentric and surreal creatures she sees in her mind’s eye. Nasla has pale skin and bright red hair.

Trippy and touching. (Picture book 4-10)

YARA’S SPRING
Saeed, Jamal & McKay, Sharon E.
Illus. by Kazemi, Nabid
Annick Press (264 pp.)
$18.95 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-77321-440-5

Yara was only 10 when the Arab Spring began and Syria became the center of a brutal civil war.

By the time she was 14, the old days when she skipped through the streets to meet her friend Shireen for dance classes were gone. Aleppo was split in two, and anyone trying to cross between East and West Aleppo could be shot dead by snipers. Yara spent her days indoors behind boarded-up windows as President al-Assad’s helicopters mercilessly dropped bombs. One of these bombs killed Yara’s parents and leaves her trapped under rubble. Miraculously, she, her Nana, and her little brother survive, and they—along with Shireen and her twin brother—begin a slow, hazardous journey to Jordan. They endure long weeks of zigzagging through back roads, bribing corrupt soldiers, and facing danger, thirst, and exhaustion. Even once she reaches safety in
Canada, Yara wrestles with guilt and ambivalence over leaving Syria; the trauma and anxiety of losing one’s home, family, and friends never fading. The novel, inspired by Saeed’s own experiences, confronts reality head-on with no attempt at romanticizing the fight for democracy or the unimaginable conditions children are forced to face in their struggle for safety. Through Yara’s eyes, readers are taken inside Syria—and through the emotions of love, loss, and steadfastness in the face of death.

A tribute to refugees that shows them as the courageous survivors of unimaginable trauma. (map, author’s note) (Fiction. 11-14)

GNU AND SHREW

Schnitzlein, Danny
Illus. by Sandu, Anca
Peachtree (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 1, 2020
978-1-68263-146-1

Gnu and Shrew are different in every way. Think “The Grasshopper and the Ants.”

Gnu describes a diamond-filled cave on the other side of the deep, wide, dangerous river. He works sporadically to dig a tunnel to the cave, declining tiny Shrew’s offers to help. Gnu has grandiose plans for his anticipated wealth, always intending to share the riches with Shrew. Maybe he’ll buy a boat, a Ferris wheel, or a golden bicycle, all of which inspire Shrew to create practical solutions. He builds a boat with a paddle wheel, chains, and pedals for power. Gnu stops working on his tunnel, playing and napping instead. He lets Shrew go off on his own in his special boat to get the diamonds. After his successful attempt, Shrew invites Gnu to join him on a journey around the world, but Gnu declines. Shrew’s subsequent life is filled with adventure, and upon returning, he finds Gnu still dreaming, this time of emeralds on Shark Tooth Mountain. And Shrew has an idea. Schnitzlein keeps readers aware of the yin and yang of the characters’ relationship without judging them. (Picture book. 5-9)

THE POPPER PENGUIN RESCUE

Schrefer, Eliot
Illus. by Madsen, Jim
Little, Brown (176 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-0-316-49542-4

Joel, Nina, and their mother, Mrs. Popper, are distantly related to the family whose penguins made the town of Stillwater famous years ago.

In nearby Hillport, Mrs. Popper has purchased an abandoned house that had once been a penguin petting zoo. While exploring their new home, the children discover two intact penguin eggs in the basement. They care for the eggs surreptitiously, without telling Mom. Once the eggs hatch, the baby penguins, now named Ernest and Mae, are mischievous and clever, and the secret is soon out. The family decides to bring Ernest and Mae to join the original group of penguins that was relocated to Popper Island in the Arctic—never mind that penguins’ habitat is the Antarctic. They travel by boat, with Yuka, an Inuit doctoral student in zoology, as their guide and leader. Journey highlights include a penguin-caused glitch in the boat’s computer systems, a vicious Arctic storm, and lively interactions with the island-based penguins. Due to a puffin problem they decide to haul all the penguins to Antarctica, their rightful habitat. Schrefer clearly greatly admires the beloved, more-than–80-year-old classic, Mr. Popper’s Penguins, keeping readers informed by referring to its characters and events while adding a modern, eco-friendly viewpoint and lots of fun and laughs. Joel and Nina are sweet, resourceful, and wonderfully kind, as are Mom and Yuka. (Illustrations not seen.)

Unbelievable, improbable, and illogical—but quite delightful. (Fantasy. 8-12)

NO MATTER WHAT

A Foster Care Tale

Shipp, Josh with Tieche, David
Illus. by Pankratova, Yuliya
Familius (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-64170-253-9

A little red squirrel acts out in various failed foster-care placements until finding unconditional love.

Lead author Shipp, a former foster child himself, names his squirrel protagonist after himself and depicts little Josh as a foundling. Grace the heron spots him by a river with a note that reads, in part, “Please help him find a new home,” an unlikely real-world scenario for a child entering the system. Undistinguished, stiff art fails to elevate the text as Grace places Josh in turn with pelican, porcupine, and kangaroo families he rejects. Mr. Kangaroo says Josh needs a family to teach him about “trees and climbing.” Grace finds a leopard family...
that terrifies Josh in the most effective illustration in the book, and he resolves to “crack them before they crack me.” Mischief ensues, and Josh similarly sabotages future placements with other species. Finally, “very large and very patient” elephants show Josh unconditional love, and he accepts their affection and care—but only after they and the other animals rescue him from drowning. While messages about the necessity of patience and loving care for traumatized children are crucial, this odd representation of foster parents (failed and otherwise) literally acting as saviors compounds the story’s missteps. Odder still is that foster care is never positioned as a temporary state with potential for biological family reunification, nor is adoption named as a possible outcome.

Not a strong addition to a needed theme. (Picture book. 4-7)

50 ADVENTURES IN THE 50 STATES
Siber, Kate
Illus. by Hill, Lydia
Wide Eyed Editions (112 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-7112-3445-9
Series: The 50 States

Find something to do in every state in the U.S.A.!

This guide highlights a location of interest within each of the states, therefore excluding Washington, D.C., and the territories. Trivia about each location is scattered across crisply rendered landscapes that background each state’s double-page spread while diminutive, diverse characters populate the scenes. Befitting the title, one “adventure” is presented per state, such as shrimping in Louisiana’s bayous, snowshoeing in Connecticut, or celebrating the Fourth of July in Boston. While some are stereotypical gimmies (surfing in California), others have the virtue of novelty, at least for this audience, such as viewing the sandhill crane migration in Nebraska. Within this thematic unity, some details go astray, and readers may find themselves searching in vain for animals mentioned. The trivia is plentiful but may be misleading, vague, or incorrect. Information about the Native American peoples of the area is often included, but its brevity—especially regarding sacred locations—means readers are floundering without sufficient context. The same is true for many of the facts that relate directly to expansion and colonialism, such as the unexplained near extinction of bison.

Describing the genealogical oral history of South Carolina’s Gullah community as “spin[ning] tales” is equally brusque and annoyed—or all three. (This book was reviewed digitally with Kirkus.com)

Go adventuring with a better guide. (Tips on local adventuring, index) (Nonfiction. 8-10)

JUST WATCH ME
Silver, Erin
Common Deer Press (135 pp.)
$11.95 paper | Oct. 7, 2020
978-1-988761-54-1

A class livestreaming assignment creates both humiliations and new friendships for 12-year-old Simon.

For Grade 7 technology class, Simon’s required to do a livestream on a shared platform. Students who create “engaging content”—that is, those students who get lots of likes and comments by their classmates—will get the better grades. Simon, who is White, wants an A, as his constantly fighting parents have promised as a reward for good grades to take him to the Canadian Video Game Championships; he secretly hopes they’ll reconcile on the trip. His best friend, Jocelyn, who is Filipina, wants to get an A in order to be allowed to continue her mixed martial arts training. It feels to Simon as though his plans to create engaging content are cursed. In a series of accidental livestreams (of increasingly dubious probability), Simon streams his dog playing with his mother’s underwear, a mortifying toilet incident, pet mouth-to-mouth, and worse. Weirdly, every video makes Simon more popular thanks to the unintentional comedy.

Everything goes awry when Simon’s teacher, at the behest of the private company that owns the video app, changes the grading guidelines for the class (inexplicably presented as a normal educational choice). Suddenly, Jocelyn and Simon are no longer allies. And Simon needs allies, for though the school’s “no-bullying zone,” the teachers are oblivious to the violent bullies who target Simon—even when they livestream the violence for their own course assignments. Video games and slapstick poop jokes can’t salvage this haphazard plot.

Insufficiently exaggerated for farce, insufficiently plausible for anything else. (Fiction. 9-11)

CLOUDS
Life’s Big & Little Moments
Simpson, Angie & Simpson, Alli
Illus. by Fleming, Lucy
Aladdin (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-5344-3953-5

Images in clouds inspire memories.

Written in rhyming couplets, this love letter from a mother to her nearly grown daughter recounts the key moments of childhood that help define the personality of the girl. Each moment is inspired by the sight of clouds passing by overhead on the mother’s walk. Illustrations combine lush, painterly backgrounds representing the real world and cartoon drawings for the memories of childhood that the mother imagines within the clouds. The juxtaposition of styles draws readers’ eyes naturally to the imagined characters with paper-white skin and hair frolicking in the sky without detracting from the real-world
Another mouse has a bowl-shaped head and freckles, making it look rather like a colander. Distractingly, almost every corner of every page is crammed with detail, including many commercial products put to use as mouse furniture. The layout is so haphazard that readers may have no idea where to look. Fortunately, the story is simple enough that it sometimes resembles a fable, like a reverse “Town Mouse, Country Mouse”: Annabel and Freddy visit each other’s neighborhoods (in South Africa and the U.K., respectively) and make them better. Annabel, for example, uses her trunk to vacuum up a nasty gang of rodents and send them flying. The pictures are less traditional. Some characters appear to have both eyes on the same side of their face. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9-by-22-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.)

Pure saccharine. (Picture book. 5-7)

**PENPALS FOREVER**

Smouha, C.K.
Illus. by Lindenberger, Jürg
Cicada Books (44 pp.)
$17.95 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-908714-71-8

Here’s a little-known fact: Elephants and mice look exactly alike. Annabel and Freddy are both gray, and they both have big ears and big noses, so they decide instantly to become pen pals even though—because mice are smaller than elephants—Freddy can stand comfortably and send them flying. The pictures are less traditional. Some combinations as home alone or become young are shoehorned together. Readers may wonder why this mother isn’t spreading the love to her sons, depicted in the memories. In fact, the audience for this nostalgic picture-book ode to the vanished childhood of a kid who is revealed to be a young teen is unclear. A gratuitous three-page endnote explaining the sincerity of the story is as effective as someone explaining why a joke is funny; it’s unnecessary icing on an already-too-sweet tale. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9-by-22-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.)

**YOU MIGHT FIND YOURSELF**

Snaith, Tai
Illus. by the author
Thames & Hudson (36 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-76076-033-5

Bright collages show a young person visiting different locations and finding ways to make positive impacts wherever they go. “Life is like a winding path, with lots of different places to discover along the way.” The young person on the verso is about to cross the threshold from a house’s interior to a torn-paper path that leads to distant hills visible from a picture window across the page’s gutter. As with all the art, there are myriad details for pleasurable pondering. In the foreground, viewers will find a wood-grained table, books and statuary on bookshelves, a cat, wall posters, and more. The recto continues with what sets the tone for the rest of the book: “If you could go anywhere, imagine where you might find yourself.” The remainder of the book has readers imagining themselves in places as varied as a rainforest and a crowded subway car as it briefly explores such separate ideas as paleontology, farming, and musicianship with extraterrestrials. The art and text are often delightfully whimsical, as in a funny tribute to the Beatles’ “Octopus’s Garden.” More-serious images include the apparently White didgeridoo player. The accessible text always encourages readers to make life choices that uphold values such as helping, sharing, and togetherness, expanded in the backmatter. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.)

For readers ready to ponder the future or as an alternative to Oh, the Places You’ll Go in graduation season. (author’s note) (Picture book. 5-8)

**CALVIN GETS THE LAST WORD**

Sorenson, Margo
Illus. by Dean, Mike
Tilbury House (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Dec. 1, 2020
978-0-88448-822-4

Calvin loves words and takes his dictionary with him everywhere he goes in order to ensure that he knows the right word to describe every situation—especially those involving his brother.

When he wakes up in the morning, Calvin brings the dictionary to the breakfast table, where he showers it with milk that shoots out of his nose after his brother tells a joke. He even reads it in class instead of paying attention to the teacher. Throughout the day, Calvin browses his dictionary in search of the perfect word and finds words like mayhem, subterfuge, and pulverize. While each word makes him think about his brother, none seems to be the perfect fit. After a long day, Calvin lands on his word, slips out of bed for a glass of water, and tiptoes to the...
his brother’s room to repay him for the jokes. This lighthearted tale of two brothers who enjoy reading will make a wise choice for classroom lessons about using a dictionary and thesaurus. The words that Calvin looks up are set in brightly colored boldface type, and while they are not actively defined in context, their meanings are clear from the narrative. (Definitions and phonetic pronunciations are scrawled on the endpapers, as if on a chalkboard.) The dictionary itself narrates, but it is not depicted with any anthropomorphic features (i.e. a face or arms) or behaviors (i.e. walking), though it does mention its bent spine and riffing its own pages. Calvin and his family have light-brown skin and black hair. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 75% of actual size.)

A fun story that promotes vocabulary development and dictionary use. (Picture book 5-8)

THE LADY WITH THE BOOKS
A Story Inspired by the Remarkable Work of Jella Lepman
Simons, Kathy
Illus. by Laframe, Marie
Kids Can (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-5551-034-4
In 1945 Germany, when children were going hungry, Jella Lepman, a Jewish woman, returned to her country and created a traveling exhibit of international children’s books.

From that work emerged both the International Youth Library and the International Board on Books for Young People. This fictional story provides an accessible introduction to a person devoted to children’s intellectual and emotional development. As Anneliese notices women working to clear Munich’s bombed-out streets, her little brother Peter picks flowers growing out of the concrete, a gesture echoed in other spreads when symbolic red flowers appear floating out of books that the children will soon view. Although food is always on their minds, they enter a big building and find an exhibit of international children’s books. Anneliese remembers her papa reading Pu de Bär (Winnie-the-Pooh) to her, and Peter is excited to find a book about an elephant in a suit. On another visit they listen to “the lady with the books” translate The Story of Ferdinand into German; the anti-war theme resonates with Anneliese.

The art and layout are spectacular, from the cover through the double-page spreads near the end. Racially diverse toddlers are shown engaging in various moods and behaviors, some of which create unhappiness and some of which lead to friendship and happiness. Every page’s color palette and composition perfectly complement the narrative. The initial verso shows two children in aggressive stances, backgrounded by a dark, partly moonlit sky. Between them is a slender, crooked cutout. The large-type text reads: “It all / starts / with a / crack / that we can hardly see. / It happens when we shout / or if we disagree.” The recto shows two children in sunlight, with one offering a pretty
Cool bits of history, funny hoaxes, and the scary reality of propaganda are packed in simple bites easy to absorb.

**BREAKING THE NEWS**

*What’s Real, What’s Not, and Why the Difference Matters*
Robin Terry-Brown
National Geographic Kids (160 pp.)
$19.99 | $29.9 PLB | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-4263-3889-2 PLB
978-1-4263-3888-5

The press: a great and powerful tool that preceded strokes of the pen and became mightier than any sword.

With color-coded info boxes and brightly colored pages, Terry-Brown provides a sharp-looking survey that examines the history of news—how it began, how it evolved, and what consumers of all ages must consider before accepting a truth as the truth. Cool bits of history, funny hoaxes, and the scary reality of propaganda are packed in simple bites easy to absorb. For example, Terry-Brown reminds readers that back in ancient Rome, people gathered in town squares to learn the latest news, and gossip was widely accepted as fact. Compare that to the digital age’s answer to the ancient town square: The author teaches children to be proud of their identities. An author’s note reveals the biographical roots of this tale. An illustrator whose work has appeared in *The New Yorker* and *Time* creates visually stunning spreads that teach children to be proud of their identities.

Highlights the importance of connections to culture and self. (Picture book. 3-5)

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**SWIFT FOX ALL ALONG**

Thomas, Rebecca Lea
Illus. by McKibbin, Mays
Annick Press (36 pp.)
$18.95 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-77321-448-1

A Mi’kmaw girl meets extended family for the first time.

Despite her father’s reassurances, Swift Fox feels nervous meeting her dad’s side of the family. When the two finally arrive where her relatives live, Swift Fox still worries they won’t like her, and she hesitates to enter the house. Though family members welcome her, Swift Fox feels “all the eyes in the room” looking at her, and when it comes time to smudge, her fears of not knowing how to be Mi’kmaw materialize. Tears surfacing, she runs out the door to hide. When a boy who clearly has a “belly full of butterflies, too” arrives, Swift Fox comes out of hiding. But it takes the familiar smells of her favorite bread frying in the pan and a deeper, inner resolve to motivate her to go back. Animation-style illustrations give the story a filmic quality, enhancing characters’ movements and emotions. Additionally, they add to the text by reflecting the diversity of many First Nations and other Native families: Swift Fox and cousin Sully have freckles, another unnamed cousin has darker skin and more textured, tightly curled hair, and Swift Fox’s aunt wears her hair closely cropped with a slight pompadour while displaying her tattoos.

Moments of material culture embedded in the images balance well with the Mi’kmaw words “Nsíim” and “Kwe” rooted in the text. An author’s note reveals the biographical roots of this tale that teaches children to be proud of their identities.

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**THE LEMON TREE**

An Arab, A Jew, and the Heart of the Middle East
Sandy Tolan
Bloomsbury (192 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-5476-0394-7

The true story of a friendship between an Israeli Jew and a Palestinian Arab that transcends political tensions and violence.

It is 1967. Three Palestinian men—Bashir Khairi and his cousins Yasser and Ghiath—are on a journey from Ramallah to see their childhood homes in al-Ramla. Yasser is turned away; Ghiath’s is now a school. Bashir knows whether he answers the door. Dalia Eshkenazi, who has wondered “why would anyone voluntarily leave such a beautiful house,” welcomes them despite misgivings, “sensing a vulnerability in these young men [that makes...
her feel) safe.” Dalia and her family, Holocaust survivors, had moved from Bulgaria to Palestine when she was just a baby. Welcoming the three men into her home opens the door to a connection, a bond between the Khairis and Eshkenazis, one that could represent hope and peace. The story unfolds in chapters that alternate between Dalia and Bashir along with chapters focusing on the histories of the land and of each family. In this young readers’ adaptation of his 2006 book for adults of the same name, Tolan seamlessly weaves in the modern history of Palestine/Israel—including dates, roles played by leaders, and details from both Bashir’s and Dalia’s experiences. The writing is rich, especially when describing the house—it and its lemon tree form the center of this moving story.

Captivating and complicated. (maps, author’s note, sources) (Nonfiction. 10-14)

THE SECRET LIFE OF BOOGERS
Tolosa Sisteré, Mariona
Illus. by the author
Sourcebooks eXplore (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 1, 2020
978-1-72820-955-5

How many liters of snot do I have in my body? How fast can a sneeze travel?
How does a giraffe clean out its nose? Answers to these questions and more can be found in this slimy read.

This import from Barcelona has been translated into English, but fascination with boogers is a universal language. Anthropomorphic boogers take on the task of explaining all things booger-, snot-, and sneeze-related, including the important role that mucus plays in our bodies, trapping viruses and bacteria. The format is informational, arranged in topical spreads with labeled diagrams. One page details what the onomatopoeia associated with sneezing is in different languages: “atchim” in Portuguese; “a-psik” in Polish! In another two-page spread, the meaning behind different colors of snot is interpreted: Black snot could mean that there is smoke or contamination nearby. A true-or-false quiz has readers wondering whether “Drinking milk produces snot.” (No, according to the key at the end.) Packed with facts and tidbits, this book will have readers finishing it as experts. The illustrations are exaggerated and whimsical rather than scientifically detailed, which gives the book a playful tone while still delivering factual information. Human characters are depicted with paper white, peach, and dark brown skin.

Gross-out science lovers will be pleased with this pick. (Answer key) (Informational picture book. 5-8)

HONEY ON THE PAGE
A Treasury of Yiddish Children’s Literature
Ed. by Udel, Miriam
Trans. by the editor
New York Univ. (352 pp.)
$29.95 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-4798-7413-2

Yiddish literature for children has had a rich history and has been written all over the world.

An extensive collection of Yiddish literary texts for children translated into English, this anthology contains works from familiar as well as not so widely known Yiddish language writers. Arranged by theme, 46 works are presented along with biographical information about their authors as well as the occasional illustration. While the book’s substantial introduction proclaims that the tome is meant for intergenerational sharing rather than for young people to read independently, the small typeset and sporadic art make this book most ideal for scholarly readers, storytellers, and perhaps the occasional read-aloud with young listeners. Some of the themes included are Jewish holidays, Jewish history, fairy tales and fables, school stories, and family stories, among others. Some pieces are religious in nature while others are more cultural. Readers may recognize several of these stories, including the timely and iconic war and peace tale “A Boy and His Samovar” by Jacob Reisfeder. Other stories, like “What Izzy Knows About Lag Ba’Omer” by Malka Szechet, a simple, informative tale about the minor—but fun—holiday of Lag Ba’Omer, might be new to readers. This collection, with its comprehensive and valuable set of stories and poetry, would make a great addition to academic libraries in particular.

A family-oriented yet scholarly anthology of Yiddish literature. (Illustration credits, original sources) (Anthology, 10-adult)

THE OBOE GOES BOOM BOOM BOOM
Venable, Colleen AF
Illus. by Cho, Lian
Greenwillow Books (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-0-06-249437-5

As a band director instructs the new band members on the different instruments they can play, he must also contend with a very enthusiastic drummer.

A group of excited-looking children is joining the band today. Mr. V, the band director, tells them “There is a perfect instrument for everyone. Let’s find yours!” First up, the clarinet. After telling the children about the different characteristics of the instrument, he invites one to try it out. But instead, all sounds are drowned out by a BOOM, BOOM, BOOM.
coming from Felicity on the bass drum. And so it proceeds as the other instruments are presented—trumpet, oboe, flute, saxophone, and trombone. Each one is drowned out by Felicity's enthusiastic BOOM, BOOM, BOOM on the drum. The dull illustrations depict the mood of the band director going from animation to despair, but an end is in sight (or is it?) when an instrument with an even louder sound takes over. Be careful what you wish for! There is an irrepressible feeling of energy in the illustrations that at times just jumps across the gutter; it's further emphasized by playful and colorful typography. As a bonus, readers learn that each child, and their chosen instrument, is based on a real musician, as detailed in the backmatter; Mr. V is the author's own father, and Felicity is the author herself. Both Mr. V and Felicity present White, and the other characters in the book represent different ethnicities and places of origin. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11.5-by-18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 23.2% of actual size.)

A lively introduction to some musical instruments. (Picture book. 4-8)

MAX & RUBY AND THE BABYSITTING SQUAD
Wells, Rosemary
Illus. by the author
Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-5344-6328-8
Series: Max and Ruby Adventure

Has Ruby learned nothing? Underestimating Max never goes well.

Ruby and her friend Louise have an idea. Branding themselves the Babysitting Squad, they decide to hire themselves out—informing Max, Ruby's younger brother, that he is neither professional nor bonded and so cannot be part of it. Soon the girls are off to their first job, however, with Max riding along in his full-sized Saw-toothed Dirt Bucketer and somehow also towing his Rock Crusher. Telling Max to play outside, the girls have big plans, but their charge, Percy, would rather wear a skunk suit and spray people with aftershave and mouthwash than cooperate. However, when Percy gets a look at Max digging in the backyard, once more the underestimated little brother saves the day. Ruby and Max inhabit a world in which people book babysitters on long corded phones and elementary-age babysitters boast that they are “bonded” without explanation. Even readers who accept this may wonder why Max is going along on the job when he's been told he can't. Beginning with insufficient setup, the book ends with a thunk (Max just turns on a sprinkler) rather than an actual conclusion. It all prompts the obvious question: Is it time to retire the sibling duo that has brought us such joy over the years? (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 30.9% of actual size.)

He may be just a toddler, but Max is getting a little old. (Picture book. 3-5)

OSCAR'S AMERICAN DREAM
Wittenstein, Barry
Illus. by Howzeshell, Kristen & Howzeshell, Kevin
Rodale Kids (36 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-0-525-70769-1

The evolution of a New York City corner store reflects 20th-century American history.

From Ellis Island immigration through women’s suffrage to the civil rights movement, Wittenstein endeavors “to better understand the past by looking at just one building.” The titular Oscar, a Polish immigrant, opens a barbershop in 1899. Over the next 100 years, the businesses reflect the times: a Great Depression soup kitchen, a World War II Army recruitment center, and so on. The Howzeshells’ illustrations, Rockwellian in feel, are beautifully rendered and offer many details to examine—and historical cues for adult readers to point out. While Oscar appears only briefly at the beginning, the title is apt, as Wittenstein’s device means his synopsis of American history is told primarily from a White, European lens. Unfortunately, aside from one Puerto Rican shop proprietor, Moises, who comes along fairly late in the narrative, children of color will mostly see reflections of themselves as side characters. Their inclusion makes for diverse scenes but ultimately conveys idealistic portraits of integrated American life even in the eras prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. For a more diverse slant on New York City immigration, consider Dave Eggers and Shawn Harris’ Her Right Foot (2017). (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 59.7% of actual size.)

Celebrates a disappointingly exclusive dream. (author’s note) (Picture book. 5-9)

IN ONE EAR & OUT THE OTHER
Antonia Brico and Her Amazingly Musical Life
Wortboy, Diane
Illus. by Wallace, Morgana
Penny Candy (48 pp.)
$16.95 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-73422-591-4
Series: Amazing Women

Women can't conduct orchestras, they said, but Antonia Brico did.

Antonia Brico (1902-1989) ignored the advice of other musicians; she dreamed of being a conductor and eventually made a career of it, though she never achieved a full-time professional job. Cast out by her foster parents in high school, Brico put herself through college by playing the piano and reclaimed her birth name. A sponsor paid her way to Germany, where she became the first American to graduate from the conducting school at the Berlin State Academy of Music. She had guest-conducting
This comforting title is part of a new line of picture books explicitly aimed at helping children feel capable and supported, and it does so perfectly.

**I AM THE STORM**

**SUPER ROOSTER SAVES THE DAY**

Wright, Maureen
Illus. by McClurkan, Rob
Two Lions (40 pp.)
$13.95 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-5420-0778-8

Ralph the rooster longs to be a superhero.

As evidenced by the many comic books scattered about his roost (along with Captain Eggplant and Shark Man posters), Ralph is thrilled by daring rescues and super strengths. He likes to believe he has some superpowers of his own. Unfortunately, they lack a bit of greatness. “He could crow and make the sun rise...but only when it wasn't raining.” He is able to fly...but not very far. The other animals on the farm are not amused. In language littered with puns, they bemoan Ralph's active imagination. “He's utterly ridiculous,” says Caroline the cow. “You're not pulling the wool over my eyes,” says Sheila the sheep. But one animal is Ralph's best friend: Rosie the pig. Rosie is the most encouraging sidekick ever. When Ralph hears “The Chicken Dance” on the radio for the first time, Rosie hollers: “That dance is your super-duper rooster booster!” Super strength charges through Ralph as soon as he does all the moves! Unfortunately, he still has trouble judging what is a true disaster and what is not. Regardless, Ralph is ready.

The amusing and bouncy refrain is a read-aloud treat: “Cheep-cheep-cheep! / Flap-flap-flap! / Wiggle-wiggle-wiggle, / and a clap-clap-clap!” McClurkan's uncomplicated farm scenes emphasize the animals' expressive faces (especially George the goat’s). (This book was reviewed digitally with 11 by 20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 84.5% of actual size.)

**ONE YELLOW SUN**

Arndt, Michael
Illus. by the author
Andrews McMeel Publishing (32 pp.)
$12.99 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-5248-5817-9
Series: M Books: See + Read

Die-cut dots create evocative numerical representations in this clever graphic board book.

Rarely have ordinary circles communicated so much, so well. Following the title page, the book opens on a clean white page with 10 tiny die-cut holes representing “10 silver beads”; a lavish silver page underneath creates the illusion of 10 sparkly,
The sturdy translucent inserts work together magnificently, layering to create an unexpected richness of color.

MY FAVORITE COLOR

I Can Only Pick One?
Becker, Aaron
Illus. by the author
Candlewick Studio (16 pp.)
$15.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-5362-1474-1

A lively rumination on the merits of different colors—and can one ever pick a favorite?

In this exuberant follow-up to his outstanding You Are Light (2019), Becker returns to the glorious medium of translucent vinyl inserts that allow colors to shine and meld. Based on a discussion about favorite colors, this board book is less poetically sweeping than its predecessor. Yet the topic of what color reigns supreme is a perennial favorite among the preschool crowd, making this nicely accessible for young audiences. Starting with the premise that “my favorite color is yellow,” a white page shows 25 differently tinted sunny yellow squares. On the following page, the narrator muses that it’s really “yellow, like the sun in a clear blue sky” and various blues are sprinkled about the gold and cream swatches. The narrator simply must then amend their favorite color to blue. As the book discusses the best parts of all the rainbow colors, there’s an ultimate conclusion. Choosing a favorite color? “Impossible!” Lyrical musings such as “ripples on an emerald sea” or the black-backgrounded “purple hues of night” create vivid verbal images that bring the colorful squares to life. The sturdy translucent inserts work together magnificently, layering to create an unexpected richness of color.

No matter what your favorite color, this rainbow ode is sure to brighten your day. (Board book. 2-4)

ALL THE COLORS / DE COLORES
Jaramillo, Susie
Illus. by Gross, Abigail
Encantos (24 pp.)
$14.99 | May 19, 2020
978-1-945635-27-4
Series: Canticos Bilingual Nursery Rhymes

A bilingual board book based on a well-known Spanish folk song.

Identical illustrations in cleverly bound dual versions star the same cheeky cartoon animals as other titles in the series. Following the first verse of the song, it then moves to teach basic colors in both languages. The English translation, modified to avoid the awkward syntax of a literal translation, does not always match the original meter, and, unlike most translations, this version substitutes “All the colors” for the Spanish “De colores.” In both renditions, large, sturdy lift-the-flap panels on the last six pages conceal six colors: red/rojo, orange/naranjo, yellow/amarillo, green/verde, blue/azul, and purple/morado. While the accordion-fold design ensures that neither language takes precedence, it also makes the book heavy, awkward to hold, and difficult for young children to reassemble when (inevitably) opened all the way out. In both versions the cover initially opens from the left, which may confuse children just learning page-turning conventions in either language. Colophon pages in English and Spanish include a web address to access a video version of the song in both languages, which will be helpful for people unfamiliar with the tune or pronunciation in either language (though young children may find the video more entertaining than the book).

An acceptable addition for schools or households seeking to promote bilingual Spanish/English skills. (Board book. 1-3)
to 11 objects typically found in each environment are named in both languages. English is always first, with the Spanish translation in a smaller, italicized type. As with most first-word books, the number of objects is somewhat daunting. The youngest board-book consumers may not sit still for more than a couple page turns, but the bright art, recurring characters, and familiar objects make picking up the activity again later fairly likely. The dual-language labels placed in proximity to the illustrations make it clear what item is being described. There is no pronunciation guide for non-native speakers in either language.

A fun way to practice naming objects in two languages. (Board book. 6 mos.-4)

LETTERS A TO Z
Jaramillo, Susie
Illus. by the author
Encantos (58 pp.)
$13.99 | Jun. 23, 2020
978-1-045035-33-5
Series: Canticos Bilingual Firsts

An extra-fat board book to help babies and toddlers grow up bilingual.

On each double-page spread, an English word is paired with an uppercase letter, with the Spanish translation in parentheses below, and a Spanish word is shown along with the lowercase letter, with the English translation included parenthetically. Often the words chosen are related, so “A / for Apple / (Manzana)” is paired with “a / de árbol / (Iree).” The cheerful illustrations, which feature the cartoon chicks and supporting characters familiar to Canticos fans, often highlight the relationship. So “K / for Knife / (Cuchillo)” and “k / de kiwi / (Kiwi)” is illustrated with a bunny in a chef’s toque cutting a kiwi fruit. The word in translation usually does not start with the same letter, but when it does, as with “N / for Next / (Nido)” and “n / de noche / (Night),” it is a happy surprise. Three sounds common to Spanish (Ch, Li, and N) each get double-page spreads but without an English equivalent. In an author’s note Jaramillo explains that Ch and Li are no longer considered part of the Spanish alphabet, but the sounds are important to the language. There is no pronunciation guide for either language.

A good start for learning the ABCs in Spanish or English. (Board book. 1-4)

I WANT TO DRIVE...
Lloyd, Rosamund
Illus. by Merritt, Richard
Tiger Tales (12 pp.)
$9.99 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-1-68010-613-8
Series: When I Grow Up

Vehicles on the job are put into action with the lift of a flap. Featuring children’s favorite modes of transportation, from tractors to airplanes, this lift-the-flap board book shows drivable machines at work. The format is simple. The verso of each layout shows a large picture of the vehicle against a plain background, the engine and insides viewable beneath a flap. The recto then shows the same vehicle in action in a larger landscape, with other vehicles typically found in that environment and more flaps. The flaps themselves are more sophisticated than in many other books with manipulatives. A wide trench runs about the perimeter, making it quite easy to grab, especially helpful for little fingers. Furthermore, once the flap is folded open into place, it alters the surrounding image slightly, often conveying movement. A lifeboat rushes down into the water, for example; a bullet train whizzes by; and a plane takes off. The illustrations are incredibly detailed, inviting readers to linger. Children will be delighted by the tiny tractor engine, a miniature fish skeleton being dumped with other refuse into the back of a garbage truck, the materials inside an ambulance. The text pales beside the illustrations, oftentimes stating the obvious—“The cement pours out of the mixer”—without adding interesting factoids. People driving and interacting with these machines are diverse. The companion title, I Want To Be..., similarly explores different occupations.

The text is dull, but the dazzlingly detailed illustrations and clever flaps make up for it. (Board book. 2-4) (I Want To Be... 978-1-68010-613-8)

GOODNIGHT, CHAMELEON!
McFarland, Clive
Kane Miller (6 pp.)
$12.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-68464-059-1

Chameleon plays one final game of hide-and-seek with his friends before bedtime.

In this lift-the-flap board book, readers join in on the fun helping Chameleon uncover his fellow animal and bug friends before settling in for the night. Each page asks who’s hiding, and some also include a little sneak peek appearing from below the flap: a curl of a tongue, the tip of a wing, an arm. The flaps themselves are made from stiff pieces of felt, certainly sturdier than paper versions. They are printed with designs such as the veins of a leaf or details like miniature fish skeleton being dumped with other refuse into a wide trench crawling up a tree. These thoughtful embellishments set the book apart from other felt-flap books. McFarland’s illustrations appear almost like collage, featuring chunky cut shapes and large-scale details. Chameleon changes color to match each hiding animal, a nice touch that some little readers might catch.

The night-sky background changes as the book progresses, modulating from blues through purples to black. It’s a simple, subtle way to walk readers toward Chameleon’s bedtime, when he curls up on a branch to sleep at last. The text is less distinguished than the illustrations, and, disappointingly, the text on the final page is placed in a way that announces the end of the search before readers have uncovered the last animal.

A sweet book; adults will appreciate its durability, kids its familiarity. (Board book. 1-3)
NO NAP!
Peirce, Lincoln
Illus. by the author
Andrews McMeel Publishing (12 pp.)
$7.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-4486-6066-0
Series: Little Big Nate, 2

Little Big Nate imagines all of the fun he’d have if only he didn’t have to take a nap.

Peirce’s Big Nate appears as his younger, preschooler self in this board book. Like many kids that age, “Nate hates naps.” To subtly rhyming text, he imagines himself “eat[ing] cookies all day,” saving the day as a superhero, and “walk[ing] on the moon!” Adult readers won’t be surprised by how this one ends or by the implication that Nate’s fantasies might really be his dreams. Any young listener will certainly relate to Nate’s distaste for the interruption of afternoon fun, but it’s hard to say that they’ll eventually be convinced that napping is a blast by the book’s end. Peirce’s illustrations of Nate’s daydreams are absolutely charming, drawn to look as if colored by a child’s hand with the softness of crayon. At first, the imaginings appear as thought bubbles, but then they turn into full-page renderings, a nice way to immerse readers in Nate’s mind and dreams. Nate is White and the sole person on almost every page except the first, which includes three classmates, one White and the other two children of color. The pacing and brevity of text per page keep the book light and moving, friendly to the attention spans of little readers.

Likely to grow little readers into future Big Nate fans. (Board book 1-3)

THE LITTLE BOOK OF SAFARI ANIMAL SOUNDS
Pinnington, Andrea & Buckingham, Caz
Firefly (26 pp.)
$19.95 | Jun. 15, 2020
978-0-2281-0251-9

Sound-clip enhanced introductions to cries and calls of a dozen creatures native to central and southern Africa.

The animals are relatively common and a mix of familiar (at least in type) and less high profile, including the African elephant, the hippo, the cheetah, the black-backed jackal, the pearl-spotted owl, and the chacma baboon. Each gets a large individual close-up portrait photo that has been digitally placed into a natural landscape opposite notes on habitat, average size, and other basic facts, plus descriptions of vocalizations — some of which can be heard by pressing the appropriate touch-sensitive area on a plastic panel attached to the edge. Young armchair travelers whose only contact with wild animals is in zoos may be in for an ear-opening experience. Though the lion sounds like some guy gargling and the elephant’s trumpeting as if it were recorded indoors from another room, several of the generally sharp, loud recordings take surprising turns, from a zebra’s astonishing cascade of birdlike trills and a cheetah who sounds for all the world like a yappy dog to the gray, go-away bird, which really does seem to be grumbling “go’way, go’way.” Children uninterested in the zoological detail can still enjoy creating a cacophony by pressing the buttons, and vice versa. Batteries are replaceable and come with a printed warning not to eat them.

Definitely not household or neighborhood noises... except for the lion, perhaps. (Informational novelty 2-4)

WHAT’S UP, FIRE TRUCK?
Reinhart, Matthew
Illus. by Leigh, Toby
abramsappleseed (10 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-4197-4107-4
Series: Pop Magic

Tour and toy in one, a compact introduction to firefighting gear that then unfolds completely and refolds into a ladder truck.

Some assembly — of the “match up the two-dot tab with the two-dot slot” sort — is required to work the transformation, but there are written instructions, a picture of the finished product on the slipcase, and even an online video to assist the manually clueless. While the toy is still a book, the diverse cast of cartoon firefighters, plus resident cat and Dalmatian, invites diapersonal digerati to view protective gear, hoses, and other equipment stowed on the truck beneath flaps and flip other flaps to “dress [one] in protective clothes,” draping layers over a green under-shirt and trading in bunny slippers for boots. Pulling one tab lifts a ladder, and another waves a hose over a small pile of burning leaves (“Some fires are big, and some are quite small. / For this one we don’t need much water at all!”). Much of the gear is unlabeled, which provides opportunity for “do you know what that’s called?” interactions to go with reading the rhymed text. It’s all printed on stock heavy enough to survive repeated foldings and refoldings (though some of the individual flaps may not last that long), and the slipcase is sturdy as well.

Clever paper engineering adds an extra bit of magic to this firehouse visit. (Novelty 2-3)

EL CHAPULÍN COLORADO
Sounds - Sonidos
Rodriguez, Patty & Stein, Ariana
Illus. by Reyes, Gisllali
Lil’ Libros (22 pp.)
$9.99 | Mar. 24, 2020
978-1-947971-41-7

Beloved Mexican TV character Chapulín Colorado presents everyday onomatopoeia in both English and Spanish.

Dressed in his iconic superhero outfit, el Chapulín Colorado (the Red Grasshopper) is a well-known Mexican TV character from the 1970s, still familiar to children today through eternal reruns. It is not necessary, though, to be familiar with
Lively, child-friendly illustrations take children on a tour of the city.

VÁMONOS A SAN SALVADOR

Rodriguez, Patty & Stein, Ariana
Illus. by Godinez, Ana
$9.99 | Mar. 24, 2020
978-1-947971-43-1

Little ones are introduced to the sights and attractions of San Salvador, the capital city of El Salvador.

Lively, child-friendly illustrations take children on a tour of the city. It starts at the nearby Boquerón volcano, then proceeds on to the botanical garden of La Laguna, the Central Market and the plaza of Masferrer, and the important monuments, such as the monument to the revolution and the monument to the Divino Salvador del Mundo (the Divine Savior of the World), from whom the country takes its name. Each sight is named by its Spanish name and is accompanied by a simple statement in English followed by the Spanish translation. Sometimes the Spanish translation is the same as the English statement, sometimes not, but the sentiment is the same. The book ends with a few thumbnails providing a little more information in English only. Companion volume, Ellen, introduces the solar system as Ellen Ochoa, the first Latina astronaut, flies or floats by each planet. The illustrations and presentation in this book follow the same aesthetic as the Chapulín Colorado book. The rhyming text informs readers of some characteristic of each planet in bilingual (English / Spanish) format: “Uranus got me a little dizzy / rotating on its side, it looks a little tricky. // El planeta Urano me mareó un poco / girando de lado, parece algo loco.” Though it is not necessary to know who Ellen Ochoa is to follow the book, it was a missed opportunity to not have included something about her in the book.

A charming bilingual offering. (Board book: 1-4) (Ellen: 978-1-947971-46-0)

100 FIRST WORDS FOR LITTLE CEOs

Sturm, Cheryl
Illus. by Kershner, Kyle
Familius (20 pp.)
$9.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-64170-220-1
Series: 100 First Words

A crash course in late-stage capitalism for entitled children.

Parents who’ve made it, professionally and financially, and who see themselves as captains of industry may enjoy indoctrinating their toddlers in the ways of the boardroom. This book may also have some appeal for the aggressively upwardly mobile. It would seem, though, to be of niche appeal at best, and less to children than to their parents. There is something to be said for teaching children how the world works, but teaching kids that their destiny is to dominate the marketplace and become a plutocrat, or to spend the rest of their lives aspiring to do so, seems cruel and stunting. While such concepts as Core Values (enumerated as Excellence, Trust, Honesty, and Integrity), Ethics, Mission, and Motivation sound positive, this work is clearly skewed toward the 1%. The only negatives mentioned are Bankruptcy, Risk, and Taxes (the creepy grin on Uncle Sam’s face clearly implies he’s getting away with something nasty; no mention is given of the useful things our taxes fund). Benefits are mentioned; such terms as Uninsured, Minimum Wage, Wealth Inequality, Union, and Strike are not. The illustrations depict an ethnically diverse cast of men and women in white-collar roles, portraying an unrealized ideal. Glass Ceiling and Tokenism don’t appear.

If this is a gag, it’s not a funny one. (Board book: 3-6)

CONTINUING SERIES

STANLEY EL CONSTRUCTOR

Bee, William
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Mendizabal, Hercilia
Peachtree (32 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Aug. 1, 2020
978-1-68263-223-9
Series: Stanley
(Picture book: 2-4)
STANLEY Y SU ESCUELA
Bee, William
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Mendizabal, Hercilia
Peachtree (32 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Aug. 1, 2020
978-1-68263-224-6
Series: Stanley
(Picture book, 2-4)

LET’S BEE THANKFUL
Burach, Ross
Illus. by the author
Acorn/Scholastic (48 pp.)
$4.99 paper | $23.99 PLB | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-338-50588-7 paper
978-1-338-50589-4 PLB
Series: Bumble and Bee, 3
(Early reader, 3-6)

DOG, DOG, GOOSE
Cameron, W. Bruce
Starscape (144 pp.)
$5.99 paper | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-250-23452-0
Series: Lily to the Rescue
(Fiction, 8-12)

DARK TRICKS
Chapman, Linda
Illus. by Fleming, Lucy
Tiger Tales (160 pp.)
978-1-68010-216-1
978-1-68010-469-1 paper
Series: Star Friends, 4
(Fantasy, 7-9)

SECRET SPELL
Chapman, Linda
Illus. by Fleming, Lucy
Tiger Tales (160 pp.)
978-1-68010-215-4
978-1-68010-468-4 paper
Series: Star Friends, 3
(Fantasy, 7-9)

THE LONG-LOST SECRET DIARY OF THE WORLD’S WORST OLYMPIC ATHLETE
Collins, Tim
Illus. by Lundie, Isobel
Jolly Fish (208 pp.)
$28.50 | $9.99 paper | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-63163-445-1
978-1-63163-446-8 paper
Series: Long-Lost Secret Diaries
(Historical fiction, 8-12)

THE LONG-LOST SECRET DIARY OF THE WORLD’S WORST SAMURAI
Collins, Tim
Illus. by Lundie, Isobel
Jolly Fish (208 pp.)
$28.50 | $9.99 paper | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-63163-449-9
978-1-63163-450-5 paper
Series: Long-Lost Secret Diaries
(Historical fiction, 8-12)

PETE THE CAT Crayons Rock!
Dean, James & Dean, Kimberly
Illus. by Dean, James
Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-06-286855-8
Series: Pete the Cat
(Early reader, 4-8)

PETE THE CAT FALLING FOR AUTUMN
Dean, James & Dean, Kimberly
Illus. by Dean, James
Harper/HarperCollins (24 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-06-286848-0
Series: Pete the Cat
(Picture book, 4-8)

SLEEPOVER PARTY!
Holabird, Katharine
Illus. by Craig, Helen
Simon Spotlight (32 pp.)
$17.99 | $4.99 paper | Aug. 25, 2020
978-1-5344-6954-9
978-1-5344-6953-2 paper
Series: Angelina Ballerina
(Early reader, 5-7)
GRAYSTRIPE’S VOW  
Hunter, Erin  
Harper/HarperCollins (480 pp.)  
$18.99 | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-0-06-296302-4  
Series: Warriors Super Edition  
(Fantasy. 8-12)

OATHKEEPER  
Hunter, Erin  
Harper/HarperCollins (256 pp.)  
$16.99 | Sep. 22, 2020  
978-0-06-264222-6  
Series: Bravelands, 6  
(Fantasy. 8-12)

THE MAP OF STORIES  
James, Anna  
Philomel (240 pp.)  
$16.99 | Sep. 22, 2020  
978-1-9848-3735-5  
Series: Pages & Co., 3  
(Fantasy. 8-12)

GRUMPY MONKEY UP ALL NIGHT  
Lang, Suzanne  
Illus. by Lang, Max  
Random House (32 pp.)  
$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Sep. 29, 2020  
978-0-593-11975-4  
973-0-593-11976-1 PLB  
Series: Grumpy Monkey  
(Picture book. 3-7)

TY’S TRAVELS  
Zip, Zoom!  
Lyons, Kelly Starling  
Illus. by Mata, Nina  
Harper/HarperCollins (32 pp.)  
978-0-06-295110-6  
978-0-06-295109-0 paper  
Series: Ty’s Travels  
(Early reader. 4-8)

WHAT IF YOU HAD AN ANIMAL TONGUE!?  
Markle, Sandra  
Illus. by McWilliam, Howard  
Scholastic (32 pp.)  
$5.99 paper | $17.99 PLB | Sep. 15, 2020  
978-1-338-59667-0 paper  
978-1-338-59668-7 PLB  
Series: What If You Had...?  
(Informational picture book. 5-8)

SECRETS OF THE SILVER LION  
Otheguy, Emma  
HMH Books (192 pp.)  
$12.99 | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-0-358-38067-2  
Series: Carmen Sandiego  
(Mystery. 8-12)

STICK DOG MEETS HIS MATCH  
Watson, Tom  
Illus. by the author  
Harper/HarperCollins (240 pp.)  
$12.99 | Sep. 8, 2020  
978-0-06-268520-9  
Series: Stick Dog, 6  
(Graphic/fiction hybrid. 7-10)

THE REINDEER GIRL  
Webb, Holly  
Illus. by Artful Doodlers  
Tiger Tales (192 pp.)  
$17.99 | $6.99 paper | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-1-68010-221-5  
978-1-68010-474-5 paper  
Series: Winter Journeys  
(Fantasy. 7-9)

THE REVENGE OF THE WEREPEenguin  
Woodrow, Allan  
Illus. by Brown, Scott  
Viking (384 pp.)  
$17.99 | Aug. 4, 2020  
978-0-593-11423-0  
Series: Werepenguin, 2  
(Fantasy. 8-12)

FOR PET’S SAKE  
Zuckerberg, Randi  
Illus. by The Jim Henson Company  
Candlewick Entertainment (80 pp.)  
$14.99 | Sep. 8, 2020  
978-1-5362-1656-1  
Series: Dot.  
(Early reader. 5-8)
JUNK BOY
Abbott, Tony
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins
(368 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-0-06-249125-1

Two teens struggling with painful home lives forge a complicated friendship in this novel in verse.
Fifteen-year-old Bobby is called Junk by kids at school, a barb directed at him due to the piles of debris that litter the yard of the home where he lives with his neglectful father, who abuses alcohol. Bobby happens to witness the mother of Rachel, an artistically gifted classmate, slapping her daughter after she discovers Rachel kissing another girl. He is drawn to Rachel despite her often mercurial treatment of him. The free-verse form effectively propels this story, which is at once action-oriented and introspective, forward. Bobby’s emotion-filled thoughts make him a narrator it is easy to feel sympathy toward, and readers will likely be relieved by the auspicious events that transpire in his life as he learns more about his family history and is befriended by the town priest. Though the secondary characters are not as well-developed as Bobby is, the idea that people can help others even as they contend with their own demons is clear. This message, and the easily accessible, evocative language of the verse, should hold appeal for a range of realistic fiction fans.

THE MAGIC FISH
Le Nguyen, Trung
Illus. by the author
Random House
Graphic (256 pp.)
$23.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-0-593-12529-8

A poignant, hopeful novel about emerging from the isolation wrought by abuse. (author’s note, resources) (Verse novel. 12-18)
father. Alternately indulged and oppressed, she falls in love with Théo, a jeweler’s apprentice. When villagers kill her father and set fire to the family’s château, Hélène and her mother escape to her mother’s family, whom she’s never met. Hélène begins to unearth family secrets while plotting to return to Théo, but when she manages to reach Paris she is met with news that changes everything. She settles into life as an ordinary citizen, but danger still lurks—brief prison scenes interrupt the narrative until the timelines converge at Hélène’s trial. Bandy’s debut features credible historical detail, an engaging narrator, and a sweet romance. Lulls in the pacing slow momentum, and the ending sacrifices credibility for convenience. Ultimately, this is an above-average history and romance, though less satisfying in terms of the mystery. Major characters are White; Hélène’s radical governness introduces her to her lover, a formerly enslaved Black abolitionist.

A lush portrayal of personal and national struggles let down by a rushed ending. (Historical fiction. 12-18)

**THE INHERITANCE GAMES**

*Jennifer Lynn Barnes*

Little, Brown (384 pp.)

$17.99 | Oct. 13, 2020

978-1-368-05240-5

A teen must solve a multilayered puzzle to find out why she’s the recipient of a billionaire’s inheritance.

One day Avery—with her mother dead, her father missing for years, and her guardian half sister on the rebound with her abusive boyfriend—is living out of her car. The very next day she is on a fortune. She must, however, abide by one condition: living for a full year with the snubbed Hawthorne family—a family that includes the billionaire’s four grandsons, young adult brothers who share a mother but have different fathers. This whirlwind story gains even more intensity when Avery learns that he is the Prince of Neurazia. What follows is an adventure in which Khi learns about his past, his legacy, and his birth family, all while caught up in a race to save himself and the kingdom from the dreaded Triskén. The imagery is vivid and elaborate enough that readers can visualize everything distinctly, but stilted dialogue weakens the text. The detailed worldbuilding, which includes a multitude of new terms, can feel overwhelming to track and remember, negatively affecting the pace of the story. Khi’s occasional frustration in having to quickly learn about his new world will mirror the experience of some readers. Before being transported, Khi has pale skin and brown hair; in the fantasy universe, characters have a range of skin tones and hair colors not found on Earth.

*A complex debut that shows promise.* (Fantasy. 13-18)

**THE DOOR TO INFERNA**

*Borah, Rishab*

Three Rooms Press (248 pp.)

$15.00 paper | Oct. 20, 2020

978-1-941110-96-6

Series: Elkloria, 1

One moment Khioneus Nevula is enjoying his winter break and the next he is thrown into the world of Elkloria, all while being hunted by the Triskén.

Will Khi learn to harness his magical powers in time to save himself and the Kingdom of Neurazia? Khi has always felt different because he is adopted—and has purple eyes. His life on Earth is short-lived, however, when he comes across a portal in the forest and is suddenly transported to the planet of Pyrithya in a different universe. There, he learns that he is the Prince of Neurazia. What follows is an adventure in which Khi learns about his past, his legacy, and his birth family, all while caught up in a race to save himself and the kingdom from the dreaded Triskén. The imagery is vivid and elaborate enough that readers can visualize everything distinctly, but stilted dialogue weakens the text. The detailed worldbuilding, which includes a multitude of new terms, can feel overwhelming to track and remember, negatively affecting the pace of the story. Khi’s occasional frustration in having to quickly learn about his new world will mirror the experience of some readers. Before being transported, Khi has pale skin and brown hair; in the fantasy universe, characters have a range of skin tones and hair colors not found on Earth.

*A diverse selection of stories reflecting the different ways of life led by rural teens in the U.S.*

Despite stereotypes, the lives of teens in rural communities are varied. Editor and contributor Carpenter states her intention to present an alternative to the idea of rural America as a monolith, one that is frequently regarded with mockery and contempt. Featuring stories set in 12 states, the tales’ formats include verse, graphic novel, memoir, as well as prose. Locales range from the southern and western sections of the country to Alaska and upstate New York. The teen protagonists, like the contributors, come from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and issues of class emerge in surprising ways. Some characters grapple with ideas about who they are in relation to their environments while others are clear about what they gain.
from their rural identities. The strength of the collection is how well it demonstrates the universality of themes such as belonging, family struggles, grief, the desire for individual growth, the meaning of home, and challenging injustice. At the same time, cultural specificity is highlighted and celebrated. The compilation successfully meets the challenge of serving as a cohesive whole while providing readers with enough variety of tone, pace, and voice to keep the reading experience interesting.

A fresh and highly accessible contribution. (map, contributor biographies) (Anthology. 12-18)

THE KEY TO FEAR
Cast, Kristin
Blackstone (272 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-982548-03-2
Series: Key, 1

“No touching today for a healthy tomorrow.”

After a deadly pandemic wiped out most of the world’s population 50 years ago, the Key Corp has emerged as humanity’s savior by creating shielding technology, imposing laws against touching, and controlling every aspect of life, from matching teens with significant others to assigning their careers paths from a very young age. Eloise is a nurse matched to a fiance she is not too sure about, but since questioning the Key is unheard of, she complies. Aiden is a rebel with a secret, changing career paths frequently until he is threatened with Rehabilitation and ends up working at the morgue. When Eloise and Aiden meet, everything changes, and Eloise starts to question everything she has been told. First in a new series, the novel fails to impart the fear necessary for its worldbuilding to work, between its risible villains, a too-easy-to-infiltrate evil corporation, and a sketchily developed connection between the main characters. The rules imposed by the Key Corp crumble under scrutiny, and the public’s overall conformity and compliance with them seem utterly implausible: Touching and sex are illegal and harshly punished, yet teenagers are still matched, married off, and expected to live together and start families (though babies are grown in laboratories). Eloise and Aiden are both brown-skinned.

Despite its topical pandemic plot, the novel brings nothing new to the genre. (Science fiction. 14-18)

YOUR LIFE, YOUR WAY
Skills To Help Teens Gain Perspective, Manage Emotions, and Build Resilience Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
Ciarrochi, Joseph V. & Hayes, Louise L.
Illus. by Hall, Katharine
Instant Help Books (168 pp.)
$17.95 paper | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-68403-465-9

This self-help workbook offers practical interventions to help teens navigate their life journeys.

Some readers may initially be drawn in by the example of environmental activist Greta Thunberg, who struggled with depression but brought about change in herself, and, eventually, many other people, by tapping into her deepest values and acting on them. Straightforward truisms encourage teens to read on, and the text promises that it will help them understand how some adults end up unhappy and unfulfilled. Readers learn to identify three aspects of their inner selves—the discoverer, noticer, and adviser. Specific exercises encourage them to figure out how to use these skills for their own empowerment. Whatever the chapter’s specific concern—anxiety, bullying, internet addiction, and more—the text reassures readers of their self-worth. Teens are encouraged to create unique personal choices when their first choice in problem-solving has failed, with the caveat that aggression is rarely a successful strategy. At appropriate moments, adult intervention is advised, and overall, the language used is accessible and nonpatronizing. One chapter mentions post-traumatic growth in the context of overcoming abuse and identity-based prejudice, but teens struggling with serious bias and oppression may find the examples in this book do not resonate. Whimsical ink drawings, pithy quotations, and frequent use of humor enhance this handbook for healthy living.

Be the change! (resources, references) (Self-help. 13-18)

A GOLDEN FURY
Coboe, Samantha
Wednesday Books (352 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-250-22040-0

A debut historical fantasy mines unexpected territory. Fair-skinned, dark-haired English teen Theosebeia Hope is a scientist and a scholar. At the side of her single mother, who has leaped from patron to patron in late-18th-century France, Thea has learned languages (including Arabic) and alchemy in their single-minded pursuit of the Philosopher’s Stone, the legendary substance said to cure all ills. Talk of revolution recurs, especially from firebrand and love interest Will, but seems more like set dressing than fully realized historical milieu, an impression encouraged by anachronistic references and
behavior. The plot careens from France to England, from madness to murder to imprisonment and more madness, as Thea seeks to finish the work her mother began (and work out their complex but almost never on-page relationship) before she too succumbs to the Alchemist’s Curse. The madness and the science are, of course, magical in nature, as the reader knows alchemy to be and as Thea gradually realizes. Despite the original premise and avoidance of many tropes (the romance, in particular, follows an interesting and unexpected course), Cohoe never quite pulls together her ideas or fully develops her intriguing characters, although she seems to be aiming for a discourse on magic, revolution, and science à la Frances Hardinge’s much more effective The Lie Tree (2016).

A pleasant, if lightweight, diversion. (Historical fantasy. 12-18)

DAUGHTERS OF JUBILATION
Cortbron, Kara Lee
Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-4814-5950-1

A Black teen learns more about her family’s magical abilities in the Jim Crow South.

When Evalene hit puberty, Mama revealed that menstruation brought an additional type of power. Since before the time of slavery, the Deschamps women have been gifted with magical abilities, called Jubilation. Although Evvie doesn’t know why they have this magic or what her mind will do, she can usually tell when something is coming by the onset of a painful headache. During the summer of 1962, Evvie spends her days babysitting a White child and the evenings taking care of her twin sisters. When Evvie begins a relationship with her longtime crush, she starts to lose command of her powers more frequently, and she seeks out her Grammie Atti to learn to control the jubin’. Evvie learns that the women in her family—and many other Black families—have been gifted with Jubilation as a tool for survival against predators. The magic feeds off intense emotions, including love and anger. When a dangerous White man from Evvie’s past returns to town, she must use the power within her to fight for her loved ones. The story is well paced and suspenseful, and the magic that is Jubilation is wonderfully creative. The exploration of home, and the reflection on how a place where you can’t be safe can nevertheless be called home, is powerful.

A compelling story of first love and battling racism with a magical twist. (Historical fantasy. 14-18)

THE PUPPETMASTER’S APPRENTICE
DeSelm, Lisa
Page Street (352 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-64567-080-3

Pinocchio meets Frankenstein in this gender-swapped light fantasy.

Eleven years after losing his wife in childbirth—and their only child too—master puppeteer Gephardt Leiter succumbs to loneliness and puts his talents to the test. Though the territory of Tavia outlawed conjuring magic generations ago, Gep recites a forest crone’s incantation beneath a lustrous blue moon to bring a lovingly crafted marionette to life, a girl about the age his daughter would have been. Seven years later,
Gep’s health fails and Pirouette, his (literally) animated daughter, finds herself struggling to complete the last in a commission of 100 life-sized soldiers. Soon after, the ruling Margrave’s heir demands yet another malicious mannequin, and he puts long-banned spells to use, turning an army of wooden brutes loose and accusing Piro of the very sorcery he’s practicing. Imprisoned by a madman, Piro faces a dreadful final task….An ear- ned, appealing, and accessible narrator, Piro fastens together a magnificent world where, per her father’s favorite maxim, “a maker will always prevail.” DeSelm’s at her best describing arti- sans at work—from the fleet-fingered tailor to the sure-handed potter—stitching, striking, stoking, and shaping raw materials into works of beauty. Allusions to source texts buttress gender-conscious explorations of belonging, honesty, autonomy, empa- thy; and the nuanced politics of creation. A simpler story about the timeless battle between those who produce and those who merely consume undergirds the fable. Physical descriptions indicate characters of varying ethnicities.

An artful adaptation and delightful debut. (Fantasy. 13-18)

POISONED
Donnelly, Jennifer
Scholastic (320 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-1-338-26849-2

The story of “Snow White” recast as a parable of fear and love. Princess Charlotte-Sidonia Wilhelmina Sophia of the Greenlands—or Sophie—loves her tough-minded fiancé but worries that she is not made of stern enough stuff to rule. Her cruel stepmother, enthralled by Corvinus, the King of Crows and the personification of Fear, has been dripping banned spells to use, turning an army of wooden brutes loose and accusing Piro of the very sorcery he’s practicing. Imprisoned by a madman, Piro faces a dreadful final task….An ear- ned, appealing, and accessible narrator, Piro fastens together a magnificent world where, per her father’s favorite maxim, “a maker will always prevail.” DeSelm’s at her best describing arti- sans at work—from the fleet-fingered tailor to the sure-handed potter—stitching, striking, stoking, and shaping raw materials into works of beauty. Allusions to source texts buttress gender-conscious explorations of belonging, honesty, autonomy, empa- thy; and the nuanced politics of creation. A simpler story about the timeless battle between those who produce and those who merely consume undergirds the fable. Physical descriptions indicate characters of varying ethnicities.

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An artful adaptation and delightful debut. (Fantasy. 13-18)
she's attending the school simply to evade the publicity that follows her celebrity mother, sparks trouble. Throughout the retrospective first-person narrative, Mia is fierce and smart, but she is also vulnerable and lashes out, not always learning from her mistakes. The characters are fully realized and memorable, with both tender moments of friendship and emotional breakdowns. This is a thoughtful examination of sexual assault, trauma, and misogyny. Mia and most other characters are White; Mia's Red Oak therapist is described as half White and half Ojibwe, and two fellow students are people of color.

**Remarkably moving.** (list of poems) *(Fiction. 14-18)*

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**QUEEN OF VOLTS**

Foody, Amanda

Inkyard Press (608 pp.)

$19.99 | Sep. 1, 2020

978-1-335-14586-4

Series: Shadow Game, 3

Foody lays all the cards on the table as New Reynes’ power players, from crime lords to politicians, play a final, deadly game in this trilogy conclusion. In this sequel to *King of Fools* (2019), the curse holding the Shadow Game together is broken, and malison Bryce is using his shade-making blood talent to replace it with a new curse game in a gambit designed to draw in a notorious figure of New Reynes legend, the Bargainer, as a last-ditch effort at saving the life of his lover, Rebecca. It’s an elaborate game of Assassin, in which each of the 22 participants finds a name written on the back of a special Shadow Game card, specifying their target. The first to collect a chain of five cards wins, and anyone who doesn’t hold their assigned target’s card at the end of the game will die. Alongside the game, the true history of New Reynes and the Revolution—and Enne’s mysterious heritage—are among the secrets that unravel. At times, the sprawling plot (with many viewpoints) could use some pruning, but part of the charm is savoring the large number of well-rounded, shades-of-gray characters as they love, make mistakes, hurt, betray, and try to forgive each other. Relationships are particularly strong—familial, friendships, and romances both toxic and healthy; plentiful queer representation thwarts bisexual erasure in particular. As in previous volumes, the cast is racially diverse. 

**As decadent and delicious as it is dense.** *(Fantasy. 14-adult)*
IN PUNCHING THE AIR, A BLACK TEEN CONFRONTS SYSTEMIC INJUSTICE AND FINDS HOPE IN MAKING ART

By Laura Simeon

PUNCHING THE AIR (Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins, Sept. 1) is a verse novel about 16-year-old Amal, a Black boy and passionate artist who ends up in juvenile detention following an altercation with White boys. This electrifying story was co-authored by Ibi Zoboi, author of National Book Award finalist American Street (Balzer-Bray/HarperCollins, 2017) and Yusef Salaam of the Exonerated Five, the group of Black and Latinx boys who were wrongfully convicted of the 1989 rape of a jogger in Central Park. (Their story was the subject of Ava DuVernay’s 2019 Netflix series, When They See Us.) We met over Zoom to discuss what Salaam describes as their “labor of love,” a story loosely inspired by Salaam’s experiences. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

How did you come to work together?
Ibi Zoboi: We met in 1999, while Yusef was visiting [Hunter] College; I already knew the story of the Central Park Five. There was no question in my mind, like many people in New York City, that they were innocent, [though] he had not yet been exonerated. For me, writing this book was cathartic because I grew up in New York: Seeing racial violence and protests on the news was part of our upbringing. I was in the sixth grade when the Central Park jogger case happened—our teacher had the newspaper out, and we talked about it in class. I had to process that: “These are my friends; they look like those boys who were accused of something. Would my friends do that? I don’t think so. What’s going on?”

Yusef Salaam: Here we are 31 years later, and Ibi’s been preparing a space to be able to help me. It’s about legacy, about being able to plant goodness in the world. Those indelible scars that you get because somebody thought that you were this monster are now a teaching point. The worst thing that happened in the Central Park jogger case was that the rush to judgment caused the real perpetrator to continue to commit more crimes. It’s those truths and realities that you bring to the page.

IZ: There was a process of realizing what happened and why—the bigger Why. There is a lot of spirituality and wisdom in how Yusef talks about what happened. I needed to write a character that was very aware. The most fascinating,
inspiring thing about Yusef’s story is that he was a conscious kid—aware of racial politics, of a higher power having a hand in things, and that being a source of courage and hope. [The character of] Amal is very much aware; a lot of young people who are thrown into these situations have a very rudimentary understanding of racial politics. We dug up in our memory all the racial violence that happened in New York, and we named them: Michael Griffith, Yusef Hawkins, Amadou Diallo. These things were part of our upbringing.

We don’t find out until late in the story what happened between Amal and the boy he’s accused of attacking.

IZ: That was a deliberate decision. I think we are too focused on the minutiae, and that feeds into all those things we’re trying to dismantle in terms of dehumanizing Black boys: “Well, did he do it?” I wanted to focus on the child, what’s happening in that child's head and soul, the moment that he’s given that verdict. How do you hold on to your humanity?

YS: The other part of that, too, is the whole breaking down of a human—this new 13th Amendment reality; this new Jim Crow; this new slave-in-modern-day-times. Amal’s name [means] hope. It just so happens that Amal/hope is in prison, and there’s a lot of hope in prison. It’s the story of America, the juxtaposition of the two Americas that we live in. Prisons are not correctional facilities anymore. We lock [people] up, throw away the key, and have the system do whatever is natural and normal in that space—which is very abnormal and unnatural.

Art is central to Amal’s identity, but his art teacher and the AP art history curriculum fail to value his gifts or represent the fullness of the art world.

YS: I went to LaGuardia High School of Music & Art, the old Fame school. To be able to have school while you’re in prison—the freedom of being able to participate in art, whether that’s music, singing, drawing, or painting—and then to see that beauty take shape in other people’s minds when they see it? It changes something, it’s a seed planted.

IZ: Oprah was asking all the Exonerated Five members how they got through it, and Yusef gave a one-word answer: He meditated. When I saw the artwork he created while incarcerated, I understood what he meant—that artwork and how he produced [it] was a meditative process. And that’s when those ideas started to germinate. The art that this child wants to do is meditative; it will save him. [Amal] is fighting for his life, and that life for him is art. Being incarcerated does not mean that he will lose that genius because he doesn’t have access to formal education. He’s creating something out of nothing.

YS: It’s not until [Amal] goes to prison [that] the box is opened; he’s unleashed and he’s able to produce on this other level—everything that he thought was stripped away. But the truth of the matter is that you are the artist. You are art, and so you create from that space, and what you create is beauty. He goes into the self, and in the self he finds the answers.

Gentrification is an important theme in the book.

IZ: This is how Amal’s story starts—he describes being boxed in in a small apartment. His mom wants him to stay safe, but he wants to experience the world. Thinking about the Exonerated Five, it made sense to me: New York City in the summertime, in an apartment building, you have the park right there. Kids just needing that fresh air and the trees and everything—but to want to do that is criminalized.

YS: That’s your park. It’s your backyard—right outside your window. On a whole other level, this is Seneca Village [a predominantly African American community that was destroyed with the construction of Central Park]. You grow into the America that is given to you and that is denied you. You can only participate in this part and you can’t participate in the rest. That dynamic is being played out in today’s world in a very profound way.

IZ: I intentionally put [Amal] in a gentrifying community; he is a 2020 version of Yusef. He wants the skate park. Because there’s this racial tension in a gentrifying community, even when it used to be theirs in a mostly Black town, with gentrification and urban renewal, they start to lose it.

YS: In the dynamic of gentrification, you are not supposed to be over in the White side of town. But this wasn’t always the White side of town; this was ours, you’re here now, but we can share.

Punching the Air received a starred review in the Aug. 1, 2020, issue.
he’s been abandoned, as his mother stayed in the United States, leaving G, his grandmother, to raise him. According to Joel, G is all the family he needs. As the two athletes inch closer to the CARIFTA games and to each other, more problems are thrown at their feet both on and off the track. Written from Joel’s and Kayla’s alternating points of view, readers are treated to both sides of the story and can see how they influence one another. The Trinidadian dialect roots the story firmly in the Caribbean, adding to the rich sense of place and showcasing the layers of modern island life. The characters reflect how many teenagers take the influences of family, friends, coaches, and figure things out on their own: Burdens we bear don’t feel as heavy when carried together.

A beautiful and uplifting read. *(Fiction. 14-18)*

**EVENTIDE**  
Goodman, Sarah  
Tor Teen (336 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020  
978-1-250-22473-6

In 1907, a web of secrets is unraveled after 17-year-old Verity and her younger sister, Lilah, arrive by way of an orphan train.

Verity Pruitt is forced to abandon her offer of college acceptance when her widowed father is involuntarily committed to an asylum. Arriving in Wheeler, Arkansas, Verity is heartbroken to discover that Lilah is to be adopted by Maeve Donovan, a beautiful, mysterious woman, and her taciturn uncle while Verity is taken in as an indenture by brusque but kindly farmers. It’s clear from the start that there is something otherworldly about the woods near the town, and as Verity struggles to find a way to reunite with her sister, she uncovers layer after layer of a tragic backstory that echoes traditional fairy tales, interspersed with her straightforward narrative. Verity’s smart, determined, and sometimes stubborn persona will bring readers into her corner. The plot spools out lengthily though there’s never a lot of question about its likely resolution and even less doubt that Verity and the bookish, handsome Abel Atchley will find their way past their initial friction. Still, this blend of genres will appeal to a variety of readers with its detailed setting and plot. All characters, both primary and secondary, seem to be White.

An unusual journey of self-discovery. *(Fiction. 13-18)*

**THE CROSSROADS AT MIDNIGHT**  
Howard, Abby  
Illus. by the author  
Iron Circus Comics (320 pp.)  
$18.00 paper | Oct. 6, 2020  
978-1-945820-68-7

Routine life intersects with the unnatural in five horror tales told through black-and-white comics.

In the opening story, Frankie talks to someone on the other side of the fence; only an eyeball can be seen through a small hole. Frankie is sick of interfering, judgmental parents and seeks connection with someone who understands. This yearning for companionship and comfort is echoed throughout the collection, each time ultimately leading to interactions with unknown beings. A stressed-out student seeks comfort from a mattress found abandoned on the street, which turns out to host a grotesque, flesh-stealing creature. Walking corpses become an old woman’s new companions. A
In the year 2185, Earth is rebuilding after a global eco-crisis. Countries maintain complete isolation so there’s no warfare over scarce resources. One Elected family is chosen to lead each country for a hundred years to ensure stability. Women aren’t allowed to take office and must reproduce at all costs. Technology is banned to preserve what’s left of the environment.

Except, I’m my country’s Elected. I’ve just sanctioned technology use to ready us for war. I’m about to cross the border to spy on our neighbor. And...I’m a girl. Shhhhhhh.....

“This gender-fluid tale opens a dystopian series on a high note.”
—Kirkus Reviews

For agent representation or information on publishing and film rights for the book series, email rorishay@gmail.com
young girl wants to be reunited with her friend the lake monster, who is not so friendly anymore. While each story features some sort of creature or monster, the way they play into the horror differs. Thrilling action, disturbing body horror, unnerving suspense, and deep melancholy can all be found within these tales. The art, consisting of realistic-looking crosshatching lines on white panels, is stunning, with various shapes and shading used intentionally to amp up the drama. The intensity of the stories warrants quick page turns, but all the little details of the art beg to be thoughtfully pored over. Most characters appear White; main characters in one of the stories are cued as Black.

**Unsettling in the best way. (concept art)** *(Graphic horror 13-adult)*

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**SMOOVE CITY**

*Keil, Kenny*

*Illus. by the author*

*Oni Press (152 pp.)*

*$19.99 paper | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-62010-781-2*

Travel back to the 1990s with R&B hopefuls Smoove City.

African American Ray knows Smoove City has enough star power to headline concerts around the globe, but his group mates, African American lady’s man Ronnie, White rollerblader Mikey, and tan-skinned, purple-haired keyboardist Vinnie, lack the same drive. Ray takes the guys to the mall to lay their first track in a karaoke booth. From there they try to slip the tape to the head executive of Phat Cat Records, Laverne Lavalle. After a run-in with security, the wannabe crooners catch the eye of intern Pip Calloway. Disguising himself as the company’s vice president, Pip attempts to land Smoove City more gigs and wiggle himself into Laverne’s good graces. When Pip books Smoove City as the opening act on the X-Cüse Mé tour, tensions between group members begin to build, and Pip’s executive act starts to wear thin. The color palette, cultural references, and retro fashions saturating each page vividly evoke the era, and the Spotify playlist at the end will introduce readers to classic ‘90s R&B sounds. The panels pulse with energetic humor, almost begging for a studio audience laugh track. At times individual characters can feel a bit one-note, but taken together the chart-topping hopefuls propel readers from cover to cover.

*A classic tale of chasing dreams with a New Jack Swing twist. (Graphic fiction. 14-18)*

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**WHEN THEY CALL YOU A TERRORIST (YOUNG ADULT EDITION)**

*A Story of Black Lives Matter and the Power To Change the World*

*Khan-Cullors, Patrisse & bandele, asha*

*Wednesday Books (272 pp.)*

*$18.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-250-19498-5*

In this young readers’ adaptation of the 2018 original, a Black Lives Matter co-founder recounts growing up in a society that sought to punish her mere existence.

Using journal entries, Khan-Cullors recalls with sometimes excruciating detail finding and developing aspects of herself that would cumulatively create her identity. From stories of her biological and chosen family to her wider community, the writing overflows with honesty, compassion, courage, and love. The many unjust interactions she and her community have had with law enforcement make for a heart-wrenching read. Still, the author and activist maintains a message of action-based hope, life-sustaining love, and community support. With assistance from co-author bandele, a noted writer and journalist, Khan-Cullors shares private and public challenges and victories. Readers will understand and connect the traumas experienced by Black people in America for centuries, from Jim Crow to the war on drugs to modern-day slavery in the form of the prison system. Most importantly, the authors share principles and beliefs that speak to what is needed to facilitate and achieve necessary changes to a blood-stained, toxic, fatal disease of American society. Part memoir, part call to action, the message is clear: Black Lives Matter despite systems and inhumane practices that say otherwise. Questions for readers at the end of each chapter will prompt discussion and awakening and even inspire action.

*A gripping, much-needed memoir about a Black woman, a movement, and people fighting for freedom denied. (recommended reading and viewing) (Memoir. 14-18)*

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**FIERCE HEROINES**

*Inspiring Female Characters in Pop Culture*

*Knight, Rosie*

*Illus. by Jovellanos, Arielle*

*Running Press Kids (160 pp.)*

*$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-7624-9663-1*

A collection of lovingly crafted entries to inspire and empower.

This compilation of artwork and character profiles serves as a celebration of fictional women. The profiles are split into sections dedicated to characters from anime and manga, cartoons, comics, movies, TV shows, and video games. Each two-page spread contains a gorgeous full-color illustration and a page of
A heartwarming story of hacking high school through math. (Science fiction. 12-18)

TIME TRAVEL FOR LOVE AND PROFIT
Lariviere, Sarah
Knopf (320 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-0-593-17420-3

A teen genius learns the perils and pluses of time travel.

Nephele Weather wants to fix her freshman year. Abandoned by her best friend, Vera Knight, for the cool crowd and bullied by her classmates—for the hairiness imparted by her Greek heritage and being exceptionally good at math—Nephele decides not to move forward but to go back...in time. Escewing a Whovian T.A.R.D.I.S. or Wellsian machine, prodigy Nephele creates Dirk Angus, her quantum-foam-manipulating phone app, only to discover that she's reset but others are not; with each reiteration, Nephele redoes ninth grade but can't win back Vera, as everyone ages except her. Tying herself and the universe in knots, Nephele learns about love and loss, discovering that she can't change the past, but she could be warp- ing the future. Lariviere revels in math and science, unabashedly celebrates science fiction and romance novels, and anchors the story in a realistic, comfortably cozy coastal Californian setting. The lack of catastrophic, explosion-riddled scenes, evil overlords, or alien invasions renders this a gentle, grounded read, reminiscent of A Wrinkle in Time. Most students read as White; math and science teacher Mrs. Saint Johnabelle, a mentor figure, reads as Black.

A fun work with strong reader appeal. (Nonfiction. 12-16)

SURVIVING THE ANGEL OF DEATH
The True Story of a Mengele Twin in Auschwitz
Kor, Eva Mozes & Buccieri, Lisa Rojany
Tanglewood Publishing (215 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Oct. 15, 2020
978-1-939100-45-0

Kor and Buccieri tell the story of how Kor and her twin sister survived Auschwitz; this new edition, published posthumously following Kor's death in 2019, includes an extensive afterword.

In 1944, when Eva and her identical twin, Miriam, were 10, their family of six was taken from their small Romanian village and sent to Auschwitz. Upon their arrival at the camp, Eva and Miriam were separated from their family, whom they never saw again. Twin children and teens arriving at Auschwitz were selected by Dr. Josef Mengele, known as the Angel of Death, to be used as test subjects in his scientific experiments. In straightforward language the book relates the twins' daily routines, including lab experiments and occasions on which they suffered serious brushes with death as the result of injections they were given. Many of the memories related come across as rough sketches, though some graphic details are included. Following their liberation from Auschwitz in 1945, Eva goes on to chart their path back to Romania, from there to Israel, and finally her immigration to America, where she became an outspoken advocate and organizer for Holocaust remembrance. The afterward provides more background and insight into the last decade of Kor's life and her controversial decision to forgive the Nazis as an act of personal healing.

A significant contribution to the history of the Holocaust. (afterword, author's note, photo credits, additional resources) (Memoir. 13-18)

WARSIORS OF WING AND FLAME
Larson, Sara B.
Tor Teen (384 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-250-20843-9
Series: Sisters of Shadow and Light, 2

Magically gifted sisters join the fight against a power-mad serial killer in this loin-moistening duology closer.

Larson constructs a flimsy plotline on which to hang intensely felt displays of passion, terror, soul searching, hot snogging, and love—both sisterly and otherwise. Having stolen the powers of soon-to-be 16-year-old Inara in Sisters of Shadow and Light (2019), Bar has gone on a rampage—roaming the countryside slaughtering other Paladin for their magic with the vaguely articulated goal of taking over the world. Inara and her loving older sister, Zuhra, set out on gryphon-back with several newly met Paladin from the parallel world of Vismperum to tackle the killer...while wrestling at length with their feelings for certain of their more eligible new allies. The inner conflicts are complicated by the revelation that one
such, moody Loukas, has the power of mind control (which he insists he’s not using) and also the fact that any healing magic leaves both healers and healed open to one another’s emotions so it’s often hard to tell exactly who is feeling what. Though the purple prose turns liverish at times, several steamy clinches ultimately help clarify things heartwise while, with the convenient assistance of a deus ex machina, the stylized threat is neatly (and literally) toasted. Relationships are all heterosexual, none of the gasping grasping gets past second base, and the cast is predominantly White.

Readers who go for interior over exterior fires will slowly lick their lips. (Fantasy. 13-18)

LIGHTBRINGER
Legrand, Claire
Sourcebooks Fire (392 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-4926-5668-5
Series: Empirium Trilogy, 3

Following Kingdom (2019), mother and daughter queens separated across time complete each other’s stories in this trilogy closer.

Held captive by the Emperor Corien after Simon’s betrayal, Eliana defies efforts to fully restore Simon’s marque power, which would enable Corien to reunite with Rielle. Eliana’s refusal is met with psychological torture in the form of dreams that feel real and through the suffering of her loved ones. Her torment is finally interrupted by a mysterious voice in her head, which results in Eliana’s greater knowledge of the Deep and the world’s mythology. Meanwhile, 1,000 years in the past, Rielle’s storyline follows her as she, fleeing heartbreak and rejection from Audric (now regretful of his reaction, deposed, and seeking asylum and allies), is dragged deeper into darkness by Corien. Rielle’s storyline leans hard on the love-triangle element. Many of these plotlines (using primary and secondary characters’ viewpoints drawn from the large, unwieldy cast) spin in repetitive ruts so that all of the pieces land in place for a dynamic, flashy final act that unifies the storylines and themes. Race and ethnicity carry no significance in this diverse fantasy world with many secondary characters of color; Corien, Simon, and Rielle are White; Audric has brown skin. Same-sex relationships also have casual, positive representation.

Pacing issues aside, a conclusion sure to satisfy fans of the trilogy. (map, list of elements) (Fantasy. 15-adult)

THE MAGIC FISH
Le Nguyen, Trung
Illus. by the author
Random House Graphic (256 pp.)
$23.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-0-593-12529-8

While Tien is fluent in English, his Vietnamese refugee parents are not, leaving them struggling at times for a shared language.

Tien’s mom, Hien, asks him to read aloud the fairy tales he checks out from the library; they both love them, and she can use them to practice English. When Tien selects “Tattercoats,” his seamstress mother tells him that there is a Vietnamese version that her own mother told her, long ago. As he reads the story of love, longing, and travel across a sea, Hien is reminded of family she left behind in Vietnam while Tien tries to navigate his own first love, a boy he is friends with. Le Nguyen’s gorgeous, flowing, detailed illustrations deftly weave Vietnamese and Western fairy-tale worlds together with Hien’s memory of her past and Tien’s struggle over coming out. The rich color palette highlights both the layers within each panel as well as serving as a road map for readers by indicating whether the panels are set in the present, the past, or within the fairy tale. This clever use of color smooths the way for the sophisticated embedding of stories within a story that highlights the complex dynamics between first-generation and second-generation family members. Warm, loving family and friends are a refreshing alternative to immigrant stories that focus on family problems.

Beautifully illustrates how sharing old stories can be the best way to learn how to share new ones. (author’s note, notes about the illustrations, bonus artwork) (Fiction. 13-17)

CONCRETE KIDS
León, Amyra
Illus. by Lukashevsky, Ashley
Penguin Workshop (96 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Oct. 13, 2020
978-0-593-09519-5
Series: Pocket Change Collective

A beautiful, heart-rending poetry collection about a childhood steeped in loss and love.

Using free verse and her own lived experience, León tells readers a story through the lens of a mixed-race girl, from her years as a young child to being a teenager, going from life with her White birth mother—never having met her Black father—to being in foster care, getting adopted by her Puerto Rican mother, and moving to pre-gentrified Harlem. Captured in this collection is the sense of community among people bonded by a shared culture as much as by proximity and class. Captivating descriptions of rituals celebrating the living and mourning lives gone highlight the resilience needed in order to not just move on, but survive. León
describes with gripping honesty the heartbreak of being separated from one's mother, the trauma of enduring violence at the hands of those who are supposed to care for you, and the bitter-sweet feeling of being adopted and finding a sense of belonging outside of one's biological parentage. Readers will be left feeling sorrowful and yet hopeful by this story of how to live when death surrounds you and how to define and dream of freedom when freedom seems like a privilege bestowed on others who don't look like you.

A moving, inspiring love letter to and about “the concrete kids. The kids with a melanin kiss.” (Verse memoir. 12-18)

Two friends embark on an emotional and physical challenge.

Rose and Tate have been lifelong friends, traveling the world and summiting mountains together. Now, at the end of their senior year of high school, they’re going for the big one—Mount Everest. But Rose feels conflicted about climbing without her mother, and Tate has a terrifying secret. Their journey from San Francisco to the highest altitude in the world tests their physical and mental strength and endurance. The isolation and harsh conditions force the pair to examine their feelings for one another as well as their motivations for climbing and the impact of the tourist trade on the environment, culture, and people of Nepal. Each chapter

"Look up, up, up to skies filled with endless possibilities in Beth Kephart’s young adult wonder, Cloud Hopper." — Foreword Reviews

"A moving story about what makes a family and making a home wherever you end up. —Kirkus Reviews
A deftly plotted narrative includes quick-moving battle sequences with a cast of sympathetic characters.

SKYHUNTER

Lu, Marie
Roaring Brook (384 pp.)
$19.99  |  Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-250-22168-1

A group of young soldiers defend their home against the evil Karensa Federation.

Talin is a Basean refugee in Mara, treated with xenophobic cruelty by many but recognized for her skill by her battle partner, Corian, and friends Rooke and Jeran. The capture of a former Federation fighter named Redlen with magnificent, strange abilities forces her into new territory and life-altering decisions. Redlen exposes details about the Federation's genetically engineered army of Ghosts, zombielike creatures, leading Talin and the rest to hatch a desperate scheme to infiltrate their stronghold and sabotage their production—against explicit orders. Their mission and its aftermath help Talin understand more about her role in Mara and her reasons for defending a nation where she is often persecuted. In this cinematically imagined dystopia, Talin uses sign language to communicate since early trauma in her homeland at the hands of the Federation resulted in the cessation of her speech. In a deftly plotted first-person narrative that is both expansive and detailed in its depiction of the setting and includes quick-moving battle sequences, Talin's trajectory is convincing. In a few instances, her earnest realizations about her own motivations can feel a bit pat, but this is a mostly nuanced and poignant story that is left wide open for a welcome sequel. Characters have a range of skin tones; one male character is in love with another man.

An exciting, layered, action-filled tale with a cast of sympathetic characters. (map) (Fantasy. 13-18)

DEEPFAKE

Littman, Sarah Darer
Scholastic (352 pp.)
$17.99  |  Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-338-17763-3

The high school rumor mill becomes even more treacherous when deepfakes are thrown into the mix.

Dara and Will are at the top of Greenpoint High's senior class—envious because, as the Rumor Has It gossip site reveals, they are a happy couple whose top grades put both in the running for valedictorian. The anonymous writer suggests that Will's best friend, MJ, is upset—possibly because she has a crush on him or because her first-choice college rejected her. But it is the site's next post, containing a video of Dara speculating that Will cheated on his SATs, that causes an uproar among this default-White cast. Despite Dara's denial that she ever said this, Will breaks up with her and the school initiates an investigation of Will's SAT. The story is narrated in alternating chapters by Dara and Will, with occasional chapters from MJ's perspective. Given current media hype over manipulated videos, most readers won't understand why the Greenpoint brainiacs readily believe the video is real, making Dara's determination to expose the fake feel anticlimactic. These themes were more surprising in 2017's Takedown by Corrie Wang. Here, the more intriguing questions come later: Who created the deepfake, and who is the writer behind the gossip website? Teens hooked on tales of high school drama who stick with it to the end, when the betrayal is revealed, will feel satisfied.

Readers who embrace the premise will enjoy watching the drama unfold. (Thriller. 12-16)

GOD STORM

Ma, Coco
Blackstone (300 pp.)
$19.99  |  Oct. 20, 2020
978-1-982527-47-1
Series: Shadow Frost, 2

Following her ascension, Queen Asterin Faelenhart of Axaria faces consequences from a previous battle. The sequel to Shadow Frost (2019) picks up with Asterin and her companions having parted ways following their defeat of Axaria's false ruler during Fairfest Eve. Queen Rose Saville and a comatose Prince Quinlan return to Eradore while Asterin's best friend, Luna, journeys to Ibreseos where she begins training in illusion magic and connects with her newly revealed father, King Jakob. In the Immortal Realm, shadowing Harry secures a reprieve from duty from Eoin, the Ruler of Darkness, in order to search for Asterin's Royal Guardian Orion, who leapt into a portal during the Fairfest battle.
Little does he know that Orion is a guest at Eoin’s Shadow Palace, with no memory of his life before. When news of Quinlan’s recovery reaches Asterin, she wastes no time before setting out toward Eradore with Capt. Eadric Covington and three members of her Elites, but a deadly ambush throws her plan into disarray. Ma successfully uses the book’s multiple storylines to maintain a steady pace throughout, with intriguing developments and new revelations to drive the plot forward. Several characters are queer; most seem to be White, and race is not significant in this world. There are multiple references to a ship whose name includes a slur for Roma people.

A stronger book than its precursor. (map, guide to fantasy world) (Fantasy. 14-18)

THE VALLEY AND THE FLOOD
Mahoney, Rebecca
Razorbill/Penguin (368 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-0-593-11435-3

When the past keeps usurping your present, can you tell what’s real anymore? Senior Rose Colter’s car breaks down somewhere between Las Vegas and San Diego in the middle of a dark desert night a few days before New Year’s Eve. When her radio picks up the broadcast of a voicemail from her best friend, Gaby, who died a year ago, Rose decides to walk toward a distant, blinking radio tower where she finds the town of Lotus Valley, someplace she can wait while her car is repaired. The local residents are wary of her presence, and Rose learns there’s a prophecy predicting a cataclysmic flood—and she is the harbinger. Rose has been diagnosed with PTSD that she usually tries to keep hidden, and thanks to the help of her therapist (who checks in with her), she is aware of the ways it influences her perceptions. However, her symptoms become tangled up in the memory manipulation of a lurking creature who is focused on her. This is a story strongly crafted in the vein of surreal fiction about memories and grief, with flashes of times and places past, and creatures somewhere between shadows, eldritch horrors, and bogeymen. In this ensnaring tale, debut author Mahoney strikes a flowing balance, weaving together suspense, connection, uncanniness, healing, devastation, and hope. Rose is White, and the supporting cast contains characters of color and queer representation.

Superb storytelling. (Fabulism. 14-18)

THE LEAGUE OF SUPERFEMINISTS
Malle, Mirion
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Jensen, Aleshia
Drawn & Quarterly (60 pp.)
$16.95 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-77046-402-5

Movies and TV shows are more than just entertainment: They also set a cultural tone that influences external and internalized perceptions of marginalized populations.

This illustrated feminist analysis explains how and why media representations of women perpetuate dangerous and dehumanizing stereotypes. The book is tailored for teen readers who are still coming to terms with multiple aspects of their identities and includes sections on sexuality, gender identity, and intersectionality. It also explains some of the most relevant issues in feminism today, including female emotional labor in heterosexual relationships, street harassment, and the ways in which structural racism elevates Whiteness as a beauty standard. The book’s cartoonlike, full-color illustrations of ethnically diverse groups are whimsical, its language straightforward, and its content up to date. However, relatively little is mentioned about body positivity or the fat acceptance movement, and the author classifies all nonbinary and agender identities as trans identities even though not all nonbinary and agender people identify as trans. Issues such as these stem from the text’s primary weakness: Issues like gender identity, race, and sexuality are treated as separate topics late in the book rather than as vital threads woven throughout the analysis.

An illustrated feminist analysis of media representation that could benefit from a more inclusive perspective. (Nonfiction. 13-18)

THE TRUTH PROJECT
Medema, Dante
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins (400 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-0-06-295440-4

The results of a DNA test send a high school senior into a tailspin. Cordelia has always felt out of place in her family of five. But when she crafts her senior class project around her ancestry and love of poetry, she never expects that the results of the DNA test she takes will shake the foundation of her identity. The test reveals that her father is not the man who raised her, triggering a myriad of questions and leading to a crisis of identity. The testing company connects her with the man who is her biological father, whom she contacts looking for answers. When he responds, she becomes increasingly fixated on getting to know him, going so far as to use a class trip as an excuse to
travel from her home in Kenai, Alaska, to Seattle, where he lives, so she can meet him. Told in a combination of verse, text messages, and emails, this debut stretches out a thin plot as Cordelia’s expressions of emotional angst feel flat and repetitive. The communication between Cordelia and the adults in her life may strain readers’ patience and credulity. A lukewarm romance develops between Cordelia and her childhood friend–turned–troubled boy Kodiak Jones. Cordelia, who is White, often employs animal imagery to describe Kodiak, who is described as having Tlingit ancestry on his mother’s side.

This spin on a teenager’s search for identity wears thin without much substance to support it. (Fiction. 14-18)

**UNDECIDED, 2ND EDITION**

**Navigating Life and Learning After High School**

Morgan, Genevieve

Zest Books (288 pp.)

$14.99 paper | Oct. 6, 2020

978-1-5415-9779-2

An information-packed reference source that details a multitude of post-secondary possibilities.

After opening with a discussion of assessing one’s interests, personality, and financial needs, Morgan plainly lays out teenagers’ options after high school in sections covering various academic and vocational educational options; military, civil, and foreign service paths; entering the workforce; and taking a gap year. The emphasis throughout is on being true to one’s core values and making choices that are realistic and suited to readers’ own situations rather than succumbing to others’ notions of what one ought to do after high school. Guided questions posed for thoughtful consideration are peppered throughout. Refreshingly, the author tries hard to make the book inclusive of the various socio-economic backgrounds, although some statements and advice assume a middle-class framework in which parents expect young people to attend college and are able to tour campuses before applying. However, detailed and balanced discussions of military service and trade schools (along with important warnings about for-profit schools) round things out. This updated edition of Morgan’s 2014 original is packed with information, balancing encouragement, empathy, and enthusiasm with sober, pragmatic advice anchored by worksheets, timelines, and other practical tools.

A useful and comprehensive handbook for teens contemplating life after high school. (resources, bibliography, index) (Nonfiction. 14-18)

**HOW TO BREAK AN EVIL CURSE**

Morrison, Laura

Black Spot Books (386 pp.)

$18.95 paper | Oct. 13, 2020

978-1-7335994-8-1

Series: Chronicles of Fritillary, 1

A comic fantasy series opener.

In the Land of Fritillary, evil wizards and kings exist side by side with pirates, cute coal miners, a budding feminist movement, and a cursed princess. Morrison aims for absurd humor, with an omniscient narrator who frequently points out fantasy tropes and breaks the fourth wall and plenty of vocabulary not usually seen in high fantasy (dudes, chicks, and thugs abound, coming across more tone deaf than modern). Unfortunately, the humor tends to miss the mark; it’s often unclear who or what is being lampooned, although the monarchy comes off particularly badly. The plot spins in several directions, mostly concerning itself with the well-intentioned but spoiled princess as she sneaks out and begins to explore the world alongside the guy whose love can supposedly break the curse intended to keep her trapped indoors. Side plots concern a pirate named McManlyman who reads romance novels and longs for the love of a good woman, an ex-criminal who wants to write true crime and longs for the love of a good woman, and the evil wizard who longs for the love of a particular bad woman, plus lots of revolution on the rise. Unfortunately, the novel is reductive, with shallow characters and one too many plot contortions. Characters follow a White default.

An ambitious effort that falls flat. (Fantasy. 12-18)

**A CUBAN GIRL’S GUIDE TO TEA AND TOMORROW**

Namey, Laura Taylor

Atheneum (320 pp.)

$18.99 | Oct. 6, 2020

978-1-5344-7124-5

An avalanche of grief—the death of her beloved Abuela, first love lost, and the betrayal of a best friend—is just too much for 17-year-old Lila Reyes. Lila’s family sends her to England, hoping a new place will help her pick up the pieces of a shattered heart after her longtime boyfriend, golden boy Andrés, ends things right before prom and she learns that her best friend was secretly planning two years of volunteering in Ghana instead of moving in with her. But Winchester is cold and so very old—nothing like the vibrant heat of Miami. Can a Cuban American baker who dreamed of taking over La Paloma, the family bakery founded by her Abuela, really find peace here? But between the incredible kitchen at the inn run by Cate, her Venezuelan honorary aunt; the diverse, new friend group that takes her in; and the blue eyes and caring heart of tea seller Orion Maxwell,
Beautifully dark and descriptive prose creates a grim fairy-tale atmosphere.

AMONG THE BEASTS & BRIARS

Poston, Ashley
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-0-06-284736-2

A lowly gardener’s daughter enters the cursed Wildwood to save her kingdom.

Cerys, the royal gardener’s daughter, always believed she would stay in Village-in-the-Valley, inheriting the care of the castle’s flowers from her father. With only Princess Anwen, her father, and a mischievous fox for friendship, Cerys has accepted her quiet life, which includes being gossiped about by others for the magic in her blood that, when spilled, causes greenery to grow exponentially. As Cerys mourns missing loved ones, Anwen’s upcoming coronation looms; as ruler, her friend will wear the crown of Alorinya, whose magic keeps the evil of the Wilds at bay. When the coronation is disrupted by the woodcurse, Cerys and the fox rush into the Wildwood, searching for the possibly mythical city of Voryn in hopes of saving the kingdom. Beautifully dark and descriptive prose creates a grim fairy-tale atmosphere that blends with horrific descriptions of bone-eaters, twisted magic, and the ominous adventure through the Wilds. The voice of Cerys, whose lack of self-confidence makes her a convincingly unwilling hero, contrasts with the talking fox’s witty narration. The romance is relatively low-key, and the developing trust and friendship between characters shines. Some aspects may feel familiar to fans of this genre, but the writing and pacing will sweep readers along. Main characters are White; queerness is accepted without comment in this world.

A deliciously dark coming-of-age fairy tale brimming with magic, monsters, and hope. (Fantasy. 13-18)

CHALLENGE EVERYTHING

The Extinction Rebellion Youth Guide to Saving the Planet
Sandford, Blue
Pavilion Children’s (144 pp.)
$9.95 paper | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-84365-464-3

A youth activist’s blueprint for mitigating climate catastrophe.

Although Sandford, a 17-year-old Extinction Rebellion Youth London coordinator, knows the relevant research, she isn’t concerned with making the case for anthropogenic climate change in her authorial debut. Per scientific consensus, ecological collapse is a pressing reality that demands action, and writing—or reading—a manifesto isn’t akin to activism. Indeed, it’s a form of greenwashing; making a superficial improvement (taking a reusable tote to the grocer) while perpetuating systemic issues (purchasing unsustainable products). To make meaningful change, one must acknowledge complicity and take ultimate responsibility for individual decisions. This concise, personable, and unpretentious book contains three illustrated sections, each concluding with a self-questionnaire to aid readers in gauging their own engagement. The first, on combating big business, shares primers on boycotting, petitioning, and conscientious consumption relative to agriculture, beauty, fast fashion, and travel. The second, on inadequate governmental responses, urges civic participation and outlines procedures for protesting, striking, and taking nonviolent direct action. The third models self-sufficiency through reclamation and rewilding; scavenging for food and goods; community-building; and consuming art, the natural world, and human experiences.
rather than commodities. Throughout, Sandford implores readers to constantly interrogate and amend their own beliefs: question what you’re told, choose your own morals, and know that your opinions matter. All merits aside, a bibliography is sorely lacking.

Immediately actionable: use less, think more, and do something. (Nonfiction. 12-18)

DEAD DUDES
Sebela, Christopher
Illus. by Sears, Ben; Hill, Ryan & Wucinich, Warren
Oni Press (136 pp.)
$19.99 paper | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-62010-778-2

Three dudes are on a mission to prove ghosts are real.

Trev, Kent, and Brian are the stars of a failing, low-budget, ghost-hunting cable TV show, aptly named Ghost Bros. After being informed of their cancellation, Trev (the ambitious mastermind of the trio) decides it’s time to visit the ultimate ghost grounds: Edgeway Penitentiary in Montana. Kent, an actor hoping to land a bigger gig, and Brian, the tech guy hoping for more, reluctantly follow Trev’s shady plan, which includes their producer Janelle’s locking them in the facility for the weekend despite her hesitations. Anticipating the chance to explore the legendary prison and its accompanying psych ward, the guys antagonize the ghosts to get their attention, resulting in their swift demise. Now they are ghosts learning how to harness their abilities while dealing with rival factions among the residents. On the anniversary of their deaths, TV rivals—the Parawarriors—arrive to solve the mystery of what happened. Now the Ghost Bros must protect the living while proving to the world that ghosts are real. The colloquial, often humorous, frat-dude lingo makes for a quick read. The hard, blocky line-work and cool color palette create an edgy reading experience fitting with the gory, creepy narrative. Trev, Kent, and Brian are White; Janelle is Black.

Paranormal fun behind the scenes of ghost-hunting shows. (Graphic fantasy. 14-18)

REDBONE
The True Story of a Native American Rock Band
Staebler, Christian & Paoloni, Sonia
Illus. by Balahy, Thibault
IDW Publishing (160 pp.)
$19.99 paper | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-68405-714-6

An entertaining graphic novel about a band of influential Native rock stars and civil rights activists.

Readers will enjoy learning the origin story of classic rock band Redbone, recently known for their hit “Come and Get Your Love” from the soundtrack of The Guardians of the Galaxy. Structured as an oral history recounted by Pat Vegas to his adult daughter, the story of Pat and his brother Lolly Vegas reveals their influential presence on the Sunset Strip beginning in the 1960s. From inspiring Jim Morrison and The Doors to conceiving of an all-Indian band with the encouragement of Jimi Hendrix, Redbone battled prejudice to be a part of the classic rock scene in America. Using their prominence as an avenue to support social justice, the band was integral to struggles for civil rights and the American Indian Movement. Including memories of the occupation of Alcatraz Island and the second Wounded Knee, this important story serves both as history and family love story. Frequently drawn without panels, free-floating illustrations are color coded to clarify the time periods discussed in the narrative. The drawing style, which feels like a personal sketchbook in places, adds to the charm and digressive nature of the plot. Well-researched and well-paced, this book will introduce a new generation to the music and impact of Redbone.

Musicians with heart put their people before profits in an inspirational tale. (Graphic nonfiction. 12-adult)

SWAMP THING
Twin Branches
Stiefvater, Maggie
Illus. by Beem, Morgan; Lawson, Jeremy & Maher, Ariana
DC (208 pp.)
978-1-4012-9323-9

Twin brothers try to understand each other as their lives take separate paths. The Incredible Holland Bros may be identical twins, but their personalities couldn’t be more distinct. Walker is the outgoing, thrill-seeking protector while Alec is the reserved plant whisperer. The boys are shipped off to Rappahannock, Virginia, to spend their last summer before college in the country with their cousins after catching their father cheating. Walker’s easygoing disposition makes his transition smooth, but Alec’s research on capturing and transferring the
thoughts and memories of plants is disrupted when his cousin’s dogs eat his specimen, which he's named Boris. The brothers grow apart as Walker becomes part of the local scene and Alec spends time in the high school lab working on his project. The summer heats up when a legendary tree is destroyed at a party, leading Alec to become his brother’s protector and sinking him further into his experiment. There is a slow, choppy build to the story, with botanical information interspersed so readers understand the science behind Alec's research. Colors are used effectively, with green and earth tones indicating Alec’s bond with nature while deep purples and blues show the effects of his experiments. The panels vary in shape and layout, maintaining visual interest. The twins appear White, but there is diversity among the cast.

An unusual origin story for a lesser-known DC Universe hero. (Graphic fiction. 13-18)

EVERYTHING I THOUGHT I KNEW
Takaoka, Shannon
Candlewick (320 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-5362-0776-7

What if memories could be transplanted along with a heart?

Before Bay Area 17-year-old Chloe collapsed while running and learned about her congenital heart defect, she was a competitive senior with her eyes set on college. Life post-heart transplant is completely different, and Chloe can’t seem to connect to her old life. Inexplicably drawn to taking up surfing, she finds herself falling for Kai, her enigmatic surf instructor. But she can’t ignore the constant, haunting nightmares and surreal, fragmented memories that inexplicably bombard her. A lifelong fan of science, and especially multiverse theories, Chloe finds herself hoping that cellular memory, the ability to store memories in cells outside the brain, is true. Because she’s almost 100% sure her anonymous heart donor gave her more than just an oxygen-pumping organ. What begins as a predictable rom-com veers into alternate/parallel universe science fiction, with each layer casting more doubt on Chloe’s reliability as a narrator. A slow start with repetitive exposition gives way to a page-turning finale. SF newbies may find the conclusion thought-provoking even if the puzzle pieces of Chloe and Kai’s relationship don’t always quite click into place. Chloe is White and Kai, who is from Hawaii, is biracial (Japanese/White).

Romance and quantum physics intertwine in this frothy introduction to multiverse SF. (Science fiction. 14-18)

TAKING ON THE PLASTICS CRISIS
Testa, Hannah
Illus. by Lukashevsky, Ashley
Penguin Workshop (64 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Oct. 13, 2020
978-0-593-22333-8
Series: Pocket Change Collective

Teen environmental activist and founder of the nonprofit Hannah-4Change, Testa shares her story and the science around plastic pollution in her fight to save our planet. Testa’s connection to and respect for nature compelled her to begin championing animal causes at the age of 10, and this desire to have an impact later propelled her to dedicate her life to fighting plastic pollution. Starting with the history of plastic and how it’s produced, Testa acknowledges the benefits of plastics for humanity but also the many ways it harms our planet. Instead of relying on recycling—which is both insufficient and ineffective—she urges readers to follow two additional R’s: “refuse” and “raise awareness.” Readers are encouraged to do their part, starting with small things like refusing to use plastic straws and water bottles and eventually working up to using their voices to influence business and policy change. In the process, she highlights other youth advocates working toward the same cause. Short chapters include personal examples, such as observations of plastic pollution in Mauritius, her maternal grandparents’ birthplace. Testa makes her case not only against plastic pollution, but also for the work she’s done, resulting in something of a college-admissions-essay tone. Nevertheless, the first-person accounts paired with science will have an impact on readers. Unfortunately, no sources are cited and the lack of backmatter is a missed opportunity.

Brief yet inspirational, this story will galvanize youth to use their voices for change. (Nonfiction. 12-18)
Islamic Scripture, stories and religious teachings convey devotional life lessons in this illustrated children's book for ages 8 and up.

Abidi's slender book, the first in a series, offers up a handful of homilies on religious principles, each comprising a Quranic verse, a brief parable showing it in action, and a concluding, traditional saying from the Prophet Muhammad or an imam. For example, the lesson “Allah Watches Us” is taught with the story of three brothers who ignore their father’s dying injunction to give to the poor; they eventually get their comeuppance, setting up an imam’s admonition that “You will never escape from Allah’s sight, so be careful about how you behave.” The lesson “Be Happy With Allah’s Decisions” cues the tale of a man whose oldest daughter asks him to pray for rain so that her husband’s crops can flourish; his second daughter, however, asks him to pray for no rain so that her husband’s pottery can dry in the sun. He settles the conundrum by leaving it all up to Allah; the moral, according to an imam, is to “Be content (with what you have), and you will be at peace.” Each parable is illustrated with winsome but uncredited, mostly static color images of various characters done in pastels, and a quiz at the end of the book aims to test youngsters’ comprehension. Abidi’s lessons all resolve in simple, straightforward sermons, but they also touch on profound religious themes, as when a character asks, “If we can’t see Allah, how do we know that He is there?” The answers to such questions are safely orthodox, but the stories are all well told and present compelling problems. Overall, the book may provide young readers, parents, and teachers with intriguing fodder for discussion and prompt further exploration of sacred literature.

Conventional but engaging instruction in precepts of Islam.
PSYCHIATRY DECLINING
Myths, Neuroscience and the Loss of Self
Brooks, Simon A.
FriesenPress (320 pp.)
$22.99 | $17.49 paper | $5.99 e-book
Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-5255-6619-6
978-1-5255-6620-2 paper

A practitioner explores the shortcomings of modern psychiatry.

Brooks, a psychiatric practitioner who has served as clinical director of two mental health services, uses this debut to excoriating psychiatry, suggesting that it “hopelessly confuses a variety of major concepts and classes of things.” He lays out his argument in a book consisting of five parts and written in a scholarly style that resembles an academic textbook. Part 1 represents an indictment of psychiatry itself and the way in which it mistakenly classifies legitimate mental disorders, in the author’s opinion. One of the primary villains, writes Brooks, is the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association. The author spends considerable time lambasting the DSM, using specific examples of its perceived deficiencies. He views the DSM “as having been more a cause than part of the solution of psychiatry’s problems in the last forty years.” He takes issue with more than this manual alone; he also discusses at length “the relative failure of psychiatry to make progress in understanding and treating the disorders in its clinical field.” Some of the more intriguing discussions in this section concern commonly held perceptions of schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder, and PTSD. Part 2 of the book combines a survey of the history of psychiatry with a comprehensive review of the thinking of numerous philosophers and neuroscientists on the subject. Part 3 focuses heavily on evolution as it relates to psychiatry. Parts 2 and 3 are perhaps the densest and most detailed parts, reading more like a scientific thesis than a book. In Part 4, Brooks argues that psychiatry “is mindless in that it has failed to think about its own beliefs in any deep way.” He reiterates the notion that several mental conditions have been misclassified as a “brain disease.” Part 5, consisting of one chapter, effectively summarizes the work’s contents. Clearly intended for academics and practitioners, the writing is pedantic and even ponderous at times. Still, the volume is scrupulously researched, and the author’s opinions are deftly articulated.

An absorbing and bravely confrontational look at psychiatry; likely to stir controversy.

THE ORPHAN’S DAUGHTER
Cherubin, Jan
The Sager Group (416 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $9.99 e-book
Jun. 11, 2020
978-1-950154-15-9

A father’s boyhood experience of abandonment shadows his fraught relationship with his daughter in this novel.

Cherubin’s book braids together three narratives exploring the life of a Jewish family in New York and Baltimore from the 1920s to the ’80s. One follows Joanna Aronson as she cares for her father, Clyde, during his latest struggle with cancer while butting heads with her stepmother, Brenda, a cold woman whom Joanna suspects of neglecting him and even trying to kill him. Interspersed are Joanna’s memories of growing up in suburban Baltimore with her sister and parents in the ’60s, a life that seems idyllic yet seethes with subterranean discontents. Clyde, an English teacher, dominates the family with his charisma but undermines it with his affairs, including a liaison with one of Joanna’s teenage acquaintances. Joanna’s mother, Evie, feels trapped in housewifery and longs for the fulfillment she felt as a Communist Party activist. Joanna, though drawn like Clyde to the life of the mind, feels slighted because of his wish that she had been a boy. A colleague of her father’s seduces her at age 14. Threading through the story is Clyde’s memoir of growing up with his brother, Harry, in New York’s National Hebrew Orphan Home after his father abandoned the family and his mother placed the two boys there in 1924. It’s a Dickensian story of cold, hunger, loneliness, frequent beatings, and sexual abuse, but it’s lit with friendships and intellectual ambitions. Cherubin’s bittersweet tale is an epic and indelible character study of Clyde from frightened cub to kvetching lion in winter, with overtones of King Lear and an occasional queasily incestuous vibe. She writes in evocative prose that mixes astringent reality with glowing reverie. (“I sized up the three agents,” recalls Evie of a visit from the FBI during the Joseph McCarthy era. “Cold, smug, and bored. They could not begin to understand how alive I was during the war, how urgent and meaningful my life was thanks to the CP. How engaged I was with the world….I still miss those days.”) As Joanna grapples with her clan’s vexed legacy, the author shows how both betrayal and forgiveness can propagate across generations.

An alternately dark and luminous, wounded and affectionate portrait of a family in crisis.

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An alternately dark and luminous, wounded and affectionate portrait of a family in crisis.
SHERWOOD ANDERSON's highly influential 1919 story collection, *Winesburg, Ohio*—which drew on Anderson's recollections of his childhood home of Clyde, Ohio—sketched not only the everyday lives of its many characters, but also offered a clear sense of what life was like in its titular setting. Here are three other books, reviewed by Kirkus Indie, that present stories set in a single town or region but which use this intriguing device in very different ways:

The children's book *Stories From Squirrel Hill: Book One* (2019) by Paul Selman Clark, illustrated by Ray Driver, includes old-fashioned stories that take place in the Squirrel Hill farmhouse and a nearby forest and features a young girl, her plush-animal friends, and her real animal friends. Readers learn valuable lessons while the appealing, full-color illustrations, according to Kirkus' review, "capture the magic of Squirrel Hill as a setting."

Terrence Murphy's *Forty Steps and Other Stories* (2018) tracks the lives of residents in small-town, fictional Egg Rock, Massachusetts. Its stories start with one about a Viking explorer and continue well into the 20th century, touching on such topics as prejudice, pacifism, espionage, and feminism. Along the way, they show how characters' actions affect the lives of people in their future. "Readers may wish that the author provided a map of the many characters in these tales," notes Kirkus' starred review, "but they'll still find it fun to track their connections."

*Unnatural Habitats & Other Stories* (2018) by Angela Mitchell presents bleak tales set in the rural Ozarks region of Arkansas and Missouri. The stories, which feature such varied players as a divorced couple, an assault victim, a conflicted bank robber, and an introspective high schooler, are "linked not only by their common location," notes Kirkus' reviewer, "but also by recurring players, which allows for unexpected, additional character development."

David Rapp is the senior Indie editor.

**ITHYANNA: LAST DAUGHTER OF ATLANTIS**

*Book 1: How the World Ended Millennia Ago*

Cook, Don Edward
FriesenPress (271 pp.)

This first installment of a religion-themed SF/fantasy saga focuses on the high-tech but intrigue-wracked island nation of Atlantis and how a brilliant woman trusts science to rescue humanity from doom.

A dedication to God up front indicates Canadian author Cook's antediluvian epic is sincerely meant as evangelical literature. But initially, readers encounter playfulness and semi-satire that fall almost within hailing distance of dogma-bashing material like James Morrow's *Towimg Jehovah* (1994). Supposedly drawing from fringe history experts and Creation science, Cook depicts life in fabled Atlantis circa the biblical deluge. Humanity is high-tech and spacegoing (though penned in by an alien embargo) but, thanks to Adam and Eve, fatally decadent, divided, and driven to self-destruction. Especially significant is a looming military conflict with Lemuria, a fierce "Women's Liberation" rogue state stopping at nothing for total control. Beautiful, psychic Atlantean science graduate Ithyanna foresees an upcoming apocalypse. Though tentatively a follower of Olympus-style deities, she puts her faith in rationalism and technology, plotting a starship escape of the planet’s best and brightest before it’s too late. Meanwhile, her adopted sister, an alcoholic "coarseneck" (redneck) with an affinity for "cargonaut" (country-and-western) music, repents and joins ex-technician Noah, a shunned disciple of the god Elohim. Noah, of course, is building a giant gopher-wood boat for his family and a menagerie of animals despite much public scorn and ridicule. God/Elohim—who appears as a talking lion like Aslan of C.S. Lewis’ *Narnia* tales—worries that Ithyanna’s scheme may spoil the whole flood thing. In this engrossing tale, treachery, arrogance, violence, nonbelief, and selfishness beset the eponymous hero’s plans and illuminate God’s true path. En route are enjoyable shoutouts to the Adam West *Batman* TV series, references to the movie flops *Star! and Doctor Doolittle*, and disguised versions of Kurt Waldheim, White nationalism, and Islam. If they aren’t too tempted to dig deeper for additional takedowns (was that supposed to be Oprah Winfrey? Madonna? Former President George W. Bush? Justin Trudeau?), readers will get a basically traditional exhortation urging redemption—complete with Gospel excerpts—attired in riots of rococo filigree and vivid anachronisms. This work certainly isn’t part of the Tim LaHaye/Jerry B. Jenkins school of Christian fantasy.

An engaging, offbeat, and Bible-inspired apocalyptic tale.
PLASTIC SOLDIERS
County, W.D.
Selt (253 pp.)
$11.99 paper | $2.99 e-book
May 7, 2020
979-8-6439-0317-8

In this novel, authorities hunt a shadowy figure operating a child sex-trafficking business in the United States.

Ten-year-old Danny Mindel is one of six young boys whom a man has recently abducted. Michael “Eddie” Pitts runs Pasta Lovers Palace on the dark web, a site for pedophiles who want more than pictures and videos. He’s amassed so much money that he’s planning to retire in another year or so. Eddie also has an M.O.: He kidnaps six children at a time in separate but geographically close regions. FBI Special Agent Trevor Doyle has been following this unknown child sex-trafficker, whom he’s dubbed “the Ghost.” After surmising that the Ghost is responsible for the missing boys, Doyle gets a break in the case. But acquiring information on his target means making a deal with an unsavory culprit looking to avoid punishment. Meanwhile, Danny and fellow abductees Mark Redmond, Tommy Wagner, Greg Carver, and Billy Saxton, some of whom are even younger than Danny, suffer at the hands of despicable adults. They cope as best they can and search for a way to escape. And they’re getting increasingly desperate, as encounters with pedophiles have a tendency to become violent—and sometimes lethal. County’s thriller is relentlessly grim. While the narrative thankfully doesn’t linger on abuse against the children, it deals with serious and disturbing topics.

A thoughtful and compelling account of the responsibilities that come with privilege.

THE ENCAMPMENT
Davenport, Stephen
West Margin Press (316 pp.)
Jun. 9, 2020
978-1-5132-6307-6

During a harsh winter, an Iraq War veteran with PTSD takes refuge in the woods surrounding a prestigious girls boarding school in this novel.

In Connecticut, 18-year-old Sylvia Bickham, who’s led a fairly sheltered existence, is due to graduate from the highly selective Miss Oliver’s School for Girls and take the next steps on a privileged but rather purposeless path. When she encounters Christopher Tripplett bathing naked in the river that runs through the school grounds, it comes as something of a shock to her; for him, it’s a moment of profound humiliation. He’s a former Marine sergeant with four tours in Iraq behind him. An incident involving the death of a young girl during his service has left him unable to cope with civilian life. He’s jobless and lives in a makeshift lean-to in the forest, but as the brutal Connecticut winter draws closer, his chances of survival are diminishing rapidly. For Sylvia, its unconscionable that someone is struggling to survive on the grounds of a wealthy school, so, aided by fellow student Elizabeth Cochrane, she starts providing Christopher with food, clothing, and money. When the weather begins to turn and Christopher’s shelter is vandalized and destroyed, it becomes clear that more drastic measures are needed. Two things are guaranteed to get you expelled from Miss Oliver’s: stealing and allowing men into your dormitory—and Sylvia and Elizabeth are soon guilty of both. In this third installment of Davenport’s Miss Oliver’s series, following No Ivory Tower, he presents readers with a slow-burning, gripping novel that will reward their patience. The dilemma that Sylvia and Elizabeth face involves making the subtle but important distinction between doing the correct thing and doing the right thing, and it’s one that plays out convincingly over the course of the story. The author also handles homeless veteran Christopher’s plight with sensitivity and insight. Davenport is an accomplished stylist with a keen ear for nuanced dialogue; he also has a knack for making serious political points with a light touch that makes them broadly accessible.

A serious subject receives understandably bleak but insightful treatment in this thriller.
Determined To Be Dad by Steve Disselhorst (Publish Your Purpose Press): “A writer recounts his journey to parenthood despite his initial fears that gay men could not have children....The memoir is perhaps not a particularly literary one, but it contains a great deal of information on the adoption process—valuable for would-be parents of all stripes—as well as a chronicle of how the social position of gay men has changed so much since Disselhorst’s generation came of age. A big-hearted account of identity and parenthood.”

Naked (in Italy) by M.E. Evans (Capybara Media): “Evans’ debut memoir charts her adventures in Italy, first as a graduate student and then as the fiancee of an Italian man with hard-to-please parents....Throughout the book, Evans effectively balances moments of humor and self-discovery, resulting in a read that’s appealingly candid and often funny. A remembrance that offers keen observations about cultural differences while celebrating the power of love.”

Have You Seen These Children? by Veronica Slaughter (She Writes Press): “A debut memoir that recounts the agonizing ordeal of a four-year-long parental abduction. Slaughter, a retired chiropractor, was 8 years old in 1959 when her father, Bob, kidnapped her and her three siblings....Slaughter writes with passion, gracefully offering the delicate details of her parents’ courtship and the erosion of her own relationship with her father as well as relating the fear and confusion that she and her siblings felt. Her narrative dexterity will hook readers immediately.”

My Adventure by William Millard (Archway Publishing): “A Texas attorney’s life rapidly changes when he learns that he may have Lou Gehrig’s disease....A lucid and controlled memoir that is written in a manner that allows readers to share Millard’s experience and rejoice in every sign of recovery. Insightful, inspirational writing in a sharply informative account.”

Myra Forsberg is an Indie editor.
the attention of the ruthless billionaire founder Peter O. Silver, "the Big Swinging Dick of the moment," who owns the cheekily named hedge fund POS Capital. Silver woos Giles away from his job with an intriguing offer: He wants Giles to go undercover, fly to San Francisco, and get close to Zyxview's founder, Egon Crump, who's notable for his unusual sartorial choices, including a fur vest, and who reveals himself to be attracted to the straight Giles. Cherry also becomes embroiled in the industrial-espionage melodrama and eventually becomes another of Peter's pawns. Giles' assignment is to extract details about Zyxview's financial holdings and its future economic stability, which he does, as Egon is surprisingly forthcoming. However, this information comes at a cost that gradually reveals itself as the highly readable story progresses.

In this gloriously sardonic book, both of the tech giants come across as caricatures, but Fellows describes them with a great amount of care. He seamlessly incorporates such larger-than-life personalities into a narrative that addresses very serious themes, including unbridled corporate corruption, vanity, hypocrisy, "the wheels of capitalism," and how rampant materialism in the modern age keeps humanity from moving forward in a meaningful way. Giles finds himself pivoting between trying to get the approval of his employer and keeping his sanity amid so much greed and criminality. Along the way, Fellows relentlessly satirizes tech companies and their extravagance, and his novel's timeliness and relevance are sure to be among the book's biggest selling points. He expertly employs his own experience as a former hedge fund manager to make the settings feel real even as his characters become embroiled in ever larger and more serious calamities. After a stampede during a product unveiling, for example, Giles notes, "Ten people were crushed to death. And the entire event dominated media coverage for days. It was pure Americana. Even Donald Trump was jealous, apparently." The descriptions and dialogue are consistently pithy and snarky throughout the novel, and Giles' narration is informative and snarky throughout the novel, and Giles' narration is informative about tech-company matters; the author gives him just the right amount of self-deprecation to make him a charming storyteller. Overall, this novel will be a riotous ride for readers.

Fast-paced and often hilarious fiction that may appeal most to members of the tech startup set.

**UNDOCUMENTED**
*My Journey to Princeton and Harvard and Life as a Heart Surgeon*
Fernandez, Harold
Self (296 pp.)
$14.95 paper | $4.19 e-book
Oct. 16, 2019
978-1-70014-754-7

A debut memoir detailing the remarkable life of a heart surgeon who came to the United States as an undocumented immigrant.

"I was living in the bubble of a dream that could explode at any minute," writes Fernandez of his early years in the United States. Precarity, as it turns out, was a feature of his life long before he became a heart surgeon. In 1969, Fernandez's father traveled from Colombia to New York City in search of employment, later followed by his wife. The author and his younger brother remained in Barrio Antioquia, a Medellín neighborhood marked by violence. After years of familial distance, the teenage Fernandez and his sibling risked a harrowing journey through the Bahamas, North Bimini, and the coast of Florida to Newark International Airport. The town of West New York, New Jersey where their parents lived, provided the setting for Fernandez's rags-to-riches experience in America. In succinct, efficient prose worthy of a pragmatic surgeon, the author details his search for cultural footing, his challenges with a new language, and his eventual commitment to achievement through education. At Memorial High School, he showed himself to be an excellent athlete, and he applied similarly rigorous discipline to his academic studies and pursuit of Eagle Scout recognition. In 1985, Fernandez entered Princeton University as a freshman, and he eloquently recounts in this book how he coped with impostor syndrome at an elite university. After graduation, he attended Harvard Medical School and undertook a grueling surgical internship at New York University Medical Center. The memoir's only notable weakness — its excessive valorization of a Horatio Alger-like work ethic — is offset by its transparency and skillful moments of poignancy. Over the course of the book, Fernandez recalls the luxury of a fresh apple, his close calls with immigration police, the death of a young friend in an apartment fire, how he helped his own family in another blaze, young love, and the agony of being separated from family members. He provokes emotion not so much through lyricism but through a frank invitation to witness his life's challenges.

A strikingly sincere rendering of one man's pursuit of the American dream.

**SURROUNDED BY OTHERS**
*And Yet So Alone: A Lawyer's Case Stories of Love, Loneliness, and Litigation*
Freiberg, J.W.
Philia Books (415 pp.)
$15.95 paper | $2.99 e-book
Apr. 30, 2020
978-0-9975899-4-8

People threatened with or suffering from loneliness turn to a lawyer for help in this insightful memoir of vexed relationships.

Freiberg, a former Boston University sociology professor and longtime attorney who represented social services agencies, recounts five cases he worked on that focus on interpersonal connections gone wrong. In a complex child custody case, a 6-year-old girl whose mother died suddenly faced separation from a man who'd cared for her from birth and the prospect of being shipped off to a grandmother she didn't know. In an off-kilter disbarment proceeding, the author defended a competent, energetic attorney accused of ethical impropriety for not pressuring clients to accept advantageous plea bargains; Freiberg came to believe that the lonely, isolated man had tried to prolong his clients' cases so he could maintain relationships with
**THE LIFE AND TIMES OF BOB CRATCHIT**
by Dixie Distler
“A pastiche novel dramatizing the life of the harried clerk from Charles Dickens’ beloved 1843 novella.”
A well-drawn exploration of the untold stories of *A Christmas Carol*.

**MARY’S SONG**
by Dixie Distler
“Distler offers a sequel to Dickens’ famous Christmas story.”
A welcoming, consistently interesting exploration of the world of *A Christmas Carol*.

**LAOZI: QUEST FOR THE ULTIMATE REALITY**
by Jingwei
“Jingwei offers a new translation and analysis of an ancient Chinese text.”
An accessible and informative presentation of the Tao Te Ching.

**ONCE IN A BLUE YEAR**
by Michael D. Durkota
“In this lyrical debut novel, the lives of two U.S. Navy men take dramatic turns after they’re cut from a submarine mission during the Gulf War.”
A bold debut filled with unforgettable moments and characters.

**WHAT NELL DREAMS**
by Anne Leigh Parrish
“Characters in this collection of short stories and a novella seek to validate their lives while ensnared in unhappy or fractured relationships.”
Relentlessly despondent, refreshing, and unforgettable tales from a skillful author.

**SEARCHING FOR FAMILY AND TRADITIONS AT THE FRENCH TABLE: BOOK TWO**
by Carole Bumpus
“This sequel offers French family stories—and recipes—from Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Normandy and Brittany on the Atlantic coast, the Loire Valley, and Auvergne.”
An engaging gastronomic presentation of French history and culture.
**KILLING TIME**
by D. P. Sparling

“A surreal thriller focuses on a stranger in a seaside town.”
Bloomday meets *The Twilight Zone*...

**WAVES END**
by C. W. Irwin

“A surreal thriller focuses on a stranger in a seaside town.”
A rousing tale that features an eerie wanderer.

**THE TIPPING POINT**
by Justin Roberts

“In Roberts’ dystopian novel, a diplomat in a North America of the far future explores a pariah continent, where descendants of the defunct U.S. concentrate their stern religious faith around firearms and death.”
Broad, cautionary anti-gun SF (sort of a Fahrenheit .451 Caliber); plays best to the already converted.

**KRIL**
by Mike Jeffords

“In this deep-space, multidimensional tale, the battle of the sexes devolves into actual warfare in a dystopian world.”
An inventive and enjoyable SF epic that offers a cosmic indictment of war.

**THAT’S NOT A THING**
by Jacqueline Friedland

“An open-hearted lawyer is forced to choose between her fiance and her dying ex in Friedland’s novel about love and forgiveness.”
A complex and compelling romance...

**WHERE EAGLES DANCE**
by Marian Sepulveda

“A white orphan girl finds refuge with a Native American tribe in 1850s California in this debut historical novel.”
An engrossing tale about a spunky heroine caught between two worlds in the Old West.
2020 Indie Fall Preview Guide

[ Sponsored ]

YOUR NAME IS A SONG
by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow
Illus. by Luisa Uribe
“A girl learns to appreciate her long name and the diverse names of others.”
A delightful celebration.

I MEANT TO DIVORCE MY WIFE, NOT MY DAUGHTER
by Zev Lewinson
A raw, gripping exposé of insular Jewish life, penned by a Talmudical scholar and publisher of children’s books, who suddenly finds himself the recipient of fraudulent protection orders and criminal court trials while experiencing the alienation of his daughter during divorce.

A RECKONING IN BROOKLYN
by Michael O’Keefe
Bushwick, Brooklyn in the 1970s is a cesspool of drugs, violence, and depravity. Butchie Buccigrosso and his partner are the only cops with the courage to take on the mob; they become a deadly nuisance trying to win back their streets.

A SYMPHONY OF RIVALS
by Roma Calatayud-Stocks
“This second installment of a trilogy focuses on a musician in pre-World War II Germany.”
A suspenseful bridge to the final volume of a historical fiction series.

BEYOND THE GATES OF ANI
by J.G. Knott
“A historical novel set in the 11th century chronicles the plight of Roman Catholic Armenians under siege by warring Turks.”
The principal selling point of the novel is its epochal authenticity—it is hard to imagine an academic treatise providing as full and vivid a picture of the time.

STOP BULLY STOP!
by Germaine Scalisi Lattier
Illus. by Alexandria Scalisi
“In this debut picture book, young schoolchildren learn that they can stand together against bullying.”
An educational, rhyming picture book with a simple message of unity.
THE CHATELAINE OF MONTAILLOU
by Susan Kaberry
“A debut novel set in 14th-century France follows the plight of a woman accused of heresy by the Roman Catholic Church.”
A meticulously researched and stirringly executed blend of historical fact and fiction.

KENTUCKY RAIDER
by George R. Karvel
“Karvel outlines a Confederate soldier’s service in the Civil War as part of the infamous unit known as Morgan’s Raiders.”
An impressively fresh look at an otherwise well-covered historical event.

DREAM OF THE DOG WITH NINE LIVES
by Edana Lir
“A memoir focuses on a woman’s almost eight-year relationship with a small dachshund.”
...charming and solid tale of human-canine bonding.

BLOOD FOR WATER
by Chad Wilkinson & Mario Cusumano
“In Wilkinson and debut author Cusumano’s thriller, an aspiring competitive fighter struggles to free himself from his family’s mob-tied business while also dodging a serial killer.”
A dark, tense tale befitting the seedy characters who populate it.

TALKING TOWARD TRUTH
by Anthony Jerome Rogers
“Whether readers are CEOs or parents, leadership can be learned through a model that sparks effective conversations, according to this debut manual.”
An insightful and practical leadership guide...

HANG SHAKESPEARE! BUT NOT DE VERE A TRUE STORY MYSTERY SOLVED
by Robert Boog
Ever wonder why people doubt that William Shakespeare was the "true" author of the poems, plays and sonnets? In this book, not only will you discover three reasons why to doubt, you will also learn why William Shakespeare, a young man from the provinces, a man without wealth, connections or a university education should be hung!
FALL SPOTLIGHT:
INDIE THRILLERS

By Myra Forsberg

**Blood on the Earth** by John Lavi (CreateSpace): “The head of a newly formed organized-crime unit searches for killers after a mob-related act of vengeance ignites a series of murders….The story moves at a steady clip thanks to shifting locales in various United States cities and brutal, concise confrontations that occasionally spin off into gunfights or close combat. A riveting but grim and unflinching tale of two assassins.”

**The Houdini Killer** by P. Moss (Squidhat Records): “In the late 1970s, Evie Eastway, a bartender and aspiring writer, is struggling in New York City until she survives an assault on 44th Street. During the ordeal, her attacker is accidentally shot dead with his own gun, which Evie keeps. This sets her on a path to fame as an anonymous vigilante killer….Moss shines when she focuses on the conflicts that a murderer faces when plans go awry, and the story as a whole comes together well at the end.”

**Fatal Longevity** by A.D. Pascal (Self): “An intelligence analyst looks into supposedly natural deaths around the world that have perplexing circumstances. David works for a covert intelligence organization. His latest assignment focuses on the mysterious death of Günther Fischer in Portofino, Italy….The cliffhanger ending will definitely whet readers’ appetites for the next volume. An engaging global tale featuring unexplained deaths, striking locales, and plenty of intrigue.”

**St. Petersburg White** by Gregory C. Randall (Windsor Hill Publishing): “The identities of two Russians tied to a deadly explosion in a small Midwestern town must be kept secret—even from the Russian authorities. In Randall’s tale, a string of power outages in Maise, Iowa, results in the local ethanol plant exploding. The blast kills 150 residents….Pistols, speeding cars, and vodka on the rocks make for fast-turning pages. Like matryoshka dolls, a many-layered, inviting treat.”
them. The author also dealt with a celebrated case of relationship fraud, negotiating contracts for Shi Pei-Pu—a male Chinese opera soprano who pretended to be a woman in order to maintain a decadeslong love affair with an ostensibly unwitting male French diplomat; the affair ended when she were arrested for espionage. (Shi’s life story later became the inspiration for the famous 1988 play *M. Butterfly*. In a bit of impromptu family therapy, Freiberg helped a lonely 10-year-old cancer patient convince his distracted parents that he needed more love from them; the attorney later advised the boy’s mother on how to rectify the fact that she robbed a bank decades before, which enmeshed him in negotiations with federal prosecutors and a Mafia don. And in a plangent domestic abuse case that demonstrates the danger of ties that bind too tightly, the author advised a baker and her stepson in their quest to get free of her violent husband.

Beneath an overlay of psychological analysis, Freiberg’s case studies unfold like short stories, complete with evocative characterizations (“my client was satisfied with living alone, working alone, and surviving on the thin emotional soup of his fancy”) and fraught scenes in which unwitting self-revelation flows from subtle observations of setting and action. For example, regarding Shi’s ill-advised operatic comeback attempt, he writes, “The delicate soprano tones he so searched to rekindle were no longer available….Three or four seconds passed before a belated and brief round of unconvincingly timid applause broke out. Shi Pei-Pu visibly quivered at being so out of place, so disconnected, so alone.” There’s a lot of lawyering here, with descriptions of gnarly strategizing, behind-the-scenes negotiations, and courtroom drama, as in the custody case: “I can’t lose my daddy,’ she replied. ‘I already lost my mommy….It would be like if you lost one eye, that would make you sad….But if you lost both eyes, that would make you blind.” At times, the narratives get bogged down in meandering dialogue, but the subjects’ own testimonies often carry extraordinary force. The result is a richly literary and psychological meditation on legal conflicts that illuminates the ways that people need and hurt one another.

A series of engrossing true-life legal procedurals that pack an emotional wallop.

**WRITING WITH YOUR EVER-PRESENT MUSE**

75 *Catalytic Reads, Wisdom Pockets, and Living Experiments*

*Friesen, Edith*

FriesenPress

Friesen offers a journey through the experiential side of writing, led by one’s inner source of inspiration, or “ever-present muse.”

There’s no shortage of books on the writing craft, but many of them focus on its technical aspects while failing to consider the undefinable spark that separates good writers from great ones. Friesen focuses on this spark, or “muse,” in a guide designed to help artists strip away the artifice, doubt, and distraction that may be impeding their writing. Using the analogy of a flower, she presents five petals, or stages, in the growth of a writer: “Opening to Wonder,” “Risking the Heart,” “Following the Energy,” “Freeing the Mind,” and “Expressing With Presence.” To enrich readers’ understanding of each stage, she splits them into 15 topics, such as “Re-enchanting the Familiar” and “Tailored Expression,” intended to deepen writers’ understanding of their muse. Throughout, the author effectively engages readers with reflection as well as writing practice. “Catalytic Reads” begins with an enticement to “Experience This” or envision an environment in which they are one with their craft; “Wisdom Pockets” contains more practical writing advice, and “Living Experiments” encourage readers to try different exercises to employ new lessons. Friesen’s approach can feel a bit esoteric at times, but it also provides tremendous practical insight, shedding new light on common writing challenges, such as distraction, revision, and finding one’s voice. She also encourages writers to confront barriers to their potential, such as self-delusion, and occasionally adds humor to her advice to move writing beyond fear to a more joyous artistic experience.

An original and thoughtful guide for writers.
strangers. The danger that lurks wherever they go adds conflict and suspense to a narrative that is generally more investigative in nature. The novel toggles between the present day and Matthias' time in London, and Hathaway is strongest in the work's depiction of the styles, manners, and characters of the earlier period. But an enjoyable mystery that combines personal drama with archaeological research is compromised by the author's increasingly heavy coating of religious proselytizing as the story moves toward its conclusion, a device apt to lead some readers to feel manipulated. That said, Hathaway delivers an engaging adventure with a few captivating twists, amiable characters, and an intriguing historical discovery, all conveyed via able prose.

An entertaining, well-paced beach read enhanced by an atmospheric visit to 1920s London.

TAKEN BY WITCHES
Iuppa, Nick
Iuppa Creative Group (382 pp.)
Oct. 1, 2015
978-0-9863241-4-7

This novel offers a supernatural romp through the 1960s informed by Grimm's Fairy Tales.

The meat of this book is an inventive story about Niko Madonie and his grandmother, nicknamed Babcia. Niko realizes his grandmother is a witch from a very young age, even before he sees her murder a neighborhood dog. He’s terrified of her, but she’s also protective of him. A bit too protective, especially after she dies and returns to haunt him and his companions, from high school to college and into his working life. She especially hates Niko’s eventual wife, Holly Blue, a classically beautiful woman Babcia believes is leading her grandson on. Much to the chagrin of his veteran father, who dreamed of his son’s writing a serious book with him based on his war experiences, Niko studies art, falls into communal love with a group of friends, and moves to Hollywood to work on cartoons. All the while, Babcia shadows Niko, communicating her desire to kill Holly. This is further complicated by his college friends Nancy Swallow and Billy Bright, who try to seduce the young couple, and then in the third act by Marla Morrison, Niko’s writing partner, who openly practices witchcraft. Along the way, Iuppa tosses in a serial killer to stalk Holly. The story is a lot of fun, mixing a ’60s period vibe with elements of Grimm’s Fairy Tales, even name-checking that book and adding stories to it. Sometimes the tale feels like a straight drama, but Babcia and her disciples are never gone for long. Where the author stumbles is in his attempt to make this a frame story, with interludes showing a warlock telling Niko and Babcia’s tale to a shopkeeper and his daughter in the Carpathian Mountains. Iuppa presumably wants to strengthen the novel’s connection to European fairy tales and provide atmosphere. But the device adds nothing to the main narrative and delays the start of this enjoyable story starring Niko.

A worthy tale for witchcraft fans despite a distracting element.

THE PRINCESS AND THE PEACOCK
Johnson, C.S.
Self (106 pp.)
May 15, 2020
978-1-948464-74-1
978-1-948464-23-9 paper

In Johnson’s fantasy novella, a man hopes to win the heart of a princess who once gave him hope after a tragedy.

On the isle of Maluhia, Kaipo climbs the Forbidden Mountain. A fall from such a great height could easily kill him, but he makes the climbs due to his love for Princess Mele, whose father, King Ahanu, wants her to marry. Kaipo has terrible burns on his left side and back, which he received after he tried to save his mother from intentional self-immolation. He failed, but while he was convalescing, he received a visit from the princess, whose kindness gave him a reason “to move forward” in life. Climbing with him is his adoptive brother, Rahj, whom Kaipo’s father rescued from slavery. At the top of the mountain, they hope to meet the Fae Queen, Jaya, who grants wishes to those who survive the trek. Kaipo plans to ask for beauty—but specifically, the erasure of his scars—because he believes that Mele “deserves to have a husband as beautiful as she is.” In her garden paradise, Jaya warns the pair that “there is a great difference between beauty that comes from magic and the beauty that is shaped inside the heart”—and she then turns Kaipo into a peacock. At the bottom of the mountain, he and Rahj awake to face Pravin the Great Protector, who might feed Kaipo to his soldiers if the peacock isn’t careful. Johnson’s brief fantasy offers readers a fine lesson in narrative economy, as she brings nothing onstage that doesn’t serve the novella’s romance plot. It turns out, for example, that Pravin also wants to wed Mele, and he assumes that their wedding will be swift and uncontested. Fans of satirical fantasy classics, such as William Goldman’s The Princess Bride (1973), will enjoy watching the loutish Pravin lose ground to Kaipo despite the fact that the latter is unable to speak a word. Johnson gracefully intertwines Rahj’s tale with his brother’s, as well. The joyous finale is satisfying, but readers will likely crave more of Johnson’s world.

A lush, poetic tale that will charm readers.

AUTOMAT
Kane, Stephanie
Cold Hard Press (157 pp.)

Lily Sparks is back in this latest mystery installment, tracking down a killer inspired by Edward Hopper’s paintings.

Ex-attorney Lily is the conservator of paintings at the Denver Art Museum, which is gearing up for a major Hopper exhibit. To gin up excitement before the
opening, the museum staff plans a series of tableaux vivants of selected paintings at venues around the city, but with a twist: The static scenes with actors will each transform into a short playlet in the spirit of the painting. The first, “Automat,” is a great success—until Lily finds the actor backstage with her throat cut. Who did it? And should the three remaining tableaux still go on? Lily wants to cancel them but she’s overruled, which means that each one will be an invitation for the murderer to strike again. As Lily tries to narrow down the possible suspects, she also tries to get her erstwhile boyfriend, FBI agent Paul Reilly, to come back from Denver to Washington, D.C.—and hopefully, back into her life. Soon, another actor is killed, and one of Lily’s friends gets pushed in front of a car. For the final tableau, Lily makes herself the bait, leading to a tense climax and a conclusion that’s a bit far-fetched but certainly apt.

Kane knows how to build suspense, and she’s adept at scattering red herrings throughout the narrative. This new outing is very similar to her previous book, A Perfect Eye (2019), in some ways; it not only features the same cast of characters, but also portrays a sick villain who’s drawn to the works of a particular painter, and it reuses the shtick of occasionally providing the killer’s interior monologues. That said, the latter device is still visceral, with a satisfying, open-ended denouement.

An often mysterious but thoroughly horrifying and macabre tale.

THICKER THAN THIEVES
King, Michael P
Blurred Lines Press (217 pp.)
May 14, 2020
978-1-952711-00-8

This eighth volume of the Travelers series sees the con artist couple attempting to score diamonds while avoiding a showdown between White nationalists and the FBI.

Danny and Genie Briggs are enjoying a retreat in the Florida Keys; at least, those are the grifters’ current names as they prepare a fresh heist. Through a connection, they learn that the Orange Hill Cartel ships $10 million in diamonds twice a year, smuggling them out of Mumbai via stateside Hashemi Wholesale Carpets & Arts. The second-generation Indian American Hashemi siblings—married Zander and recently widowed Nadia—only dabble in crime, but they’re the perfect targets for the Travelers’ unique brand of subterfuge and seduction. Meanwhile, in Summerville, Iowa, White nationalists of the Fatherland Volk ready the deadly next step in their plot to eliminate foreign elements from the United States. Specifically, members Bruce MacBurn, Ray Johnstone, and Joe Lang plan to acquire uranium and bomb several buildings, including the Denver Mint and Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. Joe, however, is actually a mole for the FBI’s Counterterrorism Task Force. As he allows the White nationalists to proceed with their plan—and potentially set themselves up for arrest on more severe charges—the Hashemis get tangled up in the scheme and realize they can no longer afford to be amateurs in the smuggling game.

King’s con has just enough complexity to allow unexpected chaos to occur.

THICKER THAN THIEVES

WISTWOOD
Kieran, Jonathan
Brightbourne Media (356 pp.)
$15.95 paper | $2.99 e-book
Apr. 10, 2020
978-0-9885681-0-5

An obscure village becomes the site of disconcerting, otherworldly incidents in this supernatural novel.

A lifelong Californian, Nebraska “Brask” Adams has yearned for a “real small-town experience.” Now that he has a book deal with a publisher as well as an advance, he can escape his dour life, including his devoutly religious, condescending older sister. He opts for an affordable cabin rental in the village of Wistwood, somewhere near Big Sur. At the same time, schoolteacher Schuyler Brody, apparently unhappy with her “insufferable” students, is eyeing an antiques shop there. But Shep Daltry has darker motivations. He’s a White cop under media scrutiny for savagely beating a woman of color and mother of five. Though his department clears him of any charges, he heads to Wistwood for a new job, which involves sinster “instructions.” It appears there are two enigmatic individuals with a plan that seems initially vague awaiting these people’s arrivals. Brask is hardly settled in Wistwood when he senses something off—at first, just a store but soon, the entire village. Yet even if he can convince fellow villagers, will anyone be able to leave? Parts of Kieran’s chilling story are deliberately hazy, with unknown characters discussing cryptic objectives. But detailed backstories ground the narrative, pitting villagers such as former British rock star Lleyton Grayle against something unearthly. Crisp prose gives largely abstract occurrences a visual component: “When she laughed, brief and mocking, the sounds sprang as arrowheads, razor-sharp and dipped in poison from her lips.” Later chapters offer a few revelations, although the author provides enough clues that most readers will have an idea as to what’s unfolding. The final act is disturbing and decidedly more visceral, with a satisfying, open-ended denouement.

An often mysterious but thoroughly horrifying and macabre tale.
finale, memorable cast, and emotional weight may have readers hoping for a direct sequel. That said, the author rarely offers readers what they expect.

King’s latest novel proves he still adores the Travelers, and so will longtime fans.

THE ROAD TO BEAVER PARK
Painting, Perception, and Pilgrimage
Kirk, Janice E.
Illus. by the author
Wipf and Stock (176 pp.)
$40.00 | $22 paper | $9.99 e-book
Apr. 13, 2016
978-1-4982-2971-5
978-1-4982-2969-2 paper

An artist recounts a yearlong sabbatical spent exploring the outdoors in this memoir.

In the summer of 1976, Kirk and her husband, Don, took their two children out of school, rented their house, packed a trailer and camper truck, and set off for the American West. “Our odyssey will not be governed by clocks or calendars,” the author writes of their first few days away from the normal pressures of life, “just seasons and cycles.” While Don saw the trip as a chance to continue his graduate work in biology, Kirk viewed it as an opportunity to paint and sketch en plein-air. Throughout the California coast and the Great Basin of Nevada, the author began to refine her technique by re-creating the grandeur of national parks. She includes her sketches to show how she slowly became aware of the same essential elements at each new location: mass, light, and space. As the family made its way across Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico, Kirk continued to progress in surprising ways, both artistically and personally. With each natural wonder, the family members drew closer to one another and to a spiritual revelation. “I performed no rituals, chanted no chants, did no deeds to attract the attention of a deity. Even so, the connection happened,” the author writes after seeing part of the Milky Way. Unlike a traditional memoir, much of the family’s life, both before and after the sabbatical, is left unaddressed in these pages. While Kirk cleverly includes her husband’s and her daughter Amy’s perspectives with snippets from their journals, their lives remain at a distance despite the intimacy of their writings. But as a transcendent reflection on nature and artistic expression, Kirk’s prose offers some truly wonderful passages. It is hard not to rejoice with her as she marvels at the Rocky Mountains, begging to be painted: “The sky, the sky!” she exclaims. “What blue is that?”

A meditation on artistic technique and how nature connects people with the divine.

STAYING IN THE GAME
The Playbook for Beating Workplace Sexual Harassment
Lawrence, Adrienne
TarcherPerigee (304 pp.)
$26.00 | $13.99 e-book | May 12, 2020
978-0-593-08411-3

A debut guide deals with workplace sexual harassment.

In this self-help book, Lawrence—a lawyer-turned—sports journalist who sued ESPN, charging that she suffered harassment while working there—addresses a predominantly young and female audience. She explains what sexual harassment is, how to combat it, and how to respond to it. The manual dissects the different forms of harassment may take, the people who enable and perpetuate it, and the possible outcomes for women who challenge it both privately and publicly. With references to some of the well-known harassment cases of the last few years as well as situations that have been less widely publicized, the volume presents a comprehensive picture of the problem in professional settings. In addition to the practical and professional impacts of harassment, the book also explores the psychological effects, offering suggestions for managing and getting help if necessary. The author also touches on intersectionality and power dynamics as factors in harassment and the workplace environment. Although men’s harassment of women is the guide’s primary focus, men’s victimization is discussed as well; the book features cases of women committing and perpetuating harassment. Readers will either find Lawrence’s casual style of writing breezy and conversational or overly slangy and millennial-pandering (perpetrators are referred to throughout as “harassholes”; phrases like “Chloe from college doesn’t have it all together despite how gorge she looks on the Gram” pepper the text). But even those who prefer a different narrative voice will find it easy to follow the volume’s ample information, with end-of-chapter summaries and callout boxes highlighting key points. The manual is realistic in its approach, examining the many levels of problematic, inappropriate, and dangerous behavior as well as the consequences victims may face if they complain to superiors or pursue litigation. For those who are new to the workplace, the book is a useful look at a common hazard that delivers pragmatic advice and effective solutions without sensationalism or fearmongering.

A highly readable and informative introduction to managing workplace harassment.
Matthews’ writing is uniformly excellent, presenting the inner world of a young hero.

**BRADLEY’S DRAGONS**

Matthews, Patrick  
Second Story Up (300 pp.)  
978-1-73307-774-3

A boy must discover his unusual heritage to save himself and his family in this middle-grade novel.

When he was 9 years old, Bradley Nash was threatened by a strange man whom his father called a “hunter.” Bradley escaped, but now—three years later—he has no memory of these events. Nearly 12, he lives in a Florida trailer park with his family. It’s been a quiet life—until just before his birthday, when Bradley gets an unexpected present from his parents: a handwritten book titled Mastering the Gallu Draig. The illustrations depict dragons, and the text includes mysterious aphorisms like “The most important part of your journey is choosing your direction” and “What you need is always more powerful than what you want.” Meanwhile, the hunter is again targeting Bradley and others, this time with some dangerous allies. With the book comes an astonishing family secret that both explains why the hunter is after him and saves dragons, and the text includes mysterious aphorisms like “The most important part of your journey is choosing your direction” and “What you need is always more powerful than what you want.”

An intriguingly exciting hero’s journey that’s also beautifully thoughtful and humane.

**I’LL BE HERE FOR YOU**

Diary of a Town  
McKean, Robert  
Livingston Press (222 pp.)  
Sep. 10, 2020

In this linked short story collection, the inhabitants of a Pennsylvania steel town grapple with aging and the shifting rhythms of their community.

Ganaego is a typical mill town in Western Pennsylvania, where the steel jobs have disappeared and taken much of the rest of the local economy with them: “The closure of the steel plant had, to be sure, clobbered all of Ganaego—one more casualty in the hollowing out of America’s industrial heartland.” Even so, American lives roll on, much in the way that they always have. Maddy Schoolcraft, a divorced community college administrator and a woman whom nobody takes seriously, is convinced she is responsible for the car accident that killed one of her son’s high school classmates. As she copes with her guilt, she must also assist her aging, philosophical father, who is going blind. The obese and aging Max Fischman operates a jewelry and appliance shop in Ganaego’s failing commercial district. When his window is smashed in the middle of the night and his inventory stolen, the police chastise him for his broken security system, but Max already has an idea who might have committed the crime. Pleasance Stubbs is a schoolteacher in her mid-50s resisting her doctor’s orders to retire or face crippling damage to her hips while dealing with her long-furloughed husband’s insistence that they pay for the suit of a recently deceased millworker. The 12 stories span the period from 1971 to 2015, and characters from one tale will often pop up as minor players in another. As a cycle, they offer a series of windows into the small, domestic lives of the town’s inhabitants as things change—or don’t—in the fortunes of Ganaego.

McKean’s prose is measured yet probing, revealing the hidden theatricality of even the collection’s minor characters. Here, Maddy describes the movements of her father’s eye doctor: “Barking out his conclusions in acronyms to an assistant who typed his comments into a computer, the doctor would strap on a helmet with a light attached—much like, Maddy would think, what a spelunker might don before descending into a cave—and gaze through a scope into his patients’ eyes.” A melancholic specter haunts the collection, and yet the author largely resists the urge to dwell in nostalgia or sentimentality for the town’s bustling past. Instead, a quiet fatalism imbues each of these tales, in which the inevitable march from youth to old age and death is mirrored in the plights of each of his protagonists. The episodes McKean chronicles are mundane, and yet in them, he discovers the perennial American drama of hopefulness giving way slowly—and then all at once—to disappointment. Stand-out pieces include “Dance of the Little Swans,” about a woman with a failing dance studio; and “Death in the 5 and 10,” about a librarian who learns of the tragic death of a child. But nearly every story will succeed at striking something in readers’ hearts.

A masterful assemblage of tales that illuminate life in a flagging American town.

**THE CORE VALUE EQUATION**

Mirshahzadeh, Darius  
Lioncrest Publishing (205 pp.)  
978-1-5445-0670-8

A CEO examines the importance of organizational core values.

This book tackles a topic that arguably addresses the most vital issue facing CEOs: how to inculcate their organizations with meaningful core values. In a firsthand account, Mirshahzadeh, a CEO who started several successful, high-growth companies, exhibits considerable mea
culpa at the outset of his journey, asserting in the introduction: “I hate this company. I can’t believe I created this.” This sobering admission in 2007 led the author to pursue the art and science of creating and implementing worthwhile corporate core values. The book is organized in two parts, the first of which tears down mistaken notions about core values in order to build them up again in Part 2. In Part 1, Mirshahzadeh explores his own failure to develop appropriate core values for his company, his recognition that these values consist of critical elements, and his realization that they “must be authentic from top to bottom in the organization.” He introduces an equation that anchors the remainder of the volume: “CORE VALUES = DECISIONS = ACTIONS = RESULTS.” He also puts forth an intriguing notion—that if the equation is properly followed, core values effectively function as “the most powerful invisible manager in the world.” Part 2 is a comprehensive manual for how to build, refine, and fully implement core values in a company. The author first painstakingly dissects the steps involved in designing core values, citing examples from his own experience. He then discusses “The Art of the Rollout,” a remarkably thorough step-by-step plan for introducing core values to an organization. Next is a refreshingly creative chapter concerning how to make core values “sticky,” in which he reveals, through text and numerous uncredited black-and-white photographs, exactly how these values were brought to life in one of his companies. Finally, Mirshahzadeh explains in detail how to measure and assess results. There is much of value here at a level of detail necessary to do justice to the subject, even if the specifics may seem overwhelming to some. Visionary CEOs will surely embrace the author’s message and take it to heart.

Extensive, engaging, and highly actionable business advice.

**VIRTUE**

_Moot, John_

Roads End Books (256 pp.)

$11.99 paper | $2.99 e-book

Aug. 4, 2020

978-1-73458-002-0

A fractured family seeks a way out of a series of crises in this debut novel. Tom Holder is a tenured professor of philosophy employed by Barnes College in Maine. He likes teaching but not writing and churns out “just enough pedagogical crap to maintain tenure.” He has recently completed the first draft of a book written with the intention of “landing Trump with a sharp-edged pen” and pissing off “people in high places.” The latter objective is achieved immediately, as the work’s contents land Tom in the crosshairs of the “loathsome” college president, Amos Whitely. Meanwhile, Tom’s wife, Hannah, is discontent with being a stay-at-home mom. Before Tom received his tenure, she was the main breadwinner, working in a bank in Boston in a management training program. Her prospects of becoming a professional were derailed with the move to Maine, where she grew resentful of Tom’s success. Their children, Madison, 14, and Dillon, 15, have their own problems. Madison is the target of a homophobic slur in high school. Meanwhile, sophomore Dillon is brought home by a police officer after being caught drinking. The status quo of the family is further disrupted when Hannah decides to take the LSAT with the hope of returning to Boston and attending law school. Tom also learns that his estranged father, whom he has not seen in over 20 years, has been diagnosed with cancer. As pressures build, Tom and Hannah find their marriage under considerable strain.

The story is poignantly recounted in intimate alternate chapters from the perspectives of Tom and Hannah. Moot writes with a succinct eloquence, creating a cast of psychologically plausible characters. For instance, when Hannah learns that Madison has been called a “dyke” by a boy at school, the intensity of her shifting emotions is palpable: “Digest, process. Calm, thoughtful mother. No, fuck that. Rage. Protect your daughter. ‘I’m calling his mother.’ ” The chapters written from Tom’s point of view are sufficiently distinct in tenor to convince readers that the narrative is being delivered by a different person. Tom is contrastingly self-involved and self-pitying: “I rolled out of bed, fed Bart and let him out. A man’s best friend. A man’s only friend. I put on a pot of coffee and showered while it brewed.” Moments such as these capture an everyday routine with which most readers will be familiar, and the difficulties faced by the Holder family are easy to relate to. The reasons behind Tom’s becoming estranged from his father add an extra element of intrigue to an already strong plot, and Moot’s examination of family secrets and teenage rebellion proves thought-provoking. On rare occasions, Tom’s narrative feels stiff and contrived, as though it has been lifted from an academic study. But this may be an intentional reflection of his professional diction: “Religion supplies answers for some. It soothes our existential anxiety by reassuring us that there is a higher power with a larger plan.” This does not detract from a carefully conceived and sharply written novel with characters that are impossible not to root for.

A compelling family tale with convincing, psychologically perceptive writing.

**ZOMBIES, FRAT BOYS, MONSTER FLASH MOBS & Other Terrifying Things I Saw at the Gates of Hell Cotillion**

_Neill, Ted_

Illus. by Broncel, Agata

Self (277 pp.)


Apr. 17, 2020

979-8-63-810554-9

A mixed-race orphan struggles to find his place in the world as a supernatural apocalypse looms in this YA novel. Teenage Liam Reilly has been looking out for himself for a long time. After his mother died, his father disappeared into his workas a scientist—and then he just disappeared altogether.
Now Liam is a ward of the university where his father worked and tries not to make waves; he patters around in his father’s old lab, audits college classes, and attempts to reconstruct his father’s final experiment, which may have caused his disappearance. Yet Liam’s solitary, structured existence is upended when he makes friends with several smart college students and encounters a demon. As it turns out, the demon, Gerald, has been sent to help Liam defeat an invasion of other demons who intend to take over the planet. Liam and his friends must stop a group of rich, White frat boys and sorority girls from fully opening a portal to hell. Neill juggles a lot of different elements in this book, as the main character and his friends must face down not only manticores and other creatures, but also racism and xenophobia. The story jumps from the adventures on the college campus to a secondary plot in a detention center, which initially feels extraneous. The center is full of Latin American children in cages who’ve been separated from their families, who were only looking for better lives in America; they’re guarded by women who can shoot lightning from their hands and a demigod disguised as a corrections officer. Overall, Neill is at his best when he confronts racism head-on, and amid all the fantasy trappings, his novel does provide effective commentary on modern social and political issues.

A timely fantasy tale of real and imaginary monsters in this YA series entry.

**GATHERING YEARS**
*A Woman’s Journey Through Troubled Times*
Nicholson, Robert
Sunacumen Press (300 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Apr. 13, 2020
978-1-73456-430-3

In the wake of the Civil War, a widow contemplates the remainder of her days in this historical novel.

In 1866, the United States was just on the other side of the Civil War, still within its hot vortex. Ellen Reed finds herself beginning a new phase of life—her husband, John, fought and died in the war, leaving her to start over but still feeling “not completely ready.” She remains a teacher of art history and drawing—her meditative ruminations on art reveal her sensitive, pensive soul: “Art thus acts by calling our attention to essential things, things that we would probably not notice if we were to encounter them in the ordinary run of life.” The war brought her “charmed life to an end,” and she struggles to accept a new political environment darkly marked by rampant corruption and unashamed duplicity; a defeated world that sorely lacks the “fundamental optimism” of an earlier time. But her life of “quiet purposefulness” is waylaid by a new development—she meets Matthew Carey, a “handsome and gracious man” with whom her husband served during the war, and their “growing friendship” starts to look like a courtship. Nicholson intelligently captures the political and social upheavals of the time: the aching pains of change during Reconstruction, a period that in some ways is an even more shameful one than the war that preceded it. His research is impressively rigorous—the book concludes with a considerable bibliography. The entire novel is a collection of diary entries. The protagonist claims her “literary style is rather plain,” but it’s closer to the truth to say that it’s elegantly straightforward, poetically unembellished but still delightfully refined. Unfortunately, the story’s digressions into the quotidian aspects of life can be excessive. Nonetheless, this book is an emotionally poignant work.

A moving and thoughtful peek into one of the nation’s most troubling eras.

**THE MILLION DOLLAR ORGANIZER**
*365 Tips for Professional Union Organizers*
Oedy, Bob
eBookIt.com (224 pp.)
978-1-4566-3330-1

A veteran union organizer offers pointers for those who are new to organizing and activism.

In this book of career advice, Oedy, the author of *Bigger Labor* (2008), shares stories from his decades of work as an organizer. The 365 pieces of advice here range from brief reminders to return phone calls promptly and learn the names of contacts to longer discussions of how to identify allies to one’s cause, how to oversee certification processes, and how to be a strong public speaker—all illustrated with specific examples from Oedy’s career. Much of the book covers topics that are particularly relevant to trade-union organizing, although portions will be applicable to readers in other kinds of activist and organizing roles (“Do you know your Collective Bargaining Agreement inside-and-out?”), but other portions contain information that will be of use to anyone in the workforce, such as “Set Big Goals for Yourself.” Oedy takes deep dives into some topics, as in a list of 101 reasons why people join labor unions, which covers obvious and less obvious motivations. At other points, the book’s approach is offbeat but clearly drawn from experience, as when the author advises readers to avoid keeping golf clubs in their cars (“eventually someone is going to assume this is how you spend your days when you should be working”). Oedy’s conversational tone makes the book an enjoyable read, and readers will feel as if they’re listening in on a veteran teaching a newbie the tricks of the trade. Indeed, readers who have no knowledge of organizing will have no trouble following the text, as the author follows his own advice and avoids using acronyms and jargon.

A solid book of union-organizing advice that will be useful to a wide range of readers.
Emily's friends Anthony and Sara are visiting her and her pet chameleon, Chloe. When Sara suggests a game of hide-and-seek, all starts off well, and, after some searching, Emily finds her two friends. But when it's Emily's turn to hide, her wheelchair gives her away. It's too tall to hide behind the bed; it sticks out of her play tent. Emily's miserable, but her friends encourage her to give the game another try. Inspired by Chloe's ability to blend in, Emily decides to disguise herself rather than hide—and soon the game morphs into a camouflage costume party. O'Sullivan makes the concept of accessibility—in this case, how Emily's wheelchair makes hiding more difficult—simple and easy for young readers to understand. The author shows Emily's point of view, especially as her friends protest that the game is “so much fun” when she is clearly upset. Emily's creative response to her situation may inspire young readers to be empathetic friends who look for ways to be inclusive. Though the uncredited cartoon illustrations have minimal depth, they show a diverse group: Sara is blond and pale-skinned with glasses; Anthony is brown-skinned with curly dark hair; and Emily has light brown skin. Emily's wheelchair is especially detailed.

A deft and subtle introduction to the idea of including people of all abilities.

SHALLCROSS Animal Slippers
Porter, Charles
Self (260 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Jul. 9, 2020
978-0-9894356-4-3

A man who hears voices joins a colorful alliance of South Florida eco-warriors. Shallcross: The Blindspot Cathedral (2014) and Flame Vine (2017), the first two books in this fictional autobiographical series, tells the story of Aubrey Shallcross, a man who sees and hears things others don’t—most notably, slippers: “Homunculus forms, three to four inches tall, from the world of mental cases and mystics.” Aubrey's chief slipper is Triple Sitter, or Trip, his guardian angel. Trip, Porter, and Aubrey constitute the trinity that narrates this third installment. Aubrey, 50, has nicely recovered from being shot in the head two years ago by his common-law wife Christaine's ex-husband. Nowadays, Aubrey focuses on the sport of dressage, enjoys family life, takes regular camping trips, and tells bedtime stories to Drayton, his 5-year-old son. When crooked property developer AM Sermon threatens to destroy 1,500 acres of wetlands, Aubrey wants to stop the disaster but doesn't have much hope. Still, he vows to try when asked by Osceola and Captain Nemo, slippers who protect two alligators called the Dragon and Two-Toed Tom. Also working to prevent the development is Freddie Cowkeeper Tommie, a mixed-race Spanish Seminole who carries on a battle against invasive species in Florida and sometimes rides the gators, one foot on each like a charioteer, while meting out ecological justice. Eventually, others join the struggle, including carnival performers Speedy Tanks and Roberta, the Woman With No Legs. An alliance of people, slippers, and animals comes together to shake Sermon's conscience and preserve the wilderness, meanwhile revealing a long-standing mystery—the true identity of the Tin Snip killer, who murdered Christaine's mother.

As in the previous books, Porter employs amazedly inventive, multivalent wordplay that taps into buried meanings. Sometimes these “private cryptonyms” can be puzzling, though once explained, they seem just right. For example, to call something mansion, Aubrey explains to Drayton, means (by extension from big house) “anything that is a big deal or gets a lot of attention.” A poetic economy characterizes this wonderfully original argot, as when an asylum inmate says everyone “told stethoscope lies, and he could hear their hearts beating children.” “Beating” does double duty here and makes the stethoscope image perfectly understandable: hidden untruths that need special equipment to be detected. This third volume is more accessible than the first two and often humorous, suggesting that Aubrey has settled more comfortably into his life. Porter's books are always captivating, but this tale gains maturity and depth from the characters' heartfelt concern for animals and ecology, which they put into rousing action. The work's presentation of the slippers' points of view is so compelling that readers may agree when Trip insists that “this is not imagination. It is a reality of a rare and mostly unknown kind.” The root meaning of schizophrenic is “split”—yet Aubrey seems not divided but multiplied.

An unforgettable tale with rich and moving connections, poetic storytelling, and an inimitable style.

THE COWBOY & THE CHEERLEADER
Redd, Mary Allen
Cascade Books (420 pp.)
$15.00 paper | Jul. 21, 2020
978-0-9636548-7-8

A tale of romance in which opposites attract, decades intervene, and emotions rekindle.

In 1957 at Fern High School in Provo, Utah, Elaine Bybee is a cheerleader for the school's lackluster football team. Even as a teen, she's independent-minded when it comes to romance: “Elaine would never go with just one person. Once you settle down, that's it.” Even decades later in the story she says, “It’s silly believing there is only one person for you.” Readers soon meet Elaine's fellow cheerleader Mona Lynn Moss and her too-perfect boyfriend, Phil Smith, as well as Andy Bond, a good-natured rancher's son from the southern part of the state who
plays trombone in the school's band. “He had good teeth,” Elaine notices, when she first meets Andy. “They looked naturally straight, not the type lined up with braces.” Andy later describes himself as coming from a family of “congenital optimists,” and soon he and Elaine are spending time together and growing closer. But despite their growing intimacy, time and circumstance pull them apart; Andy later settles down on his ranch with a cowgirl wife, and Elaine moves to New York City, where she tries hard to shed her small-town ways (“Boy, had she ever changed,” notes the third-person narration at one point). Decades pass, and unlike many novelists, Redd handles the passage of large stretches of time with smooth confidence. Andy gets divorced, Elaine’s longtime relationship with a man named Michael Shaughnessy dwindles to nothing, and in a series of events that feel only slightly contrived, Redd brings her two soul mates back together again. Over the course of the novel, Redd’s narrative voice is often disarmingly evocative: “Didn’t wobble at all,” she describes a football in flight, “a fine thing to see, that pointed ball flowing through the night, shaped to fit in hands, or to be hugged to a chest.” She also effectively shows how her female characters make compromises over time, which is perhaps the novel’s strongest element.

A vivid and mature novel about old friends and second chances.

**THE WITCHES OF WILLOW COVE**
Roberts, Josh
Owl Hollow Press (310 pp.)
$12.95 paper | $4.99 e-book
May 26, 2020
978-1-945654-49-7

Award-winning travel writer Roberts spins an engrossing tale of magic, mystery, and friendship in his debut middle-grade novel.

In the quaint Massachusetts town of Willow Cove, 13-year-old Abby Shepherd and her best friend, Robby O’Reilly, discover that she’s a witch when Amethyst Jones, another young witch, reveals the news. A mysterious and powerful magic user named Miss Winters has arrived in town, embroiling the unsuspecting teens in a web of intrigue that stretches all the way back to the Salem witch trials. As Abby meets other young witches and learns how to harness her magic under the tutelage of Miss Winters, Robby is thrust into a missing person case and starts a romance with the new girl at school. Abby and Robby, who used to be inseparable, find themselves increasingly at odds as secrets and resentments come between them. But what they don’t know is that the mysteries of Willow Cove go far deeper than they ever imagined and that no one is exactly what they seem. Roberts perfectly balances small-town drama, preteen hijinks, and paranormal thriller action in an engaging novel with a vibrant cast of characters. The strength of Abby and Robby’s platonic relationship is a key element of the story, and the witches of Abby’s coven are each dynamic and unique in their own ways. The setting of Willow Cove is also commendably well developed, offering plenty of quirkiness and local color. It convincingly feels like a living entity with a vast history—one that Abby and her friends only begin to uncover in this book; more revelations may follow in a planned sequel, *The Curse of Willow Cove.*

A delightfully spooky page-turner for middle-grade readers.

**THIS IS BIG: HOW THE BIG TEN SET THE STANDARD IN COLLEGE SPORTS**
Sherman, Ed
Big Ten Conference (352 pp.)

A history of the Big Ten athletic conference of Midwestern schools.

The Big Ten, the subject of Sherman's lavishly illustrated volume, is an intramural sports conference that includes the universities of Iowa, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Minnesota, Nebraska and Maryland; Penn State, Ohio State, and Michigan State; and Purdue, Northwestern, and Rutgers University. Since its founding in 1896, it’s provided entertainment to generations of fans. In words and plentiful photos, the author—who also wrote *Babe Ruth’s Big Shot: The Myth and Mystery of Baseball’s Greatest Home Run* (2014), among other works—takes readers through the Big Ten's centurylong history of achievements, which included several firsts both on and off the playing field. The giants of Big Ten history each get their time in the spotlight, including such figures as University of Illinois halfback Red Grange, University of Iowa halfback Nile Kinnick, or former Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany. Sherman also includes lovingly detailed features on trailblazers such as Moses Fleetwood Walker, the first Black athlete to compete in the conference, back in 1882; and Phyllis Howlett, who became the Big Ten’s first female assistant commissioner in 1982 and helped “to give thousands of young women the chance to be athletes at the college level.” Famous alumni, such as golf superstar and Ohio State grad Jack Nicklaus and President Gerald Ford—shown here during his time as a scowling University of Michigan football player—appear alongside the University of Iowa’s famously ruthless wrestling coach Dan Gable: “He came up with the ‘Iowa style’ of wrestling,” Sherman writes. “The Hawkeyes didn’t want to just beat opponents. They wanted them to give up completely.” The author also mentions University of Indiana swim coach Doc Counsilman and his motto, “Hurt, pain, agony.”

As might be expected from a volume like this, the author’s emphasis is on boosterism; it’s a work for Big Ten fans by a Big Ten fan. At one point, Sherman writes, “That’s the Big Ten. Exceptional student-athletes, renowned universities and academic pursuit that knows no bounds,” and it’s true that, as the author points out, “As leading research universities, the Big Ten schools have changed the course of medicine, science, business and social studies.” However, quotes such
as these paper over some less appealing facts. Some of these teams bring in millions of dollars to their universities, which has, in turn, been a factor in scandals that have occurred over the past few years, including some that involve allegations of player abuse. Instead, it’s quite clear that the author intends his book as an uncritical celebration of the Big Ten—and as this, it succeeds completely. The author has an impressive talent for providing the perfect quote, the perfect scenario, and the perfect statistic to illustrate his various points. As a result, any reader who’s even been a small part of Big Ten history—by streaming into a big stadium on a beautiful autumn afternoon to cheer on their champions and razz their rivals—is likely to treasure this celebratory volume.

A well-constructed but hagiographic account of the Big Ten.

Nothing could be simpler than a three-letter, one-word title—and that fits the theme of this work by the New York Times bestselling author of The Smartest Sales Book You’ll Ever Read (2014) and other books in the same series. In his research into what makes meetings effective, he found that the fundamental principle of “talking less while empowering the other person to talk more” was one of the keys to improving business interactions. This notion, along with a few other pearls of wisdom, is at the heart of this entertaining, easy-to-read work. Its first part intriguingly debunks a few commonly held beliefs and audience engagement, which lays the foundation for Part 2, along with specific suggestions for how to be an agile listener; the paragraphs are blissfully brief, and relevant examples abound. Although the material is consistently research-based, as evidenced by the extensive endnotes, it’s anything but dry, and Solin’s deceptively simple premise is solid.

Smart, succinct, and highly engaging.

OPEN WOUND
Takemoto, Scott
Self (218 pp.)
$10.99 paper | $1.99 e-book
Jul. 16, 2020
978-0-9988567-2-8

The serial executions of New York City policemen spurs a retired cop to action in this crime novel.

Takemoto’s debut novel, Bio-Justice (2017), was an SF thriller, but this sophomore effort is a straightforward police procedural with plenty of mayhem and intrigue. As the story opens, it’s the summer of 1996, and recently retired, well-known Los Angeles detective Douglas Hale, who’s nearing 50, is preparing to relocate to New York City. However, at the moment, there’s a serial murderer on the loose in Manhattan who’s targeting police officers and collecting their badges as grisly souvenirs. Soon after Doug and his new wife, technology company executive Karen, arrive in the city and get settled, a new issue of Time magazine comes out with Doug’s photo on the cover—the result of a high-profile interview he gave before he left LA. This places him right in the killer’s crosshairs—and it soon becomes clear that the young murderer has a vicious, personal vendetta against the former cop. The delusional killer is a well-developed character, and the author fleshes out his motives with skill, revealing him to be the son of Doug’s former girlfriend, a drug addict. Indeed, Takemoto embodies the murderer with so much anger and resentment that he becomes a veritable monster prowling the streets of Manhattan. The revelation of the murderer’s identity happens early in the narrative, which stunts the suspense a bit. However, the author proves to be a keen storyteller who knows his way around a police procedural, and he keeps the action breathless while also offering plenty of detail.

A New York City police chief briefs Doug on the recent cop killings and begs for his seasoned expertise to help solve the case before he loses more officers. Of course, Doug agrees, and the story pivots straight into the mind of the killer, resulting in an action-packed cat-and-mouse thriller that puts Doug, his new bride, and several others in mortal danger. The murderer, who’s revealed to be a victim of severe physical abuse, is originally planning to kill the former cop and then turn his rage to himself, but Takemoto ultimately guides his delusional character to a different end. The author is a keen observer of the human psyche and its darkest corners, and his depiction of a killer obsessed with revenge is chillingly believable. The conclusion is a perfectly satisfying ending. A New York Times crime novel worth reading.
Doug, and the latter eventually comes face to face with the killer in one of the book’s more gruesome scenes. The story speeds along to a heart-pounding finale that thankfully leaves room for possible future installments detailing Doug’s further adventures. A suspenseful and often gripping thriller that features plenty of murder and menace for genre fans.

ESTHER’S STORY
Journey From the Cross
Thomas, P.K.
Christian Faith Publishing (267 pp.)
$17.95 paper | June 15, 2017
978-1-63575-376-9

In this historical Christian novel, a young girl without parents witnesses the crucifixion of Jesus and embarks on a spiritual journey that’s fraught with challenges.

Esther, a 12-year-old girl living in Jerusalem, loses her mother at a terribly young age and belongs to an economic class that others around her disgustedly call the “dirty poor.” She notices her father becoming increasingly distant and fearful, and one day, he suddenly sends her and her younger brother, Jacob, to the home of a friend in a nearby village without explanation. They’ve barely arrived before they decide to return and look for their father. The girl inadvertently stumbles upon the crucifixion of Jesus—a spectacle that makes a transformative impression upon her: “The sight of such cruelty made me want to run away, but something inside me would not allow me to leave His side. Mesmerized, I stood looking up at Him, thinking that truly this was not a common criminal for He was no ordinary man.” Esther also recognizes the brutalized face of the man who’s being crucified next to Jesus: her own father. Hungry and alone, Esther and Jacob are taken in by Mary Magdalene, who raises them as her own children while teaching them the meaning of Jesus’ ministry and his resurrection. Esther becomes a committed Christian filled with a “fervent love of Jesus.”

Debut author Thomas thoughtfully chronicles Esther’s continuing spiritual journey; after she later witnesses a murder, she’s compelled to run away in order to protect Mary and Jacob, and she finds her attachment to Jesus’ teachings to be profoundly tested. Over the course of this book, the author’s command of the historical period is notable, and her knowledge of Christian doctrine and history is even more impressive. Her prose is, by turns, moving and elegant, although the plot sometimes meanders in a desultory fashion. The novel also occasionally adopts a didactic, proselytizing tone, so it will likely be enjoyed most by someone with an abiding interest in Christianity or an outright devotion to the faith.

An often affecting tale of a youngster’s Christian discipleship.

MAGNIFICENT BASTARDS OF THE APOCALYPSE
Torgo, J.M.
Infernal Rift Press (361 pp.)
$15.99 paper | $4.99 e-book
Jun. 27, 2020
978-1-73476-801-5

A group of misfits scrambles to save the world—and themselves—in Torgo’s dystopian debut novel.

In 2614, after several terrible disasters, the only habitable portion of Earth is the Feculent Zone, a wasteland of ruined cities and dry seafold. It’s the home of a great many scavengers, including Gibson Taylor, a man with ocular implants; Flapman, who always covers his head with a bag that has a face drawn on it; and Super Patriot Boy, who wears a kilt and a tricorn hat. It’s also home to all manner of predatory horrors, including gigantic, radioactive Kaiju monsters, huge sandworms, and gangs of violent Perpetubabies (“genetically engineered thugs with adorable and deadly baby bodies”), among others. Flapman finds himself the target of the Bolshevik, a notorious mercenary and repo woman who, for some reason, is after Flapman’s hammer, “Ol’ Smashy.” The most dangerous enemies, however, are those who wield real power. Gibson, for example, runs afoul of the governing Overlords as he attempts to use the Chronoballer, the world’s only remaining time machine, to escape the FZ. The Overlords order him to help an unfriendly artificial intelligence called the Biggens in its quest to find the legendary Cudgel of Malthior, an object that can reputedly seal interdimensional rifts caused by previous time-travel expeditions. In fact, the Cudgel could finally put an end to the troubles that have made Earth such a mess in the first place. To complete their quest, Gibson and his friends—who barely function as a unit in the best of times—must team up with unsavory characters who would ordinarily kill them on sight. Can they manage to find the Cudgel and save the planet?

Torgo’s prose is precise and often funny as it contrasts post-apocalyptic depravity with the quotidian details of life in the 27th century: “The surface was bustling with activity on this lovely, low ambient-toxicity day, and though they saw a number of organisms that they would normally murder, they respected the Scavengeday truce as they traversed the crumbling asphalt of this wretched place.” The sheen amount of imagination in this work will be enough to draw most readers in, as its mythos is rich in pastiche, allusion, absurdity, and wonder. Indeed, the fine worldbuilding helps to balance out the weaknesses of the characters, who are, sadly, less intriguing than their outfits would indicate. There are many big personalities, but they all tend to be big in a similar way, and most interactions devolve into fits of profanity, violence, or both. The story also takes its time getting going, in part because Torgo pursues frequent digressions that flesh out the fictional universe but don’t further the plot. The book’s satirical tone, too, loses some of its appeal after more than 300 pages. There’s a lot to enjoy here, though, and some readers are sure to love every minute of it. Even those who might wish for a tighter, more character-driven story will look forward to the author’s future offerings.

A sprawling and detailed comic adventure.
BY THE GODS OF BABYLON
Uninni, Sin Legi
Self (754 pp.)
Aug. 30, 2020

A debut novel offers a story about ancient palace intrigue, inspired by the Epic of Gilgamesh.

The author opens this Sumerian tale with Gaga, the court jester, entertaining the cruel King Sargon. Gaga sings a blasphemous version of the beginnings of humankind at a pre-coronation gathering of noblemen. When the priest En-shakush and Gaga argue, Sargon orders both to their knees and tells his henchman Naplanam to choose which of them to behead. Relishing the fear emanating from the two men, Naplanam takes his time, which Sargon enjoys while chomping on pomegranate seeds: “It was good...to make” all present “think twice about betraying him.” Plots and subplots abound among the multitude of characters. Ibrahim, the king’s sculptor, was cheated by the high priest Ishullanu out of final payment for his likeness of “the great god Anu.” Ibrahim convinces Sargon that the monarch is the true representative of the deities and that Ishullanu is plotting to overturn him. Soon, Enheduanna, Sargon’s virgin daughter, who is secretly involved with Isa, Ibrahim’s son, learns that her father has promised her to the pharaoh. She and Isa plan for her to lose her virginity (his also, it turns out) in “a ritual” honoring Ishtar, goddess of love. The polytheism practiced is highly sexual, as in the spring equinox festival, a celebration during which the high priest plays the role of god and plunges “his mighty plow...into the virgin earth” (a virgin selected for the ritual). Ishullanu, unable to perform, tries to fake copulation but is exposed and disgraced when the crowd angrily demands that he “show the plow...!” The last third of the engaging novel deftly connects the stories of the principal characters and ultimately delivers an unpredictable conclusion. The author’s pseudonym is the same name as the 13th-century B.C.E. scribe who compiled the Epic of Gilgamesh (“I just hope that Sin Legi Uninni would forgive me for plagiarizing parts of his epic story...and his name”). Vivid imagery and courtly formal dialogue, often followed by the characters’ thoughts, bring both the players and the period to life, as in this passage where Ibrahim meets a local merchant: “Gudea! Ibrahim exclaimed in greeting, his face chiseled into an expression of happy surprise that hid his distaste.” But many readers may find themselves squirming at some of the graphic descriptions of torture.

A lively and intriguing tale about polytheistic Sumerian society; sexually explicit, with a surprise ending.

This Issue’s Contributors

ADULT
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NUCLEAR OPTION
Van Soest, Dorothy
Apprentice House (286 pp.)
Dec. 1, 2020
978-1-62720-291-6
978-1-62720-292-3 paper

In the third entry in Van Soest’s series, the son of an atomic-testing veteran discovers that the side effects of radiation poisoning can last for generations.

In 1984, anti-nuclear protester Sylvia Jensen meets Norton Cramer, an ex-serviceman who was exposed to the Operation Redwing nuclear tests that were carried out in the Pacific in the 1950s. She soon realizes that she’s found a kindred spirit, both ideologically and romantically. They’re arrested while demonstrating against a plutonium storage company and weapons manufacturer, and in an ensuing court hearing, Norton makes a very public and very dangerous announcement to the world about nuclear testing. By becoming a whistleblower, he knows he’s risking the wrath of the government, but his past exposure to high levels of radiation has left him with little to lose. In 2019, at the memorial service of a fellow activist, Sylvia meets Corey Cramer, Norton’s son, whom she’d last seen when he was a toddler. Their chance meeting leaves Sylvia with a deep sense of responsibility for Corey’s well-being. When his own 4-year-old son dies of cancer, he angrily sets out on a mission to find out the truth about what happened in the Pacific all those years ago—and he becomes involved with a militant anti-nuclear protest
group that plans a terrible act of violence. In this latest series installment featuring Sylvia Jensen, Van Soest presents a well-researched, compassionate, and exciting blend of social commentary and political thriller. Along the way, she also manages to offer some sharp insights into the struggles of the anti-nuclear movement and its opponents. The interwoven plotlines, which bounce back and forth between the past and present, give readers a compelling view of three distinct eras of nuclear struggle—from the initial nuclear testing, through its horrible effects, to the stories of those who must deal with the consequences many years on. In the end, Sylvia is forced to act quickly in order to honor Corey’s father as his son goes down a dark path.

A perceptive thriller set in an offbeat milieu.

**A UNIVERSE LESS TRAVELED**

*von Schrader, Eric*

Weeping Willow Books (384 pp.)
Sep. 10, 2020
978-1-73297-062-5

In the 20th century, citizens of St. Louis discover that a parallel-universe effect exists, allowing them to periodically cross over to a different, more ideal city.

Von Schrader’s debut novel should especially captivate readers familiar with St. Louis, but even those unacquainted with the city will find this parallel-worlds yarn worth a visit. In 1929, during the stock market crash, Missouri financier James Whittemore Hines is contemplating suicide when he suddenly finds himself in an alternate St. Louis, with no economic malaise. World War I never happened either (apparently thanks to a benevolent Kaiser Wilhelm II), and nobody’s heard of Charles Lindbergh. Pragmatic Hines doesn’t question the phenomenon but uses his acumen to become part of the city’s infrastructure.

Von Schrader’s prose is butter smooth, and the chronological jumps the narrative makes back and forth throughout history (in both universes) are never tangled or confusing.

An enjoyable, gentle fantasy that gives new meaning to the phrase “Spirit of St. Louis.”

**HEALING TRAUMATIZED CHURCHES**

*Wean, Ronald H.*

Folioavenue Publishing Service (238 pp.)
May 25, 2020
978-1-951193-81-2

A short play with commentary addressing how churches can deal with interpersonal difficulties within a congregation.

In this book’s foreword, Pastor Dale Ziemer of the Palatine, Illinois–based Center for Parish Development, asks, “Who is not aware of a church that has been shocked or deeply troubled by behaviors, decisions, or experiences from within and without?” He specifically highlights “coercive and abusive leadership behaviors and [their] effects” as a source of trauma. Author Wean, also a pastor, introduces his book by noting how many churches have failed to take “creative, logical, and empathetic steps” to address a painful event and instead “buried it.” He seeks to provide counsel on how to address such issues, and he chooses to do so in drama form—specifically in short scenes involving clergy, church council members, bishops, and others, followed by discussion sections in which Wean elaborates on points raised in each scene. Given the inherent inconsistency of such a format, it’s a relief that Wean has a dramatist’s ear for dialogue, and his readers will undoubtedly relate to characters’ comments about church-related problems; for example, in the first scene, a church council member named John notes, “A previous pastor used people to get whatever he wanted. He didn’t care what anyone thought ’cause he was always right…. He used doctrine and the Bible to hurt and divide us. He was a sheep butcher—and no shepherd.” Nevertheless, the book is beset with imbalance, as Wean’s commentary on his scenes is consistently more compelling than the scenes themselves. His extensive experience with church dynamics is evident, and his empathy extends to all parties: “Fight, flight, or freeze survival reactions can be triggered by a voice, a tone, a situation, or a movement,” he writes at one point, “and it’s not predictable.” The dramatic interludes help to put a human face on the issues at hand, but readers will find more value in the author’s straightforward thoughts on how churches can start the complicated process of healing.

A series of dramatic vignettes and engaging discussions of church-based trauma.
Chains of Time
Woodstone, R.B.
Self (324 pp.)
$10.95 paper | $2.99 e-book | Jul. 5, 2020
978-8-6480-7189-6

An African American family with special powers battles a seemingly immortal White slave trader for over a century in this debut novel.

Terry Kelly is a 15-year-old African American teenager in Harlem. In some ways, he’s a typical teen, enduring a school bully and a father, Carl, who doesn’t treat him as favorably as his football-playing older brother, Jerome. But Terry, along with other family members, has a special ability. Regina, the youngest, who hasn’t spoken in two years, communicates with Terry telepathically, and he realizes he has a power he can use against the bully. In a concurrent narrative, starting 150 years earlier in 1860, Amara, an African woman, has a precognitive ability. She sees Hendrik Van Owen, an evil White man, force her and others into slavery on her wedding day, which she and her family sadly cannot prevent. In America, Amara is a slave on Van Owen’s tobacco farm until she runs away. But Van Owen, who has somehow acquired the same powers she and her fiancé hone, obsessively pursues her, convinced she’s entirely his. As years turn into decades, he goes after Amara and her growing family, ultimately involving the Kellys in the present day. While Woodstone profoundly addresses modern African American struggles, the tale is equally dynamic in the supernatural and historical genres. Amara, for example, foreshadows and lives through the Civil War. Characters’ abilities, which aren’t immediately known, are often surprising. Mystery also plays a part in character development, from why Regina doesn’t speak to why Carl blames his oldest son, Warren, for the death of the family’s matriarch, Dara. Permeating the story are potent messages, both on the surface (“No African born in America can ever truly know freedom”) and inferred (pale, white-haired Van Owen, like the hatred he harbors, will not die easily). Despite several supernatural confrontations, violence is relatively muffled.

A perceptive and gripping tale of race and family.

8 Paradoxes of Leadership Agility
How To Lead and Inspire in the Real World
Yeo, Chuen Chuen
Acesence (104 pp.)
$28.00 paper | $0.99 e-book
May 31, 2020
978-981-14-5846-0

An international coach shares her four-step approach to becoming an agile leader.

Agile leadership is a style that features the ability to be flexible and adapt to change. In this second edition, Yeo updates her guide to agile leadership. It is centered on “Re4,” a coaching model the author developed while working with large organizations, including Fortune 500 companies and the United Nations. Re4 consists of four steps: “Reconstruct the Map,” “Refresh the Lens,” “Renew the Identity,” and “Rebuild the Capabilities.” Instead of merely explaining the Re4 concept, Yeo deftly demonstrates its application by citing examples of how several of her clients employed it to improve their leadership approaches. In addition, she relates these cases to eight paradoxes that leaders generally face. Each of these is explained in a chapter that defines the paradox and shows how one of her clients applied Re4 to address the situation. For example, in the third paradox, “Self vs. System,” Yeo’s client Amy found it challenging to manage the conflict between her job and her family and used Re4 to solve the problem. The sixth paradox, “Executing vs. Inspiring,” depicts how the author’s client Prakash employed Re4 to learn how to facilitate team brainstorming and decision-making rather than taking on sole responsibility. The business book is organized in a useful way: After a general discussion of leadership agility (Part I), Yeo outlines the paradoxes (Part II). Then, in Part III, the author offers an in-depth examination of each client’s motivations and experiences with Re4 as well as posing questions for readers to answer. This is a very effective approach because it identifies a leadership challenge, depicts the implementation of a solution by an actual client, and encourages readers to immerse themselves in and reflect on the Re4 methodology. Yeo concludes that leaders who understand their “authentic” selves find that “the right answer” for their contexts can help them lead with “greater agility.” Well-constructed, clearly written, and replete with appropriate examples, this guide is a distinguished and welcome addition to an already burgeoning business book category.

A smart, systematic approach to enlightened leadership.
INDIE Books of the Month

THE CHAOS COURT
Jake Burnett
Effervescent and captivating, this middle-grade tale boasts a big heart.

MISS HAVILLAND
Gay Daly
An enjoyable work that explores one woman’s path to adulthood.

TO THE MAN IN THE RED SUIT
Christina Fulton
A fine collection that gives grief the tonic sting of saltwater.

GARRUBBO GUIDE
Edwin Garrubbo
An inspiring and informative guide to the foods of Italy.

THE TALKING BAOBAB TREE
Nelda Lateef
Illus. by the author
A rich, inventive rendering of a familiar folktale.

CATWALK
Meryl Natchez
Outstanding poetic musings that strike at the very core of human connections and contradictions.
COLSON WHITEHEAD WINS LIBRARY OF CONGRESS AWARD

Colson Whitehead, the Pulitzer Prize–winning author of *The Underground Railroad* and *The Nickel Boys*, has become the youngest writer to win the Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction.

Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden selected Whitehead, 50, for the prize, saying, “Colson Whitehead’s work is informed by probing insights into the human condition and empathy for those who struggle with life’s sometimes harrowing vicissitudes.”

Whitehead said he was honored to be selected for the award. “I hope that right now there’s a young kid who looks like me, who sees the Library of Congress recognize Black artists and feels encouraged to pursue their own vision and find their own sacred spaces of inspiration.”

Previous winners of the Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction include Herman Wouk, Isabel Allende, Toni Morrison, and Philip Roth.

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GREAT GATSBY PREQUEL COMING IN 2021

Little, Brown will publish a prequel to *The Great Gatsby* next year, just days after the classic F. Scott Fitzgerald novel enters into the public domain.

Michael Farris Smith’s Nick will be published in January 2021, the publisher said in a news release. The copyright to *The Great Gatsby* is set to expire at the end of 2020, which means the book can be freely published or adapted by anyone. Smith’s novel is likely to be the first of many to take advantage of the novel’s move into the public domain.

Little, Brown said Nick will focus on Nick Carraway, the narrator of *The Great Gatsby*, and his life before he met the titular character of Fitzgerald’s novel.

Smith, whose previous novels include *Blackwood* and *The Fighter*, said that he’s “always been drawn to Nick Carraway as a character.”

*Nick* is slated for publication on Jan. 5, 2021.

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LORRIE MOORE SETS TWITTER ON FIRE WITH ESSAY

Lorrie Moore has opinions about millennials, and they have sent Twitter into a frenzy.

The *New York Review of Books* published an essay by Moore with the very NYRB–ish headline “The Balletic Millennial Bedtimes of *Normal People*.” In it, Moore offers her thoughts on Sally Rooney’s bestselling book and the popular Hulu series based on it.

She also offered her thoughts on millennials. They are “essentially suburban, no matter where they have actually grown up,” and “have no authentic counterculture.” “They seem like nice people. But not normal,” Moore wrote. “They often seem like nice people who privately are doing terrible things to themselves.”

“Millennials are boundary-conscious and cannot be touched by anyone, even on the sleeve, without consent, but with consent will have hook-ups with total strangers and enact desire in frightening postures of BDSM—a term, and maybe even a thing—not to sound too much like Philip Larkin—that I’m quite sure did not exist prior to 1983.”

“Lorrie Moore pretending [she] doesn’t know what BDSM is during her humiliation dom session with Millennials is LITERATURE,” proclaimed comedian Guy Branum.

Michael Schaub is an Austin, Texas–based journalist and regular contributor to NPR.
Timmy is a Mr. Bungle. His hands are covered with germs and snot. He’s spreading disease, and he’s probably a KGB plant.

The children’s literature of the early Cold War, when I was growing up, was full of dire warnings about hygiene. It invited us to contemplate Dick and Jane as they ran about with their dog, Spot, to unknown purpose. It cautioned that we should not talk to strangers, especially not if their mouths were full while they talked. It was grim stuff. Small wonder that, according to one 1954 report, children already greatly preferred television to books.

The reason, speculated author John Hersey, was that writing for young readers was “antiseptic” and “unnaturally clean.” (Take that, Mr. Bungle!) The pedagogy was meant to inspire love of nation, not literature. Writers were bound by rigid guidelines covering content matter and word choice, with lists of “approved” words for young readers. See Spot run, indeed.

Theodore Seuss Geisel (1904–91) was having none of it. A “premature antifascist,” as the veterans of the old left used to say, who twitted Adolf Hitler long before the U.S. entered World War II, he had the subversive idea that childhood ought to be fun and that children’s books need not be stultifying. In 1957, writing as Dr. Seuss and well established thanks to books like If I Ran the Zoo and Horton Hears a Who, he delivered a whimsical tale called The Cat in Hat. His publisher had given him a list of some 350 words thought important for first graders to learn, asking Geisel to make such use of it as he could. Geisel obliged, using 236 individual words to spin out his yarn, not all of them words that appeared on that roster.

The book sold and sold. Then Bennett Cerf, Geisel’s editor and himself a writer of whimsical stories, bet Geisel that he couldn’t come up with a meaningful, entertaining story using fewer words still. Off Geisel went to his studio in La Jolla, California—you can still see his house there, with its fantastic topiary garden—and there he cooked up Green Eggs and Ham, with its beguiling theme of a child’s resistance to novel foodstuffs: “I do not like them / Sam-I-am. / I do not like / green eggs and ham.”

The 60 pages of Green Eggs and Ham, published 60 years ago this month, used only 50 individual words to deliver a message that might please even the stuffiest censor: You know, if you just tried those green eggs and ham, you might like them, and maybe other green foods like broccoli and peas.

Young readers took the book to heart. I know that I did, and reading Dr. Seuss prepared me for every other book that has since passed before my eyes. I even forgave my mother for serving me green jello with weird stuff in it—sliced cucumbers, shaved carrots, and the like. It was the early ’60s, after all, before we learned what food was.

Green Eggs and Ham remains in print, all these years later, coaxing kids to eat with its 50-word vocabulary. That it lives on is fitting tribute to a great man and his suspect ideas.

Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor.
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