Featuring 420 Industry-First Reviews of Fiction, Nonfiction, Children's and YA books

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FALL PREVIEW
Special Issue

Featuring 150 Books That Make This the Biggest Fall Season Ever

Plus interviews with David Sedaris, Juhea Kim, Nabela Noor, Tracey Baptiste, Brandy Colbert, and more
A Season for the Record Books

For the past several weeks, as we prepared this special Fall Preview issue of Kirkus Reviews, the editors have sounded like broken records, exclaiming almost daily, “This fall season is SO BIG.”

Well, it’s true.

No one knows exactly why so many books are being published this fall, and so many of them by big-name authors. (There’s a head-turning crop of debuts, too.) Were release dates moved out of 2020 because of the pandemic? Did authors get exceptionally productive during lockdown? Whatever the reasons, we’re faced with a profusion of riches in the coming months. It was harder than ever to select just 150 titles for our Fall Preview, and my own TBR list just gets longer and longer. Here are a few highlights:

**Beautiful World, Where Are You** by Sally Rooney (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Sept. 7): I could read a Sally Rooney novel every year, the way some people faithfully consume mystery series. Her latest, about the complicated friendship between two young Irishwomen, an editorial assistant at a Dublin literary magazine and a novelist recovering from a psychiatric hospitalization in the west of Ireland, falls squarely within the milieus established in Conversations With Friends and Normal People. But, as our starred review points out, “just because the novel is so characteristic of Rooney doesn’t take anything away from its considerable power.”

**Harlem Shuffle** by Colson Whitehead (Doubleday, Sept. 14): Whitehead has already racked up a string of impressive awards—two Pulitzers, one National Book Award, and a Kirkus Prize—for his novels The Underground Railroad and The Nickel Boys, both powerhouse novels written in unique registers. Now he’s back with a crime novel set in mid-20th-century Harlem (echoes of the great Chester Himes) that also explores themes of racism and social injustice. From our starred review: “As one of Whitehead’s characters might say of their creator, When you’re hot, you’re hot.”

**Unbound: My Story of Liberation and the Birth of the Me Too Movement** by Tarana Burke (Flatiron Books, Sept. 14): This memoir by the founder of the MeToo movement tells the story of a Black girl from the Bronx, called “ugly” and raped at the age of 7, who was transformed by the writing of Maya Angelou and grew up to become an influential activist and community organizer. “Told with candor and deep vulnerability, this story is raw and sobering but also a source of healing and hope for other survivors,” says our starred review.

**Fight Night** by Miriam Toews (Bloomsbury, Oct. 5): I hadn’t read Toews before picking up her unforgettable 2019 novel, Women Talking. Now I’m a convert to this piercing Canadian writer whose fiction often grapples with themes of family, Mennonite religion, and suicide. All three are themes in her latest, narrated by 9-year-old Swiv (Toews is a master of voices), who must puzzle out relations with her angsty-ridden mother and her joyous grandmother. Our starred review deemed the novel “Funny and sad and exquisitely tender.”

**These Precious Days** by Ann Patchett (Harper, Nov. 23): Patchett is one of those rare writers (Zadie Smith is another) whose best essays are every bit as sublime as her fiction. Among the highlights of this collection will surely be the title piece, first published in Harper’s earlier this year, about Patchett’s unexpected houseguest during the pandemic—it’s a stunner. Twenty-one other essays—including an introduction to Eudora Welty’s collected stories and various meditations on the writing life—round out the volume. From Kirkus’ starred review: “An enviable life, shared with candor, emotion, and knockout storytelling power.”
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HOW TO WRESTLE A GIRL
Stories
Blackburn, Venita
MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux
(224 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-374-60279-6

Short stories—many linked—about the fraught and fiery rituals of girl- and womanhood.

Blackburn’s second collection—following Black Jesus and Other Superheroes (2017)—is divided into two parts. In the first, stories that largely clock in at a handful of pages give us lightning-quick glimpses of familial and romantic relationships. The opening story investigates the link between growing up female and social media attention (“Fam”). A struggling couple visit a dog trainer thinking that the key to their problems lies in improving their dogs’ behavior (“Thirteen Porcelain Schnauzers”). A biology teacher and her female student have their relationship scrutinized (“Biology Class”). In the book’s second part, a clear narrative emerges over the course of the stories, as a series of disasters, minor and major, befalls a high school protagonist in Southern California. Her father dies unexpectedly of sleep apnea (“Fat”); her elbow is crushed by an errant softball pitch (“Grief Log”). Her mother goes off the rails, of the stories, as a series of disasters, minor and major, befalls a high school protagonist in Southern California. Her father dies unexpectedly of sleep apnea (“Fat”); her elbow is crushed by an errant softball pitch (“Grief Log”). Her mother goes off the rails, having an affair with a local pastor (“Black Communion”) and subsequently attempting suicide (“Ambien and Brown Liquor”). The protagonist must deal with her broken family, her domineering older sister, and her burgeoning romantic feelings for her best friend, Esperanza. Ultimately, these are stories about the chaos of bodies, from menstruation to athletics, from sex to movie makeup. Rather than tell an overarching narrative, each story acts as a fragment of a wildly patterned mosaic, and through accumulation, patterns come clear, if not exactly a single picture. This structural inventiveness mirrors the formally inventive stories. There are tales structured as crossword puzzles (“In the Counselor’s Waiting Room With No Wi-Fi”), as quizzes (“Quiz”), and as instructions, as in the title story. With brash humor and inventive energy, Blackburn sets her stories “on the edge of disorder” and sustains that tension throughout.

Boldly styled and deeply original.
Cooper made his name as a Sadean enfant terrible, never shying for an NGO, only to find herself stymied by bureaucracy and questions of Haitian identity in a world that doesn’t seem to any of us look away. unless it’s us, or someone we love, going up in flames,” one character muses. In this devastating work, Chancy refuses to let characters, but she does not deal in false hopes. “We all look possessing tremendous power.

A devastating, personal, and vital account.

I WISHED
Cooper, Dennis
Soho (136 pp.)
$25.00 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-641-29304-4

An elegy for a friend, lover, and muse that resists conventions of storytelling and expands the possibilities of the novel form with daring and vulnerability.

With his five-part George Miles cycle—beginning with Closer (1989)—Cooper made his name as a Sadean enfant terrible, never shying away from depicting graphic scenes of sex and violence while capturing readers with hypnotic narrative authority. This group of novels, we learn in the opening pages of his latest, was not only an homage to his beloved friend—whose suicide at 30 the writer did not learn about until a decade later—but his only way of articulating a pain “that talking openly can’t handle.” Less narrative than prismatic, this book explores imagined landscapes, George’s childhood, and the depths of Cooper’s own psyche to ask: How does the artist alchemize his grief into a work that is legible and worthy of attention? In the first major section, a narrator explores George’s traumatic upbringing by a sexually abusive father and his mental health as he transitions into adulthood while living with untreated bipolar disorder. Here, Cooper refers to himself in the third person, too, as if to examine the conditions for George’s suicide through an objective eye. Other sections examine George and the author’s relationship to him by way of wry humor and playful storytelling. In one section, a secular Santa Claus—described as “a kind of genius, [who] needs to love someone who’s very complicated”—chooses George as his favorite yet agonizes over what kind of gift to offer him. Another section bends and twists the fairy-tale form to depict a fictional encounter between George and artist James Turrell’s Roden Crater. Though the book’s emotional register can seem, at times, to be stuck in a rut of despair, its fragmentary structure allows for a range of emotional valences, ranging between grief and celebration, anger and love. Cooper’s urgency to relate his friend’s story is felt in every word, image, and narrative move; even the most oddball structural decisions possess tremendous power.

Spare but powerfully wrought, this is a book that pushes the novel’s capacity to capture grief, love, and truth.

WHAT STORM, WHAT THUNDER
Chancy, Myriam J. A.
Tin House (330 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-951142-76-6

Survivors and victims tell their powerful, moving stories in this fictional account of the 2010 Haitian earthquake.

On Jan. 12, 2010, a massive earthquake struck the island of Hispaniola, changing the face of Haiti forever. Between 250,000 and 300,000 people are estimated to have perished, many of them in the crowded capital of Port-au-Prince, while 1.5 million others were left homeless. In her searing new novel, Chancy, who spent years talking to survivors, sifts through the wreckage of this inconceivable calamity. She has shaped the stories of the living and the dead into a mighty fictional tapestry that reflects the terror, despair, and sorrow of the moment as she examines questions of Haitian identity in a world that doesn’t seem to care. Among her unforgettable characters are a desperate husband who abandons his grief-stricken wife in a sprawling, dangerous tent city; a sex worker who steps out of a hotel moments before it collapses; a drug trafficker trapped in an elevator who begins to reassess his life; a wealthy businessman who left Haiti and has returned to make a deal at the worst possible moment; a teenage girl terrorized by a former classmate in the refugee camp; a Haitian cab driver in Boston who has discovered religion and the perils of being Black in America; and an architect who returns home from Rwanda, where she’d been working for an NGO, only to find herself stymied by bureaucracy and unable to help anyone. The thread that connects these voices is Ma Lou, a market woman who has witnessed the tides of fortune in Port-au-Prince for decades and who holds no illusions about the future. The stories are not always easy to read, but they shouldn’t be. Chancy offers fleeting redemption for some hikers were left homeless. In her searing new novel, Chancy, who spent years talking to survivors, sifts through the wreckage of this devastating work, Chancy refuses to let any of us look away.

A devastating, personal, and vital account.
Find a comfortable chair, grab some snacks, and prepare yourself not to get up for a while—this fall features more potential blockbusters than any I can remember. Just for a start, there will be novels from several writers who haven’t published long-form fiction in decades. Gayl Jones returns with the historical epic *Palmares* (Beacon, Sept. 14), her first book since 1999; our review says there’s “sheer wonder, insightful compassion, and droll wit to be found among the book’s riches.” Joy Williams’ *Harrow* (Knopf, Sept. 14), her first novel in 20 years, is an “enigmatic, elegant meditation on the end of civilization—if end it truly is.” Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka will be publishing *Chronicles From the Land of the Happiest People on Earth* (Knopf, Sept. 28), his first novel since 1973—our review says “dazzling word-play and subtle allusion mark this most welcome return to fiction.”

On the other hand, *The Sentence* (Harper, Nov. 9) is Louise Erdrich’s fifth novel in the past nine years—not counting a few books for young readers—but that doesn’t mean it’s any less of an event. In the past five years, Colson Whitehead has won two Pulitzers, a National Book Award, and a Kirkus Prize for *The Underground Railroad* and *The Nickel Boys*; anticipation could hardly be keener for his new novel, *Harlem Shuffle* (Doubleday, Sept. 14).

Other big names: Sally Rooney’s *Beautiful World, Where Are You* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Sept. 7) follows two bookish Irishwomen through their 20s; our review calls it “a novel of capacious intelligence and plenty of page-turning emotional drama.” Jonathan Franzen kicks off his A Key to All Mythologies trilogy with *Crossroads* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Oct. 5), the story of a Chicago pastor and his family during the waning days of the Vietnam War. Amor Towles follows an 18-year-old and his younger brother on a 1950s road trip through the American West in *The Lincoln Highway* (Viking, Oct. 5). Elizabeth Strout revisits her two-time protagonist Lucy Barton in *Oh William!* (Random House, Oct. 19).

There are books about language: Lauren Groff turns to medieval history with *Matrix* (Riverhead, Sept. 7), based on the life of France’s first female poet. Colm Toibin creates a fictional portrait of Thomas Mann in *The Magician* (Scribner, Sept. 7). In *The Book of Form and Emptiness* (Viking, Sept. 21), Ruth Ozeki has written “a meditative tribute to books, libraries, and Zen wisdom,” according to our review. Jon McGregor’s *Lean Stand Fall* (Catapult, Sept. 21) starts out as an Antarctic adventure tale but ends up being about communication. Anthony Doerr’s *Cloud Cuckoo Land* (Scribner, Sept. 28) follows an ancient Greek manuscript over the course of centuries. And music: Paul Griffiths’ *Mr. Beethoven* (New York Review Books, Oct. 19) imagines the great composer traveling to Boston to take up a commission from the Handel and Hayden Society.

There are first novels: In *Beasts of a Little Land* (Ecco, Dec. 7), Juhea Kim creates a sweeping epic of 20th-century Korea centering on Jade, a poor girl who becomes a courtesan. Jo Hamya’s *Three Rooms* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Aug. 31) is “a prismatic portrait of British life and millennial angst,” according to our review. Its narrator, an unnamed 20-something, lives a precarious existence in Oxford and then London, noticing everything around her.

In *Fight Night* (Bloomsbury, Oct. 5), Miriam Toews channels the voice of a 9-year-old girl; our review calls it “funny and sad and exquisitely tender.” Tiphanie Yanique examines the lives of two young people as they travel the road toward each other in *Monster in the Middle* (Riverhead, Oct. 19). And if you’ve never had the pleasure of reading 91-year-old Hilma Wolitzer, pick up her new story collection, *Today a Woman Went Mad in the Supermarket* (Bloomsbury, Aug. 31); our review says it “takes our breath away.”

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.
burned in corporate America. Gabe learns that his inability to stand up for himself in business is related to his penchant for running away. Gabe and Michelle know they should be careful with their hearts, but they cannot resist their powerful attraction or shared history, which is detailed on the page through instant messages from their teenage years. Michelle and Gabe battle their inner demons and take a chance on each other, and the result will delight romance readers. Not only is it a satisfying and steamy romance, but the novel also explores how family and friends can be an essential part of a happy, fulfilling life.

A sexy, satisfying romance about people who finally grow into being right for each other.

**CLOUD CUCKOO LAND**

*Doerr, Anthony*  
Scribner (656 pp.)  
$26.99 | Sep. 28, 2021  
978-1-982168-43-8

An ancient Greek manuscript connects humanity's past, present, and future.

"Stranger, whoever you are, open this to learn what will amaze you" wrote Anthony Doerr in *Cloud Cuckoo Land*—the author did exist, but the text is invented—Doerr is his fitting heir. Around Diogenes's manuscript, "Cloud Cuckoo Land"—the author did exist, but the text is invented—Doerr builds a community of readers and nature lovers that transcends the boundaries of time and space. The protagonist of the original story is Aethon, a shepherd whose dream of escaping to a paradise in the sky leads to a wild series of adventures in the bodies of beast, fish, and fowl. Aethon's story is first found by Anna in 15th-century Constantinople; though a failure as an apprentice seamstress, she's learned ancient Greek from an elderly scholar. Omeir, a country boy of the same period, is rejected by the world for his cleft lip—but forms the deepest connections with his beautiful oxen, Moonlight and Tree. In the 1950s, Zeno Ninis, a troubled ex–GI in Lakeport, Idaho, finds peace in working on a translation of Diogenes' recently recovered manuscript. In 2020, 86-year-old Zeno helps a group of youngsters put the story on as a play at the Lakeport Public Library—unaware that Flora considered Tookie to be her best friend and thus sticks to her like glue in the afterlife, even smacking a bookmark in it—but she continues shuffling through the store's aisles even after her cremation. Tookie is recently out of prison for transporting a corpse across state lines, which would have netted her $26,000 had she not been ratted out and had the body not had crack cocaine duct-taped to its armpits, a mere technicality of which Tookie was unaware. Tookie is also unaware that Flora considered Tookie to be her best friend and thus sticks to her like glue in the afterlife, even smacking a book from the fiction section onto the floor during a staff meeting at Birchbark. The novel's humor is mordant: "Small bookstores have the romance of doomed intimate spaces about to be erased by unfettered capitalism." The characters are also haunted by the George Floyd murder, which occurred in Minneapolis; they wrestle with generations of racism against Black and Indigenous Americans. Erdrich's love for bookselling is quite real to the affected characters.

"A novel that reckons with ghosts—of both specific people and also the shadows resulting from America's violent, dark habits." (This review is printed here for the first time.)

**THE SENTENCE**

*Erdrich, Louise*  
Harper/HarperCollins (416 pp.)  
$24.49 | Sep. 28, 2021  
978-0-06-267112-7

The most recent recipient of the Pulitzer Prize in fiction—for *The Night Watchman* (2020)—turns her eye to various kinds of hauntings, all of which feel quite real to the affected characters.

Erdrich is the owner of Birchbark Books, an independent bookstore in Minneapolis and, in this often funny novel, the favorite bookstore of Flora, one of narrator Tookie's "most annoying customers." Flora wants to be thought of as Indigenous, a "very persistent wannabe" in the assessment of Tookie, who's Ojibwe. Flora appears at the store one day with a photo of her great-grandmother, claiming the woman was ashamed of being Indian: "The picture of the woman looked Indianesque, or she might have just been in a bad mood," Tookie decides. Flora dies on All Souls' Day 2019 with a book splayed next to her—she didn't have time to put a bookmark in it—but she continues shuffling through the store's aisles even after her cremation. Tookie is recently out of prison for transporting a corpse across state lines, which would have netted her $26,000 had she not been ratted out and had the body not had crack cocaine duct-taped to its armpits, a mere technicality of which Tookie was unaware. Tookie is also unaware that Flora considered Tookie to be her best friend and thus sticks to her like glue in the afterlife, even smacking a book from the fiction section onto the floor during a staff meeting at Birchbark. The novel's humor is mordant: "Small bookstores have the romance of doomed intimate spaces about to be erased by unfettered capitalism." The characters are also haunted by the George Floyd murder, which occurred in Minneapolis; they wrestle with generations of racism against Black and Indigenous Americans. Erdrich's love for bookselling is clear, as is her complicated affection for Minneapolis and the people who fight to overcome institutional hatred and racism.

"A novel that reckons with ghosts—of both specific people and also the shadows resulting from America's violent, dark habits." (This review is printed here for the first time.)

**CROSSROADS**

*Franzen, Jonathan*  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (592 pp.)  
$30.00 | Oct. 5, 2021  
978-0-374-18117-8

This first novel in an ambitious trilogy tracks a suburban Chicago family in a time of personal and societal turmoil.

It says a lot that, at almost 600 pages, Franzen's latest novel, set amid the waning years of the Vietnam War, leaves you wanting more. That it does so is also very good news: It's
the first in what promises to be a sprawling trilogy, continuing to the present day, which the author has titled A Key to All Mythologies in what is presumably a wink at its far-from-modest ambitions—yes, à la Middlemarch. That reference is classic Franzen, who imbues his books with big ideas, in this case about responsibility to family, self, God, country, and one’s fellow man, among other matters, all the while digging deep into his characters’ emotions, experiences, desires, and doubts in a way that will please readers seeking to connect to books heart-first. Here, the story follows two generations of the Hildebrandt family, headed by Russ, the associate pastor of a church in the fictional town of New Prospect, Illinois, who, when we first meet him in the lead-up to Christmas 1971, is nursing a crush on a recently widowed parishioner and a grudge against the groovily charismatic leader of the church’s popular youth group, Crossroads, in which three of Russ’ four children are variously involved. Russ’ wife, Marion, who has gained weight over the years and lost her pre-maternal intensity and with it her husband’s sexual interest, is nursing a few secret preoccupations of her own, as are the couple’s three oldest children, Clem, Becky, and Perry. Each of the five characters, among whose perspectives Franzen adroitly toggles, is struggling with matters of morality and integrity, privilege and purpose, driven in part by the dueling desires for independence and connection. Their internal battles—to fight in an unjust war or unjustly let others fight in your stead, to fight for sanity or surrender to madness, to fight to define themselves and determine their paths or to cede that control to others, to name a few—are set against the backdrop of an era in which “love” is everywhere but empathy is in short supply, where hugs are liberally dispensed but real connection’s harder to come by.

Franzen’s intensely absorbing novel is amusing, excruciating, and at times unexpectedly uplifting—in a word, exquisite.

**MR. BEETHOVEN**
Griffiths, Paul
New York Review Books (312 pp.)
$17.95 paper | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-68137-580-9

The great composer pays a visit to Boston in this high-concept novel about Old World musical genius and emerging American society.

The fourth novel by Welsh music critic and librettist Griffiths imagines Ludwig van Beethoven sailing from Europe to America in 1833. This is peculiar, considering that Beethoven died in 1827. But Griffiths wants to explore what might’ve happened if the composer had followed through on a commission he was once offered to write an oratorio for the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston. Moreover, Griffiths restricts Beethoven’s dialogue to documented statements from his papers. That makes for a novel that feels engagingly authentic while also working as a self-aware feat of metafiction. Griffiths plays with footnotes, point of view, musical notation, and historical records to develop his story while also putting Beethoven at the center of a range of lively relationships. He develops a gentle rapport with Thankful, a woman who teaches the deaf composer sign language, parries with the officious reverend who’s written a dreadful libretto for the oratorio based on the book of Job, and tests the patience of the society members concerned the maestro won’t meet his deadline. (A young Herman Melville also makes a brief, amusing cameo.) In the process, Griffiths spotlights a country that’s anxious to establish its cultural standing while still tethered to its stiff Puritan nature. In that regard, Beethoven is both a unifying force and a means to expose the fault lines. And though the Oulipian strictures might’ve suggested stiffness, the novel feels like the best kind of historical fiction, open-minded while honoring facts.

**Stylistically rich and thoughtfully conceived historical fiction.**

**MATRIX**
Groff, Lauren
Riverhead (272 pp.)
$28.00 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-59463-449-9

Set in early medieval Europe, this book paints a rousing portrait of an abbess seizing and holding power.

After the spicy, structurally innovative Fates and Furies (2015), Groff spins back 850 years to a girl on a horse: “She rides out of the forest alone. Seventeen years old, in the cold March drizzle, Marie who comes from France.” The inspiration is a historical figure, Marie de France, considered the first woman to write poetry in French. Groff gives her a fraught, lifelong, sexually charged tie to Eleanor of Aquitaine. A matrix, which comes from the Latin for mother, builds implacably between Eleanor and Marie. But in the first chapter, the queen ride the court of an ungracious, rustic Marie by installing her in a remote English convent, home to 20 starving nuns. The sisters hang the traveler’s clothes in the communal privy, where “the ammonia of the piss kills the beasties”—the lice. After a long sulk, Marie rouses herself to examine the abbey’s disastrous ledgers, mount her warhorse, and gallop forth to turn out the family most egregiously squatting on convent land. News spreads and the rents come in, “some grumbling but most half proud to have a woman so tough and bold and warlike and royal to answer to now.” The novel is at its best through Marie’s early years of transforming the ruined, muddy convent, bit by bit, into a thriving estate, with a prosperous new scriptorium, brimming fields, and spilling flocks, protected by a forest labyrinth and spies abroad. In this way, Marie forestalls the jealous priests and village men plotting against her. Readers of Arcadia (2012), Groff’s brilliantly evocative hippie commune novel, will remember her gift for conjuring life without privacy. And she knows a snake always lurks within Eden. The cloister witnesses lust, sex, pregnancy, peril. Marie has visions of the Virgin Mary, in all, but these passages stay flat. Medieval mystics, unsurprisingly, write
better about mysticism. The gesture toward a lost theology based on Marie’s visions amounts to weak tea.

Grov’s trademark worthy sentences bring vivid buoyancy to a magisterial story.

**THREE ROOMS**

_Hamya, Jo_

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (208 pp.)

$22.49 | Aug. 31, 2021

978-0-358-57209-1

A young woman seeks a foothold in the ugly, precarious world of post-Brexit England.

As this distinctive debut novel opens, the unnamed 20-something narrator is moving into a rooming house in Oxford, a “repository for postdoctoral research assistants at the university” and formerly the home of 19th-century critic Walter Pater (so says the blue plaque by the front door). She’s come here after almost a year of spotty freelance work and occasional help from her parents, but she yearns for more than just a furnished room: “the end goal I wanted, through any job necessary, was to be able to afford a flat, not just a room, and then to settle in it and invite friends to dinner.” In the book’s second part, however, we find she has moved even further from her objective—living in London, subletting a couch from the friend of a friend for 80 pounds per month, and working as a copy editor at a Tatler-like society magazine. All the while, the narrator notices and reflects on everything: university and office life; racism and anti-immigrant sentiment (readers learn, rather offhandedly, that she is a person of color); the rise of Boris Johnson to prime minister; the hulking remains of Grenfell Tower, where 72 largely immigrant residents were killed by fire. A prismatic portrait of British life and millennial angst emerges, with echoes of Zadie Smith and Sally Rooney, but the presiding spirit of the novel is Virginia Woolf, whose A Room of One’s Own provides the epigraph and the inspiration.

Scintillating prose and sly social observation make this novel a tart pleasure.

**THE CORPSE FLOWER**

_Hancock, Anne Mette_

Trans. by Chace, Tara

Crooked Lane (336 pp.)

$26.99 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-1-64385-828-9

Hancock’s striking debut rips the lid off a 3-year-old murder case and reveals even uglier secrets beneath.

DS Erik Schäfer, of the Copenhagen police’s Violent Crimes Unit, is perfectly satisfied that he knows who cut attorney Christoffer Mossing’s throat and left him to bleed out in his own bed. Minutes after the murder, the security camera in Mossing’s driveway captured an image of Anna Kiel leaving the house without making the slightest effort to conceal herself. But that was the last anyone saw of Anna—until now, when she’s begun to send insinuating notes to Demokratisk Dagblad business reporter Heloise Kaldan that are unsettling in their reference to _amorphophallus titanum_, the so-called corpse flower native to Sumatra, and their ritualistic closing lines and disturbingly detailed knowledge about the scant details of Heloise’s private life. Already treading on thin ice ever since the confidential information her lover, Martin Duvall, the communications chief to the commerce secretary, provided for her exposé of a fashion mogul’s investment in a textile factory in Bangalore didn’t quite pan out, Heloise strains to avoid any contact with the presumptive killer. The deeper she digs into the cold case, however, the closer its nightmarish details seem to impinge on her own past. Schäfer, meanwhile, is brusquely brushed off by real estate tycoon Johannes Mossing, who seems actively opposed to getting justice for his son’s murder. The highly suspicious hanging of Ulrich Andersson, the ex-reporter who covered the case for the Dagblad, kicks the investigation into high gear. But it won’t be laid to rest until Heloise comes face to face with Anna and hears why she was so indifferent to that security camera three years ago.

Scandinavian noir at its noirest. It’s hard, maybe unthinkable, to imagine how Hancock will follow it up.
No Gods, No Monsters begins with what looks like a typical case of police brutality, but then the camera widens, and the reasons for why the killing happened expand outward over the course of the novel. The answers only lead to deeper questions. It is what I feel every time these events occur, like there is a deeper understanding evading all of us, and we can’t truly stop what’s happening until we find out what it is. The novel began to embody that same frustrated searching.

What science fiction and fantasy had an influence on you when you were younger?

Very early on it was Nineteen Eighty-Four. At the time, I didn’t know it was science fiction—it wasn’t talked about that way in school—but I later realized it fit perfectly within the genre. It is the only book from high school that I’ve reread more than once and one of the few books I’ve reread more than three times.

In college, I read The Lathe of Heaven by Ursula K. Le Guin, and she continues to be the author that has influenced me the most. Le Guin is not a surprise answer to people who read genre, but I grew up in the Virgin Islands, and I didn’t know anyone who read speculative fiction. It was a lucky break I found her when I did, when I was ready to fully appreciate her work. I’m still making my way through her bibliography. I’ve never regretted reading a single story she’s written.

What fall book are you most looking forward to getting your hands on?

Can I list a few? Stephen Graham Jones is a masterful writer, and I am really looking forward to reading My Heart Is a Chainsaw. Light From Uncommon Stars by Ryka Aoki—I am a huge fan of mixing genres, and the description to Aoki’s novel reads like the perfect combination of so many things I love. I’ve been reading The Expanse series by James S.A. Corey (and watching the TV show), so I am anxiously awaiting the final installment. I trust they’ll stick the landing. They’ve been killing it so far.

Interview by Tom Beer
An epic novel brings complex 20th-century Korean history to life.

In this extraordinary historical novel, debut author Kim weaves together the story of friends and rivals trying to survive and thrive from the era of the Japanese occupation of Korea to the political purges of the mid-20th century. The book begins with a Korean hunter encountering a tiger in the snow when he is captured by a lost squad of Japanese soldiers. With its near-mythic evocations of several kinds of beasts, the prologue establishes the themes of the book. The majority of the novel follows Jade, whose impoverished farming family sends her as a young girl to work as a servant for a courtesan. Jade observes the rivalries of other girls in training, particularly Luna, the spoiled favored daughter of the head of the household, and Lotus, the spirited but plainer younger sister. Thanks to her intelligence and resourcefulness, Jade will grow up to become a celebrated courtesan and movie star in Seoul, where she and the two sisters end up as adults. Together they encounter various men, including the revolution-minded MyungBo, an intellectual fighting for Korean independence; the ever loyal JungHo, the leader of a street gang of orphaned boys; the slick and wealthy patron SungSoo; and the ambitious rickshaw driver HanChol. Jade, Luna, and Lotus fall in love with men from very different backgrounds, but their love and loyalty are not always returned. Kim shows clearly how patriarchy harms these resourceful women in one of the novel's major themes. Late in the book a Japanese general will remark, “How such enormous beasts have flourished in this little land is incomprehensible.”

He is referring to tigers, but he might as well be talking about the humans who fight here, too.

Gorgeous prose and unforgettable characters combine to make a literary masterpiece. (This review is printed here for the first time.)

**Search History**

*Lim, Eugene*

Coffee House (152 pp.)

$16.95 paper | Oct. 5, 2021

978-1-56689-617-7

Reincarnation, mad scientists, and identity all play important roles in Lim’s latest fiction.

Here, as in his three earlier novels, author, librarian, and Ellipsis Press proprietor Lim asks big questions about identity while simultaneously taking substantial risks concerning structure. There’s a vein of absurdism here—one of the events that sets the novel in motion is a drone enthusiast hearing a woman in a park tell a story about a dog. He comes to the realization “that the pet in the story was actually my deceased friend, Frank Exit.” (Readers of *Dear Cyborgs* will recognize Frank’s name, but the two novels stand on their own.) The fact that several sections of this novel are titled “Shaggy Dog” points to the more free-form elements of the novel’s structure, which moves between subgenres at a moment’s notice, alternating the enthusiast’s encounter with the dog (and its aftermath) with ruminations on identity, fiction, and media. Lim is deeply aware of the literary territory he’s working: One chapter title is an homage to Jorge Luis Borges, and one character is a robotic version of Argentinian surrealist César Aira. As befits a book dealing with death and rebirth, the novel oscillates between the uncanny and the philosophical. One moment you’ll find yourself hearing talk of Doctor Y, who “had terraformed the far side of the moon and built a small fortress,” while the next, the narrator will ask deep, searching questions about identity: “Wasn’t my friendship with Frank foundationally based on the fact that we were both Korean American?” The narrator muses midway through the book. Lim’s ability to balance the fantastical with the heartfelt is what ultimately makes this book resonate. It does cover a lot of seemingly random ground, but as the full shape of the narrative takes hold, it becomes thoroughly compelling.

*Lim brings together the mundane and the extraordinary to powerful effect.* (This review is printed here for the first time.)
A storm, a stroke, a death—this Antarctic expedition leaves a traumatic aftermath.

Robert “Doc” Wright, a 33-year veteran of Antarctic expeditions, couldn’t have picked a worse time and place to have a stroke. Not only is he at a remote research station in Antarctica—“the nearest humans are about three hundred miles away. And they’re Russian”—he and his two inexperienced teammates are outside, far from shelter, and physically separate from one another when the storm begins. Why? Because one of the researchers wants to take some pictures, and they’ve separated in order to get the right shots: “Without someone in the frame there was no way to capture the scale of this place.” Confused, debilitated, embarrassed to call for help and admit down there, in Antarctica, in the blowing snow . Though its end away . And they’re Russian”—he and his two inexperienced researchers for whom he’s responsible. Another writer might have changed researcher who has long since tired of her husband’s passion for the Antarctic and the annual absences that come with it. With Robert incapacitated by his stroke, Anna is suddenly thrust into the role of reluctant caregiver, helping him stand up, helping him dress himself, and ultimately trying to help him tell the story—to himself and to her—of what exactly happened down there, in Antarctica, in the blowing snow. Though its ending is only moderately successful (for some readers it may feel a bit too neat), this is nonetheless a quiet, beautiful novel that’s at once deeply sad and wryly funny.

Lyrical and terse, funny and tragic—a marvelous addition to the McGregor canon.
“A novel of capacious intelligence and plenty of page-turning emotional drama.”

BEAUTIFUL WORLD, WHERE ARE YOU

Two erudite Irishwomen struggle with romance against the backdrop of the Trump/Brexit years. Eileen and Alice have been friends since their university days. Now in their late 20s, Eileen works as an editorial assistant at a literary magazine in Dublin. Alice is a famous novelist recovering from a psychiatric hospitalization and staying in a large empty rectory on the west coast of Ireland. Since Alice’s breakdown, the two have kept in touch primarily through lengthy emails that alternate between recounting their romantic lives and working through their angst about the current social and political climate. (In one of these letters, Eileen laments that the introduction of plastic has ruined humanity’s aesthetic calibration and in the next paragraph, she’s eager to know if Alice is sleeping with the new man she’s met.) Eileen has spent many years entangled in an occasionally intimate friendship with her teenage crush, a slightly older man named Simon who is a devout Catholic and who works in the Irish Parliament as an assistant. As Eileen and Simon’s relationship becomes more complicated, Alice meets Felix, a warehouse worker who is unsure what to make of her fame and aloofness. In many ways, this book, a work of both philosophy and romantic tragicomedy about the ways people love and hurt one another, is exactly the type of book one would expect Rooney to write out of the political environment of the past few years. But just because the novel is so characteristic of Rooney doesn’t take anything away from its considerable power. As Alice herself puts it, “Humanity on the cusp of extinction [and] here I am writing another email about sex and friendship. What else is there to live for?”

A touching novel that offers a vital message with uncommon sympathy and intelligence.

BEWILDERMENT

A widower pursues an unusual form of neurological therapy for his son in this affecting story. Astrobiologist Theo Byrne, 45, looks for life in outer space while his 9-year-old son, Robin, seeks to protect endangered animals on Earth. Both are still grieving for the boy’s mother, Alyssa, an animal rights activist who died in a car accident two years ago as she swerved to avoid hitting an opossum. Since then, Robin has been subject to tantrums and violence and variously diagnosed with Asperger’s, OCD, and ADHD. Theo has resisted medication and turns to a university colleague who is experimenting with a neurological therapy. Powers has followed his award-winning, bestselling The Overstory (2018), a busy eco-epic featuring nine main characters, with this taut ecological parable borne by a small cast. It’s a darker tale, starting with an author’s note about Flowers for Algernon and continuing through Robin’s emotional maelstrom, Theo’s parental terrors, and, not far in the background, environmental and political challenges under a Trump-like president. Yet there are also shared moments of wonder and joy for a father and son attuned to science and nature and each other, as well as flashbacks that make Alyssa a vibrant presence. The empathy that holds this nuclear family together also informs Robin’s ceaseless concern and efforts on behalf of threatened species, just as the absence of empathy fuels the threat. As always, there’s a danger of preachiness in such stories. Powers generally avoids it by nurturing empathy for Robin. While the boy’s obsession with the fate of the planet’s nonhuman life can seem like religious fervor, it has none of the cant or self-interest. He is himself a rare and endangered species.

A novel of capacious intelligence and plenty of page-turning emotional drama.
In British author Jon McGregor’s *Lean Stand Fall* (Catapult, Sept. 21), a routine Antarctic expedition leads to catastrophe. Our reviewer calls it “lyrical and terse, funny and tragic—a marvelous addition to the McGregor canon.” McGregor answered our questions by email.

Did you write the book during the pandemic?

I finished the book during the pandemic. In theory, the early months of the pandemic should have been ideal for writing—don’t go anywhere! Don’t socialize! Stay home and work!—but in practice the pandemic was, well, kind of distracting. The practicalities of home schooling and looking out for my elderly mother, plus the existential dread and the strategic grocery shopping, rather got in the way. But I was on a deadline, so I did all my writing between 5 a.m., when the birds were singing and everything looked normal, and 7 a.m., when the existential dread kicked in.

*Lean Stand Fall* starts off seeming like one kind of book—an adventure novel—and turns out to be quite different. What would you like readers to know as they pick up the book?

I like a reader to come to a book unprepared and unwarned. But if it helps you to pick this book up: Know that these men are caught in a terrible Antarctic storm, that something is going very wrong, and that one of them will need to learn new ways of understanding survival and recovery. Know, also, that language is not nearly as robust or reliable as we might think and that it fails most of us at some time.

What kind of research did you do?

I went to Antarctica in 2004, on a writing residency with the British Antarctic Survey. It was an incredible experience and an incredibly difficult one to put into words. It took 17 years to translate that experience into a book, and in the end most of my research came from reading and from talking to other people who’ve been there. I also spoke to several speech and language therapists and spent time with a self-help group for people with aphasia. The term aphasia refers to such a broad and complex range of experiences that it was invaluable to meet people living with the condition and to get to know them over time.

Interview by Laurie Muchnick
The timing could not have been more thoughtfully ordained. Indeed—and he leant over to whisper confidentially to the surgeon during one of their meals together....It was I who set fire to Hilltop Mansion, just to get you down in Badagry.” There’s a lot going on in Soyinka’s shaggy dog yarn, its plot dense enough to rival anything by Günter Grass. The speaker here is an engineer who has fallen afoul of the nation’s prime minister, a propagandist wedded to the ironic slogan of Soyinka’s title. His lifelong friend, a surgeon who specializes in amputations, now has rivals in child soldiers and Boko Haram terrorists, given to lopping off the limbs of presumed infidels out in the countryside. They’re not the only bad actors: As Soyinka writes, the police and the Nigerian army are not shy themselves about relieving their victims of body parts, and then there are the usual grisly accidents and freelance acts of violence. Dr. Kighare Menka sighs, “I am only a surgeon. My specialization is to cut people up, after others have recommended that course of action.” His engineer friend, Duyole Pitan-Payne, has much bigger ambitions for the good doctor, but alas, things go awry, as they always do. Soyinka’s sprawling tale abounds in sly references to current events in Nigeria, and his targets are many, not least of them politicians and self-styled holy men with bigger ambitions still (says one of the latter, “The trouble with you...is diffidence, that illegitimate child of memory. Go for chutzpah!”). Everyone you’ll encounter in these pages, including someone who just might be the devil himself, has ardent hopes and big dreams and no fear of stepping on others, such as one aide who wonders “why widows, widowers, and orphans did not simply lick their wounds and adopt appeasing attitudes towards their violators for the privilege of staying alive.”

Dazzling wordplay and subtle allusion mark this most welcome return to fiction.

While *Anything Is Possible* (2017) told the stories of people among whom Lucy grew up in poverty in Amagash, Illinois, this new novel returns to the direct address of *My Name Is Lucy Barton* (2016). Lucy’s beloved second husband, David, has recently died, and “in my grief for him I have felt grief for William as well,” she tells us. Her stuttering, stop-and-start narrative drops this and other pronouncements and then moves on, circling back later to elucidate and elaborate. After the pain of their separation subsides, Lucy and William become friends, close enough so that when he begins having night terrors at age 69, he confides in Lucy rather than his much younger third wife. (Wife No. 2 was among the many infidelities that broke up his marriage to Lucy.) Perhaps it’s because the terrors are related to his mother, Catherine, who “seemed central to
our marriage,” Lucy tells us. “We loved her. Oh, we loved her.” Well, sometimes; Lucy’s memories reveal a deep ambivalence. Catherine patronized her, referring frequently to the poverty of Lucy’s background and her unfamiliarity with the ways of more affluent people. So it’s a shock to Lucy as well as William when he learns that his mother was married before, abandoned a baby daughter to marry his father, and came from a family even poorer than Lucy’s. Their road trip to Maine prompts William’s habitual coping mechanism of simply checking out, being present but not really there, which is the real reason Lucy left him. Strout’s habitual themes of loneliness and the impossibility of ever truly knowing another person are ubiquitous in this deeply sad tale, which takes its title from Lucy’s head-shaking acknowledgment that her ex will never change, cannot change the remoteness at the core of his personality.

Another skillful, pensive exploration of Strout’s fundamental credo: “We are all mysteries.”

**FIGHT NIGHT**

_Tóibín, Colm_

Bloomsbury (272 pp.)
$24.00 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-63557-817-1

The author of _Women Talking_ (2018) lets a 9-year-old girl have her say. The first thing to know about this novel is that it’s narrated by a child writing to her father, who seems to have abandoned her and her pregnant mother.

The novel-as-long-letter can often feel gimmicky; it’s difficult to craft a child’s voice that is both authentic and compelling, and it would not be unreasonable for readers to be wary of a book that attempts both. Readers familiar with _Toews_ will, however, may guess—correctly—that she’s quite capable of meeting the formal challenges she’s set for herself. “Mom is afraid of losing her mind and killing herself but Grandma says she’s nowhere near losing her mind and killing herself.” This is Swiv talking. “Grandpa and Auntie Momo killed themselves, and your dad is somewhere else, those things are true.” This is Swiv’s Grandma talking. “But we’re here! We are all here now.” This exchange captures the central concerns of this charming, open-hearted book. Swiv’s mother—an actor—is a bundle of angst, rage, and stifled ambition. Swiv’s grandmother, on the other hand, is the embodiment of joie de vivre, and it’s Grandma with whom Swiv spends most of her time, filling the roles of caretaker and sometimes-rebellious accomplice. Grandma is the type of person who befriends everyone she meets and who finds the joy in even the most ridiculous and—to her granddaughter—mortifying experiences. As the novel progresses, we discover that this ebullience isn’t the natural product of a happy life but, rather, the result of a conscious decision to endure terrible loss without becoming hard. We also come to learn why Swiv’s mom is so brittle. And we understand that Grandma, in all her glorious ridiculousness, is showing Swiv that the only way to survive is to love.

_Funny and sad and exquisitely tender._

**THE MAGICIAN**

_Tóibín, Colm_

Scribner (320 pp.)
$28.00 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-4767-8508-0

The Irish writer’s fictional portrait of Thomas Mann highlights his family life. What adventures the Mann children have. Erika weds W.H. Auden to get a British passport. Monika survives the torpedo attack that sank the SS _City of Benares_ in World War II. Golo finds that Alma Mahler wants to bring 23 suitcases along in their escape from occupied France. _Tóibín_ chronicles the Mann clan—Thomas’ parents and siblings, his wife, and their six children—across some seven decades. It’s a busy, comprehensive narrative centered on a complex, conflicted husband, father, and writer facing family problems and crises and rarely failing to put in his four hours at the desk before lunch. Half the book’s time frame spans two world wars, and German politics is a constant, as some Manns are vocal while Thomas, always protective of his good name and livelihood, struggles with demands for him to speak out. Three of his grown children are open in their sexual fluidity; but he never publicly acknowledges his feelings about men (his revelatory diaries appeared 20 years after his death). The personal and public history is compelling, but the book may disappoint some readers’ expectations. Fans of Mann may question the novel’s scant treatment of his writing. Fans of _Tóibín_’s _The Master_ (2005) and its exploration of a crucial four-year span in Henry James’ life may be surprised at _Tóibín_’s tackling nearly all of Mann’s 80 years. The new novel does at times drag like a conventional biography with the weight of mundane details and repetition, and overall it feels overlong. But _Tóibín_ succeeds in conveying his fascination with the Magician, as his children called him, who could make sexual secrets vanish beneath a rich surface life of family and uncommon art.

_An intriguing view of a writer who well deserves another turn on the literary stage._

**THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY**

_Towles, Amor_

Viking (592 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-0-73-522235-9

Newly released from a work farm in 1950s Kansas, where he served 18 months for involuntary manslaughter, 18-year-old Emmett Watson hits the road with his little brother, Billy, following the death of their father and the foreclosure of their Nebraska farm.

They leave to escape angry townspeople who believe Emmett got off easy, having caused the fatal fall of a taunting local boy by punching him in the nose. The whip-smart Billy, who exhibits OCD-like symptoms, convinces Emmett to drive
them to San Francisco to reunite with their mother, who left town eight years ago. He insists she’s there, based on postcards she sent before completely disappearing from their lives. But when Emmett’s prized red Studebaker is “borrowed” by two rambunctious, New York-bound escapees from the juvie facility he just left, Emmett takes after them via freight train with Billy in tow. Billy befriends a Black veteran named Ulysses who’s been riding the rails nonstop since returning home from World War II to find his wife and baby boy gone. A modern picaresque with a host of characters, competing points of view, wandering narratives, and teasing chapter endings, Towles’s third novel is even more entertaining than his much-acclaimed A Gentleman in Moscow (2016). You can quibble with one or two plot turns, but there’s no resisting moments such as Billy’s encounter, high up in the Empire State Building in the middle of the night, with professor Abacus Abernathe, whose Compendium of Heroes, Adventurers, and Other Intrepid Travelers he’s read 24 times. A remarkable blend of sweetness and doom, Towles’s novel is packed with revelations about the American myth, the art of storytelling, and the unrelenting pull of history.

An exhilarating ride through Americana.

**NO GODS, NO MONSTERS**
*Turnbull, Cadwell*
Blackstone (350 pp.)
$26.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-982603-72-4

In the first of a series, the monsters who have always lived among us emerge, endangered by prejudice, doubt, and at least one deadly, ancient cult.

Laina mourns the death of her estranged brother, Lincoln, lost to drug addiction and killed by a cop. Then a mysterious person sends her a video of the incident, which shows Lincoln transform to obscuring—or exterminating—that truth. As these so-called “monsters” consider the dangers of becoming more public, their allies must decide whether they, too, will take a stand and risk themselves as well.

Calvin, a man with the power to move along the timeline of any parallel universe except his own, serves as a semionomiscient and flawed first-person witness to these events. Despite her eldritch origins, it’s easy to sympathize with Sondra, a senator from St. Thomas and secret werewolf, who longs for her missing parents and both loves and resents her adopted sister, Sonya, a blood-drinking and usually invisible creature hiding many secrets. The struggles of Laina’s girlfriend, Rebeca, a werewolf who has faced many losses and made many mistakes, are absorbing, as are the struggles of Laina’s husband, Ridley, an asexual trans man yearning for his parents’ approval even as he devotes himself to improving society through cooperative enterprise.

This is a deeply human story, beautifully and compellingly told.

**HARLEM SHUFFLE**
*Whitehead, Colson*
Doubleday (316 pp.)
$28.95 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-385-54513-6

After winning back-to-back Pulitzer Prizes for his previous two books, Whitehead lets fly with a typically crafty change-up: a crime novel set in mid-20th-century Harlem.

The twin triumphs of The Underground Railroad (2016) and The Nickel Boys (2019) may have led Whitehead’s fans to believe he would lean even harder on social justice themes in his next novel. But by now, it should be clear that this most eclectic of contemporary masters never repeats himself; and his new novel is as audacious, ingenious, and spellbinding as any of his previous period pieces. Its unlikely and appealing protagonist is Ray Carney, who, when the story begins in 1958, is expecting a second child with his wife, Elizabeth, while selling used furniture and appliances on Harlem’s storied, ever bustling 125th Street. Ray’s difficult childhood as a hoodlum’s son forced to all but raise himself makes him an exemplar of the self-made man to everybody but his upper-middle-class in-laws, aghast that their daughter and grandchildren live in a small apartment within earshot of the subway tracks. Try as he might, however, Ray can’t quite wrest free of his criminal roots. To help make ends meet as he struggles to grow his business, Ray takes covert trips downtown to sell lost or stolen jewelry, some of it coming through the dubious means of Ray’s ne’er-do-well cousin, Freddie, who’s been getting Ray into hot messes since they were kids. Freddie’s now involved in a scheme to rob the Hotel Theresa, the fabled “Waldorf of Harlem,” and he wants his cousin to fence whatever he and his unsavory, volatile cohorts take in. This caper, which goes wrong in several perilous ways, is only the first in a series of strenuous tests of character and resources Ray endures from the back end of the 1950s to the Harlem riots of 1964. Throughout, readers will be captivated by a Dickensian array of colorful, idiosyncratic characters, from itchy-fingered gangsters to working-class women with a low threshold for male folly. What’s even more impressive is Whitehead’s densely layered, intricately woven rendering of New York City in the Kennedy era, a time filled with both the bright promise of greater economic opportunity and looming despair due to the growing heroin plague. It’s a city in which, as one character observes, “everybody’s kicking back or kicking up. Unless you’re on top.”

As one of Whitehead’s characters might say of their creator, When you’re hot, you’re hot.
Juhea Kim’s first novel, *Beasts of a Little Land* (Ecco, Dec. 7), is an epic tale revolving around Jade, a poor Korean girl who becomes a famous courtesan during the tumultuous years from 1917 to 1965. Our starred review says, “Gorgeous prose and unforgettable characters combine to make a literary masterpiece.” Kim answered our questions by email.

**Were you a big reader as a kid?**

I was a child bookworm, for sure! I especially loved books that made me cry. Two of the earliest I remember are *The Little Prince* and *Les Misérables*. I think that definitely shows in my work—as an artist I’m most interested in poignancy.

**You were born in Korea and moved to the U.S. when you were 9. Did you travel back while you were writing the book? What kind of research did you do?**

I’ve gone back several times over the years, although I didn’t go back while writing the book. Korea is an incredibly fast-moving country; for example, entire neighborhoods are razed and redeveloped every several years. I think being in that environment wouldn’t have been very conducive to writing a historical novel. This is also why the majority of contemporary Korean fiction deals with issues of a modern society, such as patriarchy, individuality/conformity, hypercompetition for limited resources, etc. But there is also an immense pride and continuity in our culture. Researching history books, fiction, paintings, and music from that time period was essential.

**What would you like readers to know as they pick up the book, and what would you like them to take away from it?**

My goal wasn’t to write a fun fictionalized way to learn about Korean history but to hold a mirror to our human nature and human experience. The issues these characters deal with—war, injustice, poverty, and colonialism, just to name a few—haven’t gone away; and what redeems them—love, compassion, honor, courage—is also what remains with us. So I hope this book feels true and relevant today: As Alexander Solzhenitsyn said, “I believe that world literature is fully capable of helping a troubled humanity to recognize its true self.”

*Interview by Laurie Muchnick*
A memorable return for renowned storyteller Williams after a lengthy absence from long-form fiction. “Something definitely had gone wrong. Even the dead were dismayed.” Something has gone wrong indeed, but in her first novel in 20 years, Williams doesn’t reveal the precise contours of what that something is. There are portents at the outset as the young girl known first as Lamb, then as Khristen, contemplates a bit of family lore recounting that as a newborn she was resuscitated after having stopped breathing and, thus reborn, “was destined for something extraordinary.” So Khristen’s mother believes, in any event, sending her to a boarding school where, Khristen says, “my situation would be appreciated and the alarming gift I had been given properly acknowledged.” Instead, the school dries up, for by Khristen’s third year there are no incoming students. Why? There’s no resolution in sight anywhere in Williams’ deliberately paced pre–post-apocalyptic novel: All the reader knows is that something is definitely off, signaled by such moments as when a fellow student, asked to contemplate an orange while pondering creativity, protests, “I haven’t tasted an orange in years.” Khristen takes her place in an odd community on a “razed resort” alongside a dying lake known as Big Girl, populated by the likes of a gifted, spooky 10-year-old and a Vicodin-swilling matriarch named Lola. If nothing else, the place has a working bowling alley, one good place to await doomsday. As the clock ticks away, Williams seeds her story with allusions to Kafka, bits of Greek mythology, philosophical notes on the nature of tragedy, and gemlike description (“He was in excellent physical condition, lean with rage”), and all along with subtly sardonic humor: Williams’ imagined world of the near future is so thoroughly corporatized that even the blades of wind turbines have advertisements on them, and she offers a useful phrase for obituaries to come: “What did he die of?” one character asks, meeting the reply: “Environmental issues.”

An enigmatic, elegant meditation on the end of civilization—if end it truly is.

Thirtyseven timeless stories of what goes on between men and women, grounded in an optimism that is no stranger to sorrow.

Ninety-one-year-old Wolitzer, author of five novels and mother of Meg, collects for the first time her stories from the 1960s and ’70s, many first published in *Esquire*, *Ms.*, and elsewhere, and adds a brand new one from 2020. A foreword by Elizabeth Strout alerts us to the particular joys of Wolitzer’s prose style and storytelling—how she “leaves enough spaces between the lines” for us to “enter the story with our own experiences and therefore make it our own.” After the crystalline title story zips us straight back to the mad housewife era and a second introduces the centrality of female desire in Wolitzer’s work, there’s a run of seven narrated by Paulette, or Paulie as her husband, Howard, calls her. Full of the pleasures of intimacy, these are unusually happy stories about a complicated marriage. No matter that it begins with an unplanned pregnancy; weather’s infidelity, an extended visit from Howard’s first wife, and the appearance of a sex maniac in the building (“about time,” thinks Paulie); and tackles her insomnia and his depression (usually responsive to a day spent driving around to visit model homes). “Why am I so happy?” wonders Paulie. “I know the same bad things Howard knows.” Spoiled as we are by the tonic power of Paulie’s worldview, it’s an adjustment to embrace three grimmer stories that follow. But wait—in an amazing grand finale, Wolitzer brings Paulie and Howard back a half-century later, reckoning with the usual dirty tricks of old age. “Howard, who had once been so gorgeous,” is now “grizzled and paunchy and gray,” but Paulie is still Paulie: Where she used to check her husband’s side of the bed upon waking for “a promising rise in the bedclothes,” she now rejoices in the simple evidence of breath. It seemed like the world “would all go on forever in that exquisitely boring and beautiful way. But of course it wouldn’t.” And along comes the novel coronavirus to do its worst.

Completing the trajectory of her early triumphs with a pandemic masterpiece, Wolitzer takes our breath away.
A young couple falls in love in 21st-century New York City: Is it fate, or was their connection foretold by their ancestors?

We are the sum of the people who made us, Caribbean American writer Yanique tells us in her new novel. Their hopes and dreams may bear no resemblance to our own, may in fact be directly opposed to what we want and need, but their stories are the foundations from which we blossom. The idea isn’t new, but the gifted Yanique, author of *Land of Love and Drowning* (2014), shapes it into something unique and memorable as she considers the effects of cultural disconnection on desire and love. At the heart of her story are Fly and Stela, who will meet in New York City on the cusp of a pandemic. He’s a Black American, raised on religion and weed, with a mentally ill father and an ear for music; she’s half an orphan from the Virgin Islands with an artist’s eye who loves the colors of the sea and dreams of landing in the belly of a whale. A long and compelling road leads to their love story, one lined with mistakes, regrets, and other emotional flotsam. Potential menace lies everywhere, in a preacher who peddles a peculiar brand of salvation from a parking lot; a predator who slyly hides bad intentions; police officers whose racism and careless sense of justice are tangible dangers. What, then, is Yanique’s “monster in the middle”? She scatters clues with allusions to myth and magic, but interpretation lies with the reader. This author understands how we come to be who we are. “We all know it takes a village to raise a child. But I can tell you honestly that it takes an ancestry to make a man or woman,” says Stela’s stepfather. Look to your roots, Yanique urges us, and maybe you’ll see the outline of your future.

A rich and honest examination of family histories, cultural disconnection, and the way people fall in love. (*This review is printed here for the first time.*)
A damning account of the federal government’s response to 9/11 and the two-decade war that ensued. National security expert and commentator Arkin works from a vast, meticulously assembled, million-word dossier he has assembled on the 9/11 attackers and from the government record to deliver a chronicle that reveals several essential institutional breakdowns. One was the failure to honor “continuity of government” regulations that require those in the constitutional succession to the presidency to travel to safe locations in the event of attack. Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert complied while, “when the condition presented itself for the government to take action to increase its survival, leaders brushed the apparatus aside.” Another failure was to communicate effectively with both the nation’s allies and Russia. American military movements following 9/11 were so sudden and inexplicable that Russia interpreted them as signaling the outbreak of war between the superpowers. Meanwhile, Arkin notes, Donald Rumsfeld scribbled a revealing note just hours after the attacks: “Best info fast. Judge whether good enough to hit S.H. [Saddam Hussein] at same time. Not only UBL [Osama bin Laden]. Go massive. Sweep it all up. Things related and not.” Clearly, then, the Bush administration was looking for a pretext to go to war with Iraq. The war that ensued, under the larger rubric of the war on terror, was undeclared. Even the rules of engagement on the day of the attack and its aftermath were ambiguous and variously interpreted—though Arkin reveals that it was generally understood that U.S. military aircraft were free to fire on civilian airliners suspected of posing threats. Whatever the case, Arkin writes in this relentlessly revealing narrative, 9/11 ushered in a war that has not stopped since, “evidence of the overreaction of a frustrated and humiliated Washington.” Nothing has improved in the years since, and the author clearly shows how the government’s failures on 9/11 were only recapitulated with Covid-19 as an exercise in feckless action.

A maddening, essential study in misinformation, jingoism, bad intelligence, and other hallmarks of the recent American past.
“An unforgettable page-turner of a life story rendered with endless grace and grit.”

UNBOUND
My Story of Liberation and the Birth of the Me Too Movement
Burke, Tarana
Flatiron Books (320 pp.)
$28.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-250-62173-3

A soul-baring memoir by one of the most significant social activists of the past two decades.

By the time the #MeToo hashtag became popularized in 2017, Burke had been at work for more than 10 years building the “me too” movement. Though she sets the record straight as the movement’s true founder, she’s less concerned about credit than she is about letting “women, particularly young women of color, know that they are not alone—it’s a movement. It’s beyond a hashtag. It’s the start of a larger conversation and a movement for radical community healing.” With empathy at the heart of this movement, Burke offers her own story as a means of helping others. “A dark-skinned Black girl who had been damaged and used,” the author recounts her upbringing in the Bronx in the 1970s and ‘80s where she was labeled “ugly” and blamed herself for the rape she endured at age 7. Through searing prose and riveting storytelling, Burke lays her trauma bare alongside beautifully rendered moments, such as her discovery, as a high school freshman, of the transformative power of fellow survivor Maya Angelou’s life and art. An honors student known as the “Black Power girl” who challenged racist White teachers, the author went on to become a college activist and then a community organizer in Selma, Alabama. Her intense passion and commitment shine through on every page. Even readers familiar with the story will find much of value in this survey.

AN ABOLITIONIST’S HANDBOOK
12 Steps to Changing Yourself and the World
Cullors, Patrisse
St. Martin’s (288 pp.)
$26.99 | Jan. 25, 2022
978-1-2502-7297-3

A co-founder of Black Lives Matter compiles a tool kit for activists hoping to abdul “oppressive systems, institutions, and practices” and to repair the harm they’ve caused.

Inspired partly by her father’s experiences in Alcoholics Anonymous, Cullors blends polemic and self-help in a 12-step program for getting rid of “prisons, jails, police, courts and surveillance” and otherwise “dismantling white supremacy.” As she sees it, abolition means more than demolishing institutions or practices and replacing them with more humane alternatives. It also involves taking personal and interpersonal steps to foster “healing and liberation,” such as having “courageous conversations” with friends, family, co-workers, and movement allies or colleagues about difficulties in relationships. Cullors...
begins each chapter by discussing one of her 12 steps, such as “Build Community” and “Forgive Actively Not Passively,” and ends each with practical tips on topics such as “What To Read/Watch/See/Hear” and “Guiding Questions” for reflection (listen to Beyoncé’s Lemonade to hear about “actively forgiving”). In the best sections, Cullors brings a unique perspective to BLM-related issues, such as why she favors abolishing the police instead of more narrowly focused strategies such as requiring the greater use of bodycams (the officer who killed George Floyd was wearing one, but the full horror of his death was captured not by his device but by bystanders with phones). The text is repetitious, and some of the author’s ideas will be too woolly for many readers (“Check out...CHAN1, a comprehensive astrology app that can help deepen your courage practice”) or overfamiliar to consumers of self-help (frequent plugs for therapy, mindfulness, or keeping a journal). Still, Cullors offers a wide range of strategies for activists who share her view that you can’t always fix a broken system—sometimes you have to throw it out and start over.

A veteran activist’s call to dismantle America’s judicial, law enforcement, and other systems. (This review is printed here for the first time.)

**THE CAUSE**

**The American Revolution and Its Discontents, 1773-1783**

Ellis, Joseph J.
Liveright/Norton (320 pp.)
$30.00  |  Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-63149-898-5

With his characteristically graceful prose, Ellis offers a short, straightforward history of a critical decade in the nation’s youth.

Unlike most of the author’s previous work—mostly reflective book-length essays on various aspects and leading figures of the Revolutionary era—this work is more in the line of traditional narratives about American history. While both elite leaders and average people populate these pages, no reader will mistake it for a social or cultural history or history-from-the-bottom-up. Nor is it a history of the entire Revolution, which usually starts no later than the 1765 Stamp Act crisis. Instead, Ellis digs in with the Boston Tea Party of 1773 and ends with the Treaty of Paris of 1783. His focus is on the Revolution’s male leaders, its politics, the colonists’ inner civil war, and military campaigns. Little here is new by way of interpretation. The author’s sole general argument—that the colonists’ victory was “foreordained”—won’t go unchallenged. This is, quite simply, a well-known story told by a master storyteller known for perceptive detailing. As is always the case with Ellis, he is brilliant at short takes—events, decisions, individuals. Here, he foregrounds four often overlooked men—diplomat John Jay, thinker and pamphleteer John Dickinson, military leader Nathanael Greene, and financier Robert Morris—without whom the Colonies might not have forged a nation. George Washington duly commands center stage, his character and genius indispensable for American victory. True to his own skills at bringing people alive, Ellis also includes sympathetic miniprofiles of normal, unsung participants in the period’s fraught events: loyalists, women, Native Americans, Joseph Plum Martin (“the Zelig of the American Revolution”), and, perhaps the most captivating, Washington’s personal slave, Billy Lee. The book’s only disappointment is its abrupt close.

It’s hard to imagine a better-told brief history of the key years of the American Revolution.

**BLACK NERD PROBLEMS**

**Essays**

Evans, William & Holmon, Omar
Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster (304 pp.)
$27.00  |  Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-982150-23-5

The first book from the creators of the popular Black Nerd Problems website.

In their literary debut, Evans and Holmon examine a broad swath of the popular-culture landscape, from anime and video games to comic books and movies, mixing social commentary and insight with the sheer love of the true fan. In the introduction, the authors introduce nerd culture and the joy of connecting over shared passions, with Holmon offering a solid encapsulation of both the content and the voice: “That feeling of excitement and passion for a show, book, or character that fcks with you and then wanting to share that amongst friends or even strangers, hoping they feel the same thing you do….Isn’t that worth fighting for, for Black nerds and nerds of color to come together and share that joy?” The essays include breakdowns of particular shows and characters—ranging from an in-depth analysis of Simba (“It’s Time We Pretending That Simba Wasn’t Garbage in The Lion King”) to the Black superhero in Into the Spider-Verse—all with musings on the representation of people of color in comics, the shifting definitions of nerds and nerd culture, and the reflection of social issues in popular-culture texts. The book’s format, switching between the two authors and including essays that work as dialogues, offers the sense of hearing conversations between best friends. The authors provide lighthearted material, such as an excellent essay that describes how Mario Kart shows you exactly the kind of person you really are, as well as serious inquiry—e.g., the “Sobering Reality of Actual Black Nerd Problems,” which focuses on the effect of “violence against black men and boys,” or passages about finding respectful characters of color in children’s programming like Craig of the Creek or the Legend of Korra. Throughout, the authors reach far and wide across fan culture and use a pleasing blend of humor and pathos to connect readers to the material.

An exercise in pop-culture criticism that is simultaneously funny, thoughtful, and provocative.
Anyone in the book publishing industry knows that the busiest seasons are spring and fall, and I usually find fall to be the most active—especially this year, since so many books were postponed due to the pandemic. Given the glut of books with publication dates between September and November, this year’s Fall Preview selection process may have been the most difficult ever. As in previous years, I did my best to curate a list that is diverse across authors, subject matter, and publisher, featuring a nice mix of veteran favorites and promising newcomers.

Regarding the veterans, you will find exciting new work from some of our most revered writers, including David Sedaris, Mary Roach, Allen C. Guelzo, Susan Orlean, Maggie Nelson, Joseph J. Ellis, Padgett Powell, David Hajdu, and Joy Harjo. Those names alone could keep most readers satisfied for a couple months. However, as any of my colleagues would tell you, one of the most invigorating aspects of working at Kirkus are the surprises, whether it’s a debut author exploding on to the scene or someone embarking on a bold new project. You’ll find both here.

For example, it’s hard to believe that Kelefa Sanneh, the stalwart New Yorker contributor, is a first-time author. Though his writing has appeared in various journals and a handful of books, Major Labels: A History of Popular Music in Seven Genres (Penguin Press, Oct. 5) is his debut book—and what an accomplishment it is. In a starred review, our critic writes, “a lively, heartfelt exploration of the many worlds of popular music.... Throughout, the author shows himself to be a master of the mot juste....[It’s] clear that he’s listened to just about everything with ears and mind wide open. A pleasure—and an education—for any music fan.” Sanneh deftly assesses the last 50 years of popular music, weaving among rock, R&B, country, punk, hip-hop, dance music, and pop to demonstrate the power of music to unite, divide, inspire, and move. The book is an absolute must for any music nerd, and even casual listeners will discover a feast for the ears and mind, regardless of their musical taste.

Speaking of nerds, allow me to introduce two of the self-proclaimed variety: William Evans and Omar Holmon, whose debut book, Black Nerd Problems (Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster, Sept. 14) builds from their popular website of the same name. I’ll be the first to admit that books originating from websites or blogs are often disappointing, but this one is an unquestionable success. Our starred review notes “Evans and Holmon examine a broad swath of the popular-culture landscape, from anime and video games to comic books and movies, mixing social commentary and insight with the sheer love of the true fan....The book’s format, switching between the two authors and including essays that work as dialogues, offers the sense of hearing conversations between best friends.” The authors’ vibrant voices play off each other in a consistently appealing way, whether they’re riffing on “lighthearted material, such as an excellent essay that describes how Mario Kart shows you exactly the kind of person you really are,” or dealing with more serious matters that are often overlooked in pop-culture criticism—for example, “the [essay entitled] ‘Sobering Reality of Actual Black Nerd Problems,’ which focuses on the effect of ‘violence against black men and boys,’ or passages about finding respectful characters of color in children’s programming like Craig of the Creek or the Legend of Korra.”

Whether you are looking forward to the latest book from your favorite author or eager to uncover a hidden gem, it’s all here in the Fall Preview. Enjoy!

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.
“A wonderfully nuanced history of the island nation and its often troubled dealings with its gigantic and voracious neighbor.”

**CUBA**

**An American History**

**Ferrer, Ada**  
Scribner (480 pp.)  
$32.00 | Sep. 7, 2021  
978-1-5011-5455-3

A fluid, consistently informative history of the long, inextricable link between Cuba and the U.S., well rendered by a veteran Cuban American historian.

Ferrer, a Guggenheim fellow and professor of Latin American studies at NYU, explains that her chronicle is quintessentially “American” because to know Cuba is to grapple with the “sometimes intimate, sometimes explosive, always uneven relationship between the two countries.” The author begins with the “origin myth” of Columbus, who, of course, never even landed in what is now the U.S. Coming ashore in Cuba, he and his men wiped out most of the Indigenous population and inaugurated a slave-based economy of sugar, tobacco, and rum that would decimate the island for centuries. Later, the fledgling U.S. profited enormously from that economy, and Ferrer reminds readers how Cuba supported the Colonial cause against Britain. President John Adams had his eye on annexing Cuba, but he did not want to provoke the British or Spanish; instead, the Monroe Doctrine was enacted in 1823 to keep European powers out of what the U.S. considered its domain. “Cuba—its sugar, its slavery, its slave trade—is part of the history of American capitalism,” notes the author. Such proprietary zeal led the U.S. to help Cuba expel the Spanish, although Ferrer considers it a myth that the Americans won the island its independence from Spain. Indeed, the Americans wouldn’t leave gracefully, forcing the new republic to accept the Platt Amendment. This only exacerbated tensions among revolutionary Cubans, who had grown sick of American intervention. Ferrer is an endlessly knowledgeable guide, explaining why he remained obsessed with money and may explain why he entered West Point. Graduating in 1829, Lee spent 30 years as an engineering officer except for service in the Mexican War, during which his energy as a staff officer impressed Gen. Winfield Scott. By 1861, middle-aged and widely respected, Lee declined Scott’s offer of command of Union armies and returned to Virginia to take charge of the state’s military forces. For a year, his reputation suffered after unimpressive performances in minor actions until June 1862, when he assumed command of the army fending off George McClellan’s Union forces advancing on Richmond and drove them into headlong retreat. Describing the iconic victories over the following three years, Guelzo praises Lee’s martial talents but holds a low opinion of apologists who emphasize that he opposed both secession and slavery. Lee disliked rabid secessionists as much as abolitionists but went along with the popular Virginia assumption that the North had overreacted to the surrender of Fort Sumter and intended to wreak terrible revenge. He opposed slavery because it was morally repugnant, but he also believed that Blacks were inferior human beings. As a gentleman, he disapproved of mistreating them but hated Reconstruction and opposed efforts at Black equality.

A fine biography of a flawed American icon. *(This review is printed here for the first time.)*

**A Revolution in Three Acts**

**The Radical Vaudeville of Bert Williams, Eva Tanguay, & Julian Eltinge**  
Hajdu, David  
Illus. by Carey, John  
Columbia Univ. (200 pp.)  
$19.95 | Sep. 21, 2021  
978-0-231-19182-1

A welcome graphic celebration of the work of three important vaudeville artists.

Neither revolution nor radical are terms commonly associated with vaudeville. Yet Hajdu and Carey effectively illuminate the significance of three trailblazers who merit such rhetoric and who have been largely forgotten since vaudeville lost its audience to the movies. The best-known among them is Bert Williams (1874-1922), a Black entertainer who performed in blackface along with his longtime partner, George Walker, and who earned international renown for their “broad ‘coon’ humor.” Beneath the blackface, the Bahamian-born Williams...
was playing a role that was at odds with his intelligence and articulation, with a regional accent he had to learn. After Walker’s death, Williams was recruited to join the all-White Ziegfeld Follies, where he never felt like he fit in. Few comedians of the era were more talented or popular, but the racial barriers were often too much for him to overcome. As a White observer noted, “he was the funniest man I ever saw and the saddest man I ever knew.” While Williams both challenged and struggled with racial stereotypes, Hajdu and Carey celebrate two entertainers who anticipated what would later be known as “gender fluidity.” Julian Eltinge (1881-1941) became a huge hit as a female impersonator, even as he projected a hypermasculine image offstage. His success helped inspire what was called the “Pansy Craze,” an “emerging phenomenon of drag performance.” Eva Tangay (1878-1947) represented the sexually liberated “new woman,” and she “got away with promoting radical ideas by projecting a comical ‘kooky’ persona.” She was as wild as Eltinge’s depiction of femininity was refined, though their destinies were briefly entwined as they were engaged to be married. Though the title suggests a tripart structure, with capsule biographies of each artist, the narrative is characterized by jump-cuts and crisscrosses. Hajdu’s lively scholarship and critical perspective match Carey’s spirited renderings, which range from ebullience to devastation.

A sharp account that brings life and light to a period that has gone dark in popular memory. (This review is printed here for the first time.)

POET WARRIOR
Harjo, Joy
Norton (240 pp.)
978-0-393-24852-4
$25.00 | Sep. 7, 2021

In this hybrid memoir, the acclaimed Muscogee Nation writer combines poetry and prose to trace her journey from avid word collector to seasoned wordsmith. As a child, Harjo hid under the kitchen table, eavesdropping on her elders. She later found out that her mother knew about and tolerated this habit because she, too, was a lover of words. The author’s mother would routinely recite poems by writers like William Blake, a practice that Harjo credits with sparking her interest in poetry and songs. In contrast, her father’s violence filled her with the instinct to hide herself and her literary journey. This pattern continued when Harjo’s mother married another abusive man, forcing Harjo to leave home when she was just a teenager. Built on this solid foundation, the remainder of the story details the author’s evolution from a shy, scared child to a driven writer and educator dedicated to nurturing her students in a way that she had never been. Critical to this journey was the time she spent studying at the University of New Mexico, where she formed community with other Native students and discovered much-needed healing. In 2019, she was named the U.S. poet laureate, the first Native American to hold that honor in U.S. history. The book is the perfect companion to Harjo’s previous memoir, Crazy Brave, adding depth and new meaning to familiar characters and personal milestones. Despite having a difficult life, the author’s capacity for compassion is astonishing. In one passage, she calls her abusive stepfather one of her “greatest teachers” because his abuse forced her into a life of the mind and “to find myself in the spiritual world.” She masterfully holds both her past self and her abusers accountable while layering their characters with details that render them sympathetic in spite of their often horrifying behavior. On the line level, Harjo’s words blaze with honesty and lyricism, and nearly every sentence is a delight.

A gorgeous, compassionate memoir from one of America’s greatest living writers.

THE RAGE OF INNOCENCE
How America Criminalizes Black Youth
Henning, Kristin
Pantheon (512 pp.)
978-1-524-74820-6

A sobering assessment of the separate and decidedly unequal legal regimes that govern the juvenile justice system. “Our nation’s obsession with policing and incarcerating Black America begins with Black children.” So writes Henning, a law professor who served as lead attorney with the District of Columbia public defender’s office, specializing in youth crime. Rarely did any of the cases put before her involve White defendants. As she writes, where one young Black student was accused of bringing a Molotov cocktail to school and went through a hellish legal ordeal, a White student who confessed to the same crime was barely punished. “Black children are accorded all over the nation for the most ordinary adolescent activities,” she writes, whether hanging out in a park or shopping at the mall. When those children do commit infractions, mostly involving underage drinking or minor acts of vandalism, they are punished far more severely than their White peers. Henning serves up numerous (and sometimes repetitive) cases from her legal files, documenting this unequal administration of justice with statistics and anecdotes alike. On the latter point, she gamely notes, “I could write this entire chapter in anecdotes, but then you wouldn’t believe me when I say that White kids are treated differently than Black kids for committing the same kinds of crimes all over the country. So let’s look at the history, the science, and the data.” She does, and deeply. The author observes that White adolescents, particularly in groups, are far more likely than Black youth to use drugs, drink alcohol, and carry weapons to school. Yet arrest rates for Blacks are proportionally higher, as are bail and punishment. “Every state actor who does not take an active stance against racial inequities is at least complicit—and at worst active—in perpetuating the criminalization and overpolicing of Black youth,” Henning
“A fiercely readable, potent memoir of a survivor who refuses to be silenced.”

TOUFAH

The Woman Who Inspired an African #MeToo Movement

Jallow, Toufah with Pittaway, Kim

Truth to Power/Steerforth (320 pp.)

$16.95 paper | Oct. 12, 2021

978-1-58642-300-1

A Gambian survivor of rape speaks out.

When Jallow was 19, she was raped by Yahya Jammeh, the nation’s corrupt president. Jallow had recently won the July 22 pageant, an annual event designed to commemorate the coup that brought Jammeh to power and which allegedly offered the winner “a full scholarship to the university of her choice, anywhere in the world.” When she was named Miss July 22 Queen, Jallow was thrilled at the prospect of studying abroad. Following her win, Jammeh repeatedly asked her to disrupt her schedule to appear at events with him, a pattern that Jallow later realized was part of a process of “grooming” her for sexual assault. Eventually, Jammeh asked her to marry him; when she refused, he assaulted her. Afraid for her life and her family’s safety, Jallow traveled across the border into Senegal. Through a network of allies, she moved to Canada, where she attempted to start over. As she navigated her new life, Jallow’s past continued to haunt her. She sought therapy and chose to speak out about what happened to her and, she suspects, to numerous other women at the hands of Jammeh and his enablers. “I knew attaching my real name would ensure a full scholarship to the university of her choice, anywhere in the world.” When she was named Miss July 22 Queen, Jallow was thrilled at the prospect of studying abroad. Following her win, Jammeh repeatedly asked her to disrupt her schedule to appear at events with him, a pattern that Jallow later realized was part of a process of “grooming” her for sexual assault. Eventually, Jammeh asked her to marry him; when she refused, he assaulted her. Afraid for her life and her family’s safety, Jallow traveled across the border into Senegal. Through a network of allies, she moved to Canada, where she attempted to start over. As she navigated her new life, Jallow’s past continued to haunt her. She sought therapy and chose to speak out about what happened to her and, she suspects, to numerous other women at the hands of Jammeh and his enablers. “I knew attaching my real name would ensure the story was more widely covered by news media around the world,” she writes of her courageous decision, “resulting in less room for Jammeh to hide and more likelihood that the girls and women I wanted to reach would hear my message.” The author’s voice is frank and conversational, and she peppers her harrowing story with moments of humor and humanity that make the book an inspirationally page-turner. Jallow’s emotional trajectory is particularly compelling. Throughout the book, she vividly describes her fear, strength, and sorrow, always cognizant that her experience, no matter how raw, can be a source of comfort to fellow survivors who are unable to go public.

A fiercely readable, potent memoir of a survivor who refuses to be silenced. (This review is printed here for the first time.)

BESSIE SMITH

A Poet’s Biography of a Blues Legend

Kay, Jackie

Vintage (224 pp.)

$16.95 paper | Sep. 21, 2021

978-0-593-31427-2

A Scottish poet and playwright’s appreciation of Bessie Smith (1894-1937). Kay is the former National Poet of Scotland as well as a novelist and creative writing professor, and Smith’s artistry has been one of her lifelong passions. This update of her 1997 book, now published for the first time in the U.S., features a new introduction that reinforces both the timeliness and timelessness of her subject. Her “blues are current,” writes Kay, “and her narratives are even eerily prescient.” The author frames her subject within the era of MeToo and Black Lives Matter but most of all in terms of “the shift in attitudes to gay and trans people [that] has been the biggest social change of our lifetime.” Yet Kay’s subject is deeply personal for her as a Black woman adopted by a White family in suburban Glasgow. The book is less a standard biography (though it draws heavily from Chris Albertson’s 1971 standard-bearer, Bessie) than an illumination of the process of coming to terms with the power of her music and the tragedy of her life, which also included alcoholism and spousal abuse. Smith died in a car crash in 1937, and her grave was left unmarked until 1970. Kay combines a variety of threads, including a discussion of the spell cast by Smith’s music on the author in her formative years, a critique of Smith’s lyrics, and an analysis of the racism and other prejudice the artist endured for years. There are extended italicized passages in which Kay attempts to situate herself within Smith’s heart and soul, trying her best to approximate the dialect and to speak truth where documentation is lacking. This is not a matter-of-fact record of a life; it’s ultimately about the power of the music on the listener and the enduring legacy left by the singer.

Within passionate advocacy such as this, the Empress of the Blues lives on. (This review is printed here for the first time.)

CAPOTE’S WOMEN

A True Story of Love, Betrayal, and a Swan Song for an Era

Leamer, Laurence

Putnam (368 pp.)

$28.00 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-0-593-32808-8

Truman Capote’s last hurrah and the society women who inspired it.

Prolific journalist Leamer turns his celebrity gossip lens on literary gadfly Capote, specifically the beautiful “swans” in his orbit. The author focuses on Capote’s famously unfinished novel Answered Prayers, “a daring literary feat, an expose of upper-class society
Mary Roach has always garnered positive reviews from Kirkus, so it was no surprise that her latest, *Fuzz* (Norton, Sept. 14), received a star: “From the terrifying to the frustrating, a great starting point for understanding the animal world.” Roach answered our questions via email.

**How did the pandemic affect your writing routine?**

Fortunately, I had finished all the traveling I needed to do except for a raccoon chapter I planned to report in Toronto. I recall, in mid-March, being told by the airline that the border had closed. “Oh, but surely it’ll be open by end of May, no?” I could work with that. The guy was quiet. There is no raccoon chapter. Happily, I had some writing projects lined up that required no travel—a middle-grade adaptation of *Packing for Mars* and an epilogue for a new release of *Stiff*. I worked from home, and I missed my officemates, but otherwise the writing process was little changed. I sat outside more. I had a tan.

**Tell me about your childhood reading experiences.**

My pop [would] bring me along to the public library, drop me in the children’s section, and head off to Biography and True Crime. The library was my day care center, and that was fine by me. I lived for the Tintin books....My other favorite childhood book was a lesser-known entry by Robert McCloskey: *The Man Who Lost His Head*. Dude wakes up and his head has gone missing. He looks everywhere, including the garbage can; installs a pumpkin atop his neck (later deemed too “conspicuous”—my introduction to that word); and heads out across town to look for his head. Did this influence the decision to one day write a book with an entire chapter about heads removed from their bodies? It’s fun to think so.

**What advice would you give your younger self about being an author?**

I recall being contacted by agents who had read my magazine pieces and decided what sort of book they thought I should write. “You know *The Physics of Star Trek*?” one said. “What about something like that?” In other words, try to imitate this or that bestselling author and hope that your book might bob along in its wake, or at least fail to sink. That is not good advice. My advice would be this: Be the author other authors are told by shitty agents to imitate. In other words, try to be surprising; be original. Be you.

*Interview by Eric Liebetrau*
that blended the fictional flourishes of Breakfast at Tiffany’s with the closely observed narrative nonfiction of In Cold Blood.’ Capote wanted to populate the text with glamorous and elegant women and set off to ingratiate himself with them as fodder for the book. Leamer provides society-page profiles of each, describing their lives and relationships with Capote and delivering numerous anecdotes and much name-dropping. Even when he was young, Capote loved being around women. He found them more self-aware and observant, more in tune with his own sensibilities, and he loved to gaze upon their beauty. One of his first attractions was Babe, the “epitome of class” and wife of a “serial betrayer,” TV mogul William S. Paley. They had a friendship that lasted for years. At one of Diana Vreeland’s dinner parties, Capote met Nancy “Slim” Haywood, director Howard Hawks’ second wife. Slim admired Capote’s “extraordinary mind; he was one of the three or four brightest people I’ve ever known in my life.” Pamela Churchill, a friend of Babe’s, led a notorious life, and with her “swan-like woman’s true beauty,” Capote saw her as a perfect candidate for his book. No other woman was more amusing than the wealthy, mysterious, and complex fashion maven Gloria Guinness. Lucy “C.Z.” Guest, a Boston Brahmin, remained a friend even after the debacle that occurred when Capote published advance excerpts from Answered Prayers. Capote was also able to draw Italian princess Marella Agnelli “into his emotional lair.” Leamer’s last swan is Lee Radziwill, Jackie Kennedy’s sister, with whom Capote had a “special kinship.” Engagingly gossip, Leamer provides extensive behind-the-scenes peaks into Capote’s tangled social life. (This review is printed here for the first time.)

THE REDEMPTION OF WOLF 302
From Renegade to Yellowstone Alpha Male

Rick McIntyre

Greystone Books (288 pp.)
$26.95 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-77164-527-0

Retired National Park ranger McIntyre continues his deeply revealing series on wolf behavior with this fine portrait of a lobo who makes good.

In Yellowstone National Park, McIntyre writes, several packs compete with each other for territory and food supplies, raiding for female wolves so that—unlike wolf populations at places such as Isle Royale, Michigan—the gene pool doesn’t become so shallow that natural fitness declines. In many ways, by the author’s account, the wolf population of Yellowstone, first reintroduced in 1996 after having been extirpated seven decades earlier, is thriving. In this follow-up to The Reign of Wolf 21, McIntyre focuses on Wolf 302 (Yellowstone wolves are assigned numbers and not names, though names are occasionally bestowed), who initially comes across as a bit of a roué as wolves go: He steals food from babies and mates with anything that moves. When he arrived in the Druid pack, his reputation preceded him: “The wolves in the Druid pack,” writes the author, “were already acquainted with 302 because he had made frequent visits to the Druids the previous year and gotten several of 21’s daughters pregnant. Their father took an instant dis-like to 302 and tried to chase him off.” Even so, the charmer was enough, in part by turning on a companion wolf that was his nephew, in human terms, and attacking him to indicate that he was on the Druids’ side: “I had never seen such bizarre behavior in a wolf,” McIntyre writes. That wasn’t the only surprise 302 would spring on his pack mates and human observers, and though he was a coward and a sneak at first, eventually he rose to the occasion and became an honorable alpha male. McIntyre tracks 302 over the course of a decade, writing of this unexpected transformation appreciatively while backing up his tendency to anthropomorphize with solid science. A great choice for anyone who has a fondness for wolves and an appreciation of good natural history.

ON FREEDOM
Four Songs of Care and Constraint

Maggie Nelson
Graywolf (288 pp.)
$26.49 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-64445-062-8

A top cultural critic plucks the concept of freedom away from right-wing slogans and explores its operation in current artistic and political conversations.

Containing far less memoir material than her much-loved The Argonauts (2015), Nelson’s latest is more purely a work of criticism. In the first section, “Art Song,” the author analyzes recent blowups related to cultural appropriation, “a discourse about how and when certain transgressions in art should be ‘called out’ and ‘held accountable,’” with the twist that now the so-called left is often cast—rightly or wrongly—in the repressive, punitive position. The author connects our exhaustion with our addiction to the “attention economy”—our 24/7 availability to 3.4 billion people using social media—to the dilemma she labels “I Care/I Can’t.” In the second section, “The Ballad of Sexual Optimism,” Nelson teases out complexities and effects of the #MeToo movement in the context of the current fate of “sex positivity.” She decry the conflict between different generations of thinkers and activists, “a totalizing script of intergenerational warfare, in which WE were brave, impressive adults seeking (and finding) pleasure and liberation, whereas YOU are pitiable, cowardly children obsessed with safety and trauma.” The author also examines Monica Lewinsky’s revisions of her personal history and Pema Chödrön’s comments on the sexual capacity of Trungpa Rinpoche. “Drug Fugue” analyzes intriguing texts, many not widely known, about intoxication and addiction. To open the final section, “Riding the Blinds,” Nelson considers her son’s love for trains in the context of apocalyptic climate change. Acknowledging that many find the topic
of global warming “too paralyzing, too sad, too frightening, too unimaginable,” she compares our situation to that of hobos “riding the blinds”—hiding between cars, unable to see where they are headed. Still, she recommends we “love all the misery and freedom of living and, as best we can, not mind dying.”

The subtlety of Nelson’s analysis and energy of her prose refresh the mind and spirit.

Susan
Orlean

On Animals

Susan Orlean
Avid Reader Press (288 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-982181-53-6

The beloved author gathers a wide-ranging selection of pieces about animals. “Animals have always been my style,” writes Orlean at the beginning of her latest delightful book, a collection of articles that originally appeared in “slightly modified form” in the Atlantic, Smithsonian, and the New Yorker, where she has been a staff writer since 1992. The variety on display is especially pleasing. Some essays are classic New Yorker profiles: Who knew that tigers, near extinction in the wild, are common household pets? There are at least 15,000 in the U.S. Her subject, a New Jersey woman, keeps several dozen and has been fighting successful court battles over them for decades. Lions are not near extinction, however; in fact, there are too many. Even in Africa, far more live in captivity or on reserves than in the wild, and readers may be shocked at their fate. Cubs are cute, so animal parks profit by allowing visitors to play with them. With reserves at capacity, cubs that mature may end up shot in trophy hunts or in stalls on breeding farms to produce more cubs. In “The Rabbit Outbreak,” Orlean writes about how rabbit meat was an American staple until replaced by beef and chicken after World War II, whereupon rabbit pet ownership surged. They are now “the third-most-popular pet in the country, ranking just behind dogs and cats.” Readers may be aware of the kerfuffle following the hit movie Free Willy that led to a massive campaign to return the film’s killer whale to the wild, and Orlean delivers a fascinating, if unedifying account. The author handles dogs like a virtuoso, with 10 hilarious pages on the wacky, expensive, but sometimes profitable life of a champion show dog. Among America’s 65 million pet dogs (according to a 2005 report), 10 million go astray every year, and about half are recovered. Orlean engagingly recounts a lost-dog search of epic proportions.

Another winner featuring the author’s trademark blend of meticulous research and scintillating writing. (This review is printed here for the first time.)

THESE PRECIOUS DAYS
Essays
Patchett, Ann
Harper/HarperCollins (320 pp.)
$26.99 | Nov. 23, 2021
978-0-06-309278-5

In a series of essays, the beloved novelist opens the door and invites you into her world.

As she herself is aware, Patchett has a gift for friendship—never clearer than in the magical and heartbreaking title essay, which made the rounds from friend to friend by way of texted links when originally published in Harper’s during the pandemic. (If you haven’t read it yet, get ready for Tom Hanks, Kundalini yoga, cancer treatment, and a profound yearning to be a guest at Patchett’s Nashville home.) Like This Is the Story of a Happy Marriage (2013), this book contains a mixture of occasional essays and profound ones, all previously published. Patchett includes the text of a wonderful lecture on her “feral” experience in graduate school in Iowa and an introduction written for the collected stories of Eudora Welty that seems as perfect as the stories themselves. In addition to family and friendship— “Three Fathers” and “Flight Plan” are standouts in this category—several essays deal with aspects of the writing life. The author explores the process of managing one’s papers and offers various angles on how one comes to the vocation of literature. “Influence,” she writes, “is a combination of circumstance and luck: what we are shown and what we stumble upon in those brief years when our hearts and minds are fully open.” Patchett also writes delightfully about Snoopy, the cartoon beagle and would-be novelist, first among her literary influences. Toward the end of the book, Patchett digs into Updike, Bellow, and Roth. Perhaps a few of the slighter pieces could have been left out, but even those have great lines and interesting paragraphs. A bracing essay about the author’s decision not to have children will give readers crucial pointers on conversational gambits to avoid should you ever get that houseguest invitation.

An enviable life shared with candor, emotion, and knock-out storytelling power.

INDIGO
Arm Wrestling, Snake Saving, and Some Things in Between
Powell, Padgett
Catapult (272 pp.)
$16.95 | Nov. 9, 2021
978-1-64622-005-2

After six novels and three story collections, Powell gathers his magazine articles and other short works in his first book of nonfiction.

In 2018, Powell, a professor emeritus of creative writing at the University of Florida, said that he had quit writing, and
this book suggests he meant it—all of the pieces were written before 2019 and all but one previously published or delivered at literary events. Yet if this volume collects exhume work, it has no air of mothballs about it. In a generous foreword, Pete Dexter rightly says of the entries: “They move like stories, carry
Johnson, William T; revor, and Flannery O’Connor; and Lynyrd
found that unlike earlier types of meth, made with hard-to-get
dealers to Drug Enforcement Administration agents, Quinones
and terrifying hallucinations and faster and worse harm than
amphetamine known as P2P (phenyl-2-propanone). Through
author sees as overshadowed by the opioid crisis: the explo
assault on MFA program orthodoxies. Either way, if Powell has
a world arm-wrestling championship in Sweden and his quest
ald Barthelme and others he’s known or admired from afar: art
at literary events. Yet if this volume collects exhumed work, it
ephedrine-based forms: The new meth “was quickly, intensely
cheap, and toxic” chemicals in Mexican labs and shipped north
ephedrine, P2P meth could be more easily made from “legal,

Memorable reflections on writing and life from an author
who pulls no punches.

THE LEAST OF US
True Tales of America and Hope in the Age of Fentanyl
and Meth
Quinones, Sam
Bloomsbury (432 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-63557-435-7

Quinones sounds an alarm about a rapidly spreading form of meth in a fol-
low-up to his award-winning Dreamland.

Buried in this overstuffed book lies an urgent story the
author sees as overshadowed by the opioid crisis: the explo-
usive growth of the potentially lethal form of synthetic meth-
phamphetamine known as P2P (phenyl-2-propanone). Through
extensive but rambling interviews with people ranging from
dealers to Drug Enforcement Administration agents, Quinones
found that unlike earlier types of meth, made with hard-to-get
ephedrine, P2P meth could be more easily made from “legal,
cheap, and toxic” chemicals in Mexican labs and shipped north
by traffickers. P2P, he learned, could cause intense paranoia
and terrifying hallucinations and faster and worse harm than
ephedrine-based forms: The new meth “was quickly, intensely
damaging people’s brains.” Quinones maps the wreckage
nationwide, including that it drew Black dealers to what had
been “a working-class white drug.” What he learned is genu-
inely alarming but embedded in background material on topics
that have been extensively covered elsewhere: the neurosci-
ence behind addiction, the pre–P2P shifts from prescription
painkillers to heroin to fentanyl, the toll opioids have taken in
West Virginia, and the Sackler family’s disastrous stewardship
of Purdue Pharma. The author also describes effective commu-
nity-based responses to the crisis, such as church shelters for
homeless addicts and “drug courts” that offer substance abus-
ers an alternative to prison. Quinones concludes that the nation
has forsaken “what has made America great” and that “when
drug traffickers act like corporations and corporations like drug
traffickers, our best defense, perhaps our only defense, lies in
bolstering community.” After his account of the corporate mis-
steps of the Sacklers and others, readers may be unpersuaded
that the “best defense” might come from hard-hit communities
themselves rather than from remedies such as tighter govern-
ment regulation of rapacious corporations like Purdue Pharma.

A valuable but overlong overview of an underappreciated
drug crisis. (This review is printed here for the first time.)

FUZZ
When Nature Breaks
the Law
Roach, Mary
Norton (336 pp.)
$26.95 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-324-00193-5

Tracing the line between wildlife
and the law, the acclaimed science writer
examines how humans interact with the
natural world.

“What is the proper course when wild animals break laws
intended for people?” So asks Roach in a book that, in the
author’s characteristic style, ranges widely, from wild animal
attacks to the inherent dangers of certain plants to ways in
which we have treated animals that most humans consider ver-
min. The author begins by examining “the intractable nature
of human-wildlife conflict—as it is known today by those who
grapple with it professionally.” Roach discusses well-known
conflicts such as bear attacks before moving on to an account
of her visit to a tea plantation in West Bengal, India, “a place
where ‘the elephant in the room’ is not a metaphor.” As in her
previous bestsellers such as Grant and Stiff, the author has
clearly done her homework, speaking to professionals across a
variety of disciplines, including members of the military; nuns,
priests, guards, and other workers at the Vatican; and those
with job titles that sound “like something you’d hear if you
asked an animal-besotted ten-year-old, What do you want to
be when you grow up?” (The lucky fellow in question, who has
a doctorate in wildlife biology, researches mountain lions and
gray wolves, two apex predators.) Traveling from a bear semi-
nar in Reno to a bird-infested island in the Pacific that plagued
the American military during World War II, among many other
venues, Roach joyfully explores how human culture and wildlife,
Kelefa Sanneh’s work in the New Yorker has always been a fan favorite at Kirkus, so I was delighted that his first book, Major Labels: A History of Popular Music in Seven Genres (Penguin Press, Oct. 5), received a star. We call it “a pleasure—and an education—for any music fan.” The author answered questions via email.

How did the pandemic affect your writing routine?
I didn’t start the book but I did finish it during the pandemic, and I was lucky to have a big project I could work on in my little home office. The pandemic eliminated a wide range of useful and useless activity; I’m honestly not sure whether it made me more efficient or less efficient. But my book tells a story about how popular music got so fragment—so weird—in the half-century after the 1960s. So it was strange to have this horrible plague arriving right on time, emptying arenas and dance clubs around the world and maybe setting the stage for whatever is coming next.

What book do you absolutely love that deserves renewed attention?
I don’t think it’s obscure, but I hope new generations of readers keep discovering The Death of Rhythm & Blues, Nelson George’s 1988 book about the history and fate of one of the great American genres. George was writing at what seemed like a time of crisis: As an editor at Billboard, he was closely attuned to both the culture and the economics of R&B, and he was concerned for its future and for the future of Black America. It’s an incisive book and a challenging one—a reminder of how critical consensus is always being made and unmade. (And wait ’til you read what he says about Mick Jagger!)

If someone were going to write the story of your life, who would you want it to be?
Oh, my God—someone writing about my life? If we’re that deep into the realm of fantasy, then let’s bring back two of my New Yorker predecessors. A.J. Liebling (1904-1963) wrote vivacious, acerbic articles about all sorts of people, including boxers and other interesting characters; I have no idea whether he would have found me “interesting,” but I can dream. Ellen Willis (1941-2006) was one of the sharpest rock critics who ever lived, with a knack for seeing people more clearly than they saw themselves. When I imagine her writing about me, I also imagine what it would be like to get the news and to spend a few hours—or maybe a few days—working up the nerve to read what she had written.

Interview by Eric Liebetrau
“An excellent contribution to the literature of contemporary electoral politics.”

RESISTANCE

THE RAGING 2020s

Companies, Countries, People—and the Fight for Our Future

Ross, Alec

Henry Holt (336 pp.)

$28.99 | Sep. 14, 2021

978-1-250-77092-9

In serious disarray, the social contract requires a significant overhaul.

Early on in this manifesto, Ross, the senior adviser for innovation for Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, makes a stark observation: “If the level of inequality in the United States had stayed at a constant level over the last forty years instead of widening to its current Mad Max–like state, it would have meant that $50 trillion would have gone to workers earning below the 90th percentile. That is an additional $1,100 every single month for every single worker.” Instead, we now squabble over raising the absurdly low minimum wage to only slightly less pathetic levels. A large part of the problem, notes the author, is that government has ceded authority to corporations, which naturally act in their own interest rather than for the common good. Furthermore, there is no effective labor movement to counter them. Corporations also evade taxes at such a level that if they paid their share, “of the people reading this book, 99 percent would pay less.” Ross examines scenarios on both macro and micro levels. In writing of the corporatization of agriculture, for example, he focuses on his native state of West Virginia, where the population has shrunk dramatically as rural jobs disappear. Even as this occurs, what should have been a strong union response has become an exercise in rural politics that is increasingly “nativist as [West Virginia] has grown poorer and sicker.” There are numerous alternative models for a social contract besides that of predatory capitalism. One is that of China, which “seeks to build a surveillance state so total that it becomes impossible for citizens to organize meaningful opposition,” and another is the cradle-to-grave welfare state of the Scandinavian nations. At the end of this evenhanded but decidedly liberal argument, the author advocates “killing off shareholder capitalism” and strengthening social safety nets.

A provocative, well-made case for remaking the American way of doing business—and way of life.

RESISTANCE

How Women Saved Democracy From Donald Trump

Rubin, Jennifer

Morrow/HarperCollins (320 pp.)

$27.99 | Sep. 21, 2021

978-0-06-298213-1

Washington Post writer Rubin delivers a thoughtful study of the critical role of women in containing and defeating Don-
There were plenty of Republican women who supported Trump’s nationalist, White supremacist regime. Upon his election in 2016, writes the author, “I steered myself for the likelihood that Republicans would countenance reckless and even illegal behavior.” Which they did, to destructive effect. But there were plenty of others who were determined to fight Trump’s policies. Many left the Republican Party as a result of his election since the signals were strong that women would have little in the way of a meaningful role in the new administration—unless their name was Ivanka. Many more organized, ran for office, joined grassroots organizations, and donated time and money. Rubin ponders numerous questions that may in fact be imponderable, including the central one of the moment: Why wasn’t Hillary Clinton elected? The answer may hinge in part on her weakness as a campaigner; more likely, writes the author, it was simple misogyny at work. Whatever the case, the resistance of women had an immediate effect, proven in the 2018 midterm elections, when, in formerly Republican Virginia the Democrats fielded a record number of women candidates at all levels of government, including a transgender woman, Asians and Pacific Islanders, and a self-identified lesbian. All won. Even in Alabama, “every single county swung left compared to 2016,” while in Georgia, Stacey Abrams, foreseeing legislation that would attempt to suppress the minority vote, enrolled more than 1 million Black voters. (Rubin correctly notes that if women were the principal change agents in 2018 and 2020, Black women were at the absolute center of the movement.) A sleeping giant thus awakened, Rubin holds that no one should imagine that women will now sit back and allow Trump to return, since, after all, he “taught us the unacceptable price of passivity.”

An excellent contribution to the literature of contemporary electoral politics.

“who was a bit of a throwback even when he first emerged, in 1973,” before surveying dozens of rock artists. Throughout, the author shows himself to be a master of the mot juste—e.g., “Starting in the late seventies, Van Halen perfected a Day-Glo variant of heavy metal”—and his consideration of the plight of “quiet” singer/songwriters (think James Taylor and Carole King) is intriguing. Some of Sanneh’s genre-slotted is arguable: Prince, for example, can fit into just about any category except country, while many of Steve Earle’s country songs are as punk as anything by the Sex Pistols. As for country, the author is spot-on when he observes, “Just about everyone can agree on Dolly Parton. But when it comes to country music, people seem to disagree on just about everything else”—save that even the most treacly of country acts is expected to pay homage to Hank Williams every now and then. Sanneh can be funny (“If a track went ‘Oontz, oontz, oontz,’ it was likely to be a house track,”) snobbish, and even harsh, but it’s clear that he’s listened to just about everything with ears and mind wide open.

A pleasure—and an education—for any music fan.

VOICES FROM THE PANDEMIC
Americans Tell Their Stories of Crisis, Courage and Resilience
Saslow, Eli
Doubleday (256 pp.)
$26.95 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-385-54700-0

A collection of interviews about pandemic experiences from across the country.

As Pulitzer Prize–winning Washington Post reporter Saslow writes, “the virus isolated us in our own homes, our own bubbles, our own pods, our own personal hardships, our own ideological bunkers. The world contracted.” In his latest book, the author movingly documents that sense of isolation. Saslow conducted dozens of interviews with Americans of all ages and professions, and their voices—presented in lightly edited monologues—form the crux of this crucial book. Mikaela Sakal, a nurse in a dangerously understaffed Detroit hospital, discusses how her long shifts involved rushing from one emergency to the next: “Alarms are going off every minute….Every one could mean a crisis. I’d go home at night and hear phantom alarms.” Francene Bailey describes the agony of knowing she passed the virus on to her mother, who eventually died. Anthony Almojuela, a longtime New York City paramedic, notes, “I pronounced more deaths in the first two weeks of April [2020] than I have in my whole career.” Presented one after the other, and uninterrupted, their stories do more than provide a patchwork portrait of the country: They also help correct the notion that, whatever your personal experience of the pandemic might have been, it was the only one. Saslow spoke to doctors, teachers, election officials, parents, nursing home residents, and countless others, and while the specifics of their days might have differed—some

MAJOR LABELS
A History of Popular Music in Seven Genres
Sanneh, Kelefa
Penguin Press (496 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-0-525-55959-7

A lively, heartfelt exploration of the many worlds of popular music.

Even though this is a big, capacious book, New Yorker staff writer Sanneh is not exhaustive in his treatment of seven categories of sound: Jazz and blues are only lightly mentioned, for instance, even though both had a formative role in rock and R&B, and some readers may wonder why he calves punk rock off from rock to constitute a genre of its own. Still, as he writes, “if you emphasize genres, you inevitably find yourself thinking about the other stars”—i.e., other than the major players, which explains his numerous mentions of Grand Funk Railroad, which, though disliked by critics and connoisseurs, was “one of the most popular rock bands in America.” Sanneh begins with a pioneer who’s still at it, Dion DiMucci, and moves on to Bruce Springsteen,
languished, bored, at home, while others risked their lives at thankless jobs—the book also reveals an underlying sense of shared humanity. Taken individually, the stories describe not only remarkable hardship and suffering, but also resilience, solidarity, and hope; taken as a whole, this is a vital historical document of a year-plus that none of us will ever forget.

An excellent resource full of well-rendered, memorable portraits of ordinary people enduring extraordinary circumstances.

A CARNIVAL OF SNACKERY
Diaries (2003-2020)
Sedaris, David
Little, Brown (660 pp.)
$32.00 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-0-316-55879-2


The flashpoints of the modern era—the Iraq War, Ferguson, Trump, Covid-19—pop up throughout these entries, but mainly so the author can sail past them with his usual irreverence. For example: “When the pandemic hit, my first thought wasn’t Oh, those poor dying people but What about my airline status?” His bottomless capacity to make everything about him doesn’t read as selfishness or ignorance, though; as with all good comics, the particulars of his life are stand-ins for everybody’s foibles and frustrations. Traveling the world for readings, Sedaris takes note of every culture’s peculiarities, from spitting on the street in Tokyo to offensive insults to language quirks—e.g., Tagalog is like “English on quaaludes.” Sedaris treats his own life as a kind of foreign country, too. After moving from his longtime home in France to England, he began his hobby of picking up litter (documented in Let’s Explore Diabetes With Owls), and the reactions of his neighbors, not to mention the trash itself, provide comic fodder. Family matters were trickier during this period: His troubled sister, Tiffany, killed herself, and his elderly but resilient father still treated him like a failure. Because Sedaris traveled all over the world during this stretch, the tone and form of the diaries shift; he’s sometimes glib, sometimes contemplative, sometimes content just to catalog funny stuff he overhears. So for better or worse, he’s a humorist who’ll go anywhere. This book contains one of the best jokes about the Crucifixion you’re likely to hear, along with a few subpar quips: “To honor the death of Marcel Marceau I observed a minute of silence.”

A rich trove for hardcore Sedaris fans, though no more personally revealing than his well-shaped essays. (This review is printed here for the first time.)

ORWELL’S ROSES
Solnit, Rebecca
Viking (256 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-0-593-08336-9

A fresh perspective on the iconic writer.

Perhaps the greatest political writer of modern times was also an avid gardener. It might seem contrived to build a biography around his passion, but this is Solnit—a winner of the Kirkus Prize and National Book Critics Circle Award, among many other honors—so it succeeds. Certain that democratic socialism represented the only humane political system, Orwell lived among other like-minded leftists whose shortcomings infuriated him—especially (most being middle-class) their ignorance of poverty and (this being the 1930s and 1940s) their irrational attraction to a particularly nasty delusion in Stalin’s regime. “Much of the left of the first half of the twentieth century was akin to someone who has fallen in love, and whose beloved has become increasingly monstrous and controlling,” writes Solnit. “A stunning number of the leading artists and intellectuals of that era chose to stay with the monster—though unlike an abusive relationship, the victim was for the most part not these ardent lovers but the powerless people of the USSR and its satellites.” Unlike many idealists, Orwell never assumed that it was demeaning to enjoy yourself while remaining attuned to the suffering of others, and he made no secret of his love of gardening. Wherever he lived, he worked hard to plant a large garden with flowers as well as vegetables and fruit. Solnit emphasizes this side of his life with frequent detours into horticultural topics with political lessons. She also chronicles her visits to the source of most American flowers: massive greenhouse factories in South America, especially Colombia, which grows 80% of the roses sold in the U.S. The author grippingly describes Stalin’s grotesque plan to improve Soviet food production through wacky, quasi-Marxist genetics, and readers will be fascinated to learn about artists, writers, and photographers whose work mixes plants and social reform.

A fine Orwell biography with equally fine diversions into his favorite leisure activity. (This review is printed here for the first time.)

THE HEROINE WITH 1001 FACES
Tatar, Maria
Liveright/Norton (304 pp.)
$30.00 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-63149-881-7

From Penelope and Pandora to Katniss Everdeen and Lisbeth Salander, the “hero’s journey” gets a much-needed makeover.

In her latest, Tatar—the Harvard professor of folklore and mythology and
As droll and as popular as ever, humorist David Sedaris returns this fall with *A Carnival of Snackery: Diaries (2003-2020)* (Little, Brown, Oct. 5), a follow-up to the earlier journal entries collected in *Theft by Finding*. Kirkus calls the book “a rich trove for hardcore Sedaris fans.” He answered our questions via email.

When you’re publishing your diaries, you can’t keep everything. How do you decide what ends up on the cutting room floor?

I cut probably 99% of what I wrote between 2003 and 2020. Most of it was easy to discard—too dull, too whiny, etc. Then, too, I cut things for privacy, not mine so much as various friends’ or family members.’ I kept things I thought were funny or that astonished me, like the fact that when deaf people gain their hearing, they’re often surprised that the sun doesn’t make any noise.

You’ve written essays about your experiences, and now you’ve published your diaries. If someone else were going to write the story of your life, who would you want it to be?

It never occurred to me that anyone would write my biography, mainly because my life is so small. I love to read about authors who brawled and slept around and knew a lot of famous people: Dorothy Parker, Phillip Roth, John Cheever, Jean Stafford, Robert Lowell. The only famous person I knew was Phyllis Diller, and I never have affairs or spats with other writers, so I’m afraid my biography would be pretty dull. Whoever writes it will have to do something to liven me up.

Are there published journals that you especially love or influenced you in putting together your own?

I love Alan Bennett’s diaries and Edmund Wilson’s. Mavis Gallant’s diaries are supposed to be coming out at some point. The *New Yorker* ran some excerpts, and I found them riveting.

Will you be touring for *Carnival of Snackery*? Anywhere you’re especially excited to be reading?

The book is coming out while I’m on a 72-city lecture tour, so I’ll be in theaters rather than bookstores. I love the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall in Portland, Oregon, because of the audience, and Benaroya Hall in Seattle because it’s so beautiful. I’m so grateful to be touring again that I’m looking as forward to Poughkeepsie as I am to Chicago.

What fall book are you most looking forward to getting your hands on?

Ann Patchett’s new essay collection, *These Precious Days*. I’ve loved the parts that have appeared in the *New Yorker*. She’s just the best.

*Interview by Tom Beer*
Germanic languages and literature who has annotated collections of classic fairy tales, Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen, among others—begins by pointing out that all of the faces of heroism discussed in Joseph Campbell’s influential book, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949), are male. To correct this requires a revision of the concept of heroism itself, rooted in numerous foundational texts. Starting with Greek mythology and Scheherezade and moving through the centuries all the way to the Game of Thrones series and *The Queen’s Gambit*, Tatar incisively explores women’s reinvention of heroism to embrace empathy, compassion, and care, often to pursue social justice. Among the many high points in this engaging study: an analysis of *Little Women* and *Anne of Green Gables* as autofiction, *Jurassic Park* as a reimagining of “Hansel and Gretel,” *Harry the Spy* as an antiheroine, and a deep dive into the backstory of Wonder Woman. Receiving their own chapters are female sleuths such as Nancy Drew, Miss Marple, and the less well known characters of Kate Fansler, an academic, and Blanche White, who is Black. The book really takes off when it gets to contemporary culture, particularly in a section that identifies a female version of the “trickster” archetype in Everdeen and Salander. Of this lineage, among the shared interesting traits not traditionally associated with women characters is a prodigious appetite. “Like Gretel, Pippi Longstocking, and Lisbeth Salander before her,” writes Tatar, “Katniss gorges on rich food yet her hunger never ceases.”

The book is illustrated with many reproductions of paintings and other artwork—including a postcard-worthy panel from the original Wonder Woman—that add much to the text.

As Wonder Woman might say, Suffering Sappho! This book is fascinating, fun, and consistently enlightening.

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By this authoritative account, the Afghanistan War has been a colossal failure that should have been ended years ago.

*THE AFGHANISTAN PAPERS*

*THE AFGHANISTAN PAPERS*

*A Secret History of the War*

Whitlock, Craig

Simon & Schuster (368 pp.)

$30.00 | Aug. 31, 2021

978-1-982159-00-9

A veteran *Washington Post* investigative reporter delivers a dispiriting history of the 20-year Afghanistan debacle.

The war in Vietnam was always controversial. The longer quagmire of Afghanistan, writes Whitlock, “was grounded in near-unanimous public support” when it began in 2003. There was no need, then, for the Pentagon brass to lie about the war, but lie they did, despite that fact that there was not a clearly articulated mission. The mission crept into a vaguely defined exercise in nation-building even as more than 775,000 U.S. troops cycled in and out of the country. Whitlock’s impressively documented book contains interviews with more than 1,000 participants in the war. The author also examines a report titled “Lessons Learned,” which, though inches thick, seems to have emerged only long after the damage was done (and $1 trillion disappeared into the ether). One curious diagnostic among many uncovered in this comprehensive overview: Early on, American troops had to fly their laundry to Uzbekistan, since there were no facilities in Afghanistan, whereas the base at Bagram soon sported “a shopping mall, a Harley-Davidson dealer and about 30,000 troops, civilians and contractors.” Bush administration officials could never wrap their heads around the fact that the Taliban and al-Qaeda were distinct entities and were convinced that anyone willing to fight against them was a friend of the U.S. Those presumed allies milked a gullible U.S. dry. One interviewee notes that the U.S. misadventure could have ended in weeks if direct negotiations with the Taliban had been undertaken. Instead, enemies were misidentified and innocent people killed so frequently that one officer reported that some units were “focused in consequence management, paying Afghans for damages and condolence payments.” That Joe Biden was able to order America’s withdrawal redefined the terms of victory to say that the U.S. “had achieved its original objective long ago by destroying al-Qaeda’s stronghold in Afghanistan”—rather than acknowledge that the Afghans had defeated their second superpower.

By this authoritative account, the Afghanistan War has been a colossal failure that should have been ended years ago.
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

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**ONLY ANTS FOR ANDY**
Awan, Jashar
Illus. by the author
Norton Young Readers (48 pp.)
$17.95 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-324-01659-5

A finicky anteater learns that tastes sometimes change.
With a long, stretchy tongue, Andy loves to slurp ants—but never any other food. Ants taste amazing. Why would Andy eat anything else? Andy also likes trucks: tow trucks, cement trucks, dump trucks...only trucks. When pal Sam invites Andy over for a sleepover at the Sloths’ house, Andy can’t wait. But shockingly, Sam’s room is filled with spaceships. There is not a single truck to be found. Andy soon realizes that spaceships are similar to trucks—but in space! Even better. At the dinner table, Andy is in for another surprise. The Sloths don’t eat ants (in fact, Sam is allergic); instead they eat grubs. With eyes squeezed tight in determination (and fear), Andy sticks out his long tongue and slurps. Grubs aren’t bad! He has learned that he can try new things. Awan builds Andy’s personal discoveries one atop the other, with a steady pace, culminating in a triumphant victory dance—until the furry algae dessert. “Wait. What?” Humorous details in the art will add to the guffaws. Mrs. Sloth of course drives incredibly slowly, happily oblivious to the traffic piling up behind her and the tortoise jogger that passes her; both ants and grubs sport tiny eyes as they crawl or squirm about the plates. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Trying new things can be hard, but it’s worth it (except maybe not furry algae).*(Picture book: 3-6)*

**WOUNDED FALCONS**
Buitrago, Jairo
Illus. by Yockteng, Rafael
Trans. by Amado, Elisa
Groundwood (40 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-77306-456-7

The unfortunate wounding of a falcon strengthens the bonds between two young boys in Buitrago and Yockteng’s latest collaboration.
A falcon springs up from a tree branch, soaring amid blue skies and white clouds. The rock comes from below and strikes the falcon’s wing. The falcon falls to the ground below.
Meanwhile, Adrián and Santiago walk away from a bad day at school. Adrián sports a black eye and a clenched fist, and Santiago, who “never has any problems,” offers companionship. The friends go to an abandoned lot, where Santiago reads and Adrián climbs a tree, from which he spots the injured falcon. Concerned, Adrián decides to nurse it back to health. At the dinner table, he asks for advice from his mom, who instead lets Adrián know that she’s heard about the bad day at school and his father “will give you what you deserve.” No luck there. Still, Adrián looks over the falcon, taking the bird to the “old man who cures bones” and feeding and caring for the bird with the help of his friend. Adrián’s time with the falcon stirs something in him, something that Santiago has known was in him all along: a big heart. In Amado’s translation, Mexico City–based Buitrago’s words maintain a detached aloofness, masquerading the story’s hints of darkness and brushes with pain in a straightforward yet lyrical tone. Overall, the text’s cinematic in scope but intimate in its compassion. Colombian illustrator Yockteng’s vivid artwork depicts a world in layers, with splatters of colors and intriguing details in the backgrounds that urge a second look. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Apowerfully, even divinely told slice of life. (Picture book. 4-8)

WHERE THUONG KEEPS LOVE
Buu, Thu
Illus. by Luu, Bao
West Margin Press (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-5362-2238-8

A young Vietnamese girl discovers the varied ways in which her friends and family express their love for one another. Looking for a special place to keep her feelings, Thuong asks her friends where they keep their love for their parents. Her friends, a diverse array of children, share the ways they convey affection. These include a vocalized declaration like “I love you” as well as nonverbal actions that demonstrate appreciation and respect. Each of these examples is symbolically linked to a body part. One friend keeps it in his head and explains that trying his best and learning new things make his parents happy. Another friend keeps it in her heart, as doing fun things with her parents makes her happy. Thuong also observes members of her family listening carefully, gardening, and cooking her favorite meal. This exploration of expressing familial devotion provides opportunities for social-emotional learning by connecting actions, both physical and emotional, with love. The gentle and affirming tone doesn’t prioritize one form over another and subtly introduces the ways culture can influence our expressions and how we reciprocate affection. The friendly cartoon illustrations are done in a cheery mix of bright pastel colors, which reinforces the soothing comfort of unconditional love. Thuong is Vietnamese, and her friends have a range of skin tones and hair colors. A Vietnamese rhyme reflecting the story’s theme is reproduced in the backmatter along with an English translation.

A sweet and charming tale that validates different ways of expressing love. (author’s note, Vietnamese glossary) (Picture book. 4-8)

WHEN WE SAY BLACK LIVES MATTER
Clarke, Maxine Beneba
Illus. by the author
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$14.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-338-54037-6

The author of The Patchwork Bike (illustrated by Van Thanh Rudd, 2016) writes to children about the meaning of the phrase Black Lives Matter.

Pastel illustrations, also by Clarke, on dark, textured paper are paired with oversized, contrasting text addressed to “Little one.” In the visuals, a family that begins as a couple expecting a baby grows into a family with a child and then becomes part of a community in protest, marching for Black lives, before a final page shows a jubilant Black boy in a cap and gown. The adult narrator explains that “when we say Black Lives Matter, / we’re saying Black people are wonderful-strong.” Other meanings of the rallying cry, when it is called out, screamed, sung, laughed, and known, include a demand for respect, a defiant joy, a channeling of ancestors, an acknowledgment of trouble, and knowing one’s worth. Clarke’s text is poignant and mesmerizing, with design elements that raise the text to an artistic level, shaping it around the art and highlighting active and emotional words in color: enough, dancing, radiant, precious. The art is truly outstanding, gripping the heart from the very first spread and not letting go. With colored shapes and stained-glass motifs, these Black figures feel real and weighty. Within this deep dive are tragedy, fear, anger, and mourning alongside hope, comfort, strength, and triumph. This slim book contains a necessary and healing exploration of our current moment that will remain relevant for decades to come.

An astonishing work of art and a crucial addition to every bookshelf. (Picture book. 4-8)

WE SHALL OVERCOME
Illus. by Collier, Bryan
Orchard/Scholastic (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-1-338-54037-6

Award-winning illustrator Collier sets images of the present and the past against the text of a beloved song.

Lyrics of “We Shall Overcome,” a song associated with the 1960s-era civil rights movement, are printed in orange capital letters against a strip of brown background along the bottom of each spread. The pictures tell stories, juxtaposing present-day scenes and children in full color,
A picture book is, generally speaking, not a speedy thing. Even the sparest text needs revision, and pictures take time—not only to create (picture-book art needs revision just as much as text does), but also to schedule. So, for the most part, the picture books we are seeing this fall began, probably, two to three years ago. When they were conceptualized, their creators probably did not know (though some may have suspected) that they would be landing in a United States in which the teaching of history and current events would be under legislative assault. But they are, and whether intended or not, many of them are perfect for just this moment.

Ibi Zoboi and Loveis Wise bring readers *The People Remember* (Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins, Sept. 28), chronicling the abduction of Africans from their homelands, the Middle Passage, 250 years of enslavement, 100 years of Jim Crow, and the work yet unfinished. With a rhythmic, poetic storyteller’s voice, Zoboi relates the history without flinching, while Wise creates startling compositions that emphasize African American resilience. This call to memory and to action is urgently necessary.

Martha Brockenbrough, Grace Lin, and Julia Kuo plumb legal history, bringing to light the story of Wong Kim Ark in *I Am an American* (Little, Brown, Nov. 2). Born in San Francisco to immigrant parents, Wong was unjustly detained when returning to the U.S. after a trip to China. His case made its way to the Supreme Court, and the court’s 1898 decision upheld birthright citizenship as established in the 14th Amendment. A simple narrative is buttressed by backmatter that fills in legal and historical context, but the principle is clear throughout.

In *Without Separation* (Calkins Creek/Boyd’s Mills, Sept. 14), Larry Dean Brimner and Maya Gonzalez also revisit court records, revealing to readers young and old the little-known story of 75 Mexican American students who were expelled from their California school at the beginning of the Great Depression to make way for an all-White student body. One brave 12-year-old named Roberto Alvarez spoke for his community before the California Superior Court, winning their right to attend the school and establishing crucial precedent.

Lee Wind and Paul O. Zelinsky visit more-recent history in *Red and Green and Blue and White* (Levine Querido, Oct. 19), inspired by an incident in Billings, Montana, in 1993. The pre-holiday peace of a neighborhood decorated for Christmas is shattered when the one house strung about with blue and white lights for Hanukkah comes under antisemitic assault. In a powerful example of acting locally, non-Jewish citizens put menorahs in their own windows in response, declaring solidarity with their neighbors.

With *Nibi’s Water Song* (Lee & Low, Oct. 12), Sunshine Tenasco (Anishinabe) and Chief Lady Bird (Chippewa and Potawatomi) highlight the environmental injustice so many Native Americans and First Nations people live with every day. With no clean water in her own home, the Indigenous protagonist goes to a neighboring town, knocking on doors of “big, shiny houses” in hopes of clean water, ultimately organizing a protest and demanding the inhabitants of those houses listen and act. Deceptively lighthearted, this book goes deep.

Like Zoboi and Wise, Bryan Collier celebrates Black history in his illustrations of the civil rights anthem *We Shall Overcome* (Orchard/Scholastic, Nov. 2). Readers follow a smiling Black child in sunny yellow T-shirt walking past the 16th Street Baptist Church, riding a bus with Rosa Parks, looking at Little Rock’s Central High School, all on the way to participate in a community art project bounded by a giant, yellow BLACK LIVES MATTER painted on the pavement.

Here’s hoping that “someday” is soon—these books will help to take us there.

*Vicky Smith is a young readers’ editor.*
against significant events and sites of past struggle in black and white. Endmatter explains the significance of said sites and scenes for those who may not know: the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, Rosa Parks sitting down on a bus, children integrating schools. The opening spreads feature a school-age Black child rising and getting ready for the day with a smile; the middle spreads show the child arriving at school and learning with a multiracial group of peers, a Black teacher at the head of the class. Final spreads show the child walking by a street being painted with *Black Lives Matter* in yellow, then small crowds standing together and painting a mural together. Collier uses collage with a multitude of faces and layers to place the times and movements in relationship, creating a powerful opportunity for comparison, reflection, and discussion about the past and present. The opening and closing spreads with the smiling child offer the hopeful message Collier reinforces in his note.

This thoughtful work of art comes together with beauty and meaning. (historical note, illustrator’s note) (Picture book: 3-10) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

**WITH GREAT POWER**

*The Marvelous Stan Lee*

Eriksen, Annie Hunter

Illus. by Gatlin, Lee

Page Street (40 pp.)

$18.99 | Sep. 21, 2021

978-1-64567-285-2

If anyone deserves the superhero treatment, it’s Stan Lee.

Lee takes on more than one identity in this picture-book biography. As a teen, he’s Errand Boy, with the ability to deliver lunch to every employee at Timely Comics at astounding speed. Later in the book, Eriksen compares him to the Human Torch, as he creates one classic Marvel Comics character after another. She goes for the obvious pun: “Stan was on fire!” Sometimes she rushes through the timeline almost haphazardly. The artist Jack Kirby quits Timely Comics and then, a few pages later, is working with Lee again, with little explanation. One picture shows Lee on the red carpet, apparently at a movie premiere in the 1960s, but the next page jumps back decades, to columns he wrote asking: “What makes a hero?” The sections about Kirby may be controversial. Fans of the artist have argued for years that Lee gave him (and other artists, including Steve Ditko) too little credit for coming up with the ideas behind Marvel characters. But this book mainly credits Lee for those ideas. Kirby and Ditko were superheroes, too. Nearly all of the sources in the bibliography are interviews with Lee or books and articles he wrote. Still, the frenetic pace is often genuinely thrilling, and the illustrations are enormously appealing, stretching and squashing anatomy as though Gatlin had taken Silly Putty to the funny pages. The comic-book creators are, as they were in life, generally White and Jewish, but the pictures show comics fans of many races, cultures, and body types.

This high-speed origin story, appropriately enough, is larger than life and almost impossible to believe. (historical note) (Picture book/biography: 4-8)

**CHANGE SINGS**

*A Children’s Anthem*

Gorman, Amanda

Illus. by Long, Loren

Viking (32 pp.)

$18.99 | Sep. 21, 2021

978-0-593-20322-4

Great expectations of wordsmith Gorman are not disappointed in this “children’s anthem” to change.

In rhyming verses, a first-person narrator sings along, telling readers, “I can hear change coming / In its loudest, proudest song.” The poem does become a kind of song, as the child, a Black girl with glowing brown skin and textured hair, carries a guitar. As she joins with others, she hands them instruments, and together they change the world in large and small ways—delivering groceries and meals, cleaning up outdoor spaces, and making literal and figurative music with their deeds and their instruments. Long’s illustrations offer an interpretation of the anthem that expands upon the text and becomes its own rhythmic story. A quiet opening and a stunning second spread one could gaze at for days are followed by spreads that alternate between white space and full color, climaxing with a crescendo and then ending on a soft, steady note, when the narrator looks out to readers, offering them an invitation to carry the song on into the world. In rich language and vivid art, this hopeful celebration of the life-affirming power of change to ripple out into a better future is irresistible. Text and poetry work together to regulate a careful reading of this beautiful work. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

One to keep, to read, and to reread. (Picture book: 4-8)

**I AM SMOKE**

Herz, Henry

Illus. by López, Mercè

Tilbury House (36 pp.)

$18.95 | Sep. 7, 2021

978-0-88448-788-3

Lustrous illustrations and meditative text reflect on the role of smoke in nature and civilization.

Within this exquisitely beautiful melding of science and poetry is a ton of trust: trust that readers will absorb the intricate, evocative prose; trust they will utilize the comprehensive backmatter; and trust that readers will reconsider something as ubiquitous as smoke anew. Using sparse but potent text, author Herz presents smoke as a “swirling, roiling mist” vital to nature and to humans; it’s as important in its mundanity as it soothes bees or flavors food as it is in the sacred, when smoke “participates in prayer” through incense. It’s a high-level presentation, but inquisitive readers will absorb the intricate, evocative prose; trust they will utilize the comprehensive backmatter; and trust that readers will reconsider something as ubiquitous as smoke anew. Using sparse but potent text, author Herz presents smoke as a “swirling, roiling mist” vital to nature and to humans; it’s as important in its mundanity as it soothes bees or flavors food as it is in the sacred, when smoke “participates in prayer” through incense. It’s a high-level presentation, but inquisitive readers will enjoy connecting the lyrical lines with the thor...
“Hrab’s narrative captures a child’s understanding of loss with gentle subtlety.”

**THE SOUR CHERRY TREE**

Hrab, Naseem  
Illus. by Kazemi, Nahid  
Owlkids Books (32 pp.)  
$18.95 | Oct. 15, 2021  
978-1-77147-414-6

With ample emotional subtext, a young girl recalls everyday details about her beloved grandfather the day after his death.

The child bites her mother’s toe to wake her up, wishing that she could have done the same for her baba bozorg, her beloved grandfather, who had forgotten to wake up the day before. She kisses a pancake that reminds her of her grandfather’s face. Her mother, who had been admonishing her for playing with her food, laughs and kisses the pancake’s forehead. Returning to Baba Bozorg’s home, the child sees minute remnants of her grandfather: a crumpled-up tissue, smudgy eyeglasses, and mint wrappers in his coat pockets. From these artifacts the narrator transitions to less tangible, but no less vivid, memories of playing together and looks of love that transcend language barriers. Deeply evocative, Hrab’s narrative captures a child’s understanding of loss with gentle subtlety, and gives space for processing those feelings. Kazemi’s chalk pastel art pairs perfectly with the text and title: Pink cherry hues, smoky grays, and hints of green plants appear throughout the book, concluding in an explosion of vivid green that brings a sense of renewal, joy, and remembrance to the heartfelt ending. Though the story is universally relevant, cultural cues and nods to Iranian culture will resonate strongly with readers of Iranian/Persian heritage. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A beautifully poignant celebration of memories of a loved one that live on in those that remain. *(Picture book. 4-8)*

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uses images created from smoke itself and then collaged with Photoshop and watercolor. The result is gossamer landscapes decorated with molecular structures as well as homey scenes of Greeks fumigating temples. Spreads of smoke rising fluidly into a pinprick-starry sky, a “dark dance from every campfire,” are veritable gems. Moving scenes involving humans include impressionistic images of various religions worshipping and a Huron child planting pumpkin seeds, though it’s unfortunate a group of Indigenous people in regalia isn’t given a specific tribal identity. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Smoke dissipates quickly, but this poetic text will linger. *(bibliography, sources) (Picture book. 7-12)*

**NORMAN DIDN’T DO IT!**

*(Yes, He Did)*

Higgins, Ryan T.  
Illus. by the author  
Disney-Hyperion (48 pp.)  
$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021  
978-1-368-02623-9

Series: Mother Bruce

A newcomer tests the friendship between a porcupine and his beloved tree, Mildred.

Being well used to playing games with his silent, leafy partner, conducting one-sided conversations, and having her all to himself, Norman is outraged when a sapling springs up nearby: “And WHO is THAT?!” Seeing his best friend drifting away (figuratively), Norman is soon driven by anger and insecurity to dig up his leafy rival in the dead of night and cart it very, very far away—only to be wracked by both fear of being found out and, more worthily, guilt a little later. “I have hit rock bottom!” he declares, falling into the still-open hole next to Mildred, and, more worthily, guilt a little later. “I have hit rock bottom!” he declares, falling into the still-open hole next to Mildred, and, more worthily, guilt a little later. “I have hit rock bottom!” he declares, falling into the still-open hole next to Mildred, and, more worthily, guilt a little later. “I have hit rock bottom!” he declares, falling into the still-open hole next to Mildred, and, more worthily, guilt a little later. “I have hit rock bottom!” he declares, falling into the still-open hole next to Mildred, and, more worthily, guilt a little later. “I have hit rock bottom!”

A clever, funny prod to do the right thing when changes take root. *(Picture book. 5-6)*

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**THE SECRET CODE INSIDE YOU**

LaRocca, Rajani  
Illus. by Salerno, Steven  
Little Bee Books (40 pp.)  
$17.99 | Sep. 14, 2021  
978-1-4998-1075-2

Operating on three levels, this book will help readers crack their own secret codes.

As they begin their exploration of the concept of DNA, the youngest listeners will be drawn in with questions featuring fun animals and text with internal and end rhymes, alliteration, and puns. “Why aren’t you finny like a fish, / or grinny like a shark? / Why can’t you catch flies with your tongue, / or / see / things / in / the / dark?” Describing DNA as “twisted ladders, or tiny, twirling noodles” creates accessible concrete images for children. The science ramps up for slightly older readers and discusses how personal traits like height or the size of a child’s
nose, ears, or hands are determined by the DNA that parents and grandparents share with their children. Definitions and explanations of key vocabulary like genes and chromosomes are clear, but the rhyming format creates the occasional awkward phrase. Dynamic and eye-catching illustrations on later pages emphasize the difference between genetic coding and each person’s unique choices. “[DNA] makes the color of your eyes, / but YOU choose where to look: / at butterflies or sunset skies, / or even at this book.” Personal choice also determines how someone uses their muscles and chooses an occupation. For older readers or the more science curious, the backmatter is full of DNA facts and explanations, URLs to child-friendly websites, and a well-designed and -explained experiment to extract DNA from a banana.

A solid introduction to a complex topic. (Informational picture book. 4-8) (This review is printed here for the first time.)
In Kathryn Otoshi’s *Lunch Every Day* (KO Kids Books, Sept. 7), based on a true story, readers meet Jimmy, a bully who steals a classmate’s lunch daily rather than be seen eating free lunches. Crucially, Jimmy’s victim’s mother sees this too. Our reviewer says it’s “a sensitively told conversation starter.” Otoshi answered our questions via email.

**Did the pandemic affect this book?**

There was definitely some hand-wringing involved in deciding on the release date! Ultimately, pushing it back a full year gave me the space I needed to evaluate my illustrations and consider how to use color more effectively. Instead of using natural skin tones for my characters, I used bright green, blue, red and purple hues for the students’ skin tones so the story wouldn’t be necessarily linked to a specific race or culture—[it’s] about economic disparity and Jimmy’s lunch-shaming experience.

**If someone were to write and illustrate a formative moment in your life, who would you want it to be?**

When I was in elementary school, I watched another girl get severely bullied. [She] was the only other person at my school with Asian heritage. To this day, it still really bothers me that I didn’t do anything in her defense. While later I wrote and illustrated *One*, about standing up, if someone [else] were to make a story about this specific formative incident, I’d like it to be someone like [Jillian and Mariko Tamaki], who could address this painful experience with their instinctive sensitivity and grace.

**What do you want kids to take from *Lunch Every Day?***

While we can’t always know what drives people to sometimes do hurtful things, the power of one small gesture can have an indelible impact. The mother of the boy who is bullied surprisingly offers to make a second bagged lunch for Jimmy. This transforms the situation…and ultimately changes Jim’s life. Jim Perez has helped hundreds of thousands of kids through his anti-bullying programs and community-building initiatives.

*Interview by Vicky Smith*
"Marinov expertly paces this gentle story."

LEO AND THE OCTOPUS

Marinov, Isabelle
Illustrated by Nixon, Chris
Kane Miller (32 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-68464-277-9

A captive octopus helps a neurodivergent boy find companionship.

Leo feels like he’s "living on the wrong planet." Sensory overload makes him retreat into a box to read—but this is a lonely pleasure. When he meets Maya, the octopus, at the aquarium, he sees her as a kindred spirit. At the library, he learns about octopuses, and when he returns to the aquarium, the keeper allows him to touch her. He realizes she shows emotion by changing color. "If only humans were as easy to understand." During weekly visits he strengthens their friendship, building increasingly difficult puzzles for her to solve and helping to erect a "no flash" sign when too many picture-taking visitors stress her out. Eventually, through sharing.

HOW TO CHANGE THE WORLD in 12 easy steps

Inspired by Eva Moses Kor
by Peggy Porter Tierney
illustrations by Marie Letourneau

Kids teaching kids how to make the world HAPPIER, PRETTIER, FRIENDLIER, KINDER, SAFER, SMARTER, ACCEPTING, and LOVING.

IT’S EASY!

“This wonderful book should be nightly reading for little ones”
—Nadine Briggs, CEO, Simply Social Kids

978-1-839100-54-2 | $15.99
“Aboriginal author Morgan presents a beautifully cadenced call-and-response narrative.”

**LITTLE BIRD’S DAY**

Morgan, Sally
Illus. by Malibbirr, Johnny Warrkatja
Blue Dot Kids Press (32 pp.)
$18.95 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-73622-646-9

Little Bird responds to cues from Sun, Dusk, Moon, and others as natural elements guide a day of activities.

Aboriginal author Morgan, a member of the Palyku people in Western Australia, presents a beautifully cadenced call-and-response narrative voiced by Little Bird and the natural forces that propel its behavior. “Here comes Rain, / falling and splashing, / Time to bathe, Little Bird, / time to sparkle with freshness. // I flutter with Rain to wash my fuzzy feathers.” Little Bird, rising with Sun, sings “to wake the lazy sleepers.” It soars with Wind to reach and feed on a tree’s “crimson blossoms.” Dusk, “gliding and sighing,” induces Little Bird “to join a nightfall roost.” And full Moon, “glowing and whispering,” signals that it’s “Time to rest, Little Bird, / time to settle with your family.” Illustrator Malibirr, a Yolnu artist from the Aboriginal Ganalbingu clan, uses traditional earth tones, crosshatching, and elements from clan songlines and stories to distinguish his engrossing illustrations, worked in acrylic paint on toned paper. He depicts animals from his native Arnhem Land region, from water buffalo and dingo to echidna and freshwater prawn; an illustrated key challenges readers to find all 10. As Little Bird roosts with its family, it dreams of “flying among the stars.” The dark sky, spattered with thousands of starlit specks, reveals Little Bird’s shadowy silhouette in its dreamed flight.

Pairing a lilting text and culturally resonant illustrations, this striking work soars. (editorial note) (Picture book: 3-7)

**TIME IS A FLOWER**

Morstad, Julie
Illus. by the author
Tundra Books (56 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-7352-6744-1

A series of thoughtful metaphors and diverse characters takes viewers through the manifold dimensions of time.

In how to (2013), Morstad playfully portrays concepts both invisible (the breeze, bravery) and discernible (washing socks). In this companion volume, she tackles time. Like a spiderweb, time is difficult to see; like cut hair, it disappears after growth. Minutes move slowly at school and speed by as a wave knocks over a sand castle. Morstad’s lyrical language is perfectly paced: “Time is a song. / Dancing you quick!” These lines are paired with three solitary figures in dresses, each superimposed on itself several times in variations of movement and tonality. Across the gutter, the text reads: “Or pulling you, / long and stretching, / slow and low, / to the sound of a cello.” Here a Black child is shown in an interlocking sequence of nine steps,

**BRIGHT STAR**

Morales, Yuyi
Illus. by the author
Neal Porter/Holiday House (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-8234-4328-4

Amid the borderlands, a whitetail fawn thrives and survives in Morales’ latest seed of hope.

“Child, you are awake!” A fawn gazes back at readers, curled up in the desert dirt alongside the cacti and blossoms. “You are alive!” It’s a summoning, a reckoning with the wonders—visible and not visible—of life. The opulent artwork thrums with blooms of orange, brown, and green, featuring vibrant images made of digitally altered drawings, photographs, yarn, wool, among other things. The fawn observes and prances, exploring the manifold dimensions of time.

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each iteration contributing to a rainbow effect. Assorted colors (with a cheerful magenta playing a prominent role), sizes, and patterns create visual pleasure and make the abstract concrete, while solid, spacious backgrounds prompt contemplation. The spread showing that “Time is a sunbeam...” contrasts a sleeping cat in the warm shadows cast by plants at a sunlit window with the facing page’s black silhouettes and a repositioned animal absorbing changed light.

This exuberant vehicle will expand the thinking of those just beginning to comprehend clocks and calendars. (Picture book. 4–7)
How did the pandemic affect your process?
When quarantine was called, my world became this book. In July 2020 [my parents] got infected with Covid. I realized that I was creating with emotions like uncertainty that my parents might not survive, or anger at the hate inflicted upon the Asian American community, and frustration that the U.S.–Mexican border had been closed while people waited at detention facilities. I drew and painted and dedicated myself to honor [the urgency].

How did you choose a fawn as your central character?
According to some ancient beliefs in Mexico, the deer [cares for] other animals. She is also the guardian of the mountains and is symbolized by the morning star. In the natural world, deer inhabit the borderlands. As I researched I learned how fawns are born without scent, [and] when a mother deer detects danger, they make their fawns lie down flat on the ground [and go] away to not attract attention. Do you know who else does this too? We humans do it [when] immigrant families try to protect their children from deportation.

How did creating this book help you answer some questions?
This book, more than any other, is made from the many connections I made with people. One day [in] the Sonoran Desert, my friend [and research guide] Sergio Avila suggested that I might not find satisfying answers to my questions. “What,” he said, “if there is no single answer? Or the answer is that we sit near a pond like right now, and after we talk we get up and walk some more and we work, eat, serve, write, and draw, and still feeling our hurt we live every moment and we do all of this again and again?” And it was then when I felt I began finding a light.

Interview by Vicky Smith
“Dense textures, a palette with a stunning use of light, and panoramic landscapes establish a sweeping, grandiose tone.”

ALMOST NOTHING, YET EVERYTHING
she is able to make a new friend—and when she does, her words, slowly, come back. This warmly illustrated picture book adeptly captures the experience of moving to a new country and learning a new language. The narrator’s struggle and her slow but steady adjustment to her new home perfectly balance optimism and realism. The book’s watercolor-and-ink drawings evoke a world that feels simultaneously diffuse and sharply defined, thereby serving as a wonderful parallel for the narrator’s experience. All characters have paper-white skin and black hair; the narrator wears her hair in two puffy pigtails, and her new friend wears hers in a pageboy. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A frank and optimistic picture book about learning to live in a new language. (Picture book: 3-8)

**DANCING WITH DADDY**
Schulte, Anita Rowe
Illus. by Chen, Ziyue
Two Lions (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Dec. 1, 2021
978-1-5420-0719-1

A nonverbal girl who uses a wheelchair anticipates a father-daughter dance in Schulte’s debut.

As Elsie and her mother shop for the perfect dress, Elsie ponders: Pink or red? Red matches Daddy’s soccer jersey—a red dress it is! Her supportive sisters are thrilled for her, too. But it’s snowing harder and harder. What if the dance is canceled? Refreshingly, Elsie’s disability is seamlessly presented as simply another aspect of family life; for instance, as Elsie’s sisters sharpen up noodles with chopsticks, Daddy matter-of-factly gives Elsie a “push” of liquid food through a feeding tube. Pops of rhyme or alliteration add pep to the straightforward text: “Inside, daughters dashed. Ponytails bounced. Dresses flowered...” Inspired by the author’s daughter, who has Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome, Elsie is delightfully expressive. Elsie’s italicized thoughts convey her worry and excitement; she “can’t wait to see [her] dress spin.” Her face, bearing characteristic features of the disorder, radiates emotion. She frowns forlornly at fat snowflakes and beams with infectious joy as her sisters help her “[find] her groove.” Whether she’s pointing to pictures in her communication book or anxiously indicating her missing hair bow, her family is warmly attentive. As she swings and sways in her father’s arms, her forehead against his, their missing hair bow, her family is warmly attentive. As she swings and sways in her father’s arms, her forehead against his, their

A heartwarming portrayal of a family embracing disability. (Picture book: 4-8) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

**NIBI’S WATER SONG**
Tenasco, Sunshine
Illus. by Chief Lady Bird
Lee & Low Books (32 pp.)
$18.95 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-64379-482-2

An enthusiastic but thirsty Anishinaabe girl and her French bulldog search everywhere looking for clean water to drink.

After playing outside, Nibi and her dog go inside for a nice, cool drink of water. Brown, sludgy water pours from the tap. They run to the river, but even the fish says, “You can’t drink this dirty water!” Nibi and the dog go to the next town and run along a street with “big, shiny houses.” She knocks on doors until a lady hands Nibi a small bottle of water. But the water’s gone too quickly! She tries again, at that house and the others. “KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK!” But no one answers. She paints a sign: “Water Is Life / I Am Thirsty.” Soon, her friends join her. They make their own signs, and Nibi’s quest becomes a peaceful protest. (Even her dog carries a sign: “Woof!”) They march in the town with the big, shiny houses, and its people join in, and finally, lawmakers listen. Before long, the river is clear, and clean water runs from the taps. Water activist Tenasco (Anishinabe) effectively uses Nibi’s dilemma to illustrate a larger point. Nibi’s song—“I am thirsty, thirsty Nibi and I need water!”—acts as an urgent refrain. Lively, colorful illustrations from Chief Lady Bird (Chippewa and Potawatomi) add to the energy of the story, incorporating stylized fish and flower motifs into the clean-lined illustrations of the brown-skinned, pigtailed girl.

One gutsy girl leads the way. (author’s note, illustrator’s note) (Picture book: 3-6)

**FOX**
A Circle of Life Story
Thomas, Isabel
Illus. by Egnéus, Daniel
Bloomsbury (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 30, 2021
978-1-5476-0692-4

The cycle of life in the natural world is explained using a fox as the subject.

In this thoughtful picture book, a red fox hunts and feeds her family of three cubs; as the cubs play-hunt, they grow into learning to hunt for real. Then the mother fox is hit and killed by a car. This aspect of the story is presented without anthropomorphic emotion: “Three cubs look around / sniff the ground, / hesitate... / then pad back home.” The story continues, focusing on the fox’s body and what is happening to it as it decomposes. Staying with unemotional science, the narrative tells how the decomposing body nourishes life, from the scavengers and microbes that feed on it to the nutrients it releases to the soil and air. In this way, readers come to understand that death and life are inextricably linked and that death is a catalyst for new
life. The collage-style, full-color illustrations show the maturing cubs continuing to thrive, reassuring readers and reinforcing the circle-of-life theme. The illustrations vary presentations, alternating double-page spreads, spots, and full-page spreads. The images of the foxes are lively and delicate, while the forest world depicted creates an evocative setting. A thorough, scientific explanation of what happens to the physical body after death is presented at the book’s end. Members of a human family briefly illustrated have black hair and light beige skin.

An adept and impressive handling of a sensitive subject. (Picture book: 5-10) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

YOUR LEGACY
A Bold Reclaiming of Our Enslaved History
Williams, Schele
Illus. by Engel, Tonya
Abrams (48 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-4197-4875-2

This reclamation of legacy begins with African origins before the trans-Atlantic slave trade and emphasizes the strength and resilience of enslaved people.

The first two spreads introduce Africa as the beginning of “your story”; a continent of diverse peoples and cultures and colors where people thrived for thousands of years. Then Europeans arrived on African shores, and “your ancestors” were forcibly taken away, afraid but determined to survive. They were separated and regrouped and forced into hard labor, but they chose to love one another, to use their intellects, to share music, to courageously defy the system. Examples of their determination, brilliance, strength, and ingenuity are given in the names of specific historical figures listed on spreads that show their acts or creations in a scene—people who seized their freedom, invented things, and contributed to the American way of life. Additional spreads show more recent leaders grouped around words such as intellect, dignity, and grace. Final spreads encourage readers to receive these qualities as their ancestors’ legacy and to continue that legacy by gifting equality to the next generation. Engel’s paintings fairly glow with love and pride. Caregivers of Black children have struggled to introduce America’s shameful history in a way that doesn’t put the blame on Black people; with this thoughtful, sensitive, and beautiful volume, families can begin a difficult conversation in a nurturing way. This is a must for every Black child growing up in the Americas and will help other races and ages too. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A truly powerful perspective shift. (author’s note, illustrator’s note) (Picture book: 3-adult)

RED AND GREEN AND BLUE AND WHITE
Wind, Lee
Illus. by Zelinik, Paul O.
Levine Querido (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-64614-087-9

Kids teach a valuable lesson about community spirit.

A city block is ablaze with red and green lights for Christmas; one house glows blue and white for Hanukkah. This is where Isaac, a Jewish boy, lives, across the street from best friend Teresa, excitedly preparing for Christmas. They love lighting up their homes in holiday colors. After an antisemitic bigot smashes a window in Isaac’s house, Isaac relights the menorah the next night, knowing if his family doesn’t, it means hiding their Jewishness, which doesn’t “feel right.” Artistic Teresa supports Isaac by drawing a menorah, inscribed to her friend, and placing the picture in her window. What occurs subsequently is a remarkable demonstration of community solidarity for Isaac and his family from everyone, including the media. Galvanized into defiant action against hate, thousands of townspeople display menorahs in windows in residences and public buildings.

This quiet, uplifting tale is inspired by an incident that occurred in Billings, Montana, in 1993. Readers will feel heartened at children’s power to influence others to stand up for justice and defeat vile prejudice. The colorful illustrations, rendered digitally with brushes of the artist’s devising, resemble scratch art. Isaac and Teresa are White, and there is some racial diversity among the townspeople; one child is depicted in a wheelchair. An author’s note provides information about the actual event.

The true meaning of the holiday season shines here. (Picture book: 5-8) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

HELLO, DARK
Wong, Wai Mei
Illus. by Campeau, Tamara
Pajama Press (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-77278-221-9

A new perspective combats a common childhood fear: the dark.

A young unnamed child greets the dark in the bedroom, personified by a rotund shadow with three hairs at the top of its head and droopy eyes. The child lists the many ways the dark brings uncertainty. “You keep me wide awake and worrying; what will you do once I’m asleep? / I hear the creaks you make around the house. It makes me feel helpless and alone.” The spare text gently narrates as the kid declares, “I’m tired of being afraid of you. Tonight, can we talk?” Dark purple and blue hues saturate each detailed illustration as the child acknowledges the “good things” the dark also provides. A menagerie of animals playing in the twilight and dreamy scenes of the sky attest to how the dark facilitates life for nocturnal creatures and rest for
Beautifully Me (Simon & Schuster, Sept. 14) is Nabela Noor’s “spunky and sincere” debut picture book celebrating body positivity, with illustrations by Nabi H. Ali. She answered our questions by email.

Who is Zubi, and how does it feel to be able to share her story with young readers?
Zubi is a joyful Bangladeshi American girl who discovers confidence in a world of narrowly defined beauty standard—all on her first day of school. She is curious, optimistic, bubbly and sees the beauty in all things around her. Sharing her story feels full circle for me, as a lot of what happens in the book stems from my own childhood experiences.

I hope that this book serves as a reminder to all (children and adults) to be kind to yourself and to your body—not only for yourself, but because you never know who is watching and learning.

Were you a big reader as a kid? Did any books—or encouraging adults—especially influence you as a reader or writer?
I grew up reading books with illustrations of kids and families that didn’t look like mine, bodies that didn’t resemble mine. I knew that I wanted to create a colorful, vibrant world that resembled my experience, with my language shining on the pages and our cultural attire and traditions celebrated from start to finish.

Growing up, I loved Junie B. Jones and Amelia Bedelia. I remember wishing I looked like those characters. Now I’m happy to share Zubi with the world and show young fellow brown girls that they’re beautiful just the way they are.

What fall release(s) are you most looking forward to reading?
I’m excited to read Norman Didn’t Do It! by Ryan T. Higgins, a story about friendship, Bright Brown Baby by Andrea Davis Pinkney and Brian Pinkney, a Black, Indigenous, People of Color–focused tale, and Eyes That Kiss in the Corners by Joanna and Dung Ho, another book that celebrates self-love and heritage.

Interview by Megan Labrise
The simplicity of the text adds a level of poignancy that moves readers to reflection.

From the Tops of the Trees

Kirkus.com | Picture Books | Fall Preview Special Issue | 53

THE LONGEST STORM
Taccarino, Dan
Illus. by the author
Minedition (40 pp.)
$18.95 | Aug. 31, 2021
978-1-6626-5047-5

A parent, three children, and a dog weather a crisis together.

"A storm came to our town." Autumn leaves swirl and a child swings from a tire on a tree, yet overhead looms a huge dark cloud. "We were going to have to stay inside, maybe for a long while." It's not easy: "There was nothing to do and too much time to do it." There are moments of chaos: bath-tub puddles and dog-chewed shoes. Each person looks unhappy, bored, frustrated, angry. Shockingly, the adult totally loses it. Yet when there's an enormous flash of lightning ("the whole house shook") everyone cuddles together, and afterward "things started to get better, a little every day." The family appears White. Yaccarino's bold lines and fluid figures against swaths of solid color and his use of shading and shadow are splendid. Outside the windows rain comes down at an angle. Inside there is the yellow glow of a lamp or blue of darkness and the harmony—of family activity. Sun and blue sky finally make their appearance, and the family is seen in the yard picking up scattered leaves and sticks together, a reminder that the storm didn't leave things unchanged or unscathed. The story feels emotionally true to the process of going through any profound crisis: a pandemic, death, divorce, or the prolonged absence of a parent who is deployed, a first responder, or battling an illness.

Resonant and reassuring. (Picture book 3-7)

IT'S OK, SLOW LIZARD
Yoon, Yeorim
Illus. by Kim, Jian
Trans. by Kim, Chi-Young
Restless Books (42 pp.)
$18.95 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-63206-277-2

"Even if it's stormy for a while, it's OK. The rain will always stop and the sky will always clear up."

In this cozy South Korean import, Slow Lizard gently teaches Little Bird, Elephant, Rabbit, Monkey, and readers mindful ways of soothing anger, anxiety, and disappointment. Slow Lizard lives a "slow, slow life," with lots of time for helping friends through their rough patches. With Little Bird, who is anxious and busy but also prepared for anything, for instance, Slow Lizard shares a cup of flower tea, melting the stress away. All the friends have their quirks that respond to Slow Lizard's counsel in ways that benefit the group: Elephant frustrates easily but is generous and kind to the other forest animals, including hasty but clever Rabbit, and Monkey is energetic and mischievous but also ready to enjoy a book. Straightforward language invites readers to "take [their] time" and offers careful ways of redirecting negative emotions with offers of help, friendship, and quiet distraction. Kim's rich colored-pencil illustrations, in a sweet pastel palette, portray the adorable friend group enjoying tea, apples, and picture books with peaceful smiles in their forest home. Readers and nonreaders alike will surely love quietly enjoying the lovingly rendered, abundant details in the combination of full spreads, Slow Lizard and Little Bird's teatime on giant, pillowy peonies, in particular.

Comforting as a cup of flower tea shared with a friend. (Picture book 3-7) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

THE TREES FROM THE TOPS OF
Yang, Kao Kalia
Illus. by the author
Carolrhoda (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-5415-8130-2

This tale compassionately guides young readers to face their fears. (author's note) (Picture book 3-7)

FROM THE TOPS OF THE TREES
Tang, Kao Kalia
Illus. by Wada, Rachel
Carolrhoda (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-5415-8130-2

The author recounts a formative childhood experience that continues to inspire her today.

Born to Hmong refugees, Kalia has only ever known the confines of the Ban Vinai refugee camp in Thailand. Even while playing with her cousins, reminders of the hardships of their life are always present. She overhears the aunties sharing their uncertainty and fear of the future. They are a people with no home country and are still trying to find peace. Kalia asks her father why they live behind a gate and wonders what lies beyond the fences that surround the camp. The next day they climb a tall tree, and she shows her the vast expanse around them, from familiar camp landmarks to distant mountains "where the sky meets earth." This story of resilience and generational hope is told in an expressive, straightforward narrative style. The simplicity of the text adds a level of poignancy that moves readers to reflection. The layered and heavily textured illustrations complement the text while highlighting the humanity of the refugees and providing a quiet dignity to camp life. The militarylike color palette of olive greens, golden yellows, and rich browns reinforces the guarded atmosphere but also represents the transitional period from winter to spring, a time ripe with anticipation and promise.

A visually striking, compelling recollection. (author's note, glossary, map.) (Picture book/memoir 3-7)
“Zoboi’s lyrical free verse always speaks boldly about the lives, trials, and successes of African American people.”

THE PEOPLE REMEMBER

Zoboi, Ibi
Illus. by Wise, Loveis
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (64 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-06-291564-1

A lyrical history of African American life that also explicates the seven principles of Kwanzaa.

Opening with Africans from many ethnic groups being ripped from their homelands in the midst of births, deaths, storytelling, and other daily occurrences, this immaculately illustrated picture book walks through a vast swath of history. This includes the Atlantic slave trade, the plight and escape of enslaved people, emancipation, northern migration, faith journeys, and more, ending with the Movement for Black Lives. Zoboi’s lyrical free verse, with occasional subtle rhymes, always speaks boldly about the lives, trials, and successes of African American people. The refrain the people remember emphasizes how memories are passed down from one generation to the next, be they positive or otherwise. Figures like Mami Wata center Africa and the African diaspora—necessary for explaining the Kwanzaa principles within the narrative. Wise’s humans, somewhat reminiscent of Jacob Lawrence’s, feel big and expansive in proportion to their surroundings, representing the outsized impact African Americans have had on United States history and culture, whether acknowledged or not. Rich, deeply saturated illustrations cover every page and show how integral African Americans have been to the creation and growth of the arts. Extensive backmatter will ground readers in the facts and spark interest for further research. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Zoboi’s poetic retrospective breathes life into Black history narratives and reverently celebrates Black lives. (author’s note, timeline, further reading) (Picture book. 7-adult) (This review is printed here for the first time.)
She-Ra meets How To Train Your Dragon in this vivacious series starter.

In the world of Bailiwick, bands of Berzerkers protect the people and land from roaming monsters. Barb is a small, light-skinned Berzerker with a mess of curly black hair, a fierce, can-do attitude, and an aesthetic that lightly nods to Wonder Woman. When her band of Zerks is tricked and captured by an evil demon named Witch Head, only Barb is able to escape, stealing the Shadow Blade, Witch Head's magical sword, in the process. Teaming up with Porkchop, a friendly blue yeti, it's up to Barb to harness the power of the Shadow Blade and journey to recruit the Northern Zerks to help defeat Witch Head. The art is bright, energetic, and stylistically akin to that of Jeffrey Brown. Thick lines, varied paneling, and a consistently large font further the book's wide appeal. Human background characters have a diverse range of skin colors. Readers will delight in the occasional gross-out jokes, strange creatures (vampire goat fiends, mergoblin, the Grub of Death), heartwarming camaraderie, and the over-the-top villain. Amidst the silly chaos are quieter moments that touch on Barb's familial trauma, the cost of the war between Berzerkers and monsters, and what it means to be a good friend. Earnest, unstoppable Barb is easy to root for, and the next volume will be eagerly anticipated.

Nothing will stop readers from devouring this book. (map) (Graphic adventure. 8–12)
In the world of children’s books, new titles are more plentiful than apples in autumn. This represents a scant sampling of the season’s riches.

Written by Kyoko Hara, illustrated by Kazue Takahashi, and translated by Alexandrea Mallia, The Mailbox in the Forest (Museyon, Sept. 1) finds protagonist Mayu spending her winter vacation with her grandparents near the forest. Happening upon a “mailbocks” (it’s labeled) in a tree, the first grader forges an epistolary friendship with an earnest fox. Mayu easily accepts the concept of a letter-writing fox in this Japanese charmer.

With Living Ghosts & Mischievous Monsters (Scholastic Nonfiction, Sept. 7), Ponca filmmaker Dan SaSuWêh Jones turns to print for this collection of 32 chilling stories from a wide range of Native American storytellers and traditions. The geographical reach is impressive, as is the chronological one, taking readers back to the ancient Mississippian culture and bringing them up to the present day. Tongva illustrator Weshoyot Alvitre contributes pen-and-ink images that amplify the eeriness.

Born Behind Bars (Nancy Paulsen Books, Sept. 7) celebrates the resilience of and connection between two remarkable young people in India: Kabir, a boy born to an unjustly incarcerated Hindu mother and a missing Muslim father, and Rani, a girl from the marginalized Roma, or Kurava, community. Padma Venkatraman’s ultimately buoyant story of friendship despite many differences echoes across nations, cultures, and faiths as it highlights injustices many face worldwide.

The graphic-novel format of Living With Viola (Annick Press, Oct. 3) is ideal for showing the impacts of depression and panic disorder. Inspired by author Rosena Fung’s childhood, the story follows Olivia, the Canadian daughter of immigrants from Hong Kong, who feels weighed down by cultural dislocation and high expectations and isolated at her new middle school. Viola appears as the manifestation of the self-critical, negative thoughts in Olivia’s head.

Iacopo Bruno’s lush paintings illustrate Christopher Turner’s translation of Elisa Sabatintelli’s The Secret of the Magic Pearl (Red Comet, Oct. 12), the story of 8-year-old Hector, latest in a line of deep-sea divers. His discovery of the titular pearl draws attention and complications—but Hector remembers his grandfather’s wise words and calms the seas. The liveliness of this largely White Italian coastal town makes it a character in its own right.

Natasha Farrant’s Voyage of the Sparrowhawk (Norton Young Readers, Oct. 12) is a rollicking adventure in which two young people in post–World War I England make a daring Channel crossing. Orphans Ben, 13, and Lotti, 12, along with their beloved dogs, leave behind the grim fates that await them at home. Ben refuses to believe that his missing older brother died in battle in France, and Lotti, neglected by heartless relatives, hopes to reach her French grandmother.

Following last year’s The Talk, editors Wade Hudson and Cheryl Willis Hudson return with Recognize! An Anthology Honoring and Amplifying Black Life (Crown, Oct. 12). With every selection underscoring the truth that Black lives matter, contributors explore the theme in essays, poetry, art, and graphic stories. Excerpts from the writings of Frederick Douglass, James Baldwin, and Ida B. Wells, among other historical greats, are interspersed with those from a who’s who of Black creators for young people.

Anne Ursu returns with The Troubled Girls of Dragomir Academy (Walénd Pond Press/HarperCollins, Oct. 12), a thrilling fantasy enriched by feminist themes. Twelve-year-old Marya lives in the shadow of her brother in a world where boys’ magical potential is revered. When her actions cause her to be sent far from home to a remote school where girls are molded into useful tools in a patriarchal system, Marya starts to question everything society has told her is true.

Laura Simeon is a young readers’ editor.
“Illustrator Rickenmann pulls readers onto the streets of Bogotá, where dust announces the arrival of the bicycle packs.”

NEVERFORGOTTEN

A 10-year-old boy's ride to discover friendship and truth.

Fabio, who lives in Bogotá, Colombia, in a neighborhood that “used to be a town on the outskirts of the city, but the monster began to grow and ate the town,” goes on a cruise that turns nightmarish when she is confined to her room, then contracts COVID-19. In this and the other six stories, the children express their fears, isolation, and disappointments about losing everything normal: school, friends, sports, etc. The virus also affects their parents’ mental health. For instance, Conner (Apt. 3C) notices that his dad is smoking more, watches the news obsessively, wears the same clothes every day, and becomes increasingly less capable of helping with remote learning since losing his restaurant job. One day, Conner’s dad yells at Mrs. Watts, the complex’s unofficial grandmother, when he assumes she’s hoarding toilet paper. Conner intervenes to create a positive outcome, prompting his dad to realize he needs help. While each vignette is an entertaining short story, it’s the connections among the kids that make this a brilliant read. Their support of one another and the adults in the building portrays a positive side to lockdowns and quarantines while not sugarcoating the deadliness of Covid-19. The climactic final chapter brings all of the children—and Mrs. Watts—together for a slightly dangerous but informative and emotionally satisfying conclusion. Racial and cultural diversity among the characters is conveyed but not explored; one girl and her father are Deaf.

A compelling montage of stories that will leave readers wanting to know more about each character. (author’s note)

(Fiction 10-14)

NEVERFORGOTTEN

Algorta, Alejandra
Illus. by Rickenmann, Iván
Trans. by Salazar, Aída
Levine Querido (288 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 31, 2021
978-1-64614-094-7

★ “This intriguing, oversized title combines science and story to explore water in all its forms”
— Kirkus Reviews, starred review
FALL SPOTLIGHT

Pam Smy

Cambridge School of Art lecturer Pam Smy’s latest, *The Hideaway* (Pavilion Children’s, Sept. 7), is a deeply moving middle-grade title that deals with the sensitive topic of domestic abuse. She answered our questions by email.

As in *Thornhill*, you address intense subjects with great care and a touch of the supernatural. What draws you to tell these stories?

I strongly believe that books for young people are a safe place to explore ideas and experiences that may introduce them to a topic that is “other” to their own lives or help contextualize situations. As children share our adult lives, they are impacted by our mistakes and vulnerabilities and the resulting mess we make of relationships. Therefore, I feel it is important that there are books that tackle experiences that the reader or their friends may be exposed to or that may prompt conversations about those topics. By integrating these dark and difficult subjects in gothic or ghost stories, I hope that those who do not feel comfortable with the “real life” elements can enjoy the story on a different level. I am a great believer that books that acknowledge the messy reality of life are consumed alongside [a] wide range of fiction—part of the menu young people can choose from for a broad diet of reading.

What are your thoughts on adults’ differing cross-cultural beliefs about suitable art for children?

This is something I feel strongly about, [coming] from my background as a specialist children’s bookseller, book buyer, illustrator, and lecturer in illustration. I don’t believe that there are any distinctions between art for adults or for children, except for the content of the imagery. Much like the food we expose children to through our own cultural diet, readers become so familiar with the visuals evolved from their own traditions that they think this is the “true” way of representing to children. They feel that the kids won’t get [what] they, as adults, may not have developed the palate for. Children are so much more open-minded than adults. I run a stand at the Bologna Children’s Book Fair. It is exciting to see the illustration from publishing cultures around the world. What is new to us today becomes absorbed and reinterpreted and part of our ongoing cultural evolution—but only if we are open to it. Books are one of the first places children get exposed to artwork, so why not give them as much as possible and let them decide what they like?

Interview by Laura Simeon
has loved to ride his salmon-colored bike since the day his bus driver father, Roberto, taught him how. He rides it so often that it has become like a part of his own body, and he uses it to deliver his mother’s bread to the neighbors. That is, until the day when, without knowing how it happened, he forgets how to ride and falls multiple times. Fabio pushes his friends away, instead staying home and falling into deep sadness. As he delivers bread on foot to Mamalicia, their aging next-door neighbor who always calls him son, the two form an unlikely friendship as they deal with deception, truth, and loss. With quiet, emotive illustrations reminiscent of Allen Say’s and Brian Selznick’s, Rickenmann pulls readers onto the streets of Bogotá, where dust announces the arrival of the children who ride in bicycle packs, providing a view of busy streets and the barrio. The book is presented in both English and Spanish versions; Salazar’s translation masterfully replicates the distant-yet-confiding tone of Algorta’s Spanish original, fully conveying the story and its vivid images.

An unmissable tale about loss and reclamation. (Fiction. 8-12)
someone else with powers. Drew introduces him to Blair and Kazue, more superpowered kids; their friend Ibrahim is missing, along with others. Initially thrilled, sheltered Malcolm isn’t expecting to learn from them that people’s powers don’t work outside the city limits and that his family has some connection to these unsettling truths. Arbus's story revolves around some tried-and-true aspects of superhero stories—presenting lots of action, pondering questions of morality, and protecting humanity against alien invaders—for exhilarating storytelling. But the book goes deeper as Malcolm comes face to face with the limitations of his earlier, limited understanding of crime, policing, and society. Malcolm is White; Drew and Blair have dark skin, Kazue’s name indicates Japanese heritage (she and Blair are girlfriends), and Ibrahim is cued as being of Middle Eastern descent.

\textbf{Superpowered fun with depth besides.} \textit{(Science fiction. 10-14)}

\begin{center}
\textbf{OBIE IS MAN ENOUGH}
\textit{Bailar, Schuyler}
Crown (352 pp.)
978-0-593-37946-2
978-0-593-37947-9 PLB
\end{center}

An aspiring transgender Junior Olympian swimmer finds the strength and pride in his identity to race toward his dreams in this debut coming-of-age novel by groundbreaking trans athlete Bailar.

Starting over after his abusive and discriminatory swim coach excluded him from the team, Obie Chang, a biracial (White/ Korean) transgender boy worries about catching up to the other boys and proving that he is “man enough.” Although his family supports him, one of his best friends at school and the pool has turned into his biggest bully; and the other is drifting away toward the mean, popular girls. As he dives from the blocks into the challenging waters of seventh grade and swims toward his goal of qualifying for the Junior Olympics, Obie discovers belonging in his community and in himself. Affirming adults—including his parents and grandparents, a new swim coach, and his favorite teacher—play significant supporting roles by offering encouragement without pressure, centering Obie’s feelings, and validating Obie’s right to set his own boundaries. Vulnerable first-person narration explores Obie’s internal conflict about standing up for himself and his desire to connect to his Korean heritage through his relationship with Halmoni, his paternal grandmother. A romance with Charlie, a cisgender biracial (Cuban/White) girl, is gentle and privacy-affirming. Short chapters and the steady pace of external tension balance moments of rumination, grounding them in the ongoing action of Obie’s experiences.

\textbf{Energizing and compassionate. (author’s note, resources, glossary)} \textit{(Fiction. 10-13)}

\begin{center}
\textbf{AFRICAN ICONS}
\textit{Ten People Who Shaped History}
Baptiste, Tracey
Illus. by Wilson, Hillary D.
Algonquin (176 pp.)
$19.95 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-61620-900-1
\end{center}

Ten historical African figures’ biographies are interspersed with notes on the history of the continent.

What Baptiste accomplishes in only 139 pages of narrative is near miraculous. She lifts the veil intentionally cast over African history, granting readers a veritable feast of information and inspiration. Readers meet, among others, Menes, who unified Upper and Lower Egypt in the 1st century B.C.E.; Amanirenas, first-century B.C.E. queen of Kush, who expelled the Romans; and Idia, the 16th-century queen of Benin who wielded kingship powers and ensured diplomatic ties with Portugal. Wilson’s portraits of each figure exude such beauty, strength, power, and, above all, dignity as to be nearly breathtaking. Each one gazes out at readers with a regal confidence that’s sure to inspire them to gaze back. Wilson also provides lush landscapes and spot illustrations throughout. Pictures of historical artifacts are also included. Black leaders of any age will see themselves reflected in the amazing lives chronicled, many of whom may be new to readers. Non-Black readers will get a window into the marvels of the continent oft overlooked and relegated to a single narrative. Refreshingly free of generalizations, this impressively researched work was clearly a massive undertaking (as evidenced by the source notes), presenting figures from multiple parts of the continent in the truth of their cultural and historical richness. The result is empowering, necessary, and required reading for all.

\textbf{Game changing. (author’s note, source notes, bibliography, further exploration, designer’s note)} \textit{(Nonfiction. 10-adult)} \textit{(This review is printed here for the first time.)}

\begin{center}
\textbf{VOYAGE OF THE SPARROWHAWK}
Farrant, Natasha
Norton Young Readers (352 pp.)
$17.95 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-324-01972-5
\end{center}

English orphans attempt a perilous Channel crossing in 1919.

Thirteen-year-old Ben’s father was killed while visiting Ben’s injured soldier brother in a French field hospital. Now Ben has received a telegram: Sam is missing, possibly dead. The family friend he’s stayed with is leaving for Wales, but he doesn’t want to go with her. To avoid being sent back to the bleak orphanage he and Sam were adopted from, Ben lies, saying he got word that Sam will soon return. He moves back with
TIME IS RELATIVE!

Torben Kuhlmann

Einstein
The Fantastic Journey of a Mouse Through Space and Time

$22.00 US / $30.00 CAN
128 pages, ages 8 to 12

“Another milestone in human-mouse collaboration, virtuosic of visuals and tongue in cheek of tone.”

★ Starred Kirkus Reviews

More adventures await on themouseadventures.com

www.northsouth.com
Known for her immensely popular webcomic, *Assigned Male*, Sophie Labelle returns to prose with *Ciel in All Directions* (Second Story Press, Sept. 28), translated by Andrea Zanin, the latest installment in her series of middle-grade novels about the life of a nonbinary teen. Kirkus calls it “a bright and open story” that handles important critiques and themes. Labelle answered our questions via email.

**Did you write the book during the pandemic?**

Did you write the book during the pandemic? How did that affect your writing routine?

The book was actually written in 2018! I have since written two more novels, but none during the pandemic, which did put a stop to most of my writing routines. “Third spaces,” which are neither home nor work environment, are central to my writing process: I usually spend at least a whole day every week in a coffee shop to put order in my thoughts, gather new ideas, scribble in my notebook, etc. Just me, some papers, a coffee, and nothing to possibly interrupt me. It hasn’t happened since January 2020, but I’m getting my second vaccine soon, and that’s probably going to be the first thing I’ll do!

**Were you a big reader as a kid? Are there any formative books that influenced you as a reader or writer?**

I learned to read at the same time as my older brother, who was already an early reader. I was reading big-kid novels by the time I entered kindergarten! I was an avid reader: I required a weekly trip to the library and would dive into a whole pile of books each time. I loved thrillers, horror, historical, and especially comics. Discovering Alison Bechdel’s work when I was a teenager was life-changing and has inspired me to this day to create stories meant to empower marginalized communities.

**What book released during the height of the pandemic do you think flew under the radar?**

I’d say *ZOM-FAM* by legendary Mauritian artist from Montreal Kama La Mackerel, which was released last year. I’ve been following Kama’s work for almost a decade now, and seeing it reach this new summit in such grace is simply delightful.

**Most people probably know you from your work in comics. How is writing prose a different process for you?**

I feel like comics are to prose what Broadway musicals are to theater: They need to be punchy, quick-witted, memorable, in your face—but wouldn’t happen without the introspection, research, and agitated silence of the latter. That’s especially true nowadays, when most comics are meant to be read online or even on social media, where things get consumed, then discarded. Comics, like musicals, take the stories from prose and theatre and turn them into a symphony for the senses: colors, rhythm, movement, music. But when the curtain drops, you’re only left with the story and how it may have changed you, which, for me, is at the core of prose.

*Interview by Mya Nunnally*
his dog to the *Sparrowhawk*, the family’s narrowboat home, and there finds Lotti hiding with a stolen Chihuahua. Twelve-year-old Lotti, expelled from the wretched boarding school her despicable aunt and uncle exiled her to, is trying to protect the dog she’s stolen from its abusive owner. The lonely, unlikely pair bond. Since Albert, the local constable, will shortly uncover Ben’s lie and Lotti will be sent away to another school, they set off for France on the *Sparrowhawk*, hoping to find Sam and Lotti’s French grandmother. The determined pair navigate canal locks and the Thames before attempting to reach Calais, all the while pursued by Albert. In addition to the dogs’ pivotal roles, Ben and Lotti are aided by a fascinating series of supportive adults as they attempt the impossible. Descriptive prose captures the bucolic canal boat life, tempestuous Channel crossing, and numbing devastation of postwar France. Main characters are cued as White.

**Inspiring, memorable, and adventurous: classic storytelling.** *(Historical fiction. 9-12) (This review is printed here for the first time.)*

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**SHACKLETON’S ENDURANCE**

*An Antarctic Survival Story*

Grochowicz, Joanna
Illus. by Lippett, Sarah
A & U Children/Trafalgar (288 pp.)

A novelistic account of the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition of 1914-1916, based in part on unpublished archival materials.

Taking place against the backdrop of World War I and following in the wake of Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen’s record-setting achievements and the death of fellow countryman Robert F. Scott, Ernest Shackleton and his crew set off on the *Endurance* in hopes of being the first to successfully cross Antarctica. Though for the sake of drama the disastrous expedition’s events need no embellishment, Grochowicz does add considerable immediacy to her account by casting events in the present tense and inventing some colorful dialogue with occasional speculative thoughts or actions to accompany it. Showing a fine sense of discrimination, she leaves the shooting of the sledge dogs (and the expedition’s cat, Mrs Chippy) offstage but presents in exacting detail rousing scenes such as the time one of the all-White expedition’s members fell into the rotting carcass of a whale as well as need-to-know bits like how to gut and skin a penguin and use its blubber as makeshift soap. The spate of short, rapid-fire chapters is prefaced by two maps and a portrait gallery of rugged-looking expeditioners (including Mrs Chippy) by Lippett and closes with a substantial, scholarly source list. Additional spot art enhances the opening of each new chapter. The engaging and dynamic writing will hook even readers who typically do not gravitate toward nonfiction.

**An unusually vivid retelling of the epic survival tale.** *(key individuals, timeline)* *(Nonfiction. 11-14) (This review is printed here for the first time.)*

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**THE MAILBOX IN THE FOREST**

Hara, Kyoko
Illus. by Takahashi, Kazue
Trans. by Mallia, Alexandrea
Museyon (74 pp.)

Series: Forest Friends

A young girl exchanges letters with a forest friend.

Even from her apartment window in the city, first grader Mayu can see the forest that is near her grandparents’ house. Every time she looks at the forest, she smiles and imagines what it must be like to be in it. Luckily for Mayu, she stays with her grandparents for the winter holidays and is excited to...
A powerful blend of important themes and everyday triumphs and sorrows. (author's note) (Fiction. 8-12)

A charmed story of everyday life with a hint of magic. (Fantasy. 5-8)

A multifaceted, sometimes disheartening, yet consistently enriching primer on the unyielding necessity of those three words: Black Lives Matter.

An Anthology Honoring and Amplifying Black Life
Ed. by Hudson, Wade & Hudson, Cheryl Willis
Crown (208 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-0-593-38159-5

A charming story of everyday life with a hint of magic.

How to Find What You’re Not Looking For
Hiranandani, Veera
Kokila (384 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-525-55503-2

Vivek Joplin’s adored older sister, Leah, has fallen for Raj, an immigrant college student from Bombay.

Both brilliant and bristling in its purpose.
“MAGNIFICENT.”
—Kirkus Reviews, STARRED REVIEW

Story Thieves meets Escape from Mr. Lemoncello’s Library

“PLENTY OF HUMOR, as well as clever historical and literary Easter eggs for readers to puzzle out.”
—Publishers Weekly

TIME VILLAINS

Victor Pineiro

Available July 6!

9781728230498 | HC | $16.99
Tracey Baptiste explores the lives of some of Africa’s greatest leaders in *African Icons: Ten People Who Shaped History* (Algonquin, Oct. 19), an “empowering, necessary” middle-grade anthology illustrated by Hillary D. Wilson. She answered our questions by email.

What is your hope for this book?
I’d really like to see this in schools, and not only schools with a majority Black population. It’s an aspect of history that is wholly ignored. The profiles show a more rounded view of history and how much African and European countries influenced each other. It gives the tragedy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade that much more context.

Would you share a little bit about one of the people profiled in *African Icons* and how they inspire you?
Queen Idia of Benin saw the winds of change coming and knew how to prepare for it. While others were still looking at the trans-Saharan trade route, Idia was looking out to the Atlantic Ocean, where the Portuguese were coming from. She trained her young son to speak Portuguese, knowing there would be advantages for the entire kingdom. I’m sure some felt that it was unnecessary to make any kind of changes for these foreigners, but she followed her own instincts. That kind of foresight and fortitude is very inspiring. Idia was savvy as a military strategist, knew how to use natural medicines for healing, understood diplomacy and the advantages of trade with Europe, and she was said to have magical powers and an ability to talk with the ancestors.

What book released during the pandemic do you think flew under the radar?
*When Life Gives You Mangos* by Kereen Getten came out last October, and I’m not sure many people noticed it. I’m already a sucker for Caribbean stories, so this one set in Jamaica excited me immediately. Plus it’s a mystery, and my debut novel, *Angel’s Grace*, was also set on an island and featured a mystery.

Interview by Megan Labrise
and best friend Jamal’s constant ribbing leads even to Shirley, the cute new girl from Texas, teasing Ant about his height, he starts questioning his skills, his relationships, and how his so-called best friend makes him feel. Eventually, Ant and Shirley hit it off despite Ant’s being too shy to admit it, but issues in the Joplin household and Jamal’s own volatility put a lot of stress on this budding relationship. Ant’s father is an alcoholic and gambler with a lot of reductive opinions on masculinity that confuse the naturally compassionate and thoughtful Ant. Spades becomes a way for Ant to prove himself to his father and hopefully mend some familial wounds, as well as a compelling allegory for the ways he must navigate some uniquely thorny setbacks. A charismatic omniscient narrator explains the intricacies of the game and its venerable position in Black American culture. Realistic character and community portrayals give a difficult story a great amount of heart. Main characters are Black.

A story about showing great courage and perseverance when life gets shuffled. (Fiction. 10-14) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

LIVING GHOSTS & MISCHIEVOUS MONSTERS

Chilling American Indian Stories

Ed. by Jones, Dan SaSuWeh
Illus. by Alvitre, Wesboyat
Scholastic Nonfiction (176 pp.)
$9.99 paper  |  Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-338-68160-4

A mix of 32 timeless chillers and personal encounters with the supernatural gathered from Native American storytellers and traditions.

Carefully acknowledging his oral, online, and print sources (and appending lists of additional ones), Jones (Ponca) intersperses his own anecdotes and retellings with accounts by others collected in his travels. The generally brief entries are gathered into types, from brushes with ghosts or spirits (the latter distinguished by having “more complex agendas” than the former) to witches and monsters. In them, the tone ranges from mild eeriness—hearing an elder relative on the porch just moments after she died and seeing small footprints appear in wet concrete near the burial ground of an abandoned Oklahoma boarding school—to terrifying glimpses of were-owls, were-otters, a malign walk of visual and tongue in cheek of tone.

Matter-of-fact language underscores how close the natural and supernatural worlds are.”

LIVING GHOSTS & MISCHIEVOUS MONSTERS

EINSTEIN

The Fantastic Journey of a Mouse Through Space and Time

Kuhlmann, Torben
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Wilson, David Henry
NorthSouth (112 pp.)
$22.00  |  Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-7358-4444-5
Series: Mouse Adventures

To a mouse, even space and time must bend when there’s cheese involved.

Having long looked forward to visiting the world’s greatest cheese festival, a mouse is stunned to find only a hall full of packing crates. “That was yesterday, Einstein!” says a replete fellow rodent sarcastically. “You’re a day late!” Well, might it be possible to turn back time? What is time anyway? As in Armstrong (2016) and Edison (2018), Kuhlmann employs a mix of narrative and fantastically detailed mouse’s-eye-view pencil-and-watercolor scenes to portray a small, furry investigator intrepidly tackling scientific and technological challenges in a human-sized world—here involving old records in a certain Swiss patent office, clock gears and computer parts, trial and error, and equations on chalkboards. Not to mention the guts to climb inside a cobbled-together gismo and the cleverness, when he accidentally ends up in pre-computer 1905, to entice a certain young patent clerk with a familiar brushy mustache to do the necessary calculations for a return trip—minus a day. This he does with a series of leading riddles about the relationship between space and time (what, you thought Einstein came up with relativity on his own?). The author closes with an overview of the great (human) scientist’s life and a set of reasonably clear thought experiments demonstrating some of his insights. Einstein, drawn with great fidelity, and other, less-distinct human figures are White.

Another milestone in human-mouse collaboration, virtuosic of visuals and tongue in cheek of tone. (Illustrated fiction. 8-11)

CIEL IN ALL DIRECTIONS

Labelle, Sophie
Trans. by Zalin, Andrea
Second Story Press (192 pp.)
$11.95 paper  |  Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-77260-203-6
Series: Ciel

A transgender student takes on new experiences, from an awakening crush to student council elections.
Twelve-year-old Brazilian Canadian Ciel—who is starting their first year of secondary school—showcases their sense of humor and speaks out against transphobia on their growing YouTube channel with the help of their younger brother. When their science and technology teacher assigns their class a project about mastering a new skill, Ciel decides to pick something that will improve their videos. However, more challenges appear on the horizon for Ciel, like their unfamiliar romantic feelings for their friend Liam, a White transgender boy, and upcoming elections for president of the Gender and Sexuality Alliance, who will also serve on the student council. Set in Montréal, the book depicts natural, casual cultural diversity through side characters such as Ciel’s Arabic-speaking classmate Frank, among others. Although Ciel has an outgoing side, they begin the narrative with a lot of insecurities that, refreshingly, have nothing to do with their trans identity. Each time they step outside their comfort zone, they grow and expand their perspective about privacy and consent, relationships, and their own value, even when the outcome plays out differently than they hoped. The conflict around the student council elections offers an important critique of empty hashtags used for mass appeal that do nothing to challenge injustice.

A bright and open story.  (Fiction. 10-14)

**SALT MAGIC**
Larson, Hope
Illus. by Mock, Rebecca
Margaret Ferguson/Holiday House
(240 pp.)
978-0-8234-4620-9
978-0-8234-5050-3 paper

An eerie graphic novel slides from apparent historical fiction into an unsettling fairy tale.

Larson and Mock open this story with a kiss, as Elber, just returning to Gypsum, Oklahoma, from fighting in World War I, proposes to hometown girl Amelia. Elber’s youngest sister, Vonceil, 11, watches in envy and disgust: Until Elber left two years ago, she had been his favorite companion. At the hastily arranged wedding, volatile Great-Uncle Dell accuses Amelia of being the white witch who killed his brother Jesse nearly 70 years earlier. Not long after these events, a mysterious woman dressed in white comes to town, accuses Elber of abandoning her in France, and magically turns the farm’s fresh spring to salt water. Vonceil goes to Great-Uncle Dell for help, and he tells her a strange story that parallels an adventure that Vonceil then has with a sugar witch. After that, the story gets complicated. The tension between fully grounded reality (e.g., the Sears house the family built) and wild fantasy (e.g., the witch’s fetes) pulls the tale in opposite directions, but somehow Vonceil’s pragmatism and Larson’s clean writing keep the thread from breaking. Mock’s full-color illustrations portray mood and atmosphere extremely effectively through novel page layouts and kaleidoscopic points of view. Characters read as White.

**PAHUA AND THE SOUL STEALER**
Lee, Lori M.
Rick Riordan Presents/Disney (320 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-368-06824-6

A Hmong American girl sets out on a quest to save her little brother from an angry spirit.

Pahua, the only Asian American in sixth grade at her Wisconsin school, spends most of her time with her little brother, Matt, and Miv, a cat spirit only she can see. Trying to fit in with the other girls at summer school, Pahua ignores her misgivings and follows them to a forbidden bridge in the woods. She quickly learns why it’s so dangerous: The ghost of a lost little girl inhabits it—and she is angry. When Pahua accidentally releases her, the ghost attaches herself to Matt, trapping him in the Spirit Realm. Luckily, Zhong, another Hmong girl, is sent by the School for Shamanic Arts and Spiritual Mastery to make sure the bridge spirit ends up on the proper path for reincarnation—a trial to prove that she deserves to complete her training. The two begin a journey to save Matt, equipped only with Pahua’s unusual ability to see spirits, Zhong’s apprentice training, and Miv. As they encounter tree spirits, dragons, angry Hmong gods, and more, Pahua learns secrets about her family and her past and grapples with what lies at the core of identity. This is a fun adventure through a world inspired by Hmong mythology, full of imagination and featuring characters whose concerns are both modern and timeless.

A classic, satisfying adventure tale packed with magical beings. (glossary, author’s note)  (Fantasy. 8-12)

**A TERRIBLE TIDE**
*The tale will transfix readers with both the adventure of the tidal wave and the many historical details.*

A classic, satisfying adventure tale packed with magical beings. (glossary, author’s note)  (Fantasy. 8-12)
Tour the world of water with a helpful raindrop.

This intriguing, oversized title combines science and story to explore water in all its forms. Chapters of fact alternate with stories from #ownvoices contributors about water from all over the world: Vanuatu, India, England, Zimbabwe, Lebanon, Peru, and St. Lucia. They’re based on or written in the form of traditional tales. Short biographies of the storytellers are part of the backmatter. But facts come first. Even before the first story, readers learn why they should care about this subject: 71% of our planet is covered in water, but less than 1% of that water is fresh and layered. Water is vital to life but is overtaken by the wave of cold water, described thrillingly. Boomer helps her, and they are both rescued by neighbors. Sticking to facts within Celia’s first-person narration, the tale will transfuse readers with both the adventure of the tidal wave and its aftermath and the many historical details that bring to life an isolated but close-knit fishing community without electricity or motors and with both the general store’s newly installed telephone and the telegraph knocked out by the wave. All characters read as White.

Gripping and strengthening. (historical note) (Historical fiction. 9-13)

A Deep Dive of Discovery
Mihaly, Christy
Illus. by Cabassa, Mariona
Barefoot Books (64 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 17, 2021
978-1-64686-280-1

Tour the world of water with a helpful raindrop.

This intriguing, oversized title combines science and story to explore water in all its forms. Chapters of fact alternate with stories from #ownvoices contributors about water from all over the world: Vanuatu, India, England, Zimbabwe, Lebanon, Peru, and St. Lucia. They’re based on or written in the form of traditional tales. Short biographies of the storytellers are part of the backmatter. But facts come first. Even before the first story, readers learn why they should care about this subject: 71% of our planet is covered in water, but less than 1% of that water is good for humans to drink! A world map (with labeled oceans and continents) serves as a kind of second table of contents, showing where the stories came from and pointing out the locations of some of the topics covered and some water wonders. Mihaly explores different water forms, the water cycle, the importance of water to life, salt and fresh water, water power, and water use and conservation. Fold-out page wings add further information; fold-up tabs reveal activities, experiments, and actions to preserve and protect water. Mihaly has a way with words; her explanations are clear and her language well chosen, with pleasing alliteration. (Glaciers are “massive, mountainous mounds of ice.”) She addresses readers directly, with respect for their capacity. Thoughtful, engaging design and lively illustrations add further appeal.

Oceanic in scope—but clear and refreshing. (glossary) (Nonfiction. 6-12)

A boy and his best friends embark on a pilgrimage that delivers bittersweet life lessons in a richly rendered, West African–inspired world.

Ezomo is a 10-year-old boy from the village of Sesa. Secluded from the outside world by an impenetrable hedge of sweet thorn trees and a moss-covered door, Sesa has strict rules and traditions. No one is to open the village door, and no child is to go out at night without an adult. Called useless for his daydreaming ways, Ezomo has been considered a nuisance since his father’s passing 3 years ago; his grief has been a constant burden, interfering with his ability to be a contributing village member or of any help to his mother. Ezomo’s two best friends, Chimama and Muja, are treated as outcasts thanks to their parents’ shameful shortcomings. One day Ezomo spots a leopard in the forest that he believes was responsible for his father’s death. With his friends, Ezomo sets out to capture the leopard as vengeance. Their quest and ensuing desperate circumstances lead them to the forbidden village door—and the potential discovery of weighted secrets. They may have to break the rules to rectify past wrongs and salvage their own futures. Paasewe-Valchev’s prose is captivating, smooth, and poetic in its delivery of this fresh and layered narrative. With well-timed, fluid pacing, this novel masterfully deals with themes of friendship, family, loss, and hope. Readers will be engrossed from start to finish.

A beautifully rendered coming-of-age story. (Fiction. 8-14)
Pax, meanwhile, has fathered three kits who claim his attention and devotion. Alternating chapters from the fox’s point of view demonstrate Pax’s care for his family—his mate, Bristle; her brother; and the three kits. Pax becomes especially attached to his daughter, who accompanies him on a journey that intersects with Peter’s and allows Peter to not only redeem his past, but imagine a future. This is a deftly nuanced look at the fragility and strength of the human heart. All the human characters read as White. Illustrations not seen. **An impressive sequel. (Fiction. 10-14)**

**THE SECRET OF THE MAGIC PEARL**
Sabatinelli, Elisa
Illus. by Bruno, Iacopo
Trans. by Turner, Christopher
Red Comet Press (92 pp.)
$21.99 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-63655-006-0

Hector wants to be a deep-sea diver, just like his father and grandfather.

He has internalized all his grandfather’s tales, especially the story of the “rarest, whitest, and purist pearl in the world,” said to live on the seabed offshore near the Marina, their family business. But the greedy Amedeo Limonta has set up a competitive business that’s forced the Marina to close. When Hector turns 8, everything changes. On his very first dive, he discovers the magical Pearl and brings it home…and complications ensue. Hector heeds his memories and dreams of his grandfather and courageously makes it all right. Hector narrates his adventures in meticulously organized chapters, carefully introducing each character, providing detailed information about relationships and events, and sharing credit for his successes. At the conclusion Hector presents readers with vivid descriptions of his beloved village and its inhabitants. Sabatinelli provides Hector with a voice that soars with lilting, expressive language, losing nothing in Turner’s translation from Italian. Bruno’s intensely bright, sharply hued illustrations are a tour de force. A chart of semaphore flags and diagrams that detail the parts of a diving suit fill the opening pages, and those flags head each chapter. The sea is evoked with glorious dreamlike color and movement, and characters’ features and expressions immediately announce their nature, emotions, and quirks. All present White. Hector is wise, kind, and readers will take him to their hearts.

**THE HIDEAWAY**
Smy, Pam
Illus. by the author
Pavilion Children’s (256 pp.)
$19.95 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-84-365479-7

Thirteen-year-old Billy finds an unexpected refuge in this British import. Sensitive Billy can’t handle witnessing his mother’s abusive relationship with her boyfriend, with whom they live. Doing his best to be unseen—something he has far too much practice in—Billy escapes in the night to All Souls’ graveyard, where he’d found a tiny concrete hut from World War II. When he’s discovered the next day by an old man who has come to clean up the cemetery in preparation for a mysterious event, they strike a deal—if Billy helps, the man will stay quiet for a couple of days, but then Billy must go home. Billy loves and misses his mother and
hates to cause her suffering. His emotions are juxtaposed with the empathy he feels for the individuals each gravestone represents. The text switches from the old-fashioned serif typeface of Billy's post-departure chapters to modern, sans serif for those following his mother. The frantic need to find her son breaks her out of abuse-imposed isolation, gaining her the support of neighbors and (in contrast to her previous call for help for herself) the police. Love, loneliness, and grief are portrayed in grayscale illustrations, many full-page spreads, that expertly use light and shadow to convey mood. The messaging around domestic violence is straightforward and plainspoken, while Billy's emotional arc leans into the magical; another family storyline is wrapped up tidily. Characters default to White.

**Atmospherically heartfelt and cathartic.** *(Fabulism. 9-13)*

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**STEALING HOME**

Torres, J.  
Illus. by Namisato, Davide  
Kids Can (112 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct. 5, 2021  
978-1-253-0334-0

Sandy and his family, Japanese Canadians, experience hatred and incarceration during World War II. Sandy wants to spend time with his father, but as a doctor, his dad is busy, often sneaking out past curfew to work. One night Papa is taken to “where they keep them,” by the police. Love, loneliness, and grief are portrayed in grayscale illustrations, many full-page spreads, that expertly use light and shadow to convey mood. The messaging around domestic violence is straightforward and plainspoken, while Billy's emotional arc leans into the magical; another family storyline is wrapped up tidily. Characters default to White.

**An emotional, much-needed historical graphic novel.** *(afterword, further resources) (Graphic historical fiction. 9-12)*

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**THE TROUBLED GIRLS OF DRAGOMIR ACADEMY**

Ursu, Anne  
Walden Pond Press/HarperCollins  
(432 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct. 12, 2021  
978-0-06-227512-7

In the kingdom of Illyria, the lives of young girls are of little consequence. Twelve-year-old Marya Lupu has always been told there is no place for her in the world, whereas her older brother, Luka, has been primed all his life to become one of the rare, respected sorcerers who protect the realm against the mysterious Dread and the wicked witches of Kel. A mistake lands Marya at the Dragomir Academy, an isolated boarding school for troubled girls, where she and her classmates are expected to reform themselves and leave the past behind. But the more time passes, the more the girls spot the holes in the fabric of the stories they are told. Through Ursu’s hallmark thoughtful and inspiring writing, readers delve into a story that seamlessly combines intriguing worldbuilding that is full of magic with a feminist perspective that interrogates the systemic oppression at society’s core. Marya’s developing relationships with her classmates as well as with her brother form the beating heart of the book. But it’s Marya’s inner conflict as she asks the question, “Who does the story serve?” and considers what she has always been told about herself that elevates this tale into unmissable territory, with its remarkably raw and honest look at the emotional and psychological consequences of living under patriarchal ideology. Marya is pale skinned in a world with characters of varying skin tones.

**A wonderful and inspiring feminist fantasy.** *(map) (Fantasy. 8-12) (This review is printed here for the first time.)*

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**BORN BEHIND BARS**

Venkatraman, Padma  
Nancy Paulsen Books (272 pp.)  
$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021  
978-0-593-11247-2

A young boy is forced to leave the Chennai jail that is the only home he’s ever known. When Kabir is deemed too old to stay and is sent out into the world all alone, separated from his wrongfully imprisoned mother, he decides to search for the family of the father he has never met to try to save his mother from her unjustly long sentence. Armed with faith, instinctive wits, and the ability to run fast, Kabir escapes danger and meets Rani, a teenage girl from the marginalized Kurava, or Roma, people who is traveling with her parrot. She teaches Kabir, who has a Hindu mother and a Muslim father, about caste dynamics and survival on the streets. She accompanies him to Bengaluru, where Kabir
eventually meets his paternal grandparents. Along the way, their experiences reveal the invisibility of low-caste people in Indian society, tensions between neighboring states over water supplies, and the unexpected kindness of helpful strangers. Kabir’s longing for freedom and justice underscores bittersweet twists and turns that resolve in an upbeat conclusion, celebrating his namesake, a saint who sought to unify Muslims and Hindus.

Kabir engages readers by voicing his thoughts, vulnerability, and optimism: While his early physical environment was confined within prison walls, his imagination was nourished by stories and songs. This compelling novel develops at a brisk pace, advanced by evocative details and short chapters full of action. A gritty story filled with hope and idealism. (author’s note) (Fiction. 8-12)

DUST & GRIM
Wendig, Chuck
Little, Brown (384 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-0-316-70623-0

Chills and thrills ensue when long-separated siblings find themselves custodians of a very special funeral home and cemetery.

Returning to the old mansion deep in the Pennsylvania woods from which her fun-loving if ne’er-do-well dad had spirited her years before, newly orphaned 13-year-old Molly Grim is bummed by the cold reception she gets from her likewise parentless, tightly wound 18-year-old brother, Dustin Ashe, but stoked to discover that she’s inherited a half interest in Mothstead, a final resting place for monsters—or “nonstandard citizens,” to use the less pejorative term. Sparks fly at first, but in battling their uncle Gordo, who turns out to be even more demonic than his everyday persona as a slovenly accident attorney would suggest, the two ultimately discover that they’re good for one another. Playing to strengths demonstrated in his many comics and tales for older audiences, not only is Wendig a dab hand at concocting extremely creepy critters, but here he also pulls together a secondary cast of quarrelsome but supportive allies for the beleaguered teens, featuring a (generally) low-key vampire, a mercurial fox spirit (“Cat software loaded onto dog hardware,” as one observer puts it), and other slyly tweaked supernatural grown-ups. Most of the cast presents White; one supporting character is Black, and one is cued as Latinx.

Nothing like shared brushes with horrible, agonizing death to draw seemingly incompatible characters together, right? (Fantasy. 9-13) (This review is printed here for the first time.)
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

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**ARISTOTLE AND DANTE DIVE INTO THE WATERS OF THE WORLD** by Benjamin Alire Sáenz .................................................. 87

**TONIGHT WE RULE THE WORLD** by Zack Smedley ......................... 87

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**OKSI**

*Abokoivu, Mari*

Illus. by the author

Trans. by Aronpuro, Silja-Maarja

Levine Querido (400 pp.)

$24.99 | Oct. 26, 2021

978-1-64614-113-5

This graphic adaptation of a story from Finnish folklore introduces Umi, a mother bear who is living in the woods with her brood: three male cubs and a girl they call Poorling.

Poorling is a magical creature with a small body and an oversized flame-shaped head who desperately wants to be a bear. She is quite curious and shamelessly eager to please her mother. Umi has defied her mother, Emuu, a celestial being who wants Umi to return home to the heavens. Emuu, in turn, enlists an enchanted waterbird named Scaup to work with Poorling in hopes of bringing Umi back. When Poorling commits a shocking act of violence, events are set in motion that perpetuate a cycle of brutal savagery. Ahokoivu brings the tale to life through digital art and a mix of ink and dreamy watercolors. The primarily black-and-white palette is punctuated with bursts of dazzling color. Populated by animals and magical creatures, the storyline meanders whimsically but then quickly shocks with its sudden eruptions of violence, a stark reminder of the harshness of the natural world and the powerful universality of wanting to belong. With its ethereal fairy-tale quality, this quietly challenging story of parents and children translated from the original Finnish is visually powerful and emotionally compelling.

Dark, complex, and gratifying. (note on names)

(Graphic fiction. 12–18)

**HIMAWARI HOUSE**

Becker, Harmony

Illus. by the author

First Second (384 pp.)

$24.99 | Oct. 19, 2021

978-1-250-23556-5

A shared house in Tokyo brings five young people together.

After moving to the U.S. as a child with her Japanese mother and White American father, Nao has returned to Japan for a gap year before college to explore the language and cultural heritage that she deliberately shed—at great emotional cost—in an effort to assimilate. She moves into Himawari House,
Each year readers can anticipate an avalanche of new publications during the autumn months. Below are just a few 2021 releases that are not to be missed.

Graphic novels make a strong showing with *Oksi*, written and illustrated by Mari Ahokoivu and translated from the Finnish by Silja-Maaria Aronpuro (Levine Querido, Oct. 12), bringing the visceral magic of folklore to life through intense, evocative illustrations. The Tokyo setting of *Himawari House*, by author/illustrator Harmony Becker (First Second, Oct. 19), is the backdrop for a devastating, beautifully nuanced look at coming-of-age between cultures. Author and illustrator Priya Huq's *Piece by Piece: The Story of Nisrin's Hijab* (Amulet/Abrams, Sept. 14) introduces readers to a Bangladeshi American teen who is motivated by post-9/11 Islamophobia to learn more about what it means to be Muslim. In the thrilling paranormal adventure *Artie and the Wolf Moon*, written and illustrated by Olivia Stephens (Graphic Universe, Sept. 7), a Black teen discovers that she’s part of a werewolf community—and learns to fight vampires.

Some great genre fiction is coming our way, including the evocative fantasy *Vial of Tears* by Cristin Bishara (Holiday House, Oct. 5), which transports readers to the Phoenician underworld alongside Lebanese American teen sisters who come into possession of an ancient coin. Cherie Dimaline (Métis), the 2017 Kirkus Prize winner for young readers’ literature, is back with a sequel to *The Marrow Thieves*; the nonstop action of *Hunting by Stars* (Amulet/Abrams, Oct. 19) takes place in a dystopian North America in which Indigenous people continue to resist exploitation and persecution. Shaun David Hutchinson’s *Before We Disappear* (HarperTeen, Sept. 28) is a suspenseful historical heist fantasy taking place around the 1909 Seattle World’s Fair that is sweetened with romance and centers a queer ensemble cast. The sophomore novel from Darcie Little Badger (Lipan Apache), *A Snake Falls to Earth* (Levine Querido, Nov. 9), is a creative fantasy that draws upon traditional tales and narrative structures; readers meet a human girl in Texas and a cottonmouth snake person in the Reflecting World whose lives intersect.

Current events inspired some stellar works of fiction, such as Candace Buford’s layered, thoughtful *Kneel* (Inkyard Press, Sept. 14), which examines the consequences of a Black Louisiana high school football player’s decision to become an activist for racial justice. *You’d Be Home Now* by Kathleen Glasgow (Delacorte, Sept. 28) is a well-rounded look at the impact of addiction on a White family in a small town as they struggle with secrets and chafe against narrow expectations. In *Where I Belong* (Carolrhoda Lab, Sept. 7), Marcia Arugeta Mickelson weaves a compelling narrative around issues of immigration and xenophobia through the impact on a Guatemalan American teen of being unwillingly placed in the political spotlight. The sensitive subject of sexual assault is handled with care in Zack Smedley’s *Tonight We Rule the World* (Page Street, Oct. 5); a bisexual White boy struggles with PTSD and the reactions of others in his life to a trauma he tries unsuccessfully to ignore.

Finally, nonfiction is a source of some particularly riveting new titles. *Black Birds in the Sky: The Story and Legacy of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre* by Brandy Colbert (Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins, Oct. 5) goes beyond this particular tragedy to give readers the necessary context to understand the events within the fabric of U.S. history. (Read an interview with Colbert on Page 78.) *Chasing the Truth: A Young Journalist’s Guide to Investigative Reporting* by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, adapted for young readers by Ruby Shamir (Philomel, Sept. 7), uses the authors’ work on the Harvey Weinstein case to educate teens about the methods and significance of investigative journalism.
“Sports’ biggest social movement moment of the decade gets a special homage.”

KNEEL

which she shares with Korean Hyejung and Chinese Singaporean Tina, girls who are attending the same Japanese language institute as Nao. Also resident are two Japanese brothers, outgoing, friendly Shinichi and taciturn, broodingly handsome Masaki. Blending English, Japanese, Korean, and Singlish, the group bonds over meals, excursions, K-dramas, and never-ending conversations about life, love, and family. Becker perfectly captures the heady roller coaster of feelings that accompanies cross-cultural immersion, with ordinary activities serving as barometers of successful adaptation in a new country. The personal stakes of each encounter with Japanese life are even higher for Nao,throwing into relief her internal struggles over her identity. Nao is the focal point, but Hyejung and Tina are well developed, with complex, heartstring-tugging backstories. Most of the text is bilingual, but the occasional use of Japanese or Korean alone effectively mirrors the dislocation of language learners. The predominantly photorealistic art is enhanced with a range of stylized techniques that masterfully communicate emotion. Altogether, this work exemplifies what the graphic novel format can achieve.

An unforgettable story of personal growth in an exquisitely rendered setting. (note on accents) (Graphic fiction. 13-adult) 
(This review is printed here for the first time.)

VIAL OF TEARS
Bishara, Cristin
Holiday House (320 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-0-8234-4641-4

A magical coin strands sisters in a Phoenician underworld.

Sam and Rima receive a family heirloom from their great-grandfather who lives in their mother’s hometown in Lebanon—a clay jug with ancient coins in it. The sisters, who live in poverty with their mother (their White father is dead), wonder if this could be the solution to their financial woes. But one coin is frighteningly cold, and when Rima holds it, she summonss a mysterious man and a windstorm that sweeps the girls from Michigan to a magical underworld where monsters and gods roam freely. The man—Eshmun, half god and half mortal—furiously wants his precious coin back. Sam gets her bearings in this world that is part historical Lebanon and part mythological, as she learns Eshmun’s role in a prophecy that may affect her and her sister as well. Throughout, Sam keeps her focus firmly on rescuing her sister, whose life hangs in the balance after being attacked by a beast, and returning home. Themes of destiny and death build up to an ending that’s just bittersweet enough. In contrast to Michael’s bland, Everyman foil—doesn’t deny her involvement but won’t identify her much-mythologized accomplice. Infuriating an ambitious district attorney, the police, and national news reporters, Marie chooses to tell her slippery, shifting, and allegedly supernatural story solely to Michael. More of a sympathetic confessor than a callous interrogator, Michael works to tease out Marie’s motives even as his community and the world question his entanglement with the case. Although she inserts a supernatural element, Blake otherwise grounds the true-crime–style tale—which acknowledges the influence of Truman Capote’s In Cold Blood—in real-life issues like domestic abuse, poverty, privilege, and sexism. Paradoxically, even as the book scrutinizes the darker human appetite for serial killers, criminal escapades, and vengeance, it caters to these same urges. The enigmatic ending might leave readers without resolution, but like Marie’s “truths,” the full story may never be known. Main characters read as White by default.

An insightful look at our morbid curiosity about murderers. (map, author’s note) (Thriller. 14-adult)

KNEEL
Bufoord, Candace
Inkyard Press (384 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-335-40251-6

Louisiana high school football star Russell Boudreaux chooses to take a stand.

NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick captured the world’s attention by kneeling during the national anthem to bring attention to police brutality against Black Americans. His courageous actions, which resulted in his expulsion from professional football, galvanized a generation of Black athletes to use athletic platforms to spotlight social injustice. This novel draws on this context to weave a tale about two up-and-coming Black high school football players trying to make the most of
their final season and escape the harsh realities of their hometown lives. Russell is the Jackson High Jaguars’ formidable tight end, unstoppable when paired with his best friend and game-changing quarterback, Marion. Yet, when White players from well-off rival Westmond incite a fight during a game using racial epithets, Marion must deal with the unjust consequences of biased policing that not only land him off the team, but possibly in jail. Even worse, one of the officers involved was reassigned following the unprosecuted police murder of a Black boy in nearby Shreveport. For Gabby, Russell’s love interest and self-proclaimed intersectional feminist, this requires a courageous stand—but facing up to injustice brings unforeseen consequences; readers must navigate the complex ethics that inform a principled activist stance. Debut author Buford delivers a novel that bridges the mighty dreams of Last Chance U with the trenchant social critique of The Hate U Give.

Sports’ biggest social movement moment of the decade gets a special homage. (Fiction. 12-18)

THE HEARTBREAK BAKERY
Capetta, A.R.
Candlewick (352 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-5362-1653-0

Syd navigates relationships and discovers a magical power.

After a rough breakup, 17-year-old Syd, who works at the Proud Muffin in Austin, Texas, bakes all the negative feelings into a batch of brownies. Unfortunately, Syd has just unlocked a magical power, and the customers who buy the brownies start to go through breakups of their own—including the gay couple who own the bakery, putting its very survival at risk. Aided by genderfluid delivery person Harley, Syd is determined to repair these broken relationships. This may seem simple at first, but Syd soon discovers that no relationship is entirely cookie cutter. LGBTQ+ characters take center stage in this work, led by agender narrator Syd (who does not care for pronouns) and demisexual Harley; there’s a polyamorous triad among the supporting cast, and at one event, a nonbinary elderly person serves as a reminder that queer people come in all ages. While outright bigotry is not shown, Syd’s life demonstrates the difficulties of having to explain one’s orientation and gender and the burden of feeling unheard. Syd’s love of baking shines throughout the text, with actual recipes that Syd uses interspersed throughout. Over the course of the narrative, Syd examines different types of romantic feelings, from infatuation to love, and considers what precisely is key to a healthy relationship. Syd and Harley are White; the supporting cast is racially diverse.

This sweet story shows that relationships don’t follow a recipe. (Fiction. 14-18)

I AM MARGARET MOORE
Capin, Hannah
Wednesday Books (320 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-250-23957-0

A young woman, betrayed by the boy she loves, wrestles with the aftermath in this haunting tale.

Margaret Moore has attended Marshall Summer Naval School in the Great Lakes region for years, forming close friendships with three other girls there—outspoken Rose and Nisreen and Flor, who are a couple. Their long-lasting bonds have allowed them to truly be themselves around one another. However, Margaret has hidden from them her relationship with a boy and from this omission springs a complicated, heavily atmospheric story of tragedy, secrets, and loyalty that moves through time, ranging from the 1950s to the present day and weaving in and out of realism. Told in three parts—Naiad, Subimago, and Imago, alluding to the growth cycle of the mayflies so prevalent in the camp’s remote, wooded, lake location—Margaret’s story is both heartbreaking and enraging; the particulars of power, status, and patriarchy that are at play are all too familiar, and their impact on Margaret’s life will be deeply felt. An eerie, almost dreamy lyricism resonates throughout, and repeated phrases lend a fairy-tale–like feel to this novel that is further segmented by frequent subheadings. Readers with an appreciation for the psychologically dark will enjoy the lushly developed sense of foreboding even as the twisting and turning plot is at times elusive. Margaret and Rose read as White; Nisreen is from Jordan, and Flor is from Venezuela.

A fierce, chilling, winding mystery. (Paranormal thriller. 14-18)

BLACK BIRDS IN THE SKY
The Story and Legacy of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre
Colbert, Brandy
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (224 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-0-06-305666-4

The Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 was not only a devastating attack on one community, but part of a history of violence against African Americans.

The attack on the Greenwood District of Tulsa, Oklahoma, that began on May 31, 1921, was triggered in part by a mob of Whites seeking to punish an African American teenager for allegedly assaulting a White woman. However, this exploration shows that the violence that destroyed the thriving community known as Black Wall Street was part of a long history of brutality and displacement. In addition to describing the event itself and the subsequent active suppression of information about it, Colbert provides important context for the founding of Tulsa,
as Muscogee (Creek) people who were forcibly removed from their land by the U.S. government settled there in 1833. The end of Reconstruction saw paroxysms of violence and the rise in discriminatory laws against African Americans, and many sought sanctuary in Indian Territory. By weaving together many elements, this sophisticated volume makes clear that the destruction of Black property and lives in the Tulsa Race Massacre was not an isolated incident. Beginning with the author’s personal foreword and continuing throughout the detailed narrative, readers are guided to see the complex, interconnected nature of history. The clear, readable prose supports a greater understanding both of how and why incidents like the one in Tulsa happened and their exclusion from curriculum and conversations about U.S. history.

A compelling recounting that invites and encourages readers to grapple with difficult history. (afterword, bibliography, sources, index) (Nonfiction. 14-18)

BLACK WAS THE INK
Coles, Michelle
Illus. by Johnson, Justin
Tu Books (400 pp.)
$21.95 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-64379-431-0

An often overlooked era in American history comes alive for a 16-year-old boy with the help of his ancestor.

Malcolm has been sent to his family’s farm in Natchez, Mississippi, for the summer following a traumatic interaction with the police in his hometown of Washington, D.C. Shortly after arriving, he discovers that what land remains is in jeopardy of being stolen by the state to expand the highway, a repeat of an earlier injustice that privileged land belonging to White people. Malcolm doesn’t fully understand the significance of this until he finds an old diary written by a certain Cedric Johnson. Through Cedric’s words, Malcolm is transported back in time to the
**FALL SPOTLIGHT**

**Brandy Colbert**

*Black Birds in the Sky: The Story and Legacy of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre* by Brandy Colbert (Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins, Oct. 5) is a monumental work of young adult nonfiction that situates and interprets these tragic events within a broad context. Colbert answered our questions by email.

**Did you encounter many surprises during your research?**

I wanted to examine not just the massacre, but events and circumstances in Oklahoma and the U.S. that led up to it. I was surprised particularly at how we can connect so many social issues from the 19th and 20th centuries directly to what’s happening today. One piece I couldn’t [include] because of time and space constraints was the story of Sarah Rector, an Oklahoman who was known as “the richest Black girl in America” by 11, due to the profits from an oil well on land she owned in the early 1900s. I would have been so interested as a kid to learn about [her], as well as so many of the stories that did make it into the book, and I hope that highlighting lesser-known events and people will intrigue readers to do deeper dives on these topics.

**Were there any pandemic reads that you found especially compelling?**

I’m a slow reader, but I always have several books in rotation. The ones that have stuck with me are *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett, *Such a Fun Age* by Kiley Reid, *The Secret Lives of Church Ladies* by Deesha Philyaw, *Luster* by Raven Leilani, and *The Black Kids* by Christina Hammonds Reed. Each book is so different, but the stories all follow complex Black women and girls whose experiences are both familiar and fresh. As a storyteller I found them inspiring, and on a personal level it was comforting to see a broad range of new books by and about Black women being published when we were so isolated and in need of human connection.

**If someone were going to write the story of your life, who would you want it to be?**

Isabel Wilkerson. *The Warmth of Other Suns* is one of the most engaging books I’ve ever read—nonfiction at its very best. My family is from the South, and the care Wilkerson took in writing about the lives of Black Southerners was especially meaningful to me.

*Interview by Laura Simeon*
Reconstruction era—not just that, during these episodes, he actually becomes Cedric. Malcolm witnesses the strides made by formerly enslaved people and how they were undone by those determined to preserve inequalities, as well as meeting prominent Black political figures of the time. As he understands the parallels with his present, Malcolm realizes how to enact change to save his family’s farm. This engaging and timely novel, showcasing atrocities and highlighting joyous moments, will likewise transport its readers. Meticulous details and a leisurely pace lead to a realistic but uplifting conclusion. Malcolm’s anger over the plight of Black Americans will resonate with many readers and open the minds of others.

A dynamic look at how the past informs the future. (biographies, timeline, author’s note, image credits) (Historical fantasy. 14-18)

**FEMINIST AF**
*A Guide to Crushing Girlhood*
Cooper, Brittney & Tanner, Chanel Craft & Morris, Susana
Norton Young Readers (240 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-324-00505-6

Three members of the Crunk Feminist Collective, a group of feminists of color, join forces to deliver a bold and thorough guidebook.

This title delivers wisdom and insight garnered from lived experiences and decades of research and practice in language that is mature but still accessible to young people. Divided into four major sections, the book touches on significant topics, including race, sexuality, disability, body image, friendship and family dynamics, and more. Intersectional feminism is a throughline, with inclusive stories and comprehensive counsel that provide knowledge, solidarity, comfort, and hope for its audience. Along with analyses of politics that address existence and survival across marginalized identities, the work discusses systems and structures that affect individual and societal outcomes. The authors offer specific, relevant anecdotes from their own lives as well as the media and popular culture that reflect the complex issues that girls and nonbinary youth face, accompanied by thoughtful, compassionate, honest, and realistic advice. Text boxes provide valuable background and context as well as recommendations of movies, TV shows, and books to check out. All these elements come together to create a work that reads like far more than just a handbook for a young feminist’s journey but rather presents as a guide to life as a whole.

A necessary life companion for readers of all backgrounds. (glossary, index) (Nonfiction. 14-18)

**CODE NAME BADASS**
*The True Story of Virginia Hall*
Demetrios, Heather
Atheneum (384 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-344-3187-4

A long-overdue biography of the only female civilian to win the Distinguished Service Cross in World War II.

Virginia Hall—called Dindy all her life—was born in 1906 to a life of privilege and adventure. Class president of her private girls’ school in Baltimore, she also loved shooting and riding on the family farm. She studied at Radcliffe and Barnard, then in Paris and Vienna, acquiring knowledge of French, Italian, and German before coming home to take the Foreign Service exam. Family lore says she passed it but was disqualified due to her gender. She became a secretary in the Warsaw embassy instead and continued to attempt the exam even after a gun accident blew off her left foot, requiring amputation below the knee. Dindy named her wooden prosthesis Cuthbert and, when World War II began, joined Britain’s Special Operations Executive as one of its first female spies. She not only survived the war, but was among SOE’s most successful operatives—and then entered the CIA. Demetrios tells this fascinating story in an uber-modern narrative voice that is snarky AF, LOL, with plenty of hits to the patriarchy and a glorious sense of celebrating Dindy’s badassery. It’s breezy and lighthearted in tone but meticulously well-researched, including interviews with Dindy’s surviving family.

A remarkable telling of an extraordinary woman. (biographies, research note, code names, selected bibliography, endnotes, index) (Biography. 12-18)

**HUNTING BY STARS**
Dimaline, Cherie
Amulet/Abrams (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-4197-5347-3
Series: Marrow Thieves, 2

Indigenous people continue to fight for survival in the face of environmental devastation and a predatory government. This follow-up to 2017’s acclaimed *The Marrow Thieves* picks up in the middle of the action: Miig’s joyful reunion with his husband, Isaac, is followed by Frenchie’s tragic capture by the Recruiters. Seven-teen-year-old Frenchie has been taken to a residential school, a macabre institution where Native people’s bone marrow is harvested to treat the dreamless non-Indian population. Frenchie tries to avoid complete mental and physical breakdown—and must decide what price is too high to pay to achieve freedom. Rose, 16, is unwilling to wait around for further intelligence from inside sources; desperately and impulsively, she sets out to rescue Frenchie—accompanied by Derrick, who still hopes...
she'll choose him instead. Meanwhile, the family receives disturbing intelligence that threatens the baby Wab and Chi Boy are expecting, leading to a decision to separate, with one group heading south toward the States. This lush, devastating, and hope-filled novel, which unfolds in chapters that shift perspectives among major cast members, provides some recap of earlier events but will be better appreciated by those who have read the first one. The action never lets up and is inextricably intertwined with the personal and community histories of the diverse characters who band together from various nations. Dimaline (Métis) paints a nightmarish world that is too easy to imagine; it will haunt readers long after they turn the final page.

A spellbinding sequel. (author’s note) (Dystopian. 14-adult)

**YOU’D BE HOME NOW**
Glasgow, Kathleen
Delacorte (400 pp.)
$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-525-70804-9
978-0-525-70805-6 PLB

A gut-wrenching look at how addiction affects a family and a town.

Emory Ward, 16, has long been invisible. Everyone in the town of Mill Haven knows her as the rich girl; her workaholic parents see her as their good child. Then Emory and her 17-year-old brother, Joey, are in a car accident in which a girl dies. Joey wasn’t driving, but he had nearly overdosed on heroin. When Joey returns from rehab, his parents make Emory his keeper and try to corral his addictions with a punitive list of rules. Emory rebels in secret, stealing small items and hooking up with hot neighbor Gage, but her drama class and the friends she gradually begins to be honest with help her reach her own truth. Glasgow, who has personal experience with substance abuse, bases this story on the classic play Our Town but with a twist: The characters learn to see and reach out to each other. The cast members, especially Emory and Joey, are exceptionally well drawn in both their struggles and their joys. Joey’s addiction is horrifying and dark, but it doesn’t define who he is. The portrayal of small-town life and its interconnectedness also rings true. Emory’s family is White; there is racial diversity in the supporting cast, and an important adult mentor is gay. Glasgow mentions in her author’s note that over 20 million Americans struggle with substance abuse; she includes resources for teens seeking help.

Necessary, important, honest, loving, and true. (Fiction. 14-18)

**BEASTS OF PREY**
Gray, Ayana
Putnam (496 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-593-40568-0

Opposites come together hoping to capture a menacing creature, only to find a greater purpose.

Ekon Okojo, studious and cautious, aspires to continue his family’s legacy as a Son of the Six, one of the city of Lkossa’s class of anointed warriors. Passionate and impulsive Koffi, who dreams of being free, is an indentured beastkeeper of the Night Zoo—a collection of exotic species owned by the greedy Baaz Mtombé. In the span of a single night, their paths cross and their destinies are forever altered: Ekon is cast out of the warrior class, and Koffi faces a lifetime of servitude. The pair form a tenuous partnership and venture into the Greater Jungle to hunt the Shetani, a powerful, vicious monster, hoping this will solve both their problems. As they are both headstrong and mistrustful, they get off to a rough start, but they become closer with each brush with death. Their quest for vengeance on the Shetani, which is wreaking havoc on Lkossa, turns into something more when they make an unanticipated discovery. Saving their village—and humanity—comes down to Ekon’s warrior instinct and Koffi’s ability to control the magic her people call sa’s class of anointed warriors. Passionate and impulsive Koffi, who dreams of being free, is an indentured beastkeeper of the Night Zoo—a collection of exotic species owned by the greedy Baaz Mtombé. In the span of a single night, their paths cross and their destinies are forever altered: Ekon is cast out of the warrior class, and Koffi faces a lifetime of servitude. The pair form a tenuous partnership and venture into the Greater Jungle to hunt the Shetani, a powerful, vicious monster, hoping this will solve both their problems. As they are both headstrong and mistrustful, they get off to a rough start, but they become closer with each brush with death. Their quest for vengeance on the Shetani, which is wreaking havoc on Lkossa, turns into something more when they make an unanticipated discovery. Saving their village—and humanity—comes down to Ekon’s warrior instinct and Koffi’s ability to control the magic her people call the splendor. This pan-African story, rife with betrayal and narrated through poetic language that evokes vivid imagery, will ensnare readers, keeping them engaged with its energetic pace. The beautiful blend of mythology, romance, and action ends with a hint at more to come. All characters are Black.

A dazzling debut. (maps, author’s note) (Fantasy. 12-up)

**THE RECKLESS KIND**
Heath, Carly
Illus. by Perrin, Lisa
Soho Teen (336 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-1-641-29281-8

Three young Scandinavians seek ways to live nontraditionally.

Set in a small village in an unspecified Nordic country in 1904, this story is narrated by 18-year-olds Asta and Erlend. Asta is engaged to be married but is not sure she wants to marry her intended—or anyone at all. Half French Erlend is a promising young actor willing to give it all up (a romantic move but perhaps not the best life lesson) to be with handsome outcast Gunnar. The plot is engaging, but the real magic lies in the characters and their relationships. Each has a condition that they struggle with to varying degrees: asexual Asta has Waardenburg syndrome; Gunnar has a partial arm amputation, a spinal injury, and depression; Erlend has anxiety and ulcers. (Heath is careful to avoid anachronism by eschewing labels or diagnoses that
A tender tale of queer love, disability, and self-discovery. (historical and medical notes) (Historical fiction. 14-18) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

 PIECE BY PIECE
 The Story of Nisrin’s Hijab
 Huq, Priya
 Illus. by the author
 Amulet/Abrams (224 pp.)
 978-1-4197-4016-9
 978-1-4197-4019-0 paper

After a traumatic experience, Nisrin decides to wear a hijab; however, the road to asserting her identity is not that simple.

It’s 2002 in Oregon, and anti-Muslim sentiments are on the rise. Muslim Bangladeshi American Nisrin and her best friend, Firuzeh, who is cued as Iranian and Black, become victims of a gruesome hate crime at the end of eighth grade. Afterward, Nisrin, who lives with her single mother and maternal grandparents, slowly recuperates physically and mentally. When she enters high school, Nisrin decides to wear the hijab, partly as an act of resistance. This is met with a mix of concern and strong
Benjamin Alire Sáenz is the award-winning author of *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012). Sáenz discussed the sequel to that book, *Aristotle and Dante Dive into the Waters of the Universe* (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, Oct. 12), which explores the development of Dante and Aristotle's relationship in their senior year of high school and the poignant lessons they each learn from their families. He answered our questions by email.

**What fall release(s) are you most looking forward to reading?**

*Cloud Cuckoo Land* by Anthony Doerr. His writing is so beautiful. And he always writes about the things that matter with intent and with discipline.

**What book do you absolutely love that is not as well known as it deserves to be?**

Nancy Werlin’s *The Rules of Survival*. Werlin’s work is hardly unknown, but I feel as if every book reader should spend some time with this wondrous novel.

**Did any of your own relationships with your family inspire Aristotle’s close relationships with his parents and sisters?**

I was born the middle child of seven children... all of them taught me a great deal about giving and understanding others as well as understanding myself. They also taught me that I was not the center of the universe—not a bad thing to learn. Ari’s mother is patterned very much after my mother, who happened to be a Catholic Daughter [of America] and one of the loveliest people I have ever encountered. She is the woman who taught me how to be a man.

**So much of the book is this wonderful, propulsive dialogue between the two protagonists. What would be your first tip to young writers trying their hand at dialogue?**

Listen to the way you speak. Listen to the way those around you speak. Listen to the way people sound when they’re sad or broken. Listen to the rhythms of the people who are happy. Appreciate people’s sense of humor, however quirky. Listen, not only to what the people around you are saying, but what they are not saying. Listen and understand that we all hide underneath the words we use. And, most of all, look and study the faces of the people who surround you and see in their eyes what they have suffered silently. And understand the way you judge other people. Judging other people will never make you a good listener and will prevent you from seeing their importance. There is no such thing as an unimportant person.

Interview by Johanna Zwirner
disapproval, especially from her domineering grandfather. Neither Nisrin’s mother nor grandmother are hijabi, and Nisrin herself only starts actively learning about Islam after this point. She struggles at school with discrimination from teachers and fellow students alike, made worse because Firuzeh seems to be avoiding her as well. As family tensions rise, Nisrin learns more about her family’s past and Bangladeshi history, context that helps her understand her family’s complicated feelings about her decision. This gripping graphic novel is fast-paced and dramatic, with full-color illustrations that intensify the heightened emotions. The darkness is tempered by a happy ending, with friendships—both old and new—blossoming, a family growing closer, and a teenager finding more peace in her own skin.

**Remarkable storytelling presents a multilayered struggle around identity and power in an anti-Muslim climate.** *(Information about Bangladesh)* *(Graphic fiction. 13-16)*

### BEFORE WE DISAPPEAR

**Hutchinson, Shaun David**

HarperTeen (512 pp.)  
$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021  
978-0-06-302522-6

When magic and illusion collide, anything is possible.

Sixteen-year-old Jack, magician’s assistant and pickpocket, is ready to steal the show—and anything else he can get his hands on—when the Enchantress, aka Evangeline Dubois, magician, con artist, and his guardian, sets her eyes on the 1909 Seattle World’s Fair. At the same time, 16-year-old Wilhelm, a boy with the ability to magically transposes himself and others, is forced to perform there by Teddy, his abusive captor. Teddy has plans to use Wil’s gifts to pull off the ultimate heist, and his desire for notoriety results in a plan in which the two masquerade as a magician and his assistant, causing Jack’s and Wil’s worlds to collide. With the help of street-smart dancer Ruth and clever Jessamy, the boys examine the abuses they suffer and work to build a stable life together. Like all good magic acts, the novel will keep readers on the edges of their seats as they follow the twists and double-crosses that fill the lives of con artists and magicians. The book flawlessly combines magic and suspense in a well-crafted heist story that’s sweetly sprinkled with queer romances. A final unanswered question hints at a sequel and will have readers shouting for an encore. Ruth is Black; all other main characters are White. Jack, Wil, Ruth, and Jessamy are openly queer.

*A delight. (Author’s note)* *(Historical fantasy. 12-18)*

### THE PROBLEM WITH THE OTHER SIDE

**Ivery, Kwame**

Soho Teen (336 pp.)  
$18.99 | Sep. 7, 2021  
978-1-641-29205-4

New Jersey teens fall in love while managing their sisters’ opposing presidential campaigns.

In this novel told in alternating points of view, Ulysses Gates, who is Black, and Sallie Walls, who is White, describe the events leading up to a school shooting on inauguration day. While acting in a school play, the two bond over their love of the movie *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* and slowly begin a romantic relationship. Sallie has had a crush on Uly since their English class the previous year; Uly, on the other hand, is surprised he even likes Sallie because he has never been attracted to White girls and had misinterpreted her behavior, believing her to be racist. When Sallie’s sister, Leona, begins campaigning for president on a platform calling for an end to school busing from neighboring communities that are predominantly of color, Uly’s sister, Regina, decides to run against her, call out the coded racist language Leona is using, and advocate for students of color. A third candidate enters the field—a White athlete with a divisive past—and the race escalates dangerously. Uly and Sallie are well-crafted characters; the interracial relationship is portrayed with honesty and humor, and their love is palpable. With excellent pacing, Ivery explores the impact White supremacy and patriarchal norms have on our lives and the dangers of not holding people accountable.

*A timely exploration of the state of American politics.* *(Fiction. 12-18)*

### WHITE SMOKE

**Jackson, Tiffany D.**

Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (384 pp.)  
$18.99 | Sep. 14, 2021  
978-0-06-302909-5

A family already at odds tries to survive the whims of a haunted house.

Jackson, who penned thrillers *Allegedly* (2017) and *Monday’s Not Coming* (2018), proves that her skills in suspense carry over to the horror genre. Anxiety-ridden Mari, recovering from substance abuse, tries to start anew when her family leaves California and moves into a newly renovated home in the Midwestern town of Cedarville. She’s relocating with brother Sammy; stepsister Piper; stepfather Alec; and her mother, whose acceptance into a 3-year artist residency lets them stay rent-free in a new house that looks perfect on the outside. However, certain things ring alarm bells: a basement they’re instructed never to enter, construction workers who refuse to...
stay in the house past the afternoon, and the stories circulating around the neighborhood about what happened there. As Mari unravels the mysteries around her, she must try to avoid relapsing into bad habits; contain her dizzying, trauma-born phobia of bedbugs; and avoid the wrath of entities who wish her harm. Jackson conjures horrors both supernatural and otherwise in a masterful juxtaposition of searing social commentary and genuinely creepy haunts, as well as providing an authentic portrayal of tensions within a blended family. Mari, Sammy, and her mother are Black; Alec and Piper are White.

Begs to be finished in one sitting, though maybe with the lights kept on. (Horror. 14-adult)

CHASING THE TRUTH
A Young Journalist’s Guide to Investigative Reporting
Kantor, Jodi & Twohey, Megan
Adapt. by Shamir, Ruby
Philomel (256 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-593-32699-2

In this adaptation of their bestselling She Said (2019), two journalists for the New York Times describe the reporting process that led to their breaking the story of Harvey Weinstein’s serial sexual harassment.

In 2017, journalist Kantor, who had spent some years unearthing and reporting on corporate gender bias, convinced actress Rose McGowan to talk to her about mistreatment of women in the entertainment industry and, specifically, about an incident with the noted producer. This was the beginning of a monthlong investigation by Kantor and fellow reporter Twohey that culminated in a series of stories that fanned the flames of the #MeToo movement and led to the loss of Weinstein’s job, reputation, and freedom following a court conviction. Adapter Shamir has tightened the narrative in the adult original and action scenes with textured family and community relations, all seamlessly undergirded by storytelling that conveys an Indigenous community’s past—and the vibrant future that follows from young people’s active, creative engagement with their culture.

A thrilling, high-tech page-turner with deep roots. (glossary, resources) (Science fiction. 14-18)

A SNAKE FALLS TO EARTH
Little Badger, Darcie
Levine Querido (352 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 9, 2021
978-1-64614-092-3

A 16-year-old Lipan Apache girl from Texas and a cottonmouth person from the spirit world connect when both need help.

When Nina was 9, her Great-Great-Grandmother Rosita told her a story in Spanish and Lipan Apache. Using dictionaries to painstakingly make sense of the garbled transcription app results, Nina uncovers a mysterious story about Rosita’s sighting of a fish girl in her well, long after the joined era when animal people still lived on Earth. Nina uploads her musings about her family’s stories to the Storyteller video platform. In the Reflecting World, innocent Oli, a
cottonmouth snake person, reluctantly leaves home, settling down and befriending ancient toad Ami, two coyote sisters, and a hawk. Animal people can shift between their true and false (humanoid) forms and are able to visit Earth; Nina’s and Oli’s lives intertwine when he and his friends travel to Texas seeking help after learning that Ami is dying because the earthly population of his toad species faces extinction due to human environmental destruction. They in turn help Nina with the suspicious man lurking near her Grandma’s home, an impending tornado, and her Grandma’s unexplained illness whenever she leaves her land. Little Badger (Lipan Apache) alternates between two distinct, well-realized voices—Nina’s third-person and Oli’s first-person perspectives—highlighting critical issues of language revitalization and climate change. The story leads readers through two richly constructed worlds using a style that evokes the timeless feeling of listening to traditional oral storytelling.

A *coming-of-age* story that beautifully combines tradition and technology for modern audiences. *(Fantasy. 12-18) (This review is printed here for the first time.)*

**TELL IT TRUE**

*Lockette, Tim*

Triangle Square Books for Young Readers (208 pp.)

$18.95 | Sep. 28, 2021

978-1-64421-082-6

A 15-year-old journalist gets a schooling in the power—and responsibility—of the press.

Setting up and then deftly tweaking expectations the way he did in his debut, *Atty at Law* (2020), Lockette pitches self-styled “brainy rebel” Lisa Rives into a whirl of hard choices and gut checks after she takes over editorship of her school’s paper as, mostly, a favor to her bestie (and the paper’s only other employee), Preethy Narend. Her first (but far from last) lesson in journalism’s hazards and rewards comes after she asks the two candidates for class president to identify with a political party. Her question recasts the election as a contest between a “brainy rebel” Lisa Rives into a whirl of hard choices and gut checks after she takes over editorship of her school’s paper as, mostly, a favor to her bestie (and the paper’s only other employee), Preethy Narend. Her first (but far from last) lesson in journalism’s hazards and rewards comes after she asks the two candidates for class president to identify with a political party. Her question recasts the election as a contest between a *Wry, engaging, even occasionally funny—right up to a gut-wrenching capper.* *(Fiction. 12-15)*

**YEAR OF THE REAPER**

*Lucier, Makiia*

Clarion Books (352 pp.)

$17.99 | Nov. 9, 2021

978-0-358-27209-0

A young nobleman struggles to find peace after surviving a plague and imprisonment in a neighboring kingdom.

To settle 50 years of war between their kingdoms, Princess Jehan of Brisa marries King Rayan of Oliveras, and together they sign a peace treaty. When Oliveras’ capital city, Elvira, is overwhelmed by a pestilence that leaves many dead, the king and queen are offered refuge in Palmerin by their friend Lord Ventillas. It has been three years since Lord Cas-sia and his personal guard were ambushed and captured by Brisan soldiers. Scarred, alone, and possessing an inexplicable ability to see ghosts, Cas journeys home to reunite with Ventillas, his older brother, and on the day of his arrival in Palmerin, he rescues the royal couple’s infant son from a deadly assassin. When others close to Queen Jehan are targeted, Cas and Lena, an aspiring historian and King Rayan’s younger sister, trace the killer’s steps—but when they search the queen’s past for answers, they uncover a harrowing secret that could threaten the fate of the kingdom. Lucier wastes no time in this gripping mystery: Every twist is carefully plotted, and the worldbuilding is intricate yet effortless. Each of Cas’ relationships, even those with the spirits he encounters, is distinct, and, like him, readers will find it difficult to judge who is trustworthy. Most characters have black or brown hair and dark eyes; the few mentions of skin tone reference bronze and golden complexities.

A *well-balanced and captivating stand-alone fantasy.* *(Fantasy. 13-18) (This review is printed here for the first time.)*

**WHERE I BELONG**

*Mickelson, Marcia Argueta*

Carolrhoda Lab (264 pp.)

$18.99 | Sep. 7, 2021

978-1-5415-9797-6

Cast into the political firestorm of an aspiring U.S. senator’s campaign, a Guatemalan immigrant teen grapples with her newfound notoriety.

It’s the end of Milagros Vargas’ senior year of high school in Corpus Christi, Texas. So far, aspiring marine biologist Millie’s accepted a spot at Stanford, although her mom doesn’t yet know this. As Millie became the second caretaker of her family after her father’s death, her mom expanded her housekeeping job for the Wheelers, an affluent White family. For Millie, Mr. Wheeler’s campaign for the U.S. Senate means her mom will be away from her family more, caring for the Wheelers’ young daughter. Then, the senatorial candidate highlights Millie and her family as examples of exemplary immigrants during a campaign speech,
A master of queer and fantastical fiction, novelist A.R. Capetta brings their talents to Austin, Texas, where recently heartbroken Syd navigates love, breakups, and baking in The Heartbreak Bakery (Candlewick, Oct. 12). Kirkus deems the book a “sweet story” that “shows that relationships don’t follow a recipe.” Capetta answered our questions via email.

Did you write The Heartbreak Bakery during the pandemic? How did that affect your writing routine?
The Heartbreak Bakery was fully drafted when things started shutting down, so I was revising the novel and doing quite a bit of the recipe testing during the pandemic. My little family had several not-directly-Covid crises folded into that time. There was nothing like a routine, just getting through each day. It was hard to write, and I’m so glad this is the story thread I had to hold onto. At first it felt like escapism in a way that I worried about, but then I realized I was escaping toward all the things that still meant the most to me: queer love, community, magic, food. And it was my way of sharing good things, too—I couldn’t get together with friends, but I could do cupcake drops.

What fall release(s) are you most looking forward to reading?
Two sequels I can’t wait for: Aristotle and Dante Dive Into the Waters of the World by Benjamin Alire Sáenz and The Scratch Daughters by Hannah Abigail Clarke. I’m also ridiculously excited for Ryka Aoki’s Light From Uncommon Stars and, looking ahead further, Ashley Woodfolk’s Nothing Burns as Bright as You.

What kind of reader are you: digital or physical books? Fiction or nonfiction? Do you typically have lots of books on the go at once?
I work so much on screens that a physical book feels like a treat, as much as dessert does. I read one fiction book at a time and two or three nonfiction books that I savor more slowly. I love cookbooks a lot, which should probably not surprise anyone, and when I was working as a baker, I also discovered food memoirs like Ruth Reichl’s, which were an early inspiration for The Heartbreak Bakery. But even a straight-up cookbook, if it’s good, I’ll read end to end. It’s like an essay collection you can eat.

How did you come up with the wild idea of the “breakup brownies” featured in The Heartbreak Bakery?
When other people eat the brownies that Syd (teen baker and agender cupcake) whips up in the wake of being dumped—they all break up. The way I envisioned the baking magic in this story, each recipe is sort of like a message from Syd. The message isn’t that everyone should dump someone, of course, but it’s this horrible sense that love hasn’t worked out, and now Syd’s feeling wrecked. When I’m scraping the bottom of my own feelings, I make brownies. One bowl to throw everything in, the darkest possible chocolate, and a big spoon covered in batter? It just feels right.

Interview by Mya Nunnally
resulting in public support as well as hostility from internet trolls and anonymous haters. When someone sets the Vargas home on fire, they have no choice but to accept the offer to temporarily move in with the Wheelers, even as Millie finds herself inexplicably drawn toward their son, Charlie. Setting her story against the backdrop of a nameless, anti-immigrant White House administration, Mickelson does a remarkable job of plunging into complex issues with tremendous nuance. Millie’s acquired U.S. citizenship, after arriving as an undocumented asylum seeker, further complicates the discourse, raising stark questions around common debates about which immigrants “deserve” to be welcomed. Full of thought-provoking conversations, messy answers, and lots of heart, this novel’s a quiet knockout.

Utterly compelling. (Fiction. 12-up)

ARISTOTLE AND DANTE DIVE INTO THE WATERS OF THE WORLD
Saenz, Benjamin Alire
Simon & Schuster (344 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-334-49619-4
Series: Aristotle and Dante

As the final year of high school approaches, Ari and Dante explore their love for each other—and their love for others—in Saenz’s long-awaited sequel to 2012’s Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe.

For Ari, his world’s beginning to open up. After years of silence, his father begins to share more about his experiences in Vietnam and the ensuing trauma, rebuilding their relationship. Once a nuisance in Ari’s life, Gina and Susie now seem like the allies he needs to flourish, leading to even more potential friendships in surprising ways. And then there’s Dante, the boy who “found me in a swimming pool one day and changed my life.” Embarking on a relationship, Ari and Dante navigate the joys (a camping trip that takes their journey to a new level) and pains (uncertainties about life after high school) of young love. Throughout, the harsh truths of life circle the two young men: the specter of Ari’s imprisoned brother, who makes a memorable appearance; questions of what constitutes one’s sexual and cultural identities (“We’ll never be Mexican enough. We’ll never be American enough”); and the AIDS pandemic, whose tremors fill the airwaves and affect their community. Saenz packs a whole lot into these pages, but it’s a testament to the characters that he’s created that it never feels like too much. There’s an unhurried quality to the author’s wistful, tender prose that feels utterly intimate.

Messily human and sincerely insightful. (Fiction. 14-up)

THE SPLENDOR
Shields, Breeana
Page Street (330 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-64567-322-4

Welcome to The Splendor, where your every fantasy becomes reality—if only for your stay.

Sisters Clare and Juliette grew up in a children’s home where they learned to depend only on one another. They dream of a better life, but mostly they look toward The Splendor, the elegant hotel on the hill. After Clare stays at The Splendor, thanks to a gift from her sister, who worked and saved to afford it, she returns cold and distant and asks Juliette to move out. Juliette takes their savings and goes there herself to try to find out what happened. She finds polished marble floors; food that makes you feel things like nostalgia, love, and joy; gardens that change seasons in an instant; and trees full of sweets. After a meeting with the clothier, she looks in the mirror and sees an idealized version of herself. The Splendor is like a filter for your life, run by a team of illusionists, the best of which is Henri. Henri is an orphan too, adopted by the hotel’s owners, and he may just have the answers Juliette is looking for. Readers will get swept away from the very first page thanks to the immersive and realistic worldbuilding, convincing characters, and compelling mystery. Chapters switch perspective between Juliette and Henri, showing readers both the shiny outside and the behind-the-scenes machinations. Main characters are cued as White.

Original, exciting, and magical. (Fantasy. 14-up)

TONIGHT WE RULE THE WORLD
Smedley, Zack
Page Street (368 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-64567-332-3

Ignoring things won’t make them go away.

Told in nonlinear chapters, the story follows Owen, a bisexual high schooler from small-town Pennsylvania who is on the autism spectrum. Owen is raped by someone he knows intimately while on the school’s annual trip for seniors. Covering for the perpetrator causes stress across many areas of Owen’s life, from his relationship with his ex-military father—a man who is not proactively addressing his PTSD—to his friends and his girlfriend, Lily. Once the rapist’s identity is discovered, the novel follows Owen in the immediate aftermath of the assault. The story is superbly told, and readers will be simultaneously on the edges of their seats as the narrative slowly draws closer to revealing the rapist’s identity and saddened by the waves of emotional and physical abuse Owen endures as he attempts to make the sexual assault investigation disappear. Other themes,
“A story of discovery and healing wrapped in the paranormal.”

ARTIE AND THE WOLF MOON

Stephens, Olivia
Illus. by the author
Graphic Universe (256 pp.)
$30.65 | $16.99 paper | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-5415-4248-8
978-1-72842-020-2 paper

A girl discovers she comes from a family of werewolves, starting her on a path to discovering her own abilities and history.

Black eighth grader Artemis “Artie” Irvin doesn’t really fit in with the kids at her mostly White school, where she is mocked and bullied. She devotes her time to developing photos she takes on her deceased father’s old film camera, which helps her feel closer to him. All that changes after she sneaks out for a nighttime photo shoot during a full moon and runs into a wolf. Calling her mom for help, she instead sees her mother transform from wolf to human before her eyes. Soon after, her powers show themselves, and her own wolf training begins. Artie’s mother reaches out to a community of Black werewolves who are old friends for help. As Artie trains with them, she develops ties to those like her—and something more with her friend and crush, Maya. She also learns about the origins and culture of werewolves and the history of her parents’ relationship. But danger lurks nearby, and Artie must stay alert. Stephens’ art leaps off the page, from the beautiful scenery to the celebration of characters’ Black features. Throughout, the panels are expertly used to create tension in dramatic moments and excitement that showcases the joyous ones. Readers looking for a story of discovery and healing wrapped in the paranormal will hit the jackpot.

A stirring, eye-catching portrayal of growth. (Graphic paranormal. 12-18)

SPIN ME RIGHT ROUND

Valdes, David
Bloomsbury (352 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-1-5476-0710-5

A gay teen contends with time travel—and homophobia through the decades.

All Cuban American Luis wants is to be prom king with his boyfriend, but tiny upstate New York boarding school Antic Springs Academy, with its strict, Christian code of conduct, won’t even let them hold hands in public. After a disastrous prom committee meeting at which his attempt to make the event welcoming of queer couples is rejected by the principal, Luis gets quite literally knocked into the past—specifically, ASA in the year 1985. There he meets Chaz, a Black student who attended the school at the same time as Luis’ parents and who died under mysterious circumstances after being bullied for his sexuality. Luis now faces a choice between changing the past to help Chaz and preserving his own future existence. Fortunately, he has Ms. Silverthorn, a Black English teacher and beloved mentor, who offers him support in both timelines. The narrative explores the impacts of homophobia and being closeted, remaining optimistic without shying away from the more brutal aspects. Luis is a multifaceted character with an engaging voice whose flaws are confronted and examined throughout. The solid pacing and pleasant, fluid prose make this a page-turner.

Luis’ boyfriend is cued as Chinese American, and his best friend is nonbinary; there is some diversity in ethnicity and sexuality in background characters, although the school is predominantly White.

A great read offering entertainment, encouragement, and plenty to reflect upon. (author’s note) (Fiction. 14-18) (This review is printed here for the first time.)
A Lebanese-born American surgeon reflects on her volunteer stint at a Greek refugee camp and her “cataclysmic family expulsion” for being trans.

It has been decades since the surgeon, a Harvard alumnus in her late 50s who lives with her wife in Chicago and goes by the adopted name Mina Simpson, was in the Middle East. But when a friend working for a Swedish NGO calls for help, she goes. The Moria refugee camp on the Greek island of Lesbos is fast becoming “an inhumane [mess],” but Mina does her best to treat and comfort Sumaiya, a Syrian woman dying of cancer who has concealed her fate from her family. As grim as things are there, and for all the daily atrocities that force people to flee their homeland—military bombings, terrorist attacks, bureaucratic cruelties, vile prejudice—Mina’s measured account is streaked with irreverence. (Bono, Oprah, and Madonna are tagged “the gods of altruism.”)

Partly addressed to a blocked Lebanese writer of note who convinces her to chronicle her experience—for him, harsh reality has rendered storytelling “impotent”—Mina’s account has a Scheherazade-like sparkle. Her subjects include a beautiful young woman who “refused squalor” by studding the pantry in her tent with sequins and the Lebanese writer’s father, whose prized aviary atop his home overlooking Beirut was randomly shelled by the U.S. battleship New Jersey. Mina’s own story about her struggle to overcome her mother’s monstrous treatment and be seen for who she is is affecting and amusing. Such is the ease and openness of the narrative that it’s tempting to read it as autobiographical. Alameddine, a queer San Franciscan who grew up in Kuwait and Lebanon, also was separated from his family. In any case, no one writes fiction that is more naturally an extension of lived life than this master storyteller.

Engaging and unsettling in equal measure.
THE HOUSE OF RUST

Bajabere, Khadija Abdalla
Graywolf (272 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-64445-068-0

Join a girl and a talking cat on a magical realist sea voyage.

In this debut novel, Aisha, a Mombasa girl, goes to sea on a boat made of a fish skeleton to find her missing father. Accompanying her is a wise, skinny, yellow, and very talkative cat, Hamza. This is magical realism, Kenya-style. The author reaches into the mythology of her Hadrami culture to conjure talking animals and discursive sea creatures as she charts her heroine's journey from home and back. “There are things in the water that could eat you alive,” Hamza tells Aisha. “Though I’m sure you already know this and quite well.” (Hamza is a bit of a smart aleck.) This is a novel of tradition, ritual, and mystical adventure: “On the tables of kings, candle wax had dripped down the cat’s skull and whiskers. An obedient, trained creature, but at heart: a philosopher and spy.” And a cat. Aisha sails away with her feline friend, pulling us into a series of dialogues and riddles, few of them with other humans. Then they return, and things get strange. Even if you’re not a fan of magical realism, this window into Hadrami culture should at least stoke your curiosity.

An adventure tale rife with creatures and immersed in the Hadrami culture of Kenya.

THE PESSIONISTS

Ball, Bethany
Grove (304 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-0-8021-5888-8

Ball’s mixture of satire and domestic drama turns contemporary suburban life into a frightening dystopia of “material leisure and emotional poverty.”

The satiric element centers around the Petra School, a private “temple of leisure and emotional poverty.” Headmistress Agnes seems warm and charismatic if a bit eccentric at first, but her dictatorial creepiness becomes apparent, both in the increasingly strident school bulletins she sends—linking dairy and dyslexia, warning against (pre-Covid era) vaccinations, banning any mention of Jewish holidays—and as she exerts personal control over both students and parents. Starting on New Year’s Eve 2013, Ball follows several of those parents and potential parents as three marriages begin to tailspin into crisis. Current Petra parents Virginia and Tripp are keeping huge secrets from each other: Novelist Virginia has cancer, while financially strapped Tripp has built a survivalist arsenal in the basement. Virginia’s old friend Rachel and her Swedish architect husband, Gunter, have recently arrived from Manhattan and enrolled their kids at Petra. Initially Rachel, though Jewish, is so desperate to fit in that she ignores hints of Agnes’ antisemitism, but Gunter is dismissive of Petra (and suburbia and America in general). Then Agnes begins to woo him. Margo, a compulsive cleaner and stay-at-home mother of three sons, has never recovered emotionally from the death of an infant daughter. Now a fanatic follower of Agnes’ Wednesday evening meditation sessions, Margo wants to switch her boys from public school to Petra despite objections from the kids and her overworked husband, Richard, a devoted father, pothead, and online porn addict. Once readers are drawn into these stories, Ball leaps into a broad rhetorical section, describing from a third-person plural viewpoint all the ways suburban men and women, as well as their children, are miserable. Certainly the kids Ball introduces are unhappy. Virginia and Tripp’s daughter is burdened by her parents’ secrets. Petra turns Rachel’s 6-year-old son into an outcast. Richard and Margo’s three sons stand by helplessly watching their parents’ mental health deteriorate.

Despite Ball’s mordant humor, the pain here feels all too real.

APRIL IN SPAIN

Banville, John
Hanover Square Press (304 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-335-47140-6

A literary period piece featuring colorful characters and a mysterious crime.

In postwar Ireland, “Terry Tice liked killing people,” and he offs his gay friend Percy on a whim. Meanwhile, in Donostia in the Basque region of Spain, a semi-happy couple named Quirke and Evelyn are visiting for an April holiday. He’s an Irish pathologist—hero of earlier mysteries Banville published under the name Benjamin Black—and she’s an Austrian psychiatrist who survived the Holocaust. Quirke is the perfect name for the husband, who “could never say the word ‘love’ without flinching.” And he “made love deftly, in an exploratory sort of way, like a doctor searching for the source of an obscure malady.” Evelyn loves to tease him: “You love to be miserable,” she says. “It’s your version of being happy.” Meanwhile, a young woman named April Latimer is dead, murdered by her brother, but her body has never been found. April is the catalyst who eventually brings the storylines together—but well before that, readers will savor the author’s imagery and playful language. After doing in his pal, Terry finds Percy’s photos of nude “fellows with enormous how’s-your-fathers.” In a restaurant, Quirke and Evelyn’s “waiter looked like a superannuated toreador.” Earlier, the odors in a fish stall made Quirke think of sex. They buy oysters, an innocent act that lands Quirke in prison. Later, Quirke recalls: “Anything printed about the April Latimer business? The bulk of the story focuses on the two vacationers, but Tice may have the last word on whether they can ever return to the Emerald Isle. The plot is good, but
“A moving portrayal of intense female friendship, identity, and loss.”

INSEPARABLE

Beauvoir, Simone de
Trans. by Smith, Sandra
Ecco/HarperCollins (176 pp.)
$23.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-06-307504-7

This previously unpublished novel by towering French existentialist intellec-
tual and feminist icon Beauvoir, written in 1954, is based on her deeply formative relationship with a classmate.

“When I was nine, I was a very good girl.” So begins the story of Sylvie Lepage’s friendship with vivacious Andrée Gallard. They meet at school, vie for top honors, and become inseparable. Sylvie adores Andrée, the second of seven siblings in a family old, distinguished, and militantly Catholic. Her father chairs the League of Fathers of Large Families. As the girls grow older, the expectations and obligations heaped on Andrée become increasingly onerous, crushing her spirit and threatening her health. Sylvie loses her faith, whereas pious Andrée despair of pleasing God and comes to fear her own capacity for passion. Bright, sensitive, musical, and artistic, Andrée struggles to be the dutiful daughter her family, church, and society demand. “Behind her, she had this past; around her, this large house, this enormous family: a prison, whose exits were carefully guarded.” Sylvie, meeting her friend for coffee, thinks: “All around me, women wearing perfume ate cakes and talked about the cost of living. Since the day she was born, Andrée was destined to be like them: but she wasn’t.” A lively introduction by Margaret Atwood gives the history of Beauvoir’s friendship with Zaza Lacoin, the Andrée of the story, describing it as “a wellspring”

“A captivating fantasy about demons, dreams, and a Black woman teaching English in Japan.

“Blends Japanese folklore and contemporary life, and readers will be entranced to see the mundane and the mythical collide.”
— PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“With empathetic characters, terrifying monsters, and a cinematic feel, Yume is a dream that will keep readers awake at night.”
— RICHARD FORD BURLEY, author of Displacement

#YumeTheNovel
for everything Beauvoir subsequently wrote. The book’s dedication to Zaza asks: ‘If I have tears in my eyes tonight, is it because you have died, or rather because I’m the one who is still alive?’ In a letter to Simone, included in the afterword, Zaza wrote: “There is nothing sweeter in the world than feeling there is someone who can completely understand you.” The tragedy of Zaza’s death at 21 haunted Beauvoir, yet when she showed the manuscript of this novel to Jean-Paul Sartre, he dismissed it as trivial. It is, after all, only about two young women. As Atwood says, “Mr. ‘Hell is other people’ Sartre was wrong.” It is heartbreaking to think of the author, with her brilliant, incisive mind, absorbing Sartre’s casual misogyny the way the tragic heroine of this book absorbs the narrow-minded values that destroy her.

A moving portrayal of intense female friendship, identity, and loss.

AND THE BRIDGE IS LOVE

Biro, David
Lake Union Publishing (241 pp.)
$10.99 paper | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-5420-2722-9

Three lonely older women from Brooklyn form an unlikely friendship and tackle difficult life moments together.

The book opens as 60-year-old Gertie Sundersen chokes on a plum. Corinna Hale happens to be standing nearby and rushes to help, but due to a rare genetic condition, she is too small to effectively perform the Heimlich on someone of Gertie’s stature. Corinna implores Maria Benedetti, another bystander, to help. After the women successfully rescue Gertie from impending doom, the trio meanders to a bench overlooking the Verrazzano Bridge. As they sit and take in the magnificent view, they begin to share secrets with each other: Gertie is a divorced former athlete, Maria is a lovelorn Italian widow, and Corinna, who’s never been married, dabbles in recreational drugs. The one common denominator is that each woman is very much alone. They end up enjoying each other’s company so much that they begin meeting weekly at their bench at the bridge. Over time, the friendship they share becomes the most important aspect of each woman’s life. Unfortunately, after two decades of bonding, Maria decides to go digging into Gertie’s and Corinna’s pasts, unintentionally threatening the very relationships that have come to mean the most to her. The story joins the three friends when they get together and also follows the women through various aspects of their individual lives. The story moves along rather drowsily, with long stretches between significant events and disproportionate focus on moments that do not advance the narrative. The strength of the novel comes in quiet moments when each of the main characters is able to engage in personal reflection about the life she has lived and what she hopes to do with her remaining time. The Verrazzano Bridge is also a central fixture of the story, one that essentially becomes its own character as the tale unfolds. Although the narrative veers off track at a few points and would have benefited from the fleshing out of intriguing subplots, the insightful commentary on growing older should be sufficient to keep some readers engrossed.

An unhurried evaluation of the importance of companionship and friendship at any age.
MEDUSA’S ANKLES
Selected Stories
Byatt, A.S.
Knopf (464 pp.)
$28.00  |  Nov. 23, 2021
978-0-593-32158-4

A career-spanning selection of short stories from one of England’s distinctive voices.

Byatt is known for her novels—especially the Booker Prize–winning Possession (1990)—but the short story format suits her beautifully as well. She favors adjective-spangled cascades of images, excavates the dictionary for rare specimens, and sends iambs and anapests cavorting across the paragraphs. A little of this can go a long way (though, as the novels demonstrate, sometimes a lot can go even further). These stories, selected from periodicals and previous collections, present compact versions of her favored themes, preoccupations, strengths, and occasionally weaknesses, and they’re short enough that her densely decorative prose rarely grows wearisome. As readers of Possession and Angels and Insects (1993) know, she has an affinity for the Victorian era; in “Precipice-Encurled,” an ambitious young painter falls in love with the young lady he’s sketching before losing more than just his heart as he pursues a visual idea inspired by one of Monsieur Monet’s new paintings. Disdaining the austerity of modernism, Byatt leaps forward to postmodernism, with its framing devices and art about art. In “Raw Material,” for instance, a pair of exquisite descriptions of Victorian housework—“How We Used To Black-Lead Stoves” and “Wash Day”—are enclosed in a semisatirical melodrama about a creative writing teacher and his students. Many of the stories contain jeweler’s-loupe views of artists and art, whether the artists in question are sculptors, painters, or cooks. Many of the stories address classic feminist questions about women’s work: To what extent are women free to choose how to express their creativity, and how is their work valued? Not all of the stories have aged well; in “The Chinese Lobster,” Byatt’s signature lyrical exoticism is not so charming when she applies it to the proprietors of a Chinese restaurant and the food they serve, and a Dean of Women Students unquestioningly accepting the word of a Distinguished Visiting Professor over that of the graduate student who has accused him of rape feels rather different in the post–Me Too era than it must have to its 20th-century readers. Some of the best stories in the collection are fairy tales or fantasies; in “A Stone Woman,” for example, a woman in mourning for her mother turns to stone—literally.

Short works representative of Byatt’s beautifully evocative prose.

A PLAY FOR THE END OF THE WORLD
Chakrabarti, Jai
Knopf (304 pp.)
$22.99  |  Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-525-65892-4

A play by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore serves as a source of hope for Jewish orphans in wartime Warsaw and, decades later, for Communist revolutionaries in the Indian state of West Bengal.

Jaryk Smith is just 9 in 1942 and living in the (real-life) Warsaw ghetto orphanage run by doctor and author Janusz Korczak when he plays the role of Amal—a sickly Indian child who dreams of worlds beyond his home—in the Tagore play Dak Ghar. Days later, the Nazis send all the area’s Jews to the Treblinka death camp; Jaryk is the only one of Korczak’s 200 charges to escape the gas chambers. In the displaced persons camp where he winds up after the war, he’s reunited with Misha Wazynski, who had worked at...
the orphanage. Nearly three decades on, having immigrated to New York, Jaryk and Misha have become lifelong friends with a shared history. Despite being wracked by survivor’s guilt, Jaryk is beginning to explore a relationship with Lucy Gardner, a woman who works in the city’s employment agency. Their relationship is disrupted when Jaryk learns of Misha’s death thousands of miles away, in the Indian state of West Bengal, where he had traveled to help produce the very same Tagore play. Unsettled by his friend’s demise, Jaryk travels to India to retrieve Misha’s ashes and inadvertently gets embroiled in the Naxalite uprising, the Communist movement that sparked in 1970s India. Chakrabarti deftly explores the weight of history, a touching love story, and Jaryk’s heart-wrenching survivor’s guilt. Woven throughout is the play that teaches you not about life, but about dying. It prepared the orphans for the unimaginable, as Jaryk remembers. The narrative struggles under the weight of its responsibility to these compelling themes and shortchanges a few, such as the Communist uprising, while Jaryk’s internal struggles and love for Lucy stretch on for too long.

An impressive if occasionally labored debut.

THE SWANK HOTEL
Corin, Lucy
Graywolf (400 pp.)
$17.00 paper | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-64445-066-6

A young woman whose life consists of a midlevel corporate job and a recently purchased house learns that her sister is missing, not for the first time, but this time perhaps forever.

Single, settled, and introverted, Em has long realized that for her substance-addicted sister, Ad, “there were three places in the world—missing or about to be; in a hospital; and in the house they came from—Em knew exactly what that house was. It was her parents’ brains. You came out of their bodies and into their brains.” In this epigrammatic novel of loss and longing, the reader enters Em’s brain and stays there as she learns once again that Ad is missing, becomes enmeshed in a co-worker’s bizarre extramarital
affair, and then has an equally strange liaison of her own. This dazed, alienated stream-of-consciousness is aerated now and then by grim humor and zany insight. On a visit to Las Vegas, for example, Em contemplates “gondolas gliding through chlorine,” and her snapshots of office life are laser-sharp. References to 9/11 and the hunt for Osama bin Laden tether the narrative to a specific time, while Em’s skewed observations create a queasy sense of the world having tilted and of the most mundane details—of eating, sleeping, talking, seeing—having acquired a strange and unsettling formlessness. Moving back and forth between Em’s perspective and those of a handful of other characters, the novel sometimes tests the reader’s patience and, in two passages, their tolerance for graphic details of exploitative pornography and jokes. “People were the toxic detritus of their own horrid history,” Em concludes, “and also clear water droplets on the tips of the grasses of meadows in advance of fires.” Her sister, most of all.

A fretful, introspective narrative of family dissolution.

**CASCADE Stories**
Davidson, Craig
Norton (256 pp.)
$14.49 paper | Oct. 26, 2021
978-0-393-86690-2

Disquieting stories that explore how people’s lives can be upended in a single moment.

Davidson, who also writes horror novels under the pen name Nick Cutter, does not shy away from looking point-blank at tragedy and the human propensity for cruelty. “The Ghost Lights” opens with the narrator blinking open her eyes. She’s hanging upside down in her car, her husband dead beside her, his neck severed by a tree branch. In the back seat her baby is “a pocket-sized executioner with a white hood over his face.” In “One Pure Thing,” a pro basketball player’s career ends when he climbs into the stands and punches a heckling fan, who falls down the stairs, hits his head, and winds up dying. “The Burn” slowly unfolds what happened to a Marine while he was serving in Iraq and shows how this past shapes his relationship with a high school girl recovering from a brain tumor. While these stories spotlight big, dramatic moments, Davidson’s real gift is for closely observing small actions, like the mechanics of a big man driving toward the basketball hoop or a woman trying to unlock the door of a crashed car or a Marine helping a girl with disabilities sit on a toilet. Defamiliarization is the art of making the familiar new; Davidson’s prose takes the unfamiliar—the extraordinary, whether good or bad—and makes it an embodied experience. You feel it in your bones. The final pieces are mostly concerned with how children must live with their parents’ choices: In one, a surgeon is physically malformed because his mother drank while she was pregnant with him, while in another, a child-services worker confronts everything from negligent to evil parenting and concludes that “some people shouldn’t be parents.”

Chilling tales of misfits and misfortune by a masterful writer.

**EMPTY WARDROBES**
de Carvalho, Maria Judite
Trans. by Costa, Margaret Jull
Two Lines Press (184 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-949641-21-9

A widow restarts her life after a decade of mourning in this 1966 novel, the first by this towering Portuguese novelist to be translated into English.

Dora Rosário is the manager of a finely appointed antiques shop nicknamed The Museum, the mother of teenage Lisa, and an independent woman living in Lisbon in the prime of her life. Yet, ever since the death of her...
husband, Duarte, 10 years earlier, Dora has devoted her days to tending and preserving his memory. In life, Duarte was an insufficient spouse—a self-appointed Christ figure with “vast reserves of passive resistance,” which he used to rebuff all his mother’s proclamations that “her son would one day cause a stir.” When Duarte died, he left Dora and the young Lisa destitute and forced to rely on his indomitably eccentric mother, Senhora Dona Ana, for material support until Dora became the manager of the antiques store, the first job she had ever held. For a decade this is how the women’s lives progress. Lisa grows up to become a graceful, witty, and entirely insouciant teenager, Dona Ana has begun to slip into senility, and Dora lives as “a career widow,” following a ritualistic routine among the dusty remains of other people’s memories. Then, on the night of Lisa’s 17th birthday party, Dona Ana reveals a devastating truth about her son that calls into question all of Dora’s devotion. What follows fundamentally changes the lives of all three generations of Rosário women, but particularly Dora, who must now look clearly for the first time at the legacy her husband has really left her: a desiccated life lived at the behest of a society that views her value only in accordance to her relation to men.

A still, luminous book whose precise characters evoke broad truths about the human experience.

**ON GIRLHOOD**

15 Stories From the Well-Read Black Girl Library
Ed. by Edim, Glory
Liveright/Norton (208 pp.)
$23.95 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-63149-769-8

Fifteen stories, originally published between 1953 and 2018, that center around young Black women.

A trip to FAO Schwarz turns into an uncomfortable encounter with economic inequality for Sylvia and her friends in Toni...
Cade Bambara’s “The Lesson,” while Princesse in Edwidge Danticat’s “Seeing Things Simply” learns a gentler lesson about her own artistic potential from a glamorous French-speaking painter. In Alexia Arthurs’ “Bad Behavior,” Stacy is left unceremoniously with her grandmother in Jamaica by parents who are “afraid of their fourteen-year-old daughter.” Valerie, in Rita Dove’s “Fifth Sunday,” is determined to win the affections of the minister’s “very ugly” son, while Avery, in Dana Johnson’s “Melvin in the Sixth Grade,” is besotted with the story’s titular character, a gangly White kid she calls “My beautiful alien from Planet Cowboy.” Collecting the stories of literary giants—Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston—and contemporary authors including Camille Acker and Amina Gautier, the book presents an expansive, decades-spanning view of Black girlhood. “I want to attest to the worthiness of Black girls as they come of age—their need for protection, love, and freedom,” Edim writes in the introduction. Organized around the themes of innocence, belonging, love, and self-discovery, the collection is genuinely riveting; the stories narrate the lives of indelible characters with humor, irony, and immense skill. And while each story differs greatly in setting and tone, throughlines arise. Grandmothers, mothers, and sisters loom large in these stories; two of them—“The Richer, The Poorer” by Dorothy West and Alice Walker’s “Everyday Use”—center on the dramatic differences in sisters’ lives. And throughout, the stories’ protagonists often struggle with the projections of the people around them, colored by their Blackness: what the narrator of Paule Marshall’s “Reena” calls “that definition of me, of her and millions like us, formulated by others to serve out their fantasies, a definition we have to combat at an unconscionable cost to the self and even use, at times, in order to survive; the cause of so much shame and rage as well as, oddly enough, a source of pride: simply what it has meant, what it means, to be a black woman in America.”

A profound, prismatic collection.

THE STOLEN HOURS
Eskens, Allen
Mulholland Books/Little, Brown
(320 pp.)
$28.00 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-31670-349-9

A law clerk still battling demons from her past must rise to dizzying heights in preparing a case against a serial sex killer. Lila Nash has never truly recovered from her rape when she was 18. She's cut herself, tried to kill herself, spent years in therapy, powered her way through law school, and landed a plum entry-level job with the Hennepin County Attorney's Office despite the fact that Frank Dovey, the new prosecutor, has hated Lila ever since she and her law school mentor, professor Boady Sanden, embarrassed him in court. Now Andi Fitch, the aggressive prosecutor to whom Dovey has assigned Lila as an assistant in the serene confidence that she'll fail, presses her to make the case against wedding photographer Gavin Spencer, who's accused of assaulting and nearly killing bridesmaid Sadie Vauk. Spencer, a serial predator who plans and executes his murderous assaults meticulously and has a special gift for seeing around curves and destroying the evidence that might incriminate him, is a ruthless antagonist. As Eskens demonstrates, however, he's cut from the same cloth as Frank Dovey, whose bloodless campaign against Lila is every bit as unscrupulous. Even readers who predict the tale's biggest twist before it arrives will still have the breath knocked out of them by the surprises that follow. And they'll all cheer when fragile Lila finally gains the strength to stand up to the oppressors in her life and wrestle it back from them.

A rousing legal thriller that's also an acute study of female victimization and male privilege.
“Like her fictional contemporary Jo March, Margaret has great hair, a gift for writing, a feminist spirit, and a drive to help others.”

HER HEART FOR A COMPASS

AS YOU WERE
Feeney, Elaine
Biblioasis (320 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-77196-443-2

An Irishwoman avoids dealing with her cancer diagnosis in this debut novel.

When Síneád Hynes, a property developer and mother of three boys, is diagnosed with terminal cancer, she keeps the news of her illness to herself. She avoids telling her husband, Alex, that she’s ill even after she has been hospitalized and refuses to let her children visit her. Instead of lingering on her own mortality, Síneád spends her time in the ward observing her fellow patients. Chief among them are Margaret Rose, who manages her daughter’s pregnancy from bed, and Jane, who suffers from dementia and recalls a friend’s troubled pregnancy from decades earlier. As Síneád’s health grows worse, however, her efforts to avoid her family and the reality of her situation become increasingly difficult. There is much to admire and respect in this debut novel from Feeney, also an accomplished poet, but also much that even readers who enjoy a challenge will find frustrating. Feeney is obviously an immensely gifted writer, with a gift for both dialogue and inner monologue: In one striking passage, Síneád rationalizes lying to Alex by telling herself, “It was a dreadfully selfish thing to do to another person, fill him up with worry and uncertainty, to try and make him figure out death, because that’s a dead end, a spiral, even though it’s always there, inside us all.” But her denial about her condition, even to herself, can make her feel like a device for Feeney’s considerable linguistic pyrotechnics rather than an emotionally engaging character in her own right. Though the female body is powerfully described in this novel, by avoiding the specifics of Síneád’s cancer diagnosis, Feeney renders cancer a symbolic bogeyman instead of a disease.

An arresting debut that impresses more than it moves.

HER HEART FOR A COMPASS
Ferguson, Sarah with Kaye, Marguerite
Morrow/HarperCollins (560 pp.)
$22.99 | Aug 3, 2021
978-0-06-297652-9

A headstrong heroine—the daughter of a duke—fights her way through Victorian mores to self-realization.

Ferguson, the Duchess of York, author of many children’s books, weight-loss guides, and memoirs, collaborates here with Kaye, a Scottish writer of historical romances, to create a vivid, juicy, and well-researched novel set in Victorian England and New York City. When we first meet Lady Margaret Montagu Douglas Scott, it is 1865 and she is an 18-year-old with a 19-inch waist being led like a lamb to the slaughter to the London ballroom where everyone who’s anyone has gathered to hear her father, the Duke of Buccleuch (a world-class asshole, not to put too fine a point on it), announce her engagement to the cold, repellent Earl of Killin. “Our estates have lots of sheep. He has woollen mills. In more ways than one, it will be a marriage made in heaven,” says her father. Lady Margaret begs to differ—and rather than enter the hall, she bolts, though she has never before ventured beyond the garden gate of the manor. A friend of her father’s tries to stop her to no avail as she rushes without a plan into the wilds of the urban landscape, strikingly evoked with particular attention to the olfactory. She meets her first poor person—a Crimean war veteran who has lost his legs—resulting in an awakening that will shape the rest of her life. We follow her into her late 20s, through exile in Ireland, across the Atlantic, and back, the narrative supplemented by newspaper articles and letters from her friends and family. Like her fictional contemporary Jo March, Margaret has great hair, a gift for writing, a feminist spirit, and a drive to help others; in a
“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.”
—Kirkus Reviews
For Koreans, the word *skinship* translates to a kind of pure, tender physical intimacy, the kind embodied in a mother’s loving touch or the way two schoolkids hold hands. It’s a portmanteau of words borrowed from the English language (*skin* and *kinship*) that Koreans have co-opted to describe an essential quality of the way we live in this moment. That sense of leaning on someone—and the toll that caring so deeply for another can exact on one’s life—runs strongly through Yoon Choi’s stirring debut story collection, *Skinship* (Knopf, Aug. 17). Focused closely on the complex dynamics within Korean American families, Choi’s stories are “both closely observed and expansive, a feat of narrative engineering that places [Choi] next to Alice Munro,” according to our starred review. I spoke with Choi over Zoom from her home in California; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

What was your process in working on this book? How did these stories come together?

The first story that I wrote for the collection was “The Art of Losing.” I had gone to a creative writing program [at Johns Hopkins] much earlier on in life, right after college, and then I got married, had kids, and I stepped away from writing for a while [before I was ready to write this story].

I used “The Art of Losing” to apply to the Wallace Stegner Creative Writing Program at Stanford—as soon as I sent it off, I was like, “Oh my God, I made a typo on the first page.” But I lucked out. I wrote most of the collection during those two years, when I had deadline after deadline, which helped me to not obsess over anything and just get the stories out.

When you were getting your master’s in creative writing, did you find the kernels of the stories that would end up in *Skinship*?

No. I became a different person and a different writer after leaving Hopkins. Back then, I was really young, and I wasn’t invested in writing about the Korean American experience. I used to sit around trying to figure out “How can I write a more European story? How can I write a more classically American story?” There’s been a huge cultural shift since then, but at the time, that was all that I saw. That was my reading experience, and I wanted to write books like the ones I had read and loved. I think particularly of Asian writers who grew up loving books but not seeing very many books written by Asian writers on our bookshelves. It’s not an uncommon experience.

Our review describes each of your stories as “luxuriously long.” What do you do to let a short story breathe?

As a mom, my life is full of distractions. I almost never have the time or the attention span to finish reading a novel these days. On the other hand, [while reading]
the classic short story, that 11- to 13-page length, I felt like as soon as I was in a story with a character, I wanted something more. When I was writing the stories in *Skinship*, I really enjoyed the sense of being in a character’s life without the commitment of a novel. I was really interested in the idea of time and how it plays into ideas of plot.

Chang-rae Lee was one of my mentors at Stanford, and I remember having a conversation with him about the perfect length [for a short story]. He drinks a lot of nice wine, and I’m a wine drinker—not of wines that are quite as nice—and the formulation we came up with was “a glass-of-wine story.” As you read a 30-page story, that’s about as long as it takes to have a nice glass of wine.

**What sparks a story for you?**

For me, it’s a gesture or a character. By the time I was writing toward the middle and the end of the collection, I did want a certain diversity [in my characters]. I knew I couldn't write a complete catalog of the Asian American experience, but there were pieces I wanted to touch upon.

I was conscious of the ages of my protagonists. To counterbalance the much older narrator that I had in “The Art of Losing,” I wanted to have a much younger narrator in school [in “A Map of the Simplified World”]. There are certain kinds of ideas that are unique to the Korean American experience that I wanted to get in there—for example, the fact that it’s not that uncommon for one parent to be living in Korea and one parent [to be] living in America with the kids [as in the title story, “Skinship”]. Another thing I wanted to write about was the way that different types of racism play out among younger kids [in “A Map of the Simplified World”] as they collide with different cultures. That collision is kind of how kids learn to interact with one another.

I noticed a lot of diversity among your Korean American characters. There’s a queer character, and there’s an adopted character, which I don’t see often from writers who aren’t adopted. How did you work to get those voices right?

I made a very conscious choice to focus on Korean American characters. I really wanted to write for a Korean American reader first. The stories had to work on our level. I felt a sense of, *This is my small contribution to the giant bookshelf [that I imagine].* In writing these characters, I wanted to get the details and the names right and put them out [into literature].

“First Language” [which is told in the first person from a Korean immigrant mother’s point of view] is probably the voiciest story. I heard her voice a lot in my head. The story kind of clicked for me when I was driving my daughter and her best friend in my car and listening to their conversation. Her best friend’s mom isn’t a native English speaker, and she told my daughter, “When my mom texts your mom, she has me write the texts so she doesn’t make a mistake.” The pain of insecurity in a language where you don’t feel comfortable sending a text to another Korean American mom—that stuck with me.

**How did you land on the title?**

I wanted to call the collection *Song and Song* [the title of one of the short stories], but one of my writer friends who’s much more savvy than I am loved *Skinship*, and so did my agent.

My mom used the word *skinship* a lot to describe the affection that a mom has for a kid, although it’s not limited to the bonds within the family. I knew it hooked on some of the themes of the collection.

The word *skinship* really challenges stereotypes about Korean Americans, that we’re “stoic” or “unfeeling.” Koreans are deeply emotional people. In Korea, there’s a sense of not only physical affection, but also national affection. There’s something really lovely about that.

**Hannah Bae** is a Korean American writer, journalist, and illustrator and winner of a Rona Jaffe Foundation Writer’s Award. *Skinship* received a starred review in the July 1, 2021, issue.
Thirteen stories of contemporary Israeli life weave in and out of reality.

Jerusalem Beach

Stories

Gefen, Iddo

Trans. by Zamir, Daniella

Astra House (304 pp.)

$26.00 | Aug. 17, 2021

978-1-662-60043-2

Thirteen stories of contemporary Israeli life weave in and out of reality.

From a story called “Flies and Porcupines”: “Since the day you enlisted, Yonatan, I’ve been trying to catch time. Literally catch it.... At first I didn’t catch anything, because catching time is truly tricky.” From “The Girl Who Lived Near the Sun”: “It’s been a year and a half now that you’ve been traveling all over the solar system, without popping by to visit your old grandma even once.” From “Debby’s Dream House”: “I found the job through a newspaper ad. I didn’t even know there were people who built dreams.” Originally published in Israel to awards and acclaim, many of the stories in Gefen’s debut collection combine a down-to-earth, wry narrative tone with surreal or SF–esque premises. While one narrator actually does get a job building dreams, and also nightmares, another fixes a radio that can tune into people’s inner thoughts, while a third gets a job as a representative for a company called the Meaning of Life, Ltd. At a facility called Lucid Memo, people literally share their memories with others—and the pre-wedding couples who come in get a complimentary pampering spa treatment after the procedure. Some stories have more realistic premises, or somewhat more realistic, anyway: In the very long—too long—first story, “The Geriatric Platoon,” the narrator is a man whose grandfather...
joins the military to alleviate his boredom. A military base is also the setting for “Neptune,” so called because that’s how far away from everything it feels — there, a mock trial is held for the crime of stealing a grilled cheese sandwich. Gefen’s background as a neurocognitive researcher filters through the collection in stories that meditate on dreams, cognition, mental illness, and the inner lives of his characters. His philosophical concerns and ability to combine humor with grim resignation to the conditions of everyday life in Israel recall Etgar Keret.

With stories already optioned by Ryan Gosling and Warner Bros., the author seems poised for a successful American debut.

**THESE SILENT WOODS**
Grant, Kimi Cunningham
Minotaur (288 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-2507-9339-3

In a desperate move to keep his child, a father goes off the grid. Finch and her father, Cooper, (not their real names) have spent eight years — Finch’s entire childhood so far — occupying a remote cabin on a large swatch of forested land in an unidentified, presumably northern state. Grant’s second novel sets out to explore how they got there and how they might get out. This chronicle of life in a rustic dwelling with no indoor plumbing and no electricity is an engrossing lesson in survivalism. Cooper and Finch’s whereabouts are known to only two people: their reclusive neighbor, known as Scotland, and the cabin’s owner, Jake, Cooper’s buddy from a tour of duty in Afghanistan. (Jake was severely wounded by an IED but survived thanks to Cooper.) Once a year, Jake brings supplies, and when the novel opens, father and daughter await his imminent visit. They are fugitives from a system that would have taken Finch, then an infant, from Cooper after Cindy, his wife-to-be and Finch’s mother, died in a car crash. Cindy’s parents always considered Cooper beneath her. Effectively orphaned, Cooper was raised by a loving but eccentric aunt, and the Army was his sole hope of bettering himself. Finch’s thoroughly unsympathetic maternal grandparents enlisted social services to remove her from Cooper’s care. How Cooper managed to extract Finch is the major delayed reveal, while Jake’s failure to appear with his delivery is the plot’s inciting nonincident. A trip to a faraway Walmart is a huge risk but necessary — winter is coming. Scotland has had an unnerving habit of stealthily stopping by. Finch has bonded with Scotland (also a veteran, of Vietnam), but his motives seem suspect. With the arrival, separately, of two strangers, the challenge of disappearing in today’s world becomes starkly apparent, as does the flimsiness of the novel’s premise.

*Soulful, meditative, and sad — but marred by an improbable final twist.*
strength, wit, and skills of each of the town’s three most powerful families—the Blackmoors, the Avramovs, and the Thorns—with the Harlows acting as arbiters and record-keepers. The winning family’s magic power is increased, bending fortune in their favor and giving them ultimate influence over the town and its economy. Since the Blackmoors have been winning “since pretty much time’s inception,” the other families and their respective businesses are now struggling to survive. When Emmy is approached by her best friend, Linden Thorn, and the gorgeous Avramov scion, Talia, with a scheme to rig the competition against Blackmoore scion Gareth, she agrees—changing the course of the families’ histories forever in the process. The action of the Gauntlet takes a back seat to the characters’ personal dramas and the intense romance that develops between Emmy and Talia. But the author’s writing shines in the small moments, particularly in the lush language used to capture the enchanting, autumnal atmosphere of quaint Thistle Grove and its supernatural allure.

Readers are sure to fall under the magic spell of Thistle Grove and its inhabitants.

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**SLEEPLESS**

Haussmann, Romy

Trans. by Bulloch, Jamie

Flatiron Books (336 pp.)

$23.99 | Oct. 5, 2021

978-1-250-82479-0

In present-day Germany, a woman burdened with the darkest of secrets from her brutal childhood becomes an unwitting participant in a fatal game of murder and deceit.

“You become normal by doing normal things,” Nadja Kulka’s therapist tells her, and for the most part the technique has worked. Nadja has a good job in the office of one of Berlin’s most successful lawyers and a secure if barren personal life. “I’m the woman who sits at the open window of her kitchen when she sees that her neighbour has friends over again on a Saturday night,” she explains. Social gatherings cause Nadja acute anxiety, and when the novel opens, she is in the grip of a panic attack that causes her to faint at a gas station and then to flee back onto the motorway, fearing that onlookers may have called the police. But why? And why is she wearing a blond wig? In this feverish, relentlessly tense novel, the answers to those and many other questions lie tangentially in Nadja’s past—to which the narrative cyclically returns—but more immediately in a sudden act of violence into which she is cruelly drawn. As dastardly events unfold, we are kept on edge not only by the author’s initially skillful evocation of Nadja’s troubled consciousness, but also by the novel’s restless shuttling between past and present. The eventual cinching together of near and distant events is clumsily handled, however, and the denouement utterly overwrought. A parallel plot involves the yearnings of a young woman who longs to escape her hometown backwater, embarks on an affair with a married visitor to her family’s inn, and pays a terrible price for her longings. Rather than enriching the novel, however, this drama, though potentially engrossing, seems more like a distraction.

A superficially gripping but psychologically unconvincing thriller.

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**OUT OF LOVE**

Hayes, Hazel

Dutton (416 pp.)

$17.00 paper | Sept. 28, 2021

978-0-593-18452-3

After 5 years together, an Irishwoman and an Englishman break up. The narrator of this book is an unnamed 30-year-old woman who moved from Dublin to London to join her boyfriend, Theo. She left everything behind—her mother, her job, her country—for Theo. And at first they were happy. Delighting-in-every-moment-exploring-each-other happy. But then life, with all the mundane choices...
Get the ultimate inside scoop on the best new books.

New episode every Tuesday
and decisions that can either bring people together or gradually, quietly pull them apart, happened. Now it’s five years later, and she’s trying to pick up the pieces of her heart after Theo has suggested a break but in reality moved out. This is a heart-wrenching, beautiful story told in fragments—short stories in themselves—that track backward in time, from the painful end of a relationship that once had involved deep love to its joyful beginning full of hope. In the process, debut author Hayes has created a moving, memorable, layered story where each new revelation brings the reader to a greater understanding of both the narrator and Theo, the complexity of their relationship, and, indeed, who they are as people. This story deals unflinchingly with tough topics: Love, sexuality, heartbreak, and hope are a given considering the storyline. But Hayes also deals with trauma and abuse and how those experiences affect a person’s mental health, life, and relationships. It’s rare to finish a book and immediately begin reading it again. For many readers, this will be just that book.

A gorgeously told story of heartbreak and recovery that still leaves the reader feeling hopeful about love.
simmering beneath the surface, Catherine spins off course after yet another betrayal by a faithless man. The lives of her two daughters could have been counted among the considerable wreckage. The weight of feeling that it is your job to keep your mother alive is not easily shed, but Huisman’s narrator, Violaine—Catherine’s younger daughter—balances that burden with a recounting of the abandonments, assaults, betrayals, and disappointments which formed the beautiful and impetuous woman she and her sister, Elsa, adored. Violaine’s attempt to understand Catherine’s essential humanity (or, the Catherine who existed before she was Maman) relies upon the conflicting details shared by Catherine in her effort to convey her own story, but, as Violaine muses, “the truth of a life is the fiction that sustains it.” Camhi’s translation from the French of Huisman’s debut novel conveys Violaine’s steady compulsion to understand and explain interspersed with gorgeous details such as the way Catherine’s cigarette-singed pillowcases resemble a target shot through by bullets. The names of Huisman’s characters will provoke discussion of the novel as autofiction, but the story here is bigger than that.

Love hurts; Huisman elegantly examines how and why.

**LET THE WILD GRASSES GROW**

*Johnstun, Kate*

Torrey House Press (250 pp.)

$17.95 paper | Oct. 5, 2021

978-1-948814-51-5

Struggles and dreams on Colorado’s high plains.

Essayist and memoirist Johnstun makes his fiction debut with an appealing story centered on two families roiled by the Great Depression, dust storms, racism, and war. Della, the bright, ambitious daughter of a Native American mother and Mexican father, and John, a quiet, diffident boy whose Mexican father labors in the coal mines, recount their lives in alternating chapters beginning in 1927, when the two are children in Trinidad, a town in southeastern Colorado “covered in scrub oak and hard dirt.” Della grows up encouraged to achieve. She is too smart to be a ranchero, her father tells her; her brother will inherit the family’s land, he says, and she must go on to do great things. Devouring books about science in the Trinidad library, Della sees education as the path away from “the stalks, stables, and land of the KKK.” Both families are threatened by racist violence: “Since there were no African Americans living in Southern Colorado,” Della observes, “the KKK had to hate someone, so they hated us.” Nature is another threat. As the drought intensifies in the 1930s, Della’s parents struggle to eke out a living. “At one point,” Della recalls, “I think we ate corn for three months straight.” While Della vows to leave Trinidad, go to college, and make her family proud, John assumes he will become a miner like his father; shyly in love with Della, he imagines her by his side. Dramatic events, though, upend the lives of John, his sister, and two brothers. And World War II radically changes the future for both Della and John. Johnstun knows his terrain well, creating a palpable sense of the sky and soil, grasses and wildlife of the mesa—and the winds of change that swept through the nation for two tumultuous decades.

A tender evocation of grief, hope, and dignity.

**THE COTTAGE**

*Judson, Daniel*

Thomas & Mercer (445 pp.)

$15.95 paper | Nov. 2, 2021

978-1-5420-1001-6

A suburban Connecticut teacher’s carefully curated life is shattered by a series of domestic invasions that increasingly seem connected to the estranged sister who’s returned to her home.

The same night that Kate Burke deflects her older sister Rebecca Wallace’s request to stay the summer in the cottage on Kate’s Westport property
with the reminder that the terms of their grandfather’s will restrict Becca’s access to the off-season. Kate glimpses a pair of teenagers running from her yard. The intruders, it turns out, have cut down the swings in the backyard, taken a knife from Kate’s kitchen, and impaled it on the bedroom wall. Widowed by her husband Leif’s murder two years ago and feeling in acute need of protection for herself and her 12-year-old twins, Kate rents the cottage to Jack Guarnere, a conveniently returning relation of police chief James O’Neil’s wife—and then, when the twins’ regular babysitter has a sudden conflict, is in the awkward position of begging Becca to come east from Colorado, stay in Kate’s house, and help care for Max and Callie. Her reunion with Becca, whom she’d sent away after Leif’s death, goes as well as can be expected, but the violations of her privacy continue in the form of cryptic texts, a note on her car’s windshield, a rock thrown at her living room window, and a compromising photo shared with her school superintendent. No sooner has her high school classmate Eddie Sabrowski, Leif’s colleague and best friend on the police force, working independently of her father-in-law, former police chief Leo Burke, identified a suspect than things get worse. Much worse.

A virtuoso demonstration of how painful it is for a beleaguered heroine to suspect any of the people she trusts the most.

**DARK THINGS I ADORE**  
Lattari, Katie  
Sourcebooks Landmark (416 pp.)  
$20.43 | Sep. 14, 2021  
978-1-72822-984-3

An art professor goes from predator to prey in this debut thriller.

In 2018, Max Durant, a once-acclaimed but now fading artist and art professor, is on a weekend trip to middle-of-nowhere Maine with Audra Colfax, his genius mentee. His plan? See how her thesis is getting along and finally consummate the sexual tension he’s sure has been sizzling between them since they met. Audra, on the other hand, is getting ready to spring a trap she’s been laying for years, with Max at the center. In 1988, a young instructor who goes by Juniper has returned to the Lupine Valley Arts Collective, a small camp in Maine that caters to artists of every type, and she’s ready to relax back into a place that’s like a second home. The addition of a new townie to the artist mix starts to shake things up, though, and Juniper’s closest friend, Moss, is acting strangely. As all three will find out, the Lupine Valley is beautiful and hides its secrets very well. Exploring the story through Max’s, Audra’s, and Juniper’s points of view, as well as descriptions of Audra’s thesis, lets the narrative unfold easily and keeps the momentum up. This is much more of a howdunit than a whodunit; a curious reader will easily put the pieces together as they read. However, despite it being rather clear why things are happening, the question of how things are going to happen drives the reader forward. How is Audra’s trap going to unfold? What exactly did Max do to warrant this seeming revenge? And what happened between 1988 and 2018 for it to come to this? The ending will satisfy.

A dark tale of relationships, ambition, and revenge.

**MANHATTAN MELTDOWN**  
Lentricchia, Frank  
Guernica World Editions (100 pp.)  
$17.95 paper | Oct. 1, 2021  
978-1-77183-675-3


Before he became a prolific novelist (*The Dog Killer of Utica*, 2014, etc.), Lentricchia was an academic scholar of postmodern literature. Fittingly,
this melancholy novella reads like a *Law & Order* episode scripted by one of his favorite subjects, Don DeLillo. Eliot, a former private eye who’s figured in previous Lentricchia novels, arrives in New York with his longtime friend Antonio in March 2020 to sort out some family issues. They share a car into the city with their flight’s first officer, Gina, who’s the daughter of the airline’s CEO and niece of a notorious mobster. A couple of NYPD detectives draw Eliot and Antonio into the mob investigation, and much of the story involves untangling Gina’s involvement. But Lentricchia strives to avoid a familiar police-procedural story arc; the novel is girded with scenes of the aging friends killing time in Manhattan’s Yale Club, bantering about their failing septuagenarian bodies and busted relationships. (“Revenge-desire, kills on the inside. Heart destruction. High blood pressure. Eating binges. Look at your poundage. Forgive her.”) And as the coronavirus forces the city into lockdown, Topic A for everyone is fear of death. Elliot, coming off heart surgery, is skeptical about the virus (“It couldn’t have jumped over the entire continent in one leap and landed in New Rochelle. Is the *Times* that hysterical with fake news?”). One of the cops has to manage the mob case, his wife’s newfound aggressive cancer, and the murder of Gina’s co-pilot. The novel is too brief to address any of these crises very deeply, but it successfully conjures up a city constricting upon itself and the feeling of asphyxiation it provokes in its characters.

An effective one-sitting crime story with an existential bent.

**FARAWAY**

*Lo Yi-Chin*  
Trans. by Tiang, Jeremy  
Columbia Univ. (328 pp.)  
$25.00 paper | Sep. 7, 2021  
978-0-231-19395-5

A Taiwanese writer navigates hospital bureaucracy when his father falls ill while vacationing in China.

The narrator and author share a name and profession, and an afterword makes clear that the book, which first appeared in 2003, reflects real events in Lo’s life. As the story opens, the narrator learns that his father has suffered a cerebral hemorrhage while visiting his original hometown in China and has been hospitalized in critical condition. One of the many Chinese who fled Mao’s Communist forces in 1949, he abandoned his first wife and son and started a new family in Taiwan. Unsettled history—China claims sovereignty over Taiwan while the latter says it’s an independent nation—has left the narrator with a divided clan, and his mind often drifts among thoughts of kinship, fatherhood, his own toddler son, and a wife almost nine months pregnant. The narrator and his mother travel to Jiujiang First People’s Hospital, where they settle into the day-to-day routine of visiting a patient, with the usual anxiety, uncertainty, and monotony. The run-down facility sparks in the narrator some typical Taiwanese disdain over China’s development. In “despair at the Kafka’s Castle that was the gap between Taiwan and the mainland,” he scrambles to get his father back to Taiwan, where everything is better and you don’t have to bribe doctors and the floor isn’t covered in blades the nurses drop there after jabbing a finger for a test drop of blood. Lo is a clever, resourceful writer. He finds humor in his namesake’s struggles with mainland customs and red tape while tapping into a rich vein of memories and emotions stirred when history or crisis makes the challenges of family life even gnarlier.

Thematically rich and intriguing.

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**OWN YOUR OWN SHIFT**

*Stacey Ruth*

*The Passion, Power & Freedom to Be UNSTOPPABLE*


“TURST THE FIRE WITHIN.

“"A leadership coach lays out a personal transformation plan in this debut manual.""

—Kirkus Reviews

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VAMP UNTIL READY
Magruder, James
Rattling Good Yarns Press
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$16.49 | Oct. 1, 2021
978-1-955826-00-6


Magruder—playwright, translator, and author of Let Me See It (2014)—begins from the point of view of Cary Dunkler, who, having graduated from high school a few years ago, is spinning his wheels working at the Army-Navy store selling “Belgian knapsacks and the world’s scratchiest socks.” His foster brother, Dave, who has just graduated after attending Cornell on a full scholarship, convinces Cary to try out for the local Hangar Summer Theatre, where Dave’s boyfriend, Gavin, is the artistic director. While Cary may not be a natural at musical theater, the job does net him a “showmanship,” propels his life in an unexpected direction, and leads him years later to “claim that his life before the Hangar gig had just been vamping until ready.” With Cary’s summer over, Magruder jumps a couple of years forward, into the points of view of Cary’s co-worker Kristy, a minor character in the first section, and her children’s babysitter, Isa, a theatre major at Ithaca College who become involved with both that year’s season at the Hangar and with Kristy’s disreputable ex-husband, Wayne, a “hazel-eyed, cigarette-ad charmer.” The next two stories jump again in time and into the lives of two previously minor characters before the book circles back to Cary in the final story. It’s a tour de force performance, charming and unstrained, in which changes taking place offstage magically reset the narrative, and where the theater, with its state of “perpetual panic,” and Ithaca, with its “sprouty culture,” play roles as important as any character.

A pleasant romp deepened by its insights into character.

PEARL
Malerman, Josh
Del Rey (304 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-0-593-23783-0

On a small Michigan farm, a freaky, mind-controlling pig named Pearl messes with people’s heads—and extracts literal pounds of flesh—to avenge the cruel mistreatment of his species.

Before farmer Walt Kopple acquired Pearl as a piglet, someone cruelly abused one of the animal’s eyes. Walt trained Pearl, who sits like a person, “like he would a child.” Through an eerie form of ESP, Pearl learned to manipulate people’s thoughts and silently command other pigs. After beheading a pig in a bizarre fit of rage and insisting another pig made him do it, Jeff, the ill-fated Walt’s seventh grade grandson, becomes the talk of the town. Soon enough, Jeff’s brother, their anxious mother—who fled to Brazil after high school to escape her odd premonitions about Pearl—and a pair of cops become part of the mayhem. Though the wild premise of the book is initially hard to take seriously, you quickly surrender to the creepy vibe and the Bird Box (2014) author’s ability to keep you guessing. In one great scene, Jeff thinks he is being slowly crushed in a small room by a monstrously expanding pig. Part twisted fairy tale, part animal rights protest, part PTSD drama, and part Triumph the Insult Dog, the novel never runs out of unsettling doors to open.

A strange, un-put-down-able thriller.
THE DOG OF TITHWAL

Stories

Manto, Sadaat Hasan
Trans. by Hasan, Khalid & Memon, Muhammad Umar
Archipelago (418 pp.)
$24.00 paper | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-953861-00-9

A celebrated Urdu writer’s posthumously collected short stories illuminate the human cost and the absurdity of the India-Pakistan Partition.

Manto, widely regarded as the foremost Urdu short story writer of the 20th century, writes tales of brutality, possession, and innocence. These translations of his work by Hasan and Memon illustrate the writer’s ability to regard everyone—crooks, the upper class, politicians, soldiers, housewives, and prostitutes—with an eye trained on humanity. Manto’s characters are forced to consider themselves anew as blood is shed and political boundaries are redrawn. The collection begins with “Kingdom’s End,” in which a series of seemingly random phone calls forces Manmohan to evaluate his life. “Do you like your life?” the caller asks him. He replies: “Give me a few moments... The truth is, I’ve never thought about it.” Manto’s stories often end with a twist, though, so Manmohan’s self-reflection is quickly made difficult. Manto frequently takes on both the divisions created by religion and the vows that people make to each other. In “Two-Nation Theory” and “For Freedom’s Sake,” lovers from different backgrounds are challenged by their unsustainable promises. “As long as India does not win freedom,” the husband says in the latter, “Nigar and I will live not as husband and wife but as friends.” The promise becomes a problem. Occasionally Manto’s purposes are more transparently allegorical, as in the title story, which succeeds in highlighting the atrocities and stupidities of war: When a stray dog crosses battle lines, soldiers on both sides debate its religion and immediately begin to torment the animal. Prostitutes are a frequent subject of Manto’s stories, though their worth is generally defined through male characters’ visions of their physical beauty. Each story makes Manto’s...
argument plain: Partition divided families and identities, and yet life continued to flourish.

A substantial collection from an important writer.

THE MAN WHO WOULD NOT BOW & Other Stories
Melnyczuk, Askold
Grand Iota (194 pp.)
$13.50 paper | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-874400-83-7

From veteran Melnyczuk, a collection of nine stories that often explore the links between the lusty and the high-minded and that make an argument for their being not opposing values but flip sides of a coin.

The genius loci of the book is Nikolai Gogol, who figures explicitly in the last two stories (the finale, “Gogol’s Noose,” is a biographical “fantasia,” as the author calls it) and whose fascination with the links between the familiar and the grotesque, the real and the irreal or surreal, is everywhere explored and echoed. Several stories move between the New World and the Old (especially Russia and Ukraine); this is most impressively the case in the title story, which begins with the Romanovs and then ranges forward by generations, morphing eventually into an American immigrant tale. “Termites” tells of a blocked American writer who goes to the Middle East in search of something he can’t quite name or even look at squarely; and in “Walk With Us,” perhaps the most conventionally successful story, an elderly mother musingly prepares for a prison visit with her daughter, a soldier guilty of torturing prisoners. In “Embodiment,” a middle-aged actor recounts the lusts and loves that have brought him, over the decades since college, to his current predicament—mother dying, wife having decamped—and asks, “Why? To what end? Why have you been embodied?” The stories tend to be discursive and philosophical-minded, but always with a powerful link to the physical, to the tactile, homely real. “The Criminal Element” describes a scheme to kidnap a priest, but in the end it turns out that the narrator’s investment in that grand plot is half-hearted; what he really cares about is the wife who’s abandoned him, the way, as he puts it, his life keeps “shining through the fray of theory.” The story starts with highfalutin anarchy but ends, characteristically, with the sights and sounds of the everyday: the whir of the deli slicer, a fleeting lust for the woman who operates it.

Smart, complex stories that can on occasion feel diffuse but that never fail to hold the reader’s interest.

THE MEMOIRS OF STOCKHOLM SVEN
Miller, Nathaniel Ian
Little, Brown (336 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-0-316-59255-0

A Swedish trapper relates his unique life with insights about friendship, hardship, and solitude.

Sven Ormson lives in a tiny cabin on Spitsbergen, a Scandinavian island with precious little between it and the North Pole. In 1917, he’d suffered grotesque injury to his face in a mining avalanche and acquired one of his nicknames, Sven One-Eye. Some turn away from the sight of him in disgust, though he has a circle of friends and family. “I resolved to spend my life alone,” he writes. So he’s drawn to the monastic life of a trapper and appears content with books, correspondence with his sister, Olga, and the occasional company of folks like the Scotsman Charles MacIntyre, who sees in Sven a “fellow bibliophile” perhaps “in need of a friend.” So Sven is seldom alone for long stretches. He is self-deprecating about “the topographic eccentricities” of his face that to some were a “nauseous curiosity.” But he seems not terribly bothered by it or by the fact that some call him Sven the Seal Fucker. “You
An intimate portrayal of the voices of three generations of women seen through the portrait of family life in Africa.

“In this domestic novel set in 20th-century Nigeria, Oyinsan tells the story of Oyinkan and Kole, their troubled marriage, and Oyinkan’s relationship with the grandmother who raised her and the mother who largely abandoned her.”

“A solid, well-written novel of relationships and growth.”
—Kirkus Reviews

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http://bunmioyinsan.com
look like a bear chewed you up and shit you out,” he’s told. “You were never very handsome to begin with.” Fortunately, he disdains pity, “the only thing worse than flagrant antagonism.” And he’s modest about his skills: “I trapped with something that outshone total incompetence,” sometimes proceeding “tentatively like an old lady upon cobblestones.” The arctic climes must breed self-reliance and toughness, which are evident even in Sven’s two dogs, memorable characters themselves. His first canine, Eberhard, is “a fractious, willful brute” that is sometimes his only companion. Meanwhile, Europe convulses in two world wars, and he’ll be lucky if the madness of civilization doesn’t affect him.

Sven’s ugliness is only skin-deep, and readers will love the beauty and depth of his story.

“A couple’s foray into homeownership takes a turn for the terrifying.”

**THIS THING BETWEEN US**

Moreno, Gus

MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux (272 pp.)

$17.00 paper  |  Oct. 12, 2021

978-0-374-53923-8

A couple’s foray into homeownership takes a turn for the terrifying.

In Moreno’s bone-chilling debut, Vera and Thiago Alvarez assume there are rational explanations for the phenomena plaguing their recently purchased Chicago condominium. That said, the exterminator can’t find any vermin to account for the scratching in the walls, and the HVAC technician absolves their air conditioner of blame for the cold spots and nocturnal clangs. When the pair’s new Itza smart speaker starts answering unasked questions and placing unsolicited orders for items such as industrial-strength lye and a book on communicating with the dead, they deem it defective; however, a replacement device proves no less willful. The Alvarezes attempt to track down their unit’s former occupant in hopes that she can shed some light, but before they can connect with the woman, Vera has a freak accident and dies, sparking a media storm. Unable to cope with his emotions, the attention, or the condo’s escalating weirdness, Thiago crushes the Itza with his truck and uses Vera’s life insurance to buy a fully furnished cabin near Estes Park, Colorado. His grief chases him west, though, along with a manipulative, malevolent entity determined to gain entrance to this world. Thiago’s intimate first-person narration reads like a letter written in hindsight, addressed to a now-dead Vera, and suffused with pain and regret. Moreno makes clever use of structure to maximize dread, opening with Vera’s funeral and then doubling back, while references to famous horror novels and films trick readers into thinking they’re following a familiar path before the tragic plot veers wildly off-map.

Harrowing existential horror that lingers like a nightmare.

**PERFECT TIMING**

Nicholls, Owen

Dell (384 pp.)

$17.00 paper  |  Sep. 7, 2021

978-1-984826-89-3

A comedian and a musician just might be a perfect match, if only they can get the timing right.

Jess Henson meets Tom Delaney when he literally runs into her, knocking her to the ground outside an Indian restaurant in Edinburgh. She’s an up-and-coming comedian who dreams of having her big break, while he’s in a band that hopes to find success. Despite their moveworthy meet-cute, Tom runs off, squashing any hope for a romance. They meet again when they’re both featured at an artist showcase. They each have their own problems—Jess has a distrust of most people
because her dad split when she was a kid, while Tom has severe anxiety that causes him to say the wrong things, self-medicate with alcohol, and even make up a fake girlfriend so his band mates won’t think he’s pathetic—but despite their communication problems, they feel a connection and spend a perfect evening together. That is, until they get jumped by some drunk football fans and Tom ends up in the hospital. Jess comes along, but then Tom’s best friend shows up and mentions Tom’s (fake) girlfriend. Tom is too doped up on painkillers to set the record straight, and Jess leaves, thus beginning a yearslong string of near misses and almost-kisses for Jess and Tom. Each time they reconnect, there’s something in the way—Jess’ bitterness, Tom’s anxiety, one of them seeing someone else. As their careers take off, they both have to figure out exactly what success means for them—and whether it involves each other. Nicholls writes with warmth and humor, giving Jess and Tom fully developed lives, friends, and families. It’s satisfying to watch them grow over the years, though the personal failings that keep them apart can be frustrating to read as their would-be relationship stalls again and again. Nicholls isn’t afraid to let Tom and Jess get mean and deal with personal tragedy (such as Tom’s musician grandfather’s death, Tom’s alcoholism and anxiety, and Jess’ relationship with her absent father), giving the story a realism that anchors the lighter aspects of their romance.

An angst-filled love story about the value of growth and understanding.

SANKOFA
Onuzo, Chibundu
Catapult (304 pp.)
$26.00 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-64622-083-0

A biracial British woman begins a quest to find her African father.

Anna Bain was raised in London by a single White mother, never knowing her African-born Black father. Now she’s going through a kind of midlife
Anna sees an opportunity to reconnect with her African heritage. Her father, Francis Aggrey, was an international student in London when he met her mother, Bronwen Bain, in 1969. Francis and Bronwen began a passionate affair, but Francis returned home without ever realizing the Welsh teenager was pregnant. Anna becomes something of a detective, taking the diary to a renowned professor in Edinburgh for authentication and tracking down people mentioned in it. Eventually, she discovers that her father changed his name to Kofi Adjei and was later elected prime minister of the newly formed (fictional) country of Bamana. Anna’s journey to Bamana to meet her father tests her mettle after decades of complacency as a self-described housewife dependent on her husband to make the decisions in their comfortable life. Some plot twists veer toward the melodramatic—Anna is asked to help a girl who’s been accused of witchcraft; she has an encounter with corrupt police—and seem designed to explain stereotypes about African culture to Western readers. Anna’s experiences growing up in Britain as a woman of color are also underexplored. However, Francis Aggrey/Kofi Adjei is a fantastic, charismatic character, and every scene he’s in crackles with energy. The title refers to a mythical bird that “flies forwards with its head facing back,” a potent symbol for Anna, who must learn to embrace the new opportunities that come with change.

An engagingly written journey of self-discovery.

**The Pastor**

Orstavik, Hanne

*Trans. by Aitken, Martin*

Archipelago (280 pp.)

$20.00 paper | Oct. 5, 2021

978-1-953861-08-5

A pastor wrestles with her faith in a small Norwegian town.

After the suicide of her friend Kristiane, a puppeteer, Liv heads north from a seminary in Germany where she’s been pursuing a doctorate in theology to become the assistant to the parish priest in a remote Norwegian town. A year later, she still struggles to process her feelings about Kristiane’s death. Triggered by the suicide of the 19-year-old daughter of one of her parishioners, Liv’s thoughts lurch awkwardly in an undiluted stream of consciousness between the present day and memories of Kristiane—someone she describes repeatedly, and enigmatically, as “weightless”—reviving her regret over an argument she feels somehow may have contributed to her friend’s decision to take her life. To add to Liv’s anguish over what she confesses is “such a tangle, a hopeless endeavor to unravel an impossible tangle,” she frequently digresses to the subject of her doctoral research—the rebellion in 1892 of the Indigenous Sami against Norwegian settlers and their state church that “converged in a single point, a single channel, which was the language of Christianity.” The uprising occurred in a town several hours from Liv’s church, and she has an opportunity to visit the site when she attends a synod conference there. At that meeting, Liv, the only female priest in attendance, is confronted with the undisguised sexism of some of her colleagues, but that intriguing plot turn comes late in the novel and is abandoned quickly when another suicide attempt in Liv’s parish compels her to rush home. Ørstavik successfully evokes the atmosphere of life in rural Norway in winter, but the fact that her protagonist feels equally chilly and distant robs the story of much of its emotional force.

The struggles of a young clergywoman make for a less compelling story.

**The Archivist**

Pickett, Rex

Blackstone (700 pp.)

$29.99 | Nov. 9, 2021

978-1-5385-1964-6

Archival work is a lot more perilous ethically and even existentially than you ever imagined according to this triple-decker from the author of *Sideways* (2004). Emily Snow has come from Austin’s real-life Harry Ransom Center to San Diego’s fictional Regents University to serve as the project archivist for the collected papers of Pulitzer Prize–winning novelist Raymond West. It’s an exciting assignment not only because of the size of the archive, which runs to 77 linear feet, but because West, unlike most literary lions who get this treatment, is still very much alive, teaching at Regents, and whispered to be a favorite for the next Nobel Prize in literature. Even before she’s learned to allow extra time to negotiate San Diego traffic in her morning commute, Emily senses crosscurrents in the archive. Helena Blackwell, the veteran director of Special Collections, can barely bring herself to mention the name of Emily’s predecessor, Nadia Fontaine, who drowned off Black’s Beach shortly after she was removed from the project. Digital archivist Joel Beery, who shares Emily’s love of surfing, tells her enough about Nadia, who swam half a mile every day, to make it seem highly unlikely that her death was accidental. Most important, the materials Emily finds in the dark archive—a digital hodgepodge of uncataloged material Joel helps Emily get unauthorized access to—reveal that Nadia had violated a fundamental professional taboo by carrying on a torrid affair with West and provide an extensive draft of *The Archivist*, a secret tell-all account of their relationship that West’s wife, wealthy donor Elizabeth West, would do anything to keep from the light of day. Now Emily faces her own fraught ethical dilemmas and serious threats from violent criminals.

Immensely long but as deeply, disturbingly immersive as the archive at its heart.
THE BLUE BOOK OF NEBO
Ros, Manon Steffan
Trans. by the author
Deep Vellum (156 pp.)
$19.95 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-64605-100-7

A mother and son journal their way through the end of the world.

Veteran writer Ros structures this novel as diary entries written by Dylan and his mother, Rowenna, in the tiny Welsh town of Nebo, which has been emptied following a nuclear apocalypse they call The End. (A nuclear war has devastated America at the very least, and a nuclear power plant meltdown occurs closer to home.) The two have been breaking into abandoned houses for supplies (including notebooks like the “blue book” of the title) to sustain themselves and Rowenna’s young daughter, Mona. It’s clear early on in this trim novel that the usual sense of post-apocalyptic dread doesn’t apply here: The power’s out, but there are no marauding thugs, military incursions, or other imminent threats. And though there’s evidence that the world’s gone off-kilter (like a mutated two-headed hare and masses of slugs escaping the poisoned soil), the prevailing theme is renewal. Dylan’s entries are thick with observations of nature and pride in self-subsistence. Rowenna’s entries are at first brooding, both about The End and her own story, particularly the (absent) fathers of her children. But as the years tracked by the novel press on, she shifts toward more upbeat observations as well. Rowenna reaccesses her grasp of Welsh-language reading and writing, symbolizing the idea that progress distanced us from our roots and that perhaps a reboot isn’t such a bad thing. (Ros translated the book herself from the original Welsh.) The who-needs-civilization-anyhow perspective can get cloying. (“Cooking is a lovely thing. You make something, and then you get to eat it.”) But Rowenna’s flintiness and Dylan’s maturity keep this brief novel from becoming overly simplistic. And a closing twist is both ambiguous and further challenges typical ideas about the genre.

A curiously sweet-tempered novel that finds the upside of global catastrophe.

THE LAST MONA LISA
Santlofer, Jonathan
Sourcebooks Landmark (400 pp.)
$14.49 paper | Aug. 17, 2021
978-1-72824-076-3

What might have happened to the Mona Lisa when it was stolen from the Louvre in 1911 and stayed missing for two years?

Art historian Luke Perrone has been obsessed with the history of the Mona Lisa ever since learning that his great-grandfather Vincenzo Peruggia was the man who stole it from the Louvre. When he’s contacted by an Italian professor who claims to know the location of Vincenzo’s journal, Luke immediately drops everything and flies to Florence. There, he becomes drawn into two mysteries: one from the past (why did Peruggia steal the painting?) and one from the present (why has everyone who’s recently encountered the journal died?). As he unravels the story of the first, he becomes more deeply embroiled in the second and begins to fear for his own safety—especially when he finds out he’s being watched. With the help of a beautiful American woman; an INTERPOL agent; and a famous art forger he meets in Paris, Luke begins to wonder whether the painting hanging in the Louvre, returned after the theft, is even the true Mona Lisa. Someone clearly cares enough about the answer to keep killing those who know about the journal, so Luke must rush to find the answers before he’s next. Through Vincenzo’s story as well as occasional chapters that share background on supporting characters, Santlofer crafts a layered and absorbing art mystery, complete with exciting action scenes and beautiful descriptions of the city of Florence and its art as well as Paris and Nice. It’s the human story at the heart of it, though, that
“A novel of family dysfunction that veers into startling and original territory.”

THE SURVIVORS

Schulman, Alex

Trans. by Willson-Broyles, Rachel

Doubleday (240 pp.)
$20.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-0-385-54756-7

Three sons of alcoholic parents return to an idyllic setting of long-ago trauma.

Fluidly translated from the Swedish by Willson-Broyles, this is Schulman’s first U.S. publication. In a frame story anchoring the narrative, three brothers have convened, after a long absence, at their family cabin on a lake to scatter their mother’s ashes. In the mind of protagonist Benjamin, the middle brother, events and memories spiral and circle in flashback— it’s a take-no-prisoners kind of nonlinearity. During childhood summers at the lake, Benjamin, his older brother, Nils, and irascible younger brother, Pierre, get into various scrapes. “Mom and Dad,” as they’re always called, exercise minimal supervision between frequent “siestas” and extended cocktail hours, leaving the children to disappear for hours in the woods and nearly drown in the lake. Their parents’ volatility and inconsistent care have fostered an awkward semi-estrangement among the adult siblings, which, at the water’s edge, erupts into a brawl, with their mother’s urn weaponized. Shocks escalate, from the boys’ unthinking cruelty toward a fish to a disastrous family outing on Midsummer Eve to the heist of Mom’s ashes from a crematory. All this may seem over-the-top, but Benjamin’s meditative perspective lends gravitas to the proceedings. His memories hover over one incident he recoils from confronting, even questioning his own sanity to avoid it. A pivotal figure in the novel is the family dog, Molly, a bellwether of unease; she is anxious and seems to only trust Benjamin and Mom. The behavior of Mom in particular is portrayed as classic alcoholic personality disorder; but it slowly dawns on the reader that there is far more to it than that. A final truth emerges, forcing the reader to reevaluate all that has gone before.

A novel of family dysfunction that veers into startling and original territory.

LAST WORDS ON EARTH

Serena, Javier

Trans. by Whittmire, Katie

Open Letter (120 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-948830-32-4

A tale of artistic dedication inspired by the life of Roberto Bolaño.

The first novel in English translation by the Spanish-born author Serena isn’t strictly a roman à clef about Bolaño. For one thing, its hero, Ricardo Funes, is Peruvian, not Chilean. But the arc of Funes’ life bears a strong resemblance: an early hand-to-mouth literary apprenticeship in Mexico, a later
move to Spain, then an explosion of global success until his
career was cut short by illness. Here, Funes’ story is told by
three narrators. Fernando, a fellow writer, recalls Funes from
his early days in Mexico’s “negacionismo” literary movement
that thumbed its nose at the literary mainstream. Funes’
wife, Guadalupe, remembers their courtship in Spain and
his yearslong efforts to balance his ambitions with marriage
and parenthood. And Funes himself concludes with his own
moody contemplation on his career. In each case, the prevail-
ing theme is uncompromising commitment to artistic ideals,
to the point where Fernando’s descriptions of the writer are
nearly Christlike: “He held himself with the gravitas befitting
a liturgy: his sandaled feet were planted firmly in the mud....”
This sometimes gets repetitive and hagiographic, but Serena
is also alert to details that color and complicate Funes’ obses-
sive character: his determination to woo Guadalupe (a mega-
phone is involved), his close critical attention to porn films, his
need to email manuscript instructions to his editor even as
he nears death. And Serena channels his observations about
creativity into elegant sentences (via Whittemore’s transla-
tion) that evoke the storm-clouded intensity of Bolaño’s prose
in books like 2666. (This is the first of two companion novels
by Serena; the forthcoming Atila is about the Spanish writer
Aliocha Coll.)

A meditative tribute to perseverance and literary integrity.

THE CELLIST
Silva, Daniel
Harper (480 pp.)
$19.42 | Jul. 13, 2021
978-0-06-283486-7

Gabriel Allon goes after the deadliest
weapon at the Russian president’s dis-
posal—his money.

When CIA agent–turned–art dealer
Sarah Bancroft finds the dead body of
Viktor Orlov, a wealthy newspaper pub-
lisher and Russian dissident, the grim discovery leads Gabriel
Allon, the head of Israel’s intelligence service, to a treasure
trove of documents detailing massive financial crimes. Once he
tracks down the woman who leaked these documents, Gabriel
may finally have the tools he needs to take down the autocrat in
the Kremlin. “A nuclear bomb can only be dropped once. But
money can be wielded every day with no fallout and no threat of
mutually assured destruction.” This bit of wisdom comes from
a Russian operative Gabriel captured in The Other Woman (2018),
and Silva makes a persuasive case that the best way to neutral-
ize the threat of troll farms and disinformation campaigns is to
starve these operations of cash. But this is a thriller, not an essay
in Foreign Policy. It turns out that money laundering isn’t inher-
ently exciting, and Silva does little to make it so. Identifying the
shadowy figure who manages the Russian president’s fortune is
easy, as is infiltrating his world. All the characters in this uni-
verse are types, but most of them are crafted with verisimili-
tude sufficient to keep the reader engaged. The titular cellist,
When a French teenager inherits a painful curse, ordinary life ends and a quest for healing begins.

Poor Ninon! All her life she’s been fascinated by the legendary curse that has affected the oldest female child in each generation of her family since Marie Lacaze suffered dancing fits in 1518: There have been “hunchbacks, epilepsy, aphasia, somnambulism, scabies...a third breast sprouting from the abdomen, nails and teeth that crumble like sand and never grow back....” Her own mother lost the ability to see colors at the age of 16, making her indifferent to Pixar animated films and superhero blockbusters. But when Ninon’s variation arrives in the second half of her senior year of high school, it is far more disruptive. “Normally it’s the Rihanna ringtone on her cellphone—Bitch better have my money—that wakes her at 7 a.m.,” but one day it’s a sudden, intense, horribly painful burning sensation in her arms when anything—sheet, T-shirt, stuffed unicorn, crumpled piece of paper—touches them. Of course she can’t go to school, and in fact she won’t even graduate, now condemned to full-time patienthood as she visits one doctor after the next, seeking relief from this outrageous torture (vodka and weed help only a little). No cure is forthcoming, but at least the dermatologist has a diagnosis—dynamic tactile allodynia. “It’s not serious, it’s mysterious, it’s trying, it’s rare, but you don’t die from it, it’s being researched, a little, it’s not very profitable yet, but still, people are interested in it, kind of.” This novel from Sorman, a prizewinning novelist based in Paris, comes to us in a beautiful translation by Vergnaud, with an introduction by Catherine Lacey propounding a feminist interpretation, in case you might miss it. The pacing is rather French—i.e., slow—but the ending is worth getting to.

Will appeal to mystic intellectuals, Francophile feminists, and skeptics of both Western and Eastern medicine.

**MISS KOPP INVESTIGATES**

*Stewart, Amy*

Mariner/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (304 pp.)

$15.99 paper  |  Sep. 7, 2021

978-0-316-09311-4

Youngest sibling Fleurette takes up sleuthing on her own in the seventh Kopp Sisters adventure. It opens on a grim note: The sudden death of their brother, Francis, in January 1919 has left the sisters responsible for his pregnant widow, his two older children, and a mountain of debt they had no inkling of. Each of them makes painful sacrifices: Constance gives up her dream job with the FBI in Washington; Norma abandons her plan to live a freer life in Europe; and a bout with scarlet fever has damaged Fleurette’s voice and her nascent stage career. She’s delighted when a lawyer offers her a well-paying gig as a “professional co-respondent,” helping couples who need to prove adultery to get divorced by posing for compromising photos with the husbands. Although nothing even close to adultery occurs, Fleurette knows her sisters would disapprove, and indeed Constance explodes when she finds out. But Fleurette is sick of being told what to do by Constance and storms off; her ignorance of the fact (which readers of previous novels already know) that she is actually Constance’s illegitimate daughter makes their conflict in this volume particularly wrenching. However, the mysterious behavior of one of the lawyer’s clients gets Fleurette involved in what proves to be a confidence scam targeting vulnerable women, and her attempts to bring the wrongdoer to justice land her in jail. Her sisters come to the rescue, each making her individual, forceful contribution to the satisfying resolution of multiple mysteries: Norma’s overbearing nature is instrumental in unravelling Francis’ catastrophic finances; Constance enlists her law enforcement know-how to smooth over Fleurette’s legal troubles. (As usual, Stewart explains in endnotes what in this fact-based story actually happened and what she invented.) It’s a pleasure to watch Fleurette, rather tiresomely vain and self-centered in earlier novels, mature into a strong, independent woman very much in the Kopp mold. As always, Stewart leaves us with the welcome promise of more Kopp sisters adventures to come.

**One of the strongest entries yet in this deservedly popular historical series.**

**LOOK AT US**

*Toma, T.L.*

Bellevue Literary Press (368 pp.)

$16.99 paper  |  Oct. 12, 2021

978-1-942658-91-7

A family life’s is made both richer and more complicated by the arrival of a new nanny:

Martin and Lily are a seemingly enviable couple: Each has a relatively successful career (Martin with an investment firm as a market analyst and Lily as a corporate lawyer); with the help of Lily’s family money, the two have a spacious home near New York City and live quite well; and they have young twin boys. When their longtime nanny moves to California, she seems irreplaceable until Maeve, a 20-year-old woman newly arrived from Ireland, agrees to be their live-in au pair. Maeve soon becomes integral to the family, bringing joy to the kids, order to the house, and a spark to Lily and Martin’s otherwise monotonous and hollow 8-year-old marriage. Both Martin and Lily struggle to remember how they came to each other and this moment in their lives, especially Martin, who had planned to
Shrouded in sorrow and Scandinavian gloom and a central part of a masterwork of modernist literature.

A series of strange occurrences befalls a Tennessee zoo in the summer of 1926.

Two Feathers is one of the star attractions at the Glendale Park Zoo in Nashville. All her life, she’s been an entertainer, having grown up on the Miller Brothers 101 Ranch in Oklahoma, “the last Wild West show in existence.” Now, at Glendale, she’s reached the pinnacle of her career: She’s been given a stage name that plays on her Cherokee identity (her real name is Nancy) and a skill that brings in the crowds: horse diving. Two’s act may be beloved by the crowds, but she struggles socially; as a Native American, she is decidedly apart from White society and is most at home with her friend Hank Crawford, who tends the park’s animals despite coming from an affluent Black family. When Two has a serious accident during her act, the world of the zoo grows exponentially odder, and the novel’s points of view multiply. Animals fall ill. Clive Lovett, the zookeeper and park manager, moves from being traumatized by his experiences fighting for England in the First World War to watching and trying to affect the living realm. Verble, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, has written an ambitious novel that’s impressive in its scope and concept: Glendale Park Zoo and the 101 are rife with narrative possibility and give the author a chance to examine a fascinating cross section of race and class and the uneasy relations between all manner of characters. The research lies heavily on the novel’s frame, though, and readers may find themselves wishing to sweep away some of the exposition to stick with Two and the life she attempts to carve out for herself against the weight of history.

An overflowing narrative about the ubiquitous presence of the past.

“A series of strange occurrences befalls a Tennessee zoo in the summer of 1926.”
“Williams’ small gems are as dense and beautiful as diamonds, compressed from the carbon of daily life.”

**HOW HIGH? THAT HIGH**

**Stories**

**Williams, Diane**

Soho (128 pp.)

$25.00 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-1-641-29306-8

Williams is a magician of the miniature.

Her 10th book of short fiction features 34 stories, all in the span of 128 pages. But don’t let their diminutive stature fool you: These pieces pack a punch. Brief, elliptical, steeped in longing—or is that lust?—they offer slices of life that rely on interior more than exterior details, which is to say they are small road maps of the soul. Williams sets the stage in “Upper Loop,” which opens the collection. “I am trying to think if there’s any reason for having fun anymore on any level?” she (or her anonymous narrator) wonders. “I know that that’s not the kind of thing people usually talk about.” That pair of sentences might stand as a thesis statement for the entire book. Williams’ characters—if we can call them that; many are rumors of characters, impressions—are aging, lost, and often lonely, trying to come to grips with the elusiveness only draws us in. “She’ll Love Me for It” offers a vivid snapshot of a grieving woman before raising this surprising question: “Where is her capacity for being a sly tease? for being playful?” In less than two pages, the story gives us layers, multitudes. Something similar might be said of all the pieces here, which are rigorous in both language and emotion, using nuance and inference to explore the implications, the contradictions, that people rarely share aloud. “On her stovetop, for example,” Williams writes in the magnificent “What Is Given With Pleasure and Received With Admiration?” “an iron pot she owns has been scoured and scooped out even more than she has.”

Williams’ small gems are as dense and beautiful as diamonds, compressed from the carbon of daily life.

**STILL LIFE**

**Winman, Sarah**

Putnam (400 pp.)

$27.00 | Nov. 2, 2021

978-0-593-33075-3

An epic about a family of friends who make the city of Florence their home in the mid-to-late 20th century.

Evelyn Skinner, an art teacher and Englishwoman approaching 64 years of age, meets Ulysses Temper, a 24-year-old private from London, on the side of an Italian road in 1944, while bombs are falling on distant hills. At its core, this slowly unfolding narrative is the story of their friendship, though it is also a story of the creation of a family of friends, transplanted from London to Italy: pub owner Col; pub worker, amateur singer, and eventual mother Peg; pianist Pete; elderly friend Cressy; child Alys; a bright blue parrot, Claude; and ultimately, of course, Evelyn. This story winds and wanders through the years, in the end covering 1901 to 1979, as Ulysses and Cressy establish a successful pensione in Florence, Alys grows up, and Evelyn and the others grow older. This is a slow-paced narrative that unfolds as a love story to Florence and a love story to love—romantic, platonic, familial, parental, friend, community, Sapphic, and gay love are all celebrated. Art history is often mentioned, as are parallels to the pensione in E.M. Forster’s *A Room With a View*. While this is a book to settle into, the narrative feels almost breathless at times, in part due to the lack of quotation marks around the dialogue, which makes it feel as if the unknown narrator is relating a long story deep into the night.

An unexpected treatise on the many forms love and beauty can take, set against the backdrop of Florence.

**FOUL PLAY**

**Woods, Stuart**

Putnam (352 pp.)

$28.00 | Oct. 5, 2021

978-0-593-33169-9

A new client spells nothing but trouble for Stone Barrington and himself.

Now that he’s sold his family business for $250 million, Shepherd Troutman has come to New York to spread his wings. And it’s hard to imagine any person in fiction or real life better able to help him spend gobs of money than Stone. Before he can start signing those checks for the Bentley and the suite at the Carlyle Hotel, though, Shep has to get rescued from outside Stone’s Turtle Bay home, where a masked thug has beaten him senseless, and from any suspicion of having strangled the nameless call girl who turns up in his suite at the Carlyle—an episode that makes him think twice about that particular purchase. As the attacks continue, it becomes clear that someone has it in for Shep, and the someone, under the fig-leaf disguise of a Delaware corporation, is Russian mobster Gregor Kronk. There’s no negotiating with Kronk, Stone’s security advisers tell him after he’s spirited Shep and Roderick Troutman, the father who faked his own death in order to avoid involvement, out of New York; the only sane strategy is to give him what he wants, a series of patents worth another $250 million. Naturally, this perfectly reasonable advice grates on Stone, and the battle between good and evil is on once again, this time with two pleasing novelties: a plot twist most readers won’t see coming (and some won’t believe even after it arrives) and a focus, increasingly rare in Woods’ thrillers-by-the-yard, on actually unfolding a single sustained narrative with limited interruptions for sex, posturing, upscale spending, and loose ends.

Stone’s least indulgent adventure in years. Never say never!
I could make you understand me much more clearly.” Only Rima herself hardly ever goes out. One morning, however, she starts walking, she finds it difficult to stop, so when her mother has to leave her alone in the one-room apartment where they live with Rima’s older brother, she tethers Rima to the bedpost. Rima herself hardly ever goes out. One morning, however, she and her mother set off across town to visit the librarian who has to leave her alone in the one-room apartment where they live with Rima’s older brother, she tethers Rima to the bedpost. Rima herself hardly ever goes out. One morning, however, she and her mother set off across town to visit the librarian who took Rima under her wing—teaching her to read, supplying her with pens and drawing paper. They’re stopped at a checkpoint, and what happens there sets in motion the events of the rest of this harrowing novel. It grows bleaker and bleaker as it progresses. The only real light spot is Rima herself, who makes for a brilliant guide—though she’d probably disagree. “Drawing is better than words,” she says at one point. “If I had my paints, I could make you understand me much more clearly.” Only toward the end does the novel’s central conceit—the conditions under which Rima is writing the words we’re reading—begin to show any cracks. Still, Rima is a fantastic character, and if the novel is imperfect, it’s worth reading for Rima alone. That’s a major success in itself.

A flawed novel with a main character whose quirks and eccentricities more than make up for it.

**M Y S T E R Y**

**DOWN THE HATCH**

Beaton, M.C.

Minotaur (240 pp.)

$26.99 | Oct. 26, 2021

978-1-2508-1613-9

Quick-tempered private detective Agatha Raisin gets involved in several cases that prove dangerous to her health.

Out for a lunchtime walk, Agatha hears screams and comes upon a distressed elderly couple and a dead body. She’s quite certain the man known as the Admiral was poisoned, but her nemesis, the incompetent DCI Wilkes, dismisses his death as an accident. As usual, Agatha’s love life is a bit of a mess. She’s on the outs with Sir Charles Fraith after a series of misunderstandings. Her former husband, James Lacey, is back to wooing her. And she makes an enemy of the new coroner after refusing his crude advances. When Raisin Investigations gets a phone call from a Mr. Collins, who insists that “strange creatures keep appearing” in his garden, including “three small wizards dressed all in black, with orange hats and long white beards,” James insists that she investigate; they discover that Collins’ seemingly unbelievable descriptions are actually of rare animals that have escaped from traffickers of exotic species. After she calls the police in, Agatha makes a bad enemy in the one man who gets away. The Admiral’s less than loving widow begs her to find his killer; one of the dead man’s former loves is killed in a hit-and-run; and a friend of Charles’ hires her in a paternity case that will require all her staff and longtime friends to solve.

This second posthumous adventure contains plenty of mystery plus all the usual quota of trouble for the colorful heroine.
NO MEMES OF ESCAPE
Blacke, Olivia
Berkley (320 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Oct. 5, 2021
978-0-593-19790-5

An escape room poses Brooklyn hipsters a deadly challenge.
Odessa Dean can't seem to get over the wonder that is Williamsburg. Catsitting while her aunt travels in Europe, the visitor from tiny Piney Island, Louisiana, is thrilled by the bustling streets, lavish green parks, and exotic shops (none of which she can afford to patronize), all within blocks of the doorman apartment building in which she's temporarily staying. Parker Reed, the chef at Untapped Books & Café, where Odessa toils for meager wages, introduces her to all manner of exotic fare. And new friend Izzy Wilson protects the naïve Odessa from the dangers her trusting nature might expose her to. But even Izzy thinks an escape room—a treat far too expensive for Odessa's limited budget—might be fun. So when Izzy's childhood friends Victoria Marsh and Gennifer Buckley produce two extra tickets to Verrazzano-Narrows Escape, Odessa and Izzy tag along. Their free adventure turns out to carry a heavy price. The escape room is a series of puzzle rooms, and the evening is capped when Vickie's found dead in one of them. Now Odessa has two problems: The police zero in on Izzy as their prime suspect, and Aunt Melanie returns from abroad with a fractured ankle. How can she exonerate her best friend? And how can she ever find an affordable apartment in Brooklyn?

The determined heroine carries the reader past even the most improbable plot twists.

DECK THE DONUTS
Bolton, Ginger
Kensington (256 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-4967-2560-8

Murder disrupts a Wisconsin town's winter celebration. Emily Westhill is going all out for Fallingbrook’s Ice and Lights Festival. Not only is her Deputy Donut lavishly decorated, but she’s commissioned a giant Frosty the Donut ice sculpture to be displayed in the town square. Even the crash of a tour bus on a nearby highway can't dampen the holiday feelings. Although bus driver Travis Harrison is injured badly enough to wind up in the hospital, Emily's late husband's parents, Tom and Cindy, simply parcel out the stranded passengers to willing Fallingbrook families. Emily offers her own guest room to tour guide Paige, who's mildly traumatized since Travis is her boyfriend and the tour passengers have started blaming him for the wreck. Her trauma rises into the danger zone when Travis' body is discovered, clad only in a hospital gown, under the toppled Frosty statue. As Emily's boyfriend, Brent, the local police detective who'd been investigating the crash, turns his attention to the murder, the stranded families grow restless as their calls to the tour company go unanswered. Between supporting Brent and protecting Paige, Emily has her hands full, but she still manages to keep Fallingbrookers and their hungry houseguests supplied with a steady stream of tasty holiday treats.

A standard small-town cozy with jingle bells.

GOD REST YE, ROYAL GENTLEMEN
Bowen, Rhys
Berkley (304 pp.)
$26.00 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-0-440-0000-0-8

Christmas 1935 finds murder stalking the British royal family. Lady Georgiana Rannoch is settling into married life with dashing Darcy O’Mara, who for once isn’t off on some secret government mission. When the house party she’s planned falls apart because almost no one she’s invited can come, she accepts an invitation of her own. Darcy’s eccentric aunt Ermintrude asks the newlyweds to Wymondham Hall, on the edge of the royal Sandringham estate, and hints that Queen Mary especially wants Georgiana to come. There are enough rooms on offer to allow the inclusion of Georgie’s brother, Binky, the Duke of Rannoch, his annoying wife, Fig, their children, and Georgie’s mother, the dowager Duchess, who’s suddenly arrived from Germany. Georgie even brings along Queenie, her cook, who has a reputation for causing problems. The biggest surprise is the arrival of Wallis Simpson, whom Georgie’s cousin David, the Prince of Wales, wants close by his side while he visits his ailing father. The British press has been keeping Mrs. Simpson, who’s about to divorce her husband, a secret from the public, but the scandal she’s caused is well known among the aristocracy. David is almost shot during a hunt; Mrs. Simpson is knocked out; and Georgie’s ride with the prince’s friend results in his death. Are these all accidents or cleverly concealed murder attempts? Queen Mary asks Georgie, who has a track record of successful sleuthing, to discover the truth.

Britain teeters on the brink of scandal and war in this charming combination of history and mystery.
Finally it can be told: One of Agatha Christie's most popular novels was inspired by a murder at her (fictional) manor house solved by her (fictional) housekeeper.

Since Phyllida Bright was a nurse's aide during the Great War, she doesn't turn a hair when she discovers the body of Charles Waring, stabbed in the neck with a fountain pen. The murder is a bit of an embarrassment, though, since Waring was a guest at Mallowan Hall, though an uninvited one who'd arrived only the night before, and since he doesn't really work, as he'd claimed, for the Times of London (which first-time novelist Cambridge calls the London Times). The mystery of who killed him seems less impenetrable than the mystery of why archaeologist Max Mallowan and his wife, famed mystery writer Agatha Christie, would have given the interloper a bed for the night and asked him to dinner with their invited guests: Paul and Amelia Hartford, Odell and Dora Budgely-Rhodes, Geoffrey and Tana Devine, and two single gentlemen, Tuddy Sloup and Stan Grimson. But Phyllida, once she gets over her initial reaction (how will they clean up those bloodstains?), briskly gets down to it, searching the forgettable guests' rooms for incriminating evidence, questioning the Mallowans' 14 servants for further information, and preparing an elaborately self-serving denouement, all the while overlooking the disdain of DI Cork and the severely limited participation of Mrs. Agatha, first-time novelist Cambridge calls the leading situation for her vastly more successful novel The Body in the Library.

Christie fans can expect a series. Don't say you weren't warned.

The title says it all: juge d'instruction Henri Bencolin outdoes himself in this 1932 yarn, perhaps the most atmospheric of all Carr's floridly atmospheric mysteries.

Bencolin and Marle find something even more shocking: the corpse of Odette's friend Claudine Martel nestled in the arms of the Satyr of the Seine, one of the Musée Augustin's signature attractions. A telltale scrap of paper leads the sleuths to Etienne Galant, the owner of the neighboring Club of Coloured Masks, who retired from teaching English literature at Christ Church College, Oxford, to blackmail high-society contemporaries like Odette's father whose depravity made them irresistible targets. Any neighborhood that features both a waxworks and a house of debauchery guarantees the creepes, and the denouement features one of the weirdest, wildest confrontations ever between the detective and the murderer. An earlier, lesser bonus story from Carr's college days, “The Murder in Number Four,” sets Bencolin the task of figuring out who strangled a notorious diamond smuggler without being seen entering or leaving his compartment aboard the Blue Arrow train from Dieppe to Paris.

If this slice of Grand Guignol doesn't give you the yips, you're probably yip-proof. Your loss.
Hubert. Little as Edwina and Beryl relish what they consider defend housewife Madelyn Forsythe from an absurd prostitu dy's self-assurance is close to an all-time low; she’s just failed to a pointless deception, they can see the wisdom of temporarily and flamboyant artist Louis Langdon Beck. The point of the add to the fun.

actor Patrick McNabb, whose pending divorce action ended in otherwise improbable virtually no one could see it coming. Copperman's confidence in Sandy's skills is exceeded only by his charm in, wheedling her into compliance. But Patrick’s wille to help fellow thespian Cynthia Sutton negotiate a property settlement with Cynthia’s soon-to-be ex-spouse. Sandy's self-assurance is close to an all-time low; she’s just failed to defend housewife Madelyn Forsythe from an absurd prostitution charge stemming from an online flirtation. But Patrick’s confidence in Sandy's skills is exceeded only by his charm in wheedling her into compliance. Of course, history repeats itself, though this time the murder victim is not Sandy's client's spouse but her client’s mother-in-law. Sandy gets shot at, arrested, and, and, when the final hammer falls, stuck with one verdict so hilariously improbable virtually no one could see it coming. Copper man, the creator of a host of zany franchise characters, shows that Byzantine twists and turns, if plotted carefully enough, just add to the fun.

Legal mayhem at its finest.

Sandy Moss defends a second criminal case, and it’s a doozy:

When the former prosecutor left New Jersey for sunny LA, she wanted a change in more than the weather. Tired of dealing with sociopaths, she joined the family law division of Seaton, Taylor, Evans and Wentworth, hoping that even when her clients were angry enough to kill their ex-spouses, they wouldn’t. An unfortunate early misstep found Sandy defending actor Patrick McNabb, whose pending divorce action ended in homicide. Now Patrick, convinced that Sandy is a legal genius, wants her to help fellow thespian Cynthia Sutton negotiate a property settlement with Cynthia’s soon-to-be ex-spouse. Sandy’s self-assurance is close to an all-time low; she’s just failed to defend housewife Madelyn Forsythe from an absurd prostitution charge stemming from an online flirtation. But Patrick’s confidence in Sandy’s skills is exceeded only by his charm in wheedling her into compliance. Of course, history repeats itself, though this time the murder victim is not Sandy’s client’s spouse but her client’s mother-in-law. Sandy gets shot at, arrested, and, and, when the final hammer falls, stuck with one verdict so hilariously improbable virtually no one could see it coming. Copperman, the creator of a host of zany franchise characters, shows that Byzantine twists and turns, if plotted carefully enough, just add to the fun.

Legal mayhem at its finest.

MURDER IN AN ENGLISH GLADE
Ellicott, Jessica
Kensington (304 pp.)
$26.00 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-4967-2485-4

With some help from the help, Dav enport and Helliwell Private Enquiry Agency scores another case.

Neither Edwina Davenport nor her American partner, Beryl Helliwell, considers Constance Maitland’s initial offer a plum. Constance, who shares a large fortune with Hubert, the brother who owns Maitland Cigarettes, wants to hire the lady sleuths not to solve an actual crime, but to pretend to investigate an imaginary illicit relationship between Hubert’s wife, Ursula, and flamboyant artist Louis Langdon Beck. The point of the ruse is to pacify Constance’s dotty cousin, Cressida, who insists without evidence that Ursula is cuckolding the much older Hubert. Little as Edwina and Beryl relish what they consider a pointless deception, they can see the wisdom of temporarily leaving their shared home since their housemaid, Beddoes, has recently threatened to leave their employment if Beryl doesn’t stop trying to assist with the household chores. So they hurry off to Maitland Park, where Ursula is hosting an artists’ colony while Cressida runs a Girl Guides jamboree. It’s there that their pretend investigation runs smack into a real murder. Louis is found dead in the exact charming spot chosen for his plein air exercises. The police are called in, but their efforts just agitate the Maitland domestic staff. As the rumblings increase about how shameful it appears for them to work under police scrutiny, Constance pleads with Edwina and Beryl to abandon their fake investigation and just solve the doggone case.

Plenty of shenanigans before domestic tranquility is restored.

BURIED MEMORIES
Green, Simon R.
Severn House (192 pp.)
$28.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-0-7278-9032-0

An Earth-acculturated alien’s fragmentary memories encourage him to learn more about where he came from.

In all his years as an alien on Earth, Ishmael Jones has never come as close to discovering the truth of his origins as in his most recent case, when he was visited by recollections of his early years. Could it be that Ishmael wasn’t alone when his spaceship crashed to Earth? Drawing on his dreams, visions, and superior alien senses, Ishmael has done what he can to piece together his background, but his real hope lies in his long-term association with the Organization, a vaguely purposed group for whom he’s been solving a variety of supernatural mysteries over the years. The Organization has information on Ishmael’s past that leads him and Penny Belcourt, his partner in life and work, to hop a train from London to little Norton Hedley. Once there, Ishmael and Penny seek out virtually unknown author Vincent Smith, whose low-profile lifestyle seems incongruent with their intel that he may have been Ishmael’s traveling companion. But, in a shock that seems unsurprising even to Ishmael and Penny, Vincent suddenly dies the day before their arrival. Instead of connecting with Vincent, Ishmael and Penny are welcomed by Lucy Parker, an employee of Black Heir, perhaps the only organization whose purpose is more amorphous than that of the Organization, and definitely more nefarious. Ishmael and Penny must shake their new friend, who they suspect is more a tail than anything else, and discover the truth about Vincent if they have any chance of learning about Ishmael’s origin.

Book 10 of Green’s series boldly fleshes out the hero’s origin story to fine effect.
is called upon to solve in the company of his old friend, who promptly leaves his wife in her sanatorium and follows his leader. Instead of finding the duke, the pair find a trail of corpses (three Egyptologists and a waiter, with more to come) of much more recent vintage than Tuthmose V, the pharaoh who so bedazzled the duke. Holmes learns that his quarry has been traveling in the company of Fatima Gassim, an exotic dancer who’s almost certainly a spy. A titanic battle between the fearsome khamsin and the Star of Egypt will leave more people dead. Holmes and Watson will narrowly avoid being entombed alive. In fact, Meyer keeps the pot boiling so furiously that the climactic revelation of the murderer will catch some readers sheepishly admitting that they’d forgotten there was a mystery to be solved.

A rousing adventure that has little in common with the Holmes canon except for some proper names.

**THE PICKWICK MURDERS**
Redmond, Heather
Kensington (320 pp.)
$26.00 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-4967-3428-0

Charles Dickens is thrown into prison for murder. And not just any murder.

Charles, parliamentary reporter for the liberal daily *Morning Chronicle*, is no fan of Sir Augustus Smirke, the well-named candidate for Parliament who’s rumored to have seduced several younger women—including perhaps a maid who’s gone missing. But he can’t imagine the revenge Smirke, or someone else, will take for his less-than-flattering coverage. Receiving a letter that seems to offer him membership in the prestigious Lightning Club, Charles hastens to the club headquarters, where an initiation that requires him to escape from the 1835 version of a panic room brings him into uncomfortably close contact with Samuel Pickwick, the club’s president, whose throat has been slit. Turned over to the constabulary by Tracy Upman, the vice president who denies ever having seen him before, Charles counts down the days to the publication of *Sketches by Boz*, his first book, and dreams of how he can turn his plight into a fictional account, as he languishes in Newgate Prison. Redmond’s descriptions of daily life in Newgate, based largely on the real Dickens’ account of his own much briefer visit, are appropriately grim; reeking, and desperate, with occasional shafts of sunlight. Since Dickens is locked up, the job of identifying the conspirators who framed him for murder falls to his fiancee, Kate Hogarth, who follows a trail of anonymous letters that interweave threats against her and Charles with poetic allusions that lead her closer and closer to the answer she seeks. But the prison sequences remain the highlight here.

**Excellent period flavor, a so-so puzzle, an improbable series of clues, and the usual foreshadowings of the hero’s career.**
Recalling a recent inquiry she fielded from Polly Beecroft about Quebec: “Why had no one kept searching for them?” As usual and sunk in a box in a river—that she worked with her love inter anonymous women who were shot to death, wrapped in plastic, as the memory they evoke of a remarkably similar case—two a few years older), the women are essentially unidentifiable. But easily shocked. competing for attention with the issues the newest remains have cliffhanger chapter endings nonstop, and the range of incidents est, detective Lt. Andrew Ryan, in Quebec some 15 years ago. to honoring the dead by connecting them to names and faces and thrown into the spotlight dizzying. What’s most likely to linger the disappearance of her great-aunt from Paris in 1888, T empence. Apart from their gender and age (one a teenager, the other highly ironic, coincidence at the heart of T empence’s investigation. passing through North Carolina, the storm tosses ashore a container that’s been the final resting place of two dead bod- ies. Apart from their gender and age (one a teenager, the other a few years older), the women are essentially unidentifiable. But the mystery of their deaths isn’t nearly as troubling to T empence as the memory they evoke of a remarkably similar case—two anonymous women who were shot to death, wrapped in plastic, and sunk in a box in a river—that she worked with her love inter est, detective Lt. Andrew Ryan, in Quebec some 15 years ago. Recalling a recent inquiry she fielded from Polly Beecroft about the disappearance of her great-aunt from Paris in 1888, Tempe is tormented by a question about the victims she left behind in Quebec: “Why had no one kept searching for them?” As usual in this venerable franchise, the forensics are grimly detailed, the cliffhanger chapter endings nonstop, and the range of incidents competing for attention with the issues the newest remains have thrown into the spotlight dizzying. What’s most likely to linger long after Tempe unearths the monstrously timely medical con spiracy that links all the victims is the heroine’s selfless dedication to honoring the dead by connecting them to names and faces and stories. Seasoned readers won’t be put off by the whopping, and highly ironic, coincidence at the heart of Tempe’s investigation.

Comfort food for fans who are far past the point of being easily shocked.

THE BONE CODE
Reichs, Kathy
Scribner (356 pp.)
$27.00 | Jul. 6, 2021
978-1-982399-96-4

An unsettling discovery brought to light by Hurricane Inara points forensic anthropologist Temperance Brennan back toward two murder victims she failed to win justice for in Quebec many years ago.

Passing through North Carolina, the storm tosses ashore a container that’s been the final resting place of two dead bodies. Apart from their gender and age (one a teenager, the other a few years older), the women are essentially unidentifiable. But the mystery of their deaths isn’t nearly as troubling to Tempe as the memory they evoke of a remarkably similar case—two anonymous women who were shot to death, wrapped in plastic, and sunk in a box in a river—that she worked with her love interest, detective Lt. Andrew Ryan, in Quebec some 15 years ago. Recalling a recent inquiry she fielded from Polly Beecroft about the disappearance of her great-aunt from Paris in 1888, Tempe is tormented by a question about the victims she left behind in Quebec: “Why had no one kept searching for them?” As usual in this venerable franchise, the forensics are grimly detailed, the cliffhanger chapter endings nonstop, and the range of incidents competing for attention with the issues the newest remains have thrown into the spotlight dizzying. What’s most likely to linger long after Tempe unearths the monstrously timely medical conspiracy that links all the victims is the heroine’s selfless dedication to honoring the dead by connecting them to names and faces and stories. Seasoned readers won’t be put off by the whopping, and highly ironic, coincidence at the heart of Tempe’s investigation.

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Comfort food for fans who are far past the point of being easily shocked.
A girl on the run must uncover the truth about her past in order to secure the future.

Auris has just broken out of a Goblin prison. If recaptured, she faces certain, gruesome death. She doesn’t know why Humans are penned up like animals, and she doesn’t know how she herself ended up in the prison. She remembers having parents who loved her, but not who they were or where they lived. All she knows is that she has to keep moving to stay alive. When she’s rescued by a strange young man with greenish skin who turns out to be Fae, she’s quickly drawn to him and to the beauty of the Faerie city he shows her. She yearns to belong somewhere, and why not in this beautiful city in the trees? But in order to win a place with the Fae, she must recover her lost memories of her own past and prove she’s not a danger to the community. The mystery of Auris’ past drives the plot forward, and secrets are revealed and new questions uncovered at an appealingly steady pace. Formal language, and the characters’ tendency to constantly and explicitly state how they feel (“His hand is stroking my hair and I let him continue for a moment, comforted by the feeling it provides”), keeps the reader at arm’s length. But Auris’ quest to understand herself and be accepted into a community is a compelling one.

A fast-paced plot packed with secrets makes this an enjoyable read in a slightly old-fashioned high-fantasy style.
to marry fast and produce an heir so she can get back to her true love: winemaking. When she finds that a rogue has snuck into her party, and the man begins relentlessly flirting with her, she’s intrigued enough to kiss him. But as the clock strikes midnight, she learns that her rogue is a man named Ash Ellis, and he’s claiming to be “the long-lost heir to the dukedom of Granville.” Ash is unsuitable for the dukedom in every way: He owns a gaming den, and the tabloids have branded him the Devil’s Own Scoundrel. Secretly, he only wants to become the true love: winemaking. When she finds that a rogue has snuck into her party, and the man begins relentlessly flirting with her, she’s intrigued enough to kiss him. But as the clock strikes midnight, she learns that her rogue is a man named Ash Ellis, and he’s claiming to be “the long-lost heir to the dukedom of Granville.” Ash is unsuitable for the dukedom in every way: He owns a gaming den, and the tabloids have branded him the Devil’s Own Scoundrel. Secretly, he only wants to become the

with its exploration of the far-reaching repercussions of trauma. Alex’s full-throated conviviality bounces productively off Lauren’s cautious reserve, bringing out different sides of both their personalities. Alex’s and Lauren’s attitudes toward their own bodies also evolve beautifully as their relationship deepens. As engaging as the two are when they’re together, Alex’s penchant for fan fiction and Lauren’s dynamic with her best friend help them emerge as well-rounded characters individually. Dade’s ironic awareness of popular romance tropes adds another layer of interest and fun.

A sweet slow burn of a Regency romance.

A winning, lush romance with a social conscience.
“Captivating love story meets generational saga in this novel about forging an identity and forgiving the sins of the past.”

THE SWEETEST REMEDY
Hazelwood, Ali
Berkley (384 pp.)
$14.49 paper | Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-593-33682-3

An earnest grad student and a faculty member with a bit of a jerkish reputation concoct a fake dating scheme in this nerdy, STEM-filled contemporary romance.

Olive Smith and professor Adam Carlsen first met in the bathroom of Adam’s lab. Olive wore expired contact lenses, reducing her eyes to temporary tears, while Adam just needed to dispose of a solution. It’s a memory that only one of them has held onto. Now, nearly three years later, Olive is fully committed to her research in pancreatic cancer at Stanford University’s biology department. As a faculty member, Adam’s reputation precedes him, since he’s made many students cry or drop their programs entirely with his bluntness. When Olive needs her best friend, Anh, to think she’s dating Adam and Olive agree that come the end of September, they’ll part ways, having gotten what they need from their arrangement. Adam and Olive are an opposites-attract pairing with their sunny and grumpy personalities—but there are a couple of weaknesses in this debut novel. Hazelwood manages to sidestep a lot of the romantic tropes. Genre readers will have to judge for themselves if the romance plot satisfies, but those desperate for fiction that explores the crushing weight of caregiving will find it here. The primary themes in the second half are about filial piety and how Anna’s endless self-sacrifice without corresponding acceptance from her family pushes her to create limits and boundaries. Quan is a solid, steady presence but mostly relegated to the back burner. In the afterword, Hoang calls the book “half memoir,” which helps explain why it feels like half a romance. Genre readers will have to judge for themselves if the romance plot satisfies, but those desperate for fiction that explores the crushing weight of caregiving will find it here.

Grief and suffering make for an emotionally moving novel, but without fully exploring healing and recovery, is it a romance?
encouragement, she flies to Nigeria, a place she’s never been, and finds herself intensely unprepared to deal with her family—her family, biologically speaking. The Jolades are one of the wealthiest and most prestigious families in the country, and not all of them welcome Hannah with open arms, but the first time she lays eyes on Lawrence, her late father’s protégé, the sparks are undeniable. Sticking around on Banana Island and getting to know the half siblings she never knew she had is an emotional journey all its own, especially when it comes to winning over the Jolades, who aren’t convinced she belongs. On top of that, Hannah finds herself newly shaped and redefined by a culture she’s always felt somewhat removed from, and she’s also opening up her heart for the first time in a long time—not just to the possibility of kindred, but romance, too. Igharo’s latest isn’t only a romance novel, however; it’s a story that delves into nearly every character’s perspective, carving out a richer narrative in the process. The book ultimately explores a wide range of love between people as well as strong themes of self-discovery and how blood ties aren’t always what connect members of a family to each other, with many emotional ups and downs along the way.

Captivating love story meets generational saga in this novel about forging an identity and forgiving the sins of the past.

FIRST LOVE, TAKE TWO
Patel, Sajni
Forever (316 pp.)
$13.99 paper | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-5387-3336-3

A doctor is forced to reexamine her own hurts when she gets a second chance at a relationship with the love of her life. Houston-based doctor Preeti Patel is juggling multiple anxieties: Not only does she need to find a new apartment, but she’s in the middle of hunting for a permanent position as a medical resident. She locates a place where she can stay until she gets a job, but she has to share it with her ex-boyfriend Daniel Thompson for a few weeks. Preeti has been assiduously avoiding Daniel since she broke up with him six years ago without giving a reason. But while living in close quarters with Daniel, she’s forced to accept her feelings for him and finds herself compelled to reevaluate her priorities and give him honest answers about their past. Preeti’s struggles with anxiety are illustrated in graphic detail, but the dynamics of her relationship with Daniel, which hinges more on the memories of a previous connection than on any significant development in the present, remain less well developed. Preeti’s interactions with her friends and family are occasionally fun and heartwarming, and the characters’ penchant for long emotional monologues are reminiscent of melodramatic Bollywood films. But author Patel is sharply insightful when she hints at the complex links among religion, roots, and community in the Hindu Indian diaspora and exposes the fault lines in several of these communities, particularly the deeply entrenched racism and sexism that sometimes fracture them.

An uncomplicated and often one-note romance uplifted by evocative descriptions of its social and cultural setting.

NOT THE KIND OF EARL YOU MARRY
Pembrooke, Kate
Forever (368 pp.)
$14.49 paper | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-593201-65-7

When an ambitious earl and a reticent bluestocking are forced together, they discover that opposites can, indeed, attract.

William Atherton, Earl of Norwood, is jolted by a newspaper announcement pronouncing him engaged to Charlotte Hurst, a lady he has never even formally met. Presuming that she wants to trap him into matrimony, William confronts Charlotte angrily. But when he sees that she is as puzzled as he is by the announcement, William comes to suspect it’s the work of a rival trying to puncture his political aspirations. Until the culprit can be found, the two are forced to pretend they are engaged to save her reputation and his career. Although Charlotte is initially put off by William’s arrogance and dislikes the social events he frequently attends, she begins to look forward to William’s company. She also builds lasting friendships with the indomitable women she meets through William. But before they can even consider turning a pretended engagement into reality, William and Charlotte must not only reconcile internal differences, but also confront an external enemy. Pembrooke’s debut inaugurates the Unconventional Ladies of Mayfair trilogy and is replete with secondary characters who charm and entertain. The relationship between William and Charlotte develops with gradual ease, and their interactions evolve in emotional depth. While the camaraderie between the couple and their respective families and friends is unmistakably sweet, the mystery driving William and Charlotte’s plight reaches a distinctly insipid resolution.

An uncomplicated and endearing story that will appeal to romance fans.

ON LOCATION
Smith, Sarah Echavarre
Berkley (352 pp.)
$14.49 paper | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-593201-65-7

A 32-year-old showrunner at a travel-themed TV channel films her first series on location in Utah while having lots and lots of sex with a crew member.

Told to take more risks in a meeting where her idea for a series on hiking in
Utah is spiked, Alia Dunn decides to do the opposite of what she normally would on her way home from work. Thus she finds herself tweeting about a hottie on the subway, going on an impromptu date with said stranger, Drew Irons, and then passionately kissing him after an evening of such bon mots as “You’re sex on a stick, Drew.” (For the record, he’s flattered). Coincidences and miscommunications abound in this novel as Drew, a field coordinator, and Alia find themselves working together on location in Utah on Alia’s unexpectedly green-lit series. Saddled with Blaine, a former reality star who is perpetually late, high, and drunk—and frequently naked and erratic—as a host, Alia struggles to keep to the shooting schedule while protecting the crew members from the predatory Blaine. Alia is a call-it-like-she-sees-it woman who takes no flak from anyone and can successfully run a set and schedule, but at the same time she’s a woman unable to clear up potentially simple misunderstandings with a man she is lusting over—and then having a tremendous amount of sex with—because she assumes she knows everything and refuses to listen to explanations or ask questions to clear up confusion. The locations are the stars of this unevenly paced story, in which the characters and relationships are multifaceted and yet still clichéd and arguments escalate at supersonic speed just to evaporate days later.

A series of explicit sex scenes tied together with a thin story.

LOVE, COMMENT, SUBSCRIBE

Tardley, Cathy
Montlake Romance (335 pp.)
$9.99 paper | Oct. 1, 2021
978-1-5420-3000-7

As their 10-year reunion approaches, high school frenemies fall in love.

Now, they’re both successful social media stars with huge YouTube followings: Lily is a beauty influencer, while Tobin focuses on gaming and pranks. Each of them feels under immense pressure to create new content and add followers. A chance interaction leads them to forge an unorthodox collaboration between their channels, even though it seems like their audiences have nothing in common. Being set in the cutthroat world of social media influencers gives the novel a young, vibrant edge. Lily and Tobin’s charming romance plays out over the weeks of their collaboration, with most of the conflict deriving from the differences in their work habits and professional values. Lily is hoping to add enough followers to get her own deals with cosmetics companies, but deep down she’s still craving acceptance from the cool kids who snubbed her in high school. Tobin is a big name on YouTube, but he’s struggling with burnout and parents who still push him to finish college and find a more respectable job. Tobin’s conflicts with his family and Lily’s quest for acceptance are likely to appeal to college-aged readers transitioning to adult romance, but others might wonder why two successful people nearing 30 haven’t moved past these problems in the decade since high school.

A fun, lively romance mines the insecurities common in people transitioning to adulthood.
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

TO BREAK RUSSIA’S CHAINS by Vladimir Alexandrov .......... 135
ONE FRIDAY IN APRIL by Donald Antrim ................................ 135
DEAR MEMORY by Victoria Chang ........................................ 137
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THE AMUR RIVER
Between Russia and China
Thubron, Colin
Harper/HarperCollins
(320 pp.)
$27.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-06-309968-5

INNOVATION
The History of England
Volume VI
Ackroyd, Peter
St. Martin’s (512 pp.)
$29.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-250-00366-9

In the final installment of his History of England series, the veteran historian tackles the erosion of the British Empire and the modernization of the national economy.

Like the preceding five titles, Ackroyd’s latest is a wide-ranging, elegant work of scholarship covering a century of British history, politics, and culture, from the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 to 2000. During this time period, the old aristocracy contracted as egalitarianism expanded. The Edwardian era, writes the author, saw a “cultural divide in England between those who wanted to shore up the Victorian establishment and those who hoped to build a more egalitarian country from its ruins.” Some of the currents the author follows include the continued decline of the aristocratic class, the growth of the middle class, the mass migrations into cities while grand estates were sold to “new men,” travel’s transitioning from horse to bicycle and motorcar, and the burgeoning understanding that poverty was largely caused by social ills rather than as a result of immorality. Great leaders from Lloyd George to Winston Churchill grasped this new period of political history, in which the “condition of the people” was at the forefront of reform efforts. Along with a minute delineation of political machinations, Ackroyd chronicles the surge of women moving into public roles as suffragists turned more militant; the insoluble debate over Irish Home Rule; and the nationalist sentiments that precipitated the march to war with Germany. Though numerous other authors have covered the war years better, Ackroyd is at his finest weaving together the cultural fabric of the nation, describing the “hungry thirties,” the establishment of the postwar welfare state during an austere time, Britain’s uneasy rapport with Europe, and the triumph of British icons such as ‘Twiggy, Margaret Thatcher, Princess Diana, and Harry Potter.

Thorough, readable history by a seasoned researcher and author.
Russian nobility, the middle son of a judge stationed in Warsaw, Russia into a free, democratic republic.” This thoroughgoing Boris Savinkov (1879-1925), an anti-czarist revolutionary and founds historians: a voluntary return to Russia, imprisonment, dedicated to resisting the Leninist takeover. Savinkov helped to dedicated to overthrowing the imperialist regime. Ultimately , during the first quarter of the twentieth century .” Alexandrov plays in all the cataclysmic events that shook his homeland during the first quarter of the twentieth century.” Alexandrov chronicles his subject’s early life in a prosperous family of minor Russian nobility, the middle son of a judge stationed in Warsaw, where Savinkov spent his formative years, and his gradual radicalization at the turn of the century, in prison and then exile, dedicated to overthrowing the imperialist regime. Ultimately, his greatest success was carrying out the assassinations of Minister of the Interior Vyacheslav von Plehve in 1904 and the czar’s uncle Grand Duke Sergey Alexandrovich in 1905. After a period of living in Paris, writing novels, and struggling with money and marriages, the rest of Savinkov’s short life would be dedicated to resisting the Leninist takeover. Savinkov helped to build an army to fight against the Germans who were encroaching on Russian soil, and he also fought the Bolsheviks, who aimed to withdraw from World War I and envelop the nation in a form of authoritarianism that was different from—but no less lethal—that of the czar. The final chapter of his life still confounds historians: a voluntary return to Russia, imprisonment, and ultimately suicide. Throughout this fascinating historical biography, Alexandrov demonstrates his facility with the Soviet archives, delivering a scholarly yet accessible work perfect for library collections.

A painstaking work of archival research that unearths little-known details of early Soviet history.

A controversial figure in Russian history earns an impassioned, long-overdue treatment.

Alexandrov, a Yale professor of Slavic languages and author of The Black Russian (2013), among other titles, clearly admires Boris Savinkov (1879-1925), an anti-czarist revolutionary and assassin who later battled the Bolshevik takeover. Savinkov, writes the author, “dedicated his entire life to fighting to make Russia into a free, democratic republic.” This thoroughgoing biography builds his story with meticulous, novelistic detail, showing how Savinkov “was famous, and notorious, during his lifetime both at home and abroad because of the major roles he played in all the cataclysmic events that shook his homeland during the first quarter of the twentieth century.”

Unflinchingly honest accounts of the author’s personal experiences and his perceptions of societal misunderstandings about suicide.

Antrim begins this concise memoir on the evening in April 2006 when he almost plummeted from his Brooklyn fire escape. “I was there to die,” he writes, “but dying was not a plan. I was not making choices, threats, or mistakes. I was...looking back now, in acceptance. It was a relinquishing, though at the time I would not have been able to articulate that. I did not want to die, only felt that I would, or should, or must, and I had my pain and my reasons.” Immediately preceding this event was strife with his girlfriend, but his illness—what Antrim qualifies by stating, “I try not to speak about depression. I prefer to call it suicide”—started in childhood. This story, parts of which first appeared in the New Yorker, is not one of survival after the fall but of holding on. After not jumping, Antrim, then 47, checked himself into a hospital and spent four months at the New York State Psychiatric Institute. Fractured into vignettes of anguished memories, lists of medications, and ruminations, the narrative is defiantly nonlinear and brilliantly reflective of the author’s state of being: anxious, inert, unworthy. Unlike a flat line, Antrim’s talent for storytelling is more similar to Russian nesting dolls: moments within moments that build upon each other as recollections.

Slim yet formidable, a mind-bendingly good read.

A collection of celebrations of the iconic writer.

“There are many ways to read Tho-reau,” Pico Iyer observes, “but none of them will ever be so deep as the ways he reads us, and our most private longings, often so well-hidden that we forget about...
them ourselves.” In graceful, often lyrical essays, the 26 contributors to Blauner’s thoughtful collection echo Iyer as they consider Thoreau’s meaning in their lives. Most respond to *Walden*, a book that novelist Amor Towles and NPR reporter and host Stacey Vanek Smith loved passionately when they first read it but others (novelist Lauren Groff, English professor Kristen Case) hated, put off by Thoreau’s tone of moral superiority. On later readings, though, their perceptions changed dramatically. “I discovered a love so powerful for Thoreau’s energetic vision that it often took my breath away,” Groff writes. His “great contribution to literature,” she realized, “lies in the wild strangeness of his close reading of nature, the intensity of his insistence that if one looks hard enough, one will see through the scrim of the familiar and into the astonishing gift of singularity.” Several contributors consider Thoreau’s celebration of solitude. In our wired age of smartphones and the internet, solitude, writes media scholar Sherry Turkle, is challenged by our “habit of turning to our screens rather than looking inward, and by the culture of continual sharing.” Alan Lightman asks himself what he loses “when I must be engaged with a project every hour of

the day, when I rarely let my mind spin freely without friction or deadlines, when I rarely sever myself from the rush and the heave of the external world.” Rafia Zakaria, a Pakistani essayist and historian, visiting Thoreau’s farm, thought about “the moral complications” of the solitude that Thoreau chose for himself. Other contributors include Adam Gopnik, Jennifer Finney Boylan, and A.O. Scott.

Candid, often insightful reflections testify to Thoreau’s enduring appeal.

**BLUE EYES, BROWN EYES**  
**A Cautionary Tale of Race and Brutality**  
Bloom, Stephen G.  
Univ. of California (284 pp.)  
$27.95 | Oct. 5, 2021  
978-0-520-38226-8

How an educator in rural Iowa in the late 1960s tackled racism.  
After the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., Jane Elliott, a third grade teacher in “resoundingly middle class” Riceville, Iowa, devised an exercise intended to teach her students a “real, significant, and urgent” lesson about prejudice. As Bloom shows in his well-researched investigation, that lesson, in Riceville and beyond, became both admired and incendiary. Bloom, who teaches journalism at the University of Iowa, a few hours from Riceville and beyond, became both admired and incendiary. Bloom, who teaches journalism at the University of Iowa, a few hours from Riceville, interviewed Elliott, her family and students, their parents, and many townspeople, beginning in 2004, when Elliott urged him to write her story—an invitation she eventually angrily withdrew. But Bloom was not dissuaded, intrigued by her career and missionary zeal as “an evangelist for the greater good.” After appearing on Johnny Carson’s late-night show, she quickly became a coveted speaker on racism, reprising for groups of adults the two-day exercise she had designed for her classroom. Dividing her students into blue eyes and brown eyes, she assigned blues to oppress browns on one day, then reversed the next day. The exercise, meant to demonstrate prejudice, caused a furor: Some third graders were traumatized by the experience, feeling bullied and manipulated. Parents accused Elliott of fomenting hatred, and the more famous she became, the more they condemned her as an opportunist and con artist. “Elliott used her experiment to make herself better than the rest,” many believed. Seen as “a know-it-all motormouth” even before the publicity, Elliott was now characterized as narcissistic and exploitative. When her exercise became the subject of documentaries for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, ABC, and PBS; when she participated in the Nixon White House Conference on Children; when she mounted a side career as a consultant and college lecturer, the town’s hatred deepened. Creating a balanced view of both his abrasive subject and her notorious experiment, Bloom discovered that the town’s feelings still burn.

A cleareyed portrayal of a controversial woman.
“This book is moving in a way that transcends story and message; it captures a pure sense of another person’s heart.”

DEAR MEMORY

THE LAST DIVING HORSE IN AMERICA
Rescuing Gamal and Other Animals—Lessons in Living and Loving
Branigan, Cynthia
Pantheon (288 pp.)
$28.00 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-101-87195-9

A memoir about the rescue of a sideshow animal as part of the work of a flagship animal rights group.

Branigan shares her experiences working for the Fund for Animals and its president, Cleveland Amory, one of the main architects of the modern animal protection movement. As a case study, the author focuses on the organization’s rescue of a horse named Gamal, believed to be the last diving horse used at the Atlantic City Steel Pier, and the bond that formed between them. Based on extensive research, Branigan shares the history of the diving horse attraction (“animals trained to leap, with a woman on their backs, from a forty-foot platform into a ten-foot-deep tank of water”), details regarding other horses that were parts of the show, and her traumatic experience as an audience member. The author includes the heartwarming stories of other animals that the Fund for Animals rescued during her tenure at the organization, including burros from the Grand Canyon, another diving horse named Shiloh, and a llama named Hot Britches. Unfortunately, the author’s narrative does not offer the same respect for the humans who have assisted the organization in caring for the rescued animals. When discussing the organization’s facility in Texas, Black Beauty Ranch, Branigan makes clichéd comments about the culture and accent of Texans, even though, at that point, she admittedly had not yet visited Texas or met a resident from the state. Regarding a business trip she later made to the ranch, she shares stories that focus more than necessary on the appearances of several individuals as well as innuendo regarding the actions of others. Though these details may be intended as local color to set the scene, their abundance detracts from Branigan’s message about her organization, which clearly does important work.

The history of an admirable organization that falls short in its delivery.

DEAR MEMORY
Letters on Writing, Silence, and Grief
Chang, Victoria
Milkweed (136 pp.)
$25.00 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-57131-392-8

In a series of letters and collages, an award-winning poet explores the wounds of her family history as well as her life as a writer and a mother.

“I wonder whether memory is different for immigrants, for people who leave so much behind,” writes Chang, whose parents were immigrants from Taiwan. “Memory isn’t something that blooms but something that bleeds internally, something to be stopped.” After the impressive formal innovations of her 2020 book, OBIT, which won multiple national awards, Chang continues to find new ways to plumb her experiences on the page. In addition to family members, she includes letters to Silence, to her Body, and to friends, fellow poets, and a teacher who started her on her way as a writer, which end up giving the book a second identity as an essay on craft. “What I learned from you was to forget the sun,” she writes, “that the moon burned more, to cling to things that didn’t seem to leave a trace, such as memory or silence or cruelty or beauty.” In “Dear Reader,” Chang explains that while she was at work on the letters, she found a box of photographs and interviews she conducted with her late mother. Using these and a variety of official documents, she presents a series of collages with hand-lettered text that create a backdrop of family history addressed both directly and indirectly by the letters. Depending on what one
brings to this book, each reader may find their own moment of goosebumps or tears. One possibility are these lines on overcoming silence: “I still carry the brick around with me everywhere I go, but it is now outside of my throat. Sometimes I use it as a paper weight. Other times, it’s so light that it feels like I no longer have it at all.”
This book is moving in a way that transcends story and message; it captures a pure sense of another person’s heart.

TEN PATTERNS THAT EXPLAIN THE UNIVERSE

Clegg, Brian
MIT Press (224 pp.)
$29.95 paper | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-262-54286-9

The prolific science writer offers another illuminating education on many scientific phenomena.
“It would be impossible to cope with the world,” writes the author, “if we didn’t have patterns...that inform us of how to deal with, say, an apple or a light switch, so that we don’t have to start from scratch each and every time.” After proposing this theme, Clegg delivers 10 isolated essays on topics ranging from the recognizable (DNA, periodic table) to the arcane (number lines, Feynman diagrams). Teachers traditionally portray evolution as a tree; a primitive life form, the trunk, evolves into numerous, more complex organisms, the thinner branches. In reality, this is not what happens. The “branches” often thicken, double back, and become simpler. Fifty years ago, biologists offered a more accurate description in the form of a cladogram, which merely shows in what order a species split from a common ancestor. This works even when scientists haven’t found that ancestor. Regarding more cosmic matters, Clegg shows that while everyone can picture length, width, and depth, three of Einstein’s four dimensions, adding time seems nonsensical. Enter Einstein’s math professor, Hermann Minkowski, who developed an ingenious diagram that shows how time and space are related and inseparable. After the Big Bang, the universe was so hot that only charged particles such as protons and electrons existed. Charged particles absorb photons (i.e., light), so the early universe was dark. After 380,000 years of expansion and cooling, most charged particles combined to form electrically neutral atoms. Suddenly photons could travel, and the cosmos filled with light. These light photons expanded and cooled along with the universe, and today, 13.8 billion years later, they shine from everywhere as the cosmic microwave background. First detected in 1964, they reveal the earliest structures of the universe. This is not TV science; Clegg presents difficult concepts—e.g., infinity is not a number; genes form only a trivial part of a chromosome—but there are satisfying rewards to science-inclined readers.

Ingenious, often complex insights from an expert.

ROADRUNNER

Clover, Joshua
Duke Univ. (144 pp.)
$19.95 paper | Sep. 10, 2021
978-1-4780-1439-3

A 50-year-old anthem in celebration of rock radio garners a book-length analysis.
In the inaugural title of the publisher’s Singles series, which celebrates the single rather than the album, English professor
Clover—also the series editor, along with Emily Lordi—makes his case for the titular Modern Lovers tune. Recorded in 1972 but not released until 1976, “Roadrunner” wasn’t a Top 40 hit, and it was initially unknown outside its Boston market. The group that recorded it had disbanded in 1974, and Jonathan Richman, the songwriter and singer, would take a very different direction with his music in subsequent years. This is by no means the first book devoted to the recording of a single song, but the song in question lacks the cultural reach of, say, “Like a Rolling Stone” or “Strange Fruit”—or “Hallelujah,” the story of which was brilliantly delineated by Alan Light in *The Holy or the Broken* (2013). Clover is clearly an obsessive writing to and for fellow obsessives, employing some of the jargon and occasional impenetrability of academic writing to commemorate the legacy of “the greatest song of all time, or maybe it is the greatest rock song of all time, or the greatest American rock song of all time, or the greatest American rock song of that era.” The author also explores the development of the interstate highway system, White flight, Watergate, Vietnam, and links to the sonic collages of current pop star M.I.A. “So you have these songs making circular sounds and it turns out they are trying to think about circulation,” writes Clover, “about records on turntables and cars on ring roads and sounds in the transnational flow of culture: the relaying of sonic contagions through the system and around the globe and often returning to where they began but different, mutated.” All this about a song that has an immediacy and exhilaration that hardly require a book to explain it.

Rock criticism invades academia.
**FLOATING IN THE DEEP END**

**How Caregivers Can See Beyond Alzheimer’s**

Davis, Patti  
Liveright/Norton (320 pp.)  
$26.95 | Sep. 28, 2021  
978-1-63149-798-8

Ronald Reagan’s daughter shares her experience as a caregiver for her Alzheimer’s-stricken father.

For the better part of a decade, writer Davis took care of her father during his gradual cognitive descent into dementia. That experience, documented in her heart-rending book *The Long Goodbye* (2004), forms the foundation for this guide for providers and family members seeking to provide optimal assistance to their loved one while maintaining self-care. Davis generously shares anecdotes from her painful yet always compassionate tenure with her father as well as experiences from those within the support group she founded in 2011, Beyond Alzheimer’s. Throughout, the author weaves in advice for caregivers to better evaluate unfamiliar situations—e.g., sundowning (“as the day winds down, the person gets worse”)—and to improve reactions to more classic dementia scenarios such as emotional outbursts and disorientation. Though she personally battled isolation, exhaustion, helplessness, and a fear of death, her journey was not without small gifts of positive light. Davis shares buoyant revelations about how her family, fractured by “distance and dissonance,” formed a more closely knit bond even as Reagan’s cognitive and physical health declined. During the blessing of shared time, she also learned more intimate details about her father. The author outlines several unique characteristics and types of dementia, moving from initial onset to the debilitating progressive stages. She encourages readers to obtain an accurate diagnosis and offers suggestions on navigating contentious situations like hiring an outside aide and maintaining safety measures and restrictions. She stresses the importance of avoiding guilt and denial and finding an anchoring support group. “Once you let go of the rope,” she writes, “you have to deal with the waters around you.” Her bracing narrative is a vital supportive resource for anyone navigating the choppy waters of Alzheimer’s within a familial network.

“A heartbreaking yet hopeful journey through the painful chaos of a loved one’s compassionate care.”

**BELONGING AND BETRAYAL**

**How Jews Made the Art World Modern**

Dellheim, Charles  
Brandeis Univ. Press (672 pp.)  
$40.00 | Sep. 21, 2021  
978-1-68458-056-9

A scholar tells the story of 20th-century art dealers, the avant-garde and old masters they promoted, and Nazi plunder.

In 1945, “Jewish gentleman” Lt. James Rorimer, the Harvard-educated director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s medieval branch, was given the job of traveling to Buxheim monastery in Germany and “hunting down an unknown quantity of works of art that the Nazis had despoiled.” He discovered 158 paintings of a quality few museum collections could match, works by Boucher, Fragonard, Delacroix, and others. These would not be the only cultural assets recovered that the Nazis had taken from Jews through a Wehrmacht unit known as ERR; it was a “massive confiscation of fine and decorative art almost immediately after the fall of France and the beginning of the German occupation.” But how did European Jews acquire the art in the first place, given that such works had hitherto been available only to royalty and the landed classes? In this exceptional work of scholarship, Boston University history professor Dellheim “sets out to reframe our picture of Nazi-stolen art” by focusing on “the rise and fall of a small number of Jews, individuals and families, who were both merchants and..."
connoisseurs, dealers and collectors.” The author devotes most of the book to a detailed history of the Jewish dealers and collectors who acquired these artworks—e.g., Nathan Wildenstein, a textile merchant who developed “an astonishingly good eye” for authenticating old masters paintings; and Joseph Duveen, who would become one of the most influential art dealers in history. In the devastating final chapters, Dellheim describes the “cultural violence” of the Nazi dispossession of art and recounts the grotesque goals of “ensuring that museums and galleries were securely judenrein, ‘cleansed’ of Jews,” and “removing old masters from Jewish hands.”

A brilliant account of Nazi pillage and the ongoing efforts at restitution.

**How God Works**

*The Science Behind the Benefits of Religion*

DeSteno, David

Simon & Schuster (256 pp.)

$28.00 | Sep. 14, 2021

978-1-982142-31-5

Cherry-picking the world’s religions to find useful practices for living better lives. DeSteno, a professor of psychology at Northeastern and author of *Emotional Success* (2018) and other pop-psych works, addresses a largely secular audience with a call not to ignore religion but to make use of it. The author notes that throughout history, humans have used religious rituals to deal with the landmarks and changes of life and that modern society has much to learn from these examples. He advocates “religioprospecting,” a practice through which scientists and others can mine world religions for whatever benefits can be found within them. DeSteno succinctly explains his thesis: “The practice of religion, as opposed to its theological underpinnings, offers an impressive, time-tested array of psychological technologies that augment our biology—to help us solve problems that biological adaptation alone hasn’t. And as the nature of those problems changes through time, so do rituals and even religions themselves.” The author provides a wide overview of practices used by the world’s major religions in order to celebrate birth, prepare youth for adulthood, keep people healthy, take part in marriage, and look ahead to death and the afterlife, and he notes how religions “offer spiritual technologies that boost and repair our bodies and minds.” By divorcing rituals from their theological and institutional roots, the author believes society has a great deal to gain—though devout readers of any one faith will disagree. “What truly matters,” he explains, in relation to finding value in the Jewish grieving ritual of shiva, “isn’t the exact texts of the prayers, but the togetherness, the sensitivity, and the actions inherent in the ritual.” For seekers of general, broad spiritual wisdom, DeSteno’s mining of the world’s religions for the beneficial parts will be appealing, but readers who closely follow a specific faith tradition may be displeased with the author’s excursions.

An intriguing but not convincing melding of psychology and religion.

**Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds**

*A Refugee’s Search for Home*

Dogon, Mondiant with Krajeski, Jenna

Penguin Press (336 pp.)

$28.00 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-1-984881-28-1

In a beautifully heartfelt, plainspoken account, a refugee from the Congo-Rwanda wars breaks his silence to reveal his family’s story of fleeing their home amid unimaginable violence. Dogon, who has a graduate degree from NYU, spent 20 years in refugee camps in Rwanda. Born into a cattle-farming Tutsi family in the Bagogwe tribe, by age 3 his idyllic world was shattered when the genocide in neighboring Rwanda spilled over into his country. The family was forced to flee because of killers tracking Dogon’s father, a village leader. “My father appeared at our door, bleeding, and from that moment on, every story was about

“Both poetic and political, this is a compelling, passionate memoir with a message of unconditional love and unity in divided times.”

—IndieReader Review

ISBN: 979-8-68-780255-0

“A memoir brings readers deep inside the author’s experiences as a White woman married to a Black man in an America bitterly divided along racial lines... at its heart, this is a beautiful love story. A passionate, informative, albeit dispiriting, call for change with only a few rays of hope.”

—Kirkus Reviews

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Ever since she was a little girl, Julie Klam was fascinated by stories of the four Morris sisters, her paternal grandmother’s first cousins. Family lore had it that Selma, Marcella, Malvina, and Ruth, who emigrated from Romania with their family in the early 20th century, grew up in an orphanage in St. Louis after their mother died and their father abandoned them to seek his fortune in Hollywood. Later, they got themselves to New York City, where they all lived together in Greenwich Village. One had an affair with J.P. Morgan and consulted with FDR. Another was a bohemian playwright. None ever married, all became millionaires, and they left their vast fortune to Brandeis University.

Klam originally thought the story of these fascinating, independent sisters would be her second book, after her coming-of-age memoir, Please Excuse My Daughter. She started her research in 2007 by interviewing older family members—but quickly realized how much travel and focus the project would take. She had a small child, a disintegrating marriage, and shaky finances. It just wasn’t possible.

Instead, she turned to the other project on her mind: You Had Me at Woof, a tender, funny book about dog rescue that would be her breakout. Three more books would go by before Klam returned to the sisters, and she was right about how much work was involved. She traveled to St. Louis, to Romania, to the FDR Presidential Library in Hyde Park, New York. She talked to genealogists, archivists, historians, cemetery managers, reference librarians, and even a medium. (From the latter, she learned that the sisters did not want her to make fun of them.) She pored over minutes of committee meetings, read chunks of old New York City telephone books on microfiche, and basically found out that everything she knew about the Morris sisters was wrong.

We caught up with Klam over Zoom to discuss the book she wrote nonetheless, The Almost Legendary Morris Sisters: A True Story of Family Fiction (Riverhead, Aug. 10). Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Tell us about that subtitle.
We all heard these great stories around the table back when we were kids, and at that time, there was no running to Google to see if they were true. My mother always said with total conviction that we were related to Irving Berlin. Turns out we weren’t. The more I got into tracking down each detail of the Morris sisters’ story, the more I realized a lot of it never happened.

Like, Marcella couldn’t possibly have had an affair with J.P. Morgan, who died when she was 12. But she worked in an office of his firm, and she did have a close relationship with Harold Bache, of Prudential-Bache.

Exactly. Family lore sometimes turns out to be...just that. When I started this book I thought I was going to be tell-
ing a simple story about Marcella’s amazing career as a fi-
nancier—where she worked, what she did at each place. And
then there was nothing. Except for the one line in her will
that confirmed that her estate was worth $10 million.

One of the few things that turned out to be true was
Marcella’s success on Wall Street. Why do you think
you could find so little evidence of it? Was it, as your hi-
larious Uncle Herb suggested, that she was just a very
unlikable person?

Unky Hoib. So much a man of that generation. [Does ac-
cent.] Getta loada dis one! More than her prickly personality, I
think it just wasn’t a good time for women—as opposed to
now, of course, when it’s also not a good time for women—
but particularly in the financial industry. You didn’t want
to call attention to yourself, because they didn’t want you
there. The women who were successful and got a lot of no-
toriety like Victoria Woodhull and Tennessee Claflin—they
got drummed out.

So the sisters flew under the radar on purpose.
Absolutely. Invisibility was their brand. You know, it wasn’t
like they came from some Boston Brahmin family—they
had all sorts of things they were ashamed of. Their family
history was one tragic, humiliating thing after another. One
of the great finds I came across, with the help of a St. Louis
historian, were the minutes of the committee that ran the
orphanage where the younger girls lived for several years,
about the decision to move 8-year-old Malvina, who was
disabled, away from her sister to a home for crippled chil-
dren. Meanwhile their mother was institutionalized like two
blocks away, had possibly been lobotomized, and their fa-
ther and older sisters were right there in town, struggling to
survive. It’s a heartbreaking story.

Speaking of that St. Louis historian, a person from an-
other planet reading your book could get the impres-
sion that the world is full of nice people who want to
help each other.
Well—if you need something that can be provided by an ar-
chivist or a librarian, you are in luck. These people are so
knowledgeable, and teaching is in their sphere, so they don’t
just look for the answer, they teach you how to find it.

What is your advice for people who want to investigate
family legends?
Ancestry.com is a great place to start. You’ll probably find
that people in your family are interested and eager to help.
My book came together during the pandemic, and I was al-
ways having Zoom calls with relatives and friends. The book
was on its way to press when a friend found a whole trea-
sure trove of information about Ruth’s husband from her
short-lived marriage. (Because, yes, even the fact that none
of them ever married wasn’t true!)

When I went to Romania to research the family’s origins,
I found few of the specific documents I was looking for. But
there I was in a completely different part of the world, not
Americanized or modernized, nobody spoke English, and
even though I wasn’t going there intending to find out what
it felt like to be an immigrant, that’s what I got. A sense of
what it felt like to land in a place and everybody’s talking
around you and you don’t have the faintest clue what’s going
on. Which was really more important for the book than lo-
cating a particular address.

I couldn’t help thinking, with all the holes in the story, it
begs to be fictionalized in a novel.
Or a movie. I’ve been talking to a screenwriter friend of
mine about how the true story of my quest could be inter-
woven with all the imaginings and legends about the sisters.

Wouldn’t it be great if their poor dad, who was a pho-
tographer in a department store and never got further
than St. Louis, finally made it to Hollywood! What are
you working on now?
I loved this process so much that I’m continuing with his-
torical research. My grandfather was in the Hebrew Orphan
Asylum in Brooklyn, and I’ve been reading the records of the
children who were in there with him. Like the Morris sisters,
some weren’t even orphans. There were people who kind of
used the orphanage as a day care during the week and picked
the kids up on weekends.

Sounds like another great story.
Here’s hoping!

Marion Winik is the author of The Big Book of the Dead and
other titles. The Almost Legendary Morris Sisters was reviewed
in the July 1, 2021, issue.
killing,” writes the author. “I stopped being a child….I stopped having a home. I became a refugee.” The Bagogwe were almost entirely displaced, the survivors shunted from one refugee camp to another, suffering gruesome, random bloodshed and squalid living conditions. By 1996, the family had consolidated in a camp in northern Rwanda, subsisting on tenuous international charity and fending off hunger and despair: “Being a refugee meant having to reconcile your gratitude to Rwanda and the [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees], with an increasing feeling of being isolated and forgotten.” With the assistance of journalist Krajeski, Dogon movingly, tragically describes the trauma he and his family endured. The pain was so deep that even among them, they could not talk about what they had witnessed, which led to a terrible, debilitating silence. As a hardworking student, he passed his national exam, and though denied a promised scholarship because of his refugee status, he was able to attend university in the capital. Ultimately, he got sponsorship from tech executive Tim Armstrong, the former CEO of AOL, and Armstrong paid for his education. Now, Dogon is able to advocate for the plight of all who suffer the terrors of civil war. Throughout, he delivers effectively vivid details of his life and culture, and it’s clear that he is dedicated to helping others in similar terrible circumstances. An eloquent and necessary plea for compassion for war refugees everywhere.

**THE GLASS WALL**

*Lives on the Baltic Frontier*

Egremont, Max

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (384 pp.)

$30.00 | Sep. 28, 2021

978-0-374-16345-7

The rich and tragic history of an obscure part of the world: the eastern Baltic states of Latvia and Estonia.

Egremont dives deep into the story of the Baltic frontier, an area largely controlled by foreign powers since the 12th century. Colonized by Russia, Sweden, and Germany, invaded by the Nazis and then the Red Army, the people of the Baltic have suffered domination imposed by outsiders since the days of the Crusades. The author paints an astute portrait of the Baltic Germans, the aristocracy that moved in by papal invitation during the Crusades and accumulated land, money, and power until World War I. He capably re-creates their vanished cultural world: poetry readings, croquet, halls lined with works by the old masters. But in this geographically vulnerable part of Europe, wealth was no protection against invasion. In World War II, Hitler ordered the Baltic Germans to move to a conquered area of Poland, and the Jews they relied on were executed, many shipped to concentration camps. Latvians and Estonians were drafted into the German army, and the Nazis laid plans for mass deportations of Estonians, Latvians, and their neighboring Lithuanians. After World War II, anyone perceived as an opponent of the Soviet-led regime was sent to labor camps in the Soviet Union. Today, both countries are independent republics, and one Estonian observes, “there’s no class system. It’s money that counts now.” The Russian threat is never far away, and the locals stockpile petrol and strategize the quickest way out of the country in the event of an invasion. Egremont seems to have read every Baltic German novelist, visited every notable town, and tracked down every living witness to its history. The narrative sometimes meanders, but the book contains a helpful gazetteer and chronology. The text requires serious concentration, but diligent readers are rewarded with a near-total immersion into a land, its people, and the harrowing arc of its history.

An intricately layered account of the eastern Baltic, a land shaped by colonization, revolution, deportation, and murder.

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**Baby Out of Wedlock**

This award-winning book answers all the basic questions regarding paternity tests, co-parenting relationships, child custody laws, visitation rights, support payments, and much more.

The result is a better relationship with your co-parent and lower attorney fees.

“Baby out of Wedlock is the right book for you if you are expecting a child with someone you have no intentions of settling with.”

—Literary Titan, 5 Star Review & WINNER Gold Book Award

“Readers dealing with these kinds of issues will find this book invaluable, particularly with regard to negotiation. Skillfully outlines how to prepare for and raise a child out of wedlock.”

—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

ISBN: 978-1-7368168-0-6

FOR ALL INQUIRIES, PLEASE EMAIL JIM.JESSICA.BRAZ@GMAIL.COM

www.BabyOutofWedlock.com
INTO THE FOREST
A Holocaust Story of
Survival, Triumph, and
Love
Frankel, Rebecca
St. Martin's (352 pp.)
$28.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-250-26764-1

How one Jewish family from a small
Polish village survived the Holocaust.

In her latest book, former Foreign Pol-
icy executive editor Frankel focuses on the Rabinowitz family
of Zhetel, a “very happy little Jewish town” of about 5,000 dur-
ing the 1930s. Morris and Miriam Rabinowitz had a large house
on the town’s main street, with Miriam’s medicine shop on the
main floor. Their two daughters, Rochel and Tania, were born
about a year apart in the mid-’30s. Morris, a lumber merchant,
had an intimate knowledge of the nearby woodlands, informa-
tion that later became critical to the family’s survival. “His job
took him to the town’s edges and deeper into the Polish Chris-
tian farming community, where Morris traded not just in lumber,
but in the currency of relationships,” writes the author. Toward
the end of the decade, life in Zhetel changed rapidly—first with
the nonaggression pact between the Nazis and Soviets, lead-
ing to Russian occupation of the eastern section of Poland, and
then with the German invasion in June 1941. The Germans tar-
geted Polish Jews, crowding them into ghettos and murdering
them in “selections” based on the victims’ short-term value to
the occupiers. At one point, Miriam claimed to be the mother
of a young boy from a nearby town who was there without his
family, a courageous act that saved the boy from certain death.
Recognizing the urgent need to get away from German control,
the family escaped to hide in the nearby forest, where they sur-
vived the war despite terrible privations. Frankel follows the
family after liberation, when, after failing to gain entry to Israel,
they ended up in the U.S. Her book, based on interviews with
family members and original documents, is full of telling details
about life before, during, and after the Holocaust. While the
central events are harrowing, the text has a gratifying ending.

“A potent, heartfelt life story.”
—Kirkus Reviews

“...a powerful, personal account of how recurring
childhood trauma can fracture one’s identity
and result in a deep loss of self.”
—Christina Chiu, Author of Beauty and
Troublemaker and Other Saints

“Losing the Atmosphere is a
heartbreaking account of life with
a rare psychological disorder,
and of the events that broke a
budding mind to pieces.”
—Claire Foster, Foreword Reviews

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Email Vivian@VivianConan.com • VivianConan.com
“A gripping story of one family’s courage and resourcefulness under life-threatening conditions.

SILENT EARTH
Averting the Insect Apocalypse
Goulson, Dave
Harper/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
$28.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-06-308820-7

An award-winning entomologist and conservationist examines the importance of insects to our ongoing survival.

Goulson, a professor of biology at the University of Sussex who has written about bees and other insects in A Sting in the Tale and other books, begins by exploring the history of these fascinating creatures, reflecting on periods in his life when butterflies and bees were more abundant than they are today. He also laments that future generations will likely see even fewer. Unfortunately, most people view insects as pests. However, the reality is that “as insects become more scarce, our world will slowly grind to a halt, for it cannot function without them.” Goulson offers a devastating vision of the future—marked by starvation, disease, and lawlessness—that will come to pass unless meaningful action to protect insects is undertaken immediately. Among the many reasons for their decline are pesticides, light pollution, temperature changes, and the introduction of foreign plants and insects into local communities. Even though the author has dedicated years of his life to his research, he also acknowledges that ecologists and entomologists have “done a poor job of explaining the vital importance of insects to the general public.” Striving to educate, he shows that while countless species are rapidly going extinct, there are glimmers of hope. “It is not yet too late,” he writes. “Only a small proportion of insects...has gone extinct so far.” Through concerted efforts—youth education, demands for political action and sustainable farming systems, and programs to green urban areas—there is still time for us to avert the apocalypse of the subtitle. Although much of the information here will not be new or surprising to avid nature readers, the author’s enthusiasm and conversational tone drive home the need for change and create an inspiring reading experience.

A hopeful, scientifically lucid, and timely call to action.

RUNNER’S HIGH
How a Movement of Cannabis-Fueled Athletes is Changing the Science of Sports
Hesse, Josiah
Putnam (320 pp.)
$24.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-593-19117-0

A journalist discovers running while high—and discovers he’s not the only one who enjoys it.

Readers may be surprised by the overlap between the running community and weed culture. In his nonfiction debut, investigative journalist Hesse, who has written extensively about marijuana news, upends numerous misconceptions about cannabis and well-being. After a lifelong antipathy toward sports, the author turned away from drinking and smoking cigarettes in favor of running and getting high. Weed helped him find the groove and pleasure of running, but when he signed up for his first marathon, he didn’t yet know about “the hand-in-glove relationship between pot and sports.” As he began to notice how many other runners ingested marijuana, his reporting instincts led him deep into medical research, the long history of global cannabis use, the criminalization and ongoing trend toward legalization in the U.S., and the retrograde treatment the drug receives from the governing bodies of the sports world. This last is key. One takeaway from the book is that athletes in all sports use cannabis in one form or another
TIME, MONEY, STUFF—THE THINGS WE THROW AWAY, THE THINGS WE NEED TO KEEP

Byron Reese & Scott Hoffman

WASTED

HOW WE SQUANDER TIME, MONEY, AND NATURAL RESOURCES—AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

AVAILABLE NOW
“Good stories from writers both popular and unknown, guaranteed to fill you with wanderlust.”

LETTER TO A STRANGER

at extraordinary rates. NBA and NFL players have estimated cannabis use at above 80% of players despite the drug still being banned. The reasons for use are myriad, but of particular interest to runners may be the relationship between the runner’s high and marijuana high. The cannabinoids we ingest in drug form are so chemically similar to the endocannabinoids our bodies naturally produce when running that for many runners, there is a kind of experiential convergence when the two practices are combined. To be sure, this is a work of advocacy, but—jokes aside—it’s a sober one. Hesse is circumspect in his enthusiasm, reminding readers that he’s “just a guy who likes to get stoned and run.”

An eye-opening and potentially mind-expanding read for runners and stoners alike, not to mention the culturally curious.

DVOŘÁK’S PROPHECY
And the Vexed Fate of Black Classical Music

Horowitz, Joseph
Norton (256 pp.)
$30.00 | Nov. 9, 2021
978-0-393-88124-0

Why is American classical music so White?

In 1893, visiting Bohemian composer Antonín Dvořák predicted that a “great and noble school” of American classical music would build upon the nation’s “negro melodies.” Instead, writes music historian Horowitz, classical music in America became “a Eurocentric subsidiary,” while African American melodies and rhythms were segregated in popular music. Yet Dvořák’s prophecy encouraged Black composers, including his assistant, Harry Burleigh, and mixed-race Englishman Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, to compose classical works steeped in African American folk music that were widely performed and discussed at the turn of the 20th century. The villains in Horowitz’s indictment are modernists Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, and Virgil Thomson, who all “maintained that there was no American music of consequence before 1910.” White outliers such as Charles Ives, who unabashedly quoted from popular songs in his symphonies and sonatas, and George Gershwin, who wrote an opera with African American protagonists, were dismissed as eccentrics or sentimentalists. At the same time, African American composers William Grant Still, Florence Price, and William Levi Dawson, though taken seriously in the years between the world wars, plunged into obscurity because they didn’t fit into the modernist narrative. Horowitz is unafraid to tackle the third-rail issue of cultural appropriation, coming down firmly on the side of artists’ freedom to draw on any traditions that speak to them. He covers his back by enlisting African American tenor George Shirley to make the most forceful defense in a foreword: “I have no right to tell anyone they cannot perform the music of Black folk if they have the desire and ability to do so with proper respect for its content and distinctiveness.” Horowitz closes with a clarion call for American classical music to “acquire a viable future, at last buoyed and directed by a proper past.” His chronicle of “a failure of historical memory” is feisty and opinionated but always backed by solid evidence.

Essential cultural history.

LETTER TO A STRANGER
Essays to the Ones Who Haunt Us
Ed. by Kinder, Colleen
Algonquin (336 pp.)
$19.95 paper | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-64375-124-5

Dozens of writers with something more to say to a person they never knew. As Leslie Jamison points out in the foreword, “we spend so much of our lives in the company of people we’ll never know….How rarely we admit the strange, unannounced ways they lodge inside of us.” Jamison was one of the first contributors to a column called “Letter to a Stranger,” edited by Kinder for the online magazine she co-founded, Off Assignment. In this anthology, she collects the “most extraordinary” submissions. Many are quite brief, and none are very long, and the thematic sections allow them to bounce off each other in interesting ways. The first section, “Symmetry,” includes both Lia Purpura and Michelle Tea reflecting on young strangers they felt a kinship with, one on a plane, the other in a tattoo parlor. In the “Chemistry” section, we read about various sorts of attractions that never came to fruition. Howard Axelrod: “I was twelve; this was nearly thirty years ago, I’ve never written about you, never spoken about you, not in the years afterward.” Readers will eagerly await the confidence Axelrod shares next. “Gratitude” includes characters ranging from the disappearing superhero doctor who saved Aria Beth Sloss’ baby to “the Drunk Mr. Flunchy,” a man “lanky as a Giacometti and more shabby than chic,” whose gift to Gregory Pardlo was a physical threat. While many of the essays have an ephemeral quality, some will stick with even the most jaded of reader—e.g., Sophie Haigney’s apology to the survivor of a horrible crime whom she tormented with questions in her role as “the media.” Other contributors include Pico Iyer, Maggie Shipstead, Elizabeth Kolberg, Jacquelyn Mitchard, and Lucas Mann, with letters originating from all seven continents.

Good stories from writers both popular and unknown, guaranteed to fill you with wanderlust.
An inspirational memoir from a human rights activist who has devoted her life to fighting female genital mutilation.

The author is a member of the Maasai tribe, born in the small Kenyan town of Kimana, and she evocatively explores the culture of her people. Historically, Maasai men are known as fierce warriors who protect their people and animals, while Maasai women serve as the caregivers of the house and children. A community bound by tradition, they live in hand-built circular homes and raise cattle as the primary food source. When they are young, children have one of their cheeks branded by a hot coil of wire; the scab creates a circle that serves as “a special symbol to mark us as Maasai.” When it was Leng’ete’s turn, she ran away, and she “still [has] no marks.” Another tradition is referred to as “the cut.” During this ceremony, the women subject the young females to a procedure in which their clitoris is either cut or removed completely—without anesthesia. Leng’ete refused to undergo FGM. “I loved my family. I loved my people. But this, I thought, was wrong,” she explains. “Tradition can be good. Tradition can be beautiful. But some traditions deserve to die.” Following her defiant act, she was shunned. With urgent, shocking, and heartbreaking detail, Leng’ete brings readers into her life. Beginning her work with the African Medical and Research Foundation when she was still a teenager, she found her calling. Armed with scientific evidence about the significant health risks associated with FGM, Leng’ete returned to her community in hopes of instilling change. Due in part to her relentless efforts, tribal leaders “changed the Maasai constitution to reflect our commitment to end FGM.” Leng’ete was also awarded the black walking stick, a symbol of leadership not normally given to women. She went on to campaign globally, including building A Nice Place in Kimana, “a safe haven for girls fleeing FGM.”

An incredibly powerful story that offers real hope for the future.
I was the white sheep in an all-black family," he writes. "Now the 2016 election," he writes, "[we] feared some of the rights we'd had a child who would look different from me, and I prayed about tradecraft—London devotes most of the book to "war stories," describing his experience as a case officer in recruiting agents, foreign spies working on behalf of the U.S. but lacking any identifiable factors, from geography to the culture of local forces working in opposition to American interests. One refreshing discovery two decades after 9/11 is the importance that the agency levies on HUMINT, or human intelligence derived from agents and other actors, bad and good, that leads to actionable pursuits to move a case forward or interrupt a plot to hurt others. “Espionage is about relationships," writes London. “Agents are all human beings with hopes, dreams, fears and communities....They don’t want to be treated like prostitutes, nor even employees, and they deserve respect. You dehumanize them or otherwise take them for granted at your own peril.”

There are a few recognizable names here, but most of the players remain silent, from a case officer who committed suicide to an aggressively alcoholic head of a remote posting to the asset who declared that he needed to kill his handler in order to be taken seriously.

An inconspicuous but well-informed and readable snapshot of one of America’s most secretive organizations.

**HIGH YELLA**

A Modern Family Memoir

Majors, Steve

Univ. of Georgia (280 pp.)

$29.95 | Oct. 1, 2021

978-0-8203-6031-7

A definitively modern writer wrestles with haunting questions from his family’s hidden past.

A gay man, Black while derided by relatives as not being Black enough, Majors is a veteran news producer who has worked for some of the nation’s leading media outlets. That trajectory might have been unlikely given his background as the scion of a poor Black family on the edges of Batavia, New York. His father was alcoholic and abusive, quick to blame his troubles on “whitey,” and he and his family endured backward glances regarding his mother’s patience with an untenable situation. “The older man she must have thought was fun-loving and good-looking was just a jobless drunk,” writes Majors. “Worse than that, he was a serial cheater.” Fast-forward in time, and the author is affluent, living in a succession of “spectacular houses,” eventually in a committed relationship that would end in a hurried marriage when Trump came into office, long after he and his now-husband had adopted two Black daughters. “After the 2016 election,” he writes, “[we] feared some of the rights we’d been taken for granted might be rolled back.” As one of his daughters rebelled, Majors found himself wrestling with anger and angst. “I was the white sheep in an all-black family,” he writes. “Now I had a child who would look different from me, and I prayed it would never make a difference to her.” It did, at least for a time, and the author undertook a period of self-examination and -recrimination that became only a little less fraught when a DNA test showed that the family’s past was rather different from how it was presented to him. “There was no doubt that this person who made half of me was white.” That realization did little to make the author’s sense of self less complicated, but it did provide a certain resolution that plays well in bringing the memoir to a close.

A brave reckoning with multiple questions of identity, class, family, race, and other thorny issues.

**STRASTRUCK**

My Unlikely Road to Hollywood

Maltin, Leonard

GoodKnight Books (400 pp.)

$26.95 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-1-73527-381-5

The self-described “lucky film buff” recounts his career.

Film critic and historian Maltin offers a warmhearted, rambling memoir of his long romance with movies, which began when he was a child. He delivered TV Guide instead of a newspaper, “devoured [my] weekly edition of Variety,” watched TV constantly, went to as many Saturday matinees as he could, and collected 8mm silent films. When he was 15, he began to submit pieces to Film Fan Monthly, soon buying, writing for, and editing the magazine himself. In high school, he started the Motion Picture Club, joined the AV squad, and worked on the stage crew. “Even my doodling was movie related,” he adds. “I would draw classic movie studio logos or try to list all 75 of Bogart’s films.” When he was 17, a teacher put him in touch with a book editor, who assigned him to write a movie reference guide—a task that established his reputation for a career that, even then, seemed inevitable. In 1982, he was hired by Entertainment Tonight, where, for the next 30 years, he interviewed pretty much everyone—except, he regrets, Walt Disney. Not comfortable with asking prying questions, Maltin put celebrities at ease. Katharine Hepburn offered him “soup, sharp memories, and strong opinions, sparing no one, least of all herself.” Anthony Hopkins disclosed why he became an actor: “I just wanted to be rich and famous, that’s all I ever wanted. I had no grounding and I had no cultural background at all.” Replete with anecdotes, the good-natured, rarely critical narrative features appreciative recollections of James Stewart, Buster Keaton, Robert Mitchum, Elizabeth Taylor, Jerry Lewis, Roy Rogers, Jackie Cooper, and Shirley Temple, among many more. Maltin and his wife were on the “permanent guest list” at the Playboy Mansion in the 1990s. “Hef,” the author recalls, “was the most gracious and generous host I ever met.” It seems likely that Maltin was among the most gracious and generous of guests.

A genial, entertaining memoir.
The story of Google's early attempt at creating a universal library with its "promises of making all the world's information available to everyone."

Marcum and Schonfeld, both of whom have long experience in the library world, begin their examination of the Google Books project by discussing the concept of a universal library, a "comprehensive library that is accessible to all," an idea that dates back to the Great Library of Alexandria. In 2004, in the early days of information digitization as a practice, Google announced its plans to "allow simultaneous searches of 'billions of web pages and texts of hundreds of thousands of books.'" After introducing Google's vision, the authors chronicle the history of resource sharing in libraries, from the card catalog at the Library of Congress to the creation of interlibrary loan services and online databases. Then they move on to the specifics of Google's ambitious project, which began with a partnership with five renowned university libraries and a number of publishing companies and ended up leading to the creation of a number of similarly themed projects. By sharing the views of both the librarians who supported the concept and those who were concerned about a library for everyone being controlled by a private company, the authors offer a nice overview, including the mechanics of the initial project, objections from publishers about copyright issues, and the court case that would ultimately decide the fate of the project. Throughout the heavily researched text, which benefits from interviews with librarians and other information professionals describing their experiences in "the early days of digitization," the authors keep readers informed, despite dryly academic passages, of just how widely "the entry of Google into the library arena" would affect information sharing and librarianship today.

Sometimes too scholarly, but its contribution to the Google-vs.-publishers debate is well worth the jargon and technical terms.
A medical historian offers a new history of one of the 20th century’s most significant scientific quests.

The structure of DNA, announced in 1953 by James Watson and Francis Crick, marked the beginning of the spectacular genetics revolution that has continually accelerated since then. There is no shortage of excellent histories, but Markel, a Guggenheim fellow and professor of medicine at the University of Michigan, has written one of the best. After a quick review of the relevant advancements in the 19th century, the author delivers long, satisfying biographies of the leading figures as well as a large supporting cast, including Linus Pauling and John Randall, who directed the biophysics unit at King’s College in London. Markel provides a meticulous account of DNA research by others, as well, and he emphasizes that Watson and Crick made their breakthrough by examining X-ray photographs of DNA crystals. Producing such crystals required extraordinary dexterity and photographing them demanded acute technical expertise, which often included building X-ray machines from scratch. The X-ray experts were Maurice Wilkins (who shared the Nobel Prize with Watson and Crick) and Rosalind Franklin, recruited in 1950 when Wilkins seemed to be stalled. Nearly every historian in this area explores the intense dislike between Wilkins and Franklin; all, Markel included, deliver reasonable, if differing explanations. Watson famously disparaged her in his 1968 bestseller, The Double Helix, (“he transmogrified her into ‘Rosy,’ the one-dimensional archenemy”), but Markel turns up admirers. In the end, Watson and Crick examined X-rays (Franklin’s were better than Wilkins’), built their model, and went down in history. Franklin died in 1958, and the others barely mentioned her in their 30-minute Nobel Prize lectures in 1962. Nowadays, everyone agrees that she was treated badly and that her work—examined without her permission (“one of the most egregious ripoffs in the history of science”—was essential to the discovery but during her life, she never expressed resentment.

A brilliant addition to the literature on the history of biological discovery.
Aboriginal people.” Every such acknowledgment, every line of
Mims follows the trail of a USB device, an everyday piece of
Canadian First Nations: “W as I trying to get back to my roots, or
factory (and back even further, to the extraction of the elements
quickly fell into a succession of roles involving the negotiation
and play piano. His memoir has its longueurs, but the narrative
and renegotiation of treaties. Particularly newsworthy are his
a yearslong flurry of activism and activity . A former teacher with
a remove from Cree culture, the author has devoted much time
icles the relevant history , from the scientific management theo
the construction lines of Henry Ford (ditto) and the “centuries
of experience, craft, and technology accumulated by sailors and
naval architects” that allow a crew of 30 to 40 individuals to
pilot a vessel three football fields long, stacked with thousands
of containers, across entire oceans. Mims writes in a digestible
style that conveys a pleasing you-are-there quality, and he does not
shy away from describing the vast economic inequalities
involved in the movement of commodities and the indifference
of many managers toward their workers—from injuries to
psychological impacts—since they can be trained in hours and
discarded if they do not hit their “make rate.” Inevitably, there
is plenty of predictive analytics, load-balancing algorithms, ful-
fillment engines, and dynamic route planning—right down to a
minimum of left turns for delivery trucks. Remarkably, Mims
makes docking a cargo vessel and loading conveyor belts, and
even making that left turn, well worth close examination.
A surprisingly absorbing foray into the optimization of
product flow.

ARRIVING TODAY
From Factory to Front Door—
Why Everything Has Changed
About How and What We Buy
Mims, Christopher
Harper Business (336 pp.)
$29.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-06-298-795-2

A survey of the logistical innovations
that bring a product to your doorstep
with the tap of a keyboard.

Sheds welcome light on little-known aspects of the
interaction of Indigenous peoples with politically dominant
outsiders.

I WAS A FRENCH MUSLIM
Mokhtefi, Mokhtar
Trans. by Mokhtefi, Elaine
Other Press (452 pp.)
$26.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-63542-180-4

An exiled Algerian freedom fighter’s
account of the less-than-heroic realities
undergirding the Algerian revolution.
In this memoir translated by his
widow, Mokhtefi traces his evolution
from a young boy steeped in Muslim traditions to a disillusioned
government administrator. The son of a butcher, the author grew
up in an Algerian village seething with French-Arab tensions. A
schoolteacher saw Mokhtefi’s intellectual gifts early on and urged
him to pursue a scholarship to a school outside of his village.
There, he began his assimilation into a French-dominated soci-
ety he questioned for how it “deprived my parents of an educa-
tion” and made him feel culturally “mutilated, bouncing back and
forth between the traditional family, the village, and my life at
the school and in the city.” His political consciousness emerged
in high school, and he dreamed of becoming a lawyer to defend
Algerian nationalists like his imprisoned brother. As the French
military began mobilizing to Algeria, the young Mokhtefi found
himself drawn into the murky politics that pitted rival factions of
Algerian nationalists against each other. He eventually joined the
National Liberation Army and trained to send and receive Morse
code among men who “barely [knew] how to read and write.”
Eventually promoted to a supervisory position within the signal
corps, he continued to witness a toxic “climate of fear and disdain”
prevail in the ALN. After accepting an administrative post in the
emerging Algerian government, he watched the minister and his
cabinet censor all the reports he wrote, and the justice-for-all
promises of the revolution turned to ash. This detailed, at times
labyrinthine eyewitness account of a revolutionary’s disillusion-
ment with the revolution to free Algeria not only from France,
but from its own lack of political enlightenment will appeal most to historians of colonization and students of political movements. An intelligent chronicle that may have limited appeal among general readers.

**PATRIOTISM & PROFIT**
Washington, Hamilton, Schuyler & the Rivalry for America's Capital City
Nagel, Susan
Pegasus (352 pp.)
$28.95 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-64313-708-7

Historical survey of the intense rivalries for money and power that roiled the new republic.

Biographer, journalist, and former humanities professor Nagel paints a convincing portrait of George Washington and his friend New York Sen. Philip Schuyler as manipulative real estate moguls who vied to establish the nation’s capital on a site that would enrich them personally. Schuyler, with vast tracts in the northeast, wanted the seat of federal government in New York City. Washington, on the other hand, envisioned the capital situated around the port of Alexandria, Virginia, and the Potomac River, near his Mount Vernon plantation and the 70,000 acres of western Virginia land that he owned. In addition to increasing the value of their property, both men wanted control of waterways that had great commercial potential: for Schuyler, the Erie Canal; for Washington, the Potomac. At the same time that he was the nation’s first chief executive, Washington was also president of the Potomac River Canal Company, an enterprise set up to profit from the river’s development. Both men, Nagel argues convincingly, “belonged to the class of eighteenth-century agrarians who were also capitalist merchants. They saw opportunities for commerce in everything they grew, butchered, milled, and distilled.” Virginia and New York were not the only contenders to be the nation’s capital. At various times, fierce supporters emerged for many other venues, including Kingston, New York; Annapolis, Maryland; Williamsburg, Virginia; and Princeton, New Jersey. During the 1787 Constitutional Convention, Nagel notes, debate over the location of the capital “exploded several times on the convention floor.” Although Thomas Jefferson perpetuated the story that he “masterfully mediated” the battle, Nagel asserts that he was a “bit player” in the drama that resulted in New York’s becoming the seat of financial power, and Washington, D.C., the seat of government. In her view, Washington “borrowed, leveraged… coerced, and otherwise cheated his way to creating the nation’s capital city.”

A fresh look at the self-serving nature of the Founding Fathers.

**THE END OF BIAS**
A Beginning: The Science and Practice of Overcoming Unconscious Bias
Nordell, Jessica
Metropolitan/Henry Holt (368 pp.)
$28.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-250-18618-8

Is it possible to end biases, personal and institutional? Science journalist Nordell believes so, but it will require plenty of work.
Nordell, a longtime student of prejudice and its origins, observes that there is a gulf "between the values of fairness and the reality of real-world discrimination," a gulf defined by the term implicit or unconscious bias. It is costly: Undervaluing women, ethnic minorities, or other marginalized groups deprives society of potentially valuable contributions on the parts of those who are discriminated against. While recognizing that many barriers are deliberate, Nordell argues that most people don't set out to make the sharp distinctions that engender them; the biases truly are unintended and, while learned, largely unexamined. The author's case studies include a transgender research scientist who, having transitioned to a male, found that his abilities were far more valued than when he was female; an Asian American man who lacked math skills but was promoted into jobs that assumed he was a stereotypical numbers whiz; and an imaginary Black teenager who, presented to White audiences as having "behaved in an antisocial way," was assumed to be a future felon and therefore more deserving of punishment than a White peer accused of the same thing. Nordell's examples are revealing but lead to the same general set of conclusions, so there's a certain sameness to the narrative that becomes more pronounced as it progresses. More useful are some of the recommended remedies, including "mindfulness meditation"—which, when adopted by one Oregon police department, led to a rapid decline in the use of force and citizen complaints—and counseling approaches that minimize shame while building awareness of bias and the motivation to imagine others' perspectives. "Colorblind" approaches, she writes, can backfire. These efforts pay off, she writes. Trust builds, relationships deepen; in a business context, “racially diverse teams where everyone can learn from one another outperformed homogenous teams.”

A practical primer for those seeking to reduce the hegemony of bias in everyday life.

**YOU BET YOUR LIFE**

From Blood Transfusions to Mass Vaccination, the Long and Risky History of Medical Innovation

*Offit, Paul A.*

Basic (272 pp.)

$28.00 | Sep. 21, 2021

978-1-5416-2039-1

How the medical advances we take for granted came to be—and it's not a pretty picture.

Offit, a professor of pediatrics and vaccinology, specializes in denouncing bad doctors and popular health nonsense. In his latest, he switches gears and follows the history of medical innovation. Though we are “at the dawn of a wondrous age,” he writes, there's a “catch...virtually every medical breakthrough has exacted a human price.” He illustrates with gripping, often gruesome stories of the early years of lifesaving treatments plus other medical stories that are merely horrific. In 1967, South African surgeon Christiaan Barnard became a worldwide celebrity by transplanting the first human heart. Surgeons around the world rushed to follow suit, with terrible results. In 1968, only 10% of recipients lived for two years, a number that worsened the following year; by 1971, most hospitals had closed their transplant units. The story ends happily as more judicious surgeons refined their techniques, and heart transplants are now as routine as bypass surgery. Offit then chronicles other medical success stories with rough beginnings—e.g., a 1920 professional gathering of radiologists 20 years after X-rays became an essential medical tool: “So many attendees were missing hands and fingers that when the chicken dinner was served no one could cut their meat.” Every child with acute lymphoblastic leukemia died before the first treatment appeared in 1947. Most improved with the first chemotherapy but “eventually relapsed and died.” Today, drugs cure 90% of those cases, but many tragedies happened along the way. Offit also tells the sad story of Ryan White, a hemophiliac who, in 1984, was infected with AIDS via a blood transfusion. Although doctors agreed that no one could catch his disease, ignorant neighbors and school officials treated him heartlessly. Certainly, the maxim that no one should know how sausages are made applies here, but Offit is a fluid storyteller armed with decades of knowledge, and he provides an educative, though often distressing, reading experience.

**Unsettling but realistic medical histories.**
In 2018, the authors, who co-founded the project, began an anonymous study that is alternately horrifying, depressing, and even hopeful. The U.S., write the authors, “is a lonely island when it comes to mass shootings,” mainly due to the country’s love affair with guns and unrelenting, often misguided, protection of the Second Amendment. (One shooter interviewed not only names the guns in his arsenal; he sleeps with them.) Chronicling the lives of a variety of perpetrators, from mentally distressed school shooters to rampaging extremists, the authors identify many shared attributes and experiences, including childhood trauma, anger, loneliness, societal stressors, and suicidal ideation. Many of these factors serve as propellants for terrible acts of violence, but, as the authors argue convincingly, they also can become integral parts in “unlocking solutions” for personal crisis and trauma intervention across individual, institutional, and societal levels. The authors conclude with holistic, interventional, and tangible strategies for reducing violence in contemporary society.

A distressing, critical study in the understanding, processing, and prevention of mass-casualty gun violence.

**GAME WIZARDS**
**The Epic Battle for Dungeons & Dragons**
*Peterson, Jon*
MIT Press (368 pp.)
$24.95 paper | Oct. 12, 2021
978-0-262-54295-1

A deep dive into a significant controversy in the gaming world: Who deserves credit for the meteoric rise of Dungeons & Dragons and blame for the subsequent avalanche of public spats, lawsuits, and business bungling?

The enduring success of Dungeons & Dragons is one of pop culture’s most inexplicable phenomena. Though tabletop gaming historian Peterson has previously chronicled the D&D origin story, notably in the gorgeous *Dungeons & Dragons: Art & Arcana*, this book focuses on the game’s creators, Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson. When the gregarious and ambitious Gygax and creative but sensitive Arneson launched D&D in 1974, they casually agreed to a 50/50 split of whatever royalties it might generate. In the agreement that they signed with Gygax’s company, TSR, they retained the option to repurchase rights for a paltry amount not to exceed $300 if the game went out of print—a sign of just how little confidence everyone involved had in its success. When D&D sales surprisingly surged and started generating millions in profit, controversy and thorny legal battles ensued. As Gygax and Arneson jostled over credit in print and in court, brothers Brian and Kevin Blume helped Gygax grow and diversify TSR’s business. While subsequent years saw the company thrive despite the game’s unfair association with the “Satanic Panic” of the early 1980s, profligate spending, lack of a cohesive strategy, and rampant nepotism made TSR a case study in corporate mismanagement. Peterson’s in-depth review of legal documents, contracts, and correspondence creates the most insightful account yet of the Gygax-Arneson feud, but the exhaustible level of detail occasionally bogs down the narrative. D&D fans will need to look elsewhere for a crackling account of the game’s evolution, but grognards and business students alike will find something of value.

A good dungeon crawl: Casual readers won’t make it past the start, but treasures abound for experienced adventurers.
“A palimpsestic, personal, and resonant journey with a living musical encyclopedia.”

**MUSIC IS HISTORY**

_Quotelove_
Abrams Image (336 pp.)
$29.99 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-4197-5143-1

The iconic drummer, composer, and DJ tracks modern American history through music and vice versa.

Each chapter is a specific year, beginning with 1971, when Questlove was born, and is structured around “a song that represents some idea connected to history: how it was experienced at the time, or how it is learned and understood, or what figures surface within it, or how different versions of it are reconciled, or how they cannot be.” Interspersed throughout are lists of songs—and the author’s commentary on each—divided into categories—e.g., songs worthy of being reinstated into communal memory; and hip-hop “deep cuts that...need to be excavated”; and songs in E minor, a key that “isn’t just a way of life for funk songs, but a world unto itself.”

**WHEN WOMEN RULED**

_Quilligan, Maureen_
Liveright/Norton (320 pp.)
$29.95 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-5149-796-4

A revisionist history posits warm ties among powerful queens.

Renaissance scholar Quilligan closely examines the relationships among four 16th-century rulers—Mary Tudor, Elizabeth I, Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, and Catherine de’ Medici—seeking to revise the “misogynist narrative” that placed them in “jealous and warlike opposition” to one another. With meticulous attention to the letters and gifts they exchanged, Quilligan argues that the women nurtured a culture of mutual respect based on their family ties and sense of their “shared nature of power.” Their lives were inextricably intertwined: Mary Tudor and Elizabeth were half sisters and religious antagonists; Mary Stuart was their cousin once removed; Catherine, though not a queen, was Mary Stuart’s mother-in-law and “ruled as mother of three different kings.”

Considering Elizabeth’s relationship with Mary Stuart, Quilligan asserts that the Protestant and Catholic queens evinced “an essentially similar, tolerant Christianity”—unlike Catholic Mary Tudor, who, during the first three years of her reign, “burned heretics alive, many of them common people but some of them Anglican bishops and archbishops.” Elizabeth accepted Mary Stuart’s request to be godmother to her son James and sent a solid gold baptismal font upon the boy’s birth, symbolizing the queens’ mutual desire for “unity and toleration.” Still, Mary soon melted it down to fund her troops. Other gifts among the women included gems, silver, fine embroidery, books, and tapestries; as Quilligan notes, many of Elizabeth’s 800 pieces of jewelry were gifts from women, not necessarily family. Elizabeth and her cousin never met, even when Mary Stuart, perceived by Elizabeth’s courtiers as a threat, lived for more than 18 years under house arrest in England. When Mary Stuart was beheaded in 1587, Elizabeth, furious, claimed the execution was a “miserable accident” about which she had known nothing.

At times, it is difficult to separate the rulers’ political exigency from their familial loyalty, but the book is a useful addition to the literature on European royalty.

An authoritative and sympathetic collective biography.

**THE WRITER’S CRUSADE**

_Kurt Vonnegut and the Many Lives of Slaughterhouse-Five_

_Roston, Tom_
Abrams (272 pp.)
$26.00 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-4197-4489-1

A fresh look at Kurt Vonnegut’s classic 1969 novel through the lens of PTSD.

During World War II, Vonnegut was a prisoner of war and witness to the bombing of Dresden, which killed an estimated 25,000 civilians. That experience fueled one of his best-loved novels, which blended science fiction with a more conventional tale of war trauma. In interviews, the author could be hard to pin down about the book, sometimes underplaying the impact of his war experiences, sometimes snarky, sometimes openly candid about it. “In Dresden I saw a mountain of dead people,” he once said. “And that makes you thoughtful.”

Veteran magazine journalist Roston attempts to engage with the novel and the author’s life to determine if Vonnegut suffered from what we would now call PTSD. He recognizes this as something of a fool’s errand;
Vonnegut’s son Mark believes he did, but the novel resists such simple interpretation, being so multivalent and written over nearly a quarter-century. Still, Roston’s efforts are fruitful. He explores how the nature of war trauma has changed in the past century, with special attention to Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who’ve channeled their experiences into fiction. Matthew Mellina, one writer/vet with PTSD, was so struck by Vonnegut’s conceit of the novel’s hero, Billy Pilgrim, being “unstuck” that he had the word tattooed on his arm. Roston’s byways into PTSD history and other writers’ work can sometimes draw him a fair distance from Vonnegut, and the book’s central question remains unresolved. But he successfully reenergizes a major work from a writer whose star has faded somewhat. New wars, and more recent fiction about them, may have overshadowed *Slaughterhouse-Five*, but Roston persuasively shows how the novel speaks both to Vonnegut’s moment and to our own.

A rangy, occasionally rambling portrait of one of our stranger, more enduring war novels.

**TEN MASTERPIECES OF MUSIC**

*Sachs, Harvey*

Liveright/Norton (336 pp.)

$29.95 | Oct. 26, 2021

978-1-63149-518-2

An astute guide compiles a stunning repertoire of works.

Esteemed music critic Sachs gets personal with this effervescent homage to some favorite works of “life-giving and affirmative” classical music. He chose these pieces, all in different genres, because he felt he had “something useful to say about them,” and he deftly shows how biography informed the music, each piece neatly fitting into its time and place. The more musically inclined reader will especially appreciate the brief explications of their key components. Mozart wrote his “profoundly moving” Piano Concerto in G Major in 1784 during a hectic and busy period; it was a “work of exceptional beauty and depth” that exhibited “previously unexplored regions.” Beethoven composed *Trio* in B-flat major, a “work of great breadth,” in 1811, 20 years after Mozart’s death. Its debut, an attending composer wrote, “was not a treat,” for the “piano was badly out of tune.” But Beethoven “minded little” because he was now deaf which, Sachs writes, likely led “him into previously unexplored regions of musical creativity.” One of the torchbearers at Beethoven’s funeral was Schubert, who, while ill, would compose his last and “greatest” string quartet, in G major. “I propose the hypothesis,” writes the author, “is about...trying to accept the nothingness of death.” Hector Berlioz used Goethe as a “springboard” for his *Damnation of Faust*, which “arouses admiration, fascination, and joy,” and he had the “audacity” to send Goethe a copy of the score. Verdi’s opera *Don Carlo*, writes Sachs, was “another milestone in the extraordinary biography of a master whose beginnings had been exceptionally unpromising.” After enthusiastically delving into the String Quintet in G Major by Brahms, the “spiritual devastation” of Sibelius’ Fourth Symphony, and Prokofiev’s Piano Sonata No. 8, Sachs concludes with a section on the “pungent physicality” of Stravinsky’s *Requiem Canticles*, “among the most intensely spiritual pieces of the twentieth century.”

This judicious compilation of biographies and analysis is a thoroughly engaging read.

**CONCEPCION: AN IMMIGRANT FAMILY’S FORTUNES**

*Samaha, Albert*

Riverhead (320 pp.)

$28.00 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-0-593-08608-7

An investigative journalist uncovers his family’s story.

Samaha, a reporter and inequality editor at BuzzFeed News, offers an expansive view of Filipino history and the experiences of Filipinx immigrants, who, with their American-born descendants, comprise the fourth-largest diaspora in the U.S. For his maternal grandparents, Manuel and Rizalina Concepcion, America was the land of opportunity. Although the family was prosperous (maids, private schools), beginning in 1965, when the U.S. dropped its immigration quotas, various relatives began leaving, and others followed as economic and political conditions deteriorated under the military rule of Ferdinand Marcos. Samaha and his mother came in 1995; his Lebanese father stayed behind, and his parents divorced a few years later. Drawing on more than 100 interviews as well as oral histories, court cases, and immigration records, Samaha creates a vivid sense of the reality immigrants encountered in a country they believed would offer “dreams and stability.” Even with evidence of dysfunction and decline, they never lost their faith in American greatness. The author interweaves stories of family and friends with a wide-ranging history of exploitation, oppression, and violence that shaped Filipino society and culture as Spain, Japan, and the U.S. took over the islands. “The colonizers,” he writes, “trained us with single-minded rigor to devote ourselves to their well-being.” Even after the U.S. granted the Philippines independence in 1946, the CIA “kept a guiding hand on the country’s leaders,” including Marcos. Samaha’s identity as Filipinx was in flux throughout his childhood and adulthood as he moved between the White world his mother venerated and his self-identification as “a kid who wanted to be Black.” He came to realize that Filipinx immigrants “weren’t merely new arrivals to a nation, but to a longstanding system of racial oppression, suspended somewhere between those who conquered the land by blood and those whose blood built the empire.”

An edifying, well-written narrative that provides an intimate perspective on the legacy of colonialism.
“Throughout, Schindler writes vividly about representation, memory, and the aftermath of atrocity.”

THE LOST CAFÉ SCHINDLER

One Family, Two Wars, and the Search for Truth
Schindler, Meriel
Norton (400 pp.)
$28.95 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-0-393-88162-2

A powerful account of the divergent fortunes of a prominent Austrian Jewish family.

In her impressively researched debut, attorney Schindler offers a sprawling, haunted narrative about a personal quest that was sparked by the passing of her father, long embittered by an “addiction to litigation in pursuit of what, he felt, he and the family were still owed because of the disruptions of war.” In the 19th century, the Schindlers, Tyrolean Jews, found success as distillers while riding out waves of antisemitism. Their civic-mindedness was epitomized by the author’s great uncle, who served in the Austro-Hungarian military during World War I. In the 1920s, the family opened a cafe that became central to the cultural life of Innsbruck. Things changed drastically in the 1930s, culminating in a vicious attack on Schindler’s grandfather during Kristallnacht in 1938 (which she discovered her father only pretended to have witnessed). After this, most family members fled to England or elsewhere, though several were murdered during the Holocaust. A local Nazi official took over the family villa, and the cafe was turned into “the most important Nazi watering hole in town.” Beyond the compelling personal details, the author chillingly documents how the livelihoods of Austrian Jews were destroyed, “systematically stripped of their assets, at bargain-basement prices.” Schindler brings the faded figures of her forebears to life via extensive archival research, but by returning to her misanthropic father’s presence, she also unearths fascinating digressions. His most outlandish claims proved accu-

By definition, the heart is an organ that receives fluid containing oxygen and nutrients from the body and then pumps it back out. Tiny, one-celled organisms—and some not so tiny (flatworms, corals, jellyfish)—don’t need one; they acquire these necessities by simple diffusion from the outside. More than 500 million years ago, writes Schutt, who is also a research associate in residence at the American Museum of Natural History, muscles evolved, forming the earliest circulatory system that moved fluids around. Hearts evolved later. The heart allows animals to grow large and move fast, but it isn’t essential. Insects don’t have one, but they don’t grow large. Although most readers give priority to their own heart, the author wa-

A significant addition to the literature on the Holocaust.

THE LOST CAFÉ SCHINDLER

One Family, Two Wars, and the Search for Truth
Schindler, Meriel
Norton (400 pp.)
$28.95 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-0-393-88162-2

A professor of biology writes “a story about hearts and the circulatory systems associated with them.”

CAN WE TALK ABOUT ISRAEL?

A Guide for the Curious, Confused, and Conflicted
Sokatch, Daniel
Bloomsbury (256 pp.)
$27.00 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-63557-387-9

A self-described liberal American Jew earnestly and humanely parses the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Acknowledging the passionate feelings surrounding the conflict on both sides, Sokatch, who runs the New Israel Fund, starts from the fair-minded position that Israelis and Palestinians are both right and both wrong, “two peoples, both with legitimate connections and claims to the land, who have been victimized by the outside world, each other, and themselves.” In a two-part narrative enhanced by Noxon’s illustrations, Sokatch first delves into the biblical history of the destruction of the Second Temple and dispersion of the Jews in 70 C.E. and the development of the two main Jewish cultures, Sephardic and Ashkenazi. The author moves on to Zionism and its various facets, with a sidebar exploring the question, “Is Zionism
justifiable?” He then examines the existence of a people already on the ground when European Zionists arrived, raising the question of who has the more ancient legitimacy. (The likely truth, he writes, is that both peoples probably descend from the same stock.) With the rise of Jewish nationalism in the late 19th century, Palestinian Arab nationalists began to define themselves in direct opposition to the Zionists, and Jewish-Arab violence predictably increased. The author moves steadily from independence and the displacement of the Palestinians through the seemingly endless series of depressing, tumultuous conflicts that have plagued the region ever since. In the second part of the book, Sokatch addresses thorny issues that “make people crazy” about the conflict, including discrepancies between actual territory versus what the maps denote; the fraught history of U.S.–Israel relations; the effects of the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement; and the increase in power of Christian evangelicals. The author closes with a “Lexicon of the Conflict,” a highly useful tool offering further context to the narrative and the issues at hand.

An optimistic, evenhanded instruction manual, with upbeat illustrations, for anyone trying to understand the conflict.

THE GREAT PEACE
A Memoir
Suvari, Mena
Hachette (256 pp.)
$28.00 | Jul. 27, 2021
978-0-306-87452-9

In her powerful debut memoir, the author demonstrates both candor and storytelling skill.

Suvari is stunningly straightforward about how she survived—and even flourished—despite years of sexual and emotional abuse. There will be tabloid interest in _The Great Peace_, named for “a book of poetry and stories” she wrote as an escape from her troubled teenage years, but this is much more than a celebrity tell-all. The author unflinchingly reveals that she was raped at age 12 by a childhood friend, discusses her suicide attempt, and examines her numerous questionable relationships with older men as she started her career as a young actor. Though Suvari doesn’t include anything about the sexual harassment allegations against her _American Beauty_ co-star Kevin Spacey, she does tell a story about an unusual ploy Spacey used to prepare for a pivotal scene in the movie. The author also frankly explores the problems with her previous two marriages even though they are not always flattering for her. As an award-winning veteran actor, Suvari is already known as a masterful visual storyteller, and the craftsmanship she exhibits here is impressive. “It was too hard to verbalize some of my traumas, even to my therapist….Those memories were like walls that kept me from escaping,” she writes about her first real experience in therapy. “I had become too used to pretending I was okay.” Each bite-sized chapter skillfully builds on the experiences of the previous one while foreshadowing what is to come, creating a page-turner that propels the streamlined narrative forward. Even when, in the story, Suvari seems stuck in a destructive relationship, she offers enough hints that suggest she’ll make it out. How she does it is a rewarding journey worth taking. “I want [the book] to serve as the flickering light at the end of a dark road showing there is a way out,” she writes in the author’s note. “And there is.”

Suvari’s bracing tale of abusive patterns and building new beginnings is wrenching, potent, and ultimately inspirational.

THE YEAR OF THE END
A Memoir of Marriage, Truth and Fiction
Theroux, Anne
Icon Books (208 pp.)
$22.95 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-78778-739-3

A former BBC journalist and broadcaster reflects on the last year of her two-decade marriage to acclaimed American travel writer Paul Theroux.

Long after their marriage ended, the author read this comment from her former husband in a published interview: “Writers choose their wives. They choose them for certain purposes. They need a specific kind of woman—protective and self-sacrificing types….What they want is a secretary, mother, guardian of the gate.” Naturally, she felt compelled to reply. “If you had given me the job description in advance, I wouldn’t have applied.” Instead, she was married to the man, whom she met in Nairobi in 1967, for more than two decades and bore him two sons. This memoir, documenting the final year of their union, is based on a diary she kept in 1990 and then annotated with further memories and corrections later in the decade. The entry for Jan. 18: “Paul left today—the beginning of separation and betrayal and its gradual mellowing into rue. A sensitive, thoughtful document of the immediate pain of separation and betrayal and its gradual mellowing into rue.
The celebrated British travel writer takes us on a fascinating journey along the Amur River.

In his latest adventure, octogenarian Thubron planned to follow the river “as it flows through southeast Siberia then meets China, then breaks for the Pacific.” For more than 1,000 of its 2,600 miles (which includes its source river, the Argun), the Amur forms the border between the Russian Far East and northeastern China. The Chinese call it Heilongjiang, which means “Black Dragon River, for the dragon’s imperial grandeur.” One of his first guides, a Mongolian horseman, warned him about the dangerous, “almost impassable” landscape. Shortly after starting out, the author suffered an injury, which forced him to question his body’s ability to keep up—yet, as always, he persevered. Standing out as a foreigner in a region that rarely hosts travelers, Thubron became the object of covert attention. Often, this curiosity resulted only in extended gazes and innocent questions, but he also endured numerous police interrogations and a nagging fear that he was being followed. Accompanied by various guides, the author made his way through this vast, unforgiving territory by car, boat, and train, evoking with beautiful detail and compassion its rich history and culture. Though the region is shrouded with mistrust, Thubron effectively brings it to life. Throughout his trip, the author engaged in discussions with local residents, who openly shared their personal feelings and histories as if they were longtime friends. Many villagers lamented the loss of their native cultures and offered conflicting views about the ownership of the region. The Chinese spoke of Russian land grabs and the profound unease of Chinese artifacts lying inside Russian borders, while Mongolians and Russians claimed that the Chinese were stripping the land and infiltrating every aspect of business. Thubron also lamented the demise of the region’s Indigenous cultures and languages. Readers will, too, as they savour this enthralling travel narrative.

A captivating portrait of a remote region of the world that many readers may know nothing about.

THE AMUR RIVER

Between Russia and China

Thubron, Colin
Harper/HarperCollins (320 pp.)
$27.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-06-309968-5

CREDIBLE

Why We Doubt Accusers and Protect Abusers

Tuerkheimer, Deborah
Harper Wave (320 pp.)
$27.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-06-300274-6

A legal scholar grapples with the ways in which race, class, and gender affect a sexual assault victim’s credibility—and their ability to access justice.

Credibility—or the tendency to be believed—is a form of power meted out entirely unfairly. So argues Tuerkheimer, who coins the phrase “credibility complex,” which she defines as “a cluster of forces” that lead us to believe some individuals over others. She argues that culture and the law intertwine to give women “credibility discounts” and men credibility “inflation.” Socially ingrained discounts not only make it harder for women to win abuse cases in courts of law; it also makes them doubt their own credibility, leading to a nationwide hesitation to file claims. “At its most covert,” writes the author, “the credibility complex leads victims to elevate the perspectives and interests of their abuser above their own.” This means that victims, and others involved in the process, often give abusers “the benefit of the doubt.” The tendency to doubt women is particularly hard on women of color—especially Black women—and women who identify as working class. Tuerkheimer cogently argues that until we examine and address these deep-seated biases, our society will ensure that we never treat sexual assault survivors with the gravity and care they deserve. The book’s analysis is both layered and nuanced, and the language is precise, passionate, and clear. While the author provides detailed explorations of the effects of race and class on sexual assault claims, she offers little acknowledgment of the impacts of disability or the effects of race and class on sexual assault claims, she offers little acknowledgment of the impacts of disability or queerness on credibility. Particularly glaring is the absence of women of color—especially Black women—and women who identify as working class. Tuerkheimer cogently argues that until we examine and address these deep-seated biases, our society will ensure that we never treat sexual assault survivors with the gravity and care they deserve. The book’s analysis is both layered and nuanced, and the language is precise, passionate, and clear. While the author provides detailed explorations of the effects of race and class on sexual assault claims, she offers little acknowledgment of the impacts of disability or queerness on credibility. Particularly glaring is the absence of examples involving trans women, who suffer much higher rates of sexual assault and violence than their cisgendered peers. Still, this book is an important addition to an ongoing conversation.

A trenchant analysis of how flawed notions about credibility fuel a wide variety of societal inequalities.

MALICE IN WONDERLAND

My Adventures in the World of Cecil Beaton

Vickers, Hugo
Pegasus (400 pp.)
$29.95 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-64313-843-5

Encounters with the rich and famous alongside the noted photographer, painter, and costume designer.

In 1979, impressed with Vickers’ recent book, Gladys, Duchess of Marlborough, Cecil Beaton (1904-1980) invited the author to become his biographer. Although Beaton
died within weeks, the young author ended up with access to voluminous papers, diaries, and letters as well as to Beaton’s celebrated friends. Beaton, Vickers writes gratefully, “guided me (albeit posthumously) into a PhD in lifestyle, new values, new experiences, new challenges.” Setting to work immediately, he followed Beaton’s footsteps in London, New York, Paris, Monte Carlo, and San Francisco, keeping journals of his interviews, often conducted in grand country houses or sumptuous apartments. Mining those 41 volumes, Vickers has created a lively, gossipy portrait of Beaton’s glittering world. “For Cecil Beaton,” he writes, “every day was a birthday, every afternoon a matinée, the red velvet curtains opening on a new set, every evening a first night, champagne waiting in the wings.” Vickers admits to being occasionally star-struck: Princess Diana, for example, made him feel “as though one had met the girl of one’s dreams, never believing such a thing possible.” Audrey Hepburn, whose costumes Beaton designed when she played Eliza Doolittle in My Fair Lady, was “so sweet and adorable and so nice about Cecil.” Grace Kelly was “very friendly, simple, easy to talk to, open, eager to help.” Vickers can be catty: Princess Margaret “lived up to expectations. She looks like a beautiful monkey, with the eyes.” Her laugh, he adds, was vulgar, “done on purpose.” Sir John Gielgud, less intimidating than Vickers anticipated, “smoked a cigarette almost in the style of one who expected his headmaster to catch him.” For the edification of contemporary readers, Vickers supplies footnotes to identify the many individuals whose fame has dimmed.

An assemblage of star-studded recollections of a faded world.

IN THE WEEDS
Around the World and
Behind the Scenes With Anthony Bourdain
Vitale, Tom
Hachette (308 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-0-306-92409-5

The food-and-travel icon’s longtime director and producer delivers a memoir of incomparable travelogues snatched from the clutch of chaos.

Vitale was consumed by his work with Anthony Bourdain (1956-2018), an adrenaline-fueled ride through three broadcast series in which recklessness was as much a virtue as creativity. Traveling up to 250 days per year, risking life and limb, often in some of the most perilous places in the world, the director of No Reservations, The Layover, and Parts Unknown flirted with nervous breakdowns and imminent catastrophe as Bourdain constantly increased the stakes on whatever project was at hand. Vitale’s memoir of those years—and of the vacuum in his life following Bourdain’s suicide—is a fascinating insider’s account of the making of groundbreaking TV. It is also the most complete picture yet of Bourdain’s complex and conflicted character—along with Laurie Woolever’s oral biography, Bourdain, publishing in the same month. “Tony was naturally telegenic,” writes Vitale, “possessing an unmistakable star quality….But even more alluring was his antagonistic, devil-may-care, combative relationship with the very machine that created his fame.” Vitale’s writing is seductively alive, pulsating with events and vividly rendered observations of people and exotic locales, hairbreadth escapes, and all the high-wire escapades, cultural revelations, and ethical questions that accompanied being Bourdain’s traveling companion. Everything that could go wrong generally did, yet that frequently resulted in a better product than the original script. Vitale admits that he struggled to articulate his own story, but if he was worried he was not up to the challenge, he can put those fears to rest. Drawn from show footage, notebooks, logs, travel itineraries, e-mails, and old receipts, his book is thrilling, sobering, harrowing, and as entertainingly frenetic as the events described, a tale told by a survivor still trying to make sense of it all.

Clearly, watching Bourdain’s shows was nothing like living them, as this high-flying memoir amply demonstrates.

SHELF LIFE
Chronicles of a Cairo Bookseller
Wassef Nadia
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (240 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 6, 2021
978-0-374-60018-1

The uplifting story of an Egyptian woman’s passion for books.

In 2002, Wassef and her two sisters opened a bookstore they called Diwan on the outskirts of Cairo. Her country was in political turmoil, and citizens had little interest in reading and writing. As she writes in this engaging and heartwarming memoir, “starting a bookstore at this moment of cultural atrophy seemed impossible—and utterly necessary.” On International Women’s Day, they opened their groundbreaking bookstore/cafe, stocking Arabic, English, and some French and German titles, later adding films, music, and stationery. It served as an oasis on a hot, traffic-choked street, the author’s “love letter to Egypt.” The women had a lot to learn about the business of selling books in a price-sensitive market: hardcover vs. paperback; data entry and other administrative tasks; hiring—and firing—staff; what makes a good display; customer relations in a masculine world; that a bookstore isn’t a library and must turn a profit. Women began to see Diwan as a place of refuge, and tourists visited. Wassef added space for an office, merchandise, bestseller displays, and a special Egypt Essentials section, and the staff puzzled over discounts, net prices, short ships, and censorship challenges—e.g., stocking Jamie Oliver’s The Naked Chef. In 2007, they opened their second branch. “Then,” she writes, “we drifted from the black into the unfamiliar red. We were in the throes of a global recession.” New art and design, self-help, and how-to sections helped. At the height of their success, they had
“A unique perspective that offers immense hope and direction for humanity in the face of climate change.”

GUARDIANS OF THE TREES
A Journey of Hope Through Healing the Planet
Webb, Kinari
Flatiron Books (304 pp.)
$27.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-250-75138-6

The inspiring story of the creation of an award-winning model for reversing rainforest loss and improving human well-being.

In 1993, as an undergraduate biology major, Webb traveled to Indonesia to study the dispersal of seeds by orangutans in the mountains of Gunung Palung National Park. She immediately fell in love with the land, the animals, and the people. After hearing her “least favorite sound: the whine of a chain saw in the far distance,” she learned that logging was one of the few ways the locals could make money to pay for health care. Watching the forests of Borneo disappearing, she “felt like my heart was being ripped out.” With the conviction that public health and the planet’s health are intrinsically intertwined, Webb returned to Indonesia after medical school and co-founded Alam Sehat Lesari (“healthy nature everlasting”). The organization initiated a reforestation program and a clinic to provide affordable health care to the community. Webb also founded Health in Harmony, an international nonprofit dedicated to fighting climate change by preventing the destruction of rainforests. In a compelling narrative, the author shares the details of her journey and the cultural nuances of the region. At the heart of her mission is the concept of “radical listening.” By actively engaging the community while building her program, she was able to create real and sustainable results. Webb dedicated herself wholeheartedly to her organizations, working long hours and making numerous sacrifices. She candidly shares the personal and physical struggles she endured, including a box jellyfish sting that nearly killed her. Having already created the framework for her program, Webb decided to expand her work beyond Borneo. “The human species may be deeply flawed,” she writes, “but we also have the capacity for beauty, transcendence, and unexpectedly rapid change.” Webb’s vision is notable for its focus on truly listening to community members, not just leaders.

A unique perspective that offers immense hope and direction for humanity in the face of climate change.
**“A forthright recounting of a rocky journey to self-knowledge.”**

**WHERE THE LIGHT FELL**

Yancey, Philip

Convergent/Crown (320 pp.)

$28.00 | Oct. 5, 2021

978-0-593-33850-9

The education of a Southern Christian. Yancey, who was raised as a fundamentalist, has written about his faith in more than two dozen books. Although he drew on personal experiences for those books, this is his first true memoir, a reflection on family, spirituality, education, and racism. After his father died of polio when he was 1, Yancey and his older brother grew up in Georgia within what he now calls a culture of “white-racist-paranoid-fundamentalism.” His mother taught Bible classes, and his home looked like “a Christian gift shop,” with plaques and wall calendars featuring Bible verses and Voice of Prophecy in the magazine rack. For most of his childhood, his family lived in a trailer, “a perfect symbol of my world at home and church: narrow, rectangular, cloistered, metallic.” Church services on Sunday mornings and evenings, Wednesday prayer meetings, vacation Bible school: The church dominated his life, instructing him “what to believe, who to trust and distrust, and how to behave.” Also ubiquitous was prejudice. “As a true son of the South,” he admits, he was “born and bred a racist.” As the civil rights movement erupted, Yancey, like his neighbors, feared integration. In Atlanta, he ate at a restaurant where Black waitresses, dressed as plantation slaves, sang gospel songs to the diners; boys in slave costumes displayed the menu “on sign boards hung around their necks.” Throughout his adolescence, the author believed in the “myth of the Lost Cause” and the heroism of the Confederacy. Yancey chronicles his mother’s wrath and rages; his brilliant brother’s descent into mental illness; his own struggle to find and embrace his faith. “In the end,” he writes, “my resurrection of belief had little to do with logic or effort and everything to do with the unfathomable mystery of God.”

A forthright recounting of a rocky journey to self-knowledge.

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he is going or why. The first half is a confounding, fragmented ramble, caroming in time, place, and subject matter from vegetarian philosophies of the 19th century to slaughtering chickens to arcane asides from around the globe. Presumably, this is all in aid of answering Williams’ fundamental questions: Why do we kill animals, why do we eat them, and how does it define us? Despite years of research, his only answer won’t be news to many readers: “We are predators, killers. We are good at it. We like it.” One would expect something more substantial and cohesive from a writer such as Williams, a former restaurant critic who has spent years contemplating food and eating, but much of the narrative suffers from self-indulgence. However, around the midway point, Williams jettisons his muddled meditations and employs a straightforward narrative that reveals his capabilities as a writer. The author’s vivid observations on the town of Barrow, Alaska, its people, and subsistence whaling are the highlight of the book. Along the way, he offers some telling insights on why we collect and display things: in part to make the world knowable, somehow less daunting in its immensity and diversity, in the way “maps, museums, books and farms try to do.” But Williams also knows the world “isn’t reducible in that way; it can’t be understood in a glance.” Near the end of the text, the author realizes his own intent, admitting that so many stories about the world are often about the person telling them. “The longer my inquiry went on, the less clear my intentions became,” he writes. One might say the same thing of the book. Meandering stylistics undermine episodes of solid reportage.

**12 BYTES HOW WE GOT HERE, WHERE WE MIGHT GO NEXT**

Winterson, Jeanette

Grove (280 pp.)

$27.00 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-0-8021-5925-0

A vigorous, sharp mind probes the world of computer science and more.

Hot on the heels of her recent, critically acclaimed novel, Frankissstein, the prolific Winterson offers 12 bites of the apple known as artificial intelligence, a key topic in the novel. These essays probe the past, present, and future of computer technology. The author begins by going back to key historical figures from her novel—Mary Shelley and Ada Lovelace, both of whom, “in their different ways...saw [AI] coming.” Mary had her electric-powered general intelligence, and robots, along with the Gnostics, Buddhism, and cryonics. In “Hot for a Bot,” the author discusses the history of automata sex dolls and AI-enhanced love dolls: Men do seem to think that a woman can be manmade, perhaps because a woman has been a commodity, a chattel, a possession, an object, for most of history. In “Fuck the Binary,” she posits the intriguing question of whether “AI could be a portal into a value-free gender and race experience.” Chronicling the contributions women have made in the so-called “hard” sciences—“Don’t you love the language?”—Williams bemoans the fact that, today, the “number of women taking computing-science degrees is falling.” Despite all the incumbent dangers AI might hold, the author is optimistic and hopeful: “I am sure that our future as Homo sapiens is a merged future with the AI we are creating. Transhumanism will be the new mixed race.”

Tucked into the corners of these erudite essays are multitudes of fascinating facts and thoughtful what-if speculations.
A primer on how select natural resources are classified.

In terse, impersonal prose paired to generic photos, “resources”—including fish, deer, farm animals, and trees along with the solar, water, geothermal, and wind quartet and fossil fuels—are first distinguished as renewable or not by the arbitrary criterion of whether they can replace themselves within a human lifetime. The anonymous author or authors go on to consider the advantages and disadvantages of each type but often not in depth. The discussion of agricultural products leaves out mention of GMOs, for instance; the point that not all plastics are recyclable goes unmade; and the tally of hazards related to fuels—are first distinguished as renewable or not by the arbitrary criterion of whether they can replace themselves within a human lifetime. The anonymous author or authors go on to consider the advantages and disadvantages of each type but often not in depth. The discussion of agricultural products leaves out mention of GMOs, for instance; the point that not all plastics are recyclable goes unmade; and the tally of hazards related to fossil mining misses air and ground pollution. The scope is catch all.

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“Winsome illustrations lighten the thematic load.”

WILLODEEN

Applegate, Katherine
Illus. by Santoso, Charles
Feiwel & Friends (272 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-250-14740-0

An orphan loner’s small town faces a hard future after it unwittingly disrupts a natural cycle.

Willodeen is lucky that elderly retired thespians Mae and Birdie took her in after the wildfire that killed her parents and brother, not only because they’re a loving couple, but because they let her roam the woods in search of increasingly rare screechers—creatures so vile-tempered and stinky that the village elders of Perchance have put a bounty on them. The elders have other worries, though: The migratory hummingbears that have long nested in the area, drawing tourists to the lucrative annual Autumn Faire, have likewise nearly vanished. Could there be a connection? If there is, Willodeen is just the person to find it—but who would believe her? Applegate’s characters speak in pronouncements about life and nature that sometimes seem to address readers more than other characters, but the winsome illustrations lighten the thematic load. Screechers appear much like comically fierce warthogs and hummingbears, as small teddies with wings. Applegate traces a burgeoning friendship between her traumatized protagonist and Connor, a young artist who turns found materials into small animals so realistic that one actually comes to life. In the end, the townsfolk do listen and pitch in to make amends.

Red-haired, gray-eyed Willodeen is cued as White; Connor has brown skin, and other human characters read as White by default.

The young folk and (of course) the animals are engagingly wrought in this tale with a strong ecological message.
(Eco-fantasy. 8-12)

NIGHT BECOMES DAY
Changes in Nature
Argentine, Cynthia
Millbrook/Lerner (32 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-5415-8124-1

Changes occur every day all around us. This text leads readers to notice and seek out the many changes that are taking place in their world: An acorn sprouts and grows, clouds form, a volcano erupts. Argentine simultaneously folds a lesson in opposites. “Change can BRIGHTEN” shows a desert with mountains in the background before and after a rain, the left one barren, the right one covered in blooming pink flowers. “Change can DULL” pictures fallen leaves and the beginning of soil formation. Changes can be small/big, quick/slow, hot/cold, or ancient/new, and they may take place above/below. An author’s note encourages readers to think about how all things, living and nonliving, are connected, defining this branch of science as ecology. Further backmatter provides more information about the various examples in the text and the branches of science they fall under (geology, botany, biology, chemistry, and physics). This is written at a higher reading level and largely uses undefined vocabulary (microbes, humus, molecules, minerals), possibly creating a mismatch between the audience for the main text and children who will understand the backmatter, though it could be a solid springboard in older elementary and middle-grade science classes. In addition, some of the facts presented are incomplete or incorrect. For instance, subduction is not the only means of volcano formation. The stock photos are well chosen to highlight the changes and will hold readers’ interest.

A catalyst for conversations about change. (Informational picture book. 7-12)
“Ayto’s bright backgrounds and slightly scribbly cartoon animals are a perfect match for his simple story.”

WILL YOU BE MY FRIEND?

Bush Baby’s just having no luck finding a friend.

Lonely Bush Baby sets out to find an animal friend. When they appeal to Giraffe, the response is, “No way... You're much too small. I can hardly see you down there.” Toad doesn’t like the fact that Bush Baby has a tail (Toad's vanished long ago). Zebra somehow resists Bush Baby’s imploring eyes and says, “I can’t be seen with you. You have no stripes.” Snake thinks Bush Baby has far too many legs. And Flamingo’s just rude about Bush Baby’s not being pink. Just when despair takes hold and Bush Baby’s sure they will always be alone, they meet Lion. Lion is impressed that Bush Baby is talking to him. He reveals he has no friends either: “Everyone thinks I might eat them for some reason.” Bush Baby is certain Lion won’t want to be their friend, but Lion thinks they look just right. The new friends go for a romp. After hearing Lion won’t eat friends, the other animals come for friendship... and Lion’s very loud answer will elicit giggles. Ayto’s bright backgrounds and slightly scribbly cartoon animals are a perfect match for his simple story about judging by appearances and valuing differences. Young listeners will be charmed by Bush Baby’s big, sad eyes (even if they don’t recognize the primate), and many will identify with their search for companionship.

A fine friendship fable with a funny close. (Picture book. 3-6)

BOK’S GIANT LEAP

One Moon Rock’s Journey Through Time and Space

Armstrong, Neil
Illus. by Baker Smith, Grahame
Crown (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-0-593-37886-1

A small bit of the primordial Earth is blasted into space... and a long time later makes a return journey via Apollo 11.

Utilizing parts of a talk Armstrong delivered in 2006, Baker-Smith recasts a chunk of basalt that became part of the moon (thanks to a “celestial fender bender” in the solar system’s early days) as a witness to the history of our planet. Measuring by the “billionium,” Bok oversees continents rising and falling, life’s appearance, and the arrival of dinosaurs. “But they disappeared almost before Bok noticed them.” Taking a brief nap, he then misses “the unfolding story of humankind” until suddenly a “peculiar creature” in a vacuum suit snatches him up and carries him back to where his story began. The artist puts a tiny face on the potato-shaped rock, but for the most part he focuses on large-scale events—vividly capturing the wild violence of those molten eons, the eerie wonder of Earth’s shallow early oceans in bright moonlight, extinction events, ice ages, and views of the suspenseful flight. In the backmatter, short biographies of the moon and Armstrong's astronomical career fill in further detail.

Though the photos in the last part are all of White men, an earlier picture encapsulates our aforementioned “unfolding story” with portraits of Plato, Hypatia, Maria Mitchell, Konstantin Tsolkovsky, and Bessie Coleman. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A compelling invitation to take the long view. (Informational picture book. 7-9)


Established and new fans alike will find much to love in this whimsical outing. (Fiction. 6-9)

Starla Jean and her beloved chicken, Opal Egg, are back for a second escapade. Starla Jean can’t want to make a cake for her baby sister’s first birthday party, but they’ve run out of eggs. Dad offers to get some from the store, but Starla Jean believes in Opal Egg’s ability to lay an egg in time. Proactive Starla Jean goes to work supporting her feathered friend with encouragement, exercise, and relaxation, but the nesting box remains disappointingly empty. Will Opal Egg lay an egg in time? And what if it’s not exactly the kind of egg Starla Jean had in mind? Following the structure of the first, much-lauded book, this story for transitional readers is told in four short chapters.

Colorful illustrations on every page have a hipster aesthetic and are rendered in friendly colors and soft textures. Starla Jean’s bright, bold narration is printed in large, easy-to-read type bolstered by generous white space between and around words, sentences, and blocks of text. The intrigue of the mysterious meowing Starla Jean hears is somewhat muddled by the visual presence of Starla Jean’s own black cat; nevertheless, the story’s punchline is amusing and joyous. The book is equally charming as a stand-alone or follow-up to series opener Starla Jean (2021). Starla Jean’s family is depicted with light-brown or dark hair and pale skin. The new kid in the neighborhood is drawn with light-brown skin and dark-brown hair.

Established and new fans alike will find much to love in this whimsical outing. (Fiction. 6-9)
MOLES PRESENT THE NATURAL TOLLS OF DIGGING HOLES
Badger. Springer
Illus. by the author
Page Street (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-64567-287-6

An exploration of the many reasons that humans dig holes.
Standing in for their two-legged counterparts, anthropomorphized moles enact the drama, while rhyming verse employing first-person-plural pronouns spins the narrative: “We dig holes for fun, / alone or in groups, / and holes for pipes / to get rid of poops.” While some openings in the ground yield gold, fossils, or crops, the emphasis is on holes that are unsound ecologically. These lead to oil leaks in the ocean, contaminate drinking water, consist of “damaging designs,” (the practice of fracking, overseen by “Exxoff”). The digitally collaged watercolors are composed in double-page spreads; cross sections of what’s underground rise halfway up the pages. Though the book is undoubtedly well intentioned, the execution suffers in several ways. The positive and negative purposes of holes are interspersed, and the minimal text does not provide enough context for children with little experience of the complex concepts (radiation, detonation, bomb shelters) to understand the differences. The rhyme schemes and sentence constructions are often awkward: “We shape our world / and leave behind / a future that / may not be kind.” Some images seem utterly arbitrary and nonsensical, as in the appearance of doughnuts when describing how the quantity of holes is “almost rude. / We even put holes in our food!”
While aspects of the illustrations convey whimsy, the message falls flat. (Picture book. 4-7)

PRINCESS PERSEPHONE LOSES THE CASTLE
Bair, Sheila
Illus. by Lopez, Manuela
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2021
978-0-8075-6647-3
Series: Money Tales

Loans, interest, and debt all get their day in the sun in this tale of a princess hornswoggled by a smooth-talking siding salesman.
Princess Persephone is distraught by the drafts in her father’s castle. When Aluminum Jim offers to sell and install tin siding on her home, she leaps at the chance. He even offers her a loan with a 50-page contract. Ignoring the sensible objections of Spice the dragon, Persephone signs without reading the contract. Unsurprisingly, after a sloppy installation job, her first bill comes due, and she discovers that she owes more than she can pay. Before you know it, she’s lost her castle entirely. Written by a former FDIC chair, the book valiantly attempts to simplify the concept of predatory lending and its risks but gets in over its head. The urge to teach children to “Beware the Trickster Lender” (as the backmatter further elucidates) is a noble one, but much of the text will remain obscure to young readers despite its expression in rhyming couplets (“With interest compounded annually, / The loan, it balloons exponentially”). Most baffling is the complete absence of a glossary at the end of the book. Should a child reader manage to engage with the material and wish to learn more, they’ll be hard-pressed to define such terms as lien or default — rightly identified as “mystery words” — or even contract. Bair’s Billy the Borrowing Blue-Footed Booby, illustrated by Amy Zhing, publishes simultaneously and addresses consumer debt in abab stanzas.
Predatory lending may someday yield great works of children’s literature, but that day is not today. (Picture book. 9-12)
(Billy the Borrowing Blue-Footed Booby: 978-0-8075-0812-1)
Anxious younger readers will find a like-minded soul in Chip, as the primary-color palette keeps the impressionistic backdrops of doors, the sharing of umbrellas, seats, and playtime all circled in bright red. The return of dropped items, the holding of hands, the sharing of balloons and toys. Outdoor camping seems to be going fine for the two kits, who have big effects.

A lesson by example in compassion for all ages. (Picture book. 3-12)

THE ROBBER GIRL
Billingsley, Franny
Candlewick (416 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-7636-6956-0

Robber Girl, raised by the thieving Gentlemen, knows better than to become tame.

When Gentleman Jack is arrested, the Judge takes the girl into his home. She's wild: She bites, she can't read, and she doesn't know how to eat properly. And though the girl has an Affliction making it harder for her to speak to humans, she talks with her dagger, which scolds her endlessly. The Judge insists that she go to school (“school is a taming thing,” says the dagger). The Judge encourages her to name herself, and she chooses Starling (“what a terrible name,” says the dagger). The Judge has an astonishing dollhouse that was built for his recently deceased daughter, and Starling gets a quest from the affectionate dolls (“stop talking to the dolls!” yells the dagger).

In a setting just slightly sideways from the 19th-century American frontier, it's never entirely clear what are the imaginings of an almost-feral robber girl and what are the workings of a world where allegory and reality intertwine. Though the prose is symbolically laden, it's never purple, and as Starling learns about good, kind people, her growing empathy is drawn in the gaps. The fantastical touches lend a beautiful unreality, although they also create an unfortunate connection between disfigurement and sin. All characters are White or light skinned.

Gorgeously written, with ferocious emotion in the caesuras of a sparse, unreliable narrative. (Fabulism. 11-14)

SHIPWRECK REEFS
Bissonette, Aimée M.
Illus. by Leyris, Adèle
Whitman (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2021
978-0-8075-1287-6
Series: Imagine This!

All over the world, ships sunk accidentally or purposefully have become shelters for marine life and frames for new coral reefs.

This colorful addition to the Imagine This! series came out of the writer’s encounter with sunken ships, tanks, and fighter planes around the island of Saipan in the western Pacific, relics from World War II now protected in an area that welcomes...
divers. After introducing the idea of reefs growing on sunken ships, Bissonette provides clear explanations of the formation and composition of coral reefs, how algae and coral work together, how the reefs become neighborhoods of varied fish species, and how they’re threatened by global climate change. She includes information about other artificial reefs, including those forming on retired oil and gas rigs and sunken subway cars. She points out that artificial reef construction in more northern latitudes can help keep coral growing in warming seas. Adding more reefs to the world can also help ease the pressures of fishing and tourism that endanger these fragile ecosystems. The exposition might be challenging for the audience but it’s straightforward and direct, supplemented with extra information in a smaller font and set on Leyris’ watery underwater scenes, mostly double-page spreads full of corals, sponges, tube-worms, anemones, barnacles, and fish. Like the text, they invite exploration of a watery “world of wonder.”

Dive in for a new angle on a popular topic. (author’s note, additional reading) (Informational picture book. 6-10)

MYSTIC OF THE MIDWAY
Blair, A.A.
Histria Kids (136 pp.)
$24.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-59211-118-3

When Effie arrives with her family at their Crystal Beach, Ontario, vacation home, she is determined to show her family—especially her twin, Jimmy—that she is not “broken.” However, Effie’s mother’s secretive behavior, along with sightings of an elusive, green-eyed girl, turn her attention toward sleuthing. The blond, blue-eyed tween knows her family worries about the aftermath of her previous playground injury; she worries, too. Effie sees images no one else can and has been hearing rustlings and whispered voices. She has vivid dreams that seem to be pointing toward something—but what? Her most pressing concern becomes the fear that her mother will leave her father. The plot twists and turns against the background of a lakeside community and its failing tourist industry—including an amusement park with spooky mannequins. Year-round residents the Davies family are central figures: The parents are warm and caring; 13-year-old Lydia helps Effie and Jimmy in their investigations; 3-year-old Andrew provides comic relief, but the family’s dog’s name—bestowed because of his partial blindness and excitability—is a slur for disabled people. Cultural references establish the era as the 1980s. Stock characters include Effie’s clumsy but affable dad and a local hooly whose behavior ultimately helps Effie affirm awakening notions about bigger truths. The third-person narration tends toward the awkward and didactic; readers who stay the course will enjoy the suspense and closure. Characters follow a White default.

An uneven if atmospheric drama. (Mystery. 8-12)
Children’s and young adult writer Nic Stone has hit the mark again with her new middle-grade novel, *Fast Pitch* (Crown, Aug. 31). Following Stone’s 2020 novel, *Clean Getaway*, *Fast Pitch* tells the story of Shenice “Lightning” Lockwood’s race to win the championship for her fast-pitch softball league while being drawn to solve a family mystery that was uncovered in the middle of the season. The book combines frank, age-appropriate discussions of racism with positive representations and a loving family dynamic. Stone spoke with Kirkus by phone from her home in Atlanta, Georgia, about her experience of researching the Negro Leagues for the story, explaining racism to tweens, and the need for positive representation in children’s and young adult literature. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

**Having grown up with Black parents who were in a healthy, loving relationship, I really appreciated the characters of the parents because I don’t think we see enough of this in literature. Can you tell me a little bit about the inspiration for this?**

Honestly, this part just came out of real life and wanting the story to be focused on this girl trying to shoot her shot and chase after this thing that she really, really cared a lot about. So, without the baggage of a single-parent home—not that single-parent homes are bad—there’s something beautiful about having supportive parents and being able to chase this dream that she had. Her parents are kind of loosely based on my husband and I. It was important for me to have her come from a solid family base.

**You recently posted to Instagram about your joy upon seeing the cover illustration.**

The interesting thing about the cover is that I didn’t see it until it was almost done. When I did, I just started sobbing because she does look just like me. People are actually under the impression that the cover was drawn based on me, and it wasn’t. The artist just did a really good job of portraying the person I described in the book. I cried like a baby because it was my first time ever seeing a person who looked like me, and was doing something that I would do, on the cover of a book. It was the fact that I get to be the person to put that out in the world. I don’t take that for granted.

**When I saw the cover, I knew that I was going to have to do a cosplay of the cover with myself in the same clothes that she was wearing. So, the photograph in the jacket copy [and above] is me, literally in the same pose as Shenice, with the softball hovering over my hand.**

**There’s a scene in the book where the players show up to a town, and Shenice and her teammates notice that there are Confederate flags all over the other teams’ cars. It reminded me of my own experience of moving**
to the South and realizing that, yes, these people do exist in the world.
I live in Georgia, but I live in Atlanta, which is basically a blue oasis politically and otherwise, but if you go even 30 miles outside of the city, you’re in an entirely different place. If I were to drive my family to the panhandle of Florida, there are certain cities we drive through on the way there that you see Confederate flags. I wouldn’t stop for gas in certain places.

I think it was important for Shenice to have to reckon with the feeling. I know when a lot of kids have firsthand experience with racism, they just don’t really know what to do or how to feel because it just feels weird. You feel a way, but you’re not sure of how to put it into words. She and the whole team have to reckon with what they were seeing, with these White coaches talking them through it and also struggling with it a little bit.

It was important for me to put it in the book because as much as it’s a book about softball and a book about winning a championship, she also in that moment gets to identify a little bit with what her great-grandpa might have been feeling.

Great-Grampy JonJon, who was a player in the Negro Leagues. Can you tell me about the experience of researching that history?
There is a part in the book where [Shenice] talks about the stress of not being able to find something on the internet. I literally pulled that from what I was feeling when I was trying to do all this research to find out more about the Negro Leagues and trying to find rosters for the Negro Leagues, and none of this stuff really got recorded. I couldn't find anything on the internet, and it was kind of stressful because it made me think about how much history we just don’t know about because it wasn't recorded. That was an interesting experience, and it’s made me more cognizant of things going on around me and the fact that there are things that I will never know about because they weren’t written down. It’s a really humbling thing.

Let’s talk about writing about racism for a tween audience.
Talking about racism, no matter who you’re talking to, there's no way to make it palatable. There’s no way to talk about racism in a way that isn’t going to jar the person you’re talking to, especially if the person is a kid. When I am talking to kids about race and racism, the most important thing to me is making sure that after any discussion, I leave them feeling empowered. It’s really imperative to make sure that children know that, yes, this is how things were, and even how things are, but you’re still a human being with agency.

I am really excited for this generation of children because they will have literature that is more representative than we had growing up.
Absolutely. For my kids, there’s no lack of books with them in them and on them, which is a beautiful, beautiful thing. And I just hope that the numbers increase and increase, because it’s not just for us. Books about Black kids are not only for Black kids. They need to be read by everyone. Everybody needs to see Black kids thriving, Black kids saving the day and solving mysteries. These are really important things for other people to see. It’s been quite an honor to be able to put some of the stuff out into the world.

Your novel is a nice departure from the theme of the child who is escaping a bad situation. I really appreciated that while I was reading.
There are more than enough of those. There are more than enough stories about Black kids who are struggling. Black kids dealing with racism. Black kids trying to get out of the ‘hood. I’ve written those stories, and, oddly enough, those are the stories that sell the best of all the stories that I’ve written. It is also important to see a kid’s No. 1 conflict be I really want to help my team win the championship, but I got to figure out this stuff with my family.

What are you working on right now?
What I can say is that there will be three YA releases next year. I don’t have any middle grade. My next middle grade will be in 2023.

Nia Norris is a journalist in Chicago who writes about culture and social issues for Ms., Romper, and Next City. Fast Pitch received a starred review in the July 1, 2021, issue.
“Bomgaars is tender with readers, never condescending.”

BORN TO SPARKLE
A Story About Achieving Your Dreams
Bomgaars, Megan
Illus. by Olczyk, Pete
Flowerpot Press (32 pp.)
$12.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-4867-2110-8

Everyone has the capacity to sparkle.

Young readers are encouraged to live their dreams. They can choose to follow any path, to be anything they want; they need not set limits. Perhaps their aim is to be a doctor, dancer, teacher, or chef, and no matter how big their dreams are they can make it happen. But the author reminds readers that there is a very important caveat to consider. They must understand the difference between a wish and a dream. When you make a wish, the tendency is to sit back and wait to see if it will come true. Dreamers must work hard, practice, learn, and be brave, for it might be a long and difficult road. But it is all achievable.

Bomgaars is tender with readers, never condescending, speaking directly in simple statements and providing examples and directions, all the while reminding them that their sparkle lives within them. Olczyk depicts the narrator as a stuffed toy animal wearing a green, leafy headdress and a swirly, fluffy pink boa. The listeners are a menagerie of stuffed animals, big-eyed and Bombgaars is tender with readers, never condescending, speak floating through every page and some real glitter safely adher- to the sadness of a scarecrow), the selections offer a range of moods and some choice wordplay to boot, like this from “Praying Mantis”: “Before a meal, what it will say / Is not ‘Bless this food’ but ‘Let us prey’.” The child on the cover and many of the human figures in the illustrations that accompany nearly every poem are people of color. Outside of anthologies, very little of the veteran poet’s work has made it to the States, so count this for most U.S. readers an unjustly tardy introduction.

Tender to tongue-in-cheek, a broad showcase for a versatile writer. (Poetry. 8-11)

THE MIDNIGHT BRIGADE
Borba, Adam
Illus. by Kwasy, Karl
Little, Brown (240 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-316-54251-7

Carl Chesterfield can see 33 bridges from his Pittsburgh window. Descended from generations of bridge engineers, Carl is avidly interested in the structures. His creatively frustrated father spends his time repairing bridges because there is no room to build new ones—and strangely, more repairs are needed than ever as bridges are being damaged in unusual ways. Friendless Carl spots a cryptic flyer warning people about the damage to bridges, making him wonder whether someone else also believes that monsters are the culprit. Carl’s father finally opens a food truck near an old bridge constructed by Carl’s great-grandfather where, as a proudly average person, he insists on serving average food, which he mistakenly believes will have broad appeal. Carl finally makes a friend in Teddy (flyer creator and school principal’s son), who broaches the monster theory. However, Carl encounters Frank, a troll who lives under the bridge near his father’s food truck, who, rather than eating them, once protected bridges. Bee, another classmate and daughter of Pittsburgh’s foremost restaurant critic, plays an amusing role in saving the day—after causing much of the trouble. Most main characters read as White; Bee and her mother are East Asian. Photorealistic grayscale spot art greatly enhances the text, bringing the setting and characters’ emotions to life.

An unusual story about forging new bonds. (Fantasy. 9-12)

IS THERE LIFE ON YOUR NOSE?
Meet the Microbes
Borstlap, Christian
Illus. by the author
Prestel (56 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-3-7913-7497-0

Borstlap examines the roles that microbes play everywhere on Earth and touches on their potential for solving human-created problems like plastic waste. Initial double-page spreads focus on the microscopic size and wide-ranging distribution of microbes throughout the planet. “They live on your body and on every imaginable thing throughout the world…and they can even live 3 miles (5 km) below the earth.” A clumsy analogy posits that “if we could fit all the people on Earth into a single teacup… / …we would need a big container for all the world’s microbes!” Highly stylized illustrations fail to redeem this vagueness (possibly due in part to...
the uncredited translation from French), presenting the “container” as a large rectangular box decorated with confettike splotches. More effective spreads pair arresting facts with the capricious, cartoonlike graphics. Microbes can “create families in less than an hour.” (A digital timer clocks 59 minutes above a microbe “family” peppered with wailing offspring.) Some microbes can feed on metal: Borstlap illustrates this fact with a series of toothy mouths chomping on nuts and bolts. Readers visit the cross-sectioned colon of a human (on a toilet, with a cellphone) and glean a bit about microbes’ roles in food production, natural recycling, and prospects for sustainable energy and plastics production. The complex language in eight concluding pages of factual material contrasts markedly with the text’s up-tempo tone. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

This mix of narrative fact and anthropomorphized visual fancy fails to add up. (Informational picture book. 6-9)

**ACROSS THE DESERT**

*Bowling, Dusti*

Little, Brown (320 pp.)

$16.99 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-0-316-49474-8

Twelve-year-old Jolene embarks on a desperate rescue mission after witnessing a life-threatening accident. Jolene’s single mother has spiraled into opioid addiction following a car accident, plunging the family into poverty and making Jolene a target for school bullies. The budding cartographer dreams of exploring the world beyond Phoenix and passionately admires bold, pioneering women of the past. Using public library computers, she watches the Arizona wilderness adventures of a girl her age who goes by Addie Earhart. One day, Addie’s ultralight crashes, and, as the only person viewing the livestream, Jolene knows she must seek help. After failing to convince any grown-ups (including her mom) to believe her story—and aware that undue attention could lead to a visit from Child Protective Services, landing her back in foster care—Jolene sneaks out equipped only with a backpack of meager, scrounged supplies; her mother’s ancient cellphone; and her handmade map. While traveling by Greyhound she meets 17-year-old Marty, who has her own painful family secrets. The two develop an affectionately contentious relationship and ultimately risk their lives, traversing the harsh landscape in search of Addie. Bowling’s portrait of this determined, guarded, bright spark of a girl is moving and tender. Supporting characters are less well fleshed out, but readers will appreciate the compassionate, unflinching representation of the impact of parental substance abuse. The desert rescue is no less gripping for requiring some suspension of disbelief. Characters default to White.

A page-turner with heart. (author’s note) (Fiction. 8-12)

**THERE’S A DODO ON THE WEDDING CAKE**

*Bradford, Wade*

Illus. by Hawkes, Kevin

Candlewick (40 pp.)

$16.99 | Sep. 21, 2021

978-1-5362-0884-9

In this sequel to *There’s a Dinosaur on the 13th Floor* (2018), Mr. Snore returns to the Sharemore Hotel for another memorable adventure.

Hired to play his violin at a hotel wedding, Mr. Snore arrives early. When the wedding planner offers him cocoa, Mr. Snore requests no marshmallows because they make him sneeze. Spying a dodo bird gobbling a frosting rose on the wedding cake, Mr. Snore chases it away. While the wedding planner looks for someone to repair the cake, Mr. Snore stands guard, wielding his instrument’s bow like a sword to fend off two beavers and a boa constrictor. Out of an abundance of caution, Mr. Snore moves the cake trolley into a dark closet, but it’s filled with...
Finally, the wedding planner intervenes, and Mr. Snore realizes he’s overreacted and badly misjudged everyone except the offending dodo. Just as all seems sorted out, Mr. Snore sniffles the marshmallow frosting on the wedding cake—with explosive results. Comic, dramatic, fast-paced illustrations reveal well-intentioned Mr. Snore’s cascading mistakes as he heroically thrusts and parries his bow and frantically steers the cake trolley across the pages. Diverse animals dressed in wedding finery border on the absurd, but none match proper Mr. Snore and his hilariously monumental proboscis. Mr. Snore presents White, and the wedding planner has brown skin.

A riotous, rib-tickling comedy of errors. (Picture book. 4-8)

**I AM HATZEGOPTERYX**

Bradley, Timothy J.  
Illus. by the author  
Arbordale Publishing (32 pp.)  
978-1-64351-821-3  
Series: I Am Prehistoric

“I can grow,” says a juvenile example of one of the largest flying reptiles on record with perfect truth—posing in one late illustration next to a like-sized modern giraffe.

Accompanying Bradley’s mostly monosyllabic narrative, which begins with “I can hatch” and proceeds from there, his speculative paleo-portraits go for the gusto. They track an outsized predator with an even more outsized crest decked out in dashing black and orange as it swoops over a rocky coastline or along with the physical structures of its wings and crest, fill in at least some blanks, and a pair of references at the end will help dedicated dinophiles fill in a few more. The one (diminutive) unique animal figure in the size comparison chart is White. A Spanish edition publishes simultaneously.

It’s a bit thin in the particulars, but no one’s going to look at the art just once. (Informational picture book. 3-8) (To say Hatzegopteryx: 978-1-63817-078-5, $11.95)

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**I LOVE MY HOME**

Braun, Sebastien  
Illus. by the author  
Boxer Books (32 pp.)  
978-1-91275-720-6  
$17.95 | Sep. 7, 2021

Striking illustrations and ever-changing color palettes give young listeners a tour of animal homes around the world. With each double-page spread beginning with “I love my home,” the book explores the concept of unique animal homes through illustrations of different animal parent-and-child pairs in their natural habitats. Even young children will recognize the animals: bears, rabbits, and monkeys, for example. Global habitats include the temperate forest, the rainforest, fresh water, the oceans, and the savanna, but most are described and not identified in the two or three short, unremarkable sentences for each spread. A beaver announces, “I love my home in the river. We’re adding branches to make a dam”; a whale says, “I love my home in the ocean. It’s my mysterious underwater world.” Reptiles are absent in the book, but seabirds have their home in the air and “love the freedom of floating on the wind,” while owls love their “home high in the hollow of a tree. Day or night, it’s the perfect home for me.” Distinctive illustrations with soft, simplified backgrounds focus attention on the animals, which are a cross between cuddly and realistic. Strikingly different color choices for each spread, especially for the brilliant coral reef and the tawny savanna but also the more-subtle dampened filtered sun in the forest and the multilayered blues of the ocean, make each page turn a treat. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Simple descriptions and standout illustrations make this a good group or snuggle-time read for younger listeners. (Picture book. 3-6)

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**WITHOUT SEPARATION**

Prejudice, Segregation, and the Case of Roberto Alvarez  
Brimmer, Larry Dane  
Illus. by Gonzales, Maya  
Calkins Creek/Boyds Mills (40 pp.)  
978-1-68437-195-2  
$18.99 | Sep. 14, 2021

Separate but equal—even primary grade students understand this prejudicial oxymoron.

Separation is never equal. When the Lemon Grove School District’s board of trustees decided to expel every one of the 75 students who were of Mexican American descent in order to establish an all-White student body, the Lemon Grove Neighbor’s Committee—Comité de Vecinos de Lemon Grove—decided to take action. The Mexican consul in San Diego provided lawyers who filed on behalf of 12-year-old Roberto Alvarez in San Diego’s California Superior Court. Exploding
“Young readers will laugh in amazement and delight in the unanticipated conclusion.”

MY DOG BANANA

the board of trustees’ assertion that the minority students were “backward and deficient,” Roberto himself, in fluent English, defended his position. This was the “first successfully fought school desegregation case in the United States.” On April 16, 1931, the decision was made public: “to immediately admit and receive...Roberto Alvarez, and all other pupils of Mexican parentage...without separation or segregation.” Brimner’s straightforward narrative follows Roberto Alvarez from his return to school after Christmas vacation only to be told he was no longer welcome to the day he was able to receive the same education as the White students. The substantial author’s note places this case in context with other desegregation cases in the U.S.—particularly in California. Gonzalez’s colorful and detailed mural-esque illustrations make the historical flavor of the times accessible.

A critical contribution to discussions of equal access and of systemic racism. (photos, sources, source notes) (Informational picture book. 8-11)

PLANETARY-YUM

Brockington, Drew
Illus. by the author
Little, Brown (64 pp.)
$12.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-316-50042-5
Series: Waffles and Pancake, 1

It’s just another day in the kitten-hood of brave (but hungry) space pilot Waffles.

After six volumes of the CatStronauts’ adventures in outer space, cartoonist Brockington turns to the past to tell a tale of Waffles’ youth with sibling Pancake. The two kittens are spending Saturday with Dad-Cat before he drops them at Mom-Cat’s house. They’re looking forward to a day at the science museum in the Big City. They check out some dino-cat bones and an exhibit on hairballs (in 4-D) before heading to the planetarium. Both kittens enjoy a show about constellations…but their favorite time of day follows: lunch. Waffles’ legendary appetite’s a family trait. In the Hall of Planets they learn about the moon landing, but the kittens are distracted by a tour group and lose track of Dad-Cat. After a quick moment of panic, they talk to the tour guide, who reunites them with Dad-Cat’s house. The day was fun, but lunch was still the kittens’ favorite. (Heartwarmingly, Dad-Cat liked spending the day with his kittens.) Fans of the original CatStronauts series may enjoy watching Waffles’ love of science spark, but those new to this catcentric world may be less than engaged by this day-in-the-life tale. Still, the narrative weaves in nice (if felinized) tidbits of information and pointers on what to do when separated from grown-ups: a plus.

Colorful cartoon panels and a science-forward storyline make this spinoff series opener a solid selection. (Graphic science fiction. 6-10)

MY DOG BANANA

Brouillard, Roxane
Illus. by Sagramola, Giulia
Trans. by de Jocas, Simon & Ayer, Paula
Greystone Kids (40 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-77164-793-9

A child walking a pet on a leash evokes strong reactions from passersby in this French Canadian import.

People on the street repeatedly point to a banana at the end of the leash, but the child insists that it is, in fact, a dog, exhorting them to see clearly and answering every comment they make. Banana’s yellow color indicates a very rare breed. She’s too exhausted to move and is well trained not to bark. She’s so upset over their comments that she just might bite them if they pet her. She fetches a ball so quickly that no one can see it happen. Annoyed at their laughter and disrespect, the child and Banana walk away in a huff. And then the onlookers are astonished by

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Amara needs help finding pumpkins on her farm; can you help her?

Amara, a young Black girl in overalls with Afro puffs, has many plants on the farm she runs with her elderly caregivers. Today she must find her pumpkins for her autumn potluck. The text describes pumpkins in detail and then proposes, “Let’s help Amara find her pumpkins!” As Amara wanders around her farm looking at various fruits and vegetables, the text asks readers, “Is that a pumpkin?” on the verso, and then answers, “No. That’s an apple” (or a persimmon, or a potato), and points out the differences and similarities between it and a pumpkin. This goes on until Amara is close to giving up; at last she spots the pumpkins, and the potluck is saved. A small but diverse group of friends appears for an outdoor meal, and a recipe for molasses pumpkin bread is included at the end. The premise of this story will delight preschoolers who like to show off what they know. “The premise of this story will delight preschoolers who like to show off what they know.”

Imaginative, surprising fun. (Picture book. 4-8)

GANDHI
The Peaceful Protester!
Buckley Jr., James
Illus. by Anderson, Cassie
Portable Press (96 pp.)
$12.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-64517-409-7
Series: Show Me History!

In this graphic biography, Libby (the future Statue of Liberty, depicted as a young Black woman) and the future Uncle Sam (a young White man) narrate the life story of Mohandas K. Gandhi, India's most famous freedom fighter.

The book begins with Gandhi's birth in 1860s India, at the time under British rule. Young Gandhi's highly religious mother instilled in him a dedication to Hinduism that would famously last his entire life. The book continues with a description of Gandhi's wedding to Kasturba Makanji at the age of 13, his departure to England to study law, and his eventual move to South Africa. In South Africa, Gandhi developed the tactics that would make him famous in India, including the practices of satyagraha and ahimsa—truth seeking and nonviolence, respectively—and the founding of ashrams where he could live a life of simplicity. Following a survey of Gandhi's leadership in the Indian independence movement, such as the founding of the noncooperation movement and the organization of salt marches, the book ends with Gandhi's assassination and his influence on civil rights movements throughout modern history. While the book is thorough, it is entirely laudatory, never addressing Gandhi's well-documented early anti-Blackness or his misogyny. Additionally, while the book mentions leaders Jawaharlal Nehru and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, it mentions no female or Dalit leaders, erasing the contributions of hundreds of freedom fighters who made Indian independence possible. Series companion Frida Kahlo: The Revolutionary Painter! publishes simultaneously.

An uncritical account. (Graphic biography. 10-15) (Frida Kahlo: 978-1-64517-433-2)

WORST-CASE COLLIN
Caprara, Rebecca
Charlesbridge (256 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-62354-145-3
Series companion:

A young boy wrestles with his mother's untimely death and his father's consequent hoarding.

Sixth grader Collin Brey is anxious. Ever since his mom died in a car accident two years earlier, he has carried an orange notebook full of worst-case scenarios running the gamut from a jammed door to a zombie attack. His father is a brilliant but disorganized math professor who is obsessed with proving the Riemann hypothesis. Collin battles bullies Tyson and Keith
at school but is buffered by his two BFFs, Liam and Georgia. At home, Collin’s anxiety mounts, as his dad begins to acquire more and more stuff, first starting with thrift-store finds and then working his way up to things like bags of trash and toenail clippings. Ashamed, Collin tries to hide his increasingly distressing home life from his friends, all while battling unresolved grief and his tormentors. While Collin’s problems are heavy, Caprara gives him an accessible voice, even managing to imbue humor into the story alongside the many serious moments. Many of the poems are lyrical, flowing free verse, while others play with form. Interspersed beside the poems are Collin’s lists from his notebook. Together these elements provide an intimate look into his life and struggles. A note on hoarding and mental health is included. Most characters are presumed White.

Poignant, timely, and altogether affecting. (Verse novel. 8-12)

KEEPING IT REAL
Chase, Paula
Greenwillow Books (368 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-0-06-296569-1

The fish-out-of-water class-divide tale in reverse.

Having enrolled in their fancy private school a few years before him, Marigold has always been her best friend Justice’s social interpreter. She might be the only Black girl in their grade, but Mari fits in with the moneyed students, and Justice is a scholarship kid. But this summer, things are going to flip: He’s just been accepted into Style High, a summer program designed to boost Black kids who are interested in careers in fashion design and styling. It’s hosted by preeminent hip-hop media company Flexx Unlimited—which is owned by Mari’s parents. Justice wanted to get in on his own merit and not ask for special treatment, but then Mari does exactly that—she asks her parents to let her take part. She’s genuinely interested in fashion, but even she knows her spot was not earned the same way it was by others. And they know it too. Mari’s in for an awakening ruder than she expected, one that will make her question what she knows about her family and background. The socio-economic and racial dynamics of this story add a compelling dimension to a story that fits squarely into the lifestyles-of-the-rich-and-famous genre of realistic fiction that is just a touch fantastic with all its glitz and glamour. Text messages can be hard to follow, but the prose has a strong teen voice.

A solid story of summer growth and exploration. (Fiction. 10-14)
superstar parents. When Nia attempts to run away via their father’s dimensional portal, their parents are mistakenly sucked through instead—and both kids then go through to rescue them. While there isn’t much character development on offer, readers may delight in the various adventures the Bright kids experience as they jump their way through the multiverse attempting to rescue their parents. They help creatures and restore balance to worlds—and their family—as they make their way home. By the end of their adventure, all family members just might have a better understanding of one another and their impact on the worlds around them. Simple, realistic renderings with soft, bulbous lines create an upbeat tone, in concert with the energetic color palette and expressive faces. Nia, Jayden, and their father present Black; their mom is cued as Japanese.

Highly entertaining light fare. (Graphic science fiction. 8-12)

TIME FOR BED, OLD HOUSE
Costa Bates, Janet
Illus. by Ford, A.G.
Candlewick (32 pp.) $16.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-5362-0998-3

Isaac loves spending time at Grandpop’s house, but is he brave enough for a sleepover?

Isaac is at Grandpop’s for his first sleepover. However, when night falls, Isaac seems hesitant to go to bed. When he tells Grandpop that he isn’t ready for sleep, Grandpop introduces him to a new ritual of saying goodnight to the house, explaining, “First, you move kind of quiet and slow.” This sentence sets the transition for both readers and Isaac as movements and sounds are described as “soft” and “cozy”—perfect words for snuggling in. As Isaac, Grandpop, and Snuffles the Airedale move through the house turning off lights and lowering shades, Isaac notices noises that make him afraid, but Grandpop is there to comfort him and explain the house’s “sleepy sounds.” Before turning in, he reads the pictures of a book to Grandpop, who drifts off in the armchair, bravely says goodnight to the rest of the house, and reads his book to his teddy bear. In no time, Isaac, Grandpop, and Snuffles are fast asleep. Ford’s illustrations of this loving Black duo within the comfy, older house are warm and tender. The rich honey-brown, gold, and blue hues are natural choices for a bedtime book. Isaac’s first-sleepover story is honest and one that young children will appreciate; adult readers will find it nostalgic.

A delightful multigenerational story, perfect for bedtime or anytime a child is afraid. (Picture book. 3-6)

THE TINY WOMAN’S COAT
Cowley, Joy
Illus. by Clarkson, Giselle
Gecko Press (28 pp.) $17.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-77657-342-4

When a very tiny woman needs a new coat, she gets lots of practical help.

She is determined to make the coat but needs tools and supplies. Autumn trees shed their beautiful leaves to provide the coat’s cloth. A grey goose uses its beak as scissors to cut the leaves into body and sleeves. A porcupine generously offers a quill as needle. Thread comes from a horse’s mane, and wild weeds scatter seeds for buttons. When the coat is complete, it gives her warmth and comfort through cold and storm. With text constructed in a folkloric style, each interaction begins, on one double-page spread, “The tiny woman wanted a coat,” followed by the question of where to acquire a needed element. Each donation is offered on the subsequent double-page spread, accompanied by an italicized, expository refrain. “Rustle, rustle, rustle” say the leaves; “snip, snap, zip” goes the goose’s bill; and the porcupine’s quill is “sharp, sharp, sharp.” Young readers will have fun echoing the repetitive phrases throughout the tale, adding their own voices to the narration. The pale-skinned, redhead protagonist is indeed tiny, depicted in Clarkson’s detailed illustrations as snail-sized, with plants, grasses, and the helpful animals towering over her. Sharp eyes will note the mushroom umbrella that shelters her and her coat from the rainstorm.

From New Zealand, an inventive and delightful tale that evokes Thumbelina, the Borrowers, and other beloved wee characters. (Picture book. 3-8)

CUBA IN MY POCKET
Cuevas, Adrianna
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (288 pp.) $16.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-374-31467-5

To escape the harsh realities of Castro’s Cuba, a 12-year-old boy must leave his family behind and flee to the United States alone.

Following the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, Fidel’s grip on Cuba tightens. Neighbors whisper and conspire against each other, and those not loyal to Castro’s regime face punishment, even execution. When young Cumba is marked for military recruitment, his family decides to send him off to the United States. Escaping to Miami and the home of a distant relative, Cumba struggles to adjust to his new life without his family. The labyrinthlike city’s size and the cacophony of English-speaking voices overwhelm the young boy at first. School also brings its share of pains and embarrassments. Thankfully, Cumba gains allies in the unlikeliest ways, including
an American schoolmate obsessed with horse races and other Cuban refugee young people. Letters from his little brother back home also bring him some comfort. Then, one day, a letter brings horrible news: Fidel’s soldiers have arrested Cumba’s parents. Inspired by stories from her father’s childhood, Cuevas’ latest is a triumph of the heart. Devoting half of the story to Cumba’s life in Cuba and the other half to his adjustment to the United States, the author continually reminds readers about the strength provided by community and family and the forces that can threaten to snatch these sources of happiness away.

A compassionate, emotionally astute portrait of a young Cuban in exile. (author’s note, glossary) (Historical fiction. 8-12)

**POOPER SNOOPER**

Curtis, Jennifer Keats & Ubigau, Julianne
Illus. by Saroff, Phyllis
Arbordale Publishing (32 pp.)
$9.95 paper | Sep. 10, 2021
978-1-64351-823-7
Series: Working With Scientists

A dog trained to sniff out poop? How? (Or, perhaps more to the point, why?)

The first clue that this book will be fun as well as informational is the 3-D look of the brown typeface used for the title word Pooper. Sampson, a black Lab mix, has been trained by his scientist owner (co-author Ubigau) to sniff out the poop (scat) of other animals, for which he’s rewarded with a bit of ball play. One of the animals is the Pacific pocket mouse, thought to be extinct until its scat was discovered in 1993. Now on the endangered species list, the tiny mouse is clever at hiding, and collecting its poop (a great deal can be learned from poop) is a way for scientists to learn more about the species without resorting to traps—a win for both the species and science. Another win is that most pooper snooper dogs are rescues from shelters; their high-energy, ball-obsessive temperament—which can make them tough as family pets—makes them perfect for this job. An admirable amount of information is presented here: how a dog is trained to sniff out poop, the role of the Pacific pocket mouse in its environment, a Q&A with Sampson’s scientist owner, and a fun nose game readers can teach their own dogs. The copious full-color illustrations faithfully illustrate the narrative, visually bringing the story to life and depicting Ubigau with pale skin and long, blond hair.

A fascinating story that strikes just the right tone of education and fun. (Informational picture book. 5-10)

**SHE HEARD THE BIRDS**

The Story of Florence Merriam Bailey, Pioneering Nature Activist
D’Aquino, Andrea
Ill. by the author
Princeton Architectural Press (38 pp.)
$18.95 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-64896-050-5

D’Aquino distills the life of ornithologist and activist Florence Merriam Bailey. The narrative highlights salient moments in Bailey’s childhood: a summerlong camping trip with her father and brother; learning about stars and planets with her astronomer mother. Through elision and metaphor, D’Aquino links bird song to Bailey’s awakening consciousness: “She had the feeling they had something important to tell her.” Bailey’s activism was sharpened by the global decimation of bird species to supply the Euro-American millinery trade’s insatiable appetite for the
“Young readers will grapple with different interpretations and come to their own conclusions.”

PARTLY CLOUDY

Davis, Tanita S.
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins
(240 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-06-293700-1

After weathering several storms during her sixth grade year, Madalyn Thomas seeks better opportunities for seventh grade.

Attending Kingsbridge Junior High seems like a better option than Madalyn’s old school, but there’s a catch: During the week she must live in another town with Papa Lobo, her great-uncle, a Louisiana native who moved to California but still peppers his speech with Creole. Her father’s new job has taken him to the East Coast, and her mom is away spending long hours at work. However, Madalyn is the only Black girl in her class. She befriends Latinx Aria but navigates stares and intrusive questions from classmates who are cued as White—and when a new White friend demonstrates that she may hold prejudiced feelings against Black males, Madalyn must decide if this is a friendship worth pursuing. A subplot involving a neighbor also helps to establish the novel’s central themes around responding to mistreatment of others and adhering to one’s own values. Young readers will grapple with different interpretations and come to their own conclusions about how not to let the bad actions of others allow one to compromise one’s core principles and the sticky question of whether any part of the burden for making peace rests with those who are the victims of discrimination. The California setting, amid the reality of the state’s wildfires, will resonate with readers who live with climate-related threats.

A timely novel full of thought-provoking questions. (Fiction. 10-13)

BABY’S OPPOSITES

Day, Nancy Raines
Illus. by Evans, Rebecca
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-58089-878-2

A day in the life of a toddler is experienced through an exploration of the opposites that exist in the tot’s world.

Early morning, awake in the crib, this child is eager to start the day while parents sleep. “Sleep. Awake. Daybreak!” Morning routines—getting dressed, eating breakfast, and sibling play—precede the day’s outing: “Off. On. Here. Gone. / Laugh. Cry. Hi! Bye.” The day’s contrasting descriptions continue with these one-word sentences arranged in rhymes as this interracial (Asian/White) family of four and their dog leave their city row house to take a walk to the park. They meet friends, play, buy ice cream, walk home, prepare dinner, take baths, read stories, and finally go to sleep. It is a very full day expressed as differing

bodies and plumage of birds. “People thought wearing birds on hats looked beautiful. To Bailey, those hats were the ugliest things she had ever seen.” Modernist collage illustrations contrast grayscale with bright color to emphasize nature’s paramount beauty and importance. Thus, two fashionable women, portrayed in black-and-white garb against a painted gray background, wear elaborate hats composed of colorful plumage and bird corpses. (D’Aquino sidesteps patriarchy’s profiteering role in the trend, for which women alone were pilloried.) Bailey’s tools for quiet observation of live birds—a camera, notebook, pencils, binoculars, and cars—are depicted; 10 common birds accompany their phonetic song-snippets. Other spreads distort perspective, stylize form, and celebrate the collage medium for itself, with torn-paper confetti representing leaves and clouds. Bailey herself is a paper-white cutout in patterned blue-and-white clothing, visually linked to birds and sky.

A good introduction to an important pathfinder among women naturalists. (biographical note, birds in crisis, resources) (Informational picture book. 5-8)

I LOVE YOU MORE THAN ALL THE STARS

Davies, Becky
Illus. by Brown, Dana
Tiger Tales (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-68010-263-5

A poem of love is shared between two young children throughout an adventurous day.

Two children with pale skin and stringy hair cavort across backgrounds that range from realistic settings of a grassy hill at night or a boat on a body of water to fanciful locations such as the inside of a raindrop and a ladder made of starlight. All the while, the text of the book proffers a love that is greater than “all the stars / that shimmer in the night” and is “softer than a snowflake dance / as crystals gently twirl.” The poem is sweet, the sort of sentimental verse that some people eat up and others find unpleasantly treacly. Readers with a determined sweet tooth will find a selection of vocabulary words (shimmer, endless, swirl, etc.) and concepts that will springboard young minds to abstract conversations: What is “sweeter than rain,” for instance, and what is “wider than the world”? The illustrations—silver linework primarily over navy with pops of a salmon-y pink—are pleasant if somewhat characterless. The text on most pages is set in the same silver, a design choice that may make the words difficult to discern, especially when they appear against the salmon-y pink. Educators and librarians with excellent eyesight will find this a serviceable player in love-themed storytimes.

True love may last “longer than a day, a week, a month, a year,” but the memory of this book may not. (Picture book. 4-8)
observations and feelings. “Short. Tall” describes first the children and next the family they meet, while “Hungry. Full” sums up the before- and after-dinner experiences. The lovely watercolor-and-ink illustrations extend and expand the minimal text into a complete view of a toddler’s average day with its satisfactions and disappointments. Trying to keep up with their older sib, this determined toddler is bound to try to do more than they might be ready for, as they topple off at the bottom of the slide. “Up. Down. Smile! Frown.” Toddlers will easily recognize and relate to this readable snapshot of a typical day’s activities.

A sure winner for multiple readings day after day. (Picture book. 2-4)

VIOLETS ARE BLUE
Dee, Barbara
Aladdin (304 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-5344-6918-1

Wren and her recently divorced mom have moved into a new community near Chicago, and things are not going well. Wren has made a new friend, Poppy, and found a new interest—learning about makeup by following Cat FX’s YouTube tutorials. But her mom always seems tired, even for an ER nurse, to the point where 12-year-old Wren can sense something is wrong, although it takes her quite a while to figure out what it is exactly. In the meantime, Wren, steady and dependable, succeeds in keeping up with her schoolwork and practicing her new hobby, with some help from her dad and his new wife, far away in Brooklyn. Still, her mom’s growing problems lurk in the background of everyday life. Lucky for readers and Wren, her passion for her art, the encouraging voice of Cat FX, and the chance to do the makeup for the school performance of Wicked keep her going. Wren makes great efforts to show her unhappy mom that she continues to love her and doesn’t favor her dad’s new family and their lifestyle, free of financial worries. She also navigates new relationships at school, learning to reassess some of her first impressions. Wren’s problems and her pluck will keep readers interested in this sincere story about starting over. Most main characters are White; Wren’s father’s Jewish, and one of her new school friends is Black.

A touching, realistic story about a mother-daughter relationship and its ups and downs. (Fiction. 10-13)

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK
de Kerangal, Maylis
Illus. by Haugomat, Tom
Trans. by Mixter, Helen
Greystone Kids (40 pp.)
$18.95 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-77164-685-7

A youngster is taken on a rite-of-passage trip to the snowy mountains in this French import via Canada.

The narrator, an unnamed youngster whose parents are absent (possibly dead; it’s not clear) and who now goes to a new boarding school, comes home from school to find Bruce, an old companion of the narrator’s parents, sitting with the narrator’s uncle. Years earlier, Bruce had told the youngster that one day he will take them to “seek the mountain in oneself.” Now Bruce asks, “Are you ready?” Not sure but wanting to get “away, far away,” the youngster packs a bag, and the two drive far out to the mountains. The two begin to ski beyond the markers, the narrator following “Bruce’s tracks exactly.” Then there’s an accident, and the narrator must find the courage to save Bruce. This evocative story only hints at particulars: Where are the parents? Who is Bruce, really—a friend to show a fearful child how to be courageous or someone being careless with a child’s life to soothe his own demons? The illustrations, done in a limited palette of flat blues, browns, and reds, showcase a spare graphic-design–like style that is just as evocative and ambiguous (paper-white faces are rendered without features) as the narrative, while the use of white space to define shapes also effectively gives a sense of the vast, cold space of the mountains.

Atmospheric and slightly disturbing. (Picture book. 8-12)

HAZARDOUS HABITATS & ENDANGERED ANIMALS
How Is the Natural World Changing, and How Can YOU Protect It.
de la Bédoyère, Camilla
Wellbeck Children’s (64 pp.)
$11.95 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-78312-652-1
Series: Earth Action

Human actions have damaged animal habitats; what can we do to avoid another mass extinction?

Experts on talking about climate change, especially with young people, emphasize making personal connections, staying hopeful, and focusing on solutions. This British import does just the reverse. It’s a litany of examples of the ways the natural world is changing. Prolific nature writer de la Bédoyère has had plenty of experience presenting animal facts to young readers, but in this case, the sad, scary examples far outnumber the hopeful ones. Her opening chapter introduces the concepts of animal habitats, overpopulation, climate change, pollution,
and mass-extinction events. “We haven’t cared enough about the harm we’ve been doing” to animal homes, she writes. Subsequent chapters are organized by habitats: forests, grasslands, oceans, and mountains and poles (dealt with together). Within each chapter each spread serves as a subsection: open oceans, coasts, coral reefs, the ocean floor, and plastic pollution in the marine section, for example. The text, barely more than infobits, is set in boxes decorated with photographs which themselves are set on larger photographs. There are also charts and maps, more boxes with useful suggestions for “What You Can Do,” and quizzes with choices that are “Totally True or Foolishly False?” (Answers in the back of the book.)

Advice for what the author has called “the Greta generation” but no answers. (glossary, suggested websites) (Nonfiction. 10-14)

### PLANET UNDER PRESSURE

**How Is Globalization Changing the World, and What Can YOU Do To Protect It?**

Dickmann, Nancy

Welbeck Children’s (64 pp.)

$11.95 | Sep. 21, 2021

978-1-78112-644-5

Series: Earth Action

A grab bag of global concerns and trends. This slim survey has evidently been designed to shake young audiences out of complacent expectations of growing up to a serene future. It offers superficial pictures of four general issues—increasing population pressures, immigrants and refugees, tourism and online connectivity, and economic globalization—plus a roundup of impending worldwide threats such as climate change and pandemics. Along with laying out causes and consequences for each anxiety producer, Dickmann repeatedly asks readers whether local agendas should trump broader ones in order to get to the main message that any real solutions are only feasible through international, or at least collective, cooperation. But she leaves to others practical strategies for achieving any such in the face of real-world parochial politics, pervasive racial and ethnic prejudice, self-interest, and short-sightedness. She points instead to organizations like the U.N., makes facile suggestions (“Can you plant [a tree] at home or at school?”), and inserts vague prompts to buy local and like bromides. The boxed narrative blocks are placed over generic montages of maps, charts, and photographs, with some diversity of skin color and national origin visible among the rare human figures that aren’t obscured by angle or distance. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

More alarmist than helpful, and even at that, middle graders are unlikely to find anything new here to fret about. (glossary, resource list) (Nonfiction. 9-11)

### WELCOME TO THE CYPHER

Dill, Khodi

Illus. by Afful, Awuradwoa

Annick Press (32 pp.)

$19.95 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-1-77321-563-1

Join the cypher in this exploration of the poetic power of hip-hop for young readers.

Cyphers are foundational to hip-hop culture, speaking to the ritual practice of rappers, beatboxers, or break dancers gathering in a circle, allowing each participant to take a turn in the spotlight. It’s meant to be a protected space to experiment and improvise within a friendly, supportive group. Dill, who’s also an anti-racist educator, debuts as a children’s author by showcasing the character-building possibilities of the cypher. A white-haired Black male hip-hop elder narrates throughout, highlighting how hip-hop has now grown across multiple

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**Valeria**

del Mazo, Margarita

Illus. by García, Ester

Trans. by Brokenbrow, Jon

Cuento de Luz (24 pp.)

$16.95 | Oct. 1, 2021

978-84-18302-21-3

A bashful rabbit learns to make friends in this Spanish import.

Valeria, whose worlds at school and home are depicted in crisp linework with a bright, spring-colored palette, may excel at knowing her colors, numbers, and letters, but she lacks any self-confidence. She isn’t aware that she is “as pretty as a spring morning” (both her shiny hair and sparkly eyes are noted) and repeatedly hides her face; she isn’t aware of her sweet voice and speaks too softly; and she isn’t aware of the power of her laugh or the strength of her physical affection, so she withholds them.

She looks down at the ground too much (though in the spread noting this, she, confusingly, is depicted as looking up at everyone’s feet above her). When the wind, described as dangerously bored, carries her hat away, she finally sees her classmates for who they are—and hugs Raul, her friend with a bandaged leg and crutch. Rid of her shyness, she discovers “a new world.”

The story, which places a moderate emphasis on Valeria’s physical appearance, may disappoint readers who see more value in other qualities. Moreover, children may take away a baffling message about bodily autonomy; since the story explicitly notes Valeria’s inability to give away “her hugs and her kisses.” Finally, some children may think Valeria is doing fine precisely as she is, with an introspective, shy personality not necessarily in need of fixing.

Introverts need not apply. (Picture book. 4-8)
generations: “Welcome to the cypher! / Now huddle up nice and snug / You feel that circle around you? / Well, that’s a hip-hop hug!” There’s certainly a teacher at work here, mobilizing a relatively sanitized understanding of hip-hop that avoids some of the troublesome content choices that can make mainstream rap a minefield for young children. The boombox, the microphone, and the vinyl record are some of the key motifs as Afful’s animation-influenced illustrations take readers across the urban landscape, displaying young people across genders and skin tones finding their place within the hip-hop scene. Altogether, it exemplifies much of the same rhyme schemes and patterns found in most records, serving as a fun read-aloud and a safe introduction to hip-hop as a pathway to healthy child development.

Good for the children of a rising hip-hop generation. (Picture book, 4-7)

THE SHADOW PRINCE
Durham, David Anthony
Tu Books (400 pp.)
$21.95 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-64379-428-0

In a solarpunk Egypt, a young boy seeks to win a dangerous competition and secure a coveted role. Ash’s life in his Egyptian village leaves much to be desired—bullies pick on him, and though he could easily fight back, his mentor, Yazen, makes him keep his abilities secret. Ash has never understood why Yazen teaches him how to fight, read hieroglyphs, and defeat demons. That is, until the eve of his 12th birthday, when the mentor reveals all: Ash is one of several children born on the same day as an Egyptian prince, and this allows him to compete for a spot as the prince’s shadow—and includes everything from academic tests and physical fitness challenges to battling deadly demons. The illustrations of the kraken pretending to be a spaceship or Groucho Marx are especially delightful, though the few jokes rhyming with “kraken” are a bit eye roll–y. The kraken is appealing and charming, the child is brazen and recognizable, and the overall goofiness mixed with sincerity will win over many a reluctant reader. A kraken good time. (Graphic early reader, 5-8)

KRAKEN ME UP
Ebbeler, Jeffrey
Illus. by the author
Holiday House (40 pp.)
$14.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-8234-5017-6
Series: I Like To Read Comics

An unusual pet wins over a crowd. There’s a contest at the fair, and different children are bringing their pets in hopes of winning. The bespectacled White judge is excited about the “pretty pig” and “fine hen”—and then comes across a brown-skinned child in a yellow slicker, cheerfully holding onto a large green tentacle. “It is a… / KRAKEN!” the judge shrieks in horror as the kraken, an adorable, massive-headed green sea monster, looks abashed, enormous, emotive eyes communicating volumes. All the other children are equally afraid, so the kraken slinks off to sulk in a tiny pond. This early-reader graphic novel is well paced, going a bit into the backstory of the kraken and the child with energetic, brightly colored panels, short sentences, and simple vocabulary. The ultimate triumph—involving the kraken playing around with his own ink and the sudden regurgitation of pirates—is funny and well earned, mixing both familiar children’s insecurities with off-the-wall humor and twists. The illustrations of the kraken pretending to be a spaceship or Groucho Marx are especially delightful, though the few jokes rhyming with “kraken” are a bit eye roll–y. The kraken is appealing and charming, the child is brazen and recognizable, and the overall goofiness mixed with sincerity will win over many a reluctant reader.

A kraken good time. (Graphic early reader, 5-8)

ZEB BOLT AND THE EMBER SCROLL
Elphinstone, Abi
Aladdin (288 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 24, 2021
978-1-5344-4313-6
Series: The Unmapped Chronicles, 3

Two 11-year-old children fight against the odds to free secret worlds from the grip of a world-destroying harpy. Stopping the rising global temperatures isn’t a top concern for orphan Zeb Bolt; after spending his entire life running away from foster homes and unworthy adults, finding a place where he belongs and can trust others is. Following the regrettable bargain he struck with the evil harpy Morg, Zeb must journey to the Unmapped Kingdoms to find the other half of the long-lost Ember Scroll. Once the pieces are united, they can either trigger the rebirth of the magic-restoring phoenix—or spell the end of the Faraway and Unmapped Kingdoms, if Morg has her way. As with past Faraway children, Zeb receives much-needed help from residents of the Unmapped Kingdoms after he discovers Morg’s plan to betray him. Together with his

“This heartwarming final series adventure will keep readers on tenterhooks.”
ZEB BOLT AND THE EMBER SCROLL
“Colorful dynamic illustrations create an uplifting, fun, and energized vibe.”

A FEAST FOR JOSEPH

PLAYFUL RHYMES AND BRILLIANT ILLUSTRATIONS CAMOUFLAGE A SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

When Chameleon wants “to be someone new / And see life from a different view,” forest friends agree to help the lizard become a new, “dazzling” self. Strategic formatting—a rhymed riddle on each recto page followed by an answer on the next verso—encourages readers to guess what familiar animal Chameleon will turn into next. Young readers will also enjoy the challenge of searching the illustrations to find Chameleon’s transformations, especially when they turn into a very realistic monkey and a tiny shark. But an alternating refrain develops with each transformation: “No, [animal name] actually doesn’t feel right” or “Or, maybe something else!” At last, Chameleon poses one more riddle: “I want to be colorful—red, green, yellow, and blue / And to myself I want to be true. / I am good at hiding and live in a tree / I’m a master of disguise… / what could I be?” A dazzling illustration of a chameleon presents the answer, and Chameleon learns that the best answer to “What could I be?” is “ME!” Look carefully. The answer is on the back endpaper. Colorful, humorous illustrations befitting a questing chameleon make this a good read-aloud, but preread, as black text on several pages blurs into a dark background.

Cheerily delivers the lesson that it’s best to be yourself.

(Picture book. 3-6)

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BOX

Anywho, this novel with cardboard boxes has made everyone of cardboard. In this parallel universe the friends find themselves awash in creativity, art, and beauty. However, not all is golden in Cardboardia, as an evil force—the Grey Queen—threatens it. It becomes abundantly clear that the friends have not simply happened upon Cardboardia by mistake but instead have been chosen for their individual special powers. Can the friends realize their powers and team up with the residents of Cardboardia to return its light and defeat the Grey Queen before it is too late? The protagonists are racially diverse, with a range of ages and interests, including the arts and science, as well as varied family structures and experiences. The story is told in shifting point-of-view vignettes, with a generous trim, bright illustrations, and splash pages that break up stretches of dense dialogue to engage readers. This is the first in a series, and the heartwarming final series adventure will keep readers on tenterhooks as it reaches its gratifying end. Zeb is White, and Oonie has brown skin.

A fantastic ending to an endearing series. (Fantasy. 8-12)

CHAMELEON CAN BE

PLAYFUL RHYMES AND BRILLIANT ILLUSTRATIONS CAMOUFLAGE A SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

When Chameleon wants “to be someone new / And see life from a different view,” forest friends agree to help the lizard become a new, “dazzling” self. Strategic formatting—a rhymed riddle on each recto page followed by an answer on the next verso—encourages readers to guess what familiar animal Chameleon will turn into next. Young readers will also enjoy the challenge of searching the illustrations to find Chameleon’s transformations, especially when they turn into a very realistic monkey and a tiny shark. But an alternating refrain develops with each transformation: “No, [animal name] actually doesn’t feel right” or “Or, maybe something else!” At last, Chameleon poses one more riddle: “I want to be colorful—red, green, yellow, and blue / And to myself I want to be true. / I am good at hiding and live in a tree / I’m a master of disguise… / what could I be?” A dazzling illustration of a chameleon presents the answer, and Chameleon learns that the best answer to “What could I be?” is “ME!” Look carefully. The answer is on the back endpaper. Colorful, humorous illustrations befitting a questing chameleon make this a good read-aloud, but preread, as black text on several pages blurs into a dark background.

Cheerily delivers the lesson that it’s best to be yourself.

(Picture book. 3-6)

A FEAST FOR JOSEPH

A resettled refugee kid loves his people’s ways of life and strives to feel at home in his new country.

Joseph’s memories of the tented refugee camp in East Africa, where he used to live, are full of people eating together, dancing, and playing. In his new city, likely in North America, he especially misses the presence of a crowd of people when eating. He tries to invite others to join him and his mother over food, but his relatives, math teacher, and neighbors are all busy. Whoosh, his cheerful neighbor, an Afro-Latinx girl with ribbons in her curly hair, is excited about the food Joseph brings to school: kwen and dek ngor, traditional to his Acholi people of South Sudan and northern Uganda. Colorful dynamic illustrations, including portrayals of food aromas that ignite Joseph’s memories, “white gold” moonlight, and people laughing and dancing, create an uplifting, fun, and energized vibe throughout the book. Featured children and adults are mostly black and brown, and Joseph’s and Whoosh’s mothers wear fabrics with
printed floral or geometric designs, including those associated with the African continent. A glossary explains vocabulary possibly new to some readers. At last, Whoosh and her mami join for dinner, bringing food of their own. The kids help prepare a feast where friendship grows and Joseph finds a feeling of home. 

(This book was reviewed digitally.)

A wonderful book that humanizes refugees through a focus on joy in everyday life, even in asylum. (Picture book. 3-6)

**MERMAID**

*Or, How To Find Love Underwater*

Farkas, J.M.  
Illus. by Triplett, Gina  
Cameron + Company (96 pp.)  
$18.99  |  Aug. 31, 2021  
978-1-951836-07-8

A classic, blacked-out and illustrated. In perhaps—if possible—a greater disservice to this classic fairy tale than the 1989 Disney film, poet and self-described erasurist Farkas “rescues” "The Little Mermaid," turning what she describes as a tale of a “prince-obsessed fish [who] was willing to give away her...most precious gift, just to land a boy” into a “better, stronger...and yes, feminist” story.” She accomplishes this by blacking out all the nuance along the way. Make no mistake, blackout is a subversive and powerful use of destruction as creation. As an introduction to the concept of blackout poetry, the book serves its purpose—offering up the original text reprinted in full and bound back to back with the poem not as a point of comparison, but as sacrifice for budding young blackout poets. Yet the lack of appreciation for the depth of the original text, of which the tragedy and beauty of destruction is such a core theme, is what makes this unbearable ironic. With her marker liberally applied to Andersen's prose, Farkas produces gems like “she didn't want her fins and tail,” and “the sweet witch.../...beckoned her to see where she belongs. / princess of fishes, of course a boy could never change her.” The project is buoyed only by Triplett’s whimsical illustrations of marine life, a pink-haired White mermaid, and emotive, abstract currents of color rendered in what looks like paint pen.

Not as liberating as it wants to be. (author’s note) (Poetry. 8-12)

**¡MANU!!**

Fernández, Kelly  
Illus. by the author  
Graphix/Scholastic (192 pp.)  
$24.99  |  Oct. 19, 2021  
978-1-338-26419-7

A young witching struggles when she loses her magical powers. 

Manu (don’t call her Manuela) has grown up at La Academia de Santa Dominga with the religious sisters who found her as a baby. She might have the strongest magical talent, which stems from her unknown past, but that doesn’t make her the best student at the academy—she’s always getting in trouble. When tragedy strikes and Manu’s magic starts regressing, Manu worries she has been cursed and blames Josefina, her best friend, as Josefina had wished the magic be taken away when one of Manu’s jokes got out of hand. Now Manu must decide between following the advice and remedies doled out by Mother Dolores, who believes that the magic bestowed by the saints should be used only to “serve the poor and the powerless,” or looking for answers elsewhere—even though it might endanger her and her friends. Drawing from her own Dominican experience, Fernández weaves together religion, lore, and brujería and creates a world in which magical powers bestowed by saints and evil eye necklaces work hand in hand. The setting, coded as Latin American since Spanish is spoken, provides an environment in which the narrative and illustrations explore complex relationships between accessible characters that often require forgiveness, understanding, and acceptance to survive. Characters are racially diverse; Manu has brown skin and black, puffy hair.

Fun, refreshing, antics-filled magical adventures. (maps, character list, author’s note, sketchbook) (Graphic fantasy. 8-12)

**THE HUNGRY GHOSTS**

Flores, Miguel  
Viking (336 pp.)  
$17.99  |  Sep. 28, 2021  
978-0-451-47978-5

A 12-year-old orphan bravely heads off to rescue her kidnapped younger sister. 

Milly is the oldest girl at St. George's Home for Wayward Girls in West Ernosta land of Arrett, where witches (and all magicks) have been banned for years. Despite having an inking that she might be a witch, overly responsible Milly does her best to ignore the tingling red sparks she can conjure and instead focuses on being the best older sister and substitute mother she can be to her little foster sisters. After all, Doris Barterby, St. George's headmistress, isn’t capable of taking care of them on her own. When 6-year-old Cilla, who discovers Milly’s secret book of witchcraft, is mistaken for a witch...
and kidnapped, Milly—with the help of Jasper, a snarky talking black cat who is really a wind stuck in a cat’s body—embark on a dangerous mission to rescue her. The witchy adventure is deftly narrated in the third person with original vocabulary and entertaining, comedic, and at times poignant footnotes. Milly has unruly curls and freckled brown skin; other characters are cued as racially diverse. A kind and selfless protagonist, charming sidekicks, and lyrical and evocative prose make this an ideal pick for young fantasy readers.

A delightful debut for fans of magical journeys. (Fantasy. 8-13)

**BEFORE TOGETHER, CINDERELLA**

*A Big Sister Fairy Tale*

Franklin, Ashley

Illus. by Glenn, Ebony & Josbaghani, Saba
Harper/HarperCollins (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-06-302954-5

Following her debut in *Not Quite Snow White* (2019), Tameika is excited about her new twin siblings, but she isn’t sure how to be a big sister. Will her new role be a smash or a flop?

Tameika asks her friend Khadija, who has some experience, how to be a big sister. Khadija insists that she “practice, practice, practice!” Tameika sets off to research her role. However, when the twins arrive, life with them is different from what she anticipated. In fact, the twins require so much from her parents, Tameika begins to feel left out. One day, Tameika learns about a family ball at which the participants with the best entrance win. Tameika and her family present the entrance, complete with a horse-drawn carriage. But when her parents are delayed with the twins, Tameika is sent ahead of the rest of her family, ruining the entrance. Alone in the carriage (driven by her uncle), Tameika begins to see her hopes and dreams for the evening fade fast. This is a fresh, playful take on “Cinderella,” complete with a happy ending. This story is just right for a lap-sit or read-aloud with young children who are expecting a story that is not yet ready to sit through an entire story but could benefit from a picture walk. Tameika and her family present Black; Khadija has light-brown skin and wears hijab in public.

A cute, modern new-sibling twist on a classic fairy tale. (Picture book. 3-7)

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**THE LITTLEST YAK**

Fraser, Lu

Illus. by Hindley, Kate

Peachtree (32 pp.)

$16.99 | Oct. 1, 2021
978-1-68263-282-6

Discouraged with her small stature, a little yak tackles a size-related challenge.

Living atop a snowy mountain, Gertie’s the smallest yak in her huddling herd. Despite having the “curliest, whirliest wool” as well as “splendidly grippy” hooves to scale the most “slippy” cliff, Gertie longs for “BIGNESS.” She wants to grow up to have “greatness and tallness” and the “hugest of hooves and humongous horns.” Reminding Gertie that yaks are “all shapes and sizes / and BIGNESS can come in all sorts of disguises,” Gertie’s mother urges her to enjoy being small. Nevertheless, Gertie embarks on a “Growing-Up Plan,” eating well, exercising, and reading to make her thoughts grow, but despite her efforts, “no growing arrive[s].” But then the herd frantically calls on Gertie to rescue a yak trapped on a cliff edge, a dangerous mission only she can attempt, and Gertie discovers she’s had “bigness inside” all along. The jolly, fast-paced, rhyming verse propels readers through diminutive Gertie’s harrowing, wind-swept rescue mission and matches the upbeat mood of her quest for “bigness.” A pleasing palette of silvers, grays, and blues with red and yellow accents accentuates the bleak, snowy mountaintop venue, while whimsical scenes of hairy, wide-eyed, comical yaks of assorted shapes and sizes sporting amusing cold-weather headgear will trigger chuckles and reinforce the message of individuality.

A real little winner. (Picture book. 4-8)

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**MIGHTY INSIDE**

Frazier, Sundee T.

Levine Querido (288 pp.)

$17.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-64614-091-6


“Mmmmy nuh-nuh-name is Mmmmmmelvin.” Starting high school is an anxiety-provoking milestone for anyone, but for Melvin Robinson, his stutter makes it that much worse. He wants a strong, smooth “he-man voice” so that he can actually say what he is thinking, especially to his crush, Millie Takaza. But the stress of high school, where he is one of only two Black kids in his class, is making his stutter worse, and the class bully is taking every opportunity to put him down. Melvin does make a friend: saxophone-playing Lenny, a nonstop talker who lives above the Black-owned but nevertheless segregated Harlem Club and encourages Melvin to be himself. When Lenny suggests they try out for the local TV variety show with Melvin playing his accordion and Lenny on the sax, Melvin must...
“A wonderful display of traditional clothing encourages readers to appreciate diversity within Africa.”

SMILE WITH AFRICAN STYLE

Freeman, Mylo
Illus. by the author
Cassava Republic Press (32 pp.)
$16.95  |  Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-913175-18-4
Series: Macy’s World

Macy proposes to celebrate African heritage in a very visible way.

A little brown-skinned Black girl with two Afro puffs, Macy greets her teacher, Miss Brown, and compliments her dress. Miss Brown, who is also Black, identifies the fabric as typical of West Africa. When Macy suggests that her classmates each wear an outfit from a different African country, Miss Brown loves the idea. The following week, Miss Brown points to Kenya on an African map as Naomi models a Kenyan Masai dress made with red shuka cloth and colorful beaded necklaces. Macy’s classmates wear Ghanaian Ashanti kente cloth; Angolan, Namibian and Ethiopian garb; a Nigerian ceremonial outfit, the agbada; a Rwandan Tutsi warrior’s clothing; and a Cameroonian elephant mask with matching outfit. Macy arrives late with a surprise that makes everyone smile. Freeman’s colorful, detailed illustrations represent children with different hairstyles and skin tones, including one with albinism. A richer story would have given the children personal connections with the countries they represent. But even lacking that, this wonderful display of traditional clothing encourages readers to appreciate diversity within Africa and will spark interest in learning about the origins of these beautiful, colorful fabrics and the people who wear them, since clothing expresses culture in so many ways. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A beautifully illustrated Afrocentric story that inspires as it informs. (Picture book 4-7)

MOONSONG

Gallagher, Denise
Illus. by the author
Little Press Publishing (38 pp.)
$18.99  |  Oct. 1, 2021
978-0-99799580-7-2

The moon has disappeared from the sky above Fulki’s village.

Around the same time, a group of elders declares that the villagers should stop singing. The reason, they say, is that singing attracts dangerous animals from the nearby jungle. When the singing stops and the moon is gone, the sounds of beasts grunt, growl, and bellow make all the villagers quiver with fear—all the villagers, that is, except for Fulki. Fulki is secretly friends with a tiger, whom she regularly plays with in the jungle. When Fulki tells the tiger that the elders have outlawed singing to protect the villagers from wild beasts, the tiger is puzzled. After all, the tiger is both a beast and very well behaved. The tiger then confesses that he, also, has lost his moon and that every night he sings to try to bring it back. The tiger then teaches Fulki to sing for the moon. Their lesson leads to some wonderfully surprising results. The book’s lyrical text makes great use of devices like onomatopoeia, rendering the story a delight to read out loud. In the beginning, the plot is difficult to follow: It is unclear whether the elders outlawed singing because the moon has disappeared or because they are afraid of wild beasts or both. The fanciful illustrations loosely make use of Eastern motifs, but it is not clear where the book is set geographically. Human characters have brown skin and purple hair.

The beginning’s muddled, but the message is clear: Sing your heart out. (Picture book 3-6)

PUGS FROM PLANET X

Gallagher, John
Illus. by the author
Random House (240 pp.)
$12.99  |  $15.99 PLB  |  Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-593-12111-5
978-0-593-12112-2 PLB
Series: Max Meow

Space pugs have invaded Kittyopolis, and it’s up to Max, Mindy, and friends to save the day!

Max Meow, a cat, and Mindy, a brown-skinned human girl, became superheroes Cat Crusader and Science Kitty, respectively, because of powers bestowed upon them by a space meatball. Now a group of pugs have arrived by spaceship with the intent to steal it. Meanwhile, previous foes Agent M, a mouse, and Big Boss, a squirrel, are in prison until robot Reggie comes to break them out. Thankfully, these former evildoers decide to, at least temporarily, join forces with Max and Mindy. Rounding out their crew is newcomer Rex Rocket, aka Cosmic Wiener, a blue dachshund (Mindy remarks that “he really needs a new nickname”). It’ll take teamwork and a bit of science to save the
**SONNY ROLLINS PLAYS THE BRIDGE**

Jazz legend Sonny Rollins finds a place to play his saxophone in the open air.

He can't play in his apartment because of the neighbors. So he walks down the street, listening to “that / small voice / inside / which says / you need to do this / even if / everyone / wonders / WHY?” He climbs to the walkway at the top of the Bridge (always capitalized, along with the River it “strides”) and, all alone, with just the sounds of the train and the tugboats and the sea gulls as accompaniment, he blows and blows his horn. The harmony represented on the page between the “giant jazzman” and the “giant Bridge” is also reflected in the harmony between the poetic text and the artistic images: Both show an African American man who finds peace on his own terms, in his own space, doing what he is meant to do. Endnotes describe Sonny Rollins’ career, including his unusual hiatus from the jazz scene, the history of the Williamsburg Bridge where he practiced, and the living legend’s words, which are a testament to his character. As usual, Ransome’s illustrations convey character, mood, and setting to great effect, matching the spare, effective text with energy and vibrancy that tempt readers to seek out Rollins’ sound. This meditation on music, art, and integrity offers inspiration and food for thought.

*This loving tribute is a generous introduction to a figure worth knowing.* (Picture book: 3-9)

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**HAMSTER BOY & CHAMELEON GIRL SAVE THE DAY**

*Graphic fantasy. 7-10*

Fluffy fun with extra wackiness. (drawing instructions)

**SONNY ROLLINS PLAYS THE BRIDGE**

*Graphic fantasy. 7-10*

Foolish fun that also exercises the gray matter. (Adventure. 6-11)

A star 12-year-old quarterback has a championship to win, a developing family tragedy to cope with, and a life-changing decision to make.

Barely disguising the autobiographical elements contained here in the wake of his own diagnosis of ALS, former Atlanta Falcons player Green places his protagonist, Ben Redd, in a football family and on an upstate New York team coached by his dad and two older brothers—all former gridiron stars themselves. Ben’s anticipation as he looks forward to a season that will be capped by a game against archrival Penn Yan battles with his terror as he watches his father’s NFL injuries come home to roost in slurred speech, loss of physical coordination, and, eventually, a frantic trip to the hospital for an emergency tracheotomy. But as Ben’s parents, both iron willed, clash over whether he should be allowed to follow the family career path (and one of his brothers...
A symphony soars in rhyming couplets. Music lover Greene has created a graceful poem to introduce young readers and listeners to all the sounds and sections of a symphony orchestra. She opens, as a concert would, with the entrance of the musicians, the tuning, and the appearance of the conductor. “Applause! A pause. / Then, instruments as one… // …all SING.” (This page turn is particularly artful.) The instruments are appropriately presented and grouped: first strings, then brass, woodwinds, double-reed instruments, percussion, and piano. Italicized musical terms like crescendo, glissando, allegro, and spiccato are gracefully woven into the verse, then defined in a short closing glossary. The poet’s rhythm and rhyme also sing, her metaphors add richness, and alliteration makes these lines a delight to read aloud. “French horns, trumpets, tubas blow / with lips abuzzzz and great gusto!” One early misstep aside—the oboe’s tuning A is usually much longer than a “chirp”—this is a well-pitched composition. Sanchez’s gently humorous animation-style spreads suggest a 21st-century Fantasia with a chubby, White Toscanini-like conductor and a highly diverse set of instrumentalists whose playing moves the audience out of the concert hall and into a variety of settings. Even the endpapers support the theme with musical symbols and a golden trumpet. There are many other introductions-to-the-orchestra titles out there, but few have such charm.

Pleasing to the eye and ear. (Informational picture book. 4-8)

Around the world, specially trained dogs are working with handlers to improve the environment.

In some places dogs sniff out illegal animal products such as ivory, pelts, and horns, both at poaching sites and in distant places where the contraband is shipped. Dogs are being used to discover invasive species like zebra mussels, preventing expensive, hard-to-manage infestations. Rare and endangered animals can be tracked through the discovery of their scat. Dogs are perfect for these jobs, with a success rate that far exceeds that of human conservationists. Guard dogs protect domesticated animals from reintroduced predators like bears and wolves, reducing farmers’ urge to destroy these vulnerable populations. They’re also employed to find poisoned bait that farmers have deployed. Perhaps the most unusual use is that of dogs on boats that seek out the floating scat of nonmigratory orcas off the coast of Washington. The scat provides detailed information on the status of environmental threats to the endangered whales. Numerous color photographs accompany the detailed text. Text boxes offer additional information. Unfortunately, both those and photograph captions are presented in very small print. Readers might also wish for more photographs of the rarely seen animals such as pangolin and quoll. The final chapter includes ways readers can help in the field, although some may be unrealistic for the young audience. Anjelica Houston contributes a foreword.

A well-researched and balanced presentation on a pertinent, high-interest topic. (glossary, resources, index) (Nonfiction. 10-14)
One to three sentences of information appear on verso, with family like paper dolls. The vibrantly colored animals have der would revel in answering. Illustrations present each animal during their own bedtime routines.

**YAY FOR BIG BROTHERS!**
*Halfmann, Janet*  
Illus. by Bersani, Shennen  
Arbordale Publishing (32 pp.)  
$9.95 paper | Sep. 10, 2021  
978-1-94351-822-0

An animal book focusing on big brothers offers reflection questions for older siblings to ponder.

A human big brother and his younger sibling, both presenting White, leaf through a book (readers will note it is the book they are holding) to learn about big brothers of other species. Several animals, including naked mole rats, hoary marmots, and beavers, are presented in successive double-page spreads. One to three sentences of information appear on verso, with one question for readers on recto. Some of the questions are open-ended, asking kids to consider how big brothers help younger siblings stay safe. Other queries are straightforward, asking about eating preferences and favorite games after sharing facts about the crow and kangaroo, respectively. While the title speaks to brothers, presumably older siblings of any gender would revel in answering. Illustrations present each animal family like paper dolls. The vibrantly colored animals have slightly anthropomorphic eyes and lie flat on the landscape of their natural environment. While this style doesn’t necessarily command attention, it presents images cleanly. The predictable rhythm and simple visuals are soothing and allow for focus on the discussion questions posed in each spread. Racial diversity is present in an ensemble spread of human sibling pairs. However, each one of these shares exact skin tone and hair texture between the two, homogenizing their seen identities.

**Serviceable. (glossary, charts, facts)** (Informational picture book. 4-8)

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**CRUSH STUFF.**
*Harrison, Lisi*  
Putnam (240 pp.)  
$8.99 paper | Sep. 28, 2021  
978-1-984815-01-9  
Series: Girl Stuff, 2

The nesties (next-door besties) are back and focused, minus some boy distractions, on changing the location of the seventh grade field trip.

Fonda, Drew, and Ruthie from *Girl Stuff* (2021) are still finding their place at Poplar Middle School. This year, Fonda is committed to changing the site of the Seventh Grade Slopover—an overnight field trip to a farm where the students clean out barns. She convinces the principal of the need for a new venue and pitches Catalina Island. Unfortunately, Fonda presents her argument in front of two students who suggest other sites: Henry wants Camp Pendleton, and Ava prefers the set of the TV show *Makeover Magic.* Now the three are in competition, each trying to get a majority of students behind their choice. For Fonda, winning means not only a less-stinky trip, but a spot out of the shadows cast by her popular older sisters. Ruthie and Drew are slightly less driven, distracted by crushes and their desires to bring their circles of friends together. Thanks to the advice of Fonda’s mother, readers will learn volumes about campaigning. The shenanigans that erupt during the competition add color, as does Fonda’s wordplay. The sibling rivalry, drama between cliques, and early explorations of romance all ring true. Best of all, each of the nesties’ storylines ends on a sweet note: The main cast defaults to White.

**Lighthearted fare for tweens. (Fiction. 9-13)**

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**THE BEST MOM**
*Harrison, Penny*  
Illus. by Davey, Sharon  
New Frontier Publishing (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct. 5, 2021  
978-1-913639-41-9

In this rhyming book from Australia, a querulous kid narrates the exceptional qualities of all of her friends’ mothers—and the irritating qualities of her own.

The story begins with the narrator’s intention to “trade” her mother in for a better option. Katie’s two moms, for example, are expert seamstresses, whereas the protagonist’s mom’s costume-making skills are less than impressive. Scout’s mom is a roller-skating whiz, but the narrator’s mother is hopeless on wheels. Eve’s mom is an impeccably dressed fairy (readers of a certain age might call her a hippie), whereas the protagonist’s mother constantly wears her clothing inside out and is always in too much of a hurry to be graceful. And while Will’s mother is a gifted chef, the narrator’s mother is unable even to cook a simple pot of pasta. Throughout, the book wobbles between humor and outright cruelty, but its greatest weakness is its lack
of narrative arc. After pages spent detailing her mother’s flaws, the narrator suddenly reverses her stance, declaring her mother to be her favorite: It is the first positive thing she’s said about her mother in the whole book. This startling about-face renders the ending difficult to believe, robbing the book of the optimism that could have characterized its final pages. The narrator’s mom’s skin is light brown; her daughter’s is paler.

Falls short in its attempt to be endearing. (Picture book. 3-6)

ROSIE THE TRUFFLE HOUND
Hartland, Jessie
Illus. by the author
Nancy Paulsen Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-399-54875-8

The nose knows what it knows.

Rosie is a cute brown poodle with very acute olfactory powers. She can smell anything—food or otherwise—even from great distances. She likes to surround herself with delicious aromas—easy enough, given that her humans make chocolate truffles to sell in their shop. Problem is...chocolate’s poisonous for dogs, so Rosie can’t eat any. She runs away to the city, hoping to find something to eat. Truffle recipes (one chocolate, one fungi) conclude the book. Rosie lands various posts, but nothing is quite right until she finds one for which her nose is tailor-made...as a truffle hunter—the expensive, fungi kind. Here’s where readers discover that there are two kinds of truffles; that only dogs and pigs are suited to this work (though pigs also eat them!); and that a dog’s sense of smell is far keener than a human’s. Despite her success, Rosie misses her family and returns home, where her trusty nose discovers a perfect spot to settle down. With the first two books, Julia’s House goes Home and Julia’s House Goes On, Julia’s open and unquestioning acceptance of every creature inhabitant with it. And now at last, the house has found the Perfect Spot to settle down. With the first two books, Julia’s openness and kindness lead to kerfuffles and conundrums. In this final title, the house plunges down a craggy mountain and is left in total ruins, with only the sign, a doorknob, and the front door remaining. Hatke’s lavish watercolor illustrations are magnetic and spirited, as the menagerie of curious and strange creatures are strewn all over the land. What to do? The answer lies in Julia’s open and unquestioning acceptance of every creature found on the pages. A unicorn? “We’ll make room.” A cemetery full of ghosts? “Just follow me.” Even Julia’s optimism crumbles when she finds she’s led creature friends both old and new to a junkyard instead of a home. But her unfailing welcome to all, even when it leads to quandaries, is a rare treasure, bringing friendship and support back to her in spades. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Imaginative readers will pore over the illustrations for much longer than one reading. (Picture book. 3-7)

MAYBE...
Haughton, Chris
Illus. by the author
Candlewick (40 pp.)
$15.49 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-5362-2024-7

Three young monkeys make mischief while their elder is away.

The story, set in a jungle and introduced with an Aristotelian epigraph about learning by doing, features three small monkeys and a larger one readers will assume is a parent or caregiver. As the large monkey leaves, the young ones are told to stay on the branch on which they sit: There are tigers down by the mango trees. But these mischief-makers break the rules anyway and eventually find themselves on the ground, enjoying the fruit. Four nail-biting spreads (“RUN!!!!”) are devoted to their scramble to escape the tigers, one requiring a 90-degree turn as they race up a tree. The book’s suspense is built with careful pacing and the repetition of particular words (“down, down, down, / to the trees below”) and phrases: “Any tigers here? No! / Any tigers there? No! / No tigers anywhere!” The illustrations, rendered in Haughton’s signature vividly saturated palette, feature monkeys with huge eyes, dark purple fur, blue ears, and lime green noses as well as tigers who are animated with angular lines and massive teeth. Though the ever curious monkeys are frightened by the tigers, they are tempted in the end (“maybe...”) by the mention of bananas down below. The monkeys are anthropomorphized in that readers have access to their first-person inner thoughts. Human characteristics are otherwise not attributed to them, though readers wanting to move past monkey protagonists in their picture books may take a pass.

An impish adventure. (Picture book. 3-7)
BUFFALO WILD!
Havrelock, Deidre
Illus. by Whitecalf, Azby
Annick Press (32 pp.)
$19.95 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-77321-533-4

A young boy yearns for the return of wild buffalo, and his vivid dreams bring them back to the prairie where they belong.

Declan longs to see majestic herds of buffalo like those in the stories his grandmother tells. He wishes he could feel how “the whole world trembled” when millions of buffalo still roamed the land. Kokum explains that “now...those Buffalo live in the sky” but says they will return someday. “I wish those Buffalo would draw near and come home,” Declan says, and during a starry night lit by the full moon, his imagination allows him to free the “wild, wonderful beasts” from captivity. But the creatures wreak havoc on Kokum’s garden, and Declan realizes he has no way to control the chaos. “This land must have been less crowded a long time ago,” reflects Declan, and he calls on the Creator to take the wild animals back, even though “without the Buffalo, the prairie didn’t seem nearly as wild.” Through Kokum and Declan, Havrelock (Saddle Lake Creek Nation) explores the importance of buffalo to Indigenous peoples, while illustrator Whitecalf (Plains Cree) uses bold shades of blue, red, and violet to create a child’s view of mysterious nighttime imaginings. Both text and illustrations carefully situate characters in the here and now with details such as Kokum’s smartphone and yoga gazebo. The 2014 Buffalo Treaty is appended.

A satisfying ending ensures this nighttime adventure will soothe even the wildest child. (author’s note) (Picture book 4-7)

OVER, BEAR! UNDER, WHERE?
Hedlund, Julie
Illus. by Slack, Michael
Philomel (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-593-20355-2

Be on the lookout! Wordplay is underway.

A mole named Under and a bird named Over play on a seesaw and swings. Simple declarative sentences explain where the pals are spatially as they use the equipment; their relative locations are depicted. From here, the pair begin to converse, so the prepositions over and under repeatedly appear in speech bubbles, paired with other words and set in boldface type throughout. Thus, dialogue emerges as commands, interjections, or occasional idiomatic expressions and puns—but it’s actually forming compound words. A story (ending with a sweet idiomatic phrase) develops and is expressed textually and visually: “Push, Over!” the mole yells from the swing, and “Under, Stand!” the bird demands when it wants a turn. Punctuation marks are used grammatically correctly, turning common (and not-so-common) compound words into phrases. Other examples of compound-word formation herein: “Over, eat?” “Under, cook,” “Over, done.” Unfortunately, the exercise does not amount to a satisfying story in itself. Adults will get the point; many children won’t, though some will recognize familiar compounds: overeat, understand, under/overcook, and underwear. (Here it’s punned “Under, Where?”) Occasionally, confusion reigns: Some word pairs that are boldfaced and set in speech balloons make no sense for the book’s apparent purposes because they aren’t compounds: “Over, There!”; “Dig, Dog!”; and “Down, Dog!” Colorful illustrations are energetic. An author’s note explains compound words and invites readers to locate those in the book, which are defined in a separate list. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Tries for clever but doesn’t make it. (Picture book 5-8)

ALL KINDS OF ANIMAL FRIENDS
Henn, Sophy
Illus. by the author
Kane Miller (32 pp.)
$15.99 | Sep. 1, 2021
978-1-68464-316-5

A friendly reminder that each friendship is special in its own unique way.

This follow-up to Henn’s All Kinds of Animal Families (2021) features unusual animal friendships. These friendly animal pairs live all over the world, in the backyard, the forest, the oceans, rivers, and the savanna. Right double-page spreads put the animals front and center, sometimes with an unusual perspective, such as a bird’s-eye view of two different birds offering worms to a nest full of hungry babies with gaping mouths, but always with crisp details: The stark contrasts of the black-and-white zebras, the clearly delineated hippo half submerged in a muddy river, and a dolphin and humpback splashing along a coastline all pop. Each spread has text on two levels. For younger listeners, a one-sentence statement summarizes the spread’s content. “Occasionally, friends can be friends just because.” For listeners ready for more, there is a short description that offers more detail. “[T]he Rufous woodpecker actually lays its eggs in the middle of the black tree ants’ nest. The ants protect the eggs from being eaten by other creatures—but no one really knows why they do this!” Backmatter thumbnail entries contain even more fun facts about each animal depicted: A hippo can hold its breath for up to seven minutes under water, but it can’t swim. (It actually runs along the river bottom.)

A fabulous friendship feast for the eyes and the heart. (Informational picture book 4-7)
A TREE IS A HOME
Hickman, Pamela
Illus. by Yamanoto, Zafouko
Kids Can (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-5253-0236-7

As the seasons change, so does the oak tree—and the animals who live in, on, and beneath it.

“The big, old oak tree stands tall near the empty house.... Many animals have lived here.” This picture book needs plenty of time for reading the text and looking carefully and deeply at the richly colored art. The illustrations are deceptively simple—primitive and childlike, using crayons among other media—but the details go beyond complementing the scientific text. For example, astute readers will see the “sold” sign on the empty house on the verdant, summery initial page. Successive, alternating double-page spreads show first the tree and house on the verso, with brief text that describes seasonal changes in the tree, then present what’s happening at the same time in the life cycles of six winsome animals: raccoon, acorn weevil, opossum, gray squirrel, blue jay, chipmunk. All, even the weevils, are depicted with plenty of personality. Simple sentences about the animal’s behavior or appearance. Simple sentences teach new vocabulary through context. By springtime, baby animals have joined several of the inhabitants. Extra joy comes from noticing an interracial family of human beings who move in on the autumn pages, peer out snow-flecked windows in winter, plant a garden in spring, and enjoy the outdoors in summer. And is it only the tree’s inhabitants that have added family members? (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A sweet, informative journey. (additional facts, glossary, bibliography) (Informational picture book. 4-8)

NIGHT CREATURES
Animals That Swoop, Crawl, and Creep While You Sleep
Hirsch, Rebecca E.
Illus. by Possentini, Sonia
Millbrook/Lerner (32 pp.)
$19.99  |  Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-5415-8129-6

A child and caregiver enjoy an outdoor fire while night creatures become active around them.

There are a tent and a campfire in a field dotted with trees, a pond in the foreground and a two-story house in the background. Dusk has just given way to night. A bat hangs upside down, and a family of raccoons pokes their heads out of the trunk of a tree. “Night bugs blink on” while other creatures creep in search of food, leap, crouch, prowl, watch, pounce, and snatch. Close-ups of the animals finding their food dominate the spreads, while the brown-skinned child and adult roast marshmallows and point at stars. As morning light appears with the robins and the deer, the human pair walk back toward the house while “night creatures return / to quiet dens / and dusky nooks.” The illustrations effectively represent the night world on the page, with shadow and muted colors that require readers to look closely and pay attention. The spare, lyrical text is rhythmic and soothing, just right for a bedtime story. Most of the animals are not named in the text, which allows space for guesswork and discussion before turning to the full spread of endmatter for more information about the night creatures.

Well executed. (notes) (Picture book. 3-9)

PLAYING AT THE BORDER
A Story of Yo-Yo Ma
Ho, Joanna
Illus. by Martinez, Teresa
Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$17.99  |  Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-06-299454-7

Yo-Yo Ma performed Bach’s cello suites at the U.S.–Mexico border in Laredo, Texas, in 2019.

Through poetic and reverent language, Ho uses this performance as a keyhole to introduce readers to Ma’s impressive career, with a focus on how he “challenges convention and weaves worlds together” through music. Extensive backmatter gives informative context for such global initiatives, such as the Silk Road Ensemble, which has brought together strangers from different cultures to play music, and the Bach Project, which the titular concert was part of. Ho extends the theme of global unity when she describes Petunia, his beloved cello, which embodies materials from Italy, Brazil, Mongolia, India, and West Africa. Martinez’s gentle illustrations match Ho’s inspired tone with sweeping, soft strokes in welcoming, warm tones. A visual throughline of music notes appears on almost every page, conveying the magic that music, even while unseen, can be felt by all. The wraparound cover illustration and final double-page spread both depict lines of adults and children of various ages and racial presentations holding hands across the border, beautifully underscoring the book’s theme of unity through music. Elementary school teachers and parents of school-age children searching for examples of people connecting across borders and differences will delight in this sweet introduction—an excellent companion to Mitali Perkins and Sara Palacios’ Between Us and Abuela (2019). (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Hopeful and lovely. (resources, author’s note) (Informational picture book. 5-8)
**BONES UNEARTHED!**  
Hollihan, Kerrie Logan  
Abrams (208 pp.)  
$16.99 | Sep. 21, 2021  
978-1-4197-5535-4  
Series: Creepy and True, 3

Murder and mayhem from the annals of osteoarchaeology, with modern instances of cannibalism and like chewy topics on the side.

Continuing her ventures into the more lurid corners of history and prehistory, Hollihan opens with the discovery and excavation of King Richard III’s hacked bones from beneath a modern parking lot and closes with the still-ongoing project of piecing together and identifying the jumbled skeletons of hundreds of servicemen who died in the bowels of the Oklahoma at Pearl Harbor. In between she reports on rattling finds including the 10,000-plus 13th-century burials at London’s Spitalfields and the immense tolls of various volcanic explosions. She also tucks into Inuit accounts of the ill-fated Franklin expedition and other well-documented cases of people becoming cuisine and, with a certain relish, details how the last czar and his family were shot, stabbed, looted, splashed with acid, dismembered, burned, buried, and reburied. Providing some contrast, she also describes digs that uncovered couples holding hands or hugging each other and sensitively reports on controversies with Native American and other Indigenous groups over the custody of remains like those of Kennewick Man. Photos aplenty add to the fun with views of skulls or half-excavated skeletons in situ, archaeological sites, fleshed-out portrait reconstructions, and historical images. In the pictures, most but not all of the faces (the ones with skin still attached anyway) are White.

**Solidly researched and, no bones about it, both eye- and mind-widening. (source notes, further reading, index) (Nonfiction, 10-13)**

**CREATURES OF THE FLOOD**  
Hunter, Erin  
Harper/HarperCollins (256 pp.)  
$16.99 | Sep. 28, 2021  
978-0-06-302192-1  
Series: Bamboo Kingdom, 1

The first in a new series by the pseudonymous authorial collaboration, this one focusing on pandas.

In the midst of a devastating flood, a giant panda reaches the security of a cave where she can safely birth her cubs. In an initially confusing timeline, the tale then takes up much later with Leaf, who is maturing among a group of pandas in a barren countryside. On the other side of an uncrossable river, Rain, another intrepid panda, is growing up in the Southern Forest, where more previously solitary pandas have gathered. When Sunset Deepwood, the prophesying Dragon Speaker, returns—seemingly from the dead—Rain is immediately suspicious of his behavior, especially concerning his secret meetings with antagonistic monsters. The storyline switches between these two females and Ghost, a clumsy all-white male who has grown up with his presumed littermates under the tender care of their snow leopard mother, Winter. Although he knows he differs from the other cubs in significant ways, Ghost has no idea he’s actually a panda. After a large earthquake, Leaf comes under the care of Shad-owhunter, a tiger who’s sworn to reunite triplet pandas who are destined together to become the next Dragon Speakers, setting up another entry in the series. The animals are well depicted, with clear personalities, and the challenges they face are daunting, nicely sustaining the suspense. Illustrations not seen.

**Perfect for eager readers of animal adventures. (Fantasy, 9-12)**

**BEN Y AND THE GHOST IN THE MACHINE**  
Holli, K.A.  
Chronicle Books (432 pp.)  
$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021  
978-1-4521-8321-3  
Series: The Kids Under the Stairs, 2

An emotionally charged, dynamic novel in verse.

Holli’s follow-up to 2020’s Benbee and the Teacher Griefer follows another character from the ensemble cast. This entry focusing on Ben Y, who prefers Ben to the full name Benita and is exploring gender identity, is accessible without exposure to the prior volume; although it picks up without much explanation of past relationships, the strong narrative style does all the heavy lifting. Reeling from the death of a sibling and the subsequent social fallout of “dead-brother-itis,” Ben Y retreats deeper into friendships, game worlds, and the escape provided by the Newspaper Typing Club led by the trusted Ms. J. Over the summer, in this safe space for divergent learners, close bonds formed between Ben Y, Ben B, Jordan, and Javier. At school, Ben Y wavers between feeling unseen and being picked on and takes bold steps to carve out personal space, including an interest in newcomer Ace. Ben Y also faces challenges as the bullish principal imposes limits on their school paper and becomes invested in punishing dress-code violations. This focused character study delivers layered attention to grief and self-exploration. Multiple formats, including chat messages in the Minecraft-like Sandbox, combined with extraordinary pacing make this a win for reluctant readers, while the humor and emotional reach will draw in anyone interested in middle-grade emotional realism. With minimal physical descriptions, names cue ethnic diversity.

**Accomplished, lively, and heartfelt. (Verse novel, 8-13)**
“Delicate illustrations cleverly utilize color to track Tom’s journey.”

**THE WALL**

**SUN AND SHIRO AND THE POLKA-DOT SNAKE**

Imai, Hiyoko
Illus. by the author
Little Gestalten (36 pp.)
$16.95 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-3-96704-709-7

From Germany, a small book with simple stories about friendship, seasons, and family.

Sun and Shiro are good friends. Sun is a boy with curly brown hair and pale skin. Shiro is a white dog with a white-tipped brown tail. In summer, they explore the house and garden, discovering insects and animals, flying homemade kites, and watching the moon at night. In the fall, they run through fields of acorns and go on leaf hunts. They especially love apples of all kinds. But they aren’t the only ones; geese, a pig, and a maggot each take their share, along with a polka-dot snake, who eats so much he becomes stuck in an apple and needs Sun to set him free. These stories, contained within one long narrative, demonstrate how friends help one another and do things together. The weighty text tends to tell rather than show, using little dialogue and instead declaring insights in the narrative. This is disappointing, especially when compared to the simple yet charming illustrations that place small, brightly colored items against white backgrounds for high contrast. The mixed-media illustrations seem to use textured papers or felt, which lend form and weight to the objects. Moreover, the design of the book leaves lots of white space around the objects, emphasizing their importance and central placement on each spread.

This quiet book is likely to be enchanting for those with patience and imagination. (Picture book. 4-7)

**I REALLY DIG PIZZA! A Mystery!**

James, Candy
Illus. by the author
Razorbill/Penguin (80 pp.)
$10.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-593-35013-3
Series: Archie & Reddie, 1

One mystery turns into two when Archie hides a special pizza.

In this opening volume of the new Archie & Reddie series, Archie, a critter with pointy ears, fluffy white fur, and a tail, happens upon a pizza in a box with a red bow. “Who would leave a perfectly good pizza just lying around?” Archie wonders, and that’s when the trouble begins. Instead of trying to solve that mystery, Archie uses a backhoe to bury the pizza for later. At dinnertime, Archie sees Reddie, a red fox, who is investigating Archie’s pile of dirt. That’s when Archie starts digging a deeper hole of lies. Sweating comically, Archie concocts one questionable (and humorous) explanation after another to dismiss Reddie’s clues. Finally Reddie sadly explains having left a special pizza present for Archie right where the pile of dirt is. In a less-than-satisfying ending that doesn’t explain Archie’s role in hiding the pizza, Archie turns recovering the pizza into a joint effort, and Archie and Reddie finally collapse in a pizza stupor. Despite plot holes, this outing introduces two friends with enjoyable chemistry populating well-paced panels that propel the physical comedy (“Candy James” is an author-illustrator duo, and a closing note reveals the characters to be their daughter’s plush foxes, perhaps explaining Archie’s less-than-vulpine appearance.) Sequel *We Will Find Your Hat!* publishes simultaneously. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Make room for this cute pair on the graphic early reader shelf. (Graphic early reader. 4-8) (We Will Find Your Hat!: A Conun- drum! 978-0-593-35013-3)

**THE WALL**

James, Jessie
Illus. by Echeverri, Catalina
New Frontier Publishing (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-913639-39-6

The “world is a beautiful place” to Tom, who wants to be a “great explorer and see it all”—until his grandmother warns him that “the world is not safe.” Afraid when he hears grown-ups, TV, and newspapers talk about bad “monsters” from other parts of the world coming closer, Tom stops exploring. The grown-ups build a high, long wall to keep the monsters out. Feeling safer, Tom forgets about exploring. But one day he receives a friendly message from across the wall and decides to climb over. Tom sees no monsters, just beautiful grasses, flowers, mountains, birds, animals, trees—and a little girl waving. The girl returns with Tom to his side of the wall. Listening to the girl talk about her home and people convinces those who built the wall to tear it down, and Tom starts exploring again. This simple story quietly reveals the insidious impact of xenophobic isolationism and offers a hopeful message. Whimsical, delicate illustrations cleverly utilize color to track Tom’s journey from joyful boy eagerly exploring his colorful world to fearful child sadly watching TV. Color gradually disappears from the illustrations as the wall falls. Though Tom presents White and the little girl Black, importantly, Tom’s community’s grown-ups are racially diverse, saving the narrative from reduc
tive racialization.

Timely, aspirational, affirming. (Picture book. 4-7)
“Enough to intrigue those looking for some silly, DIY entertainment.”

101 HILARIOUS PRANKS AND PRACTICAL JOKES

Plus, Learn To Invent Your Own!

Julian, Theresa
Illus. by Lewis, Pat
Odd Dot (240 pp.)
$9.99 paper | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-250-76844-5

Fuddy-duddies beware: This guide is for jokesters and comedians looking to pull off the perfect practical joke.

Delivering 101 goofy and giggle-inducing stunts, Julian’s handbook begins on a somber note by including a pledge for readers emphasizing the importance of safety, thoughtfulness, and respect. Warnings out of the way, young people are treated to a panoply of pranks wrapped loosely in a narrative by a certain Dr. Crankshaw of SHMOP, or the School of Hijinks, Malarkey & Outlandish Pranks, from mundane acts like crank calls and toothpaste-filled cookies to more clever ideas like recipes for homemade, edible poop (made from cocoa and peanut butter) and fried brain dust disorder (in which one’s brain pretends to disintegrate after too much homework). In addition to practical joke ideas, the author adds many helpful tips about comedic acting, explaining physical comedy, the importance of exaggerated facial expressions, voice modulation, and how to master the perfect pratfall. The pranks are presented with expressive cartoonlike illustrations, advice on preparation (such as necessary ingredients), and enumerated steps for execution. While not all the suggestions seem feasible, there is enough here to intrigue those looking for some silly, DIY entertainment. The illustrations throughout are notable for their inclusivity.

Gross-out fun for aspiring pranksters. (index) (Nonfiction. 8-12)

EARTH’S AQUARIUM

Discover 15 Real-Life Water Worlds

Kaufman, Alexander
Illus. by Rodrigues, Mariana
Magic Cat (80 pp.)
$24.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-4197-5289-6

In its varied ecosystems, Earth’s water world contains an astonishing diversity of life.

This oversized album (14.5 by 21.4 inches when opened), first published in the United Kingdom, contains vivid descriptions of 15 different watery environments, their representative plant and animal inhabitants, and how the pollution of the last 100 years is changing each of those worlds. The writer has chosen a wide variety of aquatic ecosystems from around the globe, 1/3 of them in Europe. These regions include mudflats, wetlands, salt marshes, estuaries, mangrove and kelp forests, coral and oyster reefs, seagrass meadows, open water, deep water, vents and seeps, sea ice, and slow- and fast-moving fresh water. Each is described in two double-page spreads, the first offering a general description and panorama, and the second, portraits and short descriptions of plants, vertebrates, invertebrates, and even algae and bacterial mats that characterize the web of life there. Most of the life-forms described can be found in the panorama. Additional text boxes explain what makes these systems distinctive. “Water is life,” Kaufman explains in an introductory section that defines ways water is measured, such as salinity, density, and acidity. The text is information rich, but much of it is printed in a distressingly small font. Rodrigues’ paintings are noteworthy; her representations of specific species are quite accurate, though occasionally creatures described as white or gray in the text are shown as rosy-orange. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Dramatic and depressing in its broad scope and its concerns. (index, sources) (Nonfiction. 10-16)

THE MONSTERS OF ROOKHAVEN

Kenny, Padraig
Illus. by Bettison, Edward
Henry Holt (336 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-250-62394-2

Stranded runaways end up at a house where a family of monsters live.

Mirabelle has always lived at the House of Rookhaven, a magical place with passages from another world. When the Glamour that protects the house and its inhuman residents falls, orphaned siblings Tom and Jem arrive in need of help. Mirabelle, a misfit among misfits, champions helping the two and quickly befriends Jem. Beauty is found through the horror, from carnivorous flowers to a beautiful lady who transforms into a swarm of spiders and other gothic monsters in residence. The mood is set through exquisite black-and-white illustrations, featuring both silhouettes and delicate line work, and through the collective fog of grief—the story is set in England shortly after World War II. Mystery comes in the form of the oldest member of the Rookhaven family—Piglet, declared dangerous and locked away but who knows that change is coming; it’s only a matter of time until Piglet is freed. Themes of grief, empathy, and the nature of monsters play out as danger arrives from an unexpected source. While the ending concludes the imminent dangers and storylines, enough mysteries remain for the fictional world to be revisited. Third-person viewpoints shift among Mirabelle, Jem, a boy from Rookhaven village named Freddie, and occasionally Piglet. Characters default to White.

A dreamy, imaginative premise gives way to pensive catharsis. (Fantasy. 8-14)
Two girls bond over knights, castles, toys, and real treasure in this series opener inspired by a video game.

Nine-year-old Demelza Penrose and her pet goose, Captain Honkers, live in a little camper on a caravan site owned by her father on Penfurzy Island in Cornwall, England. Demelza’s life is upended when a mysterious girl called Nessa breaks in during a storm. When Demelza finds out that her father needs to sell the camper park due to declining revenues, she and Nessa spring into action to defend the property. Their discovery of Demelza’s deceased mother’s notebook containing clues to the legend of the Penfurzy knights and their lost treasure propels them on a series of hair-raising adventures. Fixing up a couple of old bikes to serve as steeds, the girls embark on a lengthy quest, which takes them to a junkyard in search of the Staff of Truth, up a high tor, and into a sunken castle where they engage in battle with sinister knights and discover a roomful of treasure. A satisfying plot twist ensures a happy ending for Demelza and her father and cements the girls’ friendship. This is a light-hearted, swashbuckling tale in which physical bravery as well as smarts and honesty are rewarded. Expressive cartoon-style illustrations help readers see that Dr. Banting is an animal lover who struggles with attachment to his stray-dog subjects and is heartbroken when they die as a result of their time in the lab. One in particular, Marjorie, captures his heart. Marjorie becomes the most long-lived test subject, proving that insulin treatments were ready for testing on a human patient, and dies a hero in Banting’s arms. Ethical issues are addressed in a concluding note in which readers are encouraged to think critically about the use of animals in lifesaving research; an author’s note and list of sources attest to Kerbel’s own research. Dr. Banting and his colleagues present White.

Readers will want to dig deeper into this true story of canine heroes and lifesaving science. (Graphic nonfiction. 8-11)

A king’s love of learning and his people leads to a landmark achievement.

Born in Korea in 1397, young prince Yi Do has a love of reading. Since he is royalty, his education enables him to learn Hanja, a complex Chinese writing system used at that time. Through his studies Yi Do realizes that Hanja does not suit the Korean language and is only accessible to the rich, leaving the rest of the population largely illiterate. When Yi Do takes the throne as King Sejong, he declares, “When the heavens nourish the earth...they do not distinguish between the great and the small. When a king loves his people, it should be the same,” and endeavors to create an alphabet understood by all. Kim’s straightforward and evenly paced narrative reveals that King Sejong’s goal is not met without challenges. Even after deciding carefully to shape his consonants so they reflect how the mouth makes the sounds, he still toils on Hangeul, his 28-letter alphabet, for 10 more years. Subsequent protests from members of the government and refusal to use the system threaten initial public acceptance. Yet King Sejong’s language legacy endures. Kang artfully uses bright colors and textured cartoons to bring movement and life to the story. More detailed information about King Sejong, Hangeul, and the historic context around its acceptance is appended.

An artful telling of the birth of an alphabet. (bibliography) (Informational picture book. 5-8)
In the second installment of The Teddies Saga, the bears resume their quest, this time to find their manufacturing origins.

Picking up months after the first book, Buddy and his teddy friends have been living a stable, if not idyllic, life, mostly hidden under Darling’s bed. When the girl’s mother discovers them and becomes outraged, the teddies set out on another journey. Still yearning for the love of a child and encouraged by a final Proto story, they decide to find the Suit and his factory and demand that he fix them. Faced yet again with death and other dark challenges, the remaining bears end up among a village of discarded teddies. While younger readers may not grasp the ambitious nods to The Giver and Paradise Lost, it’s easy to understand the terror the teddies face in this dystopian camp with strange rules and loss of identity. Lending to the horror are loosely drawn scenes in grayscale. Like many middle novels in a trilogy, the worldbuilding is lengthy and slows the narration, yet it gives Buddy more opportunities to explore his leadership, question the ways of the world, and ponder why Furringtons seem to be so reviled. Another cliffhanger ending evokes mysteries to be solved in the next volume.

This series continues to be disturbing and brilliant in equal measure. (Fantasy. 9-12)

The cutting-edge topic of tree communities is expressed in a lyrical story bolstered by robust backmatter.

“Before we were mighty in the kingdom of trees…” This tantalizing beginning sets the stage for a series of short, unrhymed verses, all but one beginning with before. Although the subtitle and the art help decipher the poem, readers are advised to simply go through it aloud, savoring its sound and enjoying its rhythmic use of words and phrases that invoke magic and monarchies while weaving in arboreal vocabulary. Otherwise, it is heavy work to figure out pronoun references and backward-and-forward time sequences. For younger readers, the poem and illustrations are a lulling, if slightly confusing, introduction to forest life. For older readers, accessible paragraphs in the backmatter explain such concepts as mycelium’s role in tree communication, mother trees, arboreal layers, a seed’s journey, and species in a North American hardwood forest. The word kingdom is technically neutral, but it conjures images of kings to many ears, clashing with the note about mother trees. It was likely used for the sake of the poetry—arguably an acceptable reason. The appealing, sophisticatedly childlike art shows stylized flora, fauna, and humans of varied racial presentations, all within a palette of earth tones and with a nice variety of side, aerial, and underground views. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Relax and enjoy. (sources) (Informational picture book. 4-8)

Studies show that nearly half of the teens in this country don’t get enough sleep—and here’s a look at what they’re missing.

Gamely battling the inherent tendency of books about the topic to make readers drowse off, Kyi effervescently digests accumulated knowledge and recent findings from the dozens of scientific studies cited in the endnotes to highlight ways in which sleep gives our brains a chance to organize experiences, benefits our immune systems, and affects bodily functions from motor skills to weight control. She also offers nods to the history of sleep studies, from the invention of the EEG on, the stages of sleep and disorders like sleep apnea, and biochemical processes that initiate or disrupt sleep. In response to findings that teens need over nine hours of sleep a night for best results, she spends some time on the growing movement to experiment with later start times in high schools. If she spares barely a glance at the hazards and side effects of sleeping pills and leaves unmentioned the fact that animals dream too, still she covers a lot of territory in a reasonably systematic way. Some of her observations may even prompt young night owls to reexamine their habits. Aside from the occasional anatomical image, Goulet’s cartoon illustrations are just decorative…but human figures wakeful and otherwise are racially diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Solidly research based, this may shutter some eyes, but it’s likely to open more. (index, further reading) (Nonfiction. 10-13)
“The playful rebellion against the repetitive Dick-and-Jane pattern makes for nonstop, rip-roaring fun.”

**SEE THE DOG**

**SONG FOR THE SNOW**

Lappano, Jon-Erik
Illus. by Eggenschwiler, Byron
Groundwood (44 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-77306-268-6

For the past two winters snow hasn’t come to Freya’s town. Will an old, forgotten song help to bring it back?

In language that is almost poetic, Lappano tells the story of Freya, who loved the way snow looked and felt, and how the air changed when snow was coming. It’s been two winters now since it last came, and Freya is afraid her memories of snow are fading. At the market with her father, “a soft, twinkling melody danced in Freya’s ears.” Following the sound, Freya finds a woman holding a snow-globe music box. She gifts Freya the globe and tells her it plays an old and special song. For generations, says the woman, the song was sung by the townspeople, and some believed it was “the magic of the song that called the snow home.” Back home, her mother remembers the words, but though Freya sings them over many days, the snow does not come. Eventually, she teaches the words to her friends, who take the song home, and soon “the song once again filled their homes and hearts.” And finally (and predictably), the snow comes. Eggenschwiler’s artwork matches the gentle and magical telling of the story with textual illustrations in a limited palette of soft colors. Freya, her family, and the woman present White; the townspeople are racially diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Bittersweet—would that climate change were so easily solved. (Picture book, 4-6)

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**INFESTATION**

Lang, Heidi & Bartkowski, Kati
McElderry (336 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-5362-1629-5

Series: Whispering Pines, 2

Following *Whispering Pines* (2020), the kids dig deeper into the town’s mysteries.

A prologue reintroduces readers to the town of Whispering Pines and its dangerous Watchful Woods and gives a preview of a new threat. Rae has diverged from empath Caden (he wants nothing to do with Green On! or senior consultant Patrick), accepting Patrick’s internship offer as he teases her with information about her missing father’s whereabouts. The seven interns—some familiar faces, some new—have hardly started their tour of Green On! when things get alarming. Soon, they’re divided into teams and tasked with uncovering—and solving—a mystery. Rae’s team accidentally falls right into a creepy-crawly scenario sure to give readers the willies. Mean gore and violence into ooey-gooey territory, giving a slight disdistance between the disgustingness (that’s absolutely revelled in) and realism. Just as compelling as the supernatural storylines are the interpersonal ones, with conflicts rooted in the complex nature of family and friendships. The elements all meld together into a world that’s easy to get lost in. Most characters default to White, though some side characters have surnames that point to other ethnicities.

Will leave readers screaming for the next installment. (Horror, 8-13)

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**SEE THE DOG**

Three Stories About a Cat

LaRochelle, David
Illus. by Wohlnoutka, Mike
Candlewick (64 pp.)
$8.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-5302-1629-5

A cat takes a sick dog’s place as the protagonist of three silly stories.

In the same vein as predecessor *See the Cat* (2020), LaRochelle and Wohlnoutka’s latest collaboration plays out as a running argument between narrator and animal character. When the verso text reads “See the dog,” a blue cat appears on the recto. The cat declares via speech bubble that they’ve been asked to take the dog’s place because he is sick. At first, the cat revels in the make-believe—with a few slip-ups. But the narrator’s asks are met with resistance when the cat’s comfort zone is crossed. In Story Number One, the cat listens to the “bossy book” and digs—albeit using an excavator. The narrator abruptly interrupts the cat’s fun with a “See the dog STOP digging holes!” In Story Number Two, the cat begrudgingly jumps into the lake (which is really more of a pond) and immediately yells for help. Story Number Three puts the cat in charge of protecting a sheep from a wolf. The playful rebellion against the repetitive Dick-and-Jane pattern makes for nonstop, rip-roaring fun. Using around 130 words and their variants, the playful rebellion against the repetitive Dick-and-Jane pattern makes for nonstop, rip-roaring fun. Using around 130 words and their variants, the careful yet deliciously over-the-top writing keeps the text accessible yet engaging. Wohlnoutka’s full-color cartoon illustrations hilariously accentuate the cat’s histrionics. While most illustrations appear solely on the recto, a few well-placed double-page spreads add some delightful surprises.

See this book fly off the shelves. (Early reader, 4-8)
A TRUE WONDER
The Comic Book
Hero Who Changed Everything
Larson, Kirsten W.
Illus. by Wu, Katy
Clarion Books (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-358-23842-3

“As lovely as Aphrodite—as wise as Athena—with the speed of Mercury and the strength of Hercules....”

Wonder Woman was born when her creator, Bill Marston, decided that children needed a female superhero. But the male publishing world laughed at the idea, so Marston needed to find a way to be incredibly convincing—and he did, eventually bringing Wonder Woman into the mainstream and hiring women writers and artists to help him do so. Told entirely as a comic, complete with panels, speech bubbles, biographical text boxes, captions, and sound effects, the thought-provoking and accessible story accompanied by engaging illustrations describes how the lives of women in the U.S. changed during and after World War II and how Wonder Woman’s character embodied many of these changes. It chronicles the dilution of her personality of these changes. It chronicles the dilution of her personality of these changes. It chronicles the dilution of her personality of these changes. It chronicles the dilution of her personality of these changes. It chronicles the dilution of her personality of these changes. It chronicles the dilution of her personality. (author’s notes, source notes, selected reading) (Informative picture book. 5-10)

MY CITY SPEAKS
Lebeuf, Darren
Illus. by Barron, Ashley
Kids Can (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-5253-0414-9

A blind child introduces readers to their city en route to a violin recital. Accompanied by their dad, they step out, white cane in hand. In simple, declarative sentences dotted with vivid adjectives and verbs, they narrate the many ways their city “speaks.” “It rushes and stops / and waits and goes” as they navigate a pedestrian crossing. It “grows” as they stroke a sunflower and construction workers build nearby. It’s “busy” as they feed a flock of pigeons and “relaxed” as they lounge with their dad on a park bench. “Sometimes it’s smelly,” they note as they pass a dumpster, and “sometimes it’s sweet” as they sample ice cream flavors. It “speaks with whispers and giggles and sometimes meows” as they ride a subway crowded with racially and ethnically diverse passengers. As they cross one more busy street, it “also speaks with hasty honks, impatient beeps, distant chimes, reliable rumbles, speedy sirens and urgent clangs.” “My city speaks,” they repeat, joining fellow musicians on an outdoor stage, “and sometimes it just listens” as they serenade an appreciative crowd. In a warm finale, the narrator and their dad embrace, beaming. With cheerful, doll-like human figures, Barron’s bright illustrations highlight the quiet tenderness between father and child—a rarely represented duo in books featuring disabled characters. The narrator and their dad have brown skin. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A satisfying adventure with a hint of more to come. Hooray for Bailey. (Picture book. 6-8)

BAILEY THE BAT AND THE TANGLED MOOSE
Lawrence, Grant
Illus. by Landry, Noémie Gionet
Orca (48 pp.)
$19.95 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-4598-2729-5

Bailey is a little brown bat with a spirit of adventure who finds much to explore in the daylight.

One morning Bailey hears unusual loud noises coming from the forest, and they are too intriguing to ignore. Nervously and with pounding heart, Bailey leaves all the other brown bats sleeping and flies out of the roost to the forest, discovering Matty, a young bull moose whose antlers are badly tangled in fence ropes. Matty’s parents cannot hear his cries, and a dangerous pack of wolves is getting too close for comfort. Bailey attempts to untangle the frightened moose, using claws and sharp teeth, but cannot break the thick rope. With the wolves getting closer, Bailey emits loud, high-pitched squeaks to declare an emergency, knowing that Mama and all the other brown bats will come flying to the rescue. Mama sends some bats to get Matty’s parents and dozens more to chew the ropes. Matty is free, his parents arrive in time to charge the wolves, and Matty hails Bailey as a hero. Aimed at emergent readers, Lawrence’s brief, descriptive text keeps the action moving while carefully incorporating bat facts. Always referred to by name, Bailey is assigned no gendered pronouns and is kind, brave, and resourceful. Setting them against colorful Canadian scenery, Landry depicts the animals sympathetically as cartoons with a just-right touch of accuracy.

A lively exploration of recent women’s history as well as the creation of an iconic female superhero. (author’s notes, source notes, selected reading) (Informational picture book. 5-10)
WAR
Letria, José Jorge
Illus. by Letria, André
Trans. by Amado, Elisa
Aldana Libros/Greystone Kids (64 pp.)
$22.95 | Aug. 24, 2021
978-1-77164-726-7

Minimal text accents full-bleed, emotive watercolor illustrations in this Portuguese import from celebrated author and poet José Jorge Letria and his illustrator son.

The book opens with a near-black, abstract spread populated with spidery, serpentine shadows that subsequently creep and crawl across a stark landscape. A crow or raven leads the mass of darkness as “war spreads through the day like a whispered, swift disease” until it reaches a dark building inhabited by a faceless, uniformed human figure. Spiders, centipedes, beetles, and snakes march across a map-covered table as the ominous human leader dons a medieval jousting helm, sets books alight, and musters armies. Wordless spreads in dark, muted grays, military greens, and dull browns feature toy-soldier–like rows of faceless infantrymen, 1940s-style planes dropping bombs over a darkened European city, and the dark clouds and rubble the maneuvers leave in their wake. While not, perhaps, an obvious choice for young audiences well removed from the horrors of war, the frank but thoughtful wording and masterfully abstracted illustrations will provide an opportunity for caregivers to broach the heavy subject matter in a safe environment. War, personified, “feeds on hate, ambition, and spite” and is “never able to tell stories”—but this book is sure to open a discussion about which it is, plus the nonstop action, may keep readers forging on as cryptic clues lead from a library planet to a second uninhabited world yet to be visited. Aside from occasional name cues, markers of race or ethnicity are minimal; the three leads read as White.

Thin on character and plot development but action aplenty.
(Science fiction. 9-13)

EIGHTH GRADE VS. THE MACHINES
Levy, Joshua S.
Carrollrhoda (280 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-5415-9894-2

The students of Public School Space-ship 118 face threats both new and continuing as they get set to hunt for the rest of the human race—which has mysteriously vanished.

Though he barely gives the main plotline set up in Seventh Grade vs. the Galaxy (2019) a nudge forward, Levy does pitch his three main characters—Jack, Becka, and Ari—into a nonstop whirl of captures, escapes, betrayals, exchanges of blaster fire, racing hoverbikes, and fresh tussles with both interstellar queen bee the Minister and school bully Hunter. Repaired at last and outfitted with upgraded weaponry, the school lifts off from the depopulated Earth…and is immediately hijacked by rebellious robots who have taken over a gigantic space mall and declared independence. Along with tucking in clear signs (from a robot buccaneer complete with peg leg to encounters with a furry alien and her moms from the planet Meerkat Prime) that despite all the gunplay none of this should be taken too seriously, the author closes with a broad hint that either someone has a hidden agenda or it’s all been just a VR simulation. Curiosity about which it is, plus the nonstop action, may keep readers on the edge.

A simultaneously touching and gripping adventure.
(Historical fiction. 9-14)
Ada, a city child, arrives at her grandparents’ Maine cottage hoping to finally see stars in a night sky—one unobscured by urban lights and buildings.

Alongside Ama and Poobah, Ada kayaks, examines moss, handles shells, spots a crab, and marvels at an osprey’s nest, thinking of her stars all the while. Poobah tells her to watch the tidal waterline on a rock to track time; when the rock disappears, night has fallen. Lively, masterful watercolor illustrations capture Maine’s exhilarating currents of wind and water, its spiky evergreen needles, knobby seaweed, and bristly bird feathers. They convey Ada’s emotions too, through vignettes of her agonized squirms when evening fog blankets the stars. Chapman’s impressive specificity dissolves in a magical, breath-feathers. They convey Ada’s emotions too, through vignettes of her agonized squirms when evening fog blankets the stars. Chapman’s impressive specificity dissolves in a magical, breath-taking spread of the fog, hovering all around the cottage at dusk, a murky, muted diffusion of evening light and moisture. Readers feel they’re sitting alongside Ada as Poobah opens a book on galaxies to ameliorate her frustration, and together they admire real, seamlessly incorporated pictures photographed by the Hubble telescope. Ada twirls, emulating the swirl of a galaxy; she notes a crab in the shape of a constellation. Young readers will delight in seeing our universe’s interconnectedness, and, later, when Ada’s family dashes outside to spin in starlight, they will recognize the inextricable bonds among loved ones. All family members have light-brown skin and curly brown hair.

Astonishing artwork shines. (further information) (Picture book. 6-10)

HANNAH G. SOLOMON DARED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE
Lindauer, Bonnie
Illus. by Moore, Sofia
Kar-Ben (32 pp.)
$17.99 | $7.99 paper | Sep. 1, 2021
978-1-72841-573-4
978-1-72841-574-1 paper

Even as a child, Hannah Greenebaum knew she was destined to spend her life helping those in need.

Her parents were responsible for many milestones in Chicago’s Jewish community, including the founding of the first Reform synagogue. Her father also helped new immigrants find jobs and was instrumental in aiding runaway slaves. Her mother started a Jewish women’s sewing group that made clothes for the poor. As an adult Hannah was the first Jewish woman admitted to the Chicago Women’s Club. She fought tirelessly for women’s advancements against male domination both within Orthodox Judaism and in the general society.

From a conference of Jewish women that she organized came the National Council of Jewish Women, an organization that worked directly with people in need and pushed for new laws to address poverty, housing, and education. She also expanded her activism to the women’s suffrage movement. Lindauer presents Solomon’s groundbreaking accomplishments in clear, concise language with great admiration, stressing her persistence and determination. Statements attributed to Solomon seem to be based on her reminiscences, presumably from her memoir or archived papers as mentioned on the copyright page, but no sources are cited specifically. Many of Moore’s illustrations have a 3-D effect with black-line sketched backgrounds from which brightly colored foregrounds and people emerge. Solomon mostly appears as a part of groups, with little seen of her emotions or facial expressions. Her spouse, Henry Solomon, appears only in the closing timeline.

An interesting, informative account of a little-known woman of great achievement. (photos, author’s note, timeline) (Picture book/biography. 6-10)

IVY LOST AND FOUND
Lord, Cynthia
Illus. by Graegin, Stephanie
Candlewick (80 pp.)
$12.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-5762-1354-6
Series: Book Buddies, 1

In this series opener, a long-forgotten doll is dismayed to find herself repurposed as a library toy for children to check out.

Ivy, a brown-skinned doll with dark bangs and braids, misses Anne, the brown-skinned girl who once played with her, made her clothes, and whispered secrets. Years later, Anne, now a librarian, rediscovers Ivy and makes her a Book Buddy. Ivy, who just wants Anne to play with her again, is hurt to hear Anne call her “my old doll.” The stuffed-animal Book Buddies welcome Ivy—but not Lilyanna, a blond, White princess doll and proto-mean girl who snubs Ivy as a “hand-me-down toy.” (The polite term, a motherly hen says, is “well loved.”) A little girl named Sophie, 6, borrows Lilian, pressuring her 8-year-old stepsister, Fern, into checking out Ivy; Sophie’s little brother, Ethan, 4, chooses Piper, a flying squirrel. Like Ivy, Fern is distressed. Longing for time alone with her dad during her short visits and less time with her younger stepsiblings, she confides in Ivy, who listens eagerly. A mild adventure in the backyard offers opportunities for the toys to get to know one another and for Fern to work on her place in her dad’s new family. Like the story, the charmingly retro illustrations honor the genre’s antecedents, from Rumer Godden’s sentient dolls to the Toy Story franchise. Fern and her father both have brown skin and dark, tightly curled hair; Sophie, Ethan, and their mom all present White.

A beguiling series opener that gently conveys the upside of adapting to unwelcome changes. (Fantasy. 5-8)
“Harrison’s dreamy, blue-toned illustrations are a hit.”

**HELLO, STAR**

Lucianovic, Stephanie V.W.
Illus. by Harrison, Vashi
Little, Brown (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-316-45175-8

A girl sees a brightly burning star in the night sky and is curious, but she becomes concerned when she learns that the star is dying.

Enamored by a bright shining star she learns is a supernova, the little Black girl sets out to learn everything about it she can. She asks questions about stars in school and reads books about stars. Every night she whispers to her star so that it knows it’s not alone. As time passes, she learns that her star is a blue giant, a rare sight from Earth. As a young woman, she goes to college to study stars and space, convinced that she will find a way to her star. And so she does. All grown up, the woman becomes an astronaut and authority on stars and space. She arrives in space just in time to witness her star fade to darkness and then burst into more bright, shining stars. Based on a conversation the author had with her son, this book celebrates a child’s curiosity and compassion. Though not based entirely on scientific facts, this book will stand up as an introduction to space and stars for very young readers. Harrison’s dreamy, blue-toned illustrations are a hit; front and rear endpaper illustrations artfully attest to the protagonist’s lifelong interest in space. The author’s note discusses the book’s inspiration. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Share with your favorite future astronauts. *(Picture book. 4-8)*

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**EVERYTHING AWESOME ABOUT SPACE AND OTHER GALACTIC FACTS!**

Lowery, Mike
Illus. by the author
Orchard/Scholastic (128 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-338-35974-9
Series: Everything Awesome About...

“A charged-up roundup of astro-facts.

Having previously explored everything awesome about both dinosaurs (2019) and sharks (2020), Lowery now heads out along a well-traveled route, taking readers from the Big Bang through a planet-by-planet tour of the solar system and then through a selection of space-exploration highlights. The survey isn’t unique, but Lowery does pour on the gosh-wow by filling each hand-lettered, poster-style spread with emphatic colors and graphics. He also goes for the awesome in his selection of facts—so that readers get nothing about Newton’s laws of motion, for instance, but will come away knowing that just 65 years separate the Wright brothers’ flight and the first moon landing. They’ll also learn that space is silent but smells like burned steak (according to astronaut Chris Hadfield), that thanks to microgravity no one snores on the International Space Station, and that Buzz Aldrin was the first man on the moon…to use the bathroom. And, along with a set of forgettable space jokes (OK, one: “Why did the carnivore eat the shooting star?” “Because it was meteor”), the backmatter features drawing instructions for budding space artists and a short but choice reading list. Nods to Katherine Johnson and NASA’s other African American “computers” as well as astronomer Vera Rubin give women a solid presence in the otherwise male-dominated mainstream of humans. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A quick flight but a blast from first to last. *(Informational picture book. 7-10)*

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**ABC OF FEELINGS**

Lui, Bonnie
Illus. by the author
Philomel (22 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-593-20519-8

An alphabetical tour of emotions.

This British import mixes words that many young kids will know, such as brave, kind, and mad (the last defined in the American sense, as angry), with less-familiar ones such as overwhelmed and vulnerable. It even features at least one word that may be new to adults: “X is for Xenial…Xenial is being welcoming to strangers.” Compounding the difficulty here, the visual image of a Black kid dressed as a magician hugging a rabbit they’ve pulled out of a hat does not exactly illustrate xeniality (xenialness?). Other illustrations do a better job of helping readers understand the words being introduced. The illustrations feature racially diverse children and are usually paired in each double-page spread: “A is for Anxious. Anxious is feeling really worried about something.” “B is for Brave. Brave is being nervous about something and doing it anyway.” On the A page, a brown-skinned kid cowers from the dragon that encircles their bed, as in a nightmare. Across the gutter on the B page, the ferociously scowling child confronts the now-intimidated monster. Kids will get an immediate sense of those two words. Animals, real and imaginary, often play a role in the pictures. The book will be best shared one on one or in very small groups, when children can really spend time examining the pictures and talking about their own impression of what is happening in each picture. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A mixed bag. *(word list) (Picture book. 5-7)*

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**HELLO, STAR**

Lucianovic, Stephanie V.W.
Illus. by Harrison, Vashi
Little, Brown (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-316-45175-8

A girl sees a brightly burning star in the night sky and is curious, but she becomes concerned when she learns that
GAME OF SCONES
Luper, Eric
Illus. by Whale, Joe
Scholastic (160 pp.)
$6.99 paper | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-338-73035-7
Series: Bad Food, 1

The cafeteria foods must defend the school against the conquering office supplies and their bad ruler in this series opener.

At night, all of the food and objects of Belching Walrus Elementary come to life. With the premise stated, the main trio are introduced in profiles: upbeat Slice (pizza), artistic Scoop (ice cream cone), and shy spoken-word poet/rapper Totz (a tater tot). When Baron von Lineal, both a ruler and the ruler of the office supplies, demands nightly freezer access (on account of broken air conditioning in the office), what results is an invasion and hostile takeover. The heroic protagonists set out across the school in search of allies but find most of the school denizens either apathetic or openly hostile. Even a diplomatic summit fails to unite the downtrodden against the totalitarian ruler, leaving the cafeteria crew standing alone in a full-tilt battle that takes several chapters, twists, and some quick thinking to resolve. Throughout the story, characters make time for running jokes such as a discussion about whether a hot dog is a sandwich (which manages to pay off in the main storyline). The punny humor is absolutely delicious, pitched perfectly to the target audience. Black-and-white cartoon doodle illustrations decorate chapter heads and margins, as well as showing the characters in action. The simple yet effective facial expressions, expressive motion, and stick limbs enhance the zany humor and action.

A food fight for the ages, epic in both action and laughs. (Graphic fiction. 6-10)

BEING MINDFUL LIKE GRANDPA
Mahry, Sheri
Illus. by Urbinati, Ilaria
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2021
978-0-8075-0614-1

A young child learns to cope with the stress and fears of moving by using some mindfulness techniques Grandpa teaches.

On one of their last hikes together before the big move, Grandpa gives the narrator a smooth pebble, calling it a calming stone, to keep in a pocket for whenever worry-thoughts happen. Rubbing the stone will soothe anxious feelings while the child thinks of something that elicits gratitude. In their new town, miles away from Grandpa, the young family of color embarks on a new hike, on a new path. With the calming stone in a handy pocket, the child’s worries are still there, but slowly, with the help of some mindful observations about the natural things all around and some slow, deep belly breaths Grandpa taught, the child’s anxiety begins to ease. Nature scenes of a brisk autumn day complement the soothing atmosphere. The author’s note provides several simply applied mindfulness strategies, which have been effectively demonstrated throughout the narrative. This will serve as a great introductory lesson for discussion and understanding as schools adopt mindfulness in their daily routines and children are increasingly required to navigate the stressful pressures of today’s world.

A necessary theme explored in an easily understood and accessible story sequence. (Picture book. 5-8)

TWISTY-TURNY HOUSE
Mantchev, Lisa
Illus. by Keller, E.G.
Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-5344-3847-7

Members of a menagerie discover one another.

“Four humans, a rabbit, seven fish, and a rat live inside a twisty-turny house.” There are also two cats, whose domain is the upstairs, and three dogs, relegated to the downstairs. The other animals think this segregation is necessary and beneficial, because “the cats would hiss and claw,” and “the dogs would howl and chase them.” But one day one of the cats decides to explore the downstairs, thanks to a door accidentally left ajar, and an intermammalian friendship is born. The illustrations are rough yet elegant, the twisty-turny house elaborately detailed. While each animal is an unusual color (pink, purple, green), they somehow maintain a realistic, energetic tone. The story itself is a bit bland: The tension built up in the first few pages dissipates quickly, and the exploration of the cat-dog friendship is amusing but basic. Readers are left wondering about the four humans: Who are they? Why did they decide to keep the animals separated in the first place? How do they react to this new reconfiguration of the species? While the text is well metered and fun to read aloud, it’s missing a key component of true drama. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

For readers excited to see cute pets doing cute pet things. (Picture book. 4-7)
A young tennis champion becomes the target of revenge.

In this sequel to Legacy and the Queen (2019), Legacy Petrin and her friend Javi and Pippa have returned to Legacy’s home province and the orphanage run by her father. With her friends’ help, she is in training to defend her championship when they discover that another player, operating under the protection of High Consul Silla, is presenting herself as Legacy. She is so convincing that the real Legacy is accused of being an imitation. False Legacy has become a hero to the masses, further strengthening Silla’s hold, and it becomes imperative to uncover and defeat her. If Legacy is to win again, she must play her imposter while disguised as someone else. Winning at tennis is not just about money and fame, but resisting Silla’s plans to send more young people into brutal mines with little hope of better lives. Legacy will have to overcome her fears and find the magic that allowed her to claim victory in the past. This story, with its elements of sports, fantasy, and social consciousness, continues the series conceived by late basketball superstar Bryant and his partner in adventure: Nandude!

A worthy combination of athletic action, the virtues of inner strength, and the importance of friendship. (Fantasy. 9-12)

**GRANDUDE’S GREEN SUBMARINE**

*McCartney, Paul*  
Illus. by Durst, Kathryn  
Random House (32 pp.)  
978-0-393-37243-2  
978-0-393-37244-9 PLB

Following Hey, Grandude (2019), more jolly fun as the title character squares his four young “Chillers” aboard a green sub (where does Sir Paul get his ideas?) to catch up with his partner in adventure: Nandude!

Casting about for something to do on a sweltering day, the multiracial quartet eagerly follows their grizzled White gramps down to an underground chamber where a viridian vessel awaits to take them soaring through the sky to a distant land. There, Grandude’s old friend Ravi plays a tune of Nandude’s that accompanies them after they leave him. It leads them under the sea to an octopus’s garden and a briefly scary tangle with the ink-spraying giant. The monster’s set to dancing, though, as Nandude floats up in her own accordion-shaped ship to carry everyone home for tea, biscuits, and bed in a swirl of notes. Aside maybe from the odd spray of shiny stars here and there, Durst steers clear of sight gags and direct visual references to the film or music in her cheery cartoon scenes. Both she and the text do kit Ravi out, appropriately, with a sitar, but there’s no 1960s-style psychedelia to be seen. Nostalgic adults may be disappointed to see that even the submarine bears no resemblance to the iconic vessel of the film but instead just looks like a plush, smiling toy whale, eyes and all. Children, of course, won’t care. That this book does not try to trade (heavily) on its antecedents makes it a refreshing change from so many other celebrity titles. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Comfy and cozy, with nary a meanie in sight. (Picture book. 5-8)

**OTTERS: RIVER OR SEA? A Compare and Contrast Book**

*McConnell, Cathleen*  
Arbordale Publishing (32 pp.)  
$9.95 paper | Sep. 10, 2021  
978-1-64351-978-4

McConnell compares and contrasts the different species of otters (12 river and one sea) found around the world.

After giving basic facts about mustelids, the family to which otters belong, the author presents either side-by-side or alternating pages that look at river otters versus their ocean-dwelling cousins. This can sometimes lead to more questions than answers, though. For example, on a page that describes how each spends the majority of their day (marking territory and grooming fur, respectively), readers may wonder if sea otters also have scent glands and if river otters spend any time grooming their fur. And on the page about otter teeth, readers may mistakenly believe that sea otters have no sharp teeth and be left wondering if river otters have molars, issues compounded by the inset photos that show a river otter’s teeth from the front and a sea otter’s bottom jaw from above. Other information presented looks at habitat, facial whiskers and catching prey, eating habits, fur, socializing, and raising young. Backmatter includes enrichment activities looking at various otters’ sizes and weights, adaptations, fun facts, and otters in zoos and aquariums. (Disturbingly, one fun fact asks readers, “How long can you hold your breath?”) As is consistent with this series, the photos are the stars, showcasing the similarities and differences among these 13 adorable species. A Spanish edition publishes simultaneously, as does (in both English and Spanish) a similar title on penguins, by Cher Vatalaro.

An adequate resource for entertainment, information, research, and compare/contrast reports. (Nonfiction. 4-9)  
*Nutrias: De río o de mar?:* 978-1-64351-082-2, $11.95;  
*Penguins:* 978-1-64351-987-6;  
*Pingüinos:* 978-1-64351-828-2, $11.95
**THE BEAR HOUSE**

McIsaac, Meaghan

Holiday House (368 pp.)

$17.99  |  Sep. 14, 2021

978-0-8234-4660-5

Series: Bear House, 1

With the help of new friends and powerful beasts, sisters must save their kingdom from their treacherous uncle after he murders their father.

Aster and Ursula are known as the spoiled daughters of Maj. Jasper Lourdes, ruler of the entire Bear Highen, which comprises several kingdoms. Neither is considered fit to lead someday. When Uncle Bram betrays Jasper in an attempt to usurp the throne, the sisters know they are in danger. They flee the Manor alongside the bear Alcor, who is a High Beast, and Dev, the boy apprenticed to care for Alcor. This rich fantasy world is inspired by the constellations, and each kingdom is associated with a beast that is reflected in the stars. After sending a plea for help, the runaway group is joined by two young princes: Quintin Wyvern with a Shadow Dragon and Lorc Conri with a Starhound. The ragtag team must learn to trust one another, work together, and find their individual strengths. The stellar worldbuilding is both expansive and accessible, and the action never falters. Parental expectations clash with the aspirations of several of the young crew, adding a sympathetic dimension. The primary plot is wrapped up, but this world is ripe for many more stories. Physical descriptions are few, but most characters read as White; Quintin’s mother has brown skin.

Thrilling adventure set in an enchanting world makes this an easy pick for high fantasy fans. (map) (Fantasy. 10-14)

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**COOKIE & BROCCOLI PLAY IT COOL**

McMahon, Bob

Illus. by the author

Dial Books (80 pp.)

$12.99  |  $7.99 paper  |  Sep. 21, 2021

978-0-593-10909-0

978-0-593-52918-8 paper

Series: Cookie & Broccoli

Eager to make friends, Cookie and Broccoli test their cool factor.

Seeing a poster at school, Cookie, Broccoli, and Garlic vie to join the “Cool Crowd.” Trouble is, there’s only one opening to replace Banana, who’s split. One by one, the anthropomorphic foods’ applications to join the “Cool Crowd” are declined. Garlic smells. Cookie’s rendition of the Hokey Pokey isn’t up to par. Broccoli barely even speaks before hearing a flat-out “NO!” This prompts Broccoli to make a speech about coolness that turns the “Cool Crowd” against their own leader, Cucumber. Elected as their new leader, Broccoli must decide what is cool and what is not—a task that is such “a big pain in thePATOOTIE” that Broccoli runs away. Can the “Cool Crowd” find their leader without losing their own cool? With nonstop silliness from start to finish, McMahon’s second series entry offers yet another affirming lesson for school-age readers. Following a similar formula to *Cookie & Broccoli Ready for School!* (2020), the book is made up of five sections: three chapters, a quiz, and an epilogue. The dialogue-driven story connects words to speakers with squiggly lines, typically only a sentence or two per panel. Expressive typography adds some colorful flair to predictable block paneling and mostly white, uncluttered backgrounds. The black-outlined cartoon characters are simply but recognizably drawn, especially the tiny blueberry who adds extra comic relief throughout.

“Fantabulously” cool. (Graphic fiction. 5-8)

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**LOLA SLEEPS OVER**

McQuinn, Anna

Illus. by Beardshear, Rosalind

Charlesbridge (32 pp.)

$15.99  |  Sep. 21, 2021

978-1-62354-291-7

Series: Lola & Leo

Lola’s newest experience is sleeping over at her cousin Hani’s house. Lola is looking forward to her first sleepover tonight. She wears her favorite kanga dress with a matching hair tie, and she packs her overnight bag. She needs several outfits for the different activities they will do, as well as her favorite books and stuffed animals. Daddy walks her over to Hani’s house and says goodbye. Lola and Hani play outside and inside, have dinner with Auntie Zari and Auntie Jina, then watch a movie while Auntie Zari does Lola’s hair before bed. Bedtime is special, with a surprise from Auntie Zari, and Auntie Jina’s French toast makes a delicious breakfast. Like other books in the Lola series, this outing keeps readers engaged with delightful illustrations and simple, straightforward narration perfect for introducing young ones to new experiences. Realistic natural hairstyles are a lovely visual detail, and Lola’s two aunties are an accepted part of her world. All characters are depicted as Black. Lola’s fans will be pleased to add this volume to their collections and see how Lola’s first sleepover goes. Caregivers can use it to talk about what to expect at a first sleepover.

A sweet, family-based story of Lola’s expanding world. (Picture book. 2-6)
The racially diverse cast includes one kid who wears glasses and another who uses a wheelchair. An opening page has a space for adults and children helping one another: A sighted man helps a blind person cross the street; firefighters are at work protecting the apartment-building home to Oliver (who’s Black), Mia (with olive skin and straight, black hair), and the Tiny Dognapping: 978-1-62354-274-0
Series: Chicken Soup for the Soul Kids

Real kids can become superheroes.

The heart of this title by the author of Tracking Pythons (2020) is a vivid account of what she and her photographer son learned on a once-in-a-lifetime trip to the Galápagos Islands in 2019. They accompanied researchers on the island of Santa Cruz who track tortoises using tags, radio trackers, and a lot of challenging hiking. On this island, tortoises migrate from the lowlands to the highlands; scientists investigate why.

Science researchers work to understand and save the endangered Galápagos tortoises.

The short text is a series of statements on brightly colored backgrounds: “I will be kind to others”; “I will be kind to myself”; “I will help those in need / and ask for help when I need it.” Sometimes the cartoon illustrations, with strong black outlines that match the hand-lettered text, expand the meaning of the text. When a baseball player’s ball breaks a vase, the text reads: “I will tell the truth, even if it’s hard.” Sometimes they tell a whole story in a few images, as in the last three double-page spreads, when two kids say: “I will join with you / to make this a better world / for everyone.” After an illustration of two kids holding hands, the page turn reveals a busy street with many adults and children helping one another: A sighted man helps a blind person cross the street; firefighters are at work protecting people; a kid pets a cat; another kid waters some plants. The last spread highlights all the children seen throughout the book. The racially diverse cast includes one kid who wears glasses and another who uses a wheelchair. An opening page has a space for kids to sign their names and pledge to “keep this promise as best as I can.” (This book was reviewed digitally)

Encouraging words and pictures will help kids make good choices. (Picture book. 4-6)

Science at work in a unique setting.

"Science at work in a unique setting." TRACKING TORTOISES

<table>
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<th>I WILL!</th>
<th>A Book of Promises</th>
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<td>Medina, Juana</td>
<td>Illus. by the author</td>
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<td>Versify/HarperCollins (40 pp.)</td>
<td>$14.99</td>
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978-0-358-55559-9

Children make promises to ensure the happiness and well-being of others and themselves.

Children make promises to ensure the happiness and well-being of others and themselves.

Science at work in a unique setting. (timeline, glossary, source notes, bibliography, further reading, index) (Nonfiction. 9-14)

THE SUNSHINE SQUAD Discovering What Makes You Special
Michalak, Jamie
Illus. by Tu, Lorian
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)
$12.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-62354-274-0
Series: Chicken Soup for the Soul Kids

Real kids can become superheroes.

123 Sunshine St., located in a multiethnic community, is the apartment-building home to Oliver (who’s Black), Mia (with brown skin and long, textured dark hair), Sophie (with olive skin and straight, black hair), and brothers Lucas and Tommy (both White). Oliver is an artist, Mia a skateboarder, Sophie a pet whisperer, and Lucas a jokester. In their collective imagination, they turn those talents into superpowers to save the neighborhood. And Tommy? He seems to be too young to have a supertalent. But when a chain reaction of problems occurs, Tommy’s superpower—kindness—shines. Encouraged by Tommy’s success, the five children create the Sunshine Squad to really help the neighborhood. Backmatter includes a tangentially related story and ways to spread sunshine. Readers can see the Sunshine Squad in action in the simultaneously publishing sequel, Sophie and the Tiny Dognapping. When Sophie steals Mia’s dollhouse dog, she experiences all the emotional and physical reactions of a guilty conscience. Although the Sunshine Squad is busy helping their other neighbors, they have time to give Sophie (and young readers) some good advice. In both books, colorful cartoon illustrations with many close-ups on faces capture the struggle of trying to do what is right. The books kick off the Chicken Soup for the Soul Kids series, their mission clear and their good intentions well executed.

Slightly pedantic but with ethical situations children will relate to and good kid-to-kid advice. (Picture book. 4-7) (Sophie and the Tiny Dognapping: 978-1-62354-275-7)
“This ode to being different does not gloss over the difficult aspects of standing out.”

NOT A UNICORN

Miles, David
Chronicle Books (336 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-79720-305-8

Growing up with a unicorn horn hasn’t been easy for 13-year-old Jewel Conrad; she just wants to be normal. So when she finds a doctor in California who might be able to remove it, she jumps at the chance. There are only two problems: She hasn’t told her mother yet, and Carmen, the real live unicorn who follows her around, is getting distressed over Jewel’s deep unhappiness with her appearance. The novel’s textured representation includes an examination of how Jewel’s poverty affects her relationship with the world, including living with a single mom in low-income housing in Georgia; sharing a bedroom with her disabled grandmother; and her willingness, born out of desperation, to consider free surgery in exchange for being part of a doctor’s experimental trial. Healthy and fulfilling friendships are contrasted with more shallow, toxic ones as well as some bullying issues at school. The first-person perspective excels at showing Jewel’s internal thoughts and misconceptions. Her hobbies of drawing and reading graphic novels are woven naturally throughout the story as a whole, adding to the richness of characterization. The tension slowly builds to an adventurous climax and a heartwarming ending. Ultimately this is an ode to being different that does not gloss over the difficult aspects of standing out, especially in middle school. Main characters follow a White default.

For anyone who needs a reminder that they are perfect just as they are. (Fiction. 10-13)

ATOM

The Building Block of the Universe

Miles, David
Illus. by the author
Bushel & Peck Books (86 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-63819-100-1

A valiant attempt to make modern atomic theory comprehensible to the picture-book set. From first spread to last, exuberant typographical design combines with bright colors, cartoon images, and collage assemblages of clipped bits of paper and old portraits of Einstein and other luminaries to create considerable visual brio. Miles explains how we may not always know exactly where electrons are, but they, along with protons and (sometimes) neutrons, make up atoms, atoms of the same sort make up elements as charted on the periodic table, and elements combine into, say, all of the components in a chocolate-chip cookie. “And that’s nothing compared to living things.” But the author achieves a coherent narrative only by fudging (so to speak), surrounding said cookie, for instance, with chemical formulas but admitting in a footnote that chocolate alone actually has more ingredients than he has room to list. He outright ignores certain complications like isotopes, fundamental forces, or (aside from one reference buried in the closing timeline) quarks. A quote right at the outset from Neils Bohr alluding to how quantum theory is a total game-changer leaves readers to wonder how much of the ensuing presentation actually represents reality. All of the historical figures in view are White, but the fictional human characters that populate the pages are racially diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An animated precis—but it’s quixotic at best and somewhat shifty as a foundation for further study. (source list, index) (Informational picture book. 8-10)

SORRY, MRS. CAKE!

Milner, Kate
Illus. by the author
Tiny Owl (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-910328-78-1

Mrs. Cake makes awesome desserts…but nobody notices.

A White kid with blue glasses, accompanied by a blue cat, attends a busy picnic for which Mrs. Cake has baked a host of delectable confections. A round, pigeon-toed Black woman who wears round red glasses, sculpted red hair, and a yellow dress with red hearts, Mrs. Cake remains silent until the last page, following the narrator around as the kid tries to inform the attendees about the desserts—to no avail. Only with the cat’s suggestion does the kid accomplish this goal. The retro-styled illustrations, with a palette of greens, oranges, and blues, sometimes make objects and characters appear two dimensional that should be three dimensional, such as a flat-looking man lying on the ground in the first double-page spread. Speech bubbles identify speakers, but unfortunately, Mrs. Cake utterly lacks agency throughout the story. Named for a food and noted sometimes as isotopes, fundamental forces, or (aside from one reference in the closing timeline) quarks. A quote right at the outset from Neils Bohr alluding to how quantum theory is a total game-changer leaves readers to wonder how much of the ensuing presentation actually represents reality. All of the historical figures in view are White, but the fictional human characters that populate the pages are racially diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A summer picnic to avoid. (Picture book. 4-7)
WHAT’S IN YOUR POCKET?
Collecting Nature’s Treasures
Montgomery, Heather L.
Illus. by Lechuga, Maríbel
Charlesbridge (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-62354-122-4

If you’re a child who collects nature’s treasures, you’re in good company.
This cleverly conceived and appealingly executed title addresses young readers directly, connecting their noticing and collecting habits to those of others who continued to observe, collect, and organize in adulthood. Montgomery introduces a grandly diverse array of nine naturalists, researchers, and explorers from Maria Sibylla Merian, who studied butterflies in the 17th century, to Bonnie Lei, whose present-day research focuses on sea-life conservation. Three are people of color, and the majority are female. The young George Washington Carver collected seeds; deep-sea explorer William Beebe collected birds’ eggs; and young Jane Goodall put worms under her pillow! Other profiles include Charles Darwin, tree-canopy explorer Margaret Lowman, herpetologist Diego Cáñceres-Heredia, and fossil hunter Mary Anning. The vignettes from childhood are engaging, well paced, and smoothly told. Short introductions to the adult scientists follow, in a smaller font. In her author’s note, the writer introduces the concept of naturalist intelligence. Lechuga’s friendly illustrations feature the brown-skinned girl with Afro puffs and overflowing pockets shown on the cover as well as the scientists as children, then as adults, in appropriate times and places. The backmatter includes more about the grown-up scientists.

Inspiration for nature-loving children. (field guides, selected bibliography) (Informational picture book. 7-10)

MY MAGIC WAND
Growing With the Seasons
Mora, Pat
Illus. by Alvarez, Amber
Lee & Low Books (32 pp.)
$18.95 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-64379-085-5

Poems with kid appeal.
In the opening, titular poem, the main character declares that she is 5 years old. The poems that follow encompass the four seasons and explore topics that are meaningful to the age group, such as art projects, gardening with Mom, taking care of a pet, and more. The poems are accompanied by vivid illustrations to bring the symbolic language to life. Mora makes use of alliteration, onomatopoeia, and refrain to keep verses interesting. She reminds readers in the author’s note that not all poems rhyme, and she demonstrates this with a compilation of poems that largely don’t but still provide satisfying read-aloud potential. Each poem is a snapshot of what feels most important to a kindergarten-age child, including the death of a friend’s pet snail. As the poems continue, the passage of time is indicated with the lengthening of the protagonist’s hair, and the collection ends with a sixth birthday party illustration and poem. A handful of Spanish words and phrases appear in several poems, including one titled “Speaking Spanish,” in which the family travels to Mexico, but it is not a bilingual book. The main character, modeled on Mora’s granddaughter, has peach skin with blond hair and brown eyes. Other characters appear to have light brown or white skin and brown hair and eyes.

A sweet first poetry collection takes young readers through the seasons. (Picture book/poetry. 4-6)

DUCKS OVERBOARD!
A True Story of Plastic in Our Oceans
Motum, Markus
Illus. by the author
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-5362-1772-8

A ducky’s-eye view of an ocean rapidly becoming more polluted.
Speaking for 28,000 bath toys that were washed overboard on the way from Hong Kong to Seattle in 1992, a yellow plastic duck tells its story—from rolling off first a Chinese assembly line and then later a huge cargo ship at sea to, long afterward, floating at last in a child’s tub after being plucked from the flotsam on a littered beach. This plot may seem familiar to readers of Eve Bunting’s still-in-print Ducky, illustrated by David Wisniewski (1997). What’s new is how, while bobbing over busy ocean depths, past colorful fish and undulating jellies, Motum’s narrator witnesses a whale swallowing a plastic bag, a struggling sea turtle tangled in a fishing net, and the vast swirl of waste plastic dubbed the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. The author goes for a broad view in both wide-angled illustrations of litter floating or washed ashore and in adding notes about ocean currents, the value as well as hazards of plastics, and other related topics to his urgent message that our oceans are in trouble. A set of activities and organizations at the end add fresh incentive for young recyclers and eco-activists to get off the stick. Workers in early scenes have Asian features; the child and their dad at the end appear to be White.

An awesome odyssey that also makes a telling point, both worthy of repeated iterations. (Informational picture book. 6-8)
TWO 12-YEAR-OLDS CONFRONT THEIR VULNERABILITIES.

Told in alternating chapters from the perspectives of seventh graders Jane (in the first person) and Tyson (in third-person omniscient), this story unfolds with clever aplomb. Although they are in the same class, Jane and Tyson don't hang out together. Top-student Jane loves to read—especially mysteries—and misses her best friend, Sienna, who has recently moved across the country; underachiever Tyson pulls pranks that get him sent to the office and plays video games obsessively at home, to the detriment of his schoolwork. But when Sienna leaves an anonymous farewell note/clue in the school library for Jane, it is Tyson, hiding in the stacks, who sees Jane find the note, and he decides to jump in to the correspondence, also anonymously, as a prank. Jane, meanwhile, is unaware of Tyson's trick and continues the correspondence, happy she has found another (albeit unknown) book-loving friend. As Tyson continues his deception, he is surprised to find himself drawn into the world of books (the titles and authors of actual, excellent, and thoughtfully chosen books are used and are also listed in the backmatter). Jane, meanwhile, prepares for the upcoming Kid Lit Quiz regionals, enlisting her beloved grandfather to coach. Jane and Tyson are cued as White; there's a robustly diverse supporting cast.

A WELL-PLOTTED, WELL-WRITTEN STORY THAT WILL ENGAGE READERS AND ENCOURAGE NONREADERS. (FICTION. 11-13)

SAVING SORYA
Chang and the Sun Bear
Nguyen, Trang
Illustrated by Zdung, Jeet
Translated by the author
Dial Books (128 pp.)
978-0-593-35362-2
978-0-593-35363-9

An uplifting story about wildlife protection in Vietnam (and originally published there) inspired by real events from the wildlife-conservationist author's life.

After witnessing a brutal bear-bile extraction as a young girl, Chang becomes determined to become a wildlife conservationist. These dreams are met with mockery and derision due to Chang's age and gender as well as cultural perceptions about conservation as a career. Despite these challenges, Chang persists with studying and is accepted as a volunteer at Cat Tien National Park, narrating it all in a conversational tone that is equally genial in recounting events and presenting fascinating animal facts. At the park, Chang learns how to care for rescued animals and starts volunteering with Free The Bears, another organization. During this time, a young sun bear cub named Sorya is brought to the center from a bear-bile farm. Chang works with Sorya to prepare her for eventual release back into the wild. Zdung's use of watercolors in his frankly gorgeous illustrations enhances the rainforest setting, and the portrayals of its animal inhabitants are the epitome of wild and free. While the natural images tend to be realistic, the human characters are drawn in a manga-influenced style with elements like oversized eyes, large sweat drops, and speed lines. This blending of styles and varied panel layouts creates dynamic spreads and stunning page turns. (This book was reviewed digitally)

BREATHTAKING VISUALS AND A COMPELLING STORY SEAMLESSLY INTEGRATE CONSERVATION FACTS. (ILLUSTRATOR'S NOTE, ABOUT THE CREATORS) (GRAPHIC FICTION. 8-12)

HATTIE + OLAF
Hattie + Olaf
Nilsson, Frida
Illustrated by Wirsén, Stina
Translated by Marshall, Julia
Gecko Press (176 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-77657-317-2
Series: Hattie, 2

In this Swedish import via New Zealand, early-elementary–age Hattie longs for a horse but gets a donkey instead.

Following the events of Hattie (2020), the little girl is now in her second year of school with best friend Linda. Linda is not horse crazy like the rest of the girls in the class—but Hattie is. Hattie longs for a horse, but when her father gets her a broken-down donkey named Olaf (and is very pleased with himself), Hattie cannot bring herself to tell her classmates the truth. Instead, she makes up a story of a new, grumpy neighbor who has three white horses. Eventually the truth gets out and Hattie has to endure her classmates' taunts. This quirky and terribly funny story is told in a present-tense, third-person-omniscient voice and revels in the perspective of a young child. Readers will appreciate the innocent view full of the limits of a young child's experience and fears: “For grownups, nothing is dangerous enough to worry over,” and “Death used to be sort of fun.” As Hattie navigates school, with all the casual cruelties kids can inflict, she learns something about loyalty and what is really important to her. Wirsén's black-and-white illustrations are full of spark and life, complementing the story's quirky aspect. All characters' skin is illustrated as the white of the paper.

A SPARKLING STORY THAT HONORS THE SENSIBILITIES AND WORLD OF YOUNG SCHOOLCHILDREN. (FICTION. 8-12)
“The illustrations are rich in tiny details sure to provide hours of entertainment.”

THE DOG WALK

Nordqvist, Sven
Illus. by the author
Floris (32 pp.)
$19.95 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-78250-743-7

The Astrid Lindgren Award winner takes readers—and picture perusers—on a whimsical dog walk in this lush wordless picture book.

The book opens with a child being towed outside by an elderly woman’s fluffy white dog. Boarding a carnival-style miniature train, the pair embarks on a journey through treehouses, castles, parks cultivated and wild, European-style cities, antiques and toy shops, and tropical islands, before arriving safely back home. Masterfully rendered in watercolor, ink, and acrylic and squeezed into intricate double-page spreads, the illustrations are rich in tiny details sure to provide hours of entertainment. There’s a giraffe on what might be a romantic beach holiday, and a knight in armor morosely fishing, among many more. Most humans depicted present White, including the woman and child (who wears a red ball cap, helping read the dog walk). The perfect choice for a rainy day for readers and nonreaders alike. (Picture book 4-12)

HUSH, LITTLE TRUCKER

Norman, Kim
Illus. by Nakamura, Toboki
abramsappleseed (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Nov. 9, 2021
978-1-4197-4644-4

Put together tunes and trucks and you have the perfect singalong for any vehicular storytime.

The melody of “Hush, Little Baby” gets a proper workout in this tale of a child, the snow, and a truck-savvy mom. As the book opens, a little kid is distraught beyond measure. “Hush, little trucker, you’re in luck. Mama’s gonna find your lost toy truck.” The two, who both present as East Asian, venture out into the snow to look for it. Once they are outside, vehicles pop up, one after another, to help them. If that truck is “sunk too deep” that just means you’ll need a jeep! And if the jeep ends up in a drift? Well, then they’ll just have to use a tall forklift. As each vehicle is stuck or abandoned in the snowbanks, a new one comes to fill in the ranks. By the time a crane is lifting a frontend loader into the air, mama and child decide to dig into the snow themselves. Adapting the text to the lullaby tune provides a natural storyline. Meanwhile, animation-style art conjures up a winter wonderland worthy of this duo’s imaginary play, complete with details that subtly show that the lost toy is a replica of Mama’s own, very real tow truck. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Prep those vocal cords and sing your scales, because this is a book that begs to be sung repeatedly and with gusto. (Picture book 2-5)

PLAYING A DANGEROUS GAME

Ochieng, Patrick
Norton Young Readers (208 pp.)
$15.95 | Aug. 17, 2021
978-1-324-01913-8

Four young friends help expose local criminals in this mystery set in 1970s Nairobi.

Lucum is starting at a new, fancier school, thanks to his father’s promotion. While adjusting to this new environment, where he is looked down upon by most, he spends his time after school trying to convince his friends from the neighborhood and his old school that he’s not changing. He and his friends Odush, Dado, and Moshe hang out at an old, abandoned car, occasionally poking around a house people say is haunted by a White family that mysteriously died there. One day the boys find an old journal in the car, reading in it implications that a crime may have been committed that bears a striking resemblance to the deaths of the White family. The friends disagree over what to do with the information, but when strange things happen around town, they become more and more involved in trying to uncover the criminals until they finally reach a point of no return. Lumush is a sympathetic protagonist with believable, layered relationships with his family, teachers, and friends, and the setting is richly described. The realism of his world helps ground readers for an enjoyable ride despite uneven pacing, the less-believable element of the crime ring, and some thinly drawn supporting characters.

An entertaining picture of a boy’s life between social classes. (Historical mystery. 11-14)

WHERE SNOW ANGELS GO

O’Farrell, Maggie
Illus. by Terrazzini, Daniela Jaglenka
Candlewick (72 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-5362-1937-1

After encountering her snow angel, a little girl longs for his return.

Young Sylvie awakens one night to discover a large, shimmering creature with blue-white skin and enormous, snowy wings in her bedroom. When she speaks to
the creature, he’s shocked she can see him. He tells Sylvie he’s the snow angel she created last winter and that he watches over her, returning only when she needs him. The angel discovers Sylvie has a fever, wakes her mother, and vanishes. Sylvie’s ill for many months but remembers everything about her snow angel. When she recovers, she thinks obsessively about him, futilely engaging in risky behavior, hoping to trigger his return. In those times she’s truly in danger, swimming and riding her bike, Sylvie’s convinced her angel saves her. As winter approaches, Sylvie decides everyone should have a snow angel and asks her angel for help. The text and illustrations portray Sylvie as an inquisitive, independent, somewhat lonely White girl fascinated by her majestic, magical, winged male protector who, while constrained by professional protocols and resplendent in sparkling robes, responds sympathetically to her attentions. Using line, color washes, and arresting perspectives, the illustrations in this lengthy picture book deftly convey the realism of Sylvie’s world, the wonder of her snow angel, and the sweetness of their bond in scenes of drama as well as stillness.

An appealing contemporary fairy tale told with humor and warmth. (author’s note) (Picture book: 3-8)

SATURDAY AT THE FOOD PANTRY
O’Neill, Diane
Illus. by Magro, Brizida
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2021
978-0-8075-7236-8

A trip to a food pantry allows a child to both give and receive help.

While many children’s books about food pantries and soup kitchens focus on how children can help others, this story places a child in need at its center. Molly (who presents as a girl of color with light brown skin and full, wavy brown hair) and her mother (who has lighter skin and straight, dark hair) are experiencing food insecurity, as evidenced by the paucity of items in their kitchen and Molly’s grumbling belly when she goes to bed at night. Her mother tells her that they are going to get groceries at a food pantry—a place they’ve never before visited. When they arrive, they join a line of people waiting. Her mother tells her they are going to buy groceries at a food pantry—a place they’ve never before visited. When they arrive, they join a line of people waiting, including Molly’s classmate Caitlin, who is embarrassed to be seen there. “Everybody needs help sometimes,” Molly’s mother has told her, and she finds Caitlin’s evident sense of shame confusing. Molly passes time by drawing pictures, an activity Caitlin joins when others in line request drawings. They come to see their art making as a way of helping others, just as the good food in the food pantry, including a treat of cookies, helps them. Magro’s naïve illustrations emphasize her racially diverse characters’ faces, expressions of concern far fewer than smiles in emphasis of the book’s theme.

Eminently helpful, affirming, and necessary. (author’s note) (Picture book: 3-8)

TALES OF FEARLESS GIRLS
Forgotten Stories From Around the World
Adapt. by Otter, Isabel
Illus. by Sender, Ana
Tiger Tales (120 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-68010-256-7

This collection of fairy tales from around the world positions girl characters as adventurers.

Nearly every continent is represented here, with stories from Scotland, Spain, Sweden, Nigeria, Lesotho, Iran, Siberia, China, India, Russia, Japan, the Iroquois Nation, and more. Each story is three or four pages long, printed on paper of various attractive colors, with illustrations adorning some text-heavy pages and full-page or double-page-spread illustrations interspersed with others. The main characters are girls who face challenges from natural disasters, from families forcing them into marriages, from supernatural beings that threaten their families, villages, and kingdoms. For various reasons, they go out to save their husbands, to prove their bravery and skill, to escape, or to protect their homes. Like most fairy tales, these stories contain the inexplicable and the limited, such as a young woman who slays a dragon in order to provide her brothers with the fine clothing they demand. Still, compared to the traditional formula of a damsel in distress who is rescued, married, and lives happily ever after, these offer a welcome disruption. The girls and women are clever, courageous, and active, and they shape their own stories, if within the confines of their situations. The pictures add an engaging rest for the eyes, though the illustration of the Chinese characters suffers from racist overtones in the depiction of closed, slanted eyes.

This volume is sure to find an audience. (background, talking points, index) (Fairy tales: 5-10)

SPIDERNAUT
Arabella, the Spider in Space
Parachini, Jodie
Illus. by Kordić, Dragan
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 1, 2021
978-0-8075-0441-3
Series: Animalographies

The story of an experiment designed to answer a high school student’s question to NASA:

Told in first person—perhaps not the best choice as the arachnid narrator is called upon to describe her own death and subsequent events in the later going—the chronicle begins in 1972 with a query about whether spiders can spin webs in space. Popped into small tubes with dead flies for provisions, Arabella and another orb spider, Anita, were transported to Skylab 3 in 1973 and released into cages where, after a day or so of floating and a “wonky” preliminary effort, both actually produced
.creditable versions of their earthly webs. A better title for this might be *Spiders in Space*, because along with a tally of scientific findings, Arabella goes on post-mortem to describe several later visits to the International Space Station by various eight-legged relatives (one of whom, a Johnson jumping spider named Nefer-titi, actually “made it home again” in 2012). “That’s one small step for man but one giant leap for spiders!” she concludes. The simple illustrations largely tend to close-ups of Arabella, and if all of the adults in view seem to be White, Kordi does tuck in one late scene of a racially diverse trio of modern young children comparing a “spidernaut” with a specimen in a classroom terrarium.

A true tale of life in space, ably if not spectacularly spun. (Informational picture book. 6-8)

**WHEN CARROT MET COOKIE**

*Perl, Erica S.*

*Illus. by Fenske, Jonathan*

Penguin Workshop (32 pp.)


978-0-399-22631-5

978-0-399-22632-2 paper

An anthropomorphic carrot and cookie test the limits of their friendship. Since meeting on their trikes in the park, “bright, grounded” Carrot and “sweet, warm” Cookie have become fast friends. Carrot teaches Cookie to dip in hummus. Cookie teaches Carrot to dunk in milk. But, when Cookie’s other friends Cupcake and Lollipop mock Carrot, Carrot wilts. And, when Carrot’s other vegetable friends mock Cookie, Cookie feels crummy. Neither stands up for the other, straining their relationship and sending Cookie to seek guidance from family. Grandpa (a fig bar) spouts “stale” ideas about desserts acting like dresses. But the child of a muffin and a carrot, Aunt C.C. (a slice of carrot cake) proves that desserts and vegetables can not only be friends but fall in love. Is it too late for Cookie and Carrot to reconcile? With around 190 words and their variants, Perl and Fenske’s collaboration is a pun-filled exploration of friendship. Though the higher word count and relatively small type necessitate some reading fluency, the text never exceeds five sentences on a page and still remains accessible to emerging readers. Fenske’s bright, colorful cartoon art gives personality to each food. Delightful background details, like a pasta-noodle slide and broccoli trees, up the charm factor. But while the overall message is sunny and welcoming, the vegetable/dessert binary trivializes the complexity of racial and cultural difference by using edible stand-ins. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Crisp execution doesn’t mitigate a soggy premise. (Early reader. 4-6)

**LITTLE SEEDS OF PROMISE**

*Rafi, Sana*

*Illus. by Metallinou, Renia*

The Innovation Press (48 pp.)

$17.99 | Oct. 26, 2021

978-1-943147-93-9

Maya misses her original home, a place where she can find mosques and monsoons and—most importantly—her grandmother, who always smells like flowers. Before Maya left, Nani gave her a gift of seeds, urging Maya to “bloom where you are planted.” Maya now lives in a place where she is lonely and feels different from all the other children. At first, Maya thinks she’ll never find the right soil for her seeds—just like she feels as though she will never belong. Finally, she decides to plant just one, just to see what might happen. In the following days, she also tentatively begins friendships with a few classmates. As she waits for growth—and, in parallel, for her new friendships to blossom—she remembers that Nani told her that seeds take time, and that change, like plant growth, requires patience. This book’s story is driven just as much by its gentle, detailed illustrations, whose smudged edges and light palette create a gentle, reassuring atmosphere, as by its text. The central metaphor is mostly successful, and the lyrical story about learning to belong is one that feels hopeful and familiar. Pictures and text suggest her former home is in South Asia and her new one is in North America.

A sweet and accessible picture book about the patience it takes to make a place home. (Picture book. 3-6)

**ONE LIFE**

*Rapinoe, Megan* with *Brockes, Emma*

Razorbill/Penguin (272 pp.)

$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021

978-0-593-20341-5

Soccer star Rapinoe commands attention both on and off the field. In this memoir adapted for young readers, Rapinoe reflects on facing adversity and discovering what she’s made of over the course of her illustrious career. Rapinoe and her twin sister began playing soccer as children, joining a competitive boys’ team since there was no girls’ option in their small California town. Recognizing their potential, Rapinoe’s parents supported the girls through long drives, early mornings, and financial sacrifice. After the twins earned full soccer scholarships to the University of Portland, Rapinoe found new opportunities at the national and international levels and quickly made a name for herself. She discusses her growing understanding of her sexuality and racial politics and how this awareness led to her using her celebrity to champion causes from marriage equality to gender-based pay inequality in professional soccer. Rapinoe gained notoriety for kneeling during the national anthem, in alignment with her strong belief that White
people have a responsibility to draw attention to systemic racism. Backlash against her activism has dogged her career, but Rapinoe challenges readers to use their voices to speak up for what they believe in, emphasizing that issues, just like people’s lives, are interconnected. Soccer fans will appreciate the game details and photos, from family snaps to moments from iconic matches. However, even the non-sporty will find much to appreciate in this inspiring and engagingly written book.

**A captivating sports memoir that puts social justice at the forefront.** (Nonfiction. 11-15)

### HOW TO HAVE A BIRTHDAY

Ray, Mary Lyn

*Illus. by Derby, Cindy*

Candlewick (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Sep. 14, 2021

978-1-5362-0741-5

Are there key ingredients that are part of any (American) child’s birthday? Ray intimates that there are. Her narrative employs the second person, a choice that instantly draws the listener in: “...your birthday is to celebrate that you are here. It’s to tell you that you matter.” Derbys compositions follow three characters throughout their special days. Two have brown skin—one with long, straight hair and the other with two Afro puffs. The third child is White with flaming red hair and glasses. Each carries a stuffed animal. The telling is sensitive to class and income differences, often using the conditional *may* or *might*, and while presents and singing are mentioned, intangibles and independent actions are mentioned as well: your first present is “…you get to wonder” (what will occur on this day), and you can always sing to yourself. Traditions and cake are often involved, but it’s also terrific that birthdays are portable; they go with you all day, whatever you do. Dynamic single- or double-page scenes depict snowy, windswept play; dabs of vibrant color suggest a field of flowers that, upon closer inspection, reveal bodies and faces, illustrating the idea that pictures will help you remember the occasion. The title concludes with three horizontal, parallel views, one for each child as they make wishes.

**A delightful conversation starter on a topic of perennial interest to young children.** (Picture book. 4-7)

### THE BARN

Rogers, Laub H.

*Illus. by Root, Barry*

Candlewick (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-1-5362-0906-8

Introducing a familiar farmyard presence.

A barn sided in red cedar narrates this soothing story and describes its daily routine, overseeing the animals it lovingly shelters and nurtures. Each spread follows the initial setup opens with the line “I am a barn.” The barn begins with a discussion of the communal barn raising that brought it forth over a century earlier; readers will learn details about its construction and how it has stood strong over time. Though not written in verse, the narrative is gently poetic; the simple, straightforward prose brims with pleasant consonants and assonants, and, indeed, the rolling, rhythmic text appeals to all the senses. Slower-paced read-alouds will not only reward listeners, but also allow kids to savor the delightful, muted painted images of greenery, farmland, and the barn's residents: chickens that “amble out of my coop”; cows that “chomp on tall, rich grass”; and dogs that “romp and wrestle in my outstretched fields.” Calves, barn swallows, and a cat and her adorable brood also appear. Unsurprisingly, the book concludes after almost everyone has fallen asleep within the barn's cozy embrace. Children will happily note the open-door welcome to the kitty on the last page as she returns home from a scary encounter midway through the story. The dozers are, naturally, a signal to sleepy readers, confirmed with the barn's final whisper, “I am your barn.” Several humans depicted present White.

**Sweet, reassuring, comforting.** (Picture book. 4-8)

### HOW WAR CHANGED RONDO

Romanyshyn, Romana & Lesiv, Andriy

*Trans. by Lushchevska, Oksana*

Enchanted Lion Books (40 pp.)

$17.95 | Nov. 9, 2021

978-1-59270-367-8

A vibrant, artistic town is changed forever.

Danko (a light bulb), Fabian (a pink balloon dog), and Zirka (an origami bird) love their idyllic town of Rondo, famous for its singing flowers. The friends are happy until the terrifying and faceless War arrives and plants seeds of fear that grow into black flowers and prickly weeds, blocking out the light and silencing the wonderful singing flowers. The trio fails to reason with War and fights back with violence. At last, they galvanize the townspeople to work together to build a “huge light machine” that defeats the darkness of War. Rondo is rebuilt, but every person has been changed, scarred, injured, and red poppies spring up in places touched by War. Translated from the original Ukrainian, this allegorical picture book was originally published following the 2013-14 conflicts in Ukraine. Avoiding references to cultural or geographical markers, the universal story deftly highlights the importance of each person doing their part to battle darkness. The descriptive, lyrical text realistically depicts the impacts of war, and the visual juxtaposition of an imaginative, bright, colorful world and its war-ravaged aftermath is stark. Collage elements convey fragility and resilience in surprising yet visceral ways. Most characters are bipedal, and the three protagonists use gendered pronouns. Externally, characters are depicted in a variety of
“The storyline is anchored by emotional themes of family, adoption, loyalty, and trust.”

**JADIE IN FIVE DIMENSIONS**

An expertly crafted story recognizing the power of humanity amid the life-altering tragedy of war.

**JADIE IN FIVE DIMENSIONS**

The story of Jadie the dog unites readers to the power of humanity and love. Jadie, who presents as White, was saved by the Seers when she was abandoned as a baby and was raised in the Martin family—White mom, Black dad, and brother Marius, who spoke Spanish when he was adopted. However, when she covers an assignment for a friend, she accidentally finds her birth family and learns how they suffered at the hands of the Seers, rocking her worldview. As Jadie and Ty, another young Agent, hack into the system to learn why her birth family was targeted for harsh treatment, they begin to wonder whether the Seers are simply using them like game pieces. The moral ramifications of the course corrections deftly knit together Jadie’s origin story with wider events as chapters switch perspectives among Jadie, Ty, and Sam, Jadie’s brother from her birth family. When rival Seers are introduced, the threat level to the entire universe skyrockets. Though the techno-speak is complex, the storyline is anchored by emotional themes of family, adoption, loyalty, and trust. Readers are invited to enter this imaginative world and consider the far-reaching possibilities.

A thrilling ride through a multidimensional universe and high-stakes action.

**JADIE IN FIVE DIMENSIONS**

A family beach outing becomes an extraordinary adventure. This flight of fancy begins with an ordinary trip to the beach for a White family of four. After the adults have settled in and taken the requisite picture, the two kids wander down the sand and recede into the distance. Actually, they shrink. Finding a convenient seed pod and using its leaves as oars, they set sail on an island with a large egg, save the hatchling from entangling vines, and run from the looming cranelike parent, only to discover that their boat has sailed away. Half an eggshell becomes a makeshift boat, unseaworthy in the giant waves, but, happily, there’s a rescue. Their helpfulness is rewarded. Samworth, the creator of Kirkus Prize–winning *Aviary Wonders, Inc.* (2014), is much more adept at drawing the natural world than humans. This Brobdingnagian world (to the tiny children) is both appealing and a bit scary. The surreal, outsized flowers are worth admiring, but there are caterpillars twice the children’s height, and carnivorous plants threaten from all sides. Sequential panels suggest the passage of time and add interest to the page design. This is neither as rich nor as well executed as Dennis Nolan’s *Sea of Dreams* (2011), but many children have wondered what it might be like to be minuscule, and this wordless adventure is accessible even to a quite young beachgoer. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An imaginative journey.
THE PANGOLIN REVELATION
Schildwachter, Lori
Illus. by Klein, Laurie Allen
Arbordale Publishing (32 pp.)
$9.95 paper | Sep. 10, 2021
978-0-8234-4423-6

A student imagines an animal that already exists.

In science class, Loran learns about animal adaptations, defined as “body parts and behaviors” that help animals survive. The teacher’s assignment: choose or invent an animal and give a presentation. Animal- and art-loving Loran gets right to work on this “dream assignment” and invents. First, he draws a rounded half circle that reminds him of an armadillo. Next, he draws overlapping scales like those on the Asian dragon fish. Then comes a long tongue, claws, a tail, and so much more. Loran even adds a baby version of the animal to his drawing, too, for the “final touch.” As Loran surveys his work he realizes his animal isn’t imaginary—it’s a pangolin! Schildwachter’s debut picture book effectively compares pangolins with other animals by framing the narrative with a classroom assignment. Klein’s earth-toned pencil art adds rich detail, at times too much to believe it’s Loran’s hand. Though the generously large type is mostly easy to read, oversized text blocks and justified text placement make the words and pictures feel misaligned. The appended “For Creative Minds” section includes additional information about pangolins, a prompt to design an animal, and a quiz. A slim bibliography appears on the copyright page. Shown mostly from behind, the children’s earthy appearance in the City of Ashes, 12-year-olds Mei and Yun have been outcasts in their village. Their orphan status and reputation for seeing vaporous auras have left them with few friends. The sister and brother have been raised by their grandfather, who is known for his delicious cooking. Word of his talent has reached the Imperial City, and the Emperor’s son will be visiting to taste their grandfather’s famous mooncakes. But a sour mood has overtaken the village, and the mooncakes taste disgusting and rotten. The twins’ grandfather is taken away to the palace to await trial for supposedly using harmful magic on the prince. Determined to rescue him, Mei and Yun undertake a dangerous journey that reveals hidden truths about their family’s roots and the cursed City of Ashes. Set in ancient China during the Ming dynasty, this fantasy incorporates elements of Chinese folklore, with the Jade Rabbit acting as a spiritual guide for the twins, references to the Monkey King, and the presence of a mirrorklike dream world. The twins’ sibling bond never wavers throughout the challenges they face; like yin and yang, their individual personalities and strengths balance each other and highlight the story’s theme of achieving peace by acknowledging both the light and the dark and creating your own destiny.

An enchanting tale. (author’s note, cultural notes) (Historical fantasy. 8-12)

DOGS LOVE CARS
Scubert, Leda
Illus. by Meisel, Paul
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-5362-0309-7

Created by dog lovers for dog lovers and dog owners–to-be.

When a kid and their parents head to the car for a busy day, their three dogs charge ahead. The dogs’ ears flap in the breeze on the drive to the dog park, where both dogs and their owners get wrapped up in play—and leashes. A different topic for each spread captures the world of loved dogs: It’s full of rides, walks, playmates (canine, human, and feline), naps, toys, food that tempts from the tabletop, and even school. Each situation is loaded with options and opportunities for antonyms, delivered in an infectious chant: “Dogs love walks. // Short walks and long walks, / up hills and down, / walks in cities and countryside, / fast and slow walks, / off leash and on.” Humorous cartoon illustrations realistically show dogs of all shapes and sizes being “good dogs” even as they roll in the mud, tear up their toys, get in the way of chores, and share a love/hate relationship with the family cat. These responsible dog owners keep their dogs on leashes at community events such as a farmers market that shows the vigorous diversity of this White-presenting family’s community. At the end of the day, dogs do what dogs do best: “DOGS LOVE YOU, / all the time.”

A humor-filled love letter to the dogs that love humans so unconditionally. (Picture book. 3-8)

“Each situation is loaded with options and opportunities for antonyms, delivered in an infectious chant.”

DOGS LOVE CARS
ASTRONUTS MISSION THREE
The Perfect Planet
Scieszka, Jon
Illus. by Weinberg, Steven
Chronicle Books (240 pp.)
$14.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-4521-7121-0
Series: AstroNuts

On their third mission, the AstroNuts visit the Perfect Planet—Earth!

Following their failed missions to the Plant Planet and the Water Planet, the lovably goofy band of AstroNuts is sent back in time to prehistoric Earth in hopes of stopping humans from discovering fire and thus preventing climate change. Zooming off from their top-secret AstroNut headquarters on Mount Rushmore, the animal foursome rocket into a wormhole in their Abe Lincoln Beard Vehicle. When they arrive, the AstroNuts befriend the purple-skinned, fur-clad Sapiens family: Grunk, Lucy, and Baby Urp, who live in a cold, dark home, literally between a rock and a hard place. They soon discover that humans are not the dominant species: Wolves are! A Survival of the Fittest Olympics pits the nefariously cunning wolves against the Sapiens family. Can the AstroNuts help the humans beat the wolves without introducing them to fire? Scieszka’s third installment doesn’t miss a beat, with its consistent blend of interesting science facts, enthralling collage art, and, of course, a good poop joke or two. Weinberg’s illustrations are dazzling, juxtaposing classic works of art with bold color splashes and zany, brightly colored characters. This series has been dependable edifying and entertaining, and this latest volume works fine as a stand-alone, although the recap should entice new readers to visit previous installments.

Perfectly fun. (Graphic science fiction hybrid. 8-12)

THE SAMOSA REBELLION
Sekaran, Shanthi
Illus. by Malik, Shehzil
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-06-305153-9

A middle schooler stands up for his community after his fellow citizens embrace the xenophobic rhetoric of their president.

Since Paati, his grandmother, came from India to live with his family in the fictional island nation of Mariposa, 12-year-old Muki Krishnan has had to adjust to a lot. First of all, Paati snores through the night. Secondly, she rouses him out of bed for yoga before his commute across the city with his Salvadoran best friend, Fabi Calderón, to attend the exclusive prep school where they have scholarships. The differences between their lives and those of their classmates have always been stark. But when Mariposa’s president describes residents as either Mariposans/Butterflies (i.e., those who have been there for generations and who are mostly White) or Moths (i.e., immigrants, predominantly people of color), tensions rise immediately. After Paati is detained, Muki realizes that you are never too young to become a revolutionary and asks to join the secret rebellion against the deportations. The Indian independence movement is referenced several times among rebellion organizers, and the strength of the Krishnans’ multicultural neighborhood is celebrated throughout the book. Sekaran explains systemic racism and the dangers of demagoguery in clear and age-appropriate ways with evocative prose. Spot art showing Muki’s sketches enhances the text, and the opening page of each chapter is adorned with butterflies in flight.

Breathtakingly memorable. (map) (Fiction. 10-13)

KALEIDOSCOPE
Selznick, Brian
Illus. by the author
Scholastic (208 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-338-77724-6

In his most complex work to date, Selznick examines the unique realities surrounding love and death.

Seeking knowledge of the world on his 13th birthday, the unnamed narrator sets sail with his friend James (both are assumed White). A storm carries them to the Moon, where James brilliantly defends the night and sleep in a battle with the Sun, because “without dreams, everything dies.” He is crowned king, and the protagonist wonders how he will live without him back on Earth. Twenty-three more chapters reveal dreamlike (nonlinear, often phantasmagorical) fragments of the boys’ relationship, before and after separation/death. Each is introduced by an exquisite, graphite illustration that is preceded by a symmetrical, kaleidoscopic version of the scene: These provide foreshadowing, focus, and an aura of spiritual mystery. Settings involving shattered glass or mysterious forest lights like “the entire world had turned into jewels” further the titular provocation. While the deftly constructed chapters could stand alone, the author plants images—biblical, mythological, scientific, Sendak-ian, and even David Bowie–esque—that shift and reappear: The last view of the apple, served by a dragon, leads the protagonist to ponder a (post-Edenic) life with answers but without wonder. Labyrinths, angels, clocks, butterflies, and clasped hands resurface, prompting contemplation of fear, solace, the fluidity of time, the thrill of connection. How do you find/feel love after death? How do you live with grief?

While Selznick trusts readers to draw their own conclusions about what is true, he offers rich companionship on the voyage. (author’s note) (Fiction. 11-adult)
SYLVIA FINDS A WAY
Shaw, Stephanie  
Illus. by Lee, Fiona  
West Margin Press (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct. 26, 2021  
978-1-51328-949-6

A slug saves the day for some hungry friends.

Sylvia, a small slug who likes to practice yoga and consider “the promise of a new day,” eyes the lush flower and vegetable garden that a bespectacled, olive-skinned, dark-haired child and adult tend. When Sylvia’s friends—Deer, Rabbit, and Crow—in invade the garden and try to steal some of its bounty, the humans shoo them away and install a scarecrow and a sign: “KEEP OUT!” Sylvia determines to help her friends gain access. Despite her friends’ skepticism (she can’t leap, dart, or fly, after all), Sylvia slips under the garden fence and, using her best yoga moves, writes a curious “PLEASE” in the dirt, which inspires in the humans an act of beneficence: They place carrots, peas, and corn outside the garden fence for the creatures to eat (along with a new sign that reads, “Welcome Everyone”). Illustrations depict Sylvia as spotted with two large cartoon eyes atop her antennae. Following the story is an author’s note that includes facts about slugs. But any child wanting to learn more about slugs would do well to find an informational book instead of one that anthropomorphizes them—and that imparts such an earnest and somewhat overbearing message (one that altogether skirts the food chain) about kindness. Yoga fans may get a kick out of a slug mastering a locust pose, but otherwise the story lacks luster.

A treacly take on the forbidden-garden narrative. (Picture book. 4-8)

ELEANOR AMPLIFIED AND THE TROUBLE WITH MIND CONTROL
Sheehan, John  
Running Press Kids (240 pp.)  
$16.99 | Sep. 7, 2021  
978-0-7624-9883-3

A student reporter, convinced of a dastardly plot at her school, seeks the help of a famed investigative reporter.

Miku Tangeroa, a determined seventh grader at Brighton Middle School, is confident that the new principal, the class president, and mysterious tech company SuperInteliCom are in league together. She believes they are turning the once-ordinary school into an unrecognizable place of cruelty, brainwashing students with ubiquitous digital devices called ZipTabs and virtual reality helmets. As founder of The Brighton Beacon, the school newspaper, Miku feels a weight of responsibility after a beloved teacher is fired for refusing to use the required technology during lessons. Enter Eleanor Amplified, Union City’s famed reporter. Eleanor follows Miku’s (initially) anonymous tip, setting in motion their partnership to expose the wrongdoings. As the students of Brighton continue to suffer, Eleanor and Miku dig deeper, uncovering a villainous plot and working to save the day. This is an energetic novel with plenty of valuable commentary about the dangers of data mining and excessive technology use wrapped in an entertaining mystery. However, the characters have little depth and are minimally described, making it difficult to connect with them. Still, this novel inspired by the popular podcast Eleanor Amplified, with a tone reminiscent of superhero shows, contains enough action to keep readers interested. Characters default to White, with ethnic identity signaled through names.

A solid story with an important message. (Mystery. 8-12)

DOG STAR
Shepherd, Megan  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (224 pp.)  
$16.99 | Sep. 14, 2021  
978-0-374-31458-3

Laika is a stray struggling to stay alive on the cold, mean streets of Moscow; Nina, 12, is the daughter of a scientist working at the Institute of Space Medicine.

It’s 1957, the space race between the United States and the Soviet Union is on, and the Soviets are determined to be the first to send a living creature into space. When they settle on dogs, Laika is plucked off the streets as a recruit, and her path crosses with Nina’s during a family visit day at the Institute after the little dog has been brought in for testing. A bond immediately forms between them, and Nina engineers a service project through her Young Pioneers group so she can volunteer to care for Laika and the other dogs. The more invested Nina becomes in Laika, the more she begins to question the outright lies and lies of omission churned out by the Soviet propaganda machine, especially in light of her best friend Ludmilla’s family’s defection to the U.S. And when the question of Laika’s well-being arises, Nina will stop at nothing to protect her new friend. The narrative alternates between Nina’s and Laika’s points of view; Laika’s perspective is anthropomorphized with inner monologue as well as dialogue between dogs, and this works to the story’s advantage in arousing sympathy for the small animal who was sacrificed for science.

A poignant story that accessibly illuminates a milestone in space exploration history. (author’s note, recommended reading) (Historical fiction. 8-12)
“Love and acceptance radiate on every page.”

SOME DAYS

THANK YOU MODEH ANI
Solomon, Rabbi Alyson
Illus. by Clarkson, Bryony
Apples & Honey Press (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Oct. 1, 2021
978-1-68115-369-2

The Hebrew ritual of reciting the daily morning prayer called “Modeh Ani” is explored for all children as a mindful way to begin each day.

The Hebrew phrase modeh ani translates to “I am grateful.” Solomon takes this concept and applies it to how we can begin each day with gratitude for our health, our strength, and our bodies. “Thank you for this brand-new day / My whole body is grateful.” Without reference to a deity, children are encouraged to pay attention to parts of their bodies with a simple thank you. “Thank you for my toes that tap. My feet that point.” Each body part is assigned a function or movement, building until kids are happily jumping and dancing across the pages. With a nod to mindfulness, Solomon reminds kids to thank their breath that “goes in and out” and their heart that “beats fast and slow,” making their “whole body…ready for this bright new day.” Collage art presents a delighted group across all races and includes a Muslim girl in a hijab sitting side by side with a Jewish boy in a kippah as well as a brown-skinned, black-haired child in a wheelchair. Several illustrations show the Hebrew lettering for the phrase modeh ani.

A positive, conscious approach to a stress-free morning routine before the day ahead. (author’s note) (Picture book. 3-6)

DUMPLING DAY
Sriram, Meera
Illus. by de Antuñano, Inés
Barefoot Books (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 17, 2021
978-1-64686-281-8

The aromas of homemade food sneak their way across an entire multicultural neighborhood as growling bellies wait to be filled with…dumplings!

Recipes from Nigeria, Syria, China, Russia, Mexico, and more reveal tasty fillings tucked into doughs that are boiled, steamed, fried, and baked. There are potato-filled samosas and gyoza bursting with ground pork, bourekas stuffed with potatoes and cheese and shish barak swimming in yogurt soup. Count along as 10 scrumptious dumplings formed by 10 pairs of loving hands in 10 busy kitchens are placed on 10 different plates. The block party is ready to start—a dumpling picnic for all! “We eat and laugh and gather round, / We party till the sun goes down.” Sriram’s simple rhyming story celebrating the unifying magic of food pairs well with the childlike naïveté of de Antuñano’s inclusive and diverse gouache illustrations. Without skipping a beat, she folds words for both dumplings and family members and their respective languages into her couplets. However, the appended recipe for tamales includes a fatal typo, to be corrected in subsequent printings. Instead of calling for dried masa flour or corn flour (two words), the recipe lists cornstarch/cornflour (the British term for cornstarch) which will produce a grasy/sludge and not a dough. Backmatter includes a map of food origins, a glossary of kinship terms, and recipes for each type of dumpling. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A fun food counting book. (Picture book. 4-7)

SOME DAYS
A Tale of Love, Ice Cream, and My Mom’s Chronic Illness
Stamm, Julie A.
Illus. by Kellogg, Chamisa
The Experiment (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-61519-810-8

Not all superheroes wear capes, and the mom in this story proves just that.

Young narrator Wyatt shares how Mom may not always feel super, but “she uses her superpowers to battle her [multiple sclerosis].” No matter how good or bad she feels, they always have adventures, big and small. Some days when Mom is tired, they play in a special fort just for two. Some days, Mom is a bit unsteady, but with her magical stick, they can cast spells on Wyatt’s toys. No matter what they face, they will always have each other and fill each day with love. This beautiful picture book shares an affirming message that honestly and unapologetically reflects life with a parent who has a chronic illness. Author Stamm was diagnosed with M.S. in 2007 and, according to her concluding note, wrote this story to serve “as a tool to reinvent the perception of chronic illness and empower the children battling alongside their superhero parents.” She does just that, using Wyatt’s narrative to share ideas for entertaining games while managing symptoms and side effects of a long-term illness. Kellogg’s illustrations notably construct an unshakeable parent-child relationship using warm, vibrant colors and joyful expressions. Love and acceptance radiate on every page. Wyatt, his mom, and the unidentified man who sometimes accompanies them—sensitively leaving readers to their own interpretations of the relationship—all present White. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A loving, tender celebration of the mother-child bond. (Picture book. 4-8)
“Atmospheric elements evoke Brontë-an imagery just enough to spook but not terrorize.”

**THE GHOST OF MIDNIGHT LAKE**

When her life changes overnight, Agatha finds herself in the middle of a ghost story, bravely unraveling her family’s hidden truths. It’s the turn of the 20th century in England, and 12-year-old Agatha is forced into a new life. Upon her father’s death, she is disinherited from Gosswater Hall after learning that she was secretly—and not entirely legally—adopted, and her greedy, malicious cousin, Clarence, is taking over the vast estate. Agatha is sent to live with her biological father in his modest farm cottage, but she’s bent on undoing Clarence’s evil and fighting for what has been bequeathed to her—the Queen Stone, a priceless family heirloom whose whereabouts are unknown—and discovering the truth about who she is. Strange’s writing makes for a compelling read full of vivid descriptions and characters that are well imagined and richly drawn. Agatha is a strong and capable female lead, vulnerable enough to be believable and brave enough to remake her life. Others, like the midwife and mystic Moll Speedwell, a cantankerous goose named Susan, and Agatha’s friend Bryn, are irresistible, lively, fully formed characters. The titular ghost and other atmospheric elements evoke Brontë-an imagery just enough to spook but not terrorize. The story hits the right note thanks to expert plotting and pacing, with each twist and turn setting up what’s to come without being overly predictable. Characters are presumed White.

**A pitch-perfect page-turner.** *(Historical mystery. 9-12)*

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**INTERRUPTING CHICKEN Cookies for Breakfast**

Stein, David Ezra

*Illus. by the author*

Candlewick (40 pp.)

$15.99 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-1-5362-0778-1

The titular fowl is back, just in time for breakfast.

Readers were first introduced to Stein’s character when the irrepressible little red chicken had a hard time settling down at bedtime despite Papa’s dogged efforts to calm his offspring with some fairy tales. This latest title takes place in the morning, and a wide-awake Chicken struggles to rouse Papa from bed with appeals for “cookies for breakfast.” He resists this blandishment but acquiesces to a request for a snuggly reading of nursery rhymes—which Chicken, of course, interrupts. Repeatedly. The improvised, inserted rhymes persist in their advocacy of cookies for breakfast, and the series’ trademark metafictive play of books within a book depicts familiar Mother Goose characters startled by Chicken’s intrusion (with cookies) into their rhymes. “There was an old woman / who lived in a shoe / She had so many — // ‘Cookies, she gave me a few!’ ” yells Chicken, jumping in through the window and startling the old woman, who’s just taken a sheet of cookies out of the oven. On the next page they sit down to a cozy snack of tea and cookies. Papa and Chicken’s scenes are done in rich, full color, while the nursery-rhyme pages are done as bleached-out cartoons. A culminating rhyme of Chicken’s own devising fails to convince Papa of the merits of cookies for breakfast, but he has another treat in store for his little chick: pancakes.

*A sweet and silly read for any time of day.* *(Picture book. 3-7)*

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**LITTLE NARWHAL, NOT ALONE**

Stone, Tiffany

*Illus. by Anstee, Ashlyn*

Greystone Kids (44 pp.)

$17.95 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-1-77164-620-8

In the middle of a frozen ocean, curious Narwhal goes exploring.

At first, every wonderful thing he sees is somewhat familiar; he spies arctic char and cod, a seal, a caribou, and seabirds swooping through what appear to be the northern lights. Before he knows it, though, Narwhal has wandered so far that he can’t find a single other narwhal anywhere. After a close run-in with the propeller of a boat, a nervous Narwhal runs into a pod of white whales. Although none of them has a tusk, they do seem to be similar enough to Narwhal that they could be potential friends. As Narwhal spends more time with the whales, he becomes overwhelmed with their differences: Narwhal speaks a different language, doesn’t know the whales’ song, and eats different fish than they do. But then, slowly, Narwhal gets to know his new friends—and realizes that they have much more in common than he first believed. Based on a true story about a narwhal who wandered so far away from its arctic home that it ended up joining a pod of beluga whales, this rhyming story of a real-life friendship is compelling not only for its plot, but also for its underlying message about how diversity makes us stronger. The illustrations make use of a varied, watery color palette to give the story a truly marine feel.

*This picture book about an interspecies friendship has plenty of lessons for humans, too.* *(note)* *(Picture book. 3-7)*
KRAMPUS CONFIDENTIAL
Sullivan, Kyle
Illus. by Sullivan, Derek
Hazy Dell Press (242 pp.)
$16.95 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-948931-26-7
Series: Hazy Fables, 3

When they open a detective agency in Tinseltown, Ruprecht and his ghost friend, Marley, become entangled in a deception contrived by a small elf with big bias.

In this third installment of the Hazy Fables series, it appears that a krampus is jollifying elves, that is, overloading them on holiday spirit to the point of coma by showing them a snow globe reported to be the first toy Santa ever made. The bad news is that the police suspect young Ruprecht, who is a krampus, or goat/human hybrid from Germanic mythology, of being the perpetrator. Red herrings abound as Ruprecht and Marley race against the police, a goblin, and a bad witch to find the snow globe and the villain who is wielding it. It seems that society expects the worst of krampuses, and Ruprecht has already suffered from others’ negative expectations, a circumstance that allows readers an opportunity to understand prejudice. But Tinseltown is packed with the usual (and unusual) suspects of Christmas lore, and the culprit could be anyone. Ruprecht narrows the mystery in a noir style that is both world-weary and tongue-in-cheek. The good news is that Ruprecht, unlike most noir protagonists, accepts help, especially from his parents, who are revealed to be legendary Christmas figures in their own rights. This charming work draws to a satisfactory close with justice restored.

Good fun for youngsters who prefer their holiday cheer with a dark twist. (Fantasy/mystery 8-12)

OLWEN FINDS HER WINGS
Surojegin, Nora
Illus. by Surojegin, Pirkko-Liisa
Floris (40 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-78250-712-3

The titular owl—youngest in her family—is disappointed when she cannot copy the behaviors of a hare, a bear, or a squirrel. “Deep in a frosty forest, a family of owls lived happily in their treetop home.” The text on the recto of a perfectly composed, full-bleed, double-page spread goes on to say that Olwen herself is not happy; she is bored. The owlet sits at the verso’s forefront, her fluffy little body perched on the branch of a fir tree. Snow floats down over diffused light, and Olwen’s siblings can be seen on branches farther away. Despite the detailed realism of the owl, there is no denying that she has a bored demeanor. The art continues to perfectly complement the text as it spins a sweet, well-paced tale that will resonate with young readers. Not only can they appreciate Olwen’s feelings, they will enjoy predicting what will happen when Olwen tries to perform un-owllike feats. The detailed, just slightly anthropomorphic illustrations of animals are delightful, all set against the background of an enchanting wintertime forest. Despite Olwen’s diminutive size, the larger animals are benign and even encouraging. The art does a masterful job of playing up size contrasts. Gentle humor abounds in the text as well, including the incorrect but appropriate names Olwen gives to the three animals she encounters. The ending is both predictable and satisfying.

From Finland via Scotland, a hoot of a bedtime treat. (Picture book 3-6)

THE ME I CHOOSE TO BE
Tarpley, Natasha Anastasia
Illus. by Bethencourt, Regis & Bethencourt, Kabran
Little, Brown (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-316-46154-2

Envision a world where children are dreamers and explorers of themselves, and you have this book.

Tarpley’s latest picture book is a thoughtfully written poem penned to affirm Black children. She gives Black children permission to investigate their inner and outer landscapes and supports their choices in determining how they show up in the world. Tarpley’s text declares: “I am hope”; “I am a tiny bird”; “I am light.” These words and phrases are powerful analogies and metaphors for strength, resiliency, and freedom. Other metaphors invite children to see themselves as a “free spirit” who moves “to the rhythm of my own heartbeat” and a “gardener” who plants “dreams the world will know.” The photo-collage illustrations are full of color and movement, each one with a beautiful Black child front and center. Many of the images are out of this world—sometimes literally—and styled to represent the ideas from the stanzas they accompany. One child is a “yet unnamed” superhero surrounded by flames; another is a star dancing across the night sky; and two children who represent sadness wear golden tears frozen on their small brown cheeks. The images are a blend of the realistic and the fantastical, with hints of Afro-futurism. Moreover, the ideas are not presented as static states of being: The children are free to move fluidly from one idea to the next, as evidenced in the refrain: “My creativity and curiosity / flow without end, / and if I meet an obstacle, / I just begin again.” (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An affirming celebration of individuality and cultural appreciation. (Picture book 4-7)
ONLY MY DOG KNOWS I PICK MY NOSE
Tarshis, Lauren
Illus. by Mezoff, Lisa Bronson
Orchard/Scholastic (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-338-68025-6

A young boy appears to be a picture of perfect behavior.

He says he always follows rules, is an exemplary big brother, willingly shares his toys, and overall “do[es] everything just right.” But he gleefully admits to mischievous transgressions when he is alone with his dog. He neglects to brush his teeth, zooms through the house on his skateboard, and splashes in the tub. What’s more, he hides his smelly socks and deliberately wakes his sister from her nap. His dog witnesses it all and is his sole trusted confidant. This dog knows that the boy looks for monsters under the bed (and helps to keep those monsters away) and is always up for a hug. And when the boy picks his nose? No judgment. Tarshis presents the boy’s confessions of his secret behaviors with lots of humor, and, like the wonderful dog, there’s no reprimand or condemnation. A funny, delightful cartoon vignette with boy’s and dog’s expressions and body language in perfect symmetry accompanies each episode. Endpaper illustrations further contrast perfection with reality. The boy and his family present White. The title alone will catch the interest of young readers, who will perhaps recognize themselves in the hijinks and add their own confessions. Is the dog really the only witness; are the boy’s parents clueless? Look carefully.

It’s about unconditional love and acceptance. Enjoy. (Picture book 4-8)

SHADOWGHAST
Taylor, Thomas
Illus. by Booth, Tom
Walker US/Candlewick (352 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-5362-0860-3
Series: Legends of Eerie-on-Sea, 3

Instead of Halloween, Eerie-on-Sea townsfolk celebrate Ghastly Night, lighting mangewick candles to keep the legendary Shadowghast from stealing their shadows.

This year, candles won’t be enough. The holiday commemorates a stranger’s mesmerizing shadow-puppet show in which Eerie townsfolk watched the shadow of a grinning, horned man chase and consume fleeing shadows, human and otherwise. Cheated of payment by Eerie’s duplicitous mayor, the puppet master fed his shadow to the Shadowghast. (The mayor himself vanished.) Dr. Thalassi and Mrs. Fossil retell these historical events annually. They’re blindsided when charismatic stage magician Caliastra arrives with her agent and two mimes, planning to re-create the story theatrically. Caliastra dazzles Herbie; claiming she’s his aunt, she invites him to be her assistant. Violet, Herbie’s fellow orphan, is skeptical—and also worried because her guardian is missing. Their friendship suffers, but as Mrs. Fossil disappears and Shadowghast sightings accumulate, the two put aside differences for dangerous investigations that lead to Sebastian Eel’s empty house and the Netherways, a labyrinth of underground passageways. When quick-witted, intrepid Violet is sidelined, cautious, risk-averse Herbie needs a gutsy plan and help from Erwin, the oracular cat, and Clermit, the charming, clockwork hermit crab. Eclipsing clowns in sheer creepiness, the mimes are nastily memorable creations. Inventive plotting, spooky atmospherics, and quirky humor will keep readers entertained. Characters are minimally described, but prior entries and names signal some diversity in the default White cast. Final illustrations not seen.

Readers will revel in the shivery mood. (Fantasy. 8-12)

EARTH IS BIG
A Book of Comparisons
Tomceck, Steve
Illus. by Farina, Marcos
What on Earth Books (48 pp.)
$24.00 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-912920-34-1

Each of 18 chapters offers support for titular sentences that seemingly contradict each other, as in “Earth Is Big” versus “Earth Is Small.”

The large format—roughly 12 inches high by 20 inches wide when open—is necessary to pull off the curating. An introduction discusses exploring “the planet (and a lot of other things) through measurement and comparison.” Each chapter has been carefully arranged over one double-page spread. Bands of contrasting (if drab) colors and different type sizes and weights help keep attention; abundant, sometimes-droll posterlike illustrations are complementary but can feel overwhelming. The book has a decidedly retro feel, but art pays attention to racial presentation, and text includes climate change, mass extinctions, and a 2012 meteorite strike. Using contrasts to organize facts about the planet is a good idea in a time when attention is scarce. Teachers and parents who enjoyed browsing through the How and Why series of yore will find this a comfortable, updated replacement. The text valiantly serves up accessible explanations of terminology in virtually every field of science even as it also shows comparisons. For example, before a page comparing heavy metals, there are sidebars about the difference between nonliving, and human-made—including Earth, of course. Cool, kid-friendly fact: Soap bubbles become perfect spheres because of surface tension.

Solid scientific browsing. (Contents, glossary, conversion table, index, source notes) (Nonfiction. 7-10)
“Charming, colorful drawings feature graceful color and delicate linework as well as surprisingly detailed scientific illustrations.”

**LENTIL SOUP**

Tremblay, Carole
Illus. by Poignonec, Maureen
Trans. by Simard, Charles
Orca (32 pp.)
$19.95 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-4598-2701-1

From Québec, a charming book about soup and love.

Two little gray critters sit down for a meal. The smaller one’s soup is too hot, so while it cools the larger one is forced to field lots of questions. The bigger one, who wears glasses, patiently answers each question, whether it be about who made the soup, where lentils come from, or the origins of salt and pepper—and the questions keep coming! Each answer to the smaller critter’s questions includes beautifully illustrated botanical and cooking-science content—with funny answers thrown in to amuse adults and children alike. Is it possible that the lentils in your soup are in fact buttons pulled off the backs of cheerleaders? The smaller critter is steered to the correct answer each time, but we all get to have fun along the way. Charming, colorful drawings feature graceful color and delicate linework as well as surprisingly detailed scientific illustrations—and there’s something for everyone hidden in the sweet, whimsical details. The pages are dotted with peeping tomatoes, cuddly peas in a pod, happy sheep, and even a worried jellyfish, to name a few. The characters’ back-and-forth dialogue ping-pongs playfully in speech bubbles. Funny dialogue keeps the pages turning. It even concludes with a kid-friendly recipe to make your own bowl of lentil soup!

**LENTIL SOUP**

Tosi, Christina
Illus. by Balsley, Emily
Dial Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-593-11068-3

A dream of pastries transforms a town.

In the monochromatic town of Samesville, everything is the same: “black and white and gray.” The only cake on offer is vanilla with chocolate frosting. Sammi, the White protagonist, puts her recipe card under her pillow, makes a wish that “things were NOT the same,” and has a dream filled with riotous color and magical confections—and just like that, the town is awash with bright hues and everyone has the ability to create thrilling baked goods. The title page helpfully adds that the author is “of Milk Bar” (but not so helpfully fails to explain that this is a restaurant chain offering inventive desserts). This perhaps explains why this story feels uncomfortably narrowed in on baked goods—not quite like an advertisement but also not quite a story. There are tremendous leaps of faith required: that a wholly undeveloped character would spontaneously break out of all-encompassing conformity and that putting a recipe card under a pillow could have such transformative effects. To be effective, this setting (reminiscent of the film *Pleasantville*) requires far more worldbuilding than it’s given, meaning that the emotional tenor is similarly muted. The Wizard of Oz–like transition from black-and-white to rainbow is visually striking but can’t make up for the lackluster storytelling. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**WHETS the appetite for cake rather than reading. (recipe)**

(*Picture book. 4-7*)

**EVERY CAKE HAS A STORY**

Tosi, Christina
Illus. by Balsley, Emily
Dial Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-593-11068-3

A dream of pastries transforms a town.

In the monochromatic town of Samesville, everything is the same: “black and white and gray.” The only cake on offer is vanilla with chocolate frosting. Sammi, the White protagonist, puts her recipe card under her pillow, makes a wish that “things were NOT the same,” and has a dream filled with riotous color and magical confections—and just like that, the town is awash with bright hues and everyone has the ability to create thrilling baked goods. The title page helpfully adds that the author is “of Milk Bar” (but not so helpfully fails to explain that this is a restaurant chain offering inventive desserts). This perhaps explains why this story feels uncomfortably narrowed in on baked goods—not quite like an advertisement but also not quite a story. There are tremendous leaps of faith required: that a wholly undeveloped character would spontaneously break out of all-encompassing conformity and that putting a recipe card under a pillow could have such transformative effects. To be effective, this setting (reminiscent of the film *Pleasantville*) requires far more worldbuilding than it’s given, meaning that the emotional tenor is similarly muted. The Wizard of Oz–like transition from black-and-white to rainbow is visually striking but can’t make up for the lackluster storytelling. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**WHETS the appetite for cake rather than reading. (recipe)**

(*Picture book. 4-7*)

**WHAT TO DO WHEN THE NEWS SCARES YOU**
**A Kid’s Guide to Understanding Current Events**

Toner, Jacqueline B.
Illus. by McDonnell, Janet
Magination/American Psychological Association (80 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-4338-3697-8

Short, interactive lessons about media tactics and source reliability are interspersed with exercises to help kids cope with the strong emotions that can accompany exposure to “scary news.”

Ten short chapters are preceded by a note to caregivers, clarifying that using the book requires adult supervision and that the intended audience does not include children who “have themselves experienced trauma or loss.” That sensible caveat makes more palatable the initial example of a White, middle-class nuclear family in which the children worry as Dad watches news simultaneously on TV and the internet, and Mom calls Grandma. The frequent black-and-white illustrations do offer varied representation in subsequent vignettes. Both the art and the conversational text imply readers under 10. From the start, the text acknowledges that frightening things do happen in the world and that news media use techniques to keep news “interesting”—which can also make things seem scarier. Children are invited to become investigators, with the book providing spaces for them to jot down observations each time they learn a new aspect of reporting, including camera angles, opinions versus facts, and the famous W questions. Climate change anxiety gets its rightful due, as do relaxation techniques. Violent, systemic racism—recently forefronting scary news—is undermined by positive references to police. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**From knowledge comes power over emotions. (Nonfiction. 6-9)**
Dr. Ng: “Be warned, this volume ends on a particularly perilous cliffhanger.”

**Dr. Ng**

**DRAGON LEGEND**

**Tang, Katie & Tang, Kevin**

Sterling Children's Books (224 pp.)

$16.95 | Sep. 21, 2021

978-1-5449-3598-8

Series: The Dragon Realm, 2

Magically gifted friends and their dragons struggle against the darkness.

A thorough recap of the events in *Dragon Mountain* (2020) opens this sequel, welcoming readers new to the series. Billy Chan and his friends Charlotte, Dylan, and Ling-Fei are bonded to their dragons, enabling them with special gifts to protect the dragon and human realms from the tyranny of the Dragon of Death. The group, with the addition of JJ, whose grandfather runs their summer Chinese language camp, is now in the Dragon Realm, where they are bent on rescuing kidnapped Dylan and collecting the rest of the magical pearls to prevent the Dragon of Death from consolidating his power. Gathering each pearl entails a perilous mission, which demands they quickly rise to the occasion. From monstrous worms to human-eating fish, the plot is action-packed but carefully balanced with character development. Billy's dragon Spark's inner conflict adds another dimension as she fights her growing hunger for dark magic. JJ also adds to the complexity, as he questions where he truly belongs. The fast-paced narrative draws readers in with increasing challenges for the young people to defeat their foe. Be warned, this volume ends on a particularly perilous cliffhanger. The first book establishes the multinational cast's identities, including biracial (White American/Hong Kong Chinese) Billy, White American Charlotte, White Irish Dylan, and Chinese Ling-Fei and JJ.

**Plenty of escalating action will have readers clamoring for the next installment.** (Fantasy. 9-12)

**LOTERÍA**

**Valenti, Karla Arenas**

Knopf (320 pp.)


978-0-593-17696-2

(Science fiction. 8-12)

Life and Death's annual game leaves a girl's life in the balance as magical realism meets other-world fantasy in this novel set in Oaxaca.

Eleven-year-old Clara's destiny is forever changed when a small silver thread, borne on a breeze, marks her in a game of Lotería. The sudden loss of her aunt seems an especially cruel twist of fate, but when her grieving younger cousin disappears into the night, she knows it is up to her to save him. Though the story begins in the Latin American tradition of magical realism, it veers into full fantasy when Clara crosses through the mysterious portal into Aztlán. Aztlán presents as a Mesoamerican fantasy realm based loosely on the mythic home of the Aztecs, with echoes of Oz, Wonderland, and Narnia. It's full of challenges to be faced as Clara tries to locate and rescue her cousin. All along, Life and Catrina play their cards and debate over free will. Does Clara have any choice in what happens next, or is all that transpires simply fate? Though the metaphors are often stretched and the philosophical debates can grow tiresome, there is enough mystery to keep readers going. The end is abrupt and bittersweet, not unlike life. Exquisite illustrations greatly enhance the text.

**Philosophy and fantasy mingle with mixed results.** (author’s note, reader’s guide) (Fantasy. 8-12)

**WELCOME TO DWEEB CLUB**

**McElderry, Betsy**

McElderry (272 pp.)

$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021

978-1-338-6768-2

An eclectic group of seventh graders join a mysterious, life-altering after-school club.

At the beginning of seventh grade, Jason Sloan joins Flounder Bay Upper School's new H.A.I.R. Club at an activity fair, motivated by his popular, perfectly coiffed friend Glamorous Steve’s enthusiasm. The members soon realize that the club isn't actually about hair—it's a secret club in which the kids must monitor an anonymous donor's high-tech video system for any security breaches on school grounds. The club's first big assignment is to determine who has been stealing the cafeteria's stash of croutons, but as the eight members review the footage, they eventually notice something creepy and unbelievable—it shows themselves eating lunch five years in the future. Most of the kids don't like what they see of themselves as seniors (Steve's lost his enviable hairdo, Nikhil has an embarrassing mustache, Sonia seems to have questionable taste in clothes and boys, and Jason barely has any friends), and they team up to solve the real mystery: Who’s behind the time-bending tech, and what they can do to alter their trajectories? The story’s premise is compelling, and Jason’s family relationships are refreshing and well drawn, but the seventh graders' issues can seem superficial, and the character development is uneven. The club is majority White by default, but three kids’ names cue them as Asian.

**A funny and original story about friendship and the future.** (Fantasy. 9-12)
LANA LYNN AND THE NEW WATCHDOG
Van Slyke, Rebecca
Illus. by Sandu, Anca
Peachtree (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 1, 2021
978-1-68263-196-6

Following her debut in Lana Lynn Howls at the Moon (2019), intrepid sheep Lana Lynn surprises her flock’s new watchdog.

Discovering her flock is getting a watchdog as protection from wolves, Lana Lynn decides to handle his training. When a “stranger with yellow eyes and pointed teeth” creeps out of the woods, Lana Lynn assumes he’s the watchdog, but her more discerning pal Shawn’s not sure. Lana Lynn asks the stranger if he’s there to “take care of the sheep,” and he nods and licks his lips. She immediately commences training the stunned stranger, relentlessly ordering him to move the flock from meadow to pond, which he fails at all afternoon. By evening, unflappable Lana Lynn initiates phase two of watchdog training, forcing the stranger to stay awake all night and the following day to guard the flock. Phase three involves the now-exhausted, befuddled stranger protecting Shawn while Lana Lynn pretends to be an attacker wolf. However, when the stranger grabs Shawn, Lana Lynn decides to handle his training. When the text suggests the stranger’s other than the watchdog, the droll illustrations leave no doubt. Loose outlines and flat, colorful shapes reveal the stranger to be an increasingly confused, overwhelmed, and whipped wolf who has clearly met his match in determined, clueless little Lana Lynn.

A laugh-out-loud case of mistaken identity. (Picture book. 4-8)

TURNING BACK TO ALLAH
Sulaiman’s Caving Calamity
Vaughan, Aliya
Illus. by Azzouz, Rakaiya
Kube Publishing (56 pp.)
$8.95 paper | Oct. 19, 2021
978-0-86037-840-2

When Sulaiman gets lost in the dark on a Scouts trip, he seeks help through his faith in Allah.

Sulaiman is excited for his weekend exploring caves with the Scouts. (This British import—and the organization—eschews the “Boy” familiar to U.S. readers.) But he has some fears stemming from memories of getting lost in the park or stuck in an elevator, and he carefully engineers his days to avoid potentially scary situations. His friend Jacob assures him they will stick together so he won’t get lost. The practice goes fine, but once they’re in the cave, Sulaiman gets distracted with replacing a battery in his camera and finds himself left behind. His headlamp goes out and he bumps his head. Terrified in the dark, he remembers the instructions to stay where he is, but he also remembers stories from the hadith and Quran that inspire him to ask Allah for help. Full-page and even some full-spread cartoon-style color illustrations punctuate the chapters. The text uses vocabulary and structure at a higher level than the interest level of the story and is not fully formatted in the conventions of American English. Despite rough edges, the story accomplishes its educational objective, and the endmatter about supplication is useful (also written at a higher reading level, as religious texts tend to be).

Entertaining instruction for Muslim readers. (notes, references) (Fiction. 8-11)

I AM COURAGE
A Book of Resilience
Verde, Susan
Illus. by Reynolds, Peter H.
Abrams (32 pp.)
$14.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-4197-4646-8
Series: I Am...

The sixth in a series by Verde and Reynolds that empowers children to be their best selves.

A child with brown skin and straight black hair guides readers through a self-affirming profession of true courage. Far from presenting a perfect display of unwavering bravery, the child reveals that they tumble, waver, doubt, and fear all along the journey of a bike ride (read: life) when faced with obstacles like a dark path, a bridge over a ravine, even a scary dog. The child believes in their own strength and resilience to keep going. That resilience takes visual form in a flame icon on flags that the child shares with friends, a Black child with close-cropped natural hair and a White child with pink hair, helping them to find their own strength. Thus, the child emphasizes the role of friends in nourishing this flame, leaning on one other and sharing stories about scary, hard things. The child describes moving forward, taking a breath, digging deep, finding their center when things are tough—all crucial parts of social/emotional development and growing up. A vivid array of vibrant backgrounds evoke the range of moods experienced by the children, who themselves are drawn as distinct individuals with expressive faces. The text evolves from singular to plural pronouns, ending with the declarations: “We are strong. We are capable. We are important. / We are courage. // And we are triumphant.” (This book was reviewed digitally.)

For young readers who need help believing in themselves and for those with friends who do the same. (author’s note) (Picture book. 4-7)
This Italian import asks readers to consider: What if one friend needs to hibernate and the other doesn’t?

The forest is turning “rich amber, burned orange, and chestnut brown.” Little Red, a burnt-orange fox with a sharp snout, revels in the camouflage, excited to go unseen by Hazel the dormouse. Before readers can grasp the wisp of a predator-prey implication, the page turn curves lightly in the opposite direction: Hazel and Little Red are best friends, blissfully frolicking together in the autumn leaves. The hiding is for hide-and-seek. This joy is fleeting, though, because “the smell of winter mean[s] one thing: loneliness.” The fox is the vulnerable one; Hazel’s about to hibernate. Hazel’s burrow—a two-storied tea pot featuring a duvet-covered bed, an oven, and tea towel—will hold Hazel all winter long, leaving Little Red alone and forlorn. Proietti’s gently textured fox fur, grasses, plants, and skies are softly melancholy. Close-ups (Hazel dozing off while holding Little Red’s ear) alternate with landscapes: half-bare trees whose trunks are starkly discrete, symbolizing winter’s isolation; the sun hanging low in a pale, yellow-gray sky as the two friends sit motionless. Eventually, Hazel and Little Red fall asleep together outside the teapot. Whether this solves the problem or merely postpones it, their affection is a solid comfort.

Visual beauty plus the beauty of closeness in sad times. Cuddle close for this one. (Picture book 3-8)

HOW TO CATCH A GINGERBREAD MAN
Wallace, Adam
Illus. by Elkerton, Andy
Sourcebooks Wonderland (40 pp.)
$10.99 | Aug. 3, 2021
978-1-7282-0935-7
Series: How To Catch...

The titular cookie runs off the page at a bookstore storytime, pursued by young listeners and literary characters.

Following on 13 previous How To Catch... escapades, Wallace supplies sometimes-tortured doggerel and Elkerton, a set of helter-skelter cartoon scenes. Here the insouciant narrator scampers through aisles, avoiding a series of elaborate snares set by the racially diverse young storytime audience with help from some classic figures: “Alice and her mad-hat friends, / as a gift for my unbirthday, / helped guide me through the walls of shelves — / now I’m bound to find my way.” The literary helpers don’t look like their conventional or Disney counterparts in the illustrations, but all are clearly identified by at least a broad hint or visual cue, like the unnamed “wizard” who swoops in on a broom to knock over a tower labeled “Frogwarts.” Along with playing a bit fast and loose with details (“Perhaps the boy with the magic beans / saved me with his cow...”) the author discards his original’s lip-smacking climax to have the errant snack circling back at last to his book for a comfier sort of happily-ever-after.

A brisk if bland offering for series fans, but cleverer meta-fictive romps abound. (Picture book 6-8)

THE SECRET GARDEN ON 81ST STREET
A Modern Graphic Retelling of The Secret Garden
Weir, Ivy Noelle
Illus. by Padilla, Amber
Little, Brown (256 pp.)
$12.99 paper | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-316-45970-9
Series: Classic Graphic Remix

In this graphic novel reboot of Frances Hodgson Burnett’s classic, Mary Lennox’s Uncle Craven lives in a present-day New York City town house; Mary’s parents worked in the Silicon Valley tech industry before their untimely deaths.

Mary soon meets her uncle’s prickly housekeeper and her gregarious babysitter, Martha, and she becomes fast friends with Martha’s younger brother, Dickon. Mary gets to know the city, exploring its iconic cultural institutions and food scene and befriending the local bodega owner and his cat. Mary learns from Martha that her uncle’s standoffishness stems from the devastating death of his husband, Masahiro, but she senses that her new home holds other secrets as well after hearing unexplained noises during the night. Martha also mentions the beautiful rooftop garden that Masahiro cultivated—and Mary is determined to find it. Accessing the garden and finding Colin, an ailing cousin who suffers from panic disorder, living upstairs, Mary teams up with Dickon to nurture both. Mary and Dickon are kind and supportive, and Colin’s therapist provides professional guidance. As the garden grows, so do the opportunities for friendship and healing in a story that modernizes this timeless storyline. The simple panel layout and clear, colorful illustrations with easy-to-read speech bubbles make the plot easy even for young readers less familiar with graphic novels to follow. Most characters are brown skinned; the housekeeper, Martha, and Dickon read as White.

Empathy and self-discovery fuel this updated classic. (Graphic fiction. 8-12)
“Tackling complex issues of gentrification, corporate power, racism, and even an unwanted kiss, Mia Tang matures.”

ROOM TO DREAM

CHICKEN FRANK, DINOSAUR!
Wenger S.K.
Illus. by Ensslin, Jojo
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 1, 2021
978-0-8075-1141-1

A DNA test returns a pullet surprise for feathered Frank and his skeptical farmyard friends.

The other animals are slow to accept Frank’s insistence that he’s evolved from dinosaurs, no matter how often he draws family trees in the dirt, points out how much his feet resemble those of T. rex, and insists that he had a tail before he was hatched (he still has one, as confused readers can plainly see, but never mind). As further proof, he points to a living relative revealed by his DNA test…that would be Ike Alligator, who arrives on scene looking for lunch (Frank will “taste like chicken,” predicts a horrified cow) but stays to study the evidence and then join an expedition to the aquarium to meet some even more distant relatives. In big, squared-off panels, one or two per page, Ensslin mixes ensembles of dubious-looking livestock with diagrams and labeled genealogical lines. In the text, Wenger delivers, first in dialogue and then a prose afterward, elementary discourses on evolutionary change, inherited characteristics, DNA, the dino-bird connection, and finally a select glossary of animal groupings. If the tone is more overtly instructional here than in, say Guido van Genechten’s The Truth About Dinosaurs (2018) or Drew Sheneman’s Dinosaurs Are Not Extinct! (2020), the author and illustrator still stir some fun into the pedagogy.

Not exactly news but a lively tongue-in-beak lecture from a latter-day theropod. (Informational picture book. 6-8)

GOODBYE, OLD HOUSE
Wild, Margaret
Illus. by James, Ann
Blue Dot Kids Press (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-73622-645-2

A young child visits their old haunts for the last time with affection and greets their new home with enthusiasm.

Toussle-headed and lively, the child runs through the landscape of their old home, naming all the activities they will never do again in this place: fishing in the river, running through the trees, petting the pony, swinging on the gate, eating at the table, dreaming by the fire. They stand at the open door, looking wistfully out at the familiar scenery, then bounce from room to room, saying goodbye to each one in turn. They even change the writing on their bedroom wall to the past tense: It now reads “Sam lived here.” The process is reversed as they travel to their new home and explore all the activities in the new place: pushing open the gate, climbing a tree, petting a new cat, and saying “Hello” to the new rooms. They add an inscription on the bedroom wall: “Sam lives here now.” The visual treatment is striking: Loose black-and-white cutout sketches of the child (whose skin is, therefore, paper-white) are collaged over soft, muted, almost abstract landscapes. The effect is pleasing, but there is little detail for a child to pore over. In spite of the paucity of detail, this would serve well to soothe a child anxious about a potentially traumatic experience.

Moving house can be fun and not scary with the right attitude. (Picture book. 3-6)

ROOM TO DREAM
Tang, Kelly
Scholastic (320 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-338-62112-9
Series: Front Desk, 3

A holiday in China reignites Mia’s love of writing, while troubles with the Calivista Motel develop her journalism skills.

Tackling complex issues of gentrification, corporate power, racism, and even an unwanted kiss, Chinese American seventh grader Mia Tang matures, exhibiting endearing resilience and advocating for herself and small businesses. The first third of the book explores the emotions and confusion of reuniting with family back in Beijing. Many immigrant children will recognize the awkwardness Mia feels both in America and also in her country of birth: “At school I wasn’t white enough. Here I wasn’t Chinese enough.” Mia finds a solution—using her talent with words to write a column in a Chinese children’s newspaper. The concept of saving face is introduced, as Mia’s parents are mortified by the personal information she shares in her weekly column. When the Tangs return home, there is trouble for the Calivista Motel. What Mia saw happening in Beijing—small mom-and-pop shops being forced out of business—is also happening in California. Can an independent business win a fight with a big corporation? The livelihood of the whole Calivista community hangs in the balance. The complex and realistic relationships Mia has with Lupe and Jason show these friends developing into an interesting and talented trio. The author’s note, including writing and photos from Yang’s youth, shares the remarkable autobiographical details.

Fans of this series that keeps going strong will devour this latest entry. (Historical fiction. 8-12)
“Cinematic movement between panels, quick wit, and an irresistible dragon make for a quick adventure.”

THE A WAKENING STORM
Yolen, Jane
Illus. by Truong, Vivian
Graphix/Scholastic (240 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-338-36335-7
Series: City of Dragons, 1

A dragon egg sends a tween girl and her friends from one end of Hong Kong to the other, searching for answers.

Three years after her father’s unexpected death, Grace’s mother has remarried, and the two have moved to Hong Kong to live with Grace’s new stepfather, who works for a technology company in the city. Grace is prepared to enter an international school and meet new friends, but she isn’t so prepared for the egg a mysterious woman gifts her—one that quickly hatches into what is undeniably a dragon. With the help of her new friends from school, Grace needs to figure out how to take care of the dragon and keep him secret because both hired guns and dark forces are looking for him. With magical beings from both sides closing in, it becomes clear that there’s more to Grace herself than meets the eye, and the truth lies in the old stories her father and grandfather used to tell her. Cinematic movement between panels, quick wit, and an irresistible dragon make for a quick adventure, with setup for more to come.

A colorful, modern adventure—with dragons as a bonus.

(Graphic fantasy. 9-13)

HOW DO DINOSAURS SAY GOODBYE?
Tolen, Jane
Illus. by Teague, Mark
Scholastic (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-338-36335-7
Series: How Do Dinosaurs…?

Parting—of the temporary rather than permanent kind—is the latest topic to be dino-sorted in this venerable series’ 14th outing.

Nobody dies and the series is showing no signs of flagging, so reading anything ominous into the title is overthinking it. Instead, Teague and Yolen once again treat readers to a succession of outsized, gaily patterned dinosaurs throwing tantrums or acting out, this time as dad packs up for a business trip or even just sets off to work, grandparents pause at the door for goodbyes, mom drops her offspring off at school on a first day, parents take a date night, or a moving van pulls up to the house. Per series formula, the tone switches partway through when bad behavior gives way to (suggested) better: “They tell all the grown-ups / just how they are feeling. / It helps right away / for fast dinosaur healing.” Hugs, kisses, and a paper heart might also be more constructive responses than weeping, clinging, and making mayhem. Dinosaurian pronouns mostly alternate between he and she until switching to the generic their in the last part. In the art, the human cast mixes figures with different racial presentations and the date-night parents are an interracial couple, but there is no evident sign of same-gender or other nonnormative domestic situations.

Tried and true, both in content and formula. (Picture book. 6-8)

THE LEATHER APRON CLUB
Benjamin Franklin, His Son Billy & America’s First Circulating Library
Tolen, Jane
Illus. by Minor, Wendell
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-58089-719-8

Explore the beginnings of America’s first circulating library with Ben and Billy Franklin.

In 1739, William “Billy” Franklin, son of printer (and future statesman) Benjamin Franklin, starts his studies in earnest with a tutor. Joining Billy’s (somewhat reluctant) academic endeavors is his cousin James. While James is bored with the tutor’s stories, Billy’s imagination goes wild picturing the tales from long ago. Seeing his son’s delight, Ben introduces Billy to the Leather Apron Club library, a library founded by 12 tradesmen like Ben who value education and learning. It’s through this story that readers are introduced to what eventually grew into the first library open to members of the public (provided those members could pay the subscription fee, as the backmatter points out). Billy narrates the meandering story, which may be of more interest to adults than the intended audience. “The men debate Politics and History and Books. / They drink Cider, eat Cake, and debate more— / Mathematics and Geography and Finance. / Though the discussion is above me, / I feel as if I am in Heaven,” he rhapsodizes. The static watercolor illustrations of the virtually all-White cast do little to entice readers. The backmatter does an admirable job summarizing Franklin’s fraught relationship with an adult Billy and addresses his complex relationship with slavery.

Perfect for gift shops across Philadelphia. Less so for readers. (bibliography) (Picture book. 8-10)
Discover the natural inspirations behind robotic creations. All engineers have to start somewhere, and this book may be the dawning impetus for future robotists. The design is simple but effective: The verso page introduces a mammal, bird, aquatic creature, or insect and defines one of its notable characteristics in a sentence. The recto then provides more detailed information about a robot or robotic prototype influenced by that feature. Both pages present a photograph of the creature and robot, allowing readers to compare the animal and the machine. A plethora of vocabulary words fill each page: “Animals are motion masters. They skitter, scuttle, grip, glide, spring, cling, and more.” The paragraph explaining the robotics provides opportunities for educators and caregivers to promote learning, in terms of current world events as well as the obvious information about animals and robotics. Why do we need robots that can inspect disaster sites or report on tides and weather? The bright, full-color photographs will play well to the current bibliography to guide further learning.

Delightful, motivating, and thought-provoking—a winner for any bookshelf. (Informational picture book. 4-8)

LAST GAMER STANDING
Zhao, Katie
Scholastic Paperbacks (288 pp.)
$7.99 paper Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-338-74150-6

A hardworking prodigy takes the gaming world by storm, one epic battle at a time.

Mysterious new gamer TheRuiNar is turning heads in the 2067 Junior Dayhold Tournament. Looking at TheRuiNar’s teenage male avatar, no one would ever guess that the person behind this virtual reality star is Reyna Cheng, a 12-year-old who got a scholarship to attend the prestigious Dayhold Academy’s summer camp. Winning the tournament can rocket young players to e-sports stardom, but for Reyna the stakes are even higher. If she’s eliminated, she’s promised her struggling immigrant parents that she’ll give up her dreams of gaming forever.

Winning the prize money would not only prove she has what it takes to be a pro gamer, it would also pay for her mother’s cancer treatments. Does Reyna have the physical, mental, and emotional endurance to keep her identity a secret and become the next champion? Gripping game play as well as cliffhanger chapter endings make for an adrenaline-filled reading experience. Reyna is an ambitious, emotionally vulnerable narrator who games to escape the hardships of the real world while also acknowledging and fighting back against race and gender discrimination in the White, male-dominated tech world. Reyna’s Chinese American cultural heritage is rich and nuanced, from her complicated, realistic relationship with her parents to her K-Pop-blasting pre-gaming ritual. Reyna’s friends are racially diverse.

Emotional depth and nuanced representation level up this action-packed, futuristic page-turner. (Science fiction. 9-13)
Knock, knock.

“Y es,” and invites her to come in. The narrator then asks read

Therizinosaurus

978

Each portrait comes with an identifying label and a descriptive

denizens, from the ½-inch anemone shrimp to 110-foot blue
dinophiles are likely to find mixed in with the usual suspects a
feathered smaller relatives in the diminutive one—do come
dinosaurs in side views, tricked out by Cosanti in loud, satu

ers to speculate “Who’s sitting on this

you using the potty?” From behind a door, each animal answers

versation at each animal’s home starts, “

“The sturdy flap

THE BIG BOOK OF GIANT DINOSAURS AND THE SMALL BOOK OF TINY DINOSAURS
Banfi, Cristina
Illus. by Cosanti, Francesca
Shelter Harbor Press (40 pp.)
$16.95 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-62795-157-9

A separate small hardcover volume about small dinosaurs nestles in the front cover of a much, much larger album of their humongous cousins.

Each part of this Italian import features 18 spread-ﬁlling dinosaurs in side views, tricked out by Cosanti in loud, saturated colors or patterns and posed for scale with a remarkably calm white chicken against the same tropical backdrop. The effect is a bit surreal, as the dinos and the prehistoric foliage have the thick, rounded look and fuzzy surfaces of stuffed toys, but the weight and bulk of the looming creatures in the supersized volume—and the lithe grace of most of their often feathered smaller relatives in the diminutive one—do come through vividly enough to make strong impressions on viewers. Each portrait arrives with an identifying label and a descriptive comment. Along with being admittedly speculative, several of the latter are affiicted with translation issues. Still, even expert dinophiles are likely to find mixed in with the usual suspects a surprising number of unfamiliar species, such as Magnapaulia, Therizinosaurus, and Parvicursor. In like packaging, The Big Book of Giant Sea Creatures and the Small Book of Tiny Sea Creatures portrays in the two parts 36 brightly hued, often exotic saltwater denizens, from the ½-inch anemone shrimp to 110-foot blue whale and 130-foot giant siphonophore. An intrepid clownﬁsh (sometimes, understandably, hard to spot) provides a sense of scale in each portrait, and accompanying comments offer notes on sizes, habitats, and like helpful points.

Unwieldy for library use; just right for little hands and big (really big) laps. (Informational picture book. 6-9) (The Big Book of Giant Sea Creatures and The Small Book of Tiny Sea Creatures: 978-1-62795-158-6)

THE MISSING POTTY
Bijsterbosch, Anita
Illus. by the author
Clavis (20 pp.)
$14.95 | May 25, 2021
978-1-60537-639-4

A gentle nudge to help children make the transition from potty to “real potty.”

Bunny is potty trained. She brings her little red potty with her everywhere. But when her potty goes missing, she must go looking for it, stopping at friends’ houses one by one. The conversation at each animal’s home starts, “Knock, knock. Are you using the potty?” From behind a door, each animal answers “Yes,” and invites her to come in. The narrator then asks readers to speculate “Who’s sitting on this potty?” The sturdy flap

that doubles as a painted bathroom door hints at what animal is sitting on the toilet. With ﬁve to nine lines of text per page, the story is somewhat wordy, but the predictable format of each interaction and conversational tone throughout will sustain children’s interest, especially if they are in the midst of toilet training. Brightly colored pictures of familiar objects, including lots of toilets, give toddlers much to talk about. (Tiger’s throne is shown with a splash guard, but otherwise no mention is made of the toileting challenges tots with penises must overcome.) When Giraffe points out that “you can never lose a real potty,” Bunny runs home and uses it. A ﬁnal spread showing Bunny flushing and washing her hands before joining her friends outside will be appreciated by germ-conscious adults.

This Dutch/Belgian import will be useful during that seemingly endless time of toilet training. (Board book. 2-5)

JUNGLE NIGHT
Boynton, Sandra
Illus. by the author
Workman (18 pp.)
$7.95 | Mar. 23, 2021
978-1-5235-1360-4
Series: Boynton on Board

In the quiet jungle night, a snoring elephant disturbs the snoozing animals’ peace.

This takes its place in Boynton’s great bedtime–board-book oeuvre, next to The Going To Bed Book (1982) and so many others. “It is nighttime in the jungle. / The moon will surely rise. / All the animals are sleeping. / with whisperings and sighs,” the story begins. Each turn of the page shows a different dozing animal with its own unique sound. The tiger goes, “ZEEE-ZOOO-HAAA,” and the frogs go, “BROPP-BRUPPIT!” Set within Boynton’s assured verse, these sounds make for a particularly delicious read-aloud. “But sometime after midnight, / the elephant goes… // SNORE! // And whoever had been sleeping / isn’t sleeping anymore.” Boynton’s illustrations include her classic silly touches, like a mouse being blown away by the elephant’s snore, and anyone who has ever lain awake at night will recognize the wide, unblinking eyes on the animals at the end. The book also includes a link to download or stream a free copy of famed cellist Yo-Yo Ma’s performance of Erik Satie’s “Jungle Gymnopédie No. 1.” Perhaps even more delightful than the bouncy lullaby is Keith Boynton’s rich narration and Ma’s “animal snores” on cello, also freely available at the same link.

Another sweet Boynton bedtime read-aloud for the family bookshelf. (free audio download) (Board book. 6 mos.-2)
“Five sea creatures, five flaps, 10 pages—just enough for a bilingual board book.”

¡CUCÚ! EN EL MAR / PEEKABOO! IN THE OCEAN

Five sea creatures, five flaps, 10 pages—just enough for a bilingual board book.

Starting with the title, the Spanish text always comes first, with the English translation below in a different color. The peekaboo theme is emphasized, with each left-hand page asking the same question: “¿Cucú! ¿Quién está ahi? / Peek a boo!” on the opposite page, an animal uses their flippers, tentacles, fins, or claws to cover their face. Shaped, full-page gatefolds always open to the right to create an extended spread with the original question, the answer in both Spanish and English, and a styled image of the animal. The words stand out against color-saturated backgrounds. Each animal is shown and described in action: “dolphin splashing,” “octopus creeping,” “turtle swimming,” “seal diving,” and “crab digging.”

Hi-Five Animals

More narrowly focused but just as silly as Burach’s previous Hi-Five Animals (2018). This time young readers are greeted with “hi-fives” from farm animals. The format mimics the original title, with rhyming text in a bold type that prompts readers to slap a high-five on almost every page. Some of the rhymes are forced; several span multiple page turns. Unless the child is quick, the flow is interrupted by the pause to slap the page. None of the animals are named, but most toddlers will recognize them from their emblematic characteristics, exaggerated but still clear in the black-lined illustrations. A turtle as a farm animal is a bit of a stretch. Likewise, a llama is not part of the traditional North American farm menagerie but is increasingly common on boutique farms. They join a horse and a duck for the two-spread rhyme: “Hi-five FAST! / And hi-five slooooonn! // Way up high! / And way down low!” The smiling animals all have the same googly eyes. Lifting an enlarged hoof, paw, or wing to provide a high-five target makes for some rather awkward poses, but bold, bright colors against equally bright backgrounds keep the attention on the game. Extra-thick board pages and sturdy construction will help the book weather the abuse all those hand slaps will generate.

More game than book, but fun for little ones. Give it a high-five. (Board book. 2-4)

¡Cucú! en el mar / Peekaboo! In the Ocean

The titular words are divided by topic with animals participating along the way.

This board book reads exactly as expected. Common “first words” are organized into thematic sections like “toys and games,” “at the park,” and “things that go.” Wide-eyed animals are shown riding on a bus, using the potty, and talking on a cellphone (labeled telephone). All of the scenes and words are fairly predictable, making it familiar to toddlers but not necessarily exposing them to new vocabulary unless this is truly the first of its ilk they are reading. The “parts of the body” pages use three monkeys to demonstrate those parts, omitting tail, ears, and facial features. The choice of monkey rather than human models is an odd one, since this book is meant for very young learners just beginning to name and identify these parts of their own bodies. The “things that go” spread is the most visually interesting—possibly overstimulating for younger readers. There is plenty for caregivers to talk about with children here, in contrast to the bare-bones “clothes” spread, for example. The illustrations are cutey and two-dimensional. This makes the pictures easy to identify, but it also means they lack detail and complexity. Sturdy and sized for small hands, this book does indeed present 100 words but offers little to make it stand out among the many other similar titles already on shelves.

Does the job. (Board book. 1-2)
“While it’s possible it’s not the only book with a dorsal fin, it certainly must be among the best.”

**SHARKBLOCK**

**I CAN COUNT**

Crisp, Lauren  
**Illus. by Elliott, Thomas**

Tiger Tales (12 pp.)  
$12.99 | Oct. 26, 2021  
978-1-68010-686-2

Practice counting objects and animals with an embedded arch of 10 moveable beads.

This board book encourages number recognition and counting practice, thanks in part to its unusual design, which includes a curved die-cut opening through both covers and all pages. Occupying that space is a plastic rod arching from point to point, where it’s attached to an extra-thick internal page; strung on that rod are the 10 bright beads. The rhyming text encourages readers to answer questions like, “How many colors does a traffic light show?” or provides a directive such as, “Count [the airplanes] as they fly so high.” The beaded arch is usable from every page. Belaboring the point, “Slide the beads to help you count!” is written above it on every double-page spread. The number of items to count is clearly displayed as a numeral at the left-hand corner of every page, which is helpful for caregivers helping make the connection between one-to-one correspondence and the total number. When readers get to 10, they’re encouraged to count back down, a nice touch and a bit of an age-appropriate challenge aided by the beads. The illustrations are sweet, full of big-eyed characters. The simple and clear nature of the design lends itself to counting, and the beads facilitate both the math skill and fine-motor practice. This is assuming, of course, that the beads truly assist with counting rather than distract from it—a distinct possibility.

**Sure to occupy little fingers.** (Board book. 2-4)

**SHARKBLOCK**

Francescelli, Christopher  
**Illus. by Peskimo**

abramsapplesauce (84 pp.)  
$14.99 | May 4 2021  
978-1-4197-4119-7  
Series: Block Books

Catering to young scientists, naturalists, and Shark Week fans–to-be, this visually arresting volume presents a good deal of information in easily digested bites.

Like others in the Block Books series, this book feels both compact and massive. When closed, it is 5.5 inches across, 6.5 inches tall, and nearly 2 inches thick, weighty and solid, with stiff cardboard pages that boast creative die cuts and numerous fold-out three- and four-panel tableaux. While it’s possible it’s not the only book with a dorsal fin, it certainly must be among the best. The multiracial cast of aquarium visitors includes a Sikh man with his kids and a man of color who uses a wheelchair; there they discover the dramatic degree of variations among sharks. The book begins with a trip to a shark exhibit, complete with a megalodon jaw. The text points out that there are over 400 known types of sharks alive today, then introduces 18 examples, including huge whale sharks, tiny pocket sharks, and stealthy, well-camouflaged wobbegongs. Reef sharks prowl the warm waters of the surface, while sand tiger sharks explore shipwrecks on the ocean floor. Bioluminescent catsharks reside at the bottom of an inky black flap that folds down, signifying the deepest ocean depths, where no sunlight penetrates. Great whites get star treatment with four consecutive twopage spreads; their teeth and appetite impress but don’t horrify. The book does a wonderful job of highlighting the interconnectedness of species and the importance of environmental stewardship.

**Captivating—and not a bit terrifying.** (Board book. 3-5)

**SLEEPY BEE**

Hutton, John  
**Illus. by Gross, Sandra**

blue manatee press (14 pp.)  
$7.99 | Apr. 6, 2021  
978-1-936669-86-8

A tired bee flits about, pollinating as she goes.

Let’s talk first impressions: This is one exhausted-looking bee on the cover, with bags under her eyes that make her verge on haggard. Her weary face is somewhat off-putting, and it’s never clear what fatigues her. Does she really find the entusiastically described tasks of finding “nectar to sip” and “pollen to munch” so onerous? Readers might experience a similar feeling of disquiet when reading the poetry aloud. Yes, the book rhymes, but the couplets have a forced, choppy feel, and the meter is inconsistent from page to page. Though there are bright, informational stanzas with effervescent lines extolling the “yummy, twisty vines of green sweet pea” sprinkled throughout, others like, “At mid-day, when the sun is high. / She zooms to sunflowers nearby” feel flat and even amateurish. Better is the art sitting underneath the superimposed cartoon bee. Big, bright portraits of luscious, labeled veggies, flowers, and fruits, including strawberries, pumpkins, and apples, are eye-catching and just right for very young viewers. Muted collages of garden scenes have an earthy, cut-paper quality and contain enough details of fields and gardens to be interesting but not overwhelming. Bulleted facts on the back cover contain some neat bee facts; though they are too sophisticated for a board-book audience, adults reading with their children may learn a thing or two.

**Will not “bee” an essential purchase.** (Board book. 1-4)
WHERE’S BRIAN’S BOTTOM?
A Veeeerrrrry Long Fold-Out Book
Jones, Rob
Illus. by the author
Pavilion Children’s (24 pp.)
$9.95 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-84365-466-7

Hunt through a house for the behind of one very long sausage dog!
Built upon a silly gag—locating Brian’s bottom as his body meanders through the house—this over-the-top, extra-long board book will tickle some funny bones. With an absurdist and just a wee bit naughty tone, an omniscient narrator invites readers to search for the elusive bum. Following the dachshund’s long torso, various animals offer observations. Pauline parrot informs readers that Brian’s bottom is not in a hallway, while Derek duck says it hasn’t “been on the toilet” either. Fold-out pages make this one long journey (over 8 feet long, in fact), but finally the doggie tush is located, snug in bed. There’s lots of giggle details to take in—an ever present charismatic gray spider or the use of Brian’s body as an ad-hoc towel rack—and even more to see when the book is flipped over to show the house at night, including some very sneaky mice. Clean cartoon-style art is agreeable, and a thick, dark outline around Brian’s dachshund body makes it easy to follow. While the book reassembles fairly easily, there’s no question the long, narrow form is unwieldy, and some caregivers will find it overly tricky. But the right young viewer—an aspiring Monty Python fan perhaps?—will love lying on the floor, poring over the lengthy search for a lengthy bottom.

Eclectically enjoyable. (Board book: 2-5)

PREHISTORIC PETS
Lomax, Dean
Illus. by Love, Mike
Templar/Candlewick (30 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-5362-1714-8

A pop-up introduction to the extinct ancestors of Ernest the guinea pig, Flossy the Siamese cat, and five more domesticated cuties.

Filling in the spaces around Love’s fetching portraits of wild and domestic modern creatures, paleontologist Lomax natters on about the main types and characteristics of cats, dogs, fish, rodents, and other familiar animal families. This information appears on the outer leaves of each double-page spread, but the stars of the show are the pop-up figures that rear dramatically with each lift of a gatefold. Who lies at the far end of Lucky the black bat on the cover swoop back and forth above a jack-o’-lantern, a cat, a witch, and a ghost. A full spread is devoted to each of these Halloween icons beginning with “1/ONE purple witch [who] is flying on her magic broom.” Then a single line assume thrillingly predatory poses as they hover over further descriptive notes and smaller images of both fossil finds and contemporary flora and fauna. Whether today’s pets would kill and/or eat us given the chance may be a matter for debate...but as for their predecessors, readers will come away with no such doubts.

Visual drama paired to a substantial informational load. (Informational pop-up picture book: 6-10)

A GREAT DAY FOR A HUG
Mack
Illus. by the author
Clavis (20 pp.)
$12.95 | Jul. 6, 2021
978-1-60537-625-7

On a farm, everybody’s job is important.
In this Dutch/Belgian import, all the typical farm animals (a rooster, a piglet, a goose, sheep, a duck, a rabbit, a cow, and a horse) have roles to play. Even little Chick can contribute. “He makes all the animals feel better with a smile or a warm hug!” The somewhat wordy plot of this slight story follows the spindly-legged young fowl all over the farm. Chick politely greets each animal then, when it asks for a kiss or hug, offers it. The cartoon critters drawn to exemplify the essential features of each species are all happy to accept Chick’s friendly overture. The goat, the rabbit, the cow, and the horse all get kisses. But the piglet is startled and runs away to a mud puddle. Chick helps the piglet out of the mud and gets muddy himself, and when Chick hugs its mom, the mud is transferred to a very accommodating mother hen. No problem. Mommy and Chick share a bath before bedtime and a “sweet good-night kiss.” Each animal’s name is in bold when Chick first encounters them. Other words are italicized but not consistently. Pastoral farm scenes against pastel skies make for an idealized vision of farm life. There is no sign of a farmer.

Little chicks able to sit through the rather long story may also decide it’s “a great day for a hug.” (Board book: 2-5)

FIVE SPOOKY FRIENDS
McLean, Danielle
Illus. by Maroney, Rosalind
Tiger Tales (10 pp.)
$8.99 | Jul. 6, 2021
978-1-68010-689-3

Halloween condensed to its essence for the board-book set.
This sturdy board book invites interaction right from the start. Little fingers quickly find the kid-sized slider that makes the black bat on the cover swoop back and forth above a jack-o’-lantern, a cat, a witch, and a ghost. A full spread is devoted to each of these Halloween icons beginning with “1/ONE purple witch [who] is flying on her magic broom.” Then a single line
of rhyming text each describes the actions of “TWO glowing pumpkins,” “THREE hanging bats,” “FOUR moonlit cats” (in costume), and “FIVE spooky ghosts.” Thoughtful inclusion of both the numeral and number word is helpful for toddlers learning to count. On each recto page, a slider moves the featured creature while also shifting an image in the larger illustration. Sharp-eyed readers will notice a mouse not mentioned in the text that shows up in every scene. Flaps on the windows of the haunted house on the final page open to reveal pumpkin, bat, cat, and witch. And surprise, the mouse is behind the door, ready to welcome the ghosts to the party. Dark shaded tones make for a spooky mood. Additional traditional Halloween symbols (glowing eyes, an owl, spiders, a skeleton) haunt the pictures, but everyone is smiling, so the fear factor is minimized.

Not too long. Not too scary. Just right for first-time trick-or-treaters to read again and again. (Board book. 1-4)

SEASONS
Pang, Hannah
Illus. by Clover Robin
360 Degrees (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 31, 2021
978-1-944530-37-2

Progressive split pages capture seasonal rounds and communities of wildlife in natural habitats worldwide.

Even the Arctic in winter has a populous look as Robin generously strews six broad, painted-paper–collage landscapes with flora and fauna that are strongly reminiscent of Eric Carle’s in color and composition. Most scenes are presented in a sequence of four increasingly larger, overlapped pages, one per season, arranged so that seams between seasons are artfully aligned. If Pang’s simply phrased commentary can’t always keep up, so that some of the wildlife on display goes unidentified, still it offers informational nourishment. This is conveyed in both specific facts (“The ostrich is the largest, heaviest bird in the world”) and big-picture explanations of what’s going on (“Behind giant dust clouds and swirling water, the Great Migration is taking place across the Mara River”). Moreover, in laudable contrast to the general run of seasonal albums, the usual spring-summer-fall-winter sequence changes up after opening views in and around a European oak. Alaskan scenes begin with autumn, China’s Yellow Dragon Valley with winter, and along with the Arctic’s binary winter and summer, both a mangrove swamp in northern Australia and Kenya’s Masai Mara accurately see only “wet” and “dry” seasons. Human presence is confined to occasional pleas to be mindful of wild places.

Plenty to see for young animal (and plant) lovers, plus an expansive view of the concept of seasons. (Informational novelty. 4-6)

SUPERMOUSE AND THE BIG CHEESE ROBBERY
Tahl, M.N.
Illus. by Chambers, Mark
Tiger Tales (28 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-68010-262-8

When thieves steal the monumental Big Cheese, all Mouseopolis turns to its favorite masked crime fighter.

With liberal use of flaps and die-cut holes, including one in the front cover, to add extra drama to the caper, Chambers transforms himself into the mighty Supermouse to investigate the theft. He tracks a trail of cheese crumbs from the Hickory Dickory Docks to a dark warehouse where the culprits lurk. Miraculously avoiding an ambush involving a vat of bubbling fondue, Supermouse bursts in just as the villains are about to “cut the cheese.” After a bit of work with a string-cheese lasso (“Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No! It’s…”) Tahl has woven into the laconic narrative. Novelty elements include a pasted-in newspaper, the two-flap telephone booth in which Supermouse dons his costume, and small flaps that double as trapdoors through which our hero tumbles. Much of the story is printed on and under the large flaps, a clever device that also makes loss of flaps particularly compromising.

A brief but tasty morsel. (Novelty. 5-7)
THE NEXT PANDEMIC
What’s To Come?
Allen, John
ReferencePoint Press (64 pp.)
$31.95 | Sep. 1, 2021
978-1-67820-172-2

An examination of the weaknesses revealed by Covid-19 in the world’s ability to respond to outbreaks of infectious diseases.

Based on our experiences with Covid-19, Allen frankly explores the concerns of scientists and public health experts with respect to future pandemics. Despite the fact that many governments were not prepared to handle Covid-19, the author maintains a hopeful outlook as he explores the ways experts are taking measures to make future responses more effective. Divided into four chapters, the book explores the need for early warning systems to track and predict outbreaks, noting concerns related to privacy with increased government surveillance via connected devices; the need for improved and more widely available testing and treatment options, including at-home testing; and the need for precisely tailored, broad-based, and expanded vaccines as well as improved delivery of vaccinations. In the final chapter, the author explores reasons for the increase in zoonotic viruses crossing from animals to humans, including how such transfer happens. Throughout the book, Allen employs a conversational tone and clarifies many advanced terms and concepts, including through the utilization of sidebars and full-color images. The extensive discussion of ongoing research makes this work appropriate for more sophisticated readers. Unfortunately, the book ends abruptly, leaving readers in want of a summary or conclusion.

A timely discussion of the potential future of pandemics.
(source notes, further research, index, picture credits) (Nonfiction. 14-18)
TO BREAK A COVENANT
Ames, Alison
Page Street (320 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-64567-206-7

Some have tried, but in the end, no one leaves the Basin.
Clem and her best friend, Nina, live in the haunted town of Moon Basin, known for its accidents and murders that are linked to the now-abandoned coal mine—closed after a deadly explosion. From their friendship, which began in a graveyard following Clem's father's funeral, to Clem's saying she liked girls, nothing has changed between them—until now. Nina is looking at colleges, but Clem, whose financial status has plummeted since her father's death and her surgeon mother's life-altering injuries, can't afford it. Besides, she fears what happens to those who try to leave town, like Nina's missing mother. Along with their friend Lisey, the group shows new girl Piper around town. Piper's engineer father is inspecting the mine for stability, giving the girls access to a tour that any ghost hunter would envy. Soon after, however, things turn sour, as Piper's father starts acting strangely, and Clem is plagued with nightmares. The story builds in atmosphere with its dark and well-written imagery that invites readers into the mysterious setting. The story's exposition is cleverly supported through transcripts of unused footage from ghost-hunting shows. Most characters defaults to White; Piper is cued as Black.

A coming-of-age story wrapped in a spooky atmosphere. (Paranormal. 14-18)

HELLO (FROM HERE)
Baker, Chandler & King, Wesley
Dial Books (352 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-593-32612-1

Two teens get romantic in March 2020.
Maxine and Jonah first meet bumping into each other in the grocery store just as the world is starting to come to an end. It's early 2020, and California's going into lockdown to stop the spread of Covid-19. Jonah's been an anxious mess even before the deadly virus hit American shores, and Maxine (or as she prefers, Max) has been barely hanging on with a part-time gig buying other people's groceries. The pair strike up some witty repartee over toilet paper that tips into full-on flirtation, eventually pushing them into the unlucky task of starting a relationship just as everyone's trying to keep away from one another. As the two teens Zoom and text their way through the pandemic, class differences, mental health issues, and good old-fashioned melodrama rear their heads. The romance is sweet, and the novelty of the pandemic's early days is effectively rendered, but readers' mileage may vary when it comes to reliving the anxious second quarter of 2020. The authors never push the virus element too hard, smartly centering Max and Jonah's relationship as a fairly typical getting-to-know-you courtship with a handful more speed bumps. The end result is a quiet exploration of two teens going through some heady times, the sort of read that will be appreciated, if not now, then in a year or two. Max and Jonah are presumed White.

An engrossing drama with an abrupt conclusion. (Fiction. 14-17)

SIDELINED
Bietz, Kara
Poppy/Little, Brown (304 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-7595-5751-2

Two star football players—estranged childhood friends with a complicated past—set, hut, hike their way into their last year of high school with a high-stakes homecoming game in sight down the yard line.

All eyes in football-obsessed Meridien, Texas, are watching quarterback Julian Jackson and his long-lost teammate Elijah Vance, a once-promising defensive player. Until three years ago the two were inseparable, but then Elijah and his family moved away without explanation or saying goodbye. Now that he's returned, unresolved feelings are stirred up between them as the biggest game of the season against their archrival approaches. This sports romance includes all the pageantry of small-town Texas with none of the homophobia. When it comes to their sexuality, both main characters experience nothing but love and support from their community, including their local pastor and his husband. Instead, the tension focuses on their families' intertwined histories, perceptions of teen pregnancy, and the pressure of upholding the tradition of a local prank war with the rival football team. Contextual cues describing secondary and background characters indicate some ethnic diversity, but gender representation remains binary. Written in first-person, the chapters alternate between the perspectives of Elijah and Julian, both of whom are presumed White. Will-they, won't-they suspense accelerates the story's momentum, but the rushed pace of the resolution will leave readers yearning for a few more chapters.

An engrossing drama with an abrupt conclusion. (Fiction. 14-17)
“A passionate and substantiated call for action.”

EARTH WILL SURVIVE... BUT WE MAY NOT

WHAT ONCE WAS MINE
Bratwell, Lie
Disney-Hyperion (512 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-368-06382-1
Series: Twisted Tales

What if Rapunzel’s mother drank a potion from the wrong flower?

The Twisted Tales this time revisit the tale of Rapunzel—specifically, Disney’s animated feature Tangled with elements from the TV spinoff included. In this version, a peasant brings a different sort of flower to save the ailing, pregnant queen: the Moondrop flower as opposed to the traditional Sundrop, which has magical, healing properties. The mix-up changes things a little bit: Rapunzel grows long, silver hair that imbues her with the power to kill, rather than heal. For the safety of the kingdom, little Rapunzel is tucked away in her tower and watched over by the duplicitous Mother Gothel. Of course, Rapunzel yearns for freedom and finds it in escaping her tower and traveling the countryside with handsome rogue Flynn Rider and a young woman named Gina. The trio investigates the secrets of Rapunzel’s magical hair while Gothel and other villainous characters hunt them down. The action is crisp, and the characters are well rendered; one small drawback is the book’s inability to break free of Tangled’s (admittedly airtight) structure despite the series’ promise of twists. Regardless, the read remains compelling, and the author effectively captures the balance of enthusiasm and longing that makes Rapunzel such a beloved Disney princess. Die-hard fans will thrill, and, at the end of the day, that’s what really matters. Main characters read as White.

An engaging redressing of a near bulletproof tale. (Fantasy. 12-16)

LAKESEDGE
Clipstone, Lyndall
Henry Holt (384 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-250-75339-7

A girl makes a deal with the devil to save a monster.

Seventeen-year-old Violeta Gracel-ing and her 13-year-old brother, Arien, live with Mother, their adopted parent. Arien is consumed by a dark magic that frightens Mother, whose fear manifests itself as horrific abuse. When the village landowner, Lord Rowan Sylvanan (also known as the Monster of Lakesedge for murdering his family), comes to take Arien away to use his magic, Violeta demands to accompany them. Rowan wants Arien to use his power to help fight the Corruption, a dark force that threatens to consume the entire kingdom. When their attempts fail, Violeta makes a desperate deal with the devilish deity the Lord Under in order to save those she loves. Predictably, Violeta falls for Rowan. She learns that his monstrous moniker may not be what it seems: While he is mysterious and moody, their romance quickly ratchets from bickering to swooning to positively incendiary. Clipstone’s gothic fantasy has nods to “Beauty and the Beast” and the myth of Persephone. While at times this novel can feel a bit formulaic, dark fantasy and romance fans will likely overlook this, getting lost in the layered drama and romance. Most characters are assumed White; a secondary character is queer.

Brooding and atmospheric. (Dark fantasy. 14-adult)

EARTH WILL SURVIVE... BUT WE MAY NOT
Coppens, Katie
Tumblehome Learning (194 pp.)
$18.95 | Sep. 1, 2021
978-1-943431-73-1

A scientific examination of life on Earth and where it is headed.

With a particular focus on the impact of humans, author and middle school science teacher Coppens explores the history of life on Earth and the dangers that it is currently facing. She begins by exploring the concept of evolution and the contributions of scientists—and those excluded from the sciences due to societal bias—to evolutionary discoveries. In Part 2, she discusses the effects humans have had on the environment, including deforestation, ocean acidification, extinctions caused by humans, pollution, and the introduction of invasive species. The author’s conversational tone provides an age-appropriate approach to the scientific topics discussed, defining terms and providing diagrams and illustrative comparisons to clarify advanced concepts. She spotlights a diverse selection of individuals from around the world who have made noteworthy contributions to understanding climate change. Coppens also points out and expresses discontent with legislative decisions that have ignored the scientific evidence of climate change. Part 3 is devoted to ways individuals can help the environment, including changing consumer behavior, lowering consumption of food and energy, and informed voting. The final section of the book offers additional reading and viewing resources to enhance readers’ understanding of the Earth’s current climate change crisis.

A passionate and substantiated call for action. (glossary, sources, photo credits) (Nonfiction. 12-18)
A smart, thrilling duology closer.

THE SISTERS OF RECKONING
Davis, Charlotte Nicole
Tor Teen (352 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 10, 2021
978-1-250-29974-1
Series: Good Luck Girls, 2

The Good Luck Girls spread a little bad luck.

When we last saw Aster, she and her sister, alongside two more former Luckers (girls forced into sex work at welcome houses, or brothels), had finally escaped the Scab and made it to the border of Ferron, a country ready to receive them as refugees from Arketta. A year later, Aster is helping the Lady Ghosts, an underground network that supports escapees, working right under the noses of the wealthy landowners, capitalists, and government officials who live in the border city of Northrock. There, Aster comes across Violet Fleur, the girl she thought was killed during their escape. Violet now seems to be in league with the McClennon family, whose patriarch led the hunt for the runaways. Charged with opening the first welcome house in Northrock, Violet may actually be on the side of the Lady Ghosts, and Aster may have a shot at taking down Arketta’s elite. While *The Good Luck Girls* (2019) focused on the subjugation of women in Arkettan society and the dangers associated with resistance, this sequel does that and more, exploring and exposing the workings of a nation created by exiled convicts who exerted force over Indigenous peoples and created a system of de facto slavery through colorism, sharecropping, and unfair debt systems. The worldbuilding—slang, settings, gory dangers, and all—is rich and complex in this novel featuring a racially diverse cast.

A smart, thrilling duology closer. (Speculative adventure. 15-adult)

WHAT LIES BENEATH
Doyle, Marissa
Book View Café (338 pp.)
$13.99 paper | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-63632-003-8

Selkies guard Cape Cod and fall in love.

When the United States enters World War I in the spring of 1917, Malcolm’s father doesn’t want him shipping off to Europe like many of his Harvard classmates. Instead, he arranges with the captain of the naval air station near the hotel the family runs that Malcolm will lead ocean patrols looking out for U-boats. Malcolm and his family are the only selkies—human/sea changelings—in the area who spend most of their time on land. Meanwhile, with her own father doing secret work in Washington, D.C., 17-year-old Emma longs for war work more pertinent than bandage-rolling. But she’s shuttled to her grandmother’s house on Cape Cod, which she hasn’t visited since her mother died giving birth to her there, and endures bandage-rolling—with a side of nasty gossip. Swimming lessons with Malcolm take her mind off her concerns, as does dodging the affections of another young man, local dilettante George. Then Malcolm tells her a story that can’t be true...Doyle deftly places fantasy elements in a historical setting that sometimes feels a bit too modern, but as it’s all so enjoyable, no one will really care. Malcolm’s selkie sisters add depth to the story, not being human to the degree he is. Malcolm and Emma are appealing characters, and their sea-crossed romance keeps readers turning pages. Everyone in human form is White.

Engaging and fun. (Historical fantasy. 12-16)

WILD TONGUES CAN’T BE TAMED
15 Voices From the Latinx Diaspora
Ed. by Fennell, Saraciea J.
Flatiron Books (272 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-250-76342-6

Fifteen Latinx writers lend their voices and experiences to acutely personal narratives and poetry. In her introduction, editor and contributor Fennell provides a mission statement, one centered on “letting our truths run wild, and pushing against whatever it is you think is the ideal Latinx individual.” The truth, it seems, is indefinable and utterly human, with recurring themes cropping up throughout the collection: questions around mental health in Latinx communities, colorism and racism, the boundaries of language (known and unknown), and finding comfort and familiarity in food. Mark Oshiro’s “Eres Un Pocho” opens the anthology with an interrogation of what “it means to be Latino, what it means to be queer,” and the drawbacks of assimilation. In Meg Medina’s “The Mark of a Good Man,” the heartbreaking tale of a Cuban uncle’s arrival in the U.S. underscores the potency of migration and the limits of the American dream. Meanwhile, Kahlil Haywood’s “Paraíso Negro” recounts the writer’s numerous trips to Panama and a slow examination of Afro-Latinx identity, while Ibi Zoboi’s “Haitian Sensation” complicates and explores what it means to be Haitian, Black, and perhaps (not) Afro-Latina. This volume presents an impressive roster of voices from an array of cultural backgrounds claimed and unclaimed. The contradictions and interplays that emerge between essays serve to illuminate the immeasurable realities of the Latinx diaspora.

A tremendously thought-provoking (re)construction of Latinx experiences. (about the authors) (Nonfiction anthology. 12-18)
TEEN GUIDE TO FINANCIAL LITERACY
Ferry, Joe
ReferencePoint Press (64 pp.)
$31.95 | Aug. 1, 2021
978-1-67820-174-6

The teen years are a good time to learn the basics of personal finance. Experienced journalist Ferry offers clear advice to teens about handling their money as they approach adulthood. Addressing them directly, he explains why they need to be financially literate (and to read this book), the need for setting financial goals, and the importance of adopting a habit of following a budget that includes savings. In subsequent chapters he helps them look ahead: managing credit cards and other forms of debt, paying for college, living on their own, and investing in their future. He’s a proponent of setting SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound) financial targets and offers relevant examples. The accessible text is frequently broken up with subheadings, definitions of unusual words, stock photographs featuring racially diverse teens, and text boxes with practical suggestions for understanding paychecks, protecting your identity, repaying credit card debt, getting a head start on saving for college in high school, using the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, filing tax returns, and creating an emergency fund. He even includes advice for young investors, reminding them of the importance of starting early. Throughout, he quotes other sources to support his advice. There’s nothing particularly new in this title, but the information is solid, comprehensive, and well organized, making it useful as a foundation text.

A valuable primer for developing teens’ financial literacy.
(source notes, further information, index, picture credits)
(Nonfiction. 14-18)

ONCE UPON A BROKEN HEART
Garber, Stephanie
Flatiron Books (416 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-250-26839-6
Series: Once Upon a Broken Heart, 1

After praying to a Fate for help, Evangeline discovers the dangerous world of magic. When her father passes away, Evangeline is left with her cold stepmother and kind but distant stepsister, Marisol. Despite inheriting a steady trust in magic, belief in her late mother’s homeland of the mystical North (where fantastical creatures live), and philosophy of hope for the future, her dreams are dashed when Luc, her love, pledges to marry Marisol instead. Evangeline desperately prays to the Prince of Hearts, a dangerous and fickle Fate famed for his heart that is waiting to be revived by his one true love—and his potentially lethal kisses. The bargain they strike sends her on a dark and magical journey throughout the land. The writing style fluctuates from clever and original to overly verbose and often confusing in its jumble of senses. While the pervasive magic and concept of the Fates as a religious system add interest, other fantasy elements are haphazardly incorporated without enough time devoted to building a cohesive world. However, the themes of love, the power of story, family influence, and holding onto belief are well rounded and add depth. The plot contains welcome surprises, and the large cast piques curiosity; readers will wish more time was spent getting to know them. Evangeline has rose-gold hair and, like other main characters, reads as White; there is diversity among the fantasy races in this world.

A lushly written story with an intriguing heart. (map) (Fantasy. 12-16)

THE F WORDS
Gregorich, Barbara
Cross Your Heart (365 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Sep. 1, 2021
978-1-952536-26-7

A boy, infuriated with injustices in his world and community, learns how to fight back.

Cole Renner is a White sophomore at August Mersy High School in Chicago. His principal has labeled him a troublemaker for daring to take action against injustices—just like his father, who is currently a prisoner in Cook County Jail after leading a protest to save a neighborhood public school. Struggling with his father’s recent sentencing, Cole lashes out and spray-paints the F-word multiple times on school property. Caught by Mr. Nachman, his English teacher, he is offered a choice: face suspension or clean it off and write two poems every week about other words starting with F. Choosing the latter option, Cole writes about the injustices that surround him and his schoolmates, who are of diverse cultural backgrounds. Despite his initial reluctance, he finds solace in poetry, and it becomes an outlet for each new wrong that Cole and those he cares about face. The teen characters’ discussions of issues such as deportation and racism may inspire young readers who are fed up with witnessing inequities, though this first-person novel tackles many concepts in its five-month timeline, causing events to be rushed and detracting from some of their impact. However, the author admirably showcases the power young people hold when they come together and speak out against a biased system.

A timely novel about empowered teens. (discussion guide) (Fiction. 13-18)
Romina Garber’s Wolves of No World series combines Argentine folklore with topical issues of immigration, identity, and the gender binary. Its main character, Manu, is an undocumented immigrant from Argentina who lives in the United States with her mother, terrified of being discovered and deported. Manu eventually discovers she is also the first known lobizona—a female werewolf—and that her mother has been hiding her from a secret magic underworld because being a lobizona is illegal in the Septimus system, a world with a rigid gender divide.

Upon discovering her status, Manu embarks on a journey of self-discovery that reaches a pinnacle in the second book in the series, Cazadora (Wednesday Books, Aug. 17), which sees Manu and her friends fighting for freedom and equality. Garber spoke to me about the books via Zoom from her home in Miami. Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Like your main character, Manu, you are from Argentina, based in the United States. Can you talk a bit about this confluence in your work?

A lot of the inspiration and the motivation for getting this book out had to do with what happened in 2017 at the United States border under the previous administration. It brought to mind a lot of the stuff my parents had told me about how they met in Argentina at the end of la Guerra Sucia [Dirty War], a violent military overthrow in the early ’80s, and how dissidents who spoke up against the junta disappeared—which is a pretty way of saying they were murdered. No one knows what happened to them to this day.

Then I started seeing reports about families being separated at the U.S. border and children being caged. It made me think a lot about my parents’ story and the idea of wanting to raise your children with more hope and more potential for the future. You try to escape darkness, and yet the notion that borders could even stop dangers like those is silly, because they’re born from ideas, and ideas cannot be contained by borders, walls, or documents. I had it in my head nonstop, this idea of history repeating itself.

You also pay homage to Argentine folktales and culture. I decided to incorporate wolves and witches because it’s part of Argentine lore through this whimsical law that is still in effect today, which states that the president becomes godparent to the seventh consecutive son or...
daughter in a family, and the state covers their educational expenses until they are 21 years old. There is a superstition at the heart of this that states that the seventh son is a lobizón, and then there are some versions that talk about the seventh daughter being a bruja [witch]. I found that so fascinating, because it speaks to the way that language and words and narratives can really concretize into laws—and even sometimes cages.

These different experiences from Argentina really came together to show how that line between fantasy and reality can sometimes be as thin as the page you are turning. And this law ties into the immigrant story as well, as it supposedly came over from Russia, because there were some diplomats in Argentina in the early 1900s and they had this tradition back home. So really the superstition stems from Russia, and then it became adopted in South America. It just speaks to globalization and the idea that everything affects everything, and none of us are really isolated in any way.

There’s a lot of straddling between fantasy and the real world with the story’s focus on the gender divide. Girls like Manu are expected to be witches, never lobizonas. We live in factions: divided in houses, in neighbourhoods, in countries. We are bound by binary thinking and the gender rigidity of this world. The Septimus system is very much taken from the machismo that is so prevalent in South American countries, and I’m particularly focusing on Argentina and the outrage I’ve felt with so many cases of femicidio—women being murdered and men getting off scot-free. There’s this cultural expectation of this is what it is to be a man, and this is what it is to be a woman, and it’s so toxic. I really wanted to dismantle that.

Let’s talk about magical realism in your books—the inevitable question for any Latin American author working with fantasy.

I wouldn’t call it magical realism because there is a system in it, and usually there are no real rules in magical realism. I’m sure there’s an argument to be made, especially in the beginning of the book, for magical realism—until you figure out what is going on, and then it’s very hard to continue to hold that up. You bring up such a good point because sometimes people like to throw words at your work, like tropes, such as the magical school and the chosen one, but I really believe that until everybody has had a chance to try it, you really can’t call it a trope. If a brown undocumented girl hasn’t been the chosen one, then it’s not a trope yet. I feel the same way about this—just because I wrote a contemporary fantasy that involves an all-Latinx cast doesn’t mean it should be labeled magical realism.

Speaking of labels: Manu gets labeled many things in her story.

I am a writer. I’m an adorer of words. But I understand words could never define me or describe me or contain me, and I’m afraid that we are getting to such a point where we are so reductive—everything needs to be labeled. That translates into the bigger issue of systems and the notion that we shouldn’t have to modify ourselves to fit into systems, but rather systems should be modified to fit us. We should be reexamining laws because the world of today didn’t exist yesterday, and all of these things really tie together into the idea that we need to examine our language. We need to examine it, because it is the building block of civilization. I almost see this series as a treatise on labels.

I understand the books were originally planned as a duology, but Book 2 has a very open ending.

It’s not really an ending; it’s the setup for a new beginning. I always saw Manu’s story concluding in a courtroom battle as an undocumented immigrant. But then, you know, it wasn’t an ending at all: This is a sentencing and a new beginning.

Ana Grilo is co-editor of the Hugo Award–winning blog The Book Smugglers and co-host of the Fangirl Happy Hour podcast. Cazadora received a starred review in the June 15, 2021, issue.
THE BURIED
Grey, Melissa
Scholastic (336 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-338-62930-9

A horror-tinged, claustrophobic survival story.

After the Cataclysm, three families believe they are the only people left on Earth and live with the charismatic Dr. Moran (whose name contains echoes of Dr. Moreau) in an underground bunker. Ten years in, the three teens—Russian American Sash, Korean American Yuna, and Gabe, who is cue’d as Latinx—chafe at Dr. Moran’s strict rules, which include no touching. Steady Gabe collects facts and keeps the machinery of the bunker running, compassionate Yuna excels at the ballet classes taught by Sash’s mom and keeps her head down, and rebellious Sash defies Dr. Moran and crushes on Yuna (her crush is reciprocated but largely unspoken). The straightforward, simple narration switches between them in close third-person chapters as they discover that Dr. Moran may be lying to them about everything. The bunker, littered with 1980s detritus, bathed in dim red light, and filled with their tiny collection of families, is tightly controlled by Dr. Moran, who suits up and exits each night to see if the world is habitable yet. This novel begins in slow motion with a classic dystopian arc but evolves into gripping light horror as the teens begin to discover the truth about the day the world ended and about Dr. Moran, who hides a fanatical cruelty beneath her seemingly benificent exterior.

A compelling and grim new entry into an evergreen genre. (Horror. 12-18)

NEVER SAW YOU COMING
Hahn, Erin
Wednesday Books (320 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-250-76124-8

Two teens questioning their faith find love together.

Meg was supposed to go to a summer church camp to start off her gap year but decides instead to spend time with her newfound biological family in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. Her life was turned upside down after accidentally discovering that her strict, controlling Christian mom actually got pregnant with her following a one-night stand at a church youth group event and then hid the identity of her biological father, who died before learning she was pregnant, for 18 years. While visiting her paternal great-grandmother and uncle, she meets a boy called Micah who has his own issues with faith after his pastor father engaged in sexual misconduct and then went to prison for embezzling church funds. While Meg and Micah fall for each other, a sweet dog, a high-stakes rescue, and exploration of complicated family relationships complement their emotional journey. Alternating chapters showing Meg’s and Micah’s perspectives provide a close look at their views on faith and relationships with God. The characters affirm a belief in God and love of Jesus as the nuanced narrative includes their frank questioning of their religious communities’ treatment of the vulnerable and stances on modesty and purity culture, abstinence education, and homosexuality. Readers of Hahn’s More Than Maybe (2020) will remember Meg as a secondary character, but this work stands alone. Main characters are White. A powerful coming-of-age story about growing in faith and self-awareness. (author’s note) (Fiction. 14-18)

THE CORPSE QUEEN
Herrman, Heather M.
Putnam (416 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-984816-70-2

A teenage grave robber needs to find a killer before he finds her in Herrman’s first novel for young adults.

Molly Green, 17, has barely begun to cope with the death of her only friend, Kitty, when a wealthy woman claiming to be her aunt liberates her from the Philadelphia-area orphanage where she’s spent the last several years. Before Molly can even set foot inside her aunt Ava’s gothic mansion, she’s tasked with picking up what turns out to be a severed human head. Ava procures human bodies—the fresher the better—for Dr. LaValle, who uses them to teach medical students anatomy. Molly’s adept at dealing with the naturally dead but has a harder time with the murder victims who bear evidence of precise knifework reminiscent of a wound she found on Kitty’s corpse. This macabre novel, told primarily from Molly’s point of view, is more horror than history. Several characters, including Ava’s assistant, one-eyed Tom, and Molly’s heavily tattooed sex worker friend, Ginny, border on the grotesque, but none drop into stereotype. All characters default to White. Despite a scattering of historical inaccuracies, the narrative flows smoothly, and the plot rockets along, greased by the rot of the dead, to a satisfying, and somewhat surprising, conclusion. If Poe’s daughter told a story, this might be it. (author’s note) (Horror. 12-18)
“Riveting and indispensable.”

WHEN CAN WE GO BACK TO AMERICA?

A DARK AND STARLESS FOREST
Hollowell, Sarah
Clarion Books (368 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-358-42441-3

This girl will do whatever she can to protect her family.

Derry, 16, is one of nine young people living in an isolated lake house in Indiana. Each has unique abilities that qualify them as alchemists; Derry can grow and manipulate plants, even imagined ones. Their guardian, a middle-aged nonmagical White man called Frank, monitors their powers’ progress and sets strict rules to protect them, including not going outside without permission, especially not into the nearby forest. But danger has come to this found family. One by one, older family, plus ethnically diverse siblings and friends, knows she and sets strict rules to protect them, including not going outside without permission, especially not into the nearby forest. But danger has come to this found family. One by one, older sisters disappear without a trace, while the remaining sisters and their nonbinary sibling question their safety within the family. Without permission, especially not into the nearby forest. But danger has come to this found family. One by one, older sisters disappear without a trace, while the remaining sisters and their nonbinary sibling question their safety within the house. Following disembodied voices, Derry ventures into the forest alone at night to try to discover what happened to her sisters and maybe learn more about her powers, her home, and herself. Hollowell builds a magical atmosphere with ominous, spooky overtones. There is a good variety of identity representations among the family members, and the bonds among these adopted siblings are adamantine. The siblings have diverse body types and all function with anxiety and depression. One sister is Deaf, so some dialogue is signed. Bespectacled Derry is White and fat, while her siblings are White, Black, and Mexican American as well as queer. However, several references to the wendigo outside an Indigenous context are unfortunate. Heavy themes of mental and emotional abuse and some graphic violence make this an intense read.

An otherworldly showing of inner strength. (Fantasy. 14-18)

THE JASMINE PROJECT
Ireland, Meredith
Simon & Schuster (400 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-4814-0144-9

Everyone should dream, but Korean American adoptee Jasmine holds herself back. After high school graduation, she plans to move in with her long-term boyfriend, Paul, and get her nursing degree. But if Jaz let herself dream, she would move to Paris to pursue a culinary career. Her practical plan crumbles when she catches Paul cheating and allows him to talk her into an open relationship. While she is devastated, Jaz’s family sees this as an opportunity. Her large, lively Italian and Filipino extended family, plus ethnically diverse siblings and friends, knows she can do better than settle for Paul, so they decide to secretly stage a competition in the style of The Bachelorette, complete with podcast. They advertise on social media and narrow down the list to three bachelors: former boy next door Justin Michael, minor league baseball player Aaron, and aspiring chef Eugene.

As Jaz starts having supposedly chance meetups with the guys, she starts falling for one even as Paul realizes his mistake. Will Jaz returned to Paul and the life she had carefully planned or throw out the script and dare to dream? Occasional plot points around the messy, entertaining, and loving extended family dynamics feel inconsistent and require suspension of disbelief, but Ireland’s charming and fun debut, told through traditional narration with text messages and podcast transcripts peppered throughout, ends on a satisfyingly positive note.

A sweet story of discovering your own worth and finding someone worthy of you. (Romance. 13-18)

WHEN CAN WE GO BACK TO AMERICA?
Voices of Japanese American Incarceration During World War II
Kamei, Susan H.
Simon & Schuster (736 pp.)
$22.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-4814-0144-9

Kamei, a lawyer instrumental in achieving redress for those incarcerated following Executive Order 9066, seamlessly combines dozens of personal narratives with detailed historical research.

These stories, drawn mostly from works in the public domain, are presented in this volume that covers the bombing of Pearl Harbor through to the redress movement, the 1983 congressional commission findings, and former President Donald Trump’s 2017 executive orders restricting travel from many predominantly Muslim countries. The author provides a framework for understanding the lead-up to the decision to intern so-called enemy aliens, along with about 72,000 American citizens of Japanese descent. From there, she shares their harrowing journey to barren desert camps, the harsh realities of life behind barbed-wire fences, and their eventual release during a time when anti-Japanese sentiments still ran high. The use of direct quotes from internees—many of them children and young adults—adds remarkable emotional weight. Many lives were ruined as people’s dreams and life goals were crushed, and readers will viscerally connect with their endurance and marvel at how many still maintained faith in the democratic system. The message of awareness of this past injustice and its connection to standing in solidarity with others who face injustice is a compelling theme of this riveting and indispensable work.

This landmark historical account shines a light on a part of American history that must be remembered. (author’s note, centers and camps, timeline, glossary, abbreviations, contributor notes, sources, excerpt permissions, resources, index) (Nonfiction. 13-adult)
Adam learns to trust each other even as they lie to protect those they love the most. Jenna and Adam share a narrative that also includes flashbacks, police transcripts, and text messages that together build a fast-paced thriller that paints a portrait of troubled teens. While Jenna and Adam are well-developed protagonists and their budding romance is sweet, paper-thin secondary characters populate a story that ultimately does not fully examine the trope of boy-crazy girls and the bad boys they fall for. All characters are assumed White.

A shared trauma brings two teens from different sides of the tracks together.

Jenna and Adam barely knew each other before the morning they both happened to be at the beach and Jenna's classmate Colleen's dead body turned up. In Gardiners Bay, the boys from the Rookwood Boarding School have a bad reputation—it's an institution for troubled kids—but good friends Adam, Max, and Tommy are just trying to get by. But when Adam finds Colleen's body, he knows something must have happened at one of the secret parties the boys throw in the woods. Jenna and her close friends Hollie and Serena attend the exclusive Preston Prep School, but when Hollie becomes the prime suspect in Colleen's death, Jenna starts her own investigation to prove her friend's innocence. As they draw closer, Jenna and Adam barely knew each other before the morning they both happened to be at the beach and Jenna's classmate Colleen's dead body turned up. In Gardiners Bay, the boys from the Rookwood Boarding School have a bad reputation—it's an institution for troubled kids—but good friends Adam, Max, and Tommy are just trying to get by. But when Adam finds Colleen's body, he knows something must have happened at one of the secret parties the boys throw in the woods. Jenna and her close friends Hollie and Serena attend the exclusive Preston Prep School, but when Hollie becomes the prime suspect in Colleen's death, Jenna starts her own investigation to prove her friend's innocence. As they draw closer, Jenna and Adam learn to trust each other even as they lie to protect those they love the most. Jenna and Adam share a narrative that also includes flashbacks, police transcripts, and text messages that together build a fast-paced thriller that paints a portrait of troubled teens. While Jenna and Adam are well-developed protagonists and their budding romance is sweet, paper-thin secondary characters populate a story that ultimately does not fully examine the trope of boy-crazy girls and the bad boys they fall for. All characters are assumed White.

A readable thriller. (Thriller. 14-18)
TIME WILL TELL
Lyga, Barry
Little, Brown (432 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-316-53778-0

Four teens try to piece together a 35-year-old mystery.
In Canterstown in the present day, four close friends—Liam, Elayah, Marcie, and Jorja—dig up a time capsule that their parents buried decades ago and find, among a few harmless keepsakes, a bloodied knife and a note that reads, “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to kill anyone.” Not long after, Elayah is attacked in her own home and almost dies. Though Liam’s dad is the sheriff and he says he’s on the case, the four friends begin harboring suspicions against their own parents when their excuses and backstories just don’t add up. Meanwhile, in 1986, the stories of Dean, Jay, and twins Marcus and Antoine unfurl, chronicling the lead-up to the burial of the capsule (and its murder weapon). As the contemporary amateur sleuths try to find answers, they risk endangering themselves further for a truth they might not want to hear. Though the novel is a bit bloated with its long list of characters and hefty page count, the central mystery and various twists will keep readers turning pages. Lyga does an excellent job of portraying a racially and sexually diverse cast, not shying away from the realities of having a marginalized identity but rather braiding those elements into the plot itself.

A twisty thriller that asks: How much do you really know about your parents? (Thriller. 14+18)

THE GIRLS ARE NEVER GONE
Marsh, Sarah Glenn
Razorbill/Penguin (336 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-984836-15-1

Nancy Drew meets Ghost Hunters in this queer thriller.

High school junior Dare Chase is headed to New Hope, Virginia. After her boyfriend broke up with her, their ghost-hunting YouTube series came to an end. Now, she has accepted a monthlong internship restoring the Arrington Estate where 17-year-old Atheleen Bell mysteriously drowned in 1992—the subject of Dare’s new podcast, Attachments. Dare clicks with the two other interns: Holly, a local teen desperate to leave her hometown, and college student Quinn, who is assisting her mother, who owns the estate and wants to convert it into a museum. As Dare and Quinn take tentative steps toward a romantic relationship—Dare’s first with another girl—the trio begins to experience signs of the paranormal, including scratching in the walls, a haunted doll, and ominous painted messages. Could the spirit of Atheleen be responsible, or does the mystery go even deeper? Marsh gives Dare a strong, confident voice, portraying her Type 1 diabetes as a challenge she gains strength from learning to handle responsibly. The female-centered cast is shown to be both complex and human. Segments from Attachments appear only at the beginning and end—the story would have benefited from more—and the backstory grows heavy, leaving readers with too many names to track and derailing the otherwise exceptional plot. The book follows a White default; Quinn has a White mom and Puerto Rican dad.

A detail-bloated but utterly addictive ghost story. (Paranormal. 14+18)

THE NIGHT WHEN NO ONE HAD SEX
Miller, Kalena
AW’Teen (304 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-8075-5627-6

A group of friends in Eugene, Oregon, make a pact to have sex with their respective partners after prom in this comedic novel.

Featuring revolving first-person narration shared by four of the characters and interspersed with a group chat that includes the whole group, this engaging, madcap comedy is refreshingly frank in its discussion of sex and the problems that can arise as couples prepare to make good on their plans at the fancy vacation house they’ve borrowed from Zoe’s uncle for the occasion. Only Alex, who rushes to be with his grandmother when she is taken to the hospital, and Leah, the prom date he met only hours earlier after they were set up by a mutual friend, are not part of the pact. Zoe and her girlfriend, Morgan, who’ve had sex before, struggle with discussing changes in their college plans. Morgan’s twin sister, Madison, and her boyfriend, Jake, arrive with condoms in hand but find that a flare of her autoimmune disorder, lupus, and his good-natured but clueless response to it complicate their plans. Finally, Julia’s disappointment that she experiences extreme pain when she and her boyfriend, Kevin, attempt to have intercourse leads them to try out a role-play scenario that ends in situational hilarity. Alex is Korean American; Kevin is Chinese American; and the rest of the characters are White.

A witty, honest debut that shines a light on some very real issues. (Fiction. 14+18)
THAT DARK INFINITY
Pentecost, Kate
Little, Brown (384 pp.)
$18.99  |  Oct. 19, 2021
978-0-7595-5783-3

Saved following the destruction of her home, Flora meets the mysterious Ankou.

Floreller Tanett is handmaiden to Princess Bithera Ilurosa and lives peacefully on their island nation of Kaer-Ise. When Skaardmen raiders destroy Kaer-Ise, Flora is sexually assaulted, barely escapes with her life, and is saved by the young man who is the Ankou, or legendary monster killer. While recuperating and dealing with her trauma by training Anton—the Last Prophet and the boy he has fallen in love with—Ankou has forgotten his original name and tells her to call him Kaer-Ise. While the magic lacks a detailed system, the story is original and intriguing, as it contrasts unstable witchcraft with elemental magic, inner darkness with belief in various deities, and grotesque monsters with demons and also shows the tumultuous relationship between magic and fledgling scientific discoveries. Discussions of trauma, self-worth, and found family add realistic elements to Flora’s fantastical journey. While the slow-burn romance is predictable, it focuses on character development and Flora and Lazarus’ growing relationship. Main characters read as White; there is diversity in skin tone and sexuality in this fantasy world (Flora is bisexual).

This dark romp filled with gruesome imagery is a gripping adventure.  (Fantasy. 14-adult)

INTO THE DYING LIGHT
Pool, Katy Rose
Henry Holt (312 pp.)
$19.99  |  Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-250-21179-8
Series: Age of Darkness, 3

The conclusion to the Age of Darkness trilogy sees its protagonists facing their biggest challenge yet.

After Beru’s body is used to trap a fallen god, the Prophet Pallas uses her imprisoned sister, Ephyra, to ensure Beru’s cooperation and control over the god. Far away, Hassan plans a rescue mission to save Beru and defeat the god before he can break free and vanquish them. Jude stands by him, desperately hoping that Anton—the Last Prophet and the boy he has fallen in love with—is still alive. Meanwhile, Anton searches for a way to prevent the destruction of the world that doesn’t involve a sacrifice he and his friends are not willing to make. This little group, alongside their friends and allies, is all that stands in the way of complete devastation. This uplifting, character-driven volume takes the trilogy to new heights of adventure, tension, and conflict—then effectively wraps it all up with a satisfying bang. The protagonists, alongside their closest friends and romantic partners, are given fitting conclusions for their overarching storylines. Each plays an important role in saving the world from darkness while learning the meanings of choice, agency, and accountability within this story set in a diverse world that celebrates and affirms all kinds of love.

A successful ending to a brilliant trilogy about human hope and connection.  (Fantasy. 14-adult)

NOT HERE TO BE LIKED
Quach, Michelle
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
$15.99  |  Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-06-303836-3

An upset in the struggle for success at a high school newspaper sends shock waves far beyond the newsroom.

Eliza Quan has spent her high school career in Southern California preparing to assume leadership of the Willoughby Bugle; she’s the most qualified, and she’s sure she’s the best for the job. Her plans are stymied, however, by Len DiMartile, a biracial (White/Japanese) ex–baseball player who apparently joined the Bugle’s staff on a whim following an injury and who easily wins the election for editor-in-chief. Eliza is angry—why should likability come before dedication and well-informed goals? Determined to contest the election results, Eliza starts a feminist movement in her high school, forming unlikely partnerships in a quest for justice. In the process Eliza learns that there are no simple answers when fighting for what’s right—and that even Len may not be as bad as she believed. Maybe even boyfriend material. The narrative tackles the complications of standing up for yourself without harming others while also exploring other dynamics, including life in a refugee family—Eliza’s parents are Chinese Vietnamese—and varying attitudes toward feminism, as her mother’s pragmatism is contrasted with Eliza’s push for systemic change. Eliza’s best friend is Black, and, in a school setting that is predominately Asian, activism at the intersection of race and gender is also addressed. Quach skillfully balances all these elements, breathing life into this enemies-to-lovers story.

A fresh take on high school and activism.  (Fiction. 13-18)
As they are strapped for cash, Laney admits Aden, a new crew member who promises good payment for passage to another island nation. Obviously an inexperienced young man from a wealthy family, Aden learns the ins and outs of shipboard life from Laney—along with some less refined habits. He also sees right through Laney’s disguise, and she finds relief in the novelty of being honest. As their relationship develops, the crew of the Majesty faces stormy seas, threats of mutiny, pursuing pirates, brewing war, and even more revealed secrets. The high-seas setting, budding romance, and big dreams will sweep idealistic readers right into the narrative, although others may be dissatisfied with the lack of solid worldbuilding. Most characters read as White.

Swashbuckling with feminist overtones. (map) (Adventure. 13-17)

There be pirates on these seas...and they be closer than you think.
Lane Garrow is at home on the sea, enjoying the movement of the ship, climbing about the rigging, and battling with axes. With an established role as cabin's boy and a father who is ship’s captain, Lane’s only problem is the huge secret that she is a girl. Lane, or Laney, grew up on her father’s ship, the Majesty, but one of the powerful island kings bans women from even stepping aboard a ship. If Laney were found out, she would be killed. Still, that threat doesn’t stifle Laney’s dreams of captaining the ship herself someday. As they are strapped for cash, Laney admits Aden, a new crew member.

IT ALL COMES BACK TO YOU
Rishi, Farah Naz
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins
(432 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-06-274148-6

Pakistan Muslim Americans teens Kiran and Deen are reluctantly pulled together again when their siblings get engaged, three years after the end of their own failed secret relationship.

After Kiran’s mother died a year ago, all she’s wanted is to keep her father and her sister, Amira, close. But when Amira announces that she’s dating Faisal, with the intention of marriage and a move from the Northeast to California, Kiran is gobsmacked. Worse still is the revelation that Faisal is the older brother of Deen, Kiran’s ex who ghosted her. Deen, a sophomore at New York University, hopes that Faisal’s engagement will bring Faisal much-needed happiness, confidence, and standing with their status-obsessed parents, who see him as a failure, especially after the incident that caused them to leave Philadelphia. Discovering that Kiran is prying into the past and dissatisfied with the lack of solid worldbuilding. Most characters read as White.

Refreshingly flawed characters revisit a rom-com trope. (Fiction. 13-18)

TIDES OF MUTINY
Rode, Rebecca
Jimmy Patterson/Little, Brown (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-316-70575-2

There be pirates on these seas...and they be closer than you think.
Lane Garrow is at home on the sea, enjoying the movement of the ship, climbing about the rigging, and battling with axes. With an established role as cabin's boy and a father who is ship’s captain, Lane’s only problem is the huge secret that she is a girl. Lane, or Laney, grew up on her father’s ship, the Majesty, but one of the powerful island kings bans women from even stepping aboard a ship. If Laney were found out, she would be killed. Still, that threat doesn’t stifle Laney’s dreams of captaining the ship herself someday. As they are strapped for cash, Laney admits Aden, a new crew member who promises good payment for passage to another

A dark and enthralling journey. (glossary) (Fantasy. 14-18)
Archaeology student Mateo searches for a cure for his fatal wasting sickness, unsure whether to believe legends of curses or zero devotion to the source material add up to a read perfect for fans of The Lady Janies series. Most characters default to White. The book gracefully wrestles with these questions as the story unfurls in alternating chapters that move between Shoshana’s and Rowan’s points of view. This call-and-response structure allows for a gradual reveal of each girl’s past and present in a way that both builds suspense and feels like the growth of intimacy in friendship and love as well as the therapeutic encounter they are experiencing in the clinic. Both girls, as well as most supporting characters, default to White. The book balances tensions of class, antisemitism, and sexuality in complex and compassionate ways.

A gut-wrenching and cathartic page-turner about identity, desire, and the strength it takes to heal. (Fiction. 14-18)
MAJOR DETOURS
A Choices Novel
Sergi, Zachary
Illus. by Mountford, Karl James
Running Press Teens (320 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-7624-7141-6

A fascinating journey for fun and introspection—just like the inspirational tarot. (reading guide, personality profiles)
(Fiction. 14-18)

DRAWN THAT WAY
Sussman, Elissa
Illus. by Jovellanos, Arielle
Simon & Schusten (352 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-5344-9297-4

An ambitious teen lands a summer internship with her favorite film director. Seventeen-year-old Hayley Saffitz feels destined to be in the world of animation despite her parents’ wish that she pursue a more practical career like her pre-med brother, Zach. When she is selected to intern at BB Gun Films, she is one step closer to achieving her goals: impress Oscar-winning director Bryan Beckett and secure a job in the industry after high school. Only four out of the 41 interns will be selected for a directing opportunity; and Hayley is confident she will be among them. But when all the positions are given to boys, including Bryan’s apathetic son, Bear, Hayley’s awareness of the absence and mistreatment of women at the studio heightens. Tired of being belittled by her male peers, Hayley teams up with the five other female interns to create their own short film to prove their worth. Hayley is passionate and oftentimes arrogant, but when the systemic misogyny in the studio becomes palpable, she learns to be a better team player and friend without sacrificing her self-belief. An enemies-to-lovers romance offers dimension to Hayley’s growth as an independent young woman. Sussman purposely creates a cast that reflects the lack of diversity in the animation industry: Most characters are White; Hayley is Jewish, and there is a smattering of Latinx and Asian characters.

A refreshing tribute to all the young women who are changing the story. (Fiction. 13-18)

SQUAD
Tokuda-Hall, Maggie
Illus. by Sterle, Lisa
Greenwillow Books (224 pp.)
978-0-06-294315-6
978-0-06-294314-9 paper

New student Becca can hardly believe her luck when Arianna, Marley, and Amanda, who sit at the top of the Piedmont High School hierarchy, pick her to join their exclusive friend group. She does her best to remain in their favor, taking cues from Marley and Amanda about how to go along with whatever Arianna requires of her. One night, the three girls arrive just in time to rescue Becca from being assaulted at a party, revealing themselves to be man-eating werewolves who target predatory boys. It doesn’t take much to convince Becca to join their ranks and help them enact vigilante justice. There is a price, however: a hunger that must be satisfied by consuming human flesh during the full moon. But the girls assure Becca that with the four of them looking out for each other the risk of discovery is low. The story highlights important topics, including internalized misogyny and codependent friendships. Becca yearns for the support and closeness that the squad offers, and this fuels her willingness to overlook their offenses—from microaggressions to murder—until things get out of control. The color illustrations are reminiscent of classic comics; the familiar normality of the everyday high school scenes portrayed stands in stark contrast to the werewolves’ meting out of justice. Becca is gay and Asian, Amanda is Black, and Marley and Arianna read as White.

An exciting look at girl power gone wrong. (Graphic paranormal. 13-18)
IN 1990S BUSHWICK, BROOKLYN, 14-YEAR-OLD SARAI TRIES TO MAKE SENSE OF HERSELF, HER NEIGHBORHOOD, AND THE WORLD SHE IS GROWING UP IN.

Sarai is the youngest of three kids born to a single mother who survived domestic violence and who fights tooth and nail to keep her kids fed and alive. Velasquez’s debut novel is a collection of raw ruminations that together form Sarai’s heart-wrenching, honest, and critical narrative. With an in-your-face, call-everything-into-question approach, Velasquez, a Bushwick native herself, tells a real, on-the-block narrative of the neighborhood through Sarai, with biting pieces that masterfully weave themes of religion, street life, sexual assault, language, poverty, and so much more. Nine of the pieces are “poems in conversion” with ones written by Jacqueline Woodson, Sandra Cisneros, Nikki Giovanni, Nuyorican poet Mariposa, and others. This element, coupled with the diversity of poetic forms, from blackout poetry to stream of consciousness, makes this a gem for pleasure reading as well as classroom use. All primary characters are Puerto Rican.

Raw, breathtaking, and brilliant. (author’s note, “poems in conversation” credits) (Verse novel. 14-adult)

A teenage girl gets pulled into the intense world of K-pop as she fights for her dream of becoming a singer.

Seventeen-year-old Alice Choy, who took voice lessons at home in San Francisco, has always dreamed of fame. But since her diplomat mother moved the family to Seoul, South Korea, six months ago, the only singing she’s done has been in a small karaoke booth with her little sister, Olivia. That is, until she gets discovered in one of these noraebangs by Top10 Entertainment, one of K-pop’s biggest labels. With a little sisterly encouragement, Alice auditions and gets the opportunity to attend their Star Academy, where she is trained to become an idol. Slated to debut in just five months, Alice works to prove she’s good enough—but training to be an idol is rigorous. Even though she is a talented singer, dancing and learning Korean don’t come easy. Biracial (Chinese/White) Alice struggles with the intense pressure to keep up and fit in with her group. Even worse, gossip bloggers and anti-fans might destroy her career before it even begins. This is a fast-paced, captivating inside look at what lies behind the glitz of the K-pop industry. Alice’s road to fame highlights cultural differences, self-discovery, sisterhood, and empathy. The narrative is laced with blog posts that help move the story forward and give background information. Korean dialogue is romanized.

An entertaining read unveiling the people behind K-pop glam. (Fiction. 13-18)
Barlow concludes her trilogy with a battle between a killer who can resurrect the dead and the ultimate evil.

Jack Harper grew up in a cult that trained her to kill. Her adoptive father, Cyrus, built a network of evil to do the bidding of the Builder, a manipulative creature that feeds off the world’s ills. Now free of Cyrus, Jack plans to take on the Builder, pitting her ability to control those she kills against its own formidable powers. Joining her is a group of “ferrics,” the Builder’s ancestral enemies, and among them is Lutin, who gave Jack her resurrection talent. While Jack and Lutin are “two halves of the same heart,” not all of the ferrics trust her. As the group travels to the Builder’s otherworldly domain, betrayal is in the offing. Strange events ensue, including translocation and a plan that involves “godsoul,” a healing miracle substance doled out by the Guardian. In a last-ditch effort to eliminate innocence from the world, the Builder uses Jack’s brother to unleash a pandemic. With humanity at stake, will Jack run out of maneuvers to halt the Builder’s hunger? Barlow ends the Jack Harper trilogy with more of what hooked fans from the start— inventive plotting, consistently high stakes, and emotional realism. Jack still shoots her way out of most situations without blinking, but Patrick also kills this time, and he feels that his “heart had been disfigured.” In several surreal moments, readers get closer than ever to the Builder, whose “blank face changes. A mouth forms. Lips. Teeth. It smiles.” The author acknowledges the difficulties wrought by Covid-19 in lines like “the virus...eats the tiniest bit of godsoul from each person.” The winning theme that runs through the series, emphasized in the final volume, is that positive change is possible.

Echoes of real world events bring deeper darkness, and brighter light, to Barlow’s finale.
People of all ages are heading back to the seaside this summer—and some younger ones may be looking for something to read when they aren’t frolicking among the waves. Here are three books about kids’ adventures by (and in) the ocean, all recommended by Kirkus Indie:

Brian Rockvam’s charming 2019 children’s book, Seaside Summer, illustrated by Emily Bourke, draws on the author’s happy memories of family trips to a British Columbia island. The work shows children having a wonderful time on a similarly colorful isle—riding bikes, playing games, spotting animals and birds, and swimming, fishing, and boating to their hearts’ content. Our reviewer calls it “a vividly illustrated celebration of summertime that will resonate with readers young and old.”

The 2020 middle-grade mystery SandPeople by Cheryl Kerr brings readers to the Gulf Coast of Texas in 1998. There, 12-year-old Lea McKinney first finds odd sand sculptures on the beach and then encounters what appears to be the ghost of a blond girl in a blue dress. With the help of a new pal and the local historical society, Lea tries to suss out what’s going on. Kirkus’ reviewer calls the novel “a sensitive coming-of-age tale that shows the rewards of intellectual and personal growth.”

Kirkus Indie also reviewed See the Sea, a picture book by underwater photographers Alese and Morton Pechter, last year. In it, an angel queenfish takes readers on a tour of a coral reef while trying to meet a shark. When Jamie finally finds one, she reassures readers: “They’re not interested in us when other food can be found.” The book also offers tips on how to help protect undersea life. Kirkus’ reviewer notes that “this pleasing display rewards long gazing and helps the lessons about oceans, sea creatures, and environmental protections go down easily.”

David Rapp is the senior Indie editor.
A DARK CORNER OF PARADISE
Poetry and Musings From the Periphery of the Human Experience
Bradley, J.D.
Mojoincc (128 pp.)
$5.99 e-book | Jul. 12, 2021

Bradley’s raw collection combines stories and poems about a brutal childhood, military service, and life in a flophouse.

“My home state, Kentucky, is like some weird b-movie about travelling in time to the past,” the author writes in an essay about his earliest years and his attempts to resolve his feelings about where he spent them. It’s a place where, as a child, he kissed a Black girl and an old lady called him “white trash,” as he notes in a poem titled “Trash.” He tells of his violent father abusing him and of his father’s third wife’s slamming his hand in a car door. In another poem, he describes his father’s untimely end: “My father died at 41 years old / of heart disease / or karma, / or whatever you want to call it.” Drawing on memories of a combat stint in the Army in the Middle East, he rails against a military that wants emotionless killers but sends them back into society with no preparation. Accounts of years of drug abuse in a Corpus Christi, Texas, flophouse follow, including a nine-year relationship with a Mexican woman who was a blackout drunk: “If I had a dollar for every time she threw up on me, I’d have about ten dollars.” Reflections on this era include a story about a meeting with an old sex-worker friend who died days after their reunion, causing the author to conclude: “There is almost no redemption.”

Over the course of this collection, Bradley’s in-your-face, no-regrets style allows him to paint a fiery portrait of an anti-establishment personality who has ample reason to dislike the police, the government, and abusers. The people in these pages live in a hard-luck universe where the author learned to live by his own rules. The childhood stories are the most chilling ones here, and they seem to inform his perspective in other pieces, although his adulthood brought ample hardship as well. There’s a bit too much bragging about sexual prowess, though, and the poetry feels thin and lacks substance when compared to the essays.

A tenacious, concise collection of vignettes with a fierce attitude, although some parts feel underdeveloped.

SHADOW OF THE SPIDER
A Quest to Save a Queen
Burgess, Marianne E.
FriesenPress
978-1-03-91619-2
978-1-03-91618-5 paper

A set of triplets must save a magical realm from an evil goddess in Burgess’ YA fantasy debut.

Fourteen years ago, in the realm of Eleusia, Queen Sharra vanished from Dundarden Castle. The wizard Azmodeus helped hide her young triplets from Hera, who’s targeted the family as revenge on her husband, Zeus, who believed Sharra to be the reincarnation of a “young, mortal river nymph” he loved. Now Hera presents a challenge: If the triplets can answer six riddles, Hera will lift a curse from the land. Two of the kids, 16-year-olds Jamie and Jeremiah, return to Eleusia from the Earth dimension, where Azmodeus sent them; the third triplet is among a ragtag group of teens with unusual but untested powers who live in rural Glockamar. (Hera has charged a woman called the Spider with collecting such special children at a place called the Sanctuary.) After Azmodeus gathers his adventurers together, they learn about the riddles and the necessity of saving the Laurel Tree, which controls their troll pursuers. Should they fail, Eleusia will fall to darkness—and other dimensions, including Earth, might be next. Can the group, which includes Mikel, Tovan, Petre, Portia, and Melisande, outwit beings from Earth mythology along the way? Burgess offers YA fantasy readers an intriguing conceptual jam session. The premise that magical beings—including deities, pixies, dragons, and characters from literature, such as Ali Baba—fled Earth long ago is a particularly fertile one. The main characters’ mission doesn’t truly begin for about 100 pages, but then Burgess effectively gives each player a chance to stand out. Mikel, for example, learns he’s a wizard, and unlikable Portia solves a tough riddle and feels a sense of belonging. The oldest hero, Melisande, is 17, but the narrative has the energy of a middle-grade epic; the tale’s barrage of colorful creatures—including two different shape-changing sidekicks—and shocking revelations will keep young readers engaged. A bit more emphasis on the teens’ inner lives, however, might make the plot feel less cluttered in future installments.

An epic mashup that will reward readers of both contemporary and classic fantasy.
ONE HEADLIGHT
_A Memoir_
Caprioli, Matt
Cirque Press (239 pp.)
$18.00 paper | Aug. 6, 2021
978-1-73-751043-7

Caprioli describes coming of age in Alaska with a free-spirited Christian mother in this debut memoir.

In 2002, when 12-year-old Caprioli landed in Anchorage to visit his mom, Abby, she picked him up in a beat-up Mustang with no passenger window and a single working headlight. She drove him home through the worst snowstorm ever to hit the region: “The one-hour trip had taken five,” recalls the author. “We had sat at the edge of our seats the entire journey, terrified but excited, happy to be together, and harrowingly aware of death.” Such unpredictability was par for the course with Abby, who gained full custody of Caprioli a few years later, causing him to leave California and settle in Lazy Mountain, Alaska. It was a back-woods, hardscrabble, evangelical upbringing that didn’t always mesh with Caprioli’s growing gay consciousness. The author moved to New York City in 2012 to pursue his literary dreams. There, he worked for a time as a sex worker, making enough to send Abby money every month. Just as Caprioli began to build a life for himself, Abby was diagnosed with colorectal cancer; he found himself back in Alaska, coming to grips with what his mother meant to him. Caprioli’s prose is frank and insightful, finding the lyricism in everyday objects, turns of phrase, and locales. Here, for instance, he discusses pursuing casual sex in Anchorage after Abby got sick: “Sex is the opposite of death, and spending days with her where she could hardly move her head, or could do nothing but blankly contemplate the enormity of a white, stucco wall—I needed a distraction.” His portrait of Abby is the soul of the book, and she’s revealed as a larger-than-life character who exhibits real problems and who causes problems for the author, as well. However, she never loses the reader’s sympathy thanks to his nuanced, nonjudgmental portrayal. The result is a moving rumination on the varying roles that a mother can play in a son’s life, for better and for worse.

An affecting and surprising remembrance about the responsibilities of parents and children.

IKE’S “GO-TO GUY”
PAUL T. CARROLL
_An Extraordinary Husband, Father, Soldier, and Special Assistant to General of the Army and President Dwight D. Eisenhower_
Carroll, Robert C.
Suncoast Digital Press (250 pp.)
$35.42 | $19.95 paper | $9.97 e-book
Mar. 8, 2021
978-1-93-923777-4
978-1-93-923776-7 paper

Carroll presents a biography of his father, a decorated veteran of World War II who enjoyed a close working relationship with President Dwight Eisenhower.

Paul T. Carroll lived an extraordinary life during some of the nation’s most extraordinary trials and forged an uncommonly tight bond with Eisenhower from the start of his political ascendency. Paul was born in 1910 in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, raised in an atmosphere of “strong Catholic fervor.” He made his first big step toward an impressive military career when he entered the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1929, where he distinguished himself as both a minor rebel (he got caught drinking alcohol on Thanksgiving with other cadets) and a leader. During World War II, he rose up the ranks quickly and eventually became commanding officer and executive officer of the 2nd Regiment; he was also involved in the planning of the invasion of the beaches of Normandy. For his valor in combat in France, he was awarded the Bronze Star, the Silver Star, and the Legion of Merit. He first met Eisenhower in 1945 and worked for him when the latter was the chief of staff of the Army and the supreme commander of the Allied powers in Europe. Also, when Eisenhower became president, he chose Paul to be his secretary of the White House staff, a uniquely important role. Carroll’s biography of his father is a loving and admiring one, and he poignantly describes his father’s wartime valor: “Paul… wanted his folks to know he had been in a big battle and had done well. That was an understatement.” It’s also a historically edifying work that astutely captures his parent’s truly remarkable accomplishments. Although the author chiefly wrote this book for the benefit of his own family and friends, this slim volume may also be useful for historians focusing on Eisenhower’s professional career. Overall, this is a lucidly written profile that paints a vivid picture not only of its principal subject, but also the age in which he lived.

A rigorous remembrance of a fascinating and neglected historical figure.
Chang successfully crafts a fully formed protagonist with singular strength and determination.

SONJU

Chang, Wondra
Madville Publishing (290 pp.)
978-1-94-869258-8

Chang offers a debut historical novel about the extraordinary transformation of a Korean woman and her country.

In 1946, the inquisitive, forward-thinking 19-year-old Sonju holds onto the hope of “living a modern life” by continuing her education and marrying childhood friend Kungu, whom her parents find unsuitable. Although she dreams of being “equal partners” in a marriage in which both partners have “equal voice,” it quickly becomes clear that her future will be different, as her parents arrange a marriage to a stranger. Her new husband lives in Maari, a strictly traditional village; it takes time for Sonju to adjust to married life in a large extended family, but she grows fond of her sister-in-law and comes to have a tolerable relationship with her husband. Her life is irrevocably changed when she has a daughter, Jinju; just as South Korea moves toward independence from Japan, Sonju vows to raise Jinju as an independent girl, giving her “freedom to explore possibilities.” Sonju also begins to teach local women how to read where she rekindles her love for Kungu. Soon, though, she must prioritize, truly understand, and actually live out the Gospel, or the “Good News,” that he was able to restore his faith. The author concludes each chapter with a “Deliberations” section that assigns additional research and asks probing questions. Daigeneau should be particularly commended for his respectful, nuanced engagement with the work of high-profile atheist critics of religion, such as Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris. Rather than dismissing their arguments outright, he carefully considers and even occasionally agrees with their perspectives, and he provides an admirable model for constructive disagreement. The book’s array of references to Christian philosophers and theologians, however, is mostly limited to evangelical and Protestant perspectives, so Catholic and Orthodox readers may find themselves shut out of a book that prioritizes the Bible as its “Primary Source.”

An accessible and learned approach to Christianity.
A historian reevaluates Germany’s postwar relationship with the nascent Israel in this debut political book.

As an assistant professor of the history of international relations at Utrecht University, De Vita is among the world’s foremost experts on post-World War II German diplomacy. This work, an extension of the author’s Ph.D. dissertation from Britain’s Aberystwyth University, challenges the “conventional wisdom” of Germany’s reconciliation with Jews that suggests the nation’s support of Israel “stemmed from German moral atonement...to make amends for the genocidal policies pursued under the Nazi regime.” While this narrative of international penance may be reassuring to the West’s psyche, too little emphasis, the author argues, has been put on the global Cold War, which “crucially shaped the making of German-Israeli relations.” Within this context, De Vita emphasizes the division of East and West Germany and the role of competing foreign policies that shaped both nations’ approaches to Israel. Indeed, East Germany did not even recognize Israel’s legitimacy until after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Though the Germany atonement narrative prevailed in the West, within Soviet spheres the Communist regime spun a different story. That tale de-emphasized Nazi antisemitism in its casting of the Soviet Union’s “heroic” efforts to “liberate” German citizens victimized by an oppressive Nazi dictatorship. Within this alternative historical storyline, there was no moral impetus for East Germany to kowtow to Israel, particularly as the Soviet Union sought to expand its influence with Egypt and other Arab nations that were enemies of the new Jewish state.

West Germany’s motives toward Israel, De Vita convincingly demonstrates, were similarly based on international and domestic political calculations, even while cloaked in altruistic rhetoric. Many former Nazis who had been stationed in the Middle East and had “attempted to mobilise a global jihad” continued to play an active role in postwar West German diplomacy. West Germany’s first chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, privately stressed “the urgency of halting trials against Nazi criminals” while he publicly portrayed “Germany as ready to pay for the consequences” of its Nazi past. In emphasizing West Germany’s realpolitik, the book contributes to broader conversations about the “politics of memory and commemoration,” shedding new light on the political intentions behind West German monuments, memorials, and ceremonies that publicly repudiated its Nazi past. Additionally, the volume’s examination of the contradictory nature of the West and East German approaches to Israel claims that Germany played a “crucial role in polarizing the Arab-Israeli conflict” and thus expands the Cold War history of the Middle East beyond the standard American-Soviet dichotomy. Though at times repetitive, and perhaps a bit dense for casual history buffs, this is a remarkably nuanced work that will shape future scholarship not only on German-Israeli relations, but also on the history of modern Germany itself. Most impressive is its thorough research that draws “on sources from both sides of the Iron Curtain.” Not only does De Vita navigate the complex bureaucratic labyrinth of the West German Foreign Ministry and East German Politburo archives, but her global perspective required the translation of documents in Hebrew, Arabic, Russian, German, and a myriad of European languages as well. The use of oral histories conducted by the author with “eyewitnesses” further contributes to the book’s distinctive addition to the historical literature.

A fresh, exceptionally well-researched perspective on Cold War diplomacy.
“Garrett smoothly incorporates many anecdotes into a broader narrative that stresses the burdens of leadership.”

F*UCK ME RUNNING (A BUSINESS)!

A business executive distills some basic lessons from his long experience in this debut guide.

As Garrett points out in his book, running a business is a fiercely complicated project, one in which the demands of practical matters can swamp all other concerns, even important things such as establishing the right corporate “culture” for the company itself. “When you’re running a business, trying to hit financial goals, stay on top of industry trends, and deal with colleagues, customers, and staff,” he writes, “culture isn’t exactly top of mind.” And yet the culture of a business can be crucial—so the author urges his readers to get out ahead of it and establish it first. His insights about the interpersonal elements of the business world are the most intriguing aspects of his manual. The qualities of corporate leadership are a persistent theme. “You’re not there to vent, commiserate, or empathize,” he writes, in sentiments that go against the grain of many conventional business books. “You have to connect with people and let them know they can talk to you, but you are not their therapist.” This kind of straightforward assessment also applies to Garrett’s look at the nuances of having a business partner. “A partnership is like a marriage, and the business is your baby,” he writes in a startling passage. “You need to be on the same page about how you’ll care for it and what you want for its future.”

The discussion about partnerships of all kinds is specific and detailed, and all of it is grounded in incidents from the author’s own business life. He smoothly incorporates many anecdotes into a broader narrative that stresses the burdens of leadership. “You must manage yourself differently so you can manage your own business life,” he reminds would-be leaders. “That’s on you, not them.” Those potential leaders will find a great deal of hard-won lessons in these pages.

Useful and engagingly written advice from a seasoned business leader.

ALL THE TOMMYS IN THE WORLD

A Zombie Thriller

A couple battle hordes of zombies—who turn out to have a few shocking abilities—in this debut novel.

Two horror-loving YouTubers stay safely in their apartment when there’s a real-life zombie apocalypse outside. But after humans claim the uprising is nearly under control, Lilith Kane and Nate Warner brave the zombie-infested American city of New Southport. Unfortunately, packs of the walking dead overwhelm them and force the couple to split apart. Lilith flees to her small, nearby hometown, Leatelranch. The town may not be the best choice for a refuge, as it’s in the same spot as a giant cemetery of 300,000 plague victims. Meanwhile, Nate, stuck in the city and teamed up with wisecracking kids, aims to reunite with Lilith in Leatelranch. It’s quickly apparent the zombies aren’t like the ones in the couple’s favorite horror films. They move fast and talk; Lilith even suggests that they, for whatever reason, are “posing as ghouls.” She thinks the zombies have a plan, which may tie in to a precognitive vision her grandmother once had. But deciphering all these clues takes a back seat to merely surviving attacks from the unpredictable zombies, who aren’t so easy to kill. Gombinsky delivers an unorthodox zombie tale. The story’s increasingly complicated latter half, for example, digs into Lilith’s and Nate’s pasts as well as Leatelranch’s history. Nevertheless, fans of the genre won’t be disappointed, as there’s plenty of foggy ambiance, rotting corpses, and missing heads and limbs. The author moreover includes fun nods to popular zombie movies like Dan O’Bannon’s 1985 Return of the Living Dead. Gombinsky augments his simple prose with a perpetual, underlying threat of violence: “The moon is a scythe; it could cut you just for looking at it, and if there’s an opposite to glowing, that’s what it’s doing.” Mysteries surrounding the walking dead and even certain characters linger until the end, with many of them left to readers’ interpretations.

A sharp, entertaining zombie epic that gleefully defies expectations.

HALF OF A WHOLE

My Fight for a Separate Life

After a woman’s twin brother suffers an episode of mental illness, she reflects on her upbringing and subsequent quest for independence in this debut memoir.

In 1987, 45-year-old Haus’ family was forced to call the police when her twin brother, Marvin, had a breakdown that involved aggressive and upsetting behavior. The memoir opens with the author being quizzed by a nurse on whether there was a history of bipolar disorder in her family. Her immediate response was that “everyone in our family is fine,” but the query led her to scrutinize her childhood more closely. Raised on a farm in western Minnesota by evangelical Christians of Swedish heritage, the twins were shaped by strict religious beliefs and Scandinavian stoicism. Haus recollects her coming-of-age while touching on aspects of Marvin’s behavior that may have signaled his growing mental illness, such as his...
various “tics and shrugs” and his willful killing of bantam chicks before they hatched. Haus recognized the close bond that she had with her twin but also sought independence from her family. She excelled academically, eventually forging a new life in New England, where she raised a family and had a successful sales and marketing career while Marvin dropped out of college and served in the military before taking on a series of low-income jobs. The author describes how her sense of family duty competed with her drive for freedom as Marvin’s mental health deteriorated and he began to alienate those around him.

Haus’ memoir approaches the topic of mental illness in illuminating ways. She shares her deepest emotions regarding twinship, which she formed in childhood: “We had always been together. How could I run away if he wouldn’t go with me?” Later, Haus allows readers to eavesdrop on her therapy sessions, including an earth-shattering moment when her therapist stated: “being a twin has been a devastating experience for you.” The author astutely counterbalances moments of heightened emotional intimacy with salient factual commentary, as when she notes that “psychologists worry about the intense bonding that occurs between twins,” who “risk seeing their twin not as a separate person but as a part of their own self.” Haus beautifully embroiders the memoir with keen descriptions full of sensory imagery: “We searched for pullet eggs in the woods, played with the baby mice in our granary, or served in the military before taking on a series of low-income jobs. The author describes how her sense of family duty competed with her drive for freedom as Marvin’s mental health deteriorated and he began to alienate those around him.

The memoir can be heartbreakingly sad, it builds to a stirring moment of understanding when the author fully recognized her brother’s determination in the face of what was later diagnosed as bipolar disorder. Overall, this sharply conceived book particularly shines when it focuses on impressive travel perks and exotic locations. Over the course of the novel, Hughes takes readers on a glamorous escapade, imbuing life into scenes set in a medieval, walled French town or a sparkling seaside Spanish village. When the truth is finally revealed—in both the past and the present—it’s a satisfying conclusion for all concerned.

An enjoyable globe-trotting adventure and investigation.
“The author does an excellent job of drawing lessons from her aikido training and applying them to her life without overstretching metaphors.”

MY WALK ON THE AIKIDO PATH

A debut guide focuses on getting out of debt and increasing personal net worth.

“If you carry consumer debt and you feel trapped in the cycle of minimum payments and maxed out accounts,” writes Kelly in her book, “you are right where the system wants you to be.” Setting aside the old advice of always having six months of rent and expenses in a savings account (and noting how inadequate the pandemic showed that counsel to be), the author seeks in these pages to show her readers some new ways to think about personal finance and the elimination of debt. The recurrent theme running through all her recommendations is the value of knowledge: Readers are urged to review their financial numbers until those figures are familiar rather than intimidating or depressing. “I want you to have comfort and ease with your numbers,” she writes. “But that comes from first getting acquainted with them, and then getting intimate.” Throughout the book, she’s unflinchingly realistic, acknowledging that once her readers have totaled up their entire net worth, they may likely realize they are very, very broke. To address these and other cold realities, Kelly provides a recovery strategy in three phases: planning, paying off consumer debt, and, most importantly, following up these two by investing and building wealth, so as not to fall back into the debt cycle again. The author has been on both sides of the problem she’s describing, having once been over $2 million in debt and having also taught budgeting for many years to clients whose personal finances were a mess. This depth of experience, combined with her friendly, completely encouraging tone, gives her manual an approachability often missing from books of this kind. Readers in all states of financial disrepair will find sound, helpful, and illuminating advice in these pages.

A useful, no-nonsense, and detailed blueprint for rescuing your personal finances.

GET THE HELL OUT OF DEBT
The Proven 3-Phase Method That Will Radically Shift Your Relationship to Money

Kelly, Erin Skye

Post Hill Press (320 pp.)

$18.00 paper | $9.99 e-book | Jul. 20, 2021
978-1-64-293955-2

A debut guide focuses on getting out of debt and increasing personal net worth.

“...the system wants you to be.” Setting aside the old advice of always having six months of rent and expenses in a savings account (and noting how inadequate the pandemic showed that counsel to be), the author seeks in these pages to show her readers some new ways to think about personal finance and the elimination of debt. The recurrent theme running through all her recommendations is the value of knowledge: Readers are urged to review their financial numbers until those figures are familiar rather than intimidating or depressing. “I want you to have comfort and ease with your numbers,” she writes. “But that comes from first getting acquainted with them, and then getting intimate.” Throughout the book, she’s unflinchingly realistic, acknowledging that once her readers have totaled up their entire net worth, they may likely realize they are very, very broke. To address these and other cold realities, Kelly provides a recovery strategy in three phases: planning, paying off consumer debt, and, most importantly, following up these two by investing and building wealth, so as not to fall back into the debt cycle again. The author has been on both sides of the problem she’s describing, having once been over $2 million in debt and having also taught budgeting for many years to clients whose personal finances were a mess. This depth of experience, combined with her friendly, completely encouraging tone, gives her manual an approachability often missing from books of this kind. Readers in all states of financial disrepair will find sound, helpful, and illuminating advice in these pages.

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MY WALK ON THE AIKIDO PATH
A Healing Journey of Self-Discovery

Kling Rachel

Self (98 pp.)

979-8-74-198667-7

A debut memoir focuses on personal growth driven by aikido training.

In this book, Kling writes about discovering aikido during a difficult time in her life and how embracing the practice both physically and mentally allowed her to overcome personal and professional challenges. The author opens the narrative at her lowest point. After a childhood that included neglect and physical abuse, she made it through college without a clear direction, followed a professor’s recommendation into an MFA program, and ended up in a psychiatric hospital after a breakdown. When Kling was released from the hospital, she recuperated at her father’s home in upstate New York, where a second attempt at graduate school was almost as disastrous until a professor invited her to try aikido. In the dojo, the author discovered an educational environment that adapted to her learning needs and provided Kling with a new way of looking at the world that she eventually learned to use outside the dojo. The author does an excellent job of drawing lessons from her aikido training and applying them to her life without overstretching metaphors or making excessive leaps of logic. The prose is occasionally unwieldy (“A seemingly simple external decision, but a bit inner struggle with the fear of abandoning that which was most important to me, that which defined me, and most of all was safe for me”). But the tendency toward emotional excess also allows Kling to give readers a thorough and intimate portrayal of what went through her mind as she learned a new technique, faced bullying in graduate school, and moved to a new home. In addition, the narrative is well structured. Although the introduction makes it clear that Kling is telling her story from a place of triumph, there is enough tension in each challenge and setback in the memoir to keep readers anxious about—and engaged in—the outcome.

An inspiring account of personal growth driven by aikido training.
DO NOT DISCLOSE
A Memoir of Family Secrets Lost and Found
Krygier, Leora
She Writes Press (208 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $8.99 e-book
Aug. 24, 2021
978-1-64-742159-5

The accidental discovery of a private document begins a journey that reveals secrets of family members and strangers in this multifaceted memoir.

Krygier, a Los Angeles juvenile court judge, was on her way to work one day when she dropped by her parents’ house to find her mother conducting a cleanup campaign. Among the strewn paper, the author came across a file bearing the note: “Do Not Share This.” She surreptitiously grabbed the file and set off for court; however, she was hesitant to open it, fearing that it would reveal unbearable secrets about her family’s past. Days later, Krygier found a World War II-era postcard in an antiques mall, written by a British Army private and marked “do not disclose any particulars of your unit.” The message resonated with the author, and she began searching for details about the postcard’s sender—a quest that would later bring her to England. The book also slowly reveals details of the file’s contents as Krygier pieces together her family’s story of infidelity and Holocaust survival. Although written as a memoir, this book has all the suspense of a detective novel as the author hunts for the elusive British soldier and attempts to delay learning the truth about her own family. Along the way, she proves to be a master of the slow reveal, alluding to a night “when all hell broke loose” at the memoir’s opening and only gradually disclosing the details of what happened. Krygier also has a vibrant prose style and an eye for fine detail, characterized by her description of a typewriter: “The keys had to be struck hard. They were round, with a distinct rim, like tiny, old-fashioned spectacles. Each letter clattered downward and commandeered its own individual amount of ink from the ribbon, none uniform.” There are rare occasions when the author includes unnecessary information, such as automated responses to her internet searches, but such details of her setbacks make her successes even more enjoyable. This richly detailed memoir will particularly appeal to those whose imaginations are fired by genealogy and historical research.

A captivating story smartly recounted.

DUKE & THE LONELY BOY
Langan, Lynn
Black Rose Writing (184 pp.)
$17.95 paper | $5.99 e-book | Aug. 19, 2021
978-1-68-433751-4

A teenage jock and a solitary outsider undergo profound changes when their lives unexpectedly converge in this debut YA novel.

Failing his pre-calculus class, high school football star Duke is assigned a tutor: brainy loner Tommy, whose shadowlike existence on campus barely registers with his peers. Duke is uncomfortable with Tommy’s extreme reserve but impressed with his ability to make what the athlete needs to learn understandable, especially when his grades soar. But this poignant tale doesn’t trace a predictable or sugarcoated path to a friendship between opposites. Duke, who has witnessed his cousin traumatized by violence, intuits that beneath Tommy’s reserve is “a meteor shower of sorrow.” Langan’s well-defined first-person narratives, switching between Tommy and Duke, reveal very different lives. Tommy’s painful story shifts back and forth in time, relating horrific childhood experiences with his drug-taking mother—unsparingly realistic and difficult to read—that scarred him, sparking feelings of guilt, anger, and loss. The book also recounts his rescue by loving grandparents and how bewilderment and a sense of betrayal closed him down emotionally after his abrupt loss of contact with his sole childhood friend, Roxy. The girl’s compassion and high spirits hid her own painful secret. Duke’s present-day narrative, meanwhile, encompasses a stable family, his passion for football, and his aching turmoil over how he lets his cheerleader girlfriend, Kristy, mess with his head. She insists that they pretend not to be involved at school so her dad won’t find out, seemingly not because Duke is a Black student and she is White. The reason is her religious fanatic father insists that she date someone of their faith. Duke’s distinctive voice reveals a 17-year-old gradually cultivating self-reflection and self-respect, influenced by his connection with Tommy and by the value he discovers in his growing friendship based on mutual respect with a girl named Charlie. (Their lively verbal interactions enjoyably leaven the tale’s emotional intensity.) Tommy’s realization that “I’m still that little boy afraid of what the world would take from him” is the beginning of his own ability to move on. Although a shocking event precludes a traditional, happily-ever-after conclusion, the story ends on a touching ray of hope.

An effective, often moving tale of teen angst, heartache, betrayal, friendship, and self-discovery.
A beautifully illustrated scientific, political, and humanitarian study of the threat posed by human encroachment to an iconic species of the Pacific Northwest.

In 2018, the eyes of the world were riveted on a real-life nature drama as Tahlequah, a female of a pod of orcas, carried her dead calf hundreds of miles through the waters of the Salish Sea in a public display of maternal grief that lasted for 17 days. Tahlequah’s tragic vigil, along with the nearby death of Scarlet, a newborn orca, from a mysterious wasting syndrome, highlighted an ecological emergency that threatens both the orcas and the chinook salmon they feed on. Indigenous nations have, historically and currently, revered the orcas as family, but White settlers in the United States and Canada have been more likely to slaughter them or capture them for display and amusement. In this book, co-published with the Seattle Times, Mapes, a Seattle Times reporter on the environment, presents a compelling portrait of the orcas as creatures of dignity and sensitivity, with brains that are better structured for empathy and social interaction than humans’. No less impressive are the orcas’ prey, Mapes notes—the “lustrous,” ancient, and resilient chinook salmon, whose already perilous journey upstream to spawn has been rendered nearly impossible by human encroachment. Pollution and noise damage the orcas, the author points out, and interfere with their ability to hunt. Illustrated with charts, diagrams, and spectacular photos by Seattle Times photographer Ringman and others, Mapes’ vigorous, evocative writing draws readers into the intertwined story of the orcas and the chinook and also effectively highlights Indigenous stewards of the land and sea, including members of the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe. She explicitly charges that “it is our everyday destruction and pollution of the habitat that supports the orcas—and the salmon they eat—that is the major cause of the orcas’ decline.” However, Mapes also offers cautious hope in her account of the restorative effects of dam removal on Washington state’s Elwha River.

A compelling and troubling examination of the imperiled state of two important marine species.

“A well-designed and informative introduction to a common condition.”
Col. Preston Aldridge tells townsfolk in Harper’s Glen, close to where a blizzard spins Fallon’s car off the road. The desperate Fallon, after recovering at the local hospital, seeks refuge at nurse Shelly Christianson’s home. Though he initially takes Shelly hostage, Fallon may not be as crazy as he seems. He claims the Army is after him because he knows about the biological agent it’s been inhumely testing—and all he wants to do is flee. Meanwhile, Aldridge sets up his command post at the hospital as he attempts to quarantine Harper’s Glen’s citizens. Soldiers also scour the area for Fallon, but residents object to their presence, convinced the Army has “kidnapped” the medical staff of the entire town. When the townsfolk’s resistance turns aggressive, the armed soldiers use deadly force. This only further enrages the civilians, who retaliate with guns and much worse. McBee’s novel generates intensity through a bevy of dubious characters. For example, readers don’t know who’s lying—Aldridge or Fallon—and each convincingly explains how the other is more dangerous. The cast comprises numerous players often reacting to someone’s hostility, including in action-laden scenes of the Army versus the residents. As such, the characters are generally underdeveloped, though Shelly is unquestionably sympathetic. She escaped from an abusive husband, and she won’t let Fallon make her a victim again. Despite several explosively violent turns in the story, the author’s grandest descriptions portray the cold, snowy surroundings. “Away from the plowed roads, the top-heavy military trucks slipped and fishtailed, fighting for traction on the slick muddy surface. Slowly, they plodded along.”

Distrust and deceit throw soldiers and civilians into a tail-spin in this gripping tale.

FEARLESS BEAUTY
The Hair Business Blueprint
Moran, Mikey
Lioncrest Publishing (206 pp.)
Apr. 14, 2021
978-1-54-452007-0 paper

Learn both the specifics of setting up a hair-sales business and the larger ethos of entrepreneurship in this self-help book.

Moss, co-host of the Hair Biz Radio podcast and founder of Private Label Extensions, a wholesaler of wigs, extensions, and cosmetics, offers advice to people planning to open a retail hair-sector business and anyone else with the startup bug. Much of the guide covers basic mechanics, including legally establishing your business, opening bank accounts, registering a domain name, and building a website. The author also discusses higher-level business issues, such as whether to carry inventory and deliver products yourself or farm those tasks out to drop-shipping companies, the niceties of crafting a name and logo—avoid eccentric spellings that potential customers won’t remember, he cautions—and which advertising platforms to use. (Facebook ads are “the only advertising worth paying for” when your business is starting out, he asserts.) And he reminds readers of the importance of consistent performance, especially in communicating and engaging with consumers. He recommends handwritten thank-you notes to customers and massive blogs with weekly 1,000-word posts to keep readers returning to your website. Moran goes on to explore some deeper mental and emotional aspects of starting a business. He suggests that budding entrepreneurs closely observe and analyze other businesses and constantly ask, “How did they do that?”—whether “that” is an eye-catching display or an attractive lighting scheme. Most of all, he contends, startup entrepreneurs need to set actionable goals, make detailed plans, have realistic expectations—anticipate endless hours of work before you even quit your day job—and learn to live with and overcome the inescapable fear of doing something new and risky. The author brings a wealth of hard-won experience to the subject from his own business successes and failures, and he deftly conveys it to readers. His prose is lucid, straightforward, and replete with aphoristic distillations of wisdom. (Those seeking feedback on their businesses’ performance from friends and family should “be careful of false validation, the tendency of people to shield those they love from uncomfortable truths.”) The result is a lively and judicious how-to that will give readers a superb introduction to the rigors of the marketplace.

A useful, informative startup primer blending nuts-and-bolts knowledge with cleareyed motivation.

FOR THE RIGHT KIND OF LOVE
A Life Journey
Moss, Shari
Lioncrest Publishing (240 pp.)
Mar. 30, 2021
978-1-54-451839-8 paper
978-1-54-451840-4

A businesswoman reflects on past relationships that shaped her journey in this memoir.

The book opens with Moss at 9 years old, living in a desert motel in California along with her three siblings. The motel belonged to their stepfather, about whom she remarks: “None of us trusted him.” The children grew up poor without toys and were left to take care of themselves. The author began comparing their lives to that of the “real family from down the road.” Her mother later moved them to Ontario after catching their stepfather cheating. Moss recalls her mother beating her sister with a coat hanger. Growing older, the author made an unsuccessful attempt to study at a university before taking on secretarial work and moving in with a man who revealed he wanted her to become a stay-at-home mom. In the 1980s, her career in sales gained momentum and she fell in love with a work colleague. They married, had children, and built their own distribution business together. But she recounts that her life changed when her husband began using drugs. She describes rebuilding her life and searching for meaningful relationships after their
divorce. In this stylishly perceptive account, Moss displays a buoyant and eloquent writing style and expresses her emotions clearly. Regarding her mother’s choosing not to attend her high school graduation, she remarks crisply: “It was not pity. I never wasted time feeling sorry for myself and I think that was the moment I also didn’t want anyone feeling sorry for me.” Yet the author is unafraid to be blunt when necessary: “I hated my mother. I mean that succinctly.” It is this assertiveness that makes the memoir tick. Moss is able to find clarity in confounding situations. Regarding conflict with her in-laws, she reveals: “What I did come to understand, however, was why they were so miserable. There was no way for them to combat it other than to focus it on me, the last one to enter the family.” Some readers may feel that Moss’ descriptions of her marital troubles are overly protracted and details of her later successes as an author, too condensed. Still, this detracts little from a sharply written memoir that, despite its moments of heartache, proves emotionally uplifting.

An entrepreneur’s fiercely courageous, intuitive account, loaded with positivity.

**BUTTERFLY AWAKENS**

A Memoir of Transformation Through Grief

Nocero, Meg

She Writes Press (312 pp.)


978-1-64-742175-5

A woman recounts pulling herself out of a deep despondency after her mother’s death in this memoir about spiritual recuperation.

Nocero, an inspirational speaker and host of the podcast and YouTube show Manifesting With Meg: Conversations With Extraordinary People, revisits her emotional trauma following her mother Mary Jo’s death from cancer in 2011. Although the author had a consoling vision of a blazing lighthouse—with her mother’s disembodied voice calling “Let me go!”—the loss precipitated a downward spiral. Nocero felt angry, depressed, and lethargic; experienced marital tension at home and trouble at her job as an immigration prosecutor; had panic attacks; and contracted severe tinnitus. She battled back with various therapeutic modalities, including counseling, acupuncture, detox regimens, yoga, Zumba, neuro-emotional technique, Psych-K, and Rolfing. Returning to her Roman Catholic roots, she prayed and received Communion, which sparked “a magical rush of energy.” She “asked the universe to meet Oprah in person” and was miraculously rewarded with an onstage encounter.

Nocero’s most sustained transformative effort was to become a writer, which led to her meeting famous authors like Elizabeth Gilbert and publishing her book The Magical Guide to Bliss (2015). Concluding chapters follow Nocero’s pilgrimage to the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Spain, where she basked in the sacred landscape and reconnected with Mary Jo’s memory.

The author’s limpid prose invests ordinary travails with an intense emotional charge that is often affecting—“When I finally stopped crying, I curled up on the carpet in a fetal position with my dogs, Leo and Giorgio, by my side and fell asleep,” she recalls of a rough patch during Mary Jo’s decline—but occasionally overdone. (“I noticed that the zipper on the suitcase with my clothes was clearly defective. ‘Oh no!’ I gasped.”) She can seem self-involved at times—“Letting go of the butterfly, I released the pain I carried over the last forty-eight years: from being bullied as a child, never fitting in, the disappointments at my job and career, the sadness of losing my mom, grieving the loss, never feeling I’m enough, shame and my failures, and the physical pain I encountered in body and soul.” But her struggles are universal ones that will resonate with many readers.

A heartfelt, moving, sometimes-overwrought account of bereavement and rejuvenation.

**THE ART OF BECOMING UNSTUCK**

Your Personalized Journey Through Consciousness in Search of Ultimate Happiness

Ozdemir, Arda

Self (279 pp.)


978-0-98-981041-8

A self-improvement guide leads readers through a more conscious approach to life.

In this book, Ozdemir encourages readers to understand their emotional triggers, repressed fears, and hidden desires in order to approach life from a higher level of consciousness. Throughout the volume, the author uses the metaphor of a hot air balloon for understanding how unhelpful emotional reactions can hold people back, similar to the sandbags that counteract the heated air lifting the craft. Readers should learn to jettison their emotional sandbags, allowing them to reach greater metaphorical heights. In order to achieve this goal, the guide takes readers through a step-by-step process of becoming aware of emotional reactions, discovering the root causes of the feelings, understanding how they are expressed physically within the body, and developing strategies for responding more consciously for a better overall outcome. Ozdemir gives detailed examples of each part of the process, encouraging readers to record their reactions in a journal. The author provides sample journal entries that demonstrate how to analyze reactions, determine emotional triggers, and formulate a more conscious way of responding. The book’s examples include invented anecdotes (a husband and wife who fail to communicate; an employee who feels unappreciated by the boss) as well as stories from Ozdemir’s own life in which he candidly addresses his shortcomings and explains how he dealt with his emotions to achieve a more conscious approach to his choices and interactions. “Laws of Life” (for example, “The golden key that opens the doors to Ultimate Happiness is locked inside your body”) appear throughout the volume, providing bite-sized
encapsulations of the author’s philosophy. Ozdemir is a lucid writer, and the manual is both readable and actionable. Psychological concepts are clearly explained, and the prose flows easily. The guide makes a solid case for its approach to managing emotional reactions and moving beyond them, and readers are likely to learn from it. Readers who are open to the idea of levels of consciousness will have no trouble with the volume’s depiction of consciousness measured on a scale from zero to 100. Higher levels of consciousness are more desirable, while emotions receive a lower rating (Anger, for instance, “is so instinctive that it belongs to lower scales of consciousness, in the range of 15 to 20,” and can be managed through physical activity). Others may find instructions like “release your fists and all the emotional charges you’ve been holding in your palms out through your feet and into the earth” overly metaphysical for their tastes. But even readers who are skeptical of energy transfer and heightened consciousness may find other aspects of Ozdemir’s process helpful and practical in moving past knee-jerk emotional reactions and developing a more deliberative method of making decisions and interacting with others. The book’s structure offers appropriate scaffolding to readers at all levels of self-improvement, making it useful to both novices and those who are already accustomed to managing their emotions. Although the overall strategy will be familiar to readers of the self-help genre, Ozdemir’s approach allows the guide to feel insightful rather than imitative.

A solid and well-written manual for emotional regulation.

GUMSHOES, FANGS, ROCKETS, & SPIES
How Literary Genres Evolve and Change Our World
Pelham, Ken
Self (255 pp.)
979-8-73-712432-8

A work of literary criticism takes readers through a history of genre literature.

Literary history—like all history—is composed of long-term trends punctuated by explosive moments. An example of the latter was the dreary holiday that a group of writers spent near Lake Geneva in 1816. The weather was poor due to a massive volcanic eruption in 1815—1816 was known as the year without a summer—and it inspired the writers to hold a scary story contest. The work that came out of it included the first instances of apocalyptic fiction, vampire fiction, horror fiction, and SF, all of which would go on to shape and occasionally dominate popular culture in subsequent centuries. With this book, Pelham traces this and other moments of inspiration, out of which such archetypes as the brilliant detective, the boy wizard, the femme fatale, and the invaders from outer space all developed. Often viewed as the less serious siblings of literary fiction, these genres are shown by the author to be far more complex and popular than their pulpy reputation implies. He links them together in a web of influence that seems at times to touch all of art. Along the way, he reintroduces readers to visionaries like Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, James M. Cain, and Patricia Highsmith. Pelham’s prose is breathless and detailed, like a lecture by an enthusiastic tour guide who has more information than the expert has time to cover: “Tolkien, a fan of Verne, Wells, Burroughs, and tales of the American wilderness (I’m guessing The Last of the Mohicans in particular), was a scholar of linguistics and the 20th century master of world building. Middle Earth’s languages, cultures, and histories ring true.” Pelham can’t examine everyone, and there are a few notable absences. The hurried quality causes some of his digressions into pandemics or the Fermi paradox to feel slightly superfluous. But there are fun factoids throughout (including etymologies for words like robot and phantom), and readers are sure to learn a lot. As a broad survey of genre fiction, and particularly as an investigation into the origins of classic genres, the book more than delivers.

A sprawling and engrossing map of genre fiction.

SEAN MOSES IS MARTIN LUTHER, THE KING JR.
Powe, Moses D.
Illus. by Valieva, Angelina
Fatherless Fathers Publishing (50 pp.)
978-1-73-518033-5

A boy gets to portray a hero in Powe’s picture-book introduction to several Black figures from U.S. history.

Young Sean Moses is excited about his role in his school’s Black History Month program, and he makes his parents guess whom he’ll be portraying during a speech. As his parents mention different historical figures—Malcolm X, W.E.B. Du Bois, Thurgood Marshall, and others—the narrative offers short biographies of each, and illustrator Valieva depicts each historical figure with Sean Moses’ youthful face. Afterward, the child finally reveals his role: “I’m Martin Luther, the king!” When his mother asks why Sean Moses thinks King was an actual monarch, Sean Moses declares, “Because his dream came true.” Powe presents a hopeful narrative in this cleverly structured book, which also includes portraits of such men as Frederick Douglass and President Barack Obama. Each biography includes an inspirational quote from the person described and discusses his greatest achievements. Sean Moses’ own story features short sentences that will be readily accessible to younger readers, while the biographies use vocabulary that’s more complex. In Valieva’s beautiful black-and-white images, Sean Moses and his family members all appear Black; Sean Moses’ fellow students appear to have a range of skin tones.

A well-illustrated tale that’s also a great pick to expand libraries’ Black history sections.
A creative resource for educators looking to focus on teaching sustainability.

This work is a publication of Project Learning Tree, an initiative of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, whose goal is to advance “environmental literacy, stewardship, and career pathways using trees and forests as windows on the world.” The activities are broken down into grade-specific categories—K-2, 3-5, and 6-8—and aim to foster students’ ability to care for a sustainable world. Appendices offer helpful additional material, such as “Tips for Teaching Outdoors,” “Making a Scientific Argument,” “Planning an Investigation,” as well as “Urban Outlook,” which offers ways to adapt the material to city settings (“An urban environment is a vital and rich environment worthy of study and exploration, whether it is a city sidewalk or an urban forest”). Each activity is color-coded and presented with quick reference icons that help educators match their curriculum plans to their needs. The easy-to-grasp visual presentation offers an overview of each lesson, highlights the appropriate grade level, and lists the types of differentiated instruction and STEM skills involved as well as learning objectives; it also provides useful background information to help teachers capture students’ interest. Each activity offers clear step-by-step directions, assessments, and ideas for extended learning, including workbook pages. The activities are innovative and playful; the K-2 activity “Have Seeds, Will Travel,” for instance, suggests using a masking-tape bracelet to help collect seeds, and “Trees as Habitats” includes a Tree Observation Bingo sheet to help learners find evidence of habitation. In the Grades 3-5 section, activities effectively encourage students to extend their studies by considering their future careers in “My Green Future,” make personal connections through the use of “Poet-Tree,” and understand the consequences of human action in “Web of Life.” The learner’s role in the ecosystem plays a more central role in “Decisions, Decisions” for Grades 6-8, which asks kids to consider complicated land-use choices, and in “If You Were the Boss,” about creating a forest management plan. The activities are consistently fun throughout and offer a path toward creating a new generation focused on environmental issues.

An important and engaging tool for teachers.

“The activities are consistently fun throughout and offer a path toward creating a new generation focused on environmental issues.”

EXPLORE YOUR ENVIRONMENT

EXPLORE YOUR ENVIRONMENT
K-8 Activity Guide
Project Learning Tree
Project Learning Tree (432 pp.)
978-0-99-708068-1

THE FALLACY OF MATERIALISM
How Consciousness Creates the Material World and Why It Matters
Richheimer, Steven
Innerworld Publications (308 pp.)

Richheimer questions our assumptions about the basic structure of the universe in this work blending philosophy, spiritualism, and physics.

What if the world is not made of atoms, as science teaches us, but of consciousness? Richheimer suggests this in his treatise on the ways modern people misunderstand the nature of reality. The materialism of the title refers not to consumerism, of course, but to the concept of literal material: the upward causality theory of reality in which elementary particles form the basis of everything we experience. The alternative, which Richheimer calls spirituality, says just the opposite: “It postulates that consciousness is the ‘ground substance’ of creation and follows ‘top down’ causality since it hypothesizes that consciousness is transformed into cosmic mind and then into the material world.” While spirituality seems almost by definition beyond the purview of science, Richheimer argues that recent developments in quantum mechanics and biology have suggested otherwise. He takes the reader through such mysterious territories as near-death experiences, the mind-body connection, animal instinct, and life after death. By eschewing dogmatism and approaching each topic with an open mind, the author hopes to challenge the reader’s assumptions regarding how the universe really operates. Despite the specialized material, Richheimer’s prose is accessible enough for the general reader to follow: “There is no question that psychedelic drugs can produce many of the same experiences described by mystics,” he writes. “This has led many neuroscientists to label all mystical experiences as a product of abnormal brain chemistry.” The author has a doctorate in chemistry, but the influence of New Age spiritualism suffuses his work. The book is dedicated to the spiritual guru Shrii Shrii Anandamurti—Richheimer’s “spiritual preceptor and guide” and inspiration—and there’s some talk of God. While the premise might alienate some readers, Richheimer approaches his arguments with honesty and curiosity and little preachiness. Those interested in the intersection of spiritualism with contemporary hard science will find him to be a suitable guide: knowledgeable, nonjudgmental, and expansive.

A thoughtful, surprising work on the nature of consciousness.
A former felon experiences a crisis of conscience as her new life flourishes in Scott’s debut novel. It’s 2006 in central Massachusetts, where Annie Pulkowski lives amid the “domestic bliss” of her loving family. She works at a food bank, tolerates her manipulative addict daughter Darlene, dotes on Darlene’s daughter, Amber, and loves her health-conscious husband, Charlie. However, she hides a dark past as an impressionable young woman who took part in a crime that resulted in the death of a security guard. Though satisfied with her present life, Annie is lonely and longs to reunite with her mother, Catherine, who knew her when she was named Lucinda—before she became involved with the radical Soldiers of Democracy movement. Annie regularly stakes out Catherine’s house, stealing glimpses of her childhood home and the extended family she abandoned 37 years prior. The death of one of Annie’s former partners in crime prompts her to reexamine her past misdeeds and work toward coming clean to everyone in her life. Scott maps out her memorable characters and their circumstances with impressive dexterity, and she’s careful not to overembellish themes or scenes; instead, she allows Annie’s journey of contrition to play out in a realistic, believable way. Past and present collide in dramatic fashion as figures from the past reemerge, and Annie must face her secrets before she can truly embrace the serenity of her current life. Scott’s novel was inspired by the true story of Katherine Ann Power, who went into hiding for 23 years after participating in two robberies, and explores the destructive effects of guilt and how a double life can cause psychological and emotional damage. It ably exposes the dangers of self-deception and explores how making amends can often pave the way for personal peace and happiness.

A resonant, multifaceted story of wrongdoing and atonement.

**ULTIMATE REALITY**

* **A Challenge to the Materialist Paradigm**
  Scott, Rodger Paul
  Romar Philosophical Publishing
  (246 pp.)
  $24.95 | $14.95 paper | Nov 27, 2020
  978-1-73-581683-8
  978-1-73-581680-7 paper

A writer offers a critique of scientific materialism coupled with an argument in favor of an ultimate reality beyond empirical confirmation.

Shute avers that people live in an “intellectually inhospitable world,” one in which “overcertainty,” an inelastic and hyperbolic confidence in one’s beliefs, serves as a prohibitive bar to philosophical progress. His principal example is the “dogma of materialist science,” a reductive interpretation of the universe that, despite its increasingly obvious theoretical failings, remains the dominant paradigm for scientists. The author raises provocative questions about the inadequacy of materialism—his discussion is especially stimulating when he considers Darwinian evolution and its limitations, a perspective considered “sacrosanct” despite its incoherencies. In place of these scientific pieties, Shute argues that an ultimate reality exists that transcends perception, a spiritual dimension to life that couldn’t possibly be fully captured by the pinched categories of scientific conceptualization. The author mines psychology, physics, and biology for evidence of these “extradimensional sources of influence on the material world” as well as various altered states of consciousness, including hypnosis and near-death experiences. Shute’s analysis is wide-ranging and ambitious—he considers intractable problems like the nature of consciousness, proposes a more searching understanding of causality than science currently provides, and suggests the reasonability of a mind that survives the death of the body. Despite these grand aims, the author is impressively cautious and restrained regarding his conclusions: “This book seeks to neither prove nor disprove the existence of any particular god, nor the truth or falsity of any particular religion. What this book hopes to do is lend credibility to the idea that an ultimate reality exists behind the doors of perception.” His critique of materialism is not original but it is persuasive, and one can’t help but be impressed by his call for an authentic skepticism, one that refuses to yield easily to facile belief or stubborn disbelief.

A thoughtful and intriguing account of the relationship between science and spirituality.

**TOUGH LOVE**

* **Smith, Melanie A.**
  Wicked Dreams Publishing
  (300 pp.)
  Nov 17, 2020
  978-1-95-212117-3
  978-1-95-212112-8 paper

In this romance, an overworked lawyer cares for her grandmother with the help of a handsome doctor.

Mia Anderson works for her father’s law firm, mediating nasty divorces, and lives in the guest house of her parents’ home. For Mia, work-life balance doesn’t exist. Her first vacation in years, to Hawaii with her best friend, Joanie, is interrupted on the first day when Mia’s workaholic parents call her back to Washington state to care for her beloved, ailing grandmother Dorothy. Dorothy lives in the small town of Alpine Ridge, just outside of Seattle. Mia soon meets, and immediately clashes with, Nate Edwards, a former plastic surgeon who left facade-heavy Los Angeles for a simpler life in Alpine Ridge and now regularly checks in on Dorothy. Inspired to quit her job at her father’s firm, Mia throws herself into caring for cancer-stricken Dorothy and indulges her long-overlooked passions.
for cooking and baking as she contemplates an uncertain future. Mia and Nate grow close, united in their love for the delightful, spirited Dorothy, whose sickness is much worse than the woman initially let on. As the pair’s relationship evolves from friendship to love, Mia finds herself at a crossroads: return to a city life that’s soul-sucking but familiar, or forge a new path with a man who cares deeply for her? Smith, a former lead engineer for Boeing, weaves a charming tale from the dual perspectives of Mia and Nate, two intelligent and hardworking individuals whose lives haven't exactly gone according to plan. Mia's struggle in particular is extremely relatable, as she reflects on a career and life she never really wanted in the first place and deals with bewilderment over what may come next. Though the couple's first sexual encounter leads to confusion—a plot twist that feels both potentially triggering and unnecessary to the story—their physical relationship is otherwise depicted in sensual yet loving terms. Dorothy is a lovely supporting character, nurturing yet stubborn, with her own plans for Mia and Nate.

LIFTING STONES
Poems
Stanfield, Doug
Rootstock Publishing (108 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Jun. 8, 2021
978-1-57-869058-9

A widow presents a poetry collection about grief and love.
The first section of this emotional book, “Memories,” explores the “dusty, not-quite-living museum of our lives.” Some of its recollections are quite recent, such as in “Love in the Time of Corona,” which finds the speaker partnerless, sheltering in place, and eating frozen vegetables during the Covid-19 pandemic. In another poem, he compares navigating love to crawling through an electric fence: “You finally learn how it feels / to be knocked silly with almost no warning, / and find yourself lying, alone, on your back, / stupefied.” The second section, “Griefs and Losses,” centers on themes of mortality as the speaker revisits the end of his wife's life and wonders what his own posthumous legacy will be. The final “Turning Points” section contemplates the “absurd time-travel odyssey” of life in general and the arbitrary ways of nature, weather, and death. The author ends with a meditation on his unknown future, which he imagines as a mix of beautiful experiences and temporary happiness. Considering it all, though, he concludes that it’s appropriate to "Rejoice." Stanfield's observations on love and loss are authentic and insightful. Regarding dating disappointment, for example, a speaker asks, “Which is wrong: / The reality or the expectations?” Of enduring relationships, he wisely muses, “No vulnerability without trust, / no trust without truth / no truth in a tight grip.” He's also delicately honest about death; a speaker recalls how, in the moments after his wife died, he was "amazed at the quiet / and stillness the soul leaves behind.” The poet's descriptions of physical places are also evocative, as when the moon paints “a wrinkled, twinkled streak / on darkened waves.” However, a couple of longer poems ("Lenny" and "Racing the Sun to Kankakee") feel out of place among the shorter, more intimate missives.

A lovely, relatable set of poems for the heartbroken and helpless romantics.

WAR BUNNY
St. John, Christopher
Harvest Oak Press (376 pp.)
978-1-73-688570-3

A rebel rabbit turns the world of predators and prey on its head in this debut fantasy. Some centuries in the future, humans—now called the Dead Gods—and many animals are extinct. According to History of the Known World by Thimble Thimbalian, “Only six kinds of creatures were left in the Million Acre Wood for the canids to hunt: Deer, raccoon, rabbit, squirrel, rat, mouse.” Rabbits believe Yah has decreed they must be Glorified by a Blessed One, or, in other words, become a predator's meal, accepting their fate in a surrender called the Giving. It’s a dictum unquestioned by all but Anastasia, a brown yearling rabbit living in Bloody Thorn Warren. When she’s injured escaping from a Blessed One, she returns to the warren, endangering it; maybe worse, she publicly questions the mercy of Yah. Since the barren Anastasia is already something of a problem doe, this is the last straw for Olympia, the Warren Mother, who orders exile. Now, without a warren, Anastasia is enormously vulnerable, but she accidentally stabs an attacking fox with a sharpened stick, driving it off. What if next time, she could do it on purpose? As she works out strategies, strangers from other warrens join Anastasia, who trains them and makes alliances with other prey. In exchange for nut storage, squirrels serve as sentries, and mice lend their tiny hands to making weaponry from supplies bought from Bricabrac, a water rat tinker. Meanwhile, disbeliefing predators encounter fierce resistance when they target the Warren Sans Gloire, as Anastasia's settlement is dubbed. Wolves are the landlords of the Million Acre Wood and coyotes have always collected the rent for them successfully, but now the predators are getting very hungry. This means war—and the rabbits are ready.

In his series opener, St. John presents a world similar in some ways to Richard Adams' Watership Down (1972), where rabbits (and other animals) have language, culture, myths, and games. That said, the post-apocalyptic, apparently North American setting is far different; the points of view and abilities are more varied (a few animals are somehow able to read, piecing together what they can from texts left by the Dead Gods); and dialogue reflects human culture. A flirtatious buck named Love Bug, for example, employs rabbit-inflected pickup lines (“Did you thump just now, or was that the earth moving under my feet?”). Bricabrac calls himself “a businessrat.” Naming conventions are varied and often amusing, especially the tiny mice with names like Throat Punch, Death Rage, and Moody Loner. The premise of
prey learning to fight back is intriguing but puzzling. How can canorous animals like wolves and foxes survive without prey? Able to reproduce without check, wouldn’t creatures like rabbits soon eat everything in sight? Perhaps the balance-of-nature question will be answered in future installments; readers are likely to want to stay tuned.

An entertaining, imaginative post-apocalyptic scenario with special appeal for animal lovers.

**THE GARDEN OF FLOWERS AND WEEDS**

*A New Translation and Commentary on the Blue Cliff Record*

Sullivan, Matthew Juksan

Monkfish Book Publishing (400 pp.)

$60.00  |  Sep. 21, 2021

978-1-948626-49-1

A notated explication of an ancient Zen Buddhist text.

Debut author Sullivan explains that the work at hand is a translation of “a thousand-year-old collection of stories, comments, and poetry from the classical age of Zen in China.” There are 100 “cases” contained within, and each is accompanied by an in-depth examination. We’re warned right that the actions here may often seem bizarre. This proves to be true immediately. The first case, “The Emperor Asks Bodhidharma,” is no more than a page long. Emperor Wu of Liang is puzzled by an encounter with a famous monk named Bodhidharma. What is it supposed to mean? The author points out that, as with many of the stories to follow, it may “seem appealing but resist[s] understanding.” Other entries include everything from someone being hit with meditation cushions to a master dancing while holding a rice bucket. A question is posed: “What is Buddha?” The response is “Three pounds of flax.” The author draws on years of his experiences with Zen Buddhism (such as attempting to understand his sometimes-perplexing Zen Master Yangil Sunim) to provide context. Yet, clear-cut answers aren’t the point: “Something wonderful can happen if you have given up on understanding anything.” Of course, this approach doesn’t lend itself to easy comprehension. Paradoxes abound. Obscure (to the layman) Buddhist figures (e.g., Jetsun Milarepa) are discussed. Yet the work stands out with the personal nature of the commentaries. The author shares the cases’ common interpretations along with his own. Many insights have grown from Sullivan’s years of grappling with such material, and he notes, “subtle feelings reveal illumination.” Though these illuminations may be difficult to see initially, the reader is left with an understanding of an ageless, beguiling collection.

**RATS IN THE WHITE HOUSE**

Tabler, Judith

Illus. by Lätti, Leo

Basil Books (88 pp.)


978-1-73-591270-7

Theodore Roosevelt’s son Archie wants to solve the problem of rats in the White House in this illustrated children’s book based on a true story:

When Roosevelt becomes president in 1901, his family brings 43 pets to the White House. One is a rat, but 7-year-old Archie’s rodent would never cause problems in the kitchen. When cook Annie O’Rourke discovers a kitchen invader, Archie goes to his dad for help. But first Roosevelt is busy with paperwork, then with famous guests (including Booker T. Washington) and big projects (the Panama Canal, a coal strike, plans for national parks, and more). Each time, Archie knows the rats will have to wait. Inspired by one of his father’s favorite sayings, Archie encourages his siblings to hit pans in the kitchen with big sticks, trying to scare away the rats. It’s only a temporary solution, and eventually the rodents are back—until the president brings home rat terrier Skip to be Archie’s new friend. “Soon, not a rat remained in the White House.” Presenting a simplified version of many events from the Roosevelt presidency, Tabler makes the historical events approachable, whether union struggles,
“Warner’s knowledge of the historical period is simply remarkable, and he brings to life the tumult of the era.”

**THE LIFE & TRAVELS OF SAINT CUTHWIN**

Antitrust laws, or the invention of the teddy bear. Archie, who is a witness to both the mundane problem of rodents and the larger historical events of his father’s administration, serves as an appealing viewpoint character. The simple sentence structure makes the text accessible, and the inclusion of unfamiliar vocabulary words (*hominy, a mischief of rats*) will challenge independent readers. Lätti’s eye-catching illustrations are based on period photographs and closely depict the historical figures and Skip while also allowing Annie and Archie a wide range of expressions that add comedy to the events. Vivid details, including the full contingent of pets owned by the famous family and a moose head hanging from the dining room wall, enhance the feeling of what it might have been like to live in Archie’s White House. Copious notes, recipes, and references are provided for readers who want further details and citation information about the Roosevelts’ adventures.

A well-researched, engaging, child’s-eye view of U.S. presidential history.

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In Wade’s debut historical novel, a young man gets caught up in the movement to outlaw slavery in the British Empire, eventually becoming a spy to uncover and report the behavior of slave owners.

In late-18th-century London, Perlman’s father, Mordecai, is a tailor who wants his son to follow the trade and lead an inconspicuous life. But when Lazarus meets the activist Thomas Clarkson, he knows that he’s found a worthy cause—the abolition of the British slave trade. Lazarus volunteers to sail to Barbados and expose the brutality of slave owners. This, he hopes, will put the lie to the propaganda of the planters’ lobby and force Parliament to finally outlaw the buying and selling of human beings. In Barbados, he sets himself up as a tailor and ingratiates himself with the sugar cane plantation owners, the aristocracy of the island. They’re a hatefully brutal bunch—racist, arrogant, entitled, and gratuitously cruel. The slaves, however, are unfailingly kind and helpful to the young idealist. The leader of the planters’ society, Lord Harrington, is especially vicious, raping slave girls and mutilating any other slaves who cross him. Lazarus reports Harrington’s evil deeds to the Anti-Slavery Society, but his cover is blown and he must flee for his life. Wade’s debut novel is remarkably graceful and thoughtful. Not only is this an extended examination of the evils of slavery—Britain abolished the sale of slaves in 1807 and the owning of slaves in 1833—but it’s also a bildungsroman of Lazarus Perlman. At the end, the protagonist is shown to be unsure if he’s done very much good—a humility that speaks well of him, because we, as readers, know that he has. Barely out of his teens, he shows himself to be a formidable fighter for humanity who would have made his father proud. Overall, the book effectively speaks against intolerance and cruelty that persist to the present day.

A passionately written book that bodes well for the author’s future efforts.

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Cuthwin is born in Alnwick as the 11th of 14 siblings—his father a nameless Dane and his mother a woman who was the target of many “mean words” from judgmental townsfolk. As a boy, he witnesses a gruesome murder and runs away from home but is taken captive and forced into labor at Peterborough Abbey for 8 years. He manages to teach himself to read and write—a prideful offense for which he narrowly escapes brutal punishment. Cuthwin also learns a valuable lesson during those years about the hypocrisy of piety: “the world inside cloister and walls of a burh are no more cursed or blessed than the world outside.” He falls in love with a woman, Cwenburh, and she becomes pregnant; as a result, he finally escapes the abbey, and the couple’s adventure together begins as Cuthwin becomes a “traveling scribe,” and they become guardians to Eadrig, a late friend’s child. Warner presents a moving story in these pages, and its thematic heart is Cuthwin’s inviolable goodness in the midst of evil as well as his fervent desire to avoid the corruption of worldly success: “coin and station are a curse to man and woman. When riches and manners intrude, the chances to enjoy the wisdom god intended...go forever.” Cuthwin is a memorable protagonist who possesses a selfless wisdom, untainted by guile or cunning. Warner’s knowledge of the historical period is simply remarkable, and he brings to life the tumult and moral depravity of the era. Overall, this is an engrossing novel that’s unusually original despite being grounded in familiar history.

A compelling look at a vanished time as well as an exploration of simple human goodness.
THE LEGEND OF THE GREEN GORILLA
Woolford, Sean
Illus. by Thompson, Chad
Green Gorilla Books
978-1-73-714041-2
digital
978-1-73-714040-5 paper
digital

Two brothers find a caged green ape and discover how far the creature will go to catch them in this rhyming debut picture book.

Mark and his big brother, Stu, who have tan skin, are familiar with the stories about the giant gorilla on a nearby island—but they don’t believe the tales. Despite warning signs posted around the island, the boys persist in exploring until they enter a cave, where they find a cage. “In the cage was an ape that was big as a wall. / Twenty—no, Thirty—no, FIFTY feet tall!” Continuing to ignore the signs, Stu dares Mark to touch the ape, and when the gorilla roars, the boys decide to make their escape. But the ape busts out of the cage and chases them across the water, through the city, and to their grandfather’s farm, all the while enjoying the game. The reveal at the end is sure to tickle young readers, and Thompson’s illustrations offer a gorilla that’s never too scary despite his size and strange color. The digital cartoons are short on details, but the compositions imply depth and portray action effectively. Woolford’s rhymes feel almost Seussian, and the silliness of the giant ape seems in keeping with other Dr. Seuss conceits. The layout uses green text for Mark’s dialogue, blue text for Stu’s, ominous red text for the warning signs, and a larger typeface for the creature’s repeated “BOOM BOOM BOOM” sounds.

A fun gorilla tale that’s perfect for parents lap reading to giggling youngsters.
**NO SPRING CHICKEN**  
Francine Falk-Allen  
A fun, spirited book about traveling while handicapped.

**LADY BE GOOD**  
Pamela Hamilton  
A smart and touchingly sympathetic fictional portrayal of an enigmatic woman.

**QUEEN OF TEETH**  
Hailey Piper  
A powerful, beautiful horror story.

**DEAD LETTER OFFICE**  
Marko Pogačar  
A fine collection of poetry with a distinctly ironic and sinewy voice.

**STARGAZING IN SOLITUDE**  
Suzanne Samples  
A follow-up that tackles loneliness and isolation with remarkable candor and biting comedy.

**BETTER DAVIS AND OTHER STORIES**  
Philip Dean Walker  
Rich, elegiac meditations on art, sex, and death.
**THE ALCHEMIST FILM BEGINS PRODUCTION THIS FALL**

The Alchemist film will begin production this fall in Morocco, Deadline reports.

The bestselling 1993 novel by Paulo Coelho has undergone a long journey to reach this point: The rights were first purchased in 1994, and the slow-brewing adaptation has since undergone multiple changes in leadership and approach. Now helmed by Kevin Frakes, the film will be produced by Westbrook Studios, Netter Films, and PalmStar Media.

The Alchemist tells the story of Santiago, a young Andalusian shepherd, and his epic quest for life-changing treasure. He journeys through Spain and North Africa, meeting a variety of characters who aid him in his goal. A starred Kirkus review said of the story, “A message clings like ivy to every encounter.”

Sebastien de Souza will star as Santiago. His recent credits include the television comedy *The Great* and the drama series *Normal People*, based on the novel by Sally Rooney. He is joined by Tom Hollander and Shohreh Aghdashloo as well as Jordi Mollà, Youssef Kerkour, and Ashraf Barhom.

Frakes told Deadline, “Paulo Coelho wrote it best. ‘When you really want something to happen, the whole universe will conspire so that your wish comes true.’ It has long been my dream to bring this story to the world, and now we can do that in a way that speaks to Coelho’s vision, with a cast and crew that represents the global well of support for *The Alchemist*.”

The film is set to release in late 2022.—**Ilana Bensussen Epstein**

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**OBAMAS TO DEVELOP BLACKOUT FOR FILM AND TV**

One of the year’s biggest young adult books will be headed to the small screen and big screen thanks to a seriously notable couple: Barack and Michelle Obama.

The Obamas are developing *Blackout*, a novel by six YA fiction superstars, as both a television series and a film, the Hollywood Reporter reports.

*Blackout*, published in June by Quill Tree Books, follows a dozen New York teens navigating their love lives in the midst of a summer blackout. Its authors are Dhonielle Clayton, Tiffany D. Jackson, Nic Stone, Angie Thomas, Ashley Woodfolk, and Nicola Yoon.

The novel, told in six interlinking stories, was written during the Covid-19 quarantine. A reviewer for Kirkus said the “authors offer something fun and lighthearted that is welcome during the continuing pandemic and that will bring joy long after it’s over.”

The series and film will be executive produced by Higher Ground, the Obamas’ production company, and Temple Hill, the entertainment company behind the Twilight movies.

The authors of the novel expressed their enthusiasm for the project on Twitter. Thomas tweeted, “Y’all. The news is out. THE OBAMAS are adapting BLACKOUT for film AND TV!! Me and the ladies couldn’t be more thrilled!!!” —**Michael Schaub**

**Ilana Bensussen Epstein** is a writer and filmmaker based in Boston. **Michael Schaub** is a Texas-based journalist and regular contributor to NPR.
Mildred Pierce is having a bad day. Her husband, a “smallish man” and barely solvent real estate developer, is having a fling with a neighbor. Her children are needy terrors. Caught in the grip of the Great Depression, she bakes cakes for a couple of dollars a pop. Her financial state worsens when, finally, she banishes her wayward spouse.

All that happens in the first few pages of James M. Cain’s 1941 novel Mildred Pierce, which, like his hard-boiled thrillers The Postman Always Rings Twice and Double Indemnity, takes a decidedly bleak view of human nature. (Unlike those two books, the noirest of California noirs, the only corpse to appear in Mildred Pierce dies of natural causes, the victim of a ravaging flu.)

Things quickly go further south for Mildred. She’s got a hefty mortgage to pay and no way to pay it. Her older daughter, preadolescent Veda, has no end of demands even as she scorns those whom she considers “distinctly middle-class,” her 28-year-old mom included. Mildred doesn’t have many marketable skills, but she brushes aside a friend’s suggestion that she sell herself, pausing to reconsider only when a stern counselor at an employment agency recommends that she become a waitress: “You’ve let half your life slip by without learning anything but sleeping, cooking, and setting the table, and that’s all you’re good for.”

As the months go by and the bills mount, she tries to find work, any work. Finally, she surrenders, taking a job in a greasy spoon. She hides the fact from Veda, who eventually finds out, accepting Mildred’s fall from grace only when Mildred assures her that it’s just a step on the path to owning her own restaurant and becoming rich.

Meanwhile, Mildred’s scant funds go to others. Veda needs piano lessons. That corpse—her younger daughter—needs a funeral. Her ex needs pocket money. The supposedly wealthy polo player she takes up with does too, and it’s not the only way he complicates her life.

The pages of Mildred Pierce are filled with a kind of rough poetry (“He lived in a world of dreams,” Cain writes of Mildred’s hapless husband, “lolling by the river, watching the clouds go by”). They also burst with frank depictions of matters that might have shocked sensitive readers 80 years ago: adultery, unabashed sexuality, occasional profanity. Joan Crawford played the part of Mildred in the 1945 film adaptation with a kind of maniacal fury that doesn’t quite fit Cain’s depiction of her, one of many departures from the novel, but Ann Blyth was the perfect Veda, avid to betray.

Cain’s real subject is the vanity of human wishes. Mildred’s husband does not attain happiness with his lover. The restaurant Mildred opens rewards her with plenty of money for a time—but also added pounds and headaches. Veda cons her way into and out of her mother’s life and purse, and disaster befalls everyone who crosses her path. No one wins. Cain’s book is a masterwork of dashed hopes and disappointments, as perfect in its depiction of the grim Depression as The Grapes of Wrath. But if Mildred Pierce doesn’t make you hungry for chicken and waffles….

Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor.
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