Featuring 277 Industry-First Reviews of Fiction, Nonfiction, Children's and YA books

KIRKUS REVIEWS

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Benjamin Percy
The iconoclastic novelist continues his genre mashups with The Unfamiliar Garden

Also in the issue:
Elie Mystal, Joanna Ho, and Sophie Burrows
MY MOST ANTICIPATED BOOKS FOR 2022

The reading life is a marathon, not a sprint, and no sooner do we pass one mile marker than the next leg of the race is upon us. That’s how I always feel as January rolls around; there’s no time to bask in the glow of last year’s books—I wrote about some of my 2021 favorites in the Dec. 1 issue—when a new year brings new releases of its own. Here are five novels that I’m especially excited to get my hands on in 2022.

To Paradise by Hanya Yanagihara (Doubleday, Jan. 11): Yanagihara’s Kirkus Prize–winning 2015 novel, A Little Life, is one of those books I recommended far and wide, but with an asterisk: “Prepare to be devastated.” This is one intense novelist, and our reviewer says her 730-page new novel—comprised of three distinct sections set in 1893, 1993, and 2093—is “gigantic, strange, exquisite, terrifying, and replete with mystery.” Ready or not, here we go.

Glory by NoViolet Bulawayo (Viking, March 8): It’s been nearly 9 years since We Need New Names, the powerhouse debut by Zimbabwe-born novelist Bulawayo, won multiple literary awards and was a finalist for the Booker Prize. With a tip of the hat to Orwell’s Animal Farm, Glory is set in a fictional nation populated by animals that have finally slipped the yoke of repressive dictator Old Horse, who has ruled for decades. Inspired by the fall of Robert Mugabe, it promises an incisive parable for our times.

Booth by Karen Joy Fowler (Putnam, March 8): I was absolutely bowled over by Fowler’s last novel, We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves, winner of the PEN/Faulkner Award and a finalist for the Booker Prize in 2013. She’s back with an epic about a complex family of the 19th-century American theater that is best remembered today for its problem child: John Wilkes Booth, assassin of President Abraham Lincoln. I’m expecting rich, complicated, troubling historical fiction—my favorite kind.

Young Mungo by Douglas Stuart (Grove Press, April 5): Few novels have broken my heart and transfixed me as completely as Stuart’s debut, Shuggie Bain, winner of the Booker Prize in 2020. In his new novel, the author returns to the working-class Glasgow setting of that book to introduce Mungo and James, two queer young men who fall in love despite the Protestant-Catholic divide that separates them and the violent male gang culture of the housing projects where they live. I’m prepared to have my heart broken—and buoyed—all over again.

The Candy House by Jennifer Egan (Scribner, April 3): I’m pretty sure there’s nothing Jennifer Egan can’t do, so a follow-up to her influential Pulitzer Prize–winning 2010 novel, A Visit From the Goon Squad? Hell, yes. Egan being Egan, this is not a traditional sequel, of course—she calls it a “sibling novel”—but it promises to revisit some peripheral characters from the earlier novel and expand upon their stories with a scope and emotional wallop equal to its predecessor.
The Kirkus Star is awarded to books of remarkable merit, as determined by the impartial editors of Kirkus.

Award-winning thriller author Sheena Kamal makes her YA debut with this gripping story about a teen girl who finds a refuge in muay thai amid family dysfunction. Read the review on p. 115.

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THE STONE WORLD

Agee, Joel
Melville House (320 pp.)
$27.99 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-1-61219-954-2

The beauty and hardship of post–World War II Mexico are brought to life through the eyes of a young child in this semiautobiographical debut novel.

Peter Vogelsang, known by the nickname Pira, is a 6½-year-old boy living in a small Mexican town in the summer of 1947, being raised by his American mother, Martha, his German stepfather, Bruno, and their live-in maid, Zita. Pira processes the world in the curious, syntactically simple language of a bilingual child. He plays army men on an anthill and overhears adults talking of communist revolution. He learns of the death of Manolete, the famous bullfighter. Meanwhile, Bruno dreams of bringing his family back to his native Germany, but Pira wants to stay in Mexico with his friends Arón and Chris. “Isn’t it good,” Bruno said, “that two people can have opposite wishes and still love each other?”

Pira often retreats to the zapote tree in the garden or to the stone patio with one ear pressed to the ground: “Sounds on the air side were crisp and clear, and many... On the stone side there were few sounds, and they were muffled and dark.” Although Pira is a bright, emotional child—and an aspiring poet—whose voice occasionally flirts with lyricism or profundity, he is absent any outsized quirks or precociousness. He asks questions about concepts like evil, honesty, and prayer, and the adults in his life answer him attentively, without a trace of irony. The only clues that this book is geared toward adult readers are the rare descriptions of curse words, violence, or human anatomy, all interpreted through Pira’s naiveté. The unpretentiousness of the story carries a certain magic, but its larger meaning hinges on its connection to Agee’s 1981 memoir, Twelve Years: An American Boyhood in East Germany.

An earnest and mystical evocation of childhood memory.
GO BACK AT ONCE
Aickman, Robert
And Other Stories (400 pp.)
$17.95 paper | Jan. 11, 2022
978-1-91350-520-2

A 1975 comedy of manners and imperialism, never before published in the U.S., by a British cult novelist.

Set in England in the wake of the First World War, Aickman’s satirical novel follows Cressida Hazeborough and her wealthier friend Vivien as they leave school and set out to find purpose in life. They decide to move in with Vivien’s scandalously divorced Aunt Agnes and, for a time, pursue jobs as a saleswoman and receptionist. Soon, however, they become fascinated with the Italian “patriot,” quasi-fascist, and publicity magnet Virgilio Vittore, whom Vivien dreamily describes as “a great poet, and a great playwright, and a great athlete, and a great soldier, and a great leader, and a great aviator, and a great lover.” Fantasy quickly becomes reality, however, when Aunt Agnes reveals that she shares a romantic past with Vittore and invites the young women to join her on a trip to assist him in Trino, a bit of Italy he’s established as his own state. Once there, the novel takes a surreal left turn, foregoing traditional plot almost entirely in favor of erotic fantasy and imperial satire. The publication of this novel offers readers the opportunity to delve into a witty, sophisticated work of 20th-century British fiction. Though its lack of plot and inchoate second half might befuddle some readers, aficionados of writers like Evelyn Waugh will be delighted by this unearthed treat. Aickman can sometimes leer at his young female protagonists, but more often he observes them with dry and generous humor: “When it comes to the opposite sex,” Vivien tells Cressida, “I am interested only in a Man, and neither you nor I have ever met one.” By the end of the book, they’re still searching.

An imperfect but entertaining work of British satire.

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Xander keeps secrets tucked behind his love for Cat, through the years they begin to emerge.

“Ruther offers a romantic thriller in which a woman finds strength and courage in dire circumstances.”

“Cat is a strong protagonist, the depiction of her resolve amid adversity and heartbreak will win the hearts of many readers… and its well-developed characters and fast-paced plot will keep readers attention.”

“An engaging novel that tells a tender story of finding lasting love in an unpredictable world.”

—Kirkus Reviews

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New year, new books: The next few months will bring beloved voices and new visions to the fiction shelves. Here is a selection of 10 titles to look forward to.

In her first novel, *Olga Dies Dreaming* (Flatiron, Jan. 11), Xochitl González introduces Brooklyn siblings Olga and Prieto Acevedo, Olga a high-end wedding planner and Prieto a congressman representing the district where they grew up. There are dramas both personal and political; our review calls the book “atmospheric, intelligent, and well informed: an impressive debut.”

Chantal James’ debut novel, *None But the Righteous* (Counterpoint, Jan. 11), is narrated by the spirit of St. Martin de Porres, who died in 17th-century Peru and now watches over Ham, a 19-year-old orphan who’s trying to find a home after he’s displaced from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Our review says it’s “a mesmerizing story told by an impressive and captivating voice.”

Hanya Yanagihara’s last novel, *A Little Life*, won the Kirkus Prize for Fiction in 2015, and it’s earned devotion from readers—I know a college student who regularly re-reads the parts that make her cry. It won’t surprise fans to learn that the title of Yanagihara’s new novel, *To Paradise* (Doubleday, Jan. 11), is not exactly uncomplicated; as our review says, the book is “gigantic, strange, exquisite, terrifying, and replete with mystery.”

Musician and novelist John Darnielle returns with *Devil House* (MCD/Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, Jan. 25), about a true-crime writer whose latest project has him asking uncomfortable questions about his own gig. It’s an “impressively meta work that delivers the pleasures of true crime while skewering it,” according to our review.

Our review points out that the title of Kim Fu’s powerful short story collection, *Lesser Known Monsters of the 21st Century* (Tin House, Feb. 1), isn’t a metaphor; these stories really do include, among other things, a sea monster and a sinister doll; Fu “is equally at home chronicling bizarre events and her characters’ inner lives.”

Marlon James put his unique stamp on the epic fantasy genre with *Black Leopard, Red Wolf* (2019), the opening of his Dark Star trilogy. In the second installment, *Moon Witch, Spider King* (Riverhead, Feb. 15), set in what our review calls “a boldly imagined, opulently apportioned ancient Africa,” he’s “building something deeper and more profoundly innovative.”

Karen Joy Fowler’s *Booth* (Putnam, March 8) is about the family of Shakespearean actors that produced John Wilkes Booth, Lincoln’s assassin, but it’s also about tensions in 19th-century America—and, as our review says, “the similarities to today are riveting and chilling.”

Douglas Stuart’s first novel, *Shuggie Bain* (2020), came out just before the pandemic began, and many Kirkus staffers read it during lockdown. “You will never forget Shuggie Bain,” our review said, and that was right. His second novel, *Young Mungo* (Grove, April 5), tells the story of two working-class Glasgow men, one Protestant and one Catholic, who have to hide their love as they try to find a way to be together.

Twelve years after *A Visit From the Goon Squad*, Jennifer Egan’s new novel, *The Candy House* (Scribner, April 5), uses some of the same characters “to continue her exploration of what fiction can be and do in the 21st century,” according to our review. What would happen if, in a form of social media gone wild, people could access not only all their own memories, but the memories of everyone else who’s chosen to share them? Our review says this is “a thrilling, endlessly stimulating work that demands to be read and reread.”

You might not think a Unitarian church’s ministerial search committee is the stuff of fiction, but Michelle Huneven will prove you wrong. Her new novel, *Search* (Penguin Press, April 26), has it all, according to our review: “the voting, the vetting, the drama, the discord, the anti-oppression training….Like the lamb shank at the cafeteria, tender, salty, and worthy of note.”

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.
VELORIO
Aquino, Xavier Navarro
HarperVia/HarperCollins (272 pp.)
$26.99 | Jan. 4, 2022
978-0-06-307137-7

Set in the aftermath of Hurricane María, Aquino's debut blends magic with brutal reality.

It's 2017, and the hurricane has struck. Throughout Puerto Rico, people are scrambling for food and water and—crucially—gasoline. There's no aid in sight. Deep in the forest, Urayoán opens a little utopia he calls Memoria, where he offers gas and a place to stay. His henchmen—young boys in tracksuits—enforce loyalty and Urayoán's arbitrary sense of order. Aquino's novel revolves around Memoria and the desperate characters who gather there. These include Camila, whose sister died in a mudslide and whose body Camila lugs around until Urayoán interferes. There's also Bayfish and Banto, Cheo and Damaris. These characters narrate the story in alternating chapters. Unfortunately, Aquino has done little to differentiate their voices: They all sound the same, which makes it hard to tell them apart. So much of the novel takes place on a feverish, elevated plane that—in a similar way—it's not always easy to understand what's actually happening. Aquino sacrifices literal meaning to a lyricism that quickly grows dizzying. Sometimes his lines seem to point vaguely toward a meaning that dissipates under closer scrutiny. "There are more lives on this island," he writes, "divided by the millions left stranded overseas, shrieking back home to the sound of static." Just a little more restraint in his prose stylings would have gone a long way. Aquino's subject is rich enough; his prose threatens to overwhelm it.

An intriguing debut that flounders under the weight of its own lyricism.

NEW ANIMAL
Baxter, Ella
Two Dollar Radio (212 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Feb. 15, 2022
978-1-953387-12-7

A young mortuary cosmetologist seeks a balm for her own grief in the world of BDSM.

Amelia Aurelia loves her job. As the cosmetologist in the family-run Aurelia's Funeral Parlour on the Australian coast, she is part of a well-oiled machine that seeks to provide burial services for the dead and the solace of a perfect funeral experience for the living. "As I brush makeup across Jennifer's face," Amelia thinks as she attends to a young woman who has committed suicide, "I wish I could tell her...how important it is for her people to see her like this, how they need to witness this image of her at peace before they can begin to feel peace themselves." As good as she is at her job, however, Amelia knows that working so closely with grief takes an emotional toll that she seeks to address through daily, more-or-less anonymous sexual encounters with men who will "move [her] out of [her] head and into [her] body [and] fill [her] up with physical feeling to the point where emotions and thoughts [are] wrung out." In this way, Amelia has created a fragile but working equilibrium, but when her wildly affectionate mother dies in a sudden accident, all of Amelia's carefully built boundaries come tumbling down. Reeling with grief, she flees from her flamboyant stepfather, Vincent, her polyamorous brother, Simon, and her mother's best friend, the irrepressible mortuary receptionist Judy, on the day before her mother's funeral to stay with her emotionally distant biological father, Jack, at his isolated home in Tasmania. While there, Amelia falls into the BDSM scene, first as a sub taking part in an onstage pain scene, and then at the local kink club, the Widow Maker, where she begins her training as a domme. In both roles, Amelia struggles to manage her overwhelming grief as she moves through the rawest phases of her trauma and into the long, slow settling that comes after. At turns a rollicking sexual romp almost slapstick in its intensity,

INSPIRED BY TRUE EVENTS

He lost his home. His family. His pride. So he made his own.

"Schulze’s depiction of the Victorian era is atmospheric and intense in conveying the persecution gay people faced.”
—Kirkus Reviews

“Between its anecdotes of affairs, its slow revelations of more enduring longings, and its vivid courtroom scene, it is magnificently character-driven from beginning to end.”
—Independent Book Review

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and an existential meditation filled with the languid profundity of bodies at their final rest, this unusual novel navigates the most treacherous of emotional territories—the fault lines between love and grief, sex and death—with a deliberate lack of grace and real charm.

A tragicomic debut by an impressive new voice.

CHECKOUT 19
Bennett, Claire-Louise
Riverhead (288 pp.)
$27.00 | March 1, 2022
978-0-593-42049-2

A woman with a striking resemblance to the author recounts her life as a reader and writer.

In the second section of what is labeled as a novel—but which really reads as something genre-less and unique—the young narrator writes her first story. Inside her secondary school classroom, she has opened her exercise book to the back, where she first attempts to sketch a portrait of her absent male teacher in pen. But, as she draws, suddenly “the line broke off into words, just a few words, then a few words more, and the words set out a story, as if it had been there all along.” The narrator has already spent a childhood immersed in books, and her story, and the enthusiastic response it garners from its subject when he spots it—to her shock—in her exercise book, cements the narrator’s path further into her artistry and its expression through writing. Writing, one could say, is Bennett’s true subject, but even that may be too specific: There is an entire section of the book that retells a Calvino-esque fable that the narrator is supposed to have written in her 20s about a gentleman who acquires a vast library only to realize that the entire collection contains only one single sentence capable of unlocking the totality of the receiver’s perception, even if they cannot read. What Bennett seems after in her shape-shifting novel is less about books—though there are plenty of those, from Annie Ernaux and Roald Dahl to Sylvia Plath and Ann Quin—and more broadly about the true

Harry Potter for the New Age!

“A teenager stumbles on an intriguing world that may clear up his murky history in this YA fantasy debut.”

“...this inventive tale boasts delightfully colorful details...”

“A quirky cast headlines this overstuffed but imaginative tale for kids and adults alike.”

—Kirkus Reviews

ISBN: 978-1-884573-65-1

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power of the imagination and the lives it enables us to live when our own seem painfully circumscribed by gender, by place, by circumstance.

A kaleidoscopic and ambitious blend of criticism, autofiction, fable, and memoir.

**SEEKING FORTUNE ELSEWHERE**

*Bhanoo, Sindya*

Catapult (240 pp.)

$26.00 | March 8, 2022

978-1-64622-087-8

Eight stories of dislocation—cultural and geographic, familial and romantic.

An elderly woman parked in a “retirement-community-cum-old-age-home” in Coimbatore, India, by her well-meaning daughter, who lives in the United States, tells a lie that restores a little of her agency but also underscores how empty her life has become. A mother realizes that she has not been invited on her daughter’s buddymoon, a recent fad of newly wedded couples heading off on honeymoons with friends and family, but her ex-husband’s girlfriend has. A professor is accused of taking advantage of his graduate students, all Indian immigrants like him, by asking them to do chores around his house. Bhanoo, a longtime newspaper reporter, homes in on devastating moments of loss—the results of aging, cultural misunderstanding, so-called progress, fickle hearts, and even tragedy—throughout this stunning debut collection of stories. The professor, who sees himself in his graduate students, thousands of miles from India, completing their studies in small college towns like Bozeman, Montana, can’t reconcile his sense of himself as treating them “like family, because their own families were so far away” with the charge that he took advantage of them. In “Nature Exchange,” a wrenching story about a woman whose son was killed in a school shooting, Veena returns obsessively to the nature center where children can trade found objects like sand dollars and dead insects for points to be redeemed for prizes. Before his death, her little boy was saving up for a pair of antlers. Now, as she struggles to move on with her life, Veena fixates on the antlers as though they might free her from her grief. These are psychologically astute stories—and also riveting. By carefully withholding key details, Bhanoo transforms human drama into mystery.

Graceful stories by a writer with enormous empathy for even the most flawed and forlorn among us.
“An incandescent exploration of adolescent angst.”

THE WORLD CANNOT GIVE

stress,” he texts a co-worker. “Tombstone reads: ‘Herein lies a man, who died as he lived: tired.’”) He’s not thrilled with his living situation, either—he shares an apartment with his mother; he can’t afford to move out on his teacher’s salary. So after a tragedy upends his life, he takes out a loan and lights out for America, aimlessly traveling through the country, eating Whataburgers in Dallas with near strangers and accompanying a taxi driver to a strip club in Chicago. All the while, he’s haunted by his own growing despair: “To exist, even in my own body, was taking its toll; I wanted to escape from it, leave it all behind; I wanted to be free of it. I want to live where there was no consequence to this body, where I was not named, where I was not known….I did not want to know others. I did not even want to know myself.” Bola employs a fascinating narrative structure: The chapters covering Michael’s time in London are told in the first person; the passages in America switch to the third person, emphasizing Michael’s growing alienation from himself. Chronicling someone’s emotional deterioration can be a tricky affair, but Bola acquits himself beautifully; his prose is sensitive and powerful. Lovers of character studies that tend toward the dark will find much to admire in this novel.

Solid writing and sensitive insights make this one a winner.

SHADOWS REEL

Box, C.J.
Putnam (368 pp.)
$25.20 | March 8, 2022
978-0-593-33126-2

International intrigue crashes into Twelve Sleep County, Wyoming.

Good news, bad news for Game Warden Joe Pickett. He’s still recovering from the physical damage he suffered in his last outing, Dark Sky (2021), but he’s been moved into a bigger, better sited house since his old one was torched. The discovery of freelance fishing guide Bert Kizer on the grounds of the Crazy Z-Bar Ranch is clearly connected to a hagiographic album of Nazi photos from 1937 that’s captured the interest of Marybeth Pickett, Joe’s librarian wife. Why would someone have tortured and killed Kizer after all these years to learn the location of the album? As Joe and Marybeth await the arrival of their three daughters for what turns out to be “the worst Thanksgiving we’ve ever had,” Joe’s old friend Nate Romanowski heads off to Colorado in the hope of catching up with Axel Soledad, the outlaw falconer who beat Nate’s wife, threatened his baby, and stole his falcons. After a few rounds of preliminary fencing, Nate realizes that Geronimo Jones, the Black Lives Matter activist who tipped him off about Soledad’s location, is a perfect partner for him. But neither of them realizes that Soledad’s activities will lead them into a lot more violence than they’re ready for and, ultimately, to a last-minute reunion with Joe, who’s called on to go up against “the Eric and Donald Trump Jr. of Hungary.” The broader political overtones aren’t an unmixed blessing, and the socko climax ends predictably, but Joe’s 22nd adventure continues to give good value.

Old-school Nazis, newfangled terrorists, Big Sky country—it’s all here.

THE WORLD CANNOT GIVE

Burton, Tara Isabella
Simon & Schuster (320 pp.)
$27.00 | March 8, 2022
978-1-982170-06-6

Teenage zealotry turns toxic.

Earnest Nevada high school junior Laura Stearns is so obsessed with Sebastian Webster’s 1936 work of “wild-eyed genius,” All Before Them, that she convinces her parents to send her to St. Dunstan’s, Webster’s alma mater and the coastal Maine academy where his book is
set. Like Webster’s self-modeled protagonist, Laura yearns to escape the “sclerotic modern world” and undergo a “shipwreck of the soul”—experiences she feels certain her transfer will facilitate. Though Laura is initially disillusioned by the irreverence her peers have for St. Dunstan’s and its traditions—particularly Evensong, a weekly church service at which attendance is mandatory—everything changes when fellow Webster devotee Virginia Strauss invites Laura to join the chapel choir, of which she is president. Laura and the five boys who comprise the group may not share Christian convert Virginia’s fire-and-brimstone fervor, but they are united in their love of music—and infatuation with their beautiful, terrifying leader. As such, they allow Virginia to micromanage their lives, ostensibly in hopes of maximizing their potential. Laura has never been so happy—until a progressive new chaplain usurps Virginia’s control over the ensemble, causing the vindictive overachiever to spiral. Burton develops what begins as an apparent Donna Tartt pastiche into a defiantly distinct meditation on power, desire, and the search for self. Events unfold from Laura’s perspective via an increasingly breathless third-person-present narrative, conferring voyeuristic intimacy. Deftly drawn, deeply insecure characters complement the melodramatic plot, which crescendos to a devastating close.

An incandescent exploration of adolescent angst.

RED THREAD OF FATE
Butler, Lyn Liao
Berkley (352 pp.)
$17.00 paper | Feb. 8, 2022
978-0-593-19874-2

A Taiwanese American woman is determined to adopt a Chinese orphan as a newly widowed single mother. Tamlei Kwan, aka Tam, age 37, has vowed to follow through on her late husband Tony’s promise to adopt a Chinese toddler with special needs. Also, she’s recently taken responsibility for Angela, the 5-year-old daughter of Mia, whom Tony had presented, “vaguely,” as his first or second cousin. After emigrating from China, Mia lived with Tony and Tam in their Astoria apartment until her estrangement from the couple resulted in her exile to Flushing, where she worked in a nail salon. The cause of the rift is withheld until roughly midway through the novel in an unnecessary ploy to build suspense. Readers will guess early on that Tony and Mia’s relations aren’t exactly familial, especially since Mia’s perspective, in flashbacks, alternates with Tam’s. We learn that, in China, Mia was taken in by Tony’s parents and had a teenage crush on him. Thinking Mia is out of their lives, Tam experiences a double shock to learn that her husband and Mia have been killed by a careening truck in Flushing. What was Tony doing there? The fact that Mia’s stalker ex-boyfriend, Kenny, was either the driver or the passenger of the truck adds a foul-play element that proves to be a red herring. This unduly tortuous plot then turns to the most compelling portion of the novel—scenes from a Chinese orphanage where Tony’s dementia-afflicted elderly mother, Xing Xing, once lived with Tony and Mia. How the China-Taiwan conflict plays out on the family level is touched on but underdeveloped. The adoptee, Charlie, is 3 but physically and developmentally resembles a 9-month-old. The remainder of the novel deals with Tam’s attempts to turn her unruly, impromptu clan into a family. A kindly neighbor’s dachshund shelter provides comic relief and is more engaging than a hackneyed romance subplot.

Weighty subject matter is undermined by a melodramatic, unfocused treatment.
**DISORIENTATION**

Chou, Elaine Hsieh  
Penguin Press (416 pp.)  
$28.00 | March 22, 2022  
978-0-593-29835-0

A debut novelist takes on campus politics.

Ingrid Yang is about to turn 30. She’s been working on her Ph.D. for eight years, she’s about to run out of funding, and her dissertation is a handful of notes on a writer she never wanted to write about in the first place. Xiao-Wen Chou’s work is anodyne and unchallenging, but, before he died, he was Barnes University’s most famous faculty member, and Ingrid’s adviser thinks that studying Chou will allow her to explore her own “Chinese heritage”—never mind that her family is actually from Taiwan. A shocking discovery about her subject takes her work in a new direction and turns her world upside down. This is a promising setup, but Chou (the book’s author, not the poet she invents) doesn’t seem to know what to do with it. There are moments that seem to be aiming for screwball comedy—such as when Ingrid and her best friend, Eunice, engage in some breaking and entering—but these scenes are not funny. There are definitely attempts at satire, but Chou’s takes on both political correctness and the people who hate it are generally facile and unoriginal. For example, Ingrid’s adviser begins as a White guy who immerses himself in Chinese culture and ends up a right-wing pundit with a rabid following. The connection between intellectual and artistic colonization and White nationalism is an interesting one, but Chou makes the choice to turn a subtly ridiculous character into a cartoon villain instead of interrogating that connection. Ingrid’s nemesis, campus activist Vivian Vo, follows a similar trajectory. She’s introduced as a caricature of a social justice warrior and eventually becomes truly malevolent. At a superficial level, this is the story of Ingrid becoming socially conscious. In some scenes, Chou does a great job of showing the reader why Ingrid is reluctant to identify as East Asian. In others, though, Ingrid comes across as not merely dismissive of Vivian and her ideas, but mostly unaware of the conversations about race that have been taking place on college campuses since at least the 1990s even though she’s been a university student for 12 years. Her dogged ignorance—and her contempt for her peers who have been engaged in these conversations—takes some of the shine off what is presented as a triumphant awakening.

Ideas worth examining get buried beneath a disorganized plot and weak character development.

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**DON’T KNOW TOUGH**

Cranor, Eli  
Soho Crime (336 pp.)  
$24.95 | March 8, 2022  
978-1-641-29345-7

A high school football player and his coach struggle to survive the violence-strewn path to the Arkansas state championship.

Nobody, including himself, thinks that Billy Lowe is the star his brother Ricky was. Before he flamed out in a haze of alcohol and failing grades, Ricky was quarterback for the Denton Pirates; Billy’s just a running back. But the abuse he suffers at the hands of Travis Rodney, his mother’s lover of five years, and his obsessive comparisons of himself to his brother fuel both an unflinching determination to win and a rage that erupts without warning on and off the field. After Billy hits Austin Murphy so hard during practice that the well-connected sophomore is out five minutes with a concussion, Don Bradshaw, the school principal, draws up a list of conditions Billy will have to meet before he can take the field again. As if on cue, Trent Powers, the coach who considers Arkansas a purgatory to which the yearslong failure of the Fernando Valley Jaguars sent him from California, rips up most of the conditions because he can’t afford to lose the championship. Neither can his grimly
You've read about the Afghan war.
You're curious, not about America's motives, but about the enemies it has fought.

Didn't they understand America's might?

“...a wonderfully imaginative and original story with a strong evocation of time and place.... I was equally impressed by the authenticity.... in the vivid technical details covering military operations, surgery.... legal and political processes.”


“In this novel, a Pashtun American soldier stationed in Afghanistan faces religious zealots as well as a dangerous, clandestine U.S. group.”

“This military tale features rich culture, abundant action, and sublime characterization.”

—Kirkus Reviews

FOR ALL INQUIRIES, PLEASE EMAIL
AUTHORLEMAMHOUSETAGMAIL.COM • DAVIDRFFINN.COM
From his first short stories to his latest novel, Benjamin Percy has always found inspiration in the natural world. The Minnesota-based author, who grew up “off the grid” in Oregon, comes by it honestly.

“My parents were back-to-the-landers,” Percy says. “Twenty-seven acres of big pines outside of Eugene is where I spent the first six years of my life. We had a vegetable garden and fruit trees that my mom cultivated, and all the meat that we ate either came from our chicken coop or the animals my dad hunted, so I grew up on venison, elk, and bear.

“That’s why I sound like this,” Percy adds, in his commanding but friendly basso profundo. “A healthy diet of bear.”

Percy returns to the woods of the Pacific Northwest in his new novel, *The Unfamiliar Garden* (Mariner Books, Jan. 4), which follows Jack, a biologist whose daughter, Mia, has gone missing in the Olympic National Forest in Washington after a meteor shower. Jack and his homicide detective ex-wife, Nora, investigate a parasitic fungus that popped up in the wake of the meteor shower and that could lead them to their missing child.

*The Unfamiliar Garden* is the second volume in a trilogy that began in 2021 with *The Ninth Metal*. Percy says his love of science fiction inspired what he calls the Comet Cycle.

“I wanted to build my own shared universe,” Percy says. “You could think of the trigger event for this universe as an age-old sci-fi concept: A comet comes streaking through the solar system; the planet spins through the debris field. We are introduced to new elements that upend the laws of physics, geology, biology; that create chaos in the geopolitical theater.”

Percy is no stranger to science. His mother is a botanist who once worked for the U.S. Forest Service and passed on her love of biology to her son. He did his own research for *The Unfamiliar Garden*, consulting scientists at the Wolf Creek Environmental Center in northern Minnesota and at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, near where he lives. What he learned was fascinating, if a little unsettling.

“Pathogenic fungus takes up an estimated 3,000 acres in eastern Oregon in the Blue Mountains, and it’s estimated to be over 8,000 years old,” he says. “Botanists have tried to find the edge of this fungus, but there is no edge because it’s ever expanding....In the novel, I’ve got this otherworldly fungal organism that comes from the comet’s debris, and it’s using people as an adaptive vessel. Building off actual science, I have slippery science. There are no aliens, plural. There is an alien, singular, the mycelium, a fungus that’s spreading among us and creating this united intelligence. I guess you could think of it as like a contemporary version, a revisionary version, of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* in that way.”
Like many of Percy’s novels—Red Moon, The Dead Lands, The Dark Net—The Unfamiliar Garden isn’t easy to classify, blending elements of thriller and science fiction. And while he doesn’t consider it a horror novel per se, he acknowledges there are some terrifying elements. That’s in character for Percy, who once told an interviewer for Powell’s bookstore in Portland, Oregon, “I love nightmares. I wish I had more of them.”

“A nightmare is appealing for the same reason that a horror movie or a horror novel is appealing, because it’s a safe way of tackling your fears,” he explains. “You can face savagery and emerge at the other end unscathed and process trauma. There’s something about that vivid realization of horror that leaves you jittery and spent in the end but also relieved that you’ve made it out alive.”

The books in Percy’s Comet Cycle, which is scheduled to conclude in June with The Sky Vault, share the same universe but can be read independently of one another—a narrative decision that came from another of Percy’s great loves: comic books.

“Comics were the definitive reading experience of my childhood,” he explains. His mother would take him with her to the general store—the town of Crow, Oregon, was too small for a grocery store—where fantastic worlds awaited him on spinner racks. If he behaved while his mom shopped, he’d get to take one home.

“I can remember every comic book I’ve ever purchased and read going back to the time I was 2, and that’s because I read them over and over again until they fell apart in my hands [and] I Scotch-taped them together.”

Comic books, of course, feature a low price and a serial format, and that’s what Percy wanted for the Comet Cycle: a way for prospective readers to enter the world he created without having to shell out for an expensive hardcover.

“I think it’s a little bit backward to start off with a $37 hardback,” he says. “I wanted to flip the rollout and have the books come out initially as cheap paperbacks to help build word of mouth, to get people excited, and then later on, they’ll all be collected into a hardcover omnibus with bonus material, like additional short stories and even illustrations.”

Percy has written his share of comic books, including stints tackling characters like Wolverine, Green Arrow, and Batman. He’s by no means done with the form—in February, Marvel will publish the first issue of Ghost Rider, written by Percy and featuring art by Cory Smith.

He’s also branching into a new field—well, kind of. While Percy has experience screenwriting, the projects he’s worked on have been largely ill-fated. On his website, he lists three of them, each ending with a variation on the sentence, “Alas, it died in development hell.”

Not so with Summering, a film Percy wrote that’s set for release in the U.S. by Bleecker Street. Directed by James Ponsoldt (The Spectacular Now), the movie follows four young girls as they embark on an adventure in the months before they start middle school. The movie, Percy said, was inspired by his daughter.

“It’s meant to replicate the adventurous spirit of The Goonies and The Hobbit and Stand By Me, these adventurous stories from my childhood, which I shared with her excitedly. And though she enjoyed them, she also said, ‘Where are all of the girls?’ ” he explains. “I set out to write a story for her, and it’s got some spooky moments to it, and it’s got some harsh truth embedded in it, but it’s a much more lighthearted spirit than a book like The Unfamiliar Garden.”

Percy’s latest book might not be lighthearted, but with its theme of a biological contagion that threatens humanity, it’s definitely timely. That’s no accident, Percy says; he started writing the novel after the Covid-19 pandemic hit last year.

“If you’re able to make somebody fall in love with a story and draw them in emotionally and raise some [important] subjects, but in a slanted way—that’s what Emily Dickinson said, was to tell it slant—then people aren’t conditioned to immediately push the topic away,” Percy says. “They’re in a pot that’s slowly heating up to a boil, and by the end, maybe you’ve moved some hearts and changed some minds.”

*Michael Schaub is a Texas-based journalist and regular contributor to NPR. The Unfamiliar Garden was reviewed in the Dec. 1, 2021, issue.*
supportive wife, Marley, the most sharply drawn character in a first novel bristling with dangerous energy. When Trent and assistant coach Bull Kennedy find Travis beaten to death, everyone assumes that Billy has finally turned on his tormentor. But Trent, who took Billy into his home when his mother, Tina, vamoosed with his baby brother, doubles down on his ability to offer the boy salvation, and Lorna, Trent's teenage daughter, makes Billy her personal project. You can just imagine how well everyone's plans for escape turn out.

Friday Night Darks.

In each of these 10 stories we enter a life and a marriage—either intact, fraying, or sundered—within which the various and frequently unexpected effects of the Covid-19 lockdown on Irish society are depicted with irresistible irreverence.

From the first story to the last, this instantly engaging chronicle of life during the pandemic lockdown in Ireland resonates with the voices of ordinary Dubliners who are enduring—and in an odd way relishing—the unprecedented social restrictions and upheaval that, in some cases, deliver hidden freedoms. “It was a decision,” a woman says of fleeing her suburban existence in “Gone.” “Just, I hadn’t packed a bag...or thought about what I’d need to take....But when I heard the word. Lockdown. I was out of the house. Out of that life. I shut the door after me.” Alan in “Life Without Children,” like most characters here, has reached the crisis age when the children are grown and gone, his parents are dead, and now he is “the oldest person he knew well,” a fact that “pleased him and kept him awake.” His wife leaves him, and he leaves his previous life to enter a more precarious one, as does each of the protagonists here, mostly by accident. A father walks the Dublin streets looking for the son he has driven away with his cruelty. A husband falls in love with his wife after decades of marriage only to face the terror of almost losing her to Covid-19. A son cruelly treated by his dying mother, ostracized by his family, and still drunk on the morning of the funeral he cannot attend tries to make sense of his kitchen, the contents of his fridge, the family pet: “He won’t be falling over again. He looked down at the dog, at his feet. — That right, Jim?” Humor of every shade, from near-slapstick to keen satire, prevents the collection’s moments of emotional insight from congealing into sentimentality. And Dublin itself, the broad streets and the even broader range of its natives’ speech—so pungent and quick—has rarely been so deftly captured.

A moving and quick-witted portrait of Dublin lives under lockdown.

A stream-of-consciousness–style narrative told by an Israeli sex worker.

The narrator of Eitan’s feverish debut doesn’t have a name. She calls herself Libby at one point, but that’s clearly a kind of disguise—she’s a sex worker. No
“An archivist who happens to be a vampire receives a collection belonging to the late creator of a cult TV show.”

**DEAD COLLECTIONS**

Fellman, Isaac

Penguin (256 pp.)

$17.00 paper | Feb. 22, 2022

978-0-14-313691-0

An archivist who happens to be a vampire receives a collection belonging to the late creator of a cult TV show, triggering a series of dramatic life shifts.

Even before he became a vampire—spurred by a freak case of tetanus, after which his body must be sustained by blood transfusions and religiously shielded from the sun—Sol Katz had always lived somewhat apart from others. A trans man who, for years pre-transition, inhabited a body he “[couldn’t] bear to have touched,” Sol has always worked “best with imaginary or fictitious people,” first as a fan fiction writer and then a steadfastly patient archivist at the Historical Society of Northern California. Sol’s reclusive life, though, is disrupted when the magnetic Elsie brings in a collection belonging to Tracy Britton, her dead wife, the creator of the science-fiction TV show *Feet of Clay*. Coincidentally, this is the fandom in which Sol used to write. Almost instantly, Sol’s world is shaken as he forms an intimate bond with Elsie, who is stubbornly vulnerable and unequivocally herself; and as he goes through Tracy’s papers, he relives the journey he’s taken to understand his own gender identity. As he and Elsie grow closer, he must contend with the nearly frightening experience of desire for the first time in years and the risks inherent in a sexual relationship with a human—to whom vampire bites can be dangerous. As Sol’s life threatens to disintegrate around him—Tracy’s collection inexplicably decays before his...
eyes; he experiences near brushes with the sunlight after sleeping over at Elsie’s—he’s led to reevaluate his life and weighs the benefits of safely tucking himself away in the archives against inhabiting the flesh-and-blood human world. Author Fellman has sensitively constructed the complex internal landscape of a multilayered protagonist whose self-consciousness, quirks, and anxieties are palpable; vampire or not, Sol is a uniquely relatable character whose inner life jumps off the page. Though Sol and Elsie’s relationship sometimes veers into the saccharine, their shared vulnerability as each grapples with their sexual and gender identities is genuinely moving. Most of all, the book’s musings about bodies—their trials, tribulations, and pleasures; the ways they sometimes serve and sometimes oppose their owners—provides a deep, rich undercurrent.

Unique and emotionally deep.

GIRL IN ICE
Ferencik, Erica
Scout Press/Simon & Schuster (304 pp.)
$27.00 | March 1, 2022
978-1-9821-4302-2

When a girl frozen in ice at the Arctic Circle thaws out alive, an ancient Nordic languages specialist with troubles of her own is called to the scene.

Ferencik—author of Into the Jungle (2019)—specializes in thrillers set in wilderness environments with female protagonists; her latest takes us to the land of subzero temperatures and wind-whipped polar landscapes. But bad weather is just the beginning of the unpleasantness Val Chesterfield encounters when she overcomes her many phobias to fly out and help climate scientist Wyatt Speeks with his perplexing specimen. The girl he chopped out of the wall of a crevasse and defrosted is terrified, violent, and unintelligible. While Wyatt is creepy on many levels, creepiest of all is his unwillingness to discuss the death by exposure of his erstwhile lab partner, Val’s twin brother, Andy. Andy’s having gotten locked out of the house overnight in his underwear has been presented as a suicide, but neither Val nor her father, also a climate scientist, believe it. Belief is a problem all through this book—the elements made up to serve the plot rest on a foundation of real climate science, linguistics, and cultural history but still don’t manage to be convincing. The five characters—Val, Wyatt, a nasty cook, and a pair of married marine scientists—are also less than lifelike. Saddled with mental health issues and bad manners, their interactions range from rude to abusive except for the married couple, who are so in love it’s nauseating. You really wouldn’t want to be stuck in a room with these people, which poor Val is much of the time, and now someone has stolen her anxiety meds and hidden the booze! She finds herself becoming deeply attached to the mystery girl, but progress with communication is slow, and the girl’s health takes a drastic turn for the worse. And then they all go outside and things get crazy.

Tense, claustrophobic, and a bit hard to swallow.

BOOTH
Fowler, Karen Joy
Putnam (480 pp.)
$28.00 | March 8, 2022
978-0-593-33143-9

Ostensibly about the family of Shakespearean actors best known for their connection to Lincoln assassin John Wilkes Booth, Fowler’s novel explores tensions surrounding race, politics, and culture in 19th-century America. Given his upbringing in a vegetarian, strongly anti-slavery, highly literate, freethinking household that even today would be labeled bohemian, how did John become a pro-slavery,
pro-secessionist fanatic capable of terrorist murder? And how did his actions affect his surviving family? Alcoholic, eccentrically idealistic Junius Booth is a major star on the British stage when he and his “wife,” Mary, run away to rural Maryland while he is still married to another woman. Of their 10 offspring, six survive past early childhood. Bright oldest daughter Rosalie dotes on charming Johnny but is keenly perceptive about his weaknesses. (In a heartbreaking depiction of Victorian women’s limited options, Rosalie’s own sparkle fades into genteel alcoholism after she’s forced to forego education and marriage and become the family caregiver.) Brother Edwin is quiet, responsible, maybe even dull compared to charismatic John, but despite sharing the family addiction to alcohol, Edwin has the discipline, intelligence, and talent that John lacks to succeed as an actor. To his own—and John’s resentful—surprise, Edwin becomes America’s foremost actor, maintaining his prestige despite his brother’s infamy. Staunchly abolitionist and pro-union, Edwin, who once saved Robert Lincoln’s life, and Rosalie are increasingly aghast at John’s increasingly crazed behavior and racist ravings. More conflicted is sister Asia, who shares John’s charm as well as his prickly disposition; after the assassination, she finds herself briefly under suspicion. As the Booths’ story unfolds, Fowler inserts major national events into the narrative, like the Dred Scott case and John Brown’s uprising, along with key moments in Lincoln’s life showing his humanity as well as his public nobility. The historical context she offers is of a pre–Civil War America of deep moral divides, political differences tearing close families apart, populism and fanaticism run amok. The similarities to today are riveting and chilling.
professor of psychology at VMU and a sometime FBI consultant to boot. Everybody involved has a different agenda they’re desperately trying to keep secret from everybody else, but the main thing that changes when the secrets come out is another burst of violence that suggests that that summer 18 years ago may not be the only time that ends up getting buried.

More smoke than fire.

**SURVIVOR'S GUILT**

Gigl, Robyn

Kensington (352 pp.)

$27.00 | Jan. 25, 2022

978-1-4967-2828-9

A defense attorney takes on sex traffickers and child pornographers.

When a detective asks Erin McCabe to meet with a young woman accused of murder, he explains that he has two reasons. One is that, despite her admission of guilt, the detective thinks Ann Parsons is innocent. The second is that Ann is, like Erin, transgender. Her decision to represent Ann will end up putting Erin, her law partner, and her boyfriend in grave danger. And, as the action unfolds, she will also have to deal with her mother’s breast cancer and the knowledge that her boyfriend’s family won’t accept her. The setup is quite similar to that of Gigl’s debut, *By Way of Sorrow* (2021), as is the mix of legal thriller with interpersonal drama. Erin is an engaging protagonist surrounded by well-rounded secondary characters. But the emotional stakes here are less compelling, and the legal case is unsatisfying. In *By Way of Sorrow*, Erin was dealing with the fact that her brother and her father rejected her after she came out as trans, and she was negotiating a romance with a man who wasn’t sure he could deal with her past. Watching Erin react to her mother’s illness slows the plot of this second book without revealing anything new about the protagonist and, here, that same boyfriend is almost too good to be true. The bad guys are also implausible. The idea of powerful people exploiting children is all too believable, but there’s something ridiculous about evil geniuses whose only response to a perceived threat is to just murder everybody. The emotional realism and the cartoon violence don’t fit together. The biggest issue, though, is the amount of information—about Ann Parsons and another key character—that Gigl keeps under wraps as the narrative unfolds. The reader never sees Erin asking—or even formulating—obvious and important questions about her client. To the extent that there are big reveals, they feel artificial and insufficient.

Gigl uses her debut novel as a template, with diminishing returns.

**CALL US WHAT WE CARRY**

Poems

Gorman, Amanda

Viking (80 pp.)

$19.99 | Dec. 7, 2021

978-0-593-46506-6

Poems for teenagers and adults that cast a scrutinizing eye on United States history and current events while being hopeful about the future.

Gorman’s opening poem, “Ship’s Manifest,” lays out her intentions: “This book is a message in a bottle. / This book is a letter. / This book does not let up. / This book is awake. / For what is a record but a reckoning?” Gorman delivers subtle turns of phrase alongside playful yet purposeful punning. The book tackles grief without succumbing to melancholy. It earnestly charts the challenges its collective “we” must navigate, including mask mandates and Covid-19 restrictions; social isolation; the environmental negligence of past generations; and the civil unrest following the killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. A “dark girl” dreams and skillfully steers the collective “we” point of view in these poems, which marks a sea change in the United States and, subsequently, in contemporary American poetry. Mostly, the collective “we” point of view...
adheres. Occasionally it reads as monotonous or prosaic. But variation exists in the diversity of concrete or visual poems—shaped on the page to look like flags, whales, buildings, and text bubbles—and the intricate range of people, generational insights, and historical footnotes populating the pages. The collection overflows with teachable moments you can imagine quoted at graduation ceremonies and special events for years to come. It's not a book to be read in one sitting but to be savored and revisited. By the time readers are finished, they'll have discovered Lucille Clifton, Don Mee Choi, M. NourbeSe Philip, and a dizzying host of poets and thinkers that inspired these verses. The poems don't preen to prove their intelligence; rather, they're illuminated by it. Gorman's impulse to enlighten readers rather than exclude them is the book's guiding force. With generosity and care, Gorman takes the role of the poet seriously: “The poet transcends ‘telling’ or ‘performing’ a story & / instead remembers it, touches, tastes, traps its vastness.” An inspired anthem for the next generation—a remarkable poetry debut.

**THE HIGH HOUSE**

Greengrass, Jessie

Scribner (320 pp.)

$27.00 | Jan. 4, 2022

978-1-982180-11-9

British author Greengrass’ latest is a grim and often moving hybrid, a post-apocalyptic climate change novel with a doomed domestic idyll tucked inside. Francesca is a renowned climate change activist, ever more in demand as her bleak, accurate predictions earn her a reputation as a Cassandra. As the global situation deteriorates, she more and more leaves her teenage stepdaughter, Caro, in charge of her young son, Pauly, and the two half siblings develop a powerful bond. (Francesca's husband, the children's father, has begun traveling with her to aid her work.) Francesca is a fascinating character—high-minded, laser-focused, sanctimonious, apparently allergic to joy; her neglect has a sadness in it, too, that of the parent who feels called to “higher” duty and who, it will turn out, has done the best she can in the ways that align with her skills and her inclinations. Just before she and her husband are killed in a storm on the East Coast of the U.S., Francesca tells Caro to decamp from London with Pauly to a remote bluffside home that she's worked, unbeknownst to the kids, to make into a refuge, a well-stocked, mostly self-sustaining hidey-hole. Francesca has hired as caretakers an irascible young woman named Sal and her grandfather. Caro and Pauly arrive just in time to learn of Francesca’s and their father’s deaths, and they settle in to the high house for whatever slow and limping limbo humankind has left to it. The book’s great strength is in the way it depicts this period. There's no large-scale hope or drama remaining; choices made long ago have wreaked their irreversible damage, and all that's left for the four is to sustain themselves quietly, with whatever portion of peace and pleasure they can manage, for as long as possible. Greengrass excels in her
A large family grows up in Virginia over the course of the first half of the 20th century.

The Shaw family consists of seven children; a father, Jim, who works hard on the farm but is regularly forced to sell off land during the Great Depression; and a mother, Marie, who is often bedridden due to depression. After their mother’s untimely death, the children are affected to varying degrees, and they’re divided over whether the death was an accidental overdose or a suicide, a debate which creates a rift between the siblings. Told in short, nonsequential chapters, the novel follows individual members of the family during significant moments in each of their lives: a teenage pregnancy, marriages and losses of spouses, decisions to move away, enlistment in the Second World War, and their own lives as parents. Some of the children are eventually pulled back to the family homestead after Jim’s death, and yet all navigate the distances—both physical and emotional—that have created lingering gaps among them.

Kauffman has written a deceptively light tale about the heart of a family healing around a defining loss and siblings sustaining each other through adulthood, with lovely phrases and prose throughout. Though the sections are never weighty, together they form a satisfying story of complicated relationships against the backdrop of a “beautiful world [with] a forked tongue.”

A comforting and pastoral novel.

**CHORUS**

*Kauffman, Rebecca*

Counterpoint (272 pp.)

$26.00 | March 1, 2022

978-1-64009-518-2

A bleak, poignant, impressive contribution to an ever growing genre, the fiction of climate catastrophe.
Two teenage girls struggle to survive their senior year in the Brick City of Newark, where gangsters battle for power, turf, and revenge as matter-of-factly as if every round were just another day at the office.

Promise Mohammed, still technically a virgin, loves reading English literature; her best friend, Mouse, nee Juliette Smith, agrees to carry drugs for Abdul, the second biggest shot in town, after a low-level pitch that he seals by demanding a blow job. When the two girls are busted for shoplifting, Promise’s Aunt Dell talks them out of police custody, but only so that she can work off her enduring resentment of Promise’s late mother by forcing her niece to work even harder at cleaning her house.

Everyone is working an angle, from B-Stone, the dealer at the top of the food chain, to Dell’s tenant Keys Jackson, who refuses to act on his feelings toward Promise until his potential as a pianist can make him somebody. The pot boils over when Zul, a rival gang leader, is released from prison after serving three years on a gun charge. He orders Asher, one of B-Stone’s dealers, to execute his boss, and Asher, who has his own eye on Promise, is afraid to say no because he doesn’t want Zul to learn that Asher’s the person who planted the gun in question on him. K’wan keeps the violence tamped down much longer than you’d expect; when it finally breaks out, it slashes everyone in its path, some of them fatally.

THE DAMAGE DONE
Landweber, Michael
Crooked Lane (352 pp.)
$26.99 | March 8, 2022
978-1-64385-947-7

What would the world be like if everyone suddenly lost the capacity to hurt each other?

Sixth grader Dab, caught looking the wrong way at bullying classmate Connor’s hair, tries everything he can to avoid getting beaten up, but the only thing that rescues him is Connor’s mystifying inability to land a single punch. Social worker Ann escapes the latest beating by her abusive husband, Jake, when his fists are magically deflected from her body and face. The plan a pair of antisemites hatch to shoot up a neighborhood synagogue goes awry when their automatic weapons refuse to discharge bullets into their intended victims. Salvadoran refugee sisters Gabriela and Cristela, whose mother has warned them repeatedly about the human wolves who may attack the caravan in which they’re traveling to the States, are saved when the wolves find themselves unable to lay a violent hand on them. The Empty Shell, an underground writer imprisoned for his writing against the Nation and its Dear Leader, finds his torturers utterly stymied. Can they come up with alternative, nonviolent tortures that will be equally effective? If people can no longer be harmed by other people, can they be harmed by the dogs their attackers set on them? Can they die in drownings their adversaries have arranged? And once everyone accepts the new regime, whose arrival is never assigned a cause, how will those freed from the possibility of acting violently and the threat of suffering violent action choose to live their lives? A memorial for the Last Victim to die before the epochal change and an extended epilogue showing the principals 10 years later answers some of these questions, but larger questions quite properly endure.

Landweber pulls off a true rarity, a utopian fantasy that actually feels good.

THINK OF ME
Liardet, Frances
Putnam (400 pp.)
$27.00 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-0-593-19114-9

A widowed English vicar is forced to face the truth about himself, his marriage, and his faith when his home literally and figuratively falls to pieces.

James Acton might be a member of the great generation who offered themselves up to fight in the Second World War, but he would be the last to say so. Modest and decent, he’s an upright figure—a pilot in the Royal Air Force who met his future wife, Yvette Haddad, while stationed in North Africa. Shot down on a mission, then a prisoner of war, he suffered yet survived, marrying Yvette and becoming a vicar in the south of England. Liardet’s new novel moves back and forth in time, grounded in the present by the now long-widowed Acton, who’s taking on a new parish in Upton, but interspersed with commentary by Yvette, drawn from her notebooks. These voice not only her side of the relationship, but also details of the miscarriage of their first child, an event which created a vast schism in Acton’s life. The consequences of that schism and Acton’s eventual owning of his shortcomings, as well as Yvette’s secrets, form the intense core of this hard-to-categorize narrative that also serves as a companion to Liardet’s impassioned previous novel—also set in Upton—We Must Be Brave (2019). The central figure of that book, Ellen Parr, takes a major role here too, befriending Acton, offering wisdom and more to the vicar whose beliefs and structures have suddenly turned to dust. At times affectingingly pained and searching, at others reminiscent of the sweetly benign rural community of All Creatures Great and Small, the novel offers a quiet quest for honesty and connection that, though lacking the simple clarity of its predecessor, still offers emotional insight and a memorably humane vision.

A painful private journey is traced in a sympathetic yet fragmented tale.
THE RISING TIDE
Lloyd, Sam
Scarlet (343 pp.)
$22.36 | March 1, 2022
978-1-61316-271-2

A hard-pressed Englishwoman gets the worst possible news about her family—and then watches their situation get worse and worse.

Things have been tough lately for Daniel Locke. His Devon supply firm, Locke-Povey Marine, has had to lay off far too many of its employees since Nick Povey, Daniel's old schoolmate and ex-partner, skimmed funds from it and then sold his 50% stake to a hated and much larger rival that will surely pull the plug. But that's no reason for Daniel to take his boat, Lazy Susan, out to sea and then, after sending a mayday signal, abandon it, leaving it to sink. Reeling from the news of her husband's presumed death, Lucy Locke, who owns the Drift Net, which doubles as a music venue and gallery for local artists, is stunned to learn that their children are also missing. Eighteen-year-old Billie has vanished from her college in Redlecker, and Daniel himself picked up 7-year-old Fin from his school with a cock-and-bull story about a forgotten dental appointment. As DI Abraham Rose, who's convinced that he's months away from dying of cancer, begins making inquiries among the tightknit maritime community of Skentel, Lucy hopes against hope that her husband and children are still alive. When searches find Daniel, clad in an insulating wetsuit, near the spot from which he sent out his mayday signal, his return seems almost too good to be true. So why does he keep his distance from Lucy, simply raging, "This is a tragedy written entirely for your benefit," at someone who may or may not be her? Lloyd pulls out all the stops, then pulls out some more, sacrificing plausibility and logic to his heroine's steadily deepening emotional distress.

An overwrought nightmare for readers who think too much is just enough.

ORPHEUS RISING
BY LANCE LEE

An extraordinarily beautiful, touching adventure that can stand with the classics of children's literature.—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

Imaginative and emotional—Booklife Review, Editor's Pick (Publishers Weekly)
Charming and exquisitely written—Booklife Prize
An action-packed, heartfelt romp—Blueink
Magical—Nancy Powell, Clarion Foreword
Uniquely imagined and visionary—SPR
Enchanting—Pikasho Deka, *Readers' Favorite Reviews
Powered by love—Emily-Jane Hills Orford, *Readers' Favorite Reviews

Imaginative and emotional, this underworld adventure thrills, chills, and offers insightful lessons. Lee's vivid imagination shines through each chapter...and his quirky characters will keep readers...hooked throughout.—Booklife Review, Editor's Pick (Publishers Weekly)

...it's easy to highly recommend Orpheus Rising...as a standout from the crowd, even if its exuberant story defies simple categorization. This translates to an expansive audience who will appreciate its charm.—Diane Donovan, Midwest Book Review

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REVIEWS
lanceleeauthor.com
THE BOY WITH A BIRD IN HIS CHEST
Lund, Emme
Atria (320 pp.)
$27.00 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-1-9821-7193-3

A boy with a bird in his chest navigates all the perils of adolescence while learning to accept and celebrate his queerness.

Arriving during the yearly floods in Morning, Montana, Owen is born with a mysterious heart ailment. His mother, Janice, takes him home, expecting the worst. Instead, she awakens one morning to see a baby bird settled “inside the rib cage, next to his heart and lungs.” So begins Owen’s life as a boy with a secret, a boy who is kept inside by his mother, a boy with only the bird, Gail, for company. And so begins Lund’s symbolic tale of growing up queer in the early 2000s. Isolated and hidden from the rest of the world for most of his childhood, Owen begins to long for companionship as he enters adolescence. But his mother’s concern for his safety from “the Army of Acronyms” is warranted; when he enters a doctor’s office in an emergency, the doctor calls him a “Terror,” and Owen barely escapes. To protect her son, Janice takes him to live with her brother and his daughter, Tennessee. What follows is Owen’s coming-of-age story: his efforts to survive high school, his sexual awakening, and his growing pull toward water and the ocean. In a lovely piece of magical realism, Gail is physical proof of Owen’s difference from the people around him, but she also plays a parental role, offering advice and care. Owen’s queerness is presented both as an essential piece of his identity from birth and as a piece of himself that he must keep secret. He struggles with self-confidence and belonging and with suicidal thoughts. Yet in the end, it is love that will save him—love, Gail, and the infinite beauty and power of the ocean. The novel follows the conventional structure of a bildungsroman, but the symbolism is decidedly unconventional. And while it takes a little while to sort out the layers of literal versus figurative meaning, the strangeness sets it apart from other coming-of-age stories.

Embrace magic and suspend your disbelief and this novel may just take you on a beautiful, necessary journey.

CIRCUS OF WONDERS
Macneal, Elizabeth
Emily Bestler/Atria (368 pp.)
$27.00 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-9821-0679-9

The circus gives a young woman with a unique condition a chance to reinvent her story.

Nell, who was born with a unique skin condition, feels “the familiar burn of eyes on her” as villagers react to the news that the circus is coming to their small town. She’s used to being treated as if she was a “living curiosity,” the marks on her skin separating her from the rest of the world except for her brother, Charlie. Nell’s worst fears are realized when her father sells her to Jasper Jupiter’s Circus of Wonders, helping the showman capture her the night before the circus travels on. While at first Nell feels like a caged animal, fighting to be free again, Jasper’s vision of elevating Nell into a superstar—the amazing Nellie Moon, her skin speckled like the stars in the night sky—begins to change her perspective. “The dull reality of her life—the flower farm and the sea and Charlie—has begun to fog and vanish.” Macneal develops an intimate tale of passion, longing, and self-preservation set amid a bustling Victorian-era London, where oddities draw an eager crowd and P.T. Barnum’s performers are household names. This story is a slow burn, almost like a circus building toward its grand finale. Overburdened at first by overly descriptive language, the narrative becomes more captivating as Nell develops into a freethinking, inspired character. Jasper, the showman, thinks of the circus as “life, desire, amplified,” and it’s this desire reflected in the individual characters that will keep readers invested. Macneal does a solid job of
weaving comparisons to Shelley's *Frankenstein* throughout; the performers are diminished to monsters at times and at others they are at risk of growing more powerful than the man who invented them. The complex characters, their backstories and satisfying trajectories, make up for flowery prose and plotlines spun and quickly unraveled.

Don't be tricked; the circus is not the star of this show. Instead, larger-than-life characters draw a captive audience.

**THE DARKEST PLACE**

Margolin, Phillip  
Minotaur (304 pp.)  
$27.99 | March 8, 2022  
978-1-2502-5844-1

There’s nothing like a pair of impossible legal cases to help a defense lawyer get over the death of the fiance who was gunned down in front of her.

As soon as Profit, Oregon, investment adviser Joel Loman is found shot to death behind a Portland restaurant, a pair of homicide detectives call on his new widow, Marjorie Loman of the Profit Police Department, who can hardly conceal her delight that she no longer has to divorce the husband who was cheating on her with Kelly Starrett, his partner in Emerald Wealth Management. The detectives are shortly followed by a pair of thugs who tell Marjorie that Joel owed their boss $250,000 they expect her to pay. Faced with intolerable pressures from the law and the lawless, she flees to Elk Grove, Iowa, where, as Ruth Larson, she signs a $50,000 contract to serve as the surrogate who’ll carry a baby for childless Caleb and Emily Lindstrom. When the baby is born, Marjorie, unexpectedly bonding with him, is desperate to renege on the agreement. She rushes over to the Lindstroms’, pistol-whips Emily, and carries off the baby only to be caught soon after. Her defense on kidnapping and child abuse charges would be hopeless if Portland attorney Robin Lockwood, shocked and grief-stricken after witnessing the murder of Jeff Hodges, her investigator and husband-to-be, hadn’t also retreated to her hometown of Elk Ridge, where she reluctantly agrees to join local attorney Stan McDermott in defending Marjorie and then, when Marjorie’s extradited back to Portland, follows her and takes on her solo defense against the charge of murdering her husband. Whew!

Margolin manages his overstuffed, profoundly unlikely plot with all the efficiency of an extra-sharp defense brief.
TRIPPING ARCADIA
Mayquist, Kit
Dutton (368 pp.)
$26.00 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-0-593-18520-9

A young woman takes a job working for a wealthy family with a deadly secret in Mayquist’s debut.

Lena is a medical school dropout who recently came home to Boston after having spent two years in Italy working with her Aunt Clare, an expert in plants and herbal medicine. Lena’s family is down on their luck after her father lost his job, so when she’s called to a lavish brownstone in Back Bay for an interview to work as an assistant to the wealthy Verdeau family’s personal physician, Dr. Prosenko, she’s desperate to get the job despite the family’s oddities. Martin, the patriarch, runs the immense family company, while beautiful daughter Audrey flits in to set Lena’s heart racing, and sickly son Jonathan leans into a drinking habit despite his mysterious and debilitating illness. Horrified by Jonathan’s disregard for his own health and disgusted by the excesses of Martin’s wealth, Lena finds herself pushed over the edge by a lavish party at the family’s Berkshires estate where she witnesses the way Martin and his rich friends torment and toy with ordinary people. She decides that enough is enough. Using the knowledge of herbal medicines and poisons she learned from her aunt, Lena concocts a plan to teach Martin a lesson he won’t soon forget. It takes a few chapters for Mayquist to get the tone right, with much of Lena’s gothic-toned narration feeling out of place in the modern setting. But once Lena’s plan starts taking shape, the plot accelerates along with it as well-deployed twists keep both Lena and the reader on their toes.

A shaky start but a propulsive plot.

THE MIDNIGHT RIDE
Mezrich, Ben
Grand Central Publishing (304 pp.)
$29.00 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-1-5387-5463-4

Mezrich, best known as a true-crime author, turns to fiction with this history-based thriller.

The novel begins with a prologue that recounts the notorious (and still unsolved) real-life theft of 13 artworks from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston in 1990, then jumps to the present. Math genius Hailey Gordon is paying her way through graduate school at MIT by gambling at the casinos, and she’s just been spotted counting cards. Fleeing casino security, she dodges through an open hotel room door—and finds a dead man. Right behind her is Nick Patterson, an ex-convict who’s there to meet the now-deceased Jimmy the Lip, who was supposed to be his connection to the deal of a lifetime—one connected to the
Gardner heist. Hailey’s and Nick’s mutual desire to elude the cops quickly turns into a partnership to find the real object of the Gardner theft—which wasn’t any of the priceless paintings but an object, as the title suggests, connected to Paul Revere. They’re joined (grudgingly) in the hunt by Adrian Jensen, an enormously snobby history professor who’s been propelled into a related quest by the murder of a despised colleague. In the mode of the history-based, conspiracy-fed thriller à la Dan Brown, their race around Boston’s historic landmarks takes place in just a day. But it feels like much longer. Thrillers like this one are grounded in research, but in this book the research is dropped in giant blocks that leave the action in park for pages at a time. At one critical point, when a character is about to fire a gun, the action is interrupted by almost 300 words on how to load a flintlock pistol—a disquisition that does nothing for the plot but bring it to a screeching halt. When the action does struggle to the surface, it’s increasingly confusing and often improbable.

A conspiracy-driven thriller stalls out on too little action and a dissertation’s worth of research.

DON'T GET CLOSE
Miksa, Matt
Crooked Lane (352 pp.)
$26.99 | March 8, 2022
978-1-64385-900-2

A rookie FBI agent battles a group of suicide bombers who take a distinctly long view of their struggle.

Vera Taggart isn’t a typical recruit to the Bureau. Acting Chicago Special Agent in Charge Gina Butler had approached her at a display of the paintings she’d created in fulfillment of her degree program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago because she was convinced that Tag’s eyes saw deep enough to help track the Sons of Elijah, a cabal of bombers convinced that they’re reincarnations of earlier generations of oppressed and conquered people from civilizations as remote as medieval France, China, and Imperial Rome. Completing her training as she recovers from the death of her roommate at the hands of an unusually adventurous
lover, Tag prevents troubled Caleb Miller from throwing himself off a bridge into the Chicago River. He runs away and sets off a bomb in Chinatown. Looking for answers about Caleb’s behavior, Tag meets with his psychiatrist, Dr. Seth Jacobson, a noted expert on past life regression therapy. It turns out that Jacobson has used hypnosis to awaken remarkably detailed memories of earlier lives in both Caleb and corporate accountant Gerald Cutter, another Son of Elijah, who vanished after killing his wife in a reversal of their usual BDSM roles. Determined to find out more, Tag persuades Jacobson to hypnotize her, unleashing some shocking memories of her own past lives. The news that the particle accelerator at Fermilab is Caleb’s likely target brings Tag together with Fermilab director Dr. Alex Torres, a researcher hunting for the Big C Particle, the seat of human consciousness. Given the stakes, which of these expert authorities can she really trust?

A wildly ambitious thriller that reaches for the skies in ways some readers will like a lot better than others.
commitments”; the behavior that Arun tries to emulate in “a series of impersonations—believable performances, with hardly any slips and fluffs, as an upper-caste Hindu”; and the painful trampling of his past.

An astute, discomfiting journey into a wasteland.

PANPOCALYPSE
Moore, Carley
Feminist Press (208 pp.)
$17.95 paper | March 8, 2022
978-1-952177-60-6

At the intersection of disability, queerness, and the pandemic, one woman’s meditation on loneliness and connection.

Originally serialized in the early months of the pandemic, this work of autofiction is narrated by Orpheus (sometimes called Carley and, briefly, Charlie), a queer disabled professor in her 40s. Orpheus is grappling with twin emotions: a loneliness forced on her by ex-lovers who don’t want to see her and a loneliness forced on her by a pandemic that won’t let her see the ones who do. As she rides through the mostly deserted city on her newly acquired bicycle, she hopes to see friends and her ex-girlfriend Eurydice. What she witnesses is sickness, police brutality, and brief moments of connection between and with strangers. Desperate to touch and be touched, when she gets an invitation through the dating app Lex to an underground club styled after the 1930s Parisian lesbian club Le Monocle, she jumps at the chance to go. Moore has a fascination with time; her nonlinear narrative is peppered with Orpheus’ childhood memories of abusive doctors and portals into other worlds and time periods. While Moore does not shy away from the heaviness of her subject matter, the gravity is nonetheless offset by her persistent gentle humor and her optimistic bent: “If nothing else, we have all had to slow down. Some of us had to stop altogether. Sick time is anti-capitalist, revolutionary if you can accept it or even see it. Care and community in the time of the police state are
radical acts. Still, to this day.” And while the pandemic permeates every moment of the novel, Orpheus’ desperate search for autonomy, relationships, and self-actualization feels perennial. At once timely and timeless.

A singer/songwriter at the beginning of her career is befriended by a retired country-music luminary.

**RUN, ROSE, RUN**

O’Nan, Stewart
Grove (240 pp.)
$27.00 | March 8, 2022
978-0-8021-5927-4

Prolific, protean O’Nan examines a familiar subject, hard-pressed working-class life in America, through the lens of a Rhode Island murder.

Ashaway, Rhode Island, in 2009 is a typical postindustrial town; the mill that employed most of its residents is closed, leaving people like Carol to scrabble for a living as a nurse’s aide to support her two teenage daughters. One of them, Marie, opens the novel with these words: “When I was in eighth grade my sister helped kill another girl.” This is not a whodunit but an exploration of why the murder happened; O’Nan tells the story with his characteristic compassion (and artistic boldness) by inhabiting the consciousnesses of four unhappy, conflicted females. Overweight, unpopular Marie is the fearful, helpless observer. Carol wants more for her girls than she has, “but exactly how that will happen”—so she focuses instead on finding a new boyfriend who’s better than the parade of losers who have earned her eldest daughter Angel’s contempt. Angel can’t see any way out either; her post-graduation future promises little other than continuing to work in her dead-end after-school job while privileged boyfriend Myles heads for college and “she’ll lose him to some rich girl.” Actually, Myles is already cheating on her with Birdy, the victim-to-be, whose lovestruck perspective is the fourth narrative strand. But she’s no rich girl; Birdy and Angel are more alike than different, frustrated and obsessing about a boy who doesn’t seem worth it. Seen only through others’ eyes, Myles’ role in the ensuing tragedy remains murky. The novel’s main thrust is also unclear; Marie’s closing monologue suggests themes of memory and identity that weren’t particularly evident as the story progressed. However, the book is rich in social detail, including the teenagers’ socially networked world, and warmed by O’Nan’s customary tenderness for ordinary lives. *Everyday People* was the title of one of his first great novels, in 2001, and depicting everyday people with sensitive acuity remains one of his principal artistic achievements here.

Not one of this gifted author’s best, though it’s finely rendered with poignant realism.
Day by day, century by century, the past cries out to the future: “Do not set aside my beauty, my desires, and my carefully constructed truths, even as you try to take my precious child to some impossible shore.”
—From the Prologue

“...closely linked short stories that form a whole far greater than the sum of their parts....An extraordinary, intricately crafted work of literature...”
—Midwest Book Review

“The stories are capacious and sweeping....pitch-perfect....Zasada’s yarns captivate...”
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

“The writing is hypnotic and the stories transporting!”
—Adrienne Sparks, Reach for a Book

“We all have this sense of greatness just out of reach...”
—Vicki St. Clair, KKNW Seattle

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“Down-to-earth action tackles an otherworldly mystery in this devilishly plausible yarn.”

DIABLO MESA

Two desiccated corpses aren’t the strangest discoveries made by archaeologists in this third entry of Preston and Child’s unusual crime series.

Nora Kelly is summoned to her boss’s office at the Santa Fe Archaeological Institute and assigned to investigate the site where an unidentified aircraft, perhaps a UFO, supposedly crashed in 1947. She believes that claims of an alien space landing near Roswell are “wacko.” But billionaire Lucas Tappan has provided a generous grant to the institute, and he specifically wants Nora to lead the expedition because of her reputation. She declines and is fired. So Tappan comes to her directly. “I can’t put digging up UFOs on my resume,” she tells Skip, her less-skeptical brother. “It’s too weird.” Tappan wears her down and hires them both. Reluctantly she takes a team to the area, where they uncover a pair of corpses buried in New Mexico’s high desert. They notify the police, and FBI agent Corrie Swanson takes on the case because they’re on federal land. But the depression in the sand suggests that the vehicle—a flying saucer, maybe?—had struck the ground at a low angle and skipped repeatedly, like a flat rock across a pond. When they come to a possible final resting place, the archaeologists start digging. Just as they are about to make a shocking discovery, armed men stop them. Whatever is under a

of President Henry Caine for a midlevel New York newspaper after the brash, self-serving POTUS is elected to a second term—and her lawyer husband, Ben, picked up stakes and moved to a city to which they had no previous ties? Why has a reporter showing up at their door and asking questions struck terror into Sofie’s heart? Over the course of the novel, Pitoniak will gradually unspool Sofie’s story as well as that of President Caine’s Moscow-born, Paris-raised, former-model wife, Lara, the beautiful, stylish, and self-possessed yet maddeningly (to the press and public) elusive first lady who has enlisted Sofie to write her biography. Pitoniak’s characters may sound familiar, but the author takes them in imaginative directions as she explores and expands upon their memories and motives and the moments in which, as they weigh individual sacrifice for greater good, their decisions change the trajectories of their lives. And although the book traffics in espionage-saga tropes—Cold War! Spies! Murder! Clandestine meetings! Secret signals! Hidden drops! The KGB! The CIA! They’re all here!—and Pitoniak ultimately wraps things up perhaps too prettily, it’s fun to pick up the clues and piece together the truth about Lara Caine, Sofie, and those with whom they interact as we toggle between exotic locales—Moscow, Paris, New York City, and Washington, D.C., in addition to Split—and the 1970s and present day.

This lively political thriller mulls love, loyalty, and the rewards of playing the long game.
couple of meters of earth is a secret the government has closely guarded since the ’40s, and these dudes demonstrate that they will kill intruders on the spot. Kelly and Swanson aren’t friends, but they’ve worked well together ever since they debuted in Old Bones (2019), and they are smart, strong, and appealing protagonists. The story has tension, mystery, murder, and enough romance to give Kelly “a powerful glow, a whole-body tingle.”

Down-to-earth action tackles an otherworldly mystery in this devilishly plausible yarn.

**Ramesses the Damned**

The Reign of Osiris

Rice, Anne & Christopher Rice

Anchor (320 pp.)

$14.49 paper | Feb. 1, 2022

978-1-101-97033-1

In the wrap-up to his trilogy, Ramses the Damned is part of a band of immortals with an important mission. As readers of the preceding installments—The Mummy, or Ramses the Damned (1989) and Ramses the Damned: The Passion of Cleopatra (2017)—will know, the one-time Egyptian pharaoh is now going by Reginald Ramsey and is married to Julie Stratford, the daughter of a dead Egyptologist. The two are among the recipients of a letter from an immortal queen named Bektaten, warning them to resist the urge to get involved in the great war which is about to engulf the planet and inviting them to come hang out at her manor in England if they need a refuge. The group of people who receive the letter has significant overlap with those on a hit list carried by Russian assassins, each of whom has been equipped with an amber gem that brings statues to life, after which they can be controlled like avatars in a video game. When Ramsey and Julie are attacked, he has a vague, millennia-old memory of seeing the stone at one of his pharaonic initiation ceremonies—but feels a little awkward about bringing it up since he was tripping at the time. In any case, after the first three assassination attempts are foiled (that’s immortality for you), everybody does indeed head to the manor to plan next steps. In addition to offering what sounds like an orgasmic experience of healing when stabbed or shot, immortality has many other benefits. The immortals have vast appetites for food and sex and can eat constantly with no ill results. Since the authors are mother and son, the seeming paucity of sex scenes is probably for the best. We get a brief three-way including Cleopatra, her young British lover, and an American novelist who receives and experiences Cleopatra’s emotions “like a symphony across a telephone line.” The other one involves the male lover of the dead Egyptologist, who is not quite himself when restored to life from his coffin but is more fully revived by a hand job.

Only you can know if you want to read this book. Follow your instincts.
Virginia; as his father reminds him, “I know who you are, and Catholic upbringing causing him to ponder mortal sins and a Columbia University in the early 1970s with a tumultuous inner feel rushed. 

A charismatic figure traverses Europe, followers in tow. 

The latest novel by the Polish Nobel Prize winner to appear in English is a behemoth, both in size and subject matter. At nearly 1,000 pages, the book tackles the mysteries of heresy and faith, organized religion and splinter sects, 18th-century Polish and Lithuanian history, and some of the finer points of cabalist and Hasidic theology. At its center is the historical figure Jacob Frank, who, in the mid-1750s, was believed to be the Messiah by a segment of Jews in what is now Ukraine. Jacob preached that the end times had come and that moral- and foolish divisions and from there starting a new order all over. 

J-Bee finds him unsure of his direction in life—he's surrounded by the counterculture but is also courted by the Sachems, described as “a secret society of campus conservatives.” Eventually, one of his friends falls victim to the machinations of a drug dealer, and J-Bee's penchant for revenge returns to the foreground. He also embarks on a relationship with Margo, a fellow student with a connection to Bloom, an older man who becomes a mentor to him. It gets heady at times, with J-Bee's Catholic upbringing causing him to ponder mortal sins and a mysterious figure known as the Serpent delivering long monologues arguing for an end to political division. (Sample quote: “I tell you it’s all rhetoric, generated from a smoke screen being used to make two sides out of the same, exploited generation of men.”) The book doesn't lack ambition, but several aspects of it, including the ups and downs of J-Bee and Margo's relationship, feel rushed.

This ambitious novel evokes a time and place but gets tripped up in the pacing.

A 30-year-old married woman from Los Angeles, finding herself adrift after her mother's death, travels to Italy on a long-awaited vacation they had planned to take together.

Katy Silver's one and only true love is her mother. Her mother is—was—her first call, her last call, her everything. When Carol dies after a long illness, Katy is so overcome with grief she cannot imagine continuing her life as it was. Already on leave from work to tend to her mother, she tells her husband, Eric, that she needs space and heads to the vacation in Positano, Italy, that she and her mother had been planning. The purpose of the trip had been for Katy to see for herself the location, food, and scenery of a life-changing trip Carol had taken in her youth. Once Katy arrives at the Hotel Poseidon, she locks her wedding and engagement rings and her cellphone in the hotel room's safe and begins to wander, experiencing the timelessness of Italy. Although in this instance, that timelessness is literal. Not long after Katy’s arrival, a younger version of Carol appears. The two strike up a friendship, and Katy leans into this unexpected—and inexplicable—time with her mother. She also leans into a potential are-they-or-aren’t-they-going-to-do-it romance with Adam, another guest at the hotel. This is a story about how Katy tries to discover who she is as a person and what she wants once she is away from her mother’s wide-ranging opinions and expertise and her husband’s love, calmness, and happiness with routine. What Katy finds is that her mother isn’t who she thought she was, but then again, neither is she.

An unconventional love story that embraces people's flaws and selfishness as part of what makes them human.

“A massive achievement that will intrigue and baffle readers for years to come.”

THE SERPENT PAPERS
Schnader, Jeff
Permanent Press (330 pp.)
$29.95 | Feb. 28, 2022
978-1-57962-648-8

The protagonist of Schnader’s novel wrestles with his upbringing in 1970s New York.

The questions facing J-Bee, aka Joseph Bell, are ones familiar to many angry young men as they come of age. J-Bee comes from a military family in Virginia; as his father reminds him, “I know who you are, and you’re a fighter from a long line of fighters.” J-Bee is a student at Columbia University in the early 1970s with a tumultuous inner life. This includes a propensity for righteous violence, which he engaged in as a high schooler by getting revenge on the bullies who caused the death of his deaf brother. J-Bee’s time at Columbia finds him unsure of his direction in life—he’s surrounded by the counterculture but is also courted by the Sachems, described as “a secret society of campus conservatives.” Eventually, one of his friends falls victim to the machinations of a drug dealer, and J-Bee’s penchant for revenge returns to the foreground. He also embarks on a relationship with Margo, a fellow student with a connection to Bloom, an older man who becomes a mentor to him. It gets heady at times, with J-Bee’s Catholic upbringing causing him to ponder mortal sins and a mysterious figure known as the Serpent delivering long monologues arguing for an end to political division. (Sample quote: “I tell you it’s all rhetoric, generated from a smoke screen being used to make two sides out of the same, exploited generation of men.”) The book doesn't lack ambition, but several aspects of it, including the ups and downs of J-Bee and Margo's relationship, feel rushed.

This ambitious novel evokes a time and place but gets tripped up in the pacing.

ONE ITALIAN SUMMER
Sерле, Rebecca
Atria (272 pp.)
$27.00 | March 1, 2022
978-1-9821-6681-6

A 30-year-old married woman from Los Angeles, finding herself adrift after her mother’s death, travels to Italy on a long-awaited vacation they had planned to take together.

Katy Silver's one and only true love is her mother. Her mother is—was—her first call, her last call, her everything. When Carol dies after a long illness, Katy is so overcome with grief she cannot imagine continuing her life as it was. Already on leave from work to tend to her mother, she tells her husband, Eric, that she needs space and heads to the vacation in Positano, Italy, that she and her mother had been
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English by Croft) has been widely hailed as Tokarczuk's magnum opus, and it will likely take years, if not decades, to begin to unravel its rich complexities.

A massive achievement that will intrigue and baffle readers for years to come.

**FRENCH BRAID**

*Tyler, Anne*

Knopf (256 pp.)

$27.00 | March 22, 2022

978-0-593-32109-6

In her 24th novel, Tyler once again unravels the tangled threads of family life.

This familiar subject always seems fresh in her hands because Tyler draws her characters and their interactions in such specific and revealing detail. Robin and Mercy Garrett and their three children seem oddly distanced from each other when we meet them during a 1959 summer vacation. Robin talks a lot about what everything costs, and Mercy is frequently absent painting the local landscape. Fifteen-year-old Lily is also not around much; deprived of her Baltimore boyfriend, she's taken up with an older boy who bossy, judgmental older sister Alice is pleased to opine is only using her. Seven-year-old David rejects Robin's attempts to get him in the water in favor of inventing elaborate storylines for the plastic GIs he's recast as veterinarians. As usual, Tyler deftly sets the scene and broadly outlines characters who will change and deepen over time as the Garretts traverse 60 years; individual chapters offer the perspective of each parent and sibling (plus three members of the third generation). We need to get inside their heads, because the Garretts seldom discuss what's really on their minds, the primary example being the fact that once David goes to college, Mercy gets a studio and eventually stops living with Robin altogether. All the children know, but since she appears for family gatherings—including a weird but moving surprise 50th anniversary party Robin throws—no one ever mentions it. Tyler gives the final word to David, who, like his mother, has maintained tenuous family ties while deliberately keeping his distance. Families are like the French braids that left their daughter's hair in waves even after she undid them, he tells his wife: “You’re never really free; the ripples are crimped in forever.” It's a characteristically homely, resonant metaphor from a writer who understands that the domestic world can contain the universe.

More lovely work from Tyler, still vital and creative at 80.

**THE LOVE OF MY LIFE**

*Walsh, Rosie*

Pamela Dorman/Viking (384 pp.)

$28.00 | March 1, 2022

978-0-593-329699-8

A husband learns his wife is hiding a secret life.

Emma and Leo have been happily married for seven years, although they've weathered their share of struggles (such as infertility and Emma's cancer diagnosis). Emma's a marine ecologist and erstwhile TV presenter whose bubbly personality is loved by all, while Leo is an obituary writer and his wife's No. 1 fan. Both are head over heels for their young daughter, Ruby. Although Emma's currently doing well, Leo is given the job of prewriting her obituary, a common strategy with people who are in the public eye. In his quest to write the perfect tribute to his wife, he starts looking into her past and discovers a few inconsistencies he can't explain. Why did Emma lie about her university degree? Why is she so cagey about her life before Leo? How is she connected to a famous actress who just went missing? And, most importantly, is her name even Emma? As Emma attempts to cover up her secrets, Leo digs through their house for clues and tracks down people from her past in an attempt to figure out why she's lying and what she's hiding from him. The old life Emma tried so carefully to hide threatens to destroy the new life she's built with Leo. Walsh masterfully shows both Emma's and Leo's points of view while maintaining an intoxicating air of mystery. As readers get to know them both, it seems unbelievable that lovable Emma could be deceiving Leo...but how else to explain the secrets he's uncovering? The big reveal about Emma's life manages to be both surprising and heartbreaking, with many twists and turns along the way.

A propulsive thriller with heart that will keep readers guessing.

**MY FATHER'S DIET**

*West, Adrian Nathan*

And Other Stories (176 pp.)

$16.95 paper | Feb. 1, 2022

978-1-91350-522-6

A young man weathers his hapless father's succession of self-improvement schemes.

The narrator of West's dark, slim, emotionally precise debut novel is the product of a broken home: His parents divorced when he was 2, leaving him to navigate both of his parents' poor romantic choices. His mother has taken up with a blowhard ne'er-do-well he calls the Weirdo; his father, meanwhile, has married a woman determined to launch a New Age mindfulness spa despite her glum demeanor and poor business skills. The narrator isn't much of a success himself: He's failing French, a subject he's majoring in out of a vague urge to escape his
Midwestern rut. But he hardly has the energy to blame anyone for his lassitude; in West’s hands, this story isn’t so much about family dysfunction as a sour kind of stasis in which nobody falls apart but nobody succeeds, either. Plotwise, this idea is encompassed in the diet of the book’s title, as the narrator’s father participates in a dubious competition to shift from pudgy middle-aged man to ripped gym rat in 12 weeks. But West’s language does most of the work to convey this broken-down mood. The stepmom’s cheeks have “the indelible, grainy blush of the experienced alcoholic”; strip-mall clerks, “leaning on counters or resting their elbows on tables, had uniform looks of despair”; the mindfulness class is disrupted by stomach rumbles. West is consistently poised on a very narrow line between blackhearted contempt for these characters and comic mockery of them. But because he never slips off that line, he generates a certain affection for his characters, even if it’s clear how that body-transformation scheme is going to go. Everybody here is hard to love, but their good intentions, however misguided, make them easy to engage with.

A crisp novel with plenty of momentum despite chronicling lives stuck in neutral.

**FAMILY MONEY**

*Zunker, Chad*  
Thomas & Mercer (240 pp.)  
$15.95 paper | March 1, 2022  
978-1-5420-2616-1

A do-gooder family’s latest act of charity leads to sudden disaster.

And it’s really sudden, as Alex Mahan, founder of a successful Austin software company who’s come with his wife and her parents to Mexico to help with some construction work in an orphanage, watches in stunned horror while Joe Dobson, his father-in-law, is snatched from a street in Mexico and driven off on the opening page. The biggest initial mystery about his abduction is why Joe would shout to Alex that he was sorry as his kidnappers hooded and bundled him into the back of a van. But that riddle is soon joined by others. Who is the “Greta” who texted Joe on suspiciously intimate terms shortly before he was taken? Why were two boxes full of documents about Grande Distributors stolen when Joe retired from his law practice? And where did the $5 million he invested in Alex’s startup really come from? Alex first awaits a ransom demand that never arrives; then, after Joe’s body is discovered in the smoldering wreck of the van, asks nosy questions of every one of Joe’s associates he can dig up. Incredibly, most of them respond with meticulously detailed information that all points in one direction: Alex’s beloved father-in-law was living a second life under an assumed name after his supposed death in a plane crash with his own father 35 years ago after apparently stealing $50 million from a criminal network. The involvement of agents from the CIA and Mexico’s CNI raises the stakes without solving the mystery. Despite those initial questions, though, Zunker doesn’t provide that much mystery to be solved.

Pray that your own trips across the border turn out better.

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**M E M O R Y**

**WILD IRISH ROSE**

*Bowen, Rhys & Clare Broyles*  
Minotaur (320 pp.)  
$26.99 | March 1, 2022  
978-1-2508-0805-9

A marriage is imperiled by that age-old threat: the wife’s desire to continue sleuthing.

Most women in 1907 are wives and mothers who stay home to care for their families. But restless former private detective Molly Murphy envious her husband Daniel’s job as a New York City detective. When Sid and Gus, the eccentric neighbors with whom she’s shared past adventures, ask her to help with a clothing drive set up by the Vassar Benevolent Society to take clothes to newly arrived immigrants at Ellis Island, the task plunges her into a dangerous and exciting murder case. Molly’s ward, Bridie, a bright young girl Gus and Sid have offered to tutor because she’s chronically underserved at school, is invited along. When they arrive on the island, Bridie accidentally follows a woman who looks like Molly—a woman who later turns out to be the chief suspect in the murder of an unidentified man that Daniel’s investigating. Molly is predisposed to finding Rose McSweeney innocent, for she naturally sees herself in the beautiful Irish immigrant and soon befriends her, much to the disapproval of Daniel, who wants her to stay far from his case. Despite his stern warnings, Molly continues to make inquiries, and she eventually turns up a great deal of new evidence the police would never have found. The investigation moves slowly as it awaits information from Ireland and England, but Molly, undaunted, continues to champion Rose, who may not be what she seems.

The clever and adventurous heroine dissects a complicated mystery while standing up for women’s rights.

**MURDER IN THE PARK**

*Dams, Jeanne M.*  
Severn House (224 pp.)  
$28.99 | March 1, 2022  
978-0-7278-5045-4

This sea change from Dams’ Dorothy Martin series introduces a new heroine with a lot to learn in 1920s Chicago.

Seven years after Elizabeth Fairchild lost her husband on the day before the First World War ended and her severe depression caused her to miscarry, she’s living in the wealthy Chicago suburb of Oak Park with her snobbish mother, whose mission in life is getting her to remarry, and her schoolteacher father. They have a cook, housemaid, and gardener; Elizabeth
can't even boil an egg. Despite her liberal bent and all the committees she serves on, it takes the murder of a man she liked and respected to give her life purpose. Mr. Anthony ran a delightful antiques shop where Elizabeth often bought gifts. The police take the easy path after learning that his name was really Enrico Antonelli, identifying him as a member of the despised Italian community. Their contempt is shared by the local chapter of the Walsosas Club, the women's arm of the KKK. Soon after Elizabeth calls on Ernest Hemingway's mother to help prove the innocence of a music teacher accused of the crime, she earns the enmity of the Walsosas. When her safety is threatened, she takes refuge with the aunt of lawyer Fred Wilkins, who's in love with her, and between the two of them and several other friends, she learns to solve crimes and boil eggs.

A heroine with plenty of scope for changing her life, which plays out against a fascinating time period.

**DEADLY DIRECTOR’S CUT**
**Delany, Vicki**
Berkley (304 pp.)
$8.99 paper | March 1, 2022
978-0-593-33439-3

This follow-up to Elizabeth Grady’s exciting debut in *Deadly Summer Nights* (2021) returns to Haggerman’s Catskill Resort, which Elizabeth is desperate to turn into a success during the height of the Borscht Belt’s popularity as a summer haven for New Yorkers.

The finances of Elizabeth’s famous mother, former dancer Olivia Peters, depend on Haggerman’s, which Elizabeth manages as Olivia thrills the guests with an occasional appearance. A welcome infusion of cash and cachet arrives with a Hollywood movie shoot. Gloria Grant, one of the stars and an old friend of Olivia’s, stays with her; the rest of the cast and crew opt for the larger, better-known Kennelwood Hotel. Despite irascible director Elias Theropodous’ temper tantrums, things go smoothly enough despite all the behind-the-scenes backbiting and romances—until Elias dies in the hospital after attending a dinner party at Haggerman’s, sparking rumors that something he ate there made him sick. Only the fact that no one else has taken ill helps Elizabeth keep her kitchen open and the police at bay. Feeling that she has no choice, Elizabeth, who’s worried that her friend Velvet will get seduced by the production’s handsome male lead, finds time for some serious detective work, getting a friendly reporter to do research for her while he covers the crime. Elias had plenty of enemies, and it’s quite a challenge for Elizabeth to continue running the resort while hunting a killer.

A deft touch with characterization, plenty of suspects, and a nostalgic look at the Catskills in the 1950s add up to a fun read.

**THE CHAPEL IN THE WOODS**
**Gordon-Smith, Dolores**
Severn House (256 pp.)
$28.99 | March 1, 2022
978-1-4483-0645-9

Could a jaguar be killing people in a British forest in 1922?

Author and amateur sleuth Jack Haldean has solved many unusual cases, but none as odd and nerve-wracking as the one he investigates while he and his wife, Betty, are visiting Jack’s cousin in Sussex. The nearby estate of Birchen Bower, recently purchased by wealthy Canadian Tom Jago and his wife, Rosalind, has an evil reputation. Its mystique is deepened when the Martins, a couple Jago sent to open the house, vanish along with a cache of valuable jewelry. Certain that Derek Martin, whom he first met while they were serving in World War I, is no thief, Jago hopes for another explanation. The Cayden family, who owned the place for many years, was so eccentric that they released wild animals in the woods in an attempt to re-create the Amazon jungle. A fete the Jagos hold on their property attracts a large crowd, many of them anxious to see the Cayden chapel, which houses the tomb of a reputed Jaguar Princess. Snarls issue forth from the woods, and when Haldean, Betty, Jago, and the man who heard the scary sounds arrive at the locked chapel, they find a mutilated body apparently torn apart by a big cat. Although an expert admits that a cat could have done the deed, Haldean persists in looking for a human killer. But even he is spooked by another death and several incidents that seem impossible to explain.

Sinister events and a complex mystery make this contemporary take on the classic British mystery a real page-turner.

**DEATH BY CHOCOLATE CHIP CUPCAKE**
**Graves, Sarah**
Kensington (304 pp.)
$26.00 | March 29, 2022
978-1-4967-2922-4

Some bakers’ bid to earn extra cash turns deadly.

Winter is no time to run a boutique chocolate shop in Eastport, Maine. As the summer visitors leave, the Chocolate Moose empties out. Jacobia Tiptree and Ellie White, partners and best friends, find themselves closing in the midst of a snowstorm after a day without a single customer. Ellie is especially bummed because she’s developing a new recipe for chocolate pizza that she’s sure would be a hot item if only someone would brave the cold and come try it. Then, a bolt from the blue: Retired screen actress Ingrid Merryfield drives up in her stretch limo. The Eastport native has bought majestic Cliff House and wants to pay Ellie and Jake handsomely to provide late-night desserts for her housewarming party. Cliff House’s creepy reputation gives
the pair pause, but the gig offers them their best chance to keep the Moose open. So Jake enlists her daughter-in-law, Mika, and her stepmother, Bella, for the overnight stint. Naturally, Jake’s cream-filled cupcakes aren’t even half gone when guests start dying. Actor Gilly Blaine disappears over a cliff. Film critic Audrey Dalton’s body turns up in an empty room. And while Jake wonders who’s next, an unexpected storm topples a tree finally discover who has it in for Ingrid and her guests.

Collins creates his own mystery when a woman’s fearful screams for a killer even though Collins secretly fears that Carrie may delighted when Caroline, an excellent cook, and her pretty and dying. Actor Gilly Blaine disappears over a cliff. Film critic at Bazalgette’s workshop sends Collins and Dickens on a hunt to the person who can solve the problem, and Dickens, who’s befriended young engineer Joseph Bazalgette, is eager to help. Collins creates his own mystery when a woman’s fearful screams move him to rescue her and her child from a locked house. He’s surprised to learn that Caroline, an excellent cook, and her pretty and intelligent daughter, now called Carrie, move into his home, and he soon starts spoiling Carrie, even taking her with him on expeditions to view the engineers’ varied plans to solve the sewage problem. When he hosts a dinner party for men interested in the problem, Caroline, still terrified of her mysterious former captor, overhears a voice that sends her into a frenzy of fear. A shocking, seemingly accidental death during a demonstration at Bazalgette’s workshop sends Collins and Dickens on a hunt for a killer even though Collins secretly fears that Carrie may be involved.

A period mystery bolstered by an exciting mix of imagination and historical truth.

**SPRING OF HOPE**
Harrison, Cora
Severn House (240 pp.)
$28.99 | March 1, 2022
978-0-7278-5051-5

Another case for those eminent Victorian sleuths Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens, last seen in *Summer of Secrets* (2022).

Spring 1859 finds a group of engineers striving to solve the problems of the previous summer, when the River Thames was so overwhelmed with effluent from London that thousands died of cholera and Members of Parliament had to hold their noses as they met. The queen is offering a cash prize and knighthood to the person who can solve the problem, and Dickens, who’s befriended young engineer Joseph Bazalgette, is eager to help. Collins creates his own mystery when a woman’s fearful screams move him to rescue her and her child from a locked house. He’s delighted when Caroline, an excellent cook, and her pretty and intelligent daughter, now called Carrie, move into his home, and he soon starts spoiling Carrie, even taking her with him on expeditions to view the engineers’ varied plans to solve the sewage problem. When he hosts a dinner party for men interested in the problem, Caroline, still terrified of her mysterious former captor, overhears a voice that sends her into a frenzy of fear. A shocking, seemingly accidental death during a demonstration at Bazalgette’s workshop sends Collins and Dickens on a hunt for a killer even though Collins secretly fears that Carrie may be involved.

A period mystery bolstered by an exciting mix of imagination and historical truth.

**NO ACCIDENT**
Havill, Steven E.
Poisoned Pen (288 pp.)
$15.99 paper | March 22, 2022
978-1-4642-1512-4

Posadas County, New Mexico, Under-sheriff Estelle Reyes-Guzman investigates a suspicious accident that strikes all too close to home even though it’s taken place in another time zone.

While they’re trying out their new tandem bicycle, Estelle’s son Carlos and his fiancee, graphic artist Tasha Qarshe, are struck by a pickup truck. Both of them are seriously injured; Carlos ends up losing his spleen and one of his kidneys. As soon as he gets the news, Carlos’ brother, Francisco, a pianist in New York, charters a plane to fly himself and his wife, Angie, to Briones, just east of California’s Bay Area, stopping along the way to pick up Estelle and her husband, Dr. Francis Guzman. Working together, detectives from the Contra Costa Sheriff’s Department and the Briones Police Department unearth some dismaying news: The truck that hit the bicyclists backed up and hit them again. Far from her New Mexico comfort zone, Estelle has no official standing in the case. But she’s given a nametag identifying her as an official police consultant and allowed to ride along with variously congenial officers from both forces as they attempt to trace the movements of the truck, which construction worker James Patrick Wayne loaned his former brother-in-law Stanley Wilke just before it was stolen. The fact that Wilke worked for Todd Stringer in Crosby Cycle Sports, the shop that sold Carlos the bicycle built for two, confirms Estelle’s conviction that this accident was no accident. But which of the suspects linked by jealousy or lust to Carlos and Tasha was behind the wheel?

It’s nice to see the heroine creating family feeling far from home, but the climactic revelation is deeply anticlimactic.

**PERIL ON THE PAGE**
Loudon, Margaret
Berkley (320 pp.)
$8.99 paper | March 1, 2022
978-0-593-09930-8

An American writer-in-residence in England is involved in yet another murder. Penelope Parish, who crossed the Atlantic to enhance her ability to write bestselling gothic novels, works and writes at the Open Book bookstore in Upper Chumley-on-Stoke. Among her new friends is Odile Fontaine, a talented art teacher at the Oakwood School for Girls, who’s written a book that’s launched with a wine and paint party at the bookstore. After Odile takes ill at the party and dies in the hospital, Penelope finds herself drawn into what looks more and more like a murder. She soon learns that all is not well at Oakwood, where she’s giving a
Despite extensive searches with dogs, door-to-door inquiries, forward to say that he’d given the pair a ride. DNA evidence a body is finally found, it produces more unanswered questions and appeals to the public, the team comes up with frustratingly severe injury, especially when she catches the case of a young bad mother, and certainly an exhausted one. She especially cliff when a passing hiker grabbed the little boy’s stroller. The shows that the child is not related to the silent woman but is the son of whomever’s blood is on their clothes. Joanna is baffled than answers. No one can get her to say anything, and Joanna ends up to strike again. As it turns out, the two cases are related, and the suspects and interlocking crimes keep the intrepid heroine so busy she barely has time to finish that next bestseller.

ALMOST A WHISPER
Masters, Priscilla
Severn House (256 pp.)
$28.99 | March 1, 2022
978-0-7278-5083-6

A woman who either can’t or won’t speak holds the answers to several crimes. DI Joanna Piercy may have given birth to the son her husband Mathew desperately wanted, but her continued devotion to her job makes her feel like a bad mother, and certainly an exhausted one. She especially misses her sergeant, Mike Kopranski, who’s been sidelined by a severe injury, especially when she catches the case of a young woman who was seemingly about to shove a toddler over a steep cliff when a passing hiker grabbed the little boy’s stroller. The woman carries no identifying papers, and she and the child both have blood on their clothing. No matter how hard everyone tries, no one can get her to say anything, and Joanna ends up placing her in a psychiatric hospital and the boy in foster care. Despite extensive searches with dogs, door-to-door inquiries, and appeals to the public, the team comes up with frustratingly little evidence. No car is found, but at length a trucker comes forward to say that he’d given the pair a ride. DNA evidence shows that the child is not related to the silent woman but is the son of whomever’s blood is on their clothes. Joanna is baffled because no murders or kidnappings have been reported. When a body is finally found, it produces more unanswered questions than answers.

A riveting police procedural focusing on guilt, frustration, and the many varieties of love.

THE BLOOD COVENANT
Nickson, Chris
Severn House (224 pp.)
$28.99 | March 1, 2022
978-0-7278-5048-5

The past comes back to haunt two thief-takers. Leeds in 1823 is a heavily industrial city whose mill owners treat their workers with disdain and beastly cruelty. As he slowly recovers from an undiagnosed disease that’s left him weak and listless, Simon Westow counts on Jane, his thief-taking assistant, a virtuoso with a knife, to protect him while remaining unnoticed in the background. They’re both brought into the foreground by the discovery of a man in the river with his throat cut and a hand missing. At first Simon refuses an offer from the victim’s brother, Charles Ramsey, who wants to hire him to find the killer, but eventually

seminar on gothic literature, between divisions among the staff and drinking problems among the students. In addition, a valuable Matisse painting passed down in Odile’s family has gone missing, and there’s a great deal still unknown to Penelope’s love interest, Detective Brodie Maguire, as he juggles Odile’s murder and a jewel theft. Penelope’s decision to keep things she’s learned to herself doesn’t reckon with a killer who’s willing to strike again. As it turns out, the two cases are related, and Penelope’s efforts to puzzle things out on her own put her in a very dangerous position.

The suspects and interlocking crimes keep the intrepid heroine so busy she barely has time to finish that next bestseller.

A riveting police procedural focusing on guilt, frustration, and the many varieties of love.

THE HERETIC
McIlvanney, Liam
World Noir (400 pp.)
$18.00 paper | March 8, 2022
978-1-60945-741-9

A maverick Scottish detective returns home to nail a crime boss and shake up the police department.

Seven years after making a name for himself back in 1960 by catching the serial killer known as The Quaker, DI Duncan McCormack is back in Glasgow after his stint with the London police, much to the chagrin of his boss, DCI Alan Haddow. After a warehouse fire spreads to a nearby tenement, killing four people, including a mother and her wee daughter, the righteous McCormack decides that local crime boss Walter Maitland ordered the blaze. His initial investigation takes him to the once-posh Duke of Perth restaurant and a spa fronting for a whorehouse for white-collar gentlemen. In the absence of any concrete evidence implicating Maitland, McCormack has carte blanche to scour the colorful underworld of the notoriously gritty city. McIlvanney, who reveals the identity of the arsonist early on, is less interested in creating mystery than in exploring the pulsing, crime-ridden city through dozens of incisive character portraits and backstories. McCormack’s sidekick, DC Liz Nicol, a feminist struggling in a sexist environment, is an ideal protégée for the equally resolute McCormack. Another grisly crime lands unwelcomed in the duo’s caseload when one-time MP Gavin Elliot, director of Wyndford Property Limited, is tortured, beaten to death, and left in the city dump. As if ferreting out miscreants were not challenge enough, McCormack must also deal with Shand, an ambitious colleague anxious to bring him down.

Crackling, full-bodied Scottish noir effectively evoking a colorful era.
"A newly appointed editor gets little respect but plenty of action."

FRONT PAGE MURDER

their paths cross again. In the meantime, a request from mill owner Thomas Arden to recover some candlesticks stolen from his feckless son puts Simon and Jane in imminent danger. They have no trouble finding the thief, a friend of the son, but Simon has a bad feeling about any dealings with Arden, even, or especially, when he lauds Simon for his good work. For her part, Jane, who’s identified the person stalking her as her father, who raped her and threw her out on the streets, barely restrains herself from killing him. Simon is furious over the deaths of two very young boys, starved and beaten by mill overseers, as he was himself as a lad. Forcing Arden to pay reparations to the dead boys’ families locks him and Jane in a life-and-death fight with Arden and another evil man with whom he has a blood covenant.

A gritty tale of perseverance, cruelty, rage, and redemption not for the faint of heart.

UNDER LOCK & SKELETON KEY
Pandian, Gigi
Minotaur (352 pp.)
$26.99 | March 22, 2022
978-1-2508-0498-3

A stage magician solves a locked-room puzzle.

Tempest Raj had a glorious career. The child of five generations of Indian magicians, she followed her half-Indian, half-Scottish mother into a profession that allowed her to thrill rapt audiences with baffling illusions. But that was then. Now, still in her 20s, she lives with her grandparents in their Bay Area treehouse with her rabbit, Abracadabra, her closest confidant. Her mother is gone, disapproved and presumed dead by suicide. Her father is busy running his business, Secret Staircase Construction, a specialty firm dedicated to creating hidden staircases, secret rooms, and concealed gardens. Her successful Vegas show has been closed after an accident almost took her life and prompted a series of ruinous lawsuits against her. At the end of her rope, she agrees to help her dad with his latest project, the installation of a hidden room in multimillionaire Calvin Knight’s mansion. Her first look at the project is almost her last, though, since her initial inspection dislodges the body of her stage double, Cassidy Sparrow, the very person she holds responsible for her career-ending accident, from a hidden space with no windows or doors. Things get even more baffling when Tempest sees the ghost of her mother playing her signature tune on a violin. Impossible as it seems, Tempest feels pressed to solve the enigma, because—thanks to a family curse on the eldest of each generation—she doesn’t know whether Cassidy’s killer was aiming for her double or herself.

The real problem: All that nonstop enchantment makes magic seem pretty boring.
tip about a robbery at Sam Markowicz's hardware store, Moe is found dead at the bottom of his own cellar stairs. Police Chief Walter Turner, the future father-in-law who tends to ignore Irene's input, does tell her that Markowicz is a Jew who escaped Germany and that the robbery was really an antisemitic attack. Among the many people recently come to town to work at the Tabor Ironworks, which makes parts for the war effort, is one who's boarding at the home of Irene's mother. Glamorous Katherine Morningside's claim to be a singer who knows Frank Sinatra makes Irene doubt her veracity. Meanwhile, the mystery deepens when a Jewish janitor friend of Sam's who works at Tabor's gets beaten but refuses to talk to the police. Although Chief Turner calls Moe's death an accident, Irene suspects that he was murdered because of something he discovered about the ironworks. She gets to work tracking down clues and does such a good job that she's soon in the killer's sights.

A gutsy and likable sleuth enlivens a debut replete with historical touches.

**SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY**

**AGE OF ASH**

*Abraham, Daniel*

Orbit (560 pp.)

$28.00 | Feb. 15, 2022

978-0-316-42184-3

In the first of a trilogy, a city faces a secret crisis of rulership.

The city of Kithamar's new prince, Byrn a Sal, has died within a year of his coronation. Why and how did he die? The answer involves an ambitious thief seeking revenge for her brother's murder, the fellow thief who secretly loves her but despises the path she's on, a foreign priestess searching for her missing son, a noblewoman who serves at the head of a religious cult, and the dangerous, centuries-old secret behind the royal succession. Abraham is best known for being one-half of James S.A. Corey, the writing team responsible for *The Expanse*, the bestselling space opera book series and the source for the fan-favorite TV show. It's a shame that Abraham doesn't gain equal attention for his excellent, deliberately barbed political fantasy series, such as *The Long Price Quartet* and *The Dagger and the Coin*. This new work bears the hallmarks of a great Abraham work: intricate and dirty schemes enacted by initially sympathetic characters who make self-serving choices that they will eventually come to regret, but often too late to change course. It takes a long while for the broader outlines of the plot to take shape because of the narrow perspective of each of the characters. The fate of a great city is at stake, but the lower-class characters are mostly concerned with getting enough to eat each day and pursuing personal agendas if there's any time left over. Most of the upper-class ones and their servants are occupied with preserving a magical and social status quo to the exclusion of anything else. The middle class—well, we barely hear from them, so who knows? The secret truth that Prince Byrn a Sal was not the legitimate heir to the throne drives the plot, but we never even find out whether or not he was a good ruler; that doesn't seem to matter to all parties concerned. The blank spots in the reader's understanding can feel frustrating at first but ultimately make the society seem real.

A promising, if meandering, start; given the experienced hands we're in, it will undoubtedly pay off by series' end.

**SCORPICA**

*Macallister, G.R.*

Gallery (448 pp.)

$26.00 | Feb. 22, 2022

978-1-9821-6789-9

Five nations ruled by women are sent into free fall when, for decades, only boys are born in this novel of magic, might, and intrigue.

As the Drought of Girls rages across the Five Queendoms, fingers begin to point. In Scorpica, the warrior queendom, the Barren Queen worries that her people will turn on her only daughter, the last in the nation to be born before the Drought began. Suspicion swirls among the mages of Arca and the priests of Sestia, any one of whom could have angered their patron deities and provoked this punishment. Even if that were so, Bastion, the queendom of scribes, should have noticed the lack of girls births in its recordings. Can the peacemakers of Paxim continue to broker goodwill now; knowing that any of the other nations may fall at a moment’s notice? Macallister weaves her way through the middle class—well, we barely hear from them, so who knows? The secret truth that Prince Byrn a Sal was not the legitimate heir to the throne drives the plot, but we never even find out whether or not he was a good ruler; that doesn’t seem to matter to all parties concerned. The blank spots in the reader's understanding can feel frustrating at first but ultimately make the society seem real.

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A promising, if meandering, start; given the experienced hands we're in, it will undoubtedly pay off by series' end.
THE KAIJU PRESERVATION SOCIETY
Scalzi, John
Tor (272 pp.)
$25.99 | March 15, 2022
978-0-7653-8912-1

In this unusual pandemic novel, a young person—whose gender is never specified—is given a unique, literally out-of-this-world opportunity to escape the Covid-19 lockdown.

In early 2020, Jamie Gray is working as a marketing executive at food delivery startup füdmüd when Rob Sanders, the company’s asshole chief executive, abruptly fires Jamie for no apparent reason. Reduced to working as a delivery person for füdmüd in the following months (during the height of the pandemic, no less), Jamie leaps at a job opportunity offered by an acquaintance. That’s how Jamie winds up on a parallel Earth working for the titular Kaiju Preservation Society: lifting heavy objects, serving snacks in conference rooms, shooting monsters in the face, and just generally providing assistance to the scientists studying skyscraper-size, Godzilla-like creatures with internal nuclear reactors. In the process, Jamie discovers just how much of an asshole that former boss really is, to the potential detriment of two worlds. In his author’s note, Scalzi calls this book “a pop song…light and catchy,” in contrast to the “brooding symphony” of the completely different novel he had intended to write. But despite the absurdity of the premise, the book isn’t entirely escapist fluff. Sure, it bubbles with the banter and snarky humor readers expect from this author. But it’s also a blunt and savage swipe at tech-bro/billionaire culture, the Trump administration, and the chaos and tragedy that result when powerful and rich people set themselves against science and scientists in order to profit from disaster. The evil plot would seem creaky and melodramatic if it weren’t such an accurate satiric mirror of the current sociopolitical milieu. In short, it’s a fictional delivery system for the outrage that Scalzi typically expresses in his tweets and on his blog about the mess we currently find ourselves in.

Fun but with a purpose.

ROBIN S. KIRK_MAGAZINEollipop.png

PHANTOM GAME
Feehan, Christine
Berkley (432 pp.)
$28.00 | March 1, 2022
978-0-593-43908-1

A woman who has been in hiding for years is discovered by the man genetically engineered to be her mate.

Camellia Mist grew up in the clutches of evil scientist Peter Whitney, a man who experimented on humans in an attempt to create a race of supersoldiers. The men he experimented on became GhostWalkers, while the girls he kidnapped were engineered to be their perfect mates. Jonas Harper was part of the first group of GhostWalkers, and now he and the remaining members of their team have created a fortress to keep themselves safe from further experimentation. On a hike near their compound, he senses a compelling presence and tracks it through the forest to Camellia’s solitary fortress. Years earlier, when Camellia and the other women escaped from Whitney’s clutches, she was betrayed by one of her closest friends in the process. Determined never to trust again, Camellia hid away and focused on harnessing the incredible talents she gained in Whitney’s experiments: She can communicate with the entire ecosystem of plants in the forest and can channel the healing properties of the rare flower called the Middlemist Red Camellia. Jonas and Camellia can’t resist the powerful compulsion to be together even though they realize that Whitney engineered their connection. This is Feehan’s 18th book in the GhostWalker series, and nearly half of the book is pure exposition of previous storylines and characters in the form of Camellia and Jonas talking to each other. They talk face to face, talk telepathically, and finally she teaches him to talk to the plants. Their romance is a fait accompli with little tension or spark, and the external forces threatening the GhostWalkers are conveniently put on hold until Camellia and Jonas run out of things to talk about and have to go fight a battle.

A tedious 400-plus-page plot summary of the GhostWalker series is barren soil for a romance plot.

KAMILA KNOWS BEST
Heron, Farah
Forever (368 pp.)
$15.99 paper | March 8, 2022
978-1-5387-3500-8

A matchmaker realizes her best friend has been her perfect match all along.

Kamila Hussain is an accountant by trade and a people-pleaser by nature. She is a vibrant, self-confident, and fashionable woman who is at the center of a

Fun but with a purpose.
large, extended group of friends. She takes care of her elderly father, hosts weekly Bollywood watch parties, and is planning a puppy prom gala for her favorite animal shelter. Despite her outward bravado and confidence, she is plagued by self-doubt and tortured by memories of her late mother’s harsh, judgmental attacks. Kamila’s best friend is Rohan Nasser; in fact, he’s practically family since his brother is married to her sister. He’s always willing to co-host a party or help her father to a doctor’s appointment. Kamila has taken it upon herself to find love matches for her friends—driven by her joy at seeing people in satisfying relationships but also fueled by a conviction that her friends would be happier if they followed her advice. She ignores her friends’ hints that Rohan might be the perfect romantic partner for her; she can’t imagine changing the safe, comfortable status quo she has developed with him. However, Kamila’s usual sunny personality is disrupted by the return of her childhood arch nemesis, Jana Suleiman. Kamila suspects something might be going on between Rohan and Jana, and she can no longer ignore that her feelings for Rohan are rooted more in romance than friendship. Although Heron’s novel contains a complete romantic arc, the primary focus is on Kamila’s journey. Although Kamila is a successful adult, many of the dilemmas and difficulties she tries to overcome date to her teenage years, which lends the novel a coming-of-age feel.

A sweet, slow-burn story about a woman who finds herself before finding love.

**BY ANY OTHER NAME**
Kate, Lauren
Putnam (288 pp.)
$16.00 paper | March 1, 2022
978-0-735-21254-1

A romance editor’s belief in love is put to the test after she discovers the true identity of her favorite author.

Elaine “Lanie” Bloom believes in the power of true love, and not just because she’s a romance novel senior editor at Peony Press. Her mother’s dying wish was for Lanie to find someone “you really, really love,” and she thinks she’s found it with her fiance, Ryan. He’s a perfectly handsome legislative director with presidential aspirations, yet she’s struggling to picture Ryan next to the altar. For starters, he doesn’t get along with her tortoise, Alice, and he’s constantly implying she should quit her job to become the next FLOTUS-in-training. Life gets even more confusing when Lanie is offered a promotional position to editor director and tasked with reeling in the 4-months-late manuscript from beloved bestseller Noa Callaway. Lanie soon discovers that her favorite author is not, in fact, an elusive old woman but Noah Ross, the attractive mystery man she recently met at a book launch. Suddenly, everything she thought she knew about love, her relationship, and Noah’s novels comes crashing down. Will Lanie be able to reconcile her feelings for the real Noah in time to help overcome his writer’s block and save her job? Kate’s second adult novel thoughtfully explores the notion of living bravely and taking risks in love, but it’s weighed down early on with multiple flashback scenes that overwhelm an already short page count. A few more chapters could have tended to open-ended side plots or given Noah more room to express himself as an individual outside of his pseudonym and Lanie’s love interest.

A sweet, literary rom-com that excels in self-realization but falters with a rushed resolution.

**MR. WRONG NUMBER**
Painter, Lynn
Berkley (352 pp.)
$16.00 paper | March 1, 2022
978-0-593-43726-1

A mistakenly sent text message leads to romantic complications for a woman and her brother’s best friend. Where Olivia Marshall goes, bad luck tends to follow. But even a lifetime of mishaps and faux pas can’t prepare her for the disaster she’s gotten herself into. First, she loses her job, and her boyfriend, Eli, dumps her for the co-worker Olivia introduced him to. Then, while drunkenly burning Eli’s old love letters, she accidentally sets fire to her apartment building.

Now unemployed, single, and homeless, she’s forced to crash with her brother and his roommate, Colin Beck. Ever since they were kids, Colin has treated Olivia like a total screw-up, his best friend’s annoying little sister he loved to verbally spar with but never took seriously. But he’s also handsome, successful, and smart, and Olivia would be lying if she said she didn’t find him attractive. Meanwhile, her texting relationship with Mr. Wrong Number, an anonymous man who accidentally sent her a saucy message, has grown from lighthearted banter to what might be a real connection. The only problem? Colin is Mr. Wrong Number. When he finds out Olivia’s the woman he’s dubbed Miss Misdialed, he decides to ghost her before she can find out. But while Mr. Wrong Number can keep Miss Misdialed at arm’s length, Colin is having a hard time ignoring his growing interest in Olivia. Romance lovers will fall for the flirty banter and physical connection between Olivia and Colin, but the book has flaws. Several sources of tension—especially Olivia’s new job as a mommy columnist, for which she must lie about her childless status to her editor—come to a head early at the expense of a propulsive plot, while other conflicts are too easily and unrealistically resolved.

A flawed but entertaining rom-com.
sickening
How Big Pharma Broke American Health Care and How We Can Repair It
Abramson, John
Mariner Books (336 pp.)
$28.00 | Feb. 8, 2022
978-1-328-95781-8

A family physician and Harvard Medical School lecturer exposes the sordid tactics big pharma uses to jack up drug prices and con doctors about the facts they need to provide good care.

Abramson makes a powerful case that, over the past 40 years, profiteering drug companies have played an outsized role in two crises: the soaring costs of health care and America’s plunging “healthy life expectancy,” ranked 68th in the world in 2019. Linking the problem to a corporate shift to chasing profitability untethered from social responsibility, the author shows how corporations have hijacked sources of information doctors once could trust, such as medical journals, educational conferences, and lectures. The corruption began in the 1990s, when drug companies took control of clinical trials from academic medical centers; 6 out of 7 trials are now funded commercially by sponsors who have no obligation to show their data to medical journals. In an especially alarming chapter, Abramson shows how repeated changes in insulin have made it vastly more expensive for people with diabetes with little—if any—benefit. Companies have also withheld or manipulated facts about statins and popular drugs like Trulicity and Humira, which costs $78,000 per year. “Humira became by far the best-selling drug in the United States,” writes the author, “despite the fact that the manufacturer’s own study showed that it was no more effective as a first-line therapy for rheumatoid arthritis than methotrexate, which costs 99.5 percent less than Humira.” Abramson proposes worthy long-term solutions to the crisis, such as transparency about clinical trial results. But this book, the best on prescription drugs since Katherine Eban’s Bottle of Lies (2019), should also have high short-term value for patients, whom it might embolden to question their doctors more aggressively about whether there’s an equally effective substitute for a drug with a sky-high price tag.

A blistering, persuasive critique of the harms done when drug companies hide the truth about their drugs.
Welcome to 2022! Now that you’ve made it through the holiday season, it’s time to spend the next couple months in a blanket, reading books. I highly recommend any of these 10 books to kick off the new year. The books are listed by release date, and all quotes are from the Kirkus reviews.

The Zen of Therapy: Uncovering a Hidden Kindness in Life by Mark Epstein (Penguin Press, Jan. 11): “Empathetic and persuasive—one of the better books on psychotherapy and meditation in recent years.”

Manifesto: On Never Giving Up by Bernardine Evaristo (Grove, Jan. 18): “The award-winning author of Girl, Woman, Other generously shares her pathway to success in this nonfiction debut....She lays bare the nuts and bolts of her writing process; pushes back against sexism, racism, and ageism; and imparts her hard-won wisdom unapologetically and with refreshing nuance.”

How We Can Win: Race, History and Chasing the Money Game That’s Rigged by Kimberly Jones (Henry Holt, Jan. 18): “A prominent Black activist and YA author delivers a damning, resounding study of the many ways in which fiscal equality is denied to non-White people in [America]....Demanding better, Jones provides a wise, measured look at the economic and social landscape of America.”

The Nineties: A Book by Chuck Klosterman (Penguin Press, Feb. 8): “Throughout the wide-ranging narrative—from technology and the rise of the internet to key trends in music, TV, and film; indelible moments in sports; and significant political moments—Klosterman takes pains to ensure that references are addressed in relation to their historical context rather than through the foggy and often inaccurate lens of memory....A fascinating examination of a period still remembered by most, refreshingly free of unnecessary mythmaking.”

There Are No Accidents: The Deadly Rise of Injury and Disaster—Who Profits and Who Pays the Price by Jessie Singer (Simon & Schuster, Feb. 8): “The rate of deaths attributed to accident in the U.S. is appalling—and, but for lust for profit, mostly avoidable....An eye-opening, urgent book that demands an end to inequality as a matter of life and death.”

Watergate: A New History by Garrett M. Graff (Avid Reader Press, Feb. 15): “The text is a brisk, riveting, compulsively readable, comprehensive, up-to-date narrative of the entire tangled affair, and it’s hard to imagine it better told....Now the best and fullest account of the Watergate crisis, one unlikely to be surpassed anytime soon.”

Coach K: The Rise and Reign of Mike Krzyzewski by Ian O’Connor (Mariner Books, Feb. 22): “A full-court look at NCAA men’s basketball’s all-time winningest coach on the eve of his retirement....A sharpshooting account worthy of a champion.”

What It Took To Win: A History of the Democratic Party by Michael Kazin (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, March 1): “Like Heather Cox Richardson’s analogous history of the Republican Party, To Make Men Free, Kazin applies tough scrutiny and due criticism to an institution that, as early as the 1840s, was unparalleled in its electoral and institutional innovations and acceptance of popular politics....This should be today’s go-to book on its subject.”

The Invisible Kingdom: Reimagining Chronic Illness by Meghan O’Rourke (Riverhead, March 1): “Tormented for years by enervating symptoms, the author spent most of her 30s dealing with—and trying to understand—chronic illness....Emotionally compelling and intellectually rich, particularly for those with a personal connection to the issue.”


Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction editor.
THE NAKED DON’T FEAR THE WATER
A Journey With Afghan Refugees
Aikins, Matthieu
Harper/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$27.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-0-06-305858-3

A Canadian journalist’s riveting account of his travels with a friend attempting to flee from Afghanistan to Europe.

In 2015, Aikins, a winner of the George Polk Award, had been covering the war in Afghanistan for seven years. He spent much of that time with a friend he calls Omar (many names have been changed for safety purposes), who frequently served as his translator. By this point, Omar and the rest of his family had decided to try to leave despite the fact that the borders had been closed. Aikins, who looks “uncannily Afghan: almond eyes, black hair, wiry beard,” decided to accompany Omar, paying his way and reporting on the refugee underground, disguising himself as an Afghan migrant and leaving his passport with friends. What sounded at first like a fairly straightforward plan soon fell apart, as Omar delayed again and again, hoping to arrange a marriage with a young woman, or lost his nerve at crucial moments. Often separated, the two ended up together first in Turkey, then in an internment camp on the Greek island of Lesbos, and then in a “squat” in Athens, where they lived with “a mix of activists and migrants.” Aikins is meticulously aware of the difference in the level of danger the two faced. Though particularly moving chapters on life within the Greek refugee camp. The narrative is scrupulous and often suspenseful.

Sharp insider insights into a global dilemma.

BEER
A Global Journey Through the Past & Present
Arthur, John W.
Oxford Univ. (272 pp.)
$24.95 | Feb. 24, 2022
978-0-19-757980-0

A fascinating book that demonstrates the long and complex history behind the world’s most popular alcoholic beverage.

The first evidence of beer dates from about 11,000 B.C.E., with pottery in a cave in Israel containing residue of a drink made from fermented grains. In his latest book, Arthur, a professor of anthropology at the University of South Florida, uses the development of beer to recount the story of civilization. Beer appears in nearly all ancient cultures, and the author enthusiastically ranges across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Recent research shows that beer production was as much a part of early settlements as bread making, with wild grains being domesticated for the purpose, and it was an important source of calories. As societies developed, beer types proliferated, and it even became a sort of currency. Workers on many of the world’s ancient monuments were often paid in beer. In Mesoamerica, beer was made from corn and maize and had a key role in religious ceremonies. The Vikings apparently liked their beer sweet, so they added honey and bog myrtle, which they took with them on their conquests. The British, as their empire expanded, spread hops all over the world, and it eventually became the most common ingredient. Arthur includes a selection of beer recipes, some of them thousands of years old, and notes that many of them are tasty, even to the modern palate. However, he believes that due to massive corporations, beer has become a somewhat generic product, solidly profitable but a little bland. On the positive side, he applauds the resurgence of craft beers, which use a multitude of ingredients to create complex, layered flavors. One way or another, he writes, the path ahead for beer looks as interesting as the road behind. So next time you raise a glass, think about the history contained within.

Metically researched and written with clear-minded authority, this book is a remarkable way of telling the human story.

WHITE LIES
The Double Life of Walter F. White and America’s Darkest Secret
Baime, A. J.
Mariner Books (400 pp.)
$30.00 | Feb. 8, 2022
978-0-358-44775-7

Sturdy biography of a Black journalist, writer, and reformer who moved easily, if sometimes stealthily, between two worlds.

Walter Francis White (1893-1955) was born in Atlanta to light-skinned Black parents whose multiracial heritage spoke to the complex genealogies of the Old South. “My skin is white, my eyes are blue, my hair is blond,” White would later write. “The traits of my race are nowhere visible upon me.” The absence of those traits allowed White and his family to survive the waves of lynchings that plagued the South. In his early 20s, he moved to New York, where he worked as an investigator and sometime journalist, often returning to the South posing as a White man to examine racially motivated murder cases. Baime ably depicts White’s lifelong Zelig-like abilities: He was at some of the signal events of his time, taking his place at the lead of the Harlem Renaissance, doing gumshoe work in the immediate aftermath of the Tulsa Massacre, weathering the Red
Scare, and accumulating scores of friends. The author brings us directly into White’s fascinating world, in which Langston Hughes and Paul Robeson were frequent guests at salons White held in Harlem, while “George Gershwin debuted Rhapsody in Blue on Walter’s piano.” Active in civil rights as a leader in the NAACP, White pressed Franklin Roosevelt to support activist legislation to advance Black causes, which Roosevelt did not do willingly, fearful that “he would offend a power base of his own party, the Democrats’ Solid South.” Fortunately, Eleanor Roosevelt reached out to express her support, trying to persuade her husband to do the right thing—and adding another friend to White’s long list. He died too young, and he was almost immediately pushed into the back ranks of the civil rights movement, although he was the primary architect of an anti-lynching bill that has yet to clear the Senate, thanks to the opposition of Rand Paul.

A well-constructed life of a man who, largely forgotten, deserves pride of place in civil rights history.

FIFTY SOUNDS
A Memoir of Language, Learning, and Longing

Barton, Polly
Liveright/Norton (360 pp.)
$27.95 | March 15, 2022
978-1-324-09131-8

A Japanese translator recalls her complicated relationship with the language through some of its slippery locations. Barton’s sharp, bittersweet debut is a culture-shock story that cannily avoids the conventions of the genre. A Brit who first arrived on the Japanese island of Sado to teach English, she was often thrown by the culture’s conventions (its particular forms of address) and outrageousness (its outsize consumption of pornography). Refreshingly, the author doesn’t follow the typical fish-out-of-water arc from embarrassment to assimilation. For one thing, the structure is episodic, filtering experiences through “mimetic” Japanese words that aren’t necessarily onomatopoeic but still convey a mood through their sound. For example, kyuki-kyuki evokes the sound of a marker on a whiteboard, and jara-jara is “the jingle-jangle that seems to get into your blood and stir it up so that sleep is the last thing on your mind.” Barton attaches each chapter to a particular sound as she chronicles failed relationships, homesickness, despair, brief blissful moments of connection, and, in an especially powerful chapter, a hiking trip and coming across a man who had hanged himself. Her experiences speak to the book’s other main distinction: Though Barton gains fluency in the language, she rarely feels anything like comfort within the language or its society. Some of that is acute awareness of her standing as a Westerner with a more independent streak. “A key part of being in Japan is that gradually, without realizing, the state of being unlike others comes to seem more and more repellent to you on a subcutaneous level,” she writes. But she’s also philosophically fascinated with the relationship between language and identity (she has a few thoughtful and self-deprecating riffs on Wittgenstein) and consistently looks at her experiences in Japan with candid uncertainty.

A refreshingly honest and novel look at the nuance and revelatory power of language.

THE QUIET BEFORE
On the Unexpected Origins of Radical Ideas

Beckerman, Gal
Crown (352 pp.)
$28.00 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-1-524-75918-6

An engaging treatise on the power of communication in social movements, historically and in our current moment. Pulling together carefully documented research, Beckerman—a New York Times Book Review editor whose 2010 book, When They Come for Us, We’ll Be Gone, won both the National Jewish Book Award and the Sami Rohr Prize—traces the lineage of how human connection is formed through media, from the 1600s to the present day. Starting in Aix-en-Provence in 1635 with the scientific inquiries of Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, a little-known but hugely influential polymath, the author explores the story of how humanity has been shaped by the vigorous exchange of personal letters, the efficacy of revolutionary petitions as forms of activism, the proliferation of broadly shared manifestos, and the effects of publications meant to promote self-expression and subvert censorship—e.g., samizdat magazines that circulated around the Soviet Union in the 1960s and ’70s, which were able to “unify the community of dissident artists and writers then increasingly under attack.” Beckerman traces the histories of these movements to show how humans continue to form the significant connections that create important change. Tracking their ups and downs over the decades, the author addresses a wide variety of topics. Most relevant to current issues include the Riot Grrrl zines in the 1990s; how social media influenced the Arab Spring uprisings; growing White supremacist actions in the U.S.; the Black Lives Matter Movement; and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. In each chapter, Beckerman dives deep into a particular medium and the methods that did and did not work for the participants of the movements described. With a sharp eye for telling detail, the author uses direct, at times explicit, quotes from primary sources. At times witty, at times cautious, the text is sincere and thoughtful as Beckerman questions what it has meant to form a community in the past and what it means today. An invigorating text ripe with pertinent information about the methods of connection that can lead to real change.
A sharp, expansive biography of John von Neumann (1903-1957), a titanic 20th-century scientist.

From game theory to quantum mechanics to atom bombs, von Neumann was involved in some of the most profound scientific and technological advances in modern history. Renowned for his extraordinary mathematical ability and prodigious aptitude for applying pure math to other fields, von Neumann “understood that [he had] a path to wealth, influence and the power to transform the world.” In his riveting exploration of von Neumann’s life and work, medical researcher Bhattacharya, a former science correspondent at the *Economist* and editor at *Nature*, easily navigates among complicated concepts—von Neumann’s impact was wide-ranging and the effects of his work influenced economics, politics, neuroscience, and computing—and explains the significance of his subject’s accomplishments in terms that are easily understood by non-scientists. The author also deftly interweaves von Neumann’s personal life, relating anecdotes about his background and formative years in his native Hungary, which was blessed with money and prestige, as well as his relationships with his colleagues in Germany and the U.S.—Einstein, Gödel, and Oppenheimer, among others. Often characterized as an unflinching intellect, von Neumann was integral to the success of the Manhattan Project, but he also published critical essays on subjects including artificial intelligence and carbon emissions long before these subjects entered mainstream discourse. Bhattacharya argues that it is von Neumann’s astonishing prescience that sets him apart. He was able to sense how scientific discoveries would affect the future and how advancing technologies would lead to inequality and conflict among people and nations. In a passage that could easily apply today, von Neumann wrote, “any attempt to find automatically safe channels for the present explosive variety of progress must lead to frustration. The only safety possible is relative, and it lies in an intelligent exercise of day-to-day judgment.”

*A salient portrait of one of the most electrifying and productive scientists of the past century.*
the characters inhabiting these pages is the doomed architect Stanford White, gunned down during an affair with a woman whose husband suspected him of “blackballing him from New York’s elite clubs.” The woman in question slipped away into the shadows of the demimonde, at first commanding the tabloids for her “drunken brawls, arrests, evictions, unpaid bills, suspected abortions,” and then largely falling into oblivion. Other of Bird’s subjects are better-heeled, including Marietta Stevens, a social climber who amassed a fortune sufficient to have made her the model for Mrs. Lemuel Struthers in Edith Wharton’s The Age of Innocence. She owned much of the aforementioned hotel and plenty of other chunks of downtown, having acquired through various means a treasury of about $86 million in today’s dollars, albeit mostly administered through a trust. Stevens made enough of a stir in life that “at a time when few newspapers ran obituaries for women, all the major New York papers ran one for Marietta, a testament to her hard-earned social status.” Not so for the grifters, drifters, and other lowlier denizens of the block. Bird offers a lively account packed with memorable NYC characters, though it’s less useful in sussing out the tribes of modern New York and a touch less well written than Ada Calhoun’s St. Mark’s Is Dead, based on a similar conceit.

Students of an ever changing Gotham will take pleasure in Bird’s well-researched narrative.

DILETTANTE
True Tales of Excess, Triumph, and Disaster
Brown, Dana
Ballantine (288 pp.)
$28.00 | March 22, 2022
978-0-593-15848-7

Coming of age at Vanity Fair.
In this entertaining memoir, Brown tracks his colorful yet unlikely 25-year career at the iconic publication, which began in the early 1990s when he was hired as Graydon Carter’s assistant. The author was working as a barback at a famous New York City restaurant when Carter approached him with this unprecedented opportunity. Though Brown was a self-described club kid and college dropout, Carter recognized something more: a hardy work ethic, loyalty, and genuine likability, which set him apart from the typical moneyed, socially connected candidates. Carter’s hunch about Brown would quickly prove accurate. Though the subtitle suggests a tabloid-esque exposé, the author offers grounded and insightful observations—not only about the internal workings at Vanity Fair, but also major shifts in a media world rapidly transitioning to digital platforms and up-to-the-moment information content alongside rapidly evolving American cultural tastes. The author celebrates “the magazine business; the nineties and the aughts; the end of the millennium and the American century; highs and lows of culture, journalism, media, and technology; disruption and change; the zeitgeist; baby boomers; Gen X; millennials and Gen Z; New York the place; New York the idea; generational shifts and rifts; a country attempting to pivot to whatever’s next, struggling with an identity crisis and what the hell we are—individually and collectively.” Along the way, Brown relates amusing stories of encounters with the likes of Donald Trump, Kim Kardashian, and Caitlin Jenner, yet more notable sections focus on talented journalists such as Dominick Dunne and Buzz Bissinger and showcase moving reflections on writers Christopher Hitchens and A.A. Gill. The author offers sharp and balanced perspectives of Anna Wintour and Tina Brown, recognizing each as formidable, hyperambitious, shrewd, and accomplished businesswomen. Throughout, Carter’s larger-than-life presence serves as the narrative lynchpin, and Brown’s affectionate portrait is a tribute to Carter’s accomplishments and generosity as a quintessential mentor in a high-pressure organization.

An immensely engaging memoir and inside view of the magazine world.
A full-throated denunciation of a judicial system grown lazy, complacent, and overly given to forcing confessions for its own convenience.

Civil rights attorney Canon, whose legal work helped secure nationwide marriage equality, argues that the plea-bargaining system on which courts rely originally served the ruling class by “dividing up America’s ever-growing working class before it got big enough to take over.” He opens with a 1972 case in which a Kentuckian caught up in a check-kiting scheme in the amount of $88.30 insisted on his innocence and rejected the prosecution’s offer of a five-year prison sentence without trial. That refusal earned him a life sentence, according to a statute that allows the prosecution to seek maximal penalties for the recalcitrant.

Small wonder that so many accused Americans take plea deals, “a quotidian injustice that most of the public doesn’t know or care much about.” This injustice, Canon insists, is a feature and not a bug of a legal system that would otherwise have to bring cases to trial, which, he argues, would not be a bad thing, since it would force prosecutors to actually prove guilt before a jury. Of course, as the author also shows, the jury system is fundamentally flawed since it penalizes workers whose employers don’t make allowances for public service—workers who are mostly minority and working-class, which explains the overwhelming Whiteness of juries. Canon incisively demonstrates how the rise of plea bargaining is a way for prosecutors to decrease their workloads. “Expediency, not fairness, is the principal concern,” he writes. Since plea bargains usually carry mandatory jail time, the ploy explains why our population of the imprisoned and the criminal class is so much higher than that of other nations.

There are cures, Canon argues at the end of his well-reasoned argument. For one, “prosecutors can voluntarily screen cases to streamline the docket rather than just scramble to resolve a high volume of cases in a short amount of time.”

A compelling document of interest to anyone concerned with civil rights and an equitable system of justice.
traveled with during those years... This lively portrait... lurks just beneath the more public surfaces of *Voyage of the Beagle* and *Origin of Species*. Notably, it depicts formative experiences in the naturalist’s life unfound in—indeed, deliberately excluded from—those two works.” In his late adolescence and early adulthood, Darwin spent many years adrift, bored with schooling and trying to figure out what to do with his life. Through circumstance and opportunity, he boarded the *Beagle*, which spent considerable time in and around South America. During that time, of course, Darwin kept meticulous notes on plant and animal species. In addition to expected descriptions of the flora and fauna, Chaffin examines the motivations of the expedition’s leaders as well as Darwin’s observations on politics, slavery, Indigenous populations, and his fellow shipmates, who were largely left out of his published works. Additionally, writes the author, while Darwin’s field notes included significant observations about a wide range of natural science topics, “the islands proved, for him, initially disappointing, and provided no eureka moment.” Nonetheless, Chaffin shows how the trip “would lead him to reformulate many past assumptions” and inform his future work. Late in his career, Darwin noted that “the voyage of the *Beagle* has been by far the most important event in my life and has determined my whole career.”

A well-written overview of Darwin’s formative experiences.

THE PRESIDENT’S MAN
The Memoirs of Nixon’s Trusted Aide
Chapin, Dwight
Morrow/HarperCollins (480 pp.)
$28.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-0-06-307477-4

A former Nixon associate, jailed for perjury during the Watergate investigation, professes his loyalty to his former boss. During his childhood, Chapin (b. 1940) and his family moved from a Kansas farm to Southern California. As a teenager, he fell into politics not long after arriving in Encino, where “we lived right across the street from the flamboyant and very popular pianist Liberace.” After serving as senior class president in high school, he went door to door, “the bottom rung of politics,” for Sam Yorty, “the independent maverick and outspoken mayor of Los Angeles.” Soon he was working as an advance man for Nixon, “the most complex man I’ve ever known.” While Chapin allows that Nixon could be impenetrable and always played his cards close to his chest, he remains a true believer, so much so that he largely pins the Watergate mess on John Dean. Like Chapin, who served time in a country-club prison in California for lying to Congress, Dean, Haldeman, and a few other once-familiar names figure in the narrative. The account is of value for a few small matters, his protestations of innocence not among them—everyone is innocent, by his account, and it’s only through Democratic machinations that he was unfairly jailed. Foremost among the book’s virtues is Chapin’s fly-on-the-wall look at the inner workings of the Nixon White House, with a president given to self-isolation and paranoia, “practiced at revealing very little of himself,” and a staff fraught with internal squabbling. The takeaways on the ever ambitious Henry Kissinger and Al Haig are to the point. However, as the author sagely notes, “Watergate is now becoming ancient history. Most Americans are curious as to what it was about, but their eyes glaze over when anyone starts to talk about the details of the story.” Too much of this frequently self-serving book will induce just that stupor.

Contains a few useful insights but of tertiary interest to students of the Nixon presidency.
“An intimate, eye-opening chronicle that should serve as an alarm to fragile democratic republics around the world.”

TODAY HONG KONG, TOMORROW THE WORLD

Pertinent, mournful reflections on how mainland China continues to tighten its grip on the freedoms held so dear by the Hong Kong community.

Clifford, who has made his living in the city as a journalist and newspaper publisher since 1992, begins with a vital question: “How did a beacon of prosperity and freedom, a city of peaceful rallies where fathers stood vigil with their school-age children, find itself transformed into a place of firebombing and tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition?” The author begins in 2014 with the Occupy Central movement, which, after initially dying down, regained momentum in the summer of 2019 following the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre on June 4. Soon after, writes Clifford, the government, “angered at its inability to bring Hong Kong to heel and convinced that Western plots to overthrow China lay at the roots of the protests, responded by ushering in an ominous new phase with the July 1, 2020 imposition of a draconian National Security Law and subsequent arrests of dozens of leaders of the democracy movement.” The author believes these crackdowns are reminiscent of the violent practices embraced during the Cultural Revolution of Mao Zedong, when neighbor turned against neighbor, student against teacher. In addition to a potent personal narrative, Clifford widens his scope to encompass the larger-scale, nefarious intentions of Beijing to maintain control over its satellites. The government’s methods have included efforts to tamp down Hong Kong’s Cantonese speakers and to lock down the film industry via censorship and plot alterations (a topic that Erich Schwartzel investigates comprehensively in his recent book, Red Carpet). An agile observer and diligent journalist, Clifford leads us through Hong Kong’s fraught modern history in relation to the striving for democratic freedoms, and he reveals many stark consequences brought about by the suppression of its spirit.

An intimate, eye-opening chronicle that should serve as an alarm to fragile democratic republics around the world.
Well before the verdict was issued, Nation legal affairs correspondent Elie Mystal predicted that Kyle Rittenhouse would walk away from charges of murder, the judge in the matter having given plenty of signs that he endorsed what Mystal calls “the permissiveness of White violence.”

But neither was he surprised at the outcome of the Ahmaud Arbery case in Georgia. “Rittenhouse had a defense that a reasonable person could understand,” he tells Kirkus. “What the McMichaels had was a lynching on camera, and there is no credible defense for lynching. Even in Georgia, even with a mostly White jury, they couldn't pull it off.”

Both cases, and many others like them, inform the arguments in Mystal’s new book, *Allow Me To Retort: A Black Guy’s Guide to the Constitution* (The New Press, March 1), which reflects two long-standing interests. The first is a path Mystal chose when, after graduating from Harvard Law School, he decided that there were matters of the bench that he just wasn’t interested in. “Murder’s not for me,” he says. Neither was corporate law, which he found devastatingly dull. But he’d always been good at constitutional law, and when he decided to switch over to journalism, he reckoned that the Supreme Court was “horribly undercovered” and “blindingly White,” two strong reasons for him to stake out a beat covering the highest court in the land and explain how its justices arrive at the decisions they make.

Of Haitian descent, Mystal has plenty of experience in how “blindingly White” justice works. Though he lives in a leafy, well-heeled neighborhood in suburban New York, he has been pulled over numerous times—“only a dozen or so,” he says with meaningful emphasis—for what is familiarly called “driving while Black.” On a recent car trip, he found himself wondering why on Earth he was putting himself and his family in unnecessary danger, a prospect that worried him enough that he absentmindedly ran a stop sign. “If we'd been T-boned,” he says, “we would have been likelier to die than in a traffic stop.”

Even so, as he argues in *Allow Me To Retort*, the unequal application of the Fourth Amendment and its guarantees of reasonable search and
the necessity of probable cause is the single most damaging aspect of the Constitution for people of color. “We don’t apply that amendment with any teeth when it comes to the rights of people who are Black or brown in this country,” Mystol says. “What holds us back in that case is not anything that’s in the Constitution; it’s how the Constitution is being interpreted.”

What allows such unequal application of what should be a universal law, Mystol adds, is that the Constitution is grounded for all to see in the culture and interests of 18th-century White men, most of them slaveholders. “It is a document designed to create a society of enduring White male dominance, hastily edited in the margins to allow for what basic political rights White men could be convinced to share,” he holds. Those rights are not many, one reason that Mystol disdains the so-called originalism espoused by the conservative justices now on the bench. “Originalists will always point to an enumerated right when they want the federal government to do something in violation of the Tenth Amendment and the principle of federalism,” he argues. “But that is why they work so hard to deny the existence of unenumerated rights.”

Second Amendment absolutism is a favored originalist trope. He writes, “Gun rights are not about self-defense. They literally never have been. Gun rights are about menacing, intimidating, and killing racial minorities, if necessary.” Another element is the Electoral College, a relic of the slaveholding past that Mystol hopes to see abolished by a constitutional amendment—something permissible only if one sees the Constitution as an evolving document and not as an inviolable sacred text.

Mystol’s work is grounded in years of research, reporting, and reflection. For all that, his book is also written so that readers without law degrees can follow his arguments effortlessly, as when he writes about distinguishing protected classes from the rest of society. “Being an asshole is not a protected class, which is lucky because I discriminate against them all the time.”

“When I wrote this book,” Mystol tells Kirkus, “I didn’t know much about critical race theory, and I certainly didn’t write it to take part in that conversation. But now that the book is out, I see that of course it belongs there. I set out to write about the Constitution from a particular point of view: how the Constitution works if you’re not White, which isn’t well at all.”

Jan. 6 was also much on his mind as he wrote his book. “What I hope Allow Me To Retort will do is to get people to begin to question how the system works,” he says. “How we pick our president, the most important leadership role in government, is just dumb. How we apportion seats to the Senate is, too. And as for those nine unelected officials who serve for life....

“Outcomes are choices,” he tells Kirkus. “We’ve chosen all these things.” Clearly, by Elie Mystol’s lights, it’s time to choose something else.

Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor. Allow Me To Retort received a starred review in the Nov. 15, 2021, issue.
THE CHILD IS THE TEACHER
A Life of Maria Montessori
De Stefano, Cristina
Trans. by Gregory Conti
Other Press (368 pp.)
$28.99 | March 1, 2022
978-1-63542-084-5

A chronicle of the life and enduring legacy of the innovative Italian educator. For five years, journalist De Stefano mined published and archival sources in search of “the real person beyond the global trademark” of Maria Montessori (1870-1952). Written in the present tense, this well-researched narrative bears witness to determination, setbacks, sorrow, and overwhelming success. Montessori trained as a physician at a time when few women were admitted to study medicine. Researching her thesis in psychiatry, she was disturbed by what she saw in the children’s section of an asylum. “Considered incurable, and therefore committed for life, dressed in burlap aprons, dirty, unruly they are perhaps the most horrifying element of that terrible place,” writes the author. Immerging herself in everything she could find about the education of intellectually disabled children, Montessori discovered the pedagogy of 19th-century educator Édouard Séguin and became “a passionate disciple.” In 1899, she founded the National League for the Protection of Mentally Deficient Children and, in 1900, a school for the training of special education teachers. Within the next decade, she expanded her purview to include children who were economically deprived, inaugurating a kindergarten in a poor section of Italy. Montessori’s pedagogy—privileging the needs and desires of children and using specially constructed materials—attracted appreciative notice throughout Europe and America and grew after her books were published and translated. Montessori was so passionate about her method she seemed to some a prophetess; a devout Catholic, she devoted herself to education “in the same way that others join a religious order.” A lifelong feminist, she was an early supporter of “community education, female suffrage, a law for the determination of paternity, equal pay for men and women.” De Stefano reveals Montessori’s complicated personal life: an overbearing mother, recurring ill health and bouts of loneliness, and keeping secret the existence of a son born out of wedlock. A complicated personality, as well, she could be authoritarian, “ornery,” and selfishly opportunistic.

A nuanced portrait of an educational pioneer.

THE TURNING POINT
1851—A Year That Changed Charles Dickens and the World
Douglas-Fairhurst, Robert
Knopf (368 pp.)
$28.95 | March 1, 2022
978-0-525-65594-7

A chronicle of Victorian London and the events that sparked the genesis of Bleak House.

In 1851, six months before Charles Dickens began writing Bleak House, the Great Exhibition opened in Hyde Park, inviting visitors from around the world to marvel at British feats of invention and industry. Not only a symbol of the Victorian Age, the exhibition was emblematic of broadened connectivity throughout the world. Dickens was moved: He considered the state of the working class and saw 1851 “as an opportunity for the country to do things differently.” With estimable research and prose as electric as a newly laid telegraph, Oxford English professor Douglas-Fairhurst presents this pivotal year in Dickens’ life as London’s sociopolitical machinations kindled in him a “growing sense of a serious social mission.” The author explains that his book could be considered a “microhistory” or a “slow biography,” but it bursts at the seams, ballooned by his passion for historical context. Readers should be ready to cover a wide swath of the Dickens chronology with an eager guide. For example, October saw the publication of a recipe book Dickens
compiled with his wife. Douglas-Fairhurst expounds on this curious moment with a quick dive through Dickens’ marital relationship over the years, all of which is buffeted by an excited jaunt through supper scenes in *Oliver Twist*, *A Christmas Carol*, and more. Later, a close, academic reading of *Bleak House*’s opening pages is a welcome change of pace. George Orwell wrote that “the outstanding, unmistakable mark of Dickens’s writing is the unnecessary detail.” In this sense, Douglas-Fairhurst’s history is positively Dickensian. His own words in response to Orwell’s quote are an apt mirror: Like Dickens’ novels, this book is the work of “an overflowing imagination that piled ideas on top of each other with a generosity that could be overwhelming.”

An untethered literary history that reaches great heights.

**IN THE MARGINS**

**On the Pleasures of Reading and Writing**

Ferrante, Elena

Trans. by Ann Goldstein

Europa Editions (120 pp.)

$20.00 | March 15, 2022

978-1-60945-737-2

Essays on fiction, reality, and identity from an elusive novelist.

In 2020, Ferrante had written three lectures to present, but the pandemic lockdown led to the cancellation of public events. As Europa president Sandra Ozzola writes in the introduction, “in November 2021 the actress Manuela Mandracchia, in the guise of Elena Ferrante, presented the lectures.” Separately, another Ferrante essay “was read by the scholar and critic Tiziana de Rogatis.” All four offer candid reflections on Ferrante’s development as a writer. Growing up in what she calls a “literary patrimony,” she at first tried to...
imitate men’s works. Gradually, she realized that, as a woman, her challenge was “to learn to use with freedom the cage we’re shut up in.” Among the many writers who have shaped her work, Ferrante cites Virginia Woolf, who inspired her to think about her authorial self as a plurality, and Gertrude Stein, whose book *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* deftly subverted the autobiographical genre. Ferrante discloses the “passion for real things” that informed her early efforts: “I modeled characters on people I’d known or knew. I noted gestures, ways of speaking, as I saw and heard them. I described landscapes, and the way the light passed over them. I reproduced social dynamics, settings that were economically and culturally far apart. Despite my uneasiness, I let dialect have its space.” But she came to recognize that creating a sense of reality “was a game of illusion,” and fiction is indelibly etched with an author’s identity. “I can recount ‘out there’ only if I also recount the me who is ‘out there’ along with all the rest,” she writes. Ferrante offers insights about her complex protagonists, including Lila and Lenu, in her Neapolitan novels, and the first-person narrator of her most recent novel, *The Lying Life of Adults*, which she conceived as a story “in which you don’t know who the woman-character writing is.”

**Enticing glimpses into a writer’s life. Let’s hope for a full-length memoir one day.**

**THE HELPERS Profiles From the Frontlines of the Pandemic**
Gilsinan, Kathy
Norton (288 pp.)
$24.95 | March 1, 2022
978-0-393-80702-2

Poignant stories from the darkest days of the pandemic.

Gilsinan, a contributing editor at the *Atlantic* who reported extensively on the pandemic, shares details from the lives of a variety of individuals, including a CEO, a vaccine developer, a nurse, and a funeral director. In March 2020, Huy Le, who worked for Apple and Facebook, and his mother developed Covid-19. Both spent their birthdays “sedated and paralyzed” in a hospital. Hamilton Bennett, a vaccine developer for Moderna, and his colleagues “achieved miracles” in development and testing. Chris Kiple, the CEO of Ventec, a small company outside of Seattle, led the charge to increase their ventilator production from 200 per month to one every seven minutes. Paul Cary, a former fire department paramedic in his 60s, drove 28 hours from his home in Colorado to the country’s epidemic epicenter in New York to help out. When the pandemic began, Michelle Gonzalez was working as a nurse in the Bronx. Facing shortages of tests, ventilators, and protective equipment, she was required to continually work 12-hour days with no time to eat. At the suggestion of a friend, Nikki Rhodes, a biracial chef and culinary arts teacher from Kentucky, opened a community kitchen to help feed her community and teach her students important lessons. “Even though Covid overwhelmingly spared children and teenagers from its worst physical effects, it had utterly warped the world around them,” writes the author. “Nikka wasn’t worried about her students’ GPAs. She was just hoping they survived this new world.” Finally, Gilsinan introduces us to Jeff Jorgenson, a funeral director working diligently to provide his services during a time when gatherings were limited or forbidden. Compassionate throughout, the author effectively conveys the struggles, fears, and sacrifices that each of these individuals faced. She also exposes many of the fatal flaws in the American medical system.

**A comforting, much-needed reminder that we are still all in this together.**
A Canadian physician recounts a still-evolving practice of allowing people to end their own lives with medical help.

In 2016, Canada was ahead of the curve in passing a law that allowed for doctors to assist terminally ill people to choose when and how to die, by which “the fear of an unknown ending is replaced by a semblance of control.” The law had a few gray areas that were later addressed: At what point can it be determined that death is imminent? Can someone who is beset by incurable depression or some other mental disorder be considered a candidate for medically assisted suicide? Green addresses such questions with case studies from her own practice. She also investigates the moral and ethical challenges placed on her and her fellow physicians by the sheer task of determining when a patient qualifies for the application of the law. “It turns out all these emotions go somewhere,” she writes, “and every once in a while, a crack forms in the retaining walls, and the feeling slips out.” Her allowance that doctors are humans, too, is welcome. With a few years of practice in medically assisted suicide, which in Canada is accomplished through the ingestion of lethal drugs by mouth or intravenously, Green has a notion of trends. For example, the number of people who choose that avenue is growing, and it is especially prevalent around the holidays. Even so, she recounts, it’s a small fraction of the number of Canadians who die each year, in part, she suggests, because medically assisted suicide is not widely advertised. Canada bests its southern neighbor in favoring science over religion, but, Green also notes, medically assisted suicide is allowed in several U.S. states, if with somewhat tighter controls, with states requiring “that the patient be terminally ill with a prognosis of six months or less.” Green predicts that these controls will be loosened as more people learn about the option.

A humane, clear-eyed view of how and why one can leave the world by choice.

“...the author offers readers ‘an invitation to look below surfaces and beyond first appearances.’ The result is a wonderfully paradoxical read that provides profound, moving insights in vignettes that are typically no longer than one or two pages.”

“...this is a delightful book by an author whose career has been dedicated to exploring ethical living.”

“A poignant compilation that delivers astute reflections on creating a rich, meaningful life.”

—Kirkus Reviews

FOR ALL INQUIRIES, PLEASE EMAIL donwelch9@gmail.com • welchwritings.com
“A taut, moving, powerful account of an ongoing human rights disaster.”

_How I Survived a Chinese “Reeducation” Camp_
_Haitiwi, Gulbahar & Rozenn Morgat_
_Trans. by Edward Gauvin_
_Seven Stories (256 pp.)_
_$26.95 | Feb. 8, 2022_
_978-1-64421-148-9_

A viscerally affecting memoir from a Uyghur woman who “endured hundreds of hours of interrogation, torture, malnutrition, police violence, and brainwashing.”

By 2006, Haitiwi and her husband, Kerim, began to realize that she and her fellow Uyghurs were being incrementally stripped of their civil rights in her native region of Xinjiang. They moved to France, where life was difficult but livable. Although the couple had been well-paid engineers at an oil company in Xinjiang, they scraped by in Paris, with Kerim working as an Uber driver and the author as a baker and cook. In 2017, pressure by her former employer about her work pension convinced them that it was safe for her to return to sign required paperwork. Not long after she arrived, she was apprehended and interrogated. Photos of her adult daughter in Paris at an anti-Chinese protest for Uyghurs convinced police that she was dangerous. She was branded as a “terrorist,” a fate that has befallen many Uyghurs, who are Muslim and fiercely wary of Chinese authoritarianism. Languishing without a trial for a year, she was eventually sentenced to seven years of “reeducation.”

In this urgent and eloquent narrative, the author fashions harrowing depictions of daily humiliations at the camps (so-called “schools”), including rote memorization, senseless interrogation, and violence. After more than two years, pressure by her daughter, who publicized her mother’s ordeal, raising alarm to the highest levels of the French government, agitated Xinjiang authorities. In order to secure her release, Haitiwi was forced to confess to crimes she hadn’t committed. Despite her courage in the face of a brutal ordeal, it appears that she was one of the lucky ones: Many of the women she met in prison never made it out, and thousands still suffer based on the flimsiest of charges simply because of their ethnicity.

A taut, moving, powerful account of an ongoing human rights disaster.

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**Party Like a Rockstar**
_J.T. Harding_
_Twelve (288 pp.)_
_$28.00 | Feb. 22, 2022_
_978-1-5387-3540-4_

A country songwriter shares his zigzag path to becoming a hit-maker.
Before writing smashes for Uncle Kracker (“Smile”), Blake Shelton (“Sangria”), Keith Urban (“Somewhere in My Car”), and more, Harding was a prankish, spotlight-craving adopted kid from the Detroit suburbs. In his debut book, he captures both his impishness and dedication to his craft. Indeed, the narrative has something of the rigor and structure of a country tune. First, the setup: As a kid, he was deep into rock and pop music, excitedly engaging in KISS cosplay and talent shows as he dreamed of stardom, an enthusiasm only slightly diminished by his brother’s suicide. Then the complication: a hand-to-mouth early adulthood in Los Angeles working at Tower Records (where he once helped Michael Jackson shop for Led Zeppelin CDs) while cadging gigs as an assistant to successful acts while his own musical efforts struggled to launch. A twist on the theme: discovering his birth father, Jay Thomas, a celebrity in his own right, and then a songwriting break after years of hustling for attention. Lastly, the takeaway: Harding closes with some practical bits of tough-love advice for aspiring country songwriters—e.g., move to Nashville, don’t imitate anybody, and, his “biggest piece of advice,” keep your melodies hummable.

It’s clear that Harding takes the job seriously, but he also carries it lightly. Many of his stories are self-deprecating tales of failure (a disastrous gig opening for Linkin Park) or poor judgment (throwing a shoe toward Thomas while on David Letterman’s show, a joke that landed badly in multiple ways). The author can be curiously aloof: For somebody who insists that personal experience is essential to great songs, he shares little about the heartaches that fueled his hits. Perhaps he’s truly mastered the country songwriter’s art of withholding key details and is saving them for the next book.

Easygoing memories of a cutthroat music business.
A joyous celebration of the music of life, from the acclaimed author of *The Forest Unseen* and *The Songs of Trees*.

Seamlessly melding history, ecology, physiology, philosophy, and biology, Haskell exults in the delightful cacophony created by birds and insects, wind and sea, human voices and musical instruments as he engages in the practice of “attentive listening” in his travels around the world. “Every vocal species,” he writes, “has a distinctive sound. Every place on the globe has an acoustic character made from the unique confluence of this multitude of voices.” This multitude of sound, though, is being threatened by noise pollution and habitat extinction, dire consequences of human behavior. Sound, Haskell reveals, is a fairly new development in the planet’s history, made possible by the manifestation, 1.5 billion years ago, of cilia, tiny hairs on the cell membrane that help cells move—and also, as in our own inner ears, to sense sonic vibrations. “For more than nine-tenths of its history, Earth lacked any communicative sounds,” writes the author. “No creatures sang when the seas first swarmed with animal life or when the ocean’s reefs first rose. The land’s primeval forests contained no calling insects or vertebrate animals.” Flowering plants ushered in life forms such as insects, which filled the air with trills and buzzes, and birds, for whom sound-making “mediates breeding, territoriality, and the alliances and tensions of animal social networks.” Haskell’s capacious purview includes the origins of musical instruments, some 40,000 years ago; the possibility that dinosaurs made low bugling sounds; the particular cries of birds living above the tree line; and the way sounds, including those made by humans, are adapted to environment and even shaped by diet. He mounts a compelling warning about “the silencing of ecosystems,” which “isolates individuals, fragments communities, and weakens the ecological resilience and evolutionary creativity of life.” Like “cultural knowledge,” Haskell asserts, “sound is unseen and ephemeral” and too precious to lose.

Sparkling prose conveys an urgent message.

The BBC

* A Century on Air

* Hendy, David
* PublicAffairs (656 pp.)
* $38.00  |  March 29, 2022
* 978-1-61039-704-9

A comprehensive biography of the British Broadcasting Corporation, “the embodiment of public service broadcasting, a template to emulate.”

Hendy, a professor of media and communication and former BBC producer, offers both a history of the institution and its key personnel and an assessment of its difficulties and successes living up to its self-professed mission “to inform, educate and entertain.” The author offers his personal “version of the BBC story, not an officially approved one”—but one bolstered by “several years of invaluable help from the BBC accessing and navigating my way through its archival treasures.” Hendy begins with the founders—Cecil Lewis, John Reith, and Arthur Burrows—and its initial incarnation as a radio company in 1922. Early on, the author points out that although the BBC is not a government-run entity, it exists only by Royal Charter, funded by a license fee set by Parliament. Its history is inextricably woven into the fabric of 20th-century Britain: the 1926 General Strike, when the BBC averted a real threat of government takeover; the close collaboration with the World War II-era government, which included the sending of coded messages during broadcasts; an eyewitness account of the direct hit on its home in Broadcasting House during the Blitz; the robust patronage of the new medium, TV; and its ever increasing role as a truly global institution. Hendy ably dissects the BBC’s approach to popular entertainment and the arts without sparing due criticism. In 1975, for example, reporter Mike Phillips argued that the BBC “failed accurately to reflect the lives, problems and aspirations of immigrant minorities.” Throughout, the author offers brief profiles of numerous outsize personalities across the media, politics, and the arts. He also meticulously lays out the many attempts, by both Conservative and Labour governments and by rival media, to derail the BBC’s editorial independence—e.g., during the Suez Crisis and the Falklands War. Much of this history has been told before but never in such well-researched depth and sparkling detail.

An appropriately large-scale account of the media giant at the very heart of British life.
BLOOD IN THE GARDEN
The Flagrant History of the 1990s New York Knicks
Herring, Chris
Atria (368 pp.)
$28.00 | Jan. 18, 2022
978-1-982132-11-8

An account of the 1990s-era New York Knicks, who left a trail of mayhem in their wake.

It was a flash in the historical pan, but a memorable one, the confluence of a take-no-prisoners coach, Pat Riley, with a squad of talented, hard-nosed players that included Patrick Ewing, Anthony Mason, John Starks, Latrell Sprewell, and others. It helped matters, notes Sports Illustrated senior writer Herring, that as the Knicks were coming together, archnemesis Michael Jordan of the Chicago Bulls had decided to retire—at least to play baseball. The Knicks were lean, mean, and ready to brawl if necessary. In the memorable opening section, Herring recounts how Riley, 20 minutes into his five-year stint as coach, had to break up a fight between Mason and forward Xavier McDonald in a team practice. “Mason was nothing if not enigmatic,” the author writes later; he was hard to pin down but also hard to beat. There are some wonderful set pieces, including a 1994 NBA Finals game that no one, commentator Bob Costas included, paid much attention to, given that O.J. Simpson was then barreling down a Los Angeles highway, the police in close pursuit. But the author is at his best with on-the-court, you-are-there accounts of the game in action and its players, including Starks, who “had been the Knicks’ most reliable option, hitting 49 percent of his shots—and 45 percent of his threes—averaging a team-best 21 points and seven assists per contest.” Still, as Herring knows, all the stars in the world won’t make a real team, and throughout the decade of the 1990s, the Knicks came together, as in 1999, when “they displayed heart and resolve, showing they could sidestep distractions to sneak into the playoffs with their beloved coach’s back against the wall.”

A fond look back at a once-great basketball franchise that, now hapless, fans have “longed for...ever since.”

“...Huttner....is a true Fiddler Genius.”
—Max Lewkowicz, Director of Fiddler: A Miracle of Miracles

“A wide-ranging book explores the history and lore of Fiddler on the Roof.”

“...the author’s authority on the topic comes through loud and clear, and her decision to weave in great amounts of autobiographical reflections is well taken given the intensely personal connection most aficionados have to this particular show.”

“A wonderfully chatty and knowledgeable examination of ‘all things Fiddler.’”
—Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation or Information on Publishing and Film Rights, Email jan_huttner@msn.com
A thorough, persuasive, insightful study of Obama’s life and political achievements.

BARACK OBAMA

THE UNWRITTEN BOOK
An Investigation
Hunt, Samantha
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (384 pp.)
$28.00 | April 5, 2022
978-0-374-60491-2

A series of meditations on grief, art, desire, memory, and the spirit world, centered around an unfinished novel written by the author’s father.

An award-winning fiction writer best known for her explorations of the macabre and the unreal, Hunt plumbs the depths of human experience in this assemblage of reflections on life’s sweet mystery. “Most of our lives are spent shrinking,” she writes, “eroding into bits and decaying. What if we celebrated that decay and championed the infinitesimal?” Although her gaze ranges widely—from her love of One Direction and W.G. Sebald to her grandmother’s stamp collection and the time she “bathed” in more than 200,000 volts of electricity—Hunt returns again and again to the unfinished manuscript she discovered in her father’s desk drawer after his death. The “unwritten book” itself—three chapters of which are interspersed throughout the text—can lag a bit, as Hunt herself acknowledges in her annotations. “Apologies if this is juicy for our narrator.” Some other sections of the larger book feel cobbled together—e.g., ruminations on policing and safety, reflections on the pandemic, the author’s attempts to fill the silences of her family history. But Hunt more than compensates for these minor quibbles with her engaging style, vulnerability, and earnest engagement with death and grief, ghosts and art, desire, and memory, and the spirit world, centered around an unfinished novel written by the author’s father.

A vulnerable, wide-ranging, and at times deeply affecting patchwork of ruminations on the unknown.

AMERICAN REBOOT
An Idealist’s Guide to Getting Big Things Done
Hurd, Will
Simon & Schuster (256 pp.)
$27.00 | March 29, 2022
978-1-982160-70-8

Control, alt, delete: A former Texas congressman and CIA officer urges the GOP to start afresh.

“When you are troubleshooting a computer problem and you can’t figure out why the computer is acting weirdly,” writes Hurd, “the best thing you can do is reboot.” The author may have left Congress to work in artificial intelligence—a topic that occupies a big chunk of his book—but he hasn’t left a Republican Party that doesn’t have much room for people like him, of mixed race and moderate tendencies. Hurd believes that Trump lost the 2020 presidential race, that supporters of the Jan. 6 mob represent a clear and present danger to democracy, that climate change must be addressed, and that “our government must treat all people humanely, even ones who come here illegally.” For all that, he is an orthodox Republican in thinking that the Democratic Party is furthering socialism and that the free market is sacred. Hurd holds that given the former, the GOP has a fighting chance to win future elections (never mind gerrymandering and voter suppression), if only it becomes more closely attuned to the realities of a country that is steadily becoming browner, younger, and greener. That would presuppose losing its fealty to Trump, for whom he has little use (and who returned the favor). Hurd, who represented a huge district, reports on the secrets of his success among an electorate that had traditionally voted Democratic: He won by listening and being on the ground, traveling constantly from one ranch and little town to the next. He also reveals a few useful lessons of spycraft from his days in the CIA: Know where the safe places are, and know your friends and enemies—of which there are many, including China, Russia, and North Korea.

Hurd’s plea for a kinder, gentler GOP is well reasoned but quixotic given the party’s current rabidity.

BARACK OBAMA
Conservative, Pragmatist, Progressive
Kaufman, Burton I.
Cornell Univ. (392 pp.)
$29.95 | March 15, 2022
978-1-5017-6197-3

An exploration of the moderate ideology of America’s 44th president.

Biographer and former history professor Kaufman argues that Obama’s inveterate pragmatism and conservative values have been generally ignored in the existing literature.” As a corrective, he offers a perspective that underscores how a respect for “individual responsibility, hard work, and a free market” guided the former president throughout his political career. This approach guides the author’s convincing, often refreshing assessment of Obama’s decision-making and helps illuminate the resistance to his presidency from both the left and right as he sought to “maintain the nation’s existing free enterprise system rather than replace it with a more powerful centralized government.” Kaufman tracks Obama’s intellectual growth from his childhood through his years as a law student and community organizer, and he highlights his motivations behind key decisions during his two terms as president. “What differentiated his administration from others before him was his efforts to expand opportunities to enter the middle class for
those he regarded as not yet part of it," writes the author. Of particular interest is the emphasis placed on Obama's sometimes-ruthless pragmatism in achieving the political ends he valued most, a characteristic that has indeed been neglected by other commentators. Also revealing are Kaufman's sharp critiques of Obama's Middle East policies, including "his misunderstanding of the Arab Spring beginning in 2010, his intervention in Libya, and questionable response to the Syrian Civil War." The author's largest claim is that "future historians and biographers will evaluate Obama as one of the nation's best post–World War II presidents along with Harry Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower." Though Kaufman doesn't systematically defend this judgment, it informs his appraisal of what he takes to be the former president's greatest success, the passing of the Affordable Care Act, which epitomized his commitment to moderate reform.

A thorough, persuasive, insightful study of Obama's life and political achievements.

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**THE BELIEVER**

**Encounters With the Beginning, the End, and our Place in the Middle**

Krasnostein, Sarah

Tin House (360 pp.)
$27.95 | March 1, 2022
978-1-953534-00-2

How does one confront the unknown and unknowable?

That is the central question in Krasnostein's thoughtful meditation on humans' desire for certainty, security, and solace. Describing herself as an educated, urbane, "secular humanist" Jew, the author is generous in her investigation of diverse individuals who share a common trait: "longing for the unattainable." Her own search was ignited when she heard, by chance, a Mennonite choir singing at a Manhattan subway station. Transfixed by the sound and bond of community, she spent several months among Mennonites in the
South Bronx, where she came to understand “their insistence on seeing a perfect pattern embroidered into the fabric of reality, constant confirmation—in the good and in the bad—of a loving presence.” Belief in that loving presence, in intelligent design, and in the Bible as historical fact has attracted some for whom scientific evidence is unconvincing. As to the existence of God, they refuse “to accept absence of evidence as evidence of absence.” At the Creation Museum in Kentucky, the Director of Research is a geologist. “He demonstrates,” Krasnostein writes, “that it is possible simultaneously to consider Satan your personal spiritual adversary and to stay up to date with the Journal of Geology.” The author also talked to a lecturer on the book of Genesis who has a doctorate in microbiology and believes Noah’s Ark had room for young dinosaurs. A woman whose fiance disappeared on a solo flight after seeing unidentifiable lights in the sky; a man who clears haunted houses; an investigator into parapsychology: All find comfort in their “bespoke delusions.” Krasnostein herself is no stranger to terror, confusion, and pain: Some of her family members were victims of the Holocaust; her mother left her when she was 10 “with explanations I did not understand at the time and do not understand now.” Near the end, she writes, “I believe that we are united in the emotions that drive us into the beliefs that separate us.”

A sympathetic inquiry into the vicissitudes of faith.

MORE REAL LIFE ROCK

The Wilderness Years, 2014–2021
Marcus, Greil
Yale Univ (344 pp.)
$28.00 | March 29, 2022
978-0-300-26098-4

The doyen of rock journalists serves up a book of lists of favorite moments in pop culture over the last seven years.

The author’s lists, written for publications such as Rolling Stone, the Barnes & Noble Review, and the Los Angeles Review of Books, take in movies, books, news reports, and other sources of material. The author of the indispensable Invisible Republic, which examines the centuries-old roots of Bob Dylan’s Basement Tapes, Marcus remains a Dylan fanatic. That much is evident from his frequent mentions of Dylan performances, official releases, bootlegs, interviews, and other ephemera. Not all are good: The author calls Dylan’s “nadir” the period from 1978 to the early 1990s, “when Dylan reinvented himself onstage as a lead guitar player and went back to the ballads and blues of his first discovery of folk music with Good as I Been to You and World Gone Wrong.” Marcus is fascinated by Dylan’s dirgelike 2020 song “Murder Most Foul,” which he rightly pegs as “a seventeen-minute fever dream of the first Kennedy assassination.” The author also devotes much attention to Seattle punk trio Sleater-Kinney, whose founder, Carrie Brownstein, is a multiple threat—musician, actor, author, and screenwriter. Marcus isn’t overly political, but neither is he shy of excoriating Donald Trump, often in the words of others, as when he cites Taylor Swift’s nicely direct comment, “We will vote you out in November.” While Marcus is largely in recommendation mode, it’s not all positive. For example, he calls Marianne Faithfull’s Negative Capability, a “poor, forced album,” like “Lana Del Rey before she was born and after she’s outlived a lot of the people who bought her records.” Still, the author’s enthu-
siasms win out, whether for a Don DeLillo novel or a Henry Rollins live show. He closes with a provocation: Why aren’t the Shangri-Las in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame?

A smart set of suggestions for further reading, viewing, and listening by a most trustworthy guide.

RIVERMAN

An American Odyssey
McGrath, Ben
Knopf (304 pp.)
$28.00 | April 5, 2022
978-0-451-49400-9

The captivating story of an inveterate river wanderer who left a mark on many he met along his journeys before suddenly vanishing.

An intelligent, heavyset “misfit,” the artist and one-time hospital worker covered thousands of miles, logging his experiences in some 2,000 pages of text and reams of photographs before his disappearance, somewhere on the Outer Banks of North Carolina. In this debut book, longtime New Yorker staff writer McGrath, whose chance encounter with Conant on the Hudson River eventually launched a lengthy retracing of the adventurer’s travels, delivers a worthy combination of character study, travelogue, and missing-person’s story. His portrait, partly propelled by Conant’s own observations, also opens a portal to a world of itinerant men oft misunder-
stood as vagrants or ne’er-do-wells. More, it is a paean to eccen-
tricity and endurance and a study of a life that changed the chronicler’s own perceptions. McGrath’s writing is measured and confident, the product of a journalist’s persistence in investi-
gating the truth behind so colorful and contradictory a figure. Skeptical at first of Conant’s more implausible stories, McGrath became seduced, but he was too diligent a reporter not to won-
der how much was romantic exaggeration or outright delusion. Conant could be erratic, even paranoid, but he was also genial. McGrath’s accounts of his visits to many sleepy riverside towns in search of Conant’s connections unveil a gallery of people no less curious than his subject. Small, telling details also set the book apart. Little escapes the author’s gaze, though in the end he is just as mystified and uncertain, as anyone over this elusive man’s fate. The tone near the close is almost wistful.

A memorable and intoxicating exploration of what we make of those who reinvent themselves.
FREE SPEECH
A History From Socrates to Social Media
Mchangama, Jacob
Basic Books (528 pp.)
$30.00 | Feb. 8, 2022
978-1-5416-0049-2

A comprehensive history of free speech from ancient to modern times.

In this well-researched and highly readable book, Copenhagen-based writer Mchangama, host of the podcast series Clear and Present Danger: A History of Free Speech, traces the history of free speech around the world, examining the views of both its advocates and its suppressors. The author effectively demonstrates how much we have gained by the spread of free speech as well as what we stand to lose if we allow its continued erosion. Mchangama begins with ancient civilizations—"Judging from surviving law codes and writings, the great ancient civilizations protected the power and authority of their rulers from the speech of their subjects, not the other way around"—and ends with a discussion of the current content moderation and transparency problems of social media platforms, which allow the spread of disinformation and hate speech. Throughout history, Mchangama shows, numerous groups and individuals have diligently worked on the advancement of free speech, including Socrates, Johannes Gutenberg, John Milton, Franklin Roosevelt, and Nelson Mandela. While fighting for their cause, champions of free speech have faced leaders who have tried to rein in speech when they felt threatened. These efforts at suppression have included the banning of books, distribution of propaganda, attacks on the media, and even the imprisonment or murder of journalists. Today, as we continue to fight to contain the Covid-19 pandemic, censorship, lies, and conspiracy theories abound, and the legitimacy of the current presidency is being erroneously questioned. However, notes Mchangama, "while online expression may sometimes lead to real-life harm, it does not necessarily follow that placing restrictions on free speech is an
At the same time, as the author points out with respect to attempts to overthrow democracy, free speech should be accompanied by “a zero-tolerance policy toward organized threats, intimidations, and violence by groups seeking to establish parallel systems of authority.”

A well-structured and compelling examination of the costs and benefits of free speech.

THE CHIEF’S CHIEF
Meadows, Mark
All Seasons Press (308 pp.)
$28.00 | Dec. 7, 2021
978-1-73747-852-2

Donald Trump’s former chief of staff serves up servile homage to a man he’s sure will make a comeback bid in 2024.

No president could ask for a more fawning yes man than Meadows. Trump is a genius, a savior, the author avers in this cliché-stuffed, formulaic celebration. He’s a bulwark against what Trump calls “the Radical Left Democrat Communist Party.” That speech he gave at Mount Rushmore, if anyone remembers it? “One of the finest in American history.” Of course, Trump, God’s personal pick, didn’t really lose the 2020 election. When things go wrong, it’s always someone else’s fault. For example, Trump appointed Kavanaugh and Gorsuch to the Supreme Court only for them to rule “in ways that were deeply disappointing to the MAGA movement that had made their appointments possible.” Thanks to Pelosi and the Dems, the economy, formerly strong “due to the work of President Trump and his advisors,” tanked during the pandemic. Speaking of which, “had it not been for the China Virus, we could have spent the past months reaching more voters and running up our historic vote totals even higher”—not to mention battling Fauci, Milley, and countless other enemies. If there’s a conspiracy to be found or an enemy to be named, Meadows does so. Sometimes he falls off message, as when he writes of a typical campaign rally, “the energy of these patriots, all united for a common cause, celebrating their prosperity and patriotism in a shared space, is something you can’t describe until you’re in the middle of the crowd with them.” Prosperity or forgotten/downtrodden Americans: You can’t have it both ways. As for the Jan. 6 mob? All Meadows can muster is a pale “what occurred that day was shameful”—with the immediate deflection that a few bad apples spoiled a noble showing of support for their heroic leader.

A Trump idolator’s dream book. Everyone else should stay far away.

THE TIME TRAVELER’S GUIDE TO REGENCY BRITAIN
A Handbook for Visitors to 1789-1830
Mortimer, Ian
Pegasus (448 pp.)
$29.95 | April 5, 2022
978-1-64313-881-7

British historian Mortimer, who has already struck gold with delightful guides to Elizabethan and medieval Britain, takes on the Regency.

The Regency period lasted from 1811 to 1820 when Prince George ruled instead of his mentally ill father, George III. Mortimer rewinds the clock to 1789, when the prince became regent-in-waiting after his father “fell ill.” The author ends with George’s (by then, George IV) death in 1830, an event greeted with contemptuous obituaries in major newspapers. “In marked contrast to his father,” writes Mortimer, “George IV [was] one of the laziest...spoil, arrogant, self-indulgent, profligate, uncaring and conceited Englishmen ever to have lived.” Despite his unpopularity, he had a few positive qualities, which the author enumerates, and he exerted intense influence over his time. “You can see why those who looked back from the 1860s saw their Regency forebears as an unfettered and wild bunch….It had been a time when gentlemen and ladies, beggars and clergy, soldiers and tramps, employers and courtesans could all pretty much behave as they saw fit, in a world that gleamed with gold and heroism, drink and sex, excitement and opportunity.” Expanding the period to include the prince’s entire adult life provides a wider canvas for Mortimer’s deliciously revealing research, but there’s no denying that the pace of change during these four decades leads to not one but several “periods,” so the author must provide as much political as social history. No reader should miss his take on the era’s hygiene, diet, medicine, treatment of women, fashion, travel, theater, and music. There was even a musical superstar: Beethoven. Anglophiles will love it all, but Americans without at least a tourist’s familiarity with British geography (especially London) will struggle through the author’s descriptions of the growth and makeup of cities. It’s an avalanche of streets, monuments, districts, parks, palaces, and great houses.

Everything you ever wanted to know—and perhaps much you could do without—about Regency life.
SAVING YELLOWSTONE
Exploration and Preservation in Reconstruction America
Nelson, Megan Kate
Scribner (320 pp.)
$27.00  |  March 1, 2022
978-1-982141-33-2

An iconic national park becomes the stage for a complex game of 19th-century politics.

The Yellowstone country was not well explored until the 1870s, writes historian Nelson, “hemmed in by four mountain ranges” and sprinkled with the bones of unlucky adventurers. It did not help that numerous Native peoples, including the Hunkpapa (which Nelson correctly renders as Húŋkpapha) Lakota under Sitting Bull, considered the Yellowstone territory to be theirs and took pains to keep interlopers out. Arrayed against these Indigenous peoples were several concerns. Montana’s territorial governor, Nathaniel Langford, was interested in the country on its own terms, but there was also business behind it; he was just one of many who wanted to push a northerly transcontinental railroad through the region. The author displays her strong commitment to including the Native presence in any account of Western history, but there’s another twist in this tale: Nelson links the policy of domination of Native peoples with the unfinished business of Reconstruction in the South, extending federal control over recalcitrant states and individuals. “Republicans in the early 1870s,” she writes, “saw both projects as part of a national ideal: to create productive and patriotic American citizens.” As Ulysses S. Grant and other leading Republicans knew, the South was no place they could look for votes, but the West certainly was. All that remained was to settle the West with likely Republicans by removing obstacles, geographical or human. By Nelson’s account, it’s no accident that Henry Dawes, a Massachusetts senator who was a strong advocate for the creation of Yellowstone National Park, was also the author of legislation that settled Native peoples not on shared domains but instead allotted each individual Native American a small plot of land, destroying cultural norms. Reconstruction may have failed, but in their effort to weaken the Native population, the Republicans were successful for decades.

A readable and unfailingly interesting look at a slice of Western history from a novel point of view.

THE POWER OF REGRET
How Looking Backward Moves Us Forward
Pink, Daniel H.
Riverhead (256 pp.)
$28.00  |  Feb. 1, 2022
978-0-7352-1065-3

A study of regret based on a series of international group behavioral studies. Culling responses from an expansive questionnaire, bestselling author Pink analyzes the cumulative benefits of hindsight to inform future decision-making. His surveys encompassed hundreds of personal stories from respondents who were able to absorb the sting of regret and channel it toward better quality of life. The author believes that while optimism is essential to improved well-being, negative emotions like regret bring clarity, meaning, and much-needed alertness. Throughout more than a dozen illuminating chapters, Pink cites examples from decades of research on the psychology behind high-stakes negotiations and the resultant regret that often followed. Dubbing regret the “quintessential upward counterfactual—the ultimate If Only,” the author isolates four core categories: foundation (failure to be responsible in financial, educational, or health matters), boldness (forgone opportunities), moral (the temptation to behave poorly), and connection (unrealized potential relationship). Arguing that the open acknowledgment of regret is key to repurposing it toward the greater good, Pink gives close scrutiny to two research projects that he personally developed and championed: the World Regret Survey and the American Regret Project. The companion website for these initiatives amassed thousands of reflections from 105 countries and across a collage of cultures. Examples include a woman who regrets not climbing into her ill husband’s hospital bed on the night of his death; a Saudi Arabian businesswoman who laments a tendency to downplay her intelligence and inventiveness “to please/not upset others”; and a man who, 60 years later, still mourns not taking a college classmate up on the opportunity to join the 1964 Freedom Summer project. In the final chapters, Pink offers practical guidance on how readers can thrive beyond their mistakes, molding them into learning opportunities, and how to flip the negative connotations inherent with regret into positive experiences: “By making us feel worse today, regret helps us do better tomorrow.”

An insightful and rewarding glimpse into the emotional pathways of human contrition.
A British veterinarian and marathoner re-creates film hero Forrest Gump’s 15,248-mile run across America.

Pope had often wondered whether the run the film’s main character claimed to have completed in “three years, two months, fourteen days and sixteen hours” was really possible. Other runners had actually completed one of the five legs that had comprised it, but Pope wanted to be “the guy who tried” to do it all. A seasoned competitive distance runner, he transformed his Forrest Gump obsession into a fundraiser for the World Wildlife Federation and Peace Direct. For the next year and a half, Pope flew back and forth across the Atlantic to undertake each leg. His girlfriend, Nadine, followed him in Jenny, the RV they christened after Gump’s love interest, while friends and admirers followed him on social media and sometimes opened their homes to him as he traveled. Often sporting Forrest’s iconic red Bubba Gump hat, the author traveled through cities, prairies, mountains, and deserts, battled extremes of weather and temperature, and suffered the inevitable injuries that came from running 30 to 50 miles per day. When Nadine returned to England midway through his venture to have their child, Pope found himself torn between family responsibilities and finishing his project. “There was no question I’d be heading home for the birth, but if she needed me during her pregnancy I was ready to cancel everything and come back to her at the drop of a hat,” he writes, “She kept telling me she’d hate to be the reason for doing that, but I didn’t care—she came first.” Ultimately, Pope’s enthusiasm for his venture and for America itself, which reveals itself through the myriad details he offers when describing people and places, never flagged. Those who followed Pope on his amazing odyssey, as well as readers with a penchant for travelogues, are most likely to enjoy this book. Others may be put off by the story’s overdescrcriptiveness, length, and lack of interiority, and the author too infrequently makes room for voices other than his.

A well-intentioned but flawed adventure memoir.

An outsize, obnoxious, 19th-century self-made millionaire is restored to her rightful place.

Born to a family of “bounders and bankrupts” in New Orleans, her unknown biological mother likely Black, though her biraciality was never acknowledged, Miriam Florence Squier Leslie (1836-1914) clawed her way up the social structure to become an important figure in publishing, managing several magazines she inherited from her third husband, Frank Leslie. She also wrote essays and books. As Prioleau makes clear, class divisions in America were extreme during Leslie’s lifetime, which encompassed the Haymarket Riots, the Johnstown flood, and the Great Depression. Yet by deploying her inimitable blend of intellect, drive, greed, sex appeal, deceit, and inferiority complex-fueled snobbery, Leslie leapt the chasm between poor and rich and amassed a huge fortune, largely spent on Gilded Age excess in lodgings, attire, and hospitality. No matter what she did—and she did plenty—this world-class striver was never embraced by the upper crust. She avoided philanthropy, preferring to revile rather than lend a hand to the poor. Yet in a brilliant final stroke that balances her more foolish and despicable choices, she left her fortune to the women’s movement, funding the work that helped to pass the 19th Amendment. Prioleau, whose earlier works have focused on great seducers and seductresses, is a perfect biographer of Leslie, who was mentored by no less than Lola Montez in the application of womanly charms. “A self-mythologizer,” writes the author, “she saw herself as the legendary Lilith, the immortal gadfly and moral truant, who defied Adam’s dominion and founded her own paradise, filled with ‘jinn’ lovers and a race of ‘glorious,’ ‘rebellious daughters’ claiming the New World as their special domain.” The author uses anachronistic vocabulary and peppers her sentences with words and phrases quoted from source documents, giving the narrative an amusing period feel.

They just don’t make characters like this anymore. Kudos to Prioleau for her gallant historical rescue mission.
The bestselling author of The Romanov Sisters returns with the story of the Russian aristocrats who made Paris their home after fleeing the Bolshevik coup.

Early on, Rappaport, an expert on imperial Russian history, notes how “the Russian discovery of the French capital...goes back to the time of...Peter the Great, who made a visit to Paris in 1717 and fell in love with Versailles.” This affinity for Paris reached its apex during the Belle Époque, when the excesses of Russian aristocrats became notorious around town. “The French press,” writes the author, “regularly titillated readers with stories of the vices and eccentricities of the grand dukes.” The events in Russia from 1905 onward caused increasing anxiety for the aristocracy and fear for safety of the extended Romanov family. At the same time, Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes company was storming Paris with its shocking modern music and dance, and other artists—e.g., poet Ilya Ehrenburg and painters Marc Chagall and Chaim Soutine—were “ electrified,” as Ehrenburg put it, by the abundant culture of Paris. The author delineates the plight of both the Russian elite, who had to abandon their great wealth in land and palaces while pining to a restoration of the monarchy, and the truly impoverished immigrants who drove taxis, took up needlework in Chanel’s fashion house—“twenty-seven fashion houses were established in Paris by Russian emigres between 1922 and 1935”—or toiled at dozens of other low-paying jobs. At the time, the new arrivals were often characterized as quarrelsome or prone to dissent. As in her previous histories, Rappaport drives her lively narrative with mini-biographies of notable characters, including Nobel laureate Ivan Bunin and noted humorist Teffi. Many of these artists’ lives were stunted well into the 1930s by enforced dispossessions and poverty. Throughout, the author, a consummate historian, displays her deep research into the era, the city, and its denizens.

A culturally vibrant account of Russians uprooted to Paris during a tumultuous time.
Polymath Rooks, a two-time *Jeopardy!* champion who has degrees in theater, law, and library science, turns her prodigious research skills to what amounts to a historical footnote to hundreds of years of human misery—though this footnote is well worth a close look. Toward the end of Britain’s involvement in the slave trade, during which the nation “shipped approximately 3.1 million enslaved Africans to ports scattered throughout the Americas,” the Admiralty allowed British seafarers to seize slave ships and return their human cargo to Freetown, in Sierra Leone. If the captain of the slave ship were convicted, the ships became booty, and the enslaved people aboard would be freed. Rooks looks closely at one ship, the *Henriqueta*, which had brought thousands of enslaved people to Brazil. Seized in midjourney, the fast-running ship became the *Black Joke*, with a taunt in its very name, which went on to seize another dozen slave ships in its time. This was perilous work, as Rooks shows, involving dangerous weapons and disease, and freedom in Sierra Leone wasn’t really freedom at all. “The newly liberated Africans became British,” she writes, “whether they wanted to or not, and the adults were given three options—they could become ‘free apprentices in the West Indies,’ join a segregated regiment of troops, or settle on one of the estates bordering Freetown.” In any instance, the people were still in servitude, whether fighting Britain’s wars or harvesting sugar cane in the Caribbean. Rooks lauds the anti-slavery sentiments of the British sailors, albeit driven by self-interest, for exhibiting the “political will to do the right, hard thing,” though it took decades for Britain to take full account and make restitution.

A tale skillfully teased out of the vaults and made vivid by an artful narrative.

A veteran surgeon and historian of American medicine charts the development of effective surgery.

Rutkow, who has written multiple books about surgery, offers both useful historical context and deserved recognition to the key figures. The author notes that the first evidence of surgery goes back millennia—there are skulls from the Neolithic period with holes in them caused by a method called trephination, which relieves dangerous pressure on the brain—but he also acknowledges that for centuries, surgery was a last-resort procedure, almost as likely to kill the patient as save them. In fact, some of the early surgeons were barbers, presumably because they owned sharp blades. Rutkow sets out the parameters for successful surgery as we now know it: a profound knowledge of anatomy, a capacity to stem blood loss, access to anesthesia, and a precise understanding of infection and how to combat it. He shows how each of these elements has been addressed and provides biographical sketches of the physicians and researchers responsible. Modern developments such as X-rays and blood typing helped to turn surgery into a more exact science, reflected in increasing professionalization and specialization in the field. The first kidney transplant, in 1954, was a remarkable achievement, marking the way ahead for operations of increasing complexity. Rutkow also adds some vignettes about his own surgical experiences, which gives the book an added dimension of personal connection. The author avoids jargon, arguing against the idea of surgeons as a quasi-priestly elite and emphasizing that surgery is, ultimately, about saving lives rather than building reputations. In the concluding section, he examines the impact of robots, 3-D organ printing, and artificial intelligence systems on surgical practices, changes that will require new skills from surgeons. These advancements are all positive, writes Rutkow, but a knowledge of history provides a crucial element of humility for the profession and understanding for the public.

A fascinating, well-rendered story of how the once-impossible became a daily reality.

**NEVER SIMPLE**

A Memoir

Scheier, Liz

Henry Holt (288 pp.)

$26.99 | March 1, 2022

978-1-250-82313-7

A former Random House editor and content developer recounts an improbably complicated life courtesy of an eccentric, mentally ill mother.

Scheier’s mother, Judith, was a font of mystery and mistruths. Early on, the author recounts the time she wanted to enroll in driver’s education and needed her birth certificate. “I never filed a record of your birth at all,” said Judith. “Why not?” Replied Judith, “I was married when you were born. But not to your father.” There are multiple misdirections in this simple exchange, enough to set Scheier, ever curious, to playing the role of detective. Her father supposedly died before she was born, but there was much more to it than all that. “Telling exorbitant lies was easier in the ’80s,” writes the author, and were there a lot of them—e.g., the fake Social Security number Judith got for her daughter or how she was able to live in “a luxury neighborhood in one of the most expensive cities on earth for decades without working over a single day.” Scheier sought escape, at one point attempting suicide (“I was irretrievably broken. Entirely unfixable”). In a moment of dark humor, which abounds throughout the narrative, she writes that after taking way too many pills of various kinds, she wound up vomiting for hours in the bathroom, reading her English homework—Steinbeck’s *The Pearl*—“between heaves.” Later, she endured a “nearly sexless relationship for the better part of a decade,” a union that ended with her partner’s infidelity. “The next few weeks looked like a movie montage of a recent breakup,” she writes, “preferably with myself played by Kristen...
Wiig. Eventually, Scheier found new love and motherhood, in between episodes of which she continued to investigate the identity of her father and endured a mother who, though sinking into dementia, still had enough tricks up her sleeve to land the author in an eviction lawsuit, with no end to the mishegoss.

A fraught and sometimes overwrought drama on every page, punctuated by shrewd wit.

SPECIAL CHARACTERS
My Adventures With Tech’s Titans and Misfits
Segall, Laurie
Dey Street/HarperCollins (368 pp.)
$27.99 | March 8, 2022
978-0-06-301644-6

How an ambitious young journalist came of age in the tech sector and made her mark at CNN.

In the economic dark days of 2009, then-23-year-old Segall wrote her first story for CNN.com, “about how a small business was trying to make do in the global recession by opening up a topless coffee shop in Maine.” Elsewhere in the recession, she asserts, “a new creative energy” was emerging, represented by a group of brainy misfits who developed products that remain household names—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Uber, Tinder—as well as some that fizzled and were forgotten. Collaborating with a few women colleagues who became close friends, Segall plotted, networked, and scrapped her way from transcribing tapes and typing chyrons to telling the story of tech on-screen. In 2010, she took vacation days and paid her own way to SXSW, where she pretended to be a producer and interviewed the whiz kids. Seven years later, she was there to premiere her own series, Mostly Human. As the kooky fun of the early days gave way to bots, hacking, fake news, and revenge porn, the author uncovered the Boston Marathon bomber’s deleted Instagram account, documented the fallout of the Ashley Madison leak, and landed the first interview with Mark Zuckerberg after the Cambridge Analytica scandal. Segall ran into many obstacles—mainly her own persistent impostor syndrome and entrenched sexism at CNN—but whenever she faced rejection, she and her friends dropped everything and blasted Janis Joplin’s “Another Piece of My Heart.” A few downsides: The prose is only serviceable, some points are belabored, and romantic relationships seem to take as long to die on the page as they did in real life (a fight over who gets to keep Alexa is about as juicy as it gets).

Inspiring on the personal level while somewhat chilling on the societal one.

THE CRYPTOPIANS
Idealism, Greed, Lies, and the Making of the First Big Cryptocurrency Craze
Shin, Laura
PublicAffairs (496 pp.)
$32.00 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-1-5417-6301-2

A financial journalist and podcaster looks into the tangled rise of cryptocurrency.

Imagine the internecine politics that Alexander Hamilton had to endure in piecing together a dollar-based treasury. Amplify it with backchannel drama, dark web intrigues, and head-butting mad scientists, and you have the arena in which former Forbes senior editor Shin’s narrative is set. The impetus is the Wall Street collapse of 2008, roughly coincidental with the rise of bitcoin, a currency that links to no government and is heavily encrypted. It was perfect, Shin notes, for drug dealers who hitherto had to use hard currency and face-to-face encounters. “The advent of Bitcoin,” she writes, “had now made it possible for them to send their Molly, blow, or acid right to people’s mailboxes, rain or shine, in exchange for the equivalent of digital cash.” Still, the original bitcoin, for all its vaunted digital armoring, was susceptible to hacks that could cost millions and whose algorithms were chunky. Enter Vitalik Buterin, a math whiz who also had adequate people skills—and solutions for some of bitcoin’s shortcomings in the form of a new currency under the rubric of a foundation called Ethereum. The programming was a feat of endurance. So, too, is reading about it, as a sample of Shin’s text might suggest: “If there was no hard fork, then not only would the DAO contract be attackable by any copycats but so would every child DAO, meaning that anyone who hoped to withdraw their ETH from the DAO via a child DAO ran the risk of an attacker entering their child DAO and preventing them from withdrawing money.” Some what more accessible is the author’s account of the fraught relations between Buterin and the CEO who took years for him and his board to dislodge. Buterin is rich, Ethereum endures, and cryptocurrency seems to be on the rise, but this tale is better told in Camila Russo’s The Infinite Machine.

Financial geeks and crypto devotees will be interested, but it’s a tough haul.
The Murders of Moisés Ville
The Rise and Fall of the Jerusalem of South America

Sinay, Javier
Trans. by Robert Croll
Restless Books (304 pp.)
$28.00 | Feb. 8, 2022
978-1-63206-298-7

An award-winning Buenos Aires–based journalist investigates murders that took place in the first Jewish agricultural settlement in Argentina.

When Sinay found an article that his great-grandfather had written about a series of Jewish immigrant murders that had taken place at the end of the 19th century in the Santa Fe province, he was instantly intrigued. Mijl Hacohen Sinay had been a Belarus-born teacher and journalist who founded the first Yiddish-language newspaper in Argentina after settling in Buenos Aires in 1898 at the age of 21. Deciding to probe Mijl’s story at greater depth, Sinay discovered that most of the documentation about the murders—including the book Mijl had written about them in 1947—was written in Yiddish, a language Sinay could not read. The author’s search took him first to the Buenos Aires Jewish Museum and later, to the tiny town where the murders occurred. Named for the biblical Jewish liberator Moses, Moisés Ville was viewed as a beacon of freedom by Eastern European Jews fleeing the “tyranny of Russia.” But rather than becoming a haven, it became a place where gauchos killed and robbed the new immigrants. With the help of a Yiddish translator, Sinay unearthed not only imprecise information in Mijl’s accounts, but also silences on key issues. The gaucho terror—fomented by fear of Jewish cultural and linguistic contamination—was decisively decisive, and Sinay’s work is a contribution to Jewish history.

The audience may be limited, but this is still a worthy, unique entry in Jewish history.

The Internet Is Not What You Think It Is

A worthy critique of a technology in need of rethinking—and human control that seeks to free and not enchain.

Smith, Justin E.H.
Princeton Univ. (216 pp.)
$24.95 | March 22, 2022
978-0-691-21232-6

A professor of history and philosophy of science casts a stony eye on the liberatory promises of the internet.

When most people talk about the internet, they’re really talking about the tiny slice that is social media. It’s a “reverse synecdoche, the larger containing term standing for the smaller contained term,” writes Smith by way of introduction to his central argument. These social media, he argues, are fundamentally enemies of human liberty. Employing that reverse synecdoche, he shows how the internet “has distorted our nature and fettered us” by, among other things, turning users into addicts (in the strictest terms) and serving as a surveillance device that often limits our political freedoms. We are bent by our technology, unable to concentrate on reading and no longer remembering anything without Google’s help. Of course, as Smith points out, this is a charge leveled against previous information technologies. When Gutenberg printed the Bible, people could simply read it rather than having to memorize it, which many critics at the time considered to be a diminution of human intelligence. Smith is not quite so doctrinaire about print, but he makes a good case that the computer of Gottfried Leibniz’s dreams more than 300 years ago was not the personality-shaping machine of today. Leibniz imagined something whose workings, in modern terms, “can be performed without ‘strong AI’, without any internal life or experience of all the calculative operation it performs.” Leibniz further held that human thought is an instrument of excellence, whereas those who shape algorithms today seem not to think much about human thought (or excellence) at all. The best parts of this thoughtful book-length essay link those algorithms to the “gamification of social reality,” of which a strong example is the down-the-rabbit-hole entity called QAnon.

A worthy critique of a technology in need of rethinking—and human control that seeks to free and not enchain.

The Founders
The Story of PayPal and the Entrepreneurs Who Shaped Silicon Valley

Soni, Jimmy
Simon & Schuster (480 pp.)
$30.00 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-1-5011-9726-0

A modern technology success story about the Silicon Valley innovators who developed one of the world’s largest payments companies.

Combining historical detail with biographical perspective, Soni sifts through PayPal alumni to reveal the company’s origins and the risks it took to surpass both its predecessors and contemporary competition. He seamlessly chronicles the early years of driven entrepreneurs like Peter Thiel, Max Levchin, Reid Hoffman, and Elon Musk, who began as a bank intern at 19. Soni writes extensively about PayPal’s beginning as a digital payment platform borne from a hybridized set of companies founded by Thiel and Levchin, whose business plan was essentially to simplify the ability to transfer money. This conglomerate locked horns and vied with Musk’s expanding...
In 2002, investors were stunned when eBay purchased PayPal only months after PayPal went public. “Eventually,” writes Soni, “eBay spun PayPal out on its own, and today it’s worth roughly $330 billion.” The author entertainingly elaborates on all the high drama, as interviews with former employees paint a vivid portrait of the early working environment at PayPal: cutthroat, chaotic, and mercilessly backbiting. Soni puts a positive, conclusive spin on the machinations of this select group of enterprising internet innovators (more contentiously known as the “PayPal mafia”) by describing their funding and developing efforts as well as their mentorship programs for other startups seeking to achieve comparable success. Soni effectively captures both sides: “For its critics, the group represents everything wrong with big tech—putting historically unprecedented power into the hands of a small clutch of techno-utopian libertarians. Indeed, it is hard to find a lukewarm opinion about PayPal’s founders—they are either heroes or heathens, depending on who offers the judgment.”

A captivating examination of a significant consortium of tech pioneers.

X.com for eBay’s attention. Eventually, they combined forces to create a resilient startup merger that survived the 2000 dot-com bust despite its fair share of executive turmoil, lawsuits, fierce competition, fraudster infiltration, and imitators. In 2002, investors were stunned when eBay purchased PayPal only months after PayPal went public. “Eventually,” writes Soni, “eBay spun PayPal out on its own, and today it’s worth roughly $330 billion.” The author entertainingly elaborates on all the high drama, as interviews with former employees paint a vivid portrait of the early working environment at PayPal: cutthroat, chaotic, and mercilessly backbiting. Soni puts a positive, conclusive spin on the machinations of this select group of enterprising internet innovators (more contentiously known as the “PayPal mafia”) by describing their funding and developing efforts as well as their mentorship programs for other startups seeking to achieve comparable success. Soni effectively captures both sides: “For its critics, the group represents everything wrong with big tech—putting historically unprecedented power into the hands of a small clutch of techno-utopian libertarians. Indeed, it is hard to find a lukewarm opinion about PayPal’s founders—they are either heroes or heathens, depending on who offers the judgment.”

A captivating examination of a significant consortium of tech pioneers.

THE WAR THAT MADE THE ROMAN EMPIRE
Antony, Cleopatra, and Octavian at Actium
Strauss, Barry
Simon & Schuster (368 pp.)
$30.00 | March 15, 2022
978-1-982116-67-5

A master historian of the ancient world’s wars turns his attention to the battle that laid the foundations for the Roman Empire and to the war’s leading characters—all the stuff of legend, poetry, and film.

Few historical figures are as written about—by Cicero, Virgil, and Shakespeare, especially—as the major antagonists of the long civil war that culminated in the decisive Battle of Actium on the western shore of Greece in 31 B.C.E., and few historians can bring such a battle alive better than Strauss, a professor of classics at Cornell and author of previous studies of the battles of Troy and Salamis. His subject here is the decadelong civil war that ended at Actium, had its celebrated denouement four years later in the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra, and led to the emergence of Octavian as one of the most significant figures in Western history. Making a credible claim that an obscure engagement at the southern Greek town of Methone a half-year before the contest at Actium was the war’s turning point, Strauss sees the intervening period as “six months that shook the world.” A historian of unconcealed opinion, the author foregrounds the importance of the great Greek commander Agrippa, argues that Cleopatra and Julius Caesar were “two of the most brilliant individuals of their age,” and rates Antony more favorably than other historians. Readers will also learn much about the often overlooked and formidable Octavia, sister of Octavian and wife of Antony, Octavian’s great enemy. But the book’s strength lies less in its arguments than in the skill of the narrative. Even though written in sometimes flat prose, it’s the product of deep learning, one that avoids the distractions of scholarly minutiae and moves briskly along. It must now be considered the most up-to-date history of its subject.

A fine book about the battle whose outcome created the Roman Empire.

NORTH TO PARADISE
A Memoir
Umar, Ousman
Trans. by Kevin Gerry Dunn
Amazon Crossing (160 pp.)
$19.95 | March 1, 2022
978-1-5420-3011-3

A Ghanaian social entrepreneur tells the story of his five-year journey across Africa to the “Promised Land” of Europe.

As a child, Umar, who lives in Barcelona, dreamed of leaving his impoverished village for “the Land of the Whites,” a place his elders believed was home to people who “lived like gods.” At age 9, he left for a neighboring city to work as an apprentice in his uncle’s body shop and then moved to the capital city of Accra. Seeing the “wondrous cargo” from European ships and watching TV for the first time reawakened the desire to “be white” and live in “Paradise.” Exploited and underpaid by bosses and forced to work in often dangerous working conditions, Umar decided to take the advice of truckers he knew and go to Libya to earn a real salary. He traveled across West Africa, where he met “sinkers,” migrants too poor to continue their journey north. “They can’t afford to continue,” writes the author, “and they can’t afford to go home: stuck forever, like ghosts.” Abandoned by a smuggler in the middle of the Sahara Desert, Umar found his way to Libya, where he earned enough money to pay other smugglers for passage through Algeria. Temporarily thrown into prison with other migrants, he managed to escape and continue on to Mauritania, where he made a dangerous journey to Spain by dinghy. His status as a minor allowed him to stay in Spain, where a series of fortuitous meetings led to his being adopted by a family in Barcelona. Umar later attended college, where he was inspired to use his education to help other Ghanaian youths seek a better life. Both sobering and inspiring, this story about a young African man’s awakening to the realities of an often uncaring world offers a compelling portrait of humanity at its ignorant worst and enlightened best.

A candid and provocative memoir from a determined man.
A collection of essays exploring women's relationships with money.

In her latest book, prominent third-wave feminist Walker brings together a wide variety of contributors—both women and gender-nonconforming writers—to address the subject. “We had thought that telling the truth about money might divide us by revealing how different we were; we had not considered that the same honesty might unite us against whatever forces still kept us apart,” she writes. Throughout, the contributors show how money is inextricably intertwined with race, gender, body image, well-being, and more. From children of immigrants who witness their parents calculating how best to ensure their children’s (and thereby their own) futures to sex work, unpaid caregiving, and widowhood, the presence or absence of money is an invisible hand driving the fates of each essayist. Heart-wrenching pieces about the cost of addiction and the price of success for Black women coexist with fascinating, if less sympathetic, reflections on rejecting family wealth and the less-photogenic aspects of being an Instagram influencer. The collection contains universal truths as well as uniquely American ones, such as the contentious notion of having to pay for health care and the bureaucracy of college financial aid. While some pieces feel repurposed, with the topic at hand shoehorned in as an afterthought, for the most part, the essays are thoughtful and expansive, giving readers a glimpse of how people from across the socio-economic spectrum have had to define—and oftentimes reinvent—their futures through the prism of money. “I take as a given that we exist in a context of white supremacist settler colonialism and voracious capitalism,” writes poet and translator Jen Hofer. In this collection, talking about money becomes a revolutionary act against these systems. Other contributors include Daisy Hernandez, Porochista Khakpour, Tressie McMillan Cottom, and Jamie Wong; Alice Walker provides the foreword.

A worthy read, but its true worth will be reflected in the conversations it will start.

The acclaimed author of The Real Lolita tells the story of how a convicted murderer manipulated his way out of death row and into the spotlight.

In 1957, Edgar Smith was sentenced to die for the murder of a 15-year-old girl. A decade later, he published a book proclaiming his innocence. That book, Brief Against Death, won the admiration of Truman Capote and William F. Buckley, a friend he made while in jail. Seeking to understand how Smith managed to hoodwink intellectuals as well as the women he claimed to love, Weinman, who writes the crime column for the New York Times Book Review, investigates his life and the crimes that brought him notoriety. She examines his life-changing friendship that developed in 1962 when Buckley, who had read of Smith’s fondness for the National Review in a newspaper article, personally offered him a permanent subscription. For the next nine years, the two men exchanged more than 1,500 pages of correspondence in which the wily convict showcased his charm and writing ability and revealed his intent to write a book demonstrating that the case against him was “riddled with holes.” Buckley believed Smith and later introduced him to a female editor who was similarly captivated by Smith’s “sweet-talking” letters. After the publication of his book, the now-famous convict kindled romantic connections, including “torrid epistolary affairs” with two other women. By 1971, Smith was not only a free man; he was a famous writer thanks to his friendship with Buckley. However, by 1976, after the celebrity had dissipated, Smith was finally sentenced for a kidnapping that nearly ended in the death of a second woman. Weinman’s book is not only a disturbing study in how “brilliant people” and the institutions they serve can be successfully conned. It is also a reminder of how society has always used talent as a way to excuse male acts of aggression and violence against women.

Wholly compelling reading from an author well versed in the true-crime genre.
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

**I BEGIN WITH SPRING** by Julie Dunlap; illus. by Megan Elizabeth Baratta .................................................. 89

**THE SCHOOL FOR WHATNOTS** by Margaret Peterson Haddix .......... 93

**THE LEGEND OF THE DREAM GIANTS** by Dustin Hansen .......... 93

**THOSE KIDS FROM FAWN CREEK** by Erin Entrada Kelly; illus. by Celia Krampien ............................................................... 96

**A KUNWINJKU COUNTING BOOK** by Gabriel Maralngurra; illus. by Felicity Wright ............................................................... 99

**HONESTLY ELLIOTT** by Gillian McDunn ......................................... 99

**THE SHEEP, THE ROOSTER, AND THE DUCK** by Matt Phelan ... 103

**PERSPECTIVES** by Dav Pilkey; illus. by Dav Pilkey with Jose Garibaldi ................................................................. 103

**STACEY’S EXTRAORDINARY WORDS**

* Abrams, Stacey
Illus. by Kitt Thomas
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$19.99 | Dec. 28, 2021
978-0-06-320947-3

Before Stacey Abrams became today’s leading voting rights activist and the first Black woman in American history to become a gubernatorial candidate, she was a spelling bee hopeful.

Stacey is a kid who understands the power of language. Ushered from infancy into the world of books by her librarian mother, she is a devoted student of the dictionary and a diligent young linguist in her own right, squirreling away words in a dedicated notebook. Quiet and awkward, she finds refuge and clarity in reading and writing. When she is nominated by her second grade teacher, Mrs. Blakeslee, to participate in the school spelling bee, Stacey is thrilled. However there is one problem—she will be competing alongside Jake, the class bully, whom she has always shrink from; but, “perhaps at this spelling bee she would be braver.” Readers follow Stacey as she painstakingly prepares, steps onto the competition stage—not once, but many times—and ultimately finds her voice with the loving support of her wise momma. The text is well turned, delivering both emotional resonance and compelling, albeit unromanticized, messages about the value of perseverance and the importance of speaking up for what is right. Thomas’ bold, vibrant digital illustrations use spotlights as a motif, subtly foreshadowing young Stacey’s future as a public speaker, and excel at depicting multiple scenes on the same page to create a sense of parallel action. Jake is White, and several illustrations include diverse representation.

This engaging, edifying, delightfully nerdy childhood retrospective from one of today’s inspirational leaders speaks volumes. (Picture book autobiography, 4-8)
Many of us can remember a time when cinema’s “coming attractions” were advertised in the daily newspapers. Some might even recall how the phrase—COMING ATTRACTIONS—would loom on movie screens right before the previews (as film trailers were once called). Today, the phrase occasionally appears on historic theater marquees, but “Coming Soon” is entertainment’s new tag line, and the book world has followed suit. Instant gratification is the draw nowadays, and yet...there is something alluring about the temporal nonspecificity of a “Coming Attraction.” Without further ado, here are 10 of 2022’s.

Alighting on shelves early is Jacqueline Woodson and Rafael López’s picture book, The Year We Learned To Fly (Nancy Paulsen Books, Jan. 4). A hymn to the power of the imagination to lift us above petty strife and life’s valleys, the book draws on the myth of avian humanoids who escaped slavery by flying back to Africa.

Sticking with the elevation theme, readers can also expect the Amal Unbound companion novel, Omar Rising (Nancy Paulsen Books, Feb. 1) by Aisha Saeed. Set in a Pakistani village, the story follows the eponymous protagonist, the son of a widowed servant, through his challenging first year at an exclusive boys’ academy.

Another early-year release to welcome gladly is Traci Sorrell and Madelyn Goodnight’s Powwow Day (Charlesbridge, Feb. 18), which our reviewer describes as “a heartwarming picture book about the roles of courage, culture, and community in the journey of personal healing.” A young Native American girl recovering from an unspecified illness begins to turn a corner while experiencing a group jingle dress dance at a powwow gathering.

Begin March with I Begin With Spring: The Life and Seasons of Henry David Thoreau (Tilbury, March 1) by Julia Dunlap. Illustrated by Megan Elizabeth Baratta with a deep nod to the mid-19th-century nature journal, it’s an absorbing life history of the formidable philosopher, naturalist, and humanist, and it exemplifies narrative children’s nonfiction at the height of its powers.

As spring ripens, it’s the perfect time to read Thanhha Lai’s picture-book debut, Hundred Years of Happiness (HarperCollins, April 5), whose verdant digital paintings by Nguyen Quang are lush with vernal sensibility. With her grandfather’s help, a young Vietnamese American girl patiently cultivates gâc vines in an attempt to “untangle” the jumbled memories of her grandmother with Alzheimer’s.

Make the most of middle-grade summer reading with Kereen Getten’s If You Read This (Delacorte, Aug. 16). A Black tween girl floundering in the aftermath of her mother’s death receives a special gift from her estranged father that takes her and her friends on a life-changing quest all over their Caribbean island home.

Finally, start getting into the Christmas spirit early with the new edition of Dawn Casey’s Babushka: A Classic Folk Tale for Christmas (Lion, Aug. 19). Luminously illustrated by Amanda Hall, it’s a retelling of the (dubiously Russian) legend of an old woman who met the Three Wise Men on their way to see Jesus.

Summer Edward is a young readers’ editor.
“An engaging literary cookbook that is a feast for the eyes, the heart, and the palate.”

**ARAB FAIRY TALE FEASTS**

**JOURNEY OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN**

_Afzal, Shazia_  
_Illus. by Aliya Ghare_  
_Orcia (32 pp.)_  
_$19.95 | March 15, 2022_  
_978-1-4598-2760-8_

In Inuvik, a town 200 kilometers north of the Arctic Circle, a makeshift trailer mosque is no longer adequate for the growing Muslim community.

The cost of building “a bigger one so far north” is prohibitive, so the Winnipeg-based Zubaidah Tallab Foundation steps in to help. Based on a true story, this picture book describes the remarkable project, from fundraising and building the mosque in Winnipeg to transporting it to Inuvik more than 4,000 kilometers away. The mosque’s long-distance journey is fraught with perils and challenges that require the efforts of many people to overcome. Road signs and power lines have to be moved to accommodate the oversized semitrailer conveying The Midnight Sun Mosque over back roads and country highways as it struggles to make it to the last Hay River barge crossing of the season before the winter freeze. Ghare’s scenic, digital illustrations do the heavy lifting in this intriguing story narrated in straightforward, spare text. The artwork depicts racially and ethnically diverse communities of Muslims and non-Muslims in both locales. Roman Catholic clerics and Gwich’in First Nations elders are present at the official opening of the new mosque. A short introduction and author’s note provide additional details for consideration and discussion.

A simple, celebratory story of community collaboration and religious tolerance.  
(_Picture book. 3-6_)  

**ARAB FAIRY TALE FEASTS**

_A文学 Cookbook_  
_Alrawi, Karim_  
_Illus. by Nahid Kazemi_  
_Crocodile/Interlink (200 pp.)_  
_$25.00 | Nov. 9, 2021_  
_978-1-62371-908-1_  
_Series: Fairy Tale Feasts Collection_

This charming third installment in the Fairy Tale Feasts Collection turns to the Middle East and North Africa.

In Marrakesh, Morocco, a young girl gets caught stealing apricots from a garden and windingly explains her way out of the situation. In Cairo, Egypt, a mean miser loses his hoard of money in a swift blow of poetic justice. A pourquoi story set near the Sahara Desert explains why chickens and ostriches cannot fly. This is just a sampling of the 14 original morality tales (not fairy tales, as the book’s title misleadingly promises) gathered here. The structure of the fables—a moral is stated at the end of each one—will feel familiar to both Arab and non-Arab readers. Each story incorporates alimentary motifs and themes and is followed by a complementary recipe from the Arab world; budding cooks will feel inspired to try making mehallabeyat qamaruddin, shish taouk, shorbiat adas, and more. English translations of the names of the dishes are provided. The recipes—most of which require easily obtainable ingredients—are uncomplicated, with notes on substitutions and optional add-ins. With the inclusion of backmatter notes covering Arabic literary traditions, origins of the Arabic words used throughout the book, and bits of culinary history, there is much to be learned, even for readers familiar with Arab culture. Both stories and recipes are enhanced with folk art–style illustrations that add a traditional feel, but the dishes aren’t always portrayed accurately in the artwork.

**I LOVE YOU, BLUE**

_Barroux_  
_Flyaway Books (40 pp.)_  
_$18.00 | March 22, 2022_  
_978-1-947888-36-4_

A little sailor in a small boat saves a whale from death by plastic.

As the sea churns and rages, a little boat and its White sailor are in desperate trouble (“Mayday! Mayday!”), but a massive whale named Blue comes to the rescue. The small sailor, now snug and safe in a lighthouse, wishes Blue good night: “Blue, Blue...you are beautiful. Blue, Blue...good night.” The next day the sailor searches for Blue and frets when it doesn’t appear. Blue is deep beneath the sea and not feeling well. After entering the whale’s mouth, the sailor discovers that Blue’s belly is filled with plastic bags. In an effort to help the whale, the little sailor gathers all the bags and carries them away in the boat, leaving Blue to eat a healthier diet of jellyfish. The next encounter finds Blue leaping happily while the sailor proclaims a loving message to the whale. The caring little sailor’s tale presents basic information about humans’ threats to whales along with a heartfelt exhortation for young readers to join in the effort to save the oceans and the whales. Thin outlines delineate the simple forms of the sailor, the other living creatures, the boat, the lighthouse, and the plastic bags. The whale and its interior, the sky, and the sea dominate these softly colored compositions.

A gentle and tender cautionary tale that avoids excessive didacticism.  
_(author’s note)_  
(_Picture book. 3-8_)
“The chatty, informally written text invites readers to enjoy their discoveries.”

**BRAINS ON! PRESENTS...ROAD TRIP EARTH**

Explore Our Awesome Planet, From Core to Shore and So Much More

Bloom, Molly, Marc Sanchez & Sanden Totten
Illus. by Serge Seidlitz & Neil Swaab
Little, Brown (160 pp.)
$18.99 | March 1, 2022
978-0-316-45936-5

The three hosts of the award-winning science podcast *Brains On!* invite young readers to tag along as they journey to the center of the Earth.

In their state-of-the-art minivan (reminiscent of Joanna Cole’s Magic School Bus), the authors travel across land and water and into the air to investigate “remote realms.” For each trip, they pack helpful tools and snacks appropriate to their destination. Chapter by chapter, they explore the Earth’s layers and tectonic plates; deep-sea wonders and “the wide world of water” and other formations; and, finally, the atmosphere, weather, and outer space. The chatty, informally written text invites readers to enjoy their discoveries. Children may groan at the cheesy jokes, but their attention will be held again from the Plague, a horde of insectile aliens. Fortunately, he has the wormhole-opening unicorn lunchbox from the series opener and doughty demolition robot Highbeam, or his head at least, to bring into play. Unfortunately, the literally slick technology (see title) that could transport him into the subatomic world where his dad is stuck is up in the Plague’s immense orbit. The dust-grain world on which Finn eventually ends up requires a do-over, Finn has to not only re-recruit former-allies-buts-now-strangers Julep Li and Lincoln Sidana as sidekicks, but somehow save the Earth once again from the Plague, a horde of insectile aliens. Fortunately, he has the wormhole-opening unicorn lunchbox from the series opener and doughty demolition robot Highbeam, or his head at least, to bring into play. Unfortunately, the literally slick technology (see title) that could transport him into the subatomic world where his dad is stuck is up in the Plague’s immense orbiting mother ship. The dust-grain world on which Finn eventually arrives after considerable chasing about and firing of blasters, not to mention serious shrinkage, turns out to be not much different than this one, aside from electrically sparky grass and animals. It even likewise needs saving, as the downtrodden town of Quarkhaven has been taken over by evil genius Proton. But thanks to some notably loose-jointed plotting, Buckley manages by the end to get his protagonist’s family reunited and the aliens dispatched to a galaxy far, far away. The motley cast defaults to White so thoroughly that the bugs refer to humans as “pinkskins”; names and physical descriptions cue some diversity among supporting characters.

A thoughtfully rousingly raucous, if ramshackle, ruckus resolved. (Science fiction. 9-12)

**HOOPERS**

Boateng, Johnny
James Lorimer (128 pp.)
$27.99 | Jan. 1, 2022
978-1-4594-1637-6
Series: Lorimer Sports Stories

A Black boy with a love for basketball faces his toughest challenges yet thanks to a new coach and some tough love.

For ninth grader Jojo Antwi, basketball is life. He spends his days hanging with his two best friends, Brendo and Jose, freestyle rapping and shooting hoops. Jojo thinks his skills are top tier, and he proudly shows this off to his social media following every chance he gets. He also has his eyes set on making the varsity basketball team at his school but soon learns that accomplishing that won’t be as easy as he expected. When strict new arrival Coach Pritchard comes along and instantly starts pointing out the ways Jojo needs to improve his attitude and athleticism, Jojo is none too pleased. Coach P is intent on helping Jojo live up to his potential, but Jojo’s pride may not be able to withstand his methods. Will he be able to step things up enough, on and off the court, to be taken seriously as a hooper? Boateng uses a lot of basketball lingo, which will appeal to readers who are fans of the game. The overall themes and lessons of diligence and perseverance are clear and easy to grasp, and the plotlines, pacing, and length make this highly accessible to reluctant readers.

A rousingly raucous, if ramshackle, ruckus resolved. (Science fiction. 9-12)
“In the natural world, there is no waste. Zero. Zip. Zilch.”

So begins this child-friendly primer (an Australian import) on trash. Beginning with commentary on humankind’s growing waste disposal crisis as a by-product of rapid industrialization and the environmental consequences of excess garbage, Bunting then presents a series of infographics across double-page spreads. A sequence chart shows how waste is produced at almost every stage of “pretty much everything we use, eat, wear, or play with.” A second diagram categorizes various types of household waste, but electronic waste is glaringly absent. A timeline divulges simple yet startling statistics about how long it takes everything from a banana peel to a toothbrush to decompose in a landfill. A process map visualizes four places where our refuse can end up: in a landfill, at a recycling center, in the environment, or in our homes as reused items. Yet more infographics outline how readers can “help wallop waste” through reducing, reusing, recycling, and—a new addition to the familiar catchphrase—renewing. The closing spreads stress the importance of activism and volunteering. The brief text conveys a complex subject in an easy-to-grasp format and manages to offer a comprehensive set of achievable solutions.

A worthy read that will encourage children to ask questions and to take steps to reduce their trash footprint. (author’s note) (Informational picture book: 5-10)
White child at the playground. Dad, utterly unaware of the
The second chapter traces humankind’s evolving awareness of
First, the problems are outlined: overuse of water and other
Background characters are diverse and include a woman wear
Saya’s and Dad’s emotional responses. The story will reso
various global examples, involving failures of infrastruc
change. Various global examples, involving failures of infrastruc
natural resources, air pollution, poisoned water, and climate change. Various global examples, involving failures of infrastruct
this wordless picture book. The illustrations are rendered in
A forceful and informative handbook on environmental
Kevin, the grumpy cat who did not want cuddles, is back, and he’s bored to distraction.
He scratches the settee and knocks down a vase; but when accused, he denies responsibility. He goes so far as to bite the
doctor’s tail, an offense he shamelessly owns up to: “Oh alright, it was me.” His exasperated and concerned humans, who are
no sympathy, so he just decides to muscle his way into the cat bed…with chucklesome results. This second installment in the
Kevin perks up, envisioning the queen of England, a celebrity
and soil. Straightforward exposition is presented in digestible
inches Down Under after this hilarious showing. (This book was reviewed digitally.)
Young readers will look forward to more grouchy feline
now have various kinds of legal protections, but laws need to be enforced; so, the third chapter describes important environ-
Crumble’s simple tale, while Gifford’s bright, expressive digital
Clendenan lucidly and compellingly makes the case for environmental health as a human right.
This comprehensive primer is organized into four chapters. First, the problems are outlined: overuse of water and other
natural resources, air pollution, poisoned water, and climate change. Various global examples, involving failures of infrastruct
how crimes against nature are also human rights violations.
The second chapter traces humankind’s evolving awareness of the
need for environmental laws and regulations by reviewing pivotal developments of the last 70 years. Nearly 200 countries

KUNOICHI BUNNY
Cassidy, Sara
Illus. by Brayden Sato
Orca (32 pp.)
$19.95 | March 15, 2022
978-1-4598-2780-6

Superheroes can come in all shapes and sizes.
In this Canadian import, Saya, a toddler with big dark eyes and dark hair, is heading to the park with her dad on a sunny day. Pushed along the sidewalk in her stroller, she sees two cats squabbling and flings her stuffed bunny, Kunoichi (a Japanese word meaning female ninja), toward them, dissolving the feline conflict. Readers soon see that Saya and Kunoichi are a covert superhero team. Over the course of the day’s outing, they stop another toddler’s stroller from rolling away on the bumpy bus ride, rescue a duckling who’s fallen through a sewer grate, and deflect a baseball before it hits a White child at the playground. Dad, utterly unaware of the heroics transpiring right under his nose, patiently retrieves the plush toy time and time again en route to the story’s sweet ending.
Children will appreciate the compelling graphic format of this wordless picture book. The illustrations are rendered in a muted palette, and inset panels and splash pages are used to good effect, adding drama and focusing the reader’s attention on Saya’s and Dad’s emotional responses. The story will resonate with young readers who believe their stuffies, too, can save the world. The main characters present as Japanese Canadian. Background characters are diverse and include a woman wearing a hijab.
A visual, day-in-the-life adventure that can be used to stimulate literacy-rich conversations with children. (Picture book: 3-5)

FRESH AIR, CLEAN WATER
Our Right to a Healthy Environment
Clendenan, Megan
Illus. by Julie McLaughlin
Orca (112 pp.)
$24.95 | March 15, 2022
978-1-4598-2679-3
Series: Orca Think, 4

Young readers will recognize their kitty companions in Crumble’s simple tale, while Gifford’s bright, expressive digital illustrations pack a punch and add to the giggles. (This book was reviewed digitally.)
Young readers will look forward to more grouchy feline

THE CAT WANTS KITTENS
Crumble, P.
Illus. by Lucinda Gifford
Scholastic (32 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-338-74123-0
Series: The Cat Wants

Kevin, the grumpy cat who did not want cuddles, is back, and he’s bored to distraction.

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Kevin, the grumpy cat who did not want cuddles, is back, and he’s bored to distraction.
“A rollicking, rhyming story…Trust Now What? to provide inspiration on any ordinary afternoon when young readers might wonder how to keep themselves entertained.”

Jacksonville Florida Times, Union USA Today Network

“A lively, innovative story of friendship that encourages readers to think creatively.”

KIRKUS REVIEWS

“Now What? is a delightful tribute to the power of invention…”

PW Booklife

“A charming picture book whose creative, quirky heroines make the best of a dreary day. Humming prose, powered by rhymes and clear meters…bright colors and expressive faces, complementing the chaos of the day.

FOREWORD Clarion Reviews
Bestselling picture-book author Joanna Ho is back with the follow-up to her lauded debut, *Eyes That Kiss in the Corners* (2021). With *Eyes That Speak to the Stars* (Harper, Jan. 25), Ho continues with her trademark “poetic celebration of body diversity, family, and Chinese culture,” as our review puts it. Ho spoke with us via Zoom from her office in the San Francisco Bay Area, where she works as a high school vice principal. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

**What inspired you to write a follow-up to *Eyes That Kiss in the Corners***?
My editor introduced the idea. I had some hesitancy because I don’t want to gender books intentionally. I really struggle when people say “girl books” and “boy books.” What about nonbina-

ry people? I hope that people can find universality in all books. But after thinking about it, I realized that my son would love to have a book where he can see himself, too. If there was an opportunity to increase representation in books, why would I push it away? I thought about Asian boys, Asian men, and the stereotypes that have been so dominant and paint such a limited and inaccurate picture of who we all are. I hope that young boys and men—fathers, uncles, grandparents—can see themselves in the story, too.

**Eyes That Speak to the Stars** starts out with a painful incident at school for your young boy protagonist, in which a friend draws an offensive picture depicting him with slits for eyes. Why did you choose to open there?
Being bullied and made fun of is a journey that many of us experience, so I tried to put it in the first book, and it didn’t work. In this second book, I wanted to be clear that this happens and has a deep impact. There’s this fine line of “Maybe [the friend] didn’t mean it. Maybe it wasn’t supposed to be hurtful.” I hope [the book] can open up conversation for young people, with families and at schools, about why this kind of microaggression is hurtful and racist and how we can talk about it and prevent it in the future.

**Who do you picture as your ideal reader?**
I am writing because I am hoping that young Asian children see themselves in stories. On one level, it’s been life-changing to realize the thirst that the Asian community has for stories that represent us. *Eyes That Kiss in the Corners* changed me as an educator and as a human. Earlier on as a writer, I would have said, “I hope everyone can see themselves in my stories.” I do hope that, and I also hope that people like me, who never saw themselves [in stories] while growing up, that we see ourselves in these stories. There’s a third Eyes book that’s coming out about adoptees. Though I’m not an adoptee, I hope that resonates truthfully. [Another book in progress,] *Say My Name* is about the beauty of our names and saying them correctly. That one isn’t specific to only Asian readers, [and] I hope it speaks to
a lot of people. I believe picture books are meant for everyone, including high school kids, college kids, parents, and teachers.

So now, with three picture books down (including 2021’s *Playing at the Border: A Story of Yo-Yo Ma*), what do you hear from your readers, both children and adults? My three favorite things that I’ll hear as a pattern are that, first, young children or adults refer to their own eyes as “eyes that kiss in the corners.” I just love that, to think that we can change the vocabulary. We’re not “slit-eyed”; our eyes aren’t “slanted” or “almond-shaped.” I also hear from adults who tell me that they bought [the previous Eyes book] for their kids, who said, “That’s you, Mommy. That’s me, Mommy.” They literally see themselves in the book. I’ll also get some version of, “I don’t even have kids but I bought it for myself and all my sisters and my mom, and we all cried when we read it. I wish I had this when I was a kid.”

Speaking of word choice, how do you find such precision in your writing?

I’m always thinking backward from What is my ultimate goal? and planning from there. I knew I wanted to follow a theme of looking up and how our eyes tilt up and playing with language. For the theme of the book, I didn’t want to gender [the message] and say that boys are powerful and girls are beautiful. That’s not the message. In the first book, I hope that the power message comes through, and in the second, I was going back and forth with my editor wondering if I should just say “boys should be beautiful, too.” Ultimately, it was this idea that we are powerful, we are visionary, we can see a future that we can change to make it better than the past.

Hannah Bae is a Korean American writer, journalist, and illustrator and winner of a Rona Jaffe Foundation Writer’s Award. *Eyes That Speak to the Stars* was reviewed in the Dec. 1, 2021, issue.

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**SHOW THE WORLD!**

Dalton, Angela

Illus. by Daria Peoples

Viking (32 pp.)

$15.99 | Jan. 18, 2022

978-0-593-35139-0

An empowering picture book encourages children to develop their own voice, style, and personality in order to make an impact in the world.

A young Black girl invites young readers to “look around” at the world and reflect on what they will “do.../ or say.../ or make... / to express who you are.” With a camera in hand, she visits various places in her neighborhood—an art gallery, a sewing studio, and a planetarium, to name a few—and observes the many ways in which kids in her community are expressing themselves. Readers see another girl painting a mural, a boy with dreadlocks spinning music at a turntable, a marching band practicing, a choir singing, a spoken word artist performing, dancers and hula-hoopers in the park, and more. “Maybe your creative space is blank... / patiently waiting for you to fill it with powerful text” reads a double-page spread showing kids making signs for—and then participating in—a street protest. Another double-page spread shows kids getting their hair styled in a salon, and the text asks “Are you the canvas?”

A current of lyricism runs through Dalton’s narrative, which is thoughtful and inquisitory (“Is there a place where you shine? A space you / fill with all the things that inspire you?”), reminding kids to take their time and reflect carefully as they figure out who they are and what they want to share with the world. Peoples’ artwork, rendered using oil on paper and illustration board, is reminiscent of child art and fittingly draws attention to itself as a created work through the use of painterly textures. All characters are Black.

Show kids the world is their oyster by giving them this thought-provoking book. *(Picture book. 4-8)*

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**HOW HIGH IS HEAVEN?**

Davis, Linsey

Illus. by Lucy Fleming

Zonderkidz (32 pp.)

$18.99 | Feb. 15, 2022

978-0-310-77006-0

Emmy Award–winning journalist and ABC News anchor Davis looks at the hereafter through the eyes of a child.

A young, brown-skinned boy is missing his deceased grandmother. “Every day she’s watching over me,” he notes and wonders how he can get to heaven to visit her. He has much he would “like to tell her” and “lots of questions too.” He considers building a staircase to heaven (the artwork depicts one made of Lego bricks), making himself a pair of wings, bouncing his way up to kingdom come using a trampoline, and journeying there via hot air balloon. When the boy, along with his sister and his (apparently) single mom, makes a long-distance trip to
visit his grandfather, he hopes their airplane ride will take him to the pearly gates; luckily, it doesn't! It is only while attending church with his family one day that he finally discovers the single way to get to heaven: “It’s not how far you travel, / or not just the things you do. / It’s all about faith and the grace of God / that brings this gift to you.” A double-page spread goes on to describe how we must live our lives if we want paradise to be our reward, and the book ends with an interesting perspective on heaven that brings readers back down to earth. Davis’ rhyming text is sweet and heartfelt but often struggles for scansion. While no particular religion is mentioned, the book’s point of view is manifestly Christian. Fleming’s bright and airy digital paintings faithfully reproduce the textures of traditional mediums and feed the imagination with forays into gentle whimsy. The main cast of characters is Black; some illustrations include diverse representation.

An age-appropriate, biblically grounded, comforting picture book that can help answer kids’ questions about the afterlife. *(Picture book. 4-8)*

*DAPHNE’S BEES*
Dempsey, Catherine
Illus. by Veselina Tomova
Running the Goat (48 pp.)
$10.99 paper | March 15, 2022
978-1-927917-50-3

Dempsey, debut author and past president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Beekeeping Association, opens the buzzy world of beekeeping to young readers.

On her 10th birthday, Daphne, a White redhead, receives her dream gift—an unassembled beehive. Her parents and grandmother, all White as well, have also bestowed her with a bee suit and beekeeping tools. Over the next few days, they nail together and paint the hive, then they set it up in the bee yard. Their work entails inspecting and monitoring the hives, protecting them from wasps, and weatherproofing them for the winter. Readers hoping to read about the harvesting process will be disappointed; the story ends with Daphne looking forward to the promise of honey in the spring. The narrative is largely carried forward by unconvincing dialogue that sounds less like natural speech and more like textbook discourse on such topics as the roles of different types of bees, the insects’ life cycle, and how to smoke a hive. Tomova’s painterly artwork captures the changing seasons and the Zen aspect of beekeeping and includes several close-ups of the bees as well as field book-type sketches. The extensive backmatter consists of bee facts, advice for dealing with bee stings, and a few cheesy jokes. The lack of a glossary is glaring and unfortunate.

Less of a storybook and more of a comprehensive, if not quite inspiring, manual for already-enthusiastic young apiarists. *(Picture book. 9-12)*

**KNIGHT OWL**
Denise, Christopher
Christy Ottaviano Books (48 pp.)
$17.99 | March 15, 2022
978-0-316-31062-8

A young owl achieves his grand ambition.

Owl, an adorably earnest and gallant little owlet, dreams of being a knight. He imagines himself defeating dragons and winning favor far and wide through his brave exploits. When a record number of knights go missing, Owl applies to Knight School and is surprisingly accepted. He is much smaller than the other knights-in-training, struggles to wield weapons, and has “a habit of nodding off during the day.” Nevertheless, he graduates and is assigned to the Knight Night Watch. While patrolling the castle walls one night, a hungry dragon shows up and Owl must use his wits to avoid meeting a terrible end. The result is both humorous and heartwarming, offering an affirmation of courage and clear thinking no matter one’s size...and demonstrating the power of a midnight snack. The story never directly addresses the question of the missing knights, but it is hinted that they became the dragon’s fodder, leaving readers to question Owl’s decision to befriend the beast. Humor is supplied by the characters’ facial expressions and accented by the fact that Owl is the only animal in his order of big, burly human knights. Denise’s accomplished digital illustrations—many of which are full bleeds—often use a warm sepia palette that evokes a feeling of antiquity, and some spreads feature a pleasing play of chiaroscuro that creates suspense and drama.

A charming blend of whimsy and medieval heroism highlighting the triumph of brains over brawn. *(Picture book. 4-8)*

**IT’S ME, HENRY!**
Deslauriers, Stéphanie
Illus. by Geneviève Després
Orca (32 pp.)
$19.95 | March 15, 2022
978-1-4598-3083-7

Henry has always been a bit different from the other kids.

He can multiply numbers in his head at warp speed, only refers to plants by their scientific names, is prone to sensory overload, and often misses social cues. His peers sometimes find his behavior frustrating, and when some thoughtless older kids brand him as “weird,” he feels crushed: “Nobody understands me. No one! I’m tired of being a kid.” Henry finds solace in nature, so when his class takes a field trip to the Botanical Garden—one of his favorite haunts—he’s really in his element. The tour guide, Ms. Rose, lets Henry introduce the plants to his classmates, who are impressed by, and grateful for, his knowledge of the vegetable kingdom. Afterward, everyone claps as the teacher presents Henry with a *Trifolium repens* (ahem, a
“A story of grief, growth, and perseverance.”

WHERE THE SKY LIVES

Dilloway, Margaret
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
$16.99 | March 8, 2022
978-0-06-304724-2

A story of grief, growth, and perseverance set against the magnificence of Zion National Park.

Twelve-year-old Tuesday loves living in the Utah wilderness with her archaeologist mother. Over the course of one unforgettable summer, with the help of an artist-in-residence, a local photographer, a social media celebrity, and her best friend, Tuesday learns to accept change while also fighting to find solutions to save the pristine land and solve the last puzzle left by her recently deceased uncle. Written by a former Zion National Park artist-in-residence, this novel showcases the natural beauty of the park throughout. Like Tuesday, who is known for communicating in a frank fashion, the writing is detailed and straightforward. While this observant perspective develops the setting, the writing can at times feel more expository than engaging. The story gets off to a slow start, but persistent readers will be rewarded with an emotionally compelling second act. Most characters default to White. Tuesday, who prefers not to be touched and has been told by adults to work on her emotions, absolutely must and occasionally succeeds.

A call to action and for acceptance wrapped in a love letter to a national park. (Fiction. 9-13)

POUT-POUT FISH

Passover Treasure

Diesen, Deborah
Illus. by Dan Hanna
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (24 pp.)
$6.99 paper | Jan. 4, 2022
978-0-374-38905-5
Series: Pout-Pout Fish

Dive in and learn about an important Jewish holiday in the latest undersea outing from the author of the Pout-Pout Fish series.

Mr. Fish has been invited to celebrate Passover with his friend Miss Shimmer and her family. The day before the holiday, Mr. Fish offers to babysit Miss Shimmer’s niece and nephew while she goes shopping for dinner ingredients. He and the fry clean the house (apparently a coral cave) of chametz crumbs, turning the task into a fun Passover treasure hunt, before Miss Shimmer’s elderly parents arrive bearing Haggadahs and special Passover tableware. Then Miss Shimmer returns and Mr. Fish helps her cook the Passover meal. The following night, at the seder, the Shimmers educate Mr. Fish about the history of Passover and the holiday’s traditions, from the symbolic foods on the seder plate to the hiding of the afikomen and more. Children attending their first Passover seder may find the ritual a little easier to understand after reading this book, but some details don’t add up; for example, how do the piscine characters perform the ritual of dipping spring vegetables in salt water when their whole world is salt water? The text sometimes feels too didactic, but occasionally there is a striking turn of phrase, such as when the Haggadah is poetically described as a “treasure map.” Hanna’s cheerful cartoonish illustrations are functional.

Affirming for Jewish readers and useful for those who feel at sea about Passover. (stickers) (Picture book. 5-9)

I BEGIN WITH SPRING

The Life and Seasons of Henry David Thoreau

Dunlap, Julie
Illus. by Megan Elizabeth Baratta
Tilbury House (96 pp.)
$18.95 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-0-88448-908-5

Henry David Thoreau spent many years observing seasonal changes in the natural world; now, a new biography for young readers chronicles the seasons of his life.

The book begins with a description of Thoreau’s outdoorsy childhood spent collecting wildflowers, leaves, and seeds on his grandmother’s farm in Concord, Massachusetts. As a teenager, Henry explored the small town’s rivers and wetlands and “learned the voices of birds, frogs, and insects too.” After studying Greek, Latin, and German at Harvard, he taught at the district school until his beloved brother’s untimely death forced him to reevaluate his life. He started journaling and writing essays and poems inspired by his excursions in nature.
Determined to carry out an “experiment” in “living more simply,” he dwelled by himself in a tiny house at Walden Pond for two years. The narrative goes on to describe Thoreau’s writing life and literary accomplishments; his foray into land surveying; his public lectures; his involvement in the anti-slavery movement; and his many adventures and groundbreaking contributions as a naturalist. Dunlap’s generous text unfolds at a leisurely pace and excels at narrative despite being nonfictional. It puts Thoreau’s lasting legacy into context, establishing his forebear as a thoroughly modern individual, quirks and all. The book’s layout approximates a nature journal; the pages are riddled with labeled watercolor sketches and handwritten field notes. Facsimiles of primary documents are interspersed throughout, bringing 19th-century Concord to life.

A marvelously evocative and informative homage to courageous and pioneering Black female vocalists.

SHE RAISED HER VOICE!

50 Black Women Who Sang Their Way Into Music History
Elizabeth, Jordannah
Illus. by Briana Dengue
Running Press Kids (168 pp.)
$17.99  |  Dec. 28, 2021
978-0-7624-7514-8

Black songstresses and vocal stylists and their contributions to musical creation and culture are center stage in this illustrated collective biography.

Each of the 50 biographical sketches is five to six paragraphs long, covers the entire life span of the subject, and includes an epigraphic quote attributed to the singer in question. The revelatory and uplifting narratives span many musical genres, including soul, jazz, hip-hop, rap, reggae, punk rock, electronic music, and more. Altogether, they cover 87 years of music history—the singers’ birth dates range from 1894 to 1981—and illuminate the profound impact Black women have made on social, political, and spiritual life through the power of their voices. While most of the women profiled are African American, a few—like Jamaican reggae chanteuse Rita Marley and Beninese singer/songwriter Angeline Kidi—represent the wider African diaspora. Signature songs and classic, empowering anthems are analyzed, and Elizabeth provides insights into the personal struggles and societal barriers these divas and doyennes of sound overcame on their journeys to success and self-fulfillment. The brightly hued, minimalist digital illustrations feature bold, three-quarter portraits of the melodists that capture their distinct fashion styles and personalities. The backmatter includes a glossary of music terminology and an index.

A celebratory and informative homage to courageous and pioneering Black female vocalists. (Illustrated biography. 7-12)

WAVE
Farid, Diana
Illus. by Kris Goto
Cameron + Company (320 pp.)
$18.99  |  March 15, 2022
978-1-951836-58-0

First-generation Persian American Ava is looking forward to spending the summer before ninth grade surfing and hanging out with her friends. These hopes are dashed when her single mother, a surgeon at the local hospital, signs her up to volunteer there, hoping this will inspire Ava to follow in her footsteps. In 1980s Southern California, Ava struggles with being a part of two cultures while feeling like an outsider in both. These feelings are compounded by her father’s absence and her OCD. Music, surfing, and her friendship with neighbor Phoenix, a boy who is cued as White, provide a sense of belonging. When Phoenix’s cancer comes back, Ava’s left feeling adrift. Processing her feelings through music empowers Ava and gives her a new understanding of home and the connections she shares with others. Raw and powerful, this free verse novel honestly explores issues of identity, culture, grief, and hope. Ava’s straightforward narration is sparse yet still manages to convey a lyrical sensibility: “I forget my body. I forget the dread. / I forget the sweat. / I forget who I have been and who left. / I only feel now o’clock. / Each note’s a stitch. / I’m a cut, getting mended.” Ava’s journey is full of swells and surges, but like a true surfer, she realizes the joy is in taking the ride. Delicate, precise spot art enhances the text.

Rich, layered, and heart-rending. (lyrics, mixtape tracks, information about Rumi, endnotes) (Verse novel. 11-14)

MIXED DOUBLES
Feinstein, John
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (288 pp.)
$16.99  |  March 8, 2022
978-0-374-31207-7
Series: Benchwarmers, 3

Game, set, match for two young athletes, on the court and beyond. Having gone from Benchwarmers (2019) to Game Changers (2020), sixth grade jock buddies Jeff and Andrea finish off Feinstein’s trilogy by leading their school’s tennis squad through a series of hard-fought competitions. Tight and quick as the sports action is, though—and readers will need to be well up on tennis scoring and terminology to keep pace—it’s what goes on between matches that drives the plot. Though Andi has excelled at soccer and basketball, tennis is her best sport—and she’s so good that agents are sidling up to her with business cards and even contracts in hand. His dad being a sports journalist, Jeff sniffs a story…and so it is that the two enlist their parents and other allies to gather documents and testimonials with the aim of
This biblically grounded picture book reassures young readers that all types of feelings are natural and a part of God’s design for humankind.

Each rhyming quatrain of the text explores a different emotion that human beings experience. Accessible, child-friendly language is used to describe the physiological responses and subjective mental processes that accompany each feeling, and God’s awareness of and acceptance of our affective inner states are repeatedly emphasized. Going beyond the core emotions of happiness, sorrow, fear, and anger, Flinn also addresses excitement, anxiety, peace, shyness, and weariness. A different verse from the book of Psalms appears on each double-page spread, illuminating scriptural principles for understanding and managing the emotional dimension of our beings. The paradoxical idea that “God made us different and the same” is offered to express both the universality and individuality of emotional experiences. Kim’s simple, heartfelt digital illustrations depict children of different races experiencing various emotional situations such as a disagreement on the soccer field, a fall from a bike, a quiet moment in a flower garden, and more. The book succeeds as an age-appropriate tool for building the emotional intelligence children need as they enter school, Sunday school, and other social settings. The overarching message that God loves us no matter how we feel is comforting.

A positive look at feelings—the gifts they contain and how they help us grow. (Picture book. 4-6)
control over the harvesting of forest products. As his name and work became known, Mendes won international acclaim. The book’s closing pages sensitively recount his untimely death by murder and summarize his lasting legacy. Ganeri’s biographical account uses a narrative nonfiction style and is interspersed with factual information about the Amazon forest. The text can be dry at times but is tempered by Carpentier’s vibrant and colorful folk art–style illustrations.

A welcome and timely introduction to a pioneering Brazilian conservationist. (facts, glossary, index) (Picture-book biography, 7-12)

**DÍA DE DISFRACES**

Gómez, Blanca

Abrams (40 pp.)

$17.99 | March 22, 2022
978-1-4197-5858-4

Madrid resident, author, and illustrator Gómez delivers yet another delightful picture book reflecting childhood’s simple joys.

A young, brown-skinned girl is eager to show off her homemade rabbit get-up at her class’s upcoming costume party. Unfortunately, on the big day, she wakes up sick, so she has to stay home, much to her chagrin. Feeling better the next day, she dons her rabbit costume upon her mother’s suggestion, then eagerly heads to school. Her schoolmates’ reception, however, is less than ideal—students stare, point, and laugh. A moving, wordless double-page spread shows the protagonist running away from the playground in embarrassment. But when Hugo, who also missed the costume party, arrives wearing a carrot costume—“seriously!”—a game of rabbit-chases-the-carrot begins, and soon everyone wants to join the fun. Gómez does a solid job capturing Spanish colloquialisms (cole, conejito, tenía tantas ganas, genial) from beginning to heartfelt end. Unfortunately, the translation in the simultaneously published English edition is choppy and doesn’t do the original Spanish edition justice. The charming paper collage and digital illustrations have a flat rendering style reminiscent of child art and faithfully capture the distinctive gestures and deeply felt emotions of young children. The book’s artwork includes diverse representation.

Genial and satisfying in its sweet, childlike simplicity. (Spanish language picture book. 4-7) (Dress-Up Day: 978-1-4197-4410-3)

**PINK, BLUE, AND YOU! Questions for Kids About Gender Stereotypes**

Gravel, Elise with Mykaell Blais

Anne Schwartz/Random (32 pp.)

$17.99 | March 8, 2022
978-0-593-17863-8

From her perch, the girl can see her gramma at the yellow house’s kitchen window. Gramma is washing dishes and silently reminiscing about childhood days spent in her mother’s garden. As the girl’s mother (Gramma’s daughter) comes down the hill to fetch her, she, too, is lost in memories—of fun times spent sorting berries in the yellow house’s kitchen when she was younger. In this fashion, the narrative swings back and forth among the three characters, with the artwork alternating between grayscale spreads showing scenes from their interconnected memories and full-color spreads depicting the present. Readers watch the trio—and the grandmother’s cat—grow older; but, some things, comfortingly, never change. Wherever the characters are (literally or figuratively) in the here and now, the textual refrain points out that they are “also there,” meaning the intangible place where memories lie, untouched by the passage of time. Sparse lines of imagistic text on each double-spread page poignantly capture brief moments in time, haikulike, and create a dreamy rhythm well suited to the nostalgic narrative.

Gravel’s illustrations, executed on kitaka paper using monoprint, gouache, and (fittingly) blueberry ink, are gentle and quiet with a homespun feel. All characters are White.

A simple but profound meditation on memory and its power to foster continuity and connectedness. (recipe) (Picture book. 4-7)

**ALSO**

Goodale, E.B.

Clarion/HarperCollins (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Feb. 8, 2022
978-0-385-15394-8

Sitting among blueberry bushes on a hillside overlooking her grandmother’s yellow house, a young girl remembers camping with her mother in the very same spot as a toddler.
ideology aren’t likely to be convinced that this rather didactic book holds value for youngsters in their care. Gravel’s colorful but not very saturated webcomics-style illustrations have strong visual appeal with their pithy speech bubbles, frameless panels, and interactive elements. 

An emollient and digestible distillation of complex issues. (Picture book. 4-8)

THE SCHOOL FOR WHATNOTS
Haddix, Margaret Peterson
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins
(304 pp.)
$17.99 | March 1, 2022
978-0-06-283849-0

Two 11-year-old children fight to preserve their friendship against the wishes of an unethical company.

Maximilian J. Sterling was born into wealth with billionaire parents who wanted to protect him from greedy people and show him he had value outside of his riches. Josie experienced loss the moment she entered the world: Her mother died in childbirth, leaving her to be raised in poverty by her grieving father, whose only wish is that she have more opportunities than he did. Each parent makes a deal with a petite woman dressed all in black from the Whatnot Corporation—the company responsible for creating well-behaved android children that allow rich kids to thrive in controlled environments. Max attends a school where he is surrounded by whatnots—and Josie, who is pretending to be a whatnot so that she may receive a better education than her father could afford. Life goes according to plan until Josie and Max find out the truth behind the Whatnot Corporation, leading them to unravel a mystery that has them confronting the true meaning of friendship and reconciling the inequalities the company has prospered from and contributed to. The omniscient narrator and strong pacing will keep readers engaged and racing to the end. Meanwhile, the well-rounded characters will elicit empathy and inspire discussion of systemic socio-economic inequalities. Max and Josie are White; there is some racial diversity among side characters.

An intriguing novel that highlights social class disparities and the importance of friendship. (Mystery. 8-12)

THE GRAVE THIEF
Hahn, Dee
Puffin/Penguin Random House Canada
(368 pp.)
$17.99 | March 1, 2022
978-0-7352-6943-9

A 12-year-old grave robber is conscripted as the royal spy.

Spade is a Joolie, a member of a traveling people known mostly for theft. Unlike many of their relatives, Spade’s family makes their living through robbing graves. When Spade’s dad sends him after too valuable a prize, Spade ends up being captured by Queen Carmelia herself. There’s not much poor Spade can do when the queen orders him to steal a magical stone from the Moor Mage—Carmelia is keeping Spade’s brother captive, and Spade is scared of her henchman, Henchcliff. Against his will, Spade is joined on his quest by the queen’s niece, Ember, a redheaded spitfire seemingly modeled on every other ginger girlboss fantasy sidekick. Ember might be a pest, but she’s also clever and brave—and she’s helpful as Spade learns more about what makes him special. Spade, born with a limp that only appears when he needs a moment of poignant drama, works with Ember to save himself, his little brother, and the kingdom from the terrifying Woegan. The serious drama is peppered with some moments of silliness. All characters read as White in this European-style fantasy world. Unfortunately, the portrayal of swindling, thieving, willfully ignorant Joolies treads extremely close to real-world bigotries about itinerant travelers.

Derivative but entertaining. (Fantasy. 9-12)
dreams, representing the quiet power of giants and the vicious persistence of humans. This artwork is stunning and heavy with emotion; for example, one shows a baby bear clinging to its parent as the parent’s life and magic slip away into the sky. Berg’s friendship with Anya is heartwarming and heartbreaking, as is his relationship to Unhold. Hansen’s lilting writing has the feel of an epic poem, a tale of growing wise and of learning how to both hold on and let go.

A moving and evocative must-read. (Fantasy 9-12)
to prove otherwise. He trains Fluffy to water the garden flowers, to scare away pesky critters by thundering loudly, and more. Things are looking up until a thunderstorm blows Fluffy far away. A fruitless search leaves Max resigned to never seeing his cumulus companion again. Luckily, there is always sunshine after a storm, and the two pals’ friendship is not over yet. This fantastical take on the child-pet bond is sweet, with the potential to be clever; alas, the unremarkable writing doesn’t quite rise to the occasion. The digital illustrations are serviceable but not stellar. One perk is a page showing different cloud types. Max and Mom have curly hair and tan skin. One scene, set in a park, includes diverse representation.

Like the titular pet—lightweight but cute. (Picture book. 4-7)

Sisters Zhanna and Frina Arshan-skaya were piano prodigies in Stalin’s Soviet Union who survived against the odds. The Jewish Arshansky family lived in the small Ukrainian city of Berdiansk until the sisters were 8 and 6, when growing antisemitism forced them to settle in bustling Kharkov. The sisters earned scholarships to a famed music conservatory and were happy for some time. But when the Einsatzgruppen, or Nazi death squads, arrived in 1941, the family was forced on a long death march to Drobitsky Yar where nearly everyone was killed. The two girls, then 14 and 12, escaped and made it back to Kharkov. Relying on the kindness of courageous people, the two girls, then 14 and 12, escaped and made it back to Kharkov. They went on to become renowned pianists, hiding in plain sight and entertaining German audiences and Nazi soldiers across Europe. Though constantly living with the risk of discovery, they survived the war with their secret safe. Using a variety of poetry styles and direct quotes from Dawson’s mother, Zhanna, the co-authors relate the siblings’ horrific and incredible lives. While some of the verse forms seem almost too frivolous for such a serious tale, this work offers readers the truth of the Shoah in a simple and accessible format.

A harrowing and remarkable story of strength and survival. (Note on names, map, authors’ note, photographs, letters, afterword, list of music, historical note, places of note, poetry notes, sources, bibliography) (Verse biography. 10-14)

ALIAS ANNA
A True Story of Outwitting the Nazis
Hood, Susan with Greg Dawson
Harper/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$16.99 | March 22, 2022
978-0-06-308389-9

Putnam, Finn’s teacher, whose pretty daughter goes to school with him. With support from Coach Cooper and his kayaking friends, Finn slowly but surely starts to overcome his various hurdles, both internal and external. The author explores what this young teen goes through when faced with the breakdown of his parents’ marriage. From feeling angry and blaming himself to finding support through his peers, Finn’s character arc is well rounded. The realities of climate change and wildfires and their impacts on the younger generation are also seamlessly woven into the story. The main characters are assumed to be White; Sanjay’s name signals Indian ancestry.

A heartfelt story about family, friendship, and sportsmanship with appeal for reluctant readers. (Fiction. 10-14)

PADDLE BATTLE
Howling Eric
James Lorimer (120 pp.)
$27.99 | Jan. 1, 2022
978-1-4594-1625-3
Series: Lorimer Sports Stories

Finn Hunter’s life changed after his parents’ separation: Will he be able to paddle his kayak well enough to qualify for the Canadian Sprint National Championships?

Thirteen-year-old Finn is about to graduate from grade 8. Despite being one of British Columbia’s top U15 paddlers, lately Finn seems to have lost his touch. He feels lonely and is getting into disagreements with his crewmates, Niko, Chad, and Sanjay. Adjusting to life since his mother moved out has been hard for Finn—and to make it worse, his father is dating Ms. Putnam, Finn’s teacher, whose pretty daughter goes to school with him. With support from Coach Cooper and his kayaking friends, Finn slowly but surely starts to overcome his various hurdles, both internal and external. The author explores what this young teen goes through when faced with the breakdown of his parents’ marriage. From feeling angry and blaming himself to finding support through his peers, Finn’s character arc is well rounded. The realities of climate change and wildfires and their impacts on the younger generation are also seamlessly woven into the story. The main characters are assumed to be White; Sanjay’s name signals Indian ancestry.

A heartfelt story about family, friendship, and sportsmanship with appeal for reluctant readers. (Fiction. 10-14)
events of her whirlwind experiences in Los Angeles change her, Mango remains the down-to-earth young person fans fell in love with in previous books: a fun, relatable character to follow through the ups and downs of discovering what life is really like for Black people in Hollywood, how to stand up for oneself, and the importance of valuing true friends and family.

Glitz and glamour tempered by real-life concerns make this finale a winner. (Fiction. 9-12)

**THIS IS (NOT) ENOUGH**

Kang, Anna  
*Illus. by Christopher Weyant*  
Two Lions (40 pp.)  
$17.99 | March 8, 2022  
978-1-5420-1851-7  
Series: You Are (Not) Small, 6

Kang and Weyant’s You Are (Not) Small series is the slightly off-kilter gift that keeps on giving. This time, the diverting duo of fuzzy cryptids are excited because it’s Give-a-Gift Day. At a flea market with carnival-esque booths, each of them attempts to find the perfect gift for the other. They are both in search of a present that “COOL and FUN and BIG and ‘WOW!’” They consider music boxes, alien plushies, musical instruments that emit soap bubbles, and more—but none of the items feels special enough. So, they knit, garden, bake, paint, and even attempt carpentry and skyscrying, but it all leads to a meltdown: “THIS IS NOT ENOUGH!” When the pair eventually resign themselves to the simplest of handmade gifts that are “one of a kind” and “from the heart,” they are surprised to discover that their offerings aren’t only “more than enough”—they are “everything.” The protagonists and their other cryptid friends are visually intriguing; one of them looks like a cross between a poodle and a dinosaur. The plot twist on the final page, meant to be amusing, is a tone mismatch but is easily forgotten.

An unromanticized friendship story that manages to be both affecting and amusing. (Picture book. 3-7)

**SANGEET AND THE MISSING BEAT**

Kaur, Kiranjot  
Rebel Mountain Press (32 pp.)  
$13.95 paper | March 15, 2022  
978-1-989996-05-8

Sangeet loves music, both composing and playing all kinds of instruments, including the tabla, which are traditional Indian drums. One day, on the school playground, Sangeet notices the amazing sounds that are all around her. She hears the squeak of the swings, the creak of the teeter-totter, and the voices of her fellow students. All of the sounds come together in her mind to form a brand new beat. After school, she races home to try the beat out on her tablay. But when she plays it, she realizes that the beat isn’t quite complete. Something is definitely missing. What could it be? Sangeet practices and practices, even dreaming about the beat, but she still can’t quite figure out what she needs to finish the rhythm. When her beloved grandmother comes to visit, she hopes that she’ll find the answer. Dadiji is a talented musician who has performed all over the world. In the end, Dadiji’s advice—though unexpected—is exactly what Sangeet needs to finish her brand new beat. The book’s joyful storyline is complemented by vibrant, cartoonlike illustrations that have a homespun feel. The prose is uneven at times, but the underlying messages are clearly and cleverly communicated. Although Sangeet’s heritage is never explicitly mentioned, names and visual details (such as Sangeet’s uncut hair and her father’s and grandmother’s turbans) suggest that she and her family are Sikh; they live in a racially diverse North American community.

Cue applause for this picture book about a Sikh girl who loves music. (Picture book. 3-7)

**THOSE KIDS FROM FAWN CREEK**

Kelly, Erin Entrada  
*Illus. by Celia Krampien*  
Greenwillow Books (336 pp.)  
$17.99 | March 8, 2022  
978-0-06-297035-0

Small-town life for the 12 seventh graders of Fawn Creek, Louisiana, gets turned upside down. When new student Orchid Mason arrives—a rare occurrence in a town that hardly ever sees change—her stories of living in Paris and New York City seem too good to be true. Painfully shy Dorothy and her best friend, Greyson, who doesn’t fit his father’s gender expectations, are enraptured by Orchid’s stories of the world, which give them hope for something better than life in a place where Gimmerton Chemical is the main employer. But not everyone is as welcoming, and Janie, the queen of the social scene, plots to put the new girl in her place. Lessons on similes, metaphors, and poetry from Mr. Agosto, their English teacher whose family left Venezuela for Fawn Creek when he was small, are brilliantly used to enrich the characters’ observations. Kelly has created a strong ensemble cast of students, all of whom present White, with realistic problems rooted in family life, friendship, and school. Having grown up pigeonholed into expected roles, how can they fit in while following their own passions? The book begins with the mystery of Orchid and ends with universal lessons in self-acceptance, standing up to bullies, and the power of kindness. The rural Southern setting is well developed and is enhanced by occasional full-page illustrations.

An emotionally resonant story about authenticity and belonging. (Fiction. 8-12)
**“Poignant, existential, yet kid-friendly.”**

*WHAT I THINK ABOUT WHEN I THINK ABOUT SWIMMING*

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**EGG DECORATING**

*The 18 Essential Designs & Techniques EVERYONE Should Know!*

_Kurilla, Renée_

_Illus. by Keith Zoo_

_Odd Dot (48 pp.)_

$5.99 paper | Jan. 4, 2022

978-1-250-78436-0

Series: Show-How Guides

A basic guide to the “FUN-damentals” of egg crafts.

A cheerful blue egg (who is ungendered) sporting a half apron and an artsy beret breaks down a method for hard-boiling eggs with an adult’s help, then goes on to guide readers through the steps for executing increasingly elaborate egg decorating projects. Children will learn how to make dyes from food coloring or fruits and vegetables and how to achieve various decorative effects, including “egg people” designs and animal designs (the “egg chick” concept seems a bit meta). The book also provides suggestions for displaying decorated eggs, using them in games, and, yes, turning them into tasty treats. Materials used range from acrylic paint and googly eyes to onion skins and glow-in-the-dark glue. The written instructions are simple and concise. They frequently begin with “lay newspaper over your workspace” (good advice!) and include important safety notes. Zoo’s diagrammatic illustrations are easy to follow with numbered directions, spot art laid out in panels, and labeled, graphic overviews of required supplies; however, the minimal palette of black, white, and blue fails to give young handicrafters enough sense of the art form’s creative possibilities. Readers may want to keep a more visually stimulating handbook, like Lindstrom’s *Beautiful Eggs* (2021), handy on the worktable for inspiration.

*Simple and practical, although the visuals underperform.*

*(Nonfiction. 5-8)*

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**REGGIE RED**

_Layton, Josie_

_Illus. by Rebecca Timmis_

_Windmill Books (32 pp.)_

$27.25 | Jan. 15, 2022

978-1-4994-8964-4

Reggie Red, a young White girl, is so named because of her freckles and ruddy hair “with curls so big.”

Photo day is coming up in school, and Reggie wants to look like the girls she has seen in pictures online. She attempts to straighten her hair and make it lie flat. When that fails, she resorts to coloring her hair brown using chocolate sauce but merely makes a huge, sticky mess. She tries covering her freckles with her grandmother’s makeup and even tries on Grandma’s silver wig. Unsatisfied and dejected, she turns to her mother, who teaches her that many online photos are fake and dispenses wisdom: “Beauty is like / the roots of a tree.”

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A goldfish’s thoughts swim with the big—and not so big—questions of life.

“When I am swimming, I think about many things,” begins the introspective narrator of indeterminate gender. While swimming inside their fishbowl, they recall being a baby fish hanging in a plastic bag in a pet store; ponder “what it will be like to have legs”; fret about climate change; and—the authorial disguise wearing even thinner—light up the fish thinks about “falling in love,” but it is not clear exactly where this pans out in the narrative. Levenson’s text is elegantly spare. The goldfish pictured in O’Hagan’s minimalist, mostly spare. The goldfish pictured in O’Hagan’s minimalist, mostly close-up illustrations is expressive of both face and body language, gazing longingly out of a window, for instance, and, in one scene, posing on a rock like Hans Christian Andersen’s Little Mermaid. Adults can use the spread showing the fish floating inside a light bulb to introduce the concept of metaphor to children. Young readers will relate to the fish’s penchant for daydreaming and will also find common ground (so to speak) in the wry capper: “But mostly all I think about is…dinner.”

*A poignant, existential, yet kid-friendly slice-of-(fish)-life story with a splash of humor.*

*(Picture book. 4-8)*

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**WHAT I THINK ABOUT WHEN I THINK ABOUT SWIMMING**

_Levenson, Eleanor_

_Illus. by Katie O’Hagan_

_Windmill Books (32 pp.)_

$27.25 | Jan. 15, 2022

978-1-4994-8976-7

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Parts that matter / are the ones you can’t see.” Comforted, Reggie goes to school on photo day feeling “radiant” and “light as a feather.” When she discovers that Tilly, the tallest girl in class, is self-conscious about her height, Reggie knows just what to say to her. Layton’s narrative offers a much-needed reminder that confidence looks different on everyone; however, the text is pedestrian, the rhymes are sometimes forced, and the constructions occasionally awkward. Timmis’ cartoony digital illustrations are serviceable but not much more. Body acceptance is framed as a purely female issue, which feels out of touch. The main cast is White. Contrary to the book’s message about body diversity, background characters are all slim and mostly White.

A well-intentioned story about body positivity and inner beauty that could benefit from the prescription to show, not tell. *(Picture book. 4-8)*
“Amusingly irreverent.”

APPLE GRUMBLE

THE GOOD FOR NOTHING TREE

Levine, Amy-Jill & Sandy Eisenberg Sasso
Illus. by Annie Bowler
Flyaway Books (40 pp.)
$18.00 | March 29, 2022
978-1-947888-31-9

Levine and Eisenberg Sasso team up for another picture book based on the parables of Jesus, highlighting the lessons and values one can learn from observing nature.

“Once a gardener planted a fig tree,” the book begins. In this tree lies the promise of delightful shade and delicious fruit. The seasons change and the tree grows taller; but alas, it fails to come into leaf and there is no harvest to speak of. A White gardener and a group of racially diverse children keep watch. “Will the tree ever grow up?” the youngsters ask, and the gardener recommends patience. Another year goes by, but still the tree refuses to yield figs and shade. Adults begin to call the tree “good for nothing,” and even the gardener begins to wonder if they should start afresh with a new planting, but the children know the tree just needs more love and more time. As year follows year, the children lovingly and persistently tend to their beloved tree, ultimately reaping the literal fruit of their labor.

The magic of Katniss McPotter, er...Kelcie Murphy falls flat. (glossary) (Fantasy. 9-12)

APPLE GRUMBLE

Lewis-Jones, Huw
Illus. by Ben Sanders
Thames & Hudson (32 pp.)
$16.95 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-0-500-63244-2
Series: Bad Apple

Lewis-Jones returns with another installment of his Bad Apple picture-book series starring one foul fruit.

Antihero Apple is up to no good again. He “drank Pea’s tea, and stole Cat’s hat, and other naughty things like that.” Granny Smith, “one of the oldest apples,” lectures him about his bad manners, and Red and Golden, “two delicious apples,” urge him to be sweet like them. The popular apples (Bramley, Braeburn, and Cox) suggest that he show a little more team spirit, and the “fabulous apples”—Honeycrisp, Gala, Pink Lady, and Jazz—advise him to let go of his anger. But Apple is too hardcore (pun intended) of a grouch and a troublemaker to listen. It’s Pineapple’s birthday, and Apple crashes the party, filches Pineapple’s party hat, and imprisons the rest of the apples in an apple crumble. Readers hoping for a comeuppance for Apple (like the one he got in the previous book in the series) will be disappointed. In a darkly humorous, picaresque ending, the fate of the other apples is left unknown, and Apple learns nothing—once a rotten apple, always a rotten apple. Lewis-Jones’ sparsely narrated text has a certain appeal for those who appreciate dark wit. Sanders’ minimalist illustrations are playful and expressive and use watercolor washes effectively to vary the appearances of the anthropomorphic characters.

Amusingly irreverent, but young children will feel the lack of a moral or an apple-ly–ever-after. (Picture book. 3-6)
They have small, sharp teeth, but they aren’t venomous.” When

Despite sharing a culture with those around them, people tell

for descriptive phrase, and a general species name in both languages.

ancient rock paintings preserved within the region. Intricate

characteristics, and significance to the Aboriginal peoples of W est

ties to the sea and a place where relatives are closely connected.

the Ngaingbali clan; W right is of settler heritage.

In this fictionalized memoir, a child whose family experi-

ences forced migration moves between two homes.

In a droll, engaging, self-effacing, and disarmingly open voice,

Maribel is cued as Latinx, and names signal ethnic diversity in

the supporting cast.

WHERE BUTTERFLIES FILL THE SKY
A Story of Immigration, Family, and Finding Home
Marwan, Zabra
Bloomsbury (48 pp.)
$18.99 | March 29, 2022
978-1-5476-0651-1

In this fictionalized memoir, a child whose family experi-

ences forced migration moves between two homes.

Zahra loves where she came from, a land with traditions

tied to the sea and a place where relatives are closely connected.

them they do not belong on that land. When her parents decide
to leave for a better place, Zahra does not understand why. She
is bored and lonely in her new country and feels different from
everyone there. Eventually, she comes to love her new home, a
land with traditions that are magical in their own ways and a
place where she can stay in touch with her family abroad. The
names of locations, the reasons behind the events, and stories
linked to some of the illustrations are detailed in the backmatter.
The author’s two homes were New Mexico and Kuwait, from
which her family moved due to being “stateless” and discrimi-
nated against (despite having lived in Kuwait for generations).
While some readers may feel that revealing the details only in
the backmatter moves the plot toward the universal, others may
regret that the information there was not integrated into the
story itself. The affectionate text is accompanied by tradition-
ally created watercolor illustrations, the palette conveying the
feel and beauty of the places featured in the book.

A valuable insight into the world of immigration and dis-
placement. (author’s note, illustration note) (Picture-book auto-
biography. 8-10)

HONESTLY ELLIOTT
McDunn, Gillian
Bloomsbury (288 pp.)
$16.99 | March 1, 2022
978-1-5476-0695-2

A sixth grader’s ADHD exacerbates
the loss of his best friend, stress of enter-
ing a new school, fear of disappointing
his father, and anxiety over a new sibling.

“Always-late, homework-forgetting, not-
many-friends, extra-disorganized” Elliott
lives with his positive, supportive mother in their comfortable,
welcoming home but spends weekends with his focused, organized
father and stepmother in their perfectly redecorated house. Since the
recent departure of his best friend, Elliott’s ADHD has caused
him to nearly fail the first semester of middle school, overre-
act to his stepmother’s pregnancy, upset his father with “The
Incident,” and start seeing a therapist. Elliott, however, loves
cooking, an activity during which he’s focused, confident, deci-
sive, and calm. Rejected by the kids he eats lunch with when it’s
time to work together on a group project to develop and imple-
ment a business plan, Elliott unexpectedly ends up paired with
Maribel, the smartest girl in class. When Maribel reveals she has
celiac disease and Elliott explains his ADHD, they develop
a delicious, gluten-free pie recipe—and their friendship blooms.
Over time, Elliott applies his culinary skills, opens up about his
fears, bonds with his stepmother, and connects with his father.
In a droll, engaging, self-effacing, and disarmingly open voice,
Elliott narrates his story, providing realistic, firsthand insights
into living with ADHD. Elliott and his family read as White;
Maribel is cued as Latinx, and names signal ethnic diversity in
the supporting cast.

A refreshingly honest exploration of family and friendship.
(recipes) (Fiction. 9-12)
A same-sex couple spends the day with their baby.

Narrated in rhyming couplets and told from the perspective of the baby (whose gender is left wide open), this story follows a new family through their daily routine. The day starts with cuddles and breakfast. After a fun outing to a farm, the trio enjoys singalongs on the drive home. Next comes a bubble bath, a cozy bottle feeding, and some quiet time, then it’s off to bed... but not before a bedtime story! Each activity is permeated with gestures of love and tenderness between parents and baby and between the two mothers themselves, whether it’s “a hug from Mommy, warm and tight,” a tickle, or Mama’s voice that is “soft and low.” In one scene, the entire family unit shares a joyous moment, dancing together in the sunshine. The moms—one of whom is White and the other, Black—care for the baby equally in complementary ways. The text flows along like a peaceful river, and the illustrations are full of gentle light, conveying an almost dreamlike serenity with their pastel, watercolorlike washes. The artwork has a subtle rainbow gradient running through it, and smiles abound on every page so that a palpable joy radiates from the center of the little, close-knit family. Read-aloud enthusiasts will quickly warm up to this sweet picture book, and many readers will appreciate its affirming portrayal of an LGBTQ+ and interracial family.

Lovely. (Picture book. 3-5)

From the stage and the laboratory to company boardrooms and political platforms, Jewish women have excelled in every sphere of life.

Writing with an assured knowledge of her subjects (who are all European or American) and the belief that “social justice is coded into our DNA,” Merberg profiles 36 historical and contemporary women of Judaic descent who fought for a better world and defied the odds. Each entry is 12 to 15 paragraphs long and framed around the biographee’s “very Jewish” personal characteristics—particularly intrepidity and a strong social conscience—and societal impact. The women’s family ties, genetic connections, and degrees of religious observance are also described, as are their struggles with assimilation and antisemitism. The first section looks at social activists such as women’s rights pioneer Betty Friedan and Alicia Garza, founder of the Black Lives Matter movement. Next come glimpses into the lives of entertainers, including actress Hedy Lamarr and comedians Tiffany Haddish, who celebrated her bat mitzvah on her 40th birthday. A third section covers writers such as Emma Lazarus, Judy Blume, and more. Anna Freud and Janet Yellen are among the four scientists profiled. Entrepreneurs range from cosmetics mogul Estée Lauder to the Wojcickis of Google and YouTuber fame. Another section turns the spotlight on leaders like former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir and civil rights activist Bella Abzug. The closing section is devoted to two Supreme Court justices: Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Elena Kagan. Rucker’s stylized digital illustrations leave some areas uncolored or use color mapping for an interesting non-finito effect.

Inspiring and informative, showing impressive scope. (concept map, resources) (Collective biography. 10-14)
“Offers both lexical fun and an important lesson.”

CHESTER VAN CHIME WHO FORGOT HOW TO RHYME

Monsen, Avery
Illus. by Abby Hanlon
Little, Brown (40 pp.)
$17.99 | March 15, 2022
978-0-7595-5482-5

Cheerful endpaper illustrations of rhyming word pairs set the stage for this hilarious jab at the nursery-rhyme format.

One day, Chester wakes up and discovers he has lost his special talent—he can no longer rhyme! The text quips that “it baffled poor Chester. He felt almost queasy. / ‘To match up two sounds, it was always so . . . simple for him.’” A disheartened Chester walks to school through a neighborhood populated by classic European nursery-rhyme and fairy-tale characters—there’s a troll under a bridge, a butcher, a baker, a candlestick maker, and more. At school, Chester’s classmates try to help him get his rhyming groove back by staging a show and tell with a cat, bat, mat, hat, and even a rat. Poor Chester can only come up with amusing placeholder names—a bat is a “swingy sports stick,” a mat is a “muddy foot wipe,” and so on. On his way home, he observes community members performing various jobs and has a revelation that puts things in perspective: “This too shall pass.” Well-timed page turns will have kids shouting out the missing, but easily guessable, end rhymes. Sharp-eyed observers will also notice that the shops in the artwork have rhyming names. Hanlon’s busy gouache and colored pencil illustrations are full of attention-grabbing slapstick humor. All characters are light-skinned.

Get ready for wordplay that’s giggly and fun and lasts long after the story is...over, alas. (Picture book: 3-6)

KICK PUSH

Morrison, Frank
Bloomsbury (40 pp.)
$18.99 | March 29, 2022
978-1-4476-0597-2

Ivan, a young Black boy with a big, beautiful Afro, is such a skilled street skater that his friends have nicknamed him Epic.

When he and his family move to a new inner-city neighborhood, for the first time he finds himself without a clique to cheer him on or learn new skating stunts from. “You never landed a new trick on the first try,” his dad reminds him. “Keep an open mind, and you’ll meet new friends.” In an attempt to fit in with the neighborhood kids, Epic tries his hand at various other sports without success. Seeing his discouragement, his parents suggest that he skate down to the bodega for a treat. On his way there, Epic performs a scintillating series of skateboarding maneuvers, unaware that several kids of various ages are observing him with great interest. Only when he arrives at the bodega does he realize that he’s unwittingly found himself a new skating crew. Morrison’s upbeat narrative slides along smoothly, mirroring the energy and panache of its protagonist, and at times slips comfortably into African American Vernacular English. Skateboarding terminology is scattered liberally throughout the text, but readers unfamiliar with the jargon will feel the lack of a glossary. Morrison’s illustrations—rendered in oil with their trademark graffiti-inspired, urban mannerist style—use interesting perspectives, silhouetting, and continuous narration to create a free-wheeling sense of Epic’s, well, epicness. Most characters are Black; a few illustrations include diverse representation.

An important reminder that, in the quest for friendship, you who truly are is more than enough. (Picture book: 6-8)

LINES OF COURAGE

Nielsen, Jennifer A.
Scholastic (400 pp.)
$17.99 | March 1, 2022
978-1-338-62093-1

Five teenagers from across Europe lead coincidentally intersecting lives during World War I. The day that 12-year-old Felix witnesses the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, everything changes. His father goes to war, and Felix loses the relative safety afforded to Jews in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His city is invaded by imperial Russia, and the Jews and Roma of Lemberg might be shipped to internment camps. With the help of Elsa, a German girl, Felix and his mother escape. Though they go their separate ways, Felix and Elsa will meet again, along with British Kara, French Juliette, and Russian Dimitri. Kara wants to be a doctor and works as an orderly on a Red Cross train. Juliette seeks her lost family, and Dimitri is a miserable soldier in the trenches. The chain of coincidences that repeatedly bring these teens into each other’s lives is increasingly improbable until they resolve five years later, on the last day of the war to end all wars. While the events are packed with historical facts, the overall framing feels ahistorical: the British are kind, competent rescuers; to be a good German requires being opposed to one’s countrymen; and a Russian sees “freedom” from both the tsar and Lenin in the land-mined French countryside.

Adventures across a massive war and pandemic make for a tidy tribute to common understanding. (author’s note) (Historical fiction: 10-13)
“Narrated with brio.”

**CLIMB ON!**

Paul, Baptiste
Illus. by Jacqueline Alcántara
NorthSouth (32 pp.)
$18.95 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-0-7358-4481-0

A girl and her father, both brown-skinned, hike to the “tippy top” of a mountain in Saint Lucia.

“It’s a great day for watching futbol,” says Daddy, but his daughter wants to go hiking, and she’s raring to go. Dad reminds her that they have to pack their knapsacks. Soon after, they’re off! As they leave their seaside village, the girl shoots ahead eagerly while her father paces himself. Ascending the lushly forested slope, they admire tropical flora and fauna. Dad struggles and pauses to rest, but the spirited girl is undaunted; full of joyful abandon, she leaps over boulders, skirts the insects that attack Dad, and uses a vine to swing across a river, much to her father’s dismay. There are mishaps (nothing too serious!), but the pair persist and “mouté! Climb on!” Paul’s text is narrated with brio and exclamations aplenty. Short sentences create a sense of urgency that mirrors the girl’s excitement and haste. Saint Lucian Creole words appear throughout and are glossed in-text, adding cultural authenticity; unfortunately, the words are othered with italicization. Alcántara’s signature motion-packed art, rendered vibrantly in pencil, marker, and gouache with digital touches, lends itself well to a story centering physical activity. Varying visual perspectives allow readers to better feel the characters’ emotions and appreciate the spectacular setting. A surprise seek-and-find challenge at the end can be enjoyed by a broad age range.

A lovely—and needed—book about the rewards of persistence and Black people enjoying nature. (Picture book. 3-6)

**KINGDOM KEEPERS INHERITANCE**

Pearson, Ridley
Disney-Hyperion (320 pp.)
$17.99 | March 8, 2022
978-1-4847-8557-7
Series: Kingdom Keepers, 1

A boy who lives in an elite residential community at Walt Disney World’s Epcot amusement park is unwittingly thrust into a real, magical battle on his 13th birthday.

Eli Whitman has grown up in the Epcot CommuniTree, surrounded by amusement park magic. Unbeknownst to Eli and his friends, their parents are among the fabled Kingdom Keepers, those whose heroics protected the amusement parks from Disney villains in an eponymous prequel series. When Eli attempts to use his father’s real sword in a holographic video game, he accidentally cuts a hole in the space-time continuum and is kidnapped to an alternate-reality Disney version of the real Morocco, where he encounters the descendants of Aladdin and Jafar. Jafar’s grandson Carnius is a powerful sultan plotting to kill the Kingdom Keepers. The fast-paced plot diverges, sometimes confusingly, in numerous directions as it follows Eli, his pals the Kingdom Kids, and everyone’s parents as all try to figure out and defeat the new evil threatening their world.

A family tree of the original Kingdom Keepers and Kingdom Kids would have been helpful. Eli’s mother is described as part Asian (the rest of her ancestry is unspecified); his father is White. The depictions of Morocco and the Moroccan characters are reflective of the Aladdin Disney movie universe. A slur for Roma people is casually included without comment.

An overloaded story. (Fantasy. 8-12)

**THE TOWER OF TIME**

Peirce, Lincoln
Crown (272 pp.)
$13.99 | March 1, 2022
978-0-593-37789-5
Series: Max & the Midknights, 3

Max and Mary uncover family secrets during a time-traveling mission.

In this third series installment, plucky Max questions her relationship to Mary and explores its roots. But before she confronts her, Max and her group of noble Midknights must first find Mary—a thief wanted for stealing food—and journey from their home kingdom of Byjovia to the realm of Klunk, Mary’s homeland and Byjovia’s sworn enemy. Along the way, expected hilarity ensues: pesky pirates, a dragon ride, much magical mayhem (including spells gone wrong that turn people into a cat and an apple), and copious puns and gags. Eventually, Max and Mary find the mystical Tower of Time, attempting to travel back in time and see if they can untangle their pasts in hopes of making a new future and saving those they love. With its medieval-inspired setting, rollicking antics, and zippy pacing, the pairing comics panels with bursts of text, Peirce’s newest offering is perhaps the most substantial plotwise, tying up loose ends from previous volumes with a happily-ever-after ending rather than a cliffhanger. However, the twists are not particularly revelatory; most readers will be able to easily guess the big reveal.

A pleasing wrap-up. (Graphic/fantasy hybrid. 7-12)
THE SHEEP, THE ROOSTER, AND THE DUCK
Pfeilan, Matt
Greenwillow Books (240 pp.)
$16.99 | March 8, 2022
978-0-06-291100-1

Farm animals and French children unite to save the fledgling United States from a scheming mastermind in this airy 18th-century adventure.

Well-informed readers will recognize the titular creatures as the passengers carried into the skies by Montgolfier’s inaugural hot air balloon flight at the Palace of Versailles in 1783. Few, however, will be aware that the three—brilliant aeronautical sheep engineer Bernadette, swashbuckling rooster Pierre, and gifted duck tactician Jean-Luc—went on to lead secret lives righting ambushes, and rescues both on and above the ground on the way to a triumphant outcome. The author adds to the animal trio two young humans to do the piloting. He also trots in a host of other historical personages, including Joseph Guillotin (“as sharp a fellow as you are to find in Paris”), Franz Mesmer, King Louis XVI, and Marie Antoinette.

A grand, giddy, and, at times, literally soaring tale. (author’s note) (Adventure. 8-11)

PERSPECTIVES
Pilkey, Dav
Illus. by Dav Pilkey with Joe Garibaldi
Graphix/Scholastic (224 pp.)
$12.99 | Nov 30, 2021
978-1-338-78485-3
Series: Cat Kid Comic Club, 2

Li’l Petey and the young frogs of the Cat Kid Comic Club return for a second session that intersperses classroom and family drama with the froglets’ own comics.

This week’s lesson is perspective, both the graphical kind and the broad concept. The latter is perhaps best articulated by the froglets’ dad, Flippy, as he adjudicates Melvin and Naomi’s sibling bickering: “PERSPECTIVE isn’t just about DRAWING!!!...It’s about seeing the world from someone ELSE’S point of view!!!” Indeed, lessons in perspective abound: Curly and Gilbert’s Time Wasters comic reveals the Great Chicago Fire to have been a crashing bore...to time-traveling frog-kids who spent it playing video games; Poppy’s Skelopop gently shows how a dead dog and a dead girl, both grieving the losses of their former companions, find comfort over time through sharing their feelings with one another; and Summer and Starla’s Shodo Gardens readjusts assumptions with a series of haiku paired with photographs. Melvin and Naomi’s journey to détente, which forms the volume’s narrative throughline, includes an examination of unearned male privilege. Sharing coloring duties with Garibaldi, Pilkey deftly applies his trademark sly mix of revelation and in-your-face zaniness in busy, froglet-filled panels that take advantage of the anthology format to showcase comics’ versatility.

Mind-bending, in the best possible way. (notes and fun facts) (Graphic fiction. 8-12)

BOLD WORDS FROM BLACK WOMEN
Inspiration and Truths From 50 Extraordinary Leaders Who Helped Shape Our World
Pizzoli, Tamara
Illus. by Monica Ahanonu
Denene Millner Books/Simon & Schuster (112 pp.)
$19.99 | Jan 11, 2022
978-1-5344-6594-3

An exciting and creatively illustrated compilation of noteworthy quotes attributed to 50 Black women across time. Powerful and unforgettable words spoken by politicians, actresses, musicians, athletes, activists, writers, supermodels, businesswomen, philanthropists, dancers, one astronaut, one first lady, and one U.S. vice president grace the pages. Some entries capture the characteristics for which the subject is best known, such as anthropologist and writer Zora Neale Hurston’s memorable and poetic assertion of her elemental optimism: “No, I do not weep at the world—I’m too busy sharpening my oyster knife.” Others capture the speaker’s sense of humor, as in high priestess of neo-soul Erykah Badu’s admission that “I’m pretty mutable as a human being, period—if you put me on Pluto, I can figure it out.” Still others emphasize the vital importance of Black women’s radical self-care; Audre Lorde notes: “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” Each quote appears next to a bold portrait illustration of its utterer. Ahanonu’s artwork, executed digitally, draws from pop-art aesthetics with eye-catching color blocking and fragmented shapes used to embellish and visually unify the entries. The text on each page includes a brief biographical note and a few lines of text elucidating the quote.

Honest, inspirational, and unapologetic declarations of the trials and triumphs of Black womanhood. (Nonfiction. 10-adult)
Riddiough returns to the alphabet book’s didactic roots with this abecedarian guide on intentional living.

As the text remarks, we all “have the power to make our world a better, happier place.” Each lettered page introduces a different ethical principle in the form of a pithy alliterative imperative: “APPR ECIATE ART”; “BECOME BRAVE”; “CHOOS E COMPASSION”; and so forth. The artwork portrays children engaged in simple acts and activities that are practical, relatable examples of each principle or ideal; for example, children can “INV EDATE IMAGINATION” by cloud-gazing on a sunny day, “V ALUE VOLUNTEERING” by helping to clean up a park, and “JOIN FOR JUSTICE” by attending a street protest. A few of these visual object lessons are a bit vague or confusing; for instance, the text advises young readers to “RESIST RUMORS,” but the children pictured in the artwork are actually spreading them. Gilland’s digital illustrations, rendered using a palette dominated by pink and green, are serviceable, if unexciting. They are also inclusive, depicting kids with a variety of skin tones and hair textures, a Black girl wearing a hijab, a White girl using a wheelchair, interracial parents, and same-sex parents. The book ends by telling kids to “Z’S THE DAY,” but this pun may likely fly over the heads of the target audience.

Overt moral instruction for the preschool set may attract occasional interest, but don’t expect kids to read this book on repeat. (Picture book. 2-4)

A young Muslim girl, cued as Pakistani-American, prays for a blessing and ends up being one.

During the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Zahra and her parents fast, worship together at home, and attend mosque. Zahra has learned from her mother that Ramadan is the month of blessings, so she prays for a sibling (specifically a sister) and for her lost favorite toy, a teddy bear, to be found. At the local refugee center where Zahra volunteers regularly with her mother, she meets and paints with Haleema, a young girl who has lost both of her parents. As the days of Ramadan go by, the two girls grow closer, and Zahra wishes she could find her teddy bear and give it to her new friend. The night before Eid al-Fitr, Zahra’s parents reveal that they have “something special to tell” her. Readers discover (eventually) that Zahra’s parents are adopting Haleema—just one of the unexpected blessings Zahra receives as Eid morning dawns. Shamsi’s narrative is engaging, portraying a Muslim community assimilating to life in America but also holding on to important cultural traditions. The text makes references to Pakistani foods and to religious rituals like iftar, and the dialogue includes a few Muslim phrases. Mirza’s digital paintings depict rosy-cheeked, brown-skinned main characters (background characters are racially diverse), are full of vibrant colors, and incorporate patterns that echo Pakistani textile design. As some Muslim women do, Zahra’s mother covers her hair in public but not at home except when praying. Members of Zahra’s community are depicted wearing shalwar kameezes, hijabs, and topi hats as well as Western clothing.

A sweet story about the importance of sharing and caring that’s embedded in Islamic traditions. (notes, author’s note, illustrator’s note) (Religious picture book. 8-10)

Kaijus—giant Godzilla-like creatures—are supposed to have fearsome powers like atomic breath, the ability to summon storms, and magnetism—but not young Anzu.

Instead, he was born with the power of finding “beauty in small things.” Finally old enough to be assigned his own personal city to terrorize, Anzu hopes to impress his fond parents. But instead of inflicting fiery destruction on the tiny kodama-like residents at his feet, the best he can do is rain garlands of flowers down on them. He tries to wreak havoc by uprooting a tree but instead ends up creating a peaceful playground of blossoming animal topiaries. “I’ll never strike fear,” Anzu frets. “Am I even a kaiju?” Young readers may well share his doubts since, despite towering over the city of lumpy buildings made from low mounds of dirt, he and his family look more like cute, plump stuffies than scary reptilian beasts. When Anzu does at last manage a little devastation, his feeling of triumph is short-lived—and so, to restore joy and laughter, he exerts his special flower powers with surprising, and satisfying, results. The text is engaging and heartwarming without being cloying. The bright, colorful illustrations are rendered in watercolor and ink. Full-bleed artwork is interspersed with panels, which, along with the use of narrow boxes, lend a graphic feel to the presentation.

A tongue-in-cheek bildungsroman spun around celebrating differences and the underrated superpowers of gentleness and sweetness. (Graphic picture book. 5-7)
A sensitive, intelligent addition to the music history canon.

WHO IS FLORENCE PRICE?

Youthful Musicians Tell the Story of a Girl and Her Music

Students of the Special Music School at the Kaufman Music Center

Schirmer Trade Books (48 pp.)

$12.99 | Nov. 18, 2021

978-1-73653-340-6

Florence Price was the first African American woman to have her symphony performed by a major U.S. orchestra.

Written and illustrated by middle school students at the Special Music School at the Kaufman Music Center in New York, the book opens with a real-life mystery: In 2009, when a couple purchased a house near Chicago and found boxes of sheet music composed by Price in their attic, they posed the book's titular question. The narrative then turns to Price's life story. Born in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1887, she was the daughter of a dentist and a piano teacher. Precocious, she made her performance debut at age 4, published her first musical composition at age 11, and graduated from high school at the top of her class. After completing her studies at the New England Conservatory, Price struggled to find an orchestra that would perform a Black woman's symphony. The story goes on to recount her persistence, eventual success, and enduring legacy. The illustrations are rendered in mixed media with cut-paper elements. While the flat shapes are simple, the compositions are creative, maintaining interest with vivid background colors and changing perspectives. The text is informative, at times humorous, and the story flows well. The endpapers reproduce facsimiles—a page of Price's sheet music and an old, faded concert program. The thoughtful backmatter includes a biography, photographs, discussion questions, selected works, and an afterword about the Special Music School.

A sensitive, intelligent addition to the music history canon.

(Picture-book biography: 5-8)

I'LL ALWAYS COME BACK TO YOU

Tafolla, Carmen

Illus. by Grace Zong

Eerdmans (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Feb. 22, 2022

978-0-8028-5452-0

Young readers get the reassurance they need to deal with a caregiver's comings and goings.

The rhyming verses describe the various reasons an adult may have to venture out into the world without their child. The outings range from the everyday and humdrum—such as going to work and running to the store—to the implausible and ludicrous, like scaring off a band of pirates with kung fu moves and going for a ride on a whale's back. No matter how far the adult wanders, the child can be certain of their repeated promise: "I'll always, always, ALWAYS come back to you." Although the illustrations depict an unnamed young girl and her mom, who both have tan skin, the narration feels universal—the speaker could be any adult who plays a supportive role in a child's life. Zong's lively, expressive gouache artwork shows the girl (who appears forlorn whenever her mother is absent) being cared for by a revolving door of reliable babysitters and depicts a confident, determined, and energetic single mother. Children will enjoy following the little family's pets—a cat and a dog—who serve as the girl's cute sidekicks and mirror her emotions. Although the fantastical scenarios are amusing, they can also be seen as metaphorical, capturing the often Herculean nature of parenthood. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A touching picture book that addresses separation anxiety with heart, humor, and heroic flair. (Picture book: 3-5)
“A gentle and genuine coming-out story.”

THE BEST LIARS IN RIVERVIEW

Thompson, Lin
Little, Brown (336 pp.)
$16.99 | March 8, 2022
978-0-316-27672-6

Shortly after the end of sixth grade, Aubrey’s best friend, Joel, goes missing, and Aubrey knows more than they’re saying.

It started with the Running-Away Game, but Aubrey never suspected Joel would actually run away. Neither Aubrey nor Joel fit in in their small, mostly Catholic Kentucky town. They would rather talk about different kinds of bugs and pretend in the woods than follow the social rules of middle school. Middle school has also turned the class clown into the class bully, one who targets Joel for being gay—even though Joel’s not even sure that he is. Aubrey is also struggling with their identity; being a girl feels like a lie, but what else is there? Aubrey, with their friend Mari’s support, sets out into the woods to find Joel, and while the unfolding plot is interesting, the real enjoyment is in the characters and themes. Despite telling the story through Aubrey’s eyes, Thompson shows each character’s struggles to be unique and important. Aubrey notices the differences between their experience as a White, female-assigned person who doesn’t conform to gender roles and Joel’s experience as a Black boy in a predominantly White town who doesn’t live up to the demands of masculinity. They even see that toxic masculinity (though Aubrey does not have the terminology to name it) affects the bullies, too.

A gentle and genuine coming-out story. (Fiction. 8-12)
PRUETT AND SOO
Vian, Nancy
Illus. by Jorge Lacera
Two Lions (40 pp.)
$17.99 | March 22, 2022
978-1-5420-4342-7

Pruett’s regimented, lackluster life is completely transformed when he befriends a vivacious foreigner named Soo.

Pruett, a young monitor head robot, lives on the tiny Planet Monochrome. Like the rest of his fellow automatons, Pruett strives to never stand out, never ask or answer questions, and “never use anything but a black, gray, or white crayon” at school. One day, a new student named Soo arrives, hailing from Planet Prismatic. Soo—a multicolored extraterrestrial who literally glows—is a cheerful maverick who tries to get Pruett to live a little. He resists her attempts at first, but when Soo’s color starts to fade and her glow begins to dim, a remorseful Pruett finds the courage to break out of his society’s mold, igniting a colorful revolution that changes Planet Monochrome forever.

The unlikely friendship at the heart of this allegorical picture book is touching. Viau’s writing is engaging; however, the storyline is predictable from beginning to end. Moreover, the story’s depiction of the demise of conformity and its conceptualization of how social change is achieved are frustratingly oversimplified. Lacera’s digital illustrations are retro-futuristic with nods to video game and comic book aesthetics. Mirroring the story arc, the palette of the artwork gradually shifts from grayscale to brilliantly polychromatic.

Lightweight entertainment. (Picture book. 4-8)

OVER AND OUT
Walsh, Jenni L.
Scholastic (352 pp.)
$18.99 | March 1, 2022
978-1-338-77578-5

On the day she was born, Aug. 13, 1961, a wall went up that separated Sophie Ziegel from her family’s past.

Now 12, Sophie and her best friend, Katarina, daydream about escaping East Germany’s oppressive government by crossing the Berlin Wall into freedom in West Berlin. An aspiring scientist, Sophie knows the government will dictate her future as they did for Monika, her 18-year-old babysitter who dreamed of teaching school but has been directed to become a pharmacist instead. Complaining about her assignment lands Monika under the watchful eye of the Stasi, or secret police. Villainous agent Herr Becker threatens to put Sophie’s wheelchair-using mother in an institution if she doesn’t spy on Monika. Braving the “death strip” filled with trip wires, dogs, and armed guards that separates East from West seems like the only option. A surprise encounter with visitors from West Berlin along with Sophie’s Inventor’s Box of scavenged items lead to a high-stakes escape plan. Filled with adrenaline-inducing action and inspired by true stories, this novel evokes the perils of life in East Berlin and the risks some took in search of something better. The ingenuity Sophie and Katarina display in overcoming obstacles is compelling, and the no-win situation Sophie finds herself in rings painfully true.

Page-turning action and dangerous intrigue fuel this Cold War–era novel. (author’s note) (Historical fiction. 8-12)

MORTIMER’S PICNIC
Ward, Nick
Windmill Books (32 pp.)
$27.25 | Jan. 15, 2022
978-1-4994-8972-9

Mortimer the rabbit sets out to help a friend in need but soon needs some help himself.

When his best pal, Oggy, falls sick, their picnic plans are dashed, so Mortimer decides to take the nosh he prepared to Oggy’s house and show him some TLC. Armed with his picnic basket, medicine, a get-well-soon card, and a storybook, he sets off along a winding country lane, but trouble awaits. First, it begins to rain, and a strong wind hauls Mortimer away into a river. Then, a crocodile, a wolf, and a troll force him to surrender the yummy items in his picnic basket in exchange for safe passage. But the bullies aren’t satisfied—they want to eat Mortimer too; so, when he flees, they give chase. All hope seems lost until a brilliant deus ex machina finds Mortimer saved just in the nick of time. Ultimately, it is Oggy—who is feeling quite better as the story closes—who ends up taking care of the cold and shivering Mortimer, because “that’s what best friends are for!” The text is lively, set in varying font sizes for dramatic effect, with pleasingly familiar European fairy-tale elements. Young readers will be thrilled and surprised to discover the identity of Oggy’s illustrations, rendered in watercolors with a pencil line, are engaging. All of the characters—even a bumblebee in the background on one page—sport spot-on facial expressions.

Fun and sweet. A real picnic. (Picture book. 3-5)

SOMETIMES CAKE
Wyatt, Edwina
Illus. by Tamsin Ainslie
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Jan. 4, 2022
978-1-5362-1781-0

On regular days, two pals find reasons to celebrate.

Audrey, a little White girl, likes birthdays; but it isn’t hers. Not to worry; her outsize but eminently benign friend Lion is celebrating Tuesdays and coconuts, and she likes Thursdays, so they’ll just celebrate those. Lion is a masterful party host, producing luscious coconut-frosted cakes. On another occasion,
Lion is celebrating orange and yellow; Audrey likes purple, so the pair have fun making streamers and a jaunty party hat in those three colors. One day, a forlorn Lion doesn’t have anything to celebrate because “today is just an ordinary day.” Now it’s Audrey’s turn to spread some cheer. She plans a celebration in honor of ordinary days, monkeys (Lion likes them), and lions. The duo play with confetti, then enjoy a game of “monkeys and lions,” followed by hide-and-seek, before striking up some music on toy instruments. Wyatt’s text shows an appreciation of both the drollness and profundity of children’s thinking, and the story’s message about appreciating the little, everyday things is welcome and timely. Children may be inspired to re-create Audrey and Lion’s music jamboree, make confetti poppers, and paint pictures for their own guests of honor. Ainslie’s illustrations, rendered in pencil and gentle watercolors, are airy and sweet, communicating a sense of childlike joy and lightsomeness.

A charmer that reminds readers to cultivate simple pleasures, recognize life’s commonplace gifts, and enjoy a little cake. (Picture book 3-7)

NEW FROM HERE

Yang, Kelly
Simon & Schuster (368 pp.)
$17.99 | March 1, 2022
978-1-5344-8830-4

A family flees Hong Kong for the U.S. to escape Covid-19 only to face many complex obstacles.

Ten-year-old Knox, the middle child of three, is constantly in motion and creating messes. When he’s not annoying his older brother, Bowen, or playing with his younger sister, Lea, he’s kicking around his soccer ball. When reports of a novel coronavirus in China surface in January 2020, his family makes a drastic decision: Knox, his siblings, and their Chinese mom will relocate to their house in the Bay Area for a month while their White American dad stays behind for work. Initially their mother paints a vision of an ideal America filled with opportunities and the best health care in the world, but the kids find the reality at times unsavory. Gradually, Knox and his siblings encounter complications in their new lives, among them, their mother’s job loss, racism, and an ADHD diagnosis for Knox. Undeterred, they decide to collaborate on Operation Dad Come Over, hoping to earn enough money to bring their father to the U.S. The siblings embark on several haphazard moneymaking schemes that result in chaos—and definite growth. The coincidental timing of some plot points feels like a bit of a stretch, but Yang deftly touches on complex issues including China–Hong Kong relations, racism, the grief of separation and dislocation, and the pandemic, all while maintaining a hopeful tone.

A timely and compelling family journey. (author’s note)
(Fiction. 8-12)
THE LOVE CODE
Bach, Mette
James Lorimer (168 pp.)
$27.99  |  Jan. 1, 2022
978-1-4594-1586-7
Series: Lorimer Real Love

Astrid struggles through her dramatically changed life, learning how to balance work, school, robotics club, and new love.

A year ago, Astrid’s parents lost their jobs, the house, and all their savings, completely upending her life. She had been a carefree teen with a loving girlfriend, Ivy. Now she works every spare moment at a frozen yogurt shop, scrounging tips and saving her meager pay while handling abusive customers, all in the hope of attending university. Unfortunately, when Astrid joins a youth-led robotics team sponsored by the University of British Columbia, she finds that Ivy’s new boyfriend, Karsyn, is already a member. As Astrid struggles with extra work shifts and robotics meetings with the increasingly patronizing Karsyn, she starts to notice a girl named Bernie, their confident team captain. While Astrid’s inner narration is sometimes clunky, her maturation and evolving sense of self are realistic and easy to follow. Similarly, the discussions of stress, money issues, family, and gender roles add important layers to the simple plot. The robotics competition is not fleshed out in detail but provides an entertaining backdrop to Astrid’s growth as well as a parallel between their creations and love interest Bernie, who may be neurodivergent. Their romance is slow and satisfying but would have benefited from further exploration. Astrid is assumed White; Bernie is cued as East Asian, and names signal ethnic diversity in the supporting cast.

A sweet and uplifting novel for reluctant readers. (Romance. 12-18)

THE RACE OF THE CENTURY
The Battle To Break the Four-Minute Mile
Bascomb, Neal
Scholastic Focus (256 pp.)
$18.99  |  March 1, 2022
978-1-338-62846-3
Series: Scholastic Focus

Three world-class runners, one impossible dream: to run a four-minute mile.

In 1954, American Wes Santee, Australian John Landy, and Englishman Roger Bannister each
January is always a time of mixed emotions for me as a reader. I look back with regret on all the books that I did not manage to read in the previous year while looking forward with eager anticipation to all the new ones to come. Scanning the first half of 2022, these 10 teen titles—many of which have strong crossover adult reader appeal—deserve a spot on TBR lists everywhere.

Author Jason Reynolds and fine artist Jason Griffin, two tremendous talents, collaborated to create *Ain’t Burned All the Bright* (Caitlyn Dlouhy/Atheneum, Jan. 11), a highly original illustrated verse novel that evocatively expresses the emotional stresses of the first year of the pandemic through the experiences of one family.

In a companion to their National Book Award–finalist title, *PET*, Akwaeke Emezi's *Bitter* (Knopf, Feb. 15) introduces a 17-year-old artist who, following a childhood in foster care, finds refuge at an arts school. But citizens’ agitation for justice against exploitative monsters in the surrounding city forms an irresistible call to action.

Ironhead, or, Once a Young Lady (Levine Querido, Feb. 15) by Jean-Claude van Rijckeghem, translated from the Dutch by Kristen Gehrman, is set against the sweeping backdrop of the Napoleonic wars. When Stance is married off to a cruel, older man, she heads off to battle dressed as a boy and forges a new life path.

Once thought to be unattainable, the quest to run a four-minute mile is a story full of drama. Neal Bascomb does it justice in *The Race of the Century: The Battle to Break the Four-Minute Mile* (Scholastic Focus, March 1). This gripping work introduces readers to three mid-20th-century runners as they strive for glory.


Candace Fleming's *Murder Among Friends: How Leopold and Loeb Tried To Commit the Perfect Crime* (Anne Schwartz/Rand McNally March 29) is an unforgettable account of the devastating 1924 murder of 14-year-old Bobby Franks by two older teens. It describes the subsequent trial and discusses arguments surrounding the insanity defense and death penalty.

The latest from 2020 Kirkus Prize finalist Hanna Alkaf, *Queen of the Tiles* (Salaam Reads/Simon & Schuster, April 19), immerses readers in the world of competitive Scrabble. Following the death of her Scrabble champion best friend, a grieving teen hopes to find closure through competing herself—but instead encounters an unsettling mystery.

Dina Nayeri, who came to the U.S. from Iran as a child refugee, explores this subject in *The Waiting Place* (Candlewick, May 3), featuring photographs by Anna Bosch Miralpeix. Nayeri thoughtfully and respectfully portrays daily life in a Greek refugee camp for 10 young people from Iran and Afghanistan.

Jen Ferguson (Michif/Métis) debuts with *The Summer of Bitter and Sweet* (Heartdrum, May 10), a powerful and empowering work of realistic fiction that follows a young woman through her journey of reckoning with relationship struggles with friends and family, understanding her own sexuality, and coming to grips with violence against Indigenous women.

Laura Simeon is a young readers’ editor.
“A dark fantasy with welcome moments of levity.”

A THOUSAND STEPS INTO NIGHT
Chee, Traci
Clarion/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
$18.99 | March 1, 2022
978-0-385-46998-8

A terrifying encounter leads a young woman down a path of discovery, adventure, and looming destruction: Is this a curse, and will it bring a change in perspective?

Set in a Japanese-inspired fantasy world with a pantheon of gods, spirits, and demons that are explained in detail in the plentiful footnotes, this novel follows protagonist Otori Miuko, who is a misfit in her small village. Part of the serving designation, hei, through side characters and short historical demons and develops friendships in unlikely places. Midway through the story turns in on itself with intricacy and complexity, expanding on the character development and worldbuilding as readers view a past scene from a different perspective. Empowered at times, powerless at others, Miuko comes across other women in dire situations, requiring her to question the cultural norms of what it means to be a female in an oppressive patriarchal society. Chee introduces a nonbinary gender designation, hei, through side characters and short historical references. A dark fantasy with welcome moments of levity; this story will charm fans of Studio Ghibli’s Spirited Away.

A captivating read rich in atmosphere. (Fiction. 12-18)

WALK THIS WAY
Corrissa, Tony
James Lorimer (176 pp.)
$27.99 | Jan. 1, 2022
978-1-4594-1633-8
Series: Lorimer Real Love

Coming out is one thing; coming out as a drag queen is extra, honey. Sixteen-year-old Josh is pretty fabulous. His drag persona, Siri Alexa, just broke 10,000 followers on Instagram, no small feat for a look queen who exclusively posts images online and hasn’t performed in real life yet. The number of followers gives Josh a confidence boost strong enough to ask out newly out Randall, a hottie-with-a-body at school who cares more about accomplishments at the gym than personality. When Randall cruelly recoils after learning about Siri Alexa, Josh pushes himself to work on his act and reach new heights of drag. This plan hits a hitch when Ivan, a gorgeous ginger hockey player with binary views on masculinity and femininity, enters the picture. What will Ivan think when he meets Siri Alexa? The story’s lighthearted energy and zinger lines create a sitcom-esque vibe where every character is a little larger than life. There are a few poignant moments that add pathos without ruining the over-the-top vivacity. Readers will have a ball and may learn a little about LGBTQ+ history along the way. Josh, Randall, and Ivan read as White; Josh’s friends Kara and Chris are of unspecified Asian heritage.

Sweet, frothy fun for reluctant readers. (Fiction. 12-16)

ACROSS A FIELD OF STARLIGHT
Delliquanti, Blue
Random House Graphic (352 pp.)
$23.99 | $16.99 paper | Feb. 8, 2022
978-0-593-12414-7 paper
978-0-593-12413-0 paper

Two young adults forge a profound connection amid an intergalactic war. Lu is a curious young explorer who belongs to a scientific commune that prioritizes research and knowledge while staying neutral in the conflict brewing around them. While exploring some wreckage, Lu stumbles upon Fassen, a young member of the resistance who has lost their parents in a shuttle crash. Lu helps Fassen return to the Fireback Brigade—the “biggest resistance force the Ever-Blossoming Empire’s ever seen”—but the two keep in touch, communicating secretly and becoming fast friends. As the story progresses, they both grow into their respective roles—Fassen’s bravery and desire for combat get them switched from a medical path to a soldier’s, and Lu continues to research mysteries of the universe with Field, their mobile AI unit. All is well until Fassen discovers the exalted Fireback Brigade may not be as perfect as it seems. Delliquanti’s art entrances, combining
Two teenagers drive from Texas to Mexico to find a murderer and clear their friend’s name.

High school senior Flaco is frustrated with his family and still mourning the death of his cousin, who joined the Army and was killed by the Taliban. Skipping school to help buddy Magaña buy a 1959 Chevy Impala convertible doesn’t seem like a big deal. Their friend Tiny joins them, and Flaco is excited when longtime crush Susi asks to tag along too—but things go horribly awry. During the transaction over the car, the boys are separated from Susi, a man ends up dead, and Susi is accused of murder. The Mexican American teens experience racism in the criminal justice and immigration systems when it becomes clear that no one—not the police or even her lawyer—will help Susi and when Tiny, who is undocumented, must disappear along with his entire family to avoid arrest and deportation. Flaco and Magaña assume the real killer is Anaconda, a known murderer and coyote. The two boys set out across the border by strokes of luck that sometimes stretch credulity but make for fast-paced, heart-wrenching reading.

Dark, compelling, and surprisingly hopeful. (Fiction. 14-18)

**DIAMOND PARK**
Diederich, Phillippe
Dutton (288 pp.)
$17.99 | March 8, 2022
978-0-593-35425-4

Two teenagers drive from Texas to Mexico to find a murderer and clear their friend’s name.

High school senior Flaco is frustrated with his family and still mourning the death of his cousin, who joined the Army and was killed by the Taliban. Skipping school to help buddy Magaña buy a 1959 Chevy Impala convertible doesn’t seem like a big deal. Their friend Tiny joins them, and Flaco is excited when longtime crush Susi asks to tag along too—but things go horribly awry. During the transaction over the car, the boys are separated from Susi, a man ends up dead, and Susi is accused of murder. The Mexican American teens experience racism in the criminal justice and immigration systems when it becomes clear that no one—not the police or even her lawyer—will help Susi and when Tiny, who is undocumented, must disappear along with his entire family to avoid arrest and deportation. Flaco and Magaña assume the real killer is Anaconda, a known murderer and coyote. The two boys set out across the border by strokes of luck that sometimes stretch credulity but make for fast-paced, heart-wrenching reading.

Dark, compelling, and surprisingly hopeful. (Fiction. 14-18)

**BOY AT THE WINDOW**
Elzey, Lauren Melissa
Bold Strokes Books (240 pp.)
$13.95 paper | Feb. 15, 2022
978-1-63679-092-3

When reality becomes too difficult to face, 16-year-old Daniel Kim escapes to Neverland.

In his daydreams, Daniel, who is White and Korean, is the confident leader of the Lost Boys who spends his days seeking treasure and battling Captain Hook. There are no strict, distant parents in Neverland, no homophobic classmates, no pressure for him to be someone he isn’t. In real life, Daniel is a junior at Cranbrook Prep in Southern California, having transferred to the school for a fresh start following a suicide attempt over the summer. He no longer wishes to die but still responds to stressful situations by dissociating, a coping mechanism he developed during a traumatic experience that he refuses to tell his psychiatrist about. A year ago, Daniel excelled at academics and athletics alike; now, he can’t stay awake long enough to finish a test. Joining the Cranbrook cross-country team gives Daniel a sense of the normality he craves and introduces him to Jiwon Yoon, a friendly, attractive, gay Korean American senior who understands what it’s like to hide a part of his identity. The portrayals of mental illness and trauma recovery are handled honestly and sensitively. There is no magical solution; instead, Daniel receives support through learning accommodations, grounding techniques, and assurance from Jiwon as he fights his anxiety and despair.

An ultimately uplifting story that does not shy away from the discomfort of reality. (Fiction. 13-18)

**THE ONE TRUE ME AND YOU**
England, Remi K.
Wednesday Books (272 pp.)
$18.99 | March 1, 2022
978-1-250-81486-9

Teagan and Kaylee explore young love while under threat from mean girl Madison.

Miss Virginia Teagan needs to win one last pageant to have enough scholarship money for college, but she lives in fear of her sexuality being uncovered, thus hurting her chances of becoming Miss Cosmic Teen USA. Meanwhile, Kaylee is scared that no one will enjoy their original writing as much as their fan fiction but is determined to use GreatCon as a means of exploring their gender and sexuality. With the two events taking place in the same Florida hotel, the pair meet and form an instant attraction when Teagan sneak s out after curfew to explore the convention. Unfortunately, they encounter a mutual enemy in Miss North Carolina Madison, who will stop at nothing to sabotage Teagan and humiliate Kaylee. Teagan finds a true ally in Kaylee, who helps her avoid Madison’s scheme to have Teagan get caught sneaking around when she should be in her room, and Kaylee is inspired by Teagan to write outside of their comfort zone. This novel wonderfully explores the alienation and confusion felt by many LGBTQ+ teens without slipping into hopelessness; Teagan and Kaylee experience heartwarming and immensely relatable character growth. Evocative and witty prose will ensnare readers and keep them engaged. Central characters are White; there is diversity in the supporting cast, and the book discusses racism in the pageant system.

Delves into both the wonderful communal spaces and the toxic minefields presented by pageants and fandom. (Fiction. 12-18)
MURDER AMONG FRIENDS
How Leopold and Loeb Tried To Commit the Perfect Crime
Fleming, Candace
Anne Schwartz/Random (368 pp.)
$19.99 | $22.99 PLB | March 29, 2022
978-0-593-17742-6
978-0-593-17743-3 PLB

A comprehensive recounting of a child murder and the resulting landmark trial.

On May 21, 1924, 19-year-old Nathan Leopold and 18-year-old Richard Loeb drove through the streets of Kenwood, an affluent, partially Jewish neighborhood on Chicago’s South Side, looking for a random child to kill. They considered one of Richard’s little brother’s friends, but when that boy ran off, they settled on 14-year-old Bobby Franks, one of Richard’s cousins, with whom he’d played tennis the day before. Richard wished to prove himself a “master criminal”; Nathan wanted Richard to remain his lover. But despite the general incompetence and corruption of Chicago’s police force at that time, the pair were quickly taken into custody and confessed. Though their guilt was unquestionable, their families sought no less an attorney than Clarence Darrow (eminent in his profession though not yet of Scopes Monkey Trial fame), who took the case due to his hatred of the death penalty. Insanity had until then been seen as a binary condition; Darrow, saying “all life is worth saving,” argued that it was a continuum that could mitigate without fully denying culpability. Fleming, a master of meticulously researched nonfiction, covers Leopold’s and Loeb’s troubled childhoods, the horrible crime itself, the odd bond between the newspapers and the police that facilitated a conviction, and Darrow’s intelligence and humanity. In the end, however, Leopold and Loeb are so chilling that readers won’t celebrate their judicial victory.

Erudite, readable, and appalling. (afterword, bibliography, endnotes, photo credits) (Nonfiction. 12-18)
A nuanced representation of being Asian and transnational in the contemporary U.S. (Graphic memoir 13-18)

MESSY ROOTS
A Graphic Memoir of a Wuhanese American
Gao, Laura
Illus. by Laura Gao with Weiwei Xu
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (272 pp.)
$22.99  |  $14.99 paper  |  March 8, 2022
978-0-06-306776-9 paper
978-0-06-306777-6

A Chinese American woman from Wuhan examines her multifaceted identity.

This autobiographical account opens in San Francisco in January 2020. Responding to xenophobic and racist attitudes brewing among sectors of American society as the Covid-19 virus spreads, the narrator recalls the Wuhan she knew as 3-year-old Yuyang, “with no internet and too much energy.” Comical sketches illustrate romps through rural landscapes with cousins and visits with her urban-dwelling grandparents, who nourished her with stories and food, before she is launched into the “strange, new world” of Texas. Yuyang celebrates her symbolic arrival as an American when her mother renames her Laura after the then–first lady. The narrative overlays immigrant community dynamics with the intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender in young adults’ identity development while drawing on Chinese cultural icons old and new, such as White Rabbit candies. Most compelling is Gao’s retelling of the legend of moon goddess Chang’e, who is able to “escape her suffocating home”—something Gao manages by attending college in a faraway state and encountering a diverse student body beyond the “white-washed” conformity of her high school. Gao comes out as queer and embraces her tangled roots as she continues writing her life story with pride and confidence. The dynamic, clean, and energetic artwork colored in soft tones features bold linework and ample white space. Splashes of red emphasize the emotional impact of many scenes.

A sweet and highly earnest transgender love story. (author’s note, websites, further reading) (Verse novel 14-18)

WRECKED
Henson, Heather
Caitlyn Dlouhy/Atheneum (272 pp.)
$18.99  |  March 15, 2022
978-1-4424-5105-6

In this romantic thriller set against a backdrop of dangerous drug activity in the woods of Kentucky, two teens fall hard for one another while a third loses his way.

First-person narration alternates among three main characters in this winding, twisty mystery. Smart, thoughtful, mechanically inclined Miri yearns to escape her charismatic but strange father, who is a large-scale producer of crystal methamphetamine. She meets newcomer Fen, who’s moved there from Detroit to live with his dad, and is instantly drawn to him. This new relationship is deeply troubling to Clay, a slightly older friend of Miri’s family who has been on his own since his mother was sent to prison for cooking meth. The off-the-grid compound replete with huge gardens, free-range chickens, and menacing dogs where Miri lives is vividly imagined, providing a solid anchor for this contemporary story of troubled relationships and first love. Fen’s affinity for recording natural sounds as an art form is a captivating detail that helps flesh out the immediate connection between him and Miri. Readers will know early on that there’s more to his family’s backstory than is being revealed but may not suspect everything. An afterward by the author references Shakespeare’s The Tempest, but readers need not be familiar with it to be pulled in by this novel. All characters are White.

An intense story of love, friendship, and family that takes unexpected turns. (Fiction 14-18)
Virgil’s body, but the mental and emotional scars are far more severe. Although even when they’re acknowledged, they’re treated as trivial by Virgil’s grandparents, his father does help him get into therapy. With support from theatrical classmate Tripp, his cousin Astrid, and popular student Jarrett and his entourage, Virgil sets out to prove that the monster exists... and that it’s closer to home than anyone might imagine. The story sets out with lofty ambitions, using the monster attack as a metaphor for sexual assault and the victim-blaming that, disgustingly, often happens afterward. The novel, however, falls short of those ambitions, creating a world of underdeveloped characters whose motivations and actions seem to exist only to further Virgil’s story. Astute readers will easily follow the trail of clues that lead to the denouement, leaving the mystery an anticlimax. Main characters read as White.

An interesting concept disappointing executed. (Fiction. 14-18)

**FIGHT LIKE A GIRL**

Kamal, Sheena
Penguin Teen (272 pp.)
$10.99 paper | Jan. 11, 2022
978-0-7352-6557-8

A 17-year-old struggles to understand the accident that took her father’s life in this young adult debut by an acclaimed mystery writer.

Trinidadian Canadian Trisha, a West Indian girl of Indian descent, has always found herself most at peace while training at her muay thai gym in one of Toronto’s grittier neighborhoods. Embracing muay thai has helped her grow stronger in all ways and, most importantly, given her a much-needed outlet far away from her tumultuous home life. Though she has always known that her parents’ relationship has been defined by violence, nothing prepares Trisha for what happens when she is practicing for her learner’s permit with her mother one rainy evening. Her father suddenly appears in front of the vehicle and is fatally struck. As Trisha tries to remember exactly what happened that night, she also begins to wonder if the accident was more than what it seemed.

These suspicions grow as Trisha begins to discover new information about her parents, including secrets her mother has kept from her. Kamal’s raw novel about a young fighter from a working-class background fittingly pulls no punches when it comes to examining the lasting impact of familial trauma. Trisha’s search for the truth will stay with readers, as will the satisfying feeling that they have finished reading a truly complex page-turner.

Fascinating and complicated. (Mystery. 14-18)
Crushing (Algonquin, Jan. 11) is award-winning artist Sophie Burrows’ graphic-novel debut. In this charming, expressive work, two unnamed protagonists, a young man and a young woman who each live in the same London neighborhood with only a little pet for company, have several agonizingly near misses where their lives could but do not intersect (at least, at first). She works in a coffee shop and has an unfortunate experience with a dating app. He is cycling home after a humiliating day at work when an accident lands him in the hospital with a broken arm. The two lead ordinary lives punctuated by moments of humor, disappointment, small joys, deep loneliness—and, by the end, reason for hope. Teen and adult readers who appreciate illustrated narrative works such as those by Raymond Briggs will immediately warm to Burrows’ storytelling style, which demonstrates a gift for capturing telling details that reveal the emotional depths to be found in our everyday lives. This work is especially resonant given the social isolation of the pandemic. An associate lecturer for the children’s book illustration course at the Cambridge School of Art, Burrows lives in the London area. She spoke with us over Zoom; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

I noticed Crushing was released as an adult title in the U.K. but as a crossover YA book in the U.S. It wasn’t a decision that I made either way, but I was happy with it having that crossover appeal. It was [originally] a project for my master’s degree. We were encouraged not to think about the age of the reader at all. I had been working as an illustrator for children for a number of years, and I was using the courses to sort of unlearn lots of things. I just wanted to create something for me. The final book was inspired by observations, experiences, and memories from my life when I was a teenager and my adult life as well. I think that it’s important to not second-guess what you think is appealing [to young readers] or what is going to be trendy or publishable. It’s important to discover your own illustrative voice and what you’re passionate about creating. I’ve had the most interest from publishers in projects that I have been really passionate about.

Why did you go with the wordless format, which is unusual for a work of this length for older readers? I realized quite quickly as the themes of the book became apparent that I wanted to see how much I could communicate without adding words. The beginning part was an...
exploration of moments when you’re wandering through a city, surrounded by people but don’t talk to anybody. It’s a really strange feeling and almost more isolating than being completely on your own. As I developed the work, there was nothing that I felt could sum up that feeling more than the images. Creating something wordless is probably a bit risky and a bit difficult to sell, perhaps. But by that point, because I had distributed my shorter comic, [I knew] that people were discovering ways to connect with the book that I hadn’t consciously thought about. I loved that. I thought, wow, if I can create that space through the lack of words, then that’s really special.

How did you decide on the striking color palette of gray pencil with pops of red?

I wanted to explore color symbolism and think about how I could use that to help communicate my ideas [in contrast to how] I’d created an absence of clarity with the wordlessness. I thought, I can use color to enhance what I’m trying to say. I think it’s interesting to pick red because it means all these different things, doesn’t it? Love or passion or anger—embarrassment was a massive one to me. It can be quite an overwhelming color, but gray can be overwhelming too. I was dealing with this subject matter that was at times really funny but other times not so. I was thinking about how I could use those two colors to create images that had emotional power: If I was going to do a page that was completely red, where is that going to be in my story? It was exciting to explore that; it wasn’t something that I’d ever done with such focus before.

The London setting adds so much texture.

When I was a teenager, I would travel up to London, searching for something—[my] people or a sense of community or connection, I guess. So much of the book is formed from memories and observations—not just the artwork, but the content as well. It’s semiautobiographical, and I wanted it to feel real, to give it some kind of grounding. But I think it’s really interesting that people pick up on [the setting], because lots of places in the book are not London and are actually drawings that I’ve collected from Bristol and near where I grew up. But there are such iconic [London] moments. The park is Hampstead Heath, and I’ve had lots of messages from people—“I love that park! I’ve sat on that bench!”—and of course the red buses. I couldn’t do the buses any other color. It was a conversation that I had with my editor where we were thinking well, should it be more generic? It’s a story that could happen in any city, but I wanted it to have that sense of reality.

This book seems to have extra emotional impact given the isolating effects of the pandemic.

The original comic I worked on in the spring of 2017, but then I didn’t do anything else on it until after I graduated. I started working on this final book around December 2019, formulating ideas and building a synopsis around March 2020. It was pretty surreal to be honest, starting a book about loneliness and connection and then having those things immediately come to the forefront of everybody’s minds. It had gone from something [that] was maybe quite niche to being something that lots of other people might be able to connect with as well. I was determined to explore ideas about connection in all its forms—I was seeing people having closer connections with nature in the pandemic and reevaluating their relationships with [other] people. But really, it’s not about the pandemic. The themes of this book can be universal, but having this story framed by the pandemic really opened up the story. I was able to pour a lot of my own anxieties and emotions about these situations into my work, which was therapeutic. It was cathartic to get all those feelings out through those characters who essentially are both me, although in different forms. To have people read it and say, yes, I’ve felt like this, was another thing entirely.

Crushing was reviewed in the Nov. 1, 2021, issue.
A novel worth remembering. (Fiction. 14-18)
With the princess—the rightful heir—found dead in her tower, Lei represents the imperial decadence loathed by the Communist government and protesters alike. Lei’s mother and twin sister, Jun, warn her that involvement in the demonstrations will threaten her father’s ability to protect both their family and the precious artwork, but Lei is determined to play a part in shaping the future of her country, especially after she meets earnest and intelligent Delun, a boy who is one of the movement’s leading members. Lei’s story, briefly touched upon in Heiress Apparently (2020), is fully revealed in this fast-paced prequel suffused with political and familial tension. Details concerning Wu Zetian, the Cultural Revolution, and the 1989 protests are smoothly woven into the narrative, providing essential context. Scenes from the Tang Dynasty featuring Wu Zetian’s daughter Princess Taiping are scattered throughout the novel, connecting Lei to her family history through parallel circumstances.

Immersive and rousing. (author’s note) (Historical fiction. 13-18)

Kat wants to be wanted and liked for her true self, but failing that, she will settle for having a desirable alter ego. Kat Sanchez—fat, Puerto Rican and White, 17—has complicated relationships but finds an emotional outlet in photography. However, her Instagram account sees little engagement, even from people who know and supposedly care about her. Kat’s place of creative escape is just another venue for feeling disconnected and rejected—until she creates a fake account using photos she took of a co-worker who has sworn off social media. Blond, beautiful Max, Kat’s alter ego, quickly gets lots of likes and even connects with a fellow creator, pale, blue-eyed, “fat femme” Elena, who also calls Southern California home. Kat knows her burgeoning relationship needs to be built on an honest foundation, but the allure of getting likes and the risk of losing face make it difficult. As her online lie inevitably crumbles, Kat is forced to become more open, honest, and real in her IRL relationships. Kat’s struggle for authenticity with her family and friends, not to mention her own sense of self, sparks important questions about what is valued and what is truly valuable. Maldonado’s willingness to let Kat be unlikable at times and to embrace a bittersweet and complicated ending highlights the need for nuance and grace in the stories we tell about ourselves and others.

As with social media, the real story here requires digging beneath the surface, and it richly rewards the effort. (Fiction. 13-18)
“universal comments on the human condition” are well taken (Fantasy. 14-18)

 Aside from a reference to the “strange coupling” of a bull with King Minos’ wife, Pasiphae, that resulted in the Minotaur, the originals’ abundant sexual and romantic exploits are largely left between the lines. Considering the preponderance of strong female figures that, unlike Penelope and Ariadne, do make the cut, a claim that most of the women in this mythological tradition were presented as “subservient and largely powerless” may confuse readers. Text boxes scattered throughout introduce the Greek roots of a number of English words.

 A simplified account for reluctant readers; richer pickings exist. (map, image credits, source notes, Greek and Roman mythology guide, further research, index) (Nonfiction. 12-16)

GUIDE TO GREEK MYTHOLOGY
Nardo, Don
ReferencePoint Press (64 pp.)
$31.95 | March 1, 2022
978-1-67820-238-5

An overview of ancient Greek gods, heroes, monsters, and storytellers.

Distilling a set of alphabetically arranged rosters sprinkled with paraphrased exploits into an accessible overview, Nardo offers a general picture of the classical era’s teeming mythical storyscape—Hercules’ labors are cut to two, for example; Charybdis earns a nod but not Scylla; and though Odysseus’ faithful old dog, Argus, gets a full entry, his wife, Penelope, rates nary a mention. The author’s observations about how these myths have enduring value as “universal comments on the human condition” are well taken (though calling them “somewhat equivalent to the tales in the biblical Old Testament” may ruffle a few feathers). So is a rare chapter on specific ancient literary sources from Homer (treated as a single historical author) and Hesiod to Pseudo-Apollodorus.

OATHBOUND
McCombs, Victoria
Enclave Escape (304 pp.)
$22.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-0-06-303932-2
Series: The Royal Rose Chronicles, 1

Magic, piracy, and romance meet in this adventurous first entry in a new series.

Emme hates everything to do with piracy, the water, and Arabella the Ruthless, her infamous pirate mother who left her family behind in search of a life of adventure. But when Emme discovers she has Paslapi, her late father’s fatal illness, and that the only thing that can cure her lies across the seas on the fabled Island of Iilak, she has no choice but to join her best friend, Arn, and his pirate crew. Arn has an oathbind with a prize on his head, and finding a legendary buried treasure on an island far away seems like the only solution to save his life and make some money. Good thing he manages to convince Emme—who learned swordplay from her mother and whose knowledge of the sea is unmatched—to come along. Adventure, swashbuckling, and danger follow as Emme and Arn try to keep the truth about their motivations (and about the romantic feelings they are nursing) from each other. With a narrative that alternates between dark-haired, olive-skinned Emme and blond, blue-eyed Arn, this fast-paced novel is full of nonstop action, unexpected plot twists, mythical creatures, magic, and ghosts—as well as a slow-burn friends-to-lovers romance. It thoughtfully handles Emme’s complex feelings about her mother and the consequences of Arn’s ill-advised decisions in the buildup to the cliffhanger ending.

Aye, this is a breezy and fun piratical tale. (Fantasy. 14-18)

THE CHANDLER LEGACIES
Nazemian, Abdi
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
$17.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-0-06-303932-2

Every year teens enter prestigious Chandler Academy, a Connecticut boarding school known for setting young people up to do great things.

Among the greatest honors is selection into the Circle, a cloistered creative writing workshop run by the mysterious professor Douglas. Students from all walks of life are hungry for a spot. Those chosen in the fall of 1999 couldn’t be more varied: biracial Spence, a White and Indian American queen bee struggling with impossibly high standards; Cuban and Brazilian American Freddy, thoughtful and longing to be more than a jock; Ramin, a sensitive gay Iranian immigrant; Brunson, a White closeted lesbian and overachiever; and Beth, a White girl who is an outcast both for her anxiety and townie status. As the members of the Circle bond, becoming like family, they share their own secrets and discover much larger and more harmful ones having to do with student well-being that Chandler has kept for years. While doing vital work in discussing issues of sexual assault, hazing, and rampant homophobia, the story struggles in other ways. Characters often feel interchangeable due to the third-person–present point of view that renders them more a collection of individuated thoughts and traits than organic people (the novel is bokenked by a first-person prologue and epilogue set in 2008). Characters’ backgrounds are in some cases touched upon too briefly, but the sweet friendships and romances formed by the group are touching.

Exposes important issues with straightforward clarity. (content warning, resources) (Fiction. 13-18)
“A heady blend of the fantastical, the murderous, and the romantic.”

A FORGERY OF ROSES

Olson, Jessica S.
Inkyard Press (368 pp.)
$19.99 | March 1, 2022
978-1-335-41866-1

Magic, romance, and mystery intertwine in this stand-alone historical fantasy.

It’s been one year since Myra’s parents vanished without a trace, and she has been left alone to take care of her ailing younger sister, Lucy. Barely making ends meet, Myra survives as a painter’s apprentice in the same studio where her own mother used to work. But just like her mother’s, Myra’s artistry holds a big secret: As a Prodigy, Myra can use her painting to change the bodies of humans and animals. If she is found out, her life could be in danger from those who would exploit her abilities—or destroy her as an abomination. But when the governor’s wife offers Myra money (and threatens to expose her secret) to bring Will, her recently deceased son, back to life, Myra has no choice but to comply. In doing so, she meets August, Will’s painfully shy brother, and—once Myra realizes that Will’s death was not an accident—they immerse themselves in a world of dangerous secrets. This effortless blend of fantasy, sisterly love, sweet romance, and murder mystery is a gorgeous take on Oscar Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray. The novel focuses on Myra’s touching relationships with Lucy and August, the twisting murder investigation, and, above all, Myra’s own empowering journey: The main characters are cued as White; the story thoughtfully addresses Lucy’s chronic illness and August’s anxiety.

A heady blend of the fantastical, the murderous, and the romantic. (Fantasy, 14-adult)

LIVE, LAUGH, KIDNAP

Noone, Gabby
Razorbill/Penguin (352 pp.)
$17.99 | March 29, 2022
978-0-593-32729-6

A sweet scheme goes hilariously wrong for four teens blundering through adolescent thickets.

Violet, Montana, is on the way up thanks to the media and merchandising campaigns of local megachurch pastor Jay Reaps and his equally glossy wife, Ree. But their hunky son, Dustin, really wants out—and signs on with three chance-met young women to engineer his own kidnapping for a share of the presumed reward. His confederates have motives of their own: Zoe hopes she and her secret girlfriend can leave town and closet behind; getting caught with illicit Adderall has cost Holly her prep school scholarship; and an illicit smartphone has given Genesis glimpses of a world and Christian faith that promise more than the stagnant New Age commune in which she’s grown up. As the harebrained caper plays out in the alternating point-of-view chapters, Noone folds in a rich assortment of ruminations, confessions, bonding moments, personal epiphanies, snogging, and occasional prayers to go with the flurry of impulsive acts and comical scrambles. Despite the tale’s farcical tone, she also shapes the minds and developing characters of her cast with a light but respectful hand. Even glib and shallow Dustin gets to come off in the end as not entirely self-absorbed, and though the older adults in the all-White cast are the usual largely clueless and mockable bunch, at least his parents do seem genuinely distressed by his disappearance. The upbeat end leaves everyone uncathed and wiser.

Read, hoot, cherish this satirical romp. (Fiction, 13-18)

THE FEAR

Preston, Natasha
Delacorte (368 pp.)
$10.99 paper | March 1, 2022
978-0-593-12501-4

This perspective-jumping thriller shows you the two sides of fear.

Izzy has had a crush on Justin forever, but in her last year at Rock Bay High, will she be able to finally talk to him, or will the sudden violent death of a classmate put a wrench in the situation? After a meme daring everyone to repost how they are most afraid to die races through the teenage population, a student appears to have been killed exactly in the way she had feared. Izzy must race against time to find the killer, and with no shortage of suspects, everyone is under suspicion: her loner lab partner, Axel; his older cousin, Tristan; and even Justin, who has been acting strange. It becomes clear no one is safe from experiencing fear. This swift-moving slasher adventure proves to be a page-turning mystery. The book is written in the first-person perspective, allowing readers a deeper view into Izzy’s mind; whether she is thinking Axel is innocent or the killer, her stream of thought and persistent questioning give readers clues to help connect the dots before surprising them with clever plot twists at the end. Main characters read as White; there is racial diversity in the supporting cast.

This fast-paced thriller will keep readers guessing. (Thriller, 12-18)

LOCK THE DOORS

Ralph, Vincent
Sourcebooks Fire (400 pp.)
$10.99 paper | March 1, 2022
978-1-72823-189-1

A blended family seeks a fresh start in a new home.

Tom’s mother believes that the family may have finally found happiness. After years of dating losers, she’s finally settled
down with a nice guy—and that nice guy, Jay, happens to have a daughter, Nia, who is just a little older than Tom. The new family has moved into a nice new house, but Tom can’t shake the feeling that something’s wrong. They discover a strange message written on the wall when they are stripping the old wallpaper, and there’s clear evidence that the previous owners had installed locks on the exteriors of the bedroom doors. Those previous owners happen to live a little farther down the street, and Tom quickly becomes obsessed with their teenage daughter, Amy, and the secrets she’s hiding. This obsession unfortunately becomes a repetitive slog involving many pages of Tom’s brooding and sulking over the same bits of information while everyone tells him to move on. Readers will be on everyone’s side. But then, a blessed breath of fresh air: The perspective shifts to Amy, and readers learn in spectacularly propulsive fashion exactly what she’s hiding. Regret and intrigue blend perfectly as Amy divulges her secrets. Alas, we return to navel-gazing Tom, and the secrets he’s hiding. This obsession unfortunately for the book’s final pages, and everything ends with a shrug. Main characters default to White. A crackerjack thriller done in by its own dopey protagonist. (Thriller. 14-18)

**PRACTICAL DEMONOLOGY**
Rees, Clare
Amulet/Abrams (384 pp.)
$18.99 | March 29, 2022
978-1-4197-4558-4

A dark fantasy about demons, a plague, and the teens who need to survive both.

When a new bout of plague hits the inhabitants of the castle in the valley, all the healthy teenagers are evacuated to the ruins of Cirtop Castle, where they are expected to quarantine and avoid falling victim not only to the disease, but also the demons who live in the surrounding woods. As the daughter of a doctor, Non plans to follow in the footsteps of her father—a safe bet for a safe future—and it’s her natural curiosity and need to control her environment that allow her to observe patterns and note that the arrival of the plague and the sudden increase in demon attacks may not be a coincidence. As the quarantine turns into a siege and the adults in charge prove to be less than competent, it is down to the teens to take control if they want to live. This fantasy with a side of horror offers an original take on demons, a faux medieval setting, and an anxious protagonist whose perceptive, amusing voice carries the narrative with aplomb. Non and her relationships with her best friend and the other girls in their group, as well as a budding romance with warrior-boy Sam, give a personal touch and a sense of community to this story of survival against the odds. All characters are assumed White. A clever and atmospheric read. (Fantasy. 14-18)

**FREAKS**
Riley, Brett
Imprint (288 pp.)
$18.99 | March 1, 2022
978-1-945501-53-1
Series: Freaks, 1

Four savagely bullied ninth graders suddenly acquire superpowers. Christian, proudly out as lesbian since sixth grade, and her friends—geeky Micah, mousy Gabby, and uptight Jamie—inadvertently open an interdimensional hole by playing with an old book of spells. It somehow leaves them with a diverse mix of abilities, from shooting flames to flying. Only Micah burns to repay their trio of bullies for years of panting, swirlies, threats, and humiliating pranks. The other three take broader views, which turns out to be a good thing, as a cunning, telepathic, blood-sucking monster from another dimension has also come through the hole to crush heads and feed on residents of their small Arkansas town. Riley goes for the gusto, opening with raw language and vividly explicit incidents of bullying followed by rising general terror punctuated by sprays of blood. He also stirs in some juicy complications, as tracking and battling the monster requires the self-styled Freaks not only to learn to control their powers and rein in the half-deranged Micah, but somehow find a way to work with one of the bullies who had been lurking near the spellcasting and has come away with superstrength and the emotional stability of the Hulk. Both unresolved internal conflicts and the revelation that there are more monsters out there promise further entries. Christian and Micah present White; Gabby is Jewish and Latina, and Jamie is African American. Twists aplenty in a gorefest replete with violent emotions and events. (Horror. 14-16)

**AND THEY LIVED...**
Salvatore, Steven
Bloomsbury (384 pp.)
$17.99 | March 8, 2022
978-1-5476-0819-5

Once upon a time, on the college campus of his dreams, a freshman embarked upon a quest for love and self-discovery while striving to attain his life goal of becoming a successful animator. Like lightning, first love strikes when Chase, a fat, queer animation major, meets aspiring writer Jack at a party before the first day of classes. Charming, Captain America–handsome Jack might not even be gay as far as Chase knows, but when they’re together, Chase feels seen. Their electric connection inspires Chase to write his own fairy tale for his advanced animation seminar’s short film showcase. The winner will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to Los Angeles to be mentored by their famous director professor. After having lost out
on a desperately needed scholarship to Leila, his wealthy, dream-stealing, ex-best friend, earning the showcase prize would help make up for all the loans his single mom took out to send him to college. Amid the pressures of the competition and tension with Jack, Chase grapples with body dysmorphia, how to label his gender identity, and the fallout of his toxic relationship with Leila. His growth, supported by queer mentors and friends, provides affirming representation of questioning and nonlinear healing. Frank, vivid sex scenes model consent, informed safety, and honest conversations about intimacy. Chase and Jack are White; the supporting cast is racially diverse. A satisfying resolution delivers a nuanced reimagining of happily-ever-after.

A dramatic and refreshing storm of emotion. (author’s note) (Romance. 15-adult)

A NIGHT TO DIE FOR
Schroeder, Lisa
Underlined (288 pp.)
$9.99 paper | March 1, 2022
978-0-593-48153-0

A prom-night murder turns a town upside down.

After pranking prom king Mario, Mirabelle, a snarky, beautiful girl whom nearly everyone seems to love, ends up dead. That’s when the gossip, investigation, and revelations begin. Mario becomes a prime suspect, and his best friend tries to clear his name while his single mom hires an attorney. The possible suspects are lined up and quickly dismissed, and the outlook of most characters seems oddly upbeat despite the death that launches the story. As characters describe their relationships with the recently deceased prom queen, questions emerge about how well they really knew her. Perspectives add little tension and detract from the main plot, and the tone of voice sometimes comes more toward drama with a mild punch than high-tension thriller. The variety of formats, including letters, articles, and text messages, and the cast of realistic characters will appeal to reluctant readers. Still, some perspectives add little tension and detract from the main plot, and the tone of voice sometimes comes more toward drama with a mild punch than high-tension thriller. The variety of formats, including letters, articles, and text messages, and the cast of realistic characters will appeal to reluctant readers. Still, some perspectives add little tension and detract from the main plot, and the tone of voice sometimes comes more toward drama with a mild punch than high-tension thriller.

A meandering but pleasant mystery. (Mystery. 12-18)

FULL FLIGHT
Schumacher, Ashley
Wednesday Books (320 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-1-250-77978-6

What happens when you find someone who truly sees you as you are?

In her small Texas town, Anna James wears Christmas socks year-round and secretly worries she’s never going to be good enough. She’s struggling to perform her part of a marching band duet and risks having it assigned to someone else. But Weston Ryan—the other half of the duet and a social outcast accused of destroying the school’s memorial tree—reluctantly agrees to help her practice. Weston excels in music but, distracted and upset by his parents’ recent divorce, has trouble keeping his grades up. As Weston and Anna grow closer and inevitably fall for each other, Anna lies to her parents about where she’s spending time, knowing they wouldn’t approve of her seeing him. Echoing beautifully throughout the novel is Weston’s imagining of the last Kaua’i ‘ōō bird, the final survivor of his species who in 1987 flew toward a scientist’s recording of a bird call, searching for family who would never come. Schumacher’s gorgeous writing immerses readers in the aching emotions of close friendship and first love before delivering a gut punch of an ending. Told in alternating first-person perspectives, the narrative memorably portrays anxiety and depression without explicitly naming either, weaving these subjects into well-drawn everyday scenes. Main characters are implied White.

A powerful, unforgettable story of loneliness and belonging. (Fiction. 12-18)

GALLANT
Schwab, V.E.
Illus. by Manuel Šumberac
Greenwillow Books (352 pp.)
$18.99 | March 1, 2022
978-0-06-283577-2

Seeking a place to call home, Olivia uncovers long-buried secrets after arriving at Gallant.

Olivia Prior has always hoped for a place to belong and a family that cares for her. Instead, she’s isolated at Merilance School for Independent Girls, with its strict matrons, shunned by students who ostracize and torment her for being mute. Olivia uses sign language, taught to her by a now-departed matron (although nobody else signs); treasures the journal belonging to the mother she doesn’t remember; and can see ghouls. When she receives a letter from her uncle, Arthur Prior, inviting her to live at his manor, Olivia leaps at the chance. However, instead of the big, welcoming family she imagined, the opulent yet run-down Gallant only holds Matthew, her irritable cousin, and kindly caretakers Hannah and
Edgar. Olivia unravels the ominous secrets of both her family and the house, where ghouls lurk around every corner and the dilapidated garden gate calls to her. The evolving relationships between Olivia and her found family shine, and themes of freedom, the self, and belonging are well depicted. The gripping writing and effective incorporation of horror elements, including haunting, inky artwork, are satisfyingly spine-tingling. Olivia’s use of sign language and her artistic talents, part of the exploration of the importance of communication, are skillfully incorporated into the overall story. Olivia and the main cast are White.

Will hook readers with its gripping worldbuilding, well-rounded characters, and fantastic horror. (Fantasy. 12-adult)

**TURNING**  
Smith, Joy L.  
Denene Millner Books/Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)  
$19.99 | March 1, 2022  
978-1-5344-9582-1

After falling from a roof, a talented ballerina adjusts to paraplegia. Genie was supposed to take the ballet world by storm with her Black Girl Magic. But now, life is anything but magical. Physical therapy is grueling, her apartment isn’t wheelchair accessible, and her relationships with family and friends are fraying. Her mother, a recovering alcoholic and former teen mom, is overbearing; she is estranged from her abusive father. Genie avoids her closest friends, Hannah and Maya, who’ve grown closer to one another in her absence. Her volatile ex-boyfriend, Nolan, is threatening to tell her mother about her abortion if she doesn’t give him another chance…and she hasn’t told anyone he deliberately let her fall that fateful night. As Genie confronts her new reality, debut author Smith thoughtfully explores tough issues, including family, identity, and discrimination in ballet. Genie’s voice realistically alternates between sassy and vulnerable as she mourns her dance career, endeavors to distinguish herself in a new way, and contends with physical issues such as loss of bladder control. The author sympathetically explores the conflicting emotions of navigating abusive relationships; importantly, Genie also firmly asserts her boundaries and self-worth. Genie’s friends dispense tough love, and a tender relationship with Kyle, a fellow physical therapy patient who suffered a traumatic brain injury, provides a sweet, necessary contrast to Nolan’s controlling behavior. Most characters are people of color.

A nuanced portrayal of disability, dance, and starting over.  
(Fiction. 14-18)

**WE WERE KINGS**  
Stevens, Court  
Thomas Nelson (400 pp.)  
$19.99 | Feb. 1, 2022  
978-0-7852-3848-5

When a teen goes in search of a killer, she discovers that nothing is what it seems.

For as long as 18-year-old Nyla Wagner can recall, she’s had to share her mother’s attention with Frankie, a death row felon and her mother’s closest friend. She knows the story: Two decades ago, the body of Cora King, the 18-year-old daughter of a Kentucky senator, was found in a badly decomposed state in the lake surrounding Cora’s family’s island home. Frankie, who was Cora’s best friend, was charged with the murder based solely on her previous arrest record. Now Frankie’s out of appeals, and her execution date has been set. When a reporter comes looking for Cora’s sister, one Elizabeth King, Nyla discovers that is her mom. She starts with trying to understand why her mother fled from her wealthy family—the two of them have lived a hardscrabble, peripatetic life—then, becoming enmeshed in difficult family dynamics, seeks to prove Frankie’s innocence and find the real killer. Stevens’ sentence-level writing sizzles, effectively conveying both Nyla’s heart and the pacing falters, however, and some of the characters feel one-note, to the point that the climactic scene doesn’t evoke the emotion that it should. Main characters read as White.

Sparkles like a diamond at first but does not fulfill its initial promise. (discussion questions)  
(Mystery. 14-18)

**ALL MY RAGE**  
Tahir, Sabaa  
Razorbill/Penguin (384 pp.)  
$19.99 | March 1, 2022  
978-0-593-20234-0

Seniors Salahudin and Noor, both 18, are caught in the throes of life in the small California desert town of Juniper, where being a working-class person of color means being treated differently.

With pervasive racism coming from everyone from classmates to police officers and doctors, Juniper is a sinkhole that the estranged best friends are desperate to leave. But instead of worrying about college and his future career prospects, Salahudin is preoccupied with his mother’s kidney failure, his father’s alcoholism, his family’s deteriorating motel, and Noor, who hasn’t spoken to him in months. Orphaned Noor’s dreams of college are slowly waning; her malicious Pakistani immigrant uncle, who hates all things Pakistani, has made it clear that Noor’s future involves working behind the counter of his liquor store. Life was easier when she had Salahudin and his kind mother, Misbah, in her life, but a fight...
“Captivating and introspective.”

THIS GOLDEN STATE

Weisenberg, Marit
Flatiron Books (400 pp.)
$18.99 | March 1, 2022
978-1-250-78627-2

A teen tries to unravel her parents’ secrets, truths that force the family to live on the run.

Seventeen-year-old Poppy has lived her entire life knowing her family could need to pack up and vanish at a moment’s notice. All she has is her mom, dad, and younger sister. When her parents suddenly move them again, this time to California, mathematically gifted Poppy gets to sign up for an intense summer STEM program. Despite her natural abilities and love for the subject matter, it’s a tough wake-up call to be in a class with extremely privileged kids who’ve had much better educational opportunities. Frustrated by the restrictions of her lifestyle and her parents, who are so secretive Poppy doesn’t know who they are or even what they do, Poppy impulsively takes a DNA test to unveil details about her ancestry; her classmate Harry, whose tech tycoon father is obsessed with secrecy; too. Poppy’s DNA results indicate European heritage; Harry’s test shows his ancestors came from Jamaica, South India, and Palestine, and her mother is White. Her anxiety over climate change pushes her to try to transform the family garage into a survival bunker—and that means figuring out how to buy a $2,000 generator. College is not on her mind even though her parents want her to attend. Climate change is what occupies Jamilah’s every waking thought, but no one else in the family seems to care about it. Her 15-year-old sister, Noor, works at a coffee shop and hangs out with her girlfriend, Beth. Her brother, George, 12, is obsessed with video games. Undeterred, Jamilah...
begins stockpiling canned goods, batteries, and other essentials for the climate apocalypse in her bedroom closet. But when a national climate protest is announced in Ottawa and a climate encampment group sets up in her neighborhood park, Jamilah is forced to think beyond her individual approach to survival, push beyond her comfort limits, and venture into other forms of climate action and community organizing. Chapters are prefaced by short lists of survival tips, and Jamilah’s worries will resonate with many readers. Palestinian cultural elements are woven throughout the book. Christian Jamilah expresses positive opinions about the hijab, but the framing of burqa-wearing as always taking place under duress feels oversimplified.

An appealing title for environmentally minded reluctant readers. (Fiction. 13-18)

**SCIENCE AND THE SKEPTIC**
*Discerning Fact From Fiction*

*Zimmer, Marc*

Twenty-First Century/Millbrook

(120 pp.)

$37.32 PLB | Feb. 1, 2022

978-1-72841-945-9

A primer on the practice and evaluation of science for teen readers. Using summaries of scientific discoveries to form a narrative, straightforward text describes the tenets of science and the ways in which they are challenged in current public discourse. Included is information on the process of peer review, the rise of internet disinformation, common cognitive biases, the politicization of established facts, and the techniques of scam artists. A final chapter sums up 20 rules to help readers distinguish legitimate research from spurious claims. Perhaps most useful for anyone in today’s information economy is the following advice: “Beware if a piece of news or a social media post stirs up intense feelings, especially outrage. It was most likely designed to short-circuit your critical-thinking skills by playing on your emotions.” Valuable too is the identification of clickbait and the guidance on reading peer-reviewed scientific articles. The no-nonsense narration is effective and illuminating, particularly the analogy comparing the mystery of nature to a jigsaw puzzle without a box: “scientists need to find the pieces and put them in the correct place.” The context offered here should allow budding scholars to do just that.

Timely, practical, and all too important. (glossary, source notes, bibliography, further reading, index, photo credits) (Nonfiction. 12-18)
HOME SO FAR AWAY
Berlowitz, Judith
She Writes Press (248 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $9.95 e-book | June 21, 2022
978-1-64742-375-9

A fictional diary chronicles the experience of a young German woman—a Communist and a Jew—fighting fascism in Spain.

When Klara Philipsborn, a German living with her bourgeois family in Berlin, visits Spain in 1925, she experiences a “chemical shift” within herself, falling deeply in love with the place. A budding scientist with an interest in bacteriology, she’s able to secure a position as a lab assistant at the University of Madrid with the help of a referral from Albert Einstein, making her only one of four females out of over 2,000 students. A self-professed Communist with a “Marxist heart,” she becomes deeply involved in the leftist politics of Spain, and when Gen. Franco rises to power, she joins the Fifth Regiment, an “elite army of the people,” to serve as a nurse and translator in the fight against fascism. Meanwhile, Hitler ascends back home in Germany during a time when “logic has been replaced by wishful thinking,” a predicament that threatens her Jewish family, though her father stubbornly refuses to take the danger seriously. Berlowitz structures the entire tale as a series of journal entries composed by Klara replete with personal photographs—this generates an intimacy between the reader and Klara that results in a gripping immersion into the tale. The quotidian details of the entries and the granular accounts of the political scenes in both Spain and Germany, however, often slow the narrative to a crawl. Klara’s experience of alienation is deep and profoundly moving. Unable to return home and live openly as a Jew, she feels compelled to hide her religious identity even from her compatriots in the Fifth Regiment. Her sense of utter outrage seems to sustain her except when it is overcome by episodes of despair and hopelessness, a poignant inner turmoil that, more than political drama, is the core of the novel.

An affecting, historically astute novel.

THE DEAD BELL
Winslow, Reid
Quid Mirum Press (442 pp.)
Aug. 11, 2021
978-1-955018-19-7

These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

WINGS OVER THE WALL by Matthew Burden .............................. 128
HOW THE BEATLES KNEW by Ilse Niccolini .............................. 138
REMOTE LEADERSHIP by David Pachter .............................. 140
LOUSE POINT by Shelby Raebeck ........................................ 140
85A by Kyle Thomas Smith .................................................. 143
THE DEAD BELL by Reid Winslow ........................................... 145
Many inveterate readers seek an epic journey that takes them to enchanted lands or forbidden planets or, if they’re Michael Connelly fans, gritty Los Angeles. But others, perhaps longtime aficionados of Edgar Allan Poe, Sherwood Anderson, and John Cheever, prefer immersing themselves in exquisitely crafted short stories that frequently deliver delightful twists. Kirkus Indie recently reviewed three diverse collections of tales, and we’re looking forward to more standout short fiction in 2022.

In *Better Davis and Other Stories*, Philip Dean Walker explores showbiz in the early 1980s, when gay entertainers sought the spotlight while dealing with the specter of AIDS. The author mixes fictional characters with real-life figures, including Elizabeth Taylor, Maureen Stapleton, Natalie Wood, Michael Bennett, and Jim J. Bullock, co-star of the TV comedy *Too Close for Comfort.*

“Rich, elegiac meditations on art, sex, and death,” our reviewer writes. E.L. Jefferson’s *Faces of Evil* focuses on sinister events that affect his predominantly Black cast. The unsettling characters range from three robbers who target a mansion to a rude doctor who smokes, spouts racial tirades, keeps a liquor cabinet in his office, and specializes in tough love. The themes include retribution, betrayal, vigilante justice, and infidelity. Our critic calls these “addictive, frightening” tales “a memorable collection of provocative horror.”

A small Appalachian town in North Carolina in 1999 serves as the edgy setting for the 12 linked stories in Michael Amos Cody’s *A Twilight Reel.* The tales feature a minister who picks up a knife-wielding hitchhiker, a hapless college professor who copes with a disintegrating marriage and a senile woman, and two relatives who observe workers turning a timeworn church into a mosque. According to our reviewer, “The stories all sing on their own, but it is in the harmonizing of characters and events as they appear in multiple tales that the real joy of the collection is found.”

Myra Forsberg is an Indie editor.

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**WINGS OVER THE WALL**

*Faith, Birding, and Walking With Jesus in the Holy Land*

Burden, Matthew
North Wind Publishing (194 pp.)
$19.95 paper | Oct. 1, 2021
978-1-73293-196-1

A bird-centered devotional memoir about a trip to Israel.

In this well-designed remembrance, Burden, who previously authored the historical-fiction Hidden Kings Trilogy and several other religious works, relates a trip he took with a group to the Holy Land in 2018. Christian readers will particularly appreciate the centrality of religious pilgrimage in this account, particularly the narrative’s centerpiece—his visit to “the place where it all began,” Nazareth. Indeed, he makes sure to characterize his trip as less of a vacation than a religious journey, although he notes: “If I had taken a tour just to snap a few pictures and add a few birds to my life list, says the avid birder, “it would not be a pilgrimage.” This note of affection for avians sounds above my head wheeled dozens of swifts, cutting through the morning air with graceful, scythe-like sweeps,” he writes at one point, with the understated lyricism that characterizes much of the narrative; at another juncture, he intriguingly imagines Nazareth as closely resembling what Jesus would have seen: “The birds winging about were the same species he would have spied as a child,” he writes, “the same sparrows and doves that he referenced in his writings.”

An eloquent and often moving Christian meditation.

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**RAZORMOUTH**

*A Novel of Blood in the Sea*

Butcher, Howard
Deep Reef Books (399 pp.)
Jan. 14, 2022
978-1-7379603-0-0

Engaged grad students in the Bahamas tangle with deadly sea creatures and an even deadlier cartel in this tense thriller.

Cael Seabrook and his future wife, Aja, see their summer trip to Bimini in 1984 as “an early honeymoon.” They’re on a beautiful tropical island, living in a rental house overlooking a lagoon, but the two are working on their doctoral dissertations, as well; Aja studies cone snails, while Seabrook catches, tags, and tracks juvenile
l lemon sharks. It’s dangerous work, as cone snails are one of
the world’s most venomous animals, and Seabrook, out on a
boat alone, could run into aggressive tiger sharks. Their most
unsettling encounter, however, doesn’t involve sea creatures.
An armed man, with scarred holes where his ears once were, forces
Aja, a certified emergency medical technician, to tend to his
gunshot wounds. He eventually leaves the couple’s home, but
it’s clear he belongs to a cartel, and Seabrook and Aja worry that
he’ll someday return. Indeed, cartel members do rear their ugly
heads but with an unexpected demand: They want the $50
million that the “Earless Man” evidently stole. The Dores cartel,
which is notorious for “brazen acts of violence,” sends its dead-
liest hit man, Pelon, who has slaughterhouse saws and grinders
for torturing and murdering victims. The cartel abducts Aja and
threatens to take her life unless Seabrook comes up with cash
that he doesn’t have. As Aja searches for a way to escape her
captors, Seabrook uses his expertise and experience to try to
appease the cartel just long enough to save his true love.

The first half of Butcher’s novel is a slow but riveting build
to fierce confrontations with evil. For example, the appealing
couple initially befriends their landlord’s children, whom they
affectionately dub “the Sea Cherubs.” The three kids get their
own subplot as they desperately try to evade their abusive father.
Around the same time, Seabrook spots signs of a sea creature
with a powerful bite; when he finally sees this “Razormouth,”
it’s an “otherworldly fish” that he’s convinced is an entirely new
species. Once the cartel villains take center stage in the latter
half, the author amps up the suspense in earnest. Pelon and car-
tel head Concha Dores are revealed as cold, ferocious individu-
als who take glee in hurting others; indeed, the book features
copious scenes of bloody and visceral imagery. But it’s Seabrook
and Aja’s fight against a menacing enemy that has the most
impact, as the nail-biting tension rarely lets up. Butcher also
provides him with a job and an apartment

in the bustling city of Changsha. “You’d set two goals for your-
self that year,” he narrates to himself, “find a girlfriend and write
a book (your first time attempting either). You’d had plenty of
hookups in school but never really made it much further than
that….What was the saying? ‘Sow your wild oats.’ ” He meets a
woman named Harmony, a painter who also turns out to be a con
artist. The two begin an affair, though one fated to end abruptly.
Back in San Francisco after his year abroad, Cole is editing his
memoir while overstaying his welcome on his brother Abra-
ham’s couch. Rumors circulate about Cole making women “feel
weird,” and Abraham suspects something happened in Chang-
sha. As the two timelines unfold side by side—Cole in China
from his own perspective and Cole in America from the view-
points of those around him—a contradictory narrative emerges.
The story that Cole tells about himself may not be the whole
truth, especially given the writerly flourishes of his memoir. But
will the rest of the tale come to light? Whether aligned with
Cole or someone else, Carroll’s prose is exact and cutting, as
here where Abraham ponders the silences in his brother’s tale:
“It was clear that something had happened in Changsha. You
would never know it, though, given the way he spoke. It was all
adventure this and freedom that, roses and green fields, when
the reality of the situation was something closer to the fact that
he had hit rock bottom.” This is one of those novels of which
the less said, the better. As readers realize just what the author
is doing, the work morphs from a booshish-man-abroad tale into
something more thrilling. It’s a story of a subtler sort of toxic
masculinity, one that feels timely and yet organic. From concept
to execution, Carroll delivers.

An engrossing and unsettling tale of self-mythology and
self-delusion.
has been plying its trade in secrecy for the past 2,000 years. But although the origin of the Incendium Artis guild is ancient, the cabal is eager to remain relevant by staging fires to tamper with global markets. As Foxe and his allies unravel this mystery, they discover an even more destructive plot. Foxe works to thwart this with the support of Ray, the FBI, and MI6. Fans of action-oriented mystery novels will simply love Coppley's well-crafted book, which not only spans thousands of years, but interweaves numerous, complex characters without compromising clarity. It's also a well-researched work, but it's never dry, as it manages to balance the historical elements with plenty of modern-day thrills, including motorcycle chases and death-defying escapes. Although violence does play a role in the narrative, Coppley deftly avoids the gratuitous gore that one finds in many other modern thrillers. Overall, it's an exciting work that will keep readers engaged to the end.

A fascinating and fiery read.

**MARATHON MAN**

*My Life, My Father's Stroke and Running 35 Marathons in 35 Days*

Corcoran, Alan

Tivoli Publishing House (314 pp.)

$15.99 paper | $7.99 e-book

June 27, 2021

978-1-8386-500-4

A memoir tells the story of how a man ran 35 marathons in 35 days in Ireland.

Having lost his motivation as a sprinter, 20-year-old Corcoran was already contemplating finding his way back into running when his father had a stroke in 2011. The conditions were a perfect storm for an impetuous idea. The author would be of little use back home for his father’s recovery. Still in college, Corcoran was of an age that allowed him to take big, foolish chances and healthy enough to give his body a beating. Inspired partly by comedian Eddie Izzard’s *Eddie Is Running* documentary, chronicling 43 marathons in 51 days, the author hit on the idea of running a complete lap of Ireland to raise money for the Irish Heart Foundation, the brain injury unit at the National Rehabilitation Hospital, and Football Village of Hope, a charity his father helped establish. The story is told in a conversational style, starting out as a traditional memoir of Corcoran’s early dedication to sprinting and how his family gave him the encouragement and discipline to keep at it, turning into more of a tour diary once the run begins. He spares no detail, from his extensive preparation to his troubles holding charitable organizations to their promises of logistical support. On the road, readers see the author’s every ache and pain from the full 35-day course, from coping with blisters and burns to his friends pestering him as he was running by repeatedly screeching the song “Use Me” from a car as they followed along. The narrative can get technical at times, talking of physios and specific running techniques and training methods. But Corcoran treads lightly, keeping his sense of humor throughout. And some of the prose is beautiful: “Some days it was ballerina slippers, graceful efficiency; some days it was boxing gloves, biting down on the gumshield, swinging wild fists.”

A charming, detailed running account that should appeal to fans of endurance stories.

**MY OLD FRIEND, THEN**

Davis-Gibbon, Katherine

Illus. by Allie Daigle

Riverlet Press (40 pp.)

$24.25 | Nov. 29, 2021

978-1-73795-760-7

A girl explores her relationships with the past and the present in Davis-Gibbon’s picture book.

A kid introduces readers to a faceless figure named Then, an “old friend” whom she has known “as long as I can remember.” Then is gray and shadowy and has the same shape as the unnamed main character. The youngster, who is White, recounts her times with Then, who is very demanding, has an active imagination, and can be a braggart. When Then’s presence impacts her ability to pay attention to others and enjoy her favorite things, she makes a new friend named Now, a girl-shaped being with a colorful paint-splotched appearance. Now is supportive, caring, and fun. She also accepts the girl’s ongoing relationship with Then. The girl explains how Then “is the perfect friend” when “I feel like a story,” which Now also embraces because she “likes stories” as well. Ostensibly, this indicates a healthy ability to revisit the past without letting it overshadow the present. Davis-Gibbon’s creative personifications of the past and the present here will enable readers to reflect on how “Then” and “Now” impact their own lives. The protagonist’s constructive realizations underscore the importance of integrating our past and present selves. Daigle’s lively illustrations depict Then and Now throughout the girl’s life. Settings, evocatively portrayed, include outdoor locations with sun-dappled skies, mountains, and waters with splashes of color and texture.

A philosophical, kid-friendly take on the rewards of being present.

**BALU SAVES THE DAY**

Dee, Pria

Illus. by YoungJu Kim

Boomi (34 pp.)


Oct. 1, 2021

978-1-08-791292-9

978-8-46-660876-2 paper

The child of an Indian vegetable seller rallies community support when his mother gets sick in this picture book.

Dee introduces readers to big-eyed Balu, who, at age 5, is too young for school and instead visits the market with his mother, Amma, to sell cabbages, eggplants, and beans at her stall. Balu soaks in the smells of turmeric and cumin from other booths.
Amma uses the money from her business to buy groceries for dinner. When one day she is too sick to get out of bed, Balu fetches a doctor, who sends the boy to the pharmacy to get a prescription. With no money, Balu pays the pharmacist and physician in vegetables. Then the child goes to the market to sell vegetables alone. Sympathetic vendors gather presents from their stalls so Balu can bring dinner home to his mother—who luckily feels better. In the wake of Covid-19 and its impact on India, this story of health care for working poor people has grim undertones. The cost of the medicine for Amma might have been a steeper barrier if her condition had been worse. But this enjoyable, upbeat tale instead depicts an independent boy whose hard work and concern for his family are rewarded by an understanding community. Kim's soft watercolors in warm tones render the vivid shades of market vegetables bright and shiny; large, cartoonish heads on the characters lend themselves to vibrant emotional expressions.

An engaging tale about community response that highlights the necessity of global health care.

**PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN MADLY IN LOVE**
Desai, Boman
KDP (416 pp.)
$17.99 paper | $5.99 e-book | Oct. 27, 2021 979-8-54-79760-0

A literary novel tells the story of a struggling Indian author in three romantic periods of her life. Farida Cooper is interviewing to be an analyst in the consumer research department at the Chicago firm The Mandalay Market when she suddenly bursts into tears. Her interviewer, Percy Faber, has just told her that her lack of an MBA disqualifies her for the job; next, an education to improve her chances for a better job; third, a home for sanctuary when the world became unmanageable; and last, a man to share her load.” Currently, all four things are threatened. The unemployed, 50-year-old aspiring author is 10 years into a master’s degree in English at a school that is trying to kick her out, and she will soon run out of money for rent. Percy, a widower who comes from the same Bombay Parsi community as Farida, takes pity on her and invents a position for her at the firm, and his interest in this intense woman grows the more he learns about her. Interwoven with Farida’s present are the stories of her two great romantic affairs: one with the celebrated literary theorist Horace Fisch and the other with Darius Katrak, a precocious 17-year-old student in Bombay to whom she was supposedly giving art lessons. The threads depict a female artist at three stages in her life, always finding herself at odds with the culture around her and claiming that rules are made to be broken. Desai’s prose is tidy and mannered in a way that mirrors its intellectual characters: “They finished in silence, Farida afraid she had focused too glaringly on herself, Percy wondering how he might help. Ascending in the elevator to the office again he invited her to a discussion of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children.*” It’s a long, slow novel that asks a lot of readers, particularly in its early sections in which Farida comes off as more than a little conceited. But as readers gain greater insight into the experiences that shaped Farida, the book becomes a satisfying, if somewhat antiquated, character study.

An unhurried but immersive tale of ambition and love.

**DON’T WEAR SHOES YOU CAN’T WALK IN**
Douglas, Michelle
She Writes Press

An advertising professional shares her life lessons for 20-somethings in this debut guide.

Douglas started her own advertising career at age 21 and spent the next 10 years documenting what she learned. Thank fully, she converted her personal journal into this engaging manual that specifically targets those in their 20s with “relatable advice in the areas of work, love, practical adult life, and personal growth.” The author pays off this promise in a jaunty guide that has plenty of personality. She writes in a conversational, down-to-earth style about her own experiences, translating them into words of encouragement and positive reinforcement for others. The volume comprises eight well-organized chapters with simple titles like “Time,” “Love,” and “Work,” bookended by a “Title Lesson” and a “Farewell Lesson.” Sprinkled throughout are “prompts”—questions accompanied by blank spaces so readers can do some journaling of their own. Particularly appealing is the chapter structure. After a brief introduction, each chapter is divided into numbered sections that identify observations or suggestions, using subheads followed by brief explanatory text. Some are metaphorically related to advancement or motivation (“The greatest mountain ranges have more than one peak”), while others are more direct (“It’s what you bring to the table, not how long you’ve been sitting at it”). By dividing the content in this way, the author highlights many key life lessons yet makes the sections easily scannable—a neat trick that turns material that might be considered heavy reading into a less intimidating collection of digestible nuggets. This format seems perfectly attuned to a generation raised on texts and shorter bursts of information. Douglas writes frankly about love, advising that “when choosing a partner, find an addition, not a completion.” Her commentary concerning work is valuable; for example, “Find the sweet spot where your talents and values meet. Work there and stay there.” The author is at her best when she is doling out counsel about entering adulthood: “On the fence isn’t a bad place to be for a little while. You can see things from there that you can’t see on either side.”

Wise, witty, and worthwhile advice for readers navigating their 20s.
“Edward has created an engaging hero in Dirk, bound for greater things in the series’ next entry.”

**PANAMA RED**

*A Dirk Lasher Thriller*

*Edward, David*

Self (305 pp.)

$14.45 paper | $0.99 e-book | Aug. 22, 2021

979-8-46-010561-8

A military agent following his gut uncovers a government conspiracy in this thriller.

In this series opener, set in Manuel Noriega’s Panama, Edward’s protagonist is United States Army Special Agent Dirk Lasher. Loner Dirk is an undercover field agent collecting intelligence from low-level informants and funneling it back to analysts. One day, Dirk takes down two strangers who make the mistake of attempting to intimidate him. That’s when he learns that his informants are aware of his undercover status since U.S. agents keep rotating through the same house. Dirk also discovers that the two people he had brutalized are Drug Enforcement Administration agents coming to meet him. He searches for Army Sgt. Jack Williams, who was supposed to let him know about the DEA agents. Dirk rescues Williams, who is being held by the PDF, Noriega’s security force. Dirk also finds out that the PDF is involved with a group looking to crash the international financial market. Then the wife and daughter of Dirk’s informant Thomasito get abducted by Pablo Escobar’s Colombian thugs. Dirk and his volunteer team take part in a DEA assault to try to recover them. Despite suffering a significant loss, Dirk accomplishes his objective, taking intel to a prominent official. Edward, who has previously mostly focused on SF, wrote what he knew this time out. During his Army career, he served as the special agent in charge of the Panama Canal counterterrorism threat assessment report. That experience lends authenticity to this frenetic novel, as he brings Noriega’s Panama, Edward’s protagonist is United States Army Special Agent Dirk Lasher. Loner Dirk is an undercover field agent collecting intelligence from low-level informants and funneling it back to analysts. One day, Dirk takes down two strangers who make the mistake of attempting to intimidate him. That’s when he learns that his informants are aware of his undercover status since U.S. agents keep rotating through the same house. Dirk also discovers that the two people he had brutalized are Drug Enforcement Administration agents coming to meet him. He searches for Army Sgt. Jack Williams, who was supposed to let him know about the DEA agents. Dirk rescues Williams, who is being held by the PDF, Noriega’s security force. Dirk also finds out that the PDF is involved with a group looking to crash the international financial market. Then the wife and daughter of Dirk’s informant Thomasito get abducted by Pablo Escobar’s Colombian thugs. Dirk and his volunteer team take part in a DEA assault to try to recover them. Despite suffering a significant loss, Dirk accomplishes his objective, taking intel to a prominent official. Edward, who has previously mostly focused on SF, wrote what he knew this time out. During his Army career, he served as the special agent in charge of the Panama Canal counterterrorism threat assessment report. That experience lends authenticity to this frenetic novel, as he brings the Panama of Noriega’s time to life. Dirk proves a second-generation soldier, raised by a grandfather who had served. But the protagonist’s doubts about the military bureaucracy shine through as he seeks a more effective way to aid the innocent. The author develops intriguing helpers for Dirk in Jack, a career desk jockey forced into the field, and Sarah Mariana, an ambitious, new Puerto Rican soldier who wants to make her mark on the world. Most of all, Edward has created an engaging hero in Dirk, bound for greater things in the series’ next entry.

Through sheer will, a lone wolf agent makes a big impact in this exciting tale.

**GRIDIRON GIRL**

*Girardi, Tamara*

Wise Wolf Books (333 pp.)


A teenager makes a huge change in her life to follow her athletic dreams in Girardi’s YA novel.

Julia Medina comes from a family of quarterbacks in small-town Pennsylvania. Football is their life, but as the youngest child and only girl, she ended up playing volleyball, instead. She's expected to play hard and get scouted for an athletic scholarship during her senior year of high school. Around her 18th birthday, Julia starts to think about what she really wants, and she's not sure it's playing volleyball. She's good at it, but her drive and passion for the sport have faded. Still, the Medinas are not a family of quitters, and after she gets elected team captain, it becomes even harder to leave the sport behind. Playing football with her brothers and friends on her birthday just solidifies her need to do something different and follow her true desires. But just as Julia decides that she's going to try out for the open quarterback position on the Iron Valley Vikings football team, her boyfriend, Owen Malone, announces his decision to do the same. Girardi offers a coming-of-age novel that will resonate with teens who remain committed to their goals even when life seems to throw every possible obstacle in their way. The author wastes no time by jumping right into the plot and keeping the story moving at a brisk but pleasing pace. Julia's fears about disappointing her friends and family while still wanting to play the game she loves make her a highly sympathetic character. The cast of secondary players, including her brothers and grandmother, comes across as genuine and adds extra humor and just the right amount of non-sports drama.

A fast-paced, character-driven novel about a girl going her own way.

**THE ANTHROPOCENE EPOCH**

*Glass, Bruce*

DBG Publishing (220 pp.)

$14.95 paper | $8.95 e-book | Sept. 22, 2021

978-0-578-99530-4

A history of the effect of human activity on the natural world.

Commercial photographer Glass, the author of *Exploring Faith and Reason: The Reconciliation of Christianity and Biological Evolution* (2013), makes a case for why the current geological era, classified as the Holocene Epoch, should be called the Anthropocene Epoch, as it has been shaped so profoundly by human activity. The author begins, however, with a history of past mass extinctions on Earth—and there have been a few. In describing the effects of humans on nature, he’s careful to emphasize that the news hasn’t been all
bad; for example, Glass notes the “Green Revolution” in agriculture that, in the last half-century, has defied predictions of Malthus and others that the world’s food supply couldn’t sustain a growing human population. He also provides compelling examples of how legislation, government action, and business incentives have made positive differences in terms of pollution and species endangerment; for instance, acid rain is no longer the issue it was a few decades ago thanks to government action to curb the pollution that caused it. That said, Glass also spends several pages castigating the effects of politics and a lack of faith in science and education, and his examples effectively reflect the policies of President Donald Trump’s administration and events in the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. In these sections, he veers excessively into polemics—adding more heat to the political climate instead of providing a needed source of light. However, he appealingly returns to a positive tone by the book’s end. Backmatter includes current lists of threatened and endangered species and the text of the House bill for the Green New Deal.

A refreshingly optimistic environmental survey.

**BREAKING & ENTERING**
*New and Selected Poems*
Goldberg, Barbara
WoodWorks (884 pp.)
$26.00 paper | Jan. 15, 2022
978-1-944585-46-4

A compilation of poems spanning more than three decades.

Goldberg’s works tackle a variety of themes that touch on the Renaissance, contemporary women’s issues, fairy tales, fables, and romantic and family relationships. This compilation is divided into six sections, with each corresponding to the time frame when the poems were published. Interestingly, the book starts with the poet’s most recent body of work, then jumps back to 1986, and from there proceeds chronologically with selections from previously published collections. The first and newest section explores events of day-to-day life, moving from concrete details to more global issues: “How beautiful it is by the sea, even though / there is war in the air.” The author uses familiar references, such as Penelope in the *Odyssey* or Marilyn Monroe, to discuss the ways women have been perceived by men throughout time, then presents these perceptions from women’s perspectives. In “Marilyn,” the speaker notes that “So many / girls like to make themselves stupid, or lose / on purpose, like this girl in college, also blond”; she also expresses her own preference for men “who hoarded secrets” over those who don’t know “how to spar or crack / a joke.” In the sections that follow, the author effectively employs an assortment of forms, incorporating dialogue, character descriptions that resemble those in a play, and letters, among other narrative devices. The third section, which is appropriately titled “Cautionary Tales,” puts intriguing spins on traditional fairy tales, as in “The Woodcutter,” which explores the life of the hunter from “Snow White.”

One of the book’s most notable features is the variety of voices and characters that the poet uses to engage the reader right up to the very end. Lush descriptions and images appear throughout, and the poems flow beautifully.

A delightful selection of playful and compelling works.

**EDGE OF ARMAGEDDON**
Graft, Brad
The Sager Group (552 pp.)
978-1-950154-71-5

This third installment of a historical fiction series focuses on Mamluk warriors. Graft follows up his previous book, *A Lion’s Share* (2019), with another narrative based on highly trained, enslaved soldiers known as Mamluks. It is the year 1257 when the Sultan of Egypt is murdered in his bath. It does not take long for Cenk, a Mamluk from the preceding two installments with a penchant for koumis (fermented mare’s milk), to dispense with the culprits. But what does the future hold for Egypt? Things are tense throughout the region. This is especially true thanks to a threat from the East. Mongol forces are on the warpath; their destruction of Baghdad is ruthless and quick. Those who hope to withstand one of their invasions will need more than luck on their side. It’s a good thing Egypt has men like Leander. Leander, a Mamluk who defected from the French years ago, is on a scouting mission. What he sees is not encouraging: The Mongols’ weaponry is advanced and their numbers are immense. To further complicate matters for Leander, a spy is looking for him. Meanwhile, an accomplished Kipchak craftswoman named Esel embarks on her own path of survival. Esel seeks to escape the life of an enslaved person to help a nephew she has not seen in years. Early portions of the narrative that focus on Esel can move slowly. Readers come to understand all about how (and why) Esel is so good at making bows. They also learn how important bows are when one lives in a harsh steppe environment. Wolves eating your livestock? Better have some well-made weapons at your disposal. Nevertheless, the story kicks into a higher gear when attention turns to the Mongols. Even if some of the political maneuvering and alliances can be complicated, readers learn a lot about the opponents approaching the Mamluks. From wielding mangonels and 12-foot lances fitted with hooks to displaying a fondness for systematically destroying local structures (and subsequently catapulting the debris), a fierce group that is too often generalized as a faceless horde is skillfully illuminated. When a battle approaches, even the horses “snort their realization of what soon comes.”

This absorbing tale deftly brings to life momentous military events of the 13th century.
Florida with Val, his boxing trainer. After all sorts of surprises (yes, he escapes). Off he goes to win back Kate, the wife. Pilate has a history in Cross. In fact, he wrote a bestseller about the town. People are getting shot again, and the acting sheriff, Jeremy Ryder, enlists him to help to sort it all out. Oh, and he has left a romantic entanglement back in Key West (yes, he escapes). Off he goes to win back Kate, the wife. Pilate has a history in Cross. In fact, he wrote a bestseller about the town. People are getting shot again, and the acting sheriff, Jeremy Ryder, enlists him to help to sort it all out. Oh, and he has left a romantic entanglement back in Key West (yes, he escapes). Off he goes to win back Kate, the wife.

A well-handled mystery with the appropriate twist at the end.

A grand slam life. A physician gets Covid, finds his way, and works to transform a Texas community.

A well-written and nuanced history of Vermont's social movements.

Green Mountain State. In this history of Vermont's popular movements, he seeks to "revisit Vermont's past with fresh eyes" and to "reclaim stories lost, distorted or buried along the way." While analyzing the progressive forces and nonpartisan independence that gave rise to Democratic socialist Bernie Sanders, the book is also careful to highlight Vermont's "blind spots and dark corners," noting, for instance, that no woman has ever represented the state in Washington, D.C. Divided into three parts that chronologically trace Vermont's history, the volume focuses on the 18th and 19th centuries in the first section, juxtaposing the state's progressive credentials (it was, for example, the first Colony to ban slavery during the American Revolution) with its record of violence toward Indigenous people and close relationship with the racist eugenics movement. Part 2 looks at the early 20th century and the role of localism and fierce independence that gave rise to the nonpartisan progressive election of James Burke as the long-standing mayor of Burlington. Even Vermont's conservative establishment often bucked its national party, such as the state's stalwart Republican United States Sen. Ralph Flanders, who joined Democrats in denouncing Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s. The book's final section centers on movements since World War II, with a particularly strong discussion of the rise of Howard Dean and Sanders as two of the country's most progressive voices. The volume combines the engaging, fast-paced writing style of a seasoned journalist with the craft of a skilled historian who has full command of historical trends and archival sources. Guma's accessible yet expert prose is accompanied by ample historical photographs, newspaper clippings, and maps. Though occasional tangents distract from its narrative timeline, this work delivers a definitive examination of how average people in one of the nation's smallest states have influenced and continued to shape American history.
“The story will comfort youngsters with chronic migraines and provide resourceful, helpful insights for friends and family of all ages.”

MIGRAINE AND MIA

His upbringing by a workaholic father and affectionate mother eventually influenced his own tireless commitment and compassion for others as a doctor. He attended medical school in Mexico on a baseball scholarship and later fulfilled his year of nationally mandated primary-care service in the small town of General Escobedo. He formed a strong bond with his patients there, which further shaped his life’s purpose. After finishing anxiety-filled residencies in New York City and Wheeling, West Virginia, Haber returned to Laredo, where he treated more than 12,000 people in his private practice. Over the course of this remembrance, Haber and Herman use vivid anecdotes to share inspiring moments in the doctor’s life story. Haber’s genuine, humble spirit shines through, particularly in testimonials written by co-workers and colleagues that paint him as a role model for compassionate care. Haber’s recognition that American society has become even more polarized during the Covid-19 pandemic gives greater weight to his call for greater selflessness and humanity. At the onset of the virus’s spread, his new clinical trial practice provided opportunities to support Laredo’s underserved community in ways he’d never imagined; as he began to conduct Moderna vaccine trials in South Texas, Haber encountered distrust of vaccines, and he resolved to do whatever he could to improve vaccine education and outreach. He also experienced an epiphany after his own battle with Covid-19, which included a week in an intensive care unit—and decided to write this earnest book.

A heartfelt work that challenges readers to consider how best to live one’s life in a post-pandemic world.

MIGRAINE AND MIA

Harrison, Kat
Illus. by Marusha Belle
Warren Publishing (28 pp.)
$17.95 | $9.95 paper | Aug. 31, 2021
978-1-954614-35-2
978-1-954614-36-9 paper

A girl explains what having a migraine feels like in Harrison’s picture book.

Mia, who has light skin and dark hair, has chronic migraines—“the opposite of fun.” The debilitating condition is more than just a headache, she explains. A migraine is “a full-body pain parade that’ll make your stomach swashbuckle and your skin swelter.” The painful episodes can occur any time, even if you’re “in the middle of biting into the world’s best donut.” Things like the weather, certain smells, and light “can hurt and make a migraine grow.” The senses are often affected, too—migraines “can make you see dots, or stripes or...an aura,” and they can sound like a “rapid heartbeat with the volume turned up, or a ringing bell.” Finally, Mia recommends that if you meet someone with a migraine, “build them a comfy and cozy cave” where they can recuperate. Mia is a spirited protagonist. Her creative language and animated examples are educational and kid-friendly. The story will comfort youngsters with chronic migraines and provide resourceful, helpful insights for friends and family of all ages. Belle’s appealing illustrations, which look hand-painted, offer imaginative scenes. For instance, when Mia explains that a migraine can cause irritation that feels like “a prickly cactus playing hopscotch on your skin,” an anthropomorphic cactus hops on her arm. Bold backdrops and swirls of color, texture, and patterns surround Mia as she describes a migraine’s visual manifestations. Includes a fact sheet from American Migraine Foundation.

A well-illustrated, informative story about a painful chronic condition.

JUMPBACK

Hayman, Terry
Fiero Publishing (333 pp.)

The opening act in a new SF thriller series about a time-traveling psychologist. When Jackson Traina was 17, he naively tried to help his older brother Kenny get away from a vicious gang he was involved with. The unsuccessful attempt resulted in Kenny’s getting cut up, and Jackson was similarly scarred by trauma. Kenny’s family never saw him again, and they assumed that the gang members later killed him. Eighteen years later, Jackson is a well-established psychologist and professor who’s still reeling from his failure to save his sibling; he struggles with survivor’s guilt, PTSD, and social anxiety. However, he finds that his work and strict routines provide him with a sense of control. Then he meets two people who upend his life: Dr. Lena Cortland, a physicist experimenting with time travel, and a terrifying figure from his past. During a violent confrontation with the latter in Lena’s particle accelerator lab, Jackson finds that he’s suddenly able to jump back in time in 10-minute increments. This ability—if he can find a way to control it—could allow him to finally discover what happened to Kenny and perhaps save his sibling’s life. Hayman’s offering is a smart and unique take on time-travel tropes that combines a good SF foundation with a portrait of Jackson’s mental health. The work deftly uses Jackson’s constant alertness and fear as time-hopping catalysts. Along the way, the novel thoughtfully examines the protagonist’s PTSD and showcases his awareness of his own limits; it also highlights the likable character’s kindness toward his patients and students. Because he’s unable to move on, he keeps trying to use his newfound abilities—doing “whatever it takes”—to fix things, but every time he does so, it results in unpleasant physical and psychological consequences. This debut is further enriched by the budding romance between Jackson and Lena, the topical setting in a post-Covid Seattle, and the depiction of Jackson’s family dynamics. Overall, it’s a promising start to a planned series.

An entertaining, dynamic, and thoughtful time-tripping tale.
A veteran consultant assesses his career after a cancer diagnosis. In this debut business book, Hilditch looks back on 40 years as an environmental consultant—with a perspective shaped by a recent diagnosis of brain cancer. Hilditch worked for large firms and also founded his own business. Here, he analyzes consulting companies—how consultants interact with clients, what it means to be a good employer or colleague, and how ethical consultants can make a positive difference in the world. Topics include practical matters, like business development, contracts, and billing, along with more abstract considerations, including the role ego plays in the workplace, something Hilditch has studied in depth. The author covers favorite projects, like the restoration of an endangered warbler’s habitat, alongside tips on using LinkedIn to build connections throughout the consulting world. The idiosyncratic blend of personal passions and traditional workplace advice makes this an engaging read, and Hilditch imbues his work with a retrospective self-assessment (“I acknowledge that I have spent the last few decades working intensely as a human ‘doing’ not as a human ‘being’”). The text returns frequently to the topic of the ego, and Hilditch does not hesitate to point out when his got in his way before he learned how to check it. Although he primarily addresses his fellow environmental consultants, both the topics and the advice are broadly applicable across the business world. It’s concisely and coherently written, with bulleted summaries at the end of each chapter. While the idea of bringing humility into the work environment is not a new one, Hilditch is a qualified and convincing advocate for the concept, and he makes it clear that being authentic on the job doesn’t conflict with delivering solid financial results.

**BECOMING AN ENLIGHTENED CONSULTANT**

*Awakened by Cancer*

Hilditch, Tom

FriesenPress (182 pp.)

978-1-5255-9626-4

978-1-5255-9625-7 paper

A cogent, grounded examination of business practices.

**COTTONLANDIA**

*Key, Watt*

Self (370 pp.)


979-8-4863-8719-7

A privileged youth spends a winter break on his aging grandmother’s farm in this YA novel. It’s the holiday season on the brink of the new millennium in Manhattan, and temperamental, spoiled teenager Win Canterbury has just been informed of a major change. His parents want him to spend his private prep school’s four-day winter break with his grandmother in Mississippi. His wealthy best friend, Jules Brevard, who treats life like a “personal cruise ship of adventure,” tells Win to go hunting during his Southern vacation. After a short period of white-knuckle reservations, Win reluctantly agrees and heads to “Cottonlandia.” The ancestral, 3,000-acre cotton plantation features a crumbling main house and is home to a weathered local farmer named John Case, caretaker Gert, and Win’s decrepit grandmother, who appears gravely ill. Staying in his father’s childhood bedroom, Win experiences swift culture shock: The plantation’s accommodations are impossibly rustic, with limited electricity, no internet service, and no transportation. But this is the least of his worries. Win’s father unceremoniously arrives at the farm to announce federal charges being brought against him and that the teen’s mother has become emotionally unstable. The plantation will be Win’s new home indefinitely. After a period of denial, the truth sets in as Win, donning camouflage coveralls, must make peace with the dusty realities of Cottonlandia, his makeshift family, and a few ornery locals. Will the young, independent-minded, restless Win let the humble, backwoods country life of school, work, hunting, and dirt grow on him, or will he bolt back to the privileged urban glitz he’s accustomed to?

Key sets up this scenario expertly and sketches Cottonlandia with a gritty realism. The nearby town is populated with an endearing cast hobbled by poverty yet emboldened by Southern pride, and Win’s education percolates with the slow, persuasive simmer of the “new, strange life” that somehow just might work out. As “sentimental and impractical” as Win’s father considers the plantation, his son soon discovers a world of purpose, drive, and character-building work. This environment affords the author opportunities for descriptive brilliance, such as Win eating the gamey venison he’d shot days before that tasted “like the first time you try a lamb chop”; riding a mattress harnessed to the back of an ATV at a holiday party; and observing the local swamps at dusk “throbbing and pulsing with frogs and insects.” The tension between Win and his father is palpable, much in the same way as the teen’s resistance to settling into the slow, Southern way of life as the forgotten, bucolic cotton farm begins to blossom all around him. Key’s YA debut, *Alabama Moon* (2006), was released to wide acclaim, including a movie adaptation. Here, he utilizes the same seamless storytelling skills in an engrossing, resonant tale of humility, history, and the gravitas of family obligation. The author focuses on the excitement, the trepidation, and the anticipation of unknown places, new directions, and unfamiliar people. Key structures his introspective story around 87 brisk, clipped chapters, which serves to both tell a fast-paced, enjoyably uncomplicated tale and to create a simple yet memorable reading experience. Readers of Southern fiction and charmingly evocative tales of personal growth will find much to savor in this novel.

An affecting contemporary tale of self-discovery set against a richly portrayed Deep South backdrop.
“An approachable edition of Mencius’ philosophy that makes his wit and wisdom relevant for a new age.”

**MENCIUS IN MODERN PERSPECTIVES**

Li, Raymond K.

An annotated edition of a classic Chinese philosophical treatise, which aims to explain ancient wisdom to modern readers.

By 2182, the people of Earth are exploring the cosmos under the aegis of the Solar Commonwealth, a governmental body led by a sharp, charismatic, and somewhat mysterious man known as the Regent. In this novel, the Regent relates his origin—and that of the Solar Commonwealth—to an aged admiral of his fleet. Initially, the Regent was an anonymous human, plucked from Earth in 2017 by powerful, benevolent aliens who erased much of his memory but granted him enhanced intelligence, longevity, and other advantages. He was then put in charge of a formidable fleet of advanced ships (including one called Enterprise) and some 12 million human troops abducted by aliens over centuries. The Regent must use these to make contact with Earth and unite the peoples of the turbulent planet under a single, progressive authority; otherwise, mankind will be classed as a hopeless race and quarantined. Unlike many humans under his command (including latter-day imperial Roman troops), the Regent wants to find a peaceful way to get Earth to submit. However, his methods not only make him an enemy of China and the United States, but also spawn treachery in his own ranks. Followers of Lallier’s Solar Commonwealth series hopefully consider it one of the Regent’s SF prequel, a human is appointed by aliens to unite a fractious Earth.

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**THE PROMETHEAN CHALLENGE**

_Lallier, John_

Self (496 pp.)

$17.00 paper | $3.99 e-book | Sept. 16, 2020

979-8683832162

In Lallier’s SF prequel, a human is appointed by aliens to unite a fractious Earth.

By 2182, the people of Earth are exploring the cosmos under the aegis of the Solar Commonwealth, a governmental body led by a sharp, charismatic, and somewhat mysterious man known as the Regent. In this novel, the Regent relates his origin—and that of the Solar Commonwealth—to an aged admiral of his fleet. Initially, the Regent was an anonymous human, plucked from Earth in 2017 by powerful, benevolent aliens who erased much of his memory but granted him enhanced intelligence, longevity, and other advantages. He was then put in charge of a formidable fleet of advanced ships (including one called Enterprise) and some 12 million human troops abducted by aliens over centuries. The Regent must use these to make contact with Earth and unite the peoples of the turbulent planet under a single, progressive authority; otherwise, mankind will be classed as a hopeless race and quarantined. Unlike many humans under his command (including latter-day imperial Roman troops), the Regent wants to find a peaceful way to get Earth to submit. However, his methods not only make him an enemy of China and the United States, but also spawn treachery in his own ranks. Followers of Lallier’s Solar Commonwealth series hopefully consider it one of the Regent’s SF prequel, a human is appointed by aliens to unite a fractious Earth.

An entertaining, very-special-episode entry of a fine series.
of one figure, prompting Li’s punchline that it’s “a reminder for corporate executives.”) The end result presents readers with a nice blend of scholarly erudition and occasional flights of imagi-
native interpretation.

An approachable edition of Mencius’ philosophy that makes his wit and wisdom relevant for a new age.

RUNNING AFTER DELANO

Middleton, Zachary Delano
Grace to Cultivate (136 pp.)
$15.00 paper | $8.00 e-book | April 28, 2021
978-1-73-705560-0

A debut middle-grade novel fictional-
izes the experiences of the author’s father and great-uncle during the Orangeburg Massacre.

Alonzo lives in the shadow of his young uncle, Delano. Sometimes literally. On occasion, the Black 10-year-old likes to secretly follow Delano on his way to high school, just to mimic the way he walks. Born to a young mother and raised on a small farm in Orangeburg, South Carolina, by his extended family, Alonzo is always looking for approval from the older boy. The teen is Alonzo’s role model, his “big boy,” as Delano’s brother likes to tease. Delano is a football star, with skills good enough to attract college recruiters to come to town to see him play. He dreams of college, but not only to play ball. “I want to go to college because I want to build something,” he tells a friend. “I want to own land. I want to have a wife and kids, and I want to do something about the way the world is, especially for blacks. I think college will help me do that.” When Alonzo fails to get Delano his gear in time for a football game against a rival team, the boy is filled with shame for disappointing his hero. That same day, he witnesses an early vision of South Car-
olina’s Jim Crow order when his friend’s father is arrested for simply glancing at a White woman. Alonzo keeps getting into trouble—he’s inept at anticipating the consequences of his or anyone else’s actions—but his trespasses pale in comparison to Delano’s. The overcast sky resembled the grey color of newly poured concrete. A storm was on the horizon. The short novel is structured around two brief time periods: a slice-of-life section in September 1967 and the days surrounding the Orangeburg Massacre in February 1968.

Between the two parts, the author includes photographs of some of the real-life inspirations for his characters taken at the time or afterward. Middleton succeeds in translating the story into immersive, youth-oriented fiction, capturing Alonzo’s psychological state and the texture of his world, including the many games and activities he enjoys with his friends. The politics of the time are present but incorporated into the tale in a way that feels organic and emotionally resonant. Young readers will enjoy this short, tragic window into the lives of Alonzo and his family and the realities of the Jim Crow South.

A concise Jim Crow tale that brings a true story to vibrant life.

HOW THE BEATLES KNEW

A Theory of How They Wrote Their Songs

Nicolini, Ilse
Tonal Publications (446 pp.)
March 26, 2021
978-1-73651-712-3

A heavily biographical work explores the origins of the Beatles’ art.

In her study of the Beatles’ lyrics and artistic development, Nicolini centers the heart of their genius’s origin in the London home of Margaret and Richard Asher and their children, which featured an “intellectual, cultured and liberal” family atmosphere. Both Paul McCartney and John Lennon “hung out and wrote songs” in the Ashers’ basement, probably perusing Richard’s extensive library of psychological writings. The author infuses her narrative with psychological shadings intended to inform the personal elements of the story. She often refers to what she calls McCartney’s “IFP,” his “identity fracture project,” the developing psychological “praxis” that gave birth to his songs. (IFP, Nicolini writes, is not a term McCartney himself would have used; “it is the name I assign to his artistic process.”) The Beatles’ songs are given rigorous, exhaustive deconstructions in these pages, with even minor works coming in for extensive analysis. “Here, There and Everywhere” is “basically a picture of loss of identity when in love, as it is traditionally understood in literature,” the author writes. “I suggest that in this song, Paul has again put an IFP idea: he is describing a scattered person with no basis, and one must point out that having no basis is the definition of schizophrenia.” Sheranges her examination of the creative forces acting on the Beatles (mainly McCartney and Lennon) across all kinds of influences, from early musical factors to poets like Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath, and the result is completely absorbing. Nicolini’s biographical approach is richly nuanced and refresh-
ingly literary; every trace of possible inspiration is tracked down with sensitivity. The book is a must-have for any Beatles library.

A comprehensive and hugely rewarding look at the Beatles’ creativity.
A debut historical biography of a Colonial Massachusetts woman who plotted her husband’s murder.

Bathsheba Spooner lived in Brookfield during the Revolutionary War as the 20-something wife of Joshua Spooner, the mother of two young children, and the daughter of the highly vocal loyalist Timothy Ruggles. But she was dissatisfied with her lot in life, and when she met Ezra Ross, a 16-year-old member of a local militia, the two began a troubling sexual relationship. Soon, British Pvt. William Brooks and Sgt. James Buchanan, two former prisoners of war who stayed in the Spooner household, also became her lovers, and along with Ross, they would eventually execute a plan to murder her spouse. All four parties were later indicted, a trial ensued, and they faced execution, which forever cemented Bathsheba’s infamy. In his nonfiction work, Noone’s prose is erudite and accessible as he offers an in-depth look into Bathsheba’s background as well as those of the other players in this true-crime tale. He deftly offers extensive historical context as well, as when he writes of how the political conflict between loyalists and patriots raged in small towns (“In few towns, however, were the lines of demarcation so sharply drawn as in Worcester”) and presents painstaking detail about the home lives of women. Although the story is engaging on its own, it’s particularly intriguing when Noone examines Bathsheba’s mental health and how it might be perceived in the present day, noting that the question of her “mental competence has more recently become an issue” among historians. Although Noone focuses mainly on Worcester and the Spooners’ story, his thorough description of the events leading up to the American Revolution, as well as the war itself, provides a fine chronicle of New England’s cultural and political climate.

An informative read that will likely appeal to American history buffs.
such as the value of learning more about the lives of your subject's contemporaries. Much of her advice will be relevant for would-be novelists, as well, as she outlines considerations that are important for all writers to consider.

A comprehensive resource for writing dramatic narratives about real people.

REMOTE LEADERSHIP
How To Accelerate Achievement and Create a Community in a Work-From-Home World
Pachter, David
Amplify Publishing (240 pp.)
978-1-64543-539-6

A debut guide offers a levelheaded strategy for leading in the remote workplace.

One disruptive result of the Covid-19 pandemic was the rapid acceleration of work from home, leaving senior executives legitimately concerned about how to manage and lead remote employees. Pachter, founder and co-founder of several businesses, has personally navigated the ups and downs of remote leadership and shares both his experiences and his insights in this outstanding book. Primarily targeting the small company owner/CEO, the author makes a strong case for transformational change. He effectively suggests that it is time to jettison the traditional “command-and-control authority” of the CEO and instead adopt “leadership-based sharing” because “in your remote enterprise, each employee is in his or her own world, a single-serving CEO of themselves.” Pachter lays out a specific plan for making this transition, basing it on “the Three Pillars of great remote organizations”: “Reflective Leadership,” “Coaching Mindset and Culture,” and “Peer Learning.”

An overview of the new workplace provides an unsparring look at how far-flung employees’ various locations affect not just the way they collaborate, but also the manner in which they need to be managed. Leaders, writes the author, must move out of their comfort zones, learning such potentially unsettling techniques as adopting “radical candor,” “giving up being the problem solver,” and embracing “skip-level management.” Ultimately, the most important measurement criterion for WFH success is “Accountability.” Pachter explores the Three Pillars in detail, thoroughly explaining their importance, and illustrates each with superb examples drawn from his own experiences and other sources. The content surrounding Reflective Leadership is filled with wisdom that is sure to spark introspection. Here, the author talks about practicing “servant leadership,” “distinguishing between empathy and accountability,” and learning how to “slow down your reactions.” In Coaching, Pachter cites pertinent examples, makes salient observations, and provides perceptive counsel. Peer Learning is a captivating view into how the author’s own organization used “Circles,” a digital methodology designed to encourage participation with the objective of “reflecting the group’s shared purpose.” Pachter is a polished communicator; his writing is clear, fluid, and engaging.

Extremely timely and highly actionable advice on remote leadership.

LOUSE POINT
Stories From the East End
Raebeck, Shelby
Gatekeeper Press (228 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Sept. 23, 2021
978-1-66291-782-0

A short story collection that delves into the intricacies of love, family, marriage, and community in the East End of Long Island, New York.

Raebeck begins with “Dream Girls,” about a family coping with grief. Fourteen-year-old Ricky’s mother has died, but he still sees her as an apparition in the bathroom; he talks to her about his life and how he and the family are getting on in the aftermath of her death. In “Walking Dunes,” Darlene’s husband leaves her, and she chases after him, dragging her daughter and son along with her. Later in the collection, “Wiborg” shows how a woman’s close relationship to the land has caused a rift in her family. There’s an ongoing theme of loss and division in these tales—of people yearning for each other but unable to bridge the gap caused by their circumstances. This is especially apparent in the titular story, in which an adult Ricky describes how his sister, a single mother who just left a terrible relationship, begins to follow a similar pattern with Ricky’s 29-year-old stockbroker friend Babiak. In another story involving a troubled marriage, “Fremont’s Farewell” tells the tale of a teacher who tries to teach his students about what he feels are life’s most important lessons but instead reveals his own personal history. He describes spending the day with his son in a touching scene that’s effectively juxtaposed with his generally cynical point of view. Raebeck also has a talent for showing how characters play different roles in others’ lives, such as parents, siblings, and childhood friends. “Camp Hero” is about a teen named Lance who tries to push Ricky onto his family to fill the void he’s about to leave in their lives as he heads off to college. The story generates heartfelt sympathy for Lance, who wants to protect and provide for his loved ones but needs to go his own way, and Ricky, who’s kind but has his own problems.

A poignant and often riveting collection of small-town tales.
LULU AND THE MISSING TOOTH FAIRY
Richey, S.E.
 Illus. by Jhon Ortiz
Bright Meadow Press
978-0-578-89850-6

A lost, inexperienced tooth fairy keeps a 5-year-old child waiting for her money in this debut picture book.

Lulu, a bespectacled White girl about to lose her first tooth, plans to spend her reward on a pony. At the same time, Trixie looks forward to her first assignment as a tooth fairy. When Lulu’s tooth pops out (with the help of a slammed door and string), Trixie plugs her assignment into her Fairy Positioning System and heads out. But instead of going to San Juan Island, Washington, she arrives in San Juan, Puerto Rico. There, she meets Ratoncito, who collects the teeth of kids in Puerto Rico, and realizes she has to try again. After another false start, Trixie finally arrives, and Lulu uses her tooth fairy money to get a playmate—a hobby horse. The parallel stories of Lulu and Trixie only intersect in the one moment where both are in the same room in a sweet two-page spread. Ortiz’s digital cartoon illustrations give her first impression of watercolors, with soft edges and invisible linework, presenting lush environments for Trixie’s travels. Richey’s accessible text features several vocabulary words that may challenge emergent readers (cavities, drenched). Some design choices add an extra oomph to action words like looped. The messages that a fairy should never give up and that different places have their own distinctive tooth traditions come through beautifully.

A clever, humorous, and joyful tooth story.

THE AMERICAN
River, Indy
Grimweir Publishing (474 pp.)
$35.00 | $7.99 e-book | Nov. 19, 2021
978-1-73760-871-4

An American woman abroad finds inner strength and new romance in this globe-trotting adventure.

At the beginning of River’s debut novel, Kelly Morrison is at professional and personal dead ends. After almost seven years in low-level jobs at a Minneapolis advertising firm, she realizes that she’s never going to be promoted to copywriter. Kelly is also tired of looking at her handsome boss, Percy Loomis, who lured her into a one-night stand before marrying someone else. So when her best friend, Yang Qing, invites her to his wedding in China, she decides to go early and spend six weeks at a retreat in a castle-turned-monastery. But one day, she stumbles over Li, the 10-year-old son of the monastery’s maid, in a corridor. When she tries to reunite the boy with his mother, she and Li see and hear things that they shouldn’t—and within minutes, they’re both on the run. She manages to meet up with Qing, who introduces her to his Australian friend Durango Trunk, a resourceful—and very attractive—tour guide. Kelly just wants to get to a branch of the American Embassy, but Durango proposes fleeing to India instead. Kelly’s decision kicks off a breakneck international journey, complete with car chases, mudslides, amazing scenery, explosions, and daring rescues—and although she and Durango are keeping secrets from each other, their mutual attraction becomes undeniable. River’s tightly plotted and suspenseful novel is also well researched, with engaging facts about hydroelectricity, chemistry, and Chinese history woven organically into the narrative. Some elements of River’s story feel implausible, however; for example, if all the monks running the monastery’s retreat center were as creepy and hostile as Kelly describes them, few visitors would stay there. In addition, Durango’s backstory seems too good to be true, even for a romantic hero. Still, both leads are so likable, and the plot so exciting, that readers will forgive some far-fetched elements.

A propulsive and compelling international thriller.
“Sheppard gives an insider’s view of Nantucket that summer visitors never see, one that’s quieter, more intimate, and more genuine.”

NANTUCKET NOCTURNE

NANTUCKET NOCTURNE

A humorous, thorough exploration of whether forward time travel is theoretically possible.

IT’S REALLY ABOUT TIME

The Science of Time Travel

Ryan, John Oliver


A layperson’s guide to Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity and the possibility of forward time travel.

Physics enthusiast Ryan has written a guide for curious readers that gives an overview of Einstein’s work and his role in reshaping humanity’s understanding of nature, primarily through relativistic time dilation. With thought experiments rather than advanced math, he presents the science for traveling forward in time. He also offers historical background on Isaac Newton, who outlined the laws of motion in the 17th century; and James Clerk Maxwell, who discovered electromagnetic waves. The book includes four major sections—a review of elementary physics, a discussion of Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity, an explanation of time dilation, and the primary thought experiment illustrating time travel. Throughout, illustrations and a few limericks help simplify complex ideas, such as the propagation of sound waves. The characters in the principle thought experiment are Harry, 26 years old; and Carrie, 18 years old. They plan to marry when Carrie turns 21, but her grandmother’s will stipulates that she’ll gain a beautiful house in San Francisco if “she did not marry” before turning 28 and married someone close to “her own physiological age.” Making allowances for future breakthroughs in space flight, can we find a solution for the young lovers? Ryan ably elucidates Einstein’s bedrock notion that one can “travel at extremely high speed for a period of time, and...you will have travelled some amount of time into the future of all those who stayed put,” and he does so with a sense of humor. Those with a superficial understanding of Einstein’s contributions to physics will learn deeper concepts like the “FitzGerald contraction,” in which physicist George Francis FitzGerald “proposed that objects contract in their direction of motion by an amount dependent on their speed.” Ryan also gently reminds those who might mistrust science that, “If every...measurement we make about some particular aspect of our universe yields the same answer, then we are justified, absent evidence to the contrary,” in stating the answer as fact. A wonderful punchline awaits Harry and Carrie in the end.

A Winter’s Idyll

Sheppard, Steve

$20.00 paper | Oct. 11, 2021

The hunt is on for a rumored treasure chest that was stolen and buried 20 years ago in this sequel.

The novel Tourist Town (2016), a woman with amnesia found herself on Nantucket. She adopted the name Verona and, though her memory was restored, she stayed on. For the last few years, she and her boyfriend, tour-bus driver Addie McDaniel, have lived happily in their friend Clarence “Digit” Hathaway’s spacious house. But—with the couple’s relationship heading toward the next level—it’s now time to get a cottage of their own. Needing an off-season job, Addie stumbles into one as a reporter for the local paper and discovers a hidden talent for nosing around. Chief C.C. Dennison of the Coast Guard, one source, informs Addie that an island exile named Dirk Caspian is back after 20 years, intent on digging up a protected marsh for bogus reasons. The chief also tells the tale of a 20-year-old mystery— the unsolved robbery of an old, locked sea chest. Secrets past and present swirl around Nantucket as interested parties search for the lost treasure, which is deeply connected to the island’s history. Sheppard gives an insider’s view of Nantucket that summer...
visitors never see, one that’s quieter, more intimate, and more genuine. The story has comedy and warmth, as with the tender Addie-V erona romance—but it would be a mistake to consider Nantucket as merely cozy. The island is also haunted by the inescapable brutalities of its whaling past, as with the old chest’s first owner, a whaling captain. Supernatural undercurrents, as enigmatic as the surrounding sea, touch Nantucket and its inhabitants as well.

An involving mystery with humor, heart, and a strong sense of place.

**SAYONARA BABY**
*An Australian Fugue Novel*
Skilbeck, Ruth
Borderstream Books (240 pp.)

In this novel, an aspiring writer navigates unstable relationships during the early days of the Australian punk scene in the early 1980s.

Skilbeck, the author of *Australian Fugue: The Antipode Room* (2019), organizes the story of Roxanne “Roxy” Bergson around her romantic interactions with two men. Northern Irish Roxy, who was living in Japan, arrives for college in Adelaide with Samuel, her partner of four years—a man with whom, in her estimation, she was “supposed to have split up weeks before.” She finds Samuel particularly burdensome after she meets and sleeps with Raymond Furnett, an older university student and performance artist, so she confesses her infidelity to Samuel to push him to leave her. For Roxy, Raymond sparks “an overpowering Desire and angst. Seamus is also, like many teens, callow, grandiose, snobbish, and overwrought. (“Its eyes are so startled, you’d think it’d actually been alive long enough to see what a fuckin’ horrible world this is,” he observes of a fetal pig in biology class.)

The melodramatic novel somewhat uncritically endorses Sea- mum’s immature dudgeon given the over-the-top hate he gets from other characters. Still, the author is a gifted writer who skilfully deploys energetic, evocative prose. His panorama of Chicago is grungily atmospheric—“Two large Latinas shrieked and ear-pierce-belly-laughed over Schlitz cans as they sat on stools, talking Spanglish on the front fire escape”—and Seamus’ arresting voice indelibly conveys the wounding loneliness of adolescence. (“I was going to do my usual thing of shuttling my ass, all alone, up and down the stairs between the main floor and video room” at a club, “wishing I had someone to talk to, wishing I knew people.”) Seamus isn’t the wisest of heroes, but many readers will see themselves in him.

A fresh, engrossing tale of a misfit kid pitting his dreams against an unforgiving society.
A musician faces a crisis when her band breaks up in this contemporary novel.

Guitarist Taryn Taylor is the daughter of a rock star, but she isn’t so much following in his footsteps as getting lost beneath his shadow. Her band, Pause for Effect, started when she and her cohorts were in high school. Now, five years later and at the end of a big tour, the group’s colorful and troubled frontman, Parker, announces he’s leaving the band. Taryn continues to hope that Parker’s departure is just a hiatus. But her girlfriend—the group’s bassist, Shay—wants out of the band, too, and begs Taryn to come with her. Taryn won’t let go of the group, and Shay leaves her. The next few months are traumatic for Taryn. Parker gets a lot of press for his solo career; a sleazy journalist pursues the ex–band mates; and Taryn tries dating someone else. Then, Parker publicly outs Taryn and Shay from a phone screen. (A grandparent is pictured on a phone screen.) The author’s matter-of-fact approach to the circumstances. The boy accepts those variations even if he feels that “sometimes” can be a bit tiresome. “Sometimes it’s hot. Sometimes it’s cool,” the boy says, shown playing ball at the beach in the summer and skating in the winter. “Sometimes I walk,” he says, climbing the stairs, and “sometimes” he takes the elevator. “Sometimes” he travels by car or bus; “sometimes” he rides his bicycle. Sometimes it’s cool,” the boy says, shown playing ball at the beach in the summer and skating in the winter. “Sometimes I walk,” he says, climbing the stairs, and “sometimes” he takes the elevator. “Sometimes” he travels by car or bus; “sometimes” he rides his bicycle.

Lessa Vatner’s charming, read-aloud board book acknowledges that kids may feel unsettled as their familiar routines are disrupted by safety precautions against Covid-19. The rhythmic text offers them a comforting perspective about change. In the story, a Black child, pictured in artist Svenningsen’s whimsical scenes of daily life from morning to bedtime, reasons through how things are “sometimes” different day to day, depending on the circumstances. The boy accepts those variations even if he feels that “sometimes” can be a bit tiresome. “Sometimes it’s hot. Sometimes it’s cool,” the boy says, shown playing ball at the beach in the summer and skating in the winter. “Sometimes I walk,” he says, climbing the stairs, and “sometimes” he takes the elevator. “Sometimes” he travels by car or bus; “sometimes” he rides his bicycle.

In this picture book for preschoolers, a child views his daily life during the pandemic. Vatner’s charming, read-aloud board book acknowledges that kids may feel unsettled as their familiar routines are disrupted by safety precautions against Covid-19. The rhythmic text offers them a comforting perspective about change. In the story, a Black child, pictured in artist Svenningsen’s whimsical scenes of daily life from morning to bedtime, reasons through how things are “sometimes” different day to day, depending on the circumstances. The boy accepts those variations even if he feels that “sometimes” can be a bit tiresome. “Sometimes it’s hot. Sometimes it’s cool,” the boy says, shown playing ball at the beach in the summer and skating in the winter. “Sometimes I walk,” he says, climbing the stairs, and “sometimes” he takes the elevator. “Sometimes” he travels by car or bus; “sometimes” he rides his bicycle.

A reassuring and relatable message tailored to kids and delivered with endearing visual appeal.
hounding her to finish her research into 12th-century South Indian saints. While walking home from the grocery store one night, she comes upon a woman having a heart attack, and even as Anjali helps, she knows she needs more assistance. Then a blue-clad man appears who reminds her of the god Shiva—not necessarily in his looks, but in his bearing—and together they keep the woman stable until the ambulance arrives. After this encounter, Anjali begins to see the same man everywhere—even in her dreams—but every time she tries to follow him or speak to him, he’s too far away. Soon, Anjali’s research moves firmly toward the study of those who worship Shiva, and in her dreams, she takes the god as a lover. However, her waking life is slowly unraveling—especially her marriage to a stockbroker she calls Zoo. Her dream lover, who taunts and teases her with glimpses during the day, may be her undoing, but he may also provide her with the motivation to take her research to new realms. Wali delves into the history of Shiva worship in this off-beat romance, which has a lyrical, poetic quality to it, aided by the frequent inclusion of poems by Akka Mahadevi, a real-life 12th-century mystic poet who left her own marriage to devote herself to Shiva. The novel shows its research throughout, and the author does a solid job giving Shiva a believable, tangible human form. The scenes in which Anjali starts to feel lost are particularly well written, and some readers are sure to find them relatable.

An unusual and engaging take on the Hindu pantheon.

THE DEAD BELL
Winslow, Reid
Quid Mirum Press (442 pp.)
Aug. 11, 2021
978-1-955018-19-7

A widely disliked, wealthy old woman is found murdered on the grounds of her manicured estate in a crime novel steeped in drama, trauma, and secrets.

In Winslow’s auspicious debut mystery, Faith Wesley, a prominent resident of affluent Lake Forest, Illinois, must have been killed in her garden early in the day; the ground beneath her corpse feels moist from morning dew but not soaked from sprinklers that fire up at 6:45 a.m. Veteran investigating detective Tom Edison notes a “gash the color of crushed pomegranates” on Faith’s pale neck. The estate’s security cameras weren’t working at the time of the murder, and the groundskeeper hasn’t shown up for work yet. Faith’s 40-something daughter, Linda Edwards, treats Tom icily, saying she has to get her 10-year-old daughter to soccer. Faith and Linda had a turbulent relationship, but Linda’s been living at the estate since her messy divorce from a well-known Chicago attorney, who, it’s later revealed, has a reason to want Faith dead. Tom, divorced and recently separated from his live-in partner—they broke up fighting over a cat, as she was pro-feline and he wasn’t—wastes no time sleeping with Linda’s best friend, Nora, who lived with the Wesleys decades ago after her parents died after driving their car into a lagoon—the cause of which has never been established. A lagoon-related mishap looms large in Tom’s life; when he was 13, a speedboat’s collision with a wooden raft in another lagoon caused his friend to nearly drown, and a secret about the crash continues to haunt him. This complex mystery offers much to keep the reader engaged, including compelling, flawed characters; a complicated yet believable plot touching on themes of corruption and class; strong dialogue; and a satisfying ending. The author excels at accurate details, as well—even supplying the correct number of racquetball courts in a well-known Chicago North Shore sports center. Winslow’s use of language throughout also deserves special recognition, as it’s smart, flowing, and often poetic, as when Tom, sharing his past with Nora, notes that “Dark Knowledge had to be guarded, protected like a cracked rib, shielded like an abscess.”

A fabulous, well-researched whodunit.
ALICE SEBOLD APOLOGIZES TO MAN WRONGLY CONVICTED OF RAPE

Author Alice Sebold has apologized to a man wrongfully convicted of raping her, and her publisher has ceased publication of the memoir in which she recounts her sexual assault.

Sebold’s apology came a little more than a week after Anthony Broadwater was exonerated by a judge of the 1981 crime, for which he was convicted and served 16 years in prison. Sebold told the story of her assault in the 1999 memoir *Lucky*.

“First, I want to say that I am truly sorry to Anthony Broadwater and I deeply regret what you have been through,” Sebold wrote in a statement. “I am sorry most of all for the fact that the life you could have led was unjustly robbed from you, and I know that no apology can change what happened to you and never will.”

Sebold also wrote that she “will continue to struggle with the role that I unwittingly played within a system that sent an innocent man to jail. I will also grapple with the fact that my rapist will, in all likelihood, never be known, may have gone on to rape other women, and certainly will never serve the time in prison that Mr. Broadwater did.”

Scribner, which published *Lucky*, said in a statement that it “will cease distribution of all formats of Alice Sebold’s 1999 memoir *Lucky* while Sebold and Scribner together consider how the work might be revised.”

A planned film adaptation of *Lucky*, which was to star Victoria Pedretti as Sebold, was also canceled by its producers.

SERENA WILLIAMS TO PUBLISH A KIDS’ BOOK IN 2022

Serena Williams will make her children’s literature debut next year, *Good Morning America* announced last month.

Williams, widely considered one of the best tennis players of all time, will publish *The Adventures of Qai Qai* on Sept. 27, 2022, with Macmillan imprint Feiwel & Friends. The publisher describes the book, illustrated by Yesenia Moises (*Stella’s Stellar Hair*), as a “magical picture book” that “shows readers the power of believing—in your best friend and in yourself.”

The book follows a young girl worried about her upcoming dance recital who turns to her best friend, a doll named Qai Qai, for support.

Qai Qai is a celebrity in her own right. The beloved doll of Williams’ daughter, Olympia Ohanian, has her own Instagram account, with 353,000 followers. *The New York Times* has suggested that she’s “America’s most important doll,” and in 2019, she gave an exclusive interview to *Oprah Daily* magazine.

Qai Qai herself weighed in, of course, on Instagram. The post features an animated video of the doll reading Williams’ book and initially refusing to let a puppy join her. (She eventually relents.)

“Y’all didn’t really think I wasn’t going to share, did you?” the doll wrote.
In a thriving northerly city in late summer, a recently returned traveler feels unwell. Soon, after presenting some extremely worrying symptoms, he is dead. People go about their business all the same. Winter comes, and they huddle indoors. More die, but when summer arrives, those people crowd together outdoors, taking pains to conceal any signs of illness “to prevent authority shutting up their houses.”

The year is 1664, the start of what would come to be called the Great Plague of London. Over the course of a year and a half, that plague killed 100,000 people in the city—about a quarter of the population. Recording those events is Daniel Defoe, whose book *Robinson Crusoe* was still flying off the shelves when he published *A Journal of the Plague Year* six decades after the great pandemic, in 1722. He had seen much in a long lifetime: not just the plague, but also the Great Fire of London, a freak hurricane that felled millions of trees across England, wars with Holland, and the inside of a debtors prison.

Defoe was also a born rebel, constantly in trouble with the crown for his political and religious dissension, which he aired by means of broadsides and pamphlets. In *Journal*, he pilloried a government that was unprepared for the pandemic and followed a template all too familiar today: look for a rival nation to blame, fudge the numbers (“there were twenty more who were really dead of the plague in that parish, but had been set down of the spotted-fever or other distempers, besides others concealed”), acknowledge grudgingly that something is wrong, and finally encourage people to live as if there’s nothing to be done about it, the poor because they must, the rich because they’ve bribed the police to look the other way so that they can visit their clubs during lockdown.

Soon come the quacks, hawking bogus, “never-failing preservatives against the infection.” Meanwhile, the real doctors and nurses out on the front lines are dying right and left, having “ventured their lives even so far as to lose them in the service of mankind.” Corpses pile up on the streets, with no place to store them and no one to bury them. Those who can flee from the city. Those who cannot hide in their homes, and the economy grinds to a halt. Then, as suddenly as it appeared, the plague lifts, not for anything anyone has done but simply because of the whims of nature, “a visible summons to us all to thankfulness.”

In 1664, it should be noted, Daniel Defoe was only 4 years old. He wrote as if an eyewitness to the events of the Great Plague, and because of that, some critics have dismissed his book as mere fiction. A closer look shows that Defoe dug deep into the public records and interviewed survivors, making this a pioneering work of epidemiology and journalism as well as literature. At the start of our third year of pandemic, *A Journal of the Plague Year* makes for provocative and, 300 years later, timely reading.
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