FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK  | Tom Beer

Listening to the Changemakers

When we look at the world today, it’s easy to despair. Environmental degradation, racism, economic inequality, closed borders, the rise of fascist ideologies—not to mention a devastating global pandemic made worse by human negligence. How do we maintain hope in the face of these challenges? How do we dare to imagine something different?

This Changemakers issue of Kirkus Reviews—our first—is inspired by the many books we’ve reviewed that take on the pressing issues of our day as well as those that examine the historical figures who truly brought about change. We talk with authors who are using the written word, among other tools, to challenge the status quo.

What can a book do? We asked Bill Gates, businessman and philanthropist, why he decided to write How To Avoid a Climate Disaster (Knopf, Feb. 16). “If you want to propose serious ideas with the hope that people will act on them, there’s still nothing quite like a book,” Gates tells nonfiction editor Eric Liebetrau. “When I want to learn something deeply, or see something really thought-provoking, I still turn to books.” You can read more of our interview with Gates on p. 62.

Someone with a long track record of activism—and a long backlist—is Naomi Klein, author of No Logo and many other titles. Known for her critiques of consumer culture and neoliberal economics, she has emerged more recently as an important voice in the environmental movement. Her new book—her first for young readers, written with Rebecca Stefoff—is How To Change Everything (Athenaeum, Feb. 23). As she became more involved in climate activism, she tells contributor Mary Ann Gwinn in an interview on p. 110, she “noticed a shift in where the energy was coming from—first it was from college students, then suddenly it was from high school and middle school students….The older kids could read adult books, but there was a real need for information for middle school and high school students.” Klein’s book will surely help inspire a new generation of activists.

Activists of all ages look to historical figures for inspiration, not to mention an education in strategy. In writing her new novel, How Beautiful We Were (Random House, March 9)—about an African village challenging an American oil company—author Imbolo Mbue read the works of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela, and Mahatma Gandhi to better understand how such changemakers felt and thought in their own times. My interview with Mbue appears on p. 14.

Two vital figures in the history of Black struggle—one a household name, one nearly forgotten—are the subjects of new biographies for young readers. Harriet Tubman (Philomel, Jan. 5), the first volume in Chelsea Clinton and Alexandra Boiger’s She Persisted series for children, shows sides of Tubman that we don’t often learn about in history class. As author Andrea Davis Pinkney tells young readers’ editor Vicky Smith (interview on p. 118), this conductor on the Underground Railroad and Civil War spy also fought (unsuccessfully) to obtain the pension she was owed. Meanwhile, longtime gay activist and scholar Martin Duberman introduces teen readers to Paul Robeson (The New Press, March 9), an acclaimed Black actor and singer whose activism for Black rights and workers’ rights got him blacklisted in the 1950s, effectively ending his career. As Duberman tells contributor Christopher R. Rogers (p. 182), “Here’s a man that didn’t back down and was willing to suffer the price. And he knew he was going to succeed, but he thought it was essential not to yield an inch in demanding Black rights.”

We hope this issue of Kirkus Reviews inspires you to go out and make some change of your own.
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The Kirkus Star is awarded to books of remarkable merit, as determined by the impartial editors of Kirkus.

In his latest book, leading Constitutional scholar Akhil Reed Amar provides brilliant insights into America's founding document. Read the review on p. 55.

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PERMAFROST by Eva Baltasar; trans. by Julia Sanches

A young woman’s twin impulses toward sex and death merge into a duty to life in this lush English-translation debut. The narrator of this lithe, prismatic book is unapologetic about her frank lesbian sexuality. She is a lover, an ardent explorer of the sensual, a student of bodies—including her own—who remains uninterested in the empty moralizing of middle-class values. Born in Barcelona to a family with a deeply neurotic mother, a distant father, and a younger sister interested in fulfilling all the gender norms of womanhood, the narrator struggles not with her sexual orientation but rather with the essential absurdity of a life lived in search of speciously defined material success. Convinced by her mother to get a degree in art history, rather than pursue the urge to create, the narrator spends her post-degree years immersed in books, which she understands as a sort of pleasurable abnegation of the self. She also travels, first leaving Barcelona for a stint as a Spanish tutor in Brussels, where she meets the incomparable Veronika, whose “thick, silken hair...remind[s] her of the surreal bundles of fiber optics that a technician had once threaded through the façade of [her] Barcelona apartment”; spending a brief time as an au pair in Scotland, where she feels that the “anomalous, flat and rich” green of the Scottish landscape “rises like a suffocating tide, floods every cavity, and colonizes the most fertile parts of my ego”; and returning home to Barcelona to eventually settle into work writing articles for a publication that makes her feel “colorless—a dreadful muddle of various hues, an unthinkably grim and grayish green.” Throughout, the narrator is obsessed not only with the physicality of her lovers and the pleasure she finds in their bodies, but also with the solace she perceives in thoughts of death. She has multiple near suicide attempts which are unconsummated not due to a lack of seriousness but rather due to external factors. The narrator seems likely to continue on this way, drifting between lovers and suicide attempts in a lucid swoon of sensation, were it not for the sudden illness of her 6-year old niece, Claudia, which thrusts her into the unanticipated experience of wonder and reciprocal trust. Prior to this novel, Baltasar published 10 books of poetry in her native Catalan, and her poet’s sense of language as musculature—a body in its own right—flexes in every line of the carefully translated prose.

An intimate exploration of the unknown territory of desire, destruction, and whatever falls in between.
THE ADVENTURES AND MISADVENTURES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY AND ADMIRABLE JOAN ORPÍ, CONQUISTADOR AND FOUNDER OF NEW CATALONIA
Besora, Max
Trans. by Lethem, Mara Faye
Open Letter (400 pp.)
$17.95 paper | Jan. 12, 2021
978-1-948830-24-9

A rollicking, Rabelaisian tale by Catalan poet and novelist Besora.

Joan Orpí, writes an invented scholar in an inventive foreword, was “a Catalan man who went through a lot and managed to come through it all.” In language that would not be out of place on Talk Like a Pirate Day, Besora relates Orpí’s imagined adventures, a narrative framed by a crew of miscreant sailors being told what pass for maritime nursery tales by a captain desperate to put an end to their grousing. “Ye shan’t find these in any book of history,” the captain declares, “yet they be no less memorable or less important.” True enough. First there’s Orpí’s miraculous birth, helped along by a blast of lightning directed by the Virgin of Montserrat, who instructs him, “Hush thy blathering piehole and heed these instructions on how to effect your fate.” Alas, Orpí’s not much of a listener, and he bumbles between poles of behavior—a would-be monk one moment, a Lothario the next, unconcerned with language at one turn and adept at “mumbling unbearable Latinisms” at another. Law degree acquired but his services not exactly in high demand, Orpí bumbles further, meeting the likes of Cervantes, Sir Francis Drake, and Estebanico the Moor, companion of Cabeza de Vaca, as he eventually maneuvers his way into a position of power as the caudillo of New Catalonia, a hellhole-turned-anarchic outpost in the jungles of South America. Oh, and then there’s his ineffective courtship of a “damsel with an extremely long name,” which ends in nothing but tears. Think of it as a Catalonian rejoinder to

“A provocative, insightful thriller.”
—Donald Bain, Author of Murder, She Wrote Books

“A complex thriller set in the cutthroat world of corporate maneuvering...Raymond Chandler-esque...”

“...an efficient, spirited romp.”

“An enjoyably diverting mystery story.”
—Kirkus Reviews

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Can a novel be a changemaker? There have certainly been novels that changed the world around them: *Black Beauty* changed the treatment of horses after Anna Sewell published it in 1877, and Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* led to changes in the meatpacking industry in the early 20th century. More recently, novelists have been drawing attention to the natural world while also directly creating a plotline about environmental activists.

Novels can change the way readers think about the past. When Andrea Levy’s *Small Island* came out in 2005, it prompted White British people to write Caribbean immigrants into the story of World War II, and Sarah Waters’ *Tipping the Velvet* viewed the Victorian era through the eyes of a lesbian. *Confessions of the Fox* by Jordy Rosenberg is an exuberantly queer novel about a trans man in 18th-century London, and according to our starred review, it has a “marvelous ambition: To show how easily marginalized voices are erased from our histories—and that restoring those voices is a disruptive project of devotion.”

Some writers change the way we think about literature—for instance, Beverly Jenkins’ romances set among Black men and women in the Old West prove it isn’t only English aristocrats who deserve a happily-ever-after.

Mateo Askaripour has concrete change in mind for readers of *Black Buck* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Jan. 9), his first novel. The story of a 22-year-old Starbucks barista who becomes the only Black employee of a cultlike tech company where he experiences systemic racism, Askaripour’s novel is written in the form of a sales manual, and he’s said that he wanted to reach people “who have experienced these types of things and...give them a few tools to help better themselves and the lives of those they love.”

In his first novel, *Animals* (Blackstone, March 30), screenwriter Will Staples calls attention to the horrors of animal trafficking in Africa from many perspectives: a ranger in a South African national park, a CIA money-laundering specialist, an insurance agent investigating the source of a sick tiger at a Miami zoo, a Hong Kong narcotics cop. Our review says Staples “excels in creating scene after scene of uncompromising cruelty and sadness,” and according to the publisher, the author will be donating his profits from the book to wildlife protection.

In his fiction and nonfiction, Viet Thanh Nguyen has been expanding Americans’ understanding of the Vietnam War to include the perspective of Vietnamese refugees. His new novel, *The Committed* (Grove, March 2), checks in with the protagonist of *The Sympathizer*, a communist spy who tried to infiltrate Hollywood who’s now living in Paris and working for a crime boss. Our starred review says, “Nguyen keeps the thriller-ish aspects at a low boil, emphasizing a mood of black comedy driven by the narrator’s intellectual crisis. If communists and capitalists alike are responsible for mass cruelty, where should he throw his support? How much does his half-French parentage implicate him in the oppression of his home country? And what’s the value of picking a side anyway?”

Torrey Peters’ *Detransition, Baby* aims to change the way people think about families and about gender. Katrina is pregnant, and her lover, Ames, asks his ex Reese if she wants to be a second mother to the baby. When Ames and Reese were together, Ames was a trans woman named Amy, and he thinks that having a third parent in their family will make things less binary. As our starred review says, “There’s no question that there will be much no question that there will be much that’s new here for a lot of readers, but the insider view Peters offers never feels voyeuristic, and the author does a terrific job of communicating cultural specificity while creating universal sympathy.” That’s a great way to begin to change the world.

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.
Little Big Man, and go with the onrushing flow. Orpi’s a schlemiel, but he’s an endearing one, and we cheer for him. For his part, Besora delivers a delightful parody of the conquistadors’ reports of old, peppered with all manner of goofiness, from songs with lyrics such as “For we art the hardy foes / of abste mia & anemia” to a pseudo-Renaissance vocabulary that will make a language lover smile.

Utterly improbable—and utterly delightful.

THE VANISHING POINT
Brundage, Elizabeth
Little, Brown (336 pp.)
$28.00 | May 18, 2021
978-0-316-43037-1

The interwoven lives of artists, failed and successful.

Rye Adler evokes the late celebrity photographer Peter Beard in many ways: He seems to move easily in the world, gifted and carefree, and everyone recognizes him as a genius behind the lens. Yet something is not right in the now middle-aged man’s life, for when Brundage’s latest novel opens, a headline blares, “Rye Adler, Photographer of the Rich and Infamous, Is Presumed Dead at 52.” The focus shifts to Julian Ladd, classmate and roommate and rival, who early on realized that compared to Rye in most aspects, he was second-tier at most: “Editors would stare at his pictures, glumly, and say nothing.” So it was that Julian went into advertising, taking with him the one treasure that Rye could not have—Magda, a strikingly beautiful fellow photography student—and building a life of wealth and conspicuous consumption, all Armani suits and “shiny, expensive loafers.” Does it buy him happiness? Of course not. Rye is in turn married to a brittle, brilliant translator whose “favorite language is silence,” and each day is a negotiation in frustration. Things soon change from miserable to catastrophic when, the story shifting into the near past, Rye and Magda meet by chance—or is it?—and revelations begin to spill out. Brundage’s characters are convincing, if mostly of the sort you’d meet in the Hamptons or at Tony Chelsea galleries; at its best and most emotionally fraught moments, her novel could be bookended by Christopher Bollen’s Orient and André Aciman’s Eight White Nights. The resolution, however, seems a bit pat, as does the complication that sends Rye’s life into free fall. One thing’s for sure, though: Readers will root for him over the willfully unfulfilled Julian, whose life consists of omitting “essential clues” and leaving it to others to “draw their own conclusions, which were almost always more complex and intriguing than any he’d intended.”

An elevated soap opera but a well-written and affecting one.

LEDA AND THE SWAN
Caritj, Anna
Riverhead (352 pp.)
$28.00 | May 4, 2021
978-0-525-54014-4

A troubled sorority girl has no memory of what happened the night a classmate went missing—only that she might have been the last person to see her. Leda, a third-year college student at an unnamed Big U somewhere in America, can’t piece together most of what happened the night her classmate Charlotte Mask disappeared. They’d spoken briefly the night it happened, at the Gamma Kappa Omega Halloween party; outside, Leda had watched Charlotte get into a car and drive away. Otherwise, the evening is a blur. This, in itself, is not unusual: “For Leda, the pursuit of alcohol was basically an extracurricular activity,” an attempt, along with sex, to stave off the looming threat of loneliness that has emerged since her
mother’s death her senior year of high school. Avoiding loneliness, we are told, is the reason she does most things, including belonging to the otherwise-insufferable sorority that is at the center of her life. But she can’t shake the feeling that she may know something, may have seen something. All she knows for sure is that she was with Ian, a handsome senior, that she’d spoken to Charlotte, that her lip is bleeding, that the condom she’d been carrying is gone. She can’t remember if she slept with Ian—probably?—and can’t exactly figure out her visceral discomfort with him now—hadn’t she wanted to?—but she has the sense that something sinister has happened; the rest of the novel is her quest to figure out what. While the plot, simultaneously convoluted and clichéd, deflates under the weight of the buildup, the novel is a master class in atmosphere, so intoxicatingly ominous you could forgive the details.

A lonely, brooding page-turner about agency, identity, and consent.

Elephants and humans alike face mortal danger in this tense, complex thriller set in Africa.

Tom Klay is an American journalist in Kenya who writes about crimes against endangered species for the National Geographic–like magazine The Sovereign. Because of an earlier article he’d written, a ranger friend tells Klay, “everyone wants to see our famous elephant,” Kenya’s largest. That’s good for tourism, but now criminals want to kill the heavily protected animal and “smuggle his tusks to China whole.” Notorious poacher Ras Botha runs Africa’s ivory trade and considers elephants mere “property” to be hunted at will. “An elephant is carrying two gravestones,” Klay is told:
“The host of a popular true-crime podcast investigates an unsolved serial killer.”

*KIRKUS REVIEW*

**GIRL, 11**

Clarke, Amy Suiter

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (352 pp.)

$25.00 | Apr. 20, 2021

978-0-358-41893-1

The host of a popular true-crime podcast investigates an unsolved serial killer case in this debut novel.

In *Justice Delayed*, her podcast, Elle delves into a series of serial murders that shocked the Upper Midwest with their brutality and obsessive precision. Perhaps most devastating of all, every victim was one year younger than the last, earning the perpetrator the nickname “The Countdown Killer.” These murders happened over the course of four years until the last victim, an 11-year-old girl, escaped her captivity; the remains of two adults and one of the missing victims were found in a burned cabin shortly thereafter, and as nothing has been heard from the killer for nearly 20 years, most people believe his was one of the bodies. Elle, who was herself abducted and abused as a child, tries to put her focus on telling the stories of the victims rather than sensationalizing the killer, but when discussing TCK, she finds it hard to remain distant. When someone contacts her with a tip that they know who TCK is, and then is murdered, she begins to wonder whether her podcast may have inspired the killer back to action. When an 11-year-old girl goes missing, Elle must convince the police that her hunch is correct or risk losing everything. The irony of the novel is that, despite Elle’s insistence that because the killer “wanted to control the narrative...I’m not going to give him what he wants,” author Clarke grants him several chapters of narration to better explain his obsessions and his “evolution.” This impulse to explain everything away with nice, neat symbolism only exacerbates the argument that true crime (though in this case, of course, the story is fictional) often serves to glorify the criminal. Everyone wants an origin story to help explain away evil, and Elle, or at least Clarke, is no exception.

Chills, thrills, and tension compete with a troubling desire to tie a nice, neat bow on the psychology of murder.

**BIG BAD**

Collins, Whitney

Sarabande (224 pp.)

$16.95 paper | Mar. 16, 2021

978-1-946448-72-9

Magical realism and realism that’s not quite realistic mingle in this debut collection of 13 stories.

Death reorders the lives of those left behind; that’s the idea at the heart...
of many of the stories in Collins’ collection. In “Sunday,” Paul, who feels responsible for his son’s death, punishes himself first by losing both arms in an “accident” and then by marrying a woman with a “marathon mouth” whose incessant talking distracts him from having to remember his past. In “Drawers,” one of the collection’s standouts, Lawrence is driving to his grandson’s circumcision ceremony when he slams into a horse. Undone by his wife’s recent death, which brings back memories of his mother’s death and how his father coped, Lawrence begins to reckon with how little he has allowed himself to live. Many of these stories tilt toward magical realism. That’s the case in “Big Bad,” a feminist revision of “Little Red Riding Hood” in which a woman gives birth to older and older versions of herself, each a little more liberated than the last. Elsewhere, magical plots (one about a woman who keeps finding hearts) come at the expense of character development, and stories like “Stone Fruit” and “Lonelyhearts” feel quite slight. But when Collins flirts with magic, rather than fully embraces it, she captures the myriad ways the real world is mysterious—filled with both wonder and terror. In “The Horse Lamp,” another gem, a satellite repairman named Jarrod is seduced by a customer who wants him to help her get pregnant. As she gradually reveals her real reasons for wanting a baby, Jarrod absorbs her trauma, and the story becomes a cautionary tale about the power of storytelling and our very human desire to believe what we hear.

Beautifully written, wildly imaginative stories.
A taxidermist named Amer makes guacamole. Marina, a meteorologist, fights an infestation of ants in her kitchen and later takes her young son, Simón, to swimming lessons. Her husband, Karl, a German oboist, walks home from rehearsal, missing his eldest daughter back in Europe. In short chapters full of minute detail, we follow these characters’ lives. Attempting to quit smoking, Amer joins a self-help group and falls for a young woman named Clara. Marina turns 40. She does not believe in coincidences and consults an I Ching app on her phone. Her husband struggles with the feeling that living in Buenos Aires has changed him. “Karl was someone else but also himself. This fact—so obscure that he found it hard to put into words—materialised in a blurry and seemingly unfounded sorrow which was hard to shake off.” He buys his wife an orange vibrator for a birthday present and hides it, unwrapped, in their son’s room. In a different book, the vibrator would be discovered there, occasioning a scene of some kind. But Consiglio is not interested in cause and effect but in the accretion of granular detail. The taxidermist applies the tiniest amount of vegetable oil to the glass eyes of a stuffed otter: “The smallest of details: two strokes to the right, two to the left. That was his secret: it gave a sparkle to the gaze.” While this reporting of mundane action can leave the reader longing for a more traditional plot, the novel is interesting in the way it challenges that expectation, gesturing toward a broader truth. On her way home after a liaison, the adulterous Marina, moistening her lips in the mirror, “imagined that thousands of people—people crossing the city in taxis—were doing the same, exactly the same, at that very instant. To a point, she thought the harmony that brought them all together erased the very notion of individuality. Then, with her eyes still shut, she went a bit further still: she said to herself that she, with all her infidelity, neglect, secrets and guilt, was simply performing a cliché that humanity had repeated over and over again since the beginning of time.”

A muted and unhurried novel that insists on the validity of the imperfect present.

ABOVE THE RAIN
del Árbol, Victor
Trans. by Dillman, Lisa
Other Press (480 pp.)
$18.99 paper | May 25, 2021
978-1-63542-995-4

A Spanish crime novel attempts to connect the dots across decades, countries, and continents as two nursing-home residents embark on a late-life search for meaning.

Miguel is a widower and retired bank director in his 70s who is losing his memory to Alzheimer’s. The slightly younger Helena has plenty of spirit and all her wits but has ended up in the same Spanish nursing home, with nothing to do and nowhere to go. Following the suicide of another free-spirited resident, she realizes that time is short and life is fleeting. The pilgrimage she makes with Miguel defies credulity but ends with him in Sweden, alone. It is there that he notices a woman previously unknown to him and ponders how “people were mysteriously connected without ever realizing it.” It seems that it is Helena who has connected them, however tenuously. More than a half-century and hundreds of pages earlier, the novel’s prologue found Helena’s mother committing suicide by drowning, and threatening to kill her daughter along with her, all because of a complication it takes the rest of the novel to unravel. Miguel also had a troubled childhood, and both have had troubled marriages and relations with their children. Skipping back and forth across countries and decades, the novel explores their separate family bloodlines, from war and politics through love that is as passionate as it is taboo. Even as Miguel loses Helena (along with his memory), their mutual sense of mission never flags. No one could criticize del Árbol for lack of ambition, though this novel finds his characters a little too much at the mercy of chance and fate, as the reader struggles to find reasons to care.

With a penchant for the philosophical epic, del Árbol gets lost here in all the melodramatic detail.
“A great American novel set in the city of busted dreams.”

PARADISE, NEVADA

BURN IT ALL DOWN
DiDomizio, Nicolas
Little, Brown (320 pp.)
$28.00 | May 25, 2021
978-0-316-49695-7

A seriocomic coming-of-age tale in which a young man describes the many bad choices he and his mother make in less than a week.

When life gives 18-year-old Joey Rossi and his mother, Gianna, lemons, they wreak havoc. His boyfriend cheats on him. Her married lover dumps her after two years of promising divorce, dangling the marriage carats. And they've been here before. Gianna was pregnant at 16, and the abusive father was soon gone. Other nasty lovers followed. Now she's 34, working as a hairdresser. Joey has a part-time job stuffing cannoli at Mozzicato's Bakery while he finishes high school. Grandma has Dean Martin's "Volare" on the radio and throws around words like stunad, chadrools, and pisello. They live in Bayonne, "the exact opposite of rich-people New Jersey." They drink Luna di Luna at $16 a magnum and they've had a lot of it when they decide to trash Joey's boyfriend's car and Gianna's lover's seven-figure house in Short Hills ("the capital of rich-people New Jersey"). Only they get carried away in the mansion and start a fire. Soon they're on the road, on the lam, on their way to the rustic rural home of Marco, the one former lover who didn't mistreat Gianna. Is there a happy ending up ahead? DiDomizio creates an appealing mother-son relationship of comfortably shared lives, including a peculiar affection for Monica Lewinsky. (What would Monica do?) He takes a chance with having Joey narrate because he's a young 18 with a tendency to whine at misfortune, which drags on the generally light tone. The humor also often smacks of sitcom, both in predictability and ethnic color. It suggests an elevator pitch to mash up The Sopranos and Everybody Loves Raymond.

An uneven but entertaining debut.

PARADISE, NEVADA
Diofedi, Dario
Bloomsbury (512 pp.)
$28.00 | Apr. 6, 2021
978-1-63557-620-7

A great American novel set in the city of busted dreams.

If you're seeking a setting for a big, bold, searching American novel, you could do a lot worse than Las Vegas. This sprawling, delightful debut book captures the artificial worlds within worlds in the casinos, the unnavigable streets just outside the strip, the big dreams, and the bad beats. It has a labor dispute, a big explosion, and an immigration saga. Most of all it has four vivid strivers at its core: Ray, a math whiz and online poker stud who loses his confidence and his nerve and tries to take on live, flesh-and-blood competition; Mary Ann, a model-turned–cocktail waitress who finds herself involved in a covert sabotage scheme against the house; Tom, who, like the author, comes from Rome and who finds himself enjoying what seems like a long spot of good luck; and Lindsay, a Latter-day Saint journalist with literary ambitions. Each character brings his or her own supporting players, many of whom aren't what they seem. The central quartet is constantly in each other's periphery, pushing the plot toward ever more dangerous places. The author, who spent several years as a professional poker player (both online and live), knows these people and their habitats, and he brings them to life in colorful, page-turning detail; even if you've been to Vegas, he makes you feel as if you're seeing it with fresh eyes. Even when he gets a little too cute—for instance, footnoting Ray's inside-poker jargon—there's something around the corner to make it all worthwhile. This is a tremendously funny book, but it earns its laughs through human frailty. It makes fun of the powerful and the ridiculous, but even then there's nothing easy. Everyone here is haphazardly seeking something better and different within...
The Coldness of Objects

Panayotis Cacoyannis

ISBN: 9798560368845 [paperback]
ASIN: B08NJLHTHF [eBook]

"...Cacoyannis has written a thoroughly gripping novel, using the rhetoric of a real-life pandemic to fashion a chilling vision of an abnormal 'new normal' to come."

"An intriguing, timely, and terrifying portent of life after Covid-19."
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

"A well-written, richly complicated, and deeply engaging coming-of-age tale."
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) on The Madness of Grief

"A sophisticated, comic novel that brilliantly captures the triumph and folly of art, media, and publishing."
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) on The Dead of August

For Agent Representation or Information on Publishing and Film Rights, Email panayotis@blueyonder.co.uk • www.panayotiscacoyannis.com
You might say that Imbolo Mbue has spent a lifetime working on her new novel, *How Beautiful We Were* (Random House, March 9). The author, who was born in Cameroon and lives in New York, first began writing the book nearly 20 years ago; she interrupted work on it to write her acclaimed debut novel, *Behold the Dreamers*, which was published in 2016 and went on to become an Oprah Book Club selection and win the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction. The new novel was at last set for publication in June 2020 when the global pandemic upended publishing schedules and pushed the release date by another nine months.

Now this long-gestating novel is finally reaching readers. It’s the tale of the fictional village of Kosawa, in an unnamed African country, which is slowly and inexorably being poisoned by oil spills caused by Pexton, an American company drilling on its land. The novel is narrated by several characters, including a chorus of children who observe the tragedy unfolding. But *How Beautiful We Were* is also a narrative of resistance and struggle, as a local woman becomes the leader of a movement to change the situation.

We recently spoke with Mbue over Zoom; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

I understand you actually began this book before your first novel, *Behold the Dreamers*.

This is the very first thing I ever started writing. I knew nothing about storytelling. I had no idea about craft. I’ve been a reader my whole life, so I just started writing based on my imagined idea of excellence. I didn’t have any plans to have my work published—I was just writing to discover that side of myself.

I went to Columbia and got my master’s in education and psychology. After that, I got a corporate job, and the whole time I was writing this. And then I lost my job during the financial crisis. I was trying to get a new job, and it wasn’t exactly working out very well for me. That is when I went for a walk one day and saw these chauffeurs and had the inspiration to write a story about a chauffeur and his employer during the financial crisis.

*That became Behold the Dreamers.*

It wasn’t easy—I still had to teach myself a lot about writing. *Behold the Dreamers* came out in 2016, and the moment it came out, I knew that I had to go back to this book. I’d never left these characters, I’d never left this story, and everything about it was still haunting me. And in the process of writing *Behold the Dreamers*, I had become a more confident writer, I knew myself, I had more ownership of my voice.

*How much of the original story remains intact?*

It’s still very much about a community pushing back against corporate imperialism, it’s still very much about hope and dreams. What changed was a lot of...
the structure. I had never conceived it as a story that would be told primarily from the point of view of children. That came as a result of going back to the book in 2016, at a time when a lot was happening in America. I’m speaking specifically about [the school shooting at] Sandy Hook and [the water crisis in] Flint, Michigan—two events that really broke my heart and still haunt me. I thought a lot about what it is like for children growing up in a world that doesn't do as much as it can to understand them and to protect them and to give them what they need. That is where [the group of children who narrate the novel] came from.

One of those children, a girl, grows up to become a leader in the village’s fight against the oil company. The character of Thula was [originally] the one telling most of the story, and the book was very much focused on Thula's father. Men were the people who led movements, the people who change the world, all the freedom fighters, the revolutionaries—when I started the book, I didn't imagine a woman like Thula, even though there were women like Thula and there still are. I had been raised in a world in which the people we celebrate are men. It was only later that I started questioning that—again, it came as a consequence of being older and seeing the world through new eyes.

I wanted to talk with you about a theme that runs through the novel: How do we go about making change in our world?

It’s something that I’ve wrestled with as somebody who lives in the world. You look at the different ways in which change has come about, and you look at the sacrifices. And you wonder, was this the best way? I grew up in a dictatorship in a post-colonial country. I was very aware of what it is like to live in a society [where] so much has been sacrificed and yet it looks as if not much is changing. This novel came from a place of looking at the great revolutionaries that I admired; I read the memoirs of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, Malcolm X, dissidents all over the world. I read in order to understand how they came to their particular ideologies and how they came about crafting their strategies.

The village is up against a whole web of interconnected factors—starting with the oil company and the dictatorship—that keep the system in place. This story might be set in an African village, but it is happening all over the world. I looked at stories of environmental degradation in Ecuador, in Nigeria, it’s happening in the U.S. Most people don’t know about what DuPont did in Parkersburg, West Virginia, where for decades the people there were being poisoned. When you have a corporation so powerful, what do you do? At least in America, you have the legal system. But the characters in this novel, they don't exactly have that. Although the U.K. courts just decided that the citizens in Nigeria whose land was destroyed by the [Dutch Royal] Shell company can sue Shell in the U.K., which is unprecedented.

What do you hope readers take away from How Beautiful We Were?

My German publisher [once] asked me, “What is your second book going be about?” I said, “It has to do with characters fighting against environmental degradation in their community.” And he said, “Just remember to keep it about the characters.” That is why I think using that plural voice was important, to look at it from the point of view of children. Children don't have very sophisticated opinions, they don't have sophisticated ways of looking at the world. It's all so simple: We are being poisoned—why? They don't overanalyze anything. That helped free me from the burden of making it into some sort of manifesto. Because it is not meant to be anything but a work of art to be interpreted by each and every reader in the way they prefer to interpret it.

How Beautiful We Were received a starred review in the March 15, 2020, issue.
themselves, and they look to find it in this virtual microcosm of America.

An intimate epic set in a virtual but deeply human world.

ECHO TREE
The Collected Short Fiction of Henry Dumas
Dumas, Henry
Ed. by Redmond, Eugene B.
Coffee House (416 pp.)
$19.95 paper | May 4, 2021
978-1-56689-607-8

The work of a late, lamented, and influential icon of the 1960s Black Arts Movement is brought back into print to connect with a post-millennial Black Lives Matter generations of readers—and writers.

Dumas was two months shy of his 34th birthday when, in May 1968, he was shot and killed by a New York Transit Authority policeman in what was judged a case of mistaken identity. By that time, the Arkansas-born writer had already become something of a cult legend for his poetry and fiction, steeped in folkloric imagery, magical realism, and a haunting, deeply evocative lyricism that was near music. His short stories were posthumously collected in two volumes edited by his friend and de facto literary executor Redmond, and this book contains all those stories as well as some previously uncollected ones. Whether you’re already familiar with Dumas or are just encountering him for the first time, such pieces as the title story, “A Boll of Roses,” and the much-anthologized classic “Ark of Bones” administer a shock of recognition of how, at such a relatively early point in his career, Dumas achieved near mastery of narrative form, whether the gothic horror of “Rope of Wind,” the allegorical cunning of “The University of Man,” or the unsettling bare-bones naturalism of “The Crossing.” Most of the stories deal with the raw-nerve perils and spiritual crises that come from growing up in the rural South while others, such as “Harlem,” engage the hair-trigger tension of Black urban life in midcentury America. And there are times, as in “Devil Bird,” when Dumas’ phantasmagorical and metaphysical tendencies...
merge into wild and wicked farce. For all these stories’ spellbinding attributes, some of them seem to trail off as if waiting for yet another draft to amplify or add on to their details. The newer stories seem like variations, even repetitions of previous themes. And yet, the last story, “The Metagenesis of Sunra,” a tour de force of creation mythology and cosmic improvisation, submits yet another jolt of discovery, suggesting how Dumas, who always seemed ahead of his own, albeit brief, time, was capable of advancing African American storytelling art even further than one previously suspected.

Every couple of decades or so, we need to be reminded of what made writers like Toni Morrison call Henry Dumas a genius.

**WINTER IN Sokcho**

*Dusapin, Elisa Shua*

*Trans. by Abbas Higgins, Aneesa*

Open Letter (160 pp.)

$14.95 paper  |  Apr. 27, 2021

978-1-948830-41-6

An atmospheric novel about an independent young woman in a South Korean beach town.

Dusapin’s debut novel depicts a young biracial Korean woman living and working in a small guesthouse in Sokcho, South Korea, a beach town 60 km from the North Korean border. When a mysterious middle-aged Frenchman named Yan Kerrand arrives, off-season, in the midst of the winter slump, the woman is intrigued. She has never met her father, a Frenchman who left her mother after a brief affair, but has studied French language and literature in school and dreams of traveling to the country someday. The novel unfolds in brief vignette-like chapters that reveal the unnamed woman’s daily life. After work, she visits her mother, who works in the fish market and is renowned for her delicious octopus soondae. Despite pressure to marry, the young woman is ambivalent about her long-distance relationship with her boyfriend, Jun-oh, an aspiring model in Seoul. Dusapin’s novel avoids clichés in the woman’s developing relationship with the lonely foreigner, who turns out to be an internationally renowned graphic novelist looking for inspiration for a new book. The woman observes the man and never looks at him as a savior or stereotypical lover. Instead, Dusapin depicts a fiercely intelligent, independent woman who longs to be seen clearly for who she is and the choices she has made, including leaving Seoul to help her aging mother. Higgins’ exquisite translation from the French original is a pleasure to read. The descriptions of daily life in the titular town are beautiful, elliptical, and fascinating, from the fish markets near the beach to soju-drenched dinners in local bistros to a surreal glimpse of a museum on the DMZ. Dusapin, who like her protagonist is of French and Korean heritage, has won several awards for her novel in Switzerland, where she lives, including the Prix Robert-Walser and the Prix Régine Desforges.

A triumph.

**THE PARTED EARTH**

*Enjeti, Anjali*

Hub City Press (272 pp.)

$26.00  |  May 4, 2021

978-1-938235-77-1

Three generations of an Indian family deal with the aftermath of the 1947 Partition.

Enjeti’s fiction debut, a carefully constructed riddle of a story told in clean, simple prose, begins in New Delhi in the hot summer of 1947, when supersmart 16-year-old Deepa gets her first taste of romance, finding origami notes from handsome Amir hidden in a plant in her family’s garden. But the precarious political situation in India quickly turns toxic as the British government carries out its plan to divide the country into two parts—majority Hindu, majority Muslim, now India and Pakistan. With violence exploding around them and Amir’s Muslim family set to leave town, the two plight their truth. The next section of the book, set mostly in 2016 in Atlanta, Georgia,
centers on Deepa’s granddaughter, a young American woman originally named Shanti—she’s changed it to Shan—who is looking forward to partnership at her law firm and the birth of her first child. When her life is turned upside down, she connects with an Indian immigrant neighbor, and journeys of discovery begin for both women, with the help of a remembrance and reconciliation website similar to those projects that have been created to heal the wounds of the past in Africa, Australia, and elsewhere. Though an author’s note says that only the historical aspects of this story are nonfictional, the fact that a character shares a name with one of Enjeti’s grandmothers (as seen in the dedication) underlines the pulse of truth that makes this book feel so urgent and important.

Illuminating, absorbing, and resonant.

THE LIVING SEA OF WAKING DREAMS
Flanagan, Richard
Knopf (288 pp.)
$26.99 | May 25, 2021
978-0-593-31960-4

A Tasmanian family grapples with death, extinction, and vanishing limbs.

Anna, Terzo, and Tommy Foley have a problem: Their 86-year-old mother, Francie, is dying, and they have to decide whether to let her. This choice pits Anna and Terzo—the “successful” siblings who, having left Tasmania to pursue joyless careers, now feel guilty for having neglected their mother—against Tommy, “a failed artist” who still lives in the Hobart area. Confusing a material existence for a meaningful one, Anna and Terzo demand life-prolonging intervention after life-prolonging intervention. Francie has surgery. She goes on dialysis. She is intubated. Time passes. Francie dwindles and suffers but, in a sense, lives. Meanwhile, Australia is burning, birds are dying, and parts of Anna’s body are vanishing. Literally. First her finger. Then her kneecap. Then another finger. Then her whole hand. Gone. “Like the thylacine and the Walkman. Like long sentences. Like smoke-free summers. Gone, never to return.” Yet what does Anna do about it? She reaches for her phone and “stare[s] solemnly at her screen,” taking a perverse comfort from the dead firefighters and charred songbirds of the Anthropocene extinction. Flanagan’s latest is haunted by a central feature of our modern epoch: human denial in the face of social and environmental cataclysm. Yet though Flanagan is justified in his outrage—the natural world is literally disappearing in front of our glazed eyes—he fails to embed his outrage in a convincingly articulated story. With every scene, every character, and every sentence deployed in unabashed support of the book’s themes, the novel lacks the narrative verisimilitude it needs to transcend the realm of polemic—a problem exacerbated by Flanagan’s summary-heavy style, his refusal to explore any setting, person, or idea with adequate depth or complexity. The disappearance of Anna’s body parts, for instance, is barely integrated into the story: She is rarely debilitated by her missing limbs, and the entire phenomenon reads like an overearnest symbol, an errant plot arc that the author, grasping for Gogol-ian profundity, pasted in and forgot to flesh out. Heartfelt though his work is, beautiful though his sentences are, Flanagan has given us an early draft—a fleshy sketch of a denser, better book.

A well-meaning parable that hews too closely to its moral.
Lhosa is a new world facing an age-old question:

Are the heroes of today the gods of tomorrow, or the demons?


“In this epic fantasy by the author of The Sword of God (2009), a boy ascends into adulthood in a world tarnished by others’ bigotry and thirst for political power.”

“An enthralling coming-of-age story that unfolds in a land both strange and recognizable.”

—Kirkus Reviews

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“Full of horror and wonder.”

**EAT THE MOUTH THAT FEEDS YOU**

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**THE CAPTIVE**

*Foster, Fiona King*

Ecco/HarperCollins (272 pp.)

$26.99  |  Jan. 12, 2021  
978-0-06-299097-6

A woman is challenged to protect her family—and her previous history—in this remarkable debut.

Brooke lives on a secluded cranberry farm with her husband, Milo, and their two daughters, 13-year-old Holly and 8-year-old Sal. It’s a hard life in a rural secessionist state, but they have a home and each other. Then, during Brooke and Milo’s overnight trip to a town auction, a fugitive’s bounty is announced publicly, and Brooke recognizes the escapee’s name—Stephen Cawley. Her immediate reaction is palpable: shock, panic, and a rush of fear-fueled adrenaline. It’s clear that Brooke has dark secrets and that she’ll do just about anything to keep them hidden: “Deep down, Brooke knew she had no right to this life….She should have run farther in the first place.”

An altercation back on the cranberry farm quickly confirms the presence of danger, and Brooke takes life-threatening matters into her own hands, setting out with her family across a bleak and unforgiving landscape. With this part–feminist Western, part–dystopian odyssey, part just plain-old nerve-jangling thriller, Foster does a terrific job of maintaining the page-turning pace of her narrative—and of Brooke’s angsty-ridden story. The action is full of (often violent) surprises, and the plot exposes one secretive layer after another, embedding a highly contemporary feel to the tale despite its futuristic setting.

Packed with heart-stopping misadventures, this novel makes outdoor challenge–style outings look like a walk in the park.

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**EAT THE MOUTH THAT FEEDS YOU**

*Fragoza, Carribean*

City Lights (144 pp.)

$14.95 paper  |  Mar. 23, 2021  
978-0-87286-833-5

This collection of visceral, often bone-chilling stories centers the liminal world of Latinos in Southern California while fraying reality at its edges.

This slim volume’s brevity belies its heavy punch, with a focus on each character’s often violent yearning to exist on their own terms. The title story is unforgettable in its horror, with a young mother who allows herself to be physically consumed by her young daughter: “She asks me things I don’t know how to answer. She accuses me of things that don’t make sense.” “The Vicious Ladies” splays open the intricate, insidious inner politics of female gangs in Los Angeles, with the narrator a seemingly unwilling participant, a so-called “smart” girl who was drawn into the Vicious Ladies’ web in middle school and who has ideas beyond the parties and mini drug empire she continues to participate in. It is the Ladies’ leader, Samira, who exposes the narrator’s double standards and the darkness of her true self. The crown jewel of the collection is “Ini Y Fati,” in which Ini, a long-dead child, saves the life of Fátima, who’s been struck by lightning, wanting a playmate to alleviate her immortal boredom. The girls’ innocent fun turns foreboding as Ini slowly reveals her history, rooted in patriarchal violence, to Fati, who begins to notice sharp glimmers of that same darkness in her own home. At times utterly fantastical but deeply rooted in lived experience, these stories will reach a hand inside and yank out your insides—in the best way.

Full of horror and wonder.
HEART & SEOUL
Frederick, Jen
Berkley (352 pp.)
$16.00 paper | May 25, 2021
978-0-593-10014-1

A 25-year-old woman travels to Seoul to find her birthparents.

Hara Wilson has struggled with feeling like an outsider her entire life. As a baby, she was abandoned in Seoul and eventually adopted by a White American couple in Iowa. Hara was often the target of racism during her childhood and coped by refusing to learn anything about her homeland. The novel opens with Hara at her father’s funeral, where she overhears whispers that her race and her adoptive status mean she doesn’t count as his “real child.” Upset at the slight, Hara is surprised to find herself longing to visit Korea, hoping the information she gleaned from a DNA test will help her locate her birthparents. The first person Hara meets upon her arrival in Seoul is Choi Yujun, an attractive and friendly man who helps her find a sublet apartment. As she searches for her birthparents with the help of friends and roommates, Hara gains a new understanding of her own identity and what it means to belong. When Hara keeps bumping into Yujun, he suggests that fate might be bringing them together. Frederick’s novel is a journey of self-discovery for Hara; however, the last third abruptly shifts to betrayal, family secrets, and other dramatic situations. The soapy ending feels out of sync with the emotional, reflective tone that carries most of the book. And although this is billed as a romance, readers should know Hara’s relationship with Yujun does not have a happily-ever-after or happy-for-now ending.

Thorough exploration of the complicated emotional impact of transracial adoption.

In the town of Black Oak, nothing is ever what it seems.

“Murphy’s novel is populated by myriad, vibrant characters with engrossing backstories.”

“Frequent dialogue scenes give the narrative a consistent pace…”

“A low-key but detailed introduction to a world of uncanny characters and creatures.”

—Kirkus Reviews

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The promise is buried along with Rachel, only to be unearthed years later when subsequent family deaths force the Swarts to recollect for the rituals of mourning. Galgut moves fluidly among accounts of every single major and minor character, his prose unbroken by quotation marks or italics, as though narrated from the perspective of a ghost who briefly possesses every person. The language is peppered with regional geography, terminology, and slang, with sentences ranging from clipped (“One day, she says aloud. One day I’ll. But the thought breaks off midway...”) to lyrical (“There’s a snory sound of bees, jacaranda blossoms pop absurdly underfoot”) to metafictional (“No need to dwell on how she washes away her tears”). Galgut’s multifarious writing style is bold and unusual, providing an initial barrier to entry yet achieving an intuitive logic over time. “How did it become so complicated?” Amor wonders at one point. “Home used to mean only one Thing, not a blizzard of things at war.”

Galgut extends his extraordinary corpus with a rich story of family, history, and grief.

BEFORE SHE DISAPPEARED
Gardner, Lisa
Dutton (400 pp.)
$27.00 | Jan. 19, 2021
978-1-5247-4504-2

Gardner introduces Frankie Elkin, a tough, street-smart survivor who has found her calling searching for missing persons.

Frankie is an alcoholic who considers herself responsible for the death of the man she loved. As penance, she travels around the country, volunteering to locate missing people for whom there may be no new leads. She knows that not everyone believes in her gifts or trusts her motives, but she cannot back down from the opportunity to find answers for these grieving families. When she comes to Boston to investigate the disappearance of Angelique Badeau, she takes a cheap apartment and a bartending job at a scruffy neighborhood bar, sticking out like a sore thumb but determined to make headway in a case that has baffled the police. Teenagers go missing and teenagers run away, but not Angelique. She and her brother survived the earthquake in Haiti to live with their aunt in America, taking advantage of opportunities to work hard and get a good education. Frankie discovers that Angelique is not the only teenage girl to have disappeared in the neighborhood; a few months after her, another girl went missing. This girl’s family, torn apart by gang violence and poverty, may have been reason enough to run away, but Frankie has been around the block enough to know: There are no coincidences. Then Angelique passes a message to her brother: proof of life, but no hint as to where she’s being held. With the help of a ruggedly handsome detective, Frankie digs relentlessly into the case—until people start dying. Now in a race against time, she must discover why these girls have been kidnapped—and why they might be running out of time. Gardner is a pro at writing
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tough-as-nails, wiseass, broken-yet-steely female characters, and Frankie does not disappoint. Plus, it’s a pretty solid mystery.

Fans of Gardner’s Tessa Leoni, D.D. Warren, and Flora Dane will embrace her new heroine’s grit and empathy.

CHOLA SALVATION
González, Estella
Arte Publico Pr (200 pp.)
$18.95 paper | Apr. 30, 2021
978-1-55885-914-2

Smoldering stories that center the lives of Mexican Americans by complicating common tropes and conceptions.

This debut collection of interlocking short stories turns an unflinching eye on the small tragedies, gut-wrenching betrayals, and enduring courage of working-class Latinx folks in East Los Angeles and the borderlands. In the title story, 14-year-old Isabel struggles to break free of her mother’s physical abuse and her father’s molestations. Frida Kahlo and La Virgen de Guadalupe show up to help, but they don’t look like the typical icons of Chicano culture. Instead, Frida and La Virgen rock baggy pants, bright eye shadow, and dark lipstick while figuratively and literally arming Isabel to fight back. The story ends in a satisfying, bloody confrontation, but other stories close quietly. “Powder Puff,” an absolutely devastating story told through the meticulous makeup routine of a woman who desperately wants to be seen, ends with dejection and jars of foundation stacked in a closet, “liquid skin sitting there, flaking inside the glass.” “Matadora” and “Happiness Is Right Next To You,” both of which center around disruptive wedding guests, offer slow burns and abound in the sartorial excess of the 1980s: shantung yellow pantsuits, black velvet chokers, and perms aplenty.

Imagine Winesburg, Ohio featuring Chicano of East Los Angeles with a touch of mystical realism.

RELENTLESS
Greaney, Mark
Berkley (528 pp.)
$22.99 | Feb. 16, 2021
978-0-593-09895-0

The 10th installment in the Gray Man series begins with a dent in the hero’s armor and revs up with nonstop action. Court Gentry, aka the Gray Man, is recovering from a stab wound, and he really needs to get some rest. He’s tired and badly weakened, not yet fit for operational duty, but the CIA’s off-the-books contract killer is “wholly unaccustomed to free time.” Soon he’s in Caracas, trying to spring his comrade in arms Zack Hightower from a Venezuelan prison. Then he’s off to Germany to deal with a possible coordinated attack on Americans in Berlin. Gentry, whose CIA code name is Violator, is that rare killer with a heart, so he takes only “righteous and worthy” assignments and does them right. His CIA boss congratulates him on one assassination, saying “You put a warhead on his forehead.” Gentry’s in love with Zoya Zakharova, a field operative also working for the CIA, but gunning down bad guys keeps both too busy for a meaningful relationship. Meanwhile, a sultan in the United Arab Emirates can hardly wait for his father to die of cancer, and an Iranian Quds sleeper agent plots mayhem in Berlin. Evildoers abound in this bloody thriller, including Americans. But the star of the scum is Maksim Akulov, who works for the Russian Mafia and whose target is Zakharova. Think of Akulov as the Gray Man without the moral compass. The title aptly fits the plot, as the hero scarcely takes a breather. There’s enough bloodshed to pour into two thrillers, and author Greaney doesn’t spare the good guys. Gentry’s body is “racked with pain and exhaustion” much of the time, but he is relentless. And Zack gets more than scratched while he thinks that “fighting a robot attack would be one badass way to go.” Not for the squeamish but a jolt for thriller junkies.
SOOLEY
Grisham, John
Doubleday (368 pp.)
$28.95  |  Apr. 27, 2021
978-0-385-54768-0

Legal eagle and mystery maven Grisham shifts gears with a novel about roundball.

What possessed Grisham to stop writing about murder in the Spanish moss-dripping milieu of the Deep South is anyone’s guess, and why he elected to write about basketball, one might imagine, speaks to some deep passion for the game. The depth of that love doesn’t quite emerge in these pages, flat of affect, told almost as if a by-the-numbers biography of an actual player. As it is, Grisham invents an all-too-believable hero in Samuel Sooleymon, who plays his way out of South Sudan, a nation wrought by sectarian violence—Sooley is a Dinka, Grisham instructs, of “the largest ethnic class in the country,” pitted against other ethnic groups—and mired in poverty despite the relative opulence of the capital city of Juba, with its “tall buildings, vibrancy, and well-dressed people.” A hard-charging but heart-of-gold coach changes his life when he arrives at the university there, having been dismissed earlier as a “nonshooting guard.” Soon enough Sooley is sinking three-pointers with alarming precision, which lands him a spot on an American college team. Much of the later portion of Grisham’s novel bounces between Sooley’s on-court exploits, jaw-dropping as they are, and his efforts to bring his embattled family, now refugees from civil war, to join him in the U.S.; explains Grisham, again, “Beatrice and her children were Dinka, the largest tribe in South Sudan, and their strongman was supposedly in control of most of the country,” though evidently not the part where they lived. Alas, Sooley, beloved of all, bound for a glorious career in the NBA, falls into the bad company that sudden wealth and fame can bring, and it all comes crashing down in a morality play that has only the virtue of bringing this tired narrative to an end.

Unlike baseball, basketball has contributed little to world literature. Call this Exhibit A.
MAXWELL'S DEMON
Hall, Steven
Grove (352 pp.)
$26.00 | Apr. 6, 2021
978-0-8021-4920-6

The son of a world-famous writer plays a literary cat-and-mouse game with his late father's enigmatic protégé.

Fourteen years ago, Hall unleashed an original and inventive debut, The Raw Shark Texts (2007). With this follow-up, he delivers an equally phantasmagoric novel with shades of Stephen King’s The Dark Half. This confessional is narrated by Thomas Quinn, an unsuccessful writer whose wife, Imogen, is off on some kind of live-streamed Big Brother-type experiment. This leaves Thomas time to drink whiskey and contemplate the legacy of his late father, Stanley Quinn, a famous novelist and lousy dad. Even worse than his father, Thomas has been living under the long shadow of Andrew Black, once Stanley's assistant and for all intents and purposes his favored “son.” Black is famous for Cupid's Engine, a best-selling magnum opus about a fedora-wearing private eye, while Thomas' sole novel, The Qwerty Machine Gun, was a dismal failure. The relationship changes when Thomas receives an envelope from the reclusive Black: Along with a photograph of a black sphere, there’s a note saying, “Thomas, What do you think this is?” Hall delights in playing with typography, and early on he starts dropping in passages shaped like leaves as well as a seven-page illustration of the physics theorem that lends the novel its title. There’s really nothing like this book—long contemplations of philosophy, personality, religion, and history are all woven into something of a mystery in which no one is truly reliable. With influences that recall Fight Club and Motherless Brooklyn, Hall manages to put a whole world on the page that shifts and changes as weirdly and wildly as the ones in the novel's fictional books.

The modern novel's version of a Möbius strip, written with verve and a vast appreciation for the power of language.

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER
Harrison, Mette Ivie
Soho Crime (264 pp.)
$27.95 | May 25, 2021
978-1-641-29245-0

A stalwart member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints wrestles with her faith.

Kurt and Linda Wallheim have hit a rough patch in their longtime marriage. Now that their children are grown and out of the house, Linda, who’s always had a feminist streak, is increasingly restless with the way their religion treats women. Marriage counseling with Dr. Candice Zee makes her want “to light Kurt's entire wardrobe on fire—no, to burn down the entire house.” Still, it’s not clear that her efforts to become her own person, even if they don’t lead to arson, will have a therapeutic effect in the long run. Her current mission, prompted by her son Joseph’s worried call to tell her that the 15-year-old who babysits his toddler daughter has suddenly disappeared, takes her from her suburban home to the mean streets of Salt Lake City, where she mingles with a homeless population whose lack of access to personal hygiene products may be the least of their problems. When she does locate Sabrina Jensen and learns about the traumatic event that sent the teenager fleeing her home, Linda seems either ignorant of or oblivious to civil laws that require the reporting of crimes and discourage housing minors without their parents’ consent.

No solutions here, and by the end it’s not even clear what the question is.
A Korean American physicist with a postdoc position in Stockholm grapples with the real and imagined ghosts of her family’s past.

Elsa Park’s time in the Antarctic conducting research on neutrinos is coming to an end, punctuated by the reappearance of a specter from her past: a girl who has played with her, advised her, and followed her since she was a child. Though Elsa left her home just outside Los Angeles for boarding school and eventually her position in Sweden, her friend’s reappearance heralds a return to her old life in California, centered around her father’s crumbling auto body shop, where she must confront the complicated ties that bind her to her father, mother, and older brother. Hanging over all this are the stories her mother told—and didn’t tell—dark tales of girls sacrificed for bells, girls lost at sea, girls used. Who is Elsa’s friend really, since no one else can see her, and what does she mean for their family? Oskar Gantelius, a Korean adoptee Elsa met in Sweden, may hold the key to her questions if she can manage to make sense of all the stories. Ruminations on physics are interspersed with Korean folktales, though intergenerational trauma means the narrative can never soar into whimsy for long. Elements of magical realism are tempered well by the realities of one Korean immigrant family. Though Elsa is often an unlikable narrator, her story is gripping and rings as true as the bell she hears in her mind.

A quiet but compelling rumination on family, race, and trauma, built on the spaces in Korean folktales.
Autobiographical fiction portrays life in Soviet Russia.

Thirty years after the publication of Every Hunter Wants To Know, Iossel, who was born in 1955 and immigrated to the U.S. in 1986, offers another engaging collection of stories evoking his Soviet childhood and young adulthood. Jewish identity is a recurring theme: In “Necessary Evil,” parents surprise their 9-year-old son by telling him that he is a Jew. Encouraging him to “embrace it unreservedly, because it defines by far the most important part of you,” they assure him that Jews are “covert agents” to promote good in the world. Yet the news is unsettling for a child who sees blatant anti-Semitism everywhere. What if all the Soviet people who deride Jews are right? he wonders. Besides, as the narrator of “The Night We Were Told Brezhnev Was Dead” reflects: “Hardly any one of us knew the first thing about Jewish history or a single word of the Jewish language, which was called Hebrew and was banned from private study.”

As a Jew, he feels especially vulnerable to the state’s repression: “All of us Soviet people existed largely at the mercy of the KGB”—especially Jews. Yet the Soviet Union insisted it was a “society of ultimate justice,” in contrast to America, “a dark, dangerous, ominously rumbling, potentially deadly word.” America was to be hated, and “ordinary oppressed, exploited, proletarian Americans” were to be pitied. While many stories illuminate the absurdity of Soviet society, Iossel conveys the brutal oppression of the surveillance state most intensely, and hauntingly, in the title story: an internal monologue by a wife fearing that agents have come to arrest her husband in the middle of the night. “Anyone can be disappeared at any time,” she thinks, knowing that she will be taken soon after, their orphaned children will be indoctrinated to hate them, and no one will care.

Appealing stories bear witness to a dark reality.

A young Canadian Muslim woman finds that sticking to one’s principles is not for the faint of heart, especially when you’re juggling two jobs—and a brewing romance.

Twenty-four-year-old Hanaan “Hana” Khan has her hands full: She has an internship at a local Toronto indie radio station; a job at her family restaurant, Three Sisters Biryani Poutine; and a self-produced podcast, Ana’s Brown Girl Rambles. Unfortunately, the internship is not quite the career launchpad that Hana hoped it would be. Worse, Three Sisters is in trouble despite the family’s best efforts. Wholistic Burgers and Grill, claiming to do halal right, is opening across the street, threatening to further sink the Khan family’s fortunes after 15 years of business. It doesn’t help that handsome Aydin Shah is spearheading the new restaurant with his rich father and threatening to gentrify the diverse Scarborough neighborhood. Hana finds there’s more to Aydin than his sexy silver shades and is not sure what to make of her budding feelings for the enemy. Jalaluddin has a keen ear for rapid-fire dialogue and lively characters who add plenty of color. Hana’s feistiness and occasional impulsiveness make her an endearing protagonist, and you’ll root for her especially when darker events threaten to torpedo the carefully constructed community festival her family has cobbled together.
When her identical twin sister goes missing, a Scottish writer living in Los Angeles returns home.

On Sept. 5, 1998, identical twins Ellice and Catriona show up at Edinburgh’s Granton Harbour at dawn, covered in blood and badly beaten, seeking passage aboard a pirate ship. That was the day their second life began. Fast-forward almost two decades and the now 31-year-old twins are estranged. El is married to their childhood friend Ross and living in Edinburgh in the house on Westeryk Road where the twins had lived with their mother and grandfather. Cat is single and living in a condo overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Southern California. When El goes missing while sailing, Ross calls Cat, and she rushes back to Edinburgh. Cat is convinced that El is fine because she has an unshakable belief that she would have felt it if her sister were dead, and the cruelty of going missing is exactly what she would expect from El. Returning to her childhood home stirs up long-buried memories for Cat. Front and center among those are the endless hours the pair spent with Ross and a host of imaginary friends in Mirrorland, their name for the secret covered alley next to the house that was the setting for their childhood adventures on the high seas, in the Wild West, and at the prison from *The Shawshank Redemption*. Author Johnstone has created a dark, twisting thriller that explores the pitch-black corners of people’s minds; how good and bad, love and hate, terror and joy can co-exist; and how childhood memories can be rewritten with time as the lines between imagination
and reality are blurred. Fans of Gillian Flynn’s creeping dread and Liane Moriarty’s nuanced morality and complex relationships should love this book.

An enthralling thriller.

HEAVEN
Kawakami, Mieko
Trans. by Bett, Sam & Boyd, David
Europa Editions (192 pp.)
$23.00 | May 25, 2021
978-1-60945-621-4

This novel from the author of Breasts and Eggs (2020) takes on another subject seldom tapped in literary fiction and blows it open with raw and eloquent intensity. Kawakami has a unique knack for burrowing into discomfort, and she does it in a startlingly graceful way. Like her last novel—an unsparing treatise on the pressures of being a woman in male-dominated Japan—this book isn’t for the fainthearted. Told from the perspective of a 14-year-old boy in present-day Japan, Kawakami’s tale follows the volatile lives of two teenagers relentlessly bullied by their peers. At the outset, our protagonist—he’s referred to as “Eyes” by his tormentors because of his lazy eye—begins a furtive exchange of notes with Kojima, a quiet girl who’s also suffered at the hands of her classmates. Kojima has “stiff-looking hair” that sticks out in all directions and white shoes that are scuffed and dirty. Our narrator believes his eye is “behind all [his] problems...like a slimy deep sea fish from a hidden world.” Brought together by their differences and their shared victimhood, the two teens find a safe haven in the world of words they build. Rather than fight back, they actively succumb to the daily violence wreaked on them, clinging to the philosophy that giving in can be an act of resistance. “No matter what they do, we come to school each day, which makes them even more scared,” Kojima reasons. On the contrary, the harm they endure becomes more severe, and cheap kicks and punches escalate into grisly attacks that border on snuff. Still, Kawakami manages to pull us further in, illuminating the perils within the social structures we’ve been taught to trust.

An unexpected classic.

SUNFLOWER SISTERS
Kelly, Martha Hall
Ballantine (528 pp.)
$28.00 | Mar. 30, 2021
978-1-5247-9640-2

A saga of the Civil War gathers all the usual suspects—enslaved people, slave owners, abolitionists, soldiers, and nurses—but the result is far from clichéd. Kelly’s ambitious tale begs to be called “sweeping,” but its chief virtue is the way it homes in on the microcosms, some horrific, inhabited by its three narrators. Georgy, from New York, one of seven daughters of the abolitionist Woolsey family, is determined to become a nurse. She studies with Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, America’s first female medical school graduate, and strives to batter down prejudice not just against women doctors, but women nurses. Despite her proven ability, she’s often replaced at battlefield hospitals by incompetent, drunken male nurses. Jemma’s family is enslaved on the Peeler tobacco plantation in the border state of Maryland, where the White population seems equally divided between Union and Rebel sympathies. Firmly in the second camp is Anne-May, who inherited the Peeler plantation from her elderly Aunt Tandy Rose, flouting her late aunt’s testamentary directive to free Peeler’s slaves. Anne-May is bad to the bone, whips Jemma regularly, employs a brutal overseer, spends her family’s dwindling funds on fripperies, is addicted to snuff, and takes advantage of her husband’s absence at the front to flagrantly carry on an affair with a local merchant. The affair turns into a spying mission for the Confederacy, involuntarily abetted by Jemma, who, more literate...
than Anne-May, is forced to write down Union secrets in Anne-May’s little red book. And that’s only the beginning of Anne-May’s moral bankruptcy. These alternating, intimate vantage points situate readers in the chaotic political, military, and social hellscape of Civil War America, from Gettysburg to the draft riots. Cliffhangers closing each chapter keep the plot moving at a satisfying clip.

Histhorical verisimilitude worthy of a Ken Burns document-

tary but oh so much more lurid.

YOU LOVE ME

Kepnes, Caroline

Random House (400 pp.)

$28.00 | Apr. 6, 2021

978-0-593-13378-1

Joe Goldberg is back, once again consumed with thoughts about a woman who loves books.

Forced to abandon his son to his deranged ex-girlfriend Love Quinn, Joe lands on Bainbridge Island, near Seattle. He begins volunteering at the local library, where he quickly becomes entangled in the life of librarian Mary Kay DiMarco, mom to Nomi, a teenager whose favorite book is Columbine. Because Joe has top-notch stalking skills, he and Mary Kay are quickly more than work spouses, and Mary Kay introduces Joe to her closest friends: Seamus, a Crossfit proselytizer who hopes to date Mary Kay himself, and Melanda, a high school teacher so close to Mary Kay that she practically co-parents “Joe Goldberg is back, once again consumed with thoughts about a woman who loves books.”

“...cameraman spends a revealing couple of days with his reticent father...”

“Baran’s tale is a potent character study.”

“An absorbing, sometimes grim look at a family’s darker side.”

—Kirkus Reviews

For All Inquiries, Please Email jackbaran@gmail.com
Nomi. Neither of them much likes Joe, whom they see as an interloper. As Joe pursues Mary Kay, Kepnes employs techniques from Joe’s earlier adventures, including having him imprison characters who threaten his romantic overtures in a special, nearly soundproof room—this time the so-called Whisper Room is in his basement. While using so many cliffhangers at the ends of chapters helps generate excitement (and it will be helpful for the Netflix series), too often these surprises come out of nowhere, introducing a character, for example, who has not even been foreshadowed. Of course, telling the story in Joe’s voice, addressed to “you”—in this case Mary Kay—is the signature of the series, but Joe’s head is an uncomfortable place to be, particularly when he reduces women to faux feminist caricatures or contemplates homicide. The most compelling plot twists come from the women characters, and as Joe’s past comes back to wreak havoc on his new love affair, Mary Kay herself throws Joe some unexpected curveballs.

Part stalker romance, part thriller, the arc of this story is a bit blurry, but fans of the You series will be delighted.
Kiev-born Kuznetsova begins her novel with a knowing nod to Russian literature: a formal character list that pointedly includes pet cats and gives clues to the plot ahead. The opening scene reads like a traditional framing device when Natasha, a Russian born, American-raised actress Skyping with her almost 90-year-old Baba Larissa in Kiev, asks for the full story behind how Larissa’s grandmother Tonya died in WWII. And at first, new mother Natasha’s typical millennial ambivalence toward domesticity seems less important than Larissa’s story. In a tough, cynical voice devoid of sentimentality, Larissa describes how, in 1940, after a life of coddled comfort lasting through Communist rule, her suddenly penniless grandmother Tonya moved in with her engineer son, Fyodor, Larissa’s father. Soon Germany’s invasion forced Fyodor and family to evacuate Kiev to Lower Turinsk, accompanied by the Orlovs, a fellow engineer’s family. Tonya favored Larissa’s younger sister, Polya, whom the bookish 13-year-old Larissa considered a frivolous “lobotomized swan.” But family roles began to change as survival required increasingly difficult sacrifices and ethical choices. While Larissa discovered complicated romantic feelings toward the two Orlov brothers, Polya turned inward and Tonya grew pathetically demented. Meanwhile, the original framing device begins to dissolve as the secrets Larissa reveals (or keeps hidden) about herself and Tonya parallel the crises Natasha faces—loving her (unbelievably understanding) husband and infant daughter while becoming dangerously attracted to her husband’s friend Stas, who represents the free-spirited independence she craves. In shifting first-person narratives in which they analyze each other with assumptions that may or may not be accurate, Natasha and Larissa build a portrait of family love in all its variations.

Most compelling when history intersects with the emotions of women figuring out their lives today.
There, he learns that everybody just loved Shannon, who was on
Minguier, Charles does not ask Vincent to design a secret hide-
But DeMarco, overwhelmed by the news of Shannon Doyle's
addicted cleaner who almost certainly stole Shannon's diamond
But Mahoney wants his unofficial bagman and fixer to track
Consummate D.C. insider Joe
Speaker of the House John Fitzpat-
He can still move his left hand, which he uses to operate his
In 1889 Paris, Vincent Cavel and his
It all begins when Vincent accepts a curious job from a
the newfangled technologies of the modern era. Meanwhile,
there is no element of his body,” but he wants people to “remember there's a person in here.” Leitch, who is
A lightweight thriller contours an earnest, sincere portrait
An exciting adventure story ripe for cinematic treatment.

The most conventional and least satisfying of the anti-
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“Men and women in the thrall of vertiginous desires negotiate the precariousness and joys of sex, love, and commitment.”

*SEX WITH STRANGERS*

Lowenthal, Michael

Univ. of Wisconsin (160 pp.)

$17.95 paper | Mar. 23, 2021

978-0-299-33264-8

Eight stories about men and women in the thrall of vertiginous desires, negotiating the precariousness and joys of sex, love, and commitment.

The stories in Lowenthal’s latest collection simmer with fearless honesty as characters struggle with intimacy and learn that we are as much strangers to ourselves as we are to others, even those whom we most fiercely cherish and love. Frenzied by longing and loneliness, these diverse characters startle themselves with their own thoughts, desires, and behaviors and reckon with what their shortcomings and mistakes must mean about who they are. In “You Are Here,” a newly ordained priest is granted the position of chaplain on a cruise through the Caribbean, though this reward for graduating at the top of his class becomes a hurdle when a middle-aged married couple confides in him about the wife’s infidelity and he reencounters an ex-girlfriend, a crew member of the ship. Should an oath and loneliness, these diverse characters startle themselves with their own thoughts, desires, and behaviors and reckon with what their shortcomings and mistakes must mean about who they are. In “You Are Here,” a newly ordained priest is granted the position of chaplain on a cruise through the Caribbean, though this reward for graduating at the top of his class becomes a hurdle when a middle-aged married couple confides in him about the wife’s infidelity and he reencounters an ex-girlfriend, a crew member of the ship. Should an oath be rescinded for the sake of one’s happiness? he asks. And what does it mean that he’s suspended in ongoing attraction and love for his ex when he has renounced corporeal desires in service to God? In “Uncle Kent,” a single mother observes her teenage daughter mature beneath the gaze of a dear family friend. How does she protect her daughter from someone they both trust, and what is the cost? In the collection’s final and most poignant story, “The Gift of Travel,” a young gay man nurses his mentor, a writer afflicted by AIDS, and struggles to salvage a relationship he ruined by cheating. “Thomas had wondered what could be the point in pleasing strangers, but what I found was that I wasn’t focused on the other men, whose names I rarely bothered to discover; the stranger I discovered was myself.”

In these searing stories, the gulf between who we think we are and who we become when gripped by desire is ever widening.

*GOBLIN A Novel In Six Novellas*

Malerman, Josh

Illus. by Chadbourne, Glenn

Del Rey (400 pp.)

$28.00 | May 18, 2021

978-0-345-53780-9

In interconnected stories, the author of *Bird Box* (2014) immerses us in the Midwestern town of Goblin, where it never stops raining, the sun sets a minute before it does in neighboring towns, the dead are buried standing up, and the police “move like...the dead.” Though touted as an all-American tourist attraction, Goblin has been shrouded in spookiness since its original settlers were ambushed by Native Americans. (“Dad says they had it coming, I don’t doubt it,” one character says.) It’s a place where people obsessively tempt the worst kinds of fates. Determined to bag a Big Owl—an endangered bird no one else has had the temerity to hunt—celebrated big-game hunter Neal Nash departs his wild 60th birthday party to enter into the haunted, off-limits North Woods where the owls reside. A touring magician with the name Roman Emperor strikes a Faustian deal to rise from obscurity with a shocking trick that sends sensitive souls running. Goblin’s most celebrated figure, widower Wayne Sherman, who created an impenetrable maze with a chilling secret at the end of it, has his cover blown by a brilliant 9-year-old girl. With its array of misfits, also including a man whose romantic interest talks him into chopping off his toes as a sign of devotion, Malerman’s darkly comic portrait of Goblin is not without its grim appeal. He is right at home in the graphic-novel mode—without the graphics, save for occasional full-page illustrations by Chadbourne. But most of the stories lack either any real sense of surprise or a satisfying payoff. And a few of them drag on. Give the author credit, though, for continuing to explore alternative realities with alternative fictional approaches.

An entertaining but ultimately undercooked collection.

*WHEN THE STARS GO DARK*

McLain, Paula

Ballantine (384 pp.)

$28.00 | Apr. 13, 2021

978-0-593-23789-2

A San Francisco homicide detective traumatized by personal tragedy and the many horrors she’s encountered returns to Mendocino, once her childhood sanctuary, only to be drawn into the case of a missing girl and the unresolved mysteries of her own past.

“For as long as I could remember, I’d had reasons to disappear,” Anna Hart muses. “I was an expert at making myself invisible.” Orphaned at 8 and reared in a series of foster homes, this police detective has an unwavering commitment to the cases of missing and murdered children and an uncanny “radar for victims.” Then her own family is shattered by a death she might have prevented. Anna flees to Mendocino, where a foster family once provided not only love, but also survival lessons and where Anna agrees to help a local sheriff—also a childhood friend—as he investigates the case of a teenage girl who seems to have been abducted. But the disappearance of Cameron Curtis recalls for Anna a more distant Mendocino mystery: the vanishing of a childhood friend of hers in 1972. And when two more girls are abducted shortly after Cameron—one of them the real-life Polly Klaas—the stage seems set for a predictable serial killer hunt. But McLain largely avoids that well-trodden path to craft instead a psychological thriller that deftly evokes both the entrancing landscape of the Mendocino hills and the
rough terrain of shattered lives. “No one can save anyone,” the haunted Anna laments at the outset, but the novel’s convinc - ing outcome, while grimly realistic, permits her to think oth- erwise. Most memorable of all are the girls, past and present, who emerge here not as convenient victims but as vulnerable, believable characters.

A muted yet thrilling multilayered mystery enriched by keen psychological and emotional insight.

NERVOUS SYSTEM
Meruane, Lina
Trans. by McDowell, Megan
Graywolf (176 pp.)
$15.99 paper | May 18, 2021
978-1-64445-055-0

A woman considers her lifelong obsessions with illness, death, and the universe.

The second novel translated into English by Chilean author Meruane concerns Ella, an astrophysics scholar whose efforts to finish her dissertation on black holes are perpetually foiled. Her health is one reason for that: She’s suffering from back pain whose cause proves difficult to diagnose but presses her into pallia - tive chemotherapy. Her loved ones’ health is another: Her hus - band, an anthropologist, was badly injured in an explosion near a dig where he was working; her father, a renowned doctor, is in decline. These predilections prompt Ella to remember her mother’s death, shortly after Ella was born, and remembering only stokes her feelings of complicity in her loss. (Her older brother isn’t shy about assigning blame: “Did you forget you killed her?” he tells Ella.) For all the family drama at play here, though, the novel is less a morbid domestic tale and more a postmodern meditation on how illness and loss forge connec - tions as enduring as a happy marriage or healthy children; if Don DeLillo wrote a family saga, it might read like this. Astro - physics gives Ella an occupation, but the business of stars and the vacuum of outer space also establishes a chilly mood, put - ting her anxieties at a remove. (“The ancients thought that sad- ness came from a malign alignment of the stars.”) Meruane is an engaging, lyrical writer, often injecting her sentences with peculiar triplets of words that evoke Ella’s scattered conscious - ness: “Fingers that entered her dry open lip-full mouth...”; “She had lost house head hummingbirds.” The iciness of Meruane’s style somewhat blunts the impact of the climax, but her command of Ella’s anxiety, bordering on despair, makes it a fair trade-off.

A complex, melancholy tale of a woman on the brink.

THE MAIDENS
Michaelides, Alex
Celadon Books (352 pp.)
$25.19 | Jun. 1, 2021
978-1-250-30445-2

A blend of psychological mystery and gothic thriller puts a psychotherapist in pursuit of a serial killer on the campus of Cambridge University.

The author’s second novel features a psychotherapist as its main character, as did his 2019 debut, The Silent Patient (whose main character makes an appearance here). This book’s protagonist is Mariana, who has a busy practice in London specializing in group therapy. At 36, she’s a widow, reeling from the drowning a year before of her beloved husband, Sebastian. She’s galvanized out of her fog by a call from her niece, Zoe, who was raised by Mariana and Sebastian after her parents died. Zoe is now studying at Cam - bridge, where Mariana and Sebastian met and courted. Zoe has terrible news: Her close friend Tara has been murdered, savagely stabbed and dumped in a wood. Mariana heads for Cambridge and, when the police arrest someone she thinks is innocent, starts her own investigation. She zeroes in on Edward Fosca, a handsome, charismatic classics professor who has a cultlike following of beautiful female students (which included Tara) called the Maidens, a reference to the cult of Eleusis in ancient Greece, whose followers worshipped Demeter and Persephone. Suspicious characters seem to be around every ivy-covered corner of the campus, though—an audacious young man Mariana meets on the train, one of her patients who has turned stalker, a porter at one of the college’s venerable houses, even the surly police inspector. The book gets off to a slow start, front-loaded with backstories and a Cambridge travelogue, but then picks up the pace and piles up the bodies. With its ambience of ritu - alistic murders, ancient myths, and the venerable college, the story is a gothic thriller despite its contemporary setting. That makes Mariana tough to get on board with—she behaves less like a modern professional woman than a 19th-century gothic heroine, a clueless woman who can be counted on in any situa - tion to make the worst possible choice. And the book’s ending, while surprising, also feels unearned, like a bolt from the blue hurled by some demigod.

Eerie atmosphere isn’t enough to overcome an unsatisfy - ing plot and sometimes-exasperating protagonist.
“A surrealistic tale of love, heartbreak, and being haunted by the past.”

PEACES

HOT STEW
Mozeley, Fiona
Algonquin (320 pp.)
$26.95 | Apr. 20, 2021
978-1-64375-155-9

The bones of history are glimpsed in modern-day London through a Soho building housing prostitutes, addicts, and a French restaurant.

Mozeley’s follow-up to Elmet, her widely praised debut, explores similar themes—property, ownership, gender—but exchanges rural for urban and replaces visceral intensity with something much longer and more sprawling. Through a sizable cast of characters and references to Soho’s origins, the author conjures up the notorious London village in all its seedy glory; now awash not only with the sex industry, drinking holes, and crime, but also upscale developments and a more stylish, younger crowd. This modern scenario sits atop earth that has witnessed centuries of human activity, brothels and peripheral ones lack definition. Cheryl’s transfiguration in modern-day London through a Soho building and is trying to evict the prostitutes as well as the homeless drug addicts in the cellar and everyone else. This decision, the women’s response, and the disappearance of Cheryl Lavery, one of the homeless people, drive the action, but Mozeley’s focus is more on her web of interconnected characters than events. And while themes of human trafficking, violence, and depravity seam the narrative, relationships and conversations dominate, sometimes a weakness when central figures can seem two-dimensional and peripheral ones lack definition. Cheryl’s transfiguration in the bowels of the city adds a surreal, dreamlike quality to a loose, witty, soapy story that, even while reaching toward cataclysmic events, retains gentle detachment.

A long, empathetic vision of place and people is delivered with wide context but less pungency than its title implies.

OPEN WATER
Nelson, Caleb Azumah
Black Cat/Grove (160 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Apr. 13, 2021
978-0-8021-5794-2

A riveting love story that celebrates the cultural significance of Black artists and examines the ways systemic racism figures into every aspect of the lives of young Black men.

A photographer in his early 20s meets his friend Samuel for drinks at a pub in southeast London and finds himself instantly attracted to Samuel’s girlfriend, a dancer and university student. These two unnamed figures—the book employs an unusual second-person narration, addressing the photographer as “you”—find their lives entangled almost immediately. Both know what it means to be young and Black in London, having won scholarships to attend elite private schools where they felt constantly out of place and now attempting to navigate artistic paths. The relationship becomes increasingly intimate as a jealous Samuel breaks up with the young woman, and the unnamed two collaborate on a photography project, capturing portraits of Black Londoners. Though they dance around the question of love, they find themselves spending days on end with each other, and he begins to spend more and more nights at the flat she shares with her mother, at first on the couch and eventually in her bed. As the two negotiate what it means to turn a strong and invaluable friendship into a relationship, he finds himself unable to articulate his fears and traumas to her, withdrawing in order to process memories of racial violence and police brutality; either witnessed or experienced firsthand. Black art becomes both balm and mirror for the photographer as he by turns hides from and wrestles with questions that may determine the course of his relationship: How can you find sanctuary in love when systemic forces seem determinedly against you? And how do you express vulnerability and fear when you are socialized to bottle up your emotions, to present a mask of strength?

Written in lyrical and propulsive prose, a searing debut.

PEACES
Oyeyemi, Helen
Riverhead (272 pp.)
$27.00 | Apr. 6, 2021
978-0-593-19233-7

Two lovers embark on a train journey that forces them to confront who they are to one another—and who they were before ever meeting.

Otto and Xavier Shin board the sleeper train The Lucky Day and set off on “the Lakes and Mountains Route” for their “non-honeymoon honeymoon.” As they explore The Lucky Day’s magnificently arrayed carriages, Xavier notices their host, the mysterious Ava Kapoor, brandishing a sign that says “Hello”—or is it “Help?”—from the adjoining car. One mystery leads to another, and Otto and Xavier must unravel Ava Kapoor’s story if they are to understand their relationship to the past they’ve hidden from one another. At the heart of the novel is a dispute over an inheritance—which turns out to be a dispute over reality. Is Ava Kapoor the rightful heir to Karel Stojaspal’s fortune, or does his son Přemysl actually exist to dispute the estate? Oyeyemi imbues Otto and Xavier’s journey with her familiar flair for the fantastic, from wily pet mongooses to trainwide bazaars to men with hazy faces. Yet, as Oyeyemi once again pushes the boundaries of the novel, each of the spaces, times, and characters here are as loose, fragmentary, and un-pin-down-able as the man Otto is unable to see. Like interlinking train carriages, Otto’s
past leads to Ava Kapoor’s, and Xavier’s leads to yet another passenger’s. Combined, the stories confirm the existence of Prem but raise questions about what it means to be understood by the people who love and know you best. “You run the romantic gauntlet for decades without knowing who exactly it is you’re giving and taking such a battering in order to reach,” Otto writes early in the novel. “And then, by some stroke of fortune, the gauntlet concludes, the person does exist after all.”

A surrealist tale of love, heartbreak, and being haunted by the past.

**YES, DADDY**
*Parks-Ramage, Jonathan*
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (388 pp.)
$25.00 | May 18, 2021
978-0-358-44771-9

A young gay writer’s dream relationship turns into an abusive nightmare.

Parks-Ramage’s emotionally complex debut is narrated by Jonah, a young New Yorker determined to forget his oppressive, conservative upbringing. As Jonah was growing up in suburban Illinois, his pastor father forced him into gay conversion therapy, which only motivated him to escape the Midwest. But Gotham has left him broke and stalled his post–MFA dreams of becoming a playwright. Lonely, needy, and a touch scheming, he insinuates himself with Richard, a wealthy and accomplished gay playwright. Richard draws Jonah into his inner circle, inviting him for a stay at his Hamp- tons compound. It soon becomes clear, though, that Jonah is just one of numerous handsome and exploitable young men Richard has deceitfully roped into a form of indentured servitude; humiliations abound, from violent, bullying rages to drug-induced rape. When Richard is finally brought to trial, as we learn in the prologue, Jonah is too frightened to follow through on his plan to testify against him. It seems at first that Parks-Ramage has given the plot away early, but the closing chapters deepen the story, not just about Richard, but about Jonah’s struggle to deal with multiple betrayals and abuses along with his callowness. The novel’s title most directly refers to Jonah and Richard’s sub-dom relationship, but it’s also concerned with multiple father figures and their power dynamics, including Jonah’s father and God. Jonah’s first-person narration gives the book a confessional feel while his shifts to second person, addressing another of Richard’s victims, add a note of regret and complicity. “The things we worship eat us alive,” Richard says at one point, and the novel smartly showcases just how corrosive idolatry is.

A well-formed coming-of-age story, both erotic and chilling.

**THE SANATORIUM**
*Pearse, Sarah*
Pamela Dorman/Viking (400 pp.)
$18.88 | Feb. 2, 2021
978-1-9-848-0688-8

A hotel built on the grounds of a sanatorium has more dead bodies than paying guests.

A police detective on sabbatical after flubbing a case, Elin Warner travels with her boyfriend, Will, to Le Sommet, a remote, glass-walled, five-star hotel in the Swiss Alps, at the invitation of her estranged brother, Isaac. Isaac is throwing a party to celebrate his engagement to Laure, assistant manager at the hotel, which has been the focus of local controversy due to its shadowy history. Elin’s creepy feelings about the trip are quickly confirmed as a storm cuts off access to the mountain, a receptionist is kidnapped, a dead body is found in the snow, and Laure disappears. As overloaded, grisly, and ultimately silly as Pearse’s locked-room debut may be, the biggest mystery is how Elin ever made it out of the police academy. As she slowly reasons her way through the unfolding situation, her deductions of even the most obvious points appear in italics—“That means Laure has another phone.” This...it isn’t an accident. “She’s been killed. This is murder”—as do what seem to be the protagonist’s questions to herself about how to move things along. “So where could they have gone?” “So what are my next steps going to be?” “She examines the glass balustrade in front of her. Can I get over it?” What Elin can’t get over is a tragedy in her childhood for which she holds her brother responsible; it comes up every few pages until being resolved with a not-too-believable twist that may or may not be retwisted in a mystifying epilogue. Fortunately for Elin, she does have a few insider tricks up her sleeve. “She knows that there is an app called Find My iPhone...it would show the last location where it had a signal.” Wait. Why are you laughing? This is a thriller!

Oh, dear.

**THE LADY HAS A PAST**
*Quick, Amanda*
Berkley (336 pp.)
$16.19 | May 4, 2021
978-1-9-848-0688-8

The world of luxury hides nefarious secrets in this latest installment in the Burning Cove series.

Lyra Brazier’s new job as an apprentice investigator is off to a wild start. Her first client interview turns into a murder scene, and, shortly after, her boss, Raina Kirk, goes missing. Lyra isn’t sure if investigating is for her, but she’s determined to at least solve this mystery. She won’t be on her own, though. Antiquarian book dealer Simon Cage is sent by nightclub owner Luther Pell, Raina’s lover, to assist Lyra. Lyra and Simon pose as
newlyweds at Raina’s last presumed whereabouts, a hotel with an exclusive spa where rumors and dark secrets abound. Simon’s ability to sense emotions tied to objects has been a great asset in other crime-related cases and comes in handy here, too. As the pair draw closer to tying clues together, though, they risk making themselves the next targets. Mystery and action drive this novel, but it’s also a solid romance—and a double one at that. Simon and Lyra embark on a fling and develop deeper feelings while Luther and Raina’s relationship is explored as well. Some of the heavy topics lack emotional heft, but this allows the narrative to maintain its quick, light tone. The touch of paranormal blends in seamlessly. Reminiscent of an old-school whodunit, fitting with the 1930s setting, this story is chock full of deceit, secret pasts, red herrings, lively banter, exciting sleuthing, and power-hungry baddies.

A Hollywood star banishes himself to Palm Springs only to be thrust back into the limelight by, of all people, his young “niblings,” or niece and nephew. The children, Grant and Maisie, are 6 and 9, respectively, spending the summer with their Uncle Patrick, or GUP as they call him: Gay Uncle Patrick. One of the stars of the beloved TV sitcom The People Upstairs (think Friends), Patrick has for four years marooned himself in the desert, tetchy about his fame, his career, and his unresolved grief over the loss of his partner, Joe, the victim of a drunk driver. “He was so afraid people wouldn’t laugh if everyone knew how twisted he looked on the inside,” Rowley writes about Patrick. Self-critical but charming, suave yet insecure, Patrick is a memorable character, and it’s genuinely thrilling to read screenwriter-turned-novelist Rowley’s take on the mechanics of stardom, especially about a star who’s no longer young. Grant and Maisie are in Palm Springs because their mother has recently died and their father, Patrick’s brother, is near Palm Springs rehabbing from a drug addiction; Patrick becomes the niblings’ de-facto parent and therapist for the summer. The tension between Patrick and the kids initially makes it a delight to be inside his head. Edgar, however, isn’t just charitable—he’s also impossibly good-looking and openly gay. Carter both admires and hates him for being so perfect (or, as he puts it, “I seriously wanted to slap his photo or have sex with it”). As soon as Carter meets Prince Edgar, however, he realizes that he’s more than just a man who’s next in line to the throne—he’s also the guy of Carter’s dreams. They begin a whirlwind romance that’s full of public dates and even more public humiliations, such as Carter getting food poisoning on live TV. But their problems are larger than just an ill-timed bout of projectile vomiting. Carter isn’t sure if their relationship can withstand tabloid headlines, constant public opinions, and the fact that the queen doesn’t much care for their union. As the scrutiny intensifies and the obstacles mount, Carter wonders if he and Edgar are doomed—or if their royal romance is his happily-ever-after. Carter is a wickedly sharp and snarky narrator, throwing in pop-culture references and self-deprecating asides that make it a delight to be inside his head. Edgar, however, isn’t as easy to like. Because his relationship with Carter develops so quickly, it’s hard to understand his motivations or get invested in the men’s love story. However, Rudnick (who, in addition to being a novelist, is a playwright and screenwriter) rounds out their world with a gaggle of wacky side characters who make it easy to coast along on the surface.

A light and frothy take on royal romance.
No oceans in Minnesota, you say?

That won’t stop Lucas Davenport and Virgil Flowers, who are clearly determined to burn through their bucket list on the federal government’s dime.

The murders of three Coast Guard officers chasing a suspicious boat in Florida waters by crooks who set fire to the boat moments after abandoning it send shock waves through the DEA, the FBI, and eventually the U.S. Marshals Service. In short order Lucas and his colleague and pal Bob Matees find themselves on a task force Florida Sen. Christopher Colles convenes to find the drugs the fugitives managed to dump force’s net widens to make room for Virgil, who, working with fans of this long-running series will just know that Sandford has and swap wisecracks. Everything is so relaxed and routine that circumstances too perfectly mimic what could have happened to Emily’s life. Most of the story occurs in New York, and Santopolo paints vivid pictures of city sights and West Village hot spots while, in the college flashbacks, she deftly captures the passion that can pervade early adulthood as well as the nostalgia that follows those intense experiences. Despite a few scenarios that strain credulity, like a therapy patient whose personal circumstances too perfectly mimic what could have happened to Emily, the book is consistently entertaining. More than just a love triangle, the story explores difficult topics ranging from grief and loss to self-doubt and suicide.

An often melancholy but romantic tale about the importance of compromise and growth in relationships.

**EVERYTHING AFTER**

*Santopolo, Jill*

Putnam (336 pp.)

$26.00 | Mar. 9, 2021

978-0-593-08696-4

When a young woman’s marriage hits a road bump, she reconnects with a long-lost love and wonders whether she followed the wrong path into her adulthood.

Emily Gold has a handsome husband and a successful therapy practice at NYU. What she wants now is a baby. After a couple of years of marriage, her husband, Ezra, a respected pediatriic oncologist, is finally ready to start trying. Unfortunately, it takes several months to conceive, and shortly after they do, Emily miscarries. The miscarriage awakens Emily’s memories of a miscarriage she suffered more than a decade earlier when she was in college and deeply in love with a man named Rob. Rob and Emily were part of a band, and they delighted in performing together. After the college miscarriage, Emily distanced herself from not only Rob, but also her own musical ambitions. Now that she’s lost another baby and her husband refuses to grieve with her, Emily starts missing Rob and the person she was when she was with him. It’s particularly difficult for Emily to forget Rob now that he’s finally had success as a musician; she hears his voice whenever she turns on the radio. Emily tracks him down so they can explore whether they gave up on their relationship too soon. Once Emily begins spending time with Rob again, she wonders if Ezra will try to fight for her and whether that’s even what she wants. Told primarily in the third person, the book is interspersed with first-person journal entries from earlier in Emily’s life. Most of the story focuses on Olivia, a secretary at a Los Angeles newspaper who dreams of becoming a professional photographer. When her actor boyfriend, Delan, a Kurdish immigrant, decides to attend a family wedding in northern Iraq, she jumps at the chance to travel to war-ravaged Kurdistan with her Iraqi-born boyfriend. Inspired by her father’s stories of growing up in the Kurdish region of Iraq, Sardar’s new novel is a devastating reminder of what happens when American privilege smacks against hard reality. Set in 1979, the novel focuses on Olivia, a secretary at a Los Angeles newspaper who dreams of becoming a professional photographer. When her actor boyfriend, Delan, a Kurdish immigrant, decides to attend a family wedding in northern Iraq, she jumps at the chance to tag along, thrilled at the idea of traveling to such a bold destination, meeting his family, and, most importantly, taking the sort of exotic photos that will secure her a new career. Olivia is dimly aware that the country is politically unsettled, but the landscape turns out to be far more treacherous than she imagined, and life-threatening chaos shatters her romantic notions about photography in a war zone. Sardar’s decision to make her protagonist American and not Kurdish is deliberate, and she places the reader squarely in Olivia’s inexperienced shoes with compassion and insight. Warm and lush descriptions of the Kurdish countryside and culture contrast vividly with sudden moments of unthinkable violence. This is an unforgettable story about war and family, responsibility and love, but Sardar also pays tribute to the priceless connections we forge.

**OCEAN PREY**

*Sandford, John*

Putnam (432 pp.)

$29.00 | Apr. 13, 2021

978-0-593-08702-2

An aspiring American photographer travels to war-ravaged Kurdistan with her Iraqi-born boyfriend. Inspired by her father’s stories of growing up in the Kurdish region of Iraq, Sardar’s new novel is a devastating reminder of what happens when American privilege smacks against hard reality. Set in 1979, the novel focuses on Olivia, a secretary at a Los Angeles newspaper who dreams of becoming a professional photographer. When her actor boyfriend, Delan, a Kurdish immigrant, decides to attend a family wedding in northern Iraq, she jumps at the chance to tag along, thrilled at the idea of traveling to such a bold destination, meeting his family, and, most importantly, taking the sort of exotic photos that will secure her a new career. Olivia is dimly aware that the country is politically unsettled, but the landscape turns out to be far more treacherous than she imagined, and life-threatening chaos shatters her romantic notions about photography in a war zone. Sardar’s decision to make her protagonist American and not Kurdish is deliberate, and she places the reader squarely in Olivia’s inexperienced shoes with compassion and insight. Warm and lush descriptions of the Kurdish countryside and culture contrast vividly with sudden moments of unthinkable violence. This is an unforgettable story about war and family, responsibility and love, but Sardar also pays tribute to the priceless connections we forge.

**TAKE WHAT YOU CAN CARRY**

*Sardar, Gian*

Lake Union Publishing (336 pp.)

$15.99 | May 1, 2021

978-1-5420-2689-5
at the most terrible moments. “To identify that thing you long for and seek it out, it’s heartbreakingly human,” Olivia thinks. What she wants so desperately—intimacy, stability, success—will come at a high cost.

A heartbreaking story about war, family, and love.

**BINA**

* A Novel in Warnings

*Schofield, Anakana*
New York Review Books (328 pp.)
$17.95 paper | Feb. 2, 2021
978-1-68137-549-6

An elderly woman in western Ireland holds up her life as a cautionary tale.

Partway through the tale told by Schofield’s garrulous 74-year-old narrator, she reflects on what her story could be if she were a woman with plenty of time left to her: “She’d lace up paragraphs that would absorb you and you’d believe her, because you’re easy this way. I am not that woman. I’m not easy.” She’s right: Bina and her story are anything but easy. The story of her later life unspools, often meandering down the page in broken lines like poetry (an effect achieved because she’s partly writing on the backs of receipts and bills) and including footnotes for digressions. Bina is especially concerned with warning readers not to end up as she did after helping a man—the bully-luring Eddie—who ruined her life the day he landed in a ditch on her property after a motorcycle accident. She tells of her unwritten role as a kind of counterculture icon to a group of young radicals she calls “the Crusties” after being jailed for hitting an airplane with a hammer during a protest. (She was thinking of Eddie.) And she speaks of her secret work with a dying-with-for and seek it out, it’s heartbreakingly human,” Olivia thinks. What she wants so desperately—intimacy, stability, success—will come at a high cost.

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William, is a good man, somewhat baffled by his wife. The narrative unfolds slowly at first; then there’s a terrible accident, which swiftly upends everything. Author Silver is probing grief and guilt here as well as the mysteries of fate and character. On two separate occasions, Jean and Julian look at Miggy, “their demanding, often unappeasable child,” and ask, “Who are you?” Sentence by sentence, Silver’s writing is graceful and observant. Yet the novel doesn’t add up to much. The author portrays the accident as a turning point. Yet the grown-ups were struggling before the catastrophe, which only seems to push them further along the road they were already traveling. Miggy and Ellen are by far the freshest, liveliest characters, but the author keeps shifting focus away from them. Some parts of the novel seem truncated—Jean and Julian’s courtship, for example—while others feel too expansive.

Lovely writing but airless and unsatisfying in the end.

BIG TIME
Stories
Spry, Jen
Random House (320 pp.)
$13.99 paper | Mar. 16, 2021
978-1-984855-26-8

Fourteen satirical stories plumb the absurdities of modern life.
Spry, formerly a staff writer for The Late Show With Stephen Colbert and The Onion, gets most of her comic mileage from anachronism. She finds “influencers” among cavemen, explores dating apps with Holmes and Watson, imagines the battlefield letters of a polyamorous dopehead Civil War soldier. In her hilarious retelling of One Thousand and One Nights, she imagines the perspective of the vizier in the court of a cuckolded sultan in a murderous rage. After failing to soothe his boss with suggestions of “couples’ counseling and a seaside getaway” or to convince him that “sex with virgins was usually below average and more than you bargained for emotionally,” the vizier ends up managing a growing cache of rotting virgin heads on spikes. “He couldn’t help but sigh and think, ‘I majored in comparative literature at the University of Damascus.’” If a few of her high-concept premises are too over-the-top or puerile for some readers (“Birthday Girl,” “Monster Goo,” “meh,” the title story is the hit that redeems the misses. In “Big Time,” a tough-talking 1940s starlet named Ruby is rocketed into the present, where she learns about sex positivity, co-working collectives, edibles, and The Real Housewives of Orange County. Only on Bravo does she find the kind of entertainment she is used to: “rich women screaming at each other in evening clothes, convening, sexy waitresses, million-dollar homes, and plenty of well-dressed gays to make snide remarks and keep it interesting.” When a video of her misadventures with a malfunctioning port-a-potty goes viral, Ruby signs with ICM and becomes a contestant on the 89th season of The Bachelor, vying against Kayleigh B., Kaylee C., K-Li W., Kaelie T., etc., “most of the Kayleighs...dental hygienists from Tampa.” When her plan to game the system backfires, Ruby finally learns some important lessons about friendship. And it’s actually kind of sweet.

Abandon political correctness, all ye who enter here, and rejoice.

DIAL A FOR AUNTIES
Sutanto, Jessie Q.
Berkley (352 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Apr. 27, 2021
978-0-593-32813-2

Murder and mayhem crash the wedding of the year.
Meddelin “Meddy” Chan thought she knew all about her mother’s meddlesome ways. She’s spent her whole life surrounded by the strong-willed women in her Chinese Indonesian family—including her four aunts—and she’s learned better than to fight what they think is best. In fact, it’s their influence that made Meddy break up with her secret college boyfriend, Nathan, and stay at home to join her family’s wedding business as a photographer. But when Meddy finds out that her mother has been posing as her on a dating app for weeks—and has set her up with a guy—she’s still shocked. Even more so when she meets Jake, a hotelier who turns out to be self-centered, rude, and the exact opposite of her type. When Jake tries to attack her and Meddy accidentally kills him, she’s suddenly grateful to have five women in her life who are willing to help her hide the body. Things get complicated, though, when a cooler containing the body is accidentally shipped from her aunt’s bakery to the wedding of billionaires Tom Cruise Sutopo and Jacqueline Wijaya—and Nathan turns up as part owner of the resort where the ceremony is taking place. But this is the biggest gig her family has ever had, and they’re certainly not going to let a corpse get in the way. Comparisons to Crazy Rich Asians are apt, as the author details the wild spending and luxurious lifestyles of the superrich. But this story is filled with mistaken identity, a gaggle of intoxicated groomsmen, five lovably hilarious sisters, and slapstick humor that leans more toward the film Clue.

Readers will die for the delightfully absurd hijinks in this dark comedy.

THE END OF MEN
Sweeney-Baird, Christina
Putnam (416 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Apr. 27, 2021
978-0-593-32813-2

Beginning in 2025, a Great Male Plague spreads around the world.
The novels opens in London on a deceptively breezy note as Catherine, a social anthropologist with a happy marriage and adorable 3-year-old son, avoids
Amanda, a wife and mother of two sons herself, senses approach. Eleanor should relocate to senior housing somewhere while she dies there two days later and more fall ill, attending physician for no clear reason in a Glasgow hospital. After a second man damage, financial crises, and, occasionally, good fortune. Catherine and Amanda, who lose the men and boys in their lives early, remain central as they reconstruct their lives. But British author Sweeney-Baird swings her focus among an ever widening swathe of characters—wealthy, working class, urban, rural, White, Black, Asian, straight, LGBTQ+, British, American, Canadian, Filipino—as if afraid to leave any social subgroup out. Shallow character development is inevitable. But a captivating standoff is the portrayal of brilliant gay Canadian scientist Lisa, a villainous, much-hated savior who uses the Plague as her steppingstone to wealth and fame. Meanwhile, the loss of most of the world’s male population and the ways governments react to the Plague raise complicated ethical issues. This may be just the novel you want to read right now—or the last thing you’d want to pick up.

Sweeney-Baird’s dystopian debut novel, begun in 2018, is unsettlingly prescient.

**FAMILY REUNION**

*Thayer, Nancy*

Ballantine (304 pp.)  
$27.00  |  May 4, 2021  
978-1-5247-9878-9

An aging widow grapples with how to approach the next and final chapters of her life in this multigenerational tale.

Eleanor Sunderland lives on Nantucket in the same home that belonged to her grandparents and her parents before her. Now that she’s widowed, her adult children assume she will spend the next decade or two living alone before going quietly into the dark night. Her son, Cliff, learns a hotel chain wants to buy Eleanor’s property for millions of dollars. Cliff thinks Eleanor should relocate to senior housing somewhere while he and his sister, Alicia, receive one-third shares of the sale proceeds. Eleanor’s not having it, because she loves her home and the memories it holds. Moreover, Alicia’s daughter, Ari, has just graduated from college and wants to spend the summer living on the island with Eleanor. As the summer begins, Eleanor’s quiet island fills with all sorts of excitement. As Eleanor finds out that her young, single granddaughter is pregnant, discovers that her son-in-law might be two-timing Alicia, and develops a romantic relationship of her own, her head starts spinning. As Eleanor watches Ari tackle the challenges life throws at her, she wonders if she can follow her granddaughter’s bold example. The third-person narration alternates between Eleanor’s and Ari’s perspectives, juxtaposing the different life stages at which these women find themselves but also illustrating the many parallels between the questions they face. There is perhaps too much emphasis on Eleanor’s life being lonely and uneventful; the portraits of many ho-hum moments of jigsaw puzzling and early bedtimes do slow down the pace. Even so, with the exception of Alicia, who feels like a caricature of a money-grubbing offspring, the characters are realistically rendered and their plights sufficiently engrossing that readers will want to keep turning the pages. As always, the author’s love for Nantucket is palpable on nearly every page.

A tidy Nantucket tale shows that baby boomers still have plenty of pluck.

**THE PERFORMANCE**

*Thomas, Claire*

Riverhead (240 pp.)  
$26.00  |  Mar. 16, 2021  
978-0-593-32916-0

In the audience at a Melbourne theater, three distantly connected women watching a classic 20th-century drama consider their individual pasts, presents, and futures. Tight on structure, heavy on interiority, and light on events, Australian writer Thomas’ second novel hinges on the private thoughts of her three principal characters, who are attending a performance of Samuel Beckett’s *Happy Days*. Margot, in her early 70s, is an academic approaching retirement whose 40-year marriage is being undermined by her husband’s failing memory and increasing tendency toward violence. She’s covered in bruises. At the other end of the age spectrum, 22-year-old acting student Summer, working as an usher, is preoccupied with her girlfriend, April, who’s driving into bush-fire territory to help her parents. Philanthropist Ivy, in her early 40s, is the least stressed of the three. “An orphan with a fortune,” she’s able to offer financial aid to the theater. She also acts as connective tissue between Margot (who was once her teacher) and Summer, whom she upsets with a question during intermission. The bulk of the narrative is spent exploring the women’s ruminations as they watch Winnie, the main character in the play, who’s initially buried up to her waist, then her neck, while prattling about her marriage. As the three mentally debate their own concerns in a heavily air-conditioned auditorium, the air outside is filling with the smoke of environmental tragedy. Thomas sensitively and intricately pieces together the trio’s individual histories and psyches and larger issues while refracting lines from Beckett’s play into their thoughts. But the effect is inescapably static, and the conclusions offered for all three characters lack conviction.

An intimate, compassionate, and unusual novel constrained by its architecture.
WHAT COMES AFTER
Tompkins, JoAnne
Riverhead (432 pp.)
$28.00 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-0-593-08599-8

A quiet portrayal of troubled lives.
Making an appealing debut, Tompkins spins a tender tale of wounded souls anguished by loss and grief, yearning for love and forgiveness. Port Furlong, a small coastal town in Washington state, has been shaken by a tragedy: popular teenager Daniel Balch was murdered by his best friend, Jonah. Jonah is dead, too, killing himself after leaving a confession. The survivors are bowed by sorrow: Daniel’s father, Isaac, a divorced high school biology teacher, strains to find consolation in his faith as a Quaker. Jonah’s mother, Lorrie, a widow left to raise her young daughter and Isaac struggles to understand why he never intervened to curb his son’s arrogant behavior. Lorrie, too, wonders how well she knew Daniel, a “ridiculously handsome boy who lived his life assuming he’d be well received”; but Daniel could be a bully, and Isaac struggles to understand why he never intervened to curb his son’s arrogant behavior. Lorrie, too, wonders how well she knew Jonah, how well she understood the depths of his loneliness and rage. Like Anne Tyler and Marilynnne Robinson, who explore similar territories of the heart, Tompkins sensitively portrays her characters’ pain, isolation, and hard path to redemption.

A graceful debut.

THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING
Tucker, Nancy
Riverhead (352 pp.)
$27.00 | May 18, 2021
978-0-593-10156-9

A neglected girl commits an unspeakable crime and, as an adult, wonders if she can find redemption.
British writer Tucker wastes no time grabbing the reader in her chilling debut novel. “I killed a little boy today. Held my hands around his throat, felt his blood pump hard against my thumbs. He wriggled and kicked….I roared. I squeezed.” The murderer is 8-year-old Chrissie, who is trying to navigate an unimaginably hard and lonely life. Her mother doesn’t feed her—Chrissie is quite literally starving—and tries to give her away. Her mostly absent father offers only empty promises. Chrissie finds relief in frenzied bursts of action that make her feel powerful: Acting as milk monitor at school (so she can drink the dregs from each bottle). Stealing candy from the shop. Bossing and bullying the neighborhood kids. Even strangling the little boy is her way of saying “I am here, I am here, I am here.” But the empathetic Tucker gives the adult Chrissie a voice, too. Twenty years later with a new name and a daughter of her own, Chrissie, now Julia, is out in the world again and struggling with guilt. She loves her daughter but doubts herself and fears authorities will take the girl away. The chapters alternate between the child and adult perspectives, and Tucker builds almost unbearable tension in both timelines as the police circle closer to young Chrissie and the past pulls adult Chrissie back to the scene of her crime. This novel is a riveting thriller in every sense, but Tucker is asking big questions, too. Can society forgive the unforgivable? Does everyone deserve a second chance? She forces us to reconsider the perils of poverty and neglect.

A chilling suspense novel about guilt, responsibility, and redemption.

THAT SUMMER
Weiner, Jennifer
Atria (432 pp.)
$28.00 | May 11, 2021
978-1-5011-3354-1

Revenge for a long-ago assault takes the form of an elaborate long con.
“...she is fifteen years old that summer, a thoughtful, book-struck girl....” Weiner’s new novel opens with a prologue set during Diana’s idyllic summer on Cape Cod, babysitting for a lovely family, hanging out with the other nannies, and meeting a cute boy named Poe who hands her a red Solo cup on what she is certain will be the best night of her life. The reader is not so sure. In the next chapter, we meet an unhappy housewife named Daisy Shoemaker, nee Diana, who receives an invitation to a fancy birthday party in wine country that is meant for a different Diana, one whose email address is one character different than hers. When her reply to that email is answered immediately by the other Diana, rather than the party giver, she doesn’t suspect there’s some kind of phishing going on. Again, the wily reader is not fooled. But there’s a whole lot of book left, and we still don’t know exactly what happened in Cape Cod, or which Diana is which, and whatever happened to that ominously named Poe? The strongest character in this book has little to do with the main plot—it’s Daisy’s rebel daughter, Beatrice, who creates some comic relief with her irritated thoughts and dead-mouse taxidermy projects. “Maybe I’m dead and this is hell: my mom quoting John Mayer songs and talking about orgasms.” Fans will enjoy references to the murder plot of Weiner’s previous novel, Big
Summer (2020), and sprinklings of Weiner’s signature descriptions of food and cooking. But the stereotyped characters, the contrived morality-tale plot, and the amount of preaching are not worthy of this author.

Socialist realism for the #MeToo era.

**THE DICTIONARY OF LOST WORDS**

*Williams, Pip*

Ballantine (400 pp.)

$28.00 | Apr. 6, 2021

978-0-593-16019-0

The Herculean efforts required to assemble the Oxford English Dictionary are retold, this time from a fictionalized, distaff point of view, in Williams’ debut novel.

Esme Nicoll, the motherless young daughter of a lexicographer working in the Scriptorium—in reality, a garden shed in Oxford where a team led by James Murray, one of the OED’s editors, toiled—accompanies her father to work frequently. The rigor and passion with which the project is managed is apparent to the sensitive and curious Esme, as is the fact that the editorial team of men labors under the influence of Victorian-era mores. Esme begins a clandestine operation to rescue words which have been overlooked or intentionally omitted from the epic dictionary. Her childhood undertaking becomes a lifelong endeavor, and her efforts to validate the words which flew under the (not yet invented) radar of the OED gatekeepers gain traction at the same time the women’s suffrage movement fructifies in England. The looming specter of World War I lends tension to Esme’s personal saga while a disparate cast of secondary characters adds pathos and depth. Underlying this panoramic account are lexicographical and philosophical interrogatives: Who owns language, does language reflect or affect, who chooses what is appropriate, why is one meaning worthier than another, what happens when a word mutates in meaning? (For example, the talismanic word first salvaged by Esme, *bondmaid*, pops up with capricious irregularity and amorphous meaning throughout the lengthy narrative.) Williams provides readers with detailed background and biographical information pointing to extensive research about the OED and its editors, many of whom appear as characters in Esme’s life. The result is a satisfying amalgam of truth and historical fiction.

Who tells your story? Williams illuminates why women needed to be in the room where, and when, it’s written.

**THE QUIET BOY**

*Winters, Ben H.*

Mulholland Books/Little, Brown

(448 pp.)

$28.00 | May 18, 2021

978-0-316-50544-4

Science fiction, the paranormal, cults, and oddball characters collide in this amiable thriller.

Something very bad has happened to young Wesley Keener. He’s cracked his skull open—just how is a matter requiring some fact-finding—and now he’s empty of everything but a bright light, something like the trunk of the car at the center of Alex Cox’s film *Repo Man*. “Hollow....They hollowed him out.” So thinks Jay Albert Shenk, a Los Angeles ambulance-chaser attorney who sports a tiny ponytail and a generally good-natured attitude, turning competitive only when he’s up against lesser lawyers. He’s a fine and mostly honest fellow in whom Winters, an expert practitioner of odd scenarios in books such as *Underground Airlines* (2016), invests much attention and character development. In company with his adopted son, Ruben, a grocery-store clerk—born in Vietnam, raised Jewish, and nicknamed “Rabbi”—Shenk tries to ferret out what it was, exactly, that happened to poor Wesley while filing a medical malpractice against the doctors—the “they” in question—who treated him once he was rushed to the hospital. “Shenk had been doing this for nineteen years…and he could give you the lowdown on every sawbones, on every hospital and clinic and urgent care in Southern California,” Winters writes. The doctors range from weary to evasive to self-appointed deity, but they’re the least of Shenk’s problems: Both he and Ruben are visited by spectral cultists who think Wesley’s shell might just harbor a portal to another world. Wesley’s dad is a handful, the expert witness Shenk hires turns out to be a slippery character, and Wesley’s sister, Evie, “not a rock star, not exactly, but she was a certified indie darling, her star ascendant,” has plenty of complicating secrets of her own. Winters’ lively tale jumps from decade to decade and all over the map as everyone grows older except Wesley, with a growing trail of bodies and suspects to mark the story’s passage.

An entertaining concoction with plenty of twists on the way to a nicely unexpected resolution.
Although most of the chefs seem very nice too, some of them bring more bad news: Kraken’s first girlfriend, graphic novelist Ana Belén Líafo, has been murdered. Intermittent flashbacks to 1992 present their idyllic teen romance and provide an intriguing counterpoint to the main noir narrative. Sáenz’s large, boldly painted canvas includes a plague of inexplicable suicides by young women. Kraken’s collaboration with his own group of colorful irregulars—hacker extraordinaire Golden Girl; Tasio Ortiz de Zárate, long imprisoned as a serial killer but exonerated; street-wise skater MatsuSalem; and others—is this story’s most enjoyable feature. The murder of one of Kraken’s old friends indicates both that he’s dealing with a serial killer and that he might be the killer’s focus.

Dark and juicy, the middle entry in Sáenz’s epic trilogy immerses readers in a vibrant, dangerous city.

MURDER AT ST. WINIFRED’S ACADEMY
Griffo, J.D.
Kensington (304 pp.)
$8.99 paper | May 25, 2021
978-1-4967-3095-4

Murder strikes an amateur production of Arsenic and Old Lace—and not just those corpses stashed in the Brewster sisters’ basement.

Millionaire Alberta Ferrara Scaglione’s granddaughter, Upper Susses Herald reporter Jinx Maldonado, has wonderful news. No, it’s not that her boyfriend has finally popped the question. It’s that her roommate, Nola Kirkpatrick, artistic director of the Tranquility Players, has persuaded a major Hollywood star to headline her new production of Arsenic and Old Lace. Or at least a former star, since childhood sweetheart Missy Michaels has been out of the spotlight since she gave Shirley Temple a run for her money 60 years ago. As “Missymania” settles over Tranquility and environs, members of Alberta’s family circle rush to claim roles in the play without auditioning. Her sister, Helen Ferrara, calls dibs on the second Brewster sister, and Father Sal DeSoto is cast as Teddy Brewster. But the production, directed by Nola’s boyfriend, Johnny Fenn, doesn’t provide a comeback for Missy after all because she’s murdered before the curtain goes up. Even though she’s clutching a bottle of arsenic in her dead hand, she’s been strangled, and Alberta promptly convenes Helen, Jinx, and Alberta’s sister-in-law Joyce Ferrara to investigate. There’s so much drama among the continuing cast that the poor suspects, mainly Johnny Fenn and leading man Kip Flanagan, have to clamor for attention. No matter how many complications follow, fans of the family will be relieved to know that the opening-night cast, heavy with substitutes, gets “more bravos than Patti LuPone and Nathan Lane had ever received.”

The vibe, as usual, is that of a family gathering complete with amateur theatricals and homicide.

MURDER IN THE COOKBOOK NOOK
Adams, Ellery
Kensington (356 pp.)
$6.99 paper | Apr. 27, 2021
978-1-4967-2946-0

A renowned Virginia hotel hosts murder and mayhem.

A made-for-television cook-off hosted by wildly popular Mia Mallett and featuring several famous chefs seems like a win-win for Jane Steward, doyenne of Storyton Hall. The rural hotel, a haven for book lovers and foodies alike, is completely booked by crew members and people eager to watch the filming. The first hint of trouble is a fire in the field where the kitchen tents are set up. Luckily, there’s just a little scorching. When a gas grill blows up, however, it burns an employee and rouses Jane’s suspicions. Director Tyler Scott is happy to have Chef Pierce among the competitors, for he adds drama to the proceedings.

But when the obnoxious visiting chef is found dead in hotel chef Kraken’s partner, Estíbaliz, gets a double whammy from his lover and boss, Deputy Superintendent Alba Díaz de Salvatierra: She’s pregnant, and the father might not be him but her dead husband, Nancho, a serial killer. His pursuit of Nancho in The Silence of the White City (2020) left Kraken with serious head injuries that have impaired his ability to speak. Though he narrates in a gritty first

THE WATER RITUALS
García Sáenz, Eva
Vintage Crime/Black Lizard (480 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Mar. 30, 2021
978-1-9848-9861-6

A righteous police inspector is propelled into examining his past while facing personal and professional challenges in the present.

In the Spanish city of Vitoria, Inspector Unai López de Ayala, known as Kraken, gets a double whammy from his lover and boss, Deputy Superintendent Alba Díaz de Salvatierra: She’s pregnant, and the father might not be him but her dead husband, Nancho, a serial killer. His pursuit of Nancho in The Silence of the White City (2020) left Kraken with serious head injuries that have impaired his ability to speak. Though he narrates in a gritty first person, he regularly visits a speech therapist and rarely talks to others, preferring to conduct conversations in the texts peppered throughout. A message from Kraken’s partner, Estíbaliz, brings more bad news: Kraken’s first girlfriend, graphic novelist Ana Belén Líafo, has been murdered. Intermittent flashbacks to 1992 present their idyllic teen romance and provide an intriguing counterpoint to the main noir narrative. Sáenz’s large, boldly painted canvas includes a plague of inexplicable suicides by young women. Kraken’s collaboration with his own group of colorful irregulars—hacker extraordinaire Golden Girl; Tasio Ortiz de Zárate, long imprisoned as a serial killer but exonerated; street-wise skater MatsuSalem; and others—is this story’s most enjoyable feature. The murder of one of Kraken’s old friends indicates both that he’s dealing with a serial killer and that he might be the killer’s focus.

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The theft of an immense collection of porcelain provokes utter bafflement among the Aixois police.

The Musée Quentin-Savary in Aix is in some ways emblematic of the laid-back ways of Provence. Unlike the mammoth Musée D’Orsay in Paris, which occupies an entire decommissioned train station, Quentin-Savary, tucked into the block-long Rue Mistral, shares its compact three-story building with two apartments. The top floor is occupied by Gilbert Quentin-Savary, great-great-grandson of the museum’s original patron. The middle floor is tenanted by a chocolate salesman. The ground floor is the museum itself, which offers half a dozen rooms of porcelain vases, figurines, and dinnerware. Most of the visitors to the collection are either scholars of the ceramic arts or schoolchildren like Léa Paulik, who visits with her middle school class. Museum director Achille Formentin has so few opportunities to show off the collection that rival curator Aurélien Lopez has the nerve to suggest merging the Quentin-Savary with his own Musée Cavasino. But Formentin will hear of no such thing, at least not until he discovers his entire collection gone, vanished, stolen. Léa’s father, police commissioner Bruno Paulik, is stunned by the news. He and examining magistrate Antoine Verlaque share dozens of questions. Who would steal not just a single prized item, but the museum’s entire contents? Did the thief covet a single bauble and make off with the rest as a smoke screen? Is the collection more valuable en masse? Is the theft a ploy by Lopez to discredit Formentin? And how on earth could anyone steal an entire museum’s worth of fragile porcelain from a residential neighborhood without making a sound?

Extreme puzzlement in a lush French setting.

The fatal stabbing of one of his colleagues in chambers leads Daniel Pitt on a trail of murder that stretches backward and forward in 1911 London.

The good news is that the dead man is clear enough to win most of his cases. So Daniel focuses on two of Drake’s recent clients in high-profile cases: Lionel Peterson, an accused wife killer whose trial ended in a hung jury, and Evan Faber, fabulously wealthy shipbuilder Erasmus Faber’s only son, who was pronounced not guilty of murdering his lover, Marie Wesley, a woman who was no better than she should be. Daniel can’t believe Evan would have killed the lawyer who got him acquitted, and Evan’s soon vindicated in a way as alarming as it is definitive: After a night of pub crawling with Daniel, he’s found stabbed to death in the same Mile End neighborhood. Could the situation be any more dire? Certainly it could: Inspector Letterman could accuse Marcus fford Croft, head of chambers, of blackmailing him, and Lady Charlotte Pitt, Daniel’s mother and the wife of Special Branch head Sir Thomas Pitt, could be kidnapped to stop the investigation dead in its tracks.

The main mystery is sadly transparent and the red herrings halfhearted distractions. But Perry’s legion of fans won’t mind.

A family affair takes ex-con private eye Agustín Corral from his Denver home to the East Colorado boondocks of Melton and beyond.

Though he’s only 17, Matías Montoya has already run away from home more than once. But he’s always returned to his adoptive parents, George and Cindy Montoya, after a few days. This time he’s been away for a month. So George’s sister, Essie, calls her cousin Gus to find the boy—or find out what’s become of him. Mat’s troubles clearly began at home. He constantly fought with his father, a veteran with PTSD, and had recently been dumped by his Anglo girlfriend, cheerleader Yvonne Cleary, whose comfortably racist parents were determined to keep Mexican Americans out of their family. On his way out, Mat had left his backpack with self-described writer Wes Delgado, but the backpack has disappeared, and Delgado offers no more help. So Gus follows a lead to The Rising Sun, a shelter for runaways in Pueblo. Toni Marriot, who runs the place, refuses to say anything about the teens who’ve passed through without a court order. Jeannie, another runaway, directs Gus to local fixture Alex Temerio, but Alex merely threatens Gus if he won’t leave town, and two thugs follow up in the dead of night to make sure he gets the message. Despite the formidable forces arrayed against him, Gus uncovers such a web of crime in Pueblo that Mat’s fate comes across as something of an afterthought.

Sensitive work more deeply felt than strongly plotted.
A newly minted Virginia private eye gets her uncle's help to investigate dirty cops in a case that rapidly goes off the rails.

Soon after leaving her TV reporting job to become a full-time private investigator in Norfolk, Khloé Mercer meets client Frances Larson at a Starbucks to hear what she wants. Frances is a Rihanna look-alike, apart from her obvious pregnancy, and her self-confidence raises Khloé's hackles almost immediately. Her new clientele offers to pay Khloé $40,000 to find out what happened to his business cards that identify him. Khloé's not so sure. She's sure about the confidence that some dirty cops in the department did him in. Khloé's not so sure. She's sure about the dirty cops, though, because she runs into some as soon as she starts with.

The novice investigator faces heat from both her case and the street in this fast-paced read.

Murder strikes much too close to home for sleuthing socialite Zofia Turbotyniska. Called to the beach below the Roźnowski Villa one April morning in 1895, Cracow police commissioner Stanisław Jednoróg finds the body of a young woman who's been stabbed to death. The victim is Karolina Szulc, Zofia's virginal 17-year-old housemaid, who abruptly quit the day before to leave town in the company of the man who'd swept her off her feet even though she already had another suitor. Angry and sad, Zofia presses her cook, Franciszka Gawęda, to dig up evidence of the new sweetheart's name, and Franciszka obliges by finding a business card that identifies him as engineer Marceli Bzowski. When Zofia, already shaken by the suicide of Brazilian José Silve the morning after Karolina's death, confronts Bzowski in the full fury of her righteousness, the engineer, who's married, swears that he wasn't the man in question; an entire case of his business cards must have been stolen during his last trip to the Różana Street brothel run by Madame Olesia Dunin. Following this clue leads Zofia to focus her investigation on a trafficking ring whose boundaries far exceed Różana Street, Cracow, and Poland. Pseudonymous partners Jacek Dehnel and Piotr Tarczyński bring both the do-gooders and the criminals of fin-de-siècle Cracow to entertaining life, but their deepest interest is in the unlikely detective lurking beneath “the sedate Mrs. Jekyll”: “the hidden Mrs. Hyde, the fearless stalker of criminals.”

A gravely decorous period piece that vividly evokes its moment while maintaining an archly amused distance from it.

DS Adam Tyler investigates a baffling murder. In this densely plotted novel, Tyler, nominally a cold case investigator, is recruited to help look into the death of a woman whose body is discovered in the Sheffield Botanical Garden. The reader sees a “nighthawker,” illegally prospecting for treasure with a metal detector, unearth two of these coins are found on the woman's eyes; the mystery of her death and why the coins are there forms the backbone of the plot. But of course there are complications. The dead woman is Chinese, a student at Sheffield University, murder. and though Tyler's openly gay identity is not a strong element of this episode, he still must negotiate moments of homophobia. Readers familiar with Tyler and Rabbani will be glad to see them back, and in the morning, garden employees find it aboveground. The nighthawkers are the loosely connected members of a detectorist club prepared to break the law in the pursuit of treasure, after hours and on private property, and when the novel opens they have already explored an archaeological site and uncovered a cache of rare gold Roman coins. When the rest of the body is disinterred by the authorities, two of these coins are found on the woman's eyes; the mystery of her death and why the coins are there forms the backbone of the plot. But of course there are complications. The dead woman is Chinese, a student at Sheffield University, and though the many connections may seem a bit contrived.
“A fast-paced tale of mystery and spycraft whose exploration of inner doubts and fears makes it much more.”

THE CONSEQUENCES OF FEAR

Jacqueline Winspear
Harper/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$23.99 | Mar. 23, 2021
978-0-06-286802-2

October 1941 finds Maisie Dobbs continuing her espionage work while Great Britain is locked in a do-or-die fight against the Nazis.

As she continues her secret work for spymaster Robbie MacFarlane while also running her detective business, Maisie’s affair with Mark Scott, her American counterpart, has reached an inflection point. Maisie is a mother, a nurse, a veteran spy, and a psychologist who sees that young Freddie Hackett, one of many speedy boys running messages around London, is at his breaking point. His father is a drunk who beats him; his mother is desperate to protect Freddie and her daughter who has Down syndrome. Now the police have blown off Freddie’s claim to have witnessed a murder. Since the killer turns out to be the recipient of the message he was on his way to deliver, understand that means they’re all a little too busy to worry about why their comms have been disrupted or who tipped off the biker gang that they were coming. Fans who’ve been along for the ride for him on the National Space Program campus. She’s only 12, but she has learned from her famous uncle to always ask of a piece of machinery, “What does it do?” This phrase echoes throughout the text as June trains for work in space; Day does a terrific job of making an engineer’s thought process as exciting as a thriller’s chase scenes. June and her classmates are obsessed with Inquiry, the first-ever craft using the fuel cells invented by her uncle with a team of his students, which has lost propulsion control while orbiting Saturn. Some of them helped design the fuel cells, others have friends or lovers on the crew, so all are devastated when NSP cancels a planned rescue mission in Endurance, a craft powered by the same suspect cells. The novel blends fraught personal relationships with intricate engineering as the narrative moves forward six years, when June is sent to the Pink Planet to work with James, one of her uncle’s students, whose debates with his lover, Theresa, about the fuel cell design forecast similar conflict between him and June while they work on repairing the cells’ flaw. Nonetheless, they become intimate—until she uncovers a grim secret that ruptures their partnership. June flees the station into the Pink Planet’s unfortifying atmosphere, nearly dying in a harrowing scene that again displays Day’s gift for gripping suspense that unfolds largely in the narrator’s head. Regrettably, the author is not as skilled at gathering together her plot strands, and an abrupt ending leaves many unanswered questions about the characters she has somewhat elliptically developed.

An interesting idea that doesn’t quite gel.

EYE OF THE SH*T STORM

Jackson Ford
Orbit (512 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Apr. 27, 2021
978-0-316-70277-5

In a post-quake Los Angeles, a psychokinetic government operative is on the run from...pretty much everyone.

Seeing as Teagan was already in the middle of a high-speed chase with a murderous biker gang, not much could have made her day worse. Except maybe getting an accidental face full of the meth she stole from said biker gang. Now she’ll have to deal with the next crisis while coming down from her unintended high. Because if there’s one thing we know about psychokinetic government operative Teagan after two frenetically fast-paced adventures—most recently Random Sh*t Flying Through the Air (2020)—it’s that there’s always another crisis on the way. Sure enough, no sooner is the high-speed car chase situation resolved (with maximum destruction) than someone electrocifies an entire building, which should be impossible, and Teagan’s team is dispatched to figure out if this impossible situation might have been caused by another kid from the mysterious School, a kid with extranormal powers. Unfortunately, that means they’re all a little too busy to worry about why their comms have been disrupted or who tipped off the biker gang that they were coming. Fans who’ve been along for the ride
on Teagan’s previous two outings know what to expect by now, and this third installment fully delivers, with a breakneck pace, high stakes, and plenty of wisecracks. This adventure sees Teagan separated from her team, on the run from the government, the aforementioned biker gang, and a truly terrifying adversary known as the Zigzag Man—in other words, pushed to her absolute limits both physically and emotionally. The result is gripping, suspenseful, and thoroughly enjoyable.

An un-put-down-able, action-packed adventure that packs an emotional punch.

THE KINGDOMS
Pulley, Natasha
Bloomsbury (448 pp.)
$26.00 | May 25, 2021
978-1-63557-608-5

Napoleon conquered England in this time-travel/alt-history fantasy set at the turns of the 19th and 20th centuries.

When Joe Tournier steps off a train from Glasgow in Londres in 1898, he can remember his name but very little else. He’s suffering from “silent epilepsy,” a doctor tells him, which is characterized not by the usual convulsions but by symptoms associated with epileptic auras: amnesia, paramnesia, visions. Paramnesia is “the blurring of something imaginary and something real,” explains the doctor, giving what might work equally well as a definition of fiction, particularly of Pulley’s favored fantasy genre. In the time-travel subgenre, of course, there are better explanations than epilepsy for déjà vu (“the sense you’ve seen something new before”) and its opposite, jamais vu (“when something that should be familiar feels wholly alien”). Joe’s master retrieves him from the hospital—like most people of English descent under the reign of Napoleon IV, Joe is enslaved—and takes him home to Joe’s wife, who is not the same woman as Madeline, the wife Joe believes he remembers. A postcard delivered almost a century after it’s mailed sends Joe north to the Outer Hebrides on a quest to learn about his forgotten past and perhaps find Madeline, the wife Joe believes he remembers. A postcard delivered almost a century after it’s mailed sends Joe north to the Outer Hebrides on a quest to learn about his forgotten past and perhaps find Madeline, the wife Joe believes he remembers. A postcard delivered almost a century after it’s mailed sends Joe north to the Outer Hebrides on a quest to learn about his forgotten past and perhaps find Madeline, the wife Joe believes he remembers. A postcard delivered almost a century after it’s mailed sends Joe north to the Outer Hebrides on a quest to learn about his forgotten past and perhaps find Madeline, the wife Joe believes he remembers. A postcard delivered almost a century after it’s mailed sends Joe north to the Outer Hebrides on a quest to learn about his forgotten past and perhaps find Madeline, the wife Joe believes he remembers. A postcard delivered almost a century after it’s mailed sends Joe north to the Outer Hebrides on a quest to learn about his forgotten past and perhaps find Madeline, the wife Joe believes he remembers. A postcard delivered almost a century after it’s mailed sends Joe north to the Outer Hebrides on a quest to learn about his forgotten past and perhaps find Madeline, the wife Joe believes he remembers. A postcard delivered almost a century after it’s mailed sends Joe north to the Outer Hebrides on a quest to learn about his forgotten past and perhaps find Madeline, the wife Joe believes he remembers. A postcard delivered almost a century after it’s mailed sends Joe north to the Outer Hebrides on a quest to learn about his forgotten past and perhaps find Madeline, the wife Joe believes he remembers. A postcard delivered almost a century after it’s mailed sends Joe north to the Outer Hebrides on a quest to learn about his forgotten past and perhaps find Madeline, the wife Joe believes he remembers. A postcard delivered almost a century after it’s mailed sends Joe north to the Outer Hebrides on a quest to learn about his forgotten past and perhaps find Madeline, the wife Joe believes he remembers.

Suspenseful, philosophical, and inventive, this sparkling novel explores the power of memory and love.

MALICE
Walter, Heather
Del Rey (480 pp.)
$27.00 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-1-984818-65-2

An outcast and a spunky princess dream of revolutionizing their world even as one of them approaches her final, cursed days.

Long ago, the War of the Fae annihilated the Vila and their homeland, Malterre, but no one who survived the war—the humans of Briar and the light Fae of Etheria—seems to mind. Everyone knows that the Vila were nothing more than evil beasts, and that includes Alyce, the half-Vila forced to serve as Briar’s Dark Grace. The light Fae blessed Briar’s Graces with beauty and magical, golden blood, which they use to craft potions for paying customers throughout the land. As the Dark Grace, green-blooded Alyce bleeds life into mild curses that Briar’s citizens use against one another. Alyce’s hexes are nothing compared to the generational curse that one powerful Vila placed on the Briar Queen: to bear only girls, who must find their true loves before their 21st birthdays or die. The curse has already killed the current Briar Queen’s two eldest daughters, locking the crown in a race against time to find a suitor for 20-year-old Princess Aurora. As Alyce soon discovers, after a chance meeting with the princess, Aurora doesn’t want to marry a prince. Instead, she plans to break the curse, and who better to help her than the last Vila alive? Alyce and Aurora draw closer to one another, unable to articulate their budding romantic feelings, and that angst fuels much of the novel’s drama. The anti-Vila racism Alyce endures grows darker and more deadly as the novel progresses, and her obliviousness to an obvious betrayal plot may frustrate readers expecting a heroine with a better eye for danger. Finally, a sudden series of terrible twists of fate—some unresolved, others resolved all too quickly—forces readers to contend with a shocking and abrupt cliffhanger ending.

The unexpected cliffhanger at the end of this Sapphic “Sleeping Beauty” will leave readers impatient for a sequel.
The weak conflict of a disappointing prom night feels unnecessary in the face of other obstacles Daisy and Liam may have to contend with as fake partners approaching a modern marriage of convenience.

A thin conflict downgrades this promising fake relationship to a lukewarm rom-com.

People we meet on vacation

Henry, Emily

Berkley (384 pp.)

$15.99 paper | May 11, 2021
978-1-9848-0675-8

A travel writer has one last shot at reconnecting with the best friend she just might be in love with.

Poppy and Alex couldn’t be more different. She loves wearing bright colors while he prefers khakis and a T-shirt. She likes just about everything while he’s a bit more discerning. And yet, their opposites-attract friendship works because they love each other…in a totally platonic way. Probably. Even though they have their own separate lives (Poppy lives in New York City and is a travel writer with a popular Instagram account; Alex is a high school teacher in their tiny Ohio hometown), they still manage to get together each summer for one fabulous vacation. They grow closer every year, but Poppy doesn’t let herself linger on her feelings for Alex—she doesn’t want to ruin their friendship or the way she can be fully herself with him. They continue to date other people, even bringing their serious partners on their summer vacations…but then, after a falling-out, they stop speaking. When Poppy finds herself facing a serious bout of ennui, unhappy with her glamorous job and the life she’s been dreaming of forever, she thinks back to the last time she was truly happy: her last vacation with Alex. And so, though they haven’t spoken in two years, she asks him to take another vacation with her. She’s determined to bridge the gap that’s formed between them and become best friends again, but to do that, she’ll have to be honest with Alex—and herself—about her true feelings.

In chapters that jump around in time, Henry shows readers the progression (and dissolution) of Poppy and Alex’s friendship. Their slow-burn love story hits on beloved romance tropes (such as there unexpectedly being only one bed on their reunion trip) while still feeling entirely fresh. Henry’s dialogue, particularly the banter-filled conversations between Poppy and Alex, feels of dissatisfaction with a life that should be making her happy as well as her unresolved feelings toward the difficult parts of her childhood make her a sympathetic and relatable character. The end result is a story that pays homage to classic romantic comedies while having a point of view all its own.

A warm and winning When Harry Met Sally… update that hits all the perfect notes.

How to survive a scandal

Parish, Samara

Forever (352 pp.)

$8.99 paper | May 25, 2021
978-1-5387-0448-6

A woman destined to be a duchess finds herself at the bottom of the ton. Lady Amelia Crofton, diamond of the ton, is finally getting married, but not to the man she’s been engaged to since childhood. No, rather than becoming Lady Wildeforde, she’s being rushed to the altar with Benedict Asterly, son of a footman and noblewoman—a mere mister. Benedict thought he was doing a good deed by rescuing Amelia from her overturned carriage in the middle of a snowstorm, but instead, it appears she has been compromised, and both find themselves trapped in a marriage they do not want, far from London. Benedict does have a grand house, courtesy of his parents’ romantic meddling. Liam Murphy has returned to San Francisco to mourn his grandfather and take over the family distillery, but there’s a catch with his inheritance: He needs their family distillery, but there’s a catch with his inheritance: He needs...
An intriguing romance debut that centers class struggles along with the love story.
TO LOVE AND TO LOATEH

Waters, Martha
Atria (352 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Apr. 6, 2021
978-1-9821-6087-6
Series: The Regency Vows, 2

The second in a series of Julia Quinn–like sensuous rom-coms.

Diana Bourne decided at age 18 that in order to make her way in the world, a viscountess with no significant dowry had better marry money. And since Diana never really expected much more from the “addlepated” male gender, it really didn’t matter who. Of course, her cheeks blush in the presence of Jeremy Overington, the Marquess of Willingham. But though he’s blond and beautiful, he’s also broke, a notorious rake, and a very poor candidate. Besides, when they’re together, they spend all their time trading witty insults. Five years pass, and Diana, who succeeded in marrying well, is now Lady Templeton, a widow and—with her ample bosom and “elegant slouch”—the toast of the ton. But Diana’s older husband, the viscount, was never much in the feathers, and she wonders how she can gain some new passionate experience. Diana doesn’t want to marry again. Why would she? She’s young, free, and wealthy. As romantic novels would have it, Jeremy also needs some help. The married mistress he just spurned has intimated that he might not be the lover he thought he was. Jeremy asks Diana to spend time at his country pile, Elderwild, with a bunch of fashionable 20-something couples and his grandmother, the outspoken Marchioness of Willingham. And would she mind giving him her opinion of his bedroom technique? Interestingly for romance, though Lady Di loves his kisses, she’s critical of his finger work. And she guides him on how best to make sure his future lovers are not faking it. Through traded barbs and some overly frenetic plotting, the lovers come to understand that the uncaring faces they present to society are not the people they really are. Waters introduces an interesting rival for Diana, the desperate-for-marriage sister of an earl, who turns out to have different gender goals.

A try for a sexier Beatrice and Benedick that occasionally becomes overdone.

SUMMER IN THE CITY

Wilde, Lori & Oliveras, Priscilla & Skilton, Sarah
Kensington (320 pp.)
$15.95 paper | May 25, 2021
978-1-4967-3267-5

When a summer heat wave in New York City causes an extended blackout, three friends each find herself stuck with the last person she anticipated.

Best friends Ria Preston, Vanessa Ríos, and Alison Cahill have a plan: They’ll beat the heat by fleeing the city for a much-needed girls trip. All they have to do is make it through the next few hours of their respective evenings. Art restorer Ria is attending a benefit at the Met, theater critic Vanessa is taking a front-row seat at a Broadway play, and Alison has a scheme to throw a wrench or two into an aspiring magician’s act. But there are unforeseen complications to events that would otherwise go off without a hitch, including the plot twist of a sudden blackout that rolls through Manhattan and leaves them each stranded with an unexpected party. For Ria, it’s the chance to finally get to know her longtime crush, Wall Street consultant Vic Albright, the man she’s always admired from a distance but has been too shy to approach. Vanessa is forced to confront someone from her past—actor Mateo Garza—whose career faltered after she gave his last play a bad review. And Alison’s connection to magician Nicholas Finn runs much deeper than the rest of his audience realizes—years ago, in college, he broke her heart, and she’s never fully moved on. The conceit of a blackout offers a delicious forced-proximity element to each novella, although the friendship throughline is somewhat weakened by taking place through only a handful of text-based interactions. Ultimately, the romance is where these stories truly ignite, with varying levels of angst and heat.

A steamy trio of rom-com stories that is best savored slowly.
An affecting paean to the author’s father, James Nwoye Adichie (1932-2020). “I am writing about my father in the past tense, and I cannot believe I am writing about my father in the past tense.” So writes award-winning Nigerian novelist Adichie, reflecting on her father’s remarkable life in this slim volume. The first professor of statistics in his country, James lived an eventful and sometimes fraught life. During the Biafran War, for instance, Nigerian soldiers burned all his books, which American colleagues rushed to replace—and, Adichie adds, sent bookshelves as well. He courted the author’s mother sight unseen: A relative bragged about the young scholar, saying he needed an educated wife: “A relative of hers said that she was educated and beautiful, fair as an egret. Fair as an egret! O na-enwu ka ugbana! Another standing family joke.” Funny and principled, James died during the pandemic—not of the virus but kidney disease. Compounding her grief was distance, and Adichie and her siblings followed Igbo tradition by making an “immediate pivot from pain to planning.” In one Zoom call after another, they arranged a burial on an approved Friday that’s not a holiday, since Fridays are the one day the parish priest will bury an elderly person—and, Adichie writes, not being given a proper funeral is a fear that amounts to existential dread among people of her father’s generation. She moves through some of the classic stages of grief, including no small amount of anger—at the well-meaning but empty word demise as well as the ineffectual condolences of well-meaning people: “It has happened, so just celebrate his life,” an old friend wrote, and it incensed me.” Eventually, the author reflects on a newfound awareness of mortality and finds a “new urgency” to live her life and do her work in the ever present shadow of death.

An elegant, moving contribution to the literature of death and dying.
A page-turning doorstop history of how early American courts and politicians interpreted the Constitution.

A Yale professor of law and political science, Amar has written numerous books on constitutional matters. In his latest excellent analysis, the author emphasizes that Americans debated the nature of government for 30 years before the Constitution’s approval in 1788, and much of this occurred in courtrooms. Scholars have not ignored this or what followed, but Amar—who points out that most historians lack training in law and most lawyers are not knowledgeable enough about history—delivers a fascinating, often jolting interpretation. Perhaps most ingeniously, he asks, who is “the father of the constitution?” The traditional answer is James Madison, who participated in the major debates, kept the best records, and worked tirelessly for ratification. However, few of his ideas survived the debates, and others were attributed to him in error. Amar leans toward Washington, who “uniquely... got everything he wanted.” The Constitution’s most “distinctive feature,” its “breathtakingly strong chief executive... owed more to Washington alone than to all the other delegates combined.” Ranking other Founding Fathers, Amar places Hamilton second. A brilliant legal mind, he converted the Constitution’s sketchy articles into the strong executive that Washington envisioned. Adams and Jefferson fare badly. Both were absent from the Philadelphia convention, and Jefferson was never more than lukewarm about the results. Madison also comes up short. His conception of the Constitution never envisioned a powerful executive, and once he saw this happening, he turned against Washington, “partly to save his own political skin back in Virginia, partly because he was a policy lightweight on certain big issues (including banks, trade, and national defense), and partly because he was smitten by Jefferson.”

Brilliant insights into America’s founding document.
In our first Changemakers issue, you’ll find some of this year’s most important works about a host of contemporary issues, from racism and sexism to economic inequality. While all of them merit attention, there is no more pressing issue than the existential threat of climate change. Here are five books whose authors are seeking change in this vital area and what our reviewers had to say about them.

**How To Avoid a Climate Disaster: The Solutions We Have and the Breakthroughs We Need** by Bill Gates (Knopf, Feb. 16): “While drawing on his expertise and instincts as a successful tech innovator, investor, and philanthropist, Gates relies on teams of experts in science, engineering, and public policy to flesh out the details. The author focuses on five major emissions-generating activities—making things, plugging in, growing things, getting around, and keeping cool and warm….Though Gates doesn’t shy away from acknowledging the daunting challenges ahead, his narrative contains enough confidence—and hard science and economics—to convince many readers that his blueprint is one of the most viable yet.” (See our interview with Gates on p. 62.)

**Rescuing the Planet: Protecting Half the Land To Heal the Earth** by Tony Hiss (Knopf, March 30): “A passionate argument for protecting the world’s rapidly shrinking wilderness….Three great forested areas—Siberia, the Amazon, and the North American Boreal (in Canada and Alaska)—make up most of the world’s wilderness. ‘Siberia is 60 percent cut over,’ writes the author, ‘and so is more than 20 percent of the Amazon, where the rate of deforestation is spiking.’ The Boreal, however, is 85% intact. Since human activities account for less than 40% of our continent, and 15% is already protected, the author’s plan is feasible.”

**Under a White Sky: The Nature of the Future** by Elizabeth Kolbert (Crown, Feb. 9): “More top-notch environmental reportage from the Pulitzer Prize–winning author of The Sixth Extinction….Her travels are wide and often challenging, as when she visited remote waterholes in the Mojave Desert to examine isolated populations of pupfish or when she interviewed ornithologists and entomologists to better understand the staggering decline in avian and insect species….Can we and the world be saved from ourselves? That’s an up-in-the-air question, but the author holds out hope in a program that makes use of geoengineering, which, though highly speculative, is something that must be considered.”

**The New Climate War: The Fight To Take Back Our Planet** by Michael E. Mann (PublicAffairs, Jan. 12): Mann “clearly walks readers through the disingenuous arguments about carbon pricing; the mechanics of receiving governmental incentives for renewable energy; how the energy market lacks sufficient incentives to build a new infrastructure; solar and wind energy scare tactics in right-wing media; the pitfalls of ‘clean’ coal and geoengineering; ‘doomism,’ which ‘leads us down the same path of inaction as outright denial of the threat’; and carbon budgeting.”

**Under the Sky We Make: How To Be Human in a Warming World** by Kimberly Nicholas (Putnam, March 23): “Lund University climate scientist Nicholas delivers a user-friendly survey of the current state of the knowledge on climate change….What remains to be done, on a long to-do list, is to move from what she calls an ‘Exploitation Mindset’ to one devoted to regeneration, and this takes the large-scale down to the individual level, with each of us responsible for adopting habits that contribute to environmental healing….More immediately, citizens must reject fast-fix, ‘pollute-now, pay later’ promises on the parts of corporations and demand better solutions. Some of the author’s recommendations have been voiced by other climate activists, but she writes with welcome clarity and little partisan cheerleading.”

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.
“Ballard’s incredible achievements and gift for storytelling will captivate readers from all walks of life.”

INTO THE DEEP
A Memoir From the Man Who Found Titanic
Ballard, Robert D. & Drew, Christopher
National Geographic (336 pp.)
$30.00 | May 11, 2021
978-1-4262-2099-9

An explorer’s memoir of discovering the wreck of the Titanic—and so much more.

As a young boy, Ballard was perpetually in motion. Feeling confined in school and suffering from dyslexia, he found that he learned better by seeing and doing. From an early age, his mother had given him “license to roam,” so he spent much of his time fishing, swimming, and exploring the tidal pools of Southern California. After seeing Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea at age 12, he was hooked on the ocean: “It blew my mind.” Although Ballard is best known for the Titanic, he has made numerous remarkable discoveries in the face of significant obstacles. Among his other adventures and accomplishments: witnessing the ocean floor expanding at the Mid-Atlantic Ridge; investigating alleged Loch Ness monster sightings; finding the Bismarck and the Yorktown; exploring the wreckage of the Lusitania; tracking ancient trade routes of the Romans and the Phoenicians; stumbling upon a site that pointed the way for Israel to find “a significant offshore oil and gas field”; making findings that confirmed a theory that a catastrophic event occurred in the Black Sea (which some believe was the biblical Noah’s flood); locating John F. Kennedy’s PT-109; discovering a German U-boat in the Gulf of Mexico; and his current quest to find the wreckage of Amelia Earhart’s plane. All of this would be enough to fill multiple lifetimes, but Ballard has also developed and improved technologies to aid in the exploration of the ocean floor, made speaking appearances and written numerous articles and books about his work, and created video documentaries and live broadcasts of his adventures, bringing science to life for schoolchildren. Throughout the book, the author discusses the many challenges and setbacks he faced along the way, noting that failure should be embraced, since “every failure is a learning lesson.”

Ballard’s incredible achievements and gift for storytelling will captivate readers from all walks of life.

RESOLVED
Uniting Nations in a Divided World
Ban Ki-moon
Columbia Univ. (400 pp.)
$27.95 | Jun. 15, 2021
978-0-231-19872-1

A memoir from the diplomat who served as the secretary-general of the U.N. from 2007 to 2016.
secretary-general. Although there “was almost unanimous agreement that it was ‘Asia’s turn’ to field the next secretary-general,” South Korea was problematic due to its military ties to the U.S. Regardless, Ban got to work making the U.N. more efficient and transparent; addressing climate change; seeking a solution for the atrocities in Darfur; and alleviating extreme poverty. The author also delineates his extensive work in human rights activism; empowerment of women and LGBTQ+ people (the latter stance was unpopular in Korea); and, especially, the creation of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2016. Though the prose isn’t scintillating, the unique viewpoint on global history is invaluable.

An inspiring story of character and integrity on the world stage.

**THE SECRET TO SUPERHUMAN STRENGTH**

Bechdel, Alison
Illus. by the author
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (240 pp.)
$24.00 | May 4, 2021
978-0-544-38765-2

The acclaimed graphic memoirist returns to themes of self-discovery, this time through the lens of her love of fitness and exercise.

Some readers may expect Bechdel to be satisfied with her career. She was the 2014 recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, and her bestselling memoirs, *Fun Home* and *Are You My Mother?* both earned universally rave reviews, with the former inspiring a Broadway musical that won five Tony awards. But there she was, in her mid-50s, suffering from “a distinct sense of dread” and asking herself, “where had my creative joy gone?” Ultimately, she found what she was seeking, or at least expanded her search. In what she calls “the fitness book,” the author recounts, from her birth to the present, the exercise fads that have swept the nation for decades, from the guru-worship of Charles Atlas and Jack LaLanne through running, biking, hiking, “feminist martial arts,” yoga, and mountain climbing. “I have hared off after almost every new fitness fad to come down the pike for the last six decades,” she writes. Yet this book is about more than just exercise. Bechdel’s work always encompasses multiple interlocking themes, and here she delves into body image; her emerging gay consciousness; the connection between nature and inner meaning; how the transcendentalists were a version of the hippies a century earlier; and how her own pilgrimage is reminiscent of both Margaret Fuller and Jack Kerouac, whose stories become inextricably entwined in these pages with Bechdel’s. The author’s probing intelligence and self-deprecating humor continue to shimmer through her emotionally expressive drawings, but there is so much going on (familial, professional, romantic, cultural, spiritual) that it is easy to see how she became overwhelmed—and how she had to learn to accept the looming mortality that awaits us all. In the end, she decided to “stop struggling,” a decision that will relieve readers as well.

More thought-provoking work from an important creator.

**HEARTWOOD**

The Art of Living With the End in Mind
Becker, Barbara
Flatiron Books (224 pp.)
$25.99 | May 11, 2021
978-1-250-09598-5

A Manhattan-based interfaith minister grapples with the complexities of mortality. When Becker’s childhood friend Marisa died from cancer at age 40, the author was understandably crushed. However, the event also
opened a long-suppressed wellspring of insecurities about
death, and Becker’s grieving process became life-altering.
She began approaching life more proactively, spiritually, and
ecologically. She planted bulbs in a makeshift plot in the city,
attended a silent meditation retreat, practiced the Japanese
“forest bathing” and “water children” rituals, and made a gen-
eral promise to herself to “participate more fully in everyday
matters.” The author shows how this intensive self-reflection
benefited her on many levels, and she hopes to inspire others
to participate in their own introspection when encountering
life’s myriad challenges. Among other episodes and life events
that led her to a more intentional soul-searching journey: a
dangerous internship in politically unstable Bangladesh, a mis-
carrriage, her father’s struggles with Alzheimer’s disease, and
family losses from Covid-19. In too many instances, she writes,
“death had slipped quietly into my home and declared herself my
teacher.” But what, she asks, “was I supposed to do with these
understandings in the practical, brass-tacks way of a modern
woman going about her daily business?” While the book as a
whole is inspiring, the most moving passages involve Becker’s
time as a hospice volunteer. Though consistently heartbreak-
ing and often frustrating, the author’s experiences were also
transformative. She incorporated compassionate Zen Buddhist
end-of-life practices into her own humanitarian service vows,
and a host of nurturing interpersonal experiences broadened
her understanding of how her life could be made more useful
in both spiritual and altruistic empathetic service to those in
need. Once firmly entrenched in our “death-shy” contemporary
culture, the author is now a reassuring advocate for peace and
interreligious understanding, and she views dying as an oppor-
tunity to seek enlightenment and give thanks, regardless of
one’s preferred spiritual path.

A graceful meditation on divine deliverance.
A history of attacks on free speech. Lawyer and journalist Berkowitz offers a well-informed chronicle of censorship, from ancient times to the present, arguing persuasively that censorship does not work but instead makes ideas more effective by forbidding them. “Once transmitted,” he writes, “an idea is not easily extinguished” despite fierce coercive power wielded to prevent, suppress, or punish expression. In the ancient world, some words, thought to have magical powers, were considered “so venomous” that they were banned. Athens allowed free speech in the agora but silenced thinkers such as Socrates, whose words were seen as polluting and his trial and death, a means of purification. Societies under stress—war, rebellion, class uprisings, religious dissent—often resort to censorship in the form of conflagrations: From Rome to Nazi Germany, many texts have gone up in flames. In the Middle Ages, the state quashed treasonous utterances by instituting public shaming; severed heads went on display as warnings. Beginning around 1450, the printing press, which circulated ideas quickly and widely, proved a bane to censors. Although, in 1670, Spinoza argued that free speech is a right in a free state, that principle has not been easily upheld. Soon after adopting the First Amendment, for example, the fragile new American nation passed a draconian sedition law. With examples of banned books such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, Berkowitz underscores John Stuart Mill's contention that an idea that seems harmful one day might be beneficial on another. As much as he champions free expression, Berkowitz sharply indicts social media companies engaged in “surveillance capitalism,” profiting by allowing racism, anti-Semitism, conspiracy theories, and disinformation to proliferate. Still, faced
with this challenge, he reminds readers that “policing speech too aggressively risks exactly the kind of overbearing exercise of state power that spells the end of a free society.”

A timely contribution to an ongoing debate.

DON’T CALL IT A CULT
The Shocking Story of Keith Raniere and the Women of NXIVM
Berman, Sarah
Steerforth (320 pp.)
$17.00 paper | Apr. 20, 2021
978-1-58642-275-2

How a treacherous cult amassed a following under the guise of self-improvement.

Vancouver-based investigative journalist Berman front-loads her startling, comprehensive exposé on the NXIVM group with key information on how the association became popular yet remained elusive to law enforcement. She shares interview material from several members of a large cast of characters, including Clare and Sara Bronfman, heirs to the Seagram’s fortune who funded the organization for years (Clare is currently in prison). Berman tracks NXIVM “Vanguard” Keith Raniere’s history as an Amway distributor–turned–pyramid-sales executive. In the 1980s, he joined forces with former nurse Nancy Salzman (known as “Prefect”), and the duo promoted training and coaching programs geared toward women’s empowerment. Using a philosophical playbook influenced by Scientology and other similar groups, NXIVM began amassing members, each of whom was charged with recruiting others via classes called “intensives.” Bankrolled by the Bronfman sisters, who were cunningly exploited for their exorbitant wealth and strained familial relationships, the increasingly “dangerous mafia-like” society steamrolled its way into the lives of vulnerable, unsuspecting people, employing blackmail, extortion, forced confinement, and even sex trafficking. Raniere then created offshoots like the particularly insidious Dominus Obsequious Sororium. “By the time of his arrest,” writes Berman about DOS, “at least 102 women had been initiated into Raniere’s secret society. Not all of them had been branded, and not all of them had been coerced into sex, but court records and testimony would show that he considered all of them to be his slaves.” Not for the easily rattled, the author’s engrossing reportage meticulously reveals the tumultuous rise and fall of NXIVM after numerous criminal indictments and prosecutions. The author incorporates critical narratives from former members, laying bare their awful experiences. Her research, which eventually caused her to fear for her own personal safety, informs a vital cautionary tale about how “power, consent, and women’s agency” can be weaponized. File this alongside Lawrence Wright’s Going Clear and Jeff Guinn’s The Road to Jonestown.

An incendiary, serpentine report on criminal manipulation of staggering proportions.

SACRIFICE
A Gold Star Widow’s Fight for the Truth
Black, Michelle
Putnam (352 pp.)
$28.00 | May 4, 2021
978-0-593-19093-7

A widow seeks answers regarding the death of her Green Beret husband in Niger in 2017.

When Black met her husband, Bryan, in 2002, she had no idea that the man who looked “like a tough guy with a bad attitude” would become the “love of my life.” Though both were in relationships already, their friendship quickly turned romantic. They married in 2005, and by 2008, they had two young sons. To support his family, Bryan enlisted in the military and trained for the Green Berets, a grueling process that “takes more than desire; it requires full mental and physical commitment.” He then
The billionaire philanthropist has made fighting climate change a priority. Writing a book on the subject was a vital tactic

BY ERIC LIEBETRAU

For more than a decade, Bill Gates has directed much of his focus toward the most important issue humanity faces: climate change. Of course, it’s a subject with no shortage of relevant literature, but few people in the world have a more prominent platform—not to mention the intelligence and resources—to tackle it than Gates. In his latest book, pointedly and appropriately titled How To Avoid a Climate Disaster: The Solutions We Have and the Breakthroughs We Need (Knopf, Feb. 16), the tech pioneer and philanthropist delivers what our starred review called “a supremely authoritative and accessible plan for how we can avoid a climate catastrophe.” Gates answered our questions via email.

Given that climate change affects every single person on Earth, what is the most important daily change that each of us can make to ameliorate such a seemingly intractable problem?

I’d say there are two things that are equally important. One is to use your voice to advocate for practical plans that will help the world eliminate greenhouse gases and get us to net-zero by 2050. That includes, for instance, calling on national politicians to fund more clean energy research and development. We have a great opportunity because of the passion of activists and young people who have made their voices heard, and now we need to demand that our leaders not just make big commitments, but show the courage to implement the plans we need to reach our goals. The other action people can take, for those who can afford it, is to buy low- and zero-carbon products, even if they’re more expensive than their conventional counterparts. Plant-based burgers and electric vehicles are good examples. When you pay for a clean product, you’re telling the market that people are willing to pay to lower their emissions. That will attract more innovation and eventually help make clean alternatives just as cheap upfront as the fossil fuel–based competition, making them accessible to everyone.

Shifting to a macro level, what is priority No. 1 for the Biden administration, both domestically and internationally?

I just wrote a blog post about this! Most important is to expand the supply of clean energy innovation by doing things like dramatically increasing the funding of R&D in national laboratories. In the U.S., we should also make sure the government is set up to avoid duplication and make the best use of...
these resources by creating the National Institutes of Energy Innovation, modeled on the phenomenally successful National Institutes of Health. There are other necessary steps, too, including expanding the market’s demand for clean energy innovations and helping the world’s low-income farmers thrive despite rising temperatures. At Breakthrough Energy [the clean-tech venture capital fund founded by Gates], we’re going to be advocating for just those kinds of policies, because we need leaders to grasp that the investments we make today are critical to reaching our climate goals 30 years from now.

Outside the fossil-fuel industry, who are the most pernicious polluters that an activist should focus their energy on fighting?

I wish that we could solve the climate change problem simply by focusing on one or two areas, but unfortunately, it’s just too complicated for that. For instance, cement and steel are two areas where we need a great deal of innovation so we can make them without producing emissions, but those aren’t villainous “pernicious polluters” — they’re central to almost everything we build. So we need them, and we need them to be clean.

Activists deserve a huge amount of credit for bringing the world’s attention to the climate crisis. Now the best thing we all can do as citizens is to push for practical plans that will get us to net-zero emissions by 2050. We should spend the next decade putting all the pieces in place—expanding R&D, adopting the right policies, and understanding how markets come into play—so we can be on a path to zero emissions by 2050. As I’ve mentioned, we’ll be leading a lot of that policy work at Breakthrough Energy, and we’re eager for people passionate about this work to join us.

Why write a book? You create so much significant change through your foundation and other philanthropic ventures. Why turn to the printed word?

I wrote a book because I thought the time was right. Climate advocates have done an amazing job of spotlighting the problem. Thanks in large part to their efforts, governments are setting ambitious goals to curb or eliminate greenhouse gas emissions. But they deserve a plan to actually reach those goals. That’s what my book is—a plan.

If you want to propose serious ideas with the hope that people will act on them, there’s still nothing quite like a book. I love all the digital communications tools we have today, but when I want to learn something deeply or see something really thought-provoking, I still turn to books. If any subject deserves the thorough treatment you can only achieve with a book, it’s climate change.

This book also serves as my own road map. I founded Breakthrough Energy to take on this challenge in a comprehensive way, and that’s what we’re doing. We’re investing in startups, scaling promising technologies, supporting our most promising innovators, and advocating for the public- and private-sector policies we need to speed the energy transition.

How To Avoid a Climate Disaster received a starred review in the Jan. 1, 2021, issue.

BILL GATES
HOW TO AVOID A CLIMATE DISASTER
THE SOLUTIONS WE HAVE AND THE BREAKTHROUGHS WE NEED
earned Ranger credentials and deployed to Niger in 2016 and again in 2017. In early October that year, the author learned the devastating news that her husband had been killed in an ambush. Though she believed the military would conduct an “extensive investigation” and share details of their findings with the families of the victims, her attitude changed dramatically after Bryan’s funeral. In the difficult months that followed, stories emerged in the media from “anonymous officials” that Bryan’s team captain, Mike Perozeni, had “mischaracterized the mission to avoid getting proper approvals.” Black believed otherwise, not only because she had spoken to Perozeni, but because of the frustratingly incomplete information she received from the military investigation. After interviewing the survivors of the mission, the author discovered that commanding officers above Perozeni had not only ignored his assessments of the mission, but had forced Bryan’s team “into a dangerous situation with woefully inadequate support.” Although the narrative pace suffers at times from too much detail and some meandering, Black’s story is important for what it reveals about corruption at the highest levels of the military and how that corruption can result in the needless sacrifice of soldiers’ lives.

Not without flaws but a courageous and heartfelt military memoir from the perspective of a soldier’s family.

**NATIONAL SECURITY, LEAKS & FREEDOM OF THE PRESS**

*The Pentagon Papers Fifty Years On*

*Ed. by Bollinger, Lee C. & Stone, Geoffrey R.*

*Oxford Univ.* (368 pp.)

$24.95 paper | Apr. 1, 2021

978-0-19-751939-4

A roundtable reconsideration of the Pentagonal Papers and the legal precedents its publication yielded.

Assembling journalists, jurists, and security experts, editors Bollinger and Stone present 16 essays and a concluding report by an impromptu commission identifying points of friction and recommending next steps. At issue is the applicability of the laws surrounding Daniel Ellsberg’s delivery of the Pentagon Papers to the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, both of which published excerpts from these classified documents. The Nixon administration moved to enjoin publication, and the Supreme Court, in “a stunning decision rejecting the government’s position and protecting the right of the freedom of the press,” ruled that prior restraint violated the First Amendment in the absence of proof that publication would compromise national security. That was tested in 1979, when *Progressive* magazine attempted to publish plans to build a hydrogen bomb; the court ruled that the public had no need to know how to do so, upholding the constitutional validity of the ban. Fast-forward to the WikiLeaks and Edward Snowden cases, and the court’s decision—which essentially holds that a “leaker” may be punished but the publisher not—becomes problematic. One central reason, observes former White House security adviser Avril Haines, is that “traditional media outlets” have ceded ground to myriad online publications such that “we cannot rely on the press to be a separate actor in the framework capable of making a considered judgment about what is newsworthy.” Several contributors thereby support a “new compact” that proposes both incentives and disincentives for publishers as well as broader Congressional oversight of classified information and its declassification. Others argue against such measures as bringing leaker Julian Assange to trial, for “sooner or later a prosecutor or future attorney general will determine that the precedent set...can be used to prosecute a reporter—next time, from a real news organization.”

Civil libertarians and security specialists will find this of considerable interest.
A DESCENDING SPIRAL
Exposing the Death Penalty in 12 Essays
Bookman, Marc
The New Press (208 pp.)
$25.99 | May 11, 2021
978-1-62097-654-8

Essays from one of America’s most prominent death penalty abolitionists.

In authoritative and scholarly yet largely accessible language, Bookman—director of the Atlantic Center for Capital Representation and veteran capital defense attorney who has contributed to Mother Jones, the Atlantic, and other publications as well as numerous editions of the Best American Essays series—evaluates a dozen cases that expose glaring injustices endemic to the system. Mental illness and its (mis)diagnosis is clearly one of the problem areas, as demonstrated by the chilling case of Andre Thomas, who, inspired by a demonic delusion, murdered his family in a psychotic rage in 2004. The author argues against the death penalty in cases where a severe “intellectual disability” is readily present and medically verified, and he points out that because each state’s laws vary, so do the fates of their felons. Bookman delineates situations where capital punishment is not only unjust, but upheld through an overlooked breach of process and based on convoluted evidence, an unstable criminal, or racially tainted conclusions. The author spotlights cases plagued by prosecutorial misconduct, judicial override, and racially biased judges and jurors, and he details situations in which the convicted party received the death penalty through the improprieties of skewed perspectives. He also probes the history of—and general hesitancy about—the execution of women and shows the danger of impaired representation. “In the same way that alcoholics see things more clearly when they stop drinking,” he writes, “death penalty cases often come into better focus when good lawyers take over from bad ones.” As a staunch death penalty abolitionist, Bookman creates a clear, comprehensive portrait of a broken system, and the cases he highlights make for fascinating reading. The author acknowledges that while executions and death
sentences have decreased significantly, there remains a great amount of work to see it “grind to a slow and painful halt after an accumulation of wrongs.”

Concise, convincing arguments against the continuation of capital punishment in America.

**FACING THE MOUNTAIN**
*A True Story of Japanese American Heroes in World War II*
Brown, Daniel James
Viking (560 pp.)
$30.00 | May 11, 2021
978-0-525-55740-1

A deft new account of “one of the most decorated units in American history.” While the Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team continues to produce admiring histories, this definitive account tells a larger story. Historian Brown notes that Japanese immigrants began arriving in the U.S. in the late 19th century. Despite brutal working conditions and rampant racist discrimination, many prospered. In Hawaii, nearly one-third of which was populated by Japanese Americans in 1941, they suffered less discrimination and developed a more assertive culture and even a distinctive pidgin language. Matters were less hospitable on the mainland, where many state laws forbade noncitizens from owning property. Few readers will fail to squirm at events following Pearl Harbor. In the outrage that followed, most Americans and their leaders assumed that Japanese Americans (but not German or Italian Americans) were potential saboteurs. Declaring a large area of the Pacific coast a Japanese “exclusion zone,” the government removed more than 100,000 Japanese Americans to concentration camps further east. They were forced to leave behind any possessions they couldn’t bring with them, including homes and farms, and most were stolen or occupied and not returned after the war. In 1943, pressed for manpower, the Army formed a volunteer unit that became the 442nd. Despite the legend that young men from the camps rushed to serve, the great majority came from Hawaii. Joining brought few perks, and Brown diligently records the opposition, although activists remained a small minority. Although this is familiar ground, the author delivers a superb description of the unit’s training and unparalleled battlefield achievements. Despite their remarkable accomplishments, returning 442nd soldiers and their families faced the same boycotts, threats, and violence they suffered after Pearl Harbor. Brown does an excellent job capturing this regrettable historical episode, noting how it “would take decades for the country’s leadership to broadly recognize and formally address the wrong that had been done to them.”

An insightful portrait of exceptional heroism amid deeply embedded racism.

**FORGET THE ALAMO**
*The Rise and Fall of an American Myth*
Burrough, Bryan & Tomlinson, Chris & Stanford, Jason
Penguin Press (416 pp.)
$32.00 | Jun. 8, 2021
978-1-984880-09-3

A zesty, journalistic, half history, half sendup about the battle of the Alamo and the myths that cling to it.

Setting out to distinguish ascertainable fact from Texas tub-thumping, Burrough, Tomlinson, and Stanford, all Texans, succeed brilliantly in their intent. Their focus is the famed 1836 battle for control of San Antonio’s fabled fortress and its role in the mythology of the Lone Star State. In this evenhanded popular history, the authors situate the war for Texas’ independence from Mexico as a fight for the preservation of slavery by Anglo Texans. The fact that Santa Anna and his followers, as well as the Tejanos (Texans of Mexican birth), were “ardently abolitionist” foes of slavery is only one of the book’s many punches to received
wisdom. Some of the fort’s famous defenders come off poorly. Jim Bowie was “an amazingly brazen swindler. Had he stayed in the United States, there’s a decent chance he’d have ended up swinging from a rope.” Davy Crockett didn’t die a “glorious death”: “The Alamo’s trapped defenders died for pretty much nothing.” What the authors call the “second battle of the Alamo” has focused not on slavery but on what the events of 1836 do and should mean to Texans. Laying waste to many previous historians of the events, the authors leave readers amused as well as informed. The entertaining story contains multitudes: Disneyland, John Wayne, JFK, LBJ, and, of course, the Bush political dynasty. Since the 1970s, this battle has been joined by American Latinos, whose ancestors are finally gaining their well-deserved recognition in Texas history through “Alamo revisionism”—a direct, important challenge to the “Heroic Anglo Narrative of the Alamo.” Despite a bit too much chattiness and some unnecessary vulgarity, this lively book is sure to cause plenty of interesting conversations in Texas.

An iconoclastic, romping, bull’s-eye volley at an enduring sacred cow—popular history at its most engaging and insightful.

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**“THE CHIEFS NOW IN THIS CITY”**

**Indians and the Urban Frontier in Early America**

Calloway, Colin G.

Oxford Univ. (480 pp.)

$34.95 | May 11, 2021

978-0-19-754765-6

A history of the early American frontier from the perspective of Native Americans.

At the beginning of his latest penetrating book on Native affairs, noted Dartmouth historian Calloway calls out the simplistic belief that Native Americans disappeared into the wilderness as colonists pushed west in the 18th and 19th centuries. On the contrary, writes the author, Native Americans frequently moved toward urban areas rather than away from them, “as they responded to new centers of power, adapted to new pressures, and took advantage of new economic opportunities.” They
traveled to Boston, Charleston, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, and other cities for not only diplomatic or economic reasons, but also recreational purposes, often staying weeks or months at a time. “Many historians have pored over the writing of colonial travelers for deeper understanding of Native American society and culture,” writes Calloway, “yet few have looked to Native American travelers for alternative understandings of early American society and culture.” As he has done in previous books, the author provides an extensive review and analysis of the available literature, offering a fresh view of the lives of Native Americans during the early years of the new republic while correcting many common misconceptions, particularly in relation to hospitality, civility, and justice. Calloway shows how “colonial communities depended on connections to Indian country for their existence, growth, and prosperity.” To this end, the leaders of these cities would host delegates from various Native nations for conferences and negotiations, often making arrangements and paying for their lodging and other expenses. Native men and women would also travel to cities to trade and to engage socially. While in the city, they took part in everyday Colonial life, including eating, drinking, attending church, and visiting and performing in theater productions. Calloway also explores the perils faced by Native Americans on these journeys, including violence, racism, and disease.

A welcome Native-focused history of Colonial America.

**TASTES LIKE WAR**

*A Memoir*

Cho, Grace M.

Feminist Press (296 pp.)

$17.95 paper | May 11, 2021

978-1-952177-94-1

A Korean immigrant and sociology professor reevaluates her mother’s past and their fraught relationship.

When she was very young, Cho moved with her family from Korea to her father’s small, conservative hometown in rural Washington with her half brother, her Korean mother, and her much older father, a merchant mariner who was at sea for half of the year. “In 1986, when I was fifteen,” writes the author, “[my mother] developed what psychiatrists call ‘florid psychosis.’ Such a beautiful image to describe the terror. A field of flowers from which my second mother bloomed.” By the time she died, suddenly and mysteriously, in 2008, she was spending all her time in a “granny flat” in New Jersey in the house of Cho’s brother and his wife. Every weekend, Cho, who was working on a doctoral dissertation and then a book about the Korean diaspora, traveled several hours to cook for her mother, an activity that “let me imagine her before she was my mother.” In this probing, vividly written memoir, charged with the pain of losing “the person I loved most in the world,” Cho moves fluidly around in time, touching on difficult as well as happy memories—e.g., her mother’s former zest for foraging and baking dozens of blackberry pies. Using the tools she developed as a sociologist, as well as her own insights as a daughter, the author was able to shape an evocative portrait of her mother’s past as “an adolescent in postwar South Korea under… the rising US military hegemony, who worked at a US naval base, selling drinks, and probably sex, to American military personnel.” Though Cho refuses to settle on a specific explanation for her mother’s illness, which creates some sense of an unresolved narrative, the author’s recreation of her family dynamic is haunting and filled with palpable emotion.

A wrenching, powerful account of the long-term effects of the immigrant experience.
THE OPTIMIST
A Case for the Fly Fishing Life
Coggins, David
Scribner (256 pp.)
$26.00 | May 4, 2021
978-1-982152-50-5

Have rod, will travel: the education of a devoted fly fisherman.

“Angling is about anticipation and planning trips far in the future, but it also has a storied history,” writes Coggins. “This sport has been practiced since Izaak Walton’s Compleat Angler was published in 1653, in ways that are, to the naked eye, fairly unchanged today, like a Shakespeare play performed on a thrust stage.” Coggins, who writes about fishing for the Robb Report, adds to the canon with this reflective, leisurely travelogue about some of his favorite fishing spots. Because anglers, like gamblers, are addicted to the “chance of winning,” they must be optimists: The “angler is master of a kingdom that always threatens to crumble.” Coggins reminiscences about when he went fly-fishing for smallmouth bass in Wisconsin with his grandfather’s friends and learned the fine arts of casting and maneuvering a canoe and the vernacular of bobbers, leaders, and flies. Then the author takes us to see the cutthroat trout in the “mecca of American angling,” Montana, a state that “calls the faithful like the Louvre calls painters.” Of course, there were plenty of mistakes—e.g., a broken rod and the humiliation of losing a trout that “broke me off”—before he caught “a perfect fish.” Coggins also recounts his trip to the “wonderfully isolated and remote” flats of the Bahamas to experience saltwater fishing and to catch a fish he’s never seen before, the “silver phantom” bonefish. In Patagonia, the author sought rainbow trout, the “golden retriever of fish,” whose luminous color “mirrors the joy of catching one.” Among the author’s many other adventures: chasing striped bass in New York’s Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, running with Atlantic salmon in New Brunswick, Canada (“many shattered dreams lay at the altar of this revered fish”), and pond fishing for brook trout in the Maine North Woods, “a 3.5-million-acre wilderness that extends all the way to Canada.”

A wise, affectionate chronicle of a passion pursued.

“One woman’s account of a harrowing attack in Berkeley, California, and its aftermath.”

“...chilling.”

“An honest, nuanced look at what it means to carry on after a traumatic event.”

—Kirkus Reviews
The New York Times columnist puts forth a radical proposal to build Black political power by leveraging demographics

BY ANJALI ENJETI


His solution? Black people who can should move back to their Southern ancestral lands to reconnect with their roots and build electoral power. He believes so completely in his thesis that last January, after 26 years of living in New York City, he moved to Atlanta, Georgia.

We spoke over the phone about relocation as a political act and the recent elections. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Less than a year after you moved here, Georgia voters elected Joe Biden for president and two Democratic U.S. senators, Jon Ossoff and the Rev. Raphael Warnock, who is the first Black senator from Georgia. Did this surprise you?

I am in awe. I had not even considered it when I was writing the book or moving to Georgia. In an earlier draft, I wrote about how Stacey Abrams almost became governor and that it wouldn’t take much more to put her over the top. I turned the book in after the state went for Biden but before the runoff. What happened with the elections served as proof of the book’s central concept.

Who do you credit for these Democratic wins?

There was amazing organizing by a whole lot of people, including Stacey Abrams. But I also credit reverse migration. Georgia’s Black population doubled from 1990 to 2020, from 1.7 million people to 3.4 million people. The last Democratic presidential candidate to win in Georgia was Bill Clinton in 1992, when Black people made up only 25% of the state. Now Black people are 33% of the state. This is a seismic shift in electoral politics.

Do you have any advice about where Black people should relocate for the reverse migration to be most effective?

If a few hundred thousand Black people move to Delaware, it will be a majority Black state. If 700,000 Black
people move to Mississippi, it will be a majority Black state. There are options for everyone. There are Deep South options like Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. There are coastal options that feel Northern like Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia.

Do you think stereotypes about the South play a role in preventing Black people from returning? There are a lot of hesitations and mythologies about the South. But Black people make up only 5% of California. There is not a single majority Black city in the state. Police departments in Los Angeles have been predatory for the longest time. California is where SWAT teams were invented to deal with the Black Panthers.

Northern and western cities have massive concentrations of poverty with deleterious effects. Redlining segregated those cities and made them into functional refugee camps. Formerly redlined neighborhoods are 13% warmer because there are no trees to absorb pollution or provide shade.

The majority of Black mayors are in the South, and almost every major city in the South has a Black mayor. They are young, dynamic, and trying to be transformative. New York City had one Black mayor 30 years ago. The backlash gave us Rudy Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg, who initiated stop and frisk. New York has not produced a single Black senator in its history.

Is there an ideal timeline for a reverse migration? The window on Black people making this move is closing. According to an article in the Washington Post, by 2040, 70% of Americans will live in the 15 largest states and will be represented by only 30 senators. The other 30% of the U.S. will live in 35 states and will be represented by 70 senators. This latter group will be disproportionately White, rural, and elderly.

If we believe that reparations and police reform will be hard to achieve with this current Senate, think about how hard it will be in a future Senate. If we’re concerned about the confirmation of hostile judges, it will be worse with the future Senate.

In 30 years, the Southwest will be majority Hispanic, twice the Black population in the entire United States. Asians will take the second minority position. Black people will be third. One-third of Hispanics voted for Trump, as did one-third of Asians. Those votes will cancel the Black vote even if 100% of Black voters voted for a Democratic candidate.

We have to make a choice now about whether we want state-level political power. We don’t have forever.

Do you worry that Southern states’ disenfranchise-ment of Black voters could thwart Black people’s ability to build political power after they move here? Fighting is part of the plan. This is a generational undertaking, not a silver bullet to solve all the problems. White supremacy will fight to the death to maintain itself. Fear has no place in the quest of Black liberation. If you’re afraid of the risk involved in reverse migration, this is not your fight. This is for the brave. This is for the radicals.

A COURSE CALLED AMERICA
Fifty States, Five Thousand Fairways, and the Search for the Great American Golf Course
Coyne, Tom
Avid Reader Press (416 pp.)
$28.00 | May 25, 2021
978-1-982128-05-0

Hitting balls across America, state by state.

Sportswriter Coyne’s latest completes a trilogy of travelogues begun with golf courses in Ireland and Scotland. His goal was to play golf in every state in two-to-three week stretches for a year, in search of the mythical “Great American Golf Course.” Besides oozing with rich golf history and lore, Coyne’s heartfelt anecdotes about people he meets and the joys of companionship are appealing. After getting his wife’s permission, creating a beginning itinerary and securing tee times, Coyne began his adventure near his home, at “Dad’s home course of LuLu, a curiously named and underrated Donald Ross [course] outside of Philadelphia that was founded by a group of Shriners back in 1912.” Next up was the historic Newport Country Club. Seeking the benevolence of friends (he has many), the author gained access to America’s most exclusive courses. On Long Island, he visited the grave of C.B. Macdonald, who designed the course he had just played: the National Golf Links of America (“It was easy to appreciate its holes as perhaps golf’s most fascinating ensemble, in both shape and style”). Coyne played Bethpage Black two weeks after it hosted the PGA Championship. In Washington state, the author played Meadow Park with classic hickory-shafted clubs and enjoyed the greens at Chambers Bay, “smooth as poker tables.” On a remote southern strip of Oregon’s seaside cliffs, he took on Bandon Dunes, a “true hold-my-calls experience,” and he completed a round at Chena Bend, a central Alaska military base course, at 1 a.m. Playing Nebraska’s Sand Hills felt like “sailing a vast sea of grassy swells.” From Hawaii to a dusty Navajo Nation course in northern Arizona, Coyne tallied 300 rounds over 294 courses. A good player, his average score was an impressive 6 over par. Although bumpy to start, once underway, the narrative settles into a smooth, welcoming flow.

Even if you just thumb through, this is a delightful, entertaining book even nongolfers can enjoy.

FRAMERS
Human Advantage in an Age of Technology and Turmoil
Cukier, Kenneth & Mayer-Schönberger, Viktor & de Vericourt, Francis
Dutton (272 pp.)
$28.00 | May 11, 2021
978-0-593-18259-8

An appealing pop-science guide to creativity.

Books on problem-solving, including this one, tend to be directed toward aspiring businesspeople, but Economist senior editor Cukier and business school professors Mayer-Schönberger and de Vericourt offer a text that should have wider appeal. Unlike animals and computers, humans do not make decisions according to fixed rules. We operate with a mental model of a situation, a frame, that becomes critical when solving problems. Among the authors’ numerous illustrative anecdotes is the story of Nokia. For decades, handsets steadily became smaller, cheaper, and more convenient. That was the model, and Nokia led in sales. When Apple introduced the “bulkier, pricier, and bugger” iPhone in 2008, many companies did not realize that Apple had reframed the model, and Nokia barely escaped bankruptcy. Although an accepted tenet in psychology for a century, framing entered the mainstream only when human intelligence bumped up against the limitation of computers. Computers calculate, solve complex problems, and even learn, but they remain helpless without human input: “AI is brilliant at answering what is asked;
framers pose questions never before voiced. Computers work only in a world that exists; humans live in ones they imagine through framing.” This incredibly efficient means to reaching a decision requires three key elements: “causal thinking,” which predicts in advance what an action will produce; “counterfactuals,” which serve as “a form of dreaming—but wisely channeled, deliberately focused”; and “constraints,” which place limits on our imagination, allowing us to focus on actions that matter. The authors conclude with a long plea for pluralism, “friction,” and diversity in business, our personal lives, and society as a whole. “Uniformity is the end of successful framing,” they write. While tribalism and groupthink remain the default modes for many humans, the authors put forth solid theories supported by scientific researchers, educators, expert consultants, philosophers, and other thinkers.

Less a guide to success in relationships, creativity, or even business than an astute analysis of problem-solving.
Indeed, Darling notes, Elon Musk once built an autonomous assembly line for his Tesla electric car only to discover that robots were not yet smart enough to figure out and deal with unexpected glitches in the manufacturing process; a repentant Musk “tweeted that human workers were underrated.” Robots are best at single specialized tasks and repetitive processes—for now. Separate questions arise when robots become companions and pets. In that vein, Darling engagingly examines robots and their uses in relation to our interactions with animals—and not just pets, but also working animals such as donkeys and horses, bred over years to help with specific tasks that are difficult for humans to accomplish alone. The author notes that in the instance of both robots and animals, “we have an inherent tendency to anthropomorphize—to project our own behaviors, experiences, and emotions onto other entities.” Animals please us in part because we ascribe our best qualities to them, and in the same way, robots “engage us because we’re drawn to the recognizable human cues in their behavior.” A minor shortcoming of this book is Darling’s cursory attention to the problem of abuse, for if animals suffer so much hardship at human hands, so might those machines. Still, she provides a useful addition to a body of literature that is growing at a rapid pace.

A provocative work of ethics that may prove altogether timely given the state of the technology.

THE NEXT EVEREST
Surviving the Mountain’s Deadliest Day and Finding the Resilience To Climb Again
Davidson, Jim
St. Martin’s (416 pp.)
$28.99 | Apr. 20, 2021
978-1-250-27229-4

A practiced mountaineer recounts his fraught efforts to scale the world’s tallest mountain.

For Colorado-based climber and speaker Davidson, summiting Mount Everest was a longtime dream. He trained hard for it, arriving at base camp in 2015 and making his way up icefalls and over crevasses only to experience the devastating avalanche following a massive earthquake. Even in tamer weather, the mountain can be deadly: In one key moment, the author contemplates the body of a climber who, like him, survived the earthquake only to return the next year and die within sight of the summit. The year before his first effort, “a glacial block the size of a ten-story building sheared away from an ice ramp,” killing 16 Nepali workers below. Pausing to pay them his respects, Davidson contemplates other ice fields above him on the trail and thinks, “stopping for even a second might give gravity an opening to drop an ice building on us.” The giant mountain offers countless ways to die, including slipping off the rickety ladders that span breaks in the ice. Living through avalanches and helping locate and identify the dead were terrible enough, but the disappointment over the end of his first climb “just nine hours after I left base camp” was nearly spirit-crushing, as was the discovery that he had “officially crossed the line from prediabetic to diabetic.” All good reasons to try again, the prospect of death be damned: “Risky climbs…had taught me that if I was afraid of dying, and wanted to see my loved ones again, I should temporarily put thoughts of them away.” The book nicely bookends Into Thin Air and the author’s own Ledge as considerations of adventures that have only three outcomes: summiting, turning back, or dying.

Essential for alpinists, though armchair travelers will be bound up in Davidson’s thrill-a-minute narrative, too.
“15 Books on Business Culture That You Need to Read Today”
—Entrepreneur Magazine

“Love the analogy/metaphor of music being compared to business. There are lots of similarities...”

“Leonard’s debut compares the culture of an organization to the bass in an orchestra.”

“The author is obviously passionate about both music and project portfolio management, and his enthusiasm shines through the text.”

“Nicely orchestrated and well-executed business advice.”
—Kirkus Reviews

For Information on Film Rights, Email gerald@geraldjleonard.com
https://geraldjleonard.com/culture-is-the-bass/
“A beautifully written, loving tribute to the wonders found swimming in the wild outdoors.”

**WATERLOG**

*A Swimmer’s Journey Through Britain*

Deakin, Roger

Tin House (568 pp.)

$27.95 | May 25, 2021

978-1-951142-85-8

The foundational text for the international “wild swimming” movement, originally published in 1999 in Britain—and the only book Deakin (1943-2006) published during his lifetime.

Inspired by John Cheever’s short story “The Swimmer,” Deakin began his trip across the waterways of Britain in April 1997, running naked into the waters of the Isles of Scilly. The author ended his journey the following Christmas Day, experiencing “the intoxication of the fiery cold” waters of the North Sea. Along the way, Deakin explored the springs of Malvern, famous for their “healing powers” and visited by Florence Nightingale and Charles Darwin; the mysterious Moor Barns—famous for their “healing powers” and visited by Florence Nightingale and Charles Darwin; and the River Avon (“Avon that runs through Stratford-upon-Avon. Shakespeare’s Avon”), filled with sunbathers and loungers, creating the picture of “a water rats’ club straight from the pages of *The Wind in the Willows.*” Deakin ponders the joy of swimming amid these mysteries, doubts and uncertainties. He is a leaf on the stream, free at last from his petty little purposes in life.” The author also had a few unexpected encounters, including with unfriendly officials while disembarking from the private waters of the Itchen River. “The right to walk freely along river banks or to bathe in rivers,” writes the author, “should no more be bought and sold than the right to walk up mountains or to swim in the sea from our beaches.” Throughout, Deakin shares lyrical descriptions of the history and geography of the varied waterways he visited, and he smoothly weaves in literary references inspired by his experiences, including reflecting on other English writers who shared his affinity for the water, such as Virginia Woolf and George Borrow. This edition also features a foreword by Bonnie T sui and afterword by Robert Macfarlane.

A beautifully written, loving tribute to the wonders found swimming in the wild outdoors.

**BAD LAWYER**

*A Memoir of Law and Disorder*

Dorn, Anna

Hachette (256 pp.)

$28.00 | May 4, 2021

978-0-306-84652-6

An irreverent lawyer’s memoir. “The ‘law’ had been passed down in my family like a hideous heirloom,” writes Dorn, who grew up in Washington, D.C. “My dad was a lawyer. My grandfather was a lawyer. Most of my uncles are lawyers. And it wasn’t just my family—most of the people I grew up with also had families full of lawyers.” Though initially reluctant, the author decided to attend law school, with her grandmother willing to pay the tuition. (Dorn repeatedly admits her privilege.) Given that she wouldn’t be buried under law school debt, she committed to becoming a “good lawyer.” The author candidly and wittily shares the details about her experience becoming a lawyer, beginning with the pressures of law school. “When push came to shove,” she writes, “my favorite thing about being at Berkeley Law was telling people that I was at Berkeley Law. No matter how messy my hair was or how socially bizarre I acted, people assumed I had my shit together.” The day after learning she passed the California bar exam, Dorn expresses mixed feelings: “I woke up feeling relieved but also depressed. I was a lawyer now. I was trapped.” As her career progressed and she witnessed the many flaws in the justice system firsthand, her dedication to helping others wavered. She recounts lawyers using elitist terminology and spending little time and effort writing motions, judges shopping online during testimony and drinking in chambers, the system operating differently when the defendant was wealthy, and a culture that catered to “revolting old men” and maintaining the status quo. Dorn soon became jaded and wanted out, seeking escape in writing (her debut novel, *Vagablonde*, was well received last year). “I’d started to feel that the system was broken beyond repair, and that continued to depress me,” she writes. In the end, she bucked the system and began following her own laws.

A must-read for anyone considering law school.

**GOSSIP MEN**

*J. Edgar Hoover, Joe McCarthy, Roy Cohn, and the Politics of Insinuation*

Elias, Christopher M.

Univ. of Chicago (288 pp.)

$35.00 | May 7, 2021

978-0-226-62482-2

How a culture of rumor and innuendo helped three men grab power in mid-20th-century America.

Elias makes a stimulating book debut with interwoven biographies of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, Wisconsin Sen. Joseph McCarthy, and lawyer Roy Cohn: three men who represent, and took advantage of, what the author calls “surveillance state masculinity.” An examination of their lives, Elias contends, reveals widespread assumptions about politics, gender, and sexuality that arose after World War I, when the idea of “manhood” generated profound anxiety. Once defined by production, patriarchy, and what Victorians called “muscular Christianity,” in the early to mid-20th century, manhood became “social, consumerist, and constantly under pressure to be proven and reproven.” At the same time, gossip found a forum in magazines and newspaper columns that spewed salacious tidbits about the lives of the powerful and wealthy, including speculations about the personal lives of these men.
about “homosexuality, adultery, ‘transsexuality,’ various forms of vice, and mental illness.” As Elias notes, “gossip’s social function means that it is never frivolous, regardless of its content. It defines and redefines values, sets the parameters of group identity can be used to challenge the social hierarchy.” Hoover, McCarthy, and Cohn shared the culture’s concerns about masculinity and worked to manipulate gossip for their own ends. Hoover created the “G-man”—and his own self-image—as an icon of masculinity and “bulwark against threats to the nation.” McCarthy, who honed his identity as a “blue-collar striver,” butressed his campaign to rout out communists by linking “communism with effeminacy and homosexuality, protectionism with machismo.” Cohn, whose father was a notorious political fixer, saw manhood as synonymous with power: “Real men were influential: they socialized and conducted business with other powerful people.” Elias considers the allegations of homosexuality that dogged the men, but his overarching goal is to tie their rises—and falls—to the culture of gossip that, he rightly points out, endures in contemporary politics, notably with Trump.

A perceptive, well-informed political and cultural history.

**FIRST TO FALL**  
**Elijah Lovejoy and the Fight for a Free Press in the Age of Slavery**  
Ellingwood, Ken  
Pegasus (400 pp.)  
$27.95 | May 4, 2021  
978-1-64313-702-5

The short, eventful life of a bold agitator against slavery.

Drawing on rich historical sources, journalist Ellingwood effectively conveys the brutality of pre-Civil War America, when champions of slavery, anti-slavery activists, and abolitionists clashed violently. The central character in this vibrant history is Elijah Lovejoy (1802-1837), a Presbyterian minister, newspaper editor, and temperance crusader whose relentless stance against slavery cost him his life. At first, Lovejoy distanced himself from abolitionists, widely denigrated as “madmen and insurrectionists.” Rather, he took the view that slavery should be eradicated gradually, and he backed “colonization as the best solution to the young country’s racial conundrum.” However, owning newspapers in St. Louis and Alton, Illinois, made him increasingly aware of rampant barbarity. Slavery was a sin, he declared, a stance that put him in the crosshairs of those who viciously opposed him: He was threatened with being tarred and feathered; his offices were vandalized; his printing presses were repeatedly destroyed. Pressured to go silent on the issue, he became emboldened. “I have sworn eternal opposition to Slavery,” he wrote, “and, by the blessing of God, I will never go back.” Ellingwood also follows the fortunes of other editors, including James Birney, “a son of the South, a man bred to privilege amid the slavery system,” who freed the handful of slaves he owned and unapologetically declared himself an abolitionist. Both men faced restrictions on freedom of the press. States could defend the First Amendment—or not; Southern and border states preferred not. Lovejoy proceeded bravely even in the face of mounting violence. At home, he and his brothers slept with loaded muskets next to their beds. In the end, though, he fell victim to an armed, drunken mob that stormed a warehouse where he and others guarded a new press. He became a martyr to the cause of justice, and Ellingwood clearly demonstrates his important contributions to the anti-slavery movement.

A lucid and dramatic portrait of a tormented nation.

**COVERED WITH NIGHT**  
**A Story of Murder and Indigenous Justice in Early America**  
Eustace, Nicole  
Liveright/Norton (464 pp.)  
$28.95 | Apr. 27, 2021  
978-1-63149-587-8

A complex tale of a now-forgotten crime that shaped Native-White relations in the British Colonies of North America.

In Pennsylvania in the winter of 1722, John and Edmund Cartlidge, fur traders, visited a Seneca hunter named Sawantaeny. The brothers plied him with booze, writes NYU history professor Eustace, “hoping to lubricate their negotiations with enough alcohol that Sawantaeny would be too content to desire anything more valuable than second-rate rum for his efforts, if not too compromised to demand a fair deal.” When rum didn’t do the trick and Sawantaeny produced a musket, Edmund, a hulking man, grabbed it and hit Sawantaeny hard enough to shatter his skull. That the proposed trade was unfair was not lost on the nearby Natives who heard the story, including representatives from nations up and down the coast and far inland and powerful members of the Iroquois Nation. A mendacious Colonial governor tried to keep a lid on the murder while the governor of next-door Maryland was quick to order an aide “to contrive to let the Indians know that the Murderers are under the Pennsylvania Government and that we are no ways Concern’d in it.” From these basic elements—and with a vivid cast of characters that expands to include a shrewd go-between named “Captain Civility,” who spoke all the languages of the Susquehanna River Valley and embodied the Indigenous tradition “of assigning a person to take up membership in multiple communities, serving as the living embodiment of civil society”—the author fashions an engrossing historical excavation. The case traveled far, informing treaty agreements that were held in force for decades even as John Cartlidge proved a go-between on his own merits. The story has countless moving parts and one central mystery that demand subtle exposition, and Eustace navigates it all with skill and economy.

A fine contribution to the literature of Colonial America, where peace was far harder to achieve than war.
On March 22, 1984, the Wind Blown left Montauk Harbor in search of tilefish more than 100 miles offshore. The crew consisted of Cpt. Michael Stedman, mate David Connick, and deckhands Michael Vigilant and Scott Clarke. According to reports, the first few days of their trip were not fruitful; however, conditions soon became “boiling hot,” with “tilefish coming up on every hook.” One week in, however, the crew confronted a “dreaded nor’easter,” not uncommon in the “unpredictable” March and April weather. The ship and its crew never returned. In this well-documented, page-turning debut book, Sag Harbor–based journalist Fairbanks, who has worked at HuffPost and the New York Times, explores the circumstances leading to the ship’s disappearance as well as how memories of the crew members have affected their loved ones. The author is particularly good in her examination of the complicated social dynamics involved in the lives of career fishermen. Regarding her reasons for writing the book, Fairbanks notes, “I wanted to understand how tragedies become imprinted in our memories, how trauma and grief warp their way through generations and become a kind of inheritance bequeathed to our descendants.” She accomplishes that mission and more, offering a well-fleshed-out portrait of the Montauk community and its residents and the evolution of the area as both the largest commercial fishing harbor in New York state and a summer haven for the wealthy. Along the way, Fairbanks also discovers a few closely held secrets that have had a tremendous impact on the lives of those involved. The author’s genuine desire to provide an accurate account of the history of the Wind Blown and the lives of its crew members is evident in her extensive research and attention to detail, making this a no-brainer for fans of Perfect Storm and similar books.

A riveting man-vs.-nature story and compelling tribute to those who perished.

BUILT TO LOSE
How the NBA’s Tanking Era Changed the League Forever
Fischer, Jake
Triumph Books (320 pp.)
$28.00 | May 4, 2021
978-1-62937-871-8

An investigation of the NBA’s so-called “tanking era,” in which teams engineered losing seasons for future gain.

In his first book, sports journalist Fischer, who has written for Sports Illustrated, SLAM, and other outlets, takes us back to the 2013-2014 season, when bad teams like the Philadelphia 76ers and Orlando Magic began to arouse suspicions that they were tanking their seasons in order to collect higher picks in the next year’s draft. This was a time when the NBA draft lottery still overtly favored the worst teams, so it was likely inevitable that a few coaches and executives would find subtle ways to exploit the system. However, the author suggests that this is a deep-seated, leaguewide problem, painting a picture of an endemic culture of purposeful losing, but the...
problem of tanking seems to apply to only a few teams. Fischer maintains a specific focus on Philadelphia and the legacy of its former front-office statistics guru Sam Hinkie, who served as general manager of the team from 2013 to 2016. The author makes a pointed effort to connect *Moneyball*-style analytics with the culture of teams like the 76ers, whose players were supposedly being silently groomed by management to play at a super-optimal level in order to better position the team for a top pick in the subsequent draft. Never mind the fact that the majority of NBA players—not superstars like LeBron James and Stephen Curry, who represent a small percentage of the league—are working diligently just to retain a roster spot in the cutthroat league. Although Fischer provides an intriguing, meticulously detailed insider’s look at the complex, chesslike logistics of the NBA draft, he fails to prove the existence of a conspiratorial “race to the bottom.” NBA die-hards will find enough to entertain, but there’s not enough hard evidence to support many of Fischer’s claims.

A provocative but ultimately unconvincing indictment of the NBA.

**ENGLAND’S MAGNIFICENT GARDENS**

*How a Billion-Dollar Industry Transformed a Nation, From Charles II to Today*

Floud, Roderick  
Pantheon (432 pp.)  
$40.00 | May 25, 2021  
978-1-101-87103-4

A knighted English scholar presents a multicentury history of the economics of creating England’s famed gardens, a hugely expensive enterprise both private and public.

In a straightforward, sometimes dry narrative divided into thematic chapters such as “Gardens of the State,” “Designers,” “The Nursery Trade,” and “The Working Gardener,” Floud, who studied economic history at Oxford, always keeps an eye on the financial elements involved in the creation and maintenance of England’s gardens. Even when he discusses the great gardeners—e.g., Lancelot “Capability” Brown (circa 1715-1783)—the author focuses on their business methods, earnings, and costs, an approach that may deter readers seeking simpler pleasures. However, by tracking sums and economy of scale, Floud provides a useful outline of the evolving British economy as a whole. He examines the growth of the “creative industries” alongside manufacturing as well as the rise of the middle class able to afford such luxuries as well-tended gardens, once only the domain of the aristocracy. The author also tracks the technology and sheer physical labor involved in these ambitious projects: draining vast tracts of land, moving tons of dirt, building canals and cascades, and constructing greenhouses (especially popular during the Victorian era). The prevailing fashions have seesawed back and forth from a desire to import seeds and plants to a commitment to isolating native species, which are few. Floud points out that there are only 48 species of “endemic English plants.” Most plants in decorative English gardens have been imported, blown by wind across the Channel, or poached from the New World. Unfortunately, the greatest gardens are usually the product of economic inequality—e.g., Wrest Park in Bedfordshire, which “is the beautiful product of an extremely unequal society.” Finally, Floud looks at the rise of suburban gardens and the “kitchen gardens,” originally designed to supply aristocrats with food year-round.

A no-nonsense study of a “hobby” that has galvanized and transformed England’s economy—and the country itself.

**WHY PEACOCKS?**

*An Unlikely Search for Meaning in the World’s Most Magnificent Bird*

Flynn, Sean Michael  
Simon & Schuster (272 pp.)  
$27.00 | May 11, 2021  
978-1-982101-07-7

Unplanned adventures raising peacocks. As longtime *GQ* correspondent Flynn, a winner of the National Magazine Award, notes, it all started innocuously enough, with a text from a neighbor: “Any chance u guys want a peacock? No kidding!” His curiosity piqued, the adventure began, even though he had no experience raising peacocks and no previous desire to do so. When he saw the peacocks for the first time, he thought they were the “most magnificent creature I had ever seen.” Just a day earlier, he writes, “I hadn’t wanted any peacocks, and for the same reason I’d never wanted koalas or a narwhal: The idea had never occurred to me.” After seeing them, he decided to take home three. “A peacock...was a flicker of happy imagination,” he writes, “an impossibly magical creature escaped from a dewdrop of unicorns and wood nymphs.” Flynn shares the ups and downs of taking care of birds—including the chickens he already owned—and he interlaces his personal story with intriguing information about the history and science of the peacock and its representation in art and religion. The author also chronicles his travels, from a cathedral in New York to a castle in Scotland, to learn more about these spectacular birds. While at a meeting of the United Peafowl Association, he even met a man who had sold peacocks to Flannery O’Connor, known for having an affinity for birds. As readers follow Flynn’s journey, his clever insights and pleasing prose style will leave them alternating between moments of shock and bursts of laughter. In the last few chapters, however, the tone shifts into a more somber mode. The author follows a linear path to the end of his story, but he never fully comes to terms with the question posed by the title. Though not the most profound meditation, the book makes for pleasant reading, especially for bird lovers.

A unique journey punctuated with insight, humor, and lessons learned.
A grand sweep of peoples and cultures united by a longing for what home really means.

THE WINDOW SEAT
Notes From a Life in Motion
Forna, Aminatta
Grove (272 pp.)
$26.00 | May 11, 2021
978-0-8021-5858-1

The award-winning Sierra Leonean novelist looks at her life through multiple lenses.

“I love to fly….I love the drama of the takeoff. The improbability of the whole endeavor.” With this endearing admission, Forna inaugurates her first nonfiction work since The Devil That Danced on the Water (2002), which chronicled her search for the truth about her father’s execution in Sierra Leone in 1974. This collection ranges across topics as varied as colonialism, childhood memories, and chimpanzees. Her gaze takes in big events like Iran’s Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the Trump inauguration, but she’s at her best when coaxing hard-won wisdom out of everyday details. “Sleep is a political issue,” she declares in an essay about insomnia, noting how 18th-century Parisians would smash streetlamps to protest the conditions of sleep forced on them by the government. Forna glides smoothly among memoir, travel writing, history, and literary studies. The prose is intimate and conversational—“I do not have resting bitch face”—but the feeling of chatting over coffee belies the attention she gives to each sentence. Travel is ubiquitous in the text. Marveling at her mother’s experiences—she “has lived in nineteen countries on five continents….In between she has visited dozens more, taking in new countries year by year”—the author can barely go a page without mentioning a vacation to Thailand, a road trip through Death Valley, a winter in Tehran, and, of course, many trips to Sierra Leone. Everything is defined by roots, from Lebanese tourists to a Sri Lankan former banker to Croatian Nikola Tesla to the Kenyan ancestry of Barack Obama. Of the migrant population in her mother’s ancestral Shetland Islands, Forna writes: “The question ‘Where do you come from?’ is not followed by the spoken or silent ‘originally,’ but the word ‘now.’” Caught between worlds, Forna prefers to see them all from above, no doubt while on the plane to her next destination.

A grand sweep of peoples and cultures united by a longing for what home really means.

AFTER THE END OF HISTORY
Conversations With Francis Fukuyama
Fukuyama, Francis
Ed. by Fasting, Mathilde C.
Georgetown Univ Press (224 pp.)
$24.95 | May 3, 2021
978-1-64712-086-3

Conversations with the noted scholar of political theory.

Fukuyama became well known in 1989, a time when the communist world was collapsing and the Berlin Wall was coming down, for arguing that liberal democracy had won out over totalitarianism by its own self-evident virtues. He is less certain today as these conversations with Norwegian think-tank administrator Fasting reveal. He began to take note of some of the inherent “weaknesses in Western political development” even as his “end-of-history” thesis was making the rounds, especially among the Cold War triumphalists in the Reagan and Bush administrations. One outcome of the financial crisis of 2008 was the acceleration of a body of left-behinds who were susceptible to populist and authoritarian leaders. Those left-behinds were not lacking in reasons to mistrust those in power, who, Fukuyama notes, “can game the system in such a way that they really make the system not responsive to the people’s true wishes,” working against the spirit of democracy itself. Things are worse elsewhere, of course, such as Russia, where Vladimir Putin has traded in a kind of “sovereign democracy” brand of populism that has found a large following in White nationalist circles—some in the U.S. Still, America has not proven immune to leaders who would diminish democratic values and profess a kind of populism that “basically uses democratic legitimacy to undermine liberal institutions.” Can democracy endure? Fukuyama suggests at various points that inequality must be addressed and corporate power diminished, the latter by enforcing long-abandoned antitrust laws. He also observes that the voters who made Donald Trump’s term possible “are a declining group within the country as a whole,” not likely to have the same clout in the future, even as new opponents—China, social media, predatory capitalism—do their best to diminish the rule of the people.

Students of geopolitics and world history will find Fukuyama’s thoughts both provocative and inspiring.

X TROOP
The Secret Jewish Commandos of World War II
Garrett, Leab
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (368 pp.)
$28.00 | May 25, 2021
978-0-358-17203-1

The story of a commando unit “determined to wreak havoc on Hitler’s regime.”

The history of World War II teems with elite special forces that stepped on each other’s toes during imaginative missions, few of which went as planned, and their exploits continue to fascinate publishers and readers. Working with newly declassified documents, “breathless heat-of-the-battle official war diaries,” and other sources, Hunter College professor Garrett revives a subunit within these specialized units that consisted mostly of European Jews. Ironically, they had fled the Nazis to Britain but were arrested as “enemy aliens” and interned under terrible conditions after war broke out in September 1939. Some were permitted to join the Pioneer Corps, which performed manual labor, but it was only in...
December 1941 that internees were able to sign on to combat units. Garrett’s subjects formed part of a special commando force, formed in July 1942, comprised of displaced nationals carrying out different missions depending on their native language. The author focuses on a unit filled with German-speaking refugees called X Troop. “The men’s fluency in German,” she writes, “would enable them to get essential intelligence that would guide the next moment’s choices rather than having to wait to interview prisoners until they were back at headquarters.” Garrett describes the prewar lives of a dozen young men, their escape to Britain, the miseries of their internment, the brutal months of training, and their subsequent operations, which carried on well past the German surrender, when they tracked down and interrogated Nazi war criminals. Hollywood-style sabotage missions were rare; mostly, the troop accompanied conventional units “killing and capturing Germans, gathering crucial intelligence, and taking on leadership roles. They were trusted and respected, and they were highly sought after for especially hazardous undertakings.” The author compassionately chronicles the casualties, and the traditional epilogue describes survivors who mostly led prosperous lives.

A lively, expertly researched history of an obscure WWII unit whose heroism deserves recognition.

THE NOTE THROUGH THE WIRE
The Incredible True Story of a Prisoner of War and a Resistance heroine
Gold, Doug
Morrow/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Mar. 16, 2021
978-0-06-301229-5

A retired broadcaster narrates the remarkable World War II romance between a Slovene resistance fighter and an Allied soldier from New Zealand.

In his second book, Gold brings to life the events that brought together the man, Bruce Murray, and woman, Josefine Lobnik, who would become his father-in-law, mother-in-law. His account reads much like a work of fiction. “Where the fundamental facts are known but the corroborating details uncertain,” he writes, “I have at times created circumstances to fit those facts and, where necessary, I have created events as they imagined them to be.” Even though the author deploys plenty of “dramatic license,” he provides two engaging, intertwining tales, each of which focuses on one of the two protagonists. The first follows Bruce, who left Wellington in 1940 to fight for Britain in the war. The second thread follows Josefine, a Slovene patriot who ran documents between partisan groups in Nazi-occupied Slovenia. The two first “met” in 1942 when Josefine, disguised as an old woman, slipped a note to Bruce, then interned at the Maribor POW camp in Slovenia, through the wire fence that enclosed the facility. Her aim was to discover information about her brother, a high-profile Slovene partisan.

The two met again in 1943, when Bruce, a “serial [prison camp] escapee,” was transferred to a work camp in the same Austrian town where Josefine had gone into hiding. Gold joins their two narratives at this point in the book, celebrating the love story that gradually emerged from their second encounter. Over the next few years, their love was tested by the dangerous missions they undertook together, separation, Josefine’s meddling relatives, and the many uncertainties of war. Well-researched and pieced together, the book will appeal to fans of wartime love stories and resistance tales in general.

A memorable and uplifting work.

ON JUNETEENTH
Gordon-Reed, Annette
Liveright/Norton (128 pp.)
$15.95 | May 4, 2021
978-1-63149-883-1

The Harvard historian and Texas native demonstrates what the holiday means to her and to the rest of the nation. Initially celebrated primarily by Black Texans, Juneteenth refers to June 19, 1865, when a Union general arrived in Galveston to proclaim the end of slavery with the defeat of the Confederacy. If only history were that simple. In her latest, Gordon-Reed, winner of the Pulitzer Prize, National Book Award, Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, and numerous other honors, describes how Whites raged and committed violence against celebratory Blacks as racism in Texas and across the country continued to spread through segregation, Jim Crow laws, and separate-but-equal rationalizations. As Gordon-Reed amply shows in this smooth combination of memoir, essay, and history, such racism is by no means a thing of the past, even as Juneteenth has come to be celebrated by all of Texas and throughout the U.S. The Galveston announcement, notes the author, came well after the Emancipation Proclamation but before the ratification of the 13th Amendment. Though Gordon-Reed writes fondly of her native state, especially the strong familial ties and sense of community, she acknowledges their challenges as a woman of color in a state where “the image of Texas has a gender and a race: ‘Texas is a White man.’” The author astutely explores “what that means for everyone who lives in Texas and is not a White man.” With all of its diversity and geographic expanse, Texas also has a singular history—as part of Mexico, as its own republic from 1836 to 1846, and as a place that “has connections to people of African descent that go back centuries.” All of this provides context for the uniqueness of this historical moment, which Gordon-Reed explores with her characteristic rigor and insight.

A concise personal and scholarly history that avoids academic jargon as it illuminates emotional truths.
Americans treated Mexicans living in the U.S. no better than as Pancho Villa prepares to attack Columbus, Mexico’s president from 1877 to 1880 and 1884 to 1911. In 1910, Francisco Madero ran against Díaz, promising to end the country’s severe wealth inequality, only to end up in jail. Madero escaped to the U.S. and began a revolution. He was shortly joined by the then-unknown Villa, “whose background was questionable but whose fighting skills were exceptional.” Villa quickly became an important player in the wildly fluctuating political environment. His raids into the U.S. and on American interests in Mexico led to reprisals, especially the “Punitive Expedition” of 1916 led by Gen. John J. Pershing. All this was complicated by German attempts to keep the U.S. occupied in Europe. As he demonstrated in previous books, Guinn is an engaging storyteller, and he presents an impressively clear narrative of a significant piece of border history.

A riveting account of a dynamic period featuring larger-than-life characters and plenty of drama and suspense.

Jaku (b. 1920), member of a prosperous Leipzig family. Using his influence in the community, the author’s father obtained false papers for his son and enrolled him in an elite engineering school far across the country. After five years of living alone as a gentle under an assumed name, he graduated at the top of his class. In November 1938, hoping to surprise his parents on their 20th wedding anniversary, he returned home only to find the house empty. His parents were in hiding because it was the infamous Kristallnacht, when Jews endured massive atrocities across Germany. That evening, thugs beat him brutally before sending him to the new Buchenwald concentration camp, where he remained for six months under appalling conditions. Upon his discharge, his family fled to Belgium. After the Nazi invasion in May 1940, he fled again, walking to the south of France, where he was arrested. After spending seven months in a French concentration camp, he was loaded onto a train for Auschwitz but escaped and made his way back to Belgium to join his family in hiding. All were arrested in 1943 and sent to Auschwitz, where his parents were killed and he became a slave laborer. Readers will be horrified by Jaku’s painful description of the unspeakable conditions and sadistic treatment he received. He survived only through determination, cooperation with a friend, luck, and his engineering skills, which gave him some privileges. After the war, he returned to Belgium and married, but he found the country unwelcoming and moved to Australia, where he still lives with his wife and large family. Some readers may find Jaku’s account of his long, prosperous life after Auschwitz anticlimactic, but no one will deny that he deserves it.

A solid addition to Holocaust literature.
THE POLITICS OF OUR TIME

**Populism, Nationalism, Socialism**

*Judis, John B.*

Columbia Global Reports (440 pp.)

$27.95 | May 11, 2021

978-1-73591-360-5

A sobering assessment of recent history as a string of poorly managed catastrophes.

Gathering and updating three previously published reports, Judis voices an intriguing thesis: that “all the decades of modern history—beset by the emergence of rival nation-states and imperialisms, the ups and downs of global capitalism, war, and natural disasters—can be described as times of crisis.” One of the increasingly evident trends Judis identifies is the democratic world’s willingness to slide into authoritarianism as a response to these challenges. That tendency comes from both left and right, which agree on a few points, especially inequality and the problems of globalism and neoliberalism. To these the right adds “an exclusionary nationalism that limited who was included in ‘the people,’ and charged elites with coddling an outsider group of illegal immigrants, refugees, or Muslims.” The American exponent of such values, Donald Trump, gained office because of his appeal to those who led the race against Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush until losing credibility by claiming that “the Black Panther Party, on contract with the Viet Cong, had once tried to break into his house.” But then, as Judis notes in his on-the-ground reporting from Arizona on the promulgation of new exclusionary laws in 2010, he observed that many people were in mortal fear that “al-Qaeda operatives were sneaking across the border.” The author projects that the class and geographical (urban vs. rural) divide is likely to grow, and with it, the problems he so cogently analyzes.

Readers with an interest in global political trends will want to consult this skillfully argued book.

ASSIGNMENT RUSSIA

**Becoming a Foreign Correspondent in the Crucible of the Cold War**

*Kalb, Marvin*

Brookings Institution Press (352 pp.)

$24.99 | Apr. 13, 2021

978-0-8157-3866-1

The second installment in Kalb’s personal story, following *The Year I Was Peter the Great* (2017).

In his latest detailed chronicle, which he aptly calls “a long letter home after an unforgettable personal adventure,” the author moves forward from his time as a young diplomatic attaché at the American Embassy in Moscow in 1956. A year later, he was hired by Edward R. Murrow to work at CBS News headquarters, and in 1960, he landed his dream job as Moscow correspondent for the network. Kalb engagingly narrates his remarkable journey, from doctoral student in Russian history at Harvard to author and CBS Moscow correspondent in just a few years. As part of Murrow’s devoted “band of brothers,” Kalb was set on a fast-track ascent through the ranks, and he distinguished himself with his unique expertise on Russian politics at a time of daily perilous news from Cold War Moscow. Though he did not know how to write a radio newscast when he first arrived at the empty CBS newsroom on Madison Avenue, Kalb was a fast, eager learner, and he quickly made himself indispensable. It wasn’t long before he was contributing commentary for Blair Clark on the news roundup *The World Tonight* and then for Murrow himself on his national newscast. In addition to his entertaining personal story, including his burgeoning relationship with his wife and his diligent work in producing his first book, Kalb’s in-the-moment narrative provides an illuminating snapshot of such early newsroom characters as William Shirer, Dallas Townsend, Walter Cronkite, Charles Kuralt, Lowell Thomas, and Howard K. Smith, among many others. Kalb’s fond, generous memoir, which vividly delineates a bygone era of early journalism, will appeal to students of 20th-century American history as well as aspiring broadcast journalists. The author was involved in many significant Cold War moments, and he brings us directly into that world.

Hopefully Kalb is back at his desk; readers will be eager for the next volume.
For instance, as Moses and Aaron first approach Pharaoh with diplomacy. Kass also offers lesser-known or even radical interpretations of Scripture. For instance, he reads the story of the golden calf not as a simple example of disobedience but as a moment orchestrated by God, allowing an opportunity for collective sin. “The Israelites’ first true act of national freedom,” he writes, “was their disobedient demand that Aaron make them gods.” This act, writes Kass, helped shape a formally servile peoples’ sense of freedom of will.

Kass delivers another thought-provoking volume about a seminal work of Scripture.

HOLDING BACK THE RIVER
The Struggle Against Nature on America’s Waterways
Kelley, Tyler J.
Avid Reader Press (256 pp.)
$27.00 | Apr. 20, 2021
978-1-5011-8704-9

A gimlet-eyed look at America’s rapidly deteriorating riparian infrastructure.

In the days of Lewis and Clark, writes freelance journalist Kelley, the sight of the Missouri River in seasonal flood, overspilling its banks and spreading out to fill its floodplain,” would have seemed entirely natural. Their successors in the Army Corps of Engineers took a dim view of rivers doing their own thing, though, and over time the nation has invested trillions of dollars in efforts to control them, from huge dams to the extensive levee system along the lower Mississippi. These structures are now crumbling, and although the Trump administration talked a big game about investing in infrastructure, it was consistently sidetracked by diversions of the president’s own making—the testimony of James Comey on Russian involvement in the 2016 election, for instance, overshadowing a promise to ease regulations on coal and boost the barge industry. The professional organization of civil engineers rates the nation’s dams at a D, identifying more than 15,500 as being of “high-hazard potential”—i.e., likely to cause deaths if they failed. Of a critically important lock on the Ohio River, its manager sighs, “The lock is kept going with all the bubble gum and duct tape we’ve got left.” Meanwhile, even as the Corps of Engineers negotiates new spillways and scrambles to keep up with existing structures, nature works to thwart their efforts. For example, a projected plan to divert the Mississippi to Louisiana’s Barataria Bay would kill some of the state’s most lucrative oyster beds and a resident dolphin population—all in service of trying to keep New Orleans from going underwater, which seems destined to happen anyway, with a “new shoreline…around the latitude of Baton Rouge and the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain.” Kelley concludes with an exhortation to develop “a basin-based approach” to river management while there’s still a little time left.

Solid journalism on a pressing problem that is likely to get far worse, and soon.

ANTITRUST
Taking on Monopoly Power From the Gilded Age to the Digital Age
Klobuchar, Amy
Knopf (624 pp.)
$28.99 | Apr. 27, 2021
978-0-525-65489-6

The senior senator from Minnesota offers a thorough history of trustbusting in America and an urgent plea for stricter enforcement.

Klobuchar is on a mission to strengthen and enforce federal antitrust laws in order to halt the growing consolidation of big business, which thwarts competition and exacerbates economic inequality. This book, unlike her standard-issue political memoir, The Senator Next Door (2015), is both a diligently researched history lesson and a well thought out plan, meticulously delineated, to take on “corporate consolidation, Congressional inertia, and the conservative courts.” Showing her hardworking Midwestern roots, the author moves from her childhood in a Minneapolis suburb—her father wrote for the Star Tribune, and her paternal grandfather was a miner, a profession for which strong unions were crucial—to the initial growth of the Granger
movement in response to grain price monopolies in the heartland. The first federal legislation was put forward by Ohio Sen. John Sherman in 1890, but it was not enforced until Theodore Roosevelt assumed the presidency and sought to dismantle the Northern Securities railroad monopoly, among many others. In 1911, Howard Taft broke up Standard Oil, thanks in large part to Ida Tarbell’s groundbreaking exposé, which set the stage for the passage of more antitrust legislation—e.g., the Clayton Antitrust Act and Federal Trade Commission Act, both passed in 1914. Yet the progressive era gave way to war-caused fatigue and the reopening of certain legal loopholes. In addition to sketching the beliefs of the Chicago versus Harvard schools of thought on monopolies, Kloebach examines key cases in the digital age (AT&T, Microsoft), alarming mergers in high tech and health care industries, and suits brought against Google and Facebook. The author also clearly shows how the previous administration’s pro-business stance led to significant reductions in important resources like antitrust lawyers. The final section, “The Path Forward,” is a staggering detailed, impressively documented and presented “list of the Top 25 recommendations to improve competition in our nation."

Solid, sharp, articulate work—not just advertising for a possible 2024 presidential run.

**HADASSAH**

**An American Story**

Lieberman, Hadassah

Brandeis Univ Press (160 pp.)

$27.95 | Apr. 14, 2021

978-1-68458-037-8

An unusual autobiography that often turns away from the writer and toward the lives of family members past and present.

Lieberman (b. 1948) has a unique story to share: The daughter of two Holocaust survivors, she emigrated from Czechoslovakia as a child, earned a master’s degree in international relations and worked at Lehman Brothers and Pfizer, and, in 1982, married prominent politician (and eventual vice presidential contender) Joe Lieberman. While the narrative is occasionally intriguing and even moving in the sections about her parents, the prose leaves much to be desired. The first two chapters are the most riveting, as the author discusses her mother’s imprisonment at Auschwitz and her father’s time at a camp he called “the Hungarian Auschwitz.” Their stories, in part shared via their own words, are worth recording and disseminating, so the book has value in that regard. Shortly after the war, the two survivors immigrated with their infant daughter to America, settling in Gardner, Massachusetts, “a classic New England industrial town.” Lieberman describes a somewhat idyllic youth as a rabbi’s daughter in a town that had only around 30 Jewish families. Here, the memoir grows less engaging as the author describes a rather common tale of college, early career, first marriage, and divorce. Her second marriage thrust her into the public eye, and an interesting theme through the final chapters is how she and her family remained observant Jews despite political demands. However, Lieberman provides too few details about these years, information that would have captivated general readers. The author includes many quotes from her immediate family to flesh out her own story and offer hope to the future, but by the end of the book, most readers will have lost interest.

A flat memoir that still serves a purpose as a Holocaust remembrance.

**THE WESTERN FRONT**

**A History of the Great War, 1914-1918**

Lloyd, Nick

Liveright/Norton (688 pp.)

$35.00 | Mar. 16, 2021

978-1-63149-794-0

The first in a projected three-volume history of the bloody, chaotic “maelstrom” that was World War I.

After several well-received accounts of individual campaigns, including Passchendaele and Loos, historian Lloyd takes on the entire war, focusing this installment on the fighting in France and Belgium. Since this is a military history, the author skips over the Byzantine diplomatic maneuvers following the June 1914 assassination of the Austrian archduke and begins with the declarations of war in August. He adds an eight-page epilogue for events after the 1918 armistice. Most readers know that Germany opened with a massive invasion through neutral Belgium, a mission that nearly succeeded in capturing Paris but, after two months of slaughter, settled into a bloody stalemate along 400 miles of trenches extending from Belgium across France to Switzerland. With Germany ensconced in France, the Allied powers “had little choice but to attack,” writes Lloyd. “So they mounted a series of major offensives, each bigger than the last, to break up the trench network and return to mobile warfare.” Only in 1918 did Germany’s army, reinforced after Russia withdrew from the war, resume the offensive, which, like that in 1914, ended in a near miss. Many popular military histories focus on the common soldier, but Lloyd emphasizes senior commanders, all of whom were “trying to cope with a war that had shattered their lives as much as any other.” Though most top officials had numerous flaws, the author rejects their characterization “as `donkeys’ or `butchers’; unfeeling military aristocrats fighting the wrong kind of war.” The reality, as Lloyd demonstrates, was the usual messy picture of trial and error, with generals often learning from their mistakes and eager to adopt new technology. Tactics and firepower vastly improved throughout the war, but so did countermeasures. There are a few maps, but the author’s emphasis on battles and maneuvers will require close attention and, perhaps, a WWI atlas at hand.

Familiar ground, but Lloyd’s keen insights and engaging prose make the book a valuable addition to the literature.
“Margulies’ unflinching quest to explain her life makes her well-crafted memoir compelling whether you know her roles or not.”

SUNSHINE GIRL

Walking With Ghosts and Cecily Tyson’s Just As I Am—this book is more about the strength of the storytelling than the star power of the author. Margulies doesn’t dwell on her work on ER or discuss the rumored feud with Archie Punjabi, her co-star on The Good Wife. Instead, the author focuses on her childhood and how shuttling between the homes of her divorced parents across Europe and America influenced her life and acting career.

“I was always trying to be another person as a child,” writes Margulies, adding that her mother called her “Sunshine Girl” because she was “a naturally happy child…joyful and easygoing” and felt the need to lift everyone’s spirits in whatever way possible. However, while she was deeply connected to the emotions of her parents, she found herself ignoring her own. “I had this ongoing recording playing in my brain that I wasn’t a quitter, I was a survivor,” she writes. “I was strong, dependable.” It’s a pattern that repeated in her adult relationships, following her into stardom on ER. Margulies does reveal her reasons behind leaving the show after six seasons, turning down $27 million to extend her contract two years, and she discusses why the major relationships of her life failed before she met her husband. What the author shares and doesn’t is deliberate, all offered to advance the fascinating story she wants to tell. It’s the mark of a talented storyteller and a sign she can have another creative future if she wants it.

Margulies’ unflinching quest to explain her life makes her well-crafted memoir compelling whether you know her roles or not.

HOME WATERS
A Chronicle of Family and a River
Maclean, John N.
Custom House/Morrow (256 pp.)
$25.99 | Jun. 1, 2021
978-0-06-294459-7

A moving memoir of a family’s love affair with the Blackfoot River in Montana, made famous by A River Runs Through It, the novella written by Maclean’s father, Norman.

As the author of this book makes clear, the Blackfoot River holds a particularly special place in Maclean family history. In 1909, the Rev. John Norman Maclean, John’s grandfather, moved to Missoula to become pastor of the First Presbyterian Church. A decade later, he got a permit to build “the family cabin, a simple log affair...at Seeley Lake, fifty-five road miles northeast of Missoula on the edge of what is now the million-plus acre Bob Marshall Wilderness.” The cabin has now been in the family’s hands for “five generations and counting.” Beginning with his earliest memories of fly-fishing with his father on the river, Maclean passionately explores the history of his family’s life in the region as they became well-respected members of the community and developed an abiding love for the land. The author also digs into deeper history, noting that for centuries, Native peoples “wore a for “five generations and counting.” Beginning with his earliest memories of fly-fishing with his father on the river, Maclean passionately explores the history of his family’s life in the region as they became well-respected members of the community and developed an abiding love for the land. The author also digs into deeper history, noting that for centuries, Native peoples “wore a trail along the river as they traveled through the Blackfoot Valley and across the Continental Divide, out and back to the buffalo hunting grounds in the Missouri River country to the east.” Maclean then follows the path of Meriwether Lewis, who, along with his men and a few Nez Perce guides, passed through the area after separating from William Clark. The view from Lewis and Clark Pass, writes the author, is one of the most breathtaking in Montana, a place where the landscape remains “much as it appeared centuries ago...a land with a long-term memory.” In addition to patient nature writing and an introspective approach to the literary inspiration he has received from the land, Maclean discusses the genesis of Norman’s famous book and mystery surrounding the death of one of the characters.

Lovers of literature and nature will be captivated by this heartfelt tribute to place and family.

SUNSHINE GIRL
An Unexpected Life
Margulies, Julianna
Ballantine (256 pp.)
$28.00 | May 4, 2021
978-0-316-48025-9

The veteran actor delivers the intriguing tale of her unusual childhood and successful career.

This is no superficial tell-all or exercise in name-dropping. Rather, just like two recent standout celebrity memoirs—Gabriel Byrne’s Sunshine Girl Julianna Margulies

BRAT
An ’80s Story
McCarrthy, Andrew
Grand Central Publishing (240 pp.)
$28.00 | May 11, 2021
978-1-5387-5427-6

In his second memoir, the former Brat Pack member offers a tell-almost-all filled with entertaining tidbits from on and off the set—and a few surprises.

Now a travel writer, TV director, and author of the bestselling YA novel Just Fly Away, McCarthy found his true life’s calling during a high school production of Oliver! “When I stepped on stage as the Artful Dodger all those years ago,” writes the author, “a light went on inside me that has never gone out.” In New York City, McCarthy found his comfort zone in Terry Hayden’s classes on Method acting and in Manhattan’s cinema revival houses. An audition advertised in Backstage led to his auspicious 1983 debut opposite Rob Lowe and Jacqueline Bisset in Class (off-set factoid: Bissett kissed him...“Just the once”). A whirlwind of work followed, including Pretty in Pink, St. Elmo’s Fire, Mannequin (the descriptions of which omit any mention of co-star Kim Cattrall), freshman, Less Than Zero, and Weekend at Bernies’s and its sequel. McCarthy highlights the Hollywood perks—dinners at Spago with Liza Minnelli, parties at the Playboy mansion—as well as the uneven chemistry among the Brat Pack. On the set of St. Elmo’s
Fired, writes the author, Ally Sheedy was superfriendly; Emilio Estevez was not. Robert Redford, James Coburn, and Claude Chabrol make brief but key appearances, and McCarthy fondly describes channeling his buddy Eddie for movie-wardrobe choices. The author also addresses his personal struggles. From the start, public attention made him nervous, and his relationship with his father was fraught with challenges. Regarding booze, the author tracks his alcoholic trajectory fairly meticulously (he got sober in 1992 at age 29). It’s not Just Kids, but the book is a pleasant combination of name-dropping, fun insights, and behind-the-scenes glimpses of the actor’s relief at jumping off his particular 1980s hamster wheel.

An enjoyable celebrity memoir from an actor who also displays writing skills.

**FROM A TALLER TOWER**

*The Rise of the American Mass Shooter*

McGraw, Seamus
Univ. of Texas (232 pp.)  
$27.95 | Apr. 13, 2021  
978-1-4773-1718-1

A meditative history of mass murder by gunfire.

Freelance journalist McGraw begins in 1966, when a former Marine climbed a tower at the University of Texas and began firing. When he was finally brought down after murdering 17 people, he was said to have had a brain tumor—though that did not prevent the shooter from amassing an arsenal and planning his spree. Of all the mass killings since—Columbine, Christchurch, Parkland, the list goes on—there are, notes the author, only a few points in common. Though assaults by gun are fewer than by fists or knives, “when an active shooter—and it is most often a male—does get his hands on a semiautomatic rifle, the results are catastrophic.” The string of catastrophes that McGraw chronicles ends with a shooting from a Las Vegas hotel window “a hundred feet higher than the Texas shooter” in which an astonishing 471 people were hit with bullets and 102 died. That shooter—McGraw is scrupulous, with a couple of willful exceptions, about not naming names, denying killers the publicity they crave—was not, strictly speaking, insane. He may have been evil, but that is an amorphous, fairly useless concept that helps remove agency. What can be said about the killers in general is that they’re psychologically troubled and make their troubles known before they act, oftentimes only to be ignored. One young man who slaughtered 26 people, many of them schoolchildren, was diagnosed with numerous mental health issues, yet his mother, a gun enthusiast, bought him weapon after weapon. She was the first to die. The ease with which such guns can be acquired (2 million have entered the market since the Newtown massacre) is one of many seemingly intractable problems. That, along with a would-be killer’s sense of entitlement, contributes to a legacy of incomprehensible violence, of which McGraw writes, with grim poetry, “There is no silence on earth deeper than the silence between gunshots.”

A memorable, necessary contribution to the national conversation on gun violence.

**THE HERO CODE**

*Lessons Learned From Lives Well Lived*

McRaven, William H.  
Grand Central Publishing (176 pp.)  
$22.00 | Apr. 13, 2021  
978-1-5387-1996-1

A call to everyday heroism.  

A retired four-star admiral, former chancellor of the University of Texas System, and bestselling author, McRaven puts forth a 10-point credo called “The Hero Code,” building on many of the familiar ideas he discussed in his 2017 megahit, Make Your Bed. The author examines such virtues as courage, sacrifice, duty, and forgiveness, presenting each concept within a short personal promise—e.g., “I will be kind and compassionate to at least one person every single day and expect nothing in return.” For the author, this code is “an internal code of conduct that drives the human race to explore, to nurture, to comfort, to inspire, and to laugh so that societies can flourish.” As such, he writes, “There is a hero in all of us,” a fairly banal theme that echoes throughout the book. McRaven offers a brief chapter on each of the virtues of heroism, using military examples from both history and his personal experiences as a NAVY Seal and beyond. He often pairs the extraordinary with the mundane. For example, in the chapter on duty, the author begins with the well-documented story of John McCain’s horrific captivity in Vietnam. Then he relates the more prosaic—not as compelling—account about a soldier in Afghanistan whose refusal to let anyone through her gate without authorization from her sergeant caused McRaven to be late to a meeting with President Barack Obama. Throughout, the author repeatedly shows how a person need not be placed in an exceptional moment to act exceptionally. After describing the courageous actions of Medal of Honor recipient Ralph Johnson, who saved others by falling on a grenade during the Vietnam War, McRaven notes, “for most of us…our sacrifices do not come in one shining moment of extraordinary valor.” Instead, those sacrifices come from living by a moral code every day.

Sometimes bromidic but mostly thoughtful and inspirational.
OUT OF THE SHADOWS
Six Visionary Victorian Women in Search of a Public Voice
Midorikawa, Emily
Counterpoint (352 pp.)
$27.00 | May 11, 2021
978-1-64009-230-3

How spiritualism and the occult lit a path to fame and influence.

Co-author of a study of women’s literary friendships, Midorikawa follows up with lively portraits of six mid-19th-century spiritualists who faced down derision to become significant advocates of women’s rights. American sisters Kate, Maggie, and Leah Fox were notorious—and, for a time, highly paid—spiritualists who conveyed messages from the dead through mysterious knocks. From humble beginnings in upstate New York, the Foxes inaugurated the modern spiritualist movement, traveling the world demonstrating their powers. They were repeatedly investigated by skeptics, including committees who strip-searched them, which Leah once described as “very insulting and even violent.”

Emma Hardinge, a British woman who started out as a singer and actor, was drawn into the Orphic Circle, a group of aristocratic men who conducted experiments “through the mirror and crystal,” assisted by various “young ladies” who underwent a trance state during the tests. Although initially skeptical, Hardinge discovered her talents as a medium—and public speaker. Touring the U.S., she became a popular orator, supporting Lincoln’s candidacy for president, offering a eulogy after his assassination, raising funds for Union soldiers, and lecturing on the rights of women. Ohio-born Victoria Woodhull, who, like Hardinge, offered “the soothing balm” of connection to Civil War dead, found her fame as a spiritualist enhanced by the attentions of shipping magnate Cornelius Vanderbilt. As his protégée, Woodhull amassed considerable wealth and established her own brokerage firm. A passionate champion of female enfranchisement and free love, Woodhull announced her candidacy for president in 1872. Georgina Weldon, a spiritualist whose husband wanted her declared insane, became a prominent spokesperson for reform of Britain’s “lunacy laws.”

A well-researched, fresh contribution to women’s history.

ON THE JOB
The Untold Story of Worker Centers and the New Fight for Wages, Dignity, and Health
Monforton, Celeste & Von Bergen, Jane M.
The New Press (288 pp.)
$26.99 | May 4, 2021
978-1-62097-501-5

Monforton, director of the Beyond OSHA Project, and journalist Von Bergen tell the neglected story of the “nationwide worker center movement” that champions the rights of immigrants and others.

In 2018, when a Texas poultry plant gave its workers too few bathroom breaks, diaper-wearing protesters showed up carrying a sign that said, “Let My People Pee.” Organized by the Centro de Derechos Laborales in Bryan, the demonstration led to an immediate improvement in conditions at the plant, and it’s among the surprisingly effective tactics described in this well-reported survey of many of the 225 community labor organizations known as “worker centers,” which fight “exploitation and oppression” on the job. Unlike labor unions that serve members in related trades, worker centers educate and advocate for workers “marginalized because of language, because of immigration status, because their jobs as domestic workers isolate them, or because their employment status is murky as gig or temp agency workers.” With less government regulation than unions, worker centers have won political victories or performed services that have often flown under the radar. In Chicago, Arise Chicago and other groups successfully lobbied the city to create the Office of Labor Standards to enforce minimum wage and other laws, and in Los Angeles, the Pilipino Workers Center rented houses for workers who had to quarantine during the pandemic. In New York, the Gig Workers Collective, a virtual center for Instacart and other shoppers, teamed up with Amazon warehouse workers for a protest in which activists posed next to body bags outside Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s office, urging him to do more to protect Amazon workers. A work of journalism rather than history, the book offers little about the precursors of the centers, such as mutual aid societies, but it makes its case that “labor activism is not a quaint notion from days gone by.”

These are not your parents’ labor unions—an excellent introduction to a burgeoning and necessary movement.
While stressing empathy and resisting pomposity, she refuses to suffer fools gladly. Everest expedition. Refreshingly, this thematically conceived from male to female in 1964 (at the time, one of the most well- and cooperation. As her longtime editor, Robert Weil, notes in the introduction, in her final decade of life, she discussed her participation in Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay's 1953 Mount Everest expedition. Refreshingly, this thematically conceived collection of essays, unlike so many publications of miscellany issued shortly after an author dies, reflects the writer's intent and cooperation. As her longtime editor, Robert Weil, notes in the introduction, in her final decade of life, she discussed her work on a "posthumous book," one not to be published until after she died—though, as Weil points out, not because it "contained salacious revelations." Discussions of politics and other hot-button topics are scarce in this collection, which highlights the travel pieces that built the author's reputation for acute observation and analysis. In addition, the book showcases Morris' keen attention to mortality, faith (and lack thereof), and basic human decency—what Weil describes as her "adamantine belief in the power of kindness to help solve the immense problems of the world." The title is appropriate, as the author's essays are rarely about just one thing. A sterling example is her incisive appreciation of Ulysses, a novel she long resisted. Morris sees it not as a single coherent novel but rather an amalgamation of many parts: celebration of Dublin, portrait of an "outsider" figure, incomprehensible prose poem, "even a sort of sex manual, because a multitude of sexual preferences and variations are observed." Though Morris began her gender transition from male to female in 1964 (at the time, one of the most well-known cultural figures to do so) and underwent reassignment surgery in 1972, she summarily dismisses "those more interested in my gender than in my books." Throughout, she demonstrates the stylistic command that has always distinguished her work. While stressing empathy and resisting pomposity, she refuses to suffer fools gladly.

Engaging reflections on a life lived fully and well.

**ALLEGORIZINGS**
Morris, Jan
Liveright/Norton (264 pp.)
$24.95 | Apr. 6, 2021
978-0-87140-414-5

A fitting coda to the career of a singular writer.

Morris (1926-2020) was a prolific historian and author perhaps best known for her Pax Britannica trilogy about the British Empire as well as her participation in Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay's 1953 Mount Everest expedition. Refreshingly, this thematically conceived collection of essays, unlike so many publications of miscellany issued shortly after an author dies, reflects the writer's intent and cooperation. As her longtime editor, Robert Weil, notes in the introduction, in her final decade of life, she discussed her work on a "posthumous book," one not to be published until after she died—though, as Weil points out, not because it "contained salacious revelations." Discussions of politics and other hot-button topics are scarce in this collection, which highlights the travel pieces that built the author's reputation for acute observation and analysis. In addition, the book showcases Morris' keen attention to mortality, faith (and lack thereof), and basic human decency—what Weil describes as her "adamantine belief in the power of kindness to help solve the immense problems of the world." The title is appropriate, as the author's essays are rarely about just one thing. A sterling example is her incisive appreciation of Ulysses, a novel she long resisted. Morris sees it not as a single coherent novel but rather an amalgamation of many parts: celebration of Dublin, portrait of an "outsider" figure, incomprehensible prose poem, "even a sort of sex manual, because a multitude of sexual preferences and variations are observed." Though Morris began her gender transition from male to female in 1964 (at the time, one of the most well-known cultural figures to do so) and underwent reassignment surgery in 1972, she summarily dismisses "those more interested in my gender than in my books." Throughout, she demonstrates the stylistic command that has always distinguished her work. While stressing empathy and resisting pomposity, she refuses to suffer fools gladly.

Engaging reflections on a life lived fully and well.

**THINKING AGAIN**
A Diary
Morris, Jan
Liveright/Norton (216 pp.)
$24.00 | Jan. 5, 2021
978-1-63149-692-9

A volume of essayistic diary entries from the late writer.

Even after turning 90, Morris (1926-2020) maintained her equilibrium and good spirits by walking every day, at least 1,000 steps, a morning constitutional she embarked upon regardless of the weather. While on those walks, she composed these daily entries in her head. She revisits old memories, musing on the possible discrepancies between what she remembers and what actually happened; discusses the trials and tribulations of old age, including the challenges of dealing with the dementia of her loving life partner and fears about her own mental acuity; and offers astute opinions on contemporary life, art, and politics. Most of the entries find Morris at home in Wales, as most of her traveling is now confined to memory—though the outside world connects with her as she participates in interviews about her work and engages in the haggling about publication and payment that plagues so many writers. The author rails against Brexit ("is democracy past its sell-by date?") and shares some stray opinions about Donald Trump. "I have always rather liked his political style," she writes, "as against his personal ideals, which are almost grotesquely crude." Morris expresses her disdain for the conceptual "Environmental Art" of Bulgarian American artist Christo, a style that "cuts no aesthetic ice with me," but she offers her appreciation for the acting in the American sitcom Two and a Half Men: "comedy performance of near perfection...I admire [the actors'] professional techniques as I enjoy really polished Shakespearean acting." Beginning in the spring of 2018, the author confesses that she is "getting rather tired of me" and maintains that "there are too many old people in the world." Ultimately, this is a volume about letting go—about the need to "let it be" when the world becomes too much—and a plea for kindness toward all.

Despite the inevitable bits of chaff, this is a pleasant reading experience perfect for Morris fans.

**THE ANGLO-SAXONS**
The Making of England:
410-1066
Morris, Marc
Pegasus (452 pp.)
$29.95 | May 25, 2021
978-1-64313-312-6

A comprehensive overview of the Anglo-Saxon era seeking "to see these people as they were...and try to shed the misconceptions about them that have developed in later centuries."

Morris, author of The Norman Conquest, King John, William I, and other books of British history, returns with another compelling, sweeping story of old England, starting with the crumbling of the Roman administrative and military edifice in the mid-fifth century. The incursions by the Saxons, Picts, Scots, Jutes, and Angles, among others, wore down the Romanized Britons, and conversion to Christianity followed. Morris meticulously delineates the rise of the Northumbrian kingdom in the north and Mercia in the south, where the great King Offa reigned, and then moves on to the Vikings. Beginning with the raid of Lindisfarne in 793, the Vikings ushered in a long era of marauding armies from the north, taking advantage of the enormous
economic growth of the systems of trade further south. “The Scandinavians knew all about the rich coastal communities of the kingdoms to the south,” writes Morris, “and they also knew that they were undefended.” It wasn’t until the late ninth century, with the rise of Alfred the Great of Wessex, that the Norsemen were quelled, leading to the conversion of their leader, Guthrum, and consolidation of Anglo-Saxon fortification across the country’s boroughs and restoration of London in 886. “Alfred, in his determined efforts to undo the cultural destruction that decades of [V]iking attacks had caused,” writes Morris, “was also responsible for a remarkable renaissance in learning, and the elevation of English to a language of literature.” In this rich history, which draws on up-to-date archaeological data, the author also examines significant cultural and intellectual currents and the resurrection of monasticism in the 10th century. He concludes with the doomed King Harold II, whose death at the Battle of Hastings ended Anglo-Saxon rule in England.

A welcome refreshment of a seminal era in the forging of the English identity.

**THE ARTFUL DICKENS**

*The Tricks and Ploys of the Great Novelist*
Mullan, John
Bloomsbury (448 pp.)
$28.00 | May 11, 2021
978-1-4088-6681-8

A celebration of the Victorian novelist’s cunning genius.

Based on insightful close readings of Charles Dickens’ novels, letters, and meticulously revised manuscripts, literary scholar Mullan offers ample evidence of the “technical boldness” and “experimental verve” of Dickens’ prolific oeuvre. In discrete chapters, the author highlights more than a dozen characteristics that set Dickens apart from other writers, including the use of “fantastic analogy” to evoke “people’s strangeness and self-contradiction”; the invention of comically apt names, some of which have entered the popular lexicon; the deployment of coincidences “to move the fancy, asking us to imagine what makes the improbable somehow plausible”; and the shift between past and present tense, which, Mullan asserts, anticipated modernist and postmodernist writers: “None of Dickens’ narrative tricks is stranger or more audacious than this.” Mullan highlights the literary techniques that shape the well-populated novels’ quirky characters. Dickens, who once toyed with the idea of becoming an actor and admired performers who could use different voices, was able “to make a way of speaking comically distinct without being merely laughable.” He closely attended to word choice, using clichés to his advantage, coining words and, Mullan reveals, snatching up colloquialisms, which he pitched into “orotund sentences.” In addition, he paid attention to palpable details—odors, for example—writing “as if his nose were a sensitive instrument.” For Dickens, smell became “a narrative device” that helped readers recall characters during the many months of a novel’s serialization. Besides technical devices, Dickens had particular thematic interests: in ghost stories, for one—at the time “an undeveloped genre” that Dickens promoted—and in drowning, which became more than a useful plot mechanism but emblematic of a widely shared visceral fear. Although Mullan assumes a reader’s familiarity with Dickens’ many works, his ebullient analysis may well generate new fans.

A brisk, authoritative look at a literary icon.

**HOW TO WRITE A MYSTERY**

*A Handbook From Mystery Writers of America*

Mystery Writers of America
Ed. by Child, Lee & King, Laurie R.
Scribner (336 pp.)
$27.00 | Apr. 27, 2021
978-1-982149-43-7

Everything you wanted to know about how to plan, draft, write, revise, publish, and market a mystery, courtesy of the cheerleaders from the Mystery Writers of America.

In a marketplace crowded with how-to-write titles, the big selling point of this one is the variety of voices behind more than 30 full-length chapters covering everything from mystery subgenres (Neil Nyren) to publishing law (Daniel Stevens), punctuated with a variety of shorter interpolations. A few of them are more pointed than the longer chapters—e.g., when Rob Hart advises, “Allow yourself the space to forget things,” Tim Maleeny says, “Love your characters, but treat them like dirt,” or C.M. Surrisi notes, “If you’re writing a mystery for kids, remember that your protagonist can’t drive and has a curfew, and no one will believe them or let them be involved.” The contributors vary in their approaches, from businesslike (Dale W. Berry and Gary Phillips on the process of creating graphic novels, Liliana Hart on self-publishing, Maddee James on cultivating an online presence) to personal (Frankie Y. Bailey on creating diverse characters, Chris Grabenstein on writing for middle schoolers, Catriona McPherson on deploying humor) to autobiographical (Rachel Howzell Hall on creating a Black female detective, Louise Penny on building a community of followers) to frankly self-promoting (T. Jefferson Parker on creating villains, Max Allan Collins on continuing someone else’s franchise). Although many familiar bromides are recycled—“All stories are character-driven,” writes Allison Brennan, and Jacqueline Winspear, Gayle Lynds, and Daniel Stashower all urge the paramount importance of research—the most entertaining moments are the inevitable disagreements that crop up, especially between Jeffery Deaver (“Always Outline!”) and editor Child (“Never Outline!”), with Deaver getting the better of the argument. Other contributors include Alex Segura, William Kent Krueger, Tess Gerritsen, and Hallie Ephron.

A chorus of encouraging voices that mix do-this instruction with companionable inspiration.
solutions: “So when you think that this text is abstract, please try to remember that it embodies a noble moral ideal.” But much of the book is more journalistic than scholarly, and in a section on NCAA sports, the author sounds more like Bob Costas in a reflective mood than a public intellectual. Nussbaum fairly argues that sexual abuse involves “treating people as things,” which reflects overweening pride, and legal remedies such as “victim impact” statements can “taint a criminal trial with retributive overreach,” jeopardizing the process. The author clearly shows how toxic masculinity infects three “cathedrals of pride”—the federal judiciary, the performing arts, and the “diseased” world of college sports. Nussbaum perceptively notes, for example, that Bill Cosby, Harvey Weinstein, and James Levine were taken to task only when they were “too old and ill to make money for others any longer.” In her most controversial chapter, the author urges Division I colleges to limit the abuse by replacing their football and basketball programs with the kind of minor league teams that exist in baseball. Nussbaum’s sections on sports suggest that she’s strayed too far from philosophy to write with her usual aplomb. In those chapters, the writing is flatter, and her argument about college football is less urgent, but one can see the basis for that sentiment when looking at how transparently extreme ideologies are presented as the arbiters of truth. Those extreme ideologues, the proceedings make plain, include anyone who questions Ngo’s account of events, which is right at home with the collected works of Dinesh D’Souza and Michelle Malkin. His conclusion seems particularly untimely given the events of Jan. 6, 2021. He argues that antifa will yield a variety of insights to be gleaned from any Nussbaum book, and the comments here are sure to set sports-talk radio shows on fire in Tuscaloosa, Columbus, and beyond. An uneven examination of a topic that continues to require vigilant attention.

The Revolutionary War achievements of a Massachusetts regiment that, while not necessarily indispensable, deserves this admirable history. Prolific military historian O’Donnell begins with a history of Marblehead, Massachusetts, the second-largest New England town during this period. With an economy driven by fishing, its citizens were already primed to dislike British officials, who heavily regulated the trade and outraged its sailors by impressing them into the Royal Navy. Following the Boston Massacre, the Boston Tea Party, and the oppression of Britain’s “Intolerable Acts,” Marblehead citizens formed their own committees of correspondence, Sons of Liberty, and minutemen—a bumpy
A vivid account of an impressive Revolutionary War unit and a can’t-miss choice for fans of O’Donnell’s previous books.

**GIRL WITH NO JOB**
The Crazy Beautiful Life of an Instagram Thirst Monster
Osby, Claudia
Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster
(240 pp.)
$27.00 | Jan. 26, 2021
978-1-982142-86-5

She got famous. She got rich. She got cancelled. She’s sorry…sort of.

“I guess you could say that delusions of grandeur are my superpower,” writes Osby, a 26-year-old Instagram influencer whose feed, @girlwithnojob, has 3 million followers, apparently enough to put this silly memoir on the New York Times bestseller list. The author begins with her Long Island childhood as the third of three sisters, one of whom, Jackie, has been a partner in her social media endeavors, especially their podcast and YouTube show, The Morning Toast. “There’s never a question as to whether one of my sisters will betray my trust or not look out for my best interest,” she writes. “Caroline Manzo said it best, ‘blood is thicker than water,’ and my relationship with my sisters is a testament to that. Our bond is tighter and more secure than Kim Zolciak’s wig, though that’s not saying much.” (If you don’t recognize either of those names, this book isn’t for you.) Osby discusses her experiences at “fat camp,” her father’s tragic, sudden death at age 52 (“BAM! My dad decided to drop dead. Very, very uncool of him”), the institution and monetization of her social media presence while an undergrad at NYU, her whirlwind marriage at age 23, and her “FUPA” (Fat Upper Pubic Area). The author waits until the end of the book to address her “cancellation” in 2018—but if you don’t already know what happened, you will only find out here that it has something to do with her mother (president of the group Stop Islamization of America) and regrettable tweets from years ago. Instead of details or reflection, Osby delivers countless platitudes: “We’re all deserving of the opportunity to grow and the grace of second chances,” “Never forget that you can forge your own path and use your own voice in whatever way you want.”

One for the fans.

**AFRICAN EUROPEANS**
An Untold History
Otele, Olivette
Basic (304 pp.)
$30.00 | May 4, 2021
978-1-5416-1967-8

An extensive rendition of African European history from the third century to the 21st.

In this enterprising book, historian Otele provides critical insight into the stories of Africans in Europe, beginning during Roman times and continuing to the present. Though the author maintains a steady, meticulous chronology throughout this well-written, thoughtfully considered book, she wisely leaves room for asynchronous observations when necessary. The breadth and depth of Otele’s research are impressive, as are the vivid characters who populate these pages, including Alessandro de Medici, the first Medici duke of Florence and the son of a free African woman (see Catherine Fletcher’s The Black Prince of Florence for more information); the dual-heritage Signare women on the islands of Gorée and Saint Louis off the coast of Senegal; 19th-century Russian novelist Alexander Pushkin, who was ardently proud of his West African great-grandfather Gannibal; and significant figures in both the late-20th and early-21st-century French Afro-feminist movements, all the way through to the formation of the Mwasi movement, “a collective of women and non-binary women of African descent,” in 2014. Otele investigates the perceptions of Black populations in European countries and the degree to which those African Europeans have been truly accepted within those societies. The author analyzes the many manifestations of racism they have faced and how that prejudice and oppression can have generational effects, including the continued “criminalization of black bodies.” Otele is also highly attuned to the role of gender in her history, and she consistently draws attention to the ways in which African women have been treated in European countries. By detailing such a wide variety of experiences across a vast geographical and cultural landscape, the author causes us to rethink the way we consider the terms European and African.

A thorough, dynamic, accessible narrative that pulls together disparate strands into a unique, fresh history.
A sobering argument that American independence was gained principally after Colonial leaders purposefully “weaponized” prejudices against African Americans and Native peoples.

As Parkinson notes at the beginning, this book is a distillation and revision of his much longer book, The Common Cause (2016), and it features a “new introduction and conclusion and new material exploring all the myriad problems patriot leaders faced when they began the nearly impossible task of constructing a durable union in the 1770s.” Using rarely studied Colonial newspaper evidence, the author reveals how fear as much as idealism drove American colonists to independence. It was because of their shared conviction that the British were preparing to use non-White people against them that, Parkinson argues in John Adams’ words, “thirteen clocks were made to strike together.”

The author convincingly demonstrates how Colonial anxieties emerged immediately after the 1775 Battles of Lexington and Concord and, only 15 months later, made their way into the Declaration of Independence, which described “merciless Indian savages,” “foreign Mercenaries,” and “domestic insurrectionists.” Colonial leaders didn’t create these fears; instead, they stoked long-existing ones to unite the Colonies in their unprecedented drive for political freedom. Then they structured post-Revolution constitutions to prevent the incorporation of Blacks and Natives into the population as citizens. Parkinson pulls no punches. “When the war was won,” he writes, “the so-called ‘founding fathers’ wanted the ‘candid world’ to believe that only the first paragraphs of the Declaration—with the lofty sentiments of self-evident truths and inalienable rights—animated the colonists’ fight for liberty….What they wanted us to forget—and we largely have—was that the drive to have thirteen colonial clocks strike as one was also a campaign stamped by the vicious, the confining, and the destructive.” While omitting other factors, the author makes a strong case for the soiled origins of the U.S.

A knowledgeable, disturbing presentation of the prominent role of racism in the years of the nation’s birth.
“Not since Napoleon fought the Duke of Wellington at Waterloo in 1815,” writes historian Reeves, “had two such celebrated commanders faced one another in the field.” The author sets the scene in the spring of 1864, when the Army of the Potomac, huge and well equipped but not terribly confident after three years of mostly painful experiences at the hands of Robert E. Lee’s smaller Army of Northern Virginia, began the year’s campaign. Perhaps the North’s principal advantage was its commander, Ulysses Grant, who understood that wars are won by resources and persistence, both of which he possessed. He faced a very aggressive commander who focused on battlefield victories when preserving his army might have been a better idea. Marching south in early May, Grant’s army entered the Wilderness, “a tangled forest of underbrush and thickets.” He hoped to pass through quickly, but the Army of the Potomac did nothing quickly, and Lee attacked the following day. Thick brush restricted visibility to a few yards, and copious rifle smoke restricted it even more. Units became lost or panicked or attacked into the unknown with suicidal results. Communications were worse than usual; messages were delayed or lost, units attacked piecemeal. At the end of the second day, the advance seemed stalled, and the Union had suffered greater losses. But instead of imitating his predecessors by retreating north to recover, Grant continued on toward Richmond. Another year of fighting remained, but Lee’s shrunken army never attacked again. Reeves offers visceral descriptions of the fires that spread through the dry forest, burning to death hundreds of wounded soldiers, as well as vivid accounts of movements, battles, debates between commanding generals, and a generous helping of anecdotes from individual soldiers. He has clearly absorbed the confused geography of the Wilderness, but the maps could use improvement. Readers should keep a Civil War military atlas on hand. An expert account of a particularly horrific Civil War battle.

How the fictional houses found throughout British literature “act as a prism for focusing and diffracting the concerns of the world in which they were built.”

Employing a great books–style survey of English novelists, Richardson, who has written multiple books on architecture and design, explores why people enjoy reading about houses in fiction. She begins in the 18th century with Laurence Sterne, and concludes with such modern writers as J.G. Ballard, Ian Fleming, and Julian Barnes. Richardson starts by linking the development of the English novel to the theatrical farces of the 18th and 19th centuries. She suggests that Sterne used the “intimacy” of the house in Tristram Shandy to “squeeze comic tension from each room,” just as would a farce. For Austen, country houses and estates became places to observe the upper-class “social scene.” As symbols, they allowed her to reflect on such issues as property rights and why those rights, which favored men, were important to the women of her era. Dickens, by contrast, took a more personal approach to houses, infusing works like Great Expectations with fictionalized impressions of his own bittersweet “youngest memories.” In the 20th century, Evelyn Waugh elegized the English country estates immortalized by earlier novelists like Austen. In the aftermath of two world wars, the old social order on which they had been built was permanently “blown apart.” Ballard, Fleming, and Barnes emphasized the ugliness of what emerged in the aftermath, suggesting that “current and future housing [were] without art or promise.” This well-researched compendium, which also discusses the relationships of writers’ homes to their fictional creations, will appeal most to fans of British literature or those interested in literary representations of home and hearth.

Literary history from an intriguing perspective.

A CURE FOR DARKNESS
The Story of Depression and How We Treat It
Riley, Alex
Scribner (464 pp.)
$28.00 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-1-5011-9877-9

Eye-opening survey of the many shapes and forms of depression, from ancient history to today.

As science writer Riley notes in his concise, refreshing debut book, depression is a vastly complex collection of overlapping mental states, the product of genes, neurotransmitters, upbringing, health, trauma, diet, lifestyle, and other factors. Though the depressed state of mind has always been with us, under many names and guises, there are distinct moments when it has drawn particular attention. The author delves into these moments with notable vigor, insight, and scientific background information. Riley begins in the early years of the first millennium C.E. with Galen and his theories about the four “humors,” which would impact medical science for centuries to come, and then moves to the late ninth century and Abu Zayd al-Balkhi, who studied the effects of “negative thinking.” Little progress was made until the first asylums in the 18th century, which focused on “respect, leisure, diet, light occupation, and a gradual realignment with reason and reality.” As Riley moves into the formative work of Emil Kraepelin and Freud, he begins to weave in his own struggle with depression, effectively humanizing the narrative. The author provides a sturdy overview of the evolution of the psychoanalytical and biological worlds of psychiatry, from dementia praecox and manic depression to Freud’s mission to “find what his patients were hiding away, to fill it with color and meaning.” Treatments
Distant objects seem magically connected. Matter is replaced by ghostly waves of probability. And yet, it “has never been found wrong.” The author begins with the easy part: the history of science. Heisenberg’s work, and quantum theory was off and running. As lucidly as he can, Rovelli shows that while quantum theory may clarify the foundations of science, it doesn’t make sense. “Its mathematics does not describe reality,” he writes. “Distant objects seem magically connected. Matter is replaced by ghostly waves of probability.” And yet, it “has never been found wrong.” The author begins with the easy part: the history of science. Helgoland is a barren island in the North Sea where, in 1925, a 20-year-old explanation that atoms exist only in relation to other objects. Something that didn’t exist in itself, independently from something else.”

A welcome examination, both studious and intimate, of one of humanity’s great miseries.

HELGOLAND
Making Sense of the Quantum Revolution
Rovelli, Carlo
Trans. by Segre, Erica & Carnell, Simon
Riverhead (256 pp.)
$20.00  May 25, 2021
978-0-393-32888-0

The theoretical physicist and bestselling author digs into his discipline’s most confounding concept. As lucidly as he can, Rovelli shows that while quantum theory may clarify the foundations of science, it doesn’t make sense. “Its mathematics does not describe reality,” he writes. “Distant objects seem magically connected. Matter is replaced by ghostly waves of probability.” And yet, it “has never been found wrong.” The author begins with the easy part: the history. Helgoland is a barren island in the North Sea where, in 1925, a 20-year-old explanation that atoms exist only in relation to other objects. Something that didn’t exist in itself, independently from something else.”

A welcome examination, both studious and intimate, of one of humanity’s great miseries.

THE HOLLY
Five Bullets, One Gun, and the Struggle To Save an American Neighborhood
Rubinstein, Julian
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (384 pp.)
$28.00  May 11, 2021
978-0-374-16891-9

Journalist Rubinstein tells the haunting story of a former gang member who tried to go straight and ran into a skein of political, philanthropic, and law enforcement interests. When Ernestine Boyd, a grandchild of slaves, fled to Denver from the Jim Crow South, she became one of the first Black residents of the Northeast Park Hill part of the city, which included the Holly, a neighborhood that would earn a reputation as “the proud center of the city’s civil rights movement.” Decades later, Boyd’s grandson Terrance Roberts left his own mark on the Holly. He had found God and quit the Bloods while in prison; after his release, he founded an anti-gang nonprofit that led the mayor to name him “one of Denver’s 150 Unsung Heroes.” Roberts’ standing in the city began to unravel when, at a rally marking the opening of a Boys & Girls Club in the Holly, he shot a member of the Bloods who had credibly threatened him. In a multigenerational saga that builds toward a suspenseful courtroom drama centered on Roberts’ trial for assault and attempted murder, Rubinstein—who grew up and still resides in Denver—creates a historical palimpsest that sets its events against the backdrop of broad social and political changes, including the Crips’ and Bloods’ spread from Los Angeles to Denver; the Clinton administration’s decision to treat street gangs as “organized crime” groups; and the often clashing aims of politicians, philanthropists, and Black leaders. The author offers especially sharp and well-developed scrutiny of the use of active gang members as confidential police informants, but this important book is about more than dubious policing. A larger theme is how difficult it is for gang members to go straight while their former partners in crime still have the power to harm them, the problem a Denver activist chillingly summed up in a Chinese proverb: “He who mounts the tiger can never get off.”

A true-crime tale vividly portrays a Denver hidden by picturesque vistas of its snow-capped mountains.
“Against all odds, this unsparing, must-read portrait of modern dating and sex is also a love story.”

**NOTHING PERSONAL**

**My Secret Life in the Dating App Inferno**

Sales, Nancy Jo

Hachette (384 pp.)

$28.00 | May 18, 2021

978-0-316-49274-4

Despite the title, a very personal—and thoroughly researched—memoir of dating younger men.

In this warm, witty, and rigorously honest memoir, a “Confessions of an English Opium-Eater”-type exposé on dating apps, Sales takes us behind the scenes of her work as a journalist and filmmaker and her own experiences with Tinder. The most affecting of these involved a mostly irresistible, sometimes disappointing young man she calls Abel, 23 to her 49 when they met, with whom she remained involved for four years, while both continued swiping and hooking up with others. The author, “a single mom by choice,” managed to keep her daughter, Zazie, in the dark about her love life—thank God for summer camp—and relied on a supportive network of friends and the proprietors of her neighborhood bar and cafe to help her keep some perspective on her experiences. Ironically, the same year she met Abel, Sales went to war with Tinder by publishing in *Vanity Fair* what was apparently the first article to criticize the dating app. The company fought back with a smear campaign, but Sales continued working—and dating. On the memoir side, Sales writes engagingly about her parents and her coming-of-age in Florida waiting tables in their hippie diner, and she takes us through some failed relationships, her successful journalism career, and stories of dating during the pandemic. The personal narrative is illuminated by often chilling research—e.g., a 2014 Harvard Business School study that “should dispel any notion that millennial men ‘see women as equals’” or a 2019 survey that found “31 percent of the women…reported being sexually assaulted or raped by someone they had met through an online dating site.” Sales makes it abundantly clear that it’s not pretty out there.

Against all odds, this unsparing, must-read portrait of modern dating and sex is also a love story.

**TEST GODS**

**Virgin Galactic and the Making of a Modern Astronaut**

Schmidle, Nicholas

Henry Holt (352 pp.)

$29.99 | May 4, 2021

978-1-250-22975-5

An intrepid writer for the *New Yorker* delivers the inside story of the private space industry’s first spaceship.

Schmidle is a talented journalist, but his achievement getting behind the scenes at Virgin Galactic, one of Richard Branson’s most sensational and expensive endeavors, is especially impressive. “It was beyond zany, Branson’s dream of sending passengers into space aboard this handmade craft they called SpaceShipTwo,” writes the author. “But the zany ones were often the ones who made history.” Even reported more traditionally, the story would magnetize readers. There are certainly echoes of *The Right Stuff*, and Schmidle does an effective job in his juggling of journalistic objectivity, clear admiration for his pioneering biographical subjects, and tribute to his father, Robert Schmidle, a much-admired fighter pilot. In addition to the flamboyant showman Branson, there are appearances by Microsoft’s Paul Allen, who funded the $10 million X Prize that challenged private companies to reach space, as well as vignettes celebrating figures like John Glenn and Neil Armstrong, among others. To his credit, Schmidle drills down on a handful of significant figures, including Mark Stucky, a daredevil test pilot who had dreams of becoming an astronaut; peers like Mark Patterson, Luke Colby, and Mike Melville; and the visionary engineers that designed SpaceShipOne, most notably Burt Rutan, whose innovations in design and construction made the winning flight possible. Throughout, Schmidle delivers plenty of captivating drama, from the inevitable tragedy of fatal test-flight crashes to domestic strife stemming from the pilots’ singular obsession to the predictable friction between engineers trying to keep the spaceship in one piece and pilots who want to fly as fast and far as possible. Similar stories will be told about competing ventures like Jeff Bezos’ Blue Origin or Elon Musk’s SpaceX, but Schmidle’s agile, compassionate narrative serves as an exciting first word on the subject.

A candid and revealing portrayal of extraordinary people striving to breach one of humanity’s final frontiers.

**CROSSING THE RIVER**

**Seven Stories That Saved My Life: A Memoir**

Smith, Carol

Abrams (272 pp.)

$26.00 | May 4, 2021

978-1-4197-5013-7

A journalist dealing with the tragic death of her young son tells seven stories about people “reinventing, finding purpose, and discovering strength.”

When Smith suddenly lost her 7-year-old son, Christopher, to an abdominal obstruction, she left her freelance writer’s life in Pasadena to find comfort doing the journalism work she loved at the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. For a time, she was able to “separate my past from my daily work.” That relative peace ended, however, when she came across information about progeria, a hyper-aging disease that causes children to die before they reach their teens. What she learned led her to write a story about a 10-year-old boy named Seth who suffered from the disease. Of course, the process was exceedingly difficult because of the memories it brought up about Christopher, but it also made her realize that a short life could still be filled with
“wonders” and “love and lots of joy.” The author then wrote more features that touched on different aspects of her continuing grief. The courageous people she interviewed included Billy, who underwent extensive facial reconstruction and was forced to grapple with what it meant to live with a new identity, just as Smith was forced to do after Christopher died; and John Shalikashvili, Bill Clinton’s chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who suffered a life-changing stroke. As the author explored how someone accustomed to being in control of large-scale situations grappled with regaining such basic functions as balance and bodily movement, she was able to come to grips with her own need for control in a world where the only certainty was uncertainty. Her job at the Post-Intelligencer ended with the paper’s demise as a print publication, but the stories she collected from that time inform this intimate and humane narrative that should offer solace for readers who have experienced similar circumstances.

An uplifting group of moving stories.

**SUPPRESSED Confessions of a Former New York Times Washington Correspondent**

Smith, Robert M., Lyons Press (320 pp.) $27.95 | May 1, 2021 978-1-4930-5771-9

A former journalist’s memoir serves as a call to reinvigorate investigative reporting.

Lawyer and mediator Smith, a former New York Times Washington correspondent, mounts a sharp critique of journalism in his frank, often digressive debut memoir. Smith contends that “suppression of news is alive and well, even at the New York Times,” reflecting both editorial bias and the media’s cozy relationship to those in power. “Power,” writes the author, “oozing from the paper, forms a protective barrier around its correspondents and editors. People shy away from offending Times reporters,” fearing bad publicity. Smith recounts an accomplished career: education, jobs, salient assignments, and battles won and lost. The son of Eastern European immigrants, he attended the prestigious Boston Public Latin School, went on to Harvard, spent a year as a Fulbright Scholar, and continued his education at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. Characterizing himself as naïve, he was disillusioned when, working at Time magazine, he saw news manipulated to fit the publication’s conservative views. Smith also encountered suppression elsewhere, including at the Boston Herald and the Times. Central to the memoir is one traumatizing incident: With evidence from a trusted source, he learned about the Watergate break-in, but when he brought the story to his editor at the Times, it was ignored, to his astonishment and dismay. The paper’s failure—or refusal—to cover the story “was the result of conscious bias,” he insists, which still shapes whatever the paper sees fit to print and has evolved into “reflexive, unconscious bias” that, he believes, thwarts its efforts to effectively undercut critics like Donald Trump. Frustrated with reporting, Smith opted for the law. In the intellectually stimulating atmosphere of Yale Law School, he began to see the world not as black and white but “a dubious gray.” Smith cautions readers to watch out for bias, ask who is reporting, and consider outside pressures that influence a paper’s focus.

A forthright indictment of the media’s shortcomings.

**THE MYTH OF THE AMATEUR A History of College Athletic Scholarships**

Smith, Ronald A., Univ. of Texas (376 pp.) $35.00 | May 4, 2021 978-1-4773-2286-4

A journey through the history of money in collegiate athletics.

Today, when we think of an egregious violation of college athletic rules, we might imagine an assistant basketball coach handing a sack of cash to a star recruit’s parents. Earlier in the history of college sports, however, it took much less to create a scandal—e.g., hiring a professional coach or offering athletic scholarships. Examining the history of such scholarships, Smith takes us back to the turn of the 20th century and a collegiate sports landscape ruled by Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. (Yes, a lot has changed.) The guiding philosophical conflict was fascinating: to play sport for the sake of sport and the nobility of the competition, like the English universities Cambridge and Oxford? Or to embrace the American credo of winning at all costs in the name of such elusive concepts as freedom and equality? Few will be surprised by which side won that argument. The author shows us how we arrived here. In 1889, a pivotal year, a Princeton football recruit, writes Smith, “was offered a scholarship and was told another scholarship was available ‘for any particular friend that you might have.’ ” In 1948, the NCAA passed the Sanity Code, “the first NCAA attempt to limit athletic scholarships and control athlete recruiting.” The author combs through the subsequent decades, when scholarships became a foregone conclusion and real cheating (coaches paying parents) became more of a concern. The prose is rather dry and academic, and Smith has a tendency to digress. However, the research reveals a mind that has been exploring this subject for a long time. By the time he gets to more contemporary matters, such as college athletes’ battle to be compensated for use of their likenesses, the author has covered an impressive stretch of time and topics.

A long, winding road of sport and money supported by thorough research.
“A most welcome collection for longtime Southern fans and neophytes alike.”

THE HIPSTERS

NO MODERNISM WITHOUT LESBIANS
Souhami, Diana
Head of Zeus (464 pp.)
$15.95 paper  |  May 1, 2021
978-1-78669-487-4

A study of the anti-patriarchal women who played essential roles in the development of 20th-century modernism.

Souhami focuses on four women, and their Parisian community, who combined to create a “revolutionary force” in the fight to break away from 19th-century norms in the art world: Sylvia Beach, who founded Shakespeare and Company bookstore and published Ulysses in 1922; Bryher (born Annie Winifred Ellerman), a novelist and influential arts patron who funded modern writing and film; Natalie Barney, whose intimate circle became “the sapphic centre of the Western world”; and Gertrude Stein, who “furthered the careers of modernist painters and writers and broke the mould of English prose.” Though not all identified as lesbian, all had women lovers. Life partners and many torrid affairs add up to quite a cast of characters, including portrait artist Romaine Brooks and author Djuna Barnes. Beach’s support of modernist literature, most notably Joyce, was crucial. Bryher, who “felt trapped in the wrong body,” was “a rock” for her partner, the poet H.D. Barney, who proudly declared herself a lesbian and was “transparent about same-sex desire in a repressed and repressive age.”

Ironically, Stein, whose achievements in modernism were the greatest of the four, was the most traditional in her domestic life with Alice B. Toklas, the “wife for me.” Souhami effectively shows how “lesbians of the era, to flourish in their self-styled lives, needed to free themselves from domination by men,” but too much of the book describes those very relations—e.g., Beach and Joyce. Still, the author keeps the life stories lively, and the four narratives often intersect in interesting ways. Souhami presents these readable biographies in a series of bite-sized portions, each with its own catchy header, and the author displays a talent for choosing intriguing quotes from her subjects. For example, from the “energetically polyamorous” Barney: “I am a lesbian. One need not hide it nor boast of it, though being other than normal is a perilous advantage.”

A fresh perspective on modernism.

THE HIPSTERS
Southern, Terry
Ed. by Nile Southern
ANTIBOOKCLUB (292 pp.)
$16.00 paper  |  May 1, 2021
978-1-953862-00-6

A gathering of uncollected work by the celebrated master of black comedy.

Terry Southern (1924-1995) was known for his supremely sardonic take on the human condition as well as a “gonzo style [that] was imbued with a self-consciousness informed by his own quasi-celebrity,” in the words of his son and editor, Nile. The present volume existed as a working manuscript for decades, a companion of sorts to an unpublished novel called Youngblood. “It’s no wonder Terry didn’t return to The Hipsters, considering the intensely creative literary friendships he developed after his time at the Sorbonne [1948-1952],” writes Nile. “Rather than hanging out with lost souls, academics, and insouciant friends, Terry was mixing it up with poets, publishers, and grand eccentrics like Alex Trocchi, George Plimpton, Marilyn Meeske, Iris Owens, Doc Humes, Allen Ginsberg, and Gregory Corso.” The book is a hodgepodge of story sketches, ideas for books and screenplays, treatments, and other rough draft–ish pieces, all marked by Southern’s obvious pleasure at putting together roguish sentences. Some of the pieces could conceivably be outtakes from works like The Magic Christian, as when a narrator, having kept a truck driver from running over a sleeping junkie, suggests that he’s hauling not his stated load but instead, à la Henri-Georges Clouzot’s influential film The Wages of Fear, explosives. Among the best pieces in the book are sample pages from Southern’s screenplay for A Clockwork Orange, which, in the end, Stanley Kubrick rejected in favor of his own treatment, keeping Southern on as a producer for a time and then dropping him from the project entirely. Another revealing piece is a kind of keeping-busy thought experiment that Kubrick assigned him, coming up with sequels to Dr. Strangelove. The resulting “Strangelove Quartette” (1963), a screenplay of sorts, contains a provocation at the outset: “Does Strangelove have any emotional ties? Possibility of Sue Lyon being Strangelove’s daughter. Everyone else begging for shaft-priority.” Nothing came of it, and that’s lamentable indeed.

A most welcome collection for longtime Southern fans and neophytes alike.
**SPOON RIVER AMERICA**

*Edgar Lee Masters and the Myth of the American Small Town*

**Stacy, Jason**

Univ. of Illinois (240 pp.)

$27.95 paper | May 11, 2021

978-0-252-08582-6

In-depth study of the historical, cultural, and sociological significance of the enduring American classic.

In 1915, Edgar Lee Masters (1868-1950) published *Spoon River Anthology*, a collection of free verse epitaphs taken from a cemetery in the fictional town of Spoon River, Illinois. Stacy, a professor of history and sociology at Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, begins by discussing the romanticized myth of rural America that began in New England before moving on to discuss the political and cultural history of the Midwest in which the anthology took shape. Next, Stacy incisively examines the text itself, identifying the “familiar literary types that fueled the book’s popularity: the materialistic, hypocritical elite; the soil-bound, exploited populist; and the skeptical community exile.” The reception for *Spoon River Anthology* was mostly celebratory, but parodies also arose, with scrutiny of a “poetic form by which universal foibles could be explored through individual plight—in these cases, for humorous ends.” Some critics characterized Masters and a few of his contemporaries as “village rebels,” writers working at the edges of “a culture war between the traditional and the modern.” Masters responded to these criticisms in a 1930 interview: “I didn’t revolt against my village. The best years of my life were spent back there in Illinois,” he said, while acknowledging that his work, as Stacy notes, “appeared at a time when readers sought a reformulation of the village myth.” The author engagingly tracks the shifting concept of small-town America through the 20th century as writers, filmmakers, and other artists continued to find inspiration in the anthology. Eventually, the text entered high school classrooms, and teachers invited students “to meditate on their own lives.” Around the turn of the millennium, Stacy notes, media began to portray small towns “as places where the surreal and freakish happened.” The author cites *Twin Peaks, Pleasantville,* and *Stranger Things* as instructive examples. And so the myth continues, as does the anthology’s influence, brought appealingly to life by Stacy.

An authoritative, captivating exploration of a literary landmark.

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**DRIVING WHILE BROWN**

*Sheriff Joe Arpaio Versus the Latino Resistance*

**Sterling, Terry Greene & Joffe-Block, Jude**

Univ. of California (416 pp.)

$27.95 | Apr. 20, 2021

978-0-520-29408-0

As Arizona goes, so goes the nation, according to this searing book of reportage from Phoenix.

Joe Arpaio liked to call himself “America’s toughest sheriff.” A New England transplant to Phoenix, he ran for sheriff at an age when most of his peers were retiring, winning on a law-and-order ticket that targeted undocumented immigrants. Journalists Sterling and Joffe-Block were there for much of Arpaio’s 24-year tenure, during which he became infamous for housing inmates in tents in the summer heat and serving them “gloppy, tasteless, and sometimes moldy” food. As the authors note, Arpaio was an early ally of Donald Trump. Importantly, he also set the stage for Trump by making villains of undocumented workers and by ignoring numerous court orders to cease race-based policing. In the end, that led to a conviction for contempt of court, which might have earned Arpaio jail time but instead led to a Trump pardon. Inarguably, Arpaio’s strong-arm tactics had an effect: “One estimate found that about 92,000 unauthorized immigrants of working age—about 17 percent of that cohort—left Arizona between 2008 and 2009.” Sterling and Joffe-Block diligently chronicle the work of immigration rights activists and undocumented workers while also focusing closely on Arpaio, who, like Trump, professed to despise the press while craving its attention. They also turn in shocking stories of official malfeasance, including a case where a sheriff’s deputy victimized innocent suspects and malefactors alike, stealing a garage full of evidence, including Schedule 1 narcotics. Yet he was kept on the force because he produced “high stats,” immigrant arrests that enhanced Arpaio’s bragging rights. Finally turned out of office, Arpaio lost a primary race for U.S. Senate to a Republican candidate who herself lost because Arizona was turning blue—one reason for which, the authors hint, was a direct repudiation of Arpaio and his policies.

Though it runs a touch long, this is a work of exemplary reporting.
The author interviewed her aunt in 2002 as well as many of her subjects’ descendants, and diligent research turned up articles, letters, photographs, and even unpublished memoirs. As such, there is no shortage of documentation, but Strauss seems to belong to the history-is-boring school, so she assembles the information into a novelistic narrative with invented scenes, dialogue, and insights into her subjects’ thoughts and emotions. She gets her facts right, so most readers will make allowances.

A group biography of nine women from the French Resistance who were caught, tortured, and starved—but survived.

Despite the courage of its participants, the French Resistance movement could not withstand the power of the Nazis and their Gestapo, whose surveillance and infiltration made joining the Resistance almost a death sentence until France’s liberation. Nonetheless, Hélène Podliasky, Strauss’ great aunt, led a group of eight other women in their 20s against the invaders. No reader will doubt the Nazis’ utter loathsomeness after their crimes. As oncoming armies approached, they burned documents, killed prisoners, and “forced the remaining prisoners on death marches, at first often to other death camps further into the interior of Germany, and then by the end with no clear destination.” More died than escaped, but at one point, nine women jumped into a roadside ditch to hide until the soldiers passed. Strauss alternates tales of their early lives, Resistance activities, and arrest with their horrific experiences in concentration camps and factories, escape, and walk across Germany to American lines. A long epilogue reveals that most lived into the current century. For decades they received little recognition and rarely discussed their suffering. Some found peace and contentment, but others were clearly damaged irretrievably.

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A breathless story of almost superhuman heroism and suffering with a (mostly) happy ending.

Queer and trans activists describe their lives and work in this anthology of oral history and illustrated interviews.

Illustrator and comic artist Syan Rose calls her book “part graphic nonfiction, part thank-you note, part gay theory paper, [and] part activist gossip column.” Each of the contributors grapples with universal questions of “power, desire, justice and accountability” as well as “structural & mental racism, transphobia, fatphobia, colonialism, ableism, xenophobia, antiblackness, [and] rape culture.” Selections include Caleb Luna and Nicole Arteaga’s “Reclaiming & Revolting Bodies: Fat: The Play,” Mirna Haidar’s “Queer Muslim Family,” and “Everything You Love About New Orleans Is Because of Black People,” a conversation with New Orleans visual artist Philem. We meet sex workers and their advocates, healing and health justice activists, trans women survivors, and queer martial artists. Herbal healer Geleni Fontaine describes accountability” as well as “structural & mental racism, transphobia, fatphobia, colonialism, ableism, xenophobia, antiblackness, [and] part activist gossip column.” Each of the contributors grapples with universal questions of “power, desire, justice and accountability” as well as “structural & mental racism, transphobia, fatphobia, colonialism, ableism, xenophobia, antiblackness, [and] rape culture.” Selections include Caleb Luna and Nicole Arteaga’s “Reclaiming & Revolting Bodies: Fat: The Play,” Mirna Haidar’s “Queer Muslim Family,” and “Everything You Love About New Orleans Is Because of Black People,” a conversation with New Orleans visual artist Philem. We meet sex workers and their advocates, healing and health justice activists, trans women survivors, and queer martial artists. Herbal healer Geleni Fontaine describes “what it means to be in a transgressive body at a time when fat people are seen as diseased. There is a poignant section of reflections on the pandemic, including Ra Malika Imhotep’s “A Praise Song for Sick Blk Wimmin,” who “have been knowing something deep about this kind of embattled survival….When we talk about how Southern black folk face alarming ‘health disparities,’ we are saying that we are sick. And not because there is something inherently wrong with us, but because the world we’ve been given unto structurally & systematically disrupts our access to wellness.” The drawings throughout are exquisite, and while the swirling, hand-lettering is occasionally difficult to read, the book accomplishes its clear goal: visibility for the marginalized. As Stella, a member of the Trans Assistance Project, puts it, “It’s not just for my own happiness, it’s also because there are people who, just by seeing me, might be more kind to queer people in the future. Or if they are queer, they might feel less alone or come out sooner.”

A unique, empowering addition to LGBTQ+ literature.

A multifaceted portrait of the publishing industry and how it has been altered by digital technology.

British sociologist Thompson follows his study of trade publishers, Merchants of Culture (2010),
with an authoritative examination of the effect of the digital revolution on Anglo-American book publishing. Drawing on nearly 200 interviews with senior publishing executives and other staff, hundreds of interviews he had conducted in researching *Merchants*, and considerable proprietary data, the author reveals the complexities of a transformation that, he asserts, is still underway. He recounts in detail early efforts to find content for digitalization, such as the Google Library Project, Project Gutenberg, and the HathiTrust Digital Library, which resulted in years of lawsuits by publishers who sought to maintain control over content. Publishers worried, as well, about the e-book, fearing that it would render the print-and-paper book obsolete. The release of Amazon's Kindle in November 2007 seemed threatening, but Thompson discovered that after a surge in popularity, consumer interest in e-books has diminished. Furthermore, some content—e.g., cookbooks and illustrated books—never translated well into digital format. Nevertheless, digitalization has produced a “democratization of culture” that has allowed writers to reach readers without publishing houses as gatekeepers. Self-publishing opportunities and services, crowdfunding from sites such as Indiegogo and Kickstarter, and social media platforms such as Wattpad, where “readers and writers interact around the shared activity of writing and reading stories,” have opened up new access points for authors. Publishers have responded by becoming more reader-centric and looking for ways to create a diversified marketplace. Although optimistic about the future of the book, Thompson warns about Amazon's unfettered domination. “Regulatory policies that were devised for an earlier era of capitalism,” he writes, “need to be reconsidered in a new era in which the accumulation and control of information have come to form a crucial basis of corporate power.”

A well-informed analysis of significant cultural change that should interest anyone who works in book publishing.

### MY NAME IS SELMA
**The Remarkable Memoir of a Jewish Resistance Fighter and Ravensbrück Survivor**

van de Perre, Selma  
Trans. by Tetley-Paul, Alice & Ashbury, Alice  
Scribner (224 pp.)  
$27.00 | May 11, 2021  
978-1-982164-67-6

A harrowing memoir from “one of the few remaining Dutch Jewish survivors” of World War II. With captivating and heartbreaking detail, van de Perre (b. 1922) shares her memories of the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, offering “a testament to our fight against inhumanity.” Though the author enjoyed a happy childhood, in 1936, the Netherlands started taking in immigrants from Germany who “told troubling tales of National Socialism and what happened to people who renounced the Nazis.” At first, nobody paid much attention, but soon enough, German soldiers invaded and “beg[a]n to commit acts so horrific that I now struggle to believe they really happened, in spite of having experienced them myself.” As a child, being Jewish in Amsterdam never posed a problem. Her family wasn’t strictly observant, and people barely mentioned religious differences. While it may not have seemed significant at the time, “the fact that I didn’t look Jewish would later save my life.” By 1942, van de Perre was working for the resistance as a courier. For her own security, she bleached her hair and assumed a new name and identity, Margareta van der Kuit. Despite her subterfuge, however, she was arrested and put on a train to the female-only Ravensbrück concentration camp, where she was greeted by SS officers with whips. She was subjected to hard labor and meals consisting of watered-down coffee for breakfast and a thin slice of bread and soup (“water with a few blades of grass or cabbage”) for supper. Throughout her time at Ravensbrück, the author remained cautious and quiet, fearing that her true identity would be revealed. Due to perseverance and some good fortune, she managed to survive her brutal circumstances, which she ably conveys in a plainspoken, touching manner, displaying a sharp memory and acute sense of the gravity of her experiences. In April 1945, she was marched to freedom. Next came the task of picking up the pieces. **An incredible story of courage and compassion.**
own past and opinions, and she is unafraid to directly question readers, demanding engagement with the text. “This book is a narrative,” she writes. “It has an arc. But the tension is not in what happened when I lived it; it’s in what happened when I wrote it. Like I already told you, this is not just a recounted story; I am trying to make something happen and record the process and results.”

A fascinating magic trick of a memoir that illuminates a woman’s search for meaning.

**DESERT CHROME**

**Water, a Woman, and Wild Horses in the West**

Wilder, Kathryn

Torrey House Press (350 pp.)

$18.95 paper | May 4, 2021 978-1-948814-36-2

Testimony to the healing power of wildness. Essayist Wilder makes her book debut with a candid memoir that interweaves a trajectory of loss, pain, and hard-won serenity with a paean to wild horses. Sexually abused by a family friend when she was a child, Wilder suffered severe consequences: PTSD, depression, and addiction. When she was 19, shortly after her boyfriend died suddenly, she started using heroin and soon added cocaine, pills, and alcohol. “I lied to everyone,” she writes, “hurt friends, stole from family, shot up in my mother’s bathroom.” She married and divorced, and when she lost custody of her two sons, she fell apart. “Drugs,” she admits, “kept me going as I lived without my children.” What saved her, eventually, was a connection to the power and beauty of wild mustangs. “Watching wild horses is the best medicine,” she writes, “like watching a river or the flames of a campfire burning low in the night.” Wilder evokes with feeling particular horses she has loved as well as the dry, rolling landscapes of high desert country—red rock and juniper, pinon pine and sagebrush—where she has camped, bought and sold ranches, set up a horse clinic, and accompanied a photographer friend to document the mustangs’ lives—and their plight. Wilder examines the problem of the burgeoning mustang population, resulting from the passage of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act in 1971. Because mustangs compete with cattle for land—angering ranchers—the Bureau of Land Management conducts helicopterroundups, removing herds to reservations, where they live essentially in captivity, forcibly separated from family band members. Wilder, along with other mustang advocates, instead promotes a “humane, commonsense” solution: injecting mares with PZP, which prevents pregnancy. A governmental PZP program, she argues, can ensure that mustangs “stay wild on lands they know.”

A spirited and impassioned chronicle.

**PLANET PALM**

**How Palm Oil Ended Up in Everything—and Endangered the World**

Zuckerman, Jocelyn C.

The New Press (272 pp.)


A wide-angle study of the global scourge of palm oil production.

In the last decade, palm oil, once just an innocuous ingredient in dishwashing liquid, has become an increasingly ubiquitous global commodity, finding its way into everything from bread and chocolate to makeup and margarine. After years of globe-trotting reportage on the environmental and health hazards of this deceptively sinister substance, journalist Zuckerman—former deputy editor of *Gourmet*, articles editor of *OnEarth*, and executive editor of *Modern Farmer*—offers this definitive, damning account of the history of palm oil production and the ecological destruction it causes. “Following the plant’s journey over the decades,” she writes, “has served as a sort of master class in everything from colonialism and commodity fetishism to globalization and the industrialization of our modern food system.” The first half of the book covers the trade’s colonial beginnings, with “men of empire” like British imperialists George Goldie and William Lever marching arrogantly into Africa in the 19th century and monopolizing the palm oil business. Both exploited African labor while pushing the Indigenous trade out of their own markets. The second half of the book is where the prescient core of Zuckerman’s exposé lies, as she recounts a disturbing litany of contemporary ills associated with the palm oil trade. The author is unsparing in her revelations, from the ecological damage to the adverse health effects of palm oil and its use in cheap, high-calorie foods. “It’s common to blame sugar for the world’s weight problems, but in the last half-century, refined vegetable oils have added far more calories to the global diet than has any other food group,” she writes. But the book is not entirely grim: Zuckerman offers practical suggestions for proactively weaning ourselves off of palm oil—e.g., using synthetic versions of the oil and convincing companies to adopt no-deforestation policies in their production codes.

Instructive and provocative without the dour preachiness of so many eco-activist books.
CHILDREN’S

These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

- IVY + BEAN GET TO WORK! by Annie Barrows; illus. by Sophie Blackall
- ALIEN NATION by Sandro Bassi
- HEAR MY VOICE / ESCUCHA MI VOZ ed. by Warren Binford
- AN OCCASIONALLY HAPPY FAMILY by Cliff Burke
- NOT ALL HEROES by Josephine Cameron
- STAR OF THE PARTY by Jan Carr; illus. by Juana Medina
- TREATY WORDS by Aimée Craft; illus. by Luke Swinson
- BARNABY by Andrea Curtis; illus. by Kass Reich
- THE DAY THE RAIN MOVED IN by Éléonore Douspis; trans. by Shelley Tanaka
- AMIRA’S PICTURE DAY by Reem Faruqi; illus. by Fahmida Azim
- UNSETTLED by Reem Faruqi; illus. by Soumbal Qureshi
- WE ALL PLAY by Julie Flett
- THE STORY OF BODRI by Hedi Fried; illus. by Stina Wirsén; trans. by Linda Schenck
- BIRD HOUSE by Blanca Gómez
- I LIKE TRAINS by Daisy Hirst
- SAVING AMERICAN BEACH by Heidi Tyline King; illus. by Ekua Holmes
- THE ROCK FROM THE SKY by Jon Klassen
- STRANGEWORLDS TRAVEL AGENCY by L.D. Lapinski
- HOW TO APOLOGIZE by David LaRochelle; illus. by Mike Wohloutka
- THE PEOPLES PAINTER by Cynthia Levinson; illus. by Evan Turk
- WHEN WE FLY by Jess McGeachin

HOW TO MAKE A BIRD by Meg McKinlay; illus. by Matt Ottley
MY TINY LIFE BY RUBY T. HUMMINGBIRD by Paul Meisel
PERCY’S MUSEUM by Sara O’Leary; illus. by Carmen Mok
BORN READY by Jodie Patterson; illus. by Charnelle Pinkney Barlow
WE ARE A GARDEN by Lisa Westberg Peters; illus. by Tasmin Imamura
THE GRAVITY TREE by Anna Crowley Redding; illus. by Yasmin Imamura
THE RICE IN THE POT GOES ROUND AND ROUND by Wendy Wán-Long Shang; illus. by Lorian Tu
WE ARE STILL HERE! by Traci Sorell; illus. by Frané Lessac
SUGAR AND SPITE by Gail D. Villanueva
GRANDAD’S CAMPER by Harry Woodgate
IF I WERE A TREE by Andrea Zimmerman; illus. by Jing Jing Tsong
BLANKIE by Ben Clanton
HIDE-AND-SEEK by Shasha Lv
BABY’S FIRST FARM by Danielle McLean; illus. by Craig Shuttlewood

TREATY WORDS
For as Long as the Rivers Flow
Craft, Aimée
Illus. by Luke Swinson, Lake Annick Press (60 pp.)
$14.95 | Mar. 9, 2021
978-1-77321-496-2
My first job out of college was as a political organizer for an environmental justice group. I was not especially good at it—there’s a reason I went into librarianship and then into editing book reviews—but I did learn enough to develop a deep and abiding admiration for organizing done well. Successful protest movements large—the Salt March; the Montgomery Bus Boycott—and small don’t happen spontaneously; they are the work of organizers who combine the inspirational powers of religious leaders and the tactical acumen of military strategists.

I learned the principles of organizing on the job, but kids with their eyes on making change don’t need to wait that long. There’s a whole crop of books on hand that discuss everything from the history of organized protest to the nuts and bolts of political action.

Journalist and climate activist Naomi Klein, writing with Rebecca Stefoff, aims to teach kids *How To Change Everything* (Atheneum, Feb. 23), first explaining why they need to and then providing them practical—and practicable—advice for doing it. Their “Toolkit for Young Activists” includes advocating for school-level change as well as joining larger movements. (Be sure to read our interview with Naomi Klein on page 110 as well.)

Young people have been on the ground floor of movements for change for over a century, and Michael G. Long introduces young readers to 15 such movements in *Kids on the March* (Algonquin, March 23). His survey includes the 1903 March of the Mill Children, school integration battles in the 1950s, and the activism of the survivors of the violence at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, always keeping his focus on the efforts’ youth leadership.

Where Long’s survey focuses on youth-led movements, author Leah Henderson and illustrator Tyler Feder broaden their scope in *Together We March* (Atheneum, Jan. 19), giving young readers valuable looks at not only well-known actions such as the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, but also the anti-apartheid Cape Town Peace March of 1989, the Capitol Crawl of 1990, which paved the way for the Americans With Disabilities Act, and the Global March Against Child Labor, which began in Manila in January 1998 and ended in Geneva the following June.

In Dwayne Reed’s *Simon B. Rhymin’*, illustrated by Robert Paul Jr. (Little, Brown, March 2), the titular aspiring rapper fears public speaking but finds his voice when he decides to make a local homeless man his subject for a school assignment. Simon’s curiosity about Sunny leads him to learn more about the unseen people in his community and the heartfelt speech he finally delivers becomes his first act as a fledgling organizer.

In their latest entry in the Confetti Kids early-reader series, author Samantha Thornhill and illustrator Shirley Ng-Benitez put young Lily, a child of color, at the center of a local action in *The Protest* (Lee & Low, Jan. 12). Lily uses the tools of organizing—posters, canvassing neighbors, media coverage—to galvanize resistance to the demolition of a community garden to make way for a parking lot.

Author Nandina Ahuja and illustrator Anoosha Syed put Farah Patel, the young protagonist of *Rise Up and Write It* (HarperFestival, Jan. 5), into a similar situation when the little South Asian girl notices there are no butterflies in her neighborhood. A vacant lot and a sign posted there soliciting community input for its use get her thinking that a community garden will attract butterflies and also promote food security. This sweet novelty picture book gives little activists models for their own actions in the form of removable sample letters, posters, and petitions.

With these titles, the Stacey Abramses of the future are well on their way.

*Vicky Smith is a young readers’ editor.*
“An affecting metaphor for the cycle of life.”

THEY CALL ME RIVER

Two friends battle a dragon and hunt for treasure in this bilingual adventure story of imaginative play.

Paul, a pale-skinned redhead with freckles, and Pierre, a brown-skinned boy with tight curls, are “friends and explorers.” They draw a treasure map, which they grizzle[s]—a word most readers will learn right here—“a lot.”

French-and-English transitions between the two. The blend of English and French works like an early reader whose sentences alternate languages but repeat vocabulary words: “Suddenly they hear a roar. Un grand rugissement!” This allows both bilingual readers and second language learners to engage with the vocabulary in both languages without stopping the flow of the story. The pictures also support comprehension.

Educational content made entertaining. (Picture book. 4-10)

A young pig uses vivid imagination—and possibly poor eyesight!—against sibling woes.

Ollie’s a pale-pink pig in a blue beret. He’s also a younger brother. His sister, who’s “bigger. And older,” is weighing him down. She scowls and looks disdainful; she’s a sourpuss, raining on parades. The intimate narrative voice (“Look, there’s Ollie. Maybe you already know him?”) says that Ollie’s sister “grizzle[s]”—a word most readers will learn right here—“a lot.”

On family outings, Ollie’s sister calls cows “dull,” cars “dumb,” and an excursion boat a “slowpoke.” Ollie, rebelling, sees not cows but water buffalo; not cars but a circus parade with acrobats; and no plain slowpoke boat but a pirate ship—on which his sister’s tied to the mast. Ollie’s fantasy flights work so well as resistance to negativity that it’s baffling when, almost halfway through, a new possible cause for what he sees emerges: Ollie needs glasses. The sudden theme of weak eyesight never quite finds its place, nor does Ollie ever admit that he does need glasses, though readers see the evidence on the classroom blackboard—or does Ollie simply value imaginative play higher than teacher approval? In which case, why was the early theme so sister-focused? It’s OK—Posthuma’s neat borders, pale colors inside fine outlines, and steady visual restraint in even the outlandish scenes make for a tale that’s quirky yet calming.

From the Netherlands, an appreciation of imagination. (Picture book. 3-6)

A river is born and carried along, from source to sea, where the cycle will begin again.

Striking painted-and-collaged artwork depicts the long journey as the river itself narrates its story, beginning as rain high above in the mountains. Then it tumbles along over stones, through towns, getting ever bigger, “testing [its] boundaries,” merging with other rivers, encountering obstacles and quiet places, until eventually it “meet[s] the great ocean” and “become[s] one” with it. “And then, drop by drop, I return to the sky. / And I begin again…” Children will quickly notice that though it’s not mentioned in the text, another parallel story is taking place alongside the river’s story in the illustrations. Beginning at the foot of the mountain where the river begins, a human life is also starting. First depicted as a White-presenting babe in arms, the child is seen growing, testing boundaries with a thrilling leap into the river, in due course getting married, encountering obstacles and places of respite, until eventually, just as the river remarks, “There is more of me behind than ahead.” This now-aged adult is last seen in a tiny boat with sea life teeming beneath. “I’m grateful. I let go.” In his debut as an author, Albrecht, an award-winning producer of animated films for children, presents a gentle and approachable view on life and mortality.

An affecting metaphor for the cycle of life. (Picture book. 5-8)
“A perfect first dip into chapter books for a whole new generation of readers.”

IVY + BEAN GET TO WORK!

WHO INVENTED THIS?
Smart People and Their Bright Ideas
Ameri-Siemens, Anne
Illus. by Thorns, Becky
Trans. by Wilson, David Henry
Little Gestalten (96 pp.)
$24.95  |  Apr. 27, 2021
978-3-89955-133-4

From airplanes to zippers, a gallery of ubiquitous gadgets, products, and basic discoveries.

In an apparently arbitrarily ordered assortment of one-to three-page entries, Ameri-Siemens recaps around three dozen stories of invention, from Gutenberg’s printing press (1440) to the World Wide Web (1989). Though the inventors introduced are predominantly White, male, and Eurocentric, her choices include nods to a few African Americans such as Garrett Morgan (hair-straightening cream, automatic traffic light) and Thomas J. Martin (a type of fire extinguisher). White women Thorns presents an unidentified trio of Black women presumably meant to represent the “computers” of NASA rather than the much earlier ones at Harvard that the author mentions. Still, readers will likely look in vain through similar chronicles of invention to find the origins of, say, ramen noodles, soccer boots, toothpaste, or carbonated beverages.

This German import is an unsystematic jumble—but tailor-made for dipping and flipping. (Nonfiction. 10-13)

I’M A GLUTEN-SNiffING SERVICE DOG
Babay, Michal
Illus. by Smietanka, Ela
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99  |  Apr. 1, 2021
978-0-8075-3611-5

A well-trained service dog can be a loyal friend as well as a lifesaver.

Chewie the blue poodle already has his person picked out. “Every dog needs a person, and Alice is mine. Almost.” Chewie just has to brush up on a few details of his training and learn to hold his natural doggy exuberance in check. He is learning a highly specialized skill: the ability to detect minute quantities of gluten in foods so he can alert his owner of its presence. This ability will protect Alice, a young White girl who has celiac disease and gets sick if she ingests even a tiny amount of gluten, which is found in certain grains. Training is hard. There are so many distractions for a young dog: a bug, a bird, another dog—not to mention actual food on the ground. A visit from a distraught Alice persuades Chewie to stay as focused as he can in order to graduate from training school. Finally they can be together and Alice can feel safe. Based on the author’s experience with her daughter, who has celiac, the story is told in first person by Chewie. His bouncy narration is punctuated with excited statements in a large, italicized font to indicate both the distractions he encounters and his resolve to avoid them. It’s illustrated in a lively, colorful, cartoonish style, with diversity well represented among the trainers and Alice’s classmates.

This good-hearted book makes a serious subject fun and interesting. (author’s note, further information) (Picture book. 4-8)

IVY + BEAN GET TO WORK!
Barrows, Annie
Illus. by Blackall, Sophie
Chronicle Books (128 pp.)
$14.99  |  Apr. 6, 2021
978-1-7972-0510-6
Series: Ivy + Bean, 12

Iconic second graders Ivy and Bean are back for their final outing.

Two little girls couldn’t be much more different. Bean’s mind races in remarkable (but ever so age-appropriate) circles, making it hard to stay on task, and Ivy is as quiet and contained as Bean is boisterous. But the pair are perfect together, always finding clever ways to sort out their differences and making fun out of just about any small idea. This time it’s treasure hunting. After learning at a career day about what magical and valuable items could be found if they just could afford a metal detector, the girls decide to use their “special sense” of what’s lost, inspiring lots of hole-digging but very little treasure-finding. It’s only after they secretly hide treasured items for each other that they meet with remarkable and very satisfying success. Many of the children who read the first Ivy + Bean book as second graders in 2006 are now, unbelievably, college graduates. But the series has remained fresh and relevant, offering a perfect first dip into chapter books for a whole new generation of readers. Like the others in the series, this effort combines Barrows’ nicely developed characters and her hilarious, easy-to-read take on juvenile adventures with Blackall’s spot-on Chinese ink illustrations on every spread, with purely delightful results. Ivy and Bean both present White; their classmates are diverse.

The final, delicious entry in a much-loved series. (Fiction. 6-9)
ALIEN NATION
Bassi, Sandro
Illus. by the author
Levine Querido (56 pp.)
$18.99 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-1-64614-038-1

An artist from Venezuela debuts a wordless picture book in which creatures are obsessed with their mobile phones.

At first glance, the characters appear to be, as the title suggests, extraterrestrials. Bipedal figures have oversized heads, each unique—sporting spikes, cubes, bulbous growths, geometric shapes, an elephantine trunk, an upside-down cone, or tentacles. Closer inspection reveals light-skinned human bodies dressed in contemporary winter clothing. The juxtaposition of some bare human arms with the heads raises questions about these travelers, who pass through a railway station, then board an underground train. The station is named “La Nacionalien.” The setting and compositions, rendered in black and white with detailed crosshatchings, recall Brian Selznick’s graphite work in The Invention of Hugo Cabret (2007). Bassi is a skilled draftsman. His foreshortened close-up of a child in a stroller reaching toward a seat on which sits a clunky, early-model handheld phone focuses attention on the object that will change everything. After the pudgy finger pushes a button, everyone’s phones signal interference/dysfunction and heads explode—literally. Sequential panels portray individual eruptions; dramatic double-page spreads display co-mingling springs, cubes, sprockets, and tentacles. Then the child’s mother extends her hand, and order (and service) are restored. Viewers who studied an earlier map will ponder the purpose of that vintage phone. Those who ruminate on the title and the still-distracted phone gazers will have a eureka moment.

A clever, enigmatic glimpse at first-world alienation. (Picture book. 4-8)

BALLOONS FOR PAPA
A Story of Hope and Empathy
Bedia, Elizabeth Gilbert
Illus. by Meza, Erika
Harper/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 27, 2021
978-0-06-308113-0

A spot of color pokes through adult gloom in this charming British import.

“Ever since Mama went to the hospital, Papa had lost his smile.” Every day Arthur and Papa visit her, and every day Arthur asks for a balloon. Papa, however, just hurries his young son along, the weight of the world on his shoulders. One, two, three days in a row Arthur tries to convince his father to get a yellow, red, or blue balloon. Each time Papa says no, and the clouds above grow lower and gloomier. Then, one day, Arthur looks out the front door to see five bright balloons bobbing from their tree. Arthur immediately gives them to Papa for Mama in the hospital, a selfless act that reminds his father of the support young children really can provide in tough times. The text reads true, a balm for children and parents going through family difficulties, but the standout star is the art. From the balloon seller’s braids on the top of her head to the stitches on her sweater, meticulous watercolors capture the details that matter; the bright balloons pop (no pun intended) on the page against the wash of gloomy grays. Arthur and his parents present White. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 15.4% of actual size.)

A skillful reminder that kids can be the bright spots amid their caregivers’ serious worries. (author’s note) (Picture book. 4-6)
THE END IS JUST THE BEGINNING

Bender, Mike
Illus. by Mayo, Diana
Crown (40 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Apr. 20, 2021
978-1-984896-93-3
978-1-984896-94-0 PLB

A cyclical take on life.

Endings can sometimes feel sad or heavy in their finality. But Bender reverses this perspective. In fact, the story starts, as a tiny caterpillar tells readers, with “THE END.” A young tot on a bed closing a book looks puzzled. Bender acknowledges the absurdity. “But wait—how can a book possibly start with the end? That’s ridiculous.” It’s not, once you change your frame of reference. Continuing in a conversational tone, Bender gives examples. Some are personal and immediate: “The end of a disagreement with someone... / is just the beginning of making up.” Others are more abstract: “When you count, the end of one number is just the beginning of the next number... / and so on and so on, all the way to infinity, which, by the way, NEVER ends!” Two friends or perhaps siblings (one with brown skin and brown hair in two Afro puffs, the other with pale skin and straight, black hair) act out the scenarios, which are strung together over the course of a day from one morning to the next. Mayo’s illustrations also dance between concrete and abstract, illustrating disagreement with one kid scowling, sitting back to the other, who looks distressed, next to a ruined sand castle and infinity with an image of the two kids cycling along an enormous infinity sign. In a meta-infused closing, Bender concludes with “THE BEGINNING / (of discovering the next book).” A cleverly placed butterfly flits away. The hazy wash over muted tones gives a warm, cozy embrace to the message. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 9-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 48.2% of actual size.)*

A mind-stretching outlook that may help youngsters with change—and will certainly cause them to think. *(Picture book. 4-7)*

THE SHAREY GODMOTHER

Berger, Samantha
Illus. by Curato, Mike
Imprint (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-1-250-22230-5

Shari T. Fairy loves to share. Her joy comes from making others happy, but some of her friends are concerned that Shari is so busy sharing, she doesn’t notice that she isn’t being treated fairly in return.

Shari’s fairy-godmother friends ask: “Isn’t it unfair that no one else gives back as much?” And: “Does anyone say thank you?” And: “Would people still be your friend if you didn’t share?” Shari considers what they say and decides to try not sharing, just to see how it feels. Almost immediately, the smiling and happy fairy becomes lonely and sad. Worse, she begins to question her motives for sharing with others. Does she share just so people will like her? Shari takes some time to check in with herself, and she realizes that “something is wrong. Something feels off. Something feels all jammed up inside.” Here, Curato’s cotton-candy colors dim to gloomy purple. It takes a visit from some of Shari’s other fairy friends to remind her who she is and what she loves to do. This book will work well as a read-aloud for older children who will have experienced situations in which they question themselves and have begun to consider how their friends see them. Readers will enjoy Curato’s colorful group of fairies, who present in a number of shapes, sizes, colors, and genders. Shari herself has light-brown skin and fluffy bubble-gum-pink hair. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 23.7% of actual size.)*

Shari’s experiences will help children learn how to listen to themselves. *(Picture book. 5-9)*

WE LAUGH ALIKE / JUNTOS NOS REÍMOS

A Story That’s Part Spanish, Part English, and a Whole Lot of Fun

Bernier-Grand, Carmen T.
Illus. by Bermudez, Alyssa
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-1-62354-096-8

Two groups of friends, one that speaks English, the other speaking Spanish, encounter each other at the park and learn to communicate through the language of play.

The two languages are reflected in a responsive dual text, though not an exact translation, that allows readers to engage with each group’s thinking and understanding. “We listen to the other kids, even though we don’t understand a word of Spanish,” the children say. “Escuchamos a los otros niños, aunque no sabemos inglés.” The literal translations are: “Escuchamos a los tres niños, aunque no sabemos inglés.” The literal translations are: “Escuchamos a los otros niños, a pesar de no entender una palabra de español.” We listen to the three children, even though we don’t know English.” The two groups—both racially diverse—cautiously observe each other and then each begins to learn the other’s games until they are counting, jumping rope, dancing, singing, and playing together. The cheery art using scanned textures and bold colors highlights the activity, setting it in a city park in the shadow of numerous skyscrapers. The simple, dual text works well to establish the concept that these children have much in common. But the wording of the English title, *We Laugh Alike*, is awkward in comparison to the Spanish version, which translates as *Together We Laugh* and jibes better with the spirit of the story. Nevertheless, the children are alike in their eagerness to befriend one another and laugh together.

A sweet demonstration of how friendship can transcend language barriers. *(glossary, author’s note) (Picture book. 4-7)*
HEAR MY VOICE / ESCucha Mi VOZ

The Testimonies of Children Detained at the Southern Border of the United States

Ed. by Binford, Warren Workman (96 pp.) $19.95 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-1-5235-1348-2

In Spanish and in English, a devastating first-person account of children’s experiences in detention at the southern U.S. border. The nightmare children have faced while separated from their families at the U.S.–Mexico border in recent years is detailed unsparingly via interview snippets from 61 migrant children ages 5 to 17. The words are interpreted by 17 different Latinx illustrators. While some of the artists build fantasy imagery, depicting the children as caged birds or representing escape from a dangerous country as flight from a terrifying monster, the most affecting double-page spreads simply detail the horrifying living conditions and allow expressions on faces to do the rest. Hunger, overcrowding, verbal abuse, and unsanitary conditions are only part of the horrors. “I have been here without bathing for twenty-one days,” one child says from behind chain-link fencing. “I wish I could get clean.” The Spanish-language version is bound dos-à-dos to the English one, and the children’s words are even more painful in their native language. Additional context on how the stories were captured and the legal issues around child detention is provided in a foreword and backmatter; it reinforces the impossible and cruel situation the migrant children have faced and their misplaced hope in a system that has failed them. It’s the kind of terrifying book that no adult should hand to a child before preparing to explain, with context, that the stories are true and that they must be remembered.

“A powerful, critical document only made more heartbreaking in picture-book form.”

—Kirkus Reviews

Always remember, you are loved just as you are.

Turns out being different made Ack the luckiest duck of all!

Ack Ack Ack!

“A sweet tale with a strong moral about appreciating differences.”

—Kirkus Reviews

ISBN: 978-1-7340101-0-7

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Once upon a time, people told children stories both to entertain and forewarn. Stories of dragons and villains and wolves at the door carried a serious message: The world is a perilous place. Better pay attention. Better take care.

In her own way, climate activist Naomi Klein is following that tradition. In her new book, *How To Change Everything: The Young Human’s Guide To Protecting the Planet and Each Other*, written with Rebecca Stefoff for ages 10-17 (Atheneum, Feb. 23), she drives home through facts, figures, and inspiring stories a message that’s all too real: Climate change is upon us, and it’s up to a new generation to turn the boat around and do what it takes to stop its destructive effects.

Klein, author of several books (*No Logo, The Shock Doctrine, This Changes Everything*), is a renowned campaigner for many causes, notably curbing the excesses of capitalism and globalism and restructuring the world’s economy for a better life. *How To Change Everything* is a more personal book. It starts with her joy at showing her young son the Great Barrier Reef, then her anguish at having to tell him that great swaths of it could die from climate change. It conveys her admiration for the young climate campaigners she has met on her activist journey and presents a step-by-step road map for how to get involved in the movement.

Kirkus gave it a starred review, concluding that “if you can only get one climate change book for youth, let this be the one.”

A high-octane speaker and thinker who comes up with a new idea every five minutes, Klein, a Canadian who makes her home in British Columbia, answered questions by phone about why she decided to write a kids’ book and what she hopes to accomplish with it. Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

You’ve written several books for adults. Why a kids’ book, and why now?

I have been part of the climate movement for a long time, first reporting on it, then being swept up in it myself. I noticed a shift in where the energy was coming from—first it was from college students, then suddenly it was from high school and middle school students. I noticed that when I published *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal* and partnered with Sunrise [the Sunrise Movement], that some of these kids were in the seventh grade. The older kids could read adult books, but there was a real need for information for middle school and high school students. Youn people are really the heart and the soul of the movement.

How do you hope kids will use the book?

I think of my books as ammo practice—the facts and the figures to really get you on solid ground. We hear about youth climate strikes, with thousands of people on the streets, but mostly in smaller places it’s just a few kids. A lot of kids talk about being bullied and isolated. I wanted to hold them up as heroes, show them that they are not alone even though sometimes they are.
Some of the material you present in the book’s first chapters makes for a hard-hitting indictment of human heedlessness and greed. How do you convey the concept of something like “disaster capitalism” (developers moving in to exploit a disaster in its aftermath) to a 10-year-old? How do you inform them without making them despair?

I’m a mom, and I get it. My son is 8, and I’m constantly navigating that line. But we have to be honest with them about the world they know. A 10-year-old—the only president they’ve ever known is Donald Trump. The parents of Black kids have to introduce terrible concepts to them at a relatively young age. I’m explaining the systems underlying the climate crisis, so it’s not about vilifying the individual. It’s about systems.

In How To Change Everything you write about the need to strengthen young people’s attachment to nature. How do we do that, especially with groups of kids who live in cities and who have been so isolated because of Covid?

Our No. 1 job is to create opportunities for young people to attach themselves to the natural world. One of the things I am most heartened about in Biden’s first weeks in office is the announcement of a Civilian Climate Corps for young people. One of the most exciting precedents we can draw from is the New Deal, when both the Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Youth Administration created jobs for young people. We need to get young people out in nature and give other people access to trails and parks. We need to recover that ambition.

We know that young people have it really bad right now because they miss each other. I’m a big believer in reconnecting with the natural world, but we’ve neglected that infrastructure. We can design programs that will capture carbon and rewild the world and recover habitat for endangered species.

What is your opinion of the Biden administration’s climate change strategy thus far?

I would like to see specifically more for young people. The pandemic has been hard on them. They really need their friends, and they understand the importance of in-person schooling.

When young people see a decision made to have a Super Bowl with 25,000 people but not to create a safe environment for school, it’s a choice. It’s sending a message. I think there are some good signs, [but] we also need to do more with outdoor education. We could make a huge investment in summer camp. We could safely hire tens of thousands of university-age students to run camps for hundreds of thousands of middle school and younger students.

What do you think the long-term effect of Covid will be on climate change strategy?

The best news from the Biden administration is that he’s not throwing climate under the bus because of Covid, which is what’s happened many times in the past. You have attention and focus and political momentum, and then a financial crisis hits, and it’s *Scrap all these policies, we’ve got a more urgent crisis to deal with.* I’m heartened that the Biden administration is multitasking. We need a recovery plan that’s also a Covid plan that’s also a racial justice plan. We need a Covid response that’s a transformational response.

Why do you think things could be different this time?

The biggest push back I’ve gotten in the past from the expert class about climate change is *We just can’t do it. Sure, we need to do it, but we can’t change that much, we don’t know how.* Now, having collectively lived through a period of activist government, the experience of Covid and our response to it is the greatest counterargument: We did it [responded quickly to Covid]. Now, let’s do it in a thoughtful way. That’s what a Green New Deal is.

The only reason a Green New Deal is up there at all is the activism of the Sunrise Movement. Young people have already remapped this debate. They have transformed what is possible.

Mary Ann Gwinn is a Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist in Seattle who writes about books and authors for several publications. How To Change Everything received a starred review in the Dec. 15, 2020, issue.
“A feisty protagonist who’ll keep readers on their toes.”

AVEN GREEN SLEUTHING MACHINE

WELCOME HOME, WHALES
Booth, Christina
Illus. by the author
Blue Dot Kids Press (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Apr. 6, 2021
978-1-7331212-8-6

A child hears the far-off song of a right whale.

It seems to be a dream at first, because no one else can hear it. It is a haunting sound that grows a bit closer each day, sometimes joyful but more often mournful and sad. The sounds become a saga of the whale’s darkest experiences, or possibly a history of the entire species. After several mornings, the child goes to the beach in the early light and hears the whale plead to know why she was hunted and is now unable to come home. With an aching heart and feeling the creature’s pain, this young human can only whisper a soft apology for the deeds of others. The whale heads out to deeper waters, but as more people gather, listening and waiting, she returns with a baby, and this time her call is filled with hope. The child, who presents White, narrates in a tender and gentle tone, addressing readers as companions. The whale’s tales are depicted as small, gray drawings of whales, whaling ships, hunters, harpoons, and death, all placed within the more colorful, large-scale illustrations of the whale at sea or child at home or at the shore. Although the whale’s species is not named in the text, a double-page spread at the conclusion of the tale provides a great deal of information about right whales. (This is an Australian import, suggesting the whale is a right whale.

Beautifully tender, moving, and even hopeful. (Picture book. 6-10)

FLIGHT OF THE PUFFIN
Braden, Ann
Nancy Paulsen Books (240 pp.)
$17.99 | May 4, 2021
978-1-984816-06-1

Three seventh graders struggle with family, community, and self. Libby and Jack live in a rural Vermont populated with broadly drawn families: entitled men, submissive mothers, bullies, and government-averse hunters with a fear of gender nonconformity. After opening in Vermont, the story shifts to Vincent, who lives in Seattle and is mocked by his peers due to his obsession with triangles, love of puffins, and unconventional clothing choices. The contrived conflict vaguely centers around trans and nonbinary youth, who are positioned as a problem to be resolved. A local bureaucrat threatens to withhold funds for Jack’s school, citing a number of policy violations, including the absence of a gender-neutral restroom. Jack defends his school’s right to run as it pleases, and, in the process, the well-meaning but clumsy boy makes comments that a horde of strangers—some angry, some more constructive in tone—interpret as transphobic. Ultimately, the comments lead him to understand things differently, including a matter that cuts close to home. Vincent meets T, a nonbinary homeless youth whose perspective is wrought through brief, poetic italics and who functions mainly to teach Vincent important lessons about gratitude and strength. Libby, the least involved in the conflict, also has the least-developed story arc and mainly functions to unite the narratives through postcards. This story puts forward many messages but never coheres as a story and treats trans and nonbinary youth as convenient plot points rather than fully developed human beings. Characters default to White.

Mildly inspirational at best. (Fiction. 9-13)
A WILDER MAGIC
Brandt, Juliana
Sourcebooks Young Readers (272 pp.)
$16.99 | May 4, 2021
978-1-72820-964-7

A young Appalachian girl uses magic to try and save her home.

Sybaline Shaw’s family has known for years that their magical valley in the Appalachian foothills would be flooded when the nearby Tennessee Valley Authority dam was complete. Her father is off fighting in World War II, but Momma has already packed up their household. Sybaline alone of her family can’t accept this. Everyone in the Lark bloodline can use magic within the valley to shape the natural world, but they risk transforming themselves into plants or trees—a danger Sybaline and her cousins regularly ignore. After lying to their parents shortly before everyone moves away, Sybaline and her cousin Nettle—each claiming to be going to stay with the other—remain behind and create a bubble around Sybaline’s home, which soon turns into a dark, dank prison on the bottom of the newly formed lake. Now Sybaline and Nettle are becoming trees—how will they escape? Told from Sybaline’s point of view with matter-of-factness, the novel blends fantasy and reality with worldbuilding that leaves unanswered questions. Brief mentions of aluminum plants supporting the war effort, riots by White men over Black construction workers, and the Trail of Tears contrast with the Edenlike imagery of the lush, unspoiled valley and its sheltered occupants living off the land in yet another Appalachian story supporting the trope that technology is predominantly bad. Main characters are assumed to be White.

Inconsistent and messy. (Historical fantasy. 8-12)
**I SPEAK BOY**

**Brody, Jessica**

Delacorte (368 pp.)

$16.99 | $19.99 PLB | May 4, 2021

978-0-593-17368-8

978-0-593-17369-5 PLB

The course of true love never did run smooth.

Seventh grader Emmy Woods is a lot of things. Consummate schemer. Aspiring app developer. Risk taker. And where her best friend, Harper, is concerned, she’s “Emerie Woods: Love Coordinator.” But a matchmaking attempt goes horribly wrong, and Emmy knows exactly who to blame: boys, “humanity’s greatest unsolved mystery.” When she wakes up one morning with a new app on her phone that translates the hitherto-hidden thoughts of boys, she thinks she’s hit the jackpot and starts making matches left and right. But when the secret of the app falls into the wrong hands, Emmy must face the consequences of meddling in others’ love lives. Emmy is a lively, engaging narrator, and even the most minor characters are richly imbued with distinctive quirks, desires, and traumas. Brody expertly teases romances, fractured friendships, and plot twists, keeping readers guessing at every turn. Echoes of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which the language arts class is reading, provide added spice. Emmy is White, and there is some diversity in the supporting cast. In a jarring note seemingly equating Whiteness with being American, the book states that Harper’s black hair is from her Korean-born father, but she got “her hazel eyes and fair complexion from her mom, who was born right here in Highbury.”

A hilarious, heartwarming middle school drama. (Fiction. 10-13)

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**AN OCCASIONALLY HAPPY FAMILY**

**Burke, Cliff**

HMH Books (224 pp.)

$16.99 | May 18, 2021

978-0-358-32567-3

Nothing sounds exciting about this first family vacation since Mom died. And they can’t even bring the cat.

Thirteen-year-old Theo Ripley feels powerless about this trip and steels himself for the eight-hour drive. Deftly capturing the childhood torture of family road trips, Burke nails the hilarious dialogue between Theo; his 16-year-old sister, Laura; and their science teacher dad. They are headed to Texas’ Big Bend National Park in the middle of July—to camp. Theo prefers to appreciate nature from indoors. He also prefers drawing to dialogue and stares aimlessly out the window as Dad and Laura argue endlessly. Once at the barren and boulder-filled park, the family bounces from one disastrous mishap to the next, encountering a riotous cast of eye-opening characters who surprisingly unite them. Each short chapter provides a glimpse of the humor and pain caused by the lack of communication and unaddressed grief that burdens each family member. When a surprise visitor joins their vacation, the bottled-up grief spills over. With memorable characters and voices, realistic emotions, and an extra helping of humor, this title rocks. The Ripley family reads as White; names cue some diversity in the supporting cast.

A masterful look at loss and mourning wrapped up in a hilariously painful family vacation. (Fiction. 10-13)

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**LOOK WHAT I FOUND IN THE WOODS**

**Butterfield, Moira**

Illus. by Verona, Jesús

Nosy Crow/Candlewick (32 pp.)

$14.99 | Apr. 20, 2021

978-1-5362-1723-0

Three children explore and collect things from the forest floor in this multitasking picture book.

Part story, part seek-and-find, part nonfiction nature book, this adventure begins as three friends, two White and one Black, enter the woods wearing backpacks, dog running along ahead. On the opening spread, a rhyming couplet at the top invites readers to follow a child narrator into the woods (I and we are used throughout, and both work). Two additional lines declare, “Look what I found! / A curly stick that looks like a magic wand.” An insert in the bottom-right-hand corner asks readers to also find one signpost, two butterflies, and three flowers. On the second spread, facts about the shapes of trees are placed throughout the illustration, and a full sidebar shows and labels tree shapes to find. The spreads continue to alternate between these layouts as the children make their way through the woods, finding different “treasures” along the way. At the end of their walk, they have a table full of finds, and the rear endpapers show adorable craft creations composed of objects from the woods, with a reminder to only take treasures from the ground. The book’s detailed, varied illustrations and useful information for beginners invite readers to linger over the pages and to use the book as a companion in the natural world. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10.6-by-19.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 87.9% of actual size.)

A versatile and irresistible invitation to explore the outdoors. (Informational picture book. 4-10)
TOUGH LIKE MUM
Button, Lana
Illus. by Mok, Carmen
Tundra (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-0-7352-6598-1

Kim is tough, just like her mum.
But today Mum’s staying in bed, with
the blanket wrapped tightly around her. Kim pulls her thumb
out of her mouth (before Mum can see it there) and gets up to
start the day. She prepares her lunch bag and checks her home-
work. Almost ready. But Mum forgot to sign Kim’s field-trip
form! “Don’t start on me, Kim!” says Mum, who’s still curled
up in bed. What can Kim do? Grab some spare change for the
field trip. Not enough to cover the $6, but “maybe Mrs. Jones
won’t notice.” The school day brings its pleasures and pains—
Mrs. Jones does call out the incomplete form—but Kim keeps
her composure, like Mum seems to do. Returning home, Kim
sees that Mum’s “at the table wearing what she slept in last
night.” Maybe some tomato soup can help. “Eat. You’ll feel bet-
ter,” insists Kim. It’s a small gesture, but it finally cuts through
the gloom that surrounds her mum. Button elevates these
tender moments thanks to a keen sense of compassion for her
characters, underlining that even the most seemingly mundane
moments can have an impact. Buried within this showcase of a
loving mother-daughter relationship is the potential catharsis
of grappling with accepting help. Mok’s compassionate gouache
artwork—full of muted colors, gently curving lines, and arrest-
ing facial expressions—enfolds this tale in its earnest embrace.
Mostly light-skinned characters fill out the cast, including Kim
and her mum. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9-by-16.6-
inch double-page spreads viewed at 82% of actual size.)
Powerful in its vulnerability. (Picture book. 4-10)

NOT ALL HEROES
Cameron, Josephine
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
(336 pp.)
$16.99 | May 18, 2021
978-0-374-31443-9

Young people engage with social
change in coastal Maine.
Still healing from the death of 7-year-
old Wally, the Helinski family is slowly
settling into life in Port City, Maine,
after leaving Wisconsin in search of a fresh start. Sixth grader
Zinnia struggles to find her place in her new school, wanting to
befriend cool, nice girls like Jade and Anji but dogged at every
step by Trevor, who shows his affection by relentlessly teasing
her. But when the Anand family moves in upstairs, Zinnia dis-
covers that they are part of a community of Real-Life Super-
heroes, “shining a light” on social problems and bringing “help
to the helpless and hope to the hopeless.” Zinnia’s 19-year-old
Aunt Willow, also struggling to find herself, comes to visit and
joins them on their missions to provide food, shelter, and care,
all while dressed in attention-grabbing superhero costumes.
With its clear, accessible writing, this suspenseful story mas-
terfully juggles many topics: grief; self-assurance; the need for
individual, collective, and systemic approaches to ableism, pov-
erty, and other social ills; and the fine line between “extreme
altruism” and self-aggrandizement. Never preachy, the story
includes a suspenseful and satisfying climax involving a ring
of coffee shop thieves, with every thread satisfyingly resolved.
Zinnia and her family are White; the multiracial supporting
cast is well developed.
A perfect balance of morally complex and extremely fun.
(Fiction. 8-13)

A lonely rabbit. A quiet pine cone.
And what it means to be
a true friend.

Best Friend in the Whole World
Sandra Salamur
HC: $17.99 / 978-1-68263-250-5
Ebook available

“A sweet, sensitive tale.”
—New York Times

“Life lessons gently told. Lovely.”
—Kirkus Reviews
“Using a bright palette that really stands out against her starry backdrops, Medina captures the festive tone of the event.”

STAR OF THE PARTY

RULE OF THREES
Campbell, Marcy
Chronicle Books (320 pp.)
$17.99 | May 11, 2021
978-1-79720-123-8

Twelve-year-old Maggie’s contented life is disrupted.

Sure, only child Maggie’s parents insist they all eat dinner together at the table, and they are big on engaging her in dinner conversation, but though she complains a bit, she is secretly happy that they are so persistent about communicating with her. And she is glad she doesn’t have best friend Olive’s life, with a chaotic little brother, or other BFF Rachel’s situation, with family members who eat separately in front of various screens. While Maggie is nervous about being in middle school, she knows her parents are always there for her. Plus, she has her beloved grandmother, who has taught her about interior design—something Maggie adores and shares with her BFFs. But everything starts to unravel when a previously unknown 13-year-old half brother from an affair her father had shows up and, on top of that, Maggie’s grandmother discovers for themselves. The overarching interior design metaphor stretches itself thin in Maggie’s first-person–narration revelations. Characters are White by default.

A competent, if somewhat belabored take on sensitive family issues. (Fiction. 9-12)

SUMMER LIFEGUARDS
Carey, Elizabeth Doyle
Sourcebooks Young Readers (224 pp.)
$7.99 paper | May 4, 2021
978-1-72822-122-9

Four seventh graders get lessons in community spirit when a hurricane hits their Cape Cod town.

Narrators Jenna, Selena, Piper, and Ziggy start their school year assigned to write “a paper about what matters to us in life.” Meanwhile, as a hurricane heads their way, Jenna frets about beating Franny, her swim team rival, at an upcoming meet; Selena tries a homemade beauty treatment that goes badly awry; Piper worries about the safety of her grandma and the horses they care for; and Ziggy has concerns because her “hippie” mom is a conspiracy theorist who refuses to take the storm warnings seriously. Still, as the storm causes dramatic flooding and evacuations, all four girls pitch in to help and, in the aftermath, are left with both themes for their school assignment and inspiring glimpses of the good work done by the local lifeguard crew. In a largely White cast, the representation of characters with various underrepresented identities—from Ecuadorian American Selena to biracial Israeli and Somali Samantha, who has “dyslexia and other learning differences,” and autistic Franny—unfortunately misfires. The book broaches identity-related subjects, but they are not developed with tact or insight. Selena’s concerns about color-blind casting in the school play, Samantha’s self-identifying as “a mutt,” a character’s misleading comment about racial diversity in Israel, and the objectifying portrayal of Franny’s autism are missed opportunities for depth.

An uplifting story marred by clumsy efforts to inject diverse representation. (Fiction. 9-11)

STAR OF THE PARTY
The Solar System Celebrates!
Carr, Jan
Illus. by Medina, Juana
Crown (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 27, 2021
978-1-5247-7313-7 PLB

What do you give a sun for her 4.6 billionth birthday? The planets decide to throw a party—during the planning of which, amid much chatter and banter, Carr delivers an impressively detailed rundown of the components of our local system. “Let’s get Sun a belt,” suggests Mercury; “She already has belts,” says Mars—namely, “Kuiper” and “asteroid.” She also laces the narrative with mini-disquisitions on stellar and planetary origins, gravitational effects, moons, and dwarf planets. Maintaining an appropriate air of mystery in fedora and topcoat, the theorized Planet X crashes the party briefly, and a launch from Earth prompts Mars to moan, “They’re not sending up another rover are they? Enough with the exploration! Can’t a planet have any privacy?” Using a bright palette that really stands out against her starry backdrops, Medina captures the festive tone of the event. She kits out both Sun and planets with loud party hats and mobile faces over each one’s accurately rendered natural features, also rendering orbital lines and the tails of passing comets. Ultimately the planets agree that testimonials will be the best presents because, as Uranus accurately puts it: “You tug on our hearts and pull our warm family together.” What is the other planets sign off with inviting waves.

An uplifting story marred by clumsy efforts to inject diverse representation. (Fiction. 9-11)

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978-1-72822-122-9

Four seventh graders get lessons in community spirit when a hurricane hits their Cape Cod town.

Narrators Jenna, Selena, Piper, and Ziggy start their school year assigned to write “a paper about what matters to us in life.” Meanwhile, as a hurricane heads their way, Jenna frets about beating Franny, her swim team rival, at an upcoming meet; Selena tries a homemade beauty treatment that goes badly awry; Piper worries about the safety of her grandma and the horses they care for; and Ziggy has concerns because her “hippie” mom is a conspiracy theorist who refuses to take the storm warnings seriously. Still, as the storm causes dramatic flooding and evacuations, all four girls pitch in to help and, in the aftermath, are left with both themes for their school assignment and inspiring glimpses of the good work done by the local lifeguard crew. In a largely White cast, the representation of characters with various underrepresented identities—from Ecuadorian American Selena to biracial Israeli and Somali Samantha, who has “dyslexia and other learning differences,” and autistic Franny—unfortunately misfires. The book broaches identity-related subjects, but they are not developed with tact or insight. Selena’s concerns about color-blind casting in the school play, Samantha’s self-identifying as “a mutt,” a character’s misleading comment about racial diversity in Israel, and the objectifying portrayal of Franny’s autism are missed opportunities for depth.

An uplifting story marred by clumsy efforts to inject diverse representation. (Fiction. 9-11)
**A BEARY RAINY DAY**

Ciccio, Adam  
Illus. by Timmermans, Emilie  
Clavis (32 pp.)  
$17.95 | Apr. 6, 2021  
978-1-60537-598-4

It all happens one morning when “weather is being the peskiest pest.”

Wallow the Bear is just heading out to play when he notices a “rainstorm rolling along.” Wallow is, as his name suggests, “unfortunately, a quite gloomy fellow” who “always [gets] sad when it start[s] to rain.” So Wallow heads inside and hunkers down in his cozy cave, but his frustration rises with the water level. When he finally tries to sleep through the rest of the storm, the sounds of splashing and laughter echo in his cave. When Wallow looks out, he sees his friend, Little Cub, playing in the rain puddles, and Wallow’s frown turns into a smile. Thanks to Little Cub’s friendship and positive attitude, “Wallow always [plays] in the rain from that day on,” and, as the moral to the story, Wallow realizes that his “gloominess wasn’t because of the storm, / but because he’d never seen past the rain clouds before.”

The text is set in, mostly, four-line stanzas, but, possibly due to the (uncredited) translation from the Dutch, scansion can be a challenge, and these stanzas often flow better when read as a couplet, sometimes with optional end rhymes. Cartoon illustrations feature woodland greens and browns; Wallow’s cave is realized in warm red-brown and beiges enclosed in a black cave outline. In the woodland scenes, diagonal lines subtly emphasize the rainfall and, later, the sunshine. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10.2-19.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 31.2% of actual size.)

A good snuggle-time read when rain turns everyone grumpy. (Picture book. 3-6)

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**GLITTER GETS EVERYWHERE**

Clark, Yvette  
Harper/HarperCollins (320 pp.)  
$16.99 | May 4, 2021  
978-0-06-303448-8

Losing your beloved Mum to cancer has to be one of the worst things in the world to happen to a child, but 10-year-old Kitty finds her own way of coping with this terrible loss.

Kitty lives in the upscale Hampstead borough of London with her older sister, Imogen; her father, and her cat, Cleo. Her beloved Gran is close by, and her godmother provides support, food, and wisdom for the bereft and grieving family. Going back to school is particularly tough, however. Everything reminds Kitty of her mother, and she feels lethargic and dejected. As Gran says, comparing grief to glitter, “If you throw a handful of glitter in the air, even if you try your very best to clean it up, you’ll never get it all. I keep finding glitter tucked into unexpected corners. I suppose it will always be there.” When her father’s work responsibilities bring a chance to spend some time living in New York City, Kitty is resistant. At Dad’s insistence, they go, however, and the family learns the language and customs of this new place. Kitty ultimately comes to realize that memories of her mother are the glitter that will be with her wherever she goes. The heart-rending topic; the well-drawn family relationships; and Kitty’s brave, honest, and often funny responses to her tragedy are the soul of this book. All characters present White.

Heartfelt and comforting. (Fiction. 8-12)
In a writing and publishing career that spans some 30 years, Andrea Davis Pinkney has published dozens of her own books, including many illustrated by her husband, Brian Pinkney, and brought countless others into the world. Her Jump at the Sun imprint at Hyperion Children’s Books, established in 1998, helped pave the way for today’s new imprints that cultivate marginalized voices. She has won the Coretta Scott King Award and is a four-time nominee for the NAACP Image Award. Today she serves as vice president and executive editor for Scholastic Children’s Books even as she continues writing. Loretta Little Looks Back (Little, Brown) was one of Kirkus’ Best Middle-Grade Books of 2020. Her newest book, Harriet Tubman (Philomel, Jan. 5), kicks off Chelsea Clinton’s She Persisted series of chapter-book biographies celebrating American women who made a difference. (The entire series is illustrated by Gillian Flint.) Davis Pinkney spoke to Kirkus by phone about both writing about and being a changemaker. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

How did you approach writing about Harriet Tubman for a chapter-book audience?
I played Harriet Tubman in my school play in fourth grade and did it with great pride. What I knew as a fourth grader from the few books at that time was that she was the most notable conductor on the Underground Railroad. That’s what we conventionally learn about Harriet Tubman. I said to Chelsea Clinton, you know, I needed the She Persisted series back then. But the beauty is that we have it now. What I learned in creating this book for the fourth graders of today is that Harriet made her first attempt at escaping slavery when she was about 8 years old. And it was just a few years later that she tried to protect an enslaved neighbor from the violence of an overseer. There we are, we see young Harriet making these amazing strides. I plant readers right in Harriet’s shoes from the time she’s a young girl and take it from there.

Your book taught me two things I didn’t know about Harriet Tubman. One was that her first husband was awful. And the other is that she fought the federal government for a pension for decades. What was your thinking in bringing those details to light?
My thinking was exactly what you said, which is that I didn’t know these facts. And now’s the time to know them. Kids are smart; they understand some of these larger issues. And I did work hard to contextualize them to make the information accessible. Hopefully the fourth graders of today will embrace these books. And if one of them later on marries a guy that’s not so great, maybe she’ll remember that Harriet Tubman was in that same situation and was strong and persistent throughout it. And who knows who’s going to be fighting for a pension down the road? I think that’s vital information for young readers.

Did you know that Harriet Tubman was going to be the kickoff book for the series when you started working on the project?
I didn’t know that. But I think that Harriet Tubman is really the perfect persister to lead the parade, if you will. So many women who came after Harriet, even women today, credit her for being the one that blazed that trail. And so many of the women that are featured in the series point to Harriet Tubman and say, those are the shoulders I stand on. The Kamala Harri ses of tomorrow are reading the She Persisted series today. And thank goodness they have these books, because they’re going to be the ones who have that hand on the Bible and are being sworn in.

How did you feel watching Kamala Harris be sworn in?
I felt proud and exhilarated and hopeful and all of those things, but those words feel too small for the intensity of the moment. I was looking at it through several lenses. I was looking at it through the lens of my mom, who was one of the first women of color to be part of the League of Women Voters. I look at it through the lens of my own daughter—her world is even more wide open. And I look at it through my own lens, as an author and publisher and parent and social justice advocate. It struck me from many vantage points.

Your mom was in the League of Women Voters, and wasn’t your dad an activist as well?
In 1959, my dad, the late Philip J. Davis, was one of the first Black interns to work on Capitol Hill in the House of Representatives. His life goal was to learn the inner workings of Congress with an eye toward making changes, and he did that. He later went on to work in the Department of Labor, advising several presidential administrations on labor policy and civil rights practice as it relates to people of color and women. That’s the family tree from which I come. As I look back now, I took it for granted that as a kid, I would answer the phone and I’d say, “Dad, it’s Jesse Jackson.”

When did you realize that not every other kid was having those experiences?
When I would go back to school in September, and every year it was the same situation—you know, what did you do last summer? My answer was always the same. I went to the National Urban League, I went to the NAACP conference. And right as we come into the school year, I’m going to the Congressional Black Caucus. I always said it with a little bit of an eye roll, because everybody else was [talking about] sleep-away camp, the beach, you know, this and that.

As young Andrea Davis, did you have the expectation that you would have this twin purpose of not only supporting yourself but also continuing in your parents’ activist path?
Yes. Absolutely. I learned very early that the pen is very powerful. And when used to the right purpose, you can make a change through writing.

Talking about the power of the pen, as I was reading your book, all I could think was, what could Harriet Tubman have done had she had the advantage of literacy?
I know—what a force. You asked about the Kamala Harris moment. I did have the feeling when I watched Kamala Harris being sworn in that Harriet Tubman would have been there. She would have been at that inauguration with her mask on and social distancing—all 5 feet of her.

What characteristics of Harriet Tubman’s do you want young readers to come away with?
She was unstoppable. Look at everything that she endured. Not only the 300 passengers that she ushered to freedom, but going up against men, even Black men who doubted her. I think if Harriet rang my doorbell in Brooklyn, New York, and I invited her in, and we sat down, I would ask her, “Sister Harriet, what did you do when you wanted to say, ‘Enough—I can’t take another step?’ What did you do?” And my guess is that she would say, “I kept going.” That’s what courage is, that’s what faith is.

Do you have any final words about Harriet Tubman (or anything else)?
You may not have heard that we She Persisted authors have dubbed ourselves the Persisterhood. It’s really emblematic of everything that we’re talking about today—that we are sister authors telling these vital, important stories in new ways.

Harriet Tubman received a starred review in the Dec. 1, 2020, issue.
An Encrypted Clue

Cole, David
Illus. by O'Toole, Shannon
Common Deer Press (145 pp.)
$11.95 paper | Apr. 1, 2021
978-1-988761-56-5
Series: The Math Kids, 4

The four fourth grade Math Kids discover a cipher which leads them on a treasure hunt.

Jordan and his friends, having defeated all the other fourth grade classes in their school, busily prep for the district math contest by solving challenging logic puzzles. But do they have a real-life puzzle to solve, as well? Stephanie finds strange symbols written in a library book. Justin immediately identifies the symbols as a pigpen cipher, and the Math Kids are off on an adventure. The pigpen cipher leads to another puzzle that seems to be nonsense blocks of letters. Each puzzle points to another, with both the ciphers and the math-contest practice presenting many opportunities for interested readers to try for a solution themselves. Frustratingly, know-it-all Justin, illustrated as White, has more of the puzzle-solving epiphanies than all of his friends put together; Stephanie, illustrated with brown skin, has almost none. (In the simple, semirealistic illustrations, Jordan also has brown skin, and Catherine presents White.) Nonetheless, the exciting conclusion is a true group solve, with the kids deciphering the overall metapuzzle, accomplishing as a team what they never could have solo. An appendix doesn’t always clarify, but its explanations of cryptography and the Enigma Machine are stellar.

Math, logic problems, and puzzles solvable by readers who want to try, all in a diverting chapter-book mystery. (Mystery 8-11)

Yes & No

Cooper, Elisha
Illus. by the author
Roaring Brook (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-1-250-25733-8

The maxim that cats and dogs get along like...well, cats and dogs, is upended.

The unseen guardian of a cat and dog awakens the pets cheerfully, asks how they slept, offers breakfast, invites them to clean up and play together, then suggests they frolic outside. To every comment, the canine responds affirmatively; the feline—quite the opposite. For example, does it want food? Answer: “I already ate.” Will it help clean? The haughty response: “Never.” Backyard merriment doesn’t go well, as the dog attacks the clothesline and digs holes, and the cat climbs a tree. Finally commanded to play together farther from home, the duo are depicted wordlessly marveling at nature in engaging, colorful panoramic spreads. Eventually, they have a grand time—and the tables get turned. When the owner finally summons the pair home, the cat willingly complies. However, the pooch, now the naysaying contrarian, only reluctantly accedes to its human’s ideas, expressing sorrow the great day is over. A calming, reassuring reminder to the dog at the conclusion sets things right, and, in a comic twist, the animals’ customary natures are restored. This sweet, gentle story reminds youngsters that ye and no have their proper places and times and that all good things don’t necessarily end. The deceptively simply drawn, definitively lined ink-and-watercolor illustrations with their limited palette capture the animals’ lively personalities well; ample white space focuses attention on their activities. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 85.9% of actual size.)

Children will say, “Yes!” to this delightful charmer. (Picture book 3-6)

Hello World!

Corrigan, Kelly
Illus. by Ebert, Stacy
Flamingo Books (44 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 6, 2021
978-0-593-20606-5

Cultivate interest not simply in the world, but also in the people who inhabit it.

Behind the facade of yet another picture book to hand to graduates lies a title with grander ambitions. A kid scooters off into the world to text that relates the wonders to come. Using the letter B (for no apparent reason) as a touchstone, the text catalogs everything from bobsledding to boredom. This is all well and good, but the true treasures come when one realizes, “There’s more to everyone than you think.” Readers are encouraged not merely to look and draw assumptions, but to ask people questions to learn more. Characters introduced early appear later with some context. A bicycling ballerina “misses her grandpa Benny,” and “the bully was bullied” (a sign held by a disembodied hand reads, “That’s how he learned to do it”). Even the endpapers get into the act, featuring balloons that sport questions like “What makes someone smart?” and “What’s the best gift you ever got?” This emphasis on humanity separates this title from books that offer empty aphorisms about getting through life. Meanwhile, the cheery art displays a Seussian sensibility but populates its hopeful world with lots of different kinds of people. The brown-skinned protagonist appears to be biracial, with a White-presenting mom and darker-brown-skinned dad who bid their offspring farewell on the first page. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10.3-by-20.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 86% of actual size.)

Less Oh, the Places You’ll Go and more “Oh, the people you will know.” (Picture books 4-8)
“Centers the story on an Indigenous understanding of treaties in their truest sense.”

TREATY WORDS

IF I WERE A DOG
Cotler, Joanna
Illus. by the author
Philomel (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 27, 2021
978-0-593-11610-4

No wonder kids and dogs get along well. They’re so much alike.

To hear the young narrator of this story tell it, they and dogs share all the characteristics that count—silliness, patience, nosiness, shyness, grumpiness, happiness, greater or lesser feelings of self-esteem, playfulness, and a host of other traits and feelings that children often (pups not so often) keep to themselves, including worry and loneliness. Like children, dogs might make mischief and have siblings and pals. In the end, no matter what, children and dogs can be assured of being loved. This brief, sweet, quiet book resounds with reassurance, and readers/listeners will snuggle to hear it, just as cuddling pooches do, in laps, at bedtime, or in small group-reading sessions. The watercolor illustrations’ palette is simple and features shades of blue, white, and black. The gently expressive artwork highlights dogs of various breeds and sizes and presents them against plenty of white space to keep young eyes focused on the pups’ activities. The narrator is seen only in opening and closing spreads and is depicted as a dark blue silhouette; a parent/adult caregiver and a dachshund join them in the final heartwarming illustration. Kids and dogs frolic on endpapers. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9- by-18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 45.9% of actual size.)

A sweet treat for dog lovers. (Picture book: 3-6)

TREATY WORDS
For as Long as the Rivers Flow
Craft, Aimée
Illus. by Swinson, Luke
Annick Press (60 pp.)
$14.95 | Mar. 9, 2021
978-1-77321-496-2

Relationships between people and land, grandfather and granddaughter, frame a story on the significance of treaties.

Whether spending time “on and with the river” researching and restocking sturgeon, leading mapping projects dedicated to highlighting original place names in Anishinaabemowin, or heading “into the bush” alone every spring, Mishomis has lived a full life “out on the land.” In order to impart lessons from his life and teach his granddaughter about the importance of maintaining a connection to place, he sits with her along a river bank. There, they “let the silence speak” until the sounds of nature provide an opportunity for him to remind her of her “responsibilities to this land and water, and to their stories.” But perhaps the most important teaching he hopes she carries forward—one rooted in the first treaty made “between the earth and the sky”—is the power of working together and acting with “respect, reciprocity and renewal.” Appropriately, this unique story’s plot doesn’t follow the typical narrative structure that revolves around conflict. Attorney Craft’s (Anishinaabe Métis) lyrical prose, richly layered with Anishinaabe language, culture, and philosophy, centers the story on an Indigenous understanding of treaties in their truest sense, as “agreements to make relationships.” Swinson’s (Anishinaabe) beautifully colored illustrations rendered in an arresting graphic style give a decidedly modern feel to a story that links generations. Its unusually small trim (4.5-by-6.5 inches) means it can travel in pockets as readers themselves engage with the land.

Meditative, devotional, and vital. (author’s note) (Picture book: 9-12)
“Little individualists will identify.”

**JET THE CAT (IS NOT A CAT)**

Crede, Phaea
Illus. by Runyan, Terry
Barefoot (32 pp.)
$16.99 | $8.99 paper | May 1, 2021
978-1-64686-166-8
978-1-64686-167-5 paper

This kitty is unconventional...does that make her less of a kitty? “Jet is a cat just like any other cat. / She loves to pounce. She loves to sprawl. / And, of course, she loves to swim.” Then Tom the Cat informs her that “real cats” don’t like swimming at all. He thinks she must be a frog. So...“Jet is a frog just like any other frog. / She loves to swim. She loves to eat bugs. / And, of course, she sings in a high voice.” Bull the Frog informs her that frogs have low voices, so Jet must be a bird.... She can’t fly, though, so she must be a goat. She doesn’t have a beard, however, so could she be a pig? A platypus? A goblin shark? What is she? She goes home for a relaxing swim, which centers her enough that she can now say, “I am a cat UNLIKE any other cat. / But I am still a cat. And a great cat at that.” This declaration prompts all the other animals to shout out their own peculiarities—which Jet is quite happy to accept. Crede’s tale of individuality and acceptance of self gets its point across in an age-appropriate manner. Little individualists will identify with Jet and respond favorably to Runyan’s cartoon illustrations of wide-eyed animals with bendy limbs and googly eyes.

A brightly colored story of self-discovery by process of elimination. (Picture book. 2-6)

**WHY CAN’T HORSES BURP?**

Curious Questions About Your Favorite Pets
Crump顿, Nick
Illus. by Snowden-Fine, Lily
Thames & Hudson (48 pp.)
$16.95 | Apr. 20, 2021
978-0-500-65230-5

Horse facts, basic and obscure, fill this oversized illustrated book.

Following Why Do Cats Meow? and Why Do Dogs Sniff Butts? (both 2020), this latest volume in a series on animals turns to horses of all kinds. Each spread focuses on one question, such as “How long have there been horses?” “Why do horses wear shoes?” and “Can a horse speak with its ears?” Short paragraphs responding with answers are spaced throughout each spread, around painted illustrations of horses against white backgrounds, in action scenes, or in portrait frames. Readers will learn the names of horses’ colors, the names of older and younger members of a herd, the relationships between humans and horses, the jobs horses do, which breeds are strongest, which are most easily trained, and, of course, why horses can’t burp, among other things. While the title implies that the book will be filled with quirky, unusual facts, most of the information is fairly basic—enlightening for beginner horse enthusiasts but less so for those who have already been delving into equine affairs. The writing style is plain, and bolded headings make browsing easy. The delicate watercolor illustrations are realistic enough to be informative but also playful in places, depicting horses with eyebrows to exaggerate their emotions in one spread, for instance. A number of famous horses from history are featured as well. Humans are pictured in a variety of skin tones.

A fun gift or reference book for the newer horse enthusiast. (glossary, index) (Nonfiction. 5-9)

**ANTARCTICA**

A Continent of Wonder

Cuesta Hernando, Mario
Illus. by Martin, Raquel
Trans. by Kelly, Paul
Prestel (48 pp.)
$19.95 | Apr. 20, 2021
978-3-7913-7456-7 paper
978-3-7913-7457-4

This Spanish import via Germany offers glimpses of the southernmost continent framed as a quick tribute/travelogue.

Cuesta Hernando begins the book by describing a sea voyage to McMurdo Station in a faux journal format but is inconsistent about maintaining it. After galleries of Antarctic whales, seals, and penguins, he moves on to various Antarctica-related topics. These include daily life at a research station, climatological facts about the continent, a bulleted list of human-caused “Lurking Dangers” to the ecosystem, a discussion of volcanoes, a Eurocentric “Who Discovered Antarctica” entry, a page of arbitrary facts that does double duty as a glossary, and a closing note about climate change...at both poles. The facts have been strung together with little apparent sense of flow; a picture caption that mentions the Antarctic Treaty occurring several pages before the topical spread that explains it. Along with icescapes and wildlife, Martin’s reasonably accurate paintings offer views of McMurdo scientists (mostly but not entirely White) at work inside and out, a volcano, the Antarctic seabed, and the southern aurora. Armchair naturalists and explorers will be better served by the closer encounters described in, for instance, Sally M. Walker’s Frozen Secrets (2010) or Sophie Webb’s evocative My Season With Penguins (2000). (This was reviewed digitally with 14.5-by-23-inch double-page spreads viewed at 50% of actual size.)

A disjointed jumble—the parts (some of them, anyway) better than the whole. (map) (Nonfiction. 7-9)
A bird leaves home in a fit of pique. Barnaby, a blue budgie, lives with a White lady who feeds him “sunflower seeds and pieces of sweet mango.” For a different bird, this might be a gilded-cage existence (literally): “His cage was gold and shaped like a gumdrop castle. He had a swing and a ring, a rope to chew, and bells that jingle-jangled.” But far from feeling confined, Barnaby genuinely loves the cozy home with patched-up furniture and the human whose neck he nuzzles during his free fly-around time. Everything’s copacetic until the lady dares to bring home a second bird. “Barnaby ignores[s] the little yellow puff,” throws tantrums, and storms out the open window into the wild blue yonder. His time in nature with a flock of strangers mellows his snobbery and sense of entitlement; when he returns, he mirrors a kindness for the yellow bird that an outdoor bird modeled for him. Curtis mentions no emotions, instead using poetic figures of speech: Doubt and isolation are “silence heavy on [Barnaby’s] wings”; when Barnaby finally accepts the new family member, the yellow bird’s feathers look “soft as summer wind.” Reich’s gouache paintings with colored pencil are honey-toned and golden except the scene of Barnaby’s furious departure, which is awash with uneasy green. The lady’s off-center mouth shows a wry and solid wisdom while a crucial berry is unforgettably red and specific.

Full of feeling. (Picture book. 3-8)
THE FIFTH QUARTER
Dawson, Mike
Illustrations: by the author
First Second (240 pp.)
$12.99 paper | May 11, 2021
978-1-250-24418-5

Practice makes perfect, or at least better—both in basketball and in friendship.

Lori may be only good enough on the boards to play in her fourth grade team’s informal “fifth quarter” warmups, but her determination to improve burns steadily enough to prompt signing up for both youth league and an intensive girls basketball camp at the local college. While chronicling plenty of realistically aggressive game and practice action in the tight but cleanly drawn panels, Dawson hands his protagonist a different sort of challenge too, as Lori discovers that Elyse, a likewise unskilled teammate she had pegged as a friend stealer, is actually an admirer who has been inspired by Lori’s focus. In a thematically similar side plot, Lori’s own mom nervously announces that she’s going to run for town council. By the time fifth grade tryouts roll around, the work both girls have put into their games and their relationship bears fruit—and if the political campaign doesn’t end so happily, still Lori expresses stout pride that her mom had the courage to try. That sentiment along with a more experienced player’s “If you want to win you can’t be scared you’ll lose” make up the main message in this first of a planned duology. The bright, saturated color palette and characters’ expressive faces complement this engaging, fast-paced story. Racially ambiguous Lori and her parents have black hair and light skin; the cast is visibly diverse.

Nothing but net. (Graphic fiction. 10-13)

AWESOME DOG 5000 VS. THE KITTY-CAT CYBER SQUAD
Dean, Justin
Random House (224 pp.)
$13.99 | $16.99 PLB | May 4, 2021
978-0-593-17282-7
978-0-593-17284-1 PLB
Series: Awesome Dog 5000, 3

Marty, Ralph, Skyler, and Awesome Dog 5000 go public as superheroes in this third outing.

After the public battle against the former mayor, Townville plans an award ceremony for Awesome Dog. The human heroes (White-appearing Marty and Ralph and Korean-coded Skyler) decide to don superhero costumes and identities in order to attract the attention of obsessive fangirl Tina Tinkerwith, who reads as Black. Upon losing her job as a toy inventor, Tina is tricked into villainy as a way to get closer to her idols. The comic-book-genre savvy is combined with fourth wall-breaking humor (such as an introductory guide giving page numbers for recaps based on readers’ needs and a gag inviting readers into a staring contest with a drawing of a snail) and, of course, fart jokes. Fact-spouting Ralph is the emotional focus of this one—his more conventional friends take to heroics more easily, and he struggles to feel like he belongs. This storyline is more successful than previous ones because it includes his difficulties outside of the heroic arena. That said, plenty of page space (and silly illustrations) is devoted to the escalating battles against Tina’s alter ego, Lady Catastrophe (“emphasis on the C-A-T,” reflecting her robotic feline criminal army). A puzzle at the end provides breadcrumbs for the next sequel.

A solidly funny book that knows its audience. (Science fiction. 7-11)

HABITATS
How Adventurers, Artists, Scientists—and You—Can Protect Earth’s Habitats
Debbink, Andrea
Illustrations: by Orlando, Asia
Quirk Books (232 pp.)
$19.99 paper | May 25, 2021
978-1-68369-246-1
Series: The Wild World Handbook, 1

A hands-on handbook that traverses nine habitats around the globe, sharing stories of nature protectors and encouraging new ones.

Well-designed and smartly organized, this handsome title demonstrates the wide range of ways the environment can be protected. Each chapter focuses on one habitat: mountains, forests, deserts, polar lands, ocean, freshwater, cities, rainforests, and grasslands. The structure of each chapter is simple to follow and is repeated consistently, including profiles of two individuals, a description of a natural wonder, creative ways to experience the habitat close to home, an environmental success story, a DIY project, and concrete steps readers can take to protect this habitat. With every turn of the page, stimulating stories, compelling facts, colorful pictures, and action items provide ideas for readers. The biographies and success stories are entertaining human-interest tales that read like short stories. The habitat protectors vary in age, gender, ability, nationality, and race—some, like Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai, are modern while others, such as Central Park designer Frederick Law Olmsted, are historical. The suggested activities are interdisciplinary, providing inspiration that proves that all types of people can enjoy and protect nature. Orlando’s truly beautiful art, with its soft edges and natural tones, contributes to the inviting, welcoming reading experience.

A strong choice for any young reader interested in the natural world. (Bibliography, index) (Nonfiction. 8-12)
“A highly inventive, magic-filled fantasy.”

REA AND THE BLOOD OF THE NECTAR

Doshi, Payal
Mango and Marigold Press (350 pp.)
$19.95 | Jun. 15, 2021
978-1-64543-763-5
Series: Chronicles of Astranthia, 1

Rea Chetri is tired of living in her twin brother Rohan’s shadow. He gets better grades, has more friends, and gets off easy on his chores. Her feelings of insecurity and questions about their absent father have driven the twins apart. When Rohan goes missing on their 12th birthday, the strange way her family reacts prompts Rea to investigate. She embarks on an otherworldly quest to rescue her brother and save the Kingdom of Astranthia. During this journey, Rea is challenged both by the dangers of this magical land and by her own selfishness. Through new friendships with neighbor Leela, who accompanies her, and Xeranther, an Astranthian they encounter, Rea develops empathy and becomes more altruistic. Her personal growth unlocks a powerful family secret that is the key to saving both Rohan and Astranthia. This original fantasy features an Indian heroine alongside mythical creatures with origins from various cultures. Reflecting the Darjeeling setting, Hindi and Nepali terms are naturally woven throughout the text. Though the pacing is uneven and Rea’s feelings and motivations are sometimes too explicitly spelled out for readers, her adventure is full of action and humor, and her development from selfish to selfless is an admirable one.

ALICE FLECK’S RECIPES FOR DISASTER

Delaney, Rachelle
Puffin/Penguin Random House Canada (256 pp.)
$17.99 | May 11, 2021
978-0-7352-6927-9

Mix one shy tween, one unwelcome new woman in her single dad’s life, one Victorian hotel, and one TV cook-off prone to mysterious failures. Shake and bake.

Ever since the fifth grade calf’s foot jelly incident, Alice has kept her love for cookery on the down low—but all bets are off after she learns that Hana, her food historian dad’s girlfriend, has signed him up for a weeklong reality cooking competition ominously christened Culinary Combat. Events conspire to keep Alice on the hop too, as the challenge of facing the show’s caustic, terrifying judge while preparing dishes like Victoria sponge cake and charlotte russe on camera—at first as her dad’s sous-chef, then alone after he’s eliminated for alleged misbehavior—is complicated by a string of malfunctioning appliances and other odd kitchen mishaps...not to mention her own tangled feelings about Hana, who introduces her to the intriguing world of Japanese desserts and is actually pretty cool in other ways. Spooning new friends with surprising talents, savvy detective work (it turns out the show does have a saboteur), and mouthwatering foodie talk (if no actual recipes) into this culinary caper, Delaney dishes up a savory tale that tests her young cuisinier—in the face of change as much as in the kitchen—on the way to a flying finish. Alice and her dad present White; Hana has some Japanese ancestry; and there is diversity in the supporting cast.

Generous portions of yum for fans of mysteries and millefeuille. (Mystery. 10-13)

REPTILES EVERYWHERE

de la Bédoyère, Camilla
Illus. by Teckentrup, Britta
Big Picture/Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-0-7352-6926-2

An introduction to everyone’s favorite coldblooded, scaly land (mostly) creatures.

De la Bédoyère tackles her topic in pithy, systematic observations. She opens with a look at reptilian types and anatomy, then surveys both modern and extinct species, then introduces reptiles resident in the Borneo rainforest and other habitats, discusses feeding and parenting patterns, explores survival strategies, explains brumation and other temperature-control mechanisms, looks at sea-turtle migration, and, to close, interrogates our various interactions with reptiles, from fashion and science to conservation efforts. Using what looks like a mix of brushwork and painted paper collage, Teckentrup depicts dozens of flat but realistically detailed snakes, lizards, and crocodilians, all labeled and posing individually or in groups in natural settings. Regular invitations to count or spot dinosaurs, camouflaged geckos, tiny Brookesia chameleons, a baby Komodo dragon, or other creatures will tempt viewers to linger over scenes and take closer looks at the flora as well as the fauna. Though realistic, the illustrations are not without whimsy. A depiction of a pit viper sensing a rat’s body heat positions the rodent’s silhouette as if seen with an infrared camera, a cone of white extending down from the snake’s eyes; a mother timber rattlesnake looks protectively behind her at her brood of snakelets. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11.8-inch double-page spreads viewed at 60% of actual size.)

A meaty but easily digestible overview. (Informational picture book. 7-9)

ALA PRIMO 2021
Onjali Q. Raúf’s *The Star Outside My Window* (Delacorte, Jan. 19) is a powerful tale following two siblings—10-year-old Aniyah and 5-year-old Noah—as they arrive at their new foster home near Oxford, England. It soon becomes clear to the reader that the kids are survivors of domestic abuse and that Aniyah is deeply traumatized by something she witnessed: She has lost her voice, doesn’t remember the events that led them here, and believes her missing mother, Isabella, is now a star. After hearing on the news that astronomers have spotted a new star passing close to Earth, Aniyah is sure it is her mother and that they must go to the Royal Observatory in Greenwich to properly name it.

Despite its difficult subject, the novel also has fun, adventurous moments. Was it hard to find a balance?

Absolutely! This book felt horribly difficult to write, and I had so many false starts with it because I just couldn’t find that balance. At one point, I seriously thought about emailing my agent to tell her it was game over and that I couldn’t do it. But then a breakthrough stepped up in the most unexpected form: through my brother! He was seeing me spiral and asked me to explain to him what the story was about. I told him that all I knew was it featured a little girl, obsessed with the stars, who believes her mum has become one. It wasn’t until he uttered the magical words, “Oh, you mean kind of like Simba in *The Lion King*?” that everything clicked into place. The “fun” element was vital, otherwise the story would be too heavy and unbearable to read.

What’s striking about the book is how “voice” is essential to the storytelling: Aniyah loses her voice due to trauma, but her internal narrative voice is unreliable because her memory of events has been affected. Similarly, her mother used her own voice the only way she could: to protect her kids from the truth of the domestic abuse they endured.

I love that you picked up on the incomplete, slightly skewed, and in many ways silenced truths of a mother and daughter who are both bearing the brunt of the unbearable. With most survivors of abuse—no matter what form that abuse might have taken—storytelling, reinvention, or an outright blocking out of trauma often become a medium through which to cope and survive. There has to be something to numb the pain that otherwise would be too much to endure. For Aniyah, it’s her body literally wiping out her voice and blurring the truth. For her mum, it was reinterpreting what was really happening into something else completely so that her children could survive it all alongside her.

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I understand that some of the inspiration for the novel comes from a deeply personal experience. I wish it wasn’t the case every single day, but yes, that’s true. The book is dedicated to my beloved aunt, Mumtahina ‘Ruma’ Jannat, and my two beautiful nieces who have had to live through and survive their mother being stolen from them by a man who couldn’t bear not to have control over them all. Exactly like Aniyah and Noah. My aunt fought tooth and nail for her life and for her daughters to stay safe, and we were with her every step of that fight. But in the end, the judges, the social care workers, and all involved believed him and chose to disbelieve her and discredit her experiences. Despite my aunt’s warnings — on record — that he had told her he was going to kill her and that no one could stop him, her abuser was still granted access to her two beautiful children — through which, of course, he was able to gain more access to her and do just what he said he would. I will never forget the day I received that call. And then suddenly having my nieces be taken away and immersed in a system none of us knew anything about as a court case ensued and our lives were put in danger, too. That pain and the dealing with it will last a lifetime, and this story, thanks to my editor suggesting I write it, has in some ways helped me confront it. I just wanted more eyes to note how children remain largely forgotten when it comes to speaking about domestic violence. And how desperately that needs to change.

In addition to being a writer, you are also the founder of an important and inspiring organization called Making Herstory.

I set up Making Herstory unofficially as a book club just a few months after my aunt’s murder. I thought if I could set up a feminist book club, raise awareness about the injustices women have endured for time immemorial, and donate any money raised to a local women’s refuge, then maybe it would help me get to grips with what had happened and renew hope somehow.

But what was a book club became a jumping-off point. The women’s refuge we were donating to began asking for basics like bed sheets and toothbrushes and toiletry kits and lamps. I started hosting fun, larger events, like an *Alice in Wonderland* tea party, and the odd quiz night, and a Harry Potter dinner, to raise more money for more refuges. Meanwhile, because I had written about my aunt’s case in the *Guardian*, I was asked to speak about her case and what needed changing to local authorities and colleges and then about Making Herstory in schools more and more.

Now we deliver pre-packed suitcases twice a year to a network of shelters; have an emergency survivors’ fund to pay for hotel rooms when beds aren’t available in shelters or to purchase things that the shelters can’t afford; lobby the government in support of campaigns and crucial cases brought forward by the Centre for Women’s Justice, the NIA, Woman’s Place U.K., and others.

It’s been an incredible journey — and at moments, one that feels too tough to go on with. But now that *The Star Outside My Window* is a part of it (a portion of all royalties goes back into its works), I seem to have come full circle in a way. MH started with sharing books and stories in hopes that by doing so, we could help some of the bravest women in the world, and their children, escape violence and find sanctuary. That aim, by some wondrous twist of fate, now comes with its very own book cover and a story to hopefully help our children do just that.

Ana Grilo is co-editor of the Hugo Award–winning blog The Book Smugglers and co-host of the Fangirl Happy Hour podcast. *The Star Outside My Window* received a starred review in the Nov. 15, 2020, issue.
“This subtle metaphor for experiencing and processing grief, depression, or trauma invites reading and rereading.”

**THE DAY THE RAIN MOVED IN**

Dougherty, Brandi
Illus. by Pooler, Paige
Andrews McMeel Publishing (96 pp.)
$6.99 paper | Apr. 20, 2021
978-1-7448-6474-3
Series: Bark Park, 2

A dog solves three mysteries.

Scout is a dog of undisclosed breed who appears to visit Bark Park daily with her human. There, she talks with her friends, eats snacks provided by her human, and solves mysteries. Each of the three chapters is a self-contained mystery that barely warrants the label. It may appear to be splitting hairs to point out that dogs most likely would recognize a sweater (which the plot of “The Mystery Material” turns on) even if they hadn't seen one on another dog, considering how many humans wear sweaters. This also speaks to the quality of the mysteries. Early chapter-book readers may be developing their reading skills, but their critical-thinking skills will generally be advanced enough that the “mysteries” in this book will (most likely) not be mysteries to them. This suits the book best for the audience (such as Dori Hillestad Butler and Nancy Meyers’ King & Kayla series) aren’t so prominent here. Pooler’s full-color spot illustrations help to distinguish the characters, and three separate factual notes that touch on elements found in canine humor and charm found in other dog-centric books for the audience (such as Dori Hillestad Butler and Nancy Meyers’ King & Kayla series) aren’t so prominent here. Pooler’s full-color spot illustrations help to distinguish the characters, and three separate factual notes that touch on elements found in each chapter conclude the book.

In future, let’s hope Scout uncovers some mysteries worthy of her commitment to sleuthing. (Mystery. 6-9)

**SCOUTING FOR CLUES**

Dougherty, Brandi
Illus. by Pooler, Paige
Andrews McMeel Publishing (96 pp.)
$6.99 paper | Apr. 20, 2021
978-1-7448-6474-3
Series: Bark Park, 2

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THE DAY THE RAIN MOVED IN

Douspis, Éléonore
Illus. by the author
Groundwood (32 pp.)
$18.95 | Apr. 6, 2021
978-1-77306-481-9

What do you do when it starts raining inside your house?

Uninvited, the rain moves inside the house. Huddled and wet, Pauline and Louis watch the rain fall. Their family tries to stop the rain, but nothing works. Outside in the sunshine, the children go to school, hiding their secret from their joyful classmates. Back at home, a seedling sprouts through the kitchen floor. Soon the house is bursting with plants and animals. The siblings watch as their father opens the door to their curious classmates, who marvel at the “unlikely new playground” inside their house. Eventually, the life inside outgrows the house itself, with sky-reaching branches shooting through the walls and roof. Finally, the rain stops, and sunlight fills the transformed house. Translated from French, the sparse, poetic text is at once specific and open to interpretation. This quietly resilient story, a subtle metaphor for experiencing and processing grief, depression, or trauma, invites reading and rereading as small visual and textual elements are discovered and examined. The relationship between inside and outside hinted at in the text is compellingly explored in the illustrations. Colorful accents create balance and focus against the sparse neutral brown and gray backgrounds of the house’s interior and the desertlike outside world. Pauline and Louis, along with the rest of their family, have straight black hair and rosy-tan skin. The schoolchildren are diverse in appearance. (This book was reviewed digitally with 7.5-by-20.8-inch double-page spreads viewed at 89% of actual size.)

Visually and textually poetic, this contemplative story continues to grow through repeated visits. (Picture book. 4-9)

A GIANT MESS

Ebbeler, Jeffrey
Illus. by the author
Holiday House (40 pp.)
$14.99 | $7.99 paper | Apr. 6, 2021
978-0-8234-4639-1
978-0-8234-4934-7 paper
Series: I Like To Read Comics

A child doesn’t want to clean up after playtime, only to discover a mess that’s much bigger.

Molly, a White child cued as a girl with pigtails and a bright orange dress, is having fun playing with an abundance of toys. When Mom tells her to clean up the “giant mess,” Molly starts to throw a tantrum—only to be interrupted by a literal giant. Bright green and bushy-eyebrowed, giant toddler Jack (cued as a boy with oversized sweater and red pants) runs through Molly’s neighborhood, using houses, infrastructure, animals, and people as playthings. When Jack’s parents insist he clean up his “toys,” Jack begins to throw a tantrum, and Molly decides to pass down the lesson she’s been taught: You should clean up the mess you make. Unfortunately, Jack leaves the job unfinished, and Molly finds her room even messier than before. The upside-down second story of the house puts a whole new spin on Mom’s request that Molly “pick up your room.” Simple sentences and short sight words are apt for a new reader. Full of big facial expressions, sweeping movement, and destructive chaos, the dynamic illustrations carry the book. While some may find the double-entendre concept and resulting chaos humorous, the comedy is flattened by giant disparities of gender and power, as a girl and her mother are left to clean up after a (giant) boy who treats them like objects.

Something of a mess indeed. (Graphic early reader. 4-8)
LILY’S PROMISE
Erskine, Kathryn
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins
(288 pp.)
$16.99 | May 18, 2021
978-0-06-305815-6

While finding her own voice, a shy sixth grader speaks up for bullied students.

Grieving the death of her father, Lily must adjust from home-schooling to enrolling in a public elementary school as well. Instantly befriended by Hobart, a gregarious boy who interjects his love for the sport of curling whenever he can, Lily sees that he’s bullied by wealthy classmate Ryan, who also targets her. The quiet, observant tween also can’t help but notice that Skylar (a boy presumably living in poverty because he wears the same clothes and has little to eat at lunch) and Dunya (a refugee from Iraq) are more of Ryan’s victims. Erskine aptly conveys Lily’s inner struggle between her reserved demeanor and her desire to stand up to bullying. Motivating Lily is her deathbed promise to her father to find ways to speak up and make her voice heard. With increasing self-esteem, Lily, along with Hobart, Skylar, and Dunya, not only finds ways to address bullying, but to spark kindness and respect throughout their school. Although the effect can be heavy-handed, the metafiction appearance between chapters of “Libro,” the voice of the physical book, adds humor and draws attention to the literary craft. As Lily takes the biggest chance yet, an open ending lets readers envision her success. With the exception of Dunya, Lily and most of her peers present as White.

Even the quietest readers will cheer. (Fiction. 8-12)

I’LL BUILD YOU A BOOKCASE / TE HARÉ TU PROPIO LIBRERO
Fabey, Jean Giborowski
Illus. by Shin, Simone
Trans. by Canetti, Yanitzia
Lee & Low Books (32 pp.)
$14.95 | Mar. 16, 2021
978-1-64379-4019-1

In rhyming text this bilingual (Spanish/English) book details the pleasures children and adults will find reading together from birth through the rest of childhood.

Gentle illustrations that combine the looks of print and collage depict a pregnant Black mother preparing for the arrival of her baby by making a bookcase out of old shoeboxes. “I’ll build you a bookcase before you are born / that’s made out of boxes from shoes that were worn.” In the next double-page spread, two White dads describe the kinds of books that will go in the bookcase for their infant child: “for books we will read in the soft morning light / and books we will read before saying good night.” Each new double-page spread shows a different set of adults and children: a multiracial family, a Muslim mother and child; black, White, brown, and Asian adults and children; old and young people; and a child in a wheelchair. And each spread details the wondrous worlds books will open up: “We’ll learn about bluebirds that live in a tree / and giant green turtles that nest near the sea.” There’s also a clear message aimed at adults: “I’ll build you a bookcase for when you turn 2, / my phone tucked away so it’s just me and you.” Backmatter tips on reading with children reemphasize the text’s message. The Spanish translation, done by Canetti, captures the mood and the rhythm of the original English text.

A how-to for adults that they can share with children. (Picture book. 3-5)

AMIRA’S PICTURE DAY
Faruqi, Reem
Illus. by Azim, Fahmida
Holiday House (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 6, 2021
978-0-8234-4019-1

Amira and her brother scan the sky, looking for the sliver-thin crescent moon that will tell them that Eid is the next day.

With her hands decorated, goody bags ready for kids at the masjid (Faruqi uses the Arabic term for mosque throughout), new Eid clothes, and the knowledge that she will be missing school to celebrate Eid, Amira is excited! But then she notices the flyer on the fridge and remembers tomorrow is Picture Day. She doesn’t want to miss her class picture! But the next day, “seeing the masjid, Amira’s sadness floated away. Her mouth popped open. She could hardly recognize it.” She’s happy during Eid prayers and when greeting friends and family—until she remembers Picture Day. But maybe there’s a way she can do both? Faruqi effectively builds up the excitement to celebrate Eid and balances it with Amira’s distress at missing Picture Day—readers will see that both are important. The characters and interactions at the masjid are real, reinforcing a community celebrating Eid, and so are Amira’s interactions with her classmates. Azim’s illustrations pair well with Faruqi’s words, focusing on facial expression as well as body language to highlight the mixed emotions: excitement, sadness, surprise. There is much diversity among the people at the masjid, including hijab styles, other attire, and racial presentation. Amira’s blue, mirror-bedecked shalwar kameez stands out. Her family is of South Asian heritage.

Sweet and sympathetic. (author’s note, more about Eid, glossary) (Picture book. 4-8)
A Pakistani girl’s life is uprooted when her family immigrates to the United States, where she struggles to fit in and remain true to herself.

Nurah is a 13-year-old girl living happily in Pakistan. She loves hanging out with her family and her best friend, but her favorite thing to do is swim. Everything changes when Nurah learns her father has accepted a job in America. While missing Karachi, they try to adjust to their new surroundings in Georgia, but learning to speak, dress, and act differently takes its toll on the family. Nurah and her older brother, Owais, find some happiness at the community pool. Although Nurah makes a friend in fellow swimmer Stahr, she becomes jealous of Owais, who has been more easily able to fit in and win swim meets. When a tragic incident befalls him—in part due to her jealousy—Nurah learns it’s better to stand up and stand out as who you are than try to conform. Faruqi’s lyrical, hopeful, poignant verse novel will resonate with the story of a Pakistani immigrant family. Qureshi’s floral and paisley spot art and illustrations of henna designs add delicate beauty.

Lyrically written, with its metaphors that emphasize feelings and details of daily life, Middle schoolers who struggle with fitting in will resonate with the story while also receiving a glimpse into the lives of a Pakistani immigrant family. Qureshi’s floral and paisley spot art and illustrations of hands with henna designs add delicate beauty.

An agreeable lesson in inclusion. (Verse novel. 10-13)

Edward wears checkered pants with suspenders. The band members play a wild variety of instruments, from harp and double bass to accordion and toy xylophone. Their jungle is full of colorful variety, too. These bright, scribbly illustrations are the stars of the show. One striking scene shows Edward, drink in hand, enjoying a musical performance, clearly part of the circle even in his role as audience—which (it should have been noted) is also important. The circle is repeated on the last spread, when Edward and his new drum join the band. Whether by accident or design, Filipina often spaces her characters far enough apart from one another to suggest social distancing.

Possibilities abound in the latest picture book to tout a shiny tomorrow.

“Today is a triumph. It’s awesome. You’re great! / The things you’ve accomplished are truly first rate.” So begins a relentlessly cheery narrator who addresses a host of children of varying races and genders on what appears to be the last day of school. To the thump of its omnipresent glee they are presented with a wide array of occupations they may wish to pursue in the coming years. Whether they wish to become a detective, a baker, a politician, a mechanic, or any of the other jobs on display, children are told in no uncertain terms that they’ll be great no matter what. Even so, what they become is less important than who they become as a person. And, most importantly, the title of the book itself concludes the final line, beating home the overt messaging. Rhymes scan pleasantly, yielding few surprises. A stream of watercolor shades and hues slips from page to page, changing in tone and color as they go, providing a backdrop to the array of occupations on display. Not a drop of self-doubt can be found for miles. Amid all these rah-rah’s, it is difficult to locate any aspect of this book different from similar titles that flood the market each year. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9-by-18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 25% of actual size.)

Yet another picture book that hopes to fall into the hands of graduates everywhere. (Picture book. 4-8)
Flett shares the joyful antics of young animals as they romp in much the same way as human children. The rhythmic text offers both rich vocabulary and a page-turning chant. Woodland animals “hide and hop / and sniff and sneak” while Indigenous children, depicted in differing shades of brown, run, skip, jump, and hunt for butterflies. “We play! kimêtawânaw mina,” they proclaim in the refrain. Aquatic animals “swim and squirt / and bubble and bend” while children swim under the water and float on its surface, in inner tubes. On the prairie, snakes “slip and slide” through the grass while the hopping bunnies, the spouting beluga whale calves, and the yawning wolf pups. Flett’s characteristically minimalist compositions are deceptively simple. Readers who slow down to look will be charmed by the cricket that hops in tandem with a rabbit and the fox that stares in bemusement at a turtle. This celebration of nature is sprinkled with words from the Cree language, and a closing glossary provides both Cree and English names of the animals depicted; a note provides guidance on Cree pronunciation for readers not familiar with the language.

Simple text and bold, graphic illustrations celebrate our interconnection with the creatures who share our world. (author’s note) (Picture book. 3-7)
“Fried tells just enough of the horrors to help readers to a modicum of understanding.”

THE STORY OF BODRI

Fried, Hédi
Illus. by Wirsén, Stina
Trans. by Schenck, Linda
Eerdmans (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-0-8028-5565-7

A young girl is “a happy child in a happy place” until everything changes. Hédi lives in a little town in Hungary with her parents, her sister, Livia, and her dog, Bodri. She shares secrets and fun with her best friend, Marika. Hédi is Jewish and Marika is Christian, and that has not made a difference in their friendship. When Hitler’s frightening, hate-filled voice is heard, Hédi’s parents try to reassure the children. But the soldiers come and bring a new reality. “Hitler hated me and my family because we were Jewish.” Restrictions force Hédi’s family to stay indoors, always hoping things would get better, but of course they never did. They’re rounded up and put on a train for the camps. Dreaming of Bodri throughout her captivity keeps Hédi from total despair as the many months pass. Her parents are gone; she and her sister, their heads shaved, are hungry, cold, and filthy. The sisters survive and are miraculously reunited with faithful Bodri. In a brief introduction, Fried warns that her story is difficult for her to tell, but readers must listen. She speaks to a young audience in carefully chosen language, skillfully translated from Swedish by Schenck, telling just enough of the horrors to help them to a modicum of understanding in the hope that they will always choose good over evil. Wirsén’s liquid watercolors perfectly invoke that time of understanding in the hope that they will always choose good over evil. Reader to a modicum of understanding.

True and powerful in its simplicity. (Picture book/memoir 6-12)

THEORY WAS A SILLY UNICORN

Who Wanted to Fly

Geist, Ken
Illus. by Barclay, Eric
Orchard/Scholastic (32 pp.)
$14.99 | Apr. 6, 2021
978-0-545-65188-2

Will this little unicorn get her wish to soar through the bright, blue sky?

The action plays out in the patterned manner of “There Was an Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly.” Unfortunately, it struggles to achieve that classic’s familiar meter and scansion. “There was a silly unicorn who wanted to fly. / She tried by swallowing a bee. / The buzzing would surely make her go high.” She swallows a butterfly to assist the bee. Unfortunately for the other winged creatures in her vicinity, that does not help her to “dance with the trees.” She next gULPS down a bat. Still grounded, she gobbles an owl, to no avail. Even swallowing an eagle doesn’t get her into the air. But when she sees a rainbow, it magically lifts her into the sky...and the friends she swallowed in her misguided attempts to get airborne all magically pop out so they can “swirl and whirl and dance with the trees.” Barclay’s pudgy, pink unicorn and bright, generic landscapes can’t save this leaden effort, though the swirl of cakes and candies in the unicorn’s stomach do nicely echo the treacle in the text. The verse is maddeningly difficult to read aloud due to its chunky meter and frequent departure from its model’s form. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9.9-by-19-inch double-page spreads viewed at 15.9% of actual size)

Even the most rabid members of the unicorn-loving herd should stampede away. (Picture book 2-5)

BEAR BOTTOM

Gibbs, Stuart
Simon & Schuster (32 pp.)
$17.99 | May 11, 2021
978-1-5344-7946-3
Series: FunJungle, 7

Leaving FunJungle Adventure Park for a vacation on a ranch in West Yellowstone, 13-year-old Teddy and his girlfriend, Summer, find themselves searching for missing bison. The latest book in Gibbs’ FunJungle series leaves the adventure park for new territory. Even so, Teddy can’t seem to escape mysteries. While staying at the Oy Vey Corral, his skills as a teen detective are enlisted by the ranch owners to help find out who is stealing their purebred bison. When a grizzly bear named Sasquatch breaks into the ranch house late one night and Summer’s mother’s dazzling multimillion-dollar necklace goes missing, Teddy finds himself working not just one whodunit, but two. From an old hidden room for hiding bootleggers’ stashes to an abandoned gold mine and a bull on the loose, Gibbs keeps the pace moving and the action coming. While most of the main characters are presumed White, there is diversity in secondary characters. The owners of the Oy Vey Corral are Jewish. Gibbs doesn’t shy away from discussing America’s brutal treatment of Native peoples or the ways Americans have destroyed animal populations and habitats. This action-packed mystery with a satisfying resolution doesn’t rest on predictable thieves or obvious answers.

A thrilling, mystery-laden story with an incredible setting. (author’s note) (Mystery 9-12)
THE MOUSE WATCH
UNDERWATER
Gilbert, J.J.
Disney-Hyperion (240 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 4, 2021
978-1-368-05219-1
Series: The Mouse Watch, 2

The Mouse Watch returns. Bernie and Jarvis have settled back into their Mouse Watch training six months after saving the world. Bernie itches to move beyond her station as a Level One agent, to get out into the world and do more than rescue cats stuck in trees. Luckily adventure calls in the form of reports that the SS Moon, a spy vessel long thought lost, may still be out there with a map and the propulsive set pieces that made the first entry such a winner. Jarvis and Bernie continue to prove themselves as engaging protagonists who are supported by an array of old reliable characters from the Rescue Rangers cartoon as well as new additions to the franchise.

Corporate-branded adventure done right. (Adventure: 8-12)

BIRD HOUSE
Gómez, Blanca
Illus. by the author
Abrams (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 20, 2021
978-1-4197-4408-2

A little yellow bird is grounded in the snow with a broken leg when a child and their abuela rescue it.

Cupping it gently in her hands, Abuela takes the bird home and sets its leg while her grandchild eagerly looks on. Settling the bird in a domed cage, they both care for it until, soon, the bird is flying around the house—to the child’s delight and the cat’s frustration. The day comes to release the healed bird, and the child waves it on its way as it flies over the city. But one spring day a familiar sight greets them—their winged friend has returned. Although the child yearns to keep it, Abuela soothesingly reminds her grandchild that the bird belongs to itself and has the right to fly free. But Abuela constructs a sturdy birdhouse from a blueprint and mounts it beside the balcony door—an implicit invitation for future visits. Spanish author/illustrator Gómez’s semiautobiographical tribute to her own abuela is a charming window into an idyllic childhood infused with love for all living things. The simple, flowing first-person narrative flits from page to page in a gentle lilting commentary on harmony and respect. Gómez’s carefully constructed images, from the well-tended profusion of plants to the child-sized chair and mouse toy, are whimsically detailed and subtly compelling. Both child and Abuela have light-brown skin. A Spanish-language edition, Un pájaro en casa, publishes simultaneously. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-16-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.)

This little gem elicits a sense of deep-seated comfort and refuge for these uncertain times. (Picture book: 4-7) (Un pájaro en casa: 978-1-4197-4855-4)

KONDO & KEZUMI ARE NOT ALONE
Goodner, David
Illus. by Tsurumi, Andrea
Little, Brown (80 pp.)
$15.99 | Apr. 6, 2021
978-0-7595-5472-6
Series: Kondo & Kezumi, 3

Seafaring best friends experience new adventures both whimsical and thought-provoking.

Following Kondo & Kezumi Reach Bell Bottom (2021), this third series outing sees the titular pals deciding to take one last detour on their way back to their home island. At Tiny Island, they happen upon Lilliputian inhabitants known as the Teenies. Seeing what looks like beach debris and thinking they can help clean it up, Kondo and Kezumi begin to tidy it until they come to a shocking dual realization: Their help is a hindrance, and their large stature is terrifying the diminutive islanders. Once they arrive back at their native isle, something looks amiss: their large stature is terrifying the diminutive islanders. Once they arrive back at their native isle, something looks amiss: Their home is dripping with slime, and an unwelcome guest is creeping about. Circling back around to their time on Tiny Island, they suss out their feelings about judgments, perception, and giving the unfamiliar a chance; could what seems scary be a new opportunity? Goodner and Tsurumi’s latest installment offers a true visual feast, from the large, brightly rendered illustrations and imaginative worldbuilding all the way down to smaller details, such as the tiny lanterns that house each page number. Imbued with an easy-to-understand moral (it reads like a grandchild of the Berenstain Bears without all the hokiness), Goodner’s tale manages to steer clear of any mawkishness, bringing its narrative satisfyingly full circle. As Kondo and Kezumi resolve this adventure, more are promised for those who may be eagerly anticipating more fun.

A consistently clever and charming series. (Graphic fantasy: 7-10)
MR. MOLE MOVES IN

_**Green, Lesley-Anne**_  
Illus. by the author  
Tundra (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | Apr. 13, 2021  
978-1-912920-71-6  
Series: Juniper Hollow

When Mr. Mole moves to Juniper Hollow from Mole Town, his neighbors are a little surprised at his behavior.

Raccoon greets him, but Mr. Mole shakes hands with a tree branch instead. Rabbit waits to introduce her three bunnies, but the dapperly dressed mole courteously doffs his hat and apologizes to a fence post he walks into. Giraffe sits outside the general store with a large watermelon in her lap. Surprisingly, Mr. Mole says: “What a beautiful baby!” His puzzling behavior has the residents of Juniper Hollow inferring that this is how everybody is in Mole Town, but some knowledgeable readers may figure out that Mr. Mole has a vision problem. A young bunny wearing big round glasses realizes this, and when the townsfolk bring a gift basket to Mr. Mole’s cottage, she helpfully gives him her extra pair. The author/illustrator creates enticing felted animal figures, dressed in sweaters, skirts, and other clothing, and sets them in simple scenes. While the illustrations are appealing, the text is both on the long side for the intended age group and not all that exciting. Polite behavior is emphasized, but the extended joke about not seeing well is not very funny. Skip this one. (*This book was reviewed digitally with 8-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 30.6% of actual size.*)

_3-D critters in pleasing illustrations welcome Mr. Mole, but the chunky text does not charm._ (*Picture book. 4-6*)

THE STAR FESTIVAL

_Hadley, Mont Ritchie_  
Illus. by Fujisawa, Mizuho  
Whitman (32 pp.)  
$16.99 | Apr. 1, 2021  
978-0-8075-7595-6

_A spunky introduction to the origin and customs of Japan’s Star Festival._

Keiko, a young Japanese girl, is so excited to experience her fifth Tanabata Matsuri, which will also be her grandmother’s 85th. Her mother tries to help Keiko behave, but Oba understands Keiko’s bright enthusiasm. Together they all dress up in summer kimonos, put on their geta (one of the sandals falls off of Keiko’s foot), and make their way to the festival. Oba recounts the folk tale behind the festival, in which two stars fell in love and neglected their duties, causing the Emperor of the Heavens to prevent them from seeing each other. At the festival, Keiko marvels at the taiko drums, streamers, and slippery noodles. Suddenly, Mama notices that Oba is missing! The merry chaos of the festival impedes Mama and Keiko as they frantically search. When at last they reunite, they share the wishes they have made and return home after an eventful day. Themes from the folk story are woven into this family tale, the expressive text seamlessly incorporating Japanese words into the narrative and dialogue. Backmatter includes the story of Tanabata Matsuri as well as information about food, decorations, and instructions on creating a tanzaku for wish making. The warm, rich palette alternates between deep hues of blue and red and more muted pastels, with a particularly eye-catching spread of fireworks.

_A satisfying family story that weaves together cultural practices and intergenerational connections._ (*Picture book. 4-7*)

FACTOPIA!

_Follow the Trail of 400 Facts..._  
_Hale, Kate_  
Illus. by Smith, Andy  
Britannica Books (208 pp.)  
$14.99 | May 4, 2021  
978-1-912920-71-6

_Free association rules in this gathering of hundreds of facts about science, technology, and the natural world._

Strung along a single long, fine dotted line that meanders irregularly across each page from first to last, the one- or two-sentence factoids and observations veer from topic to topic but are linked by a key word or concept. The fact, for instance, that a rectangle has four sides leads to the note that there are four species of giraffes, then to the information that a group of giraffes is a “tower,” that the Eiffel Tower gets 60 tons of paint slapped on it every seven years, that cave artists added the mineral mica to their paint, that fluoride is a mineral, and so on and on. As one way to vary the pace of the onslaught of trivia, the line occasionally forks to send readers to a related sequence on another page, and as another, the illustrations mix bright stock photos and Smith’s comical cartoon figures in a broad range of sizes. Readers with attention spans on the short side may indeed find plenty of, as Hale promises, “mind-blowing, wow-worthy and crazily cool” facts, but the arbitrary ordering will quickly lead to informational overload with any sustained exposure. Alas, the “FACTopians” provide no sources beyond a slew of unidentified URLs at the end—to the various resources’ homepages, to boot, so would-be researchers who go to usgs.gov, for example, will be hard-pressed to find out exactly what information was gleaned from there.

_A real browsers’ buffet, though everything on the menu is appetizer sized._ (*Nonfiction. 6-10*)
When his messy, crowded environment becomes too chaotic, a young kangaroo reaches a tipping point.

Alexander loves “hanging out” with his mum, who’s great at skipping rope, cooking, playing the piano, and crafting. Unfortunately, Mum’s not very tidy and always overloads her pouch, where Alexander prefers to spend most of his time. The pouch is warm, cozy, and smells like Mum, but it’s also filled with her phone, wallet, shopping receipts, change, things she finds in the park, and sometimes his sister’s stinky gym shorts. When Alexander complains, his sister just tells him he’s too old to still be in Mum’s pouch. Alexander futilely tries organizing things alphabetically in the pouch, but Mum just keeps adding more and more. One day, Mum tosses so much stuff into her pouch that Alexander can barely move. A half-eaten banana—“A HALF-EATEN. BANANA.”—however, proves to be the final straw, and finally takes needed action. Amusing illustrations, rendered with fluid, black brush strokes and a snappy, eye-catching, orange-dominated palette, effectively capture all the turmoil, unrest, and chaos of Alexander’s life in Mum’s bulging pouch. Double-page spreads of Alexander fruitlessly wrangling an endless array of diverse objects present a convincing argument for his eventual progression from pouch into the next phase of his young life.

A humorous invitation to embrace change and move on. (Picture book 3-6)

THE POCKET CHAOTIC
Harman, Ziggy
Illus. by Gray-Barnett, Daniel
Cicada Books (32 pp.)
$16.95 | Apr. 6, 2021
978-1-908714-80-0

An encouraging, eloquently argued call to action.

Though rightly suggesting that “climate crisis” is a more apt term than “climate change,” Harman delivers an overview that is measured rather than urgent, focused more on general talking points than specific actions. Keeping “sciencey” terms to a minimum, she lays out general causes—mostly unrestrained use of fossil fuels and wanting “too much stuff”—and current and potential effects of human-engendered changes, including the scary prospect of unpredictable, uncontrollable climactic “feedback loops.” She then launches into a series of fictive exchanges between activist and reactionary talking heads on “problems” including corporate greed (“The ‘Just one more cookie’ problem”), conflicts between poor and rich nations (“That’s not fair!” and “Smelt, it, dealt it”), and hostile responses to being told what to do (“Goody-two-shoes”). Acknowledging that “climate justice” is “a marathon, not a sprint,” she finishes up in a section brashly titled “The Solutions” by urging concerned readers to get off the stick but (savvy advice) not to have unrealistic expectations of either themselves or others. Her concluding promise that “we can stop climate change” runs counter to scientific assessments that the best we can do is slow it, however. Along with being diverse in age, race, and, to some extent, dress, the dozens of humans in Lozano’s cartoon illustrations include figures in wheelchairs and a same-sex couple. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9.8-by-15.2-inch double-page spreads viewed at 75% of actual size.)

Rich in pointers but too reasonable to be a mind-changer. (glossary, index) (Nonfiction 10-13)
When the soil is sifted, an ancient gold ring is found. Since all artifacts belong to the state, she can’t keep it, but Dabi is more than satisfied with her adventure. Her parents see only the dirt and all side issues disturb. (glossary, author’s note) (Picture book. 8-10)

A delightful ode to the curiosity of childhood. (Picture book. 4-7)

Penelope and her mother live in the city, where there are sounds on every corner, but what will become of Penelope now that she’s heard a new musical sound? Penelope, a young girl with light-brown skin and hair in a single Afro puff, joins her mother on a walk to the farmers market. Along the way, they stop to enjoy a saxophonist on the street corner, a drummer in the subway, a guitarist in the park, and a cellist playing from inside a building. When they arrive at the farmers market, Penelope becomes fascinated by pleasant music riding the air that she can’t identify. She follows the sounds until she finds a violinist; enraptured, she declares, “I’m going to make that music too.” Penelope’s curiosity about music and the world around her rings true. The illustrations offer a pleasant, cartoonlike feel and plenty of details to bring character to this bustling, diverse city. Hilariously, three rats are drawn on the subway tracks, giving young readers an “I spy” opportunity and adults a chuckle. This will be an excellent book for picture walks with very young children, who will be drawn to the bright colors and busy pages. The text, alas, falters a bit, incorporating clunky onomatopoeia that doesn’t always provide a good imitation of the instruments they describe—does a bow drawn across a cello’s strings really sound like “pluck-pluck-pluck”? (This book was reviewed digitally with 11.7-by-20.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 19% of actual size.) Marvelous—poised to make train converts of readers one and all. (Picture book. 2-4)

Dabi loves digging and dirt and mud. While visiting Israel with her parents, she spends her time digging for worms, making shapes from mud, and enjoying the mess. Ima and Abba insist that she cease her tomboy ways and be more ladylike. But her aunt is more understanding. Doda Gili calls Dabi an “adventure girl” and has a wonderful plan for her. Gili takes Dabi to join an archaeological dig headed by a woman, who gives Dabi a trowel and directs her to fill up buckets with soil. When the soil is sifted, an ancient gold ring is found. Since all artifacts belong to the state, she can’t keep it, but Dabi is more than satisfied with her adventure. Her parents see only the dirt until Gili tells them of her find and demands that they show pride in her accomplishment, though it seems to take official recognition and a certificate to seal the deal. Dabi is delightfully curious and strong-willed, but her need for Gili’s intervention as a buffer to counter her parents’ gender stereotyping is disappointing. Large-scale, detailed portraits bring the characters, all pale skinned and Jewish, to life and show every emotion, especially at picture-book-viewing distance. Ima’s and Abba’s body language is unsubtle and exaggerated; they appear angry and almost frightening, not smiling until Dabi receives the award. Readers might find the family dynamics quite uncomfortable, perhaps overshadowing what is meant to be an affirmation of Dabi’s skills and determination.

Interesting in its depiction of an Israeli archaeological site, but side issues disturb. (glossary, author’s note) (Picture book. 8-10)
A world-weary girl is sent to live with family in Key West during the Great Depression.

Times are tough in 1935, and Turtle doesn't believe in Hollywood endings like her starry-eyed Mama does. When Mama gets a job as a housekeeper for a woman who can't abide children, Turtle is sent down to Key West, Florida, to live with her aunt's family. She learns that she has three boisterous boy cousins who, along with their friends, form the Diaper Gang, an enterprising babysitting venture in town. Denied official entry into the Diaper Gang because she's a girl, Turtle nevertheless spends her days with them, observing the quirks and cultural particularities of the locals, from their colorful jargon and nicknames to the kids' tendency to run around barefoot. This graphic-novel adaptation of Holm's acclaimed 2010 novel is perfectly suited to conveying the vibrant local color of Key West as well as the comic pace of Turtle's adventures with the Diaper Gang. Chapters unfold in vignettelike fashion, building to reveal new information about the history of Turtle's family that she was unaware of while gradually chipping away at her tough exterior. Turtle's immediate family presents as White; there is some reflection of Key West's racial diversity in secondary characters.

A lively adaptation certain to entertain readers old and new. (author's note, notes about the illustrations, concept art) (Graphic historical fiction. 9-12)

Almost a year after his sister Katie dies, Jude Banks turns himself in for her murder. Jude is 12. Katie, less than a year younger, had been accelerated at school and started seventh grade alongside him. Before her death, the siblings were inseparable; afterward, Jude and his mother and father are awash with grief. Jude starts therapy and joins a sibling loss group where he makes friends with Clementine, who, like Jude, feels responsible for her sister's death. Hood, whose own experience of tragic loss has informed some of her previous books, writes well, but she does not handle this subject matter appropriately for the target reading audience. The book slides back and forth unevenly in time, making it difficult for young readers to track Jude's healing. Jude's voice never sounds like that of a modern middle schooler—he's alternately too innocent or too adult. His parents are one-dimensional. The book focuses relentlessly on awful details of grief, from Jude's descriptively imagining his sister's autopsy to a painful revelation about a baby that died to riffs on strange ways children have been killed. There is never any emotional let-up. Worst of all, when one character attempts suicide, several aspects of the narrative directly contraindicate best practices for safely discussing the topic in order to minimize the risk of suicide contagion. Many books have covered this subject matter well for this age group; young readers would do better elsewhere.

Tackles highly sensitive subjects without the necessary care. (Fiction. 8-12)

In 1959, a North Carolina teen is caught up in the social changes of the times.

Eighth grader Jackie Honeycutt is coping with issues in his family and his community. The television is full of news about the sometimes-violent resistance to efforts to desegregate schools. In his still-all-White school, Jackie faces a bully. Further, his college-student sister is becoming involved in civil rights issues, bringing those concerns closer to home, although his parents are more interested in avoiding trouble. Jackie takes refuge in preparing his cow for the local fair and dreaming of winning a prize. Through it all, he has developed a friendship with Thomas, an African American teen he met at the local fishing spot—but it does not take long before the gulf between them is evident. Jackie ultimately realizes his own role in a hurtful incident involving Thomas and needs to decide how to make amends. Jackie is an earnest young person trying to make sense of the world around him, encouraged by a perceptive teacher. This depiction of racial struggles as seen through the lens of the White community has a dense narrative that is well crafted but does not do better elsewhere.
Ophie's Ghosts
Ireland, Justina
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
$16.99 | May 18, 2021
978-0-06-291589-4

A 12-year-old Black girl in 1920s Georgia learns she has the ability to commune with ghosts—and goes on to help solve a mysterious death.

Ophelia “Ophie” Harrison was startled awake by her father’s urgently telling her to grab their emergency money, wake her mother, and escape to the woods—just before White men came and burned their house to the ground. The next morning, she found out those same men had already murdered her father; what she had seen was his ghost. Her mother, dealing with her own grief and their new reality, is not ready to hear of Ophie’s talent, so after they move north to live with Aunt Rose and her family in Pittsburgh, Ophie is forced to keep quiet about it. She longs to attend school but starts working with her mother at Daffodil Manor, home to one of the city’s wealthiest families, so that they can save up for their own place. She soon discovers that ghosts fill the manor; one in particular, Clara, helps her satisfy the demands of the curmudgeonly old White lady who is their employer. In return, Ophie is determined to find out how Clara died. Once again, Ireland weaves together the fantastical with historical realities that Black Americans have faced. Ophie’s optimistic personality and the intrigue-filled story will keep pages turning all the way to the satisfying conclusion.

An enthralling journey interwoven with historical realities. *(Paranormal mystery. 8-12)*

Impossible
Isol
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Amado, Elisa
Groundwood (92 pp.)
$18.95 | Mar. 2, 2021
978-1-77306-434-5

Toribio the toddler is a terror. The text explains that “his parents love him very much. / But they would also love to get some sleep.” In other words, and to invoke the title, Toribio is impossible. A muted color palette contrasts stylistically with the Argentine author/illustrator’s energetic linework, which skillfully conveys Toribio’s vigor (not to mention his volume) while also doing the work of depicting his parents’ weariness. Toribio’s parents desperately want him to stop being afraid of the dark, to eat protein, to bathe without fussing, to nap, and to use the potty. While real-life parents may find the depiction of the parent-child dynamic quite authentic, the story takes a fantastic turn when Toribio’s parents seek help from a “specialist” in solving problems. They end up with an “impossible” solution: After paying a fee and following instructions that involve a magic powder, they sleep uninterrupted and awaken to find that Toribio has transformed into a cat! The story ends rather abruptly at this point, with the parents seeming to rue the fact that they got what they wished for, though Toribio the cat seems perfectly content in the illustrations. All characters appear White in illustrations, with skin color matching the pages’ background colors and dark, straight (if unkempt) hair. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 9.8-by-15.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 25.5% of actual size.)*

A fun take on the terrible 2s, if a bit twisted. *(Picture book. 3-6)*

Rescue at Lake Wild
Johnson, Terry Lynn
HMH Books (208 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 27, 2021
978-0-358-33485-9

When someone shoots beavers whose dam has caused a flood in the Canadian small town of Willow Grove, Madi, Jack, and Aaron rescue kits, find the culprit, and figure out how to keep the beavers from attracting further violence.

This middle-grade wildlife mystery makes explicit homage to the work of Jane Goodall, whom Madi, who introduces herself as an “animal whisperer” like her late grandmother, is dying to meet. But after a gripping opening during which Madi swims underwater and up into a beaver lodge to rescue two orphaned kits, readers learn she has a choice: She can see Goodall in person at an upcoming gala or she can bring home the two kits, though her parents have forbidden her rescuing any more wildlife. She chooses to bring the kits home anyway. The rest of her first-person, present-tense narrative balances the difficulties of hiding and nurturing beaver kits with the work she and her friends—all 12 years old—do to solve the mystery and the town’s beaver problem. Johnson sets this firmly in the present day; they use iPods, smartphones, and ATVs. There’s helpful information about animal rescue, but she makes clear that the process isn’t easy. A professional wildlife rehabilitator praises Madi’s work but adds that ordinary people keeping wildlife “usually does more harm...than good.” The cover illustration suggests that Madi and Aaron are White while Jack, who hopes to be a game warden, has brown skin and long, straight black hair.

An appealing and informative wildlife adventure. *(Author’s note, wildlife tips. Fiction. 8-12)*
“Holmes uses a brilliant cerulean for ocean and sky and peppers the vibrantly patterned illustrations with found items.”

SAVING AMERICAN BEACH

**HUDSON AND TALLULAH TAKE SIDES**

Kang, Anna
Illus. by Weyant, Christopher
Two Lions (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 27, 2021
978-1-5420-0668-2

Hudson and Tallulah, dog and cat (respectively) neighbors and archenemies, find they can have some companionable moments.

Tallulah happily chases a bluebird in her yard, hears loud barking, climbs atop the property’s dividing fence, and sees Hudson busily digging a hole under the fence. “WHAT are you doing?” she demands. Hudson replies, “I’m busting out. Fences keep me trapped.” Tallulah disagrees: “Fences keep us safe.” But her curiosity wins the day, and she follows him down the block, where Hudson begins to explore an overfilled garbage can he calls a breakfast “feast.” Tallulah counters, “It’s garbage. It’s garbage.” Then she begins to chase a butterfly. At the dog park Hudson is enthusiastically welcomed and Tallulah is uproariously rejected. “Why would anyone want a dog for a friend?” bemoans Tallulah, the white space above her crammed full of all-caps sentences.

**SUNDAY FUNDAY IN KOREATOWN**

Kim, Aram
Illus. by the author
Holiday House (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Mar. 2, 2021
978-0-8234-4447-2
Series: Yoomi, Friends, and Family

When the little things start getting you down, look to Grandma for a pick-me-up.

It’s “Sunday Funday” and Yoomi, the black-and-white cat protagonist of *No Kimchi for Me!* (2017) and *Let’s Go to Taekwondo* (2020), rushes downstairs, eager to watch her favorite show on TV. Unfortunately, she is greeted by her siblings, who inform her that her show is cancelled for the soccer playoffs. Still cheerful, she asks her father to start their Sunday ritual of making kimbap for breakfast—only to find a lack of ingredients means she needs to eat cereal instead. The sparse and simple narrative describes the growing pile of frustrations, even when Dad takes her to Koreatown. Her favorite book of folktales has been checked out from the bookmobile. At the Korean market her favorite pastry-wrapped hotdog treat is sold out. When she tries treokbokki (rice cake in a spicy sauce), she accidentally spills the red sauce all over her shirt. To top it all off, her grandma is not home. An exasperated Yoomi declares, “Today is not a Funday.” Happily, Grandma returns to bring a fresh perspective. Once again Kim explores universal experiences, in this case bad days, while highlighting the comforts and joys of Korean culture, her signature bright and colorful cartoons drawing attention to all the small, delectable details of Koreatown. A note about Koreatown and a recipe for kimbab follow.

Sweet and accessible: Readers will savor Yoomi’s latest adventure. (Picture book. 3-6)

**SAVING AMERICAN BEACH**

The Biography of African American Environmentalist MaVynee Betsch

King, Heidi Tyline
Illus. by Holmes, Ekua
Putnam (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-1-101-99629-4

An unsung American hero who used her voice to preserve the natural spaces she loved.

MaVynee Betsch grew up in the Jim Crow South, where she and other Black kids couldn’t swim with the White kids. An orange rope even segregated the ocean. Wanting beaches for all, MaVynee’s wealthy great-grandfather, Abraham Lincoln Lewis, bought a beach in Florida and welcomed African Americans, calling it American Beach. This “ocean paradise” entertained both regular folk and greats like Ray Charles, Zora Neale Hurston, and Ella Fitzgerald. MaVynee herself became a successful opera singer, but when her mother got sick and died, MaVynee abandoned her musical career and returned to Florida only to find her beloved beach in disrepair. Developers wanted to buy it to build condos. Holmes’ stunning, intricately composed paint-and-collage images bring MaVynee to life in full color and capture her eccentricities: She grew her locked hair to 7 feet long, draping it over her arm. Holmes uses a brilliant cerulean for ocean and sky and peppers the vibrantly patterned illustrations with found items such as torn raffle tickets, newspaper clippings, promotional posters, and sheet music, making each spread visually rich, realistic, and fascinating. King’s storytelling, Holmes’ artwork, and informative backmatter portray MaVynee Betsch as the larger-than-life Black environmentalist she was. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9.5-by-21-inch double-page spreads viewed at 72% of actual size.)

A spectacular story about a little-known eco-warrior whose story should be told and retold. (Author’s note, illustrator’s note) (Picture book/biography. 6-12)
“Klassen’s animals react to their seemingly absurd—but never tragic—universe with characteristically subtle, humorous postures and eye maneuvers.”

**THE ROCK FROM THE SKY**

Klassen, Jon
Illus. by the author
Candlewick (96 pp.)
$18.99 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-1-5362-1562-5

If Samuel Beckett had written an early reader, it might look something like this one.

In the first of five chapters, Klassen places his now-familiar turtle and armadillo (wearing bowler hats) on a minimalist gray/green landscape with one flower and—one on the facing page—one plant. Personalities are revealed through occasional, slow movement across the gutter together with color-coded dialogue that feels as if it is being invented in the moment, sans script. Turtle is inflexible, not wanting to relocate, even when Armadillo moves farther away after a bad feeling about the space. It is only when Snake (sporting a beret) appears near the mammal that Turtle joins them—just in time: A huge asteroid falls on the vacated spot. Readers have watched it coming, suspense effectively building as they turn the pages. In subsequent episodes, Armadillo attempts to be helpful; miscommunication abounds; and Turtle is stubborn, proud, and jealous of the unspeaking snake, now near the rock: “I see how it is. Just enough room for two.” Turtle playing the martyr: “Maybe I will never come back.”

As daylight turns into a striking, rose-tinged sunset and then a starlit evening, a life-zapping extraterrestrial (created previously in Armadillo’s futuristic forest fantasy) stalks Turtle. At the last minute, a second asteroid annihilates the creature. Klassen’s animals react to their seemingly absurd—but never tragic—universe with characteristically subtle, humorous postures and eye maneuvers. The weirdness of it all exerts its own attractive force, drawing readers back to it to wonder and ponder.

*Waiting for Godot imagined for the playground population’s sensibilities. (Early reader 5-8)*

**OCEAN LULLABY**

Kvasnosky, Laura McGee
Illus. by McGee, Kate Harvey
Philomel (32 pp.)
$17.99 | May 4, 2021
978-0-593-11801-6

The newest collaboration by sisters Kvasnosky and McGee takes readers on an evening stroll to the beach and a dive underwater in the nighttime ocean. The sun sinks toward a distant horizon while a racially diverse group of family and friends sings along at a seaside picnic. Young and old enjoy the music, and a child sits and listens in mother’s lap “as they rock to ocean sounds.” The sun begins to set, and the mother’s words echo the lapping of the waves as she sings a lullaby. “Shhh hush. Shhh hush. We can sing along.” Below the waves and under the darkening water, Kvasnosky’s lulling verse continues, “the big whales doze,” and “turtles float and shut their eyes.” Floating peacefully, “dolphins drift and mantas glide / through the rocking, rolling tide.” Twilight turns tide pools golden. The encroaching nightfall slows everything down, and baby falls asleep on mother’s shoulder. “You, my sweet, my sleepy child, / rest here in my arms awhile. / As the moon rises over the sea, / dream the ocean lullaby.” With the crescent moon (not, some will quibble, a new moon) and stars person, “Maybe I will never come back.”

A delightful winding-down story after a busy day at the beach—or anywhere. (Picture book 3-6)
Amid all the death and betrayal, Jane's timid, sweet flirtation. A daring flight in a location definitely not intended for an airplane! A massive rolling boulder! Sandstorms and scorpions! A journey through an ancient haunted house. Readers will be eager to visit more worlds with irrepressible Flick and prickly Jonathan. Characters read as White by default.

Utterly delightful. (Fantasy. 11-14)
**DELICIOUS! Poems Celebrating Street Food Around the World**

*Larios, Julie*

*Illus. by Paschiks, Julie*

*Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster (32 pp.)*

$17.99 | Apr. 13, 2021

978-1-5344-5377-7

Sticky fingers, smudged faces, and full bellies—the hallmarks of good street food everywhere.

Whether purchased from a street vendor in Athens, a bike vendor in Marrakech, a train station in Mumbai, one thing is universal: The mouthwatering aromas of cooking food beguile people on highways, alleyways, and byways. Larios’ whimsical tribute to the comfort found in munching mandu in Seoul or chomping a churro in Oaxaca will stir memories of places far away—or right next door. These sometimes-awkward, four-to-six-line poems are little bites of specific places and experiences—try a deep-fried scorpion on a stick in Beijing or the black devil’s broth in Surabaya, East Java! Not so adventurous? How about pretzels in New York or Fenway franks in Boston? Paschiks’ vibrant, opaque watercolor scenes whisk readers off to an Israeli beach or a celebration in Peru. A few page turns later, and the scene is at the foot of a baobab tree in Senegal. Diverse dishes for diverse cultures. Readers will be sorry, however, there is no illustrated food glossary. In the closing “International Menu of Sweets and Treats,” some dishes, such as the devil’s broth, are vividly explained, but others are only names mentioned in passing—Russian pelmeni, piroshki, and blini are lumped together as “savory pastries.” *(This book was reviewed digitally with 10-page spreads viewed at actual size.)*

A tasty (if slight) tour of fast-food offerings the world over. *(Picture book/poetry. 4-8)*

**BRACELETS FOR BINA’S BROTHERS**

*LaRocca, Rajani*

*Illus. by Prabhat, Chaaya*

*Charlesbridge (32 pp.)*

$15.99 | $6.99 paper | Apr. 20, 2021

978-1-62354-129-3

978-1-62354-398-9 paper

Series: Storytelling Math

It’s the Hindu holiday Raksha Bandhan, when sisters give brothers bracelets to ask for their protection from harm.

This year, Bina is old enough to make bracelets for her three older brothers: Vijay, Siddharth, and Arjun. To prepare, she asks each brother about their favorite and least favorite colors. At the craft store, Bina and her mother pick out blue, orange, and green beads along with some special beads that represent each of the brother’s interests: a book, a basketball, and a pair of musical notes. When they return from the store, and with the help of her dog, Tara, Bina gets to work. For each bracelet, she creates a pattern using the colors that each brother likes—something that can be confusing to remember and results in a few do-overs. Eventually, Bina creates three different bracelets using three different color patterns, each one perfect for her brothers. On Raksha Bandhan, Bina’s gifts are a hit—and so is the gift that the brothers give Bina, even if it doesn’t necessarily follow a pattern. Basing a plot on Raksha Bandhan, which has come under criticism for its gendered emphasis on girls’ needing protection from boys, feels like a strange way to introduce a spunky female protagonist like Bina. Still, the text does seamlessly integrate the mathematical concept of patterning into a fun and accurate modern twist on an ancient religious tradition. The colorful illustrations perfectly capture Bina’s impish spirit as well as her love for her family. An author’s note expands on both Raksha Bandhan and patterns.

This culturally relevant, STEM-savvy picture book showcases a strong female protagonist. *(Picture book. 3-6)*

**HOW TO APOLOGIZE**

*LaRochelle, David*

*Illus. by Wohnoutka, Mike*

*Candlewick (32 pp.)*

$16.99 | May 4, 2021

978-1-5362-0944-0

A primer on contrition.

“Everyone makes mistakes,” opens this guide to accountability. Every page shows a different situation in which someone owes another an apology: when a penguin parachutes into an alligator’s bathroom during bathtime, when student politicians trade jabs, when a giraffe has borrowed a worm’s socks without asking, or when a chicken breaks a goat’s violin. All the characters are soft-edged anthropomorphic animals: a taunting hyena, a snail speeding past a sloth, two ancient tortoises. In Wohnoutka’s light gouache illustrations, the many full-bleed spreads and careful use of white space keep the tone friendly and focused. Without ever feeling preachy or prescriptive, the calm, even nonjudgmental tone reminds readers that “apologizing can be hard,” but it’s important to be sincere and simple without making excuses. The perfect balance of humor and gravity delivers the message in an appealing way, and even the most outlandish scenarios are accessible. Most of the scenes are entire little stories in and of themselves while a couple have slightly longer resolutions. Children and adults alike can see themselves in both the aggrieved party and the wrongdoer, all presented with understanding and compassion. Equally useful as a lesson on social-emotional dynamics and as a story, this book has a place on every shelf.

A necessary and entertaining approach to conflict resolution. *(Picture book. 4-8)*
“Levinson’s strong narrative is supported by emotive, brilliantly vibrant paintings.”

THE PEOPLE’S PAINTER

How Ben Shahn Fought for Justice With Art
Levinson, Cynthia
Illus. by Turk, Evan
Abrams (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Apr. 20, 2021
978-1-4197-4130-2

Art and protest meld perfectly in the life of a 20th-century artist. Born into a family of Jewish artisans in early-20th-century Lithuania, Ben Shahn wanted to draw, but there was no money for paper. Instead, he sketched in the margins of his book of Bible stories. After his father, a labor activist, was exiled to Siberia, the family eventually made their way to Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Shahn was teased in school because of his accent but won the bullies over with his drawings. His teachers encouraged his talent. Having to quit school to work, Shahn was able to apprentice to a lithographer and attend art school. There, his teachers told him that “pictures should be beautiful—not real life.” Shahn thought otherwise. He went on to paint 23 pictures of the Sacco-Vanzetti trial and worked for the FDR administration photographing the American “outsiders” who needed relief and painting murals for a new village for garment workers. Despite threats from the FBI during the McCarthy era, Shahn continued to paint protesters and peace lovers. Levinson’s strong narrative is supported by emotive, brilliantly vibrant paintings in gouache, acrylic, pencil, chalk, and linoleum block prints. One triptych offers powerful images of the Shahns immigrating to NYC; it’s followed by scenes of the neighborhood with its jumble of new streets and foods. Well-researched and -sourced, this is a valuable addition to the canon of artist biographies. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 42.4% of actual size.)

This life of an artist with a social conscience makes itself heard. (Yiddish glossary, author’s note, illustrator’s note, timeline, select bibliography, source notes) (Picture book biography 7-10)

THE POOP SONG
Litwin, Eric
Illus. by Boldt, Claudia
Chronicle Books (40 pp.)
$15.99 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-1-4521-7950-6

As the title indicates, a song about pooping in the potty.

Best known for writing several of the early Pete the Cat books, Litwin opens this picture book with the lines “CATS poop in their own little box. / MOUNTAIN GOATS poop as they climb over rocks.” Ensuing pages show other animals (and eventually dinosaurs and extraterrestrials) pooping, too, but the book’s main goal seems to be to use humor to inspire human children to do their business on the potty. As the refrain states in part, “But the BIG BOYS and BIG GIRLS are pooping in the potty / And then we hear a happy sound. // FLUSH!” The text has a rhythmic, rhyming cadence that clearly lends itself to singing while accompanying childlike illustrations of smiling, defecating animals and children of differing skin colors enhance the humor of the text. Children should respond positively to the silly depictions of “SPACE MARTIANS poop[ing] by a faraway star” (space Martian dung is gray, evidently) and a picture of “Mr. Eric” (so indicated by a license plate) exclaiming “A little BLUEBIRD just pooped on my car.” While there’s no sheet music in the book, a note on the jacket flap prompts readers to find a recording of the song at the publisher’s website. Listeners will be treated to an upbeat tune, flushing sound effects, kids’ voices chiming in with Litwin’s, and perhaps just a few fartlike sounds for good measure.

Sure to be music to the ears of potty-training families. (Picture book 1-3)
"Maier and Sánchez are back with another bicultural take on a favorite folktale."

**THE LITTLE BLUE BRIDGE**

**GROW**

Macken, JoAnn Early  
Illus. by Colman, Stephanie Fizer  
Boyds Mills (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | Apr. 20, 2021  
978-1-63592-308-7

"Mighty oaks from little acorns grow."

When young children and their parents and grandparents explore the woods, fields, and waterways, they ponder "what if." What if you were an acorn, caterpillar, tadpole? Step by step, the answers explain the development of these offspring to maturity. "If you were an acorn, you’d swing from a stout twig, snug inside a hard brown shell, bristled cap on your head." The acorn drops, cracks open, and grows until it becomes "an oak tree, reaching lobed leaves toward sunlight." Strong word choices allow a caterpillar to "button [itself] to a leaf," a turtle hatching to shed "old scutes," and a duckling to "forage in foliage [and] dabble upended." The final "what if" describes the personal journey of a baby to adulthood and spotlights the book's diverse families, which include an interracial same-sex couple, two grandparent-led families, and three headed by single parents. Each child's journey has stretched from days "snug in a blanket" to "splash[ing] in the shallows like turtles and ducks" and "leav[ing] your dear footprints wherever you go." Gentle illustrations feature green for growth and locate all the families in different parts of the same woodland. The final illustration brings the story full circle as the White child encountered first poses before an oak tree, arms stretched up toward sunlight. (*This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 32.3% of actual size.*)

Dappled illustrations and vivid text highlight growth in the natural world. (*Picture book: 3-6*)

**THE LITTLE BLUE BRIDGE**

Maier, Brenda  
Illus. by Sánchez, Sonia  
Scholastic (40 pp.)  
$17.99 | Apr. 6, 2021  
978-1-338-53801-4

"Trolls come in different sizes and species—as enterprising Ruby and her three brothers are about to find out."

How are they going to pick pails of blueberries for their pie if Santiago the bully won't let them cross the creek? Each of the three brothers throws the one behind under the proverbial bus in order reach the berries. When it’s Ruby’s turn to cross Santiago’s log, she has another idea. Rather than hand over her nonexistent snack as a toll to the trollish lad, she relies on her creativity and problem-solving skills. With a blueprint, tools, and supplies, Ruby’s ingenuity—and Santiago’s surprising cooperation—manifests as a blue wooden bridge spanning both creek and misunderstandings. What could the toll be for crossing Ruby’s bridge? Pie! Following _The Little Red Fort_ (2018), Maier and Sánchez are back with another bicultural take on a favorite folktale: “The Three Billy Goats Gruff.” The feisty Latina protagonist, red boots and all, is still being sidetracked by her older brothers and the bully of the creek, but, as in the prior book, neither Ruby’s size nor gender is an obstacle to success. Along with succinct dialogue, the refrain’s internal rhymes make for a fun read-aloud experience. Barcelona-born Sánchez’s familiar, bold illustrations form a delightful backdrop to the repurposed story, from the irate bridge bully to the stymied sibling triumvirate.

Readers will happily discover that trip-trapping to friendship and cooperation is indeed a pie-worthy prize. (*Picture book: 4-6*)

**JULIUS AND MACY**

A Very Brave Night  
Mahoney, Annelouise  
Illus. by the author  
Two Lions (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | Apr. 6, 2021  
978-1-5420-0716-0

A twilight adventure for the toddler set.

Two young nocturnal animals are ready to play and explore at night, each brave in their own way: Julius, a badger, is full of curiosity and excitement; Macy, a mouse, is inquisitive but cautious. Warm and fuzzy illustrations create a welcoming atmosphere while the storyline introduces gentle suspense into this cheery nighttime world. When the two realize that their snacks have been swiped, Julius explains that the culprit is likely the Night Goblin, and the two budding heroes (Julius in a blue cape, Macy in a pink dress with a fairy wand) courageously set out to solve the mystery. The Night Goblin, ensconced in a shadowy cave, turns out to be a lonely raccoon, and Julius and Macy, at Macy’s instigation, approach him gently, learn about sharing, and find themselves on the way to making a new friend. While the messages about generosity and courtesy are beyond reproach and the idea that bravery can take many forms is very welcome, gender stereotypes are present in full form, from the colors and costumes the two are wearing to their behaviors and attitudes. Still, many young listeners will appreciate the warmth and sweetness of this comforting selection as they follow the appealing, accessible tale and learn about kindness and friendship.

*A warm nursery tale sprinkled with traditional sugar and spice.* (*Picture book: 2-5*)
Daniel spends the days before the visit in training, practicing facing forward and sitting up straight. Any school-age child and long black hair flying in the wind. Zonia's life as portrayed are very bad behavior on a field trip to the prime minister's house, or at least that's what his parents and teachers say. So Daniel spends the days before the visit in training, practicing facing forward and sitting up straight. Any school-age child will see where this picture book is going, and they may place bets on when he'll finally flip upside down. It happens close to the end, as he leans down to pick up a coin from the floor. But two pages later, the prime minister's assistant is pointing to a photo of David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, upside down on a beach. And by the next page, the assistant is standing on his head, to applause from everyone. Even a parent or teacher might approve of the lesson: Headstands are good training for a future in politics. Unfortunately, the artwork reproduces on the final page, is whimsical and inspiring. The protagonist is depicted as a brown-skinned (with a few exceptions, light-skinned Israelis) look less free-spirited. Their body language is often stiff or contorted. But the actual historic photo of Ben-Gurion, reproduced on the final page, is whimsical and inspiring. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11- by 18.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 74.9% of actual size.)

Oddball politicians are still sometimes worth celebrating. (Picture book. 4-9)

A young Asháninka girl in the Peruvian rain forest enjoys exploring her surroundings—until one day she sees something that frightens her.

Zonia is Asháninka, the largest Indigenous group living in the Peruvian Amazon rain forest. “Every morning, the rain forest calls to Zonia. / Every morning, Zonia answers.” Following a blue morpho butterfly, she greets the sloths; sings with the birds; says hello to a boat of coatis; rides on a jaguar; watches Amazon river dolphins swim by; congratulates a giant anteater with new babies; sits on a giant lily pad as a caiman floats nearby; and even hangs upside down side by side with a boa constrictor. Sweet illustrations done on handmade banana-bark paper depict a spunky and happy brown-skinned child with high cheekbones and long black hair flying in the wind. Zonia’s life as portrayed here feels beyond idyllic—cartoonishly so, if not for the quality of the art. Abruptly, after her sequence of delightful encounters, Zonia comes across a section of the forest that has been clear-cut. Frightened, she runs home and tells her mother the forest needs help. When her mother tells her the forest “is speaking to you,” Zonia declares, “We all must answer”—and the book ends. With no buildup or explanation, the last sentence carries no emotional weight. The real substance of the book is in its backmatter. There, readers will find the story translated into the Asháninka language by Arlynder Sett Gaspar Paulino, information on the Asháninka and the Amazon rain forest, and the names of the animals depicted in the story. A Spanish edition, La selva de Zonia, publishes simultaneously.

An important environmental message obscurely delivered. (Picture book. 4-8) (La selva de Zonia: 978-1-5362-1336-2)

Silly, rhyming euphemisms to jazz up powder-room humor. Matejek-Morris shows remarkable wordsmithing skill in his laugh-out-loud lines of text. The narrator is depicted as a child who opens the book with a warning: “There are nice words like puppy and buttercup and snickerdoodle, and there are rude words.” To help readers avoid saying rude words, the child then delivers a torrent of tongue-twisting, rhyming euphemisms for poop, pee, burp, belch, butt, boogers, and farts. For the titular rude word, for instance, readers could substitute “humdrum bum crumbs, / float-or-sinker, / major stinker, / sometimes mushy from your tushy, / smelly belly funky jelly.” It all culminates in a cumulative barrage of words that readers will be hard-pressed to say without dissolving into giggles—unless they are distracted and dismayed by some truly unfortunate visual characterization. The protagonist is depicted as a brown-skinned person with black, curly hair. Color associations in the cover art and some interior pages may cause the eye to link the shade of the character’s skin with the anthropomorphized turds that appear along with the aforementioned euphemisms. If that weren’t bad enough, when the cumulative text arrives, it’s presented as a grinning (and farting, urinating, defecating, belching, nose-picking) tap-dancing spectacle that evokes caricatures of minstrelsy. (This book was reviewed digitally with 8-by-14-inch double-page spreads viewed at 50.1% of actual size.)

Just…don’t. (Picture book. 3-6)
A loving father and a wise neighbor find a way for Mindi's invisible goose to depart.

Mindi's goose, seen as a large and looming shadow on her bedroom wall, “came into her room as quietly as a thought... and...stayed there for as long as it wanted to.” Children will understand that Mindi can’t get rid of the goose on her own. Mindi’s father hikes over the hills to visit Austen, a “wise old man” who helps others with “sensible advice.” Austen asks that Mindi journey with her father to visit. Austen allows her to feed Mindi's father hikes over the hills to visit Austen, a “wise old man” who helps others with “sensible advice.” Austen asks that Mindi journey with her father to visit. Austen allows her to feed a young goat some apricots. “If she likes you she will give you back the stone.” The hidden stones of the apricots and, later, plums returned by the little goat to Mindi's hand seem poetic and meaningful. The little girl gives the heretofore nameless kid a pragmatic name: Black-and-Whitey. When, a week later, Austen arrives at Mindi's house, little goat in tow, and tells Mindi that the goat is hers in exchange for “the big goose no one else can see,” Mindi’s mother’s expression is amusing. McBratney's posthumously published tale is gentle, kind, and the illustrations pick up on that, both treating the child's fear with respect. Ólafsdóttir's country scenes are tidy and double-page spreads viewed at 29.1% of actual size.)

Low-key and reassuring. (Picture book. 3-8)

WHEN WE FLY
McGeachin, Jess
Illus. by the author
Philomel (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-0-593-20358-3

“A not everything that’s broken can be fixed.”

Lucy and her father must manage on their own, now, and Lucy loves to help Dad by fixing things. So when she finds a sparrow with a broken wing, she builds an airplane to help it fly. The plane breaks apart in flight; luckily, they’re rescued by an assortment of caring birds. By summer’s end, the sparrow is gone, but she still has her dad. McGeachin's illustrations provide a poignant subtext for this moving debut, an Australian import. In the very first scenes, Lucy wears an orange scarf. It becomes a nest for the injured bird. The same scarf also appears early on in pictures on the wall of a woman readers will assume is Lucy’s mother. Toward the end, one is shown more fully. Her mother's in a wheelchair, the three of them gathered close. Outside, the scarf flies away. Both bird and mother have gone.

A final, hopeful spread shows Lucy and Dad putting up a birdhouse together. Under a birdbath there’s a stone with the bird’s name, Flap. This is the only scene in which the father smiles. The color palette is muted early on but brightens as the story progresses. Readers who enjoy detailed pictures will marvel at the household materials Lucy gathers to make her airplane and the range of helpful birds. (A final spread labels those birds and includes what to do if you find an injured bird.)

A gentle, effective presentation of grieving and moving on. (Picture book. 3-8)

HOW TO MAKE A BIRD
McKinlay, Meg
Illus. by Ottley, Matt
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 20, 2021
978-1-5362-1526-7

A child imagines, designs, and builds a bird only to let it go and watch it soar through the clouds.

The child—a preteen, with pale skin and tousled brown hair—lives, apparently alone, in an elevated stilt house on a beach. The house stands precariously on tilting legs and is painted, as are many of the landscapes in the book, with a slightly distorted perspective, as if viewed through a fish-eye lens. The child collects tiny, hollow bones and shapes them into a bird; adds feathers; gives the creature a heart, eyes, beak, claws, and a song; and adds “final touches, the way an artist adds her last plums returned by the little goat to Mindi's hand seem poetic and meaningful. The little girl gives the heretofore nameless kid a pragmatic name: Black-and-Whitey. When, a week later, Austen arrives at Mindi's house, little goat in tow, and tells Mindi that the goat is hers in exchange for “the big goose no one else can see,” Mindi’s mother’s expression is amusing. McBratney's posthumously published tale is gentle, kind, and the illustrations pick up on that, both treating the child's fear with respect. Ólafsdóttir's country scenes are tidy and double-page spreads viewed at 29.1% of actual size.)

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A gentle, effective presentation of grieving and moving on. (Picture book. 3-8)
“Accurate natural history simply and charismatically presented.”

MY TINY LIFE BY RUBY T. HUMMINGBIRD
Meisel, Paul
Illus. by the author
Holiday House (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-0-8214-4322-2
Series: Nature Diary, 4

A ruby-throated hummingbird chronicles its first full year of life.

This latest addition to the series of first-person nature diaries that began with My Awesome Summer by P. Mantis (2017) introduces the ruby-throated hummingbird, familiar to residents of the East Coast and Midwest, where they summer, and of Mexico and Central America, where they winter. The front endpapers map the ruby-throated species’ range, show some western hummingbirds, and present some facts including the nest-building process. This slightly advanced scientific text sets the stage for Ruby T.’s personal story. Dates head entries of one or two sentences, simple enough for fledgling readers. Meisel’s illustrations augment the storytelling. The title page includes a picture of Ruby T.’s mother on her nest; a page turn reveals just the tip of her beak poking out of a cracked egg. Soon, Ruby T. is flying “really fast!” Spread by spread the pacing reflects Pluto, an astronomy-loving seventh grade girl facing struggles alongside her single mother at their family pizza shop on the Jersey shore. The scents and sounds of this summer hot spot make for a lively backdrop, but it’s not all fun and games at the boardwalk, as Pluto’s family deals with her new mental health diagnosis. Pluto’s worries are compounded by expectations, both external and internal, such as adjusting to new medications, meeting with a tutor to catch up with missed schoolwork, balancing the competing expectations of her divorced parents, and making headway on a self-assigned checklist she believes will help her feel better. Nervous about reconnecting with old friends and starting therapy, Pluto befriends Fallon, whose family runs another boardwalk business. As Fallon explores her gender identity, Pluto discovers they have a surprising and special bond. Pluto feels caught between her parents, as her father wants her to move in with him and his new girlfriend in the city, but ultimately, she articulates what she wants and learns to value herself and her complexities. Readers will find insight and compassion around setting realistic goals and navigating results that may not match initial expectations. Main characters present as White.

Accurate natural history simply and charismatically presented. (sources, recommended reading, further information) (Informational picture book. 4-8)

HOW TO BECOME A PLANET
Melleby, Nicole
Algonquin (288 pp.)
$16.95 | May 25, 2021
978-1-64375-036-1

Dealing with depression and anxiety lies at the heart of this gentle coming-of-age story. Lambda Literary Awards finalist Melleby tackles the gravitational force of the youth mental health crisis through Pluto’s family. As Pluto’s family deals with her new mental health diagnosis. Pluto’s worries are compounded by expectations, both external and internal, such as adjusting to new medications, meeting with a tutor to catch up with missed schoolwork, balancing the competing expectations of her divorced parents, and making headway on a self-assigned checklist she believes will help her feel better. Nervous about reconnecting with old friends and starting therapy, Pluto befriends Fallon, whose family runs another boardwalk business. As Fallon explores her gender identity, Pluto discovers they have a surprising and special bond. Pluto feels caught between her parents, as her father wants her to move in with him and his new girlfriend in the city, but ultimately, she articulates what she wants and learns to value herself and her complexities. Readers will find insight and compassion around setting realistic goals and navigating results that may not match initial expectations. Main characters present as White.

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OUR WORLD OUT OF BALANCE
Understanding Climate Change and What We Can Do
Minoglio, Andrea
Illus. by Fanelli, Laura
Trans. by Mandley, Emma
Blue Dot Kids Press (72 pp.)
$21.95 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-1-7350005-3-4

A survey of global threats to our environment and what can be done.

From human-caused climate changes to too much trash, our world is out of balance. Appropriately, this clear introduction to the whats and whys of environmental degradation balances sad facts with examples of what can and is being done. Chapter by chapter this Italian import covers 15 environmental problems: global warming, rising sea levels, shrinking forests, growing cities, melting ice, disappearing wildlife, extreme weather, plastic in the ocean, desertification, air pollution, dying corals, over-farming, water pollution, fires, and waste management. Each four-page chapter includes an introduction to the issue, with descriptions of circumstances both before and after recent climate change, and a spread explaining why and how the damage happens (usually described step by step), personal ways to help, and what others are doing. There’s a concluding call for readers to speak out, as other young activists do. The organization of this survey is clear, the information accessible, the translation smooth, and the backmatter U.S.-centered. The illustrations have the appearance of prints, with blocks of undifferentiated color. They’re full of details, humans (whose skin color is usually paper white but sometimes tan or black) doing all sorts of things, visual explanations, and scenes from all over the world.

A solid pick among many similar titles for its positive approach and breadth. (websites for action, glossary, index) (Nonfiction. 9-12)
DEAR UGLY SISTERS And Other Poems
Mucha, Laura
Illus. by Rex, Tania
Otter-Barry (96 pp.)
$13.99 paper | Apr. 1, 2021
978-1-93074-79-1

British poet Mucha reaches for quirk in this debut collection for children.
Like many a children's anthology, the collection is replete with poems addressing a diverse range of topics and artistic forms interspersed with explanatory notes. Where many of this ilk are almost entirely humorous, however, some of Mucha's poems take darker or more plaintive, even existential tones and are enlivened by an oh-so-characteristically British dryness rather than, say, poop jokes. As the title suggests, some poems are fairy-tale reboots, but others tackle contemporary social issues or render the banalities of life in vividly muddled color; still others are so absurd that they seem lifted directly from the more bizarre corners of the internet. From "Alien Dictionary": "LEAVES are dropped by tall, / one-legged creatures (known as TREES) / when they are sad." A consistent style, verging on pretentious in its deliberately constructed artistry, is more or less maintained throughout. Some poems seem almost to be trying too hard to be topical, artistic, or funny, whereas others, which lay out their core emotions in simple, frank terms, are far more genuinely moving and beautiful. On "The Lonely Side of the Moon," a fictional Michael Collins muses: "Billions / (plus two) / on the other / side. But over / here, it's just me / and radio / silence." Rex's black-and-white illustrations are mostly decorative but at their best add their own whimsical notes.

Children who enjoy poetry will almost certainly find something in the work that resonates. (Poetry. 8-12)

DEAR DC SUPER-VILLAINS
Northrop, Michael
Illus. by Duarte, Gustavo with Peter, Cris
DC (176 pp.)
$9.99 paper | Apr. 6, 2021
978-1-77950-054-0

Members of the Legion of Doom answer their emails.
Harley Quinn, Black Manta, Lex Luthor, Katana, and more correspond with curious fans in this middle-grade graphic novel. After performing a daredevil museum heist in Cairo, Catwoman answers a question from a curious fan about how it is that Batman keeps getting the better of her (laser pointers, but she is sure not going to admit that). Giganta plucks an atomic payload from a truck she crushes before helping a young beanpole see the advantage of unusual height. And so on. This sequel to Dear Justice League (2019) improves upon its predecessor in nearly every way, starting with a poppier color palette that better suits these larger-than-life villains. There's also more connective tissue among the villains' vignettes, embracing their peculiar clubhouse energy. The book still contains a few too many of these vignettes, though: The format's repetitive nature can't quite be shaken. However, a larger narrative time around concerning a master plot concocted by Harley Quinn gives the novel some semblance of a spine. Some readers may find themselves speed-reading through the panels of villains sitting down to read the letters to get back to the action. The characters are well designed, Peter's colors are terrific, and the panels are reasonably propulsive. Black Manta and Katana help to diversify the mostly White humanoid villains, and there is diversity among their correspondents, including one kid who uses a wheelchair.

DC delivers another charmer. (Graphic adventure. 8-12)
BAD CAT!

O’Byrne, Nicola
Illus. by the author
Nosy Crow/Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-1-5362-1728-5

A guileless, off-site narrator futilely entreats Fluffykins—green-eyed, ginger-furred, and utterly recalcitrant—to apologize for successive misdeeds.

Encounters with a glass vase of pink flowers and a basket of knitting yield predictably naughty results. The narrator ineffectively cajoles: “Now, that’s two things you need to apologize for…. / Fluffykins! What have you done now?” After attacking the sofa, the computer keyboard, the toilet paper, and the blinds and peeing on the floor, the cat’s banished outdoors. “Now go and think about what you’ve done.” A spell of rain brings the bedraggled cat to the window, customarily narrowed eyes now turned to saucers, and soon Fluffykins is indoors, making abbreviated amends: a belly-up posture of supplication and a “MEOOOW” that’s interpreted optimistically as self-reproach.

“Thank you, Fluffykins. That wasn’t so hard, was it? Now, let’s clean everything up and forget all about it.” Of course, the incorrigible cat’s already on the goldfish bowl. O’Byrne ever so lightly anthropomorphizes her protagonist’s expressions, the cat’s heavy-lidded glare modulated by tiny changes in mouth position that give the cat a distinctively evil look—dramatically magnified by a view through the goldfish bowl on the final page. That fish is right to look terrified.

Nothing new here, but readers inclined to indulge feline mischief will chuckle at the extremes on display. (Picture book. 2-5)

FINDING JUNIE KIM

Oh, Ellen
Harper/HarperCollins (368 pp.)
$16.99 | May 4, 2021
978-0-06-298798-3

Her grandfather’s story about growing up during the Korean War mobilizes a girl against racism in her own town.

When someone defaces the gym of her suburban Maryland middle school with racist graffiti, Korean American Junie Kim at first doesn’t want to join her outraged friends in protesting. Instead, Junie, who has been facing the racist taunts of a school bus bully every morning, becomes cynical, negative, and depressed. Her resistance alienates her friends, and she endures a brief bout of suicidal ideation; fortunately, her family finds her a therapist she trusts. A school assignment to interview an elder gives Junie a chance to hear about her beloved grandfather’s boyhood during the Korean War. His harrowing tale and her grandmother’s similarly traumatic story offer valuable perspective, and she is inspired to take action by working with her friends to create a video about diversity for an upcoming assembly. Extraneous details sometimes slow the story, the dialogue can feel unrealistically expository, and the alternating narration and time jumps are at times disorienting, but the brutal depictions of life during the Korean War, including the desperate hunt for food and the chaos of evacuation, ring true. Junie’s love for her grandparents—and theirs for her—is movingly portrayed. Their conversations and Junie’s relationships with her diverse friend group sensitively unpack a range of subjects relating to identity and prejudice.

An intergenerational tale that highlights a girl’s growing confidence and awareness. (author’s note) (Fiction. 9-13)

PERCY’S MUSEUM

O’Leary, Sara
Illus. by Mok, Carmen
Groundwood (32 pp.)
$18.95 | Apr. 6, 2021
978-1-77306-252-5

Percy adjusts to his new home by opening himself to nature.

The first of the book’s whimsical, exclusively double-paged spreads opens with the text “Percy’s old house was perfect. There was always something to do, and always someone to do it with.” Percy’s former home is an immaculately clean city, portrayed with candy-confection colors and populated by a diverse group of active, happy citizens. Aided by Percy’s image on the cover, readers can spot Percy, a school-age boy with brown skin and a thatch of straight brown hair, upstairs with a friend, inside one of the buildings. Soon it is revealed that Percy’s new home has a large, sprawling yard with a good-sized playhouse toward the back. There are meadows and mountains. A light-skinned girl and her dog occasionally appear in the distance. It takes a short amount of time for Percy and his cat to start exploring the surroundings and to start collecting and recording. The text continues with short, generalized statements about new concepts Percy learns as he continues his investigations. What he finds and draws becomes, in the backyard playground, the titular museum. A gentle sweetness pervades the book, which comes full circle in the concluding spread. The art and text—and the lack of adult interventions—offer relief and empowerment to children facing a new environment and a calming, quiet read to those who are not. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9.4-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 54.8% of actual size.) Encouraging and kind. (Picture book. 3-6)
THE EYEBALL ALPHABET BOOK
Pallotta, Jerry
Illus. by Bersani, Shennen
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)
$17.99 | May 11, 2021
978-1-57091-710-3
Series: Jerry Pallotta’s Alphabet Books

The eyes have it in Pallotta’s latest playful and informative ABC.

Bersani follows up the spectacular illustrations in Not a Butterfly Alphabet Book (2019) with another set of equally bright, bold, and this time literally eye-catching close-ups to go with Pallotta’s alphabetical assortment of ocular animal facts. Pallotta offers specific observations on the eyesight of creatures from giant squid to spider while also contrasting the general benefits of monocular and binocular vision, describing three types of tears, and casting glances at other vision-related facts, such as a fly’s compound eyes and a python’s thermal sensors. Both author and illustrator tuck in extras, including, for each letter, a thematically related figure of speech like “get some shut-eye” and “to see eye to eye” and a gallery of goofy eyeglasses, and they occasionally dart off topic (“N” is represented by “Night Crawler,” for instance: “They never need to visit an eye doctor!”). The statement that “having no eyesight is called blindness” may be glaringly simplistic, but that’s an isolated blink in a generally illuminating overview. A bulleted list of savvy advice for proper peeper care at the close is worth taking a gander at.

Occasionally loses focus but rich in eye-opening facts and eye-candy art. (Informational picture book. 7-9)

BEAUTIFUL DAY!
Petite Poems for All Seasons
Pappa, Rodoula
Illus. by Ratanavanh, Seng Soun
Cameron + Company (56 pp.)
$16.95 | Mar. 2, 2021
978-1-951836-14-6

A four-season round, observed in stylized scenes and 20 haiku-like poems. Pappa is loose with her syllable count but otherwise follows the form’s conventional antecedents as she reflects on a young child’s outdoor encounters and activities: “Beautiful day! / Teach me, too, how to fly, / mother swallow.” Appealing though the spare and precise poetry may be, younger audiences will likely be more strongly drawn by the serene, harmonious pictures. As in her eye-catching illustrations for Roxane Marie Galliez’s Thank You, Miyuki (2020), Ratanavanh sets an Asian-presenting protagonist with pink cheeks against likewise stylized, mostly natural, flat backdrops constructed using delicately transparent hues and bright Japanese washi patterns. A paper boat and a flight of origami “wild geese” add further atmospheric notes. Though the child climbs a ladder in one scene to color in a rainbow and in another hangs little dolls in a Christmas tree, in general they are small enough to peer from a poppy at an equally tiny spring lamb, sit on a dahlia with a pair of “happy snails” in autumn, and, in one droll summer scene, make a lazy comment about the grasshopper on the nose of a mountainous, napping dog—oblivious to the comparatively giant butterfly perched on their own.

A little thin but the lovely art rewards lingerers. (Picture book. 6-8)

THIS BOOK HAS ALPACAS AND BEARS
Parekh, Rikin
Illus. by Perry, Emma
David Fickling/Scholastic (32 pp.)
$6.99 paper | Apr. 20, 2021
978-1-338-63570-5

Alfonso the alpaca is surrounded by books, and not one is about an alpaca.

Alfonso’s lawn is covered with enormous piles of titles about bears, like Be More Bear! He knows what he must do to remedy this: write a book starring a charming alpaca. Unfortunately, this storyline calls attention to one of the main problems with this picture book: The act of writing—not to mention “rewriting and correcting”—a story isn’t all that exciting to watch. Other scenes are slightly irritating. Due to his writer’s block, Alfonso spends most of the first half of the book begging his friend Colin to be his co-author. This is odd, because Colin is a bear. It also highlights the other big problem with the story: The central metaphor doesn’t work. Anyone who feels underrepresented in books—women and minorities, for example—may be frustrated to hear Colin say that “alpacas are noisy, clumsy, careless, and REALLY annoying.” They may even be more frustrated when Alfonso, rather than accepting his own self-worth, tries to impress his closed-minded friend with spectacular tricks. But that does lead to the funniest section of the story, as Alfonso hums nursery rhymes backward and performs “four-legged splits in MIDAIR!” Perry’s cartoons of a skateboarding alpaca are hysterical, and the book works just fine at surface level, as a story about an insecure writer looking for support wherever he can get it. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10.5-by-18.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 38.4% of actual size.)

Alpacas may be hilarious, but they make lousy allegories. (alpaca facts) (Picture book. 4-7)
Unbeknownst to the aspiring thespians and singers, trouble—Dante, Rickety—encounters and is instantly enchanted by Canta, the Gloom King upon the kingdom of Eem. When help from a Cat, utterly trashing the kitchen with a click of his claws and, for a two-week trial, than they are accosted by fiery-eyed Scaredy and any summons (they are not dogs, after all), clawing the fur—a beautiful human singer who is also competing. Rickety's and the Gelatinous Goo, reanimated skeletal troubadour Rick—colored panels with intrigue, epic battles, and espionage. While of saving their beloved homeland. Throughout the previous vol—competition. Unlike the others, Rickety's heart isn't truly in it; throb bard (but overall jerk) Percival Dante. Upon meeting Dante, Rickety encounters and is instantly enchanted by Canta, a beautiful human singer who is also competing. Rickety's performance at the battle flops, causing a rift with his friends. Unbeknownst to the aspiring thespians and singers, trouble lurks below as a rogue order attempts to unleash the nefarious Gloom King upon the kingdom of Eem. When help from a secret faction arrives, friends and enemies must unite in hopes of saving their beloved homeland. Throughout the previous volumes, Rickety has questioned who he may have been; this one offers long-awaited answers. In perhaps the most swashbuckling of the series, Parks and Costa have filled their vibrantly colored panels with intrigue, epic battles, and espionage. While narrative threads are neatly resolved, there is certainly room for subsequent adventures. The characters are a mix of imagined beings and humans depicted with a variety of skin tones. 

Satisfying and exciting. (Graphic fantasy. 11-14)

A Black transgender boy shares his identity and competes in a karate tournament with the encouragement of his family in this picture-book biography.

Penelope knows who he is and what he likes even if his family is too busy to notice him. He stomps through the house, cuts in line, and pounds his fists so they will hear, see, and feel his anger that everyone thinks he's a girl. When his mom stops to listen, he tells her about his gender and helps her understand that he doesn't just feel like a boy, he is one. With his family's support behind him and the strength of his own determination to never give up, Penelope comes out at school and faces a new challenge: competing in a karate tournament. First-person narration centers Penelope's feelings and perspective in every stage of his story. Warmth and pride in identity radiate from the pages, brightened by the expressive, lively illustrations. The adults in Penelope's life model care by encouraging him to speak for himself and listening to him when he does. One thing he speaks up about is that he likes his name: Penelope. Perseverance also stands out as a significant theme within the narrative, with emphasis placed on Penelope's diligent practice to never give up, Penelope comes out at school and faces a new challenge: competing in a karate tournament. First-person narration centers Penelope's feelings and perspective in every stage of his story. Warmth and pride in identity radiate from the pages, brightened by the expressive, lively illustrations. The adults in Penelope's life model care by encouraging him to speak for himself and listening to him when he does. One thing he speaks up about is that he likes his name: Penelope. Perseverance also stands out as a significant theme within the narrative, with emphasis placed on Penelope's diligent practice to never give up, Penelope comes out at school and faces a new challenge: competing in a karate tournament. First-person narration centers Penelope's feelings and perspective in every stage of his story. Warmth and pride in identity radiate from the pages, brightened by the expressive, lively illustrations. The adults in Penelope's life model care by encouraging him to speak for himself and listening to him when he does. One thing he speaks up about is that he likes his name: Penelope. 

The True Story of a Boy Named Penelope

Patterson, Jodie

Illus. by Barlow, Charmelle Pinkney

Crown (40 pp.)

$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Apr. 13, 2021

978-0-593-12363-8

978-0-593-12365-2 PLB

A triumphant declaration of love and identity. (Picture book/ young adult)

Two shelter cats take on a mysterious puss with weird powers who is terrorizing the feline community. Hardly have timorous (and aptly named) Poop and her sophisticated buddy, Pasha, been brought home by their new “human beans” for a two-week trial than they are accosted by fiery-eyed Scaredy Cat, utterly trashing the kitchen with a click of his claws and, hissing that he’s in charge of the neighborhood, threatening that if they don’t act like proper cats—disdaining ordinary cat food and any summons (they are not dogs, after all), clawing the furniture instead of the scratching post, and showing like “cattitude”—it’ll be back to the shelter for them. Will Poop and Pasha prove to be fraidycats or flee to the cowed clowder of homeless cats hiding from the bully in the nearby woods? 

Shines with joy and affirmation.

BORN READY

The True Story of a Boy Named Penelope

Patterson, Jodie

Illus. by Barlow, Charmelle Pinkney

Crown (40 pp.)

$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Apr. 13, 2021

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“The beautiful text celebrates America’s difficult immigrant history with honesty and respect.”

**WE ARE A GARDEN**

**A Story of How Diversity Took Root in America**

Peters, Lisa Westberg  
Illus. by Tentler-Krylov, Victoria  
Schwartz & Wade/Random (40 pp.)  
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Apr. 6, 2021  
978-0-593-12313-3  
978-0-593-12314-0 PLB

From the first humans in North America to the immigrants and refugees of today, the story of America’s diversity is the story of migration.

Poetic text and stunning watercolors outline the history of how peoples from all over the globe arrived in what is now the United States of America. Peters likens migrants to seeds that are carried on the wind, taking root in the new soil, creating a “garden of Americans who turn to face the wind.” The book begins with spreads featuring different groups of arrivals, chosen for their numbers, contributions, or impact. Native Americans, English settlers, enslaved Africans, Chinese railroad workers, and migrant field workers are among those featured, and each is accompanied by a few sentences that do not explicitly mention country names but cut to the core of their significance with pointed honesty. “The brutal leader” of a group of “colonists” depicted as conquistadors, for instance, is recorded as having “slaughtered the tribe that was living” where they settled. After the Statue of Liberty’s famous welcoming poem appears in its entirety, more modern immigration is represented. These pages feature individuals here and now: a mother who works long cleaning shifts, a 13-year-old refugee who wears a head scarf, a boy who loves soccer. And finally, a city block exuberantly depicting residents of many skin tones under a celebratory sky of fireworks. The beautiful text celebrates America’s difficult immigrant history with honesty and respect while simultaneously maintaining a feeling of pride and optimism in its present and future. Extremely informative notes round out this outstanding book. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 10.5-by-21-inch double-page spreads viewed at 53.1% of actual size.)*

**ENLIGHTENING, VISUALLY GORGEOUS, AND EMOTIONALLY MOVING.** *(Informational picture book. 6-10)*

**THE GREMLIN’S SHOES**

Potter, Ellen  
Illus. by Sala, Felicita  
Amulet/Abrams (144 pp.)  
$13.99 | Apr. 20, 2021  
978-1-4197-4324-5  
Series: Big Foot and Little Foot, 5

In the fifth Big Foot and Little Foot book, Hugo and Boone go on a money-making adventure.

The toy store downtown is hosting a special appearance by Sasquatch celebrity Mad Marvin, who’s selling his Marvelous Monster Magnet. To earn money for one, aspiring cryptozoologists Hugo (a Sasquatch) and Boone (a human, White) take a couple of delivery jobs. In the woods on a run, they’re pursued by something mysterious that turns out to be a Sasquatch wearing a hat and riding a moose (drawn, like other illustrations, to emphasize silly playfulness). He offers the boys a chance to split a treasure he’s looking for with him, giving them directions. The directions bring the boys to a hill where, while the boys play a somersaulting game, a sneaky gremlin steals the package they’re delivering! They trade Boone’s new shoes to get it back, but Boone struggles in the woods without them. Throughout the straightforward plot, delivered in Potter’s characteristically breezy style, Hugo mentally makes a list of things he envies about humans—such as cool shoes and pockets—and then crosses the items off as he realizes Sasquatches have their own strengths. After the deliveries, Hugo finds a way to recover Boone’s shoes, and the boys learn the wholesome truth of the treasure. They decide they like things better.
LUCY’S BLOOMS
Prochovnic, Dawn Babb
Illus. by Berenst, Alice
West Margin Press (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-1-5132-6719-7

An optimistic little girl’s in for a surprise when she enters a flower contest.

Discovering “hundreds and hundreds of bright, yellow blooms” growing behind Gram’s house, Lucy decides to enter a clump of them in the upcoming Flower Festival, hoping to win a blue ribbon for her grandmother. After transferring blooms into a flowerpot, Lucy returns to Gram, who’s whistling a song. Next morning, Lucy notices her thirsty blooms drooping and whistles as she waters them. That night, Gram tells Lucy a story about daisies, and the following day, when Lucy finds her blooms “curled and crisp” from too much sun, she repeats Gram’s story while shifting them into shade. On the day of the festival, Lucy finds her blooms shriveled from cold, and she revives them with sun, water, whistling, stories, dancing, and love. She enters her blooms in the contest only to learn they’re disqualified as a “bunch of weeds.” Lucy’s disappointed, but her blooms remain winners in her eyes. Using flat patterns, textures, and bright colors, the illustrations reveal Lucy as a dark-haired, wide-eyed, freckled, tan-skinned, smiling girl whose energetic, upbeat personality radiates off the page whether she’s dancing in fields of dandelions, nurturing her pot of dandelions, sharing sunsets and stories with silver-haired Gram (who presents White), or celebrating the shimmering beauty of dandelions going to seed. Close-ups of Lucy reinforce the pervasive theme of love.

A nurturing, affirmative, happy tale. (Picture book. 4-7)

HOW OLD AM I?
100 Faces From Around the World
JR & Pugeat
Illus. by JR
Phaidon (216 pp.)
$19.95 | Apr. 21, 2021
978-1-83866-158-8

Readers will meet and learn about 100 people in this artistic concept book.

Created by JR, the artist behind the international art project Inside Out, the book features black-and-white portraits of individuals from all around the world. These photos are arranged uniformly across a series of double-page spreads beginning with Gwen, age 1, and ending with Beatrice, age 100. Each spread introduces the subject with a greeting from their language, lists their place of birth and current residence, presents a world map locating both places (if they are different), and provides a brief paragraph from their point of view that dances loosely around the topic of age. Gwen, a Briton, “can say some words”; Beatrice, who is from the U.S., is a little surprised to be 100. Both Gwen and Beatrice present White, and in between readers will meet Costa Rican 10-year-old Diego, Zimbabwean 33-year-old Ngomizade, Vietnamese 48-year-old Vu, and Iraq-born Canadian 90-year-old Menashe, among others. As readers delve further into the book they’ll notice the background colors of the pages change hue from a bright yellow, shifting through the color wheel, and returning to yellow. The book is beautiful and borders on the profound (especially for older caregivers), but the question remains: Who is this for? Babies obsessed with faces may love the portraits; toddlers may learn numbers, colors, etc.; older readers may learn some geography—all ages get a little, but is it enough? (This book was reviewed digitally with 8.5-by-14.5-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.)

By providing a little for everyone, the book may spread itself too thin. (Picture book. All ages)

I AM LOVED
Qamaniq-Mason, Kevin & Qamaniq-Mason, Mary
Illus. by Lim, Hwei
Inhabit Media (30 pp.)
$16.99 paper | May 4, 2021
978-1-77227-281-9

“A gift to Inuit children in care” from the authors, foster parents, this story is rich with empathy and understanding for those with uncertain futures.

Although Pakak is happy with his new White foster family, he misses the family he left behind and is worried about what may happen to him. His new family provides him with a comfortable and safe haven, with good food and fun outings. “I went out sledding with my foster sister and we played on the big pile of snow,” Pakak recounts. But sometimes Pakak feels sad when he thinks of the family he can no longer be with. Those are the times he remembers the “secret that my aanaatattiaq, my grandmother, told me,” that “love can travel anywhere in an instant!” Playfully, Pakak whispers it to readers just as his aanaatattiaq had done with him. Pakak knows she loves and thinks about him all the time. When he feels unsure, he knows that he’s not alone, a feeling that extends beyond his family. “Nunarniuq, the Land, loves me,” he says; “Sijinig, the Sun loves me,” and “Tagqiq, the Moon, loves me.” He holds “a happy secret in my heart.…I know I am loved. And so are you!” Lim’s illustrations are packed with cultural details, reinforcing both Pakak’s affectionate relationship with his foster family and the love of his birth family. The text is interspersed with Inuktitut vocabulary.

Like a love poem, this story will resonate in the hearts of both children in foster care and the adults who love them. (glossary, pronunciation notes) (Picture book. 3-7)
HANNAH AND THE RAMADAN GIFT
Rashid, Qasim
Illus. by Jaleel, Aaliya
Viking (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 6, 2021
978-0-593-11466-7

Eight-year-old Hannah is too young to fast, but she’s not too young to learn about making the world a better place.

It’s the holy month of Ramadan, so Hannah wakes up with her family before dawn to eat sehri even though Dada Jaan tells her fasting is for grown-ups—instead, her grandfather tells her, she can celebrate Ramadan “by saving the world.” This seems a tall order, but a full month of practice shows her that she can do her part. Grandfather and granddaughter visit the soup kitchen and donate clothes to a homeless shelter. Hannah helps her friends at school, sometimes when they see and thank her but also when they don’t. And she plays with a new girl in the neighborhood. When Eid comes around at the end of the month, Hannah isn’t sure if she’s been successful. But assurance from Dada Jaan and a multifaith celebration make it the best Eid ever. With her ups and downs and uncertain moments, Hannah offers children an accessible vehicle for learning about the character-building aspects of Ramadan and of Islam in general.

While the story is text heavy, its abundant food for thought will be worth returning to year after year. Jaleel’s bright, animation-style illustrations feature a diverse cast and thoughtful cultural details that enrich the setting. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 73.2% of actual size.)

A sweet addition to holiday collections. (author’s note) (Picture book. 4-8)

THE GRAVITY TREE
The True Story of a Tree That Inspired the World
Redding, Anna Crowley
Illus. by Imamura, Y asmin
Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$17.99 | May 25, 2021
978-0-06-296736-7

All about the apple that (contrary to legend) did not hit Isaac Newton’s head in the mid-17th century—and what became of the tree from which it fell.

The apple may have missed, but the insight into why it fell down instead of, say, up struck the young genius hard enough to revolutionize our understanding of how the physical universe works...and to turn the tree into a destination for generations of pilgrims. As Redding relates with alliterative vim, the tree survived a lightning strike around 1820, though pieces of it were carved into a chair—“a perfect perch for pondering”—and, much later, carried onto the International Space Station. It still produces fruit to this day, sending offspring to grow around the world. In the wake of illustrating Nancy I. Sanders’ The Very Oldest Pear Tree (2020), Imamura portrays the tree from first tiny seed to gnarled snag, inspiring visitors from Albert Einstein in 1930 to Stephen Hawking in his wheelchair in 1987. As the centuries pass, racially diverse background characters begin to diversify the mostly White cast...and on the final page, a brown-skinned child stands in for readers with, the author writes, a similar “potential to change the world.” (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 77% of actual size.)

A sweet windfall of history and inspiration. (biographical notes, bibliography, timeline) (Informational picture book. 7-9)

BUG BLONSKY AND HIS SWAMP SCOUT SURVIVAL GUIDE
Redmond, E.S.
Illus. by the author
Candlewick (96 pp.)
$15.99 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-1-5362-0676-0
Series: Bug Blonsky, 2

Bug Blonsky isn’t known for his positive attitude. While he’s on a camping trip, Bug makes a list of “Terrible Things To Avoid,” which includes several of the other scouts along with “rubbery hot dogs,” “rabbit poop,” and “the outhouse.” Fans of bathroom humor will be very fond of this novel. But Bug has one idealistic quality. He believes that Bigfoot “for sure is totally 100 percent real.” This does very little to improve his relationships with the other campers, who tend to say that Bigfoot doesn’t exist—or walk into the Bigfoot trap Bug has set outside the bunkhouse. But by the end of the story, some of those campers are nominating him for a Steadfast Scout patch for his faith and bravery. Anyone who loved the first Bug Blonsky book, which was crammed with frogs and armpit farts, will find the same sort of jokes here, but they may also love the moments of sweetness. There are surprisingly—shockingly—many. The style of illustration, however, is very much the same. The characters are essentially very elaborate stick figures, with one important difference: Their ears are drawn right near the bottoms of their faces, as in the old song “Do Your Ears Hang Low?” Many of the main characters are White, including Bug, but Bug’s best friend, Louie, is Black.

This novel has just enough farts that no one will accuse it of being mushy. (Fiction. 6-10)
“Reedy’s familiarity with the terrain, the culture of the outdoors, and combat breathe authenticity into the narrative.”

**HUNTER’S CHOICE**

*Reedy, Trent*

Norton Young Readers (176 pp.)

$17.95  |  Mar. 2, 2021

978-1-324-01137-8

Can Hunter live up to his name? Hunter Higgins is 12, and it feels like his whole life has been leading to this weekend: his first deer hunt. His family is a hunting family, and their land in the Idaho wilderness has been its emotional center for decades. Hunter’s taken all the classes, has perfected his shooting, earned his license—but still he wonders whether he can actually take a life. He keeps this worry bottled up as his family gathers at their lodge: his father, his grandfather, his uncle, and his cousin, Yumi, who’s also 12—and, unexpectedly, Yumi’s friend Annette, their classmate and Hunter’s secret crush. Now Hunter has to navigate his family’s expectations and Annette. Reedy introduces a powerful subplot in Yumi’s difficult relationship with her father, a veteran whose experiences in Afghanistan have left hidden scars. Reedy’s familiarity with the terrain, the culture of the outdoors, and combat breathe authenticity into the narrative; as Hunter reflects, “A non-shooter would probably never be able to understand what this felt like.” Hunter’s rural Idaho world is populated by folks like the Higginses; the ethics of hunting are not called into question. It is also mostly White, with Yumi and her mom’s presumed Japanese heritage hinted at in their names. Readers from outside Hunter’s culture may find such details as the lodge’s all-camo decor cartoonish, but those from within it should feel at home.

For kids who, like Hunter, can’t get enough of *Hatchet*. (Fiction. 8-12)

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**WHAT WOULD YOU DO IN A BOOK ABOUT YOU?**

*Reidy, Jean*

Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)

$18.99  |  Apr. 6, 2021

978-0-06-304150-9

If someone wrote a book about you, what would happen in it?

Who would you be? What would you do? This rhyming, cheerily illustrated picture book offers some possible answers. You might, for example, travel on a broomstick or find yourself a magic wand. You might travel to outer space or the Arctic, or you may stay closer to home. You might do incredible, important things like rescuing royalty or giving huge speeches or tearing down walls. You might heal the world by curing polar bears of their blues or simply apologizing for something you did wrong. You might go on wild adventures that give you the opportunity to interact with walruses, dinosaurs, emus, yaks, and tea-sipping frogs. When you use your imagination and tell your own stories, there are endless possibilities for magic, mayhem, fun, and learning. The layered, geometric illustrations include cartoon characters with various skin tones inhabiting colorful, detailed worlds that burst with life and movement. The text has a call-and-response feel that lends itself to reading out loud. Some of the pages reference possible choices that could occur both in dreams and in real life, such as doing small kindnesses or choosing your own path. At times, however, the words feel repetitive, with, perhaps, scenarios added to fill out the page count rather than because they were strictly necessary. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 76.3% of actual size.)*

This quirky picture book is sweet but overlong. (Picture book 3-6)

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**Hatchet**

*Rewards for Readers*

Kirkus, Maranke

Illus. by van der Linden, Martijn

Trans. by Forest-Flier, Nancy

Levine Querido (152 pp.)

$14.99  |  Apr. 20, 2021

978-1-64614-040-4

A mischievous talking popcorn kernel with a short fuse turns a Dutch girl’s life upside down.

When an American farmer pours a “super-illegal” substance onto his cornfield, he’s completely unaware that just a little while later in the Netherlands one of the “mega-big” kernels from that crop will become Popcorn Bob. Nine-year-old Ellis brings Bob to life while secretly microwaving popcorn in the shed. Ellis used to eat popcorn every day, but now both her school and her dads will allow only healthy food, and that means no popcorn. Now Ellis is stuck with the cowboy-hatted Popcorn Bob, whose insatiable hunger and bad temper throw Ellis’ life into chaos—which Ellis is always blamed for. If only Ellis could get rid of Popcorn Bob and convince everyone to stop eating gross, healthy food all the time! Originally published in the Netherlands, the plot of this illustrated chapter book strings together an odd assortment of slapstick scenarios, all propelled by the selfishness of a strange and repugnant kernel of corn. The detailed grayscale pencil illustrations are full of whimsy, exaggerated facial expressions appropriate to the cartoonish plot. Ellis and her dads appear to have fair skin, and Ellis’ classmates are diverse in appearance. The “meantime, back in the American Midwest” ending sets up a sequel. Numerous references to “crazy” people may leave readers with a bad taste in their mouths.

For readers with a taste for the bizarre. (Science fiction. 7-10)
When Bix discovers Pella has left, she rushes off to rescue her. United Arab Emirates. They are deeply personal and expressed Philippines, Uruguay, Pakistan, China, Venezuela, and the Canadian import features 15 poems by young immigrants from Outremont, Quebec, Canada.

A worrywart goblin must face her fears to save not just her sister, but the whole of Teacup Island.

Bix’s headstrong little sister, Pella, is one of her main sources of worry. Ever since they lost their parents, Bix has been responsible for Pella—but Pella is not easily controlled. Mere days before the Midsummer Festival, the goblins’ underground city is struck by yet another earthquake, leading the elders to decide they all must leave. It is said that the Earth Queen who lives in the Enchanted Forest is responsible for the earthquakes, so Pella decides to go confront her. When Bix discovers Pella has left, she rushes off to rescue her despite all her fears of the Enchanted Forest that swallows up anyone who dares to enter. With the help of Cici, an enthusiastic tree troll, Bix navigates dangers and discovers the hero within herself. Gorgeous black-lined, pastel-colored art brings life this charming adventure story of sisterhood and friendship. Bix, Pella, and Cici, who live in a fantasy land that is filled with magic and devoid of humans, are lovable for their distinct personalities and big hearts. The colorful inhabitants of Teacup Island are all pretty cute—even the ones that veer toward creepy. With danger always lurking and illustrations that are full of movement, it’s easy to get quickly swept up into this tale and not want to leave.

Enchanting indeed. (map, character guide) (Graphic fantasy. 8-12)

A collection of poems written by immigrant students at the Paul-Gérin-Lajoie-D’Outremont high school, in Outremont, Quebec, Canada. Originally published in French as Bagages—_mon histoire_, this Canadian import features 15 poems by young immigrants from many corners of the world: Moldova, Iran, South Korea, Israel, Philippines, Uruguay, Pakistan, China, Venezuela, and the United Arab Emirates. They are deeply personal and expressed in different ways. “Now I advance / Slashing my chrysalis,” declares Dohee Kim, from South Korea. “I have gained the future / I have lost the past,” reflects Hernan Farina Forster, from Uruguay. “Thank you, FaceTime / For showing me their tear-streaked faces / Even here in Canada,” writes Arad Panahi, from Iran. The poems are marked by very universal themes, predominantly sadness over the people and places left behind and uneasiness over what lies ahead. Alongside the poems are striking full-page portraits in muted sepia tones on cream-colored paper. While some of the portraits correspond with the author of the accompanying poem, most do not. It must be presumed they are portraits of other young immigrant students at the school, not included in this poetry anthology. The English title of the book plays on the double meaning of the phrase, expressing so simply what it means to be an immigrant. Immigrants are the sum total of the baggage they carry on with them as well as the future they forge as they carry on with their lives in their new country.

A sensitive and heartfelt voicing of the immigrant experience. (editor’s note, illustrator’s note) (Picture book/poetry. 10-15)

Well-known historical figures from wildly different disciplines have a surprising connection.

In 1937 New Jersey, Marian Anderson sings to a White audience in a huge theatre, but the minute the curtain is down, she’s no longer a star. She’s a Black woman who is invisible to most and persona non grata to others—especially nearby hotels. Without a place to stay for the night, she’s on her own, until someone from the front row of the audience approaches her and invites her to stay in his guest room. The man is Albert Einstein, and he knows all too well what it’s like to be treated as less than human in one’s own country, ever since he fled Germany soon after Hitler’s rise to power. The two get along and talk music, and Albert is glad to pull out his violin and play for her. The evening portrayed in this picture book is the start of what would presumably go on to be a lifelong friendship between people known for their professional achievements who were uncomfortable in the spotlight as activists but did their work quietly. Muñoz’s illustrations are inviting, buoyant, and colorful, and the text does not oversimplify the racism Anderson endures. Though the afterword gives quick details on both figures’ lives more generally, it does not cite or give context to their relationship beyond telling readers that the incident is “not well known”—a disappointment. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-8.8-inch double-page spreads viewed at 61.4% of actual size.)

A charming anecdote. (Informational picture book. 5-10)

“A sensitive and heartfelt voicing of the immigrant experience.”
ONE SMALL HOP
Rosenberg, Madelyn
Scholastic (256 pp.)
$17.99 | May 18, 2021
978-1-338-56561-4

Four seventh graders go on an adventure to save what they think may be the last bullfrog in Maine.

It is the mid-to-late 21st century, and climate change has suffocated the town of Blue Harbor, Maine. The ocean is toxic, the sun is scalding, and the natural world is decimated. When Leroy Varney, paddling a canoe he made for a school project, stumbles across a live lobster in a stream on an island near the town, he brings it back to try to save it, but it is taken away by the Environmental Police Force—an inept government agency tasked with “PROTECTING THE WORLD FROM YOU; PROTECTING YOU FROM THE WORLD.” Friends Jonathan “Ahab” Goldstein (who is the first-person narrator), Delphinium “Delph” Perez, and Davy Hudson convince Leroy to paddle them out to the island to see if anything else is alive. When they find a solitary bullfrog, they decide to take matters into their own hands, leading them into more adventure than they’ve ever had in their lives. Along the way they experience a less-decimated natural world and learn about the power of friendship, trust, and, most importantly, hope. Add to this solid theme occasional social irony and the story sparkles like a gem.

Davy is cued as Black and Delph as Latinx; other main characters default to White.

In turns adroitly funny and heartbreakingly sad but ultimately inspiring. (Fiction. 8-13)

HIDING BABY MOSES
Roth, Judith L.
Illus. by Cataldo, Melanie
Flyaway Books (32 pp.)
$18.00 | Apr. 27, 2021
978-1-68437-988-0

A retelling of the story of Moses, cast adrift and saved by Pharaoh’s daughter. A mournful mother prepares a water-tight basket for her baby son, and she and his older sister kiss him goodbye. They carry him through a crowded marketplace to the river, singing as they walk along, “God will hide us in the shelter of a rock.” They then set him afloat. The sister, who narrates, imagines many dangers in and about the Nile: soldiers, currents, crocodiles. Then, dressed in ornate finery, Pharaoh’s daughter and her attendants appear. The sister would like to snatch the baby from the water, but it is Pharaoh’s daughter who holds him and comforts him. The sister shows herself and tells them that she can bring them a woman to nurse the baby; it is his mother. Miriam, the sister, tells the story in her own words, although she is never named in the text. The narration circles around verses of the author’s original song, “The Shelter of God’s Wings,” and reads like stanzas to its refrain of God’s power. The mundane illustrations feature brown-skinned people and a plethora of green reeds. In the author’s note, there is a brief summary of the history of the Hebrew people in Egypt from Joseph to Moses and the entry into the promised land. The festive holiday of Passover, which celebrates this event, is not mentioned, however.

Not a worthwhile or necessary addition to Passover stories; it may find a home on the shelves of some Christian families, however. (song notation, lyrics) (Picture book. 4-8)

SOMETIMES IT’S BRIGHT
Ruygt, Annie
Illus. by the author
Boyds Mills (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 6, 2021
978-1-68437-982-8

A child experiences creativity as magical wisps.

A little blue-hued child with hair in two Afro puffs and their similarly blue parent pass a trumpeter (also blue-tinted, with close-cropped hair and a sharp nose) whose trumpet (and head to a lesser degree) emits colorful, magical-looking bouquetlike wisps. In this watercolor-and-colored pencil world most everything is blue-hued, so the wisps stand out. When the pair reaches a busy square, more wisps appear near billboards and a theater marquee. Once they’re in the theater, wisps are depicted coming from both attendees and performers. Back at home, the rhyming text muses in the child-narrator voice: “How can I find it? Can it be bought? / If I take note and share what I see… / Wait, there it is! / It’s coming from me.” Readers observe here that as the child draws what they observed that day that emitted the magical wisps, more are created from their art. Unfortunately, why the magical wisps are important or valuable is never made clear. Do they make the child happy? Inspired? Both are implied, but it’s a bit disjointed to have such a heavy focus on the wisps without delving into why they matter. The rhyming text suggests a young target audience, but the high-concept idea suggests this offering is intended for older readers. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 32.6% of actual size.)

Try pairing with other titles about creativity for a more well-rounded picture. (Picture book. 3-5)
DO YOU KNOW ME?
Scott, Libby & Westcott, Rebecca
Scholastic (320 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 5, 2021
978-1-338-62119-8

Challenges continue for an autistic sixth grader as she joins her class in a weeklong end-of-year campout.

Following Can You See Me? (2020) teenage author Scott and adult co-author Westcott draw upon Scott’s personal experiences to portray middle schooler Tally’s responses to stressful situations—both at home, where she’s faced with a 12th birthday celebration, and at camp, where everything is new, including a particularly vicious mean girl. As before, the tale is told in the third person with entries from Tally’s journal, in which she explains her responses to events and offers guidelines for neurotypical readers. In those entries she comes into focus as not just a mouthpiece, but a character with a distinct, individual voice. Tally is mobbed by understanding allies, including not only her parents and older sister, but a sensitive camp counselor who is in charge of a shelter for rescued pets, two fellow campers who are also neurodivergent, and a formerly trusted classmate who is sincerely remorseful about her role in a devastating incident. With their support and her own growing understanding of how to head off incipient meltdowns and to communicate her own needs clearly, Tally transforms what promises at first to be a disastrous failed experiment into a successful, memorable experience. Aside from some name cues the cast presents White.

Heavy on instruction and behavior modeling, but there’s a sturdy enough storyline to bear the weight. (Fiction. 9-12)

THERE’S A RANG-TAN IN MY BEDROOM
Sellick, James
Illus. by Preston-Gannon, Frann
Crocodile/Interlink (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Apr. 19, 2021
978-1-62371-873-2

A fanciful approach to raising children’s consciousness about conservation.

Rhyming text introduces the titular conundrum with the opening line, “There’s a Rang-tan in my bedroom,” delivered by a child with brown skin and straight, dark hair. Accompanying colorful art shows an orangutan wreaking havoc in the child’s home—throwing away chocolate, howling at shampoo—until the child finally asks why the animal is there. The following pages, set in a forest, switch perspective, with the orangutan’s narration: “There’s a human in my forest, and I don’t know what to do.” The text goes on to explain that the human presence in the rainforest is linked to clear-cutting in order to grow palm trees for palm oil used in products like chocolate and shampoo. (These facts are also detailed in both a foreword by actor and conservationist Emma Thompson and the backmatter, which specifies Indonesia as the place where orangutans live in the wild.) Now the child knows what to do: organize! Moved by the orangutan’s plight, the child writes letters to corporations asking them to curb deforestation, and backmatter provides readers with practical, accessible steps to do the same. Preston-Gannon’s illustrations feature characters both human and animal with big, round eyes and soft outlines; the scenes of bulldozers laying waste to the forest are unsurprisingly upsetting. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10.5-by-21-inch double-page spreads viewed at 18.4% of actual size.)

A good, green read. (Picture book. 4-7)

THE RICE IN THE POT GOES ROUND AND ROUND
Shang, Wendy Wan-Long
Illus. by Tu, Lorian
Orchard/Scholastic (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Apr. 20, 2021
978-1-338-62110-5

A young Chinese family enjoys a visit to their grandparents’ house.

Modeled after “The Wheels on the Bus,” the narrative opens with, “When my family gets together we laugh and sing, / laugh and sing, laugh and sing.” The grandparents along with their small white dog give a warm welcome to their extended family. The four grandchildren are two grade schoolers, a tutu-wearing toddler, and a baby. The dinner table is stacked with bamboo steamers and numerous dishes, with a lazy susan in the center. As the story progresses, each family member is addressed in Chinese and associated with a traditional dish. “Nai Nai drinks her tea with a hoo, hoo, hoo” (the kids’ grandmother is evidently blowing on the hot liquid); “Ye Ye eats noodles going slurp, slurp, slurp” (the grandfather slurps a comically long noodle); and “Ba Ba takes a pancake to roll up the duck” (the dad happily munches Peking duck). The repetitive stanzas and delectable onomatopoeia establish a rhythmic pace that irresistibly begs for participation. Tu’s illustrations elevate the joyful tone with brightly colored cartoons filled with textures and lively details. Shang follows up with a detailed glossary explaining food, family titles, and dining etiquette. The explanations are thorough, accompanied by characters in both Traditional and Simplified Chinese and Romanized spellings. This deceptively simple story artfully brings an authentic expression of family love. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 90.9% of actual size.)

An utterly charming Asian twist to a familiar tune. (author’s note, illustrator’s note) (Picture book. 3-5)
“Kids and caregivers alike will commiserate with Dylan and his parents as they navigate their busy weeks.”

**DYLAN’S DRAGON**

*Silvestro, Annie*
Illus. by Whitehouse, Ben
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 1, 2021
978-0-8075-1742-0

Dylan’s days are packed full to the brim, but all he wants is a little bit of time to just be a kid.

Dylan loved drawing when he was very little. He drew castles, snakes, trains, but especially dragons. As he grows, his days begin to fill up with karate, baseball, swimming, and gymnastics. “Every second was planned, every moment measured, every day completely, utterly full.” One morning, Dragon appears to see if Dylan would like to play. He needs to go to school but promises to play later—which they do, until it’s time for piano lessons. So the week goes on, with Dylan stealing away moments of play with Dragon around school, baseball, and piano lessons. It seems like Dylan is always busy, until Sunday finally comes and he goes looking for Dragon—one day Dragon is nowhere to be found. Disappointed, Dylan devises a plan to bring Dragon back, but will it work? Kids and caregivers alike will commiserate with Dylan and his parents as they navigate their busy weeks. The frustration of not having time to play is something most kids can relate to. Busy illustrations help fill out the text and give a clear visual of the chaos that is Dylan’s family schedule. Dylan and his parents present White; the toy tepee in the playroom is a disappointing detail.

A reminder that making time to play can bring a little bit of magic back into our days.  (Picture book, 5-8)

**MARS IS**

*Stark Slopes, Silvery Snow, and Startling Surprises*
Slade, Suzanne
Peachtree (48 pp.)
$19.99 | Apr. 1, 2021
978-1-68263-188-1

A photo gallery of Martian landforms and surface features, taken by the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter’s powerful HiRISE camera.

A failure in both concept and execution, this set of big, square close-ups not only renders HiRISE’s extraordinarily high-resolution shots as, too often, murky blurs, but pairs them to passages of commentary that don’t consistently mention essentials like scale and location—or even seem to be describing what’s on display. Slade offers just a small wedge of what she vaguely dubbs a “colossal crater,” for instance, while leaving viewers to search for invisible “channels in the ice” carved among unexplained hillocks at the Martian south pole and wondering what the dark, brushlike formations that seem to be sticking up from “northern sandy dunes” even are. She just swoons over the planet’s “gorgeous rocky layers” and “lovely linear ridges” while building up to a rhapsodic finale (“completely breathtaking!… / Mars is more amazing than anyone ever imagined!”) in immense type. Capped by a closing timeline that asks readers to believe that Mars was “first discovered” in the 1600s, this outing offers neither the information nor the inspiration of similar photo essays like Seymour Simon’s *Mars* (1987) and Elizabeth Rusch’s *Mighty Mars Rovers* (2012).

Never leaves the launchpad.  (Informational picture book, 7-9)
“An emphatic, triumphant declaration.”

**THE COLOR COLLECTOR**

*Solis, Nicholas*
*Illus. by Metallinos, Renia*
Sleeping Bear Press (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 15, 2021
978-1-5341-1105-9

A homesick young immigrant collects colorful scraps in an effort to re-create the colors of the home she has left behind.

A muted double-page spread in shades of gray introduces the story; the only touch of color coming from the violet bands holding the braids of a lonely girl on the school playground. From the narrator—another child in the school—readers learn her name is Violet and she is new. They walk home the same way every day, and a quiet, tentative friendship develops between the two. On the walks, Violet picks up colorful cookie wrappers, bits of paper, bottle caps, and leaves, all disappearing into her backpack. When finally asked the purpose of her collection, Violet extends an invitation to her home and reveals a bedroom exploding with lush colors. Every piece of paper, every leaf, has found a place in the vast collage that encompasses all of her room, depicting the sky, beach, palm trees, and village the homesick child misses so much. “I miss the sounds and smells. And I miss the colors.” Where she comes from is not stated, but Violet is Black and is perhaps from the Caribbean or from an African country. Violet having finally confided in someone, readers will see that not just her room, but even the outside is now colorful, and both children are smiling. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 28.8% of actual size.)

A good discussion starter on empathy. (Picture book. 5-8)

**WE ARE STILL HERE! Native American Truths Everyone Should Know**

*Sorell, Traci*
*Illus. by Lessac, Frané*
Charlesbridge (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 20, 2021
978-1-62354-192-7

In this meticulously researched nonfiction picture book, Sibert honorees Sorell and Lessac team up once again to answer this question: What has happened to Native Nations and their citizens after the treaties with the U.S. government ended in 1871?

Lessac’s trademark colorful, folk-art–style illustrations show a Native American community school with a classroom of diverse students preparing for presentations at the Indigenous People’s Day assembly. Spread by spread, each child speaks, featured words and terms highlighting the journey Native Nations have taken to reclaim their land and rights. They show why Indigenous people say, “We are still here!” In the “Assimilation” presentation, Native children are dressed in militarylike uniforms, showing how U.S. leaders used schooling to destroy Native traditions. Dividing plots of tribal land for “Allotment” left much treaty land open for public sale. With “Termination” and “Relocation,” Native people were encouraged to leave their tribal lands and “act more like white people.” But Indigenous people say, “We are still here!” and the narrative arc turns to emphasize resilience. When activists speak up and organize, it strengthens tribal sovereignty. The tribes “protect and provide for future generations” by holding on to their traditional ceremonies, opening businesses to support their tribal members, and reviving their tribal languages. The illustrations, too, change their tenor, modulating from historical wrongs to emphasize contemporary strength, community, and joy.

An emphatic, triumphant declaration: “WE ARE STILL HERE!” (Further information, timeline, glossary, sources, author’s note) (Informational picture book. 7-10)

**SUMMER OF STOLEN SECRETS**

*Sternberg, Julie*
Viking (288 pp.)
$16.99 | May 11, 2021
978-0-593-20364-4

A middle schooler discovers that her prickly, estranged grandmother has a soft spot.

Catarina Arden-Blume’s father has not spoken to his mother ever since she objected to his marrying a Christian. He rejects organized religion, though Cat’s mom encourages her daughter to explore her Jewish heritage. And whether Cat feels awkward about it or not, she’s about to be confronted with it, because she’s been invited to her father’s hometown of
When the school principal tries to keep the girls from forming their own soccer team, the thrust of the story becomes the girls’ efforts to do so anyway, aided by supportive adults. Bea’s teammates, especially her new neighbor and the new girl at school (who is deaf and has an ASL classroom interpreter), inspire her with strength. Even as Bea finds sympathy for Bryce over the death of his mother when he was very small, Bryce distances himself from his obnoxious friends. The resolution to the storyline of the obstructive principal feels unrealistic, but Bea’s team’s communal success is real and wonderful. Characters read as White by default.

Charming and heartfelt. (Fiction. 8-12)

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A dog muses about a peaceful day in the garden with a favorite human.

Narrated from the point of view of the dog, this gentle story has peace and soothing ambiance on its side. What it does not have, however, is a riveting storyline. Dutch, the dog, pretends to be asleep as the titular gardener, a young woman (illustrated with pale skin and red hair), goes down to her breakfast. When she calls the dog (this is why Dutch pretends to be asleep, the dog tells readers, to hear her “gentle voice” calling), they go outside together. There, the young woman begins to work in her garden while Dutch observes. The young woman digs garden beds (the dog approves), they rest, Dutch plays with the water hose, they go home at twilight. Where the narrative lacks pizzazz, however, the illustrations are another story. Luscious, rich depth of color and effective visual design combine with a delicate play of light and shadow to create a serene, calming atmosphere all on its own, without any words. Light-filled indoor and outdoor scenes of the sunniest complementary colors are joyful in their combinations of patterns. The illustrations prioritize the dog’s viewpoint: a few show the dog prominently while the woman’s torso, but not head, is shown—a clever tactic to keep the illustrative focus on the doggy perspective. (This book was reviewed digitally with 8.5-by-11.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 40% of actual size.)

Not much happens, but it’s gorgeous to look at. (Picture book. 3-10)

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In this world, everyone has a sentient, self-directed shadow that represents their innermost self. The White, floppy-haired main character explains that his shadow “is quite different, it’s not what you think.” Most of the shadows in his family are blue, but his is pink and “loves…princesses, fairies, and things not for boys.” In awkward rhyming couplets the narrator anxiously awaits the first day of school, where all of his apparently mixed-gender classmates seem to have blue shadows. When he’s instructed (via a rhyming note) to wear his shadow’s “favourite” thing to school, he arrives in a tutu—then runs home when everyone stares at him. His father, a burly masculine triangle of a man and also White, dons a pink hooded dress in solidarity to escort his son back to school, and all is well. The central
This messy middle school drama shines a light on what it means to develop identity. Haddie, Taylor, her mother, and herself. Kate must decide who she is changing for better, worse, and everything in between.

Seventh grade is starting, and Kate’s mom has moved away, leaving her with her dad. She has been growing apart from former bestie Haddie, a nonconformist who doesn’t feel like a good fit for Kate anymore. Popular mean girl Taylor, who befriends Kate, may not be the best fit, either. But Kate is—mostly—happy to be in Taylor’s orbit, where she doesn’t have to talk about her situation the way she would with Haddie, who is genuinely interested in her life. Kate even follows along when Taylor’s clique harasses Haddie, resulting in Haddie’s fall through the ice on a frozen pond. Narrated by Kate, the scene and her ugly, conflicting emotions are vividly described. Instinct kicks in, and Kate saves Haddie. Video of the rescue makes national media, and celebrities dub her Kate the Great. Is she? Tensions mount, and Kate anxiously treads water until her full role in the incident is exposed, forcing her to confront Haddie, Taylor, her mother, and herself. Kate must decide who she is: bully, hero, friend, foe, beloved daughter, dependent, all of the above. Characters are three-dimensional and realistically flawed, as Kate becomes increasingly aware. The resolution feels familiar above. Characters are three-dimensional and realistically flawed, as Kate becomes increasingly aware. The resolution feels familiar. Doing the same—with a beautiful, cumulative impact.

The conceit of this story leaves many questions unsatisfyingly unanswered: Many girl-presenting classmates have blue shadows, so how are shadow colors assigned at birth? How can a person’s shadow have a discrete sexual orientation? Why use rhyming couplets when they lead to tortured constructions like “I join a small group, though in I don’t blend”? (This book was reviewed digitally with 10.8-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 20.8% of actual size.)

As a parable of gender nonconformity this is too disjointed to work. Don’t bother. (Picture book 4-7)

**THE KATE IN BETWEEN**
Swinarski, Claire
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins

Kate is changing for better, worse, and everything in between.

Seventh grade is starting, and Kate’s mom has moved away, leaving her with her dad. She has been growing apart from former bestie Haddie, a nonconformist who doesn’t feel like a good fit for Kate anymore. Popular mean girl Taylor, who befriends Kate, may not be the best fit, either. But Kate is—mostly—happy to be in Taylor’s orbit, where she doesn’t have to talk about her situation the way she would with Haddie, who is genuinely interested in her life. Kate even follows along when Taylor’s clique harasses Haddie, resulting in Haddie’s fall through the ice on a frozen pond. Narrated by Kate, the scene and her ugly, conflicting emotions are vividly described. Instinct kicks in, and Kate saves Haddie. Video of the rescue makes national media, and celebrities dub her Kate the Great. Is she? Tensions mount, and Kate anxiously treads water until her full role in the incident is exposed, forcing her to confront Haddie, Taylor, her mother, and herself. Kate must decide who she is: bully, hero, friend, foe, beloved daughter, dependent, all of the above. Characters are three-dimensional and realistically flawed, as Kate becomes increasingly aware. The resolution feels familiar above. Characters are three-dimensional and realistically flawed, as Kate becomes increasingly aware. The resolution feels familiar. Doing the same—with a beautiful, cumulative impact.

**THE LITTLE THINGS**
A Story About Acts of Kindness
Trimmer, Christian
Illus. by Juanita, Kaylani
Abrams (40 pp.)

A little girl’s small act of kindness energizes her town into doing the same—with a beautiful, cumulative impact.

**SUGAR AND SPITE**
Villanueva, Gail D.
Scholastic (208 pp.)

Jolina uses magic to seek revenge on a bully.

Twelve-year old Jolina has recently moved to Isla Pag-Ibig from the busy city of Manila. Moving to the small island hasn’t been easy, especially with Claudine continually bullying her. Luckily, Jolina has her dog, Kidlat, and her healer grandfather’s lessons in the arbularyo’s magic to distract her. But one day Claudine wants to be her best friend, following anything Jolina says. The girls get to know each other and become real friends, but the price of magic must be paid, putting everything and everyone at risk. This is a fun, heartwarming novel of friendship, love, and forgiveness. Fantasy mixes with reality, exploring themes of privilege, consent, free will, and sacrifice. Filipino culture and Tagalog are naturally worked into the story, which highlights the old healing practices, landscape,
food, and history of the Philippines. Early on in the story, Jolina heartbreakingly compares her dark brown skin, thick straight black hair, and flat nose to Claudine’s light brown skin, wavy black hair, and high-bridged nose. Claudine’s mother has a female partner.

A delightfully sweet mix of magic and friendship (and pets). (recipe, author’s note) (Fantasy. 8-12)

THE BIG HUG
Walker, Megan
Illus. by the author
POW! (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 20, 2021
978-1-57687-979-5

Two friends find ways to give hugs when world events keep them inside and apart.

Two friends, both Black, live on opposite sides of a quiet street and are inseparable. They play active games outdoors from morning till evening. When they fight, they always make up with a big hug and get back to playing together. But one day, they must stop playing, go inside, and stay apart for a long while. “Where can you put friendship when friends are apart? / Slowly, they learned.” From across the street, through windows and phones, they share “hugs” in the form of smiles, waves, songs, pictures, dance contests, and laughter. By the time they can return outdoors, playing while keeping their distance, they have discovered that “A friendship is a hug when you can’t be there.” And when they finally can “be together again,” they share one big physical hug. The bold cartoon illustrations in this picture book use thick black lines, expressive faces, and selective variations in white space, grayscale, bright color, and framing techniques to depict the roller coaster of feelings the children experience, from joy to isolation and back again. The simplicity of the story and its lack of specific detail (face coverings are not pictured, and the reason for the isolation is not named) make it emotionally resonant now and likely to remain relevant for years to come.

As comforting and hopeful as a big hug. (Picture book. 4-9)

THE SHAPE OF THUNDER
Warga, Jasmine
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (288 pp.)
$16.99 | May 11, 2021
978-0-06-295667-5

Two best friends haven’t spoken in the year since the tragedy that upended their lives.

Cora Hamed lives with her Lebanese father and White American maternal grandmother; her mother left years earlier. She is mourning the loss of her older sister, Mabel, who died in a school shooting. Quinn McCauley, who is White, is coping with the emotional fallout of her brother Parker’s life-changing actions. While Cora’s family grieves openly and makes sure she sees a therapist regularly, Quinn’s parents fight constantly over who is to blame for what Parker did. The story unfolds in chapters that alternate between the two girls’ viewpoints; Quinn’s chapters open with movingly honest letters to Parker. On Cora’s 12th birthday, she finds a box on her front porch. Quinn believes she has discovered a way to fix everything, but she needs Cora’s help. Eventually the two begin to work together on a time-travel project, seeking a wormhole that will allow them to travel back in time and prevent the shooting. Throughout, Quinn struggles with her guilt and a secret she’s keeping while Cora struggles with her last interaction with Mabel, wondering whether she can still be friends with Quinn, and understanding the Lebanese heritage she knows relatively little about but that shapes people’s perceptions of her. Both characters are well developed, and Warga skillfully handles both their delicate, emotional friendship and larger subjects of grief and gun violence.

Powerful and emotionally complex. (author’s note, resources) (Fiction. 9-13)

GRANDAD’S CAMPER
Woodgate, Harry
Illus. by the author
Little Bee (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 6, 2021
978-1-4998-1193-3

This road trip has been a lifetime in the making.

Readers are introduced to a young, brown-skinned, curly-haired protagonist on a visit to their White grandfather’s cottage. While there, the protagonist, who narrates, and their grandfather play the usual games and do the usual activities, but Grandad also tells stories about how he and Gramps, a man of color who is now deceased, met and fell in love while traveling in an old VW microbus. Inspired by these tales, the narrator encourages Grandad to fix up the van, and the two take it for a road trip to the beach. This is a quiet story that speaks volumes, and astute educators and storytellers will be able to use the book in both intimate storytimes and with larger groups. Caregivers, especially older ones, may see this book as an opportunity to talk about departed loved ones and introduce their happy memories to a younger generation—many a family will find themselves pulling out photo albums to relate their own origin stories. The artwork is enticing and rich, and readers will be happy to pore over the pages studying details like Grandad’s friendly dog and the textured backgrounds as they read and reread the story. This book deserves pride of place on any bookshelf, be it in a library, school, or home. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11 by 19-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.)

As warm and friendly as a kind grandparent. (Picture book. 4-8)
“Readers will delight in the breathtaking illustrations.”

**IF I WERE A TREE**

*Zimmerman, Andrea*
Illus. by *Tsong, Jing Jing*
Lee & Low Books (40 pp.)
$19.95 | Apr. 6, 2021
978-1-62014-801-3

Enjoy and observe nature with all your senses.

A family of color embarks on an adventure in the great outdoors. On their way to the campsite and when they get there, the children repeatedly declare, “If I were a tree,” then imagine exploring the world from the trees’ perspectives. They imagine seeing (“a web draped with dew, the dawn turning blue”), touching (“nests on my bark, bats hiding till dark”), smelling (“sweet honey and bees, and skunk on the breeze”), tasting (“waters that flood, and minerals in mud”), and hearing (“snakes in a hole, the sneeze of a mole”) their surroundings. As the children wander through the forest, the rhyming verses and simple text engage children in the fun. Readers will delight in the breathtaking illustrations. Double-page spreads are rich and vibrant, Tsong using the colors of nature to evoke a warm and inviting environment. The combination of printmaking and digital collage creates an abundance of depth and texture to each illustration. From an aerial view of a tiny tent in a vast forest to a close-up look at a dazzling spiderweb, the varying perspective reveals more and more with each page turn. Mom presents Asian, and Dad has brown skin, with one child taking after each; the book thus adds valuable representation to the nature genre. A concluding spread offers tree-related extension prompts.

**Young readers will want to experience this book over and over again.** (Picture book: 3-8)

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**YANG WARRIORS**

*Yang, Kao Kalia*
*Illus. by Thao, Billy*
Univ. of Minnesota (40 pp.)
$16.95 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-1-5179-0798-3

In the bleak Ban Vinai Refugee Camp, a brave group of young Hmong children, all cousins, rises up to help those they love.

Led by 10-year-old Master Me, the cousins spend their time training to protect themselves and others. Driven by a sense of duty that defies their age, the group undertakes a risky mission to leave the camp and retrieve vegetables for the younger children. Their fortitude and sacrifice leave an indelible mark on the younger children, giving them their “first taste of freedom” and the courage to keep enduring for a better life. The story springs from Yang’s experience as a child in Ban Vinai, and she narrates with a reflective, retrospective tone, incorporating sensory details that lend immediacy: Readers will taste that bravely foraged meal. Thao’s strong use of perspective highlights the oppressive nature of the camp, with its linear row of dwellings and towering trees standing sentinel. Shadows are dramatically rendered, Master Me’s taking shape in the form of a Hmong heart symbol, representing his role as a leader and as the one “who cares the most.” Within the dull and muted landscape, the warrior children stand out as contrasting pops of bright color symbolizing their resistance and role as bearers of hope. Alas, chunky, repetitive design impedes readers’ immersion in the book. The author and illustrator, who is also Hmong, each contribute a moving note.

*YANG WARRIORS*

A powerful tale about finding purpose and strength in the face of extreme adversity. (Picture book/memoir: 6-10)

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**GRANDPA ACROSS THE OCEAN**

*Yum, Hyewon*
*Illus. by the author*
Abrams (40 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 27, 2021
978-1-4197-4225-5

A summer spent in Korea with Grandpa provides growth for a little Korean American child.

A little black-haired Asian child wheels a blue suitcase through a vast forest to a close-up look at a dazzling spiderweb, the varying perspective reveals more and more with each page turn. Mom presents Asian, and Dad has brown skin, with one child taking after each; the book thus adds valuable representation to the nature genre. A concluding spread offers tree-related extension prompts.

**Young readers will want to experience this book over and over again.** (Picture book: 3-8)

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Enjoy and observe nature with all your senses.

A family of color embarks on an adventure in the great outdoors. On their way to the campsite and when they get there, the children repeatedly declare, “If I were a tree,” then imagine exploring the world from the trees’ perspectives. They imagine seeing (“a web draped with dew, the dawn turning blue”), touching (“nests on my bark, bats hiding till dark”), smelling (“sweet honey and bees, and skunk on the breeze”), tasting (“waters that flood, and minerals in mud”), and hearing (“snakes in a hole, the sneeze of a mole”) their surroundings. As the children wander through the forest, the rhyming verses and simple text engage children in the fun. Readers will delight in the breathtaking illustrations. Double-page spreads are rich and vibrant, Tsong using the colors of nature to evoke a warm and inviting environment. The combination of printmaking and digital collage creates an abundance of depth and texture to each illustration. From an aerial view of a tiny tent in a vast forest to a close-up look at a dazzling spiderweb, the varying perspective reveals more and more with each page turn. Mom presents Asian, and Dad has brown skin, with one child taking after each; the book thus adds valuable representation to the nature genre. A concluding spread offers tree-related extension prompts.

**Young readers will want to experience this book over and over again.** (Picture book: 3-8)
REGINA IS NOT A LITTLE DINOSAUR
Zuill, Andrea
Illus. by the author
Schwartz & Wade/Random (32 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Apr. 13, 2021
978-0-593-12728-5
978-0-593-12729-2 PLB

As a small animal tries to defy expectations.

Regina, a diminutive theropod, yearns to be a fearsome predator, but Mama tells her she’s too little to join the hunt. Phooey, Regina thinks. She’s not that little: She can roar and make scary faces, and she knows how to hide. She attempts to prove Mama wrong. First, Regina spies a tasty-looking morsel to chomp on—the tail of an enormous triceratops who, luckily, is a forgiving sort who merely scowls at her in displeasure. Next, she encounters a bulky ankylosaurus, who patiently (and a bit insultingly) humors her. Just when she’s ready to give up and consider an herbivorous life, Regina sees a promising, smaller possibility—and a mammal to boot. Problem is, it hisses and chases the would-be predator. Fortunately, Mama appears, heads off disaster, and teaches Regina what’s safe to hunt. A comic final twist upends Mama’s solution somewhat. This cute story told with wry humor roars loudly to youngsters who want to step—tentatively—out of their parents’ safe nests and test life’s hunting grounds alone. The conclusion reassures kids that parents will always be there to welcome wanderers back and guide and comfort them whenever needed. The energetic, solid-lined ink illustrations are boldly colored, evoking the prehistoric landscape, and feature a big-eyed, ridiculously adorable protagonist with a lively personality. Occasional onomatopoeia and sound effects set in larger type enliven visuals and add humor. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-17-inch double-page spreads viewed at 27.7% of actual size.)

Fun for dinosaur mavens and brave young explorers who want to test their mettle. (Picture book 3-6)

BUGS AND OTHER LITTLE CRITTERS
Babin, Stéphanie
Illus. by Callejon, Manu
Twiirl/Chronicle (12 pp.)
$16.99 | Mar. 16, 2021
978-2-40802-465-9

Series: Matching Game Book

Peek through sliding panels to discover all manner of insects and small creatures. Though the “critters” might be little, this is one hefty board book! While the series of eight sliding panels clustered on the recto of each spread makes the book’s solid cardboard construction essential, they also make it unwieldy. The back-cover proclamation that this a “great take-along travel activity” notwithstanding, this is not a book caregivers will toss in a diaper bag. Opening the book, readers find a vibrant landscape on the verso of each spread, with five distinct habitats including watery pond, cheery meadow, and eye-catching nocturnal scene. Clearly labelled bugs and creatures mill about, with a satisfying mix of common (ladybugs) and uncommon (weevils) bug and animal species. Opposite the scene, eight smoothly moving panels hide four matching pairs. Though there are general suggestions of games to play with the panels written in itty-bitty text, the list of ideas (match the animals, locate them on the scene, hide the critters, and play I spy) feels half-hearted and repetitive at best. Better are the cartoon illustrations that make spiders, bats, and mosquitoes look as friendly as these creatures can, with large eyes and unobtrusive smiles. Intense, almost garish primary colors are forcefully cheerful.

The game element doesn’t fly, but the art and interactive panels will attract toddler interest. (Novelty/board book 2-4)

MY ARMS WILL HOLD YOU TIGHT
Bowman, Crystal & McKinley, Teri
Illus. by Kubaszewska, Anna
Tyndale Kids (26 pp.)
$7.99 | Jan. 12, 2021
978-1-4964-4622-0

A rhyming board book about the love between a parent and child.

As the title suggests, this offering is all about the ways that caregivers love, protect, care for, and cherish their children. Each turn of the page reveals a new adult-child animal pair with its own rhyming stanza. The text explores many facets of parental love—celebrating it not just when things are sunny, but also on stormy days and through sadness. One particularly sweet rhyme relates, “I’ll hold you when sadness / and tears fill your eyes. / My arms will be there / to catch all
your cries.” Most of the text includes simple rhymes (sky/fly and sand/aband for example), and none are forced or read aloud awkwardly. The illustrations include anthropomorphized animals in mostly bright pastels with simple smiling expressions. Much like the text, they’re cute enough, but there’s not a lot of variation in style. The bat pup wrapped up in its parent’s wings is an especially darling pair; they do indeed look “all cozy and snug.” Glancing references to “prayers” and “God” give the text a slight religious edge, though the book is otherwise secular.

Undeniably sweet even if neither theme nor treatment is particularly new. (Board book. 1-3)

**HUG ME LITTLE PUPPY**
**Finger Puppet Book**
*Chronicle Books*
Chronicle Books (10 pp.)
$9.99 | Mar. 2, 2021
978-1-7972-0570-0

A finger-puppet board book celebrates the love between a puppy and a dog.

Two fairly long, adult-sized finger-puppet dog “arms” are affixed to the back and extend through die-cut holes so that the reader can manipulate them on each page. The text suggests actions: “My arms are always ready to play. I’ll toss, you fetch!” On the page opposite the adult dog with arms outstretched, a puppy romps, stick in mouth. The last page is perhaps the sweetest, as the arms wrap around the puppy for a hug. The text is simple and straightforward, describing dog activities through the lens of a human caregiver-child relationship: “My arms say good morning each day with a hug and a squeeze,” and “My arms carry you to your warm bed,” for example. The smiling brown dogs are drawn simply and plainly against a solid-colored brown background. The fuzzy finger-puppet arms themselves have a surprising amount of detail, with spots and paw pad features. On some of the pages, it’s awkward to move the arms in such a way that it makes sense with the illustration, but little ones probably will not cavil.

Finger-puppet fun, sure, but otherwise forgettable. (Board book. 6 mos. –2)

**BLANKIE**
*Clanton, Ben*
illus. by the author
*Tundra (22 pp.)*
$8.99 | Feb. 2, 2021
978-0-7352-6676-0
Series: Narwhal and Jelly

Narwhal and his jellyfish sidekick, Jelly, see just how much joy a simple thing can bring if they use a little imagination.

When Jelly remarks on Narwhal’s new “blankie,” Narwhal points out that it’s not just a blanket—it can do so much more.

In fact, Narwhal’s blankie is amazingly versatile. It’s a blanket! It’s a hankie! And, of course, after sneezing into it, one can fashion it into a hat and wear it on one’s head. Mounted on a stick, it makes a dandy flag; gathered in a knot, it doubles as a bag. Blankie is a great place to host a picnic; it can also be worn as a cape or a dress. But Blankie’s best feature, Narwhal points out, is that it’s big enough for two—a cozy, warm place to snuggle with a friend. The two friends swim and play against an all-white background that accentuates their delightful expressions and chemistry. A few well-placed motion lines and Blankie’s various permutations provide the rest of the story in Clanton’s successful adaptation of his Narwhal and Jelly books for school-age readers. The characters’ loosely rhymed dialogue unfolds in fast-paced, breezy jokes, and a good-natured sense of play permeates the proceedings. The contemporaneously published volume **Bubbles** is similarly charming and manages one of the few fart jokes (kids love ‘em) that one might arguably describe as clever.

A delightful celebration of friendship and fancy. (Board book. 1-4) (Bubbles: 978-0-7352-6676-6)

**THE COWS ON THE BUS**
*Deutsch, Georgie*
illus. by Sindelan, Valerie
*Tiger Tales (10 pp.)*
$9.99 | Feb. 9, 2021
978-1-68010-647-3

Sing along with this board book designed to grab toddlers’ attention.

The recognizable rhythms of “The Wheels on the Bus” pair vehicles with farm animals for a rollicking good read. The fun starts right on the cover, with cows as both passengers and driver sitting in a red double-decker bus. The word moo in a cutout window hints at what’s to come. Pull the tab to reveal the full text, which incorporates the title and is continued on a sliding panel: “The Cows on the Bus / Go moo / moo MOO! / All day long!” This is followed by ducks quacking on a boat, sheep driving a car, pigs flying in a plane, and dogs on a train. Finally, a rocket is big enough for all the animal friends when pulled up to its full size. Tabs alternating between the right side of the book and the top could be confusing, but the correct tab is conveniently color-coded with the appropriate background and holds a thumbnail picture of the corresponding animal. The panel that slides out is 4.75 by 4.25 inches wide, almost the same size as the book. The large tabs and thick sliders withstand rough handling and slide smoothly, making it nearly perfect toddler design. The back side of each large tab is decorated with repeated images found on adjacent pages (fish, clouds, butterflies) so if one is left open, it does not disrupt the experience of the next spread.

Pull-tabs, animal sounds, vehicles, and an irresistible song—an ideal mix for toddlers. (Board book. 1-3)
“Big, rounded, simplified shapes and bright color contrasts create both instant recognition and immediate visual drama.”

ROAR!

LET’S PRETEND FIRE STATION
Edwards, Nicola
Illus. by Elliott, Thomas
Tiger Tales (12 pp.)
$9.99 | May 11, 2021
978-1-68010-658-9
Series: My World

Intricate die-cut windows and the shaped edges of sturdy pages invite young children to explore careers through play.

Peekaboo windows hint at what the turns of the extra-thick pages will reveal. Simplified illustrations of firefighter equipment and trucks are accurate, incorporating photographs and drawn elements, including photos of two recurring characters: a child of color and a White child who demonstrate the tasks of firefighters. Odd design choices mar this effort. For example, on both the cover and the first page, the same White child appears twice, and in another early spread, the child of color holds a fire hose that is not hooked up to the nearby hydrant; after the initial scenes with children in the firetruck, no people are seen on the rest of the trucks, rendering the illustrations rather sterile. Equipment shown in companion title Let’s Pretend Animal Hospital looks like it came from a preschool dramatic play kit. How the equipment is used is left to the imagination. (How does a veterinarian use safety pins?) The cast of Animal Hospital is larger than Fire Station and is about half White and half children of color. The final spread features an Asian child in veterinarian garb while three children in the background cuddle the real stars, a dog, kitten, and bunny. Both books offer the right amount of information for little ones, but exclamatory sentences (“We put out fires and save lives!”) fail to generate excitement.

Useful information passively presented. (Board book. 18 mos.-3) (Let’s Pretend Animal Hospital: 978-1-68010-658-9)

SURPRISE!
Slide and Play Shapes
Fouquier, Elsa
Illus. by the author
Twirl/Chronicle (10 pp.)
$14.99 | Feb. 16, 2021
978-2-40802-469-7

As an orange cat explores a fanciful landscape, little ones are invited to turn, twist, or slide large buttons in this French import.

A square, circle, star, and triangle are visible through die-cut holes in the cover and interior pages corresponding to these brightly colored shapes. Within, a small orange cat (who often gets lost on the pages due to his diminutive size) meanders through the somewhat psychedelic landscape by zooming in an airplane, balancing on a leaf, and floating on a cloud. On every other double-page spread, youngsters are invited to manipulate one of the large, paper knobs, which seem to be made out of cut, stacked, and glued board pages. When the green square is twisted to the left, a panel hidden between the board pages flips up out of the top of the book, causing the birds that are painted on it to appear to fly out of the tree as if the cat has startled them. The star-shaped knob makes butterflies shoot up to and to the right on another panel. Manipulating the triangle and the circle cause a palm tree to grow and the sun and a rainbow to appear, respectively. Unfortunately, the manipulatives may not stand up to abuse, particularly as children who try to replicate the “twist” that triggers the first special effect may entirely detach the star and triangle with the same action. Text offering direction and light observations appears on the verso, but Fouquier’s whimsical art in bubble-gum colors is what primarily draws the eye. While the large buttons are big enough not to cause choking-hazard concerns, their flimsy construction makes them unlikely to survive many readings by active toddlers.

If little fingers are too interactive, they will make this offering permanently inactive. (Novelty/board book. 2-3)

ROAR!
A Book of Animal Sounds
Kerouli, Katerina
Illus. by the author
Bloomsbury (24 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 1, 2021
978-1-5476-0641-2

Outsized animals open wide, inviting younger children to do the same.

“Tiger, tiger, / is that you, / hiding in / the tall bamboo?” Six wild animals pace, glide, or slither through natural settings—seen alternately from the side and then full page and face on in images that gape with the lift of unusually large flaps to expose toothy or fanged maws and a rousing “GRRRR GRRRR” or other prompt. In addition to the tiger, readers meet a crocodile, a generic snake, a monkey, and a lion, each set against a clean background with the occasional whimsical touch (a dragonfly gives the tiger a side-eye; a frog looks nervously at the crocodile). Along with building up to repeated crescendos in her accompanying rhymes (“Such pointy teeth, /your tail so long, /such scaly scales, /and jaws /so strong!” Kerouli uses big, rounded, simplified shapes and bright color contrasts to create both instant recognition and immediate visual drama. Even with a slow reading it’s all over too soon, but the pictures are tailor-made for sharing with big groups, and all the roaring, snapping, and hissing will leave audiences of any size set for follow-up action rhymes, a round of “Old MacDonald Had a Farm,” or a high-volume thematic cousin like Brian McLachlan’s convention-busting What Noise Do I Make? (2016). Alas, the flaps are flimsy enough that they will not likely withstand direct use by children.

Roaring good fun. (Novelty/picture book. 2-3)
Crisp, meticulously accurate illustrations of shells pair with predictable rhyming couplets. Locating a perfect, unbroken shell is one of life’s small delights, and this board book shares that sense of wonder. Opening on a child with tousled black hair listening to a seashell, the narrative drifts through various elegant, ink-drawn shells, from the crowd-pleasing “pearl shell” (a mussel) or “round shell” (a sand dollar) to the lesser-known “winged shell” (a piddock) or “spotted shell” (a junonia), before closing with a different child gazing at a hermit crab claiming its own shell. All children pictured have pale skin. The rhyming text, which incorporates the tongue, but some information is lacking. There’s no context to explain the “lei shell” necklace in the key labelling the shells, and why have northern cowrie shells been designated “play shell[s]”? That same feeling of vagueness brings down the delights, and this board book shares that sense of wonder. Open-and—beneath a double gatefold—at night. None of the flora is identified, but nearly every animal comes with a label, usually in generic. Though it’s startling on one page to see a rhino and an orangutan seemingly about the same size, however, the ensembles of flat but generally accurately detailed animals in each scene are consistently drawn from at least the same geographical region. For more hands-on learners, two pop-ups, a pull-tab, a big spinner, and lots of small flaps that are often pleasantly challenging to spot amid the busy backgrounds offer plenty of engagement.

A fact-packed venture into one of nature’s busier biomes. (Informational pop-up picture book. 6-9)

**SEASHELL**
*Koster, Amy Sky*  
*Illus. by Ashlock, Lisel Jane*  
Creative Editions/Creative Company  
(18 pp.)  
$9.99 | Mar. 2, 2021  
978-1-56846-354-4

From France, a teeming gallery of wild creatures posing in plain sight or hiding beneath flaps. Two young human guides on the title page, one brown-skinned, one pink, beckon little explorers to open up a succession of spreads with varied effects. It begins with a big 3-D panorama of rainforest layers from understory to emergent layer and goes on to present dozens of creatures blending in to their densely leaved surroundings, hanging out in family groups, gliding through the air, and, finally, at rest in daylight and—beneath a double gatefold—at night. None of the flora is identified, but nearly every animal comes with a label, usually in boldface, and many with a basic descriptive or behavioral fact or observation: “The vine snake is very thin. It looks just like...a vine!” Some tropical settings are specified, but others are left generic. Though it’s startling on one page to see a rhino and an orangutan seemingly about the same size, however, the ensembles of flat but generally accurately detailed animals in each scene are consistently drawn from at least the same geographical region. For more hands-on learners, two pop-ups, a pull-tab, a big spinner, and lots of small flaps that are often pleasantly challenging to spot amid the busy backgrounds offer plenty of engagement.

**HIDE-AND-SEEK**
*Lv, Shasha*  
*Illus. by the author*  
Chronicle Books (32 pp.)  
$10.99 | Mar. 16, 2021  
978-1-4521-8359-6  
Series: Little Snail

Mischievous Little Snail returns, this time to play an unexpectedly sneaky game of hide-and-seek. In an engaging return for the friends introduced in *Time To Go Home* (2020), Bear searches the classroom, this time depicted in a cozy color palette of mustard yellow, stone blue, and navy. Bear locates hidden friends from Little Mouse, crouching among a selection of sippy cups, to Little Turtle, whose shell admirably imitates a large leaf. Toddler readers will adore searching alongside Bear, scanning the spare, lino-printed pages to find the subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle clues. What child—or piglet—hasn’t tried the hiding-behind-the-curtains trick? Little Cat’s hiding spot is devilish, but once it’s revealed, little ones will enjoy going back to see what they missed. Eventually, all the friends but Little Snail are found. Brief but evocative dialogue moves the plot right along, and tension builds as the lively animal children giggle. They know what’s up, and suddenly, viewers do too: Little Snail is slyly camouflaged in the decorative spirals of Bear’s chunky blue sweater! It’s an absolute hoot to watch Snail “whoosh” back into the shell just in time, leaving a confused Bear to address readers: “Have YOU seen Little Snail?” Quirky, rounded prints add to the jovial feel and are artistic simplicity at its finest.

Board books this much fun can be hard to find. Make sure to seek it out. (Board book. 2-4)
AGE OF THE DINOSAURS
Marx, Jonny
Illus. by Engel, Christiane
Tiger Tales (16 pp.)
$14.99  |  May 4, 2021
978-1-68010-663-4
Series: Curious Kids

A select set of pop-up prehistoric portraits, with bite-sized facts for dedicated dinophiles.

In contrast to previous Curious Kids outing Explore the Meadow (2020), this gallery has a slapdash air. Including a less-than-melodramatic opening tableau that features a sauropod who looks almost comically resigned to becoming a theropod’s next meal, five of the eight central pop-ups are just static portraits that hover over stylized prehistoric backdrops. Of the other three, one offers a face-on T. rex with a comically tiny (but toothy) mouth and another, a giant meteorite that actually rises as the spread opens. The fact bits scattered at random are occasionally mind-blowing (“Stegosaurus and Tyrannosaurus lived further apart in time than Tyrannosaurus and humankind”) but more often run to obvious truisms, misstatements (no, Diplodocus was not conclusively the longest dino), or outright non sequiturs: “Some were FEROCIOUS! Others were TALL.” Some of the real-world comparisons do not provide sufficient context: “Even a pig would have been able to run past [Ankylosaurus] with ease”—but how fast does a pig run? Moreover, all but one of the dinosaurs posing on the first and last spreads go unidentified, and Marx also manages to leave birds out of his closing list of dinosaur-age survivals. It’s a shame given the child-attracting combination of topic and format. Companion title Stars and Space publishes simultaneously.

A perfunctory effort. (Informational pop-up book. 5-7) (Stars and Space: 978-1-68010-654-1)

BABY’S FIRST FARM
McLean, Danielle
Illus. by Shuttlewood, Craig
Tiger Tales (10 pp.)
$8.99  |  Feb. 2, 2021
978-1-68010-669-6

A cow, a pig, a sheep, and chickens seen through a cutout barn door and windows hint at what this simple board book is about.

Turn the thick pages to find four different farm buildings, each housing a different animal. Direct, repetitive text follows the same formula on each spread: “This is a [farm animal] on the farm. A cow, a pig, a sheep, and chickens are playfully droll and the palette soothing, Suber’s art is too busy, with stylized and patterned backgrounds that don't always flow well together. With all the sensory elements and gimmicks at play, it's no wonder the chicks can’t get to sleep.

There is just too much going on here to make it suitable bedtime fare. (Board book: 1-3)

TOUGH CHICKS GO TO BED
Meng, Ceece
Illus. by Suber, Melissa
HMH Books (12 pp.)
$9.99  |  Jan. 5, 2021
978-0-358-34299-1

Mama Hen struggles to put her trio of Tough Chicks to bed on the farm. Mama points to the examples set by the other farm residents, such as the sheep, the horses, and pigs, all hunkering down for the night, and encourages her offspring to follow suit. Tabbed pages with small images of each critter allow little ones to easily turn the board pages. A tactile element is embedded on each page for sensory exploration, such as the chicks’s satiny pillow, embossed paper connoting the breeze blowing through the barn, and the fleece of the sheep. Molly, one of the bumptious chicks, succeeds in waking up all the dozing farm residents, much to her mother’s chagrin, but Mama eventually gently coaxes the little ones into their bed made of cut hay in a sequence that plays out on a gatefold page. On almost every recto, a gray mouse suggests calming actions related to the story that sleepless toddler readers can try: “How many sheep can you count before you fall asleep?” While the animals’ expressions are playfully droll and the palette soothing, Suber’s art is too busy, with stylized and patterned backgrounds that don't always flow well together. With all the sensory elements and gimmicks at play, it’s no wonder the chicks can’t get to sleep.

There is just too much going on here to make it suitable bedtime fare. (Board book: 1-3)

1 2 3 FISH IN THE SEA
Parks, Luna
Illus. by Lucas, Garett
Tiger Tales (10 pp.)
$9.99  |  Apr. 27, 2021
978-1-68010-648-0

An original counting rhyme in board-book format, with a tactile twist.

Following common nursery-game conventions, rhyming text counts fish from one to five, until—“Eek!”—a big fish chases them away. Squishy silicone numerals show through
die-cut openings. On the front cover 1, 2, and 3 are visible, supplying the first part of the title. Inside, spread by spread, the number, spelled out, begins each couplet on verso, with the remainder of the couplet continuing on the right-hand page. Turning the page completes the rhyme with the next number. “One little fish is yellow, white, and blue. He meets a speedy friend, and now there are… // ‘Two…’" All five numbers are visible on the first spread, which might confuse little learners who may not readily recognize the correct choice. This problem is mitigated as the numbers, and therefore the choices, are hidden one by one with the turn of the page. Another subtle hint is that each new fish to count is the same color as the correct numeral. Each number also has a slightly different tactile pattern. The fish, all approximately the same size, swim through fancifully colored seascapes. When a much-larger shark shows up at the remainder of the couplet continuing on the right-hand page. The extending parts are made of a lighter stock—but the object is visible through every hole on the recto. Safely tucked away, the head can be folded down at the end to reveal an alternative face. Also, as the pages are printed on heavy-duty stock, the whole figure is thick enough to stand up when closed. The extending parts are made of a lighter stock—but

Not much of a fish story but good practice for toddlers just learning to count. (Board book. 6 mos.-2)

**EAT UP, BEAR!**

Pierce, Terry Illus. by Sarell, Nadja Yosemite Conservancy (14 pp.) $8.99 | Apr. 13, 2021 978-1-951179-01-4

Humans can play an important role in keeping bears safe by ensuring our food is securely tucked away.

Readers aren’t going to miss the noble, not-so-subtle theme of this educational board book: that humans must “take care or bears will eat your food!” On the left-hand page of each spread, a diverse assemblage of picnickers, campers, and hikers plainly demonstrate various methods of keeping bears away from tempting people-food, including locking up coolers, using bear-safe containers, and appropriately disposing of trash. Safely separated by the gutter, bears on the right-hand page nosh blissfully on insects, acorns, berries, and the like. Bright, almost painterly, full-bleed illustrations pay homage to the lovely scenery both bears and humans are enjoying, and while the illustrations are more cartoonish than photorealistic, the bears’ natural poses as they chew down remind readers that these are real animals they are trying to protect. But while this board book clearly introduces safe food storage to little hikers, it’s still a somewhat odd conceit: Children, particularly toddlers don’t generally plan trips or handle the gear. The text also flags, in its read-aloud rhythm. It opens and closes with peppy couplets, but the rhyme disappears abruptly, replaced with a chunky repetitive refrain that feels awkward and unfinished.

Though challenging to read aloud, it should raise bear awareness for young wildlife enthusiasts. (Board book. 1-4)

**THE EASTER EGG IS MISSING!**


A trio of children search through egg-shaped board-book pages for a missing Easter egg.

A White tot with shoulder-length red hair, a Black tot with short, curly hair, and a brown-skinned tyke with straight, black hair observe, in the first-person-plural narration, that they have not yet found the golden egg. Readers, however, see it through egg-shaped die cuts that reduce in size as pages are turned. The kids wonder if the egg is in the birdhouse, in the carrot patch, or inside a chocolate bunny. A few more children (racially diverse) join in the hunt along with a yellow chick, a bow-tie–wearing bunny, and other springtime critters. When readers get to the final spread, a gold-foil egg is visible inside the chicken coop—it turns out the chick that has been following along with the children has hidden it there. Companion title *The Valentine Is Missing*, also by Platt but illustrated by Anne Pascichier, follows a similar premise as racially diverse kids search for their teacher’s missing valentine (she is depicted as a woman of color). Here, a shiny, red heart is visible through the heart-shaped pages. The jewel-toned art style is cheerful, bright, and graphically accessible across both offerings. While the gimmick makes for a playful reading experience for the very young, the hide-and-seek queries may prove confusing to literal-minded toddlers since the object is visible through every hole on the recto.

A die cut above typical holiday board books. (Board book. 1-3) (The Valentine Is Missing: 978-0-358-04062-0)

**MAKE ME A ROBOT**

Rogalski, Mark Illus. by the author Chronicle Books (16 pp.) $14.99 | Nov. 10, 2020 978-1-7972-0525-0

In a feat of design wizardry, a plain, rectangular body is transformed by unfolding hands, wings, rocket engines, and more on successive pages. A robo-face visible through a large, round hole cut all the way to the back cover guides young technophiles through nine steps from feet to final smile. Rogalski depicts each component in a blocky, retro-futuristic style and delivers rhymed instructions in a distinctively tongue-in-cheek tone: “Make me a robot / with antennas for ears. / Just don’t say I look funny. / That really grinds my gears!” (No one will write home about its meter, though.) For a climactic surprise, the head can be folded down at the end to reveal an alternative face. Also, as the pages are printed on heavy-duty board, the whole figure is thick enough to stand up when closed. The extending parts are made of a lighter stock—but
even if they aren’t quite as durable as the body they can be opened in different combinations to customize the robot’s limbs and looks.

**A delight for diaper-clad droid heads.** (Board book/novelty. 2-5)

**I LOVE YOU MORE, BABYSAUR**

Rosner, Rose
Illus. by Bianda, Junissa
Sourcebooks Wonderland (24 pp.)
$8.99 | Jan. 5, 2021
978-1-7282-2295-0
Series: Punderland

A board-book ode to parental love as old as the dinosaurs.

A line of text on the left of each spread reads like a dinosaur-themed valentine that a third grader might choose, with punishingly punny wordplay that incorporates dinosaur-related words. On the facing page a dinosaur pair—a baby and an adult—gaze lovingly into each other’s eyes against whimsical, pastel-hued prehistoric-ish backgrounds. In smaller print, in all caps, at the bottom of the left page is the scientific name for the dinosaur referenced by the text and picture followed by a helpful phonetic pronunciation guide. White-outlined footprints appear next to their names, though the white is sometimes difficult to see against the pastel pages. Ten of the best-known dinosaurs are included. Twisting the dinosaur names to fit the loving sentiments succeeds some of the time but more often results in tortured text, well beyond the understanding of the board book audience. The line accompanying two hugging velociraptors, for instance, is just confusing: “Wrap-TOR arms around me, / with you I’ll always stay.” Others are just plain clumsy: “I-wanna-GUANODON you kisses, / I truly just adore you.” Very young children, even those fascinated by dinosaurs, will not get it. Older dinosaur fans will be put off by the babyish format.

**Not a great choice for the youngest dinosaur lovers.** (Board book. 18 mos.-3)

**WE’RE BETTER TOGETHER**

**A Book About Community**

Spinelli, Eileen
Illus. by Trukhan, Ekaterina
Highlights Press (26 pp.)
$12.99 | Feb. 9, 2021
978-1-64472-328-9
Series: Highlights Books of Kindness

A tribute to human kindness, empathy, and mutual support.

In double-page spreads on unusually large board-book pages, different scenarios present preschoolers with a variety of ways to demonstrate acting in concert. A White family, including a very large dog, works together to clean up a large kitchen spill. A group of diverse kids helps a White friend who uses a wheelchair find a lost blanket. Two children, one White and one with dark hair and medium-brown skin, help a brown-skinned, hijab-wearing grown-up retrieve toys dropped by a stroller-riding tyke. The art is graphically clean and clear, with simple cartoon faces and geometric swaths of solid colors against white backgrounds; clear attention has been paid to diversity of racial presentation, gender presentation, and ability. A child with cochlear implants with straight black hair and medium-brown skin can be seen in two of the spreads, and a White child with light-brown hair wears glasses—even, strangely enough, in bed. The project ends with the youngsters in bed dreaming of all the good accomplished during the day. The following page includes quotes from 5- and 6 year-olds and the author describing things they have done to make the world a better place. The didactic nature of the text gets laid on a bit thick with the repetition of the “We’re better together…” refrain in every scene, but the lively art adds much-needed cheer.

**Useful and jolly.** (Board book. 2-4)

**GOD BLESS YOU, LITTLE ONE**

Temple, Tilly
Illus. by Braun, Sebastien
Tiger Tales (22 pp.)
$9.99 | Jan. 5, 2021
978-1-68010-632-9

A bedtime-prayer board book features a family of badgers.

Speaking in a gentle rhyme, the badgers ask for God’s blessings for family and friends and offer gratitude for the gifts of the natural world. Temple’s stanzas have a lullaby-like feel to them, with a cadence that remains consistent throughout. With the exception of the first and last stanzas, which are voiced by the older badgers, the little badger relates the text. The accompanying images show the little badger remembering how much there is to be thankful for, from loved ones like grandparents to the moon and stars. It’s Braun’s illustrations that truly speak to little readers. The badger family is adorable; the softness and simplicity of their features are charming. The same is true of the other woodland creatures and animals. A wintry scene stands out from the rest thanks to the feelings of frostiness and wonder it evokes. There’s the little badger wrapped in a red scarf, nose to the sky, and a tiny mouse leaning on a walking stick, the soft snow floating down around them. Other details, like a lemonade bottle tucked in a picnic basket and a toy boat with a leaf sail, add depth and interest to the scenes.

**Satisfactory text; irresistibly delightful illustrations.** (Board book. 1-3)
LEPRECHAUN’S RAINBOW
Tortland, Christy
Illus. by Beranek, Carlo
HMH Books (10 pp.)
$7.99 | Dec. 22, 2020
978-0-358-27265-6

Teach the colors of the rainbow with this board book.
A charming cartoon fox in a leprechaun-green suit and top hat stars in a rhyming romp through the colors of the rainbow. A couplet on each page introduces a color and lists some of the items of that hue children can spot. It follows the color spectrum pattern with the exception of indigo, an appropriate choice for the audience. There are no humans in this colorful fantasy world. The vulpine leprechaun featured on every page drives a red tractor, points out orange butterflies, eats a picnic lunch with lots of yellow treats. The couplet on the green page eschews shamrocks in favor of four-leaf clovers: “Green is clover, pluck some up, / All day long you’ll have good luck!” Blue is a sailing scene. Though the verse on the purple page says, “Purple in a garden grows,” a purple cottage is the prominent feature in the illustration, not a garden. The final spread actually has three rainbows—two arcs at the top and a third partial rainbow that ends in a pot of gold. The rainbow arcs form a handle, making this sturdy book also toteable. Very young children won’t appreciate the oblique references to St. Patrick’s Day but will enjoy identifying colors.

St. Patrick’s Day lite, for very young children. (Board book: 1-2)
INDIVISIBLE
Aleman, Daniel
Little, Brown (400 pp.)
$18.99 | May 4, 2021
978-0-7595-5605-8

A Mexican American boy takes on heavy responsibilities when his family is torn apart.

Mateo's life is turned upside down the day U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents show up unsuccessfully seeking his Pa at his New York City bodega. The Garcias live in fear until the day both parents are picked up; his Pa is taken to jail and his Ma to a detention center. The adults around Mateo offer support to him and his 7-year-old sister, Sophie, however, he knows he is now responsible for caring for her and the bodega as well as trying to survive junior year—that is, if he wants to fulfill his dream to enter the drama program at the Tisch School of the Arts and become an actor. Mateo's relationships with his friends Kimmie and Adam (a potential love interest) also suffer repercussions as he keeps his situation a secret. Kimmie is half Korean (her other half is unspecified) and Adam is Italian American; Mateo feels disconnected from them, less American, and with worries they can't understand.

He talks himself out of choosing a safer course of action, a decision that deepens the story.

Mateo's self-awareness and inner monologue at times make him seem older than 16, and, with significant turmoil in the main plot, some side elements feel underdeveloped. Aleman's narrative joins the ranks of heart-wrenching stories of migrant families who have been separated.

An ode to the children of migrants who have been taken away. (Fiction. 14-18)

THE POWER OF STYLE
Allaire, Christian
Illus. by Li, Jacqueline
Annick Press (100 pp.)
$19.95 | Apr. 27, 2021
978-1-77321-490-0

A celebration of clothing, cultural pride, and fashion activists.

Have you ever wondered why we don't usually see high heels in men's sizes? Do you remember when darker shades of makeup finally became easier to find? Are you curious about Muslim fashionistas? This book is for anyone who wants to explore the ways in which clothes,
Young people these days are frequently exhorted to go out and change the world—and certainly there are remarkable teens doing just that. It's also common for adults to talk about their faith in the future thanks to the incredible youths they meet. However, these remarks—intended to be encouraging and supportive—can inadvertently add to the huge pressures young adults already feel just from daily life. Changing the world is easier when your family has a certain amount of financial and intellectual capital, and even with these advantages, mental health and other struggles strike indiscriminately and leave less energy for contemplating world-altering action.

There is a lot to be said for recognizing changemakers who start off on a smaller scale: Changing just your own self is incredibly hard (as anyone who has set New Year’s resolutions can attest), but what could be more inspiring than seeing someone you know personally achieve genuine change? Being a positive influence in one’s community, however small, is similarly powerful.

There are a lot of books rightfully lauding those who have changed the world. Here are some great reads highlighting young adults who serve as role models for change in ways that start closer to home but are no less worthy of celebration.

*Girl on the Line* by Faith Gardner (HarperTeen, Jan. 19): This intense, insightful book about a young woman appropriately named Journey, whose mental health struggles will feel piercingly relatable to many, begins by offering perspective. Journey opens her story by observing that she is about to “go work a volunteer shift at a crisis hotline,” adding, “last year, I should have been the girl on the other end of the line.” Her ability to not just face and overcome incredible personal challenges, but to find a way to help others offers critical reassurance and hope.

*Fat Chance, Charlie Vega* by Crystal Maldonado (Holiday House, Feb. 2): It’s hard to face the world with confidence when the messages you hear—even from your own skinny White mother—is that you’re not all right just the way you are. Charlie is smart, kind, funny, and a good friend. But to some people all that matters is that she is a fat, brown-skinned girl. Although she tries to embrace body positivity, self-doubt is insidious. Charlie’s path to genuinely loving both herself and the boy who is smitten by her is textured and real, offering no pat resolutions.

*The Mirror Season* by Anna-Marie McLemore (Feiwel & Friends, March 16): When Ciela Cristales and Lock Thomas first cross paths it’s at a high school party where they are both victims of sexual assault—although only she remembers exactly what happened. Bearing the heavy burden of deciding whether to speak up takes a toll on Ciela and extinguishes the magic she inherited from her bisabuela. This searing novel deals with a subject that, tragically, touches far too many young people’s lives. As Ciela and Lock wrestle with the emotional fallout, they must also reckon with the price of silence.

*Can’t Take That Away* by Steven Salvatore (Bloomsbury, March 9): Genderqueer high school student Carey has a passion for the theater and dreams of being on stage like the icons they admire. A school production of the musical *Wicked* offers an opportunity to try out for the role of Elphaba, but Carey’s joy at landing the part is short-lived when a hostile, intolerant teacher and some parents protest. Carey is both strong and vulnerable, and they have friends who rally to their side in this book about striving to make school a more inclusive community.

Laura Simeon is a young readers’ editor.
hairstyles, makeup, hats, and other sartorial decisions communicate who we are to the world. A person’s style can be powerful, as it enables the wearer to make a statement, giving them the opportunity to express cultural confidence, body positivity, and self-acceptance. Allaire (Ojibwe), a Vogue fashion and style writer from the Nipissing First Nation Reserve in Ontario, celebrates the way diversity is changing the world of fashion. Beginning with an introduction about the importance of representation, the author transports his readers to a place of pride. His writing questions norms and encourages young people to resist the status quo and not allow others to limit their creative expression. With sections dedicated to natural Black hair, gender nonconformity, cosplayers, Indigenous designers, and more, he brings fashion colorfully to life with photographs and history lessons. The book is made stronger by personal touches, for example passages about the ribbon shirt made by his mother and aunts that honored his Ojibwe culture and ancestors.

A vibrant read about the connections between fashion, culture, and social justice. (index, further reading, photo credits) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

REALM BREAKER

Aveyard, Victoria
HarperTeen (576 pp.)
$19.99 | May 4, 2021
978-0-06-287262-3

When the realm is in danger, only a small band of misfits can save Allward.

An in medias res prologue, told from the point of view of the lone squire accompanying the 12 Companions of the Realm, tosses readers into the thick of a quest. Half the Companions are human heroes and half are immortal Elders; they seek to stop a rogue thief and his wizard accomplice from using a magical Spindle to tear a passage between worlds for nefarious ends. A disastrous battle sends Andry fleeing with Cortael’s sword so villain Taristan can’t get his hands on it. Grieving Elder Dom requires both a person of Corblood (a descendant of human travelers from another realm) and the Spindleblade Andry protects to stop Taristan from bringing ruin to the realm. Dom seeks Cortael’s secret daughter, Corayne, a bright but sheltered teenager with a pirate mother. At times the narrative tension is undermined by flashbacks that readers already know the conclusions to and by occasional repetition caused by the multiple point-of-view jumps, but there’s a wide variety of action scenes, daring escapes, and betrayals. Many tropes and character types are familiar, but exquisite descriptions and clashing motivations result in a nuanced, sprawling realm with a sense of complicated history. This world is highly diverse in terms of both skin tone and in the refreshing range of roles female characters inhabit.

An epic series opener of old-school high fantasy catering to modern audiences. (map) (Fantasy. 12-18)

RULE OF WOLVES

Bardugo, Leigh
Imprint (608 pp.)
$22.99 | Mar. 30, 2021
978-1-250-14230-6
Series: King of Scars Duology, 2

Following King of Scars (2019), the world’s a powder keg of political hostilities and existential threats.

In a juggling act between viewpoint characters, readers follow far-ranging intrigues inside countries, between countries, and between individuals. King Nikolai faces imminent threats from Fjerda, rumors of his bastardy that threaten to dethrone him, complicated trade relations with both Zemeni and Kerch, and an engagement to Princess Ehri of Shu Han—despite her sister, Queen Makhi, having schemed to kill both of them. Zoya, Nikolai’s loyal general, is handed a series of high-impossible assignments, including some having to do with the Darkling. Meanwhile, deeply embedded Nina spies on Fjerda, working to undermine the rumors surrounding Nikolai’s parentage, uncover Fjerda’s military plans, manipulate their royals toward a more peaceful path, and secretly sway the population’s view of Grisha. And all over the world, a mysterious blight suddenly appears, destroying everything in its path. Sprinklings of recaps and lots of action help to prevent the massively intricate world from becoming overwhelming. Battles in particular shine, not just for their action, but for the questions they pose about the direction of warfare in an arms race. The multiethnic cast that includes queer characters and relationships showcases a White-passing biracial character grappling with identity and another character’s trans-coded journey. A big finish manages to tidy up almost all ends but still leaves space for more to come.

A wild ride both fantastical and grounded in nuance. (Orders of Grisha guide, map) (Fantasy. 14-adult)

MINDFULNESS & SELF-COMPASSION FOR TEEN ADHD

Bertin, Mark & Bluth, Karen
Instant Help Books (68 pp.)
$16.95 paper | May 1, 2021
978-1-68403-639-4
Series: Instant Help Solutions

This selection from the Instant Help Solutions series addresses teens struggling with symptoms of ADHD.

The table of contents lists 10 chapters, from “What Is ADHD Anyway?” to “Steering Yourself to the Future You Choose.” The text is frank and supportive: Besides discussions of symptoms, strategies, and specific mindfulness and self-compassion exercises, each chapter includes quotations from
An absorbing thriller let down by simplistic stereotypes. (author's note, references) (Thriller 15-adult)

Extreme loyalty and polished skills are realistically depicted and pull readers into her gripping narrative, filled with plot twists and shocking revelations. Unfortunately the Russian baddies feel cartoonish, and the two-dimensional Muslim characters feed into common Islamophobic tropes. Rain is assumed White; there is some diversity in the supporting cast.

Helpful strategies for tackling ADHD. (endnotes) (Self-help 12-18)

Rain's isolated mission to hunt terrorists changes when she is kidnapped. Rain isn't a typical teenager; living alone in a basement in Texas, she dedicates her entire life to defending America from terrorist threats, as her FBI-agent father's secret operations. Rain's purpose in life revolves around her membership in the True Patriots, a secret, elite FBI team that focuses on preventing terrorist attacks. Rain knows how to take orders, follow rules, and pass her father's countless Loyalty Tests. But when she orders a forbidden pizza to celebrate a success, she is kidnapped and dragged into shocking reality by Russian Mafia boss Dmitri. Rain struggles to remain loyal as her sense of reality shatters, dragged into shocking reality by Russian Mafia boss Dmitri. The book mentions that although the condition is permanent, symptoms can effectively be reduced through mindfulness and self-compassion training plus other supports and medication, which it describes as the most highly effective treatment for some aspects of ADHD. However, it stresses that medications typically do not help with organization or time management, two topics thoroughly covered in the book. The sample scenarios may speak most to adolescents with relatively nonserious concerns about school, friends, and family; alcohol and sex are only briefly mentioned. The exercises are terrific for all teens, whether they have ADHD or not, and are largely accessible without having to read the whole work. Downloadable audio assistance and worksheets are added bonuses. The authors, who address anxiety throughout, repeatedly use the tired metaphor of steering the wheel of a fossil-fuel–powered vehicle, an unfortunate choice given the prevalence of environmental anxiety in today's young people. Dynamic art, uncredited, features silhouettes, often set against patterned backgrounds, that help break up the text.

A teenage girl has an eye-opening, whirlwind summer with her father and Mother Nature as catalysts in this debut by actress Bromfield. She, along with her younger sister, Mia, sets off to spend two summer months in Jamaica with their father. Despite feeling hurt by his frequent absences and emotional neglect, Tilla is hoping to mend her relationship with her former hero, a parent whose affection she has desperately sought for years. The moment she lands in Jamaica, she begins a journey filled with culture shock beyond her wildest imagining—in both good and bad ways. While staying with relatives in the countryside, Tilla experiences life-changing moments and learns beautiful, complex, and harsh lessons about life, love, and liberation, all while

launching their personal assistant. To cement her once again fallen prey to mistaken assumptions. Nami is cued as Serbian and finds shelter in the Colony with a band of free humans. They have a plan to defeat the Residents, but Nami has her doubts and can’t help remembering how much she trusted Ophelia when she was alive. Could Residents and humans possibly coexist? Nami intends to find out, but she must navigate relationships with ice-cold Prince Caelan of Victory and Gil, the only human to survive War. Bowman asks readers to question what it means to be human and to forgive. This satisfying novel offers plenty of room for a sequel to explore whether Nami has once again fallen prey to mistaken assumptions. Nami is cued as biracial (Japanese/White), and human characters are ethnically diverse.

An intriguing speculative world that interrogates consciousness and humanity. (map) (Science fiction. 13-18)

Artificial intelligence has taken over the afterlife, and humans are in trouble. Eighteen-year-old Nami Miyamoto has her whole life ahead of her, until bad timing sends her to Infinity, where humans go when they die. Infinity, Nami quickly learns, is under the control of Ophelia, the AI humans developed to work as their personal assistant. To cement her power, Ophelia created more AIs, known as Residents, who control the Four Courts: Victory, Famine, War, and Death. Each is ruled by a prince, and humans are subjected to an array of tortments, including making them mindless servants—much the way that humans used Ophelia. Nami evades the Residents and finds shelter in the Colony with a band of free humans. They have a plan to defeat the Residents, but Nami has her doubts and can’t help remembering how much she trusted Ophelia when she was alive. Could Residents and humans possibly coexist? Nami intends to find out, but she must navigate relationships with ice-cold Prince Caelan of Victory and Gil, the only human to survive War. Bowman asks readers to question what it means to be human and to forgive. This satisfying novel offers plenty of room for a sequel to explore whether Nami has once again fallen prey to mistaken assumptions. Nami is cued as biracial (Japanese/White), and human characters are ethnically diverse.

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facing the looming threat of a dangerous hurricane. Although Tilla pushes back when she encounters colorism, other sensitive and heavy topics—like sexism, sexual abuse, and assault—would have benefited from greater development. The story captures the perspective of someone who is half family member and half outsider, and as a result, the descriptions of Jamaican culture often come from a lens that is noticeably “other” while tinged with a sense of yearning to belong. The flowery prose simultaneously expresses a fascination with and appreciation for the experience of rural Jamaican life, but some descriptions unfortunately perpetuate common exotizing stereotypes.

A coming-of-age story about discovery, loss, renewal, and longing. (Glossary) (Fiction. 14-18)

EXCUSE ME WHILE I UGLY CRY
Goffney, Joya
HarperTeen (368 pp.)
$17.99 | May 4, 2021
978-0-06-302479-3

After her journal goes missing, a high school senior is blackmailed into completing her most sensitive to-do list. By all appearances Quinn has everything—her family is rich, she is well liked at her private school, and next fall she’s headed to Columbia, her parents’ alma mater. But it’s an act: Quinn uses her journal as a place to alleviate some of the pressure around her secrets and fears so she doesn’t have to directly confront them. The biggest among them are that she was in fact rejected by Columbia and has been lying about it and that being one of only five Black students at a mostly White school is really hard. When Carter, a Black classmate she crushes on, mistakenly takes her journal and then loses it, the person who finds it starts anonymously threatening her. If Quinn doesn’t complete her “To Do Before I Graduate” list, the mystery person promises to reveal her secrets on social media. Because Carter lost the journal, he volunteers to help her discover the culprit. The character development is excellent; even Quinn’s parents get rich storylines. Goffney’s explorations of race and class are also well executed. At its heart, this is a story about finding the courage to be honest and take risks and the freedom that follows from embracing authenticity.

A perfect mix of humor and romance—and a source of inspiration for being brave. (Fiction. 14-18)
When Malinda Lo received the happy news—she’d won the 2021 Alice B Readers Award, a once-in-a-career honor given annually to authors for literary excellence and contributions to lesbian culture—she took to Twitter to thank the committee and congratulate her fellow honorees.

Many of her followers then took the time to congratulate Lo. And one fan’s words captured a prevalent sentiment: “Ash was the first book I ever read that made liking women seem like an option,” they wrote. “You’ve been doing kickass work for a good while.”

Since Ash, a lesbian retelling of “Cinderella,” debuted in 2009, Lo has become well known for kick-ass YA fiction featuring complex queer characters and compelling storylines. She’s also known for leveling with readers and writers about craft, the publishing industry, and LGBTQ+ representation in her popular blog, Lo & Behold.

“I’ve been engaged in that kind of honesty about publishing for a long time,” Lo tells Kirkus. “Of course, it’s wonderful to be recognized for that. And also, hopefully, for my books.”

Lo’s sixth novel is the marvelous expansion of a short story she wrote about a young lesbian in 1950s San Francisco: Last Night at the Telegraph Club (Dutton, Jan.19) stars 17-year-old Lily Hu, whose interest in an advertise-
ment for a male impersonator leads her to a lesbian bar where she begins to see herself in a new light. “Finally, the intersectional, lesbian, historical teen novel so many readers have been waiting for,” Kirkus wrote in a starred review. “Beautifully written historical fiction about giddy, queer first love.”

Lo spoke with Kirkus by phone; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

In the acknowledgments, you say editor Andrew Karre inspired you to “think outside the boundaries of what [you] perceive to be young adult fiction” for Last Night at the Telegraph Club. That makes me want to ask—what do you perceive to be young adult fiction?

Oh, that’s a really hard one.

Sorry to hit you with the big one up top. We can put a pin in it....

Well, I can tell you what I thought going into this [book]....

Please!

When I was writing it, there were all these constraints I had in my subconscious: The book has to be about a teenager. It has to be from her perspective and limited to the teen experience.

The more I got into it, the more I realized there were a lot of things about Lily’s family I wanted to include, but it was basically impossible to do so from her perspective.

In her family, like a lot of Chinese families, the parents don’t sit around telling their kids stories about the past. There’s no reminiscing—it’s just, it’s not a thing that is done widely—so Lily would not even know what had happened in her parents’ past; she wouldn’t have been alive.

So, when Andrew suggested I write some scenes from the adults’ perspectives, I remember saying I didn’t think I could do that. And he’s like, Yes, you can. That was really good [advice]. It helped me get to know Lily better and fleshed out the context in a way that could not have been done if I stuck to her experience.
Speaking of Lily’s experience, one of the most satisfying parts of the book is watching her perception evolve: how she sees the Telegraph Club the first time she goes there, how that changes on subsequent trips. How her self-perception changes, too. There’s a lot of “seeing” and “revising” in this book.

Yes, there really is. Andrew brought that out, too....He has a great way of seeing what you wrote on the page, which is different than what you thought you wrote. That is a very key thing that I have found so useful working with him: He can take what I wrote and kind of show it back to me, in conversation and in his notes, and I will notice [what] I didn’t realize I was doing. That is so useful because, for me, that’s how you go back and deepen the characterization and the dynamics among the people and the experiences—by noticing what you put there on the page, kind of subconsciously—and then bringing that forward in a way that makes it make sense for the reader. Your subconscious can put something on the page that is important, but you may not have clearly woven it into the story.

**What do you love about Lily, as a character?**
What I love about Lily is that even though she is quite naïve about a lot of things in life, once she figures out what is happening, she does not hesitate to act....You could read this book as a slow-burn romance, but I don’t think that’s actually what it is. I think it’s that it took Lily whatever percentage of the book to figure out what was happening. And the minute she figured it out, she did something about it. So it was mostly about awakening to who she was, and that took a while. Because, for Lily, there were no examples for her. She’d never experienced [same-sex attraction] before, and it was very difficult to comprehend that that was a possibility.

**Is there anything else you’d like our readers to know about Last Night at the Telegraph Club?**
This book has been really meaningful to me. I really feel like I leveled up. And I’m very proud of my team....It’s interesting to come back to ideas that I had before I wrote this book, because I learned so much about writing. I look at those older projects, and they seem easier now. After this book, I feel like I can do them.

This interview is for our Changemakers issue. When I read your blog, I see you speaking frankly about craft, about LGBTQ+ representation in YA fiction, and generously sharing your own experiences and insights. It seems like a project intended to join—and start—changemaking conversations. To help work toward a more inclusive publishing industry.

Absolutely....I’ve been [in the industry] for 12 years now. Change has been happening for a while, and, especially recently, it’s been happening fast. I’m really glad to have been a part of that.

You often use statistics to communicate the truth about where the publishing industry stands on diversity and inclusion.
In the early days, a lot of the discussion about race and representation seemed to be anecdotal. And for those who were not fully engaged in the fight for greater representation, they could easily dismiss those anecdotes.

When I started doing my research into the number of LGBTQ+ YA books published, that came out of kind of an anecdotal sharing of experiences on the internet—of some authors saying they’d had this experience with a homophobic agent. And people were very much like, *Well, this happens all the time.* But there were no statistics.

Statistics can be manipulated, obviously, and I would not want to rely on them entirely. [But] putting those things into pie charts can be strangely convincing for a lot of people who otherwise would just dismiss personal lived experience. So I think it’s been really valuable to have both of them. Over the years, more and more people have done these statistical roundups of things—it’s definitely not just me. But I think that it’s useful to have charts and spreadsheets that you can point to to support your argument. It shouldn’t even be an argument! People need these things to support their statements of truth.

Editor at large Megan Labrise hosts Kirkus’ Fully Booked podcast. Last Night at the Telegraph Club received a starred review in the Dec. 1, 2020, issue.
around them due to human-made disasters, Kasey strives to uncover the mystery surrounding Cee's disappearance while Cee survives, marooned on an island and driven to search for Kasey through her wavering memories. While the science-fiction setting often does not feel fully realized enough to anchor readers in this world where the residents of the floating eco-cities carry out most of their nonessential activities in holographic mode, the story is a compelling exploration of humanity and its tendency toward selfishness and self-destruction. The pacing is maddeningly slow at first, but midway through, the action accelerates, racing to a breathless end. Readers who puzzle through this world will find a curious struggle that may answer the question of whether humanity is worth saving.

An intriguing foray into a devastating future—and yet one where hope abides. (Science fiction. 14-18)

EVERYONE DIES FAMOUS IN A SMALL TOWN

Hitchcock, Bonnie-Sue
Wendy Lamb/Random (208 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Apr. 20, 2021
978-1-984892-59-1
978-1-984892-60-7 PLB

Small-town teens across the American West experience heartbreak and healing in this linked short story collection.

Set in 1995 and with locations ranging from Alaska to Colorado, nine teens’ third-person narratives play out against the backdrop of an increasingly devastating wildfire and the disappearance of a young girl. Each story is peripheral to these two major events, immersing readers in the distinct experiences of each narrator: Gina grieves her dead mother; Kelsey questions her place in a basketball-obsessed town; Delia seeks revenge on the priest who abused her and her brother; Ben drives through the night to find Conrad, the boy he loves; and another young couple confronts the end of their relationship. Each narrative underscores the suffocating social expectations unique to their small rural communities, challenging the stereotype that nothing ever happens in them. Arranged in loose chronological order, the seemingly disparate stories contain overlapping secondary characters and locations, and Alaskan author Hitchcock uses small details of daily life to paint a strong sense of place and quirky characters. While some stories are stronger than others in terms of pacing, narrative voice, and character development, readers will enjoy deciphering how each connects to the wildfire and the missing girl. A White default is assumed.

Illuminating. (content note) (Fiction. 13-18)

KISSES AND CROISSANTS

Joubannou, Anne-Sophie
Delacorte (320 pp.)
$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Apr. 6, 2021
978-0-593-17357-2
978-0-593-17358-9 PLB

American Mia’s summer in Paris is supposed to be entirely focused on ballet, but a cute French boy and a family mystery vie for her attention.

A prestigious six-week ballet program is 17-year-old Mia’s opportunity to be noticed by a professional ballet company, especially after she lands an important role in Swan Lake. When she meets Louis, she doesn’t intend to let him distract her from her goals, no matter how charming he is, yet she continually finds herself spending time with him. He helps her seek out the true story behind family lore regarding a ballerina ancestor and opens her eyes to the beauty of Paris. As the program’s end draws nearer, Mia reevaluates her priorities and aspirations. Straightforward writing suits this sweet romance while French words peppered in add to the strong sense of place. While most of the characters lack depth, the city of Paris feels like a character itself that outweighs them all. Accurate details and inclusion of several Parisian landmarks make the city come alive. Additionally, the world of ballet jets off the page with descriptions that allow readers to picture the movements and understand the difficulty and dedication needed. Last-minute twists turn the plot unduly messy, but the ending reinforces the overall light, upbeat tone. Mia and Louis are implied White; there is some diversity in secondary characters. Francophiles searching for a breezy love story will find this book très amusant. (Romance. 12-17)

SAVING ANIMALS

A Future Activist’s Guide

Kelaher, Catherine
Ashland Creek Press (310 pp.)
$19.95 paper | May 4, 2021
978-1-61822-094-3

Activist Kelaher rallies supporters for two crusades: rescuing farmed or lab animals and refusing to eat them or use their products.

The Aussie founder of NSW Hen Rescue dishes up a spicy mix of interviews and advocacy to promote the idea that switching to a vegan diet and vigorously opposing any sort of animal use go hand in hoof (paw; fin, claw). Her main ingredients are short Q&A exchanges with budding animal activists around the world but mostly in Australia and the U.S. They are all vegans and mostly teenagers—though some are far younger—who speak about both their favored methods of raising awareness and specific areas of concern, ranging from livestock abuse and slaughter to plastic pollutants, cruelty in the pet industry, wildlife rescue, and classroom
dissections. One interesting section presents veganism through the lens of intersectionality. Along with breezy reassurances that any dish can be reinvented as vegan and introductions to some of her own feathered rescuees, Kelaher folds in checklists, a sample press release, and other useful tools. If some suggested activities skate legality’s ragged edge (slapping protest stickers on grocery store shelves or items), at least they’re nonviolent and generally feasible for younger audiences. The few photos that aren’t portraits of interviewees (who are mostly White, with some Asian and Black representation) or healthy-looking rescued chickens are at worst only mildly disturbing. The tone overall is friendly, chatty, and highly engaging.

Helpful and inspirational. (online resources) (Nonfiction. 12-16)

I AM CHRIS
Kent, R
Bold Strokes Books (240 pp.) $13.95 paper | Apr. 13, 2021 978-1-63555-904-0

The son of a recently deceased bull-riding legend, Chris Taylor is determined to make a name for himself on the rodeo circuit and give his little sister, Luce, a better life.

With his substance-abusing stepmother in a coma, 17-year-old Chris is separated from what’s left of his family as Luce is put in foster care and he is sent to live in an abusive boys home. Chris hides the fact that he is transgender, knowing he’ll be barred from bull riding if anyone finds out. However, Chris’ secret is just one of his problems. In order to graduate high school, go to college, and get himself and Luce out of their small Texas town, he’ll need to conquer bucking bulls, sadistic bullies, and a sheriff who is mysteriously out

“Blowing in the Wind”

“When three teenagers get lost in the desert, dangerous conditions, animals, and people test their mettle in this debut YA novel.”

“...a feel-good conclusion that readers will enjoy.”

“A thoughtful and entertaining coming-of-age tale with a vibrant setting.” —Kirkus Reviews


For All Inquiries, Please Email jpmurnane3@gmail.com

| KIRKUS.COM | YOUNG ADULT | 15 MARCH 2021 | 181 |
“I AM A RADICAL. I am going to stay one until my people are free to walk the Earth,” said Paul L. Robeson Sr. (1898-1976), the actor and humanitarian who remained steadfast in the struggle to achieve full citizenship and equal treatment for Black Americans. For his bold, uncompromising stance, he was blacklisted in the 1950s, thwarting his thriving career. Robeson’s global stature never truly recovered.

Prefaced by YA stalwart Jason Reynolds, Paul Robeson: No One Can Silence Me: The Life of the Legendary Artist and Activist (The New Press, March 9) is adapted from the critically acclaimed 800-page biography published by Martin Duberman in 1989. Duberman, a respected historian and founding figure in gay and lesbian studies, was selected to write the authorized biography by Robeson’s only child, Paul Robeson Jr.

In a phone conversation about the new YA edition, Duberman spoke about the challenges of writing a giant’s biography and what this generation can learn from revisiting Robeson today. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

You’ve been a political activist for decades. How did you first become aware of Paul Robeson?

As far back as I can remember, I’ve always been conscious of him as one of the great pioneer figures in the Black civil rights struggle. Through my readings, preparations, and my own activities in social justice, I became familiar with Robeson. In my 20s, I would teach seminars on the history of American radicalism and radical protest [that] featured Robeson. Surprisingly, I didn’t know much, until writing the biography, about his theatrical and singing careers.

Could you talk about the challenge of writing the biography of a man who accomplished so much and touched so many people throughout the world? What in your own experiences helped you meet this challenge?

“Challenge” is such an understatement. I wish I could lead you to an essay I wrote called “Writing Robeson” [which appeared in The Nation in 1998]. All the while I was writing this biography [in the 1980s], I kept revisiting the issue: Should I be the person writing this? Do I fully understand things like the National Negro Conference, Black radicalism in the labor movement? I eventually ended up sitting down and writing out my reasons why I felt I was a suitable biographer, even an appropriate one. As just one example, the fact that I was gay, and the misperceptions of sexuality and character that were attributed to our community, allowed me to push back on negative labels ascribed to Robeson for his nonmonogamy, a perspective that a heterosexual biographer might have missed.

There’s something of a Robeson renaissance happening recently and many different ways to learn about his legacy. What distinguishes your YA biography from others?
I’ve read four or five of the YA books available on Robeson. Lots of the narratives presented reference my published biography, with the original research and the exclusive access to the family archive that I had at the time. With the 130, 140 interviews that I executed, I got to people who, even if they were still alive, would surely not have spoken to a biographer. There were a couple who would not even speak to me! There’s people like Helen Rosen. She put me through the wringer, but after more than a year, she warmed up to me, reached into her closet and presented me with a collection of letters from Paul Robeson. Paul rarely wrote letters because he knew they would be surveilled. He was being tracked by everybody from the FBI to you name it. This was a treasure! I had a very tenacious personality to chase down such relationships and connections across the four corners of the world.

Why a YA edition of the biography now?
In a way, it was like a sudden illumination: With all that we are finally hearing about Black Lives Matter, I’m not hearing Paul Robeson. I’m occasionally hearing W.E.B. DuBois, but these were the two great forerunners. Why aren’t people talking about them more? My book is out there, but it’s a huge 800-pager. My hope had been with the original biography that at last, this giant of a man is going to become better known. This new generation needs to know about him, and my hope was that I could reach them in this more accessible format. Even with my new YA edition, which I expect to do really well, I still believe that a film will be the most important vehicle for the masses to recognize Paul Robeson as a dominant historical figure.

For young people and educators, what do you believe that this text and the story of Paul Robeson can do for challenging and clarifying the terms of who and what is considered “controversial,” “contested,” sometimes even “cancelled” in the sphere of public opinion?
I think it’s important to compare Robeson with some of the Black figures who have become very well known and honored. For example, Jackie Robinson. Everybody knows the name Jackie Robinson. Still, relatively [few] people know Robeson’s name. Robeson was speaking out for Black rights starting in the early 1930s, even before. During my original research, I got to interview a couple of his college classmates, and they remember that Paul would lead them in discussions about the need to achieve full citizenship and full rights for Black Americans. While Jackie and others were unwilling to fully stick their necks out for Black rights, they are now revered. Not only did Robeson stick his neck out, he would eventually lose everything for doing so, including his career and his health.

In terms of unpacking Robeson’s legacy, the critical reason why he became a “nonperson” was, of course, his refusal to denounce the Soviet Union [during the Cold War]. In the popular mind, there’s also that idea that he himself was a Communist. I cover [his alleged Communist membership] in great detail in the book. What really needs unpacking is that for Robeson, racial matters always came first. Second would be socialism, not to be confused with Stalin’s specific program of communism. Robeson continued to believe that socialism was the likeliest path to a better, fairer, more just world—the ideal of giving highest priority to the needs of the poorest people.

[Talking about the erasure of Robeson] gets me riled up. Here’s a man that didn’t back down and was willing to suffer the price. And he knew he was going to suffer, but he thought it was essential not to yield an inch in demanding Black rights. Black rights were always at the top of his agenda, and that cannot be stressed enough. The mainstream reporting on Robeson never says he stood early and steadfastly for Black rights. And that’s exactly what’s going on today [with Black Lives Matter]. There shouldn’t be any trouble articulating Robeson’s contribution and understanding what a hero he is. The trouble is people have been so brainwashed to think otherwise that they cannot reconcile the truth of Paul Robeson.

Christopher R. Rogers is a writer and educator in Chester, Pennsylvania. Paul Robeson received a starred review in the Feb 15, 2021, issue.
for his blood. The captivating, high-stakes plot with its larger-than-life villains verges on melodramatic—and that’s not a bad thing. Chris must learn confidence and trust in his friends as he grapples with sexuality, abuse, corruption, drugs, suicide, and grief. Some of the language around gender and an instance of deadnaming reflect the 1994 Texas setting. Behind an unappealing book cover, Kent has taken elements of Western, coming-of-age, and romance novels and combined them to create a touching yet exciting tale of a young man finding his way in the world. Characters present as White.

**A gripping teen Western with a transgender protagonist.** *(Fiction. 13-18)*

### MEET CUTE DIARY

*Lee, Emery*

Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins  
(400 pp.)  
$17.99 | May 4, 2021  
978-0-06-303883-7

A transgender boy in love with the idea of falling in love charts a course for the ultimate relationship to save his viral blog from a troll attack.

Noah Ramirez, a Japanese, White, and Afro-Caribbean 16-year-old, is stuck in Denver with his college-age brother while his parents relocate from Florida to California. He plans to spend his summer exploring selfie-worthy shops as inspiration for his popular blog, a diary of clandestine, romantic, first trans love encounters. Reality hits him hard when his mom insists he get a job and a troll targets his blog with true accusations that his stories are fake. As Noah’s readership plummets, a seemingly perfect solution presents itself in the form of a gorgeous, White, cisgender boy who volunteers to fake date Noah in order to save the blog. Throughout the narrative, Noah demonstrates significant character growth: He begins the story naïve and self-absorbed but learns through his mistakes how to set boundaries, identify his needs in a relationship, and be a more supportive friend. The book’s explorations of gender identity and sexuality stand out for important representation of questioning and nonlinear self-discovery; one of the primary characters, an asexual, nonbinary, Cuban teen, tries out multiple labels and pronouns. High emotional tension and mounting stakes maintain a page-turning momentum. While the coming-of-age story awakens Noah to a less fluffy side of romantic relationships, the resolution is loving and hopeful.

**A heart-swelling debut.** *(Fiction. 14-18)*

### VIOLET AND DAISY

*Miller, Sarah*

Schwartz & Wade/Random (320 pp.)  
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Apr. 27, 2021  
978-0-593-11972-3  
978-0-593-11973-0 PLB

The story of a pair of conjoined twins who became an American vaudeville sensation in the 1920s.

Violet and Daisy were born in England in 1908 to a young, unwed mother and adopted by their midwife, Mary Hilton. Hilton exhibited the twins from infancy, taking them on the road to Germany, Australia, and finally the United States, where they performed at fairs, carnivals, and circuses. In contrast to other sideshows, their act was considered wholesome, designed to emphasize their musical abilities, beauty, and charm. When they weren’t performing, the twins were sequestered from the world, and their social isolation kept them ignorant of the ways in which they were being exploited. By 1925, Violet and Daisy made the incredible leap from the sideshow to the vaudeville stage, where they debuted to extraordinary success. Catapulted to instant fame, they fascinated the press and earned a fortune for their management. Yet their outwardly sunny dispositions masked their growing turmoil at their virtual imprisonment, which finally led to a court battle that marked a watershed moment in their lives. Though related somewhat repetitively, Violet’s and Daisy’s story shines when describing their deep respect for each other’s privacy and individuality and their mutual harmony despite their differences. The twins had a tendency to sensationalize their own story for publicity, and the text is careful to point out the incidents in their account that remain unsubstantiated.

**A story of two individuals worth the telling.** *(author’s note, sources, notes)* *(Nonfiction. 12-18)*

### PROM HOUSE

*Mueller, Chelsea*

Underlined (256 pp.)  
$9.99 paper | May 4, 2021  
978-0-593-18005-1

In this whodunit set on prom weekend, partiers stuck in a house are being picked off: Is it a random killer or one of their own?

Kylie is looking forward to spending this weekend in a house on the Jersey shore, the perfect celebration before old and new friends, such as bestie Aubrey and recent boyfriend Liam, head off in different directions for college. Things quickly go wrong when Aubrey’s boyfriend is found dead with a shard of glass stuck in his neck. Strangely, when the cops arrive, the body is gone. The mystery spins out like a B movie; just as the teens are arguing
about what to do next, a storm brings flooding, trapping them in place. Nervous, they agree to stay together only to drift off from the group for different reasons. Bodies pile up. Surely one of them must be the perpetrator? Most attempts by narrator Kylie at logical deduction are lost in the presence of hormone-arousing Liam, although she occasionally pauses to wonder whether he is the culprit. The cast of characters is two-dimensional, with individuals representing stock types: the boozer, the fighting couple, the failure, and the weird kid. Tension is lacking, and by the time psychological drama and jealousy are explored, the lagging pace will have turned delighted screams into yawns. Most characters are White by default.

Only those addicted to teen drama will be hooked. (Thriller. 12-16)

YOUNG BLOOD
Mzobe, Sifiso
Catalyst Press (320 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Apr. 13, 2021
978-1-946395-48-1

A South African teen finds himself caught up in increasingly risky crimes and bad decisions.

Seventeen-year-old Sipho’s income mostly comes from his work as a backyard mechanic. He and his family live in Umlazi, a township near Durban, South Africa, where there aren’t many opportunities for them to thrive economically. Disillusioned with school and taken by the extravagant lifestyle of his old friend Musa, Sipho falls in with a violent crime syndicate. Starting with smaller crimes like drug use and theft, Sipho’s actions intensify as he falls further in lust with the lavish rewards that crime gets him. Of course, such bad judgment calls come with increasingly dangerous risks, and the window...
for Sipho to choose a different path in life closes further with every escalating act. The fetishization of wealth, from upscale cars to access to expensive drugs, is portrayed deftly; illuminating Sipho’s choices as being mired in peer pressure and capitalist messaging. Sipho himself is the most rounded of the characters, though he still feels distant as more time is spent detailing the types of cars he drives (and steals) than his internal processing of events and their consequences. This leaves the ending and any character growth feeling unearned. Both Sipho and the novel treat the girls around him as little more than bodies to comment upon or pursue sexually. Main characters are Black.

Blunt, brisk, and fast-paced and with little introspection. (Thriller. 15-adult)

NOTES FROM A YOUNG BLACK CHEF (ADAPTED FOR YOUNG ADULTS)
Onwuachi, Kwame with Stein, Joshua David
Delacorte (272 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Apr. 13, 2021
978-0-593-17601-6 PLB
978-0-593-17600-9

This YA adaptation of a critically acclaimed 2019 memoir by the same title—which is also being adapted for film—chronicles the perseverance and hustle of rising star chef Onwuachi.

Growing up between New York City, Nigeria, and Louisiana, he was able to turn away from troublesome youthful temptation, instead embracing a love of cooking and beginning an entrepreneurial life in the kitchen. His unconventional path to the top tier of fine dining, a rare perch for an African American chef, included selling candy on the subway to save up to start his first catering company. This text covers the challenges of experiencing discrimination in an industry stacked against cultural outsiders and finding resolve in laying claim to the diasporic inheritances that make one unique. Young readers will walk away with strategies to confront, heal, and grow from failure. Beyond tantalizing stories of ingredients and cooking techniques, Onwuachi’s journey points to the ambitious grit required to carve one’s own path and the beloved community that must come together to see one achieve their potential. No man in the kitchen stands on his own island. “I know that if I cook this food, food that is in me already, the world will come to eat it. All I have to do is stay true to myself, to be the Kwame I am when no one is looking,” he concludes.

Enough sizzle, color, and character to entice young readers. (Memoir. 12-18)

THE TIES THAT BIND
Ottow, Micd
Illus. by Pitilli, Thomas & Szymanowicz, Andre & Workman, John
Archie Blue Ribbon (144 pp.)
$14.99 paper | May 4, 2021
978-1-64576-958-3
Series: Riverdale

A suspenseful stand-alone graphic novel tie-in to the popular CW franchise.

Set in the dark, contemporary world of television’s Riverdale, Archie, Betty, Veronica, and Jughead all face separate horrors on one fateful night as a sinister secret society stalks them. As Jughead and Archie both find themselves locked in at their respective schools, Betty and her sister, Polly, are terrorized at a run-down motel, and Veronica (along with pal Cheryl) is pursued through an eerie, seemingly deserted mall. Readers realize that a creepy conglomerate is responsible. Using a symbol of two interlocking infinity signs as their secret mark, a nefarious group calling themselves Ivanovinki targets toys with the Riverdale citizens, but their motives are tenuous at best (and true-to-brand, answers are uncovered while the foursome is packed into a booth at Pop’s Chock Lit Shoppe). While the trademark thrills and chills from the show are present here, too many questions are left unanswered. The lack of exposition and overreliance on plot-driven action may be alienating for those new to or unfamiliar with the series. Despite this, the full-color, cinematically styled illustrations resonate; those who know the characters will find them instantly recognizable. Riverdale aficionados will certainly relish more time with the beloved cast and will forgive the narrative gaffes. Archie, Betty, and Jughead read as White; Veronica has brown skin.

Best for diehard fans. (Graphic fiction. 12-18)

BETTER THAN THE MOVIES
Painter, Lynn
Simon & Schuster (368 pp.)
$18.99 | May 4, 2021
978-1-5344-6762-0

A grieving teen’s devotion to romance films might ruin her chances at actual romance.

Liz Buxbaum has always adored rom-coms, not least for helping her still feel close to her screenwriter mother, who died when she was little. Liz hopes that her senior year might turn into a real-life romantic fantasy, as an old crush has moved back to town, cuter and nicer than ever. Surely she can get Michael to ask her to prom. If only Wes, the annoying boy next door, would help her with her scheming! This charming, fluffy concoction manages to pack into one goofy plot every conceivable trope, from fake dating to the makeover to the big misunderstanding. Creative, quirky, daydreaming Liz is just shy of an annoying stereotype, saved by a dry wit and unresolved grief.
and anger. Wes makes for a delightful bad boy with a good heart, and supporting characters—including a sassy best friend, a perfect popular rival, even a (not really) evil stepmother—all get the opportunity to transcend their roles. The only villain here is Liz’s lovelorn imagination, provoking her into foolish lies that cause actual hurt feelings; but she is sufficiently self-aware to make amends just in time for the most important trope of all: a blissfully happy ending. All characters seem to be White by default.

Exactly what the title promises. (Romance. 12-18)

BABY & SOLO
Posthuma, Lisabeth
Candlewick (416 pp.)
$19.99 | May 11, 2021
978-1-5362-1303-4

Through work, friendship, and honestly, 17-year-old Joel confronts his difficult past and begins healing.

At the suggestion of his psychiatrist—and despite his worried mother’s concerns—Joel starts working part time at a video store (it’s 1996). On the first day he is asked to choose a movie character’s name for his work alias, and he picks Han Solo from Star Wars. The significance of this choice is revealed much later, as readers slowly learn why Joel was in and out of psychiatric hospitals for much of his youth. Joel’s burgeoning friendship with co-worker Baby (from Dirty Dancing) is refreshingly platonic. It challenges Joel, who is torn between wanting to be seen as “Normal” and his growing desire to confide in her about his past. In his sometimes-wry, always clear-eyed narration, Joel drops tantalizing clues about his family’s pain and his struggles with mental health. The author seamlessly weaves sound psychological advice into the story through Joel’s observations about how he reacts to the behavior of his parents and cast of misfit co-workers. This sensitive, complex, and layered novel provides insight into family trauma and mental health recovery while taking readers on a journey of discovery that ends with an unexpected revelation. Most characters are White; there is some diversity in the supporting cast.

An absorbing story of recovery from trauma. (Fiction. 13-18)

MY EPIC SPRING BREAK (UP)
Rockaway, Kristin
Underlined (256 pp.)
$9.99 paper | Apr. 6, 2021
978-1-593-18011-2

A spring break full of disappointment, bad choices, romance, tattoos—and self-realization.

High school junior Ashley’s ultimate goal is to leave Brooklyn behind and achieve success as a software engineer in Silicon Valley. Between being a mathlete, belonging to a coding club, and tutoring classmates in math, she has been doing everything she can to prove to colleges that she’s dedicated to studying STEM. Ashley believes she’ll have no trouble landing a summer internship with the popular social media platform ZigZag. However, her two-week spring break is off to a poor start when they send her a rejection letter. Frustrated with having tried to do everything right, when she runs into her crush, Walker, she decides to put herself out there and have more fun. Jason, Ashley’s lifelong friend and literal boy next door, warns her that Walker is bad news, however. When Jason joins Ashley’s coding team for a spring break hackathon, she starts to see something special in the boy who has been there all along. Ashley comes across as authentic and driven—but not consumed—by her ambitions, and the role of STEM in the story is both natural and noteworthy: Ashley’s sometimes-misguided choices feel genuine, and her disappointments real. Main characters are White by default; surnames indicate some diversity in the supporting cast.

Refreshing characters bring new life to classic romance tropes. (Romance. 12-18)

BRONTË
Santoni, Manuela
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Benassi, Matteo
Graphic Universe (184 pp.)
$14.99 paper | May 4, 2021
978-1-72841-290-0

Sisterly bonds are eternal. This black-and-white graphic novel opens at a point when the Brontë family is in desperate financial need. Their father is getting sicker each day while their heartbroken brother, Branwell, is ruining himself with opium and alcohol. Charlotte and Anne want to publish their writings to help bring in some income, but Emily refuses to join them, as she says that she writes only for herself. To relieve some of Emily’s concerns, her sisters suggest publishing under male pseudonyms, and the Bell brothers, Currer, Acton, and Ellis, are born. Despite some initial rejection and mixed reviews, praise and admiration grow for their published works. Recognizing the need to share who they truly are, the sisters reveal themselves to their father, brother, publisher, and, finally, the world. Soon after, tragedy strikes the family with the untimely deaths of Branwell, rapidly followed by Emily and Anne. In this account of the Brontë family translated from Italian, Santoni’s simple, energetic illustration style works well to convey the story’s tone. Every bold, sweeping line expresses the family’s dire situation and the Haworth parsonage. Each character is portrayed clearly and distinctively, giving sharp clarity to their individual feelings and desires despite the relatively sparse text.

A beautifully illustrated reimagining of the Brontë sisters’ lives. (character designs, timeline) (Graphic historical fiction. 13-18)
ALL KINDS OF OTHER  
Sie, James  
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins  
(416 pp.)  
$17.99 | May 4, 2021  
978-0-06-296249-2

A cisgender boy and a transgender boy navigate bullying and a budding romance.

Jules, a White, Jewish cis boy, is about to begin his sophomore year of high school in Los Angeles. He is instantly intrigued by Jack, a mysterious and aloof new arrival from Pittsburgh. Their shy flirtation seems to be leading to more until someone sends out a video revealing that Jack is trans. Jules’ mother and friend say a gay guy shouldn’t date a trans guy, but Jules’ heart tells him otherwise. Although the author does not shy away from depicting transphobia and bullying—including the use of a slur—the overall tone is hopeful, and this is, in the end, a realistic, sensitive depiction of a trans boy. In one powerful scene, the author captures the intense discomfort of being asked invasive personal questions while your supposed allies let you down. On the other end of the emotional spectrum, the boys’ romance is tender, sweet, and endearingly awkward. As Jack himself points out, there are few media depictions of cis and trans men dating. This book is a welcome and successful entry into the category. Jack’s mother is Asian Indian; his multi-racial father is White-passing. Sie incorporates Jack’s intersectional identities into the story, as he is faced with racism and seeks a closer connection to the Indian heritage he knows little about due to a family rift.

A touching, romantic, and rewarding read. (Fiction. 14-18)

EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT INDIANS BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK (YOUNG READERS EDITION)  
Treur, Anton  
Levine Querido (272 pp.)  
$18.99 | Apr. 6, 2021  
978-1-4926-7706-2

A plainspoken cultural guide for Natives and non-Natives alike.

This collection of short essays about Native Americans is comprehensive, equitable, and generous. Structured around questions that distinguished scholar Treuer (Ojibwe) encounters in his public talks, the book addresses a range of topics: sovereignty, politics, language, music, religion, gender and sexuality, and more. Responses to founding events in America’s history help counteract missing Native perspectives in school curricula. Written with a clear desire to heal misunderstandings and do away with stereotypes, the book uses photographs and anecdotes to illustrate the author’s lessons. This edition adapted for teens is also updated, with coverage of current events, including the Covington Catholic High School scandal at the Lincoln Memorial, the Black Lives Matter movement, the Dakota Access Pipeline protest, progress with removing Native sports team mascots, and the Covid-19 pandemic. The author’s tone is thoughtful as he asks readers to engage with challenging subjects: “All human beings have dark chapters in their personal histories. And all nations have dark chapters in theirs. Nobody should be stuck in shame. However, it is important for all countries and all individuals to examine dark chapters in order to learn from them and prevent them from reoccurring.” While driven by facts, the book becomes personal whenever elements of the author’s life peek through, giving readers a sense of his character and the commitment he brings to his work.

Wise, well-researched, and not to be missed. (recommended reading, notes, photo credits, index) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

ANY PLACE BUT HERE  
Van Name, Sarah  
Sourcebooks Fire (336 pp.)  
$10.99 paper | May 4, 2021  
978-1-4926-7706-2

A North Carolina teen gets a fresh start at a new school midway through her junior year.

When June and her best friend are caught with alcohol at their private school, it feels like the end of the world. Sent to live with her Oma, who teaches at a girls boarding school in Virginia, June is furious with her parents for separating her from Jess, whom they consider a bad influence. With Jess, June felt unstoppable, confident, worldly, and seen, whereas her overbearing parents only saw delinquency. But as she settles into life in Virginia, June begins to learn who she is on her own thanks to her reserved but supportive grandmother, a tightknit (and sober) trio of new friends, and a film photography class she unexpectedly loves. Contemplative yet matter-of-fact prose chronicles the development of June’s sense of self, grounded by photography assignments that literally and figuratively offer opportunities to see the things—and people—in her life in new ways. June’s complicated feelings for Jess—and subsequent questioning of her sexuality before coming out as bisexual—are compassionately and authentically written, as are her tense exchanges with her parents. Most characters are presumed White; Kitty, one of June’s new friends, is queer and implied Korean American.

An atmospheric meditation on connection and identity. (Fiction. 12-18)
“Immersive, dazzling.”

**MIRROR’S EDGE**

Frey infiltrates Shreve to rescue a friend and discovers more than she bargained for in this sequel to *Shatter City* (2019).

She and Col have undergone camouflage, a full-body operation to hide their identities from the surveillance dust. Even though her twin sister, Rafi, is against the mission, Frey is determined to rescue her friend Boss X because she killed Seanan, who happened to be both his lover and the twins’ brother. Now Frey navigates Shreve at the street level, uncovering secrets: A privateer gives her eyeglasses that reveal thousands of hidden messages covering every surface in the city. Used by smugglers and treasonous citizens, they offer her a glimpse into Shreve’s underbelly. She digs deeper and soon uncovers new horrors her father has committed along with his plans to maintain control. As the action escalates, Frey is locked in a silent struggle with her sister—who isn’t aware of the free cities’ plans for Frey to eventually rule Shreve—while battling her own identity dysmorphia. To take down their father, Frey and Rafi must decide who they really are, no matter the cost.

An immersive, dazzling installment that journeys to new heights. (Science fiction. 12-18)

**SUNKISSED**

West, Kasie

Delacorte (320 pp.)

$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | May 4, 2021

978-0-593-17626-0

978-0-593-17627-7 PLB

The summer before her senior year, 17-year-old Avery unexpectedly finds romance on a family vacation.

Avery’s family spends their summers away from Los Angeles, enjoying the outdoors; this year it will be two months at a remote resort in the California woods. Her 15-year-old sister, Lauren, an outgoing video blogger, is distraught by the camp’s lack of internet access while go-with-the-flow Avery is just hoping for no drama, upset after having found out her best friend kissed her ex-boyfriend. An initial miscommunication makes things tense with handsome camp staff member Brooks—until Avery agrees to help him write songs for a band competition in exchange for his helping her step out of her comfort zone. Of course, staff aren’t supposed to fraternize with campers, which leads to much sneaking around, though Avery and her sister attend several staff parties thanks to befriending lifeguard Maricela and drummer Kai. Avery learns to find her voice, both metaphorically—she feels her parents don’t take her seriously—and literally, as she must overcome her stage fright when asked to step in for the vocalist in Brooks’ band when they compete in the festival. Avery’s complicated relationship with her family feels underdeveloped, though the love story with Brooks hits all the right notes. Fans of West will enjoy this watered-down *Dirty Dancing* tale, with its swoony romance and uncomplicated plot. Most characters are White; Maricela is implied Latinx, and Kai is Polynesian.

A sweet, undemanding summer read. (Romance. 12-16)

**BACK HOME**

Walker, Dan L.

Alaska Northwest Books (198 pp.)

$12.99 paper | Apr. 6, 2021

978-1-5132-6269-7

Series: Secondhand Summer, 2

His big brother’s return from Vietnam with wounds both physical and psychological shakes up a 16-year-old Alaskan’s familiar world of girls, guns, and clueless grown-ups.

Three years after his father’s death and the move to Anchor age recounted in *Secondhand Summer* (2016), Sam Barger is left at home with just his fretful mom—until, that is, his strong, admired brother, Joe, comes back from the war with crutches, intensifies as news of Joe’s return gets around. When Sam takes off on his own for the family’s old cabin in Ninilchik, Joe follows, setting up a hunting expedition and an accident that tests Sam’s heart as well as his abilities to build a fire (using “squaw kindling”), butcher a moose, and complete other outdoorsy tasks. Aside from a classmate who identifies himself as “a half-breed (Sam’s mother) and two temptresses. Walker does better with women given significant roles stereotyped as a hand-wringer and clueless grown-ups.

A patchy but occasionally powerful mix of family drama, late-’60s culture clashes, and wilderness adventure. (Historical fiction. 14-16)
A SITTING IN ST. JAMES
Williams-Garcia, Rita
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins
(480 pp.)
$17.99 | May 25, 2021
978-0-06-236729-7

An unblinking view into plantation life in the Deep South.
At first glance this epic seems to be focused on the ups and downs of the Guilbert family, slaveholders living in the Louisiana parish of St. James whose legacy is protected by 80-year-old matriarch Madame Sylvie Bernardin de Maret Dacier Guilbert. However, Williams-Garcia doesn’t stop in the salons and sitting rooms; she brings readers into the cabins and cookhouses of enslaved people whose perceived invisibility gives them access to ideas and knowledge that empower them in ways that few fiction writers have examined. Sixteen-year-old Thisbe is the personal servant to Madame Guilbert—treated like a pet and beaten with a hairbrush for the smallest alleged slight. Her narrative to liberation is intricately webbed within the story of the Guilberts. Thisbe’s silence helps her acquire the language to affirm her humanity to those who would deny it. With a cast of characters whose assorted genealogies feel like an ode to the mixing of peoples and cultures in Louisiana, this story broadens and emboldens interrogations of U.S. chattel slavery. Williams-Garcia’s meticulous research processes shout volumes about the importance of taking contemporary inspiration into the archives to unearth sorely needed truths as we continue to navigate questions of equity and justice for the descendants of enslaved people.

A marathon masterpiece that shares a holistic portrait of U.S. history that must not be dismissed or forgotten. (author’s note, bibliography) (Historical fiction. 15-adult)

INSTRUCTIONS FOR DANCING
Yoon, Nicola
Delacorte (304 pp.)
$16.99 | Jun. 1, 2021
978-1-5247-1896-1

A girl’s views on love and heartbreak are full of confusion—and then a dance book leads her to romance.
High school senior Evie Thomas thought she had the perfect family until she caught her dad with another woman. Formerly a genuine romantic, she is devastated. Even as her mother and sister appear to move on, she leaves her romance novels at a Little Free Library where she meets a mysterious woman who insists she take the book Instructions for Dancing. It leads her to a dance studio run by an elegant older couple who have an attractive grandson, Xavier, who goes by X. Evie and X start practicing to represent the studio in a dance contest—as well as spending time together off the dance floor building a connection that will improve their performance. Meantime, Evie has been having visions that show when and how people’s relationships will end. Despite herself, she falls for X and allows herself to reconcile with her father. Evie is guarded and careful while X is passionate and intrepid; both are likable characters whom readers will instantly love. Main characters in this richly textured novel featuring clever dialogue and expert pacing are Black; it includes diverse secondary characters who are interesting and fully realized. The elements of fabulism deliver an unexpected twist, presenting the question of whether love is worth the pain of loss.

A remarkable, irresistible love story that will linger long after readers turn the final page. (Romance. 12-18)
In this reprint, previously published by University of Louisiana Press in 2018, Abraham details some of humanity’s most ruthless figures.

The book begins with a characteristically lurid description of a murder before asking, “What sort of people would admire these butchers?” Its answer, which sets the tone for the subsequent 300 pages, is simply, “We would.” Though figures from Genghis Khan to Idi Amin make appearances, the book focuses on Western civilization, which “has been anything but civilized.” The West’s history of conquest dates back to the “sadistic cutthroat” Alexander the Great, whose legacy of brutality and thirst for territorial domination echoed through the 20th century, as seen in the British Empire, which brutally put down independence movements in India and Africa and turned a blind eye to the starvation of its subjects. To the author, the self-proclaimed benevolent empire “rivals the body counts from Hitler, Stalin, and Mao.” Not only do Western rulers have a history of world conquest, they also have been notoriously ruthless to their own people. Comparing European kings and queens to “thugs” like Al Capone, Abraham sees few differences between extortion and murder committed by the Mafia and the wanton violence of French King Clovis I or the role of Catherine de’ Medici in the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre. Abraham is perhaps most dismayed that despite this voluminous record of violence, many in the West “overlook the horrible realities of civilization” and celebrate the very people who are responsible for mass murder. Even the prototype of the West, ancient Athens, which is lauded for its contributions to democracy and philosophy, was a society dominated by “remorseless killers” whose obsession with war appeared even in their most sophisticated cultural materials, like The Iliad and The Odyssey.

To the author, America is perhaps the biggest hypocrite of all—evidenced in the paradox that exists between its ideals and its history of violence, from the Puritans “ruthless and vicious” treatment of Native Americans to the My Lai Massacre in Vietnam and beyond. The book also concludes with a frighteningly convincing juxtaposition of amoral rulers of yore to modern day corporations (“corporate psychopaths”) who accept that...
Better Business

Karen Schechner is the vice president of Kirkus Indie.

It’s easy for businesses or entire industries to stagnate, upending people’s lives and undermining economies. As Nadya Zhexembayeva notes in The Chief Reinvention Officer Handbook, only 60 of the Fortune 500 companies from 1955 have maintained their standing—“a sinking rate of 88%.” In these Indieland favorites, authors offer their visions for the long game, whether that’s creating an ethical startup that’s positioned to thrive; saving a plant that employs hundreds by bringing people and government together; or using chaos to a business’s advantage.

Karim Abouelnaga, a former Forbes columnist, writes about creating a socially conscious startup in The Purpose-Driven Social Entrepreneur. Abouelnaga “examines the difference between passion, which initiates a goal, and purpose, which, for him, entails a sense of moral obligation,” notes our reviewer. The author places significant emphasis on “whether one’s idea will have a broad impact on society.” Overall, a clear-eyed manual on becoming an ethical, dynamic entrepreneur.


Two Black brothers rise up from racism and poverty in this debut illustrated children’s book based on a true story. The Allen children have experienced many challenges over the years: growing up in poverty, having drug-addicted parents, and sometimes being hungry, homeless, or separated. When the youngest sibling, Gilbert, is struggling in school, he asks his Black teacher for guidance. But she tells him: “You’re not doing well because you’re just not that smart...focus on sports, that’s what you’re good at.” It’s true that Gilbert is a talented athlete, but that’s not enough for him. Things at school get even worse, so Gilbert goes to his new school, which has a better education, but his grades are still low. Michael provides subject matter tutoring and teaches Gilbert how to overcome very serious hardships like poverty and familial disruption.

The Allen children’s book about their family, their products will result in deaths, from General Motors to the military-industrial complex. Abraham’s academic background as a biologist and medical doctor influenced his ugly portrait of humanity. For example, in idyllic outdoor scenes full of vegetation and playful wildlife accompanied by the sounds of birds chirping, Abraham sees “the songbirds’ melodies are actually avian challenges,” and “the squirrels’ games are struggles over territory.” Though the book’s scientific analysis, which spans Darwin’s concept of evolution to cutting-edge psychology, is a welcome addition to historical conversations, some historians may be left wanting for deeper discussions of sociocultural contexts of specific times and places. The historical research, however, is solid, and ample footnotes are included. The book includes haunting images and photographs that span the history of human warfare.

A well-written, thoroughly researched, if flawed, history of human brutality.


Two Black brothers rise up from racism and poverty in this debut illustrated children’s book based on a true story. The Allen children have experienced many challenges over the years: growing up in poverty, having drug-addicted parents, and sometimes being hungry, homeless, or separated. When the youngest sibling, Gilbert, is struggling in school, he asks his Black teacher for guidance. But she tells him: “You’re not doing well because you’re just not that smart...focus on sports, that’s what you’re good at.” It’s true that Gilbert is a talented athlete, but that’s not enough for him. Things at school get even worse, so Gilbert goes to his new school, which has a better education, but his grades are still low. Michael provides subject matter tutoring and teaches Gilbert how to overcome very serious hardships like poverty and familial disruption.

The Allen children provide a heartening example of how it’s possible to overcome very serious hardships like poverty and familial disruption. Their approach combines good character traits, including grit and determination; organizational skills, such as making schedules and checklists; and the establishment of emotional strength through mutual support and activities like...
journaling, reading books on racism, or collecting positive quotations. Goshay, who has worked on many children’s books featuring Black characters, provides varied and expressive digital illustrations.

A tale with an inspirational message that kids from any background can learn from.

YOUR PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH Month To Month
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Illustrated by Yanson, John & Lightbox Visual Communications Inc.
Photos by Cade Martin Photography with Photogroup Inc./DC Studios
ACOG (762 pp.)
$19.95 paper | Jan. 26, 2021
978-1-934984-90-1

A comprehensive manual focuses on pregnancy and childbirth. This standard, extensive work by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists gets a seventh edition featuring new material on the latest developments in genetic testing and noncompromising pain medication during labor. The updated guide offers the newest thinking about how to incorporate lifestyle choices like exercise regimens into pregnancy. This edition is also the first one written during the pandemic, making frequent references to Covid-19 as it affects various aspects of pregnancy. The book takes readers through the whole experience, from the decision to have a baby to the possible complications presented by previous pregnancies. The work looks at the various considerations involved in choosing parenthood like mental health and a family history that may signal potential genetic problems. The manual moves through every week of pregnancy, letting readers know what changes are normal and which may be causes for concern. The text is accompanied by many useful charts, graphs, and photographs. But the most illuminating supplement is a series of illustrations showing the exact size, location, and development of the fetus at every stage—not only where it is situated, but also what it can do. The images depict when the fetus’s fingernails first develop, when it can first bend its elbows, when it can first hear sounds from the outside world, and so on (week 26, for instance, is when loud sounds may begin causing the baby to respond physically). All of the specifics in these pages are presented calmly and firmly. The various editors and writers do a superb job of distilling a huge amount of information into easily digestible bits and segments, conveniently arranged at exactly the moments in a pregnancy when they’ll be needed. In clearly phrased and precisely detailed chapters, readers are given all the medical, nutritional, procedural, and psychological knowledge they’ll require, with no jargon, no omissions, and plenty of confident encouragement.

This seminal, all-encompassing pregnancy guide just got a lot more authoritative and informative.

THE GATES OF GUINÉE
Arden, Alys
For the Art of It Publishing (550 pp.)
Jan. 19, 2021
978-1-988733-56-2

A New Orleans witch, hoping to rescue her father, braves the Afterworld with help from friends and enemies alike in this fourth installment of a YA saga.

Callisto Salazar has stolen teenager Adele Le Moyne’s and other witches’ Spectral magic. He and his Ghost Drinkers coven threaten the entire city. Callis has also kidnapped Adele’s father, Mac, and will kill him unless she fetches the Medici vampires’ grimoire (book of shadows). But Adele, who fancies Niccolo Medici, has a plan to save Mac and everyone else. She’ll cut Callis’ tie to his magic’s source—his late father, Jakome—in Guinée, the Afterworld. Adele, Nicco, and five other vampires and witches must each travel through Guinée’s seven gates on their way to find Jakome. Even in the Afterworld, which resembles a desolate New Orleans, Jakome is a menace, and Adele doesn’t trust all in the traveling party.

Arden has amassed an impressively diverse cast of varying backgrounds, skin tones, ages, and abilities. This harrowing installment focuses a bit more on witchery than vampirism and further develops a romantic entanglement among Adele, Nicco, and Air witch Isaac Thompson, who, like his fanged rival, begins this novel harboring a secret. Arden’s prose is lyrical, especially when describing the Afterworld, an unnerving place: “The archway opened into a circular room, which was simply an enormous pool of water. The reflection of the mirrored walls sparkled atop it like diamonds in a treasure chest.” While one subplot reaches a sublime resolution, this series has more to come.

A moody tale of teen-centered paranormal action and romance.

BONUS KISSES
Barker, Freya
Self (342 pp.)
$15.99 paper | $4.99 e-book
Dec. 7, 2020
978-1-988733-56-2

A young woman cares for her dying sister and finds herself struggling with romantic feelings for her sibling’s husband in this novel.

When Natasha Boran, the free-spirited misfit of her family, receives word that her sister, Nicky, is dying, she heads immediately from her job in Africa to her hometown of Eminence, Missouri. Natasha, also known as Taz, has been in Congo, working for Doctors Without Borders and trying to forget the rift between herself and her family. Nine years earlier, she found herself falling in love with her sister’s
fiance, and rather than destroy Nicky’s future, Taz high-tailed it out of town before the wedding. Although Taz feels she was misjudged and unfairly maligned by Nicky and their parents, when she learns her sister is dying, all sour feelings are instantly forgotten. When Taz gets to Missouri, she moves in with Nicky; her husband, Rafe; and their two young kids. As Taz and Rafe nurse Nicky through her final days, many of Taz’s old feelings for him come rushing back to her. She slowly begins to question whether Nicky might actually be trying to push Taz and Rafe closer to each other. Meanwhile, the sisters’ mother is constantly stopping by the house, berating Taz for her every choice and making emotionally trying circumstances all the more difficult. Told in alternating voices from Taz’s and Rafe’s perspectives, Barker’s story delves deep into the pain the protagonist feels at losing a sibling and her confusion over how to handle her feelings for Rafe. The chapters narrated by Rafe feel more topical, focusing mainly on his attraction to Taz and his struggle to resist his yearslong yearning for her. With angry parents and a terminally ill sibling, there are many intensely emotional moments throughout the tale as well as some surprisingly spicy sex scenes. Reading as both a family drama and a romance, this story tries to accomplish a lot. The result is a sometimes-disjointed narrative in which characters’ emotions flip on a dime. Even so, the relationship between Taz and Rafe feels sufficiently authentic and compelling that readers will keep turning the pages to see how the tale ends.

A tear-jerking romance well suited for fans of complicated family dynamics and unlikely affairs.

UP FOR AIR
Berry, Christina
Black Rose Writing (298 pp.)
$19.95 paper | $6.99 e-book
Feb. 11, 2021
978-1-68433-632-6

A married writer embarks on a poly-amorous journey in this novel. Ariana “Ari” Goody Hendricks has always done the right thing. Married to her sweetheart, Greg, whom she met at age 17, the 29-year-old freelance writer and published author lives with him in Austin, Texas—with their mutual best friend, bad boy musician Jacob “Jake” Mitchell, close by. Jake affectionately calls Ari “Goody Two Shoes.” When Greg’s grandfather’s funeral beckons the trio back to their East Tennessee roots, Ari begins to wonder whether she’s truly lived. She’s never been drunk or smoked a cigarette and, more significantly, has only emotionally and physically been with her husband. Ari broaches the idea of an open marriage to Greg once they return to Austin, and he agrees on the condition that their union “close” again if anything goes sideways. Over the next several months, Ari explores her city’s vibrant bar scene and finds a fun-loving friend in roller derby star Sheryl while enjoying passionate flings with a variety of men. But there’s one man Ari can never get out of her mind: kind and steady Alex, whom Ari met her first night at the bars and never saw again. When Alex reappears in Ari’s life and introduces her to a new world of kinky sex, the two quickly form a deeper connection that may demand more than the occasional one-night stand. Berry gives each character, from inquisitive hero Ari to protective Jake to questioning Greg, their own nuanced, complex motivations that inform their actions, and she pens sex scenes that are both titilating and (even those that involve BDSM) romantic. The love between Ari and Greg and the platonic friendship between Ari and Jake are strong and steady even as the relationships grow and change. But the novel’s greatest strength is its informed and compassionate portrayal of polyamory, from the necessary communication to the glow of newly forged connections to the realization that relationships old and new may be headed down an unexpected path.

A refreshingly nonjudgmental look at opening one’s marriage and heart.

MY TRANS PARENT
A User Guide for When Your Parent Transitions
Bryant, Heather
Jessica Kingsley Publishers (304 pp.)
$19.95 paper | $9.99 e-book
May 21, 2020
978-1-78775-122-4

Bryant offers advice to those with a transgender parent in this instructive guide. There has been much discussion in the last few years about how parents should best accommodate their transgender children. But the opposite dynamic is a common one as well: children—be they kids or adults—who learn that their parents identify as transgender. Bryant went through this experience three decades ago, long before transgender awareness was widespread. At the time, Bryant was in the fifth grade, and she understandably had a lot of questions. Easy answers, however, were not forthcoming. The word transgender was not even used. “I thought I was the only person on the whole planet with a family like mine,” she writes in her introduction. “This book aims to fill a gap in conversations about the many shapes of families. I hope that reading this book will provide you with a built-in community of people like you.” When a parent transitions, it doesn’t just mean a change for them. It’s a change for the entire family. While that change should not be viewed as negative, it can often result in feelings of confusion or uncertainty for other family members, especially the trans parent’s children. By sharing stories from her own experience, as well as the experiences of people from around the world who have also gone through this process, Bryant prepares the reader for what to expect. It isn’t only a matter of getting used to a parent’s new look, name, or new pronoun. There are logistical issues, like whether or not the parent “comes out,” possible divorces or new partners, and the realities of transphobia. There are a number of mental shifts that can occur, altering the child’s perspective of their parent, themselves, and the world.
“The tales are wickedly entertaining and, through differing amounts of intensity, deftly illustrate the recklessness and peril of compulsive instability.”

BOWLING AT THE LAUNDROMAT

As Bryant reminds the reader early on, “It’s your transition, too.” The book is essentially a What To Expect When You’re Expecting for those with a transitioning parent, tipping the reader off to the situations that may arise while providing them with the tools needed to navigate them. Bryant’s prose is chatty and reassuring, elucidating the ins and outs of the transition process: “If our parents don’t want to be out in the community, they might not want to connect with other families. It might be something we seek out for ourselves. Mostly, it’s about finding people who say ‘Yeah, I’ve been there and this is how I got through.'” She moves frequently among the stories of several families, and the reader gets to know them over the course of the book. Each chapter ends with prompts meant to generate reflection about the reader’s own family situation. The book also includes a large glossary of transgender-related terms—a necessity for a subject where language so often reveals its limitations—and an extensive list of additional resources. Whether you are a 10-year-old like Bryant was when her father began to transition or you are an adult with children of your own trying to understand an older parent’s journey, this book provides a positive, nonjudgmental guide to all the thoughts and feelings you might be going through.

A heartfelt manual for those seeking to understand their transgender parent.

THE FIVE CORE CONVERSATIONS FOR COUPLES

Bulitt, David & Bulitt, Julie

Skyhorse (216 pp.)


Feb. 4, 2020

978-1-5107-4612-1

A married couple talk out their differences, travails, and humorous foibles in this rollicking self-help book.

David Bulitt, a divorce and family lawyer, and his wife, Julie Bulitt, a social worker and family therapist, have a series of bantering conversations in this text that draw on anonymized case studies of their clients and episodes from their own marriage of more than 30 years to back up their pointers on improving one’s relationships and family life. They explore five themes: building a solid partnership; dealing with monetary issues, such as their own periods of overspending, financial crisis, and austerity; work-life balance; parenting, including their own experience raising a troubled daughter; and sex, a topic that provokes some acerbic exchanges over the course of the book. Via these dialogues, they convey straightforward, sensible wisdom, stressing the importance of communication, facing problems head-on, and being attentive to the needs of one’s partner. The Bulitts couch their advice in homely metaphors—“Your relationship garage gets cleaned and swept by spending time with your partner, doing nice things for him, talking to her, and at least now and then, having sex with each other”—and raw confessional moments: “I was tired and wanted to sleep,” Julie recalls of times when she rebuffed David’s advances. “But Mr. Selfish Boner-Head made me feel guilty, like I was shortchanging him somehow.” For the most part, though, their conversations often play out in snappy repartee worthy of a screwball comedy, as when he says, “Tell me I look good, that you think I’m sexy; you’re attracted to me. It’s not all that complicated,” and she kids, “You want me to lie.” Other passages earnestly reveal the authors’ self-lacerating anguish over their daughter’s destructive behavior: “when a parent says that they will ‘always be there for you no matter what,’ it might be a lie.” Overall, the Bulitts’ vivid, captivating prose and willingness to open up about their shortcomings and setbacks make their advice engaging and credible.

An insightful, often funny, and painfully honest guide to navigating rough patches in relationships.

BOWLING AT THE LAUNDROMAT

Stories of Obsession

Cannella, Frank

Random Thoughts Press (244 pp.)


Jul. 14, 2020

978-1-61737-009-3

A debut collection of short stories surveys obsessive aspects of human behavior.

Long Island–based author Cannella’s creative volume of eight tales is inspired by the ways people allow specific relationships or situations to fester, then to consume them. Though haphazardly written, the title story is a great example: It chronicles the reality of a reclusive, newly 50, twice-divorced man named Chuck Baber, who laments strangers’ “unconscious rejection” due to his age. Dealing with some “emotional kinks,” he finds trips to a large, nearby laundromat therapeutic and the best chance he has for human connection. Unfortunately, Chuck becomes furious and implausibly vengeful after the dryers damage his new clothes. He hatches a plan to irritate the arrogant owner by washing and drying bowling balls in every machine at once, with disastrous results. The author’s stories range from nearly novella-length yarns, like “A Malevolent Year,” about a college student whose life quickly spirals out of control when he becomes embroiled in a serial killer’s murderous existence, to more condensed tales spanning just a few pages. The shorter pieces include “Harry’s Invisible Box,” which finds a Central Park mime lethally boxed into his own container, and “Death in the Family,” a tale of a dangerously jealous sister. Some stories are more haunting than others, mostly due to the way the writer fleshes out his characters and briskly outlines the precarious and sometimes deadly situations they find themselves embroiled in. Delirious resentment is the extreme that consumes a bedeviled woman in “Donna Gets Her Man,” as the spurned lead character dons a bridal gown to interrupt her daughter's wedding with what she hopes is her own. Collectively, the tales are wickedly entertaining and, through differing amounts of intensity, deftly illustrate the recklessness and peril of compulsive instability. Interestingly, the racy
explicit, cab driver-narrated closing story, “Hacking Without Martin,” set amid the racially intolerant mayhem of the mid-1960s in New York City, is noted as semiautobiographical. The tale is loosely drawn from Cannella’s own experiences during a time “when racism was undisguised even after the dawn of the Civil Rights Movement, and reflects some of my own growth in understanding.” Thankfully, many of these torrid stories stray far enough from the formulaic to remain memorable.

A clever assemblage of tales sure to please psychological thriller and suspense fans.

THE SEAGULL

Chekhov, Anton

Trans. by Korenev, Anton

Anton Korenev Entertainment (158 pp.)

$29.95 | $19.95 paper | $9.99 e-book

Apr. 22, 2021

978-1-953608-00-0

978-1-953608-01-7 paper

An actor and director delivers a fresh translation of Chekhov’s classic play.

A comedy with its share of tragic elements, Chekhov’s famous drama has been a staple at theaters around the world for over a century. Here, debut translator Korenev presents a new version for English readers meant to capture the poetry and wit of the original. The play follows a group of artists (and would-be artists) and lovers (and would-be lovers) at a Russian country estate. The actress Irina Nikolayevna Arkadina is there with her lover, the famous writer Boris Alexeyevich Trigorin. Irina’s adult son, Konstantin Gavrilovich Nikolayev, is an aspiring playwright who stages an experimental and poetry, both ancient and modern. Patricia Ann Colón and Angel Rafael Colón concentrate on two particular aspects of Zeus’ legend, his lurid reputation as a “seducer, rake, roué, and rapist” and his general, immoral “vindictiveness.” The book points out that “mythological tales usually cast Zeus as a lustful, narcissistic, temperamental and vengeful god who launched puissant thunderbolts with wild abandon to those who offended him, apparently an unsettling common occurrence, and is known as a consummate reprobate who maintained and further fostered the family tradition of incestuous relationships, whether sanctioned by marriage, seduction or rape.” The authors astutely draw on a rich literary tradition that features Zeus, including ancient writers such as Homer and Hesiod and modern ones like William Butler Yeats. Nevertheless, the highlights of the volume are its discussions of Zeus’ pictorial representations as well as those of his family and victims, often overlapping groups. Zeus was an equal opportunity predator, victimizing other gods, including his own kin; nympha; and “vulnerable mortals.” The authors include nearly 100 beautiful illustrations of paintings and sculptures, a diverse offering of work by the likes of Rubens, Titian, and Rembrandt. And while the subject matter can be grim—Zeus is linked to dozens, if not hundreds, of rapes—the authors attempt to inject a spirit of levity into the book, sometimes exploring the gossipy salaciousness of Zeus’ transgressions. Toward the end of the volume, they include a newspaper article from the ersatz tabloid the *Olympian Times* with the headline “Zeus Again Accused of Rape.”

A historically perceptive and cheeky tour of a licentious mythological figure.

ZEUS IN ART

A Survey of a Serial Seducer

Colón, Patricia Ann & Colón, Angel Rafael

Self (188 pp.)

$20.00 paper | Oct. 30, 2020

978-1-64970-193-0

A House Full of Windsor

Contino, Kristin

Wyatt-MacKenzie Publishing (292 pp.)


978-1-948018-99-9

A TV presenter navigates her relationship with her hoarder mother in this novel.

Sarah Percy is a 30-year-old New Yorker with a tidy career plan and a strong fan base. Still, life isn’t nearly as
easy as Sarah makes it sound in her “Sarah Says” lifestyle advice segment on Good Morning New York. Back in suburban Philadelphia, Sarah’s mother, Debbie, struggles with hoarding British royal family tchotchkes and memorabilia dating back to Prince Charles’ wedding to Diana Spencer. It’s a decades-long issue that wreaked havoc on Debbie’s safety—she has to clear paths to get through the house—and, more significantly, on her relationships with her three adult children. When Sarah’s younger brother, Will, lands an associate producer position on the popular hoarder intervention show Stuff, he promises the higher-ups he will convince Debbie to star in an episode. Sarah takes time off to assist with the segment—much to the chagrin of her new boss, who is all too eager to replace her with the latest Bachelor runner-up. Sarah finds herself reluctantly enamored with the handsome, empathetic Stuff showrunner and host, Pierce Thompson. Meanwhile, Debbie takes stock of her house full of possessions, reflecting on how one drink with a charming stranger while studying abroad in 1981 London got her to this point, lonely and clinging to the past in her home. The impressive and enjoyable novel alternates between Debbie’s and Sarah’s points of view, giving sensitive perspectives of a hoarder who can’t stop shopping and the effects it’s had on her loved ones. Contino never reverts to reality TV stereotypes of a very shallow personality, giving genuine humor in the story, not to mention an abundance of love, as Sarah and her two siblings, twins Will and Anne, band together to repair their broken family once and for all.

A spectacular and addictive family tale that’s equal parts charm and depth.

**CHANGING THE WORLD WITHOUT LOSING YOUR MIND**

Leadership Lessons From Three Decades of Social Entrepreneurship
Counts, Alex
Rivertowns Books (302 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $6.99 e-book
Apr. 16, 2019
978-1-73391-410-9

The founder of a humanitarian nonprofit organization offers a wide range of lessons in this debut memoir/leadership book.

Like many who devote their efforts to nonprofit service, Counts recognizes “the psychic toll that dedicating your life to a noble cause can sometimes take.” In this candid work, the author traces his early interest in advocacy up until he started and ran the anti-poverty and anti-hunger Grameen Foundation. Counts was inspired by his mentor, Bangladeshi social entrepreneur and Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus of Grameen Bank, about whom the author wrote the book Small Loans, Big Dreams (2008). Not surprisingly, Counts hopes his own story is an inspiration to other nonprofit leaders—which is very likely to be the case given the lessons he learned along the way and his ability to translate them into meaningful action. As a whole, this volume is a neatly organized lesson plan for both novice and more experienced nonprofit managers. Counts divides the book into three distinct parts—first, how he got started in his chosen field; next, his experiences as the leader of the Grameen Foundation; and, finally, the most personal section, “Caring for Yourself.” Even in his teen years, the author recognized “things can be improved, often simply by getting motivated, designing a plan, enlisting others, and following through,” but humility taught him that he could be “overconfident in my ability to right wrongs.” The most intriguing portion of Part 1 concerns the relationship Counts developed with Yunus and the influence the entrepreneur had on the author’s own leadership style. Counts learned, for example, how Yunus employed storytelling and why it was such a powerful method of personalizing a nonprofit’s mission. The author’s prose in this section is particularly descriptive as he details living conditions in Bangladesh and recounts the different means of communicating and interacting in another culture. Lessons came fast and furious to Counts as his career unfolded and he launched the Grameen Foundation.

In Part 2, the author recalls how his ultimate goal of running a nonprofit came to fruition. Here, Counts delivers a wealth of well-considered advice about the knotty subjects of fundraising (which he admits most nonprofit leaders detest), cultivating relationships with powerful patrons, managing staff during tough times, making effective decisions, building nonprofit boards, and more. Along the way, readers will learn about the somewhat perplexing yet intriguing world of microfinance. Many of the author’s observations in this part should be very beneficial to nonprofit leaders. Part 3 is as much a lesson in self-reflection as it is a blueprint for healthy living. Counts eloquently discusses the dangers of work-life imbalance, how to be a constant learner, the importance of gratitude, and the right time to leave a leadership position. The author’s keen insights demonstrate that he took the lessons he learned during his career to heart, accepting his failures while celebrating his successes. A thread of mea culpa runs throughout the invaluable book, attesting to the author’s sense of his own vulnerability. But that just adds to the humanity he displays.

Noble and enriching leadership advice.
A sensual meditation on the nature of love in prose poetry form.

Robert Deshaies’ collection of modern poetry starts on a steamy note between two lovers: “You caress me as your curves rhythmically move with synchronous motion of your words.” In subsequent poems, the narrators wonder if they will find love again, if they have reached their breaking point, and if love is stronger than hate. They warn, “I need you, but I won’t be your forever.” On their birthday, they run into a one-night stand. In another poem, they describe the agony of sobering up: “As I lie again, if they have reached their breaking point, and if love is of a hostile, hard-drinking stepfather—a man “as black and ever, the author, a self-described “hopeless romantic,” returns only grew a flower.” But the reader has little sense of who the anger. It plagues them, and “at times the monster needs to be set free.” The narrator rails against a man named Frank, for whom “brutality was your only way to get out.” Ultimately, however, the author, a self-described “hopeless romantic,” returns to love. In an afterward, he urges readers to “try to love, for without it, we are immoral and desolate creatures living a life void of happiness.” Deshaies’ language is visceral, evident in phrases like “you bite and gnaw at my flesh,” and “Her glance bites me, a snake wandering the unknown field.” He poignantly describes his feelings, like disappointment, in apt, although sometimes clichéd, metaphors: “I expected a garden when you only grew a flower.” But the reader has little sense of who the “I” speaking throughout is or who the “you” addressed in these poems is; the reader feels they are peeking into a stranger’s diary. Scene-setting is scant, leaving the reader a bit unmoored. The poems are interspersed with stunning black-and-white nude photographs by Joseph Deshaies and black-and-white illustrations by Dawnmarie Deshaies.

An emotional, visceral exploration of desire.

DEWDROPS
Flanigan, Dan
Arjuna Books (171 pp.)
$9.95 paper | $0.99 e-book
Apr. 19, 2019
978-1-73361-039-1

Novelist and practicing attorney Flanigan’s debut story collection ably depicts ordinary people making the best of bad circumstances. In the leading story, “Some Cold War Blues,” good-natured 11-year-old Jack lives at the mercy of a hostile, hard-drinking stepfather—a man “as black and stony and desiccated as cinders”—and his distant mother. His cursed childhood seems soothed only by the swearwords he learns from his pal Rex Jefferson and outdoor time spent with his buddies. But what begins as an epic neighborhood snowball fight turns violent when older interlopers relentlessly ambush their wintry forts. The title novella digs deeper into the human condition as Ray, a drug rehabilitation counselor and recovered addict, forms troubled and emotionally destabilizing relationships with his clients. Ray oversees the progress of a motley assortment of addicts. Here, the original scene-setting is as striking as the characters themselves. For example, Angel Day, an attractive participant (and recognizable semifamous singer) in one of Ray’s groups, must but cannot suppress her sexuality: “She has studied and displayed it for so long that it has captured every pore and cell of her and will not let go.” Finally, “On the Last Frontier” spotlights the melodramatic dynamic between Katie and Reuben, a restless and dysfunctional pair surviving in a small, tightly knit Alaskan village. Flanigan has a flare for description as he sets up scenes and expertly carves out characterizations; Jack’s icy snowball fight hums with the same palpable excitement as the chatter within the rehab’s recovery rooms. As different as each tale may be, they share a common thread of human perseverance, tenacity, and hope. Flanigan is an entertaining, skillful storyteller; his stories will appeal to both younger and adult readers of realistically drawn fiction.

Three compelling, impressively crafted tales united by authenticity and grace.

THE 2 KEYS TO PERMANENT WEIGHT LOSS
How To Change Your Overweight Nature Into a Permanent Weight Loss Nature
Flett, Ken
FriesenPress (277 pp.)
978-1-4602-9473-4
978-1-4602-9474-1 paper

A debut guide to weight loss emphasizes behavioral changes.

Weight loss is a perennial subject about which countless books are published annually. Many of the titles recommend specific diets while others concentrate on combining healthy eating habits with exercise. Typically, these works are authored by weight loss “experts” who are often doctors or nutritionists. This clearly written manual departs from the more traditional paths to weight loss by instead focusing on two primary “keys,” which Flett depicts in oversize capital letters as “YOUR MIND” and “HAVE YOUR HORMONES WORK FOR YOU—NOT AGAINST YOU.” The author’s credentials are also nontraditional; he learned how to control his own weight and then decided to write a book to help others. Flett based his work on seven years of research, which included sending out over 2,000 questionnaires. The guide is neatly organized into four
“Gibson’s sharp-witted, tenacious personality radiates throughout this spirited book.”

**KICKING AND SCREAMING**

A Memoir of Madness and Martial Arts
Gibson, Melanie D.
She Writes Press (280 pp.)
$16.95 paper  |  $8.99 e-book
Apr. 20, 2021
978-1-64742-028-4

An organizational development consultant battling mental illness finds hope in martial arts training in this debut memoir.

“To be frank: I’m crazy,” declares Gibson in her prologue, “and my biggest challenges have stemmed from what being crazy makes me do.” Raised in Snyder, Texas, the author describes being “turned inward” as a child, experiencing anxiety that gave way to depression. As a teen, she displayed behavior that she now recognizes had the markings of bipolar disorder, but she only began contemplating suicide after starting college. Reluctant to receive counseling, Gibson figured that she could handle her problems on her own. A successful and fiercely independent “career girl,” she only truly reached out at the age of 31, when a romantic hiccup led to an “epic” breakdown. Alongside finding a therapist, Gibson reconnected with the taekwondo grandmaster who oversaw the dojang where she trained as a child. The author recounts her progression to becoming a black belt in a journey that is punctuated by injury and romantic instability. But through taekwondo, Gibson gained the self-understanding to “kick ass” in other parts of her life. The subject matter of this memoir is understandably dark, with the author candidly describing her lowest moments, such as “drinking whiskey for dinner and sobbing incoherently into the phone” to her “worried parents.” Yet this is countered by a stylistic approach that is refreshingly buoyant and self-aware: “In case anyone thinks the white belt months were a 1980s movie montage of me doing push-ups and high kicks and high-flying other students set to cheesy inspirational music, think again.” Naturally humorous, Gibson is also capable of elegant, emotionally communicative prose: “The lyrical beauty of the movement, the expressive focus, and the mind-body connection of taekwondo seeped into the marrow of my bones.” Some readers may not take to the author’s casual narrative style. At one point, she instructs them unnecessarily to “flip back to Chapter One if you don’t remember,” but this adds to the affability of her writing. Gibson’s sharp-witted, tenacious personality radiates throughout this spirited book, and her determination should prove contagious, spurring readers to discover a pathway through which they can combat mental illness and discover their true selves.

An inspirational, sharp, and disarmingly humorous account about taekwondo and mental health.

**ORANGE CITY**
Goldberg, Lee Matthew
Atmosphere Press (308 pp.)
$18.99 paper  |  $1.99 e-book
Mar. 16, 2021
978-1-64921-878-0

Near a bleak, dystopian future America, an offshore City exists, run by a grotesque cyborg, serving as a supposed rehabilitation haven for society’s outcasts. In his SF novel, Goldberg vaguely sketches a mad, bad, and dangerous future world created by the aftermath of the “War To End All Wars.” Poverty, crime, the maimed, and the deformed are rampant in “Americyana,” but at some point, a solution, of sorts, takes shape via the construction of The City, a offshore community that welcomes society’s most desperate individuals. Hidden from outside eyes by hologram projections, the place is more a strange, surreal simulation of a city than the real thing. The metropolis’s inhabitants have predetermined roles and are universally camera-monitored by “the Man,” a freakish, multlimb cyborg fixed in place in a cyclopean tower dominating the skyline. But the Man—a Stalin admirer—is no therapeutic, healing entity. Graham Weatherend, an abused, imprisoned orphan, has been brought to The City by Scout E, one of the Man’s many hirelings. Formerly known as Edmond Edwards, Scout E is a conscience-wracked wife killer who traded his dismal lot for a lofty position in The City doing the cyborg’s bidding. Now, the two citizens are installed in The City’s lone remaining advertising agency, hyping a soda called orange Pow! Graham becomes a specialist at writing slogans for the strangely addictive brew, and suddenly he sees orange colors and themes everywhere, becoming a literal slave to the refreshment. Until, abruptly and arbitrarily, green lime Pow! makes its overwhelming appearance...and then...a blue-raspberry Pow!...and then....What seems a seriocomic, semihallucinatory, semicryptic dark satire of Madison Avenue guys (with prosthetic limbs and other body horrors) ultimately grows into seriously dystopic and violent stuff. Neatly paced...
and escalating like a sinister bar crawl, the novel gives readers the flavor of Philip K. Dick and perhaps a little Kafka and J.G. Ballard in the mixology (though the book’s back cover mentions George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four and the TV series Lost). A final twist at the end leaves the aftertaste of a promised sequel, in which some of the big narrative questions posed by this zesty installment may be answered. We’ll drink to that.

A tart and fluid SF view of a nightmare future dominated by canned beverages.

**SOUTH KOREA The Price of Efficiency and Success**
Gonzalez, John & Lee, Young Self (442 pp.)
$15.95 paper | $8.95 e-book
Dec. 22, 2019
978-1-67423-215-7

Debut author Gonzalez, with co-author Lee, offers a searching reflection on the tension between South Korea’s embrace of globalization and its ancient culture.

When California teacher and guidance counselor Gonzalez first visited South Korea in the 1990s, he was astonished by its technological sophistication, which, by many measures, surpassed the United States. He lived and taught there for 5 years, starting in 2012, and was impressed by “hard-working, entrepreneurial, goal-oriented, practical, and sacrificial Korean people” in a nation that historically weathered war and financial crisis to become a fiercely competitive player on the world stage. At the heart of South Korea’s success, he says, is its cultural emphasis on efficiency—a “way of life” for many citizens, who place extraordinary importance on conventional career accomplishment. However, for a culture with a long history of Confucian and Taoist traditions, the shift toward more traditionally Western values has come at a steep cost, according to the author, who thoughtfully investigates the ways in which a focus on efficiency and competition has negatively affected university admissions and infrastructure, to name two examples. Even more worrisome, he says, many “longstanding traditions seem to be declining,” including the valorization of unity and harmony; reverence for elders, and other traditional family values. Gonzalez astutely charts this tension, and overall, his appraisal of South Korea is impressively comprehensive, encompassing many aspects of its complex culture, even including eating habits. However, he has a tendency to bury the reader under far too much granular detail; for instance, he dwells at protracted length on recent industrial accidents—much more than is necessary to make his argument. Nevertheless, Gonzalez combines his rigorous research with a depth of personal experience, lucidly presented in this admiring but critical account.

An edifying analysis that’s exacting but fair.

**MISSING CHARLIE**
Hardy, Jess K.
Black Rose Writing (244 pp.)
$18.95 paper | $6.99 e-book
Feb. 25, 2021
978-1-68433-640-1

A woman magically cursed with premature aging gets her groove back courtesy of a sexy mystery man in this fantasy romance.

Nona May Taylor is a 23-year-old woman trapped in an 83-year-old body for the last five years thanks to a curse placed on her by Rebecca Delanore, a witch. Rebecca stole Nona’s face, form, and voice along with her flourishing career as a folk singer. Nona is holed up in a remote Montana cabin with her relatives and manager, who were turned into talking animals by Rebecca’s spell. Her mother, Penny, and stepfather, Wally, are a hen and a hog, her sister, Bridget, and brother-in-law, Jack, are a fox and a rabbit; and her manager, Fritz, is a ferret. With her feeble strength, woozy balance, and blurred eyesight, Nona provides for everyone by hunting game with her shotgun, chopping firewood, and whipping up gourmet meals of fresh venison and huckleberry sauce, with Penny contributing eggs. When a huge snowfall blocks the roads, they come upon an injured hiker named Charlie Brown. Nona is instantly smitten by his 20-something good looks, insinuating charm, and guitar chops and by his habit of singing Nona’s old songs, including her hit “Missing Charlie.” The two spend an evening in intimate, flirty conversation despite their apparent 60-year age gap, and Nona wakes to find herself looking and feeling decades younger, with her senses restored and brunette streaks in her silver hair. As things heat up and she continues to de-age, she and her hopeful menagerie suspect that Charlie may be able to lift the curse by bringing true love to Nona—until she realizes he is not what he seems. Hardy’s distaff version of “Beauty and the Beast” treats its magical themes with a light touch and prose that’s witty and sparkling. (Nona: “What the hell was that thing you wore to the Grammys? Looked like Bridge here ate a wedding dress and a bag of skittles and barfed it up all over you.” Rebecca: “As if you’d know anything about current fashion, Grizzly Adams.”) The cute critters are not kid friendly thanks to their bawdy repartee and sex scenes that take on kinky overtones in a passage in which they regain their human forms for one night of pent-up passion. The result is a blithely captivating but very adult Disney story.

An entertaining, warmhearted yarn about love that persists through extreme transmogrifications.
“The authors offer a thoughtful, cogent analysis of the manifold problems in the U.S. health care establishment.”

BEYOND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In this memoir, an eminent American scientist recalls his life and achievements.

When Haseltine was ill as a child, his mother advised him: “When you grow up, discover a cure to the common cold. You will be a millionaire and have the gratitude of mothers everywhere!” The author spent his formative years at the China Lake naval base in California, where his father, a physicist, was involved in advanced weapons research. His mother suffered from various illnesses, and it was at this point that he decided to learn whatever medical skills were necessary to help others.

Haseltine went on to graduate from Berkeley before obtaining his Ph.D. in biophysics from Harvard in the early 1970s. His pioneering research involving DNA and RNA sequencing and use of the human genome to treat disease shaped a career in which he became a distinguished professor at Harvard Medical School, developed new cancer treatments, spearheaded the fight against AIDS, became a successful biotech entrepreneur, and was most recently tasked with combating the Covid-19 pandemic.

Haseltine’s writing is agile and punchy—he will hook readers at the outset with an eyebrow-raising anecdote about accompanying the actress Elizabeth Taylor to lobby Congress for AIDS research funding. The author’s style is precise but never overly clinical, always leaving room for profundity: “Science leaps into the darkness, the very edge of human knowledge. That is where we begin.” Although Haseltine often makes readers feel like insiders, this sharply compelling book is by no means a tell-all.

Time to radically revamp the American health care system in light of the flawed response to the Covid-19 pandemic and many other dysfunctions, argues this sweeping manifesto.

Kapur, a public policy professor at the University of Maryland College Park, and debut author Chalil, a physician and chairman of the Indo American Press Club, start by noting medical difficulties faced by the United States during the Covid-19 pandemic. These include shortages of masks, personal protective equipment, and ventilators; mass layoffs that caused people to lose their insurance; and bankruptcies among some hospitals that suspended elective procedures to make way for virus cases. They continue with a wide-ranging critique of American medicine, spotlighting its higher costs and poorer health outcomes compared to other developed countries; the lack of accessibility of needy and uninsured patients; shortages of hospitals, doctors, and nurses; and the pressure on providers to improve profits by cutting corners and to defend against malpractice suits with unnecessary tests. To remedy these problems, the authors propose a “Grand Plan To Restructure Healthcare in the U.S.” with a mix of public provisions and market-based competition. They envision a “SafetyNet” of public county hospitals providing basic care to all regardless of insurance or ability to pay.

A second system of private hospitals, providers, and insurance, funded by “Enhanced Health Savings Accounts,” would run in parallel and compete in price and quality in a national and global market, with medical services advertised like groceries, complete with coupons. Other plan features include a unitary electronic medical record, caps on malpractice damages, a Comprehensive Consumer Healthcare Score that awards points for healthy lifestyles that could lower insurance rates, initiatives to train more health care professionals, a National Strategic Healthcare Reserve of emergency supplies, and new technologies, from online diagnosis to medical robots.

Kapur and Chalil present their case for far-reaching reforms of American health care in lucid prose that has an incisive bite. (Calling it a healthcare system is a misnomer. It is a disease-care system, one that focuses on diagnosing and treating symptoms instead of taking on the job of educating individuals and families to take a proactive approach to their health.) But the book suffers from a meandering, repetitive structure and an occasional lack of focus and rigor; it pursues tangents that some readers may consider dubious, like a brief for traditional Indian ayurvedic healing as an adjunct to Western medicine; and it sometimes gets facts wrong. (The 1918 Spanish flu did not kill “a third of the world’s population”—mortality was between
1% and 6%—and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson did not "support a herd immunity theory until he was hospitalized with the COVID-19 virus", he imposed a national lockdown to prevent contagion on March 20, 2020, seven days before he tested positive.) The authors' plan is something of a hodgepodge, with myriad moving parts to achieve many disparate goals, and it's hazy on some important points, like the costs and funding mechanisms of the public SafetyNet hospitals. Still, Kapur and Chalil manage to steer clear of the dogmas of the right and left approaching conservatives on their own terms is incompatible with their own values and methods of fighting climate change. They are clearly not the book's intended readership. But for the target audience, the volume offers a useful framework for reaching out to potential allies. Concrete examples, like a South Carolina VFW post's conversion to solar energy and a hotel complex's willingness to produce its own renewable energy despite high fees charged by the local utility, make a persuasive case for the potential success of the work's strategies. Specific action items in the book's later chapters provide helpful guidance for those hoping to convert more conservatives to green energy and environmental reform. While the chapter on the psychology of persuasion can be wearing, with its repeated references to thought leaders like Simon Sinek and Chip and Dan Heath, it contains a number of useful takeaways. The remainder of the volume is thoroughly researched and reported, with solid information, strong writing, and cogent arguments. The case Karelas makes for unity and bipartisanship may be overly optimistic on a macro level—the book assumes all participants are rational actors and does not address the challenges of convincing those whose conservatism includes belief in conspiracy theories. Still, the volume should sway readers that grassroots activity supported by strong community ties provides the most effective path to the widespread adoption of clean energy and other forms of sustainable living.

A convincing argument for persuading conservatives to fight climate change.

CLIMATE COURAGE
How Tackling Climate Change Can Build Community, Transform the Economy, and Bridge the Political Divide in America
Karelas, Andreas
Beacon Press (248 pp.)
Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-8070-8488-5

A green energy advocate promotes environmentalism to conservatives.

In this debut nonfiction book, Karelas makes a case for green energy and environmental protection within a framework that aligns with many conservative values. The volume opens with a pop-psychology–driven argument in favor of approaching climate change with optimism about opportunities for making progress instead of focusing on the bleak future of inaction. The author then moves into a historical look at Republican support for environmental initiatives and points out the faulty logic of climate change denial ("This argument is equivalent to not believing the doctor who says you have a broken arm if it means you have to wear a cast all summer"). Subsequent chapters look at the shift toward clean energy from the perspectives of national security, job creation, faith, and community, with examples of successful programs supported by people and groups with a range of political perspectives, including the nonprofit Karelas runs. The author concludes that a bottom-up approach to adopting clean energy is the most effective ("The only way to ensure that new sustainable ways of living are woven into the fabric of our culture"). Making it a good fit for the conservative goal of minimal government intervention. He suggests that if conservatives are approached in an empathetic and emotionally intelligent way, it is almost inevitable that they will agree that embracing clean energy is the smart path forward.

Those Karelas dismisses as "liberals from Berkeley with painted faces holding posters with wind turbines on them" may feel that the book's emphasis on supporting positivity and approaching conservatives on their own terms is incompatible with their own values and methods of fighting climate change. They are clearly not the book's intended readership. But for the target audience, the volume offers a useful framework for reaching out to potential allies. Concrete examples, like a South Carolina VFW post's conversion to solar energy and a hotel complex's willingness to produce its own renewable energy despite high fees charged by the local utility, make a persuasive case for the potential success of the work's strategies. Specific action items in the book's later chapters provide helpful guidance for those hoping to convert more conservatives to green energy and environmental reform. While the chapter on the psychology of persuasion can be wearing, with its repeated references to thought leaders like Simon Sinek and Chip and Dan Heath, it contains a number of useful takeaways. The remainder of the volume is thoroughly researched and reported, with solid information, strong writing, and cogent arguments. The case Karelas makes for unity and bipartisanship may be overly optimistic on a macro level—the book assumes all participants are rational actors and does not address the challenges of convincing those whose conservatism includes belief in conspiracy theories. Still, the volume should sway readers that grassroots activity supported by strong community ties provides the most effective path to the widespread adoption of clean energy and other forms of sustainable living.

A detailed and innovative blueprint for fixing what ails American medicine.

A WOMAN, A PLAN, AN OUTLINE OF A MAN
Essays
Kasbeer, Sarah
Zone 3 Press (159 pp.)
$17.00 paper | Oct. 1, 2020
978-1-73315-051-4

A series of deeply personal and thought-provoking essays explore moments in a woman's life, from high school rebellion to domestic violence and sexual assault.

"On the Edge of Seventeen," the first of 13 vivid writings by debut author Kasbeer, captures a poignant period of her adolescence when rebellion crossed over into danger; in it, she tells of visiting her high school boyfriend in prison. Multiple essays unravel the repercussions of a rape that occurred when the author was 23. In "Lovers" this unraveling comes through therapy and a relationship with a kind and helpful partner while the titular essay investigates the therapeutic value of released rage. Other writings examine Kasbeer's contention that the condition of having "one foot in childhood and another in adolescence is truly terrifying." "The Diving Well" is one of these, capturing the uneasy exhilaration of testing one's physical strength and courage in a female body on the brink of adulthood as well as a "central truth about skill and talent: "I had no idea being good at something would come with such pressure to always be better." In "Stuck in a Water Well," Kasbeer juxtaposes her unsatisfying relationship with her mother and the...
The authors provide thorough explanations and prose that’s always lucid and even stylish.

THE GREAT AMERICAN HOUSING BUBBLE

Levitin, Adam J. & Wachter, Susan M.
Harvard University Press (400 pp.)
$45.00 | $45.00 e-book | Jun. 9, 2020
978-0-674-97965-9

Rickety Wall Street innovations and systemic market failure caused the rise in housing prices and mortgage debt that precipitated the Great Recession of 2008, according to this study.

Georgetown law professor Levitin and Wharton economist Wachter reject prominent explanations of the housing bubble of the 2000s. It was not, they contend, primarily caused by the Community Reinvestment Act’s requirement that lenders make loans to poor borrowers or by loose monetary policy or by a global savings glut. The authors advance their own complex, systematic theory of financial markets gone awry. The problem started, they argue, when the traditional 30-year fixed-rate mortgage — “the hero of our story” — was supplanted with exotic, adjustable-rate mortgages or no-amortization loans that lured borrowers with low initial payments. These mortgages were pooled and sold to investors as “private-label securities” by unregulated lenders who grabbed a market share from the staid, federally regulated corporations Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Demand for more mortgages to sell to investors drove lenders to make loans to bad credit risks. These iffy mortgages were packaged in complicated, opaque collateralized debt obligations and sold to still more investors with no serious accounting of their risks. That expansion of cheap credit caused borrowers to bid up housing prices to unsustainable levels on mortgage-backed securities whose risks were not reflected in their prices — with no short-selling mechanism to let the market correct itself. Dysfunctions like these are intrinsic to housing markets, the authors contend, and can only be solved by a sweeping deregulation of housing finance that would entrench traditional fixed-rate mortgages under a more powerful, federally chartered corporation that they dub “Franny Meg.” Levitin and Wachter base their intricate, incisive argument on a close reading of the scholarly literature backed up by careful attention to economic evidence and price data, which they present in illuminating charts. The book is aimed at academics and policymakers, but interested lay readers can also tackle it thanks to the authors’ thorough explanations and prose that’s always lucid and even stylish. (It took only a very small amount of dumb or conflicted...
money in CDOs to build an enormous pyramid of leverage in the housing market.” The result is an indispensable analysis of the crisis and the far-reaching measures needed to prevent a recurrence.

A trenchant analysis of the berserk market dynamics that laid low the American economy.

**THE TOPOGRAPHY OF HIDDEN STORIES**

*MacDonnell, Julia*

Fomite Press (226 pp.)


Irish Americans deal with challenges and opportunities in the 20th century.

In this short story collection, MacDonnell follows a large cast of Irish American characters through the ups and downs of the second half of the 20th century. In “Whistle-Stop,” a child draws her parents’ ire when she absorbs their adulation of presidential candidate John F. Kennedy. “Red Stain on Yellow Dress” follows a young pregnant woman traveling to get an illegal abortion. In “Diana’s Dresses,” the setting is the late 1990s as a mother and daughter deal with questions of mortality while visiting a traveling exhibition of Princess Diana’s wardrobe. Problems of life and death also appear in “Dancing With NED,” in which a seriously ill woman’s husband and sister accompany her to an oncologist’s office, “a pinnacle of the health care system, a place above bed pans, barf buckets and blood, the stench of unhealing wounds, the fearful cries of the dying.” The author’s characters cover a range of socio-economic classes, but nearly all are of Irish descent, with many having roots on the South Shore of Boston. “Soy Paco,” which was nominated for a Pushcart Prize, is the exception, though its theme and tone allow it to fit easily into the rest of the collection. While there are moments of tenderness, like the bonds a new mom unexpectedly finds with her own mother in “Violets,” violence, abuse, and dysfunction more often characterize the volume’s families. Those who fail to conform are often pressured or ostracized, beatings are doled out, and a pacifist mother makes her son throw away the violent toys he received for Christmas in “Weapons of War.”

Despite the stories’ bleak aspects, the book is an enjoyable read. MacDonnell’s writing is frequently elegant, full of vivid metaphors (“His sisters, three pale silent women, who’d nod and sigh and press their palms together like Daddy had just spoken The Word, and that The Word had come to dwell among us”) and descriptive language (“She sees her mother surrounded by lengths of these fabrics: satin, tulle, taffeta, shantung; her mother, a hard bright thing, a stone, in this rainbow of luscious color”). The plots are both familiar and unpredictable, drawing readers in while challenging their preconceptions. In addition to themes of family, loyalty, and independence that resonate from one tale to another, the work is also full of minor details that recur throughout. Three stories, set in different times and places, feature a baby sister named Caitlin; Frank Sinatra songs provide much of the soundtrack; older women wear “polyester pull-on pants”; and two tales are narrated by women living in buildings known as the Ten Commandments in the 1970s Bronx.

Many of the protagonists are unnamed, adding to the repetitive nature of the stories as well as the sense that the discrete tales blend into a single narrative of a collective experience. Fans of Andre Dubus III and Jennifer Haigh will find much to appreciate in MacDonnell’s exploration of a narrow slice of the American experience.

A strong collection of stories connected by deep Irish American roots.

**SQUISHY SAND!**

*McIver, Charlene*

Illus. by Keys, Caroline

Self (38 pp.)


978-0-648-41783-5

A boy and his friends use a wheelchair for sand adventures in a picture book about creative problem-solving.

Leigh, Cosmo, Tara, and two dogs are enjoying the boardwalk together when Tara suggests going down to the beach. “Sorry, guys, my wheels get stuck in the sand,” explains Leigh, who uses a wheelchair. The pals brainstorm ways for everyone to enjoy the sand, first using the dogs to pull the chair like huskies. When that doesn’t work, Cosmo realizes the wheels need to be wider and finds dune-buggy tires, which the friends affix over Leigh’s wheels. The result? “Leigh is zooming across the sand all on his own!” Although McIver’s story focuses on a wheelchair’s limitations, the way the three kids find solutions helps to normalize his experience. Some may find a scene in which Tara and Cosmo take Leigh’s chair for a spin to be problematic, but the way they credit Leigh as the expert on maneuvering the chair helps to normalize his experience. McIver’s simple sentences and accessible vocabulary (with some Australian spellings, such as *tyres*) make this story, inspired by the author’s late son, a good choice for independent readers. Debut artist Keys’ eye-catching, cheerful watercolor illustrations realistically depict the characters; Tara appears to be of Asian heritage, and Cosmo, who wears glasses, and Leigh are light-skinned.

A series starter that encourages thinking in new ways.
A fight to keep a Wisconsin paper mill open helps to rejuvenate labor politics in this impassioned nonfiction work.

Nelson was the county executive of Wisconsin’s Outagamie County in 2017 when the Appleton Coated paper mill was forced into receivership by its creditor PNC Bank—one of several mill shutdowns in the Fox River Valley paper-manufacturing region. Appleton Coated was the economic mainstay of the town of Combined Locks, providing it with 620 high-paying jobs and tax revenue, and its managers insisted it would be profitable after it weathered a rough patch of high wood-pulp prices and depressed markets and introduced new product lines. Nelson recounts that PNC claimed otherwise and that it used provisions in a loan agreement to take control of the mill and auction it to another company that planned to shutter and scrap it. Appleton Coated’s community rallied to its cause: Workers staged a “reverse strike” and kept the mill operating; the United Steelworkers Union local representing them filed an objection to the receivership sale in court and set about finding another buyer that would keep the mill up and running; and Nelson filed his own objection in court, citing the economic damage to the county that would result if the mill closed. A heated legal battle ensued, and the mill won a reprieve thanks to concessions from the union and a loan from the government. Nelson notes that PNC’s actions were inconsistent with the spirit of the law, which is to encourage business but to avoid defaulting a financially troubled company if doing so would harm an entire community.

Nelson’s narrative offers an incisive insider’s view of industrial policy. Nelson lays out a case for labor-law and immigration reform (“one underappreciated consequence of using immigration as a source of cheap labor has been a transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top of our economy”), but his fiery prose is anything but wonkish. The book presents an engrossing courtroom drama, an acerbic indictment of bank policy that’s also fair to the difficulties that business managers face, and communitarian paens to blue-collar America: “This was my childhood. This was the American Dream.” The result is a compelling story of a struggle for economic survival that strives to get beyond ideological polarization and highlight ways that unions, businesses, and governments can help ordinary people.

An inspiring saga of grassroots political cooperation.
In this novel, a sheltered young woman harboring a striking condition discovers the outside world may be as harsh as her repressive mother claims.

Amelia Weaver believes the pearls agonizingly coming out of her upper arms and back are a monthly sickness. But her mother sees it as a benefit, making good money by routinely selling the pearls. She keeps her daughter at home for years, asserting that people will lock Amelia up if they know what she can do. Her mother ensures Amelia stays put by confining her to the attic when she’s away. At age 21, Amelia absconds from her Roseburg, Oregon, home and heads to Portland, where she quickly has to deal with a lack of both money and shelter. Luckily, she finds a buyer for her pearls—a soon-to-open museum of “human oddities,” such as Gabriel, whose entire body is covered in hair. This small museum community becomes like a family, and Amelia lives on her own with an apartment and a job. But a condition such as hers isn’t one she’ll be able to keep secret for long. And she will come to the unfortunate realization that people just as cruel and selfish as her mother are never far away. Ousley’s thematically rich tale packs a few punches. For example, the protagonist’s “harvest” of pearls corresponds with her menstrual cycle, and Gabriel endures mistreatment for a condition he, unlike Amelia, can’t easily conceal. Characters are sublime, as the ones whom some call “freaks” are dynamic and tenderhearted while the rest of humanity includes a mugger and worse. The author gracefully describes disturbing scenes, such as Amelia’s harvests, making these painful, bloody experiences palpable without graphic details. Amelia muses about the terrible effects of these incidents: “After that first year of harvesting pearls, my skin had constellations of scars. I avoided mirrors. The one comfort to my isolation was no one could see my monstrous skin.” The moving novel has its share of positivity as well, especially Amelia’s making friends for the first time in a long while. Though the latter half of the book takes a surprisingly drastic turn, it’s befitting, as is the potent ending.

An indelible story of loving yourself in a world of dreadful realities.

A specialist in eating problems addresses how readers can change their relationships with food in this debut motivational guide.

Parente, who has treated hundreds of patients with eating disorders, focuses on a theme not often expressed in traditional diet books: “To change your relationship with food you must work through and grieve loss. A change in one’s eating presents an emotional loss, sometimes manifested in feelings of emptiness.” With this intriguing notion driving the content, the work is as much about psychological factors as it is about eating problems—primarily overeating and binge eating, as noted by the author. Parente approaches the challenge in a methodical way, leading readers through a logical process of understanding the problem and embracing the need to change. Most notable is the volume’s reliance on numerous case studies—self-contained anecdotes based on patients treated by the author. These stories are particularly impactful because they delve into the issues behind specific eating problems, pointedly depicting why a dramatic change in attitude is both difficult and empowering. “The Story of Angela,” for example, demonstrates the relationship of food to loss. Angela endured a 20-pound weight gain without realizing that it was related to the loss of her spouse: “The loss of her husband represented emptiness, fear, and anxiety; thus, she began to fill the void with food. You might identify with how Angela used food to cope with her loss.” Parente weaves these tales throughout the book to illustrate the six steps in her “Template for Change,” a tool intended to guide readers in overcoming any eating problem. The six steps—Acknowledgment of the Problem, Shame, Anger, Fear & Anxiety, Inner Voices, and Belief & Acceptance—are explained in individual chapters and tidily tied together in a Summary section at the end of the book. While designed to address eating problems, it seems as if this process could generally apply to any major change one may need to make; as such, the template has residual value. Parente writes compassionately and knowledgeably about a thorny subject.

A useful manual that effectively opens the door to the underlying causes of eating problems.
“Sandler deftly toggles among nostalgic memory, historical analysis, and present-moment wonder without sacrificing cohesiveness.”

THE LAMPS OF HISTORY

CRYS TALS OF EMPIRE TRILOGY

Poyhonen, M.  
Self (574 pp.)  
979-8-62-233335-4

This omnibus features the first three volumes of the Crystals of Empire fantasy series, focusing on an agent of order chosen by the Cosmos.

In the duchy of Vissing, there lives a boy on whom the Cosmos has bestowed a great destiny. He is Kazi Boku, son of farmers Dennon and Emma, who must eventually stand against chaos in all its forms. As a child, he becomes best friends with Tissan’s hands and kills Po, his father. Though they ultimately defeat the beast, the young warriors don’t yet recognize it as a creation of Tyrus Hammersvold, the High Priest of the Temple of Kaal. Tyrus uses genetic tinkering to generate monstrous animals with which he intends to eliminate settlers in the Vissing wilds. He also manipulates his flock with crystals that heal and extend life.

destiny. He is Kazi Boku, son of farmers Dennon and Emma, who must eventually stand against chaos in all its forms. As a child, he becomes best friends with Tissan, a boy who is the same age and lives nearby. Like brothers, they do everything together, including hunting, fishing, and clearing grain fields. They also befriend Jabar, a local retired soldier who teaches them subjects like reading, writing, and physics. When Jabar’s pigs are attacked by a giant bear, the boys hunt the creature with their fathers. During the battle, the bear mutilates Tissan’s hands and kills Po, his father. Though they ultimately defeat the beast, the young warriors don’t yet recognize it as a creation of Tyrus Hammersvold, the High Priest of the Temple of Kaal. Tyrus uses genetic tinkering to generate monstrous animals with which he intends to eliminate settlers in the Vissing wilds. He also manipulates his flock with crystals that heal and extend life.

Then there are the Clousen, a humanoid race with red hair and 12 fingers, who worship the deity Dun. After further tragedy strikes the village of NewPo—named after Tissan’s father—Kazi ends up at a Dun conclave in Barta. There, he falls in love with the healer Kasumi Matsura. Unfortunately, if Tyrus has any say, Kazi’s happy ending will never arrive.

Poyhonen plays the long game in his first three volumes: Kazi Boku, Crystals of Power, and Angus Town. Like Orson Scott Card’s Tales of Alvin Maker series, this narrative portrays frontier life realistically, with only light flourishes of magic. The community where people grow all their own food represents the ultimate good while the bureaucratic, structure-obsessed Temple of Kaal symbolizes evil. When Deborah, Tyrus’ lover, suggests to the dog park, where the speaker struggles to overcome his shyness. Sandler explores familial roots in poems like “Still: How Many Verses Do You Know?” which highlights a father’s ability to “shut up Yid-haters,” or a grandmother’s longing for the old country and her refusal to “talk about the mass pits of history” in “Velikiye Luki.” He considers why his Uncle Saul is considered a “turncoat” in “Independence Day.” Sandler is a poet’s poet and has the publication credits to vouch for his talents. His language is layered with meaning, and his expansive vocabulary will delight logophiles. There is no subject too small for his keen eye and insight. His imagery, such as that of a papaya—“the Janus-faced fruit / would scowl its blotchy ripeness / into a failed state, / before being sliced to a smile / for her lips”—is evocative and bright. Sandler deftly toggles among nostalgic memory, historical analysis, and present-moment wonder without sacrificing cohesiveness. Some may want to keep an encyclopedia (or Google) handy, however, to fully grasp the author’s references.

A complex, electric work of erudite poems.
THE LIABILITY OF LOVE
Schoenberger, Susan
She Writes Press (337 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $9.95 e-book
Jul. 20, 2021
978-1-64742-130-4

A novel that explores how societal expectations can make people hide their true selves.

In Hartford, Connecticut, in 1979, Margaret Carlyle graduates from high school and begins college with dreams of finding a great romance at Trinity College. However, in the spring of her freshman year, fellow student Anders Salisbury rapes her during their first date. Her close friend Fitz, who’s secretly in love with her, urges her to report the crime, but she refuses; she wants to simply ignore it and put it behind her. Years later, however, Anders becomes a famous movie star. The trauma of the incident causes Margaret to hide her true feelings from those closest to her, including Douglas, a thoroughly average high school teacher whom she eventually marries. Fitz is wealthy, privileged, and popular but also full of self-loathing due to anxiety over his weight. His father expects his son to follow him into the insurance business. However, he sympathizes too much with insurance claimants and feels “completely unsuited for the role he had been groomed from birth to play.” His secretary, Brenda, develops an intense crush on him, but she has her own secret. Schoenberger shows a great deal of sympathy and affection for her good-hearted and flawed major characters, and she relates their stories in matter-of-fact prose studded with pithy observational gems: A secretary “functions as a human alarm clock”; a socialite’s expensive spa treatments are “hush money she slipped to gravity and time.” The novel effectively examines love in all its forms—friendship, romance, unrequited longing, marriage, self-love, the love between parents and children—and what happens when people don’t believe themselves worthy of others’ love. In the end, the various players can only get what they deserve by speaking their own truths.

A keenly observed, compassionate, and absorbing work.

GLOBAL SALES
A Practical Playbook on How To Drive Profitable Growth for International Sales and Marketing Leaders
Selch, Zach
Global Sales Mentor (362 pp.)
$17.99 paper | $0.99 e-book
Nov. 23, 2020
978-1-63210-083-2

A veteran of international sales offers insights for others in the field.

In this business book, Selch draws on decades of work with governments and corporations around the world to explain the fundamentals of a strong international sales organization. The volume covers basics like the value of developing an international sales channel, the key personnel involved in selling globally, the mechanics of establishing a relationship with a local distributor, how shipping and payment are managed across borders, and the ways in which modifying a product for a particular market can help and hamper sales. The book addresses both building a sales organization from scratch and managing an existing network of regional managers, distributors, and salespeople. The author also devotes a chapter to best practices for trade shows, addressing everything from how he prefers to organize his booth to the types of conversations he aims to have with each visitor. The work does an excellent job of explaining the elements of sales, and readers without a background in the field will be able to follow the discussions of strategy, market share, and training programs. Selch, who introduces himself as “a bit of a a-hole,” does not pull his punches (“In my opinion, the vast majority of people in the US who are building international sales organizations have no idea what they’re doing, so the organizations that they build are almost by definition faulty and weak”). While the aggressive tone of his prose may not appeal to all readers, some will find his unabashed confidence motivational. The author is undoubtedly knowledgeable about selling products in a global context, and the many stories he shares from his career illustrate the book’s concepts and establish his credentials as an expert. Readers looking to expand their careers or their companies’ sales in overseas markets will find many concrete lessons and thought-provoking suggestions throughout the text.

An informed and enthusiastic guide to managing sales internationally.

AT THE EDGE OF THE CLIFF
Poems
Shapiro, Marian Kaplun
Illus. by the author
Plain View Press (112 pp.)
$17.95 paper | Jan. 25, 2021
978-1-63210-083-2

A book of poetry and drawings that explore emotional disconnections, silences, and efforts to make contact.

In the introduction to her second full-length collection, which includes several pieces that were previously published in literary journals, Shapiro states her purpose is to pursue “extremes of feeling” and their resulting epiphanies through “experimenting with form and content.” These experiments encompass diagrams, sketches, spacing, and unusual typography which often focus attention on conceptual organization. “What We Know” for example, is organized around a long vertical line with arrows pointing up at the top and down at the bottom. Centered on this line, a short stanza reads “Before the beginning / After the end,” and from the double space that separates them, a hand-drawn arrow loops up to a balloon circled around the phrase “Why here?” The piece plays with the concept of lines—poetry, direction, time—perhaps to
show how the here and now is a constantly moving target. "John Cage in the Wild," "Quaker Meeting on the Concord River," "Dividing Line," and "Ellipses" address similar themes, often suggested in their titles. Sometimes silences can reveal meaning, as with Quaker quietism, but at other times, they reflect painful truths or traumas that overcome the quiet, as in several poems about rape. Shapiro uses typography expressively, as well, as in "Blow Up," in which the type size echoes its recommendation to inflate, then smash its sentences before reaching "the deepest silence ever heard." Other experiments are less effective, however, as in "Right Triangles," a diagram reminiscent of a therapy-group handout, or "Mixed Message," which graphically represents but doesn't offer insight into indecision.

Poems that creatively reveal the unsaid and unsayable.

**A FIELD GUIDE TO HUMANS**

*The Natural History of a Singular Species, Second Edition*

*Smith, Ronald M.*

Lava Fields Publishing (340 pp.)

$17.00 paper | $8.99 e-book

Jul. 14, 2020

978-0-9990006-1-8

Debut author and former educator Smith offers a naturalist's view of humanity in this manual on *Homo sapiens*.

Field guides are normally reserved for birds, trees, or other types of life that one might find while wandering through a meadow or walking along a forest trail. The authoritative but soothing format is emblematic of modern humankind's perspective on nature as something to be visited, something separate from oneself. Smith's field guide attempts to invert this relationship by placing the reader on the other side of the binoculars. Here, he catalogs the history, habitat, and genetic profile of the human species for easy reference. He describes their physical characteristics, eating habits, and even mating habits in offbeat ways and includes a sobering chapter on the "conservation status" of human beings, which reinforces the extent to which they are still vulnerable to the laws of the natural world, even if they choose to flout them. More than anything else, his book encourages readers to think of humankind not simply as a mass of individuals, but as a collective: "Many problems confront humans as a species," Smith writes in his introduction. "Successfully addressing these problems requires a broad common understanding of what it is to be human and how to engage together to achieve positive outcomes." The prose is appropriately scientific and dispassionate in tone, which often results in humorous observations: "Humans will eat just about anything that isn't poisonous or (too) spoiled." Although the premise may initially feel like a gimmick—and perhaps it is—the author takes his project seriously, never breaking character or shying away from details. The end result is a surprisingly effective meditation on the current state of humanity that never comes off as preachy, dire, or cynical. It's the history of the species stated in the least romantic terms, eschewing intimacy and celebration in favor of documentary distance—and through that distance, it deftly clarifies key concerns of our time, including climate change, economic disparity, and political polarization.

A metafictional and insightful work from an intriguing perspective.

**NO ORDINARY CAT**

*Spandel, Vicki*

Illus. by Kelleher, Jeni

Teaching That Makes Sense (122 pp.)

$29.95 | Jun. 1, 2020

978-0-9972831-3-6

A cat hungry for adventure discovers that his destiny lies closer to hearth and home in this chapter book.

Swayed by an aging tomcat's tales of seafaring derring-do, orange tabby kitten Rufus dreams of a world beyond his tame life with Mama Cat and his siblings. Adopted by gentle Mrs. Lin, Rufus is happy to be her affectionate companion until his first birthday brings an acute itch to roam and uncover his destiny. But after a near-fatal forest encounter with maddened nesting geese, the wandering feline is content to settle in with his rescuer, Mr. Peabody. A lonely poet with writer's block, Mr. Peabody finds peace and the renewal of his creative drive in Rufus' comfortable presence until he learns that his furry friend, "Mr. Cat," is the subject of Mrs. Lin's desperate "missing cat" notice in the newspaper. This feline-centric yet deeply human and adult-friendly novel for children is the first work of fiction by Spandel, a prolific author best known for instructional books on writing for classrooms and workshops. May it not be her last. The author's well-drawn characters are shaped by empathy, not sentiment, and by her near-poetic observations of the minutiae in their lives (Mrs. Lin's garden and kitchen; Mr. Peabody's books and herbal teas) and of the natural world around them. Rufus, beginning his journey with an explorer's bravado, sees a "familiar wooded landscape transformed into a patchwork of meadows and wetlands. Carpets of purple asters and yellow marigolds rolled out in all directions as the sun spilled the last of its light across the water and littoral mud flats....The world was reaching out its arms, enveloping the young swashbuckler in its embrace." How Rufus stays in the lives of both his loving caretakers and discovers his true purpose are movingly answered through the wisdom of an unexpected and memorable source: Asha, a battered rescue cat, scarred but not broken by rough living. The text is richly complemented by Kelleher's pastel paintings of animals and ambient settings. Among the book's endmatter: Mr. Peabody's recipe for crab cakes and his poem dedicated to the absent Asha, promising to "keep an extra blue plate at the table always...for when you bring your wild heart home."

A beautifully written and illustrated feline tale with subtle emotional depths.
A ROPE FOR JUDAS
Turner, Robert S.
Resource Publications (266 pp.)
$40.00 | $25.00 paper | $9.99 e-book
Jul. 25, 2019
978-1-5326-8603-6
978-1-5326-8600-9 paper

A novel reimagines the life of Judas and his relationship with Jesus.

Nearly everyone knows the biblical story of Judas’ perfidy—he handed over Jesus to his enemies for 30 pieces of silver. Turner bases his thoughtful dramatization of the life of Judas—Youdias in the novel—on a tantalizingly original conceit: that he composed a suicide note before taking his own life. The book is this note, an explanation of the manner in which he met his spiritual master, Yeshua (Jesus), whose ideas he finds exhilaratingly novel. Unfortunately, Youdias has nothing but contempt for Yeshua’s “uncouth band” of disciples, a sheepish tribe of ignorant peasants. Youdias becomes obsessed with convincing Yeshua not only to explicitly assume the mantle of the Messiah, but also the Son of David and fashion himself a political liberator of Israel. As far as Youdias is concerned, only a revolution will spread Yeshua’s ideas. “We must fight fire with fire.” Yeshua, though, is committed to “nonviolent resistance” and opposes a reduction of his mission to worldly terms. When Youdias learns of a plot to assassinate Yeshua, he contacts Nathan, an aristocratic priest. Youdias pretends to conspire against Yeshua in order to force his master’s hand in declaring himself the Son of David. In this illuminating book, the author doesn’t waste the novel’s inventive premise, painting a vivid picture of Yeshua’s charismatic ministry and the complex spirituality of his message. In addition, Youdias is intelligently portrayed as arrogantly confident of his own opinions but finally tortured by doubts that his scheme is prudent: “I was not at all sure that even the instinct for self-preservation would be enough for Yeshua to take up arms if he had not heard from his Abba. Might he not simply surrender and take on the role of the Suffering Servant?”

A theologically perceptive and dramatically enthralling work of historical reconsideration.

LOVE IS BLIND
Vallis, Ruth E.
FriesenPress (195 pp.)
978-1-5255-9362-8
978-1-5255-9361-1 paper

Vallis recounts her struggles and triumphs living as a blind person—and her mother’s unwavering support.

Vallis was born in 1960 in Toronto and enjoyed an otherwise ordinary childhood until she suddenly lost her eyesight before turning 3 at first, the cause of her blindness was mysterious, but doctors eventually diagnosed her with Still’s disease, an “aggressive form of juvenile rheumatoid arthritis that attacks joints and can also cause acute inflammation of the eyes or around the heart.” Vallis’ mother, Blanche— the author affectionately nicknamed her Peach—insisted on her daughter’s independence and encouraged her to view the challenges of blindness as an “adventure.” Vallis attended the Ontario School for the Blind for two years before being reintegrated into public school, and she learned to read Braille and walk with a cane. She would eventually become an avid swimmer and cyclist. In 1981, Vallis heard a voice clearly say “physiotherapy,” and she interpreted it as a kind of calling to a vocation. She moved to England and attended the North London School of Physiotherapy for the blind and visually impaired, a difficult course of training in preparation for an emotionally daunting career choice. The author astutely describes the hurdles posed by blindness and the inspiring manner in which she overcame them. And the entire book is an enduring homage to Peach, “a strong, bright, and capable woman.” “Peach used to describe us as two peas in a pod, and that was true on many levels. We had a connection that went beyond DNA.”

A thoughtful, edifying, and moving remembrance.
“Vidal leans into the gauziness of his fictional world, playing games with time and memory in ways that are often bittersweet.”

THE SPHERE OF TIME
Vidal, Juan P.
Pàmies (252 pp.)
$7.96 e-book
Jul. 27, 2020

In Vidal's cerebral debut novel, a man finds a book about a former lover that reshapes the story of his own life.

In 1953, Andrés Santaella met a 20-year-old woman named Leire Quirós in a police station in southern Spain. The young lawyer was hired to represent her as she faced charges of helping her parents plunder a sunken shipwreck. Released into Andrés’ custody, Leire began an affair with her lawyer, but she later vanished from his life. About two decades later, Andrés visits a bookstore in New York City where he comes across a book called The Sphere of Time, with no writer credited but with Leire’s picture on the cover: “This is a biography; my mother’s, ruled by strange forces which control our lives: chance and chaos,” reads the jacket. “It is a story about the passing of time, about memory, about dreams cut short and about death; a story that blends illusion and reality, just like any other.” In the book, Andrés learns about aspects of Leire’s background for the first time—as well as an account of himself and their affair. Then he comes across a detail he never knew: that Leire was pregnant with his child when she disappeared. With the book as his guide, Andrés sets out to reconnect with Leire and their child, who would now be an adult. However, this journey proves to be more difficult than he thought it would be. Over the course of this book, Vidal writes in a dreamy prose style that perfectly shifts between Andrés’ present and the various narratives contained in Leire’s biography. There are moments when the book-within-a-book structure results in a lack of clarity, but Vidal leans into the gauziness of his fictional world, playing games with time and memory in ways that are often bittersweet.

A cleverly executed story about finding answers in one’s past.

ONE VOTE
Willis, J. Stewart
Self (298 pp.)
$14.99 paper | $8.99 ebook
Nov. 5, 2020
978-0-578-79553-9 paper

A struggling farmer turns into a national figure when he dramatically chooses to become a faithless elector in this novel.

Chance Fitzbourne inherited a Virginia farm when he was only 35 years old, land that had been in his family for generations and that he proudly cherished. Now 67, he’s exhausted from the demands it imposes and the financial precariousness of the industry. He feels swallowed up by the avarice and corruption of the world, a melancholic depletion poignantly depicted by Willis: “There’s too much unknown with farming. Like with most things, the big guys have taken over. They have lobbies, money, and government support. The big guys rule the world.” But in the midst of Chance’s powerlessness, he’s given an opportunity to make a difference. A long-time supporter of the Democratic Party, he’s appointed as an elector for his district, a role that typically only requires the perfunctory rubber-stamping of the winner. But then Democratic President-elect John Vickers suddenly collapses and dies, and the Electoral College process is thrown into confusion and disarray. Chance suddenly becomes a singularly important man after Democratic National Committee Chairman Edwin Damson chooses Sen. Brock Henry instead of throwing his support to Vice President-elect Jane Meyer Grete. Chance strenuously objects to Henry’s brand of radical socialism and considers the lawmaker a “bigoted ass,” refusing to cast his vote for him. Damson, an unscrupulous man, is maniacally intent on changing Chance’s mind, even if that means resorting to intimidation. The author vividly captures the chaos into which the nation descends, including the possibility that the other faithless electors who follow suit were bribed and the White House is somehow involved in a related murder.

Willis builds a suspenseful political drama around a tantalizing premise that proves ingenious because it is both eminently plausible and one on which the Constitution is silent. As a consequence, he deliberately exposes the fragility of the democratic process and the rule of law. Furthermore, he avoids sullying the literary execution of this idea with politically partisan ax-grinding—there is plenty of dark corruption on both sides of the ideological aisle. At the heart of the story, though, is Chance’s embittered frustration, expressed in terms provided by the political moment but with deeper roots. Speaking to the Democratic county chairperson, he unleashes his disgruntlement: “I’ve backed the Party for forty-some-odd years, Gwen Ellen. Really voted for some sad candidates. Fortunately, the Republicans haven’t been any better. Politicians get rammed down our throats, qualified or not. I can’t swallow Brock Henry, simple as that.” The author’s irreplicable realism starts to waver toward the end of the story, and some blandly sentimental scenes meant to make readers feel good sneak in incongruently. Nevertheless, this momentary loss of literary nerve doesn’t come close to undermining a thoroughly captivating novel that is as politically astute as it is emotionally affecting.

A thrilling work about a political crisis; original and gripping.
YOUR VITAMINS ARE OBSOLETE

The Vitamer Revolution: A Program for Healthy Living and Healthy Longevity
Zablow, Sheldon Blake
Hybrid Global Publishing (214 pp.)
$18.95 paper | $8.99 e-book
Sept. 17, 2020
978-1-948181-86-0

A psychiatric physician makes a case for focusing on the key role of two specific molecules on one’s health.

In this debut health book, Zablow lays out his argument that the beneficial effects of two crucial forms of vitamin B are often overlooked and that if everyone consumed sufficient B12 and folate (B9) in forms most easily used by the body—the “vitamers” of the title—it would result in substantial improvements in individual and public health. The book opens with an explanation of how vitamins work, with a particular focus on B12 and folate, and a detailed account of how nutrition affects the expression of genes. It also presents a rundown of the biochemistry of metabolism and the different forms that B12 and folate can take. The body, Zablow says, responds to stress with inflammation, and if people are able to find ways to reshape their body’s response to stress, they can minimize inflammation, which, in turn, can improve their overall physical well-being. He addresses the dietary and lifestyle changes that he says are necessary to incorporate vitamers at appropriate levels and provides suggestions for reframing the medical field’s understanding and treatment of vitamin deficiencies. The book takes a fanciful turn when it uses questions about astronaut nutrition and an eventual mission to Mars to demonstrate the practical implications of particular B-complex deficiencies and suggest mitigation strategies, but Zablow effectively pulls the focus back to how his concepts might be applied to everyday circumstances on Earth. Ultimately, his book makes an intriguing argument for his health-management system.

Zablow does a good job of making a complex topic comprehensible for those who might lack a background in nutrition or biochemistry while also providing more detailed information for those who are able to approach the topic from a more technical perspective: “Without ample supplies of B12 and folate to generate energy, regulate genetic expression, and keep the cells clear of metabolic waste, all other efforts to improve health will be of reduced benefit.” The author ably breaks down the various elements of what it takes to use vitamers properly—processing them into forms the body can use, consuming the compounds in sufficient quantities, and being aware of symptoms of deficiencies, which may also be present due to other conditions. The book is realistic about practical aspects of treating such deficiencies; for instance, it notes that folate supplements are readily available in stores, but it also warns that they’re often in forms that are harder for the body to process, making them less effective than their packaging might suggest. Zablow’s challenges to medical orthodoxies, such as that the body retains a usable store of vitamin B in the liver, will likely raise eyebrows, but his persuasive arguments, supported by research, make his ideas worth looking into further. Overall, the book provides readers with a new framework for understanding functions of the body—one that can serve as a basis for productive conversations with medical providers.

A thought-provoking reinterpretation of how vitamins affect wellness.
**Indie Books of the Month**

**EVERYWHERE**
Adam Loveless
Illus. by Madeline Timm
A well-illustrated work with a message that will appeal to a young audience.

**THE BOOK OF JEM**
Carole Hailey
A sublime tale that explores theology with profundity and black comedy.

**THE FOUNTAIN**
David Scott Hay
A passionate meditation on art wrapped in a hilarious sendup of artistic pretensions.

**AT ANY GIVEN SECOND**
Paula R. Hilton
Varied, dexterous, and tender poems.

**STARGAZING IN THE ATOMIC AGE**
Anne Goldman
A beguiling meditation on Jewish achievements that shine brightly against a dark background.

**THE PART THAT BURNS**
Jeannine Ouellette
A textured remembrance of a traumatic childhood that also offers affecting moments of beauty.
REMEMBERING ERIKA ROHRBACH

On Jan. 31, the Kirkus firmament lost one of its most enduring lights. Erika Rohrbach had reviewed for the magazine since at least 2004, when I started here, and she was one of the first eager reviewers of the wave of books that poured in when a colleague and I developed the Kirkus Discoveries program (predecessor to Kirkus Indie). I was also fortunate to have her as a judge for the 2020 Kirkus Prize for Nonfiction. Always energetic and refreshingly capacious in her reading and literary analysis, Erika was an absolute joy to work with; the phrase “consummate professional” may be a cliché, but it certainly applied to Erika. She was always evenhanded and trustworthy in her criticism, and her catholic tastes and rock-solid reliability made my job easier.—Eric Liebetrau

Erika was one of my go-to reviewers for poetry, and she welcomed everything I sent her. Much as I loved working with her reviews, I loved reading the notes that accompanied them even more. “This one’s a STAR! Kids will totally eat this up.” “OMG, Vicky, a ***STAR*** if ever there was: for me, this is what a picture book should be.” “Loved it! It’s funny and smart. Check out [the poem] on p. 7: really clever stuff.” Even when she didn’t love a book, she loved the opportunity. Almost every note closed the same way: “Thanks so much for sending:) e.” I will miss her terribly. Already do.—Vicky Smith

One of the great delights of knowing Erika was the sheer range of her passions which informed and enriched her reviewing (not to mention her enthusiasm for good food—I ate better at conferences thanks to her recommendations). She was a tireless advocate for the international students she supported and was knowledgeable about global events affecting them. This awareness, combined with her broad curiosity, meant I could assign her a wide variety of books, knowing she would approach each with genuine interest. Kirkus Reviews and its readers benefited greatly from Erika’s discerning mind and equally generous spirit.—Laura Simeon

PICTURE BOOK AT CENTER OF CONTROVERSY IN UTAH SCHOOL DISTRICT

A Utah school district suspended an initiative promoting diverse and inclusive reading after parents complained that their children were read a book about a transgender boy, the Associated Press reports.

The Murray City School District paused its equity book bundles program, as well as its equity council, despite the fact that the book in question, Kyle Lukoff’s *Call Me Max*, was not part of the book bundles. The picture book was brought to school by an elementary student who asked the teacher to read it aloud. Lukoff is a reviewer for Kirkus and was a judge for the 2020 Kirkus Prize in young readers’ literature.

After the teacher read the book, the school fielded complaints from parents who were angry that a book about a transgender boy was read to their children.

The school district provided a statement to ABC4 Utah saying the book “triggered questions from parents” and that the Board of Education would “further examine both programs to ensure all literature introduced at Murray City School District follows clear policies and procedures.”

Lukoff told the AP he thinks it’s important for children to read books with transgender characters.

“I find in my experience that adults think that term unlocks a lot of confusion in children when it really doesn’t,” he said. “It’s only a problem if you think that being transgender is itself wrong. And it’s not. That’s something the parent then has to work through.”

—Michael Schaub

Michael Schaub is a Texas-based journalist and regular contributor to NPR.
Time is fleeting. Yes, it is. One datum is that John Lennon’s anthem “Imagine” is now 50 years old. Another is something that was once scarcely imaginable at all: Thirty years ago, having lost its Eastern European satellite states, the Soviet Union collapsed, giving birth to a dozen new countries overnight.

Overseeing the fall was the last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, who had politicked himself out of a job over the preceding six years. He took office on March 11, 1985, after old-school Communist boss Konstantin Chernenko died, the third Soviet supreme leader to die in just that half-decade. It was not only those men who died, Gorbachev recounts in his Memoirs. “The very system was dying away,” he writes. “Its sluggish senile blood no longer contained any vital juices.”

A comparative youngster at 54, Gorbachev was not a universally popular choice for the job. He had been a loyal Communist since his teenage years but was effectively stranded as a middle manager in the vast Soviet bureaucracy, kept from foreign travel—a sure sign, he writes, of one’s political status—with the assurance that he was simply too important to leave the country. He got away now and then, however, and he noticed that the people of other countries seemed happier than did his compatriots.

Given his chance to lead as a compromise candidate, and sure that the Communist Party could be shaped into an agent of reform so that “we would be able to unfold the creative forces of socialism on a larger scale,” Gorbachev loosened the reins. He introduced economic reforms and eliminated some of the harsher practices of centralized planning, replacing them with policies that were collectively called perestroika. He pledged transparency and local decision-making, a new openness called glasnost.

Yet, as he writes unapologetically, he remained a believer in the Soviet system writ large. In Memoirs, he recounts conflicts in defense of the party with the democratic dissident Andrei Sakharov on the one side and with the ambitious (and, Gorbachev winks, eternally drunk) Boris Yeltsin on the other. Yet, even as right-wingers within the party threatened to replace him with someone of more draconian bent, Gorbachev continued his reforms, in particular his negotiations with Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher to lower the temperature of the Cold War by limiting the number of nuclear weapons the superpowers were aiming at each other. (It’s not without irony that Gorbachev writes dismissively of Thatcher’s “authoritarianism.”)

For his troubles, Gorbachev finally faced down an attempted coup on the part of those right-wingers—the faction that would eventually prevail with the elevation of Vladimir Putin in 2000. The coup was crushed, and on March 15, 1991, Gorbachev took the new office of president of the Soviet Union. His term ended on Christmas Day of that year, when the Soviet Union finally disintegrated. Gorbachev retreated to a small apartment on the outskirts of Moscow and wrote his book, published in English in 1996. At once revealing and guarded, his Memoirs was a bestseller around the world—just about everywhere but Russia, already on the path to restoring strong-arm rule.
A new picture book from critically acclaimed author/illustrator Thao Lam

An honest #OwnVoices story about growing up with a name that is unfamiliar to the kids around you, told with humor and heart.

“Anyone in an unfamiliar environment will be able to relate.”
— Kirkus Reviews

“A timely, resonant, exceptional model of visual storytelling.”
— Kirkus Reviews, STARRED REVIEW and a Best Picture Book of 2020

“A tender tribute to the author’s parents and to all refugees who survive and thrive despite enormous odds.”
— Booklist, STARRED REVIEW and a 2020 Editors’ Choice

“An important story told in an impeccable format.”
— School Library Journal, STARRED REVIEW and a Best Picture Book of 2020

“Sensitively rendered.”
— Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books, STARRED REVIEW and Blue Ribbon Honoree

Publishing April 15

9781771474320 • Ages 4 to 8

Also by Thao Lam

9781771473637 • Ages 6 to 9
SPRING GUIDE 2021

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Mary Kay DeGenova, Ph.D.

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Reda Reynolds

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Reda Reynolds was five when her father was killed in the Battle of the Bulge. Her recently re-married mother did all she could to eradicate traces of him. In Collateral Damage, Reda recalls filling the void in her life, learning about her father through government documents.
The Great Betrayal presents a history of monetary policy in the United States, provides an account of how our monetary policy has evolved, and speaks to how our founding values are under threat from enemies of the free market.

Filled with classic rock ‘n’ roll references, wit, and charm, this novel follows one man’s thrilling ride through the afterlife attempting to find the “Stairway to Heaven” and avoid the “Highway to Hell” as a battle for his soul begins.

The author of “Your Eyes That Told Me Yes” looked into his heart.

My Trials draws upon Mark’s experiences with a religiously-guided psychopath to help others spot psychopaths before they have a chance to negatively impact the world we live in.

By the 1950s Dr. J. Calvitt Clarke was running the largest Protestant organization dedicated to children’s welfare. In this biography, J. Calvitt Clarke III, PhD, honors his grandfather’s passion for helping the needy.

A sequel to Sunset in Kentucky, Daybreak in Indiana tells the story of how a community becomes a town full of good people who help the Patterson family as they forge a new home.

In a novel that explores the meaning of faith, Reid Scott discovers he has unwittingly befriended his son’s killer. Will seek vengeance, or as a new Christian forgive the unforgivable?
While facing embarrassing classroom situations, and unusual troubles of all kinds, the boys featured in Boys, Bears, and Bubblegum work their hardest.

After his family is murdered, Lex goes to live with his grandfather and learn the art of war from a member of an alien race who fights to protect the earth.

Cornelius, First Centurion of Rome’s Tenth Legion, gives an eyewitness account of the Crucifixion after befriending Pontius Pilate and Jesus Christ.

In this long poem, author S. Karlan uncovers layers of history, both public and personal, and explores their significance.

Joyce Verplank Hatton shares her inspiring story of an entrepreneur, political leader, open ocean sailor, and mother of six who embraced change and sought opportunities to make a difference.

Written by nine-year-old Makayla L. Tyler and her grandmother Cheryl K. Greer, Love 7 is filled with memorable characters who teach young readers about teamwork and living up to one’s potential.

Don’t be fooled by promises of a Socialist Utopia. A non-intellectual reviews the unfortunate effects of Liberal-Leftism on traditional American values.
Set in the 80s, this six-year journey of a child from Detroit, Michigan whose life spins out of control on his tenth birthday tells a story of sex, drugs, murder, and life in the hood.

On the cusp of a winter storm in the north Atlantic in September 1861, three men attempt to alter the fate of the world through an act of espionage.

A life always on the move can have harrowing effects on a child. Michael Boudreau reflects on his troubled family dynamics and his efforts to heal the wounds of the past.

To save Iressia, Princess Seraphina calls on the famed female Guardians who set out on a quest to light the five towers and conquer the evil sorcerer Alastair.

What do lemonade stands and speed-reading hacks have to do with one another? Everything in Rita’s world as mother, nana, and teacher.

This book describes the astonishing life of David Ferrie, a complex, multi-talented New Orleanian who, long entangled with the mob, became the first person arrested for conspiring to assassinate JFK.

Two criminal brothers are under constant investigation from the police and press. The mysteries surrounding them and their associates are revealed one by one, culminating in a chilling, murderous finale.

An unusual collaboration between a poet and an artist. What you find here is the best of their work — a kaleidoscope, perhaps — with a common undercurrent in human experience. Come, Dream in Color.
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Ebook | 9781504937269 | $4.99
Pages: 242
www.authorhouse.co.uk

Author Michael Robinson asks whether time can heal mistrust and non-forgiveness. 13 days is a narrative story exploring the broken friendship between Justin and Tom and examines the consequences of their actions on the 19th day of March 1999.

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This fictional tale set in 1750 follows the Martin family as they immigrate to Canadian Acadia from France to escape heavy taxation. Later, the Martins travel to Louisiana after British expel French speakers from present day Nova Scotia.
Clive Hiscox reflects upon his family history including the minor trials and tribulations they faced. Along the way many characters appear yet it soon becomes clear exactly who the biggest character is and how he claims his fame.

In an Australian neighborhood, secrets are about to be revealed. Through choice or necessity, their Aboriginal neighbors have kept their culture and identity to themselves—but that’s about to change.

Anthea came down a rainbow in a star shaped ship. She arrived from Fos on a garden named Talia. There, she befriends a sunflower, Zoe, and together they experience exciting adventures.

Ambrose Madu presents readers with a “challenge for change; change from violence, war and other forms of criminal activities that had resulted to the destructions of lives and properties.”

In this novel, two young physicists trapped in a distant galaxy unleash the energy of a black hole that teleports them to New York City where their real adventure begins.

This story is about the adventures of some red-breasted robins which lived Birdieland. Rina, Raba and Karlow met in the bird school. They look very much alike and everyone thinks that they are all related, but are they?

The Hard Bargain describes in vivid detail and elegant prose the clash of wills between a famous father and his hard-driving middle son.

A Real Whole Lot allows readers to witness through handwritten letters the efforts of a newlywed African American couple separated during WWII to sustain love and build a sixty-six-year marriage.
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This book looks at the behavior and policy implications of those who vote to do good but are unaware of crucial consequences of their advocacy of greater income redistribution.

DISCOVERING WHO YOU ARE
Say Thu Varadewa
Softcover: 5x8 | 9781482881998 | $10.57
Ebook | 9781482882001 | $3.99
Pages: 52
www.amazon.com

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Change your Thoughts and Change your Destiny
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When war ends for catastrophically wounded veterans, battles begin for their caregivers and families. This book for children helps young readers understand the new normal for heroes returning home to the challenges of daily life.

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Opening our Hearts
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James Bruce and his secret mission to Africa
Jane Aptekar Reeve
Softcover: 6x9 | 9781728396248 | $33.09
Hardcover: 6x9 | 9781728396255 | $49.00
Ebook | 9781728396262 | $4.99
Pages: 708
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Through this biography about James Bruce, an espionage agent aiming to eradicate slavery, the author addresses the neglected aspects of the ancient habit of slavery and the related abuse to women.

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John F. Caddy Ph.D.
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In this novel, a sequel to Dogs Don’t Talk, a high school wrestler deals with problems big and small among his friends and family as he works toward his goals.

Thunder in the Wind is a historical novel concerning the assimilation reservation American Indians underwent at the turn of the twentieth century.

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How to Write an Irish Play is both an affectionate tribute and spoof of the great Irish plays and playwrights. If you read only one Irish play, then read this one.

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Bobby the Bear helps his friends realize the importance of accepting someone who’s different from them when they learn that Danny doesn’t have the same beliefs they do about Christmas.

This poetry collection takes the reader on a deep journey to the darker side of being human as reality is exposed and life is painted through a myriad of emotions.