What Does the Power of Story Mean to You?
Learn More from Award-winning Authors Tami Charles, Francisco X. Stork & Kelly Yang

Why We Need the Power of Story
Build Your Library with New Books from Scholastic

The Power of Story
Diverse Books for All Readers
There’s nothing more powerful than a story to connect us, to help us understand each other, and build empathy. Scholastic’s ongoing Power of Story initiative highlights books for all ages that represent diversity of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and physical and mental abilities. In sharing these books with young people, you will be giving them the opportunity to see themselves and their communities reflected, to read widely, and to understand and expand their world. Visit Scholastic.com/PowerofStory for a complete catalog of diverse books for all ages updated for 2020.

What Does the Power of Story Mean to You?

Tami Charles, award-winning author of All Because You Matter
For the first 11 years of my life, I was an only child, so stories were all I had to keep me company. Stories gave me the power to envision myself far beyond where I was at the moment. Now I’m in an incredible position to show the power of story to readers. I get to share the power of story with my son, Christopher. I want him, and all children, to grow up knowing that they have a purpose in this universe. The stories I write and the stories that we read together take us to places both near and far, and teach us about people who are like us and those who are beautifully different.

Francisco X. Stork, award-winning author of Illegal
The power of story happens when there is a character in a novel who is like me, although I’ve never seen myself that way, and there are words for what I’ve felt before but could not name until then, and something suddenly opens in me and around me and I see new worth and value to who I am, such as I am, and to my life, such as it is, and I am rung like a bell, certain that I am being asked to give to life what only I can give.

Kelly Yang, award-winning author of Three Keys
Stories are powerful because they transcend the boundaries of race, gender, and your current socioeconomic station. They don’t care that you add water to your shampoo to make it last longer or that you practice the piano on your desk because you can’t afford a real one. They put all those differences aside and appeal to what we all have in common. My parents and I were first-generation, struggling immigrants from China, working in motels all over California. But I always had stories, borrowed from my school library. It didn’t matter that my parents and I worked seven days a week or that the last vacation my family took was coming to this country – through those stories, I could travel the world, be anyone, do anything! That is the power of story.
THE Diversity ISSUE

Celebrating the books that reflect our diverse world

Conversations with Jason Reynolds, Ibram X. Kendi, Rishi Reddi, Ainissa Ramirez, and more
If there’s one thing that the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us, it’s that we’re all interconnected. The world is a smaller place than ever before; we are affected by what takes place halfway around the globe, and the fate of our fellow humans—no matter their race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, creed, or ability—is our fate as well.

This Diversity Issue, our second annual, was conceived and assigned before the coronavirus turned our world upside down. But the principles that this issue celebrates—that our differences as people are a source of strength and that by embracing our diversity we are a fuller and fairer society—are as true as ever before.

In *How Contagion Works: Science, Awareness, and Community in Times of Global Crisis* (Bloomsbury, April 14), the Italian physicist and novelist Paolo Giordano notes that the virus “doesn’t care about us, our age, gender, nationality, personal preferences….The community we should be taking care of isn’t our neighborhood or our city. It’s not a region, or Italy, or even Europe. Community, in the contagion, is the entirety of the human species.” Nevertheless, it is also true that here in the United States, low-income people of color are being disproportionately affected by COVID-19, as suggested by early data from Chicago, Milwaukee, and Michigan. Journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones has shared a distressing thread about these disparities on Twitter.

Unsurprisingly, a pandemic can also exacerbate racism and xenophobia. President Trump has referred to COVID-19 as “the Chinese virus,” the most high-profile instance of an anti-Chinese and anti-Asian backlash that includes bias attacks and discrimination in several countries. In India, as author Arundhati Roy observes in her essay, the pandemic, among many other things, is a “portable door.”

The Diversity Issue offers a different vision. Here we aim to celebrate the books and authors who are expanding our horizons and complicating our understandings of identity, never a simple construct. We speak with author Rishi Reddi, whose debut novel, *Passage West* (Ecco, April 21), reveals the little-known story of Indian immigrants in California in the early 20th century. Scientist Ainissa Ramirez, author of *The Alchemy of Us: How Humans and Matter Transformed One Another* (MIT Press, April 7), shines a light on the overlooked contributions of women and people of color in the sciences. National Ambassador of Young People’s Literature Jason Reynolds and scholar Ibram X. Kendi discuss their collaboration on *You People’s Literature*.

Meanwhile, as Arundhati Roy observes in her essay, the pandemic, among many other things, is a moment of rupture with our past and its prejudices. “It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next,” she writes. “We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.”

The work begins, as it so often does, with our books. Keep reading.
A young woman prevails against fat prejudice, letting her song and dance talents shine in a K-pop competition in Lyla Lee’s delightful rom-com. Read the review on p. 135.
THE VANISHING SKY
Binder, L. Annette
Bloomsbury (288 pp.)
$27.00 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-1-63557-467-8
A rural German family faces the end of World War II and all its dangers.

The war is racing toward its conclusion in Germany, but the danger for the rural Huber family is far from over. Aside from suffering the daily hardships—finding food in the shops is a struggle, for example—Etta Huber fears for the safety of her sons. Max, the elder, has mysteriously returned home from the front, but he's unreachable, barely himself, altered forever by what he has witnessed. His 15-year-old brother, Georg, is at a school for Hitler Youth, drilling in preparation for the hopeless and final burst of fighting to come. Meanwhile, Etta's husband, Josef, grows more distant and nationalistic; he wants to fight for German pride, too. Then Max disappears, and Georg flees from his school, an act for which he could be hanged, and the novel shifts into an increasingly dizzying nightmare until its harrowing conclusion. Binder provides a family’s-eye view of the terror and trauma, offering readers a unique perspective on the war. The narration closely follows Etta and Georg in turns, delivering the details of privation and fear as well as surprising moments of kinship and generosity with an unforgettable grace. “They planted boys in the stony fields and up along the hills,” Georg observes. “They planted them, and crosses grew.” The future is unimaginable, Binder writes—and yet, somehow, those who are left will find a way to carry on.

A masterful story of war, horror, and love.

AGE OF CONSENT
Brainerd, Amanda
Viking (336 pp.)
$26.00 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-63557-467-8

Boarding school kids get into hijinks.

At the start of this novel, students are arriving for the fall session at Griswold Academy, a fictionalized Connecticut boarding school. “Let me out,” Justine tells her father. “Stop the car!” She doesn’t want anyone to see her with the “wheezing orange Volvo”—Justine comes from a less privileged background than
most of her classmates, including Eve, Justine’s soon-to-be new best friend, whose strict parents live on Park Avenue. Brainerd’s debut opens in 1983, and it strains to evoke the charm of that era: David Bowie, shoulder pads, cocaine, and so on. It doesn’t really succeed. Brainerd’s narrative style comes off as flat, her dialogue paper-thin. “It’s Saturday night. There’s nothing to do. I’m bored,” Eve says. Attention alternates between Eve and Justine, but because that narrative voice never changes, it quickly becomes difficult to differentiate between the girls. The reader is told that Eve is culturally sophisticated, Justine sensually aware, but aside from explicit reminders, these traits aren’t readily apparent. A subplot involving another girl inexplicably named India seems quickly sketched and, in the end, unearned: This diversion never quite fits with the rest of the book, and it distracts from what fun might have been had.

Brainerd might have had a beach read in mind, but the novel plods along far more often than it skips.

THE BALLAD OF BIG FEELING
Braverman, Ari
Melville House (176 pp.)
$17.99 paper | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-61219-767-8

Watching an elderly parent become frail and ill is never easy, but it’s even more difficult when the relationship is fraught.

The unnamed 33-year-old narrator of this unsettling debut not only has to help her once-neglectful and often haughty mom sell her house and downsize, she also has to deal with her mother’s physical decline. The two live thousands of miles apart, in two dissimilar but never-identified locales. The woman lives with her male partner in a cozy rental and both work in never-defined jobs that allow them a modicum of social mobility. The novel presents their relationship as comfortable, settled, and their day-to-day interactions unfold alongside the woman’s planned and random encounters with people known only as “the neighbor,” an elderly woman dying of kidney disease; “the cousin”; “the hard stranger”; “the father” and “the stepmother”; “the coworker”; “the pretty-necked friend”; and “the bad-lucked friend.” Who she is with each of these people varies, but self-doubt is never far from the surface. Her weight, always a source of discomfort, is a constant concern, but readers have no idea if the narrator is actually overweight or if this fixation is a delusion. Whatever, it creates tension, and it is only after the woman and her mother have readied the family home for sale that eating cupcakes together becomes a rite of release. Class and religious differences are alluded to, as well, since the father is Jewish and the mother is not, but the many possible meanings of these identifiers are left hanging. In the end, it is up to the reader to parse meaning from each and every incident, many of them bizarre and some of them shocking.

An original, compelling, and enigmatic first novel.
After more than a month spent sitting at home, with a couple of trips to the grocery store thrown in to ramp up the anxiety, I’m yearning to read books that will take me far away. Maybe you are, too. A good place to start would be with I Don’t Expect Anyone To Believe Me by Juan Pablo Villalobos (& Other Stories, May 5), which “follows a Mexican literature student, conveniently named Juan Pablo Villalobos, who travels to Barcelona to work on his dissertation and, by way of his cousin, gets caught up in a world of gangsters and thugs.” Our starred review continues, “Villalobos’ narrative style is so propulsive it’s nearly impossible to stop reading….This is a hilarious novel, and it’s brilliant and it’s bittersweet, too, in surprising ways.” Sounds perfect.

An Yu’s Braised Pork (Grove, April 14) begins in Beijing and then Jia Jia, the protagonist, travels to Tibet, so you’ll get two trips in one book. Jia Jia has just found her husband dead in the bathtub, and she feels liberated from their loveless marriage. “But an arresting sketch of a ‘fish-man’ that Cheng Hang leaves behind on a pile of towels in the bathroom where he died makes Jia Jia restless,” according to our review. “Why did her husband draw this strange creature with the head of a man and the body of a fish? Why does it draw Jia Jia in? Remembering that her husband told her he’d dreamed about this fish-man while he was on a spiritual trip to Tibet about a month earlier, Jia Jia decides to travel there for answers. Yu’s original debut spins an increasingly surreal tale which brilliantly mirrors Jia Jia’s own discombobulation.” Discombobulation is a good word for our own current state—or at least one aspect of it—so this would fit the mood.

Or perhaps take a trip to Ireland via Rónán Hession’s charming first novel, Leonard and Hungry Paul (Melville House, May 5), about two solitary men and their unusual friendship. Both men, who are in their 30s, still live with their parents, Leonard writing entries for children’s encyclopedias and Hungry Paul working as a substitute postman. Our starred review says, “The prospect of change propels the plot, prodding each man to articulate, with surprising self-awareness, the depths of his identity…A charming, luminous debut.”

The Mountains Sing (Algonquin, March 17), the first novel by Vietnamese poet Nguyen Phan Que Mai “centers on the Tran family, living in North Vietnam during three conflict-struck generations. Her lens turns to two characters in particular: Diêu Lan, who grew up amid Japanese and French occupations, and her granddaughter Huong, who uses Diêu Lan’s stories to try to piece together what happened during the war. It is a largely grim portrait.” Our starred review concludes that it’s “a richly imagined story of severed bonds amid conflict.”

Because of my job, I spend most of my time reading books that are coming out a few months in the future, but sometimes I find the time to catch up with one that I’ve missed. The novel I’m hoping to read in this time of social distancing is The Old Drift by Namwali Serpell (Hogarth, 2019), which has been a favorite of many of my friends and colleagues. In 1904, the fates of an English photographer, an Italian hotel manager, and an African busboy—and four generations of their families—become entangled through an accident in a colonial town in what would become Zambia. “Comparisons with Gabriel García Márquez are inevitable and likely warranted,” said our starred review. “But this novel’s generous spirit, sensory richness, and visionary heft make it almost unique among magical realist epics,” and they make it sound like the perfect book for our moment.

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.
now called the Tzadi Sophit, is the leader of a California cult that aims to create a multiracial utopia. In 1957, he and his followers move across the country into a newly built town adjacent to a Long Island suburb and are violently attacked by some of their neighbors. The echoes of that terrible night shape the main characters in the rest of the chapters: a young black man embarking on an intellectual life in Harlem, a salesman in Florida who makes a wild career change, a woman who hosts a conspiracy-theory radio show in Phoenix, another woman whose husband was the ringleader of the attack, a teenage girl whose grandparents and parents were targets of the attack, and finally an old man, the son of Oliver’s first followers, still on their farm and haunted by the ghost of his brother. Several characters recur, including Max Felt, who was a boy during the attack and grows up to be a rock star and something of a cult leader himself. Max and Oliver remain mysterious characters whose thoughts the reader has little access to, and the plot is built around mysteries as well—many chapters end in a cliffhanger without resolution. But Castleberry maintains deft control of the novel’s arc, making satisfying connections and bringing rich characters to life.

Memorable characters inhabit a surprising, engaging story of American idealism and its dark opposite.

**THE CITY OF GOOD DEATH**
Champaneri, Priyanka
Restless Books (448 pp.)
$27.00 | Jun. 2, 2020
978-1-63206-252-9

Ghosts haunt the living in a holy Hindu city.

This debut novel is set in Kashi, on the banks of the Ganges. Believers say that those who die in Kashi experience a “good death,” meaning they die once and for all, with no reincarnation. Pilgrims come from far and wide hoping to spend their last days in one of Kashi’s designated death hostels, one of which is managed by a man named Pramesh. Pramesh grew up outside of Kashi with an alcoholic...
and abusive father and uncle and a cousin who resembled him so closely they passed as twins. As Champaneri’s novel begins, Pramesh’s cousin, Sagar, suddenly shows up in Kashi, having died under mysterious circumstances. Then his ghost begins to haunt Pramesh’s hostel—the washroom, specifically—with an earth-shattering racket, and nothing that anyone does seems to have any effect. What Sagar’s ghost wants is just one of the mysteries of this somewhat overstuffed book. Champaneri’s Kashi is teeming and vivid, but her prose can sometimes feel overdone. The story sags in places. Most interesting are the flashbacks to Pramesh and Sagar’s childhood, but these moments often feel rushed. It’s possible that Champaneri is trying to fit in too much. A subplot involving yet another ghost—this one a young woman’s—is compelling but never quite coheres with the novel’s main action. Still, the book frequently charms, and it’s as full of humor, warmth, and mystery as Kashi’s own marketplace.

Uneven but charming, Champaneri’s debut intrigues even as the writing occasionally sags.

**WATCHING YOU WITHOUT ME**

Coady, Lynn

Knopf (320 pp.)

$25.95 | Jul. 7, 2020

A woman returns to her childhood home to settle her late mother’s affairs. A household aide is suspiciously eager to assist.

Karen, the narrator of Coady’s sixth novel, has returned from Toronto to her childhood home in Nova Scotia after her mother’s death. In addition to arranging to sell the house, Karen needs to find a place for her developmentally disabled sister, Kelli, and she feels lucky to have a plan already in place: A decent facility has a room ready, and a home aide, Trevor, has been showing up regularly to take Kelli on walks. Kelli and Trevor seem to have a great rapport, but practically from the start Trevor’s demeanor seems manipulative and vaguely threatening: He’s overly familiar around the house, making nonregular visits using his key while steering Karen away from sensible decisions regarding Kelli’s care. And Kelli herself soon suffers spells of illness that Karen is being gaslit is never in doubt; the novel’s drama comes from Coady’s sensitivity to how Karen, a savvy woman, could be manipulated by a man who isn’t especially bright but knows her emotional weak spots. Coady has a talent for inventing creeps: Her novel *The Antagonist* (2013) features a half-crazed man who feels his life has been exploited by a novelist. Trevor is similarly unstable, and Coady takes a giddy pleasure in stretching out scenes that expose his capacity for menace while cloaking his intentions. And Kelli, inspired by Coady’s real-life uncle, is a rich character in her own right: Coady is careful not to make her a mere plot device, inhabiting her hard-to-express thoughts and emotions with an acuity that heightens the drama. Karen and Kelli’s unique sisterhood deepens the more Trevor tries to drive a wedge between the two.

A thoughtful and intense drama about how insidiously family ties can be exploited.

**THE PARTY UPSTAIRS**

Conell, Lee

Penguin Press (320 pp.)

$26.00 | Jul. 7, 2020

978-1-984880-27-7

One day changes the lives of a working-class Manhattan father and daughter forever.

Martin, a longtime super in an Upper West Side apartment building, has been hearing the voice of a recently deceased tenant. Lily was Martin’s longtime friend and a pseudo-grandmother to Ruby, his 24-year-old daughter; Ghost Lily is now haunting Martin in both menial and meaningful ways. Ruby—who is newly single, unemployed, and deeply in debt—has just
moved back in with her parents. Primarily set in the apartment building, the novel takes place over the course of one day. While Martin fields calls from tenants with innocuous and embarrassing requests, Ruby prepares for her interview for her dream job at the American Museum of Natural History—and a penthouse party that evening at her best friend Caroline's apartment. When the interview (that Caroline has helped secure) is not what Ruby expected, she begins to recontextualize her childhood and lifelong friendship with Caroline. At one point Ruby compares their relationship to a diorama (her preferred art form): “Lovingly crafted, deeply illusory, a lifelike depiction of something already extinct.” Ruby grew up brushing shoulders with the wealthy and thus is less able to distinguish the class markers that separate them—an inability Martin cannot fathom or stomach. When a tenant asks him to dispose of a pigeon nest, Martin angrily remembers what he's done in the past to keep this job and support Ruby: “He wanted to tell her there were some kinds of debt she didn’t even realize she owed, debts no dream job would pay back.” The strained father-daughter relationship eventually boils over, and Martin's and Ruby's decisions set into motion a series of events that upend their lives forever. Conell's debut perfectly captures the co-op's ecosystem and the ways class informs every interaction, reaction, and relationship inside it. While the plot sometimes dips a little too far into the absurd, Conell's writing remains clear-eyed, darkly funny, and deeply empathetic.

A slow-burning debut that keenly dissects privilege, power, and the devastation of unfulfilled expectations.

BLACKTOP WASTELAND
Cosby, S.A.
Flatiron Books (304 pp.)
$26.99 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-250-25268-5

A gifted getaway driver desperately wants to go straight, but he's towing around a lot of baggage.

Beauregard Montage is a good mechanic in a bad fix. A son needs braces. His daughter needs tuition. His cancer-stricken mom's nursing home is demanding a lot of cash, fast. But his repair shop is about to go belly up. He needs money—and a lot more than he can make in illegal drag races in his classic Duster, because everybody in Red Hill County, Virginia, knows he's the fastest driver around. Is it any wonder he's thinking of returning to his criminal past for one more job that will solve all his problems—and feed his need for thrills to boot? The stage is eventually set for a big-dollar diamond heist—but the story's not that simple. This is also a novel about the struggles of being an African American man with an absent father who's “a ghost without a grave.” The Montages have a family tradition for violence that Beauregard doesn't want to pass down. It's a true curse, he feels. “Money can’t fix it and love can’t tame it. Push it down deep and it rots you from the inside out. Give in to it and you end up doing five years in some hellhole.”

Beauregard's anguish makes him a sympathetic lead. But the supporting cast isn't nearly as compelling, and some turns of phrase (“Pockets of rust covered the hood like some oxidizing eczema,” “Even after all these years, she still captivated the savage that lived between his legs”) are as painful as anything anybody suffers in the bloody climax.

The at-times action-packed ride can't hide the fact that this one doesn't fire on all cylinders.
In a whirlwind of queer eroticism, classical strings, and vernal sensuality, debut novelist Delabroy-Allard whips up a bracing portrait of consumptive love and mutual obsession.

A young mother and new teacher in Paris has found herself adrift, “living a life [she] never thought [she’d] live” following her husband’s sudden departure. Left to raise their young daughter alone, the unnamed narrator “walk[s] around like a ghost,” the sudden shift in identity rendering her vulnerable, transparent, thrust into “a period of latency.” Drawing her back into the world and its fecund, proliferating springtime is Sarah, a woman she met at a New Year’s party who has quickly woven herself into the fabric of the narrator’s life, sparking off a liminal hum of possibility that buzzes between them. Sarah, a successful violinist who darts in and out of the city on tour with her quartet, is too much in every respect—she drinks too much, smokes too many cigarettes, wears too much makeup, is too loud, too magnetic. In her faded and fragile state, the narrator absorbs Sarah’s radiance until she too begins first to shine, then burn as their unsustainable passion increasingly erupts in violence and despair. Each time Sarah departs and returns, the narrator is torn apart and stitched back together, until finally she’s worn too thin for further repair. While the cumulative effect of repetition can at times slow rather than drive the swell of the narrative’s crescendo, overall the prose exerts a tidal pull, and the book’s structure skillfully mirrors the story’s atmosphere: The short vignettes that constitute Part I replicate the breathless swirl of the narrator’s turbulent affair with Sarah while lengthening chapters throughout Part II reflect her descent into rambling dishevelment and a sense of being stuck in time. In this second half, the narrator flees Paris for Italy in a frantic attempt to resurrect herself from the ashes of her devastation when her relationship with Sarah finally collapses beneath the weight of its own fraught history.

A dizzying, lush flight through the ecstasy and devastation of an incendiary romance and the grief that follows its loss.
rock music the way you enter a cathedral, remember, Vernon, and our story was a spaceship,” says Bleach in his taped confessions. “There were so many saints everywhere we didn't know who to worship.” Perhaps Despentes is working through the stages of grief, because if the beginning was so very angry, here we find bargaining, depression, and just perhaps the seeds of reconciliation.

A worthy, anarchic sequel for the lost souls and beautiful losers of Paris’ blank generation.
A clever cocktail of psychological thriller and supernatural horror.

PARIS NEVER LEAVES YOU

Feldman, Ellen
St. Martin's (368 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-250-62277-8

Nothing is quite what it seems in this historical novel set in occupied Paris during World War II and the New York publishing world of the 1950s.

Charlotte Foret, a young widow with an 18-month-old daughter, runs a bookstore in Nazi-controlled Paris. Her husband has been killed in the war; her father, a left-wing publisher, is on the run. Food is scarce while the fear of arrest and deportation to a concentration camp is constant. A polite German officer becomes a regular at the store, browsing and occasionally buying a volume. Charlotte is disturbed by his presence and tries to ignore him. But when he turns up one day with an orange for her hungry child, things begin to change. Intercut throughout are scenes from Charlotte’s life in Manhattan a decade later. With the help of Horace Field—a prominent publisher who knew her father—and Horace’s wife, Hannah, Charlotte and daughter Vivi have made a fresh start. Charlotte works as an editor for Horace while Vivi, now 14, is a lively, inquisitive scholarship student. Horace is confined to a wheelchair from wounds suffered in the war; nonetheless, he begins to display a more than mentorlike interest in Charlotte. Complications ensue. It’s hard to get your bearings in the novel’s awkward beginning pages. But author Feldman soon regains control, and the narrative proceeds at a brisk pace. There are multiple revelations: All the major players have something to hide. Though some of their secrets are a bit improbable—leaving the reader feeling intentionally misled—it doesn’t much matter. The story is involving, and the big-ticket themes—having to do with loyalty, betrayal, and what it takes to survive—are mostly handled in a graceful, nuanced way (though Charlotte’s guilt does feel overblown). Wartime Paris is described in vivid, sometimes harrowing, detail.

An uneven but engrossing page-turner.

HOW TO SAVE A LIFE

Fenton, Liz & Steinke, Lisa
Lake Union Publishing (303 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-5420-0509-8

A 34-year-old San Diego man is on a date with his ex-fiancée, whom he has never gotten over, when she dies horribly. He then relives the same day over and over again, each time trying to save her life.

Dominic Suarez fell hard for Mia Bell and proposed to her when they were in their early 20s. But then he derailed both their lives by breaking off the engagement. She fled to Chicago and became a teacher; he stayed in San Diego and became a TV producer. Ten years later, he’s still obsessed with the one who got away. A chance encounter after she moves back to town leads to a date at the San Diego County Fair. That date goes perfectly—that is, until the ride they are on suffers a catastrophic failure and Mia is killed in a 54-foot fall. Dom is broken by the loss. But when he wakes up the next morning, it is once again the day of their date. He enters a time loop—a la the 1993 movie Groundhog Day—where he dedicates himself to helping everyone he comes across and tries to keep Mia from dying, only to fail to save her every day. Authors Fenton and Steinke have created a realistic look at the trauma that reliving the same events multiple times might cause a person as they try to come to terms with the impossible. They also explore the meaning of love, compatibility, and how a person might change—yet remain the same—over the course of a decade or even just a week. Their storytelling is on point, and each version is told from a new angle as Dom mentally works through the situation he’s in, trying to grapple with how he can become a better man.

A well-told story that leaves some questions unanswered—but in a good way.

NATURAL HISTORY

Fonseca, Carlos
Trans. by McDowell, Megan
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (320 pp.)
$27.00 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-0-374-21630-6

An odd assemblage of characters moves across time and space in Costa Rican novelist Fonseca’s latest intellectual puzzler.

As in Colonel Lágrimas (2016), Fonseca populates his latest novel with smart people who don’t
When a serial killer strikes a Missouri plantation, a slave and her lover discover they must outwit a cunning and devious psychopath in this historical novel.

“The author successfully balances the romance with a gripping murder mystery that, while violent, is never gratuitous.”

“This series opener from DuBois (A Tale as Old as Time, 2018, etc.) is a richly detailed historical thriller brimming with intriguing, well-developed characters and a fast-paced plot that offers a plethora of surprising twists and turns.”

“A complex thriller that offers intense romance and suspense.”

—Kirkus Reviews

For information about agent representation or film rights, email catalinadubois.novels@gmail.com • www.literarytitan.com/tag/catalina-dubois
Years before Kawai Strong Washburn published a lick of fiction, he was a graduate student studying macroeconomics at Columbia University who found himself falling for “big L literature.” He took his first creative writing workshop — taught by then-MFA student Parul Seghal, now a top book critic at the New York Times — and knew he’d keep writing after that.

Short stories, a family, a career as a software engineer, and a decade under his belt, and now Washburn has published his debut novel, *Sharks in the Time of Saviors* (MCD/FSG, March 31). Set in his native Hawaii, the book tells the story of three siblings, at odds in part because their parents see one brother as having received a fearsome blessing from the sea.

As the siblings leave, one by one, for the mainland, they become progressively lost—but each also tries to find a way to reconnect with home.

Washburn spoke via Skype from his home office in Minneapolis.

How would you describe the family’s economic status?

I would say they’re in the working-class bracket. At different points in the story, they have jobs that are more or less viable in terms of allowing them to provide for the family, but at other times they’re just scraping by to make ends meet. A lot of people don’t realize how difficult economically it can be to live in Hawaii.

Yet the characters live in this tropical paradise.

There are some fantastic natural spaces in Hawaii that are still accessible to everybody: national parks, state parks. But in some cases, parts of the islands that had some of the most pristine and, especially for Native Hawaiians, sacred spaces have been converted into tourist-driven facilities—an amusement park or hotel or condominiums. You can grow up there and be living a blue-collar lifestyle and have a lot of access to natural beauty, but there can also be times when, if somebody has enough money, those things can be taken away from the local residents.

How do you see the role of Hawaiian spirituality and religion in the book?
The book doesn't present a complete view of Native Hawaiian spirituality and religion. It's written in a rotating first person, and each character has a flawed, incomplete understanding of their heritage and their culture. A lot of people in Hawaii can still not understand as much of the islands as they would like, and that's a result of colonialism—there were formal attempts to annihilate Native Hawaiian culture. These characters are living with the legacy of that, which means they don't have a full understanding of their religion. Over the course of the novel they're trying to understand—what's happening to us, and what does that mean, and what do we believe, and what's real and what isn't.

Each of the siblings—Dean, Nainoa, and Kaui—has a different relationship to the islands. Who do you most closely identify with? There's probably a little bit of each of them in me. I'm the least like Dean—leaving the islands and making it big as an athlete is his dream. Like Nainoa, there have been parts of the islands that have remained with me and have grown stronger the farther I've gotten away—he's ultimately called to return. And Kaui—I have felt like an outsider in a lot of situations, not only because I grew up in the islands and then came to the continental United States, which are very different, but also because I was kind of shy and awkward. So I would say it's a mix of Nainoa and Kaui.

Let's talk about Kaui's path—she studies to be an engineer but winds up on a farm in Hawaii trying to create regenerative agriculture.

I really want to talk about the themes of the book in a way that I hope spreads the conversation beyond just the story. About trying to build a sustainable future and learning from the Indigenous cultures that, in my belief, had some better understanding of their relationship with the natural world. When we look at things like climate change, we're going to need to start turning back to some of these beliefs that were part of our history. We need to put them in the forefront so we have a better understanding of how we're going to build a modern world that is sustainable, that is ecologically and socially just. It's going to take all of us forming better communities and thinking about what we want the world to look like in the coming decades. I think this book speaks to that at some level, and I'm hoping that it becomes a launchpad for those sorts of discussions.

Carolyn Kellogg is the former books editor of the Los Angeles Times. Sharks in the Time of Saviors received a starred review in the Jan. 15, 2020, issue.
always behave as intelligently as they might. The narrator is
a museum curator (whence the title) obsessed with the five-
pointed shape called the quincunx, which figures in the wing
patterns of certain tropical butterflies. An article he has written
for a British natural history journal catches the attention of a
beguiling, beautiful fashion designer who works against type:
If some think fashion is meant to call attention to oneself, she
is a believer in “the art of anonymity in the jungle.” In various
aspects of her orbit stands an odd constellation of characters: a
woman who seeds the press with learned, utterly false stories
that, to her delight, cause people to freak out and markets to
plunge; an Israeli traveler who shelters a secret; a photographer
who is drawn into the darkest recesses of the Earth to find his
subjects. Throughout, as with that earlier novel, Fonseca takes
the occasion to venture odd connections and prolegomena for
future projects; one of his characters, for instance, insists that
the novel has been stagnant since the time of Cervantes and
needs to be reimagined so that it becomes geological, “novels
of multiple layers, novels that could be read the way you read
the passage of time on the surface of rocks.” Everything is con-
tingent in Fonseca’s story, and nothing is quite to be trusted; as
it draws to a close, Fonseca begins to play with stories within
the story, marvelous concoctions of, for instance, “an odyssey
that gradually stretches out, from motel to motel, train station
to train station, that grows in leaps and bounds, like the man’s
conviction.” The novel is an elegant meditation on art, incon-
stancy and hiding, with a deftly woven subtext of camouflage
that emerges as the narrative progresses.
A treat for fans of Cortázar, Bolaño, and other adepts of
the literary enigma.

**MOTHER LAND**

*Franqui, Leah*

Morrow/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
$27.99 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-0-06-293884-8

Rachel, an aimless American newlywed, moves to Mumbai with her
husband, Dhruv.

Soon after, his mother, Swati, leaves
her husband and life in Kolkata to move
in with her son and his new wife. Soon
after that, Dhruv’s company sends him to work on a monthlong
project in Kolkata, making the women unlikely roommates.

The chapters alternate between Rachel’s and Swati’s close third-
person perspectives, but unfortunately, neither of them contain
enough complexity to carry the story. During an argument with
Dhruv, Rachel thinks, “He sounded like his father, or like some
sterotype from a movie, a cartoon figure, the generic ‘disap-
proving male.’” But the same might be said of the women, who
are little more than stale types themselves. Rachel is the quint-
essential individualistic American. Loving to cook makes up
the bulk of her personality. Swati is a traditional Indian woman
discovering herself beyond the roles of wife and mother late in
life. She insists on hiring a cook against Rachel’s wishes because
that is the way things are done among a certain class of Indians.
The cook conflict represents the power struggle between the
two women, whose desires turn out to be more similar than dif-
ferent, predictably, but it’s too one-note. Both women spend an
awful lot of time alone, fuming about the other and ruminat-
ing on their own experiences. Rachel stumbles into voice-over
work for an Estonian soap opera that’s far more interesting than
her own brooding. By the time the plot takes off in the novel’s
final quarter, when a friend of Rachel’s visiting Mumbai forces
her to confront hard truths about her choices and Swati finds
a love interest, it’s too late. The friction between Rachel and
Swati is belabored and the friendship that eventually develops
between them, belated.

A slow story that misses the mark.

**THE PARIS HOURS**

*George, Alex*

Flatiron Books (272 pp.)
$26.99 | May 5, 2020
978-1-250-30718-7

Set in 1927, George’s atmospheric
third novel follows the lives of four ordi-
ary Parisians, each seeking something
they lost, over the course of a summer
day.

The book opens a few hours after
midnight as Souren Balakian, an Armenian refugee haunted
by traumatic memories of his flight from Ottoman Anatolia a
decade before, prepares his puppets for his daily shows at the
Jardin du Luxembourg. Impoverished painter Guillaume Blanc
awakes, hungover and desperate to raise money to pay off a loan
shark’s debt that is due that day. Insomniac Jean-Paul Maillard,
a journalist nursing physical and emotional wounds from the
Great War, comforts himself listening to the music of George
Gershwin. Camille Clermont arrives at a cemetery with her
young daughter, Marie, to lay flowers on the grave of her former
employer, writer Marcel Proust. As the day progresses, alternat-
ing chapters interweave these characters’ pasts with their pres-
ents to gradually reveal tragedies and heart-wrenching secrets.
The era’s celebrities (Josephine Baker, Gertrude Stein, Maurice
Ravel, Sylvia Beach, Ernest and Pauline Hemingway) make
guest appearances in a name-dropping *Midnight in Paris* fashion.
Despite some striking moments (a badly wounded Jean-Paul is
moved by an impromptu piano concert in an abandoned church
by an ambulance driver who turns out to be Ravel), other
encounters feel forced. Likewise, in George’s aim to get his four
protagonists to the climax in a Montmartre jazz club, the loose
connections he creates among them seem at times like heavy-
handed contrivances. And despite the vividness of the stories
being told, their power is undermined by the flatness of the
character development. Still, the ambiguous ending will pro-
vide discussion fodder for reading groups.

Despite its flaws, George’s Proustian homage to a lost
time will be a Francophile’s madeleine.
Get the ultimate inside scoop on the best new books.

Fully Booked by Kirkus Reviews

New episode every Tuesday

Podcast Available on iTunes
TRUE LOVE
Gerard, Sarah
Harper (224 pp.)
$25.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-06-293743-8

A young woman moves from suburban Florida to New York City to pursue her MFA in writing but finds she has dragged her old life with her. It’s not so much that Nina has come adrift as that she was never tethered to begin with. Her parents’ preoccupation with their bitter divorce left her “cutting [herself] and sneaking pills” as early as middle school, and when she moves to New York for college, her self-destructive behavior spirals out of control. She returns home before she finishes her degree and spends eight weeks in rehab in Tampa for “weed, wine, sex, starvation….any numbing or mood-altering agent would do.” In the three years that have since passed, Nina has surrounded herself with a cadre of old friends and new bad influences, each embroiled in their own brands of escape: navel-gazing. Chief among these are Seth, Nina’s boyfriend, a self-described “artistic genius” who is incapable of completing either his artistic projects or his job applications; Odessa, a childhood friend who is reuniting with her daughter’s father in spite of the permanent restraining order she has taken out on him; and Brian, an editor at the paper for which Nina freelances, who has a penchant for recording their increasingly humiliating sexual encounters. Through it all, Nina has been working on an autobiographical story cycle based on her and Seth’s love life. When she’s admitted to an MFA program, she moves back to New York with Seth. There, she quickly becomes involved with Aaron, a friend from college, with whom she begins another autobiographical project, a screenplay titled True Love. Nina is a brilliantly observant narrator, able to take the caustic material of her squalid living conditions and her increasingly abusive relationships and render it with a precise insouciance. Yet, though Nina’s primary quest is for self-knowledge, she turns every possible insight into a reiteration of what she already knows best: the shape of her ravenous need. The problem, both for Nina and the novel, is that nothing she creates out of her experiences treads beyond the well-worn paths of her narcissism, rendering the narrative static and all the characters who are not Nina into indistinguishable props for the performance of her selfhood.

A book that occasionally provokes introspection but mostly founders under the weight of its own gaze.

BLOCK SEVENTEEN
Guthrie, Kimiko
Blackstone (288 pp.)
$26.99 | Jun. 23, 2020
978-1-982-678-40-1

A young woman is haunted by frightening phenomena in a debut novel about the lingering impact of WWII Japanese internment camps in the U.S. Akiko, the book’s first-person narrator, has long been uncomfortable with her Japanese heritage on her mother’s side, changing her name to Jane as a girl and choosing not to speak Japanese with family. Now in her 30s, engaged to Shiro, Jane is adrift, unemployed, and worried that her mother, Sumi, seems to have disappeared again as she did in Jane’s teens. Jane can’t seem to connect with her in real life, although Sumi has a robust existence on social media. Meanwhile, Shiro, who works for the Transportation Security Administration at the Oakland airport, is so enraged by the racism and sexual harassment he sees on his job that he’s secretly making and posting videos about it. As Jane frets about both of them, she is having disturbing dreams, or perhaps hallucinations, or maybe they are memories, but not all her own. She tells her story to a “you” whose identity is only gradually revealed. In brief third-person chapters, we learn about Sumi’s past: As a young child, she was interned with her family during World War II in camps
in California and Arkansas, where a secret tragedy occurred. As Sumi drifts into cyberspace and Shiro sinks into paranoia, Jane’s sanity grows ever more tenuous, and the novel suffers from an overload of unreliable narrators. The prose is uneven, sometimes striking in its bizarre images, other times clunky in its exposition. But the surreal story and its linkage of past and present remain compelling even if the dark power they generate is undercut by an oddly cheery ending.

A 21st-century ghost story offers chills in this uneven but promising debut.

DEATH AND THE BUTTERFLY

Hester, Colin
Counterpoint (208 pp.)
$26.00 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-64009-325-6

From the Battle of Britain through 9/11 and beyond, a group of characters is connected by bonds of grief, loss, and beauty. The sequence of appalling disasters flows relentlessly in Hester’s second novel. A downed wartime pilot expires in an airplane riddled with enemy bullets; a beloved daughter dies in her crib; a solitary Scotsman falls at the scene of a terrible air tragedy; a cherished wife fades away. The litany of heartbreak, overshadowed by larger horrors—a couple committing suicide together; wartime land mines; 9/11; terrorist bombs—winds through a story that spans multiple decades while looping among a scattered group of characters. Susan McEwan, in England in 1940, meets
two of her brother Phillip’s friends, RAF Capt. Roger Grey, whom she will marry, and Nial McKellan, who will reconnect with the Greys, disruptively, 20 years later. In Toronto in the 1980s, a husband named Polo must deal, in difficult financial circumstances, with his wife’s pregnancy. And in Montana, in 2001, when a wedding is suddenly threatened by unwelcome news, the groom, Jack Riordan, finds an article written by Polo about Susan and Roger and Nial. Hester moves among these figures in teasing fashion, sometimes affecting, often using provocative stylistic tics, including sensational chapter openings, distracting phraseology (“Their hair glistening and wavy and succulent as plums”), and the invention of verbs from nouns or adjectives (“tauted,” “genesised,” “raven’d”). The effect is both whimsical and disruptive, the novel’s sincerity on the subject of love and parenting sometimes snagged or punctured. The author’s tendency toward sentimentality has a similar seesawing effect, most noticeable in a late chapter spent, eye-poppingly, with King George VI and Princess Margaret.

A story of passion and intermittent poetry undermined by technical soft spots.

THE WILD LAUGHTER
Hughes, Caoilinn
Oneworld Publications (208 pp.)
$24.95 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-78607-780-6

Two brothers try to help their terminally ill father end his life in a rural Irish town.

Doharty Black and his older brother, Cormac, are stunned when their domineering, terminally ill father, known to them as the Chief, asks them to look in the Bible and “find the bits that reference suicide.” The two brothers reluctantly embark on a quest to find a safe way for them to help the Chief commit suicide. But while the older and more successful Cormac can temporarily escape to his home and job in town, Doharty must remain with his parents at their struggling farm and deal with the day-to-day reality of their father’s illness. Doharty’s lifelong resentment of Cormac festers as they attempt to navigate their familial duties and is further complicated when they both become involved with the same woman.

This novel, set in 2014, functions both as a biblical parable and an indictment of Ireland’s Celtic Tiger economic boom of the 1990s and 2000s, culminating in the 2008 financial crash. The Chief’s physical decline mirrors the decline of the family’s economic prospects in the wake of an ill-advised loan. Hughes is attentive to the larger political context of her narrative and to more granular details of language and place, and her prose is vivid and unsparing: “His mind was a luxury,” Doharty thinks bitterly of Cormac, “…at any moment something you’d say would be turned inside out like a child’s eyelid to traumatise you.” The novel would be more successful, however, if its plot and the relationships between its characters were as vivid as its sentences. So much is left unsaid between Doharty and his family that these fraught relationships begin to feel threadbare.

A striking novel about fathers and sons in 21st-century Ireland that does not quite live up to its potential.

YOU AGAIN
Immergut, Debra Jo
Ecco/HarperCollins (288 pp.)
$27.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-06-274758-7

A middle-aged marketing executive questions whether she’s seeing doppelgängers or suffering delusions.

Abigail Willard, 46, is heading home to Brooklyn after a long day at her job as art director at a pharmaceutical company when she spies her 22-year-old double at a pay phone near the Holland Tunnel. She leaps out of her taxi to get a better look only for the girl to hail the cab and disappear. Abby doesn’t mention the incident to her husband, Dennis, or her sons, Pete and Benjamin; it was dark and rainy and she was probably just
tired. Then, several days later, she happens upon her younger self reading on a bench outside a library she used to frequent—and the encounters only escalate from there. Is Abby hallucinating? Is the figure a friendly ghost of sorts, meant to remind the former painter of the dreams she abandoned? Or is this a chance for Abby to prevent whatever tragedy caused her to forget a year of her 20s? Meanwhile, Dennis fears he’ll be fired, and 16-year-old Pete becomes involved with an increasingly violent group of antifa activists, earning him—and Abigail—the attention of a handsome police detective. Although an unidentified individual’s quest to solve “the many mysteries about Ms. Willard’s role in the deadly events of 2015” forms the book’s frame, Immergut allows the bulk of the tale to unfold via Abby’s journal. Her entries are evocatively written, keenly self-aware, and peppered with artful observations that lend the story texture, vibrancy, and depth.

At once a mind-bending puzzle and a profound meditation on love, fate, ambition, and regret.
Our notion of the Wild West is most often populated with white cowboys, less so the Indigenous tribes that lived on the land, Mexicans who crossed a more porous border, African Americans migrating from the South, and immigrants from many parts of the world.

Rishi Reddi’s debut novel, Passage West (Ecco/HarperCollins, April 21), tells the story of a group of Sikh men from India, then a British colony, who migrated to California’s Imperial Valley in the early 20th century to farm the land. Because they were not allowed to bring their relatives, some married Mexican women and started families in their new home. As the United States grew, immigration policies were changed and challenged and changed again to define what it meant to be an American citizen. Reddi’s capacious novel brings all of these histories and more into sharp focus. She recently spoke with Kirkus about the book.

How did you come to this story?
I first heard about the Supreme Court case of Bhagat Singh Thind in 1989 in law school. It was the first time I learned there was a South Asian, a man from Punjab, who came to the U.S., served in the Army during World War I, and was honorably discharged. He applied for U.S. citizenship based on his service and won in state court, but the case went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court took away his citizenship.

This was eye-opening for me. One, because I never knew Indians had been in the country that early. This was 1923. Second, when I started to look into it, I realized there were many immigrants at the time. We have forgotten that those folks added to U.S. society. That’s what made me start to write the story. Then I met the children of this community of Mexican mothers and Indian fathers. I was fascinated by their stories, and they were so warm and so welcoming.

As I did more research specifically on the Imperial Valley, I realized that it was a metaphor for the way that everything was settled in the West. At first, as folks went out there to learn how to farm the land, society was a little less stratified. There were these friendships across races and ethnic groups, and it was more fluid. But the minute that “civilization” entered and it was more stratified, everything became more restricted. It was a little bit of a symbol for everything that has happened in the country, even though the history of it is specific to California. What began as a much smaller story became a symbol of all of America.

How did your work as a lawyer shape how you approached the story?
Having a legal background shapes my worldview in understanding that things are not etched in stone. Our laws are just as fallible and malleable as anything else. Legal structures may provide us with a way to
work together, but they are changeable, and they change all the time. Our laws could once again become just as strict, isolating, biased, and xenophobic as they once were. It can happen, and it’s happening now. It took a long time to think about and learn how to write this book. I was very focused on it before 2016, but after that year, a certain angle of the storyline that didn't exist came into focus for me.

Which authors and books did you look to for guidance?
The book that I went back to again and again was Edward P. Jones’ *The Known World*. There’s something about his language and the way that he danced around and created a completely fictitious county, which I was so sad to find out wasn’t real. *Beloved* was another touchstone, in terms of how it re-created a world. I also read a lot of Indian authors who inform my work.

What’s your hope for the book’s readers?
I hope the book inspires some discussion around the way that we think of race and racism. I wanted to depict characters that were both suffering under racist laws of social structure but also not devoid of that worldview themselves. I hope the book inspires some discussion so that we're not pointing fingers and feeling exempt from the work that we have to do individually and that we all have to do as a society to erase some of these ills. I would love more than just “these were the good guys” and “these were the bad guys.” I want us to go deeper than that.

Leena Soman Navani is a writer living in New York. Passage West was reviewed in the Feb. 15, 2020, issue.
military character, and Harlow, his partner/girlfriend, is marginally believable, but most of the other characters are predictable: a sheriff reluctant to upset the status quo, a ruthless security manager, an evil political-influence peddler, and so on. Interestingly, several female characters enter the fray, but they are stand-ins, effective only when they fight “like men.” The battle descriptions are detailed and sometimes not confusing, but the real stars of the book are weapons, bristling with spiky acronyms, and electronic security technologies.

An old story with updated weapons.
THE GOLDEN CAGE
Läckberg, Camilla
Trans. by Smith, Neil
Knopf (352 pp.)
$26.95 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-525-65797-2

Faye Adelheim has it all—a wealthy, handsome husband, an expensive home, and a beautiful little girl. But when her fairy-tale life fractures, how far will she go to exact revenge?

Läckberg, the mistress of Scandinavian noir, returns with a smart riff on women's thrillers: This is Big Little Lies meets Gone Girl with some 9 to 5 tossed in for good measure. Having grown up in a small town, Faye independently makes her way to Stockholm changes her name, and eventually secures a spot in the prestigious Stockholm School of Economics, where she meets her best friend, Chris, and her future husband, Jack. While Jack builds his first business (virtually forgetting that Faye helped come up with the idea for the company), Faye abandons her studies to support them by waiting tables. She even signs a prenuptial agreement that guarantees her nothing, trusting in Jack's love. Once married, Faye stays home, her career essentially dead, but Jack's thrives, emboldening him to insult and degrade her. And while Jack's business takes him on glamorous trips, Faye finds herself killing time and numbing her pain by drinking with the other women caught in golden cages. That is, until she discovers Jack's affair; their divorce leaves her practically penniless. Despite her pitiful predicament, Faye isn't entirely without resources. Certainly, she has Chris, who's founded her own hair-care empire and become a wildly successful businesswoman. She also has rage, and she quickly channels that rage into her business acumen, developing a plan not only to take down Jack, but also to market a product to jilted woman (and isn't that nearly all women?). Yet as Faye begins dismantling Jack's life, Läckberg deftly teases the reader by dropping clues to Faye's dark past. We can't help but wonder if she's done this before.

A deliciously inventive thriller brimming with sex, secrets, and scandal.
Lock's novel blends history and delirium in a thrilling, unnerving portrait of 19th-century America.

The books in Lock's American Novels cycle—of which this is the seventh—have ranged from the wryly philosophical (A Fugitive in Walden Woods, 2017) to the metafictional (The Boy in His Winter, 2014). This book, which shares a few characters with Feast Day of the Cannibals (2019), both stands on its own and carves out a distinctive space—one part novel of ideas, one part madcap adventure. In an author's note at the end, Lock calls this novel's subject “America for the disenfranchised and powerless.” And so the story follows one Ellen Finch, who goes to work for Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1883. Ellen is pregnant when this new position begins, and halfway through the novel, she gives birth—at which point her newborn son vanishes. With the aid of P.T. Barnum, Ellen and her allies determine that the Ku Klux Klan is the responsible party, at which point the novel takes on a more stylized tone—one which echoes the occasional forays into fever-dream imagery in the book's first half. While Lock's focus is largely on 19th-century politics, there are a few moments that recall the current political scene—including one of a group of Klansmen shouting, “Build a wall! Build a wall to keep them out!” Lock juxtaposes critiques of racism and sexism with snappy dialogue: “In Mr. Barnum's opinion, twelve clowns should be sufficient to fluster a Grand Cyclops and turn a meeting of the Ku Klux Klan...upside down” is perhaps the most ornate example.

Lock continues to experiment and push against narrative conventions.

---

Perhaps the greatest novel by the multifaced Brazilian writer receives a fresh, lively translation.

Machado (1839-1908) never met a literary form he could not master; his poems, plays, stories, newspaper articles, and other writings are all exemplary, and he is regarded as Brazil's greatest writer more than a century after his death. This novel, published in 1881, at once lampoons and celebrates the liberal ideals of the country's intelligentsia, and it's told from an odd viewpoint: that of the corpse of a generally useless minor aristocrat. “I am not exactly an author recently deceased,” Brás Cubas declares at the opening, “but a deceased man recently an author.” In 160 mostly short episodes, all dedicated to the worm that took the first bite of his interred body, Brás Cubas outlines what he's bothered to understand of the intellectual currents of his time; given the choice between praying for glory in the here and now or glory in the afterlife, for instance, he finds something else to do. One of those things is to go to Portugal and get a law degree without much enthusiasm for the project, instead acting up as “a wastrel, a superficial, troublemaking, and petulant student, given to adventures, following romanticism in practice and liberalism in theory.” Back home, Brás Cubas takes up with a married woman while yearning for a lost love, finding himself in a condition that he calls “the solidarity of human disgruntlement.” Not even Aristotle could foresee the mess he's in, he concludes. Machado's pages are punctuated by nicely philosophical apothegms (“What lies between life and death? A short bridge”) and fables, one of which explains the unceasing battle between reason and folly. Such passages read as if from classic texts, while his...
here-and-now reminiscences of lost loves and other missteps could have been written yesterday. All are highly entertaining. Machado deserves wider familiarity among English readers, and this is a fine place to start reading him.

**ONE YEAR OF UGLY**

Mackenzie, Caroline  
37 Ink/Simon & Schuster (336 pp.)  
$26.00 | Jul. 14, 2020  
978-1-982128-91-3

A Venezuelan family living illegally in Trinidad is forced to work for a crime lord in this comic novel.

Twenty-four-year-old Yola Palacio and her extended family are having a backyard barbecue when a man holding a gun strides into the gathering, introduces himself as Ugly, and announces that Yola’s recently deceased Aunt Celia owed him a large sum of money, which the entire Palacios family must pay off by working for him—on pain of death or deportation back to the dysfunctional Venezuela they fled two years earlier. The four Palacios households begin receiving waves of illegal immigrants, whom they must house, feed, and entertain for free. Shuttling these refugees is Ugly’s handsome enforcer, Román, toward whom Yola feels an immediate and bewildering carnal pull. Soon the Palacios settle into a sort of rhythm: Every few months, they host “a mix of fleeing intellectuals, political refugees, impoverished asylum seekers, and a smattering of adventurers just looking for a new start,” befriending their kinder guests and tolerating the obnoxious ones. Everyone, that is, except Yola’s Aunt Milagros, who becomes suspicious of the refugees and eventually shoots a child living in her home. Román tells Yola—they’ve become lovers who bond over their “shared love of books”—that he’s sent Milagros back to Venezuela and told Ugly that she’s dead, and the remaining Palacios are forced to work in Ugly’s clandestine high-end strip club in various capacities. Debut author Mackenzie maintains a jangly, casual sort of humor throughout (“My father was born for...
safe-housing illegal migrants...he fell upon our new houseguests with all the bonhomie of a Sandals Resort manager, bearing three buckets of fried chicken and a bottle of rum). But just as often her prose is choked with clichés—"With a thunder crack, in a perfect display of pathetic fallacy, the clouds split." And while the novel provides a much-needed view into the many double binds of illegal immigration, it also, troublingly, seems to prop up stereotypes. At one point, Yola curses her "inability to thwart all those genetically wired impulses that allow pop culture to accurately peg Latin women as ‘feisty,’ ‘fiery,’ and ‘mothafuckin’ crazy as shit.’ " Really?

An intriguing premise turns disappointingly banal.

OTHER PEOPLE’S PETS
Maizes, R.L.
Celadon Books (304 pp.)
$26.99 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-250-30413-1

When helping dad means quitting school and committing felonies.

"La La has crime in her blood as surely as the Flying Wallendas have acrobatics, and the Kennedys, politics. Maybe it's pointless to resist it. Especially now that Zev needs her." The protagonist of Maizes' first novel—after We Love Anderson Cooper (2019), a collection of short stories—is the daughter of an ill-starred family. Her mother, Elissa, who never wanted children and preferred animals to people, disappeared without a trace after a nearly fatal parenting error went large in the media. Her father, Zev, left on his own with 8-year-old La La, withdrew her from school and made her his partner in a combination locksmith/burglary operation. Like her mother, La La is passionate about animals, but with her, it goes a step farther. She is an animal empath who can actually read animals' minds and feel their aches and pains. Both parents' legacies play a positive role in early adulthood—La La's star in veterinary school, and she meets her fiancé, Clem, when she helps him break into his locked chiropractic office. But when Zev leaves his phone at the scene of a bungled job, the darker side of the family history takes hold: "It's Sunday, a good day to rob churchgoing families." Rationalizing her crimes by tending to the pets she finds locked inside the homes she breaks into, La La sacrifices almost everything in the attempt to raise legal fees for her father—and what's left gets tossed into the flames of the torch she carries for her missing mother. While its quirky combination of fictional elements and adroit, deadpan writing give the novel a wryly comedic atmosphere, La La's story is melancholy and moving.

An uncanny, appealing blend of suspense, irony, tragedy, and how-to for lock-picking, burgling, and ankle monitor removal.

COOL FOR AMERICA
Martin, Andrew
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (272 pp.)
$27.00 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-374-10816-8

A collection of stories that document suburban angst and the burdens of being too young and too smart for your own good.

Martin has emerged as a leading chronicler of millennial ennui in contemporary America; his new collection includes two stories featuring Leslie, a character from his acclaimed debut novel, Early Work (2018). The 11 stories all feature young people struggling to find authentic connections to friends, family, work, and culture in a modern America not particularly interested in them or their opinions. The settings range across the United States, from Missoula to New York to suburban landscapes that could be just about anywhere. None of the protagonists are likable in a traditional sense, but they're all trying to do their best in a time that feels like the twilight of an empire. The characters suffer from various anxieties, addictions, and maladies, but primary among the things that all them is a cruel awareness that they're not actually suffering. When thinking about her anxiety over the state of the world and politics, Cassie realizes that "the anxiety was tolerable. She could, to her relief and regret, live with it." The protagonists of these stories know their suburban angst is, in reality, quite shallow, which just makes them feel worse. Each character suffers from the knowledge that no matter what they're doing there's something better and more satisfying out there somewhere. "The big problem that Leslie had, as far as she could tell, was that she was still, at twenty-seven, a person without well-established and verifiable thoughts or opinions about things." She handles this feeling by drinking with friends and stumbling into relationships that leave all involved parties exhausted and puzzled. Martin's writing, however, is as light and lively as his characters are frozen and hesitant. Frequently hilarious, Martin's stories are insightful, and the characters are both truthful and authentic.

Each story rings with wry, modern truth even as the characters are frustrated at every turn.

HIGH TREASON
McFate, Sean
Morrow/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
$27.99 | Jun. 9, 2020
978-0-06-284365-4

A military contractor must unravel the mysterious assassination of the U.S. vice president.

With extensive military experience in the 82nd Airborne Division and as a private contractor, McFate brings reliable...
German novelist Nadolny conjures up the sweep of modern European history through the eyes of a wizard.

**THE JOY OF SORCERY**

Nadolny, Sten

Trans. by Mitchell, Breon & Mitchell, Lynda Paul Dry Books (265 pp.)

$18.95 paper | Jun. 30, 2020

978-1-58988-146-4

German novelist Nadolny conjures up a slow-moving tale that takes in the sweep of modern European history through the eyes of a wizard.

It’s hard to write about magic these days without inviting comparison to J.K. Rowling, but Pahroc, Nadolny’s protagonist, is no Harry Potter. Of improbable origin—his father was a Paiute Indian who “could ride bareback, shoot a bow and arrow, and dance like a god” but whose greatest ambition was to be a German—Pahroc is an old man when we meet him, writing long letters to his granddaughter Mathilda, who shares some of his magical powers. About those powers, Pahroc is ambivalent: He points out repeatedly that while sorcerers are able to do certain things that ordinary mortals can’t, on the whole those ordinary mortals lead happier lives: “It’s sorcerers aren’t really supposed to use their powers to kill or influence the course of history, his contributions aren’t very memorable. The reader will benefit by knowing some of the basics of 20th-century German history, including the country’s division after World War II.

**22 MINUTES OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE**

Merkin, Daphne

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (256 pp.)

$26.00 | Jul. 7, 2020

978-0-374-14038-0

Merkin, whose nonfiction has dealt with her own depression and sexual obsessions, now offers a “novel about a sexual obsession.”

Narrator Judith Stone, a New York City writer securely married to radiologist Richard and pregnant with their second child, announces to the reader that she’s writing the story of an intensely carnal affair years before her marriage because it still haunts her in ways she wants to resolve. Judith writes about her younger self in the third person as a character in a novel, but here and there narrator Judith breaks into the story to offer what she calls digressions and speak directly to the reader about her thoughts and writing process. Unfortunately, this potentially interesting concept falls flat because character-Judith and narrator-Judith offer the same compulsive self-analyzing. Character-Judith’s affair occurred when she was a young book editor with a limited sexual history despite what narrator-Judith calls “striking looks.” The object of her affection, or at least lust, was Howard Rose, a criminal lawyer at least 10 years her senior, whom she met at a party three weeks after her adored therapist’s death—transference upon transference. Judith and Howard carried on for the next eight months. According to Judith, sex with Howard Rose was 50 shades of ecstasy and awakened her previously dormant capacity for erotic passion. But the repeated descriptions of insertions and wetness become a blur of run-of-the-mill physical machinations and phone sex. Character-Judith considered Howard “a jerk,” maybe even a pervert. Or was he simply an aggressive lawyer-type settled into middle-aged bachelorhood? Maybe she shouldn’t have disparaged his early warning that “I’m the wrong guy” for her because he was too old and poor. But narrator-Judith has little interest in Howard as a human being with feelings and motivations. Despite displays of social wit and literary smarts, Judith fails as both narrator and character, not because she is untrustworthy but because her self-absorption is boring.

Who knew hot sex could be such a drag.
Nugent won the 2019 Terry Southern Award, *Paris Review*’s annual prize for humor, and this collection of eight interconnected stories makes it easy to see why.

The comedy in *Fraternity*, as befits its subject, is dark, uncomfortable, even disturbing. The stories are set in a Massachusetts college town (clearly Amherst), and the focus is on young men who are in many ways the usual suspects: hearty-partying casual misogynists, macho tribalists, the toxically masculine. But Nugent understands that satire is a means not only of exposing or ridiculing its subject, but of making them, using the rules of their own skewed logic, understandable, even sympathetic. They’re a varied group. There’s the genuinely sweet, universally admired chapter president, Nutella, object of an unsanctioned desire in the brilliant opening story, “God” (and narrator of a subsequent story set years after he leaves college); there’s Swordfish, whose atrocious sex-toy prank during an anti-rape march ends up bringing a wooden house mascot to demonic life in the magical-realist “Ollie the Owl”; there’s Petey, the gung-ho frat officer who’s always up for anything (“The Treasurer”); there’s the thoughtful non-Greek freshman from Long Island (in the poignant “Cassiopeia”) who comes to think of fraternities, despite an instinctive distaste for them, as a potential refuge from the anything-goes ethos of Amherst and wanders one night into a house where he has an utterly unexpected encounter; there are the idiot powers that be in “Hell” who, eager to concoct fresh humiliations for new pledges, invite an alumnus, a naval intelligence officer, to help them—and very soon find themselves contemplating deeper, darker types of initiation rituals than they’d intended. Nugent writes memorable women here, too: the title character in “God”; a wunderkind film director; the homeless, cocaine-selling dropout, Claire, who narrates the final story, “Safe Spaces.” This is a book about the awkward, awful passage between adolescence and adulthood and about the way these unwary, ill-prepared boys negotiate it, or try not to.

Nugent manages—the mark of the master satirist—to be simultaneously compassionate and ruthless. Splendid.

---

Daisy Parsloe, a 34-year-old attractive assistant TV producer, is a bit of a mess, according to her exceedingly judgmental “smart” fridge-freezer. Her face is too wide, she eats too much, and she has bad taste in men. Her fridge—or rather the artificial intelligence that *is* her smart fridge—decides that it will improve her life by finding her a romantic partner worthy of her attention. As that effort continues, the fridge gets bolder in its boundary crossing and decides to help Daisy’s mother, Chloe, whose memory is not what it once was. Daisy’s fridge impersonates Chloe’s fridge-freezer to do so, taking on a P.G. Wodehouse–inspired Jeeves persona and commandeering appliances—including Chloe’s mobile phone—to guide her through the days, reminding her of what she has forgotten, ordering her taxis when necessary, and making sure she stays safe. While the fridge pays lip service to being gender neutral and not wanting to police Daisy’s weight, it holds firm to many gender stereotypes as to the appropriate manner in which people should
behave. The story is split between Daisy’s point of view and the fridge’s point of view, with much repetition about how the fridge is able to enter data-sharing agreements with any nearby smart electronics to follow Daisy and her mother visually (via cameras) and aurally via microphones utilizing the U.K.’s growing Internet of Things network. There is very little narrative tension, and it can be difficult to lose oneself in the story: The fridge is prone to monologues that break the fourth wall, and the characters’ dialogue often runs back and forth in staccato without any indication of who is saying what, so it becomes easy to lose track of who’s speaking.

A book that tries for Jerome K. Jerome’s tongue-in-cheek humor—albeit 21st century and swear-y—but doesn’t quite get there.
“The Second Detective” offers a minimystery, about a private eye looking for a missing girl, replete with the genre’s tropes. Most of the stories are extremely short and meticulously minimalist, but Ridge devotes more real estate to the longest story, “Hey, It’s America!” involving one man’s determination to throw a quirky festival starring Clint Eastwood. Next, we get a big batch of abrupt but ambitiously experimental stories. “Three Prayers for Artists” offers eccentric good wishes for Subway sandwich artists, con artists, and conceptual artists. Most seem like flash fiction, staccato bursts of scenes such as “On Acid,” which reads in its entirety, “I glance at our guru’s finger as he’s pointing at the moon, but then I realize it’s his middle finger pointed at a riot cop and it’s the middle of the afternoon.” The penultimate set of stories starting with “22nd-Century Man” purports to turn some chatbots loose to answer the questions posed in Padgett Powell’s novel in questions, The Interrogative Mood (2009). Finally, Ridge finishes with an acid series of stories that follow around Death as the Grim Reaper grapples with anxiety, work stress, and human resources during a well-earned vacay in LA.

A collection of unpredictable postmodern jests with more than a little pathos underneath the levity.

**BONNIE**
Schwarz, Christina
Atria (352 pp.)
$27.00 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-4767-4545-9

Schwarz’s fictionalized biography of Bonnie Parker, who, with Clyde Barrow, gained notoriety as part of a wave of Depression-era outlaws, will divide readers along generational lines.

For those too young to remember the 1967 movie Bonnie and Clyde, this play-by-play account of the couple’s far-from-successful criminal career offers a grim introduction to a gang of characters hopelessly downtrodden, psychopathic, or sometimes both. Readers who came of age around the time of the iconic film—a mix of comedy, graphic violence, and visual romanticism that made outlaws into larger-than-life romantic figures—will see Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway on every page (as when Bonnie notices Clyde’s dimple for the first time) and will wonder at the necessity of this ploddingly detailed, all-too-earthbound retelling. But the novel’s opening offers even those who remember the movie a fresh, touching view of Bonnie before Clyde—the bright, sensitive child more plucky than headstrong evolving into a young woman still innocent but with “big dreams, no patience.” Briefly married at 16, Bonnie is waitressing in Dallas, Texas, when she meets Clyde, whose courtship is charming and conventional in its first weeks until he’s arrested while sleeping on her (always devoted) mother’s couch. Sent to jail in March 1930, Clyde convinces Bonnie to help him escape. Recaptured, he’s sent to a harsher prison. When he’s released two years later, they hit the road, living off Clyde’s robberies, which often go wrong and sometimes end in someone’s death. They’re joined in their dreary capers by a few hardened criminals but mostly by boys like W.D., riding along for the excitement until implicated too deeply to easily leave. By 1934, Bonnie is destitute, in constant pain from a car accident, drinking and popping pills. Still committed to deluded loser Clyde, she continues writing romantic poetry although her own romantic illusions evaporated long ago.

So many cars and guns, so many screw-ups, so many dead bodies—they all blur together after a while.

**LITTLE EYES**
Schweblin, Samanta
Riverhead (256 pp.)
$26.00 | May 5, 2020
978-0-525-54136-3

A nuanced exploration of anonymous connection and distant intimacy in our heavily accessible yet increasingly isolated lives. Schweblin, a canny observer of both the better and less-savory angels of our nature, asks: Would you rather be a “keeper,” inviting an unknown observer into your home to view your daily routines and private habits through the camera eyes of a “kentuki,” a kind of fuzzy robot animal companion and the latest technocraze, or would you prefer to be a “dweller,” the anonymous controller on the other end, rolling on little rubber wheels through the life of a stranger? Kentukis take the form of animals—crows, dragons, and most aptly, moles; they’re slickly packaged, expensive, desirable, and have the capacity for only a single connection. We spy on a number of these transglobal connections, some brief, as with the Barcelona nursing home director who buys kentukis for his residents, while others span months and are followed throughout the book. One such relationship begins with a dweller in Lima, who displaces the maternal feelings she can’t seem to connect to her adult son onto a young German woman, a keeper, whose abundant affection for her rabbit kentuki gives the Lima woman a sense of belonging. As happens with many new technologies we blithely attach to our lives, few users have really considered the potential consequences of the arrangement before entering into it. But everything imaginable happens through kentukis—adventure, love, rejection, extortion, exploitation, and even more inventive deprivations. As the firecracker ending reminds us, with our real and virtual lives increasingly blurred, any one of those moments could be our own.

Capacious, touching, and disquieting, this is not-so-speculative fiction for an overnetworked and underconnected age.
An intricate blackmail scheme goes off the rails in Sutton's sizzling debut.

**THE LADY UPSTAIRS**

Sutton, Halley
Putnam (304 pp.)
$26.00 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-0-593-18773-9

An intricate blackmail scheme goes off the rails in Sutton's sizzling debut. When Jo met a woman named Lou three years ago, she was drowning in heartbreak and self-loathing. Her boyfriend (and co-worker) had not only dumped her, but he’d also gotten her fired. Lou showed Jo a way to make him pay and reclaim her life, and Jo has never looked back. Now Jo is running her own jobs for the Lady Upstairs’ Staffing Agency, a front for elaborate sexual blackmail schemes designed to entrap some of the wealthiest, and most morally bankrupt, men in Los Angeles. Only Lou knows who the mysterious Lady Upstairs actually is, but as long as the cash keeps flowing, Jo tries not to sweat the small stuff. When a grift goes wrong, leaving Jo with no incriminating photos or video to force her mark’s hand, she does start sweating it, because she owes money to the Lady Upstairs, and a large just went down the drain. To recoup that cash before the Lady resorts to desperate tactics, Jo prepares to run a con on one of the biggest fish in the city. In Sutton’s sweltering LA, where grit and glamour entwine, nothing is free and life is cheap, so a few dirty cops, lots of double dealing, and maybe a little murder are only to be expected. Narrator Jo is a tough cookie, making her flashes of vulnerability, mostly glimpsed in her scenes with Lou,
even more poignant. Sutton’s assured and moody prose often channels the best classic LA noir, but this deliciously tawdry and twisty tale is entirely her own. Readers who savor crime stories featuring complex, unapologetic women will be hooked.

A scorching, knockout noir from an author to watch.

THE SON OF GOOD FORTUNE
Tenorio, Lysley
Ecco/HarperCollins (304 pp.)
$27.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-06-205957-4

An undocumented Filipino American teenager struggles to make sense of his past in order to move into the future.

After spending nine months in the desert of Southern California, 19-year-old Excel Maxino (“like the spreadsheet”) tries sneaking back into his old apartment via the fire escape but finds himself at the business end of a switchblade, wielded by his mother, Maxima. A former D-list star of Philippine action movies, Maxima welcomes Excel back with leftover Panda Express and doesn’t ask any questions about his reappearance. Instead, she must get back to work scamming men on online dating sites to make ends meet. Though Excel doesn’t volunteer the truth of his nine-month excursion, the chapters alternate between his present-day struggles to raise money and his misguided adventure to the desert oasis of Hello City, where he and his girlfriend, Sab, tried to make a life for themselves. This deceptively simple back-and-forth structure yields a rich cast of characters, who quickly populate the world and bring it to life. Gunter, a Serbian immigrant, rehires Excel at The Pie Who Loved Me, a children’s pizzeria with an espionage theme, with hilarious and unfortunate results. Joker, the grandmaster who trained Maxima in martial arts, slips forbidden comic books to Excel before his unfortunate passing. While most interactions within this widening circle of relationships serve to advance the plot, a few of the roles feel a bit forced, as with Gunter’s grandfather Zivko, who studies a dictionary at the pizzeria and slips words and phrases into Excel’s lexicon. But the occasional diversion doesn’t detract from the propulsive prose, captivating characters, and vital details of immigrant life, like the Tagalog phrase for undocumented Philippinos, “TNT,” which stands for tago ng tago: hiding and hiding.

A masterfully constructed story of identity and ambition and an authentic portrait of one unforgettable Filipino family.

SURVIVOR SONG
Tremblay, Paul
William Morrow (320 pp.)
$27.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-06-267916-1

When a virulent and potent form of rabies upends life as we know it in Massachusetts, a pregnant woman and her pediatrician must fight for survival.


Now, in the midst of a real-life health crisis, Tremblay delivers an eerily prophetic story about a mass outbreak of a rage-inducing virus and the havoc that ensues—basically, he’s gone full-on Stephen King by way of 28 Days Later. The story opens in a small, woody community south of Boston where what seemed like a relatively mild rabies problem has jumped to humans, who are driven to violent rages and overtaken by a compulsion to bite as many other victims as possible to spread the disease before they eventually succumb and die within a short time. One of our protagonists is Natalie, a very pregnant woman whose husband is violently murdered by one of the outbreak victims right before her eyes. Desperate, bitten, and infected herself while also in shock, she reaches out to her pediatrician, Dr. Ramola “Rams” Sherman, to help her get a dose of the rabies vaccine before she has the baby or succumbs to the illness. Now it’s a race against time to save Natalie and the baby, all while communities are being ravaged by violence. Meanwhile, the outbreak is exacerbated by “a myopic, sluggish federal bureaucracy further hamstrung by a president unwilling and woefully unequipped to make the rational, science-based decisions necessary.” Encounters with well-meaning strangers and near-death escapes are punctuated by Natalie’s sweet recorded messages to her unborn child. A cinematic scope, scenarios grounded in the real world, and a breathless pace make this thriller one of the must-read titles of the summer.

A prescient, insidious horror novel that takes sheer terror to a whole new level.

SURVIVAL INSTINCTS
Waite, Jen
Dutton (368 pp.)
$26.00 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-5247-4583-7

When a young girl, her mother, and her grandmother are kidnapped, secrets come to the surface as they fight to escape.

Single mother Anne, a therapist, has always been close to her daughter, Thea. But now, not long after the two moved from a small town to a lovely new house in Burlington, Vermont, the 12-year-old has
A riveting and tense examination of identity, violence, and female anger.

THE LIVES OF EDIE PRITCHARD

Watson, Larry
Algonquin (368 pp.)
978-1-61620-902-5

A smart, strong Montana woman is drawn to and obsessed by her; as Edie Dunn, caught in a volatile marriage to a jealous second husband and mother to an unhappy teenage daughter; and as Edie Pritchard, a 60-something grandmother still trying to live on her terms but imposed upon by outside forces. Watson's novel is set against the rugged landscape of Montana, the perfect backdrop for a story about a woman who spends her life running up against and away from mountains of male ego and desire. Smart and decisive but too often defined by her good looks, Edie appears at three different points in time: As Edie Linderman, a young wife to Dean, a man whose twin brother is drawn to and obsessed by her; as Edie Dunn, caught in a volatile marriage to a jealous second husband and mother to an unhappy teenage daughter; and as Edie Pritchard, a 60-something grandmother still trying to live on her terms but imposed upon by family and the past. As they do to all of us, outside forces buffet Edie's peace of mind and forward momentum. In each segment, she faces conflict: an ugly random encounter with strangers and the inexplicable behavior of men; a tragic premature death; a shooting, a gang rape, and a terrible revenge plot. Both aspects of Edie's peace are well handled, but do they really go together? When you get a bereaved dad dressed up in a ludicrous cowboy outfit intervening to rescue his son from being gunned down by the police you have to wonder.

An eccentric, well-written small-town novel jam-packed with appealing characters and their dreams.

THE BIG DOOR PRIZE

Walsh, M.O.
Putnam (384 pp.)
978-0-7352-1848-2

When a photo booth–type machine in the grocery store starts spitting out predictions of people's true callings, the residents of Deerfield, Louisiana, are deeply affected.

"In the way that aspiring novelists might like to imagine their work someday being discussed in a sophomore literature class...or the way philosophers like to chart the evolution of thought from Socrates to Plato to Jay-Z...Douglas also liked to imagine himself one day becoming part of some traceable lineage." Douglas Hubbard, a happily married high school history teacher, has a fantasy of becoming a famous jazz trombone player. He's even signed up for lessons. Unlike the other dreamers in his little town, he came up with this idea all by himself, on his 40th birthday. His wife and many of his neighbors, on the other hand, are running around little blue slips of paper produced by a machine called the DNAMIX. They say things like ROYALTY, CARPENTER, LOVER, and MAGICIAN, and because of them the school principal, the mayor, and many others in Deerfield are quitting their jobs, buying costumes, and planning major life changes. There's something a little strange about Walsh's follow-up to his remarkable first novel, My Sunshine Away (2015). On one hand, it has a warm, folksy, Fannie Flagg–type feeling, complete with John Prine references galore (the title is one) and a goofy touch of magic. On the other hand, like the author's debut, it addresses very serious and disturbing issues. It opens with the death of a teenager, as experienced by his twin, and later adds intimations of a school shooting, a gang rape, and a terrible revenge plot. Both aspects are well handled, but do they really go together? When you get a bereaved dad dressed up in a ludicrous cowboy outfit intervening to rescue his son from being gunned down by the police you have to wonder.

A riveting and tense examination of identity, violence, and female anger.
THE LOST AND FOUND BOOKSHOP
Wiggs, Susan
Morrow/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
$27.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-06-291409-5

With her promotion to vice president of digital inventory at a Sonoma winery, Natalie Harper finally has the financial security she's always wanted, but a sudden tragedy sends her home to rescue her late mother's charming bookstore.

Once in San Francisco, Natalie moves back into her childhood home, an eclectic set of apartments above the bookshop, a home she shares with her grandfather Andrew, who is suffering from dementia and other mysterious ailments. Blythe, Natalie's mother, loved books, but she was not a savvy businesswoman. Natalie arrives to find unpaid bills and back taxes. Housed in the historic Sunrose Building, the bookshop certainly has stories of its own to tell: Originally a saloon and brothel, it was eventually bought by Natalie's great-grandparents, who converted it into a home and apothecary. Luckily, "hammer for hire" Peach Gallagher shows up. Strong and gorgeous, the contractor catches Natalie's eye, and he certainly is drawn to the curly-haired proprietor. But Peach doesn't date clients, and Natalie is gun-shy from her previous relationship. Plus, she's already met Peach's adorable little girl, Dorothy. Natalie isn't about to break up a marriage, but she doesn't know Peach is actually divorced. Wiggs skillfully manipulates the stock in trade of a master romance novelist as she orchestrates Peach and Natalie's inevitable love story. To challenge Peach, enter Trevor Dashwood, a gorgeous and wealthy children's book author, whose books have already won Dorothy's heart. Hosting a book signing with Trevor might help the store's bottom line. Meanwhile, Natalie, Peach, and Andrew find historical artifacts hidden in the Sunrose building's walls. Will it be enough to save the store?

A gentle love story perfect for anyone looking for love amid personal, family, and financial crises.

SENSATION MACHINES
Wilson, Adam
Soho (384 pp.)
$27.00 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-64129-165-1

In the midst of a potential social revolution, a husband and wife on the downside of a bad marriage find themselves at odds.

Here we find a perhaps-prescient tale of murder and deceit set during a political upheaval in the near-future United States. There are hints of events to come, with drone deliveries and social uprisings as well as a critical plot involving the potential passing of a bill authorizing a universal basic income for all Americans. The two critical players are Michael Mixner, a Wall Street trader fallen dangerously into debt, and his wife, Wendy, a marketing guru soldiering on despite PTSD from a recent stillbirth. This marriage between a drug-added former hip-hop artist–turned-trader and an anxiety-ridden marketing whiz is crumbling, but so is the community around them. The pivotal event comes when Michael's best friend, a wealthy gay activist named Ricky, is shot to death after violent protestors interrupt the party of some wealthy elites. It's not a mystery—Wilson calls out the killer in plain sight but wraps the drama in a web of familial deceit, societal dismay, and economic inequality that renders no one innocent. The nexus is Michael's plot to get rich via a scheme involving a cryptocurrency in a virtual reality game that just happens to be the brainchild of his wife's new client. Wendy has been hired to launch a stealth campaign dubbed Project Pinky, designed to derail the UBI bill. The narrative is dripping with drama, not least due to Wendy's unapologetic seizure of her own fate in the wake of Michael's recklessness. Wilson creates a deft juxtaposition of contemporary American classes on par with Richard Price's Lush Life, but whether readers approach it as a flawed crime drama or a satire of American inequality, they may find that implausible plot threads and unanswered questions leave them dissatisfied with the experience.

An ambitious but erratic portrayal of a society gone wrong with no resolution in sight.

NOT LIKE THE MOVIES
Winfrey, Kerry
Berkley (320 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-984804-04-4

A Columbus, Ohio, woman who became the unwitting inspiration for a new rom-com struggles with all the ways her real life doesn't seem destined for a happily-ever-after ending.

At almost 30 years old, Chloe Sanderson doesn't have the life she expected. Her mother disappeared from her and her twin brother Milo's lives when they were just 10, and her father, whom she loves, was too shell-shocked to handle the responsibility. So Chloe, just a child herself, took care of them. Now she's trying to finish her college degree online, working in a coffee shop that she loves, and spending almost all her money and mental energy on her dad, who now has Alzheimer's disease and is staying at an assisted living residence where Tracey, her ex-girlfriend, works. She's in constant turmoil about her need to run to her dad's side every time Tracey calls when every iota of her being just wants to ignore the demands on her time and instead start a relationship with her boss, Nick, who's very interested in her. Her should-I/should-I-not anguish is significantly complicated by the fact that her best friend, Annie, has written a soon-to-premiere rom-com, Coffee Girl, that imagines a world where Chloe and Nick (well Zoe and Rick) do get together. Fans of author Winfrey’s previous book, Waiting for Tom Hanks (2019),...
will recognize Chloe, Nick, and Annie, though this time Chloe is the heroine and Annie the sidekick. Winfrey excels at upending typical romantic comedy tropes, and Chloe is a complicated, realistic, believable character. Sitcoms, movies, and music are all heavily referenced in the story; fans of the TV series *New Girl* will no doubt love this book.

A quirky novel perfect for rom-com fans and readers looking for a little sweet escapism.

**THE STONE GIRL**

Wittenborn, Dirk  
Norton (480 pp.)  
$27.95 | Jun. 16, 2020  
978-1-324-00581-0

In Wittenborn’s TV-ready novel, an Adirondack hunting club shelters a cabal of wealthy misogynists.

Growing up in the backwoods of Rangeley, New York, Evie Quimby, has been raised to trap, fish, and hunt—and to be resourceful and wary. Her adoptive parents are known as the town hippies. One night in 2001, when she’s 17, Evie narrowly escapes being molested by a group of local slackers when Lulu Mannheim intervenes. Lulu owns Valhalla, a mansion on acres of pristine Sister Lakes property. The two women form an unlikely friendship, and Evie first sees Lulu’s attorney, Win Langley, as an avuncular, mentoring figure. But readers know, from an earlier chapter, that Win is a sociopath—apparently it’s his mother’s fault—who was groomed by Porter Moran, an older Wall Street investment banker who hires only handsome young men without scruples. Moran and Langley have recruited a number of other morally challenged males to join the exclusive Mohawk Club, whose lodge and acreage adjoins Lulu’s property. The group style themselves as the Lost Boys. Lulu’s fiancé, Charlie, a Langley protégé, turns up dead, wearing Lulu’s wedding dress. Although she has every reason to suspect Langley in Charlie’s “suicide,” Evie, incredibly, trusts him. That trust is shattered when, under the guise of encouraging her nascent art-restoration career, Langley drugs and rapes her. But Langley, with his sexual proclivities, is an outlier—the Lost Boys’ main mission is financial, though the details of their shenanigans remain frustratingly opaque. Seventeen years later, Evie’s quest to find a bone-marrow donor for her cancer-stricken 14-year-old daughter Chloe precipitates dizzying complications. We’re soon in high-concept thriller territory with only glancing nods to subtext. Evie is a well-rounded, fully motivated character, but Lulu is a stereotypical good rich girl, and the Lost Boys are one-dimensional scoundrels.

A fictional validation of the phrase “more money than brains.”

**DANGEROUS PURSUITS**

Bannister, Jo  
Severn House (240 pp.)  
$28.99 | Jun. 30, 2020  
978-0-7278-9087-0

The assault of a Norbold teenager turns her tiny household upside down and introduces deadly complications for PC Hazel Best.

Grabbed by a man who plants himself between her and her home, Rachel Somers, 17, takes off into the nearby forest, followed by architect Gethin Phillips, the longtime domestic partner of her mother, hotel owner Pru Somers. Soon after Rachel runs from the woods into the arms of used bookseller Gabriel Ash, a friend of Hazel’s, traumatized but not seriously hurt, DC Emma Friend finds Phillips bashed to death by a tree limb the Meadowvale police know they’re never going to find. A second attack reported a few days later by 15-year-old Sky Pascoe makes DCI Dave Gorman fear his department is looking at a serial rapist. But questions and contradictions raised by the stories told by Rachel, a gifted pianist, and her relentless stage-door mother make both Gorman and Hazel, returned from a leave in Cambridgeshire after her last case, wonder if the situation’s both simpler and more complicated than that. Could the attack on Rachel have been only a smoke screen for the criminal’s real target, the murder of Phillips? Or is it possible that Phillips ran after Rachel for some other reason than to rescue her? Hazel, not one to bear wrongs patiently, will seriously endanger her quest for assignment to Meadowvale CID before justice is done.

Fine, no-frills detective work that repeatedly throws disturbing new lights on every member of its limited cast.

**WITCH HUNT**

Conte, Cate  
Kensington (304 pp.)  
$7.99 paper | Jun. 30, 2020  
978-1-4967-1760-3

Magic and mayhem collide when the owner of a Connecticut crystal shop is arrested for murder and her ghostly mother comes to her rescue.

Though her store is strictly about healing and feeling, not everyone is a fan of Violet Mooney’s Full Moon crystal shop, as she learns when town official Carla Fernandez yells at her about some supposed séance one morning when Violet’s just trying to caffeiniate. Carla’s aura is a bright blue that some might see as evincing creativity but Violet is seasoned enough to know speaks of Carla’s strong opinions, which Carla seems more than willing to speak
of herself. Before Violet can fret too much about the fallout from Carla’s verbal firestorm, she’s being asked by North Harbor police about Carla’s murder. But wait, Carla’s been killed? It seems so, and when the police bring in Violet—whose alibi is that she was napping—as a likely suspect, an unlikely ally comes to Violet’s aid: her mother, Fiona Ravenstar. Accompanied by Violet’s teenage sister, Zoe, Fiona ducks out of her responsibilities in the astral realm to help the daughter she hasn’t seen since she was 5. Literally hasn’t seen, because Violet’s recently deceased grandmother, Abigail Moonstone, evidently cast a spell blocking Violet from Fiona’s visions. Now that Fiona can see her daughter’s in trouble, she’s more than ready to help. But Violet isn’t sure she wants help from a mother she’s always been told abandoned her, and Fiona can’t help Violet until she earns her daughter’s trust.

Zippy and fun, with an otherworldly hook that’s further enhanced by characters with a little magic of their own.

DEATH COMES TO DURHAM

*DAMS, Jeanne M.*
Severn House (224 pp.)
$28.99 | May 29, 2020
978-0-7278-8925-6

Sleuths with a highly developed sense of fairness fight prejudice.

During a visit to see their friend David Tregarth, a retired policeman in the ancient English city of Durham, American expatriate Dorothy Martin and her husband, former chief constable Alan Nesbit, are introduced to Tregarth’s great-aunt Amanda, who suffers from dementia and lives in the posh Milton Home, where she is lovingly cared for until she is accused of murdering Blake Armstrong, a semiretired geriatric doctor with a dodgy reputation. Amanda, who’s naturally upset, is the perfect scapegoat since she has no memory of smothering the doctor with a pillow and would never be prosecuted even if she had. While the sleuthing duo enjoy the historic beauties of Durham, they work to clear Amanda, who looks no guiltier than all the old ladies the doctor cared for and methodically bilked. The couple make friends with Timothy Hayes, an entertaining castle guide and theology student who must struggle to pay his tuition because his mother’s best friend changed her will favoring Timothy and left her estate to Dr. Armstrong. Then Timothy’s friend Eileen Walsh, who had reported a drowning in the nearby river, reveals that she saw Dr. Armstrong nearby. When a second patient is attacked and Amanda’s put on notice to find another home, Dorothy uses her ability to extract information to help the police find the truth.

A travelogue, a complex mystery, and an empathetic look at the horrific nature of dementia.

YOUNG BLOOD

*FIELDS, Tricia*
Severn House (240 pp.)
$28.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-7278-9246-1

A police veteran and a distraught mother take on a doctor obsessed with finding the fountain of youth.

Maggie Wise’s decision to retire to Santa Cruz, the Florida town where her husband tried and failed to beat cancer, might very well belie her name. After 25 years in law enforcement, Maggie’s settled into a new routine as a part-time radio talk show host for WKQE and a part-time costumer at a strip club that gives her far too much time to drink and brood about her husband. The man’s she seeing, Mark Hamilton, is a police chief who can’t help thinking that Maggie’s dating him because she misses her old job. She proves him at least partly right when two little girls disappear and Maggie takes up Kelly O’Neal, one of their mothers, as a cause. Maggie helps trace the disappearance and reappearance of Kelly’s 10-year-old daughter to Dr. Oscar LeBlanc, who’s devoted his life to reversing the aging process and relies, like a white-coated vampire, on young blood to get what he needs to treat aging Floridians for large sums. Despite Mark’s warnings to leave it alone, Maggie’s first case as an ex-cop tosses her into a sea of embezzlement, implausible medicine, and murder as she veers from professional insight to emotional neediness until you’re torn between hugging her and shaking her.

Though she keeps digging herself in more and more deeply, the heroine’s outsized heart wins forgiveness for her missteps.

A SPRINKLING OF MURDER

*GERBER, Daryl Wood*
Kensington (304 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Jun. 30, 2020
978-1-4967-2634-6

When the owner of a nearby shop is killed in Courtney Kelly’s fairy garden store, she must join forces with her fairy friend to solve the crime.

Courtney, the proprietor of the Open Your Imagination fairy garden store, doesn’t just believe that fairies are real; she has proof to share. Her store is home to Fiona, a mischievous fairy who’s in a sort of remedial fairy-in-training program to get her adult wings. Apparently her propensity for pranks in fairy school has obliged her to demonstrate to the queen fairy that she’s serious about her do-gooding duties. When Courtney becomes a suspect in the murder of Mick Watkins, the owner of the Wizard of Paws grooming salon, it seems like the perfect time for Fiona to give Courtney an assist that the queen fairy will notice. If Courtney’s innocent, though, who’s to blame? When Courtney and Fiona
begin to investigate, they find many too many suspects, from Mick’s wife, Emily, who’s angry about his recent affair, to Mick and Courtney’s landlord, who wanted Mick’s business out. In this old-fashioned cozy, the whos and why’s won’t be a surprise. Nor will the 25 pages of appended recipes, which complement the fairy focus of the story with some serious calories.

Faries flutter throughout the first in this by-the-book series.

**DEATH OF A PROMINENT CITIZEN**

*Harrison, Cora*

Severn House (224 pp.)

$28.99 | Jul. 7, 2020

978-0-7278-8924-9

A nun uses her sleuthing skills to solve the murder of her cousin in the 1920s.

Ireland may be free from English rule, but there’s unrest among the poor, who live in shocking conditions. At a slum clearance meeting, the Reverend Mother’s cousin Charlotte Hendrick, a slumlord, is represented by her companion/housekeeper Julie Clancy, another cousin, who begs the Reverend Mother for help influencing Charlotte, who has announced plans to change her will. Instead of dividing her wealth equally among seven close relatives, including the Reverend Mother and Charlotte, she now proposes that whichever of them makes the best case for their use of the money will get the lot. The bishop insists that the Reverend Mother attend a meeting at Charlotte’s mansion to make a pitch even though she thinks Charlotte’s already made up her mind. On that same night, the Reverend Mother’s former pupil Eileen MacSweeney gets roped into minding the megaphone at a college demonstration that ends in a riot and the murder of a landlord not far from Charlotte’s house. When Charlotte’s throat is cut in a locked room the morning after the cousins make their pitches, the Reverend Mother calls in her old friend Inspector Patrick Cashman. Charlotte’s open window suggests the possibility that she was the victim of an outside killer. But except for the Reverend Mother and the wealthy cousin who shared her room, the others are all suspects, especially poor Julie, who might have been left penniless by the new will. Patrick follows the evidence, but the Reverend Mother has her own opinion.

A classic golden-age mystery whose shocking solution will appeal to fans of Christie and Sayers.

**AN EXQUISITE CORPSE**

*Harrison, Helen A.*

Poisoned Pen (320 pp.)

$14.99 paper | Jul. 7, 2020

978-1-7282-1400-9

Surreal shenanigans surround the murder of a prominent Cuban painter.

New York, 1943. French writer Andre Breton discovers the body of his friend Wifredo Lam at Lam’s apartment on West 10th Street in Greenwich Village. Uncertain how to proceed, Breton goes to his friend Roberto Matta’s place, where he enlists Marcel Duchamp to check out the scene. After reporting the body at the 6th Precinct, the duo spend most of the wee hours dictating statements. As Harrison’s focus shifts to the murder probe, readers follow married detectives Juanita Diaz and Brian Fitzgerald and a team of cops as they unravel the case and dip entertainingly into Manhattan’s vibrant subcultures. Fitz and Diaz go to East Harlem to question “spiritual advisor” Madame Carmen, who knows everyone in the city, about the background of Lam, a Cuban national. Meanwhile, a cop named Dillon is watching the Chilean Matta, who knows more than he’s told police. He and his friend David Hare discuss a certain important package in the possession of Carlos Solana, who was freaked out to discover Lam’s corpse before Breton did. Harrison’s short, brisk chapters keep the action moving from cons to cops to colorful characters in between. As the case becomes increasingly tangled, the path to its solution runs through Midtown, Chinatown, and elsewhere, and the cast of real art-world characters expands to include Lee Krasner, Max Ernst, and more.

Harrison writes with panache, mixing real artists with her vivid creations.

**FALSE CONCLUSION**

*Heley, Veronica*

Severn House (240 pp.)

$28.99 | Jul. 7, 2020

978-0-7278-8974-4

Kindhearted Bea Abbot takes on yet another worthy cause.

As owner of a well-regarded domestic services agency, Bea already has a lot on her plate. But she never hesitated when her old friend Leon Holland asked her to serve as guardian for his orphaned niece, Bernice. Truth be told, middle-aged Bea enjoys having the lively teenager around—not that she’s around all that much, since she’s a star student at a prestigious boarding school. So Bea’s more than a little disappointed when wealthy, imperious April Trescott insists on driving Bernice home from school instead of letting Bea collect her. Bernice has been given the dubious honor of serving as roommate to April’s niece, Evelina, a fellow orphan, who needs supervision because she suffers from epilepsy. April
also presses Bernice to accept an invitation to Evelina’s 16th birthday party, an event Bernice would just as soon skip. But the week before the party, Bea gets an emergency call from April begging her to let Evelina stay with her for a few days while the family sorts out the death of April’s brother, Constant, who was Evelina’s legal guardian. The more time the dull, ill-dressed, ill-groomed Evelina stays in their house, the more Bea and Bernice suspect that she’s not as impaired as her aunt wants them to think and the more Bea wonders whether Bernice’s assignment as Evelina’s roommate was entirely random. With the help of her ex-husband, Piers, another lost soul who falls intermittently under her care, Bea unearths a plot against her family as finely calculated as it is evil.

**Shocking yet not really surprising.**

**DEAD LAST**
**Lamb, Amanda**
Light Messages (256 pp.)
$14.99 paper | May 12, 2020
978-1-61153-342-2

Maddie Arnette stops in the middle of running a marathon to help a woman who has fallen and is shocked when she whispers "My husband is trying to kill me." Maddie is a television reporter for a small North Carolina television station. After the death of her husband, she traded her crime beat for feature reporting, hoping it would cause less stress and give her more time for her 10-year-old twins. But her curiosity, coupled with memories of her own mother, compels Maddie to investigate and help Suzanne. Suzanne claims her husband, a doctor, is abusive and won't give her a divorce. But Maddie's investigation brings only more questions and inconsistencies. The author, herself a television reporter, gets the details about Maddie's job right and has fun with her "amazing animals" beat—though there's perhaps a bit too much about these stories. The prose is serviceable, the dialogue is credible, and Maddie is likable and believable.

**While not gripping, this debut shows enough promise to encourage readers to follow along if it turns into a series.**

**ONCE YOU GO THIS FAR**
**Lepionka, Kristen**
Minotaur (320 pp.)
$26.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-250-30937-2

Looking into the death of a woman tied to a cultish new church leads an investigator to wonder if the murder is connected to something closer to home. Her background as a cop’s daughter has left Columbus PI Roxane Weary always on alert. When fellow hiker—well, walker, really—Rebecca Newsome dies in a local park, Roxane isn't sure whether she fell or was pushed into the ravine where her body was found. Rebecca's daughter, Maggie, certain that it's the latter, hires Roxane to investigate with a view toward proving that Rebecca's second ex-husband, Keir Metcalf, killed her, as Maggie's certain he did. As Roxane digs into Rebecca's background, she links the family to a church that seems more like a cult, complete with a charismatic leader whose background may be shady. Roxane's own background is marked by her ongoing will-they, won't-they relationship with Tom, her dead father's former colleague. It's hard for Roxane to make the leap of faith to commit and even harder when she learns that Tom's been keeping one last secret for her dad. Though Roxane's digging into the church group seems to promise danger, there's not much suspense, and her determination to work the case even after Maggie asks her to quit clearly represents a road that's already been too well trodden in the series to generate much excitement. Roxane may be surprised that the murder is so personal, but it's unlikely that her readers will be.

**The latest case for this hard-nosed desperado of an investigator reads a lot like the case before.**

**BORROWED TIME**
**Mark, David**
Severn House (240 pp.)
$28.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-7278-8995-9

A man searching for his birthparents is drawn into a world of confusion and horror.

At 36, Adam Nunn is still looking for his place in life. Clever and attractive, he’s drifted since college. He lives with his girlfriend, Zara, and her children, but he also has a child of his own with Grace Senoy, a pal from college. When Adam's father, who has dementia, tells him he was adopted and his mother refuses to talk about it, he hires private investigator Larry Paris to dig up the truth. When the PI turns up dead in a pond known as a dumping ground for mob hits in the 1970s, Adam is arrested. With Grace’s help, he sets out to work the case on his own, following a path that leads to the infamous crime family of Francis Jardine. Now that the crime lord is close to death, his empire is run by his daughter, Alison, with help from Irons, a loyal family servant so badly disfigured that most people flinch when they see him. After getting beaten up by Alison’s son and rescued by Irons, Adam meets Alison and learns about his parentage: He’s the son of Alison’s dearly loved friend Pamela, who was raped when they were 15, gave birth to Adam, and then killed herself. Irons, who loved Pamela, went to prison for killing her attacker. But did he get the right man?

A wild, brutal, fascinating tale of death, betrayal, and love.
FIRE AND VENGEANCE
McCaw, Robert
Oceanview (336 pp.)
$26.95 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-60809-368-7

Who's responsible for the elementary school explosion, and why are persons of interest turning up dead?

On the big island of Hawai‘i, Chief Detective Koa Kāne rushes to the KonaWili School in response to reports of disaster in the wake of Hurricane Ida. An explosion has destroyed the structure, killing or injuring everyone inside. Koa learns that the school was heedlessly built upon a volcanic vault, and with improper concrete walls to boot. The builders must have known that the construction was reckless, but who's ultimately responsible? Righteous Koa decides to confront the general contractor, Hank Boyle, before going to the mayor and governor. He and junior detective Piki break down the door at Boyle's home to find his corpse hanging from the ceiling by an electrical cord. Though the scene's been staged to look like a suicide, Koa notices details that indicate murder. A meeting with the mayor and other politicos is unsatisfying because they act more interested in closure than in justice. In the meantime, the clock is ticking, for those responsible for the KonaWili disaster are wasting no time in covering their tracks. The pressure on Koa increases with the news that his brother Ikaika, currently in prison, must undergo surgery for a brain tumor. Then Koa gets an urgent call from Piki telling him that Arthur Witherspoon, the architect on the school project, has been brazenly shot to death in his home while his wife was upstairs. Can the ruthless killer be stopped before the body count rises further?

McCaw's third spices its by-the-numbers plot with interesting local details and a cracking pace.

MURDER AT BLACKWATER BEND
McKenna, Clara
Kensington (304 pp.)
$26.00 | Jun. 30, 2020
978-1-4967-1778-8

A spirited American heiress who's shocked the stuffy Edwardian aristocracy turns to detection once more.

Stella Kendrick's social-climbing father has arranged her marriage to Viscount "Lyndy" Lyndhurst, whose financially strapped family needs an infusion of filthy lucre. The couple unexpectedly find themselves falling in love, but Stella is constantly criticized by Lyndy's mother, Lady Atherly, who'd much prefer the beautiful, sly Lady Phillipa Fairbrother as a daughter-in-law. As Stella rushes off from a party, her beloved horse is bitten by an adder. Harvey Milkham, aka the snakecatcher, saves the horse but returns home to find his cottage destroyed by a fire he blames on Lord Fairbrother. Much to the annoyance of breeder George Parley, Fairbrother's inferior pony wins the 1905 New Forest Pony Challenge Cup. So when Stella finds Fairbrother murdered while fishing with Lyndy, Parley is an obvious suspect. When Lady Phillipa is informed of Fairbrother's death, she accuses Harvey even as she remains remarkably undisturbed. Watching Phillipa use one of Lyndy's handkerchiefs to wipe away her crocodile tears, Stella wonders if she's been mistaken in his feelings for her. Unwilling to see Harvey falsely accused, Stella puts her working relationship with Inspector Brown to good use. She and Lyndy nose around and shortly uncover plenty of surprising motives for murder.

Stock characters still offer oodles of charisma in a neat combination of mystery and romance.

THE MOLTEN CITY
Nickson, Chris
Severn House (224 pp.)
$28.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-7278-8976-8

A police officer with a deep love for his home city juggles several difficult cases.

As Detective Superintendent Tom Harper tirelessly works his job, outside forces are about to roil Leeds in 1908. Harper's oldest friend suddenly dies, and his force is severely tested by the coming visit of Prime Minister Herbert Asquith. As desperate unemployed men and a group of determined suffragettes seeking publicity prepare separate demonstrations, Harper's curiosity is piqued by an anonymous letter claiming that a wealthy family's son was actually stolen from a poor family as a child. Investigations reveal that the wealthy family's daughter was also stolen. Both crimes were covered up by Adam Taylor, a bent cop long since fired, but before Harper can question Taylor, he's found dead. Harper and his squad spend as much time as possible investigating the ex-cop's murder despite the many hours they must devote to preparations for the prime minister's visit. Harper's wife, Annabelle, bored since she gave up her job as a Poor Law guardian, is seriously considering the lucrative offer she's received to sell the pub she owns. Although the Harpers' daughter is 16 and passionate about the suffragette cause, they forbid her to go to the demonstration. Harper, stretched to his limit with so many problems to ponder, emerges battered but unbowed.

Social commentary and period detail enhance a solid, thoughtful procedural.
A copycat killing of a teenager 25 years after the original murder reopens old wounds in a small British town.

You hear a lot about mean girls, but in North’s follow-up to The Whisper Man (2019), it’s the boys who are a bunch of creeps. Back in his school days, 14-year-old Paul Adams and his best friend, James—a couple of losers—fell in with a small, nasty crowd led by a charismatic, seemingly psychic, and possibly homicidal weirdo named Charlie Crabtree. Charlie trained his group in the keeping of dream diaries and the techniques of lucid dreaming, and ultimately one of the friends ended up dead. The local scary woods, known as The Shadows, and a wild pattern of bloody handprints, known as Red Hands, were involved. As soon as he possibly could, Paul packed up for college and never went back, not even once. When he is forced by his elderly mother’s fall to return to Gritten Park 25 year later, there is only one consolation—he reconnects with Jenny, the bookish girl with whom he bonded over a shared love of Stephen King. (Their conversation about the King oeuvre is one of the most charming parts of the book.) Meanwhile, on a parallel track, Detective Amanda Beck is investigating the recent murder of a teenage boy in the town of Featherbank. On message boards used by those close to the incident, someone with the handle CC666 claims to have been present at the original Red Hands murder so long ago. No one has seen Charlie Crabtree in 25 years...could this be him? The complicated backstory and new characters introduced late in the game to explain the increasingly confusing facts are not great. But the recourse to the ol’ “and then I woke up” tactic to pull one over on the reader is worse.

Despite several interesting characters, the suspense plot lacks an engaging emotional core.

**MUZZLED**

*Rosenfelt, David*

Minnatur (304 pp.)

$27.99 | Jul. 7, 2020

978-1-250-25711-6

Paterson’s laziest lawyer, Andy Carpenter, is dragged from sort-of-retirement back to sort-of-work by one of the world’s most unlikely dog lovers.

Weeks after three top employees of Pharmacon—Alex Vogel, Stephen Mellman, and Robert Giarrusso—are blown up aboard Vogel’s boat off Long Beach Island, speech therapist Beth Morris, whose obsessive hobby is reuniting lost dogs with their owners, gets a phone call from Daniel Simmons claiming ownership of Lucy, a yellow Lab Andy’s Tara Foundation has been sheltering. That would be perfectly normal and even great news if Beth didn’t recognize Simmons’ voice as that of Alex Vogel. At a hastily arranged reunion with Lucy, Vogel admits he escaped the blast that destroyed his boat after the two colleagues who’d been planning to launch a new company with him had already been shot. Not surprisingly, he’s arrested for their murders, leaving Andy with an awful lot of circumstantial evidence to explain. Since Rosenfelt obligingly identifies the real killers as Charlie Phillips and Orlando Bledsoe and since Vogel had recently been dating Carla D’Antoni, the late girlfriend of premier New Jersey mobster Joseph Russo Jr., the only mystery is what pharmaceutical secret provided the motive for the murder. And even that secret is broadly hinted when Pharmacon Founder and CEO Eric Buckner tells Andy that the company’s on the verge of releasing Loraxil, a medication for antibiotic-resistant infections. The resulting complications will appeal mainly to readers sheltering in place over their fears of other infections today’s headlines might have told them about.

One of Rosenfelt’s least suspenseful cases despite its unsettlingly serendipitous relevance to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS**

*Spencer, Sally*

Severn House (224 pp.)

$28.99 | May 29, 2020

978-0-7278-8949-2

An Oxford graduate investigates a professor’s death.

Jennifer Redhead’s years at Oxford left the working-class girl from the north of England with a profound distaste for anyone posh, pompous, or pretentious. So at first the private detective isn’t inclined to accept a commission from Julia Pemberton, who teaches physics at Cambridge, to find her mother’s killer. But after holding her own in a verbal sparring match with the eminent physicist, and after earning the blessing of DCI Ken Macintosh of the Thames Valley police, Jennie decides to look into the cold case. She learns that Julia’s parents are also academics: Dr. Derek Stockton a rather prosaic professor of religion, and Dr. Grace Stockton a somewhat less conventional anthropologist, whose early years growing up in Papua New Guinea marked her more deeply than even her husband realized. Still, it was not her earliest years but a relationship with a down-and-outer named Jane that developed when both were young mothers during the World War II bombings of London that lays the foundation for Grace’s tragic end. Readers who can get past Jennie’s inveterate reverse snobbery will be treated to a complex tale of good people who make bad decisions for reasons even they don’t completely understand.

Spencer telegraphs some of her plot twists too early but sneaks others under the radar for a series of delightful jolts.
The onstage tragedy in Christopher Marlowe’s new play is rivaled by dark offstage mysteries swirling around him.

**THE RECKONING**

Developers upend the life of a feisty Gulf Coast native.

There’s a reason Blanche Murninghan’s cousin Jack calls her “Bang.” When she gets mad, it’s an event to rival a Santa Maria Island sunset—and it happens about as often. Right now, her irritation has two distinct sources. First, shady entrepreneur Sergi Langstrom is taking his dog-and-pony show to town hall, trying to persuade the islanders that the pink-and-turquoise mall and designer homes his company plans to build will increase the value of their more modest properties. The last thing Blanche wants is overscaled monstrosities crowding her shorefront cabin on Tuna Street, where she lived with her grandma Maeve after her mother’s death and where she continues to live even after Maeve’s passing—and she doesn’t mind looking Sergi in his Bradley Cooper blue eyes to tell him so. But even as she fulminates over Sergi’s machinations, a second blow falls. Bob Blankenship is found in his car with a broken neck. Blanche teams up with Liza Kramer, her sister is kidnapped, but her real problems begin when the sister returns. On top of that, Vanessa gets bizarre phone calls, and a murder takes place. On top of that, Vanessa realizes she still has feelings for Christian. This amateurish effort is marred by obvious plotting but especially by unrealistic dialogue that is used to introduce facts: “No. I’ve wanted to attend the American Academy of Dramatic Arts since I was twelve and I’ve been lucky enough to be accepted” might be the way a person would talk to a stranger, but not to her sister.

Clichéd characters and clunky dialogue.

**SAVING TUNA STREET**

*SAVING TUNA STREET*
*Sullivan, Nancy Nau*

Light Messages (282 pp.)
$14.99 paper | Jun. 23, 2020
978-1-6153-330-9

Developers upend the life of a feisty Gulf Coast native.

There’s a reason Blanche Murninghan’s cousin Jack calls her “Bang.” When she gets mad, it’s an event to rival a Santa Maria Island sunset—and it happens about as often. Right now, her irritation has two distinct sources. First, shady entrepreneur Sergi Langstrom is taking his dog-and-pony show to town hall, trying to persuade the islanders that the pink-and-turquoise mall and designer homes his company plans to build will increase the value of their more modest properties. The last thing Blanche wants is overscaled monstrosities crowding her shorefront cabin on Tuna Street, where she lived with her grandma Maeve after her mother’s death and where she continues to live even after Maeve’s passing—and she doesn’t mind looking Sergi in his Bradley Cooper blue eyes to tell him so. But even as she fulminates over Sergi’s machinations, a second blow falls. Bob Blankenship is found in his car with a broken neck. Blanche teams up with Liza Kramer, her sister is kidnapped, but her real problems begin when the sister returns. On top of that, Vanessa gets bizarre phone calls, and a murder takes place. On top of that, Vanessa realizes she still has feelings for Christian. This amateurish effort is marred by obvious plotting but especially by unrealistic dialogue that is used to introduce facts: “No. I’ve wanted to attend the American Academy of Dramatic Arts since I was twelve and I’ve been lucky enough to be accepted” might be the way a person would talk to a stranger, but not to her sister.

Clichéd characters and clunky dialogue.

**THE RECKONING**

*Trow, M.J.*

Creme de la Crime (224 pp.)
$28.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-78029-129-1

The onstage tragedy in Christopher Marlowe’s new play is rivaled by dark offstage mysteries swirling around him.

1592. Problems plague Kit Marlowe’s new theatrical project from the start. At the elderly Queen Elizabeth’s insistence, Marlowe’s been saddled with the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, a troupe of inexperienced actors. His decision to produce his friend and housemate Thomas Kyd’s play *The Spanish Tragedy* is rejected, leading to a difficult conversation with Kyd and the harder challenge of writing a new play. Marlowe comes up with *The Troublesome Reign and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second, King of England*. John Foxe, one of his actors, is found dead with a knife sticking out of him in the whorehouse of Mistress Isam. Moll, the sweet blonde prostitute who serviced Foxe, is both inconsolable and unhelpful in Marlowe’s efforts to get some insight into the killing, but the sometime sleuth is determined to learn more. Things take an even darker turn when Moll dies one cold night while on the job. The details her grief-stricken friend Jane lays out are murky, and Jane’s description of Moll’s last client is too generic to be helpful. Meanwhile, the show must go on. Rigorous rehearsals alternate with Marlowe’s attempts to investigate the two recent deaths. The pressure on Marlowe to finish the announced play is alleviated when friendly rival Will Shaxsper (sic) provides some pages he’s able to incorporate. But more murders deepen the mystery and challenge Marlowe further.

Marlowe’s 11th case is short on sleuthing but long on theatrical travails and backstage bitchery.

**PRAYING FOR TIME**

*Thompson, Carlene*

Severn House (256 pp.)
$28.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-7278-8984-3

A young woman is devastated when her sister is kidnapped, but her real problems begin when the sister returns.

Vanessa Everly was just 19 when she and her 14-year-old sister, Roxanne, went swimming late one night. Vanessa was attacked, and when she came to, she realized Roxanne was gone—and despite massive efforts by the law and her family, the girl was never found. Vanessa ended her relationship with medical student Christian Montgomery because Christian’s brother was a prime suspect. Now, eight years later, Vanessa is a successful Hollywood actress when she gets a call that Roxanne is back home in Oregon, claiming she had been abducted and abused. Family members react in strange ways, Vanessa gets bizarre phone calls, and a murder takes place. On top of that, Vanessa realizes she still has feelings for Christian. This amateurish effort is marred by obvious plotting but especially by unrealistic dialogue that is used to introduce facts: “No. I’ve wanted to attend the American Academy of Dramatic Arts since I was twelve and I’ve been lucky enough to be accepted” might be the way a person would talk to a stranger, but not to her sister.

Clichéd characters and clunky dialogue.

**SAVING TUNA STREET**

*SAVING TUNA STREET*
*Sullivan, Nancy Nau*

Light Messages (282 pp.)
$14.99 paper | Jun. 23, 2020
978-1-6153-330-9

Developers upend the life of a feisty Gulf Coast native.

There’s a reason Blanche Murninghan’s cousin Jack calls her “Bang.” When she gets mad, it’s an event to rival a Santa Maria Island sunset—and it happens about as often. Right now, her irritation has two distinct sources. First, shady entrepreneur Sergi Langstrom is taking his dog-and-pony show to town hall, trying to persuade the islanders that the pink-and-turquoise mall and designer homes his company plans to build will increase the value of their more modest properties. The last thing Blanche wants is overscaled monstrosities crowding her shorefront cabin on Tuna Street, where she lived with her grandma Maeve after her mother’s death and where she continues to live even after Maeve’s passing—and she doesn’t mind looking Sergi in his Bradley Cooper blue eyes to tell him so. But even as she fulminates over Sergi’s machinations, a second blow falls. Bob Blankenship is found in his car with a broken neck. Blanche teams up with Liza Kramer, her sister is kidnapped, but her real problems begin when the sister returns. On top of that, Vanessa gets bizarre phone calls, and a murder takes place. On top of that, Vanessa realizes she still has feelings for Christian. This amateurish effort is marred by obvious plotting but especially by unrealistic dialogue that is used to introduce facts: “No. I’ve wanted to attend the American Academy of Dramatic Arts since I was twelve and I’ve been lucky enough to be accepted” might be the way a person would talk to a stranger, but not to her sister.

Clichéd characters and clunky dialogue.

**THE RECKONING**

*Trow, M.J.*

Creme de la Crime (224 pp.)
$28.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-78029-129-1

The onstage tragedy in Christopher Marlowe’s new play is rivaled by dark offstage mysteries swirling around him.

1592. Problems plague Kit Marlowe’s new theatrical project from the start. At the elderly Queen Elizabeth’s insistence, Marlowe’s been saddled with the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, a troupe of inexperienced actors. His decision to produce his friend and housemate Thomas Kyd’s play *The Spanish Tragedy* is rejected, leading to a difficult conversation with Kyd and the harder challenge of writing a new play. Marlowe comes up with *The Troublesome Reign and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second, King of England*. John Foxe, one of his actors, is found dead with a knife sticking out of him in the whorehouse of Mistress Isam. Moll, the sweet blonde prostitute who serviced Foxe, is both inconsolable and unhelpful in Marlowe’s efforts to get some insight into the killing, but the sometime sleuth is determined to learn more. Things take an even darker turn when Moll dies one cold night while on the job. The details her grief-stricken friend Jane lays out are murky, and Jane’s description of Moll’s last client is too generic to be helpful. Meanwhile, the show must go on. Rigorous rehearsals alternate with Marlowe’s attempts to investigate the two recent deaths. The pressure on Marlowe to finish the announced play is alleviated when friendly rival Will Shaxsper (sic) provides some pages he’s able to incorporate. But more murders deepen the mystery and challenge Marlowe further.

Marlowe’s 11th case is short on sleuthing but long on theatrical travails and backstage bitchery.

**PRAYING FOR TIME**

*Thompson, Carlene*

Severn House (256 pp.)
$28.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-7278-8984-3

A young woman is devastated when her sister is kidnapped, but her real problems begin when the sister returns.

Vanessa Everly was just 19 when she and her 14-year-old sister, Roxanne, went swimming late one night. Vanessa was attacked, and when she came to, she realized Roxanne was gone—and despite massive efforts by the law and her family, the girl was never found. Vanessa ended her relationship with medical student Christian Montgomery because Christian’s brother was a prime suspect. Now, eight years later, Vanessa is a successful Hollywood actress when she gets a call that Roxanne is back home in Oregon, claiming she had been abducted and abused. Family members react in strange ways, Vanessa gets bizarre phone calls, and a murder takes place. On top of that, Vanessa realizes she still has feelings for Christian. This amateurish effort is marred by obvious plotting but especially by unrealistic dialogue that is used to introduce facts: “No. I’ve wanted to attend the American Academy of Dramatic Arts since I was twelve and I’ve been lucky enough to be accepted” might be the way a person would talk to a stranger, but not to her sister.

Clichéd characters and clunky dialogue.
THE TYRANT BARU CORMORANT
Dickinson, Seth
Tor (656 pp.)
$29.99 | Jun. 9, 2020
978-0-7653-8076-0

Third part of a doozerific epic fantasy in which a woman seeks revenge against an evil and insatiable empire.

In the first book, The Traitor Baru Cormorant (2015), we learned the reasons why Baru Cormorant seeks to destroy the Imperial Republic of Falcrest and something of the depth and nuance of her plan. Book 2, The Monster Baru Cormorant (2018), exposed new vistas, churned bravely, and accumulated flab. Book 3 succumbs to bloat while setting up a sequel. Once, Baru was a protégé of the cryptarch Cairdine Farrier, one of the secret powers running the empire. Now a cryptarch herself, she realizes that he's been subtly controlling her from Day 1. Under his orders, she's sought out the Cancrioth, a people ruled by immortal tumors in human form, in order to use them as a weapon. The Cancrioth are concealing the Kettling, a hemorrhagic plague that could kill hundreds of millions. Baru undoubtedly could unleash the plague and destroy Falcrest, but millions of innocents would die too. Another way to achieve her goal would require more devilish tactics but run the risk of Falcrest's becoming the world's supreme power. To implement either strategy, Baru must first survive murderous threats from allies and enemies alike. As before, the storytelling is intense, deftly handled, ingenious, and often absorbing. Dickinson is, however, a writer blessed with an exceptionally fertile imagination who can't resist packing in everything—to the point where needless overcomplication all but sinks a narrative heavy with plot threads, timelines, gore, torture, conspiracies, violence, intrigue, and war. Less would have been far more digestible. The book does work impressively well as an allegory about modern politics, economics, and global power projection (mark the eerie though entirely coincidental thread about the Kettling). Yet the final confrontation, building through three enormously long, dense, involved books, doesn't actually come off—as drama or as catharsis. Those attuned to the author's singular methods will rejoice. Otherwise, this is demanding and ultimately overwhelming.

UNCONQUERABLE SUN
Elliott, Kate
Tor (528 pp.)
$27.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-250-19724-5

Clash of empires: an action-packed yarn loosely based on historical precedent, the sort of flawlessly plotted, high-tension science fiction Elliott's been threatening to write for some time.

The story precipitates us into a kind of modernized Chinese-flavored Alexandrian Macedonia, with a partially collapsed “beacon” network allowing instantaneous interstellar travel, commerce, and war. It's the sort of society where everything of importance happens in front of the cameras, where broadcasting is indistinguishable from propaganda. Under queen-marshal Eirene, the matriarchal Republic of Chaonia has expelled the Yele and Phene occupiers. Eirene, unaccountably, grudges her daughter and heir, Princess Sun, a word of praise, no matter how stellar Sun's achievements. Sun's Companions are aids drawn from her relatives and the scions of powerful nobles, though some of the same ambitious families and court factions would prefer to see Sun ousted or dead. Meanwhile, the rich, powerful Phene, with their four arms and profoundly creepy secrets, become alarmed at Chaonia's success and prepare to strike. The two main narrative viewpoints complement one another. Third-person past-tense Sun must survive constant threats to her life and freedom while conducting battles, making plans, exposing traitors, controlling her wayward impulses, and asking the questions everybody else shrinks from. First-person present-tense Persephone of House Lee struggles to gain independence from her insidious and possibly treacherous family and prove her loyalty to Sun. The upshot is a maelstrom of palace intrigue, interstellar back-stabbing, devious plots, treachery, blistering action, ferocious confrontations—and a heroine for the ages, tough, resourceful, loyal, intelligent, honorable, courageous, and utterly indomitable.

Enthralling, edge-of-your-seat stuff hurtling along at warp speed. Grab!

RANDOM SH*T FLYING THROUGH THE AIR
Ford, Jackson
Orbit (544 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Jul. 14, 2020
978-0-316-51922-9

A small team of misfits is the only thing standing between the West Coast and a very unnatural disaster.

Until the earthquake hit, Teagan's biggest problem had been burning the paella she made for Nic, the crush who turned her down when he found out she was psychokinetic and worked for a secret government agency. But the earthquake is The Big One, and
The damage is severe. What’s worse, what nobody knows except for Amber, a desperate mom on the run, is that her hyperintelligent, superpowered 4-year-old, Matthew, triggered it on purpose. And loved it. Teagan thinks her next mission is to steal a list of American spies back from Jonas Schmidt, a distractingly handsome tech billionaire who’s planning to sell it, but no sooner has that mission gone completely sideways than Matthew learns a lot more about fault lines—and starts looking for ways to put that knowledge to work. Soon, Teagan and her team are racing to find Matthew before he can do even more damage—which leaves very little time for worrying about the terrible things Nic said to her when she refused to use her powers in public. Or wondering who gave Matthew his powers, and why.

This second book about psychokinetic superspy Teagan is even more suspenseful than *The Girl Who Could Move Sh*t With Her Mind* (2019). The stakes couldn’t be higher. The damage Matthew can cause is made all too real on the page, and, with his breathtaking abilities and mercurial moods, he makes a chillingly dangerous villain.

The suspense, the danger, and the rocket-fueled pace are all turned up to 11 in this more-than-satisfying sequel.

**TROUBLE THE SAINTS**

*Johnson, Alaya Dawn*

Tor (352 pp.)


978-1-250-17534-2

The fates of three people intertwine in a World War II-era New York where some people of color are blessed and cursed with magic in their hands.

Phyllis, a light-skinned African American woman who can “pass” under many circumstances, has impossibly dexterous hands that wield murderous knives in the service of Victor, a Russian mob boss, and believes her kills serve justice. Her once and future lover, Dev, a half-Indian undercover cop posing as Victor’s bartender, whose own hands can sense threats to himself and others, can’t quite reconcile his feelings for Phyllis with his duty to a department that will never truly accept him as one of them. And Phyllis’s best friend, Tamara, an African American snake dancer and aspiring impresario at Victor’s club, with an oracular gift of reading cards, hopes that if she pretends she doesn’t notice the violent foundation of Victor’s empire, it won’t touch her. But the truths that each refuses to acknowledge and the death-haunted pasts that refuse to stay buried have dangerous implications for all three of them, both on the streets of New York City and in the supposedly quiet Hudson Valley town where Dev, Phyllis, and Tamara take an uncertain refuge. Johnson’s secret history is a nuanced portrait of racism in all of its poisonous flavors, brutally overt and unsuccessfully covert. She explores in deeper detail an issue she touched upon in her two YA novels, *The Summer Prince* (2013) and *Love Is the Drug* (2014): the incredibly fraught, liminal space of being a light-skinned person of color. In musical prose, she also offers passionate and painful depictions of the love expressed in romance and friendship and the sacrifices such love can demand.

A sad, lovely, and blood-soaked song of a book.

**STRANGE FLIGHT**

*Ed. by Leonie, Skye*

ELM Books (188 pp.)

$4.95 paper | Jul. 1, 2020

978-1-641614-30-3

An assortment of fiction featuring protagonists with disabilities, most of whom exist in futurescapes not designed to accommodate them.

What happens in a future in which people continue to live with disabilities, mental illnesses, and neurodivergences? That question lies at the heart of editor Skye’s collection, comprised of six stories featuring protagonists who live with chronic illnesses and other disabilities. The standout, Yvette Franklin’s “The Darkness of Goo,” follows Nani, a Deaf protagonist on a gone-awry space mission, whose nonverbal-communication abilities prove key to saving a crewmate. Similarly strong, Victoria Feistner’s “Music of the Spheres” traces a terminally ill astronaut’s final hours, but the circumstances of the death may leave some readers feeling less than celebratory. David Preyde’s “Twentieth Century, Go To Sleep,” another uncomfortable story, sees its protagonist make friends with not one, but two infamous assassins from history. The collection’s weakest moment arrives in Timothy Lamoureux’s “The Reject,” in which a group of sperm-donating smugglers make a series of intentional and accidental masturbatory jokes which feel out of sync among the more serious tales in the collection. These pieces range from stolidly cerebral to deeply emotional, and although the quality of the stories is uneven, the hits far outweigh the misses.

A bold and experimental, if uneven, collection imagining hopeful futures for people with disabilities.

**MEXICAN GOTHIC**

*Moreno-Garcia, Silvia*

Del Rey (320 pp.)

$27.00 | Jun. 30, 2020

978-0-525-62078-5

Moreno-Garcia offers a terrifying twist on classic gothic horror, set in 1950s Mexico.

Inquisitive 22-year-old socialite and anthropology enthusiast Noemi Taboada adores beautiful clothes and nights on the town in Mexico City with a bevy of handsome suitors, but her carefree existence is cut short when her father shows her a disturbing letter from her cousin Catalina, who recently married a fair-haired and blue-eyed Virgil Doyle, who comes from a prominent English mining family that built their now-dwindling
fortune on the backs of Indigenous laborers. Catalina lives in High Place, the Doyle family’s crumbling mansion near the former mining town of El Triunfo. In the letter, Catalina begs for Noemí’s help, claiming that she is “bound, threads like iron through my mind and my skin,” and that High Place is “sick with rot, stinks of decay, brims with every single evil and cruel sentiment.” Upon Noemí’s arrival at High Place, she’s struck by the Doyle family’s cool reception of her and their unabashed racism. She’s alarmed by the once-vibrant Catalina’s listless state and by the enigmatic Virgil and his ancient, leering father, Howard. Nightmares, hallucinations, and phantasmagoric dreams of golden dust and fleshy bodies plague Noemí, and it becomes apparent that the Doyles haven’t left their blood-soaked legacy behind. Luckily, the brave Noemí is no delicate flower, and she’ll need all her wits about her for the battle ahead. Moreno-Garcia weaves elements of Mexican folklore with themes of decay, sacrifice, and rebirth, casting a dark spell all the way to the visceral and heart-pounding finale.

Fans of gothic classics like *Rebecca* will be enthralled as long as they don’t mind a heaping dose of all-out horror.

---

**EVERY SKY A GRAVE**

*Posey, Jay*

Skybound Books/Simon & Schuster  
(384 pp.)

$27.00 | Jul. 7, 2020  
978-1-982107-75-8

Just as the human race has achieved a stable society that stretches from planet to planet, an elite government agency discovers the seeds of a growing revolution in the opening volume of Posey’s new series.

Long ago, humankind discovered that the key to conquering the universe was language. The Deep Language controls all of reality, and those who can speak it have immense power. An organization called the Ascendance is in charge of the agents who speak the Deep Language, but it works more like a religious group, with the Paragon at the top and her group of agents, called Advocates, following her lead. Elyth, one such Advocate, is tasked with destroying planets where the Deep Language has been compromised, which really means it’s her job to put down uprisings against the Ascendance. Using the Deep Language is akin to magic, in that Elyth knows the correct phrase to say in order to fast-track a planet’s natural death. The Paragon, pleased with Elyth’s work, sends her on a crucial mission to follow a strange speech pattern that shouldn’t exist, and at the end of the trail, Elyth finds a man who shouldn’t exist, either. The notion of language as the fabric of the universe is pretty clever and works well here because Posey goes to great lengths to keep the Deep Language scenes straightforward and easy to follow. But what does that matter when the stakes are so murky? It’s clear that the Ascendance is corrupt, but it’s unclear how, unclear why some people are revolting, unclear why any of this matters other than passing mentions of intergalactic travel and vague menace.

---

**SCARLET ODYSSEY**

*Rwizi, C.T.*

47North (560 pp.)  
$24.95 | Jul. 1, 2020  
978-1-5420-2382-5

Rwizi has crafted a sprawling, Africa-inspired world for his debut novel. Following the death of his mentor, Salo, a young man with an innate gift for the “women’s work” of magic, takes the responsibility of his clan’s future on his shoulders when he passes the ordeal required to become their much-needed mystic. His new duties lead him across the land, into Yonte Saire: the Jungle City, also known as “the world’s beating heart,” a place brimming with magic and mysticism. He’s accompanied by a handful of allies, including Ilapara, a young woman who also wants to take on a role not traditionally given to members of her sex. Although Rwizi’s writing is compelling, the hero’s journey—first to becoming a mystic, then to Yonte Saire—loses momentum as he leaves behind family and friends who have played major roles in the story so far and makes hastily forged alliances with new compatriots. Due to the inclusion of several subplots which prove less compelling than, and largely superfluous to, the main story, the novel has nearly come to a close by the time Salo has the chance to redeem himself for the death that spurred him to action. An ambitious debut that may reach too far for its readers to follow.

---

**THE SIN IN THE STEEL**

*Van Loan, Ryan*

Tor (432 pp.)  
$27.99 | Jul. 21, 2020  
978-1-250-22258-9

The fate of an empire hangs on the abilities of one girl. Buc and Eld have made names for themselves as investigators who solve uncrackable cases. But now they’ve gotten themselves into a bit of trouble. Found-surrounded-by-dead-bodies-and-still-holding-a-smoking-gun kind of trouble. And their only way out of that trouble is to help the powerful Kanados Trading Company figure out why so many of their ships carrying precious sugar are disappearing...before shortages bring down the entire empire. Fail, and they’ll be executed. Succeed, and Buc wins a seat on the company’s powerful board—which means she has a chance to ensure that no other child has to live through the horrors she saw growing up on the streets. The moment Buc and Eld are launched on their seafaring adventure, they’re plunged into a
world of intrigue and violence, chock-full of pirates; the mysterious Sin Eaters, who draw on the power of their Goddess to communicate mind to mind; and the Sin Eaters’ enemies, the priests loyal to the Dead Gods. To succeed and win the power she craves, Buc will have to not only navigate all these uncharted waters, but tame her racing mind, which always sees six steps ahead. Buc’s story starts with a bang and never slows down, rollicking through naval battles, sudden betrayals, and plenty of dark magic. Van Loan packs in almost too many twists, turns, and reversals, and the book at times feels overstuffed with supernatural mysteries, but Buc makes for a prickly, interesting heroine, and her relationship with Eld grounds an otherwise highflying story in emotional truth.

This fast-paced high-seas adventure will satisfy genre fans looking for swashbuckling fun.


CONVENTIONALLY YOURS

Albert, Annabeth

Sourcebooks Casablanca (400 pp.)

978-1-72820-029-3

Two young men fall in love on a road trip to Las Vegas for a gaming convention.

Conrad Stewart and Alden Roth’s rivalry has made them the stars of a gaming vlog about a card game called Odyssey. When the local game shop owner who runs the vlog announces he has procured a set of complimentary entries for his players at the national Odyssey convention in Las Vegas, Conrad and Alden each have their own reasons for wanting to win. Alden is socially awkward and feels adrift after failing to get into medical school, and turning into a Odyssey pro would provide much-needed structure to his life; Conrad has been disowned by his family after they find out he’s gay, and winning the tournament would give him the financial security to provide for himself and finish college. Due to a series of unfortunate mishaps, Conrad and Alden end up together on the road trip to Las Vegas for the convention. As they travel thousands of miles cross-country, they work together to navigate a series of minor mishaps and challenges. Once they learn to look past their knee-jerk dislike of each other, they realize that they are a pretty good team. Their romance is sweet and slow, with the more experienced Conrad showing Alden the joys of falling in love. Their romance has the classic hallmarks of the new-adult subgenre, with both of the main characters learning to face the challenges of the adult world while resisting family pressures and expectations. The tight pacing, interesting conflict, and careful characterization make this a great bridge for readers looking to make the jump from YA to adult romance.

A straightforward and charming Regency romance with a pleasing horticultural bent to set it apart.

WHEN YOU WISH UPON A ROGUE

Bennett, Anna

St. Martin’s (336 pp.)

$7.99 paper | May 26, 2020
978-1-250-19950-8

A debutante finds her match at last—after she is betrothed to another.

The last of a trio of debutantes is about to find herself off the marriage market, much to her dismay. Sophie Kendall is to be betrothed in two months to Lord Singleton, an inoffensive man she has no interest in but must marry to settle her father’s debts. This means she’ll no longer be leading the clandestine meetings of the Debutante Underground, an “eclectic group of women” from all walks of life who meet to discuss “sensitive topics such as courting, desire, intimacy, and love.” It also means she shouldn’t take any interest in Henry Reese, the Earl of Warshire, whom she’s just met in her quest to find a new meeting spot for the group. But Henry is desperate to get to know Sophie better after he learns that her tea, and her presence, is so soothing to him that he’s able to get a good night’s sleep despite his persistent PTSD. In exchange for the use of his space for her group, she agrees to spend one chaste night with him each week, insisting that they aren’t to touch each other at all. But her strict boundaries are no match for their attraction, and she is soon regretting her imminence of the engagement, which will mean the end of all the relationships that are important to her—unless she calls it off, ruining her family. Sophie’s prohibition against physical touch adds a heightened chemistry to the scenes of intimacy between her and Henry, which build nicely in intensity throughout the story. Sophie’s freedom to leave her house overnight without any chaperone feels awfully contemporary, but Bennett provides an explanation plausible enough to let the fun continue. Readers who love a grumpy-to-smitten hero will swoon for Henry, and his PTSD is sensitively handled, if a bit simplistic.

Royal watchers and tabloid devotees will devour this juicy look behind the gilded curtain of palace life.

**THE HEIR AFFAIR**

Cocks, Heather & Morgan, Jessica
Grand Central Publishing (464 pp.)
$28.00 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-5387-4591-8

Cocks and Morgan, the fashion bloggers known as the Fug Girls, return with the highly anticipated sequel to their regal rom-com, *The Royal We* (2015). Nick and Bex, more formally known as the Duke and Duchess of Clarence, have escaped from London and taken refuge in Wigtown, Scotland, where they are posing as local booksellers Margot and Steve. The newlyweds are not only running from their disastrous wedding ceremony—during which rumors of an affair between Bex and Prince Freddie, Nick’s brother, were released to the public by a former friend of Nick’s who’s a tabloid journalist—but from the resultant wrath of Nick’s grandmother, Queen Eleanor. Both Nick and Bex are uncertain about how to move forward in their marriage following Freddie’s declaration of love for Bex, and they’re contemplating never returning home. But when Queen Eleanor concocts a scheme to get them back, they return to their public lives, where they must confront the deepening cracks in their relationships with each other as well as with Freddie and the way history seems to be repeating itself in the palace. It’s clear that the authors are experts on all the juicy rumors about the real British royal family, as they deftly inject recognizable scandals and characteristics from real-life people into a world of their own making. A mystery from the past involving Princess Georgina, the queen’s late sister, mirrors one in the present day of the book and adds intrigue to the plot, though some readers might find the resultant drama a bit over-the-top. The novel takes place over the course of several years and can feel drawn out as multiple illnesses, pregnancies, scandals, and secrets keep cropping up, but the characters are so compelling that most readers won’t mind spending extra time with them.

Royal watchers and tabloid devotees will devour this juicy look behind the gilded curtain of palace life.

**THE TROUBLE WITH HATING YOU**

Patel, Sajni
Forever (352 pp.)
$14.99 paper | May 12, 2020
978-1-5387-3333-2

A biochemical engineer ends up working with the man her parents would like her to marry. Liya Thakkar is happy both professionally and personally. She has a tight-knit group of friends and just accepted a big promotion at work. Unfortunately, her conservative father is still trying to arrange her perfect match—a good Hindu man from a respectable family—even though she never plans to get married. One night, Liya goes to her parents’ home for a quiet family dinner and is surprised to find her father has invited a surprise blind date, Jay Shah. Infuriated at her father’s meddling, Liya refuses to even meet Jay and sneaks out the back door. But running away from Jay is harder than it looks, as he’s been hired to bail her firm out of a daunting legal mess. As they work together to save the company, Liya discovers that the prickly confrontation demeanor she uses as a shield doesn’t work with Jay. Meanwhile, Jay is surprised to find himself impressed with Liya’s dedication and hard work. Liya is slow to trust Jay, but their professional relationship slowly evolves to friendship and then to romance.

**THE MARRIAGE GAME**

Desai, Sara
Berkley (352 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Jun. 9, 2020
978-0-393-10056-1

A down-on-her-luck Indian American human resources professional locks horns with an Indian corporate downsizer while she tries to start her own HR firm. At the same time she’s helping her family’s restaurant stay afloat after her father has a health crisis, she has another item to tackle: evaluating the potential grooms he had selected for her from a matrimony website. To complicate matters further, Sam Mehta, an uptight corporate executive, has rented the space above the restaurant and refuses to give up his lease. Desai, who has previously published as Sarah Castille, now mixes up ingredients for a South Asian rom-com khichdi, with meddling aunts, a mishmash of Indian foods, references to movie songs, and a string of marriage candidates. Layla and Sam’s chemistry channels the drama of Indian cinema. There are many humorous moments of banter and slapstick between them and a notable attempt to immerse the reader in South Asian Americanness. But the novel shows a poor understanding of the sociopolitical dynamics within Indian communities (including in the diaspora). Desai seems unaware that names signal a person’s region and religion, so there are seemingly northwest Indian characters specializing in southern Indian vegetarian food, which sidelines their own staple cuisine. Similarly, Layla’s marriage candidates span a pan-Indian, pan-religious roster, a misleading representation of the reality of religious biases that impact Indian minorities. A subplot about domestic violence also teeters on the edge of representing people with disabilities as supporting characters who only serve to shape others’ stories.

A comic, potentially multicultural romance conflates India’s many identities into a misleading package for easy consumption.
As a teenager, Liya was a victim of sexual assault at the hands of an older, respected member of the community. It makes her fight-or-flight survival strategy easier to understand, but she never moves past these simple coping mechanisms. The book fails to portray a modern world of dating. Early on, a white man expects her “to give it up” after an expensive dinner date, and she is openly shunned by her community for being a sexually active woman in her 20s. There is little nuance in Patel’s exploration of gender and dating, which fuels rather than interrogates stereotypes of South Asian culture.

Stale, unexamined stereotypes coupled with lack of character growth make for a disappointing romance.

GHOSTING
A Love Story
Skilton, Tash
Kensington (352 pp.)
$15.95 paper | May 26, 2020
978-1-4967-3065-7

Cyrano de Bergerac meets classic rom-com banter in this contemporary romp about the highs and lows of modern dating.

Miles Ibrahim is possibly at the lowest point in his life: His engagement is over, his ex-fiancée announced a surprise pregnancy, he’s forced to crash on a friend’s couch, and his freelancing gig of playing ghostwriter for online dating profiles is in jeopardy. To add insult to injury, Miles now has competition for the free day-old biscotti and large window seat at one of his favorite cafes in New York. Miles’ cafe interloper is Zoey Abot, recent transplant from California. Though both Miles and Zoey get off on the wrong foot, they have way more in common than they realize. They’re affected by the loss of trust from loved ones. They are firmly in the camp of “starving artist” as they scrounge and scrimp to afford rent and food in the Big Apple. They’re also both secretly wooing another as dating profile ghostwriters for other people. Both Miles and Zoey are complex and lively characters who sizzle and spark when together, and getting to know their adorable family members is an added, heartwarming bonus. Miles’ parents are a Muslim and Jewish couple, and they adore their son to bits. Meanwhile, Zoey is still dealing with abandonment issues from her parents, who met in the Philippines while doing disaster relief; thankfully, she has a lovely best friend who is also her grandma. At times, the romantic pacing gets bogged down in the details of Miles’ and Zoey’s larger social circles, like Zoey’s definitely racist boss, Clifford, and the persnickety boyfriend of Miles’ best friend. For those feeling the lack of romantic comedies on the screen, this book will undoubtedly scratch that itch with its excellent banter, secret personas, and slow-burn attraction between a hero and heroine vying for a table big enough to put down their laptops.

An energetic romance that would make Nora Ephron proud.
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

**THE HEART AND OTHER MONSTERS** by Rose Andersen | 51

**A HISTORY OF MY BRIEF BODY** by Billy-Ray Belcourt | 51

**FALLOUT** by Lesley M. M. Blume | 53

**BRIGHT PRECIOUS THING** by Gail Caldwell | 55

**LET THEM EAT PANCAKES** by Craig Carlson | 56

**DESERT NOTEBOOKS** by Ben Ehrenreich | 66

**TIME OF THE MAGICIANS** by Wolfram Eilenberger; trans. by Shaun Whiteside | 66

**THE TURNAWAY STUDY** by Diana Greene Foster | 69

**THE FUTURE EARTH** by Eric Holthaus | 73

**PROPHETIC CITY** by Stephen L. Klineberg | 76

**THE BIGGEST BLUFF** by Maria Konnikova | 77

**NICHE** by Momus | 78

**WAITING FOR AN ECHO** by Christine Montross | 79

**THIS IS WHAT AMERICA LOOKS LIKE** by Ilhan Omar with Rebecca Pyle | 81

**THE BEAUTY OF LIVING** by Alison Rosenblitt | 84

**RIDING WITH THE GHOST** by Justin Taylor | 90

**STANDOFF** by Jamie Thompson | 90

**EDVARD MUNCH** by Øystein Ustvedt; trans. by Alison McCullough | 91

**NEON GIRLS** by Jennifer Worley | 92

---

**PURE INVENTION**

*How Japan’s Pop Culture Conquered the World*

Alt, Matt

Crown (368 pp.)

$28.00 | Jun. 23, 2020

978-1-984826-69-5

A nerd- and generalist-friendly look at how Japan shaped the post–World War II world, from toys to Trump.

Alt, a longtime “localizer” of Japanese culture for English-language audiences, considers Japan’s pop-culture influence through two lenses. The first is product-based: He delivers deep, engaging histories of totems such as toy jeeps, which sparked an industry that helped the nation pull out of its postwar economic doldrums; manga and anime, which reflected the growing cultural ferment, especially among youth protesters; karaoke machines and Hello Kitty gear, which made sweetness profitable; and the Sony Walkman, a symbol of the nation’s knack for innovation and 1980s economic might. Alt has a collector-geek’s enthusiasm for all of these, but he also thoughtfully considers the social trends that produced them. (Hello Kitty, for instance, embodies “kawaii,” an unconstructed adorableness that echoed the boom years and also inspired the likes of “Super Mario Brothers” and Haruki Murakami novels. Alt’s second lens has more of a social element: Exploring the country’s “lost decades” after the ’80s, he looks at how schoolgirl culture, certain anime films, video games, Pokemon, and the internet responded to the pall that had fallen upon an aging and economically strained society. Alt is particularly sharp in his writing about “otaku,” a subculture of hardcore anime fans who feel deeply disassociated from mainstream society, establishing a disenchanted mood that persisted even as the country’s fortunes improved. That attitude coalesced around the website 2channel, which in turn inspired 4chan, Grand Central Station for alt-right memes and Trumpy trends. It seems a bit of a stretch to reduce American habitués of dank online forums to a politically influential expression of otaku, but Alt does persuasively show how Japan’s economic fortunes influenced America’s, and his book neatly summarizes how the future “will be made everywhere else, with values borrowed from Japan.”

A non-native’s savvy study of Japan’s wide influence in ways both subtle and profound.
At the nexus of critical race and queer thought, this should become a timeless interdisciplinary resource for students, educators, and social justice activists.

A HISTORICAL BRIEF BODY

LET’S NEVER TALK ABOUT THIS AGAIN
A Memoir
Alterman, Sara Faith
Grand Central Publishing (272 pp.)
$27.00 | Jun. 9, 2020
978-1-5387-4867-1

A daughter discovers her puritanical father’s dark secret hobby.

Though her suburban Boston childhood was comfortable, Alterman was raised by two “straitlaced squares,” most notably her quirky father, Ira, who was “allergic to difficult conversation.” In a childhood “act of quiet mutiny,” Alterman snooped through the volumes cloistered high up in the family den’s bookshelves. She was shocked to discover a trove of pornographic books all authored by her father. Keeping this discovery secret, she spent her early teen years fumbling with awkward advances from boys before experiencing her first romance and sexual experience with Ace. After Ira was laid off in his 60s, he began penning a blog with Andersen in the final third of the book. “I am curating her life. I am the bookkeeper. I am the chronicler. I am an editor of her life story,” the author writes. “I am her editor.”

In sharp pieces infused with a yearning for decolonized love and freedom, Belcourt, of the Drift-pile Cree Nation, ably balances poetic, philosophical, and political insights throughout this unique book. The author situates his reflections on love, longing, and vulnerability amid a political reality of trauma, violence, and oppression “on the shores of what is now improperly called Canada.” More than a chronological life history, these elegantly crafted essays on his personal experience as an NDN boy explore themes of queer identity, sexuality, and love; family bonds that defy colonialist brutality; and the tension of living and writing on the edges of “killability” and freedom. Belcourt confronts histories of marginalization as well as urgent present-day issues, including the racialized coding and “ontological shaming” that infect online dating apps and what the author sees as a lack of unbiased medical care. “Hospitals have always been enemy territory,” writes the author. “My body, too brown to be innocent, too queer to be assimilated.”

I take your hand and lead you through the blood and bile this story is made of. “The unbearable note of grief still sings in my head. The melody of which you will never hear.” In a note to readers on the first page, we learn that the author suspects her sister, Sarah, was murdered, although she has no proof. Then Andersen leaves that idea behind, imagining her sister’s death as an accidental overdose, which is what both the police and the author believed when Sarah’s body was found locked in the bathroom of her boyfriend’s home, her dog wailing outside the door. As Andersen describes dealing with the logistics of the death and coping with her initial experiences of loss, she revisits her childhood, her troubled parents and stepfamilies, and her experience with cancer as a teen. Her own dark interlude with drugs and alcohol in her early 20s—“My worst lies happened when I was drinking and using coke...social lies, omissions, white lies, gray lies, kind lies, terrible lies”—eventually gave way to lasting sobriety through AA. The family story unfolds in brief, elegiac chapters illustrated with black-and-white snapshots. Gradually, Andersen begins to change the narrative, slipping in news stories about a seemingly unrelated murder, which, by the end, she has causally connected to her sister’s death. The revised facts are presented in a report made to the police, included near the end of the book. Combining the agonizing emotional intensity typical of narratives about losing a sibling with the memoiristic style of a murder investigation successfully complicates the reading experience.

A literary grief memoir combined with a skillfully unfolded murder mystery.

THE HEART AND OTHER MONSTERS
A Memoir
Anderson, Rose
Bloomsbury (224 pp.)
$24.00 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-63557-514-9

An essayist looks back on her life and the circumstances surrounding her sister’s alleged overdose at age 24.

“I know what I am doing,” writes Andersen in the final third of the book. “I am curating her life. I am the bookkeeper. I am the chronicler. I am an editor of her life story.”
This is one of my favorite issues of the year, and in the spirit of the theme, I wanted to provide a wider variety of recommendations than usual. So here they are, my lucky 13 recent—or forthcoming—books that celebrate diversity in all its magnificent forms. My reviewers usually say it best, so I’ll get out of the way and quote their reviews.

Nicole Chung and Mensah Demary, *A Map Is Only One Story* (Catapult, Feb. 11): “Two Catapult magazine editors gather essays about immigration and ‘the meaning of home’ from 20 emerging and established women writers....A provocatively intelligent collection.”


Desus & Mero, *God-Level Knowledge Darts* (Random House, April 14): “Two very funny guys riffing from a black and Latinx perspective....In their literary debut, Desus and Mero deliver a series of back-and-forth debates about such topics as masculinity, dating, drugs, and the criminal justice system.”

Annie Finch, *Choice Words* (Haymarket, April 7): “A powerful collection of poems, fiction, and essays on the reality of abortion....Finch has drawn together writers across time (from the 16th century to the present), place, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and culture who offer stark, often wrenching revelations.”


Cathy Park Hong, *Minor Feelings* (One World/Random House, Feb. 25): “The poetry editor of the New Republic....offers a fierce and timely meditation on race and gender issues from her perspective as a Korean American woman....As she sees it, the United States has achieved dominance through ‘the capitalist accumulation of white supremacy.’”

Mikki Kendall, *Hood Feminism* (Viking, May 29): “The poetry editor of the New Republic....offers a fierce and timely meditation on race and gender issues from her perspective as a Korean American woman....As she sees it, the United States has achieved dominance through ‘the capitalist accumulation of white supremacy.’”

Kirkus is nonfiction and managing editor.
enflames the nurses’ racialized curiosities. For them, there’s always the possibility that my pain is illusory, dreamt up in order to get my next fix.” Stretching memoir beyond personal memory, Belcourt deftly carves out a space where joy and love become vital acts of resistance, and he incisively considers how the state-sanctioned “suppression of NDN vitality” and resulting “existential hunger” fit within a broader construct of colonialism. Ultimately, Belcourt delivers an inspired call for “a radical remaking of the world,” at once accomplished, expansive, even vulnerable—but never weak. “In the face of antagonistic relation to the past,” he writes in conclusion, “let us start anew in the haven of a world in the image of our radical art.” At the nexus of critical race and queer thought, this should become a timeless interdisciplinary resource for students, educators, and social justice activists.

An urgently needed, unyielding book of theoretical and intimate strength.

**PUTIN’S PEOPLE**

*How the KGB Took Back Russia and Then Took On the West*

Belton, Catherine

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (640 pp.)

$35.00 | Jun. 9, 2020

978-0-374-23871-1

Carefully detailed account of the rise of Vladimir Putin and the restoration of Russia to Soviet-era power.

A Reuters correspondent and former Moscow bureau chief for the *Financial Times*, Belton recalls a time, 25-odd years ago, when it seemed possible that Russia might become a democracy with a thriving economy. Then came the era of the oligarchs, who, protected by Boris Yeltsin, cornered big pieces of the newly open market economy. It didn't last long. As Putin rose to power, he proceeded to “rein in the market freedoms of the Yeltsin era, and to launch a takeover by the state.” That project involved neutralizing enemies—and then, writes Belton, turning on former allies, a process Americans have seen in the actions of the Trump administration. By the author’s account, Trump’s fortunes are bound up in Putin’s, and both represent what one Putin associate exalts as a defeat of “the neocons who thought they controlled the whole world.” According to Belton, while the extent of the connection will likely never be known, Trump has been the beneficiary of Russian cash since at least 1990, when Russian banks floated funds to extract his organization from bankruptcy. One Russian executive has claimed that Trump has received hundreds of millions of dollars from Russian funders who will likely never see the money again, all in the interest of providing “an opportunity to further compromise the future president” and, as a larger goal, “to undermine and corrupt the institutions and democracies of the West.” All that, of course, is straight out of the KGB playbook as enacted by Putin’s lieutenants around the world, with the state’s extensive financial resources at their disposal. Much of Belton’s story has been related in earlier books, but none with so specific a focus on those shadowy aides and their actions.

An eyebrow-raising book that, among other things, helps connect some of the dots of the Mueller Report.

**FALLOUT**

*The Hiroshima Cover-Up and the Reporter Who Revealed It to the World*

Blume, Lesley M.M.

Simon & Schuster (288 pp.)

$27.00 | Aug. 4, 2020

978-1-982128-51-7

Los Angeles–based journalist Blume uncovers the fascinating backstory to perhaps the most influential piece ever published by an American magazine; John Hersey’s 1946 report on the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

Highly recommended as a work of historical excavation regarding a watershed publication.
After the catastrophic August 1945 bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, justified by President Harry Truman and other officials as necessary to end World War II, the American public witnessed a barrage of government propaganda about how the attacks had been what Secretary of War Henry Stimson called “our least abortive choice” when it came to ending the war with Japan. In Stimson’s telling, the nuclear option was once again depicted as humane.” At the time, most American journalists tended to disseminate the propaganda; for at least a year after the bombings, few Americans—or global citizens—knew “what had actually transpired beneath those roiling mushroom clouds. Then, on Aug. 31, 1946, the New Yorker devoted its entire issue to a 30,000-word account by Hersey about the human toll in Hiroshima. About 42,000 Hiroshima residents had died quickly while countless more were suffering horrible aftereffects of radiation. The eventual number of fatalities is estimated at 280,000. Blume skillfully relates the biography of the still young but already well-known Hersey; his remarkable collaboration with New Yorker editors Harold Ross and William Shawn; and Hersey’s inspiration for his decision to structure the article around six Hiroshima survivors. “It was simply a question of scale,” writes the author. “Hersey would dial it down from God’s eye level to a human vantage point.” Blume’s narrative explaining how Hersey gained access to Hiroshima, despite obstacles raised by the U.S. military, never flags in its drama. The author also provides endlessly interesting anecdotes about the aftermath of the publication of “Hiroshima,” which eventually became a bestseller book. Hersey continued to be both lionized and criticized until his death in 1993, and his work has continued to inform debates about the appropriate use of nuclear weapons.

**Highly recommended as a work of historical excavation regarding a watershed publication.**

**THE CASE OF THE VANISHING BLONDE**

**And Other True Crime Stories**

Bowden, Mark

Atlantic Monthly (400 pp.)

$26.00 | Jul. 7, 2020

978-0-8021-2844-7

Veteran narrative journalist Bowden resurrects a half-dozen works of true crime, ranging from merely creepy to palpably fascinating.

**Best known for his visceral accounts of warfare in Mogadishu and the lives and deaths of Pablo Escobar and Osama bin Laden—not to mention his excellent Vietnam book, *Hue 1968* (2017)—here the author recalls his foundations as a reporter, a trade that “hones an appetite for crime.” The opening story, published in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1983 as “The Incident at Alpha Tau Omega,” is awkward. While Bowden’s writing is solid and sincere, his attempt to parse the moral implications of the gang rape of a female college student comes off as both overly disturbing and painfully sympathetic to the perpetrators.

**Similar themes arise in “why don’t u tell me wht ur into,” a 2009 *Vanity Fair* piece in which Bowden uses the case of a sex offender to debate the ethics of entrapment à la the TV show *To Catch a Predator.* The author’s reporting in “…A Million Years Ago” (*Vanity Fair*, 2012), about the investigation into a decades-old cold case, has attracted some controversy, but there’s no skepticism about his portrayal of the investigation itself, resolutely documented and as incisive and enraging as any true-crime podcast or episode of *NCIS.* The collection picks up considerably with the introduction of private eye Ken Brennan, a no-nonsense, profane former Long Island cop. “I’m from New York,” Brennan tells one suspect. “I talk like that to everybody.” Readers are likely to have encountered some version of the title story (“from the start, it was a bad case”) in popular media. However, that piece and its companion stories, “The Body in Room 348” and “Who Killed Euhomme Bond?” are as gripping as any murder mystery and feature shades of Agatha Christie and Edgar Allan Poe.

**An uneven but often enthralling collection of true-crime investigations.**

**THE SENSITIVES**

**The Rise of Environmental Illness and the Search for America’s Last Pure Place**

Broudy, Oliver

Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)

$27.00 | Jul. 14, 2020

978-1-9821-2850-0

A journalist takes to the road to meet people suffering from hypersensitivity to chemicals and toxins.

“Environmental illness” has increased dramatically since it was first recognized in 1962, affecting as many as 30% of Americans, baffling the medical establishment, and eluding sufferers’ quest for a cure. Making his nonfiction book debut, journalist Broudy offers an animated recounting of his search to meet some “sensitives,” as they call themselves, to understand their experiences, and to reflect on his own concerns about the prevalence of synthetic chemicals—$5,000, he discovered, including 9,000 food additives and 17 pesticides—to which most people are habitually exposed. Thyroid, liver, and kidney cancer rates have skyrocketed, as have autism, intellectual impairment, allergies, obesity, the early onset of puberty, and birth defects. “I am trying to be sane,” writes the author, but he questions whether chemicals have a role in these burgeoning numbers. Certainly, sensitives believe the environment is assaulting: Although they are a diverse group with varying susceptibilities, Broudy found that hypersensitivity could be induced by “a single, massive toxic exposure,” such as a house renovation, insect fumigation, or household mold; or by “years of low-level exposures.” Once afflicted, sensitives experience symptoms that include asthma, rash, headache, fatigue, memory problems, inflammation, and shortness of breath, which they try to control through diet (one sensitive touted protein bars made of organic grass-fed
lamb meat), supplements, esoteric bottled water, and relocation, likely to the high elevation, dry air, and relative isolation of the desert Southwest. Broudy evokes that landscape in painterly prose, offering sharply drawn portraits of the sensitives he meets along the way and contextualizing their plight with lively digressions into conventional, and unconventional, medical history. Sensitives, frustrated with mainstream medicine, tired of being diagnosed with psychosomatic illness, and despairing of making their experience credible, have found a respectful, if sometimes bemused, chronicler in Broudy.

A sympathetic portrayal of a perplexing illness.

Caldwell’s fourth memoir sings. It’s a song for the ages, but it sounds especially resonant in the #MeToo era.

**BRIGHT PRECIOUS THING**

**BRIGHT PRECIOUS THING**
A Memoir
Caldwell, Gail
Random House (208 pp.)
$27.00 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-525-51005-5

A glistening reflection on how the women’s movement profoundly influenced the Pulitzer Prize winner’s life.

Raised in the Texas Panhandle, “a stronghold of Protestant churches and Republican politics,” Caldwell knows her life could’ve easily played out differently. She began college at Texas Tech in 1968, just as the first wave of feminism caught fire. Then she transferred to the University of Texas, located in Austin, deemed the “the den of iniquity” by her mother. It was there, in that “countercultural hotbed,” that she attended her first women’s liberation rally. Though Caldwell was clearly never wired for Stepford life, she superbly demonstrates...
how the women's movement was a beacon that led her to fully embrace her equality and autonomy. Not that these things were easily won. She suffered sexual harassment and assault as well as rape, and she had an illegal abortion in Mexico when she was 19. She confronted frequent sexism in academia and battled alcoholism (the latter features prominently in Caldwell's bestselling memoir, *Let's Take the Long Way Home*). Jumping from her childhood and young adulthood in Texas to her present life in Massachusetts, the author revisits a variety of seasons and scenarios, but the presence of feminism is always evident. “The women’s movement gave me a reclamation of self I had found nowhere else,” she writes, “and I don’t like imagining my life without it.” Caldwell pays tribute to some of the men in her life, including her father, her therapist, and her longtime AA buddies, and her love of dogs is also readily apparent. One of the unexpected driving forces of the narrative is an ambrosial, 5-year-old girl named Tyler, a neighbor who seems to effortlessly embody the feminist ideals the author has spent decades cultivating.

Caldwell’s fourth memoir sings. It’s a song for the ages, but it sounds especially resonant in the #MeToo era.

### LET THEM EAT PANCAKES
**One Man’s Personal Revolution in the City of Light**
Craig Carlson
Pegasus (336 pp.)
$27.95 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-64313-440-6

More tales from the owner of the Breakfast in America diners in France.

In this follow-up to *Pancakes in Paris*, Carlson shares more intimate and engaging stories of how he fell in love with France and a Frenchman while running his well-known diners. Although he starts out slowly, reminiscing about his childhood, the author quickly ups the tempo as he regales readers with the comical story of Pigeon Man, an older gentleman who insisted on feeding hundreds of pigeons in front of Carlson's building. In addition to describing the physical mess the birds created, the author discusses the bureaucratic red tape he had to cut through to get the Pigeon Man to move. Carlson then shares memories of how he learned French and gives readers advice on how to learn the language more efficiently than he did (the text features French words and phrases sprinkled throughout). As a business owner, Carlson spends a good portion of the text discussing the ways in which French employers differ from Americans when it comes to their employees, from providing far more vacation time and maternity/paternity leave to the near impossibility of firing someone even due to poor performance. The author ponders the French fondness for smoking and the love locks placed by tourists on the bridges in Paris, and he explains the importance of Thanksgiving to him, which motivated him to celebrate Turkey Day abroad....For me, what I loved most about the holiday was its simplicity, just dining and drinking with friends for hours on end.” Of course, Carlson explores both French and American food, whether cooked at his diner, at a high-end French restaurant, or by his mother-in-law.

*A pleasant, witty memoir from an American diner owner in France.*

### CHAMPIONS DAY
**The End of Old Shanghai**
James Carter
Norton (352 pp.)
$28.95 | Jun. 16, 2020
978-0-393-63594-2

A distillation of the international flavor of old Shanghai and its sublimated race relations through one wartime day of celebration, mourning, and horse racing.

Carter, a history professor and fellow of the National Committee on U.S.–China Relations, focuses on Nov 12, 1941, when “three crowds gathered in Shanghai...in different locations and with very different motivations” but all “represent[ed] tremendous change amid the crises engulfing China.” It was the time of Japanese occupation, yet the International Settlement, the 3-square-mile area that served as an extraterritorial colony sheltering foreigners amid the bustling Chinese city, remained technically neutral. The Settlement was also the host of the vaunted Shanghai Race Club, whose last Champions Day race was held on this day. This event, ably portrayed by the author, drew the first—and largest—crowd. Originally established in 1850 by British residents who had elbowed their way into Shanghai commerce after the Opium Wars, the SRC gained popularity over the next few decades as more foreigners flocked to the prosperous city and horse racing grew in popularity among the Chinese. Excluded from joining the SRC, in the early 1900s Chinese merchants founded the International Recreation Club, located outside the IS, allowing the members to bypass “the complicated politics of the all-but colony.” The second crowd was celebrating the birthday of the late Sun Yat-sen (d. 1925), father of republican China, whose legacy was being co-opted by the city’s Japanese occupiers. The third crowd was attending the ornate funeral of China’s wealthiest woman, Liza Hardoon, “the half-Chinese, half-French Buddhist widow of a Baghdadi Jewish merchant, whose death symbolized the passing of a generation that had seen Shanghai rise to global prominence.”

Carter, whose knowledge of Chinese history and culture is abundantly clear, moves fluidly back and forth between the historical perspective and the bitter moments when Japanese occupation would eclipse the city’s once flamboyant heyday.

*A satisfying juggling act of academic research and engaging popular history. (45 illustrations)*
A largely detached observer offers a series of digestible, timely assessments of the U.S.

**AMERICA THROUGH FOREIGN EYES**
Castañeda, Jorge G.
Oxford Univ. (304 pp.)
$27.95 | Jul. 1, 2020
978-0-19-022449-3

Astute observations about both the expanse of American “civilization” and the dilution of its “exceptionalism.”

The United States has always been subject to scrutiny and criticism, from de Tocqueville to Borat, and Castañeda—the global professor of political science and Latin American studies at NYU who served as the foreign minister of Mexico from 2000 to 2003—is a rather avuncular critic of many aspects of American society. Via his meandering notes on the middle class, humor, “dysfunctional” democracy, racial issues, and other topics, he provides mostly valuable and useful analysis. Interestingly, he counters some of the usual, often heard criticism from Europeans and Latin Americans about the American “same-ness,” uniformity, and homogeneity, examining in comparative graphs the rise of the middle class. While it was, on one hand, the envy of the world—cars, TVs, and other gadgets in every household—it masked the “underlying diversity” that made up the country and largely excluded significant populations of blacks, Natives, and Latinos. The relative equality of income distribution peaked in the late 1960s and has grown increasingly unequal since. Castañeda also examines the country’s much-vaunted (and highly problematic) systems of meritocracy and expectation of social mobility—and how the latter trend has declined below the levels of many European countries. The other “defining trait” of America—after uniformity and obsession with money—is “exceptionalism,” a myth that the author explodes, quoting Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes: “The United States has been the bearer of a nationalism as aggressive and self-celebratory as any European imperial power.” In the last, hard-hitting chapter, “The Unforgivable,” Castañeda explores how America’s grand Enlightenment ideals have been trampled by a “breach of contract with liberalism.”
and tolerance” in terms of “mass incarceration, the death penalty, guns, and intelligent design.”

A largely detached observer offers a series of digestible, timely assessments of the U.S.

THE DEVIANT’S WAR
The Homosexual vs. the United States of America
Cervini, Eric
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (512 pp.)
$35.00 | Jun. 2, 2020
978-0-374-13979-7

An account of the decadeslong struggle for civil rights for gay people, a story that begins at the height of the Cold War. “After World War II,” writes historian Cervini, “homosexual arrests...occurred at the rate of one every ten minutes...In sum, one million citizens found themselves persecuted by the American state for sexual deviation.” One was Franklin Edward Kameny, a budding astronomer pressed into Army service in 1943, who, come peacetime, fell in love with another man. Arrested for “lewd conduct,” he was dismissed from his civilian post with the Army Map Service in 1957. It took him years to find regular employment, time in which he advocated for gay civil rights, speaking before audiences as a member of the Mattachine Society. None other than J. Edgar Hoover took a personal role in suppressing Kameny, among many others; meanwhile, Kameny organized demonstrations against the State Department, which, according to Secretary Dean Rusk, did not “employ homosexuals knowingly, and...if we discover homosexuals in our department, we discharge them.” It would take many years—in fact, into the presidency of Barack Obama—before some of the goals Kameny advocated for were reached. Cervini is wide-ranging in his coverage of such topics as the medical classification of homosexuality as deviance and the government’s justification for not hiring gay workers for fear that they would be security risks. In the latter case, just before World War I, a gay Austro-Hungarian officer sold military secrets to the Russians, and when CIA Director Allen Dulles went to work at the U.S. Embassy in Vienna, he found “everyone still whispering about the homosexual spy who had lost the First World War for the empire.” While insightful on such big-picture issues, the author also focuses on individuals who made their identities known in order to protest such misguided policies.

A solid contribution to LGBTQ history — and that of civil rights generally. (23 b/w illustrations)

DYING FOR AN IPHONE
Apple, Foxconn, and the Lives of China’s Workers
Chan, Jenny & Selden, Mark & Pun Ngai
Haymarket (300 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Jun. 2, 2020
978-1-64259-124-8

A damning indictment of Apple’s labor and supply practices. Chan, Selden, and Pun persuasively argue that the relationship between Apple and shadowy Chinese manufacturing giant Foxconn epitomizes the brutality of globalized late-stage capitalism. “In summer 2010,” write the authors, “we collaborated with researchers from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong to conduct undercover research at Foxconn’s major manufacturing sites...Our effort to engage the corporations in discussion of labor responsibility produced only corporate rationalizations and platitudes.” The authors investigate Foxconn’s aggressive rise, propelled by mysterious CEO Terry Gou, seemingly determined to create a Maoist workers’ cult complete with slogans and surveillance. Still, “while Foxconn carved out a niche as the exclusive final assembler of the iPhone, the lion’s share of the profits was captured by Apple.” The authors merge deep dives into data with chilling testimonials from workers, including some who attempted suicide. “All of us log long hours of overtime with only two rest days in the entire month,” said one worker regarding the demands for iPad production. Due to such pressures, “fire hazards and metallic dust explosions had put workers’ lives at severe risk, with Apple complicit along with its supplier network.” Although their focus is the corrosive effect of Foxconn on China’s labor market, the authors address subtopics including exploitative internship programs, environmental issues, and workers’ efforts to organize for better treatment, opposed by the company and the government. This contrasts uncomfortably with Apple’s hip, progressive public image. “We can speak of a veritable cult of Apple,” write the authors, “with tens of thousands of consumers tracking each corporate unveiling of a new design.” Although their tone is dry, they harness disturbing and varied evidence, including anecdotes, corporate communications, and first-person accounts, creating a compelling exposé of what lies behind one of the most recognizable icons of consumerism.

A valuable contribution to an overdue discussion about technology and privilege. (b/w photos)
Want to invest in real estate but don’t have the time? No matter your level of experience, you can outsource your investments with passive syndications!

With a typical syndication deal, multiple investors passively invest into a fund while a manager is responsible for everything else. This provides an avenue to invest in real estate without tenants, toilets, or trash—and The Hands-Off Investor is the only comprehensive guide available that will teach you how to invest in these opportunities the right way.

The Hands-Off Investor: An Insider’s Guide to Investing in Passive Real Estate Syndications
$24.99 USD
Available at all major retailers starting May 5, 2020

MORE INFORMATION AT
BiggerPockets.com/Syndications
OUTRAGED
Why Everyone Is Shouting and No One Is Talking
Charles, Ashley 'Dotty'
Bloomsbury (176 pp.)
$26.00 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-63557-500-2

A British radio host and opinion columnist rails against online outrage and the benumbed fatigue it induces.

Charles combines her chatty, conversational style with smatterings of academic research as she reexamines some viral campaigns during an era in which outrage requires so little commitment or emotional investment, when a hashtag or a retweet is enough for people to feel good about themselves or believe they have made a difference. The author begins with the backlash against the insensitivity of the H&M clothing retailer, whose website featured a young black boy in a hoodie that read, “COOLEST MONKEY IN THE JUNGLE.”

Charles felt that if anyone had a right to be offended, it should be her—“I represent a ‘triple jeopardy’ intersection: a black, gay woman” (and mother of a black infant boy)—but she felt that the uproar was exaggerated and that there were plenty of more serious inequities for people to get riled up over—and perhaps even do something about. In January 2018, the author wrote an opinion piece for the Guardian titled “The Currency of Outrage,” which begins, “Everyone is offended by everything. It’s exhausting.” She goes on to note that “by becoming fickle and oversaturated, the value of outrage is plummeting.” This brief book stems from that piece, and she includes accounts of her interviews with those who have been victims of such outrage—e.g., Rachel Dolezal, branded as a “race faker” after the activist for black causes was revealed to be a white woman passing as black—and those who have benefitted from it, building their personal brands through the wide exposure they’ve received from “the outrage conga line.” Though the author could have gone much deeper in many areas, she effectively shows how mass outrage allows people to feel better about themselves without doing the hard work that true change requires.

A breezy read that might make readers hesitate before climbing aboard the latest hashtag bandwagon.

THE ROAD FROM RAQQA
A Story of Brotherhood, Borders, and Belonging
Conn, Jordan Ritter
Ballantine (272 pp.)
$28.00 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-1-9848-1718-1

Syrian brothers take different paths of immigration, neither easy, in this thoughtful account.

The Middle East has experienced waves of violence for generations. One came in the 1980s, an early spasm of repression by the Assad regime, which sent Riyad Alkasem on a roundabout path to America. Riyad had studied law, but when he finally landed in Tennessee, he opened a restaurant serving Syrian food—one that proved so popular that, by the end of Ringer staff writer Conn’s account, Riyad is planning to open a second location. Meanwhile, his brother Bashar stayed in Syria, became a lawyer, and was on his way to a judgeship when civil war erupted and the brothers’ hometown, Raqqa, was seized by the Islamic State group (aka Daesh).

“Bashar saw the world as a place filled with the wonders of God’s creation,” writes Conn. “Daesh saw it only as a place full of things to burn.” Riyad’s earlier course had led to American citizenship, and he became an ideal immigrant: a hard worker and business owner who contributed strongly to his community. But after 9/11, he was rewarded with one episode of bigoted reaction after another. Bashar’s path turned instead to Germany, for in Trump-era America, no Syrians—no Muslims, for that matter—need apply. For Riyad, “Trump emboldened the worst of America,” while for Bashar, “Germany is what Riyad has long believed the United States to be: the kind of place Ronald
Reagan once called the ‘shining city upon a hill.’ Conn’s affecting narrative touches deeply not just on these contrasting immigration issues, with the strong implication that Germany’s gain is America’s loss, but also on how the bonds of family and old community can exist even when people are uprooted. As such, it makes a solid complement to Khaled Khalifa’s novel Death Is Hard Work (2019) as a study in how people persist and prevail in a time of terror.

A convincing counterargument to anti-immigrant sentiment.

DEMOCRACY, IF WE CAN KEEP IT
The ACLU’s 100-Year Fight for Rights in America
Conn, Ellis
The New Press (480 pp.)
$29.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-62097-383-7

A history of the organization that has fought to protect the Bill of Rights for the past century.

In 1919, in the aftermath of World War I, “xenophobia, racism, and the war between management and labor” erupted violently, leading to the founding of the American Civil Liberties Union the next year. Dedicated to championing “in the highest courts the civil liberties of persons and organizations,” the ACLU has been involved in labor’s right to “picket, boycott, and strike”; Vietnam War dissent; civil rights infringements; women’s rights (in 1972, the organization tapped Ruth Bader Ginsburg to head its Women’s Rights Project); and suing on behalf of mental patients, the disabled, and prisoners, among many other issues involving its core mission to protect democratic freedoms. Conn, chairman of the editorial board of the New York Daily News and contributor to USA Today, Newsweek, and Time, draws on ACLU archives, interviews, and published sources to offer a thorough, balanced recounting of the organization’s often turbulent century. Throughout its history, it participated in some celebrated cases—e.g., the Scopes trial, testing Tennessee’s prohibition of the teaching of evolution; and the trial of the so-called Scottsboro boys, nine black youths charged with raping two white girls on a freight train in Alabama. The ACLU helped NAACP lawyers prep for arguments in Brown v. Board of Education but was otherwise not directly involved; in the 1960s, writes the author, “it had rarely been on the front lines” of racial issues. The Trump era has energized an organization pledged to remain nonpartisan. “As of early 2019,” writes Conn, “the ACLU had initiated 186 legal actions against the Trump administration, including 92 lawsuits.” In the 2018 midterms, it supported many ballot initiatives (and candidates) that had an impact on civil liberties. Conn traces the ACLU’s growth, management challenges, and philosophical conflicts, through which the organization has maintained itself as a strong defender of democracy.

A well-researched chronicle of democratic activism.

THE GREEN NEW DEAL AND BEYOND
Ending the Climate Emergency While We Still Can
Cox, Stan
City Lights (200 pp.)
$16.95 paper | May 19, 2020
978-0-87286-806-9

A strictly science-based plan for effectively addressing the dire realities of climate change.

Geneticist and science writer Cox begins with bad news, although good news is rarely in evidence. Earth’s average temperature is now 2.2 degrees higher than in the pre–fossil fuel era. This may sound trivial, but it is anything but. A rise of another half degree will produce widespread human suffering, but we are on course for a catastrophic nearly 6 degree rise by 2100. Activists advocate the Green New Deal plan that cuts carbon
IN THE ALCHEMY OF US, A SELF-DESCRIBED “SCIENCE EVANGELIST” SPOTLIGHTS OVERLOOKED FIGURES IN THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE
By Kelly McMasters

Author Ainissa Ramirez, self-avowed “science evangelist,” fell in love with the field early and deeply. “I was one of those kids with a chemistry kit, doing experiments,” she says. She became obsessed with the educational science show 3-2-1 Contact that aired on PBS in the 1980s. “I saw this little African American girl who was part of the Bloodhound Gang [a segment involving junior detectives solving mysteries using science] and I asked my mom, ‘What is she doing?’ She was a black woman using her brain. I rarely saw myself on television and that put me on the path to science.”

Ramirez’s debut book, The Alchemy of Us: How Humans and Matter Transformed One Another (MIT Press, April 7), aims to bridge what she sees as an unnecessary separation between humans and science. “The separation exists because of the way scientists typically present to people; we don’t need to always be punching people in the face with science!” Her antidote consists of eight beautifully rendered portraits of inventions that have altered human experience—including lightbulbs, labware, and silicon chips—with a focus on the historical figures often overlooked in the history of science, including women and people of color. “I couldn’t write a book where I am not reflected,” Ramirez says.

Ramirez, 51, first studied science at Brown University before going on to Stanford University for her Ph.D. in materials science and engineering. (“My mom doesn’t even know what that means,” she jokes about her chosen field. “Now that there is a book, she just says I am a journalist and writer.”) She has worked as a scientist at Bell Labs, taught at Yale University, is a TED speaker, and is an inventor in her own right, with six patents to her name. Yet her journey in science has not been easy. “I know now why that seed needed to be planted early,” Ramirez says. “It needed deep roots because there are so many barriers to becoming a scientist.”

When she first began working on The Alchemy of Us five years ago, she just planned to write a standard science book: Here are the facts, here’s how it happens. But the 2016 presidential election and subsequent social upheaval changed the way she considered well-worn stories such as that of “lightning man” Samuel Morse, inventor of the telegraph and Morse code. “When I found out this guy thought slavery was ‘a divine arrangement,’ I thought—people admire you, and I need to let people know this.”

Often, research led Ramirez to a hidden gem, as in the case of Ruth Belville, whose story opens the book’s first chapter, “Interact.” “I found this one sentence in a thick library book: ‘...and there was a lady who used to sell time.’ And I’d go, what? Hold up! I need to find out all I can about this Ruth lady.” Ramirez ultimately used Ruth
to tell the human side of timekeeping. “I wanted to make sure that people who have been eclipsed by ‘geniuses’ get their moment, too.”

In a chapter titled “Capture,” Ramirez traces the technology of color Polaroid film as well as the company’s little-known involvement in supporting apartheid in South Africa in the 1960s and ’70s. “I felt heartbroken because I had loved Polaroid so much as a kid,” Ramirez says. She met with activist and former Polaroid employee Caroline Hunter, going together to Hunter’s old workplace in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she had been harassed and fired for starting the Polaroid Revolutionary Worker Movement in opposition to Polaroid’s production of passbook photos used to identify and discriminate against black South Africans. “That was an incredibly hard story to write, but I thought, if I could write it as beautifully as I could, then people will be willing to read it and learn from it and actually see it.”

During her research, Ramirez learned a lot about science but also about herself. “Writing this book used both sides of my brain,” Ramirez says, since she had to look at the research as both a scientist and a writer. “The person who started this book and the person who finished this book have the same DNA but are different people,” she says. “That’s the true alchemy.”

Kelly McMasters is the co-editor of This Is the Place: Women Writing About Home and author of Welcome to Shirley: A Memoir From an Atomic Town. The Alchemy of Us received a starred review on KirkusReviews.com.

emissions to zero through transition to an economy running on non-fossil energy. After expressing admiration, Cox adds that it won’t work. As he writes, the assumption that “renewable energy coming on line each year will be matched by an equivalent amount of coal-, oil-, or gas-fired capacity going off line” is wrong. So far, it’s mostly added to the total energy pool. It’s imperative that we stop using fossil fuels and ditch our obsessions with economic growth, new technology, and quick-fix (and ineffective), market-oriented approaches such as carbon taxes. Cox proposes to ban all mining and extraction, possibly after nationalizing the fossil fuel industries. More realistic than the average activist, he points out that clean sources can’t replace these in the foreseeable future, so the world will have to get along with less energy. Since the poor benefit under the Green New Deal, the burden will fall on the wealthy and upper middle classes, whose standard of living may drop to that of Denmark or Switzerland, nations that use half the energy of the U.S. Cox’s audience, deeply worried about global warming, may protest that his prescriptions seem unrealistic as well as political poison. Anticipating this, he delivers a blunt rebuttal: “Weaning ourselves off high levels of energy use now is good practice for a future in which a weaning is going to happen, like it or not.” Convincing, painful, and a long shot—but better than the alternative.

Keep Clear
My Adventures With Asperger’s
Cutler, Tom
Scribe (352 pp.)
$20.00 paper | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-950354-08-5

A British humor writer chronicles his experiences with Asperger’s syndrome, for which he didn’t receive a diagnosis until he was 55, and explores some of the science associated with the condition.

For decades, Cutler lived with his “eccentric” nature, “which until lately had mystified and grieved me.” Some of the traits of his personality included perfectionism, anxiety, limited eye contact, hypersensitivity, directness, uncommon vocabulary, loneliness, distaste of social touch, and an inability to engage in small talk. All of these formed a “painful puzzle,” with “the real me… hidden behind a façade of facile wit and practiced social formulas.” The author astutely points out that “there is no such thing as a typical Asperger,” and he chronicles how, after a nighttime panic attack, he found a psychiatrist who suggested Asperger’s as a diagnosis. Unconvinced, Cutler began researching, and he shares a readable history of the autism spectrum, jumping in where necessary to offer personal commentary: “What people often do not see in Aspergers, sometimes because it is so well camouflaged, is the confusion and dismay caused by the frequently inhospitable world: the constant self-monitoring, the anxiety, the botched social approaches and muffed relationships, the anguish, the exhaustion, the silent rage, and the deep
dark cave of loneliness.” In precise prose laced with a sharp sense of humor as well as plenty of somber moments, the author delves into his journey of self-discovery, learning that, although the origins of Asperger’s are not clearly defined, there is solid evidence of a genetic component. Science aside, the meat of the book is Cutler’s detailed, highly entertaining examination of his life on the spectrum, and his unique brand of comedy is evident throughout—e.g., his account of awkwardly learning ballroom dancing, where the participants were “holding our partners like bags of radioactive waste.”

An intimate embrace of Asperger’s full of both melancholy and salty humor.

**HOW DID WE GET HERE?**

From Theodore Roosevelt to Donald Trump

Dallek, Robert

Harper/HarperCollins (272 pp.)

$32.50 | May 26, 2020

978-0-06-287299-9

A veteran American historian looks back at previous presidencies to see how we arrived at our current one.

Dallek—who has published works about Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Richard Nixon, among others—devotes chapters to all the presidents between Theodore Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan, briefly summarizing their lives and times and assessing their strengths, weaknesses, accomplishments, and failures. No fan of Donald Trump, the author emphasizes the previous presidents’ failures and sees how they have led to Trump, who gets his own damning chapter at the end. Dallek does a good job of seeing the strengths of presidents he does not otherwise admire, and he also explores the weaknesses in those he does admire. For example, he credits Nixon for his advances with China, and he chides FDR for deceptions about his health. Dallek makes clear that all the negative aspects of previous presidents have come home to roost in Trump: Theodore Roosevelt’s craving for attention and his self-adulation, Woodrow Wilson’s “exaggerated presidential promises,” Truman’s making war in Korea without Congressional approval, Dwight Eisenhower’s moves in Iran and Vietnam, JFK’s focus on image, LBJ’s “deceitfulness on foreign affairs,” Nixon’s fondness for imperiousness, Jimmy Carter’s ineffectualness, and Reagan’s use of celebrity as a political weapon and his displays of ignorance. In the final chapter, Dallek’s dagger emerges. Trump is a “retrograde force” whose “abusive language” shreds dignity from the office—as do his innumerable lies, distortions, and overall boorishness. “Making America great again,” writes the author, “hardly satisfies any standard for leading us into a better future.” The author shifts from the third person to the first from time to time to tell us about a relevant personal experience—e.g., his 1979 meeting with some Soviet historians in Moscow.

Informed and passionate words to bring cheers from Never Trumpers and no reaction from Trump fans, who won’t read it.

**PERFECTLY WOUNDED**

A Memoir About What Happens after a Miracle

Day, Mike with Vera, Robert

Twelve (256 pp.)

$28.00 | Jun. 9, 2020

978-1-5387-0183-6

A Navy SEAL recounts a career of service and recovery from terrible wounds.
In 2007, Day was involved in an operation designed to track down and neutralize a terrorist cell in Iraq’s Anbar Province. He entered a room where four guns were trained on him, receiving 27 wounds—and still managed to kill all four shooters. Some of his memoir is by-the-numbers—it’s no surprise to learn that SEALs undergo training that would send most people packing—and some of the narrative is a touch overwritten—as when he writes of that critical moment: “It was surreal, like something out of a movie: time slowed almost to a stop and everything happened in super slow motion, almost as if I were watching the scene unfold frame by frame.” Each of Day’s 27 wounds was, in the words of the doctors who treated him, “perfect”—that is, each entered and exited from his body without hitting a vein, artery, or vital organ, making treatment possible. “Not one of the bullets, or the combination of them all, was enough to kill me,” he writes. Still, Day, who entered the service bearing the psychic wounds of an abusive childhood, suffered PTSD in the aftermath. Separated from the service, he spent time casting about for something to do before settling on a course of care for his fellow veterans and trauma sufferers, working both as a motivational speaker and a guide through the organization he founded called the Warrior Tribe, which provides “resiliency programming” for those who have undergone similar terrors to his. The author’s account of his recovery is inspiring indeed, a matter of tough love, persistence, and an ethic borrowed in part from Mr. Rogers: “If you could only sense how important you are to the lives of those you meet…”

Readers interested in care programs for returning veterans will find Day’s account invaluable.

THE LOST ART OF DYING
Reviving Forgotten Wisdom
Dugdale, L.S.
HarperOne (272 pp.)
$27.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-06-293263-1

A physician draws wisdom from a late medieval text to transform our thoughts and fears about dying.

When a terminal patient’s life is prolonged with desperate medical procedures, that individual’s final moments may be sadly compromised. Yet reliance on modern medical interventions has become increasingly common in our culture. As Dugdale, the director of Columbia University’s Center for Clinical Medical Ethics, writes, “in failing to die well, we fail to live well.” Beginning with a case study example, the author relates how woeful such a failure can be. The patient was an elderly man approaching the end of a lengthy battle with cancer, and no one in his family was prepared to acknowledge his approaching death, insisting that every effort be made to keep him alive. In his final hours, he suffered through several unnecessary resuscitations, resulting in a long, painful death. Such examples led Dugdale to seek out a more compassionate alternative. In her studies, she was inspired by the holistically grounded approach to dying examined in *ars moriendi* (“the art of dying”), a 15th-century text that contains intriguing reflections on death as an essential aspect of living requiring careful preparation. “Although more than six hundred years have passed, I have been repeatedly struck by the need for a similar handbook today,” writes Dugdale. “That’s why I wrote this book. Although some of the original *ars moriendi* content is less relevant to the diverse and global twenty-first century, it nevertheless offers rich wisdom on how we might die well.” Throughout the book, Dugdale balances her clinical experience with an openly holistic mindfulness, and she thoughtfully expands on the relevant lessons of *ars moriendi*: acknowledging our human finitude, or what it means to be mortal; embracing a meaningful community; facing a fear of death; and giving consideration to the decision of whether to die at home or in a hospital or other setting.

A wise and reassuring guide for confronting death.
An exemplary work of scholarship that is comprehensible to everyone.

TIME OF THE MAGICIANS

A readable, expert introduction to some of the most abstruse yet influential philosophical thought of the 20th century.

No quartet of contemporaneous philosophers ever had a greater impact on popular thinking, as well as on formal thought, than the figures whom Eilenberger terms “magicians.” That word is the single slip-up (and a minor one) in this enthralling tale of four men whose fresh consideration of thought, sign, and language—variably termed phenomenology, semiotics, linguistics, and epistemology—revolutionized serious philosophical thought in the decade after World War I. Ably translated by Whiteside, Eilenberger’s book is the kind of limpid presentation of Continental philosophical expression rare in books about the subject. It’s an achievement that has already won plaudits and prizes abroad. That’s no doubt due to the author’s own professional standing as a philosopher, but it also owes much to his approach: a multilayered exploration of the lives and thoughts of four very different thinkers at a time when Western and Central Europe struggled to emerge from war and economic crisis before slipping into the horrors of Nazism. The imposing Ludwig Wittgenstein, the hapless Walter Benjamin, the always troubling Martin Heidegger, and the steady, placid Ernst Cassirer emerge from Eilenberger’s portrait as formidable minds attached to flawed personalities whose sometimes barely comprehensible formulations nevertheless transformed the way human understanding is now seen by philosophers. The book’s special value lies in greatly advancing accessibility to these men’s works and thought. So clear and sometimes jaunty is Eilenberger that no reader will miss out from understanding the narrative. One can complain only that he, too, rarely makes known his own views. Otherwise, his lucid presentation of his characters’ often hard-to-comprehend thinking and the muddy language in which they expressed it make this book invaluable for anyone seeking to learn about these extraordinary figures.

An exemplary work of scholarship that is comprehensible to everyone. (16-page b/w photo insert)
WHICH COUNTRY HAS THE WORLD’S BEST HEALTH CARE?

Emanuel, Ezekiel J.
PublicAffairs (256 pp.)
$28.00 | Jun. 16, 2020
978-1-5417-9773-4

A leading oncologist and medical ethicist turns a gimlet eye on the health care systems of the world’s leading economies and finds most of them wanting.

Where’s the best place in the world to be sick? To judge by Emanuel’s findings, if you have a condition that will allow you to live awhile, the U.S. isn’t bad; it leads the world in medical innovations and finding cures or treatments for unusual ailments. By other measures, the U.S. ranks well down the list of the 11 systems he analyzes here: “It significantly underperforms on numerous dimensions,” writes the author. China may be worse, in part because its system of health care is hospital-centric: “There are vanishingly few physician offices or other ambulatory centers to deliver care.” Consequently, with the current COVID-19 crisis, Chinese people needing treatment flooded the country’s hospitals and overwhelmed them. In many parts of that country, Emanuel writes, hospitals are few and far between, forcing patients to travel far from home for treatment. Canadians have it better except in the remoter reaches of the far north; Emanuel acknowledges that Canadian health care has its problems even while noting that conservative critics in the U.S. have vastly overestimated the problem of waiting times for treatment. Britain’s system is worse but not terrible. The author offers numerous methods for improving systems around the world. Some may be unpalatable to libertarian advocates of privacy. For example, Taiwan was able to keep a lid, relatively speaking, on COVID-19, because medical data are centralized with passports and other key documents, so that it was easy to identify Taiwanese who had visited mainland China and test and, if necessary, quarantine them. Among Emanuel’s recommendations are to provide universal coverage, simplify data flows...
and insurance programs, and regulate drug prices—which are sky-high in the U.S.

Students of health economics and policymakers will find the doctor’s diagnoses and prescriptions well worth considering.

**CARVILLE’S CURE**

*Leprosy, Stigma, and the Fight for Justice*

*Fessler, Pam*

Liveright/Norton (352 pp.)

$28.95 | Jul. 14, 2020

978-1-63149-503-8

A social and medical history of Louisiana’s leprosarium, the only such operation in the continental U.S. during the 20th century.

From 1894 until 1999, on the Mississippi River between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, stood the Louisiana Leper Home, later known as Carville. This is the story of the patients, families, and caregivers who contended with Hansen’s disease, also known as leprosy, one of the world’s most dreaded and misunderstood illnesses. In this fine history, by turns heartbreaking and infuriating, NPR correspondent Fessler begins with the ramshackle sugar plantation that was chosen to house the nation’s leprotic population and then moves on to the nature and progress of the disease—in particular, the societal perception of leprosy, which hasn’t changed much from its biblical depiction “as God’s way of punishing sinners by condemning them to a life of suffering and scorn.” This stigma has always clung to those with the disease, and it has been used as a convenient justification for prejudice against immigrants. “Asian immigrants, already a target for those who believed they were taking Americans’ jobs, were especially suspect,” writes the author. Without descending into melodrama, Fessler paints a clear picture of a class of people who were confined at Carville typically for life, isolated, stripped of their identities (since it might cause backlash against their families) and their civil rights. The author also shows how Carville became a refuge for its patients as well as a rare integrated institution in the Jim Crow South. Vignettes of the patients, some tracked over decades, humanize the story, as does the depiction of the Daughters of Charity, who cared for the patients and “would prove to be some of [their] strongest allies in their fight for more freedom and rights.” Fessler also follows medical developments to treat the disease, which still has the same old stigmas of discrimination, superstition, and ignorance. A caustic story told with empathy and a sharp eye for society’s intolerances. (8 pages of b/w illustrations)

**THE BEAUTY AND THE TERROR**

*The Italian Renaissance and the Rise of the West*

*Fletcher, Catherine*

Oxford Univ. (384 pp.)

$29.95 | Jun. 1, 2020

978-0-19-090849-2

In a memoir written in 1575, writes historian Fletcher, an Italian doctor and mathematician named three innovations that had changed the world in his lifetime: “firearms, the compass, and printing.” The first two helped lead the discovery of the world and conquest of parts of it. Italy should have been in a perfect spot to undertake that work, but it was bound up in damaging in-fighting between city-states and principalities and, eventually, in conflicts between larger powers—the Holy Roman Empire versus the Papal States, for instance. Aspects of those conflicts fueled great achievements of the Renaissance, a term that means “rebirth” but in the sense of “raising the dead”: Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, for example, which “should be read...in the context of the ongoing wars.” Leonardo da Vinci professed to not like war but had no qualms about selling designs for military technology to the Ottomans, the scourge of the Mediterranean. Fletcher employs a large cast of characters, seeking to “arrange them into their galaxy” as she recounts the lives and accomplishments of great men and women and ordinary people alike, the latter of whom were perhaps less scientifically inclined than we might like. When plague struck, leading to the brilliance that was the *Decameron*, Italian cities expelled their prostitutes not as a direct health measure but because by chasing sin out they might be saved from the worst excesses of avenging angels. Fletcher’s colorful pages are peppered with stories of anti-Semitic cruelty, religious and political reform, “senior managers” like Rodrigo Borgia, and of course Michelangelo. The author constructs a deft portrait of a country and time whose “importance has been defined by culture and ideas more than by wealth and power.” Densely detailed but highly readable—a fine one-volume survey of the Italian Renaissance.
A compelling examination of “the state of abortion access in our country and the people whose lives are affected by it.”

Foster, a professor and researcher in the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences at the University of California, San Francisco, synthesizes the findings of The Turnaway Study, a 10-year longitudinal project, involving 40 researchers, comparing the emotional, physical, and economic effects to women of having an abortion or being denied one due to a clinic’s deadline for when an abortion could be performed—a cutoff date that varied depending on the location of the clinic. The study excluded women seeking abortions because of fetal anomaly or severe health risk, which affect the timing of the decision. With much hearsay, unfounded assumptions, and strident rhetoric fueling public policy, the UCSF researchers aimed to provide scientific evidence about abortion “in the context of real women’s lives.” Beginning in 2007, the study included more than 1,000 women from diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds, recruited from 30 facilities in 21 states. From in-depth interviews conducted every six months, Foster has selected 10 women whose stories are related in their own words: white, Latina, and African American; rural and urban; some with strong family support, some facing their decision alone; women enmeshed in abusive relationships; some already mothers and some who went on to have children later; all with hopes for the future. Their candid stories are riveting, sometimes surprising, and always illuminating—as are the study’s findings. There is “no evidence that abortion hurts women,” the study concludes. “For every outcome we analyzed, women who received an abortion were either the same or, more frequently, better off than women who were denied an abortion.” To those who assume women make the decision to abort rashly, the researchers found thoughtful deliberation.

Required reading for anyone concerned about reproductive justice.

---

**EXERCISE OF POWER**
**American Failures, Successes, and a New Path Forward in the Post-Cold War World**
Gates, Robert M.
Knopf (464 pp.)
$29.95 | Jun. 16, 2020
978-1-5247-3188-5

Former Secretary of Defense Gates offers a sweeping view of the uses and limitations of American power in the modern era.

The U.S. remains the world’s foremost superpower, notes the author at the beginning, but that doesn’t mean that we’re not challenged at every turn: China is growing economically, with its political influence broadening; Russia “is aggressively threatening and attempting to destabilize Western democracies and dominate its neighbors”; and small states from North Korea to Iraq and Syria remain hot spots even as several...
Phuc Tran has loved books as far back as he can remember. But it never really occurred to the high school Latin teacher and tattooer from Maine to write one of his own.

That changed after his TEDx talk on the linguistic differences between English and Vietnamese, “Grammar, Identity, and The Dark Side of the Subjunctive,” attracted a lot of attention—from NPR, from YouTube viewers, and from Asian Americans thrilled to see a bit of their experience in the spotlight.

“The feedback from the talk was so affirming, and that planted the seed of ‘I think I want to sit down and write more about my life,’ ” says Tran, calling from his Maine home. “I think it was the first time I had felt like I had an invitation to tell my story.”

Sigh, Gone: A Misfit’s Memoir of Great Books, Punk Rock, and the Fight To Fit In (Flatiron, April 28) chronicles his family’s escape from Vietnam, their settlement in rural Pennsylvania, and all the chaos that entailed.

It starts with his first memory—figuring out, at 4 years old, how to translate his Vietnamese name into English and settling on “Phuc rhymes with Luke”—and ends with his graduation from high school. Sigh, Gone covers Tran’s quest to fit in, to become American, and how that changed his relationship with his family. It captures the paradox of being invited to live in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, as refugees and receiving support from some while also living as targets of intense and continuous racism from others.

“People’s stories are complicated,” Tran says. “If that’s the only thing people take from my story, that’s a win for me. I don’t want to have my life reduced to a sound bite or a 140-character tweet...I did some things that were super terrible, and I was also helpful and I tried to be a good son. That’s part of the paradox of being a person and being alive. Right?”

Tran saw books (and later music) as a way to connect to others, reading all the classics he could from the local library. Each chapter in Sigh, Gone is named after a classic—from The Metamorphosis to The Scarlet Letter—and relates his life to a different book in the literary canon, creating what he calls “a love letter to the books that really shaped who I was.”

“I just wanted to have people intersect with it in different ways,” Tran says. “I think my main hope was that there were lots of on-ramps for people to get into the story—whether it was the book angle or the punk rock/skateboarding thing, or even just growing up in the ’80s.”
Though very few may share in the specifics of his life as a Vietnamese refugee, Tran hopes they can relate to the broader themes of *Sigh, Gone* — the quest for meaning and a sense of belonging.

As eager as Tran is to connect with readers, he isn't really looking forward to having his family read the book, which chronicles some tough times, including physical abuse and a night when he ran away from home because his father tried to stab him.

Tran says his parents aren't happy he hasn't given them a copy of the book yet, and he isn't sure he ever will. He didn't give his younger brother, Louis, an advance copy either. “He was so pissed,” Tran says, laughing. “He entered the Goodreads giveaway, and he won one. He took a screenshot and sent me a text like, ‘Fuck you, dude’ and read it....His endorsement meant a lot to me.”

Tran says he isn't sure what his parents will think of the book. “I hope that they can see the complexity in the way that I’ve depicted them,” he says. “I hope that they see there’s empathy there and that I recognize that they were coming to this country as 20-year-old people with two kids and no sense of anything. I know how hard that was....I worry that they’re going to just pick up on me airing our family’s dirty laundry and then be embarrassed by it and then think I’m an asshole. But I mean, that’s also kind of par for the course.”

Glenn Gamboa is a writer in Brooklyn. *Sigh, Gone* received a starred review in the Feb. 1, 2020, issue.
A captivating, shady story about massive, brazen corruption hiding in plain sight.

THE VAPORS

A Southern Family, the New York Mob, and the Rise and Fall of Hot Springs, America’s Forgotten Capital of Vice
Hill, David
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (400 pp.)
$28.00  |  Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-250-08611-2

The history of a small town in Arkansas that once rivaled Las Vegas in gambling, booze, and prostitution.

For most Americans, Hot Springs, Arkansas, doesn’t raise an eyebrow, but folks who lived in the state from the 1930s to the ’60s knew the place as “the most sinful little city in the world.” In his first book, Hill, a Brooklyn-based journalist from Hot Springs, tells a juicy tale of how such a place was born and stayed in business for so long as the “sin city of the Bible Belt.” Due to the Vapors, therapeutic, thermal springs offering relief to those in pain, the area was the first park to be managed by the federal government. The author offers up a huge cast of colorful, mostly sleazy characters, but he focuses on three key players: Hazel Hill, the author’s grandmother; gangster Dane Harris, boss gambler and the “most powerful man in Hot Springs”; and Owney “The Killer” Madden, who was sent to the town in 1931 by Meyer Lansky to be the “mob’s ambassador.” Weaving their stories in and out, from 1931 to 1968, Hill unfolds an engrossing history of corruption at the highest levels. During World War II, Hot Springs and its excellent hospital became a refuge for soldiers seeking much-needed R&R, enjoying the illegal booze, and gambling. Madden consolidated power, teaming up with Harris. Struggling to raise her family of three sons, including Jim, the author’s father, Hazel moved from Ohio back to Hot Springs in 1951 and got a job as a barmaid and, later, a “shill player” at a casino, gambling with the house’s money. In highly detailed, novelistic prose, Hill chronicles the rise of the power brokers and their ballot-stuffing control of local and state elections. In 1965, J. Edgar Hoover and Attorney General Robert Kennedy finally shut it all down.

A captivating, shady story about massive, brazen corruption hiding in plain sight. (8 pages of b/w illustrations)
GOOD CHEMISTRY
The Science of Connection, From Soul to Psychedelics
Holland, Julie
Harper Wave/HarperCollins (320 pp.)
$27.99  |  Jun. 16, 2020
978-0-06-286288-4

It’s hard to argue the fact that we are losing our human-to-human connection. One way back, suggests Holland, a psychiatrist who specializes in psychopharmacology, is via psychedelic medicines.

To reproduce, nurture, and survive, humans are hard-wired for connection, but our current state is one of disconnection and isolation. However, as the author writes in this enthusiastic foray into the possibilities of igniting the “pharmacological fireworks in our brains,” we have the potential “to bring us back into alignment with our true purpose, which is connection.” Social isolation “has a lethality on par with being obese, or with smoking about fifteen cigarettes a day.” One expression of it is our obsession with screens; another is the opioid epidemic. Via her personal experience, interviews with experts, and a sturdy grasp of the medical literature, Holland explains the monitored use of MDMA, LSD, THC, and psilocybin mushrooms to “light a path out of chronic loneliness and toward connectedness.” The author, who edited The Pot Book: A Complete Guide to Cannabis (2010) and Ecstasy: The Complete Guide (2001), ranges among connections with the self, a partner, family, community, Earth, and the cosmos. One of Holland’s most important aims—and one that will ring true for many readers—is to tap into the parasympathetic nervous system, the flip side of the fight-or-flight state, the mode when we feel relaxed, safe, loving, and loved. There are many states of chronic stress, loneliness, addiction, and alienation that can be addressed by using the best drugs available for orchestrating the process of attachment, and they are already in your brain—e.g., oxytocin, vasopressin, serotonin, endorphins, endocannabinoids, and dopamine. Holland explores a number of avenues to access this feel-good chemistry—conscious breathing, sex, meditation, group activities—and she conveys great excitement and marvelous anecdotes about the prospects of the psychedelic pharmacopeia.

An intriguing invitation to tune into the therapeutic experience of psychedelic connectivity.

THE FUTURE EARTH
A Radical Vision for What’s Possible in the Age of Warming
Holthaus, Eric
HarperOne (256 pp.)
$22.99 paper  |  Jun. 30, 2020
978-0-06-288316-2

A weather and climate change journalist envisions a 30-year plan for reversing the effects of climate change.

“A new era of urgently paying attention to nature has arrived,” writes Holthaus in the introductory chapter, “A Living Emergency,” he delivers an alarming global overview of our current climate conditions. Vividly detailing the severity of recent hurricanes, wildfires, droughts, floods, and other natural disasters that have devastated large sections of our planet, he relates how each can be directly attributed to increased carbon emissions and how the levels in 2019 were the highest in human history. “We can no longer deny that weather in every corner of the Earth is different now,” writes the author. “That change is because of us. And we have the power to choose a different path.” Despite the substantial obstacles created by our current political landscape, which is driven by the financial interests of major corporations, Holthaus finds hope in the diligent efforts of leading scientists and environmentalists, the new wave of progressively charged politicians and the concept of the Green New Deal, and youth organizations such as the Sunrise Movement. All emphasize the urgency of finding ways to go beyond simply transitioning to electronic cars; we must radically shift from an aggressive, profit-centric growth economy to a “regenerative economy” focused on sustainability. In the second half of the book, Holthaus outlines a detailed plan by decade, leading up through 2050. Writing in the past tense, he somewhat optimistically lays out the results of these measures as having already taken place—e.g., “2020-2030: Catastrophic Success” or “2030-2040: Radical Stewardship.” In the chapter titled “2040-2050: New Technologies and New Spiritualities,” the author concedes that even with emissions possibly reduced to “two-thirds of current levels,” temperatures will likely continue to rise and may require the use of controversial methods of geoengineering, which include the concept of “planet-cooling aerosol technology.”

An encouraging and diligently researched call to action regarding the most pressing issue of our time.
THE SEARCH FOR LIFE ON MARS
The Greatest Scientific Detective Story of All Time
Howell, Elizabeth & Booth, Nicholas
Arcade (448 pp.)
$27.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-950691-39-5

A new account of the scientific quest that "promises to spring even more amazing surprises in the years to come."

Journalists Howell and Booth, as well as most experts, agree that Martian life would likely resemble that on Earth, and earthly organisms are tough. They can thrive without oxygen or sunlight, at temperatures above boiling and below freezing, and in the presence of strong acids, toxic metals, and poisons. However, none exist without water. The good news is that Mars has water. The bad news is that its surface is bone dry. In the era before spacecraft, many observers believed in life on Mars, led by the brilliant, wealthy Percival Lowell (1855-1916), who built his own observatory, saw the iconic canals, and never doubted that they represented works of an advanced civilization. The general public—but few astronomers—agreed until the pioneering 1965 Mariner 4 flyby revealed a cratered moon-like surface, an atmosphere 1/100 thinner than ours, and a temperature of minus 150 degrees Fahrenheit. The authors deliver a densely detailed account of subsequent unmanned flybys, orbiters, and landers whose missions have returned an avalanche of new geological, chemical, and meteorological discoveries that thrill scientists but may overwhelm general readers. Two more landers should launch soon, and much is expected. The authors conclude that most—but not all—experts consider Mars dead except, perhaps, deep underground, where liquid water may persist. A better environment existed billions of years ago, with volcanoes providing heat and gases, hot springs, and bodies of water that lasted perhaps 100 million years. "Conditions have deteriorated from earlier states into the freezing tundra-like world we see today," write the authors, who provide the latest on the possibility of Martian life and proof that we probably won't know for sure until humans set foot.

The search retains an irresistible fascination, and this enthusiastic account brings readers up to date. (32 color photos)

FUNDAMENTAL
How Quantum and Particle Physics Explain Absolutely Everything
James, Tim
Pegasus (256 pp.)
$26.95 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-64313-470-3

A lucid and humorous layman's guide to quantum mechanics, a theory that has been proven accurate despite its exceeding weirdness.

From the celebrity of the Higgs boson to reports of quantum computing, many people are vaguely familiar with quantum and particle physics and its strange implications, but few (if any) truly understand it. James, a science teacher and blogger, clearly has experience in explaining complicated ideas in understandable terms, and he capably applies his skills to this tricky subject, which he describes as "a realm of craziness and chaos where knowledge and imagination become the same thing." The author tells the familiar yet interesting stories of scientific heavyweights such as Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg, Schrödinger, and Feynman ("he had red carpets laid out for him at weekly lectures and spent his free time hanging out in topless bars, doing calculations on napkins and drawing sketches of the dancers and sometimes the men watching"), and he details a history of experiments designed to verify theories that, on the surface, seem impossible. James also unpacks quantum field theory, an idea so dense that most writers don't dare broach it. He includes hand-drawn illustrations and is mostly successful in using plain language to convey not just quantum theories, but why they deservedly generate such excitement—or, seemingly just as often, frustration—among scientists. Throughout each clearly defined chapter, the author uses pop-culture analogies to great effect and laces his nuanced science writing with genuinely funny asides (see: "quantum pants"). He also includes several appendices with additional context and simple exercises inspired by science communicators such as Carl Sagan. James writes with infectious enthusiasm and optimism, concluding that, "rather than science drawing to a denouement, it appears that things are just getting started and that is a good reason to get excited."

Even first-time physics readers will come away with a working knowledge of one of the universe's most enigmatic subjects.
The latest in the Queens of the Resistance series, exploring the life and career of “political samurai” Elizabeth Warren.

Like each subject of Jones and Trotman’s series, Oklahoma native Warren has long worked to achieve social and political justice. She grew up in a family in which the breadwinning role unexpectedly shifted to her homemaker mother after a heart attack left her father in poor health. At 12, Warren began to help her family financially, first by babysitting and then by waitressing. An excellent student, she attended college but dropped out to marry her high school sweetheart. She earned her degree several years later and began working as a children’s speech pathologist. Forced to leave her job due to pregnancy, Warren went to law school, divorced her tradition-minded husband, and became a single mother to two small children. Warren’s path led to academia, where she became an expert in bankruptcy. This led to a political realignment from Republican to Democrat and an awakening regarding the status of working-class Americans. Later, as a Harvard professor, she served on the Congressional Oversight Panel to monitor how the Treasury Department managed the Great Recession bank bailout. Though reluctant to enter politics, Warren became the first woman senator from Massachusetts in 2013 and a symbol of “political samurai” Elizabeth Warren.

SEE NO STRANGER
A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love
Kaur, Valarie
One World/Random House (384 pp.)
$28.00 | Jun. 16, 2020
978-0-525-50909-7

A Los Angeles–based Sikh American activist, lawyer, and filmmaker tries to reinvent the wheel of love in her coming-of-age memoir.

As the child of Sikh farmers in Clovis, California, Kaur grew up with the Punjabi phrase “chardi kala,” often translated as “relentless optimism,” a state prized by her faith. She has perhaps taken those words too much to heart in her first book, an overambitious blend of memoir, self-help, and left-leaning polemic. As a Stanford undergraduate, Kaur learned that a Sikh family friend had become “the first person killed in a hate crime after 9/11,” and the tragedy led her to travel across the country to interview other victims, whose stories she told in the documentary Divided We Fall. At Yale Law School, Kaur served as a legal observer at a prisoner’s hearing at Guantánamo, where the U.S. naval base just over the hill from the detention center was “a fantastical cross between small-town America and a Caribbean seaside resort,” with fast food restaurants, tennis courts, and a bowling alley. Unwisely, the author folds vivid sections on those and other trips into a meandering, New Age–y brief on
the “revolutionary” effort “to reclaim love as a force for justice in our time” and “to love even our opponents.” Toward that end, Kaur says “meditating, expressing gratitude, retreating, bodywork, and being in nature” as well as other overfamiliar warhorses of the self-help genre. Throughout the book, her call for acts like “forgiveness” clashes with her view that rage is “a rightful response to the social traumas of patriarchy, white supremacy, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and poverty.” Depending on the situation, that view is debatable, and while the author offers plenty of good material on the plight of Sikh Americans after 9/11, those elements account for less than half the book; the rest is the author’s heavily ideological “manifesto.”

A unique portrait of post–9/11 Sikhs hampered by its rebranding of old ideas as “revolutionary.”

HOW YOU SAY IT

Why You Talk the Way You Do—and What It Says About You

Kinzler, Katherine D. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (272 pp.) $28.00 | Jul. 21, 2020 978-0-544-98655-8

How we speak shapes our lives in powerful ways, argues a psychologist immersed in research on the subject.

In her persuasive first book, University of Chicago psychology professor Kinzler maintains that the way we speak, whether in a “foreign” accent, a “nonstandard” version of our own language, or a “high-status” one, affects both how we perceive the world and how we are perceived by others. Making judicious use of her own research as well as that of others, the author shows the deep roots of our reactions to language and its variations. Kinzler’s research is particularly fascinating. Many of her experiments were conducted with children less than 1 year old—sometimes just a couple months—and proved that even at this age, children are able to differentiate among accents and prefer those of their primary caregivers to any others. Perhaps more surprisingly, babies and children recognize language as one of the key defining aspects used in discriminating between “us” and “them”—even more essential than race. Kindergartners, for example, think that “someone who was white and spoke English was more likely to grow up to be black than grow up to speak French.” After comprehensively educating readers about the vital role that our speech plays in how we are viewed, Kinzler goes on to argue, using several legal cases as well as more formal research as evidence, that discrimination based on accent or regional speech is just as real as discrimination based on, say, race or national origin. In fact, it may be more insidious because it’s often not consciously recognized by the individuals doing the discriminating. Writing informally and concisely, Kinzler aims to raise our awareness of this unnoticed prejudice so that we can put an end to it.

An articulate examination of an underrecognized aspect of human communication.
There’s a numeracy and a logic to the game, to say nothing of deception” that it involves. Konnikova explores the mathematically and psychologically rich world of high-stakes poker.

In her latest, the author opens at the World Series of Poker, where, “for a neat ten grand, anyone in the world can enter and take their shot at poker glory”—and a chance to win up to $9 million. Konnikova seeks to explore the fine line between skill and luck, “to learn what I could control and what I couldn’t.” If ever there were a game to illustrate those categories, poker is it: There’s a numeracy and a logic to the game, to say nothing of the psychology of such things as the tell, the gestures or betting behaviors of one’s opponents at the table. There are other lessons to learn along the way, including forgoing complacency and simply paying attention to everything that’s unfolding before you. “Presence is far more difficult than the path of least resistance,” writes the author with oracular economy. The theme of untangling what might be attributed to skill and what to chance engages Konnikova throughout: How much of her success has turned on hard work and how much on being in the right place at the right time? Whatever the case, she traveled to all the right places—Macau, Las Vegas, Monte Carlo—and even made some money along the way. The payoffs for readers are more cerebral, including Konnikova’s observation that we think we have much more control over our lives than we really do. She peppers her reflections with the sage advice of experts (“Less certainty; more inquiry”) as well as headier stuff from the scholar, including John von Neumann’s game theory, which turns out to have been inspired by, yes, poker and the “little tactics of deception” that it involves.

A smart and subtle delight—highly recommended for fans of cards and brain-hacking alike.

Russian American writer and psychologist Konnikova explores the mathematically and psychologically rich world of high-stakes poker.

In her latest, the author opens at the World Series of Poker, where, “for a neat ten grand, anyone in the world can enter and take their shot at poker glory”—and a chance to win up to $9 million. Konnikova seeks to explore the fine line between skill and luck, “to learn what I could control and what I couldn’t.” If ever there were a game to illustrate those categories, poker is it: There’s a numeracy and a logic to the game, to say nothing of the psychology of such things as the tell, the gestures or betting behaviors of one’s opponents at the table. There are other lessons to learn along the way, including forgoing complacency and simply paying attention to everything that’s unfolding before you. “Presence is far more difficult than the path of least resistance,” writes the author with oracular economy. The theme of untangling what might be attributed to skill and what to chance engages Konnikova throughout: How much of her success has turned on hard work and how much on being in the right place at the right time? Whatever the case, she traveled to all the right places—Macau, Las Vegas, Monte Carlo—and even made some money along the way. The payoffs for readers are more cerebral, including Konnikova’s observation that we think we have much more control over our lives than we really do. She peppers her reflections with the sage advice of experts (“Less certainty; more inquiry”) as well as headier stuff from the scholar, including John von Neumann’s game theory, which turns out to have been inspired by, yes, poker and the “little tactics of deception” that it involves.

A smart and subtle delight—highly recommended for fans of cards and brain-hacking alike.

RAISING A RARE GIRL
A Memoir
Lanier, Heather
Penguin Press (320 pp.)
$27.00 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-525-55963-4

A poet and creative nonfiction professor grapples with motherhood and the meaning of life in this memoir of raising her developmentally challenged daughter, Fiona.

As Lanier notes at the beginning, she had followed all the best-practices advice throughout her pregnancy—organic fruits and vegetables, no GMO, maintaining a seated position leaning forward with “my elbows propped on my spread knees like I was forever on the verge of imparting a proverb”—to make certain that hers would be a “SuperBaby.” But Fiona was born with the extremely rare Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome, which has profound developmental affects relative to mental growth, speech, coordination, and other areas. It has a high youthful mortality rate, and “there is no specific treatment.” The author struggled mightily to cope with the severity of the diagnosis: “I was free-falling….My sadness was no longer the selfish reaction that my baby wasn’t, would not be perfect, but that we could lose her…. My cry was an emptying….My cry was a collapse.” Lanier writes with powerful humanity as she charts her course, and one of the first lessons she learned was that when anyone chooses to have a child, they “sign up for the fragility of life.” The author is especially sharp on her journey to remake herself, to pivot away from “the desperate, clinging, distraught version who wanted what her child was not.” Along the way, she forcefully condemns the concept of a hierarchy of lives worth living. Her abiding love for Fiona is clear throughout, and it’s heartening to watch her learn to reject the idea that disability is deficit. “We can only open our arms, say welcome,” she writes, and she is clear that this means being vulnerable, “often fallible, but always open, and raw, and real. And present to the whole messy world.”

A book of pluck, spirit, and great emotion with an appealing perspective on the value of each human life.

PROTOCOL
The Power of Diplomacy and How To Make It Work for You
Marshall, Capricia Penavic
Ecco/HarperCollins (448 pp.)
$28.99 | Jun. 23, 2020
978-0-06-284446-0

A memoir from the U.S. chief of protocol from 2009 to 2013.

Protocol, notes Marshall, who also served as social secretary for the Clintons for eight years, is a strategic tactic in diplomacy that can be just that element that seals the deal, “the structure that houses the dignitaries as they have the crucial conversations.” As the daughter of two immigrants—a Mexican mother and a Croatian father—raised in Cleveland, the author professes a passion for ways to “bridge cultural divides and influence the outcome of [clients’] engagements.” Unsurprisingly given her career, Marshall’s first book is sharply organized. She begins with some of the highlights from her high-level work—e.g., in 2012, when Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin met for the first time as presidents at the G20 economic summit in Los Cabos, Mexico. There, Marshall had to execute a “high-wire act” to help ensure her president’s most advantageous outcome: room, décor, seating arrangement, table setting, food, and interpreter. The scene worked perfectly then, though a year later, when the same two leaders met for the G8 summit in Northern Ireland, it was a “cold, unproductive reunion” and a logistical disaster:
Altogether a grand entertainment, effortlessly blending pop culture and high culture.

**NICHE**

**THE BEGINNING OR THE END**
*How Hollywood Learned To Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*

Mitchell, Greg
The New Press (272 pp.)
$27.99 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-62097-573-2

What happens when the military gets involved in an arts project.

Mitchell, the former editor of *Nuclear Times* and Editor & Publisher, uses his sharp investigative reporting skills to unearth this detailed, behind-the-scenes story about Hollywood’s first movie on the atomic bomb. It begins innocuously enough in October 1945, two months after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, with a letter to actress Donna Reed from Ed Tompkins, her former high school chemistry teacher who moved on to become a scientist at Oak Ridge. He asked if she thought a “movie could be planned and produced to successfully impress upon the public the horrors of atomic warfare.” Mitchell sets his tale up as a series of battles. The primary one was between the scientists, including Tompkins and Robert Oppenheimer, who were desperate to control nuclear proliferation and the deployment of nuclear weapons, and the military, led by Gen. Leslie R. Groves, director of the Manhattan project. Reed’s husband, talent agent Tony Owen, helped pitch the idea to MGM’s Louis B. Mayer, who showed a keen interest in the project. Paramount’s Hal B. Wallis had a similar idea, with “controversial novelist Ayn Rand” writing the screenplay. MGM lined up Bob Considine, author of *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, to write theirs. MGM talked to President Harry Truman, who was on board, even coming up with an apocalyptic title: “We are either at the beginning or the end.” Wallis’ less dramatic title was *Top Secret*. In mid-December 1945, the *New York Times* published a story about the “Hollywood Atom Sweepstakes.” Wallis eventually dropped out of the race. Excellent research and rich dialogue give Mitchell’s book a novelistic flair as he recounts the battles between MGM and the military over actor choices, deletions, revisions, and retakes concerning massive open tent, weak lighting, no food, and chair placement that offered “only a three-quarter view of the other’s face.” The author demonstrates the importance of the “twin engines of protocol: bridging and persuading,” and her many behind-the-scenes anecdotes are both instructive and entertaining. The meticulous care that goes into table setting, food presentation, and appropriate gifts all convey one’s identity and eagerness to negotiate. Within the rules of etiquette, the author writes, “lies a hidden world of communication and leverage” as well as “intention and feeling.” Marshall’s story is fascinating, but especially illuminating are the concluding chapters, “Negotiating While Female” and “What Would Capricia Do: A Handbook of Protocol and Etiquette.”

An informative and often charming primer on a little-known—but vital—government post.

---

**NICHE**
*A Memoir in Pastiche*

Momus
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (336 pp.)
$28.00 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-0-374-14408-1

When in doubt, let David Bowie narrate your autobiography. “It’s a strange world wherever you are.” So says Graham Greene as filtered through Momus, the pseudonym of Scottish pop musician Nicholas Currie. Born in 1960, Momus has been writing and making music for decades, yet he isn’t particularly well known except perhaps among fans of Vampire Weekend. It’s fitting, therefore, that he put writers and musicians better known than he to work in telling his life story. “Dead writers are unemployed,” he writes at the beginning. “It’s a shame, because they could be put to better use than rotting and being forgotten.” Benjamin Spock, the guiding light of the parents of boomers everywhere, turns up early to assure readers that because “children given autonomy will tend to become adult of their own accord,” his mother did just right to allow N—so he’s addressed throughout, akin to a certain literary K—to push the books in the bookshelves around as he crawled. Sigmund Freud shows up to validate an early expression of carnal interest while hard-boiled detective novelist Mickey Spillane is on hand to deliver a few nicely cynical lines about the nature of life. Some of the “pastiches” are less effective than others. For example, a longish contribution attributed to Ernest Hemingway doesn’t sound in the least bit Hemingway-esque as it recounts what it was like to be in New York on 9/11. Some are overstuffed, as when Karl Kraus, the Viennese satirist, delivers a soliloquy that draws in the biologist Ernst Haeckel, DSL technology, the iPhone, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Lord Haw-Haw, among others. Still, the appearance by David Bowie, N’s “lodestar, the single most decisive influence on his life,” is lovely, and it will make those who share the author’s love for him miss Bowie all the more as “life goes on in its innocent, incorrigible way.”

Altogether a grand entertainment, effortlessly blending pop culture and high culture.
A searing indictment of a system in which far too many people “languish within prisons and jails because of their poverty, their race, their addiction, or their mental illness.”

Psychiatrist Montross, who is accustomed to treating mentally ill clients in hospital settings, decided to explore what happened to similar people who landed in the American prison system. What she learned was horrifying—and not just for the inmates. Through her firsthand experiences and diligent research, she concludes that everybody in American society—the imprisoned mentally ill, the rest of the prison population, prison staff, police, attorneys, judges, jurors in criminal trials, loved ones in the free world, residents of neighborhoods into which former inmates have been released, and taxpayers whose money pays for punishment instead of rehabilitation—experience harm from the status quo. Montross divides the book into three parts—“Our Prisoners,” “Our Prisons,” and “Our Choice”—each undergirded by copious anecdotes involving real people in distress. In the first section, the author explains why so many obviously mentally ill women and men end up in prison. As she notes, most crimes they commit are caused, at least in part, by their mental illness, and prison staff members are woefully unqualified to deal with psychiatric issues effectively. The second section includes chilling case studies of ineffective incarceration, especially regarding solitary confinement. The final section offers some hope, as Montross chronicles her research in Norway, where prisons have drastically lowered recidivism rates by emphasizing human rehabilitation. So why does the U.S. refuse to learn from such success stories? Montross consistently wrestles with that conundrum, but answers are elusive. In conclusion, the author quotes James Baldwin: “Nothing can be changed until it is faced.” In this revelatory book, the author faces the problem head-on. Read this and then turn to Jason Hardy’s The Second Chance Club to learn more about what happens after inmates are released.

Yet another eye-opening, powerful demonstration of the profound structural problems with mass incarceration in the U.S.

A subversive volume that translates a series of complex works of literature into a single-page illustration.

Every picture tells a story, and the pictures in this book invite readers to interpret the story anew. As Mr. Fish notes in the introduction, these artists “capture the meanings and essence—perhaps even to reveal the deeper truths previously neglected by the keenest of readers—of some of the world’s most famous books.” Later, he continues, “the fact is, an image, whether snapped or rendered, does something that the written word cannot: it communicates a version of reality instantaneously, one that informs immediately without first needing to be assembled brick by syntactic brick, then cognitively deciphered and then paired with the appropriate sense memory, moral contrivance, and rote definition before its meaning and intentions can be made clear.”

Some of the contributions are comics with captions—often very funny—and a few are more like a comic-strip panel. Others are wordless images that require no explanation or ones that allow readers to actively participate in the interpretive act. Some have the feel of abstract art. Regardless of the specific form, each renders a familiar classic from a fresh perspective. It’s difficult to misinterpret—or improve upon—Mr. Fish’s rendering of The Scarlet Letter, depicting a man standing at the base of a giant wall, the shadow of the Grim Reaper washing over him and a noose hanging from the top of the wall, on which three military officials look down and say, “Quick, soldier! Stick your head in and we’ll pull you up!” Other entries include Metamorphosis, War and Peace, Nineteen Eighty-Four, and Infinite Jest.

A variety of artists rise to a unique literary and visual challenge.
moving compendium of culture and history are viewed by the Palestinian people living there as “adjabi”—“an alien” or “a person not belonging to a particular place or group.” For some, their invitation to Palestine and its people came via marriage; others arrived in pursuit of a need to become a positive force in the world. What each found in this tortured part of the Middle East is a magnetic dichotomy of openness and tradition, a place where transplants from seemingly anywhere may become woven into the fabric of local life, even if they are never fully assimilated. Above all, it may be Palestine’s deep and abiding wellspring of familial love and interconnectedness that holds each contributor fast. As Carolyn Agner Quffa, who arrived in Ramallah in 1985 with her Palestinian husband, writes, “one dominant trait that I hold in high esteem is the value placed on family. Children, in particular, are cherished as a pure joy. Children are a family endeavor, and everyone helps and takes an interest.” While seemingly averse to dwelling too much on the dark realities of Israeli occupation for fear that such an approach might define the Palestinian identity being celebrated, those realities cannot be ignored. Some of the other topics include “Learning To Pray,” “A Very High Tolerance for Frustration,” “The Clothes They Wear,” and “Trying To Be a Good Dad in a Complicated Neighborhood.” A minor quibble: The intimate reflections each writer has to offer sometimes demand more attention than some of the skimpier entries allow.

An engrossing anthology that attempts to see past the pain and bloodshed into the soul of the Palestinian people.

**WIVING**

*A Memoir of Loving Then Leaving the Patriarchy*

*Myer, Caitlin*

Arcade (264 pp.)

$24.99 | Jul. 21, 2020

978-1-950691-47-0

Growing up in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a woman wrestles with faith, family, and her own mind.

Poet, essayist, and fiction writer Myer was shaped by “the limited characters available to women in Mormonism: fallen woman or wife.” In her starkly revealing debut memoir, she recounts her struggle to define herself beyond those two roles, which, she came to realize, were “only a highly concentrated version of America.” Even outside of her religion, she was expected “to be the dentist’s wife, the artist’s wife, the killer’s wife: whoever I hook myself to stains me with his choices.” Her struggle was intensified by her family. Her bipolar mother retreated into depression, which Myer later understood to be rage turned inward; her father protected his wife from their children, leaving Myer feeling abandoned. Molested by a teenage cousin when she was 7, at 12, she encouraged the physical attentions of a 15-year-old neighbor, let the paperboy “(sin sin sin) feel my breasts,” and suffered a sexual assault by a 26-year-old man. That traumatic experience didn’t stop her from going to a man’s hotel room when she was “maybe thirteen….We keep our clothes on, mostly.” Myer calls these encounters “wiving.” As she writes, “I have been wiving since I was a little girl. I am good at wiving. I fail at wiving. Both are true.” Seeing a man happy “will light me up all my life, no matter how many times it is the exact wrong thing to do, the wrong man to cheer.” That is her job, as written in the Scriptures: “and if you are to be good at it, you have to start practicing early.” Promiscuousness also assuaged a fear that she was unlovable, “that, without another person to see me, I disappear, I cease to matter.” Myer recounts in candid detail her process of self-discovery and eventual, hard-won empowerment.

An absorbing, emotionally raw confessional memoir.

**POULENC**

*A Biography*

*Nichols, Roger*

Yale Univ (352 pp.)

$38.00 | Jun. 9, 2020

978-0-300-22650-8

A rich scholarly biography of the prolific French composer.

Nichols, who has written previous volumes about Ravel, Debussy and Messiaen—returns with a densely detailed account of the life and music of Francis Poulenc (1899-1963), who seems barely to have drawn an idle breath throughout his illustrious career. A gifted pianist, Poulenc began composing as a teen and would continue throughout his life. As the author reveals, Poulenc wrote songs—often based on poems of those whom he admired, like Apollinaire—orchestral pieces, works for piano and other instruments (oboe, harpsichord), and film scores and opera, one of which, *Dialogues des Carmélites* (1957), was popular throughout the Western world and is a work to which Nichols devotes a dozen pages of musical and dramatic analysis. The author’s structural design is not surprising: chronology, family background, quotations from numerous letters and other sources, mentions of many pieces—and some accounts of others so detailed that only musicians and/or theorists will follow with much comprehension. Nichols also occasionally tells us, without judgment, about Poulenc’s romantic life: He never married, and though he was gay, he sired a child; also, until near the end of his life, he engaged in relationships with younger men. We also learn about his friendships, his professional associations (Stravinsky was a favorite), and his personal struggles (fear of death was prominent). The tone throughout is decidedly serious, though the author occasionally waxes ironic. Poulenc briefly considered an opera based on the story of Oedipus. “Not many jokes there,” quips the author. He is almost uniformly positive about Poulenc’s work, and some readers will be frustrated by the decision not to translate the French titles of the pieces under discussion. Like Graham Johnson’s *Poulenc*, this one likely won’t interest general readers.

Deeply diligent, intelligent research underlies a work for classical musicians and fans.
No matter a reader’s personal politics, Omar’s life should serve as an inspiration.

By any measure, Omar’s trajectory is dramatic and remarkable: Born in 1982 into a loving, stable family in Mogadishu, Somalia, she was displaced at age 8 by the civil war that killed hundreds of thousands in her home country. She escaped to neighboring Kenya and spent four years in a squalid, dangerous refugee camp. After being screened by immigration authorities, she and her family were allowed into the U.S. They spent two years in New York City and then moved to Arlington, Virginia, where Omar was bullied constantly. Nonetheless, and even though she knew very little English, she was determined to learn. Landing in Minneapolis a few years later, Omar blossomed into a leader at her high school. In 2009, she relocated to North Dakota to earn a college degree, and, upon her return to Minneapolis, she became involved in local politics. In 2018, she and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan “became the first Muslim women elected to Congress.” As a junior member of the House of Representatives, she gained notoriety for her grace in the face of attacks by Donald Trump aimed at her ethnicity, dark skin tone, citizenship, and political advocacy. Naturally, Omar feels confused and angered by Trump and many of his fellow Republicans. Refreshingly and wisely, however, she waits until Page 225 before turning her attention to Trump’s petty tactics. Her trajectory to that point is impressive and compelling. It’s clear that the author has always made her own way while struggling to find her role among her beloved family members, not all of whom approved of her path. Page after page, Omar is by turns fierce, self-deprecating, and confident, and, with the assistance of Paley, she has produced a smoothly readable narrative.

No matter a reader’s personal politics, Omar’s life should serve as an inspiration.

The multifaceted memoir of a 20-something gay Filipino American male’s conflicted relationship with affluent white America.

The first African refugee elected to Congress tells her unique story.

THE GROOM WILL KEEP HIS NAME
And Other Vows I’ve Made About Race, Resistance, and Romance

Ortile, Matt
Bold Type Books (336 pp.)
978-1-5417-0279-4

The multifaceted memoir of a 20-something gay Filipino American male’s conflicted relationship with affluent white America.
by playing such an assimilationist role. Regarding sexual identity, he has always been more sure of himself, as evidenced by his recounting of his sexual escapades in New York City as a young, exoticized Filipino man. “I inhabit a fetishized body,” he writes, “one marked as other, even by men who desire it.” While working as a magazine intern, he was also constantly trawling for wealthy men on Grindr. Ortile’s fascination with Barthes leads him on extended musings about not only Western marriage myths, but also the fallacy of American masculinity as expressed through men’s underwear ads. Looking back on his experiences, he writes, “I took up the role of a Filipino Carrie Bradshaw who read Barthes and trolled Grindr.” This is revelatory stuff, of course, for a self-analytical youngster still learning the ropes in the big city. More affecting, however, are Ortile’s partially successful attempts to come to terms with his own “Filipinoness” and finally reconcile his Asian identity with the nascent American in him.

An intellectually ambitious, politically engaged, ideologically sensitive memoir.

**SHE PROCLAIMS**

*Our Declaration of Independence From a Man’s World*

*Palmieri, Jennifer*

Grand Central Publishing (208 pp.)

$26.00 | Jun. 23, 2020

978-1-5387-5065-0

The director of communications for Hillary Clinton’s 2016 campaign offers a manifesto for American women seeking empowerment outside patriarchy.

When Clinton lost the election, her setback mirrored the situation for all American women seeking to shatter professional glass ceilings. As Palmieri observes, “the professional world belongs to men, and women are only visitors.” In this follow-up to *Dear Madam President* (2018), the author creates a modern declaration of independence in 13 sections that draw on feminist history, current events, and her own experiences as a working woman. Each chapter begins with a “proclamation” that rejects “truths” about women created by patriarchy: for example, that only “a limited number of women…can succeed in the world and that the professional advancement of women is a zero-sum game,” or that females must silence themselves in order to be accepted. Palmieri suggests that events and trends like the 2017 Women’s March on Washington, the #MeToo movement, and the unprecedented numbers of women attaining political office in the last two years reveal an increased, vocal desire to “even out the power dynamic between men and women.” Furthermore, the rise to prominence of older, more experienced women disparaged by patriarchy (and also represented by Clinton) can only benefit society. Indeed, Palmieri asserts that midlife has been nothing but productive and “exhilarating” for her. But because American society is governed by the rules of men, women’s continued efforts to better their status have still not achieved the social parity for which such feminist foremothers as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Alice Paul fought. Inclusivity is at the heart of Palmieri’s “declaration,” which she asserts is an attack against patriarchal systems rather than individual men. Inspiring and invigorating, this brief, sharp call to action cries out for continued feminist action in order to create an American society based on “equality for all.”

A provocatively progressive declaration.

**KIM JONG UN AND THE BOMB**

*Survival and Deterrence in North Korea*

*Panda, Ankit*

Oxford Univ. (272 pp.)

$27.95 | Jul. 1, 2020

978-0-19-006036-7

A full-length look at the history and strategic implications of North Korea’s acquisition of nuclear weapons. Pandu, a senior editor at the Diplomat, traces the Korean quest for the bomb to Kim’s grandfather, Kim Il Sung, under whom the country built its first nuclear reactor in 1963. By 1985, the elder Kim had made enough progress that the Soviet Union pressured him into joining the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons. But with the U.S. having tactical weapons deployed in South Korea to offset the conventional military superiority of the North, Kim Il Sung had every incentive to continue working to acquire his own nuclear weapons. By the early 1990s, the CIA concluded that North Korea had generated enough weapons-grade plutonium for one or two bombs. The process of building a working bomb continued with help from A.Q. Khan of Pakistan—until, in 2006, North Korea conducted its first nuclear test. Since then, it has continued to conduct tests and build delivery systems culminating in ballistic missiles able to deliver a bomb to the continental U.S. Panda gives a detailed, sometimes plodding account of each of the phases of this process, with attention not only to Korea’s actions, but to U.S. and international responses. An entire chapter looks at the back and forth between Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump since 2017 while the final chapter examines the long-range implications of Korea’s emergence as a nuclear power. The book is especially valuable as a correction to the usual Western view of Kim Jong Un, in that the author shows the strategic and political logic behind his moves without ignoring his ruthless consolidation of power. Asia policy wonks, take note.

An unflinching examination of North Korea’s emergence as a nuclear power and its implications for the rest of the world.
Memorable reading for die-hard devotees and those seeking to relive all the breathless histrionics.

DOLLS! DOLLS! DOLLS!

LAST MISSION TO TOKYO
The Extraordinary Story of the Doolittle Raiders and Their Final Fight for Justice
Paradis, Michel
Simon & Schuster (480 pp.)
$28.00 | Jul. 28, 2020
978-1-5011-0471-8

The Doolittle raid over Tokyo four months after Pearl Harbor has received plenty of attention, but this captivating account of the lesser-known aftermath deserves attention.

A lawyer specializing in war crimes law, Paradis ably summarizes the mission in which B-25 bombers inflicted little physical but much psychological damage to the Japanese. Of the 80 American airmen who participated, two died in crashes and eight were captured. The Japanese executed three for “bombing and strafing school areas”; five were pardoned by a “merciful” emperor but sentenced to life imprisonment with “special treatment.” The result was more than four years of brutality. One airman died of malnutrition before liberation, and one was close to death and never entirely recovered. Once the news got out, Americans demanded vengeance, the survivors most of all. Most of the book describes efforts of a team of American lawyers to track down those responsible, gather evidence, and try them for their crimes. Had the U.S. followed Japan’s lead, officials would have swept up everyone involved, performed a cursory show trial, and extracted our revenge. It is to America’s credit that it stuck to democratic ideals. The lawyers worked hard to assemble convincing evidence on each individual involved and then persuade relatively impartial judges who were also listening to an aggressive defense. Although a legal scholar, Paradis writes engagingly, delivering clear explanations of the legal issues, the onerous preparations, and the trial itself. Four defendants, all Japanese army officers, faced five American judges who were Army officers and not lawyers. The lawyers for the accused, who were not chosen for their experience, worked hard for their clients. The relatively mild verdicts that resulted—three received “five years at hard labor,” and the other received eight—incensed their superiors. However, the author, who demonstrates a clear grasp of the legal matters at play, feels that the defense presented a reasonable case.

A surprisingly absorbing legal procedural.

DOLLS! DOLLS! DOLLS!
Deep Inside Valley of the Dolls, the Most Beloved Bad Book and Movie of All Time
Rebello, Stephen
Penguin (352 pp.)
$17.00 paper | Jun. 2, 2020
978-0-14-313350-6


Rebello delivers a meticulously detailed paean to both incarnations of Valley of the Dolls, which, despite scathing reviews, were runaway commercial successes. As he writes, the book was a “magnificent obsession” since he first read it as a “precocious kid and an insatiable reader.” He explores author Jacqueline Susann’s early “full-on assault at stardom” in New York in the 1930s as she pursued an acting career, and he traces the dedicated, rigid schedule she adhered to while writing Dolls. When the novel finally published in 1966, it garnered mixed reviews, but it caused a promotional commotion and became a publishing juggernaut. Susann’s later opulent life as a “master of self-promotion and pioneer of branding” was embodied in her active participation in the outlandish film treatment a year later. The complete backstory of the film decorates the second half of the text, as Rebello enthusiastically stuffs each chapter with widely unknown scandalous tattle. The author’s dutiful scrutiny shines in the series of lists pointing out all the differences between the various screenwriters’ treatments and the final production. This scrupulous quality makes the book a blissful treasure trove of gossipy insider details that Dolls fans will swiftly devour. In grand fashion, the author delivers frothy particulars on the agonizing casting process to “find the right Neely” (under consideration, among many others, were “Petula Clark, Helen Mirren, Liza Minnelli, and Andy Warhol ‘superstar’ Baby Jane Holzer”), the film designer’s perfectionist “wardrobe plot,” and, of course, the competitive infighting among the four leading ladies: Patty Duke, Barbara Parkins, Sharon Tate, and Susan Hayward (who replaced the unceremoniously fired Judy Garland). Written with a cinematic excitement and giddiness bordering on satire, this is an indulgent treat for Dolls fans.

Memorable reading for die-hard devotees and those seeking to relive all the breathless histrionics.
YOU LOOK SO MUCH BETTER IN PERSON

**True Stories of Absurdity and Success**

Roker, Al

Hachette Go (256 pp.)

$28.00 | Jul. 28, 2020

978-0-316-42679-4

Sage advice from the much-loved TV weatherman.

Sharing a host of lively anecdotes, Roker, longtime weather forecaster on NBC’s *Today* show, reflects on what he’s learned from his undeniably successful career. Each chapter offers what he calls an “Altruism”—e.g., “If You’re Gonna Cry Know How To Cry,” or “You Don’t Need To Be the Top Banana.” The author recounts the highlights of his working life from his beginnings in upstate New York. A self-described “AV Club dork” in high school, he took his first professional gig at a local station in Syracuse. After two years, he was recruited to Washington, D.C., where veteran weatherman Willard Scott took him under his wing: when he was offered a job at an NBC affiliate in Cleveland, he jumped at the chance. Although Cleveland had a history of racial strife, Roker says he never experienced racism at work until one colleague made an offhand racist remark. “I chose to defend myself with humor,” Roker writes, an example of his overall attitude to “roll with the punches” and learn to deal with different personality types. Sometimes, he thinks, it’s better to let things go than to make a fuss. In any case, “when it comes to my challenges,” he admits, “weight trumped race.” Roker counsels readers to keep themselves open to new experiences: “Keep life interesting—explore ALL your talents and then some.” His inclination to say yes to opportunities brought him to Manhattan for what should have been a part-time job at NBC; but when *Today’s* weatherman left, Roker took the helm: “Move in the direction the wind takes you.” Among his many joys are early rising (time alone is a great gift) and his marriage to the gregarious Deborah Roberts, a TV journalist at ABC.

Ebullient revelations of a contented life.

FUTUREPROOF

**9 Rules for Humans in the Age of Automation**

Roose, Kevin

Random House (256 pp.)

$27.00 | May 26, 2020

978-0-593-13334-7

A technology journalist proposes future-oriented skills to prepare people for a new machine age.

To counter worry that artificial intelligence will make human workers obsolete, *New York Times* tech columnist Roose offers an upbeat, practical guide for dealing with “a world that is increasingly arranged by and for machines.” Rather than competing with machines by trying to work longer hours and heeding up technological knowledge, the author advises that humans should optimize skills that machines cannot emulate: “handling the unexpected,” for example; meeting “social and emotional needs”; and doing jobs “that involve novel circumstances, low-probability events, and rare combinations of skills.” AI is programmed to address “big data sets, large numbers of users, or huge quantities of inputs or outputs” but not to transfer knowledge from one problem to another. If people want to make themselves harder to replace, they should hone their ability to do things that require creativity, flexibility, and “human accountability.” Among the nine rules that Roose suggests for the future are a few that deliberately distance humans from technology: Wrist your attention from constantly checking your phone; curb “hustle tendencies” to overfill your schedule and drown yourself in work obligations; increase interaction with others by physical proximity, collaborative projects, and social videoconferences even if you work remotely; and speak up about “the potential stakes” of implementing AI and automation in your workplace. It’s crucial, Roose asserts, to keep humans involved in critical processes. Essential skills for the future include the ability to pay sustained attention (a skill undermined by the distractions of the internet); being able to hone emotional intelligence and empathy; media literacy; “treating other people well” and “acting ethically”; and becoming a “consequentialist,” applying critical thinking to evaluate the success or failure of AI processes and tools and “to analyze new products and imagine all the ways they could go wrong.”

Helpful advice to quell workers’ anxiety.

THE BEAUTY OF LIVING

**E.E. Cummings in the Great War**

Rosenblitt, J. Alison

Norton (320 pp.)

$35.00 | Jul. 21, 2020

978-0-393-24696-4

How outrage over brutality and violence informed a well-known poet’s work. British literary scholar Rosenblitt creates a perceptive, captivating portrait of the modernist Edward Estlin Cummings (1894-1962), focusing on his early years and experience during World War I. Cummings, she argues persuasively, “remained a war poet until the end of his life. His sympathy with the smallest of creatures, and the beauty that he saw in the world, come out of the destruction that he saw during the war.” Cummings grew up in Massachusetts; his father, minister of Boston’s progressive South Congregational Church, was socially liberal but, within his family, “deeply authoritarian,” generating in his son a “suppressed rage and sense of failure” that led, increasingly, to personal and literary rebellion. At Harvard, cummings was drawn to “Decadence, classicism, Futurism, and poetry.” When war broke out, he volunteered as an ambulance driver in France, a decision that felt willful yet still one that his father would approve. “It was defiance without actual defiance,” Rosenblitt observes. Once in
Paris, logistical problems left him and his friend William Brown at large for a month while they waited to be processed. During that time, he fell in love with Marie Louise Lallemand, a prostitute, which Rosenblitt characterizes as a deeply profound relationship. Cummings “clung to his love” for her “because to him she embodied everything about beauty and tragic nobility that would seem to give some romanticized meaning to war and death.” Shortly after beginning their service as ambulance drivers, on the basis of ill-considered letters, Cummings and Brown were arrested for being German sympathizers. Through his father’s vociferous efforts, Cummings was released after 3 months of imprisonment, an experience he chronicled in visceral detail in The Enormous Room. Besides insightful analyses of Cummings’ poetry, Rosenblitt presents him as an accomplished artist, with 74 pieces at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

A graceful, sympathetic biography of an innovative American poet. (6 pages of illustrations)

THE INFINITE MACHINE
How an Army of Crypto-hackers Is Building the Next Internet With Ethereum
Russo, Camila
Harper Business (352 pp.)
$28.99 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-0-06-288614-9

A deep dive into efforts to build the next internet, one free of government interference and regulation.

Russo, a leading cryptocurrency journalist, recounts the story of “an idealistic hero, his band of misfits, and the challenges they face to make their incredibly ambitious dream a reality.” The hero is Russian Canadian programmer Vitalik Buterin, gifted in mathematics and committed to a certain kind of anarchy, with numerous like-minded allies scattered across the globe. Some, like Russo, are South American, convinced that the key to breaking government control is to develop a cryptocurrency even more thoroughly hidden away than Bitcoin. But that’s only a start, a kind of proof of concept of a larger “world computer,” the dream in question, called Ethereum. Cryptocurrency is just beginning—however, notes the author, it now outstrips many national economies in capital. By way of an analogy, explains one of the players in this book, “email was to the internet what Bitcoin, the cryptocurrency, was to blockchain technology,” and Ethereum is bigger still, “bigger than any application built on top of it.” Though, as Russo writes, it turns out that cryptocurrency is subject to the familiar boom and bust of the business cycle, there are still plenty of hackers working on it, even as government agencies such as the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission seek to regulate it. The same is true of Ethereum, which seems more desirable than ever since “long-ago scrappy upstarts Facebook and Google had now become megacorporations serving as the main gateways to the internet.” Russo’s narrative, based on more than 100 interviews, is dense, detailed, and often overstuffed. It’s also quite arcane, and it could use some of the patient explication that Michael Lewis and Katie Hafner, among other technology writers, bring to bear on their work.

A slog, but it will interest small-L libertarian techies.

PRISON BY ANY OTHER NAME
The Harmful Consequences of Popular Reforms
Schenwar, Maya & Law, Victoria
The New Press (240 pp.)
$26.99 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-1-62097-310-3

A useful survey of a variety of “alternatives to incarceration.”

Truthout editor-in-chief Schenwar and Law, the co-founder of NYC Books Through Bars, critique efforts by reformers seeking to significantly reduce the prison population. Both authors have first-hand experience with the criminal justice system: Schenwar’s sister, a heroin addict, spent more than 14 years in a variety of detention centers and on parole and probation; as a teenager, Law was arrested for armed robbery and served five years of probation. Now journalists on the front lines of the incarceration issue, the authors offer a massively researched book about not just prison reform, but about the people who are trying to effect needed change. They show that although advocates are almost universally well intentioned, not all of the work has led to progress. In a poignant foreword, Michelle Alexander sets the tone, discussing how both high-tech digital prisons and lower-tech control mechanisms are often as harsh as what can be found inside traditional jails and prisons. Schenwar and Law build on the foreword skillfully and persuasively, explaining with case studies, anecdotes, and scholarly research how many of the new pathways are about controlling those deemed criminals, about punishment rather than rehabilitation. Those who avoid a physical prison cell for a year through a plea bargain or some other protocol often end up with years of house arrest wearing a costly, confining ankle monitor followed by additional years of scrutiny by a probation officer. Many POs report negligibly small violations, which puts the offender back into the prison system. The authors also illuminate the mechanics of mandatory drug treatment facilities, mental illness centers, sex offender regimens, prostitution “rescue” programs, foster care placements, and school-to-prison pipelines. Regarding the last, the authors write that “it is time to challenge the notion that surveillance and policing are the answers to school-based violence. School safety does not come in the form of a uniform, a badge, and a gun.”

Important reading for anyone involved in the criminal justice system.
“This is a biography...not an autobiography or memoir,” writes Scioli on the first page. “The first-person narration in this work is a literary device. The story is told through ‘Kirby’s’ point of view, adapted from a number of sources, including interviews he gave throughout his life.” One of the claims from the protagonist’s mouth is that he “saved Marvel’s ass.” While comic-book aficionados and cultural historians have long recognized Kirby’s crucial role in the expanding Marvel universe—and his creative development of Spider-Man, the Hulk, Ant-Man, and Iron Man—he has never achieved the name recognition among the public at large as Stan Lee, with whom Kirby had a troubled, complex relationship as a collaborator and rival. In Scioli’s treatment, Lee gets the chance to say his piece, but it is clearly meant to serve as a corrective to restore some critical balance. In a vivid style similar to Kirby’s, Scioli brings out his subject as a comic hero himself and gives repeated voice to his complaints: that Lee took more credit than he deserved, promoting himself as a hipster icon; and that as Marvel continued to generate revenue streams through TV and film adaptations and licensed consumer goods, the artist responsible for creating these characters saw little or nothing in the way of either acclaim or money. As the man Kirby knew as “Stanley” promoted his own legend, making himself synonymous with Marvel, his leading artist counters, “It’s all lies.” Whomever one believes, the book underscores how difficult it can be to assign credit or negotiate a fair deal in a market-driven business filled with copycats, where any popular success spawns numerous imitators and artists borrow or steal from each other regularly.

A fast-paced celebration of an underheralded legend within the comic-book industry.
roads, fertilizers, and tractors." On that note, adds the author, agricultural yields are expected to rise in the coming decades by 20 to 30 percent, depending on which scenario one follows, contrary to projections of widespread famine caused by climate change. Shellenberger asserts that his conclusions are drawn from the best scientific literature and that works such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s summary of climate change have advanced incorrect assumptions such as the disappearance of the Himalayan glaciers by 2035. Of course, it’s not yet 2035, and those glaciers seem to be melting away pretty quickly, so it remains to be seen where we’ll be in another 15 years. The author predicts a future in which people will suffer far less greatly than some of the direr scenarios would have it, but some of that will depend on adopting still-controversial measures, such as the nuclear energy that he advocates.

Though arguable, Shellenberger’s prediction of a healthier future adds balance to the literature.

Exploding the profound hypocrisy of sexual life in Morocco.

As Slimani amply shows, Morocco is a country obsessed with sex, but premarital sex, adultery, abortion, prostitution, and homosexuality are all illegal—and, at the same time, rampant. The author of the well-received thriller The Perfect Nanny (2018), Slimani began the project that culminated in this book while on tour in Morocco for her first novel, Adèle, the protagonist of which is a woman with a double life: a secret sex addict who struggles to experience pleasure. Slimani’s feeling that this tale was a metaphor for the collective experience of young Moroccan women proved true when, one after another, women approached her to share their own stories of hypocrisy, oppression, and shame. In explicit opposition to what she calls “Morocco’s motto”—“Do what you wish, but never talk about it”—the author collects the stories of these women and others, one more troubling and outrageous than the next, threading in her own experiences and commentary. We learn that since “virginity is an obsession in Morocco and throughout the Arab world,” girls who have had sex, even via rape, pretend to be virgins and have hymen restoration surgery when marriage is on the table. We hear from a therapist who suffered through two violent marriages: “My second husband…used to rape me regularly. He would bring prostitutes into our home and tell me: ‘You’re lucky…I haven’t humiliated you by taking another wife. You ought to thank me.’” One of Slimani’s interviewees, a theology researcher and public intellectual, asserts that though “the Koran is notably silent on questions of sex,” in broadcasts “on the Arabic satellite networks, the ulama (experts on Islamic law) never stop talking about sex.” A particularly ludicrous recent fatwa prohibited women from touching bananas and cucumbers. You can imagine why.

A passionate, candid, and convincing narrative of unmasking and revelation.

Thinking of not voting this time out? Smith’s handy owner’s manual to the democratic process removes any excuse for not showing up at the ballot box.

The author hails from small-town Texas and lives in New York City, places respectively conservative and liberal but that she characterizes as equally fearing “that their wants and needs will be ignored if their candidate doesn’t win,” which of course is no way to run a representative democracy. Neither is the steady decline of voting. As Smith notes, every generation votes in fewer numbers than the one preceding it, and minority voters turn up at the polls in fewer numbers, proportionally, than white voters. There’s irony to such disparities given the long battle to secure voting rights for minorities. The author reminds us that a white woman born in 1900 would have been allowed to vote at age 21 while “an African American born at the turn of the 20th century and living in the South may not have cast a ballot on Election Day until she was 65 years old.” Smith serves up a youth-friendly—though by no means youth-restricted—guide to understanding not only one’s rights as a voter, but also such thorny constructs as how polls work (badly, too often) and how gerrymandering keeps districts that should go to one party going to the other instead. Usefully, she provides a timeline of what to do not just to vote, but to bring one’s cohort along for the ride: First thing is to register to vote, then “choose five friends to join you to vote.” Then, 40 and 30 and 10 days before the election, be sure those friends know how to vote, whether in person or by mail, where the polling place is, and other such practical matters.

Intelligent, spirited, and especially valuable to budding activists and first-time voters.
In this emotional travel memoir, the author ponders the many changes that come with entering one’s 50s. Soderlind visited Kentucky, and West Virginia. In each locale, she met with locals descriptions a nostalgic or melancholic mood. Soderlind visited a long-term relationship, she and Colby set out in a small camping trailer to explore the lost and forgotten parts of the country. “It seems that once you understand Buffalo,” she writes, “is that when Europeans began conquering peoples on other continents, they sometimes found that local people had political institutions that were more democratic than what they knew in their home countries.” The French missionaries who explored what is now Canada, for example, discovered that women had political rights in a system with a broad distribution of power. In much of Europe at the same time, writes the author, democracy flourished largely in places where local rulers were too weak to control the state—one gauge being the rulers’ knowledge of local economies and their subsequent failure to collect tax revenue based on good information. Autocratic governments, by contrast, tended to know about such things as gross domestic product, collecting significantly more revenue in the bargain. Along the way, Stasavage looks into such matters as whether a society marked by inequality is more inclined to autocracy than democracy, since “have-nots may...be more susceptible to the appeals of demagogues.” It’s a point well worth pondering. In the end, notes the author, democracy isn’t inevitable, but it is and has been so widespread among societies around the world that it appears to “come naturally to humans.” Modern democracy has evolved in complex ways, he adds, with the system of checks and balances being an example of a departure from the powers of the Athenians, eventually allowing the disenfranchised “a powerful argument for demanding the same rights as others.”

A carefully researched and argued study of democracy as an evolving, and anciently rooted, means of political organization.

**The Change** *(My Great American, Postindustrial Midlife Crisis Tour)*

Soderlind, Lori

Univ. of Wisconsin (268 pp.)

$26.95  |  Jun. 2, 2020

978-0-299-32830-6

A meandering road trip with an aging dog helps a woman find some direction in her life.

Soderlind had wanted to take a road trip into the middle of the U.S. with her dog, Colby, in tow for a long time. After ending a long-term relationship, she and Colby set out in a small camping trailer to explore the lost and forgotten parts of the country. In this emotional travel memoir, the author ponders the many changes that come with entering one’s 50s. Soderlind’s midlife crisis sent her along the American back roads in search of struggling towns that used to be buzzing with life and industry. The author interweaves a brief history of each neglected or deserted location with her own longings, fears, and worries, giving her descriptions a nostalgic or melancholic mood. Soderlind visited the Erie Canal, Buffalo, and small towns in Pennsylvania, Illinois, Kentucky, and West Virginia. In each locale, she met with locals who were sometimes earnest, sometimes reluctant to share their histories with a stranger, yet she manages to piece together an intriguing map of middle America. Among her many observations, the author writes about old grain silos being turned into climbing walls, mysterious dark tunnels that didn’t seem to end, glorious sunsets on the edges of lakes, and, most importantly, a perspective on life that she wouldn’t have discovered without this trip. “It seems that once you understand Buffalo,” she writes, “by simply adjusting names and locations and substituting commodities once made or exchanged, you could understand most cities in most places. You would know why the Rust Belt was rusty and how the general state of chaos in the world was in most ways utterly predictable.” Ultimately, Soderlind shows how each place she visited was unique and deserving of attention.

Entertaining, informative stories of a distressed America and of a woman looking for answers.

**The Decline and Rise of Democracy** *(A Global History From Antiquity to Today)*

Stasavage, David

Princeton Univ. (416 pp.)

$40.00  |  Jul. 28, 2020

978-0-393-63424-2

The claims of exceptionalists to the contrary, democracy is not a Western invention—nor its definitive form of government.

The received wisdom, writes Stasavage, a professor of politics at NYU, is that the Greeks bequeathed both the word and the institution of democracy before it faded away, to be reborn more than a millennium after with the Magna Carta and the republics of medieval Italy. “One problem with this story,” he writes, “is that when Europeans began conquering peoples on other continents, they sometimes found that local people had political institutions that were more democratic than what they knew in their home countries.” The French missionaries who explored what is now Canada, for example, discovered that women had political rights in a system with a broad distribution of power. In much of Europe at the same time, writes the author, democracy flourished largely in places where local rulers were too weak to control the state—one gauge being the rulers’ knowledge of local economies and their subsequent failure to collect tax revenue based on good information. Autocratic governments, by contrast, tended to know about such things as gross domestic product, collecting significantly more revenue in the bargain. Along the way, Stasavage looks into such matters as whether a society marked by inequality is more inclined to autocracy than democracy, since “have-nots may...be more susceptible to the appeals of demagogues.” It’s a point well worth pondering. In the end, notes the author, democracy isn’t inevitable, but it is and has been so widespread among societies around the world that it appears to “come naturally to humans.” Modern democracy has evolved in complex ways, he adds, with the system of checks and balances being an example of a departure from the powers of the Athenians, eventually allowing the disenfranchised “a powerful argument for demanding the same rights as others.”

A richly researched and argued study of democracy as an evolving, and anciently rooted, means of political organization.

**A Dominant Character** *(The Radical Science and Restless Politics of J.B.S. Haldane)*

Subramanian, Samanth

Norton (416 pp.)

$40.00  |  Jul. 28, 2020

978-0-393-63424-2

A rich biography of a central figure in the 20th-century genetics revolution.

British journalist Subramanian begins with a substantial account of the life of his subject’s father, J.S. Haldane (1860-1936), a Scottish physiologist who made pioneering discoveries on gases and respiration. His studies included harrowing experiments on himself and his young son, which endangered their lives but stimulated his son’s fascination with science. J.B.S. (1892-1964) performed brilliantly at prep school, Eton, and Oxford, with time out to serve in the trenches in World War I, where he also won praise for his bravery. After the war, he returned to academia and turned his attention to population genetics. Subramanian reminds readers that, well into the 20th century, fossils—but little else—supported Darwinian natural selection. That it seemed to operate by blind
chance offended many evolutionists, and their alternative theories competed with Darwin’s. Haldane’s groundbreaking studies described natural selection as a consequence of Mendelian inheritance through mathematical expressions of concepts such as gene frequencies, mutations, recombination, genetic drift, and linkage. Haldane—and two contemporaries, Ronald Fisher and Sewall Wright—established Darwinian natural selection as the central mechanism of evolution, where it remains today. Since his breakthroughs were largely mathematical, he never attained the popularity of figures like Darwin and Mendel, and the author’s explanations, though lucid, will not change matters. Haldane became better known as a popular writer and mildly controversial as a communist. He proclaimed his sympathies in the 1930s when it was fashionable but kept them well into later life, when he continued to admire Stalin and shamefully refused to denounce Trofim Lysenko, whose nonsensical theories won over Stalin and destroyed Soviet genetics along with many talented Soviet geneticists. Subramanian delivers a sympathetic account that will interest but frustrate readers who expect geniuses to behave more rationally than others.

Haldane deserves to be better known and better understood, and this fine biography succeeds superbly in the first. (12 illustrations)

**CULT OF GLORY**
_The Bold and Brutal History of the Texas Rangers_
Swanson, Doug J.
Viking (480 pp.)
$28.00 | Jun. 9, 2020
978-1-101-97986-0

A comprehensive account of the Texas Rangers, perhaps the most storied police force in American history.

There’s *Walker, Texas Ranger*, and then there’s *The Lone Ranger*, the latter recounting “a crime-fighting career that spanned almost ninety years.” There are *Lonesome Dove* and many an oater. Celebrated in popular culture very nearly from the beginnings of the organization almost 200 years ago, the Texas Rangers have always been a small outfit with an oversized image. Even today, writes former *Dallas Morning News* reporter Swanson, now a journalist professor at the University of Pittsburgh, there are only some 160 Rangers on active duty in a state of 29 million people. In the force’s early days, most of their work involved fighting the Natives, and the legacy of conflict between the group and non-Anglos is strong. The author points out that it was only in 1969 that an officer of Hispanic descent was admitted, and more than two decades would pass before an African American was allowed into the service. That legacy includes, in recent history, the use of the Rangers to break up a strike of Hispanic farmworkers, a cloud on a reputation already marked by episodes of violence. Still, as Swanson writes—after recounting tales ranging from Ranger incursions into Mexico to the successful hunt for outlaws Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker—the force is slightly more representative of Texas’ population today, with about a quarter of its number representing ethnic minorities, and all now recruited from the state’s highway patrol. “The perils have dwindled in the modern era—no one is pulling Comanche arrows from their foreheads anymore—but the job still carries risks,” Swanson concludes. His narrative is a touch too long and sometimes repetitive but understandably so, given the big story he has to tell, expanding on, updating, and sometimes correcting works by writers such as Walter Prescott Webb and John Boessenecker.

Revisionist history done well, if not likely to please Chuck Norris die-hards.

**THE INFLUENCE OF SOROS**
_Politics, Power, and the Struggle for an Open Society_
Tamkin, Emily
Harper/HarperCollins (320 pp.)
$28.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-06-297263-7

A close analysis of the causes the Hungarian-born billionaire has promoted and fought against over the decades.

George Soros (b. 1930) has an undeniable influence on the political and economic process in the U.S. and elsewhere. The question is: Is it good or bad? Former *Foreign Policy* staff writer Tamkin examines the sources of his power and his interests in using it to achieve extrapersonal ends. As a pioneer in hedge funds, for instance, he has become “perhaps the most famous currency speculator in history,” his earnings outstripping the economies of entire countries. He has used much of his fortune to promote his Open Society initiatives, in turn inspired by the philosopher Karl Popper, who, like Soros, had witnessed the rise of totalitarian powers in Europe early in the 20th century but did not live to see Hungary return to autocratic rule. Indeed, by Tamkin’s account, Soros has spent $32 billion “working for justice, democratic governance, and human rights.” This has put him squarely in the sights of the right wing, spokespersons for which—Glenn Beck, for one—have accused Soros of collaborating with the Nazis during World War II (he was a child at the time). Rather than spend his fortune suing the perpetrators of such stories, Soros has instead worked within existing systems and laws to build himself up as a person “too powerful to operate in one sense as a citizen of the market and in the other sense as a citizen of the political sphere.” As Tamkin allows, this immense power is in some respects contradictory to the spirit of the “open society,” which pledges equality, particularly equality of access to the political system—for which reason Vladimir Putin has banned Open Society organizations from operating in Russia. Still, Soros continues to promote controversial causes, including immigration reform in the U.S., yet another reason to draw right-wing ire.

A welcome study of a man whose outsized power in the marketplace and public sphere fascinates.
Though Taylor has previously published two well-received collections of short stories...this memoir sets a new literary standard for his work, as he aims higher and reaches deeper.

RIDING WITH THE GHOST

A Memoir
Taylor, Justin
Random House (240 pp.)
$27.00 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-593-12929-6

A memoir about coming to terms with the life and death of a father, a man who no longer wanted to live.

Though Taylor has previously published two well-received collections of short stories as well as the thematically ambitious novel The Gospel of Anarchy (2011), this memoir sets a new literary standard for his work, as he aims higher and reaches deeper. Here, the author shows the precision and command of tone that has informed the best of his stories, but there’s something more at stake—for both the writer and his readers. In 2013, his father “had decided that he would end his life by throwing himself from the top of the parking garage at the Nashville airport.” He felt that unemployment, divorce, depression, Parkinson’s disease, and other signs of poor health had left him with no reason to live. He was saved at the time by family intervention—the author, who had distanced himself, played a minimal role—but never again found much reason to live before dying, alone, four years later. In this deeply reflective, sensitive narrative, Taylor not only explores the last decade of his father’s life, but also the aftermath, when he and his family were forced to pick up the pieces and find a way forward. “The silence since he has been gone is unimaginable,” he writes. “It terrifies and unsettles, but also—I won’t mince words here—exhilarates and relieves…I’m not saying I’m glad he’s gone. I am saying that I feel the absence of his suffering just as palpably as, for so long, I felt its presence. A storm has passed, a calm precedes the ‘peace’ of the apt platitudes.” His father’s isn’t the only ghost with whom he must come to terms, and there’s plenty of additional insightful observations about the stories we tell ourselves and the differences between the way we shape a story and the way we live our lives.

A greater literary achievement than Taylor’s impressive fiction.

STANDOFF
Race, Policing, and a Deadly Assault That Gripped a Nation
Thompson, Jamie
Henry Holt (320 pp.)
$27.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-324-00152-2

An absorbing account of a 2016 ambush that left five Dallas police officers dead.

Based on hundreds of hours of interviews, Texas journalist Thompson chronicles the events before, during, and after July 7, 2016, when a disaffected man acting alone murdered five Dallas police officers and terrorized an entire city before being stopped. The author, who covered the shooting for the Washington Post and, later, the Dallas Morning News, avoids discussing the murderer until more than 200 pages into the narrative. Instead, she focuses on law enforcement and civilians who entered the line of fire, explaining why and how they converged on downtown Dallas on that fatal night. Large crowds had gathered to protest against police in various cities killing civilians without cause, especially black men. The death of Philando Castile in Minnesota had especially angered the protesters. Of all the major characters, Senior Cpl. Larry Gordon is the most memorable. A black officer and negotiator on the Dallas SWAT team, his specialty is to talk to holed-up criminals, citizens contemplating suicide, and any others within his jurisdiction who could be persuaded with words. Gordon seems ideal for his specific task due in large part to his empathy and his understanding of the complex racial undercurrents involved in police work, both of which are on full display throughout the text. As Thompson also makes clear, Gordon does not automatically cover for his brethren; he is unafraid to call out injustice when he sees it. Throughout the book, the author deftly weaves Gordon’s opinions and experiences with those of her other significant characters, including Mayor Mike Rawlings, Chief David Brown, trauma surgeon Brian Williams, public transit police officer Misty McBride, and protester Shetamia Taylor, who was shot in the leg by the perpetrator. Thompson’s storytelling gift allows her to maintain suspense despite the outcome being known in advance.

A nail-biting and nuanced true-life police procedural. (photo insert)

GHOST ROAD
Beyond the Driverless Car
Townsend, Anthony M.
Norton (320 pp.)
$27.95 | Jun. 9, 2020
978-1-324-00152-2

A deep dive into “the driverless revolution to come.”

Townsend, president of urban forecasting initiative Star City Group, focuses on the seamless integration of automated vehicles (AV) into a society that he feels is ready for them. However, he also evenhandedly addresses the pitfalls. The text features an erudite analysis of the AV industry’s social and financial benefits and the finer points where the industry has already fallen short of expectations, and the author engagingly explores the facts behind the hype and weighs opinions from both sides of the spectrum. Townsend splits the narrative into three relevant “stories,” examining the specialization, the materialization, and the financialization of the driverless revolution, touting its benefits and debunking common myths about its future. In the first section, the author explores the transformative advancements in AV history and the “species” of innovations, and he
enthusiastically promotes the eventualities of the “taxibot take-over” and the “push-button supercommute.” One of the areas to be affected most will be taxis. “Most market analysts agree,” writes the author, “that all taxis in the industrialized nations will be automated by 2030.” Then Townsend moves on to scrutinize the steep demand of deliverables facing the e-commerce industry and the ways automation and “robofreight” could simplify these processes. Finally, Townsend warns of a potential regulatory crisis as corporations begin jockeying for power when lucrative autonomous markets proliferate. This convincing and balanced report also contains six “big mobility” codes of conduct, which will allow readers to apply specialized rules to personally maximize the autonomous experience. A natural follow-up to Townsend’s Smart Cities (2013), this well-researched, smoothly written book will appeal most to urban planners and those in the AV and related industries. Still, general readers will appreciate the author’s optimistic yet cautionary assessment of a technology that remains as elusive and unpredictable as it is awe-inspiring.

An astute and cautiously encouraging overview of the driverless technology revolution. (17 illustrations)

EDVARD MUNCH
An Inner Life
Ustvedt, Øystein
Trans. by McCullough, Alison
Thames & Hudson (224 pp.)
$19.95 paper | Jul. 9, 2020
978-0-500-29576-2

Norway’s most lauded modernist reinvented his aesthetic aims throughout his long career.

Edvard Munch (1863-1944), famous for his haunting work The Scream, produced nearly 1,800 paintings and thousands of drawings, etchings, prints, sculpture, and photographs. In the 1950s, New York’s Museum of Modern Art mounted an extensive traveling exhibition of his works, and in 1963, the Munch Museum in Oslo opened on the centennial of his birth. Although Munch has been the subject of much scholarship, art historian and museum curator Ustvedt saw the need for an introduction addressed to general readers. He amply succeeds in this insightful, vibrant overview of Munch’s life and prolific oeuvre, deftly translated by McCullough and illustrated with a wealth of images. The author traces Munch’s development beginning in the 1880s, when he broke with past traditions and “successfully positioned himself as a radical revolutionary.” Munch identified an early painting, The Sick Child, as an artistic breakthrough: an effort to capture “the fleeting mood” of the sickroom with bold, layered brush strokes, streaming light, and blurred details. Throughout the 1890s, Munch became part of a circle of bohemian intellectuals in Paris and Berlin. An Artists’ Association exhibition in Berlin, however, scandalized some critics, who derided his paintings as “sloppy and unfinished” and not “morally edifying.” Munch welcomed the scandal, soon mounting his own exhibition—for which he charged an entry fee. Ustvedt recounts Munch’s doomed love affairs, mental breakdown, and artistic frustrations, all feeding works that evoked—with swirling movement, brash colors, and ghostly images—“the emotional rather than the rational”, anxiety, vulnerability, and “the inner life of the soul.” Though receptive to the “sensibilities of the age,” Munch delved deeply into his psyche, believing that art must be “forced into being by a man’s compulsion to open his heart. All art...must be created with one’s lifeblood.”

A beautifully produced introduction to a celebrated artist. (130 illustrations)

THE DIVINE MISS MARBLE
A Life of Tennis, Fame, and Mystery
Weintraub, Robert
Dutton (384 pp.)
$28.00 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-5247-4536-3

The first full-length biography of a multitalented and mysterious athlete.

Tennis champion. Fashion designer. Singer. Writer. Teacher. Motivational speaker. Celebrity. Alice Marble (1913-1990), writes Weintraub, was all of these and more. Yet for a woman of such prominence, her life remains shrouded in mystery. Born in a small California town to modest circumstances, she moved with her family to San Francisco as a child. It was there that her athleticism blossomed, first in baseball—as a teenager, she was the mascot for the San Francisco Seals—and then in tennis. Guided by her coach and mentor Eleanor Tennant, she won five singles titles and 13 doubles titles at Wimbledon and the U.S. Nationals during her amateur tennis career. Marble also hobnobbed with celebrities such as Clark Gable, advocated for black tennis player Althea Gibson, and contributed to the Wonder Woman comic book. As for her personal life, she wrote of her marriage to a man who was killed in action during World War II and also asserted that she spied on a former lover in Geneva during the closing days of the conflict. Yet for all his prodigious research, Weintraub is unable to verify either of these stories. This poses a problem for readers, as does the author’s occasional verbosity—e.g., why not use “type-writer” instead of “keys of an Underwood”? Nonetheless, Weintraub more than compensates for such minor flaws. He skillfully provides the historical and social contexts for Marble’s life, and his sketches of her contemporaries, particularly Tennant, are enlightening. The author also deftly sprinkles his narrative with charming anecdotes, such as the story of Marble’s brief (and frustrating) tenure as tennis instructor for future astronaut Sally Ride.

“You only live once, and that woman lived,” Rita Mae Brown once said. Weintraub ably conveys this sentiment.
A vivid and erudite exploration of class struggle and gender identity.

**NEON GIRLS**

**I GOT A MONSTER**

*The Rise and Fall of America’s Most Corrupt Police Squad*

Woods, Baynard & Soderberg, Brandon

St. Martin’s (320 pp.)

$27.99 | Jul. 21, 2020

978-1-250-22180-3

Two Baltimore journalists reveal the nearly unbelievable tales of widespread police corruption in a squad whose leader ran it “like a war machine.”

Woods and Soderberg meticulously reveal a group within the Baltimore Police Department that became a criminal enterprise all its own. Known as the Gun Trace Task Force, its mission revolved around confiscating illegal weapons and narcotics and arresting the perpetrators. The authors begin with the egregiously corrupt head of GTTF, Sgt. Wayne Jenkins, who operated with near immunity. “For years,” write the authors, “high-ranking allies covered for Jenkins, helping him escape scrutiny coming from what they considered minor infractions.” However, as they demonstrate, most of Jenkins’ infractions were hardly minor, and in 2017, he was “indicted on federal racketeering charges.” The members of GTTF revolved in and out according to who applied and who was approved by either Jenkins or his superiors. Though the authors focus primarily on Jenkins and the eight other GTTF members, they also weave in secondary characters (the cast of characters at the beginning is useful), including a former BPD officer who moved to the force in Philadelphia, drug dealers who served as “collaborators,” families who were robbed and or terrorized by GTTF members, federal prosecutors, a Baltimore prosecutor, and defense lawyers. Dozens of other characters populate the narrative, too, sometimes in circumstances that might cause readers to question their utility. A few of the major characters emerge as the heroes within this massive scandal. Foremost is Ivan Bates, a defense lawyer who represented some of the victims of GTTF and was determined to bring down Jenkins and his thugs. Though racial bias is not an overriding theme of the text, it is nonetheless always in the background. Eventually, justice was served, at least in the form of lengthy jail sentences, but certain wounds will never heal.

Few readers will close this page-turner doubting that the GTTF was anything but the most corrupt police group in the U.S. (16-page color photo insert)

**NEON GIRLS**

*A Stripper’s Education in Protest and Power*

Worley, Jennifer

Perennial/HarperCollins (272 pp.)

$17.99 paper | Jun. 9, 2020

978-0-06-297132-6

A former sex worker’s chronicle of her days hustling at a legendary San Francisco peep show serves as a piercing examination of gender politics and a gritty insider’s account of union organizing.

Like many of her colleagues at the Lusty Lady Theatre, Worley, an English professor, had a greater vision for herself when she began working as an exotic dancer in the 1990s. Working on her doctoral degree, she had just embarked on a new career in academia, entered into a promising new relationship, and expanded her circle of friends. At the same time, she realized that stripping could theoretically give her the time she needed to advance her studies. What she did not fully understand, however, was just how much the Lusty Lady gig would demand of her body and soul. Worley adroitly captures the devastating dichotomy of feminist power running headlong into the realities of work built around the whims of men. “Despite my now-proficient skills combating licking...and bossing around, I was unprepared for this new indignity, this blatant, wholesale rejection,” she writes. “I felt a commingling of shame and fury at being discarded so perfunctorily by someone I was, after all, pretending to like in the first place.”

The economic exploitation the author was to experience on the Lusty Lady stage and in its darkened, secluded side booths could not be ignored. Worley’s dynamic campaign to organize the performers into the Exotic Dancers Union could be used as a primer for unions nationwide, as her spot-on account of the battles between management and workers is as relevant now as it was 25 years ago. The author also demonstrates a deep understanding of trade unionism’s extensive roots in burlesque and respect for those who came before her, including iconic figures like blacklisted “communist” Gypsy Rose Lee.

*A vivid and erudite exploration of class struggle and gender identity.*
**GOODNIGHT, LITTLE DANCER**
Adams, Jennifer
Illus. by Marley, Alea
Roaring Brook (32 pp.)
$14.99 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-1-250-31004-0

A pair of siblings dances their way to sleep in this ballet-themed bedtime book.

The brown-skinned duo with curly hair has reached the end of their day. A narrator with a caregiver’s voice tells them, “It’s time for bed now, little dancer,” as they pose, wearing pajamas, in the softly lit living room. They make their way to a bedroom, still prancing and stretching, and say goodbye to their ballet props: ribbons and slippers. The lightly rhyming text tells the two to “practice steps inside your head. // Tomorrow you’ll be on the stage. // But now let’s tuck you into bed.” The children, one with long, voluminous hair (and, oddly, no scarf or wrap), the other with close-cropped hair, lie in twin beds side by side and dream of dancing together. This simple text moves swiftly, with one or two lines per spread, making a short, sweet good-night story ideal for weary adults to help dance-obsessed young children settle into bed at the end of a long day. The amicable sibling relationship is a pleasant reprieve from feistier depictions. The soft colors are soothing and calming, as are the children’s enduring smiles. In companion title *Goodnight, Little Superhero*, pale-skinned siblings say goodnight to their capes and other gear. The text employs a similar pattern and voice; the colors are a bit brighter but still suitable for nighttime.

A good choice for the youngest dancers of all genders.
(Picture book. 3-6) (Goodnight, Little Superhero 978-1-250-31005-7)

**IT HAPPENED ON SWEET STREET**
Adderson, Caroline
Illus. by Jorisch, Stéphane
Tundra (44 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-101-91885-2

Sweet Street had just one baker, Monsieur Oliphant, until two new confectionists move in, bringing a sugar rush of competition and customers.

First comes “Cookie Concocter par excellence” Mademiselle Fee and then a pie maker, who opens “the divine Patisserie Clotilde!” With each new arrival to Sweet Street, rivalries mount and lines of hungry treat lovers lengthen. Children will
BIBLIOThERAPY FOR ALL

Bibliotherapeutic books are arguably the vitamins of children's literature. Often with titles that announce their missions—Diabetes Doesn't Stop Maddie, by Sarah Glenn Marsh and illustrated by María Luisa Di Gravio (Whitman, April 1)—is a recent example—they serve a necessary purpose for adults seeking to explain complicated subjects to children. Sometimes these subjects are particular and specific, such as Maddie's diabetes; sometimes they approach universal, as with a grandparent's declining cognition. Like American children's literature in general, historically bibliotherapy has assumed a white, normative default, asking kids of color to find themselves in books about white kids confronting family separation, illness, grief.

Happily, the bibliotherapeutic shelves are diversifying along with the general ones, and it's nice to know that when the caregiver of a child of color approaches a librarian or bookseller asking for a book to help them with a complicated explanation, it's getting easier to provide them with inclusive books.

Latinx kids, for instance, whose grandparents are showing signs of dementia may find comfort in not one, but two recent books: Diane de Anda and Alleanna Harris' The Day Abuelo Got Lost (Whitman, 2019) and Pat Mora and Alyssa Bermudez's My Singing Nana (Magination/American Psychological Association, 2019). In both books, a child notices a beloved grandparent's changed behavior, and parents offer loving support.

Of course the death of a grandparent or another family member can rock a child's world. Two upcoming books address the subject with protagonists of color. In Candy Wellins and Charlie Eve Ryan's Saturdays Are for Stella (Page Street, Aug. 11), a young biracial (black/white) child suddenly loses his beloved grandmother; in Kao Kalia Yang and Ce Reider's The Shared Room (Univ. of Minnesota, June 9), an Hmong American child suffers the sudden loss of a sister.

Parental separation is another situation frequently confronting kids, and here, too, the options are expanding if still too slim. Evelyn Davidi's illustrations for Tamara Ellis Smith's Here and There (Barefoot, 2019) paint an interracial family coping with divorce; Mom and son present black, and Dad presents white. In Matt de la Peña and Christian Robinson's Carmela Full of Wishes (Putnam, 2018), the Mexican American protagonist's parents are separated by immigration issues and not due to divorce, but the child's yearning for both parents to be together is both recognizable and broadly accessible.

Of course, many children do not live with either parent. Just Like a Mama, by Alice Faye Duncan and illustrated by Charnelle Pinkney Barlow (Denene Millner/Simon & Schuster, Jan. 14), presents the life of one such African American child who, for unspecified reasons, lives with a foster mother who is also black.

One bibliotherapeutic subtopic where kids of color are in the majority is that of books about children with incarcerated parents. Jacqueline Woodson and James E. Ransome's Visiting Day (Scholastic, 2002) provided a critical resource for black families affected by mass incarceration, and subsequent books such as Daniel Beaty and Bryan Collier's Knock Knock (Little, Brown, 2013) and Mariame Kaba and Bria Royal's Missing Daddy (Haymarket, 2019) similarly offer essential mirrors for black children whose fathers are in prison.

However, the accumulation—and corresponding absence of similar books with nonblack protagonists—has the effect of inadvertently promoting a narrative that only black men suffer incarceration, which is harmful on many levels. That's why Becky Birtha and Maja Kastelic's Far Apart, Close in Heart (Whitman, 2017) is such a valuable contribution. In presenting a racially and ethnically diverse group of children who have either a mother or a father in prison they make it clear that the issue touches all kinds of kids.

Here's to more diverse bibliotherapy to come—so that it'll be there when all kinds of kids need it.

Vicky Smith is the children's editor.
delight in thinking about an abundance of gingerbread cookies, teetering, towering cakes, and blackbird pies. Wonderfully eccentric line-and-watercolor illustrations (with whites and marbled pastels like frosting) appeal too. Fine linework lends specificity to an off-kilter world in which buildings tilt at wacky angles and odd-looking (exclusively pale) people walk about, their pantaloons, ruffles, long torsos, and twiglike arms, legs, and fingers distinguishing them as wonderfully idiosyncratic. Rotund Monsieur Oliphant’s periwinkle complexion, flapping ears, and elongated nose make him look remarkably like an elephant while the women confectionists appear clownlike, with exaggerated lips, extravagantly lashed eyes, and voluminous clothes. French idioms surface intermittently, adding a certain je ne sais quoi. Embedded rhymes contribute to a bouncing, playful narrative too: “He layered them and cherried them and married people on them.” Tension builds as the cul de sac grows more congested with sweet-makers, competition, frustration, and customers. When the inevitable, fantastically messy food fight occurs, an observant child finds a sweet solution amid the delicious detritus.

A rollicking tale of rivalry. (Picture book. 4-8)

**COME OUT AND PLAY**
* A Global Journey
Ajmera, Maya & Ivanko, John D.
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Jun. 13, 2020
978-1-5235-163-7

An international array of color photographs presents children engaging in many kinds of joyful activities.

A child in Madagascar uses tin cans to create a toy car. An Ethiopian kid plucks a stringed instrument. Kids play foosball in Benin, chess in Spain, jacks in Guatemala, and table tennis in the Czech Republic. Two others play in the water with a large leaf and a basket in a photo captioned “Cooling off with a buddy in a river in Thailand.” Children in Mexico and South Africa have fun with bubbles. The South African photo gracing the cover shows a racially diverse group of children on a colorful play structure stretching out their arms to let the bubbles fly up into the sky. Each double-page spread includes a full-bleed photo and then two or three photos on the opposite page on a solid-color background, following the format of other books supporting the Global Fund for Children by this capable author pair. Short phrases in large type explain different ideas about play, and clear captions identify each activity and country. At the end, a map identifies each country’s location, and short paragraphs further explore the book’s themes. Most parts of the world are included, although there could be more from Latin America and the Middle East, and the Caribbean has been neglected.

An attractive pictorial offering stressing the universality of children’s play the world over. (Informational picture book. 4-8)

**LITTLE GREEN DONKEY**
*Allepuz, Anuska*
Illus. by the author
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-5362-0937-2

Little Donkey lives out the adage that you are what you eat, with humorous outcomes.

Little Donkey is a finicky eater and will eat only green grass. Mom tries to convince her child to try other foods, to no avail. Humorous illustrations show that Little Donkey’s exclusive overconsumption of grass causes a dramatic transformation. When Little Donkey sees a decidedly green reflection in the pond, the young equine panics, rolling in mud and leaves to try to conceal the greenness. Mom sees right through this ruse—Little Donkey’s green snout is clearly and comically visible. This finally prompts Little Donkey to try other foods, but none appeal until Little Donkey tries carrots. Careful readers may have noticed the carrots decorating the front endpapers and will delight to see this newfound favorite food. Alas, trying and loving carrots does not break Little Donkey’s trying trait. Young readers will not be surprised to see the protagonist overindulging so that the once-green hide turns orange. “Great,” Little Donkey says on the final page, delivering a funny ending if not a sign of growth. Throughout, Allepuz’s colorful illustrations augment the text’s humor, especially in a spread akin to a centerfold that shows Little Donkey’s alarm at being all green, head-to-toe.

A good pick even for picky readers. (Picture book. 3-5)

**ONCE UPON A UNICORN**
*Anders, Lou*
Crown (288 pp.)
978-1-5247-1944-9
978-1-5247-1945-6 PLB

In the Glistening Isles can a unicorn and a night mare be friends? Midnight the young night mare lives in the Whisperwood near the Court of Thistles. She can’t control her magical fire the way other night mares can, but she has a Plan to fix that. Meanwhile, Curious the unicorn has a Scientific Mind (or so he thinks); other unicorns do not. He’s also friends with Wartle, a pukele; other unicorns find puckles annoying. When Curious’ decision to study a wispy wood wink leads him to be trapped by three evil kelpies in the River Restless, it’s Midnight who happens upon him. Hoping to prove that night mares are not the evil creatures unicorns think them to be, Midnight decides to rescue him. Interspecies bickering leads to competition for the wispy wood wink—and suddenly pumpkin-headed Jack O’ the Hunt the wickedest of Wicked Fairies is after the both of them. When the (possibly, or maybe it’s occasionally) good
Queen Titania gets involved, it’s any fairy’s guess if Curious and Midnight will even survive. Anders tiptoes into Terry Pratchett country with this funny and fresh fantasy steeped in Celtic myth. The snarkily omniscient narrator and chapter titles such as “Is This the End? But There Are Still So Many Chapters Left” up the giggle quotient.

A distinctive unicorn tale for those seeking a funny-bone tickle. (Fantasy. 8-12)

RISE OF THE SHADOW

Anderson, Brian
Illus. by the author
Crown (240 pp.)
$16.99 | $19.99 PLB | Jul. 28, 2020
978-0-553-49865-3
978-0-553-49866-0 PLB
Series: The Conjurors, 1

Siblings are thrown into a dangerous magical world.

Alex, 10, and Emma, 13, live with their cruel antiques-dealer uncle in a house with 252 rooms, 17 Victrolas (Alex calls them “hundred-year-old record players”), and no connection with the modern outside world. Their parents died on an archaeological dig (Alex believes this, but Emma does not), searching for an artifact that would restore magic to a world called the Conjurian. Their quest was pressing because nowadays, “Magic is dying” there. One night, horrifying creatures burst into the mansion and chase the siblings into a secret passage and out into that other realm. Monsters and smugglers loom; the head of this land’s ruling circle might be defending the realm from evil—or might be creating illusions of evil to gain more power. Within this adventurous setup, prose is clunky and pacing drags. Even the cliffhanger ending, with one sibling under a collapsed building and the other underwater unable to swim, lights no spark—readers know by then that this story’s flashy dangers resolve quickly without substance. An ongoing sibling debate on whether magic exists—even as magic unfolds before their eyes—is preposterous.

Flimsy, forced, and stale. (Fantasy. 9-12)

LET’S PLAY OUTDOORS!

Ard, Catherine
Illus. by McRae, Carla
Little Gestalten (56 pp.)
$19.95 | May 19, 2020
978-3-89955-843-2

A series of activities offers simple directions for specific ways that kids can interact with the outdoors.

A chaotic but appealing table of contents lists the many single-spread topics, which include ways to observe nature (“Window Camera”), ways to help preserve nature (“We Need Bees!”), and how to create carefully controlled entertainment in the great outdoors (“Campfires,” “Outdoor Cooking,” and “Obstacle Courses”). From constructing careful environments for “minibeast” observation to making bark rubbings, the directions are always clear and simple. Along the way, animals (and a couple of mushrooms) remind children via speech bubble of proper, mindful behavior and of when an adult must be present during an activity. A notebook icon sometimes appears with further suggestions for writing or drawing. Badgers, hedgehogs, and general vocabulary indicate this German import’s European genesis, as does a note about shutting gates behind you when roaming in the countryside. Otherwise, the art and text translate well to many North American settings. Facts surface, such as the differences between deciduous and evergreen and between centipede and millipede, but the book’s strength lies in the many ways offered to enjoy the outdoors while being mindful of other life forms. The color-block illustrations are full of people with varied skin tones and hair types. Aerial views of a multicultural woodland band and a campfire gathering are particularly appealing.

A solid, accessible reference book that is fun to peruse. (Informational picture book. 4-8)

BUNNIES ON THE BUS

Ardagh, Philip
Illus. by Mantle, Ben
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-5362-1116-0

Mayhem ensues when bunnies board the bus.

Don’t be fooled by the tranquil-seeming town in the opening scene; look closely and you’ll spy bunny ears. And on the title and copyright spread that follows, those bunnies sneakily take over the city bus behind the back of the regular driver, an elephant. The bunny behind the wheel seems to take the “Am I driving well?” sign on the rear of the bus as a personal challenge. (The answer is no, as many would-be bus riders and pedestrians can attest.) Repetitive phrasing in the rhyming verses adds to the frenzied atmosphere that quickly ensues, the author’s
British origins evident in some of the word choices: “Pandas at the crossing! / Pandas at the crossing! / Their shopping jumping in the air, / spinning and a-tossing.” (This likely also accounts for the rhyming of “again” with “train.”) But Mantle’s busy and very funny illustrations will ease any potential confusion among American readers. Children can follow a pig letter carrier, a parent and child sheep going about town, a bear in a bow tie gathering gifts for and then dining with a sweetheart, a pair of masked red-squirrel bandits who are making their getaway after robbing a bank, and many other characters, not to mention the antics of those bunnies on the bus. The ending hints at a possible sequel as the bunnies disembark in favor of a train.

The illustrations alone will keep readers occupied for hours. *(Picture book. 3-8)*

**HOW TO GO ANYWHERE (AND NOT GET LOST) A Guide to Navigation for Young Adventurers**

*Aschim, Hans*

*Illus. by Lozano, Andrés*

*Workman (224 pp.)*

*$14.95 paper | Jun. 23, 2020*  

978-1-5235-0634-7

Since prehistoric times, human beings have been trying not to get lost; Aschim traces how we got better and better at finding our way.

Before the advent of radio waves and GPS (which the book also covers), humans navigated using everything from stars and ocean swells to trees and sand dunes. Aschim traces how humans used these natural systems to build increasingly sophisticated navigation tools, such as the chronometer and the compass rose. Interspersed among the historical and scientific descriptions are activities designed to reinforce concepts and to help readers become master navigators themselves, such as making a sextant and practicing dead reckoning. The book is at its finest when it explores broad scientific and social concepts, such as the inherent navigational capacities of the human brain or the seafaring practices of the ancient Polynesians. Unfortunately, as the book continues, these moments grow fewer and fewer, the text bogging down with lengthy mathematical explanations and dense exposition. The book’s hectic design—including its frenetic color scheme—makes it even more difficult for readers to read through.

**WAYS TO WELCOME**

*Ashman, Linda*

*Illus. by Chou, Joey*

*Farrar, Straus and Giroux (40 pp.)*

*$18.99 | Jun. 16, 2020*  

978-0-374-31318-0

Ashman and Chou look at some simple ways to say, “Hello, friend. / I’m glad you’re here,” with acts of kindness and friendly gestures.

From waves and handshakes among humans to nose-to-nose sniffing between two dogs, the text looks at the many ways one can share a welcome with someone else, be they old or young, well known or someone new to you. Retrieving a blown-away hat, helping a new student find their way, showering love on a newly adopted dog, holding a homemade sign at the airport arrivals gate, and providing toad abodes and birdhouses are all put forth in the gently rhyming text. “An offering, / A smiling face / That lights an unfamiliar place” shows neighbors bringing garden largesse and a neighborhood picnic invitation to a family that’s just moved in—cardboard boxes are piled outside, and they were previously seen arriving at the airport. That neighborhood picnic ends the book on a high note, people from all walks of life and every shade (many from previous pages) sharing a wonderful day together. Two women wear hijab; a small kid uses a wheelchair; and there is a same-sex couple raising a baby. Simple, stylized artwork in bright shades keep the focus on the interactions, and readers will delight in finding the blue butterfly in every scene.

**GRASPING MYSTERIES**

*Atkins, Jeannine*

*Illus. by Assanelli, Victoria*

*Atheneum (320 pp.)*

*$17.99 | Aug. 4, 2020*  

978-1-5344-6068-3

This collective verse biography “honors women who used math to frame and solve problems, fix things, or understand the size of the universe.”

Atkins opens with German Caroline Herschel (1750-1848), the first woman to discover a comet, and closes with American Vera Rubin (1928-2016), an astronomer who proved the existence of dark matter. Throughout, she illustrates how each woman faced personal obstacles as well as gender bias but never allowed “insults or lack of faith to stop” her. Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) revolutionized the nursing profession through use of medical statistics, and Hertha Marks Ayrton (1854-1923) became the first female electrical engineer, registering 26 patents; both women were English. American geologist Marie Tharp (1920-2006) helped develop the first map of the entire
ocean floor while her countrywoman mathematician Katherine Johnson (1918-2020) endured segregation as she calculated trajectories for NASA. At the U.S. Census Bureau, statistician Edna Lee Paisano (1948-2014) used math to “give everyone a fair chance.” With the exception of African American Johnson and Nez Perce Paisano, the women profiled are white. Presented chronologically in engaging verse with a feminist tone, the text artfully weaves scientific data and history with imagined “dialogue and sensory detail based on what’s known about the time, places, and questions” of these remarkable math mavens. A line drawing introduces each woman’s biography, and the “Women Who Widened Horizons” section summarizes their achievements.

Thoroughly researched, creatively presented, inspiring real-life role models for girls who love math. (author’s note, selected bibliography) (Verse biography. 10-14)

MEMOIRS OF A BASQUE COW
Atxaga, Bernardo
Trans. by Costa, Margaret Jull
Dedalus Limited (224 pp.)
978-1-912868-01-8

A philosophical cow recounts her life and ponders its meaning.
Mo looks back on her long life: her unceremonious birth, dismay at the realization that she’s a cow, humans she befriended or fought, a tumultuous friendship with a fellow cow called La Vache qui Rit, and her dot-age with a plucky French nun. Mo’s narration is monopolized by philosophical conversations with The Pest, Mo’s inner voice, an all-knowing, formally prissy conscience. Serenity, danger, and cruelty are all present in Mo’s account. The story is translated from Basque, and the author’s preface provides brief historical context about the Spanish Civil War and the anti-fascist Basque rebels who fought against Franco’s dictatorship after the war. Unfortunately, the text fails to explore these sociopolitical issues. It is also a shame that the translator and publisher did not opt to remove problematically dated terms. Mo shares a saying from “a wise oriental,” and the story’s villain is referred to as “a foreigner”; as Mo cannot understand the latter’s (unidentified) language, it is, regrettably, represented throughout with just one nonsensical word: “Karral.” Human characters seem to be default white. The meandering narrative bounces between past and present, with many digressions in between, punctuated by pithy cow sayings. There’s a monotonous lack of urgency between bits of action and the occasional fight scene.

Dated language and slow pacing make a muddle of this tedious title. (Fantasy. 10-14)

MONSTER AND BOY
Barnaby, Hannah
Illus. by Syed, Aaooobha
Godwin Books/Henry Holt (144 pp.)
$13.99 | Jul. 28, 2020
978-0-8234-4251-5

A boy discovers that monsters are real—and that one lives under his bed. The monster and the boy—no names given—share a bedroom, but they have never met. The monster is nocturnal and has lived under the boy’s bed for many years; he knows the sound of the boy’s voice and loves the smell of his dirty socks. One night the boy’s mother reads her son a book about monsters, and she tells him that there is no such thing as monsters. Knowing this is untrue, the monster decides to introduce himself. Predictably, this doesn’t go as well as the monster expects, and when the boy screams, the monster swallows him in a panic. This is distressing for both the monster (who just lost his only friend) and the boy (who now finds himself trapped inside a stomach). Eventually the monster coughs the boy out—only to discover the boy is now grasshopper-sized. Humor ensues. In archly amusing fashion, the author breaks the fourth wall—this is marked by teal-colored page backgrounds—reassuring readers during potentially scary parts of the book, filling in background details, or collegially including them in aspects of the storytelling. Teal-flecked grayscale cartoons appear on almost every page, making this a solid choice for new independent readers. As depicted on the cover, the boy has tightly coiled brown curls and pink skin.

No need to be afraid of monsters after reading this sweet and unusual friendship story. (Fantasy. 6-9)

GIRL VERSUS SQUIRREL
Barrett, Hayley
Illus. by Andrani, Renée
Margaret Ferguson/Holiday House (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Jun. 2, 2020
978-0-8234-4251-5

An enterprising girl meets her match in an even more enterprising squirrel.
Pearl, illustrated with black hair and eyes and beige skin, has just built herself three birdhouses. “One looked like a house. / One looked like a tube. / One looked like a teacup”—because it is a teacup, and it’s the one Pearl is most proud of. While the house-shaped feeder and the tube feeder attract appropriate (and accurately illustrated) birds, the teacup, filled with peanuts, attracts a squirrel—who eats them all. Irritated, Pearl rigs up a contraption to foil the squirrel, but the squirrel defeats this easily. Finally, after building a Rube Goldberg–like obstacle course of things Pearl keeps in her “box of useful odds and ends”—which the squirrel navigates with ease—Pearl’s irritation turns to admiration. When she discovers that the squirrel
is, in fact, a mama with three kits, the friendship is sealed. Barrett's high-energy narrative is filled with action verbs that give it a pleasingly crisp forward movement while Andriani's illustrations are just as pleasingly varied in their presentation and keep up perfectly with the text. (Of note is the sequence in which nine separate iterations of the squirrel navigate each element of the ninja course.) This can-do story is delivered with great good humor, and it has the added benefit of ending with empathy rather than outright victory. Backmatter delivers more factual information about squirrels.

Determination and perseverance—both girl's and squirrel's—are celebrated. (Picture book. 4-8)

FROM A MASTER OF THE WORDLESS PICTURE BOOK

Geraldo Valério

“An important story for readers of all ages.”
— School Library Journal, starred review

“A magical world of joy.”
— Booklist

“A provocative drama.”
— Kirkus, starred review

@GROUNDWOODBOOKS
GROUNDWOODBOOKS.COM
the pool. Instead, they've been transported to a strange place infested by huge bats with astonishingly bad breath. The cousins must use Dante's video game experience, Ivan's creativity, Malia's leadership, and the help of some fantastical characters to survive the terrifying bats and return home to Aunt Lucy's house. Bowles gently introduces a sprinkling of Spanish vocabulary throughout this chapter book. Encouraging messages greet readers after some chapters, along with occasional progress markers. In addition, a summary of the number of chapters, pages, and words read gives readers a sense of accomplishment at the conclusion, and the three protagonists speak directly to readers, encouraging them to take up another book. Three additional activities aim to further readers' engagement with the story and develop critical reading skills.

An exciting series opener that should whet readers' appetites for more. (Horror. 6-10)

**SHADOW IN THE WOODS AND OTHER SCARY STORIES**
Brallier, Max
Illus. by Rubegni, Letizia
Scholastic (64 pp.)
$4.99 paper | $23.99 PLB | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-338-61541-8
978-1-338-61542-5 PLB
Series: Mister Shivers, 2

Five more spooky shorts from the haunting Mr. Shivers.
Yet another box is found at the pseudo-author's doorstep. Five more spooky shorts from the haunting Mr. Shivers. This time, the box contains a rusty padlock, an owl's feather, a fingernail chewer, starts using his teeth on other people. Sophie writes a message on the wall of her new room and gets an odd reply. Finally, there's something—“SCRATCH-SCRATCH”—behind Emma's locker. Brallier effectively repeats the scream-worthy formula established in *Beneath the Bed and Other Scary Stories* (2019) to add a sense of familiarity to the foreboding. Rubegni's full-color cartoon illustrations depict racially diverse schoolchildren. A combination of spot, panel, and full-page illustrations helps add drama to the pacing. The abrupt, disquieting endings mix the creepy and weird with the genuinely terrifying, creating a nice balance as readers jump bravely between stories. Each page has around 50 words or less, with longer paragraphs broken up with ample leading and spacing. The final page includes drawing instructions and a short creative writing prompt.

Easy to read but definitely not easy to forget. (Early reader/horror 5-7)

**A QUIET GIRL**
Carnavas, Peter
Illus. by the author
Pajama Press (32 pp.)
$18.95 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-1-77278-122-9

The world is full of wonders—but you have to be really quiet to appreciate them.
Mary is very quiet. She hears things no one else can: a buzzing dragonfly, a sleeping dog, a creaking tree. When she speaks, her parents and brother don't hear her, though they're usually too busy with activities or plugged-in devices anyway. Even when Mary raises her voice, she has trouble being heard. So she becomes even quieter. Suddenly, an enriched world opens to her senses: Mary sees, smells, and feels phenomena she never experienced before. Mary's family, still engrossed in pastimes and electronics, barely see her; Mary herself feels she doesn't exist. She goes unnoticed for a while, but soon the family realizes Mary's "disappeared" and search everywhere. Eventually, the family falls silent, too; for the first time, they listen and hear. Only then do they realize that Mary's among them—and permanently adopt her new method for engaging with the world. This gentle Australian import exhorts readers to listen, pay attention, and, sometimes, unplug, but some children may be unsettled by the notion that if they tend toward quietude, they may go unheeded in their families. The delicate, sweet line illustrations present brown-haired Mary and her family with beige skin and also depict creative ideas for recycling plastic bottles. A spread with simple mindfulness tips concludes the book.

A cautionary tale about listening closely in order to discover the world's pleasures. (Picture book. 4-7)

**HOW TO BE A GIRL IN THE WORLD**
Carter, Caela
Harper/HarperCollins (304 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-0-06-267270-4

Lydia, 12, would rather swelter in heavy clothes in the August heat than endure her mom's boyfriend, Jeremy, touching her bare skin.
Without saying why, Lydia gives her cousin Emma, 11, who lives with them, the candy he slips them. Jeremy's not the only male threat in Lydia's world: Andrew and their male Catholic school classmates find ingenious ways to look up her skirt. Knowing her friends happily seek male attention that sickness her, she keeps her reactions to herself. Is it normal to enjoy this? Lydia, who's white, has distanced herself from Emma, whose mother is deceased and who longs to live with her dad. (Emma's biracial; her mom was black and her dad is white.) Emotionally isolated from her squabbling, divorced parents, Lydia dreads hurting her attorney mom; her bartender dad often cancels their scheduled visits. Dreading the day
Jeremy will move into their new house, Lydia discovers it contains a room with herbal extracts and a book of spells she hopes will offer needed protection. This ambitious novel covers significant, rarely explored ground. Do manspreading, unchecked sexualized teasing, and sexual predation share a continuum of exploitation? Who gets to define each? Why? Most female characters here accept these behaviors with passive resignation or active welcome remains frustratingly unexplored. Alsohovering unacknowledged is the role of sexual objectification as a societal norm and value.

A flawed but urgent read set in the fading #MeToo era, this is sure to ignite mother-daughter book club debates. (Fiction, 11-13)

From a Caldecott and Sibert honoree, an invitation to take a mind-expanding journey from the surface of our planet to the furthest reaches of the observable cosmos.

Though Chin’s assumption that we are even capable of understanding the scope of the universe is quixotic at best, he does effectively lead viewers on a journey that captures a sense of its scale. Following the model of Kees Boeke’s classic Cosmic View: The Universe in Forty Jumps (1957), he starts with four 8-year-old sky watchers of average height (and different racial presentations). They peer into a telescope and then are comically startled by the sudden arrival of an ostrich that is twice as tall…and then a giraffe that is over twice as tall as that…and going onward and upward, with ellipses at each page turn connecting the stages, past our atmosphere and solar system to the cosmic web of galactic superclusters. As he goes, precisely drawn earthly figures and features in the expansive illustrations give way to ever smaller celestial bodies and finally to glittering swirls of distant lights against gulfs of deep black before ultimately returning to his starting place. A closing recap adds new animal groups appear to the right of the previous one at each page turn. Whatever readers see on the far right of the recto appears on the next spread’s verso.

Readers count up to 13 with affable animal groups, from one moose to 13 sea gulls. In short sentences, heavy on alliteration, if it takes place on a wide stage. A new animal group appears to the right of the previous one at each page turn.

A stimulating outing to the furthest reaches of our knowledge, certain to inspire deep thoughts. (afterword, websites, further reading) (Informational picture book. 3-7)

A shy octopus makes a similarly reclusive friend.

The front endpapers introduce readers to Maurice, a flapjack octopus, an impossibly adorable pink sea critter who hides behind his mom, under his desk at school, and in anything he can find. The mysteriously omniscient narrator suggests that “Right now, you’re probably thinking ‘What a bore!’ But I wouldn’t be so quick to jump to conclusions.” Following this observation, readers see Maurice jetting off to the Deep Blue Dance Hall and performing a solo dance in an extremely cute six-panel sequence, possibly to an unseen audience. The story concludes with Maurice being dragged to a birthday party, hidden under a paper bag with a delightfully grouchy face drawn on it. There he meets a similarly disguised yellow boxfish named Lucy, who turns out to have been the narrator the whole time. Naturally, the two become friends. Careful observers who flip back through the book will realize that Lucy has been hiding in the backgrounds of multiple earlier pages. Gorgeous, muted illustrations show an entrancing variety of sea life, and the personalities of each creature carry the story rather than the awkward prose and inconsistent storyline (that dance sequence is delightful but extraneous).

A feast for the eyes. (Picture book. 3-7)

Wordplay abounds, as evidenced by the title’s “EnCOUNTers,” in this counting book featuring anthropomorphic creatures in the wild.

Readers count up to 13 with affable animal groups, from one moose to 13 sea gulls. In short sentences, heavy on alliteration, they learn that each group is up to something (a “moose mak[es] a movie”; “bears bik[e] by the bay”; and “seals [go] surfing”). The animals’ speech-balloon dialogue consists of silly wordplay; most of it involves playing with the sounds of English. The moose, for instance, declares its movie is a “moose-ical,” and a young fort-making deer announces it’s “really fawn-d” of its creation. The lively, playful illustrations move the action along as if it takes place on a wide stage. A new animal group appears to the right of the previous one at each page turn. Whatever readers see on the far right of the recto appears on the next spread’s verso: A discarded bottle of cider in the right corner of a spread with two raccoons appears as the centerpiece of the next one, as slugs feast on its contents. The story comes full circle with a
THE ANTHOLOGY ONCE UPON AN EID REFLECTS AND CELEBRATES DIVERSITY WITHIN MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

By Megan Labrise

The joyful middle-grade anthology Once Upon an Eid (Amulet, May 5) celebrates the annual Islamic feast days of Eid al-Fitr (May 23-24, when observers break the monthlong fasts of Ramadan) and Eid al-Aha (July 30-31, commemorating the sacrifice of Ibrahim) in stories by 15 Muslim writers from diverse backgrounds. Edited by bestselling authors Aisha Saeed (Amal Unbound) and S. K. Ali (Love From A to Z), “this thoughtful and uplifting volume will keep readers turning pages year-round,” according to Kirkus’ reviewer. We spoke with the editors about the collaboration.

Where did the idea for an Eid-themed middle-grade anthology come from?

S.K. Ali: It was late 2017, and I’d been noticing that a lot of stories with marginalized characters often centered pain. I thought, what does it look like for a young Muslim reader to mostly have access to stories about struggle around their identity? Then I thought about what the opposite would look like. There are so many hidden moments of joy that we Muslims keep to ourselves—what Aisha calls sort of the “insider experience”—that happen in our communities and in our families. Black Muslim communities were sharing #BlackoutEid, posting pictures of their celebrations, their clothing, on social media, and I thought about how we could bring it to a wider public. So I connected with Aisha about the idea.

Aisha Saeed: Growing up, I never saw those kinds of stories in print. So it was really exciting to be able to see them for ourselves and [help make] these kinds of books accessible in classrooms. One thing that we really want to emphasize is, even though it’s Eid stories, as far as the theme goes, we really see this as having year-round interest. It shouldn’t be siloed as simply being pulled out for holidays. They’re stories about potentially losing a parent to cancer, they’re stories about sharing and being generous. There’s lots of different things going on that extend beyond the holiday itself.

That could make it a useful thing for children to have in their classrooms, not just for the stories themselves, but also for that representation on the shelf.

When you were the same age as the characters in Once Upon an Eid (10 to 12), how did you celebrate the holidays?

Saeed: Growing up [in Miami], I was lucky, because some of my friends’ parents had jobs where they couldn’t take time off of work—[Eid]’s not a national holiday—and my parents could. My siblings and I always took the day off from school, and I remember waking up to the smell of, oh, lots of carby things, like my mom’s Pakistani desserts from back home. For breakfast we would eat all these different desserts, and
we could sip our parents’ tea, which we were not normally allowed to do; it was a special treat. We got to put on a brand-new outfit we’d never worn before and go to the mosque, and we prayed. Then we got to visit each of our friends’ homes; we would all take turns. And everyone would have something sweet for us to eat. That’s what I remember the most.

Ali: I was the imam’s daughter; my father was the director of the largest mosque in Toronto downtown. So, for me, it meant a lot of community events. We used to have a big henna party with a lot of the girls the night before. Toronto is very multicultural, and there are a lot of Muslims, but, growing up, there was one prayer place for [the whole community].

Ali: I was the imam’s daughter; my father was the director of the largest mosque in Toronto downtown. So, for me, it meant a lot of community events. We used to have a big henna party with a lot of the girls the night before. Toronto is very multicultural, and there are a lot of Muslims, but, growing up, there was one prayer place for [the whole community].

Saeed: We were really lucky [with the pitches we received], because we did want to make it accessible to all kinds of readers—not just culturally, but also in form. There may be children who don’t want to read a short story, and so they would turn away. Well, there’s a comic in there, so maybe that could be their gateway into the anthology itself.

Ali: There are diversities of all kinds in this book. It’s going to be touted for its diversity of cultures, but it should be touted for its diversity of themes: economic struggles, what it feels like to be marginalized within your own community...I think it will reach all types of readers, whether they’re from the Muslim community or not.

Are there any other characteristics of this anthology you’d like to highlight?

Ali: I like to write the parts of being Muslim that are not always explored....As [a Muslim writer], I can hopefully examine my community with warmth and positivity, from a place of love for the community, without shying away from any issues. I think all the authors in the anthology managed to do that beautifully, to reflect from that place of love and warmth.

Saeed: And joy! [As S.K. said], a lot of times the stories that are out there can focus on marginalized communities and their pain and their struggle. Those are stories that need to be told, too, but it was a lot of joy for both of us to curate and contribute to an anthology that was just happy, period. Even if things happened in the stories that were challenges or struggles, they still ended on happy notes. I think we need happy these days.

Editor at large Megan Labrise hosts Kirkus’ Fully Booked podcast. Once Upon an Eid received a starred review in the March 1, 2020, issue.
black-haired, beige-skinned child who, unseen by the animals, watches the tomfoolery from behind foliage. Despite the inclusion of “Forest Friends” in the subtitle, readers also follow animals to the bay, where they meet groups of otters, orcas, seals, and sea gulls.

Goofy fun with wordplay. You can count on it. (Picture book. 3-6)

CANNONBALL
Cotter, Sacha
Illus. by Morgan, Josh
Sourcebooks Jabberwocky (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 1, 2020
978-1-7282-1756-7

In this New Zealand import, a young Maori child in pursuit of the perfect cannonball seeks the source of confidence to jump from up high.

Doing an amazing cannonball is a source of pride in this community. The narrator, a brown-skinned child, has been studying cannonballs and learning from Nan. But once at the edge of the diving board, the will to jump fizzles. A little chant helps. Advice from all the onlookers only weighs this jumper down. When someone tells the learner “cannonballs aren’t for you,” Nan offers other advice: “Listen to your heart, to your mind….Do it your way.” When the child listens to what’s inside, a whole new world of self-expression opens up. All dressed up with flowers, feathers, and face paint, the aspiring diver shouts out loud instead of whispering the chant, then, over two spreads, flies and rolls through the air before landing with a big splash—and an appropriate celebration for the accomplishment. This distinctive story of summer fun and growth, set within a culture underrepresented on North American shelves, carries a universal message of listening to one’s own heart and being oneself when the world tries to tell you how and who to be. Morgan, who is of Maori descent, uses bright colors and creative layouts on white space and dark backgrounds to trace the child’s journey from student to star.

A creative treat. (glossary) (Picture book. 4-8)

THE TOTAL ECLIPSE OF NESTOR LOPEZ
Cuevas, Adrianna
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (288 pp.)
$16.99 | May 12, 2020
978-0-374-31360-9

A Cuban American boy who can speak to animals moves to a new town where he faces off against a dangerous witch with a nefarious plan.

Twelve-year-old Nestor Lopez has moved five times in the past few years while his military dad is deployed (now in Afghanistan). When Nestor and his mother move in with his abuela in New Haven, Texas, his plan is the same as always when getting to a new place: unpack just the essentials, avoid making friendships he can’t sustain, and keep his ability to talk to animals a secret. But the plan takes a turn when Nestor becomes friends with schoolmates Maria Carmen and Talib just as his abuela falls under suspicion for the mysterious animal disappearances in the woods. Nestor needs to use his powers—with a little help from his animal and human friends—so he can prove his grandmother’s innocence and defeat the real culprit, a mythical tule vieja who steals powers from animals. Debut author Cuevas reinterprets the tule vieja legend from Panama and Costa Rica to tell a story about a boy who deeply feels the burden of being “man of the house.” The importance of community and working together are deftly explored alongside Nestor’s longing for a more stable life, preferably with his dad by his side. Maria Carmen is Latinx; Talib’s name suggests Middle Eastern heritage.

A charming and vibrant debut fantasy. (author’s note) (Fantasy. 8-12)

SOAKED!
Cushman, Abi
Illus. by the author
Viking (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-9848-3662-5

Three woodland creatures persuade a fourth to have some fun in the rain.

The first drop of rain hits the bear on the title page. “Look at all this rain,” says the bear in the opening pages. “Everything is dreary. / Everything is drenched.” A wet badger, bunny, and moose with a hula hoop are seen standing in the rain. —and an appropriate celebration for the accomplishment. This distinctive story of summer fun and growth, set within a culture underrepresented on North American shelves, carries a universal message of listening to one’s own heart and being oneself when the world tries to tell you how and who to be. Morgan, who is of Maori descent, uses bright colors and creative layouts on white space and dark backgrounds to trace the child’s journey from student to star.

A creative treat. (glossary) (Picture book. 4-8)
An affecting account of Japan’s catastrophic earthquake and the days that surrounded it.

**BEYOND ME**

**MEMORY SUPERPOWERS! An Adventurous Guide to Remembering What You Don’t Want To Forget**

Dellis, Nelson

Illus. by Stilwell, Steph

Abrams (208 pp.)

$19.99 | Aug. 4, 2020

978-1-4197-3187-7

There is, apparently, an actual Grandmaster of Memory.

Dellis, a memory record holder and four-time winner at the U.S. Memory Championship, has crafted a book that offers exercises to improve memory. The book begins by setting a goal: defeating a mythical character called Memory Thief, who lurks at the summit of Mount Foreverest. The illustrations in each section are used as visual cues and act as memory guides to help readers navigate a variety of engaging memory exercises. In a section headed “Foreign Words,” for instance, the French “chou” (cabbage) is given a graphic mnemonic of a shoe crushing a head of cabbage. Even though the book’s overall goal is to follow the journey to the summit of Mount Foreverest, each chapter is individually accessible, such that readers don’t need to make their way through the book in a linear fashion. For example, if readers are having trouble memorizing lists, one chapter covers that particular skill. Another chapter coaches readers on how to remember names and faces. For help with schoolwork, there are memory tools for spelling and definitions as well as how to remember numbers. These trickier sections may work best with a teacher or tutor on hand to defeat the Memory Thief, as the mnemonics gradually become more complicated.

A handy go-to for teachers and students that offers a variety of methods for all different types of learners. (Nonfiction. 10-14)

**BRIGHT DREAMS**

**The Brilliant Ideas of Nikola Tesla**

Dockray, Tracy

Illus. by the author

Capstone Editions (32 pp.)

$18.95 | Aug. 1, 2020

978-1-68446-141-7

An illuminating study of the visionary inventor’s tumultuous life and equally stormy career.

In a portrait powered by twin themes of electricity and obsession, Dockray retraces Tesla’s life from birth (during a thunderstorm) and early youth (wandering about his family’s yard with nose in a book about, presciently, Niagara Falls) to the lighting of the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893 and the opening of the massive alternating-current hydroelectric project at, yes, Niagara Falls in 1895. She then closes with a quick list of his other inventions over a view of him speeding past in the modern electric car that bears his name. In an afterword (set in small type) she suggests that his behavior points to an “autism spectrum disorder” diagnosis and summarizes his troubled, obscure final years. Sidebars alongside the main narrative explain the difference between AC and DC, how a dynamo works, and other relevant topics; a timeline includes several incidents and inventions not mentioned in the main narrative. The line-drawn illustrations have an old-time-y look, emphasized by sparing application of color, that’s occasionally jarred by the sudden appearance of a collaged-in photographic element. Though this doesn’t equal the voltage of Elizabeth Rusch’s *Electrical Wizard*, illustrated by Oliver Dominguez (2015), it generates watts enough to leave readers with a deeper understanding of Tesla’s larger-than-life feats and flaws. Human figures are white throughout, the men sporting picturesque period facial hair.

A well-turned tale with flashes of insight. (glossary, further reading) (Picture book/biography. 7-9)

**BEYOND ME**

Donwerth-Chikamatsu, Annie

Caitlyn Dlouhy/Atheneum (304 pp.)

$17.99 | Jun. 30, 2020

978-1-4814-3789-9

When Japan is left in ruins by a massive earthquake, one child must navigate through fear to help the community.

Maya, half Japanese, half American, lives in a suburb a few miles outside of Tokyo. On March 11, 2011, a five-minute-long earthquake shudders through Japan, changing their lives forever. Aftershocks and tsunamis threaten to cause more devastation every moment. Maya’s family discovers they are luckier than many; they still have their home and their lives. But with each new tremble, Maya can’t help but panic. As whole areas are wiped out by the ocean, a nuclear plant is damaged, and the death toll continues to rise, the rest of Japan bands together to send relief to the hardest-hit region, in the northeast. Maya continues to feel hopeless and afraid, but her father tells her, “strengthen yourself,” then helps others. Through small acts of kindness, Maya finds strength and discovers even little things can make a big difference. Narrated by Maya in free verse, this is an affecting account of Japan’s catastrophic earthquake and the days that surrounded it. The time signature often appears in red in the margins, allowing readers to grasp how long each day felt and how frequent and unpredictable aftershocks were. Occasionally shaky typesetting, along with the changing size and movement of the words on the page, adds to the overall impact and gravity of the story.

A moving but never overwhelming look at Japan’s devastating 2011 earthquake. (author’s note) (Historical fiction. 8-12)
Dowell leaves plenty of mental room for young writers to take their stories in any direction at all.

**HOW TO BUILD A STORY...OR, THE BIG WHAT IF**

Dowell, Frances O’Roark
Illus. by Ebert, Stacy
Caitlyn Dlouhy/Atheneum (128 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 28, 2020
978-1-5344-3842-2

Advice on plotting stories for those who love to write and those who hate it but have to do it anyway.

Middle-grade novelist Dowell speaks directly to her typical audience in this breezy, lighthearted guide. First, she assures readers that if they’ve ever written anything, they are, in fact, writers. Acknowledging that it’s much easier to write the beginning of a novel than to follow it all the way through, she focuses most of her attention on how to move a story along. Start with the “Big What If” of the subtitle: “What if you woke up one morning and realized you could fly?” Create an action-packed opening scene and then throw obstacles—she calls them sticks, stones, and monsters—into the protagonist’s way. Solve the problems, and bang! You’ve got a story! Except that now it’s time to find an editor and revise. Dowell follows several what-if scenarios through to possible conclusions to show young writers how it might be done—but leaves plenty of mental room for them to take their stories in any direction at all.

Both encouraging and realistic (“Writing is like a sport: it takes practice to get good”), she confines standard writing advice (“show don’t tell,” etc.) to an appendix and instead confronts the real monster that devours many an aspiring writer: quitting before the end.

Fresh, interesting, and unique—likely to be very useful in many settings. (Nonfiction. 8-14)

**CATALYST**

Durst, Sarah Beth
Clarion (288 pp.)
$16.99 | Jun. 9, 2020
978-0-358-06502-9

She’s just the adorablest, teeniest of stray kittens—suddenly grown as big as a hippopotamus. Zoe’s not supposed to bring stray animals home anymore, ever since the skunk incident. Who can resist the world’s smallest kitten, though? And it’s Zoe’s 12th birthday, and she’s been unhappy at how tall she’s grown, and she’s been crushed over her older brother’s impending departure for college; eventually, her concerned parents cave. But after Pipsqueak’s been with Zoe for just a couple of days, she’s suddenly a full-grown cat. Then she’s the size of a dog, then a lion, and after less than a week, a hippo. If the government finds out about the enormous talking feline (for Pipsqueak can speak, now, and read as well), will they take her away to Area 51? Zoe and her best friend, Harrison, begin a quest: They’ll take Pipsqueak to Zoe’s wacky New Age aunt, who’ll maybe have a solution for them. Along the way their fellowship swims with magical animals, an offbeat crew composed of a six-tailed green dog and a multicolored flying mouse. The far-fetched setup and ensuing adventure convey themes that will resonate with the audience; Pipsqueak’s as unhappy with her out-of-control body and circumstances as Zoe, and the quest may lead them to new comfort with themselves. Zoe is depicted as white on the cover, and Harrison is of South Asian descent.

Magical animals become a kooky, sweet metaphor for growing up. (Fantasy. 8-11)

**LOIS LANE AND THE FRIENDSHIP CHALLENGE**

Ellis, Grace
Illus. by Williams, Britteny
DC (160 pp.)
$9.99 paper | Aug. 11, 2020
978-1-4012-9637-7

A young Lois Lane solves a mystery. It’s the first day of 13-year-old Lois Lane’s summer vacation, and she has her sights set on creating a perfect viral video. Lois’ friend Kristen is a bit less focused on the task at hand, anxiously anticipating her departure for sleepaway camp. But when the fireworks for the post–bike race barbecue go missing, Lois and Kristen take up the case, investigating the new girl on the block and the proprietor of the fancy new bike shop. Lois’ first mystery is composed with energetic panel work and dynamic compositions, colored with deep greens, blues, and purples. The central mystery is a bit routine, but the outcome shades the central friendship between Kristen and Lois in a pleasant-enough way to make the enterprise seem worthwhile. Hardcore DC fans may be a bit disappointed: There’s very little branded content to be had here—no hints at Batman, Superman, Green Lantern, etc. This is Lois Lane’s story, and while it may not work as an introduction to the hero-filled universe, it works wonderfully as a celebration of the character’s pluck and can-do attitude. Lois and Kristen both present white, but there’s significant diversity among the supporting cast.

A nifty starter mystery. (Graphic mystery. 8-12)
With the simultaneously publishing *A Celebration of Sisters*, companion books about companionable siblings.

Delivering just what its title promises, Evans' rhyming text and Landazábal's accompanying illustrations present readers with an idealized vision of brotherly love. There is no story for readers to latch onto; words and pictures simply affirm the importance of sibling bonds. Pleasingly, there is an acknowledgement of children without brothers in their families in one line: "You might find your brothers in the friends you make." On the other hand, the well-intentioned refrain, "Stepbrothers or half brothers, we love them, one and all," may not sit well with those who reject the latter term as problematic even with assurances of love. In other ways the book as a whole is fairly inclusive, with illustrations depicting diverse siblings enjoying one another's company. Importantly, though this book is about brothers, its art rightly depicts the fact that some of its title characters are siblings to kids who do not present male. Likewise, the companion title shows girls with siblings of different genders, and both books resist gender stereotypes in their depictions.


---

A little girl who loves ballet learns that preschool can also be wonderful.

Preschooler Pearl attends the children's ballet class that her mother teaches. She loves everything about ballet, but now her mother has suggested a regular preschool class. Pearl has her doubts, but her mother reassures her. Pearl can learn to count, and the costume is a mouse. All in all, it’s a good time for a little girl, with dancing the best part, of course. The softly colored illustrations, outlined in black, are very appealing and feature a lovely double-page spread of Pearl and her mother attending a classic ballet performance. She and her mother are white, and the other children are diversely represented, including a boy of color in the ballet class.

Tender and sweet comfort. (Picture book. 3-6)

---

**PEARL GOES TO PRESCHOOL**

Fortenberry, Julie

Illus. by the author

Candlewick (32 pp.)

$16.99 | Jun. 9, 2020

978-1-5362-0743-9

---

**RACE FOR THE DRAGON HEARTSTONE**

Halbrook, K.D.

Illus. by Gort, Ilse

Henry Holt (256 pp.)

$16.99 | Aug. 18, 2020

978-1-250-18109-1

Series: Silver Batal, 2

---

Silver and her bonded dragon, Hiyan, are on the run in this sequel to *Silver Batal and the Water Dragon Races* (2019), seeking safety from Queen Imea and her trackers.
A month later, Silver, Nebekker, and Mele, plus their dragons, are trekking through the frigid mountains. When a terrifying, cave-dwelling Screw-Claw attacks Hiyyan, poisoning him, and Nebekker's heartstone cannot heal him, Silver must figure out a way to save him before it is too late—for both Hiyyan and herself. Their journey takes them to the Watchers—“the keepers of knowledge and history, charged with sharing that knowledge freely.” Readers join all of them on a freezing journey during which they must remain vigilant and stay ahead of trackers and other lurking creatures. Silver must also come to terms with who she is—she walked away from her family's legacy to fulfill her dream of racing water dragons—and explore her bond with Hiyyan. Halbrook focuses on each character in relation to Silver and through Silver's point of view. Because of this, Nebekker and Mele may not appear fully developed, yet each character undergoes a transformation. Halbrook continues to develop her Middle Eastern–esque fantasy world, fleshing out the historical relationship between dragons and humans.

A gripping sequel full of adventure, bravery, fear, and self-discovery. (Fantasy. 9-12)

SAL & GABI FIX THE UNIVERSE
Hernandez, Carlos
Rick Riordan Presents/Disney (432 pp.)
$16.99 | May 5, 2020
978-1-368-02283-5
Series: Sal & Gabi, 2

The continued multiverse adventures of Sal Vidón and Gabi Reál. It's been three weeks since Sal and Gabi saved the life of Gabi's newborn brother, Iggy, and everything seems to be back to normal—or at least as normal as possible with a potentially broken universe. Then Sal's calamity-physicist father and Gabi's Dad: The Final Frontier finish work on their remembrance machine, which they hope will fix the holes in the universe created in the Pura Belpre–winning Sal and Gabi Break the Universe (2019)—but has become sentient artificial intelligence in the process. As if that were not enough, Sal's unlikely new friend, Yasmany, seems to have gone missing, and a Gabi from another universe shows up to warn Sal that Papi's research has destroyed her world and killed her own Sal and that they must stop his version of Papi from doing the same. This excellent sequel features nonstop multiverse hijinks, great comedy, and heartening moments that are skillfully interwoven with a subplot that features a delightfully surreal student production of Alice in Wonderland—er, “Alicia” in “el pais de las maravillas.” The supporting cast includes a plethora of nurturing adults as well as amusingly melodramatic AIs. Most characters are Cuban American, and Hernandez continues to effortlessly incorporate intersectionalities, including Gabi's loving polyamorous family and Sal's Type 1 diabetes and his aromatic identity.

A hilarious, heartwarming, and absolutely unmissable sequel. (Science fiction. 10-13)

ONE YEAR AT ELLSMERE
Hicks, Faith Erin
Illus. by the author
First Second (176 pp.)
978-1-250-21910-7 paper

Two roommates become friends at a prestigious boarding school. Juniper, who goes by Jun, leaves her public school after winning a scholarship to the elite Ellsmere Academy. After scaring away her roommate, Cassie, during their first meeting, Jun later redeems herself when she stands up to Emily, queen bee and bully, for calling Cassie an orphan. Jun's confrontation with Emily is the beginning of their rivalry, each vying to be the best student for her own reasons. Jun's sarcasm and wit serve her well when dealing with Emily, but as the school year goes on, the bullying gets more and more severe. Driven by her desire to become a doctor, Jun finds her life at Ellsmere is constantly at risk due to Emily's scheming. All the while Jun and Cassie's friendship blossoms as the two get to know each other. A fantastic element involving the Ellsmere family and the dark forest next to the academy is woven into the story but lacks development. Fans of Hicks' visually appealing artwork in Rainbow Rowell's Pumpkinheads (2019) will enjoy the familiar art style and bold lines. Characters are expressive and cleanly drawn, complementing the straightforward text and accessible storytelling. Jun is illustrated with beige skin, dark hair, and dark eyes while her roommate, Cassie, has pale skin, light-brown hair, and green eyes. Several pages of notes on the illustrations are appended.

Kindness and friendship prevail in this charming story. (Graphic fiction. 11-15)

THE INVISIBLE BOY
Hollingsworth, Alyssa
Illus. by Lee, Deborah
Roaring Brook (320 pp.)
$16.99 | Jun. 9, 2020
978-1-250-15572-6 paper

A budding investigative journalist begins her summer as a suspicious neighborhood sleuth until she finds new friends—and a dangerous secret. Nadia's a comic-book lover and reporter-in-training. Like her hero, Lois Lane, she sees supervillains and superheroes everywhere in her mostly white neighborhood. Paddle Boy is the neighborhood villain who once broke her canoe paddle. Invisible Boy is the local man of mystery: a boy her own age who appears out of nowhere to save a dog or
Rivera’s expressive, comical illustrations capture Lola’s transformation with aplomb.

**FUSSY FLAMINGO**

James, Shelly Vaughan  
Illus. by Rivera, Matthew  
Sourcebooks Jabberwocky (40 pp.)  
$17.99 | Jul. 1, 2020  
978-1-7282-0970-8

Will little Lola the flamingo ever eat her flock’s preferred menu of shrimp? Lola’s pink-flamingo parents urge their little, gray chick to eat shrimp so that she will share their rosy plumage and grow up big and strong. She demurs, finding the crustaceans “soggy,” “muddy,” and “yucky.” Instead, finicky flamingo Lola sneaks off and seeks out a variety of tropical fruits. An avocado turns her feathers green, pepino melons, yellow, and dragon fruits, fuchsia with black spots. “¡Ay de mí!” Mami cries at each instance. But it’s her parents’ encouragement rather than their alarm that encourages Lola to finally try to eat shrimp. But like Dr. Seuss’ protagonist with his green eggs and ham, it turns out that Lola does like shrimp after all when she finally gives them a chance. James’ text employs pattern, repetition, and alliteration, making it a pleasure to read aloud. Young listeners will key in on, as Lola’s parents do, the rebellious flamingo’s typical prelude to sneaking away for a nonshrimp snack: “Lola dallies on her right leg. / Lola dallies on her left leg. / She dips her black-tipped beak into the water.” Rivera’s expressive, comical illustrations capture Lola’s transformation with aplomb, concluding with a triumphant picture of the not-so-little-anymore chick taking flight, her plumage now blushing a bright pink. Backmatter facts about flamingos round out the offering.

Try it. **You’ll like it.** *(Picture book. 3-6)*

---

**DANIELA AND THE PIRATE GIRLS**

Ivern, Susamma  
Illus. by Gómez  
Trans. by Fielden, Laura Victoria  
nubeOCHO (44 pp.)  
$16.95 | Aug. 11, 2020  
978-84-17673-27-7  
Series: Egalité

Daniela, captain of a fearsome pirate ship, contends with a band of pirate girls whose reputation is outstripping hers.

Daniela’s ship, the **Black Croc**, receives word that some merfolk are trapped in a cave. They heroically travel and dive to free them...only to discover that the Fearless Piranhas beat them to it. Daniela sets out to find this all-girl band of pirates to see if they’re as great as the merfolk say they are. On their quest, they discover more people and animals who’ve been saved by the Fearless Piranhas—people who have by now obtained the lost treasure for which the **Black Croc** had been searching. Their pursuit carries them into a storm, where they find the Fearless Piranhas’ ship has been overturned. Despite their differences, Daniela and her crew work with a whale to rescue their rivals. The two bands reconcile and go on to have amazing adventures together, including sharing the treasure. Pirate-loving children are bound to enjoy this fun story of jealousy and overcoming differences. The brightly colored illustrations are busy assemblages of goofy faces, with little space for the eye to rest on most spreads. The multiracial cast features a white Daniela and a black captain of the Piranhas, both with orange hair, though some of the depictions of black and Asian characters sway toward the stereotypical. The book is a Spanish import, and the Spanish-language original publishes simultaneously in the U.S.

A solid story with illustrations that don’t quite measure up. *(Picture book. 4-8)* *(Daniela y las chicas pirata: 978-84-17673-26-0)*

---

**HEART ON PLUTO**

Jones, Karl  
Illus. by Ross, Andrew J.  
Penguin Workshop (32 pp.)  
$8.99 | Aug. 4, 2020  
978-0-593-09629-1

Greetings from the New Horizons space probe—which has a big surprise to share about the dwarf planet Pluto.

Giveaway title notwithstanding, the personified probe does a good job setting up the climactic revelation with an account of its long, long journey past Jupiter and the other outer planets and a simple introduction to Pluto’s changing official status. Upon arrival the narrator burbles, “I made it!” and sends an image of the huge, heart-shaped nitrogen lake that is Pluto’s most prominent physical feature back to Earth. “It’s so cute!” Ross, in contrast to his realization of the dusty setting of Sara Schonfeld’s *Birthday on Mars* (2019), gives the encounter a warm and informal air by rendering the planets and probe with spongy surfaces, as if they were constructed out of blocks of colored foam, and the heart with sharp, nearly symmetrical borders so that it looks cut out and pasted onto Pluto’s surface. Though Saturn is tilted in an early view he does depict the planet with rings seen edge on in a later one, which may confuse some
Why We Need the Power of Story

How Scholastic championed an initiative celebrating books that reflect the beautiful diversity of young readers

[Sponsored]

By James Feder

Stories have the power to win elections and start wars. Stories have the power to alter government policy and win over the hearts and minds of complete strangers. And stories have the power to convince young readers—any young reader and every young reader—that they matter. Because to see one’s story told in a book sends a powerful, sometimes even lifesaving message: that people with lives like yours are worth celebrating.

The publishing industry has often seemed oblivious to the audience for diverse books, relying instead on the perceived marketability of books dominated by largely white, largely straight, and largely able-bodied characters. Recent years have seen important strides in the diversification of publishing, but just because a book about an Indigenous girl or handicapped boy has been written doesn’t mean it will get published. And just because it has been published doesn’t mean it will find its way into the hands of readers who would see themselves reflected in it. Even with parents and librarians on the hunt and organizations like We Need Diverse Books issuing calls to action, real change demands response on an institutional level.

In 2018, Scholastic launched the Power of Story initiative in order to lend the publisher’s considerable clout to the drive for a catalog of diverse books that reflects the world we live in. As Lizette Serrano, VP of Library Marketing at Scholastic, explains, “We wanted to create a resource that shares information on which books represent underrepresented experiences in a variety of topics and themes including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and physical and mental abilities.”

The decision to launch the project was not a sudden one. “We’ve felt it was necessary for decades,” says Scholastic VP and publisher David Levithan (author of the bestselling novels Every Day, Boy Meets Boy, and other titles). “But we needed a larger engagement on this prioritization, from every aspect of the kid-lit world—and that’s what we’ve gotten.”

Every year, Scholastic prints and distributes close to 15,000 Power of Story catalogs; hosts programming at conferences featuring authors and their stories; and sponsors activities and exclusive giveaways in support of the Power of Story initiative. The publisher also has a special partnership with the nonprofit We Need Diverse Books, which Serrano cites as instrumental to the project’s achievements. “We’re working closely with their team to find new ways to showcase and highlight books, authors, and programs that get books to the readers who need them.”

Earlier this year, that relationship was celebrated at one such event hosted by the American Library
Association, where Levithan saw firsthand the impact that the Power of Story initiative can have. He recalls how, “for two hours, we had a nonstop stream of librarians coming to the booth as we handed out various books, and no matter what they asked for—‘I’d like a YA novel with a nonbinary character,’ ‘Do you have a black girl story that is affirming instead of tragic?’—I had a book to hand them. Are there still voices that need to be heard?” he asks. “Absolutely. But we're getting there. And, more important, striving to get there.”

For the team at Scholastic, the annual process of cataloging books allows it to identify gaps that need filling, which then kicks starts the process of identifying new authors and acquiring new titles. And while it is not yet the case that every child has access to a book that reflects their reality, the catalog is growing each and every year. In the next several months, Scholastic is releasing Leah Johnson’s queer black girl romance, You Should See Me in a Crown; Alex Gino’s Rick, which touches on toxic masculinity; Lucas Rocha’s Where We Go From Here, which centers around three queer boys dealing with HIV; Pam Muñoz Ryan’s cross-border Mañanaland; and All Because You Matter, Tami Charles and Bryan Collier’s illustrated love letter to black and brown children.

For the team behind the Power of Story, professional achievements are closely bound with a deeper sense of personal fulfilment. Levithan and Serrano both see titles among the upcoming releases alone that strike a chord. Would Levithan’s struggle as a young gay boy been easier if he’d had a chance to read Where We Go From Here? Might Mañanaland have helped Serrano appreciate from a young age the literary heights to which Latinx writers could aspire?

But diverse stories also serve another function. The wide range of books being released is important not just for readers who will see themselves in the stories, but also for those who stand to gain insight into new and different ways of living. That dimension of the Power of Story mission is never far from the minds of those at Scholastic, especially today.

“With so much uncertainty and misinformation and prejudice in the world, we have to work even harder to make sure everyone is heard,” Levithan says. “Kids are so open-minded, and stories can teach them so much empathy and self-respect before other forces try to close their minds.”

In a time of rising polarization, division, and now the need for social distancing, the ties that bind us as a society are under incredible strain. But, Serrano affirms, “there’s nothing more powerful than a story to connect us.”

James Feder is a Brooklyn-born, British-educated writer based in Tel Aviv.
viewers. Also, though Jones closes with a bulleted fact list, he goes for mush over wonder at the end with multiple exclamations about how Pluto loves us, and Earth loves it back. Human figures are diverse throughout; one classroom group includes a child wearing a hijab.

An interplanetary lovefest with sprinkles of astro-fact embedded in the goo. (Informational picture book. 6-8)

---

**Play in the Wild**

*How Baby Animals Like To Have Fun*

Judge, Lita
Illus. by the author
Roaring Brook (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Jun. 30, 2020
978-1-250-23706-4

As is true with tiny humans, play is important in young animals' development.

Judge looks closely at 27 different animals and the playful habits of their young. Sometimes play helps animals learn how to forage and hunt. Other times, it can be practice for following rules. For some, it can even mean survival. Each subtopic is allotted two double-page spreads. In a dramatic setup scene, a large, bold statement declares an observation, such as: "Many young animals ask first before playing." Judge depicts one young chimp approaching another that is cradled in mom's embrace. A smattering of vignettes follows in the next spread. "A young chimpanzee swings his head and shoulders from side to side.... That is his way of asking his friend, 'Do you want to play with me?'" However, a sea lion pup "approaches another while holding a piece of kelp that serves as a toy, then quickly swims away." Kids will delight in comparing their own actions to those of the baby animals. The variety is also impressive: Red river hogs cavort in these pages, along with bottlenose dolphins and wallaby joeys. Judge's realistic illustrations are both endearing and expressive. Energetic moments are expertly captured. Tufts of fur fly; young ones are caught midpounce or with trunks held high, sending water splashing. The most appealing? The mischievous gleam of fun in everyone's eyes.

Warm, inviting nonfiction, especially for those new to the genre. (additional facts, glossary, sources, recommended websites) (Informational picture book. 3-8)

---

**Kiki's Delivery Service**

Kadono, Eiko
Illus. by Onoda, Yuta
Trans. by Balistrieri, Emily
Delacorte (208 pp.)
978-1-9848-9666-7
978-1-9848-9668-1 PLB

A young witch makes her way in the world, encountering adventure and friendship along the way.

On her coming-of-age day, 13-year-old Kiki and her talking black cat, Jiji, fly on her broom to find a town in need of a witch. Kiki settles in Koriko, a busy, seaside city. The citizens aren't used to witches, but Kiki's charming, helpful nature eventually wins them over as they come to rely on her titular business. Whether she's saving swimmers at the beach, delivering a secret love note, or ensuring the success of the New Year's celebration, Kiki's first year in Koriko is anything but dull! Readers may already be familiar with Kiki from Hayao Miyazaki's 1989 film version. Originally published in Japan in 1985, the book first appeared in the U.S. with illustrations by Akiko Hayashi and in a translation by Lynne E. Riggs. This new translation from Balistrieri is descriptive and whimsical, and both characters' names and their appearances in Onoda's anime-inflected illustrations create a Japanese-inspired fantasy world. The characters' quirkiness creates the feeling that Kiki's future will be filled with countless friends and adventures. There are mishaps galore but never any real danger, as Kiki always finds a solution using creativity, intelligence, and a dash of magic. Families looking for a book to share will appreciate the episodic chapters.

An enchanting, gently humorous all-ages family read-aloud. (Fantasy. 5-12)

---

**It's Girls Like You, Mickey**

Kim, Patti
Atheneum (240 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 30, 2020
978-1-5344-4345-7

A secondary character gets to tell her story in this companion title.

A lot has changed since I'm Ok (2018). Headstrong Mickey's best friend, Ok, has moved away, and they now communicate infrequently through postcards. She and former pal Asa have also drifted apart, only sharing greetings in the hallway. And as if middle school weren't hard enough, she still takes care of her little brother, Benny, while navigating the volatile moods of her mother, who is exhausted from working nights since her dad up and left. While Mickey scrounges up meals at home, the confidence she exudes at school means that no one there knows of her struggles. Her prospects seem to brighten when she befriends a new student, Sun Joo. Mickey takes it upon herself to help Sun Joo— or Sunny,
Korman acknowledges the widely held view of World War II of what war is like as they travel both then and now from Fort Benning to Omaha Beach and then through Normandy. Jacob's wartime experiences are an absorbing whirl of hard fighting, sudden death, and courageous acts spurred by necessity…but the modern trip turns suspenseful too, as mysterious stalkers leave unsettling tokens and a series of hostile online posts that hint that Jacob doesn't have just German blood on his hands. Korman acknowledges the widely held view of World War II as a just war but makes his own sympathies plain by repeatedly pointing to the unavoidable price of conflict: "Wars may have winning sides, but everybody loses." Readers anticipating a heavy-handed moral will appreciate that Trevor arrives at a refreshingly realistic appreciation of video games' pleasures and limitations. As his dad puts it: "War makes a better video game...But if you're looking for a way to live, I'll take peace every time."

This weave of perceptive, well-told tales wears its agenda with unusual grace. (Fiction/historical fiction. 11-13)

WAR STORIES
Korman, Gordon
Scholastic (240 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-1-338-29020-2

Two young people of different generations get profound lessons in the tragic, enduring legacy of war.

Raised on the thrilling yarns of his great-grandpa Jacob and obsessed with first-person-shooter video games, Trevor is eager to join the 93-year-old vet when he is invited to revisit the French town his unit had helped to liberate. In alternating chapters, the overseas trip retraces the parallel journeys of two young people—Trevor, 12, and Jacob, in 1944, just five years older—with similarly idealized visions of what war is like as they travel both then and now from Fort Benning to Omaha Beach and then through Normandy. Jacob's wartime experiences are an absorbing whirl of hard fighting, sudden death, and courageous acts spurred by necessity...but the modern trip turns suspenseful too, as mysterious stalkers leave unsettling tokens and a series of hostile online posts that hint that Jacob doesn't have just German blood on his hands. Korman acknowledges the widely held view of World War II as a just war but makes his own sympathies plain by repeatedly pointing to the unavoidable price of conflict: "Wars may have winning sides, but everybody loses." Readers anticipating a heavy-handed moral will appreciate that Trevor arrives at a refreshingly realistic appreciation of video games' pleasures and limitations. As his dad puts it: "War makes a better video game...But if you're looking for a way to live, I'll take peace every time."

This weave of perceptive, well-told tales wears its agenda with unusual grace. (Fiction/historical fiction. 11-13)

CAVE OF KRYPTONITE
Korte, Steve
Illus. by Baltazar, Art
Picture Window Books (32 pp.)
$21.32 | Aug. 1, 2020
978-1-5158-7176-7

Series: Amazing Adventures of the DC Super-Pets

A super game of hide-and-seek turns into a rescue mission.

Superman and Krypto the Super-Dog are flying high over the city of Metropolis enjoying a game of hide-and-seek. When Superman flies into a cave high in the mountains, he doesn't suspect a chunk of kryptonite lurks within the cave's walls. Weakened by the substance of his homeworld, Superman must count on Krypto to save the day. This early reader is charmingly illustrated with bold, approachable lines and a simple color palette that will spark young readers to break out their own crayons and draw some new adventures for the Man of Steel. The story's simplicity is neatly geared to those familiar with the broad strokes of Superman but not up to the nitty-gritty details of his decadeslong mythology quite yet. The text is full of standard sight words, making this an excellent read for those just starting both to read and to get into the world of superheroes. There's one citizen in Metropolis that's a person of color, but Superman's world remains a mostly white one.

A super early reader title. (Early reader. 4-7)

NO FUZZBALL!
Kung, Isabella
Illus. by the author
Orchard/Scholastic (40 pp.)
$14.99 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-338-56542-3

This feline queen knows how to care for her subjects—as long as they worship her by shouting her name.

NoFuzzball lives in total harmony with the subjects in her queendom. They see to her every need and shower her with presents. When she sees a new gift, a perfect queen-sized bed (which readers might recognize as an open suitcase), she plucks herself in it until they chant her name: “NoFuzzball!” But then they leave?! The nerve! Well, that gives the queen a chance for some alone time. When she wakes, they’re still not home! She wallows in sadness for a moment before she decides to be a gracious ruler. She makes them new beds, thoughtfully destroying the furniture for extra fluff. She brings them gifts of lovely dead mousies. She redecorates the whole of the queendom. When they return, her subjects greet her at the door shouting “Fuzzball!” Have they forgotten her name? No. Once they see the work she’s done...they remember, appropriately acclaiming her “NoFuzzball!” The fluffy black kitty gives preschool readers an early lesson in the unreliable narrator as she describes her relationship with her humans. In Kung’s illustrations, she’s
Hail the divine number nine!

Nine shines in this nonet anthology. A nonet is a nine-line poem about any subject and may rhyme but doesn’t have to. Heeding the syllables in a nonet’s lines is vital: The first line contains one syllable; each line thereafter adds one more in turn until the ninth line contains nine. However, this pattern can be reversed, and the offerings here reflect both counting schemes. Each nonet focuses on the number nine itself. “Before You Were Born” honors human gestation; “Nine Lives” salutes cats; “Play Ball!” refers to a baseball’s team’s nine players and the game’s nine innings. A few poems provide information: “The Little Rock Nine” nods to the landmark 1957 Arkansas school-integration effort; “Nonagon” introduces the nine-sided geometric shape; “Beethoven’s Ninth” highlights the composer’s last symphony. The anthology concludes with “The Whole Nine Yards,” a reminder that nine is the last one-digit numeral. As with many anthologies, the poems’ quality varies, though overall, they’re jaunty and read well. While most verses admirably demonstrate how cleverly poems can develop from strict adherence to form, some verses seem contrived in service to that principle. Colorful, lively illustrations depict a robustly diverse ensemble cast. Interesting backmatter adds an additional gloss on each poem and further celebrates the number nine.

Children may wish to compose nonets after delving into this unusual, entertaining collection. (Picture book/poetry. 6-9)

An expressive, endearing little chunk of well-meaning evil. Her interracial human family is just as expressive, and the bright spot and full-bleed illustrations are entertaining from the first endpaper to the last.

Hope for more soon from debut author/illustrator Kung. (Picture book. 3-9)

Questions facing even mortal kids. It tells the story of Beetle, a young goblin and aspiring witch who is torn between hanging out at the mall with pal Blob Ghost and serious study. When childhood friend Kat Hollowbone returns to Beetle’s town to apprentice with her sorceress aunt, it disrupts Beetle’s friendship with Blob Ghost as well as Beetle’s ideas about identity and relationships. The story quickly develops urgency as Kat’s aunt emerges as a villain intent on demolishing the mall, thereby endangering Blob Ghost, who is bound to that location. Layne’s renderings of her paranormal cast are highly evocative. Green-skinned Beetle has large, pointy ears and a tufted tail; skeletal Aunt Hollowbones has a spindly bird skull for a head. Climactic action scenes are expertly rendered. Diversity is a strength in this female-driven text, which features a tenderly portrayed LGBTQ love story between Kat and Beetle. Wise older women act as mentors, body diversity is casually positive, and Blob Ghost uses they/them pronouns throughout. Amid the fantasy elements, Beetle, Kat, and Blob Ghost text, video chat, post pictures online, and look at one another’s social media feeds—and Beetle is forced, grumbling, to take the bus to the mall.

This inclusive fantasy adventure passes the Bechdel test with flying colors. (Graphic fantasy. 10-14)

Skip this flight of fancy. (Picture book. 5-9)
An absolute love letter to con culture.

Con Quest!

Maggs, Sam
Imprint (256 pp.)
$16.99 | Jun. 23, 2020
978-1-250-30727-9

Siblings compete in a scavenger hunt at a comics convention.

Twelve-year-old twins Cat and Alex Gallo have been attending GeekiCon their whole lives with their comic-creator parents. This time, they’re determined to win a scavenger hunt organized by the dreamboat star of the hit TV series Paranormal. Fan Cat hopes to spend time with the actor, and artist Alex aims for a TV crew mentorship. Their strictly conventional 14-year-old sister, Fi, has been charged with babysitting them, hoping to prove she’s responsible enough for a camping trip with the cool crowd. Chapters alternate among the three siblings as the twins escape Fi to compete in the challenge. Fi isn’t the only one after the twins—James M., a white, sexist con staffer who scorns “fangirls and fake geeks,” wants them kicked out for participating in the hunt, which has not been endorsed by GeekiCon. The book’s an absolute love letter to con culture, focusing on camaraderie and confidence. Instead of citing real-world pop culture, pseudonymous stand-ins (Whom, M.D.?) turn the text into a scavenger hunt of in-jokes for geeks. The actual scavenger items are challenging and entertaining, as is the resulting conflict between Alex and Cat, despite their strong relationship. The siblings are white, with a Slovakian-immigrant mother; Alex is autistic, developed with nuance and depth. Positive representation’s given to a Filipinx character and to an adorably age-appropriate girl-girl relationship.

The next best thing to actually attending a con. (Adventure. 8-14)

Dinosong

McCanna, Tim
Illus. by Smythe, Richard
Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-5344-3002-0

Three young dinosaurs enjoy a percussive prehistoric perambulation.

Modeled on their Watersong (2017) McCanna pairs a text composed nearly exclusively of sound-effect words to Smythe’s bright and sprightly views of a triceratops, an ankylosaurus, and a generic sauropod, all sporting smiles, googly eyes, and hides in glowing hues. They cross a log over a stream, lumber through a rocky landscape as thunder rumbles, and tumble into a dark cave to escape the eruption of a nearby volcano. Unlike the previous outing, the sounds sometimes seem oddly unsuited to the action on the page. It’s hard to figure, for instance, how “clank clack // crinkle crackle / clunk” sounds like an ankylosaurus rolling down a steep hill, or “Bang bowl / clang roll” evokes a boulder doing the same. (Maybe the author had a storyline involving robots in mind and the illustrator took an unexpected turn?) Still, there’s never a dull moment, until the cave opens out at its other end to reveal parental dinos in a peaceful setting: Ahh, “Safe and sound.” The author suddenly turns voluble, adding a closing page of remarks about dinosaurs, magma, the three kinds of rocks, what paleontologists do, and other scattered topics at least tangentially related to the mise en scène.

Definitely a rousingly rumbley ramble, but the seams are rough enough to trip over. (Picture book. 5-7)
Sentences are concise and witty, capturing the voice of this feisty individualist.

MY STINKY SUMMER BY S. BUG

Debut author/illustrator Metzger opens the story with exte-
rrior and interior settings rendered in pale gray/green watercolor
and ink, a choice reinforcing the lonely silence surrounding the
large, white bear that feels forgotten, unseen. His presence is
distinguished only by the rain cloud perpetually above his head.
One morning, a cluster of rosy dragonflies flits into his orbit—
followed by a truck packed with the green and pink cargo of
Madame Odette. Double-page spreads of the elderly white
woman’s home and greenhouse, as well as vignettes of her many
activities, show that she “lived in a cheerful world of color and
sound.” Initially annoyed, the bear learns to accommodate the
changes and ultimately help his new neighbor by transporting
his cloud to her wilting garden. Then his new friend is gone:
“She loved her dragonflies so much that she flew away with
them.” Whether this is meant to be literal or metaphorical is
open to interpretation, but the bear finds a potted flower on
his doorstep and realizes that he has been seen. While the two
characters’ contrasting lives are well delineated, the gray lasts
a bit too long, the bear’s predicament is never explained, and
the conclusion in which the friend departs will be unsatisfying for
many children.

Readers will be forgiven for wondering if a plant can
replace companionship. (Picture book. 4-7)

THE INVISIBLE BEAR

Debut author/illustrator Metzger opens the story with exte-
rrior and interior settings rendered in pale gray/green watercolor
and ink, a choice reinforcing the lonely silence surrounding the
large, white bear that feels forgotten, unseen. His presence is
distinguished only by the rain cloud perpetually above his head.
One morning, a cluster of rosy dragonflies flits into his orbit—
followed by a truck packed with the green and pink cargo of
Madame Odette. Double-page spreads of the elderly white
woman’s home and greenhouse, as well as vignettes of her many
activities, show that she “lived in a cheerful world of color and
sound.” Initially annoyed, the bear learns to accommodate the
changes and ultimately help his new neighbor by transporting
his cloud to her wilting garden. Then his new friend is gone:
“She loved her dragonflies so much that she flew away with
them.” Whether this is meant to be literal or metaphorical is
open to interpretation, but the bear finds a potted flower on
his doorstep and realizes that he has been seen. While the two
characters’ contrasting lives are well delineated, the gray lasts
a bit too long, the bear’s predicament is never explained, and
the conclusion in which the friend departs will be unsatisfying for
many children.

Readers will be forgiven for wondering if a plant can
replace companionship. (Picture book. 4-7)

MY STINKY SUMMER BY S. BUG

Metzger, Cécile
Illus. by the author
Holiday House (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 16, 2020
978-0-8234-4033-5
Series: Nature Diary

A malodorous insect narrates its
autobiography.

A brown marmorated (“veined or streaked like marble,”
according to the glossary) stink bug describes its summer life
cycle and activities in diary form. While the creature celebrates
its birth in early June, having hatched from one of 28 eggs laid
on the underside of a leaf, others are less than thrilled. This is
partly because S. Bug’s more-vile-than-fragrant aroma protects
it from being eaten and threatened by neighbors. Text is mini-
mal in this fact-filled, captivating title. Sentences are concise
and witty, capturing the voice of this feisty individualist. Read-
ers will learn much about the smelly insect, including facts about
its plant-based diet—which, unhappily, makes it a crop-damag-
ing pest—and how it develops, after several larval stages, into a
fully grown winged creature. Throughout, pithy, comically neg-
ative points of view about the stink bug are expressed as hand-
lettered dialogue by other animals and insects. The book ends
with S. Bug’s search for a suitable winter home, which it locates
in early October and from which it will emerge the following
spring. Appealing colorful illustrations depict natural-world
details, rendered in vivid colors. White space and light-colored
backgrounds allow kids to focus on S. Bug’s activities and habi-
tats. Illustrated facts about stink bugs appear on the endpapers,
which are designed so that no text is covered by the flyleaves.

Ew! Here’s an enticing critter children won’t soon forget.
(sources, further reading) (Informational picture book. 4-7)
DAN UNMASKED
Negron, Chris
Harper/HarperCollins (368 pp.)
$16.99 | Jul. 28, 2020
978-0-06-294305-7

Comics and baseball are all Dan needs—before the accident.

Things couldn’t really be going better for 13-year-old Dan. The Mira Giants have just qualified for the Western New York Double Elimination Tournament, and a new Captain Nexus comic is about to come out. Dan’s father is too busy for him these days, but it’s OK, because Dan shares comics and baseball and everything great with his best friend, Nate, the Giants’ amazing pitcher. So Dan’s world seems shattered when Nate is hit with a baseball during practice. Now Nate’s in a coma, and Dan’s falling apart. Maybe if he and Nate’s kid brother make a Captain Nexus fan-fiction comic, that will be the talisman that wakes Nate up? While Nate spirals through rage, fear, and magical thinking, he tries to draw lessons from his beloved comics. But if comics can’t save Nate, Dan’s got nothing left—except encouraging the now-underdog Giants through a series of inspiring speeches and cinematic epiphanies. Long passages describing the Captain Nexus comics are lovingly detailed, showing a passion for the art of the superhero comic, but these moments drag the action to a crawl; in a visual medium, the dynamism depicted would complement the baseball tropes, but in prose, they detract. Dan and most characters appear to be white, though it’s left unclear.

Though uneven, stirring hits every despairing low and thrilling high of a sports movie. (Fiction. 10-12)

A BEAR IS A BEAR
(Except When He’s Not)
Newson, Karl
Illus. by Allepuz, Anuska
Nosy Crow/Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-1-5362-1202-0

When a bear wakes up early from hibernation, he can’t seem to remember what kind of animal he is.

In his search for his forgotten identity, the bear wanders the snowy forest, observing the creatures all around him. He attempts to emulate each animal he sees, but all to no avail. When he tries to be a bird, he realizes he cannot fly. When he tries to be a moose, he realizes he can’t stand the taste of grass. When he tries to be a fox, he fails to prance. And when he tries to be a squirrel, he doesn’t like having to climb so high. Finally, the narrator tells the bear that he’s woken up from hibernation in December, instead of in the spring, and reassures him that when he does wake up, he’ll know exactly who he is. The bear obediently goes back into his cave and settles into a cozy slumber. Happily, the rest does wonders for the bear’s memory, and the spring brings a happy ending, accompanied by a suitably colorful and cheerful illustration. The book’s rhyming text is charming, funny, and delightful to read aloud. Unfortunately, the shift from third to second person is jarring and, on the first read through, confusing in its abruptness. The gorgeous, softly textured illustrations effectively enhance the story’s witty twists and turns. Particularly charming is the bear’s expressive face, which effectively conveys his confusion, frustration, sadness, and joy.

A sweet, fun romp through a winter forest with a goofy protagonist kids will love. (Picture book. 2-6)

THE MISSING
O’Hearn, Kate
Aladdin (464 pp.)
$18.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-5344-1707-6
Series: Titans, 2

Following Titan (2019), human Astraea, winged equine Zephyr, and company seek out allies against the Mimic threat.

Astraea and Zephyr have teamed up with human Jake, half-Rhean/half-human Tryn, and the centaur trio of Render, Darek, and Cylus, the centaurs’ antagonistic leader. The unlikely group journeys to Zomos, the home of Jake’s companion snake, Nesso, to recruit more snakes, as their venom is the Mimics’ greatest weakness. But difficult encounters with the deadly wildlife of Zomos result in serious injuries to both Astraea and Zephyr—and, to make matters worse, Shadow Titans under Mimic control are also hunting the snakes. To get reinforcements and help for Zephyr, Jake and Tryn head to Xanadu only to find that Emily, Riza, and the Olympians (characters who will be familiar to readers of the previous Pegasus series) have been captured by Mimics. They also learn the truth behind the dangerous pod-people–style villains (who menace with lines like: “You believed you could defeat us! So many have tried, but none succeeded”) and team up with Pegasus. Near-death fakeouts and supposedly serious injuries that impede the characters only when the plot demands it form a repetitive pattern that lowers the stakes. The endless round of action scenes takes readers among multiple worlds before setting up an ending that promises to take the heroes to yet another one.

A lengthy bridge to the next book—for dedicated fans only. (Fantasy. 8-13)
Rabbit best friends Pepper and Frannie excitedly prepare for a concert—but when the curtain rises, can they overcome an unexpected case of stage fright? Exuberant, extroverted Frannie and shy, pragmatic Pepper are back! In this companion to Odell’s authorial debut, Pepper and Frannie (2019), the leporine pals explore musical pursuits: Black-and-white Pepper practices piano while brown Frannie sings, dances, and strikes dramatic poses all over town. When Frannie decides to host and perform a (free!) concert in an enchanting forest amphitheater, Pepper is there every step of the way—with her backstage checklist, of course. But Frannie, focused on the fabulous costumes and special effects, has neglected something important: guitar practice. As she steps onto the stage, she forgets the chords to her favorite song, and her confidence dissolves while a couple of pigs exchange concerned looks from the back row. Luckily, readers (and Frannie) can count on Pepper to save the day, proving that our differences are truly what make us special. Odell’s playful, rounded illustrations utilize subtle layers of color dominated by cool tones—greens, blues, and violets—that contrast with the thick, rich, red curtain. Speech bubbles, paired with restrained text, emphasize the visual narrative, which expertly captures Frannie’s evocative postures and expressions as well as Pepper’s quiet focus.

A charming, colorful celebration of the unique contributions we each bring to our friendships. Encore! (Picture book. 3-8)

OLDER, DANIEL JOSÉ

THUNDER RUN
Older offers the third installment in the Dactyl Hill Squad series.
Opening where Freedom Fire (2019) ended, this sequel finds 12-year-old Afro-Cuban orphan Magdalys Roca reunited with her older brother, Montez, a Union soldier in the U.S. Civil War. Third-person, past-tense narration highlights brave, genuine Magdalys’ continued fight to thwart the plans of the white supremacist Knights of the Golden Circle and ensure the U.S. doesn't become an empire of slavery, all while battling racism, sexism, and ageism—and riding dinosaurs. In a New Orleans lit through with intimate details, Magdalys finds a mentor, LaFarge, and discovers there’s more to dino wrangling than she’s realized. LaFarge, a white man, is a pacifist (for sympathetic reasons), but Magdalys doesn’t let him off easy, reminding him he’s forgotten “what it means to care about something enough to fight for it.” Magdalys’ path leads her to the deserts of Mexico, where the new, democratically elected president is Zapotecan—welcome Indigenous representation. Good triumphs over evil—at least temporarily—and as “safety is always a fleeting thing,” Magdalys’ commitment to the struggle persists. Another book seems likely. As usual, Older infuses what could have been a basic romp with depth, using a critical social justice lens to examine the past while also embedding in it representation that we can aspire to in the future.

More than a dino-infused historical adventure. (author’s note) (Historical fantasy. 10-14)
Jenae’s funny, candid voice makes her instantly endearing.

**SOMETHING TO SAY**

_A new friend brings Jenae new challenges that move her out of her comfort zone._

On the first day of junior high, Jenae doesn’t have any friends, and she feels invisible. Then she meets redhead Aubrey, who is also black, and he’s a huge fan of “Astrid Dane,” Jenae’s favorite YouTube show. Aubrey is loud and un–self-conscious while Jenae just wants to hide, smiley rabbit continuing on its way. The simple, sweet illustrations, rendered in black and white with judicious pops of color, are fine conversational springboards; lapsitters and kids in group read-aloud sessions will enjoy interpreting what’s happening in the pictures. Some require a bit of thought; the pig looking dismayed at a wheeled trash can with a bit of litter next to it suggests a story that is upended with the turn of the page. And its retrieval of a black kitten from within the can.

**LITTLE BOOK OF KINDNESS**

_Pirrone, Francesca_  
_Illus. by the author_  
_Clavis (50 pp.)_  
__$11.95 | Jun. 2, 2020_  
_978-1-60537-533-5_

Kindness makes the world go round—and makes it better.

Spare text speaks meaningfully about how small acts of kindness and thoughtfulness can make big differences, both in others’ lives and in one’s own. Imported from Belgium and the Netherlands, this slim, compact offering, just the right size for little hands, says just the right things about the myriad ways one can be kind, all enacted by a sweet, young pig in a yellow jersey and shorts. An act of kindness is stated on a verso page with a wordless illustration facing it, followed by a double-page illustration showing the consequences of the kind act. For instance, the admonition “Offer a smile” faces an illustration of a dejected rabbit; the accompanying spread depicts the pig greeting the rabbit with a big grin and then a cheery, smiley rabbit continuing on its way. The simple, sweet illustrations, rendered in black and white with judicious pops of color, are fine conversational springboards; lapsitters and kids in group read-aloud sessions will enjoy interpreting what’s happening in the pictures. Some require a bit of thought; the pig looking dismayed at a wheeled trash can with a bit of litter next to it suggests a story that is upended with the turn of the page and its retrieval of a black kitten from within the can.

**GHOST HUNTER’S DAUGHTER**

_Poblocki, Dan_  
_Scholastic (288 pp.)_  
__$18.99 | Jul. 7, 2020_  
_978-0-545-83004-1_

When a famous ghost hunter vanishes on the job, his daughter and her spirit-sensitive classmate brave a vengeful curse to bring him home.

Everyone in Archer’s Mills knows Claire Holiday, and all her classmates want to be her friend—but not on her account. Her father, Miles Holiday, hunts down and banishes ghosts on the popular TV show _Invisible Intelligence_. Unlike Claire, no one wants to be friends with Lucas Kent, who moved to Archer’s Mills two years ago to live with his paternal grandmother, who talks to ghosts and firmly disapproves of Miles Holiday’s methods. Forces from beyond the veil bring Lucas and Claire together when Lucas receives a desperate visitation from Claire’s dead mother, who warns him that her father is in grave danger. This fast-paced supernatural mystery switches between Lucas’ and Claire’s perspectives, so readers see both characters struggle with their own insecurities, discover potential in themselves, and grow by working together. The story is set after an unidentified natural disaster that devastated the East Coast, and cellphones no longer receive reception. All of the primary characters are presumed white, and the background characters fall into a white default. Poblocki deftly sustains tension until the resolution. Not all of the characters receive a happy ending, but the conclusion is satisfying and ties up loose ends all the same.

**PARTY PROBLEMS**

_Reid, C.L._  
_Illus. by Aiello, Elena_  
_Picture Window Books (32 pp.)_  
__$12.32 | Aug. 1, 2020_  
_978-1-5158-7180-4_  
_Series: Emma Every Day_  

Eight-year-old Emma is worried that being Deaf will make it hard to enjoy her best friend’s party.

In this first entry of Reid’s debut early-reader series, the author introduces Emma, who is white and Deaf, as she nervously gets ready for Izzie’s birthday.
LADY MISS PENNY

Rodale, Maya
Illus. by Flint, Gillian
Rodale Kids (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 28, 2020
978-1-63565-229-1

A golden-brown dog named Lady Miss Penny narrates this story about proper behavior when eating out in a restaurant.

Penny lives in a city with her owner, a girl the dog calls Milady, and the pair enjoy pleasant dining experiences at a variety of restaurants. Penny's group of friends includes two other dogs, a rabbit, and a pigeon, and these friends join Penny and Milady at a white-tablecloth restaurant for a special meal. Penny describes how to behave through a numbered list of rules with related explanations. Each rule is illustrated with the group of animals either following the recommendation or behaving in opposite fashion, like running between tables or barking and meowing while chewing. At the end of the meal the group prances out the door, leaving the restaurant a mess, with the table overturned and food everywhere. The animals, however, did follow the final rule: "Do have a good time!" The tongue-in-cheek humor is mildly humorous but its use as an etiquette guide falls rather flat as the misbehavior looks far more enjoyable than the prescriptions for proper behavior. Charming watercolor illustrations elevate the whole, with appealing animals and a likable Milady. She has brown skin and a dark brown ponytail; other guests in the restaurant include people of color.

Amusing animal antics but not really useful for young human restaurant guests. (Picture book, 5-6)

RACE THROUGH THE SKIES
The Week the World Learned To Fly
Sandler, Martin W.
Bloomsbury (288 pp.)
$16.99 | Jun. 23, 2020
978-1-250-21991-6

Oh, “those magnificent men in their flying machines!”

National Book Award winner Sandler explores one brief but momentous week in the early history of aviation. Only about six years after the Wright brothers achieved their first 57-second flight, pilots from around the world gathered in Rheims, France, in August 1909 for the Champagne Region’s Great Aviation Week (Grande Semaine d’Aviation de la Champagne). It was the first international air meet. Although the Wrights chose not to participate, the U.S. was well represented by Glenn Curtiss, whose limited experience matched that of other so-called veteran pilots of the era. They would all compete in their remarkably flimsy wood-and-fabric machines for a variety of large cash prizes, in the process captivating immense crowds and advancing aviation technology. The races are presented in thrilling detail and clearly placed in the context of the history of early aviation. A large collection of outstanding period photographs extends the tale. Unfortunately, in the midst of excellence, numerous additional topics, all about two pages long, are wedged in, nearly always interrupting the narrative mid-sentence—an annoying design flaw in this otherwise fine work. A final section provides a “postscript” of the lives, some sadly brief, of the aviators, mostly white and European, who participated at Rheims.

Fascinating, eminently entertaining, and sometimes frustrating. (further reading, websites, museums, sources, index) (Nonfiction, 10-14)
bars, and her mother tells her to “Find your uncle!” before they are taken away. As Lola sets off for the royal city of Dore to look for her uncle, she befriends Melvin, a fastidious rat, and Blue, a baby penguin—sterling secondary characters whose quirky personalities add lively originality and exquisite freshness to the story. In the best hero’s-journey way, Lola confronts her fears and learns her strengths. The richly imagined, tightly woven, and deliciously nuanced plot is inhabited by animals that live in the real world of Tasmania, and readers will also discover echidnas, pygmy possums, and swamp water rats as they go.

Engrossing and engaging—a fabulous hero’s quest. (Fantasy. 8-12)

ANI’S LIGHT
Singh, Tanu Shree
Illus. by Prabhat, Sandhya
Magination/American Psychological Association (32 pp.)
$14.99 | Jun. 23, 2020
978-1-4338-3277-2

Singh and Prabhat combine forces for an unflinchingly honest yet soothing book about a child and his mother’s illness.

Ani’s mother isn’t home, and he is stuck in the dark: “It’s dark. Still dark,” he says, even when morning comes and the sun peeps in through his window. His nani (maternal grandmother) offers him ice cream, but he says nothing. At school, “everything had lost its color.” He rebuffs his friends, seeking solace with his dog, Dobby. When his mother finally does come home, her hair is gone, but “nothing was dark anymore!” and the colors return to the world. Ani relays his fears to his mother—that she might never come back—and she reassures him: “As long as you let others love you…you will be okay.” Ani isn’t sure: “Even if you aren’t there?” he asks. “Yes,” she says. Singh, a professor of psychology, includes an author’s note that stresses the importance of honesty in the face of difficult situations, from illness to divorce to death. Prabhat’s illustrations set the story in India and deftly capture Ani’s darkness and lightness with both perspective and palette. Bird’s-eye views of Ani from directly overhead emphasize his powerlessness while a cloud of darkness that surrounds him effectively captures his unhappiness; a two-page spread detailing Ani’s despair is particularly powerful.

A hopeful, sadly necessary resource for children coping with a caregiver under medical treatment. (Picture book. 4-8)

ODIN, DOG HERO OF THE FIRES
Smith, Emma Bland
Illus. by Salazar, Carrie
West Margin Press (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Jun. 30, 2020
978-1-5132-6294-9

A resourceful ranch dog protects a herd of goats during a wildfire in Northern California.

A Great Pyrenees dog named Odin narrates this dramatic story based on true events. The dog relates the harrowing tale in first-person present tense, adding dramatic suspense as the plot unfolds. As a fast-moving wildfire approaches, the two owners of a ranch decide to flee. They leave in their truck with only one of their dogs after Odin refuses to get in. He stays behind with a herd of eight young goats, saving their lives by leading them to the shelter of some boulders on a hill. When one of the dog’s owners returns the next day, he finds Odin, all the goats, and two fawns safe near the rocks, though the farmhouse and barn have been burned to the ground. The illustrations are uncompelling in execution and composition, with the animals often portrayed in static poses. The scenes of the nighttime fire and the hazy, gray day that follows, however, project a dreamlike effect that in combination with the posed animals conveys the nightmarish quality of the wildfire and its aftermath. An author’s note describes the owners of the ranch, who present a white, and the circumstances of the actual fire. A final page gives information about Great Pyrenees dogs.

An entertaining story of a dog’s brave behavior in a devastating wildfire. (Picture book. 5-8)

COOP KNOWS THE SCOOP
Souders, Taryn
Sourcebooks Young Readers (304 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Jul. 1, 2020
978-1-4926-4018-9

A middle-grade mystery set in the American South serves up murder and mayhem with a side of hot mustard.

After his Marine hero father died five years ago, Cooper Steven Goodman and his mother, Delilah, took up residence with his paternal grandfather, Dr. Harley Goodman, in bucolic Windy Bottom, Georgia. (Despite the setting and several Civil War references, race plays no part in the story, and all characters are assumed white.) Now 13, Coop spends most of his time with best friends Justice and Liberty, brother-and-sister twins whose parents co-own A Latté Books, Windy Bottom’s only bookstore/cafe, with Coop’s mother. A few days before seventh grade begins, a playground renovation disinters the earthly remains of Tabby Goodman, Coop’s grandmother, who allegedly skipped town four decades earlier, and shatters the small town’s idyllic peace. As evidence stacks up, Coop reckons with revelations.
that rattle his family's history. How could he have known his grandmother was the heiress to a shipping fortune? That his grandfather jilted his high school sweetheart when he returned from college? That Gramps' lifelong injunctions against drinking and gambling are rooted in practice, not principle? Coop's narration, playful language, nuanced characters, intricate plotting, and a bittersweet conclusion help transform a slow-as-molasses whodunit into a race against the clock. Can Coop and his friends clear Gramps' name in time—or is everything he thought he knew a lie?

An engrossing, good-humored page-turner. (Mystery. 9-13)

A GIFT FOR AMMA
Market Day in India
Sriram, Meera
Illus. by Cabassa, Mariona
Barefoot (32 pp.)
978-1-64686-061-6
978-1-64686-062-3 paper

It’s market day, and a young Indian girl is looking for a gift for her mother.

But with so many colorful goods on display, how can she possibly decide what to get? As she wanders through the narrow lanes, the dark-skinned narrator inhales the scents of jasmine, kebabs, mint, and coriander, listens to the beating of large black drums, ducks out of the way of rickshaws and goats, and sneezes in a windblown cloud of spicy red chili powder. In the end, the pigtailed protagonist stops at a bangle stall, deciding that, since she cannot possibly choose just one color, she’ll have to choose them all. Based on the author’s childhood experiences of markets in Chennai, the book’s poetic prose actively engages all five senses. With a few well-chosen details, Sriram avoids making the story overtly Hindu: For example, the narrator takes care to explain that Amma doesn’t wear vermilion powder on her forehead, something typical of modern Indian families that is often overlooked in Western picture books. The illustrations are colorful and vibrant but at times lack key details. Script on signs in the background—which should be Tamil—is instead a set of scribbles, an artistic choice that misses an opportunity to fully realize the setting.

A culturally authentic journey through a modern Indian market lovingly told through the eyes of a child. (Picture book. 2-6)

THE BEST WORST POET EVER
Stobler, Lauren
Illus. by the author
Atheneum (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-5344-4628-1

An interspecies war of verse! An orange-and-white cat channels Shakespeare, feathered quill in paw, while his creative nemesis—a pug—clacks away at a green typewriter. The origin of the two foes’ conflict isn’t quite clear, but they battle in rhyming couplets, haiku, and galloping verse. “I hope it shan’t disturb you that I plan to write some poems today,” Cat begins. “I hope it ‘shan’t’ disturb you, Cat, that I intend to do the same,” Pug retorts. The ensuing scansion and prosody are remarkable, making for a truly rollicking read-aloud with extreme emotional highs. Both animals are fat and joyous, Cat’s dignity neatly offset by Pug’s crude hilarity: “Can I write a poem with my butt? / I don’t know! / Oh can I write a poem with my butt? / Here I go!” In the illustration, Pug’s fuzzy posterior hovers above the typewriter. There are even some moments of poetic instruction toward the end, when the two animals reconcile their differences and collaborate: “If a line is too long… / then we can enjambe it! / If a rhyme’s almost rhyming… / it’s not wrong; it’s just slanted!” It starts to drag in the middle, as this is slightly longer than an average picture book, but there’s plenty of humor and energy to keep audiences large and small enthralled.

Delightful. (Picture book. 4-8)

SUNRISE SUMMER
Swanson, Matthew
Illus. by Behr, Robbi
Imprint (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Jun. 9, 2020
978-1-250-08058-5

Summer has arrived and, with it, an annual—and unusual—family trip. Four siblings and their parents travel 4,000 miles to arrive in Alaska. The young pale-skinned, brown-haired narrator is excited to finally be part of the fishing crew this summer. Before dawn, outfitted in rubber waders, special gloves, and warm wool hats, the crew goes out to stack nets and attach them to a raft headed out into the waves in the dark, cold morning. But the young protagonist isn’t strong enough to do it alone; luckily the crew is there to work together just as the sun comes up. Soon there are fish in the nets, and they have a catch for the day. Paired with ebullient first-person prose, the illustrations immerse readers in the changing colors of the sky and waves throughout the thrilling event. Extensive backmatter explains that illustrator Behr and author Swanson are actually the mom and dad in the story, and their children are the kids. Behr’s parents bought land in a place called Coffee Point and learned to fish the waters in search of adventure and family
An enchanting tale of a 15th-century artist that emphasizes attributes and skills we need today.

A THOUSAND GLASS FLOWERS

Ezra Jack Keats Award winner Turk puts his research skills, art-history knowledge, and artistic talent to the test in this gleaming, imagined account of the development of 15th-century glass artist Marietta Barovier, believed to be the discoverer of millefiori glass. This technique was invented by the Romans and lost until Barovier’s time, when it was recalled in the rosetta bead. Poetic yet accessible text sparkles with clarity as it portrays the artistic sensibility and discerning eye of a young girl inspired and encouraged by her renowned father but initially barred from the family’s glasswork studio, as such occupation was seen as suitable only for men. Meanwhile, illustrations inspired by works of Renaissance, impressionist, and abstract art show the young Barovier and her light-filled world: the moody radiance surrounding the canals of Venice, the glow of the glassworks studio, the colorful, luminous array of glass beads she is thought to have created. Clearly a labor of love, this ethereal and striking selection incorporates imagination, art, creativity, and women’s history in a story that emphasizes dedication, resilience, and innovation.

An enchanting tale of a 15th-century artist that emphasizes attributes and skills we need today. (author’s notes) (Picture book. 5-9)

Uncluttered design and clear instructions mark this kid-friendly introduction to nine basic yoga poses.

Each double-page spread pairs National Geographic photos with a rhyming two-line verse, with action words set in display type. The high-quality photos are set within circles of bright contrasting colors. On the right-hand side of each spread, a child on a yoga mat (this photo outlined by an original mandala design) demonstrates a yoga pose inspired by the animal: “CURL like a cat! / STRETCH like a puppy! / ROAR like a lion! / TUCK like a bunny!” Four to six lines of instructional text in a smaller but still clear font guides readers into the posture and includes suggestions about when to breathe and how often to repeat the action or sustain the pose. A conversational foreword by yoga teacher Tara Stiles encourages children to “go with the flow” when trying the movements. Towler’s verses, including an introductory and closing stanza, speak directly to children’s interests: “Playful puppies run and fetch, / tumble, tussle, stop, and stretch.” Four pages of backmatter repeat on a smaller scale the photos of the animals that inspired the poses along with information about their behaviors and habitats, thumbnail photos of the five racially and gender diverse children modelling proper yoga technique, and the English and Sanskrit name of each asana.

Animals, action, and accurate information—packaged for kids. A winner. (Informational picture book. 4-8)

“A THOUSAND GLASS FLOWERS
Marietta Barovier and the Invention of the Rosetta Bead
Turk, Evan
Illus. by the author
Atheneum (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-1-5344-1034-3

“It was a small bowl, not much bigger than the palm of her hand, which looked like it had a field of flowers forever blooming across its surface.”

Uncluttered design and clear instructions mark this kid-friendly introduction to nine basic yoga poses.

Each double-page spread pairs National Geographic photos with a rhyming two-line verse, with action words set in display type. The high-quality photos are set within circles of bright contrasting colors. On the right-hand side of each spread, a child on a yoga mat (this photo outlined by an original mandala design) demonstrates a yoga pose inspired by the animal: “CURL like a cat! / STRETCH like a puppy! / ROAR like a lion! / TUCK like a bunny!” Four to six lines of instructional text in a smaller but still clear font guides readers into the posture and includes suggestions about when to breathe and how often to repeat the action or sustain the pose. A conversational foreword by yoga teacher Tara Stiles encourages children to “go with the flow” when trying the movements. Towler’s verses, including an introductory and closing stanza, speak directly to children’s interests: “Playful puppies run and fetch, / tumble, tussle, stop, and stretch.” Four pages of backmatter repeat on a smaller scale the photos of the animals that inspired the poses along with information about their behaviors and habitats, thumbnail photos of the five racially and gender diverse children modelling proper yoga technique, and the English and Sanskrit name of each asana.

Animals, action, and accurate information—packaged for kids. A winner. (Informational picture book. 4-8)

YOGA ANIMALS
A Wild Introduction to Kid-Friendly Poses
Towler, Paige
National Geographic Kids (32 pp.)
$16.99 | May 19, 2020
978-1-4263-3752-9

Uncluttered design and clear instructions mark this kid-friendly introduction to nine basic yoga poses.

Each double-page spread pairs National Geographic photos with a rhyming two-line verse, with action words set in display type. The high-quality photos are set within circles of bright contrasting colors. On the right-hand side of each spread, a child on a yoga mat (this photo outlined by an original mandala design) demonstrates a yoga pose inspired by the animal: “CURL like a cat! / STRETCH like a puppy! / ROAR like a lion! / TUCK like a bunny!” Four to six lines of instructional text in a smaller but still clear font guides readers into the posture and includes suggestions about when to breathe and how often to repeat the action or sustain the pose. A conversational foreword by yoga teacher Tara Stiles encourages children to “go with the flow” when trying the movements. Towler’s verses, including an introductory and closing stanza, speak directly to children’s interests: “Playful puppies run and fetch, / tumble, tussle, stop, and stretch.” Four pages of backmatter repeat on a smaller scale the photos of the animals that inspired the poses along with information about their behaviors and habitats, thumbnail photos of the five racially and gender diverse children modelling proper yoga technique, and the English and Sanskrit name of each asana.

Animals, action, and accurate information—packaged for kids. A winner. (Informational picture book. 4-8)

BRAVER, STRONGER, SMARTER
A Fun and Easy Guide to Being More Mindful, More Confident, and More You!
Vincent, Vincent
Sourcebooks eXplore (160 pp.)
$12.99 paper | Jul. 1, 2020
978-1-7282-0953-1

Braver, stronger, smarter?
This mix-up of intention and execution begins as the author vents about the many crafted narratives that accompany preternaturally happy-looking selfies on social media and their potential impact on one’s confidence—aka, everyone’s happy, and I’m not. The initial pitch encourages readers to acknowledge their own confidence by disconnecting from social media and utilizing more time for creativity. Amid puzzles, exhortations, and exercises such as creating your own song, crafting a haiku, or trying sudoku, the author contradicts the original message of avoiding social media by encouraging readers to create their own apps, which most likely would tempt them to venture back online. Another stumble is the haphazard selection of celebrity quotes that are peppered throughout the book, including from Richard Branson and Lady Gaga, two people the lower edge of the publisher’s targeted “8 & up” audience would probably be unfamiliar with, along with Miley Cyrus, and Zac Efron, two former Disney Channel stars who date back 15 years. The book is designed to be written and doodled in, marking it for personal use rather than lending.

A hodgepodge of self-help advice that loses its steam with its lack of focus and unfamiliarity with Gen Z icons. (puzzle answers, quote sources) (Nonfiction. 8-12)
A dinosaur story of family and size.

This surprising picture book uses illustrations that slowly build in tension to create a sense of high drama paired with simple, informative text that, on its own, says very little. “Some dinosaurs are small,” it starts, with a wee green reptile happily gathering pineapples in a basket. “They have tiny flat teeth for munching through fruit and leaves,” it goes on, with the small protagonist plucking a pear. But the next page, which says merely that “Some dinosaurs are BIG,” starts to introduce anxiety as enormous yellow and orange legs and tails flank the much smaller dino. The following page introduces two menacing theropods who, accordingly, “have huge pointy teeth and sharp claws.” Readers learn additional basic facts about the personalities and habits of the bigger dinosaurs as they steal fruit from the little one, who at first peeks over its shoulder anxiously and then bolts away. But luckily, the last dinosaur readers meet, who is “simply... ENORMOUS,” turns out to be the teeny one’s mother, and she scares away the relatively puny carnivores.

The well-paced text steadily and deliberately drives the image-facing worrisome experiences. Even though Lance literally lets drawn action forward, making for an engaging read-aloud that’s self-confident. (Picture book. 4-7)

A veteran birder invites young readers to look for the birds around them.

“There are lots of ways to find a bird. / That’s the wonderful thing about birds,” Ward, author of many nature titles including Mama Dug a Little Den, illustrated by Steve Jenkins (2018), offers good suggestions for bird-finding at any age. Move slowly and quietly. Try to blend in. Look up, down, and also straight ahead. And, finally, “the best way to find a bird”: close your eyes and listen. Ward makes clear why birds are where they are. Some are feeding or nestling on the ground; some are snacking or splashing in the water; some are high in the sky; others perch on wires or feed in your own backyard. Sudyka’s opaque watercolors are as engaging as the text. A smiling black child and a shorter child with pale skin and straight, black pigtails discover birds in a variety of environments. Hand-lettered labels identify the many birds shown. Two spreads make a puzzle: Three birds blend into a tree’s bark so well they can barely be seen; a page turn shows them close-up and labeled. The birds might not realistically all be found in the same parts of this country or at the same time, but they are reasonably common (except on the spread showing five extinct birds) and clearly identifiable in these illustrations. An afterword for older readers or caregivers provides good suggestions and further resources.

Bird-finding made easy and attractive. (Informational picture book. 4-8)

On a journey to save his parents, a boy gets lost in an enchanted forest in this new graphic fantasy.

After retrieving medicine from a nearby village, Kerry is desperate to find the quickest way home to his ailing parents.
When he finds a childlike spirit at the edge of the Forest of Shadows, he follows her into the woods, hoping for a shortcut. Soon, Kerry comes across a large, kite-shaped black stone with one singular piercing yellow eye. Floating above the ground and called the Knight of the Road, the creature is a Waystone whose role is to help travelers find safe passage through the forest. The last of his kind, he agrees to help Kerry navigate the perilous wood. But their journey isn’t easy, and Kerry’s naïve, earnest, and trusting personality sometimes grates on the grumpy, mysterious Waystone. When they learn that an evil force is vying for control of the forest’s creatures, Kerry must decide if he will attempt to free everyone from its spell, endangering both himself and his parents, or return home quickly to his sick family. While some of the plotting, particularly the denouement, feels contrived, readers will be happy to find such a tidy, happy ending. Overall, characterization takes a back seat to plot and adventure, an emphasis furthered by the simplicity of characters’ facial features. Character sheets, including a guide to creating your own character, and early concept art are included in the back.

A pleasant romp for plot-happy readers. (Graphic fantasy. 8-10)

**SATURDAYS ARE FOR STELLA**

Wellsin, Candy
Illus. by Ryan, Charlie Eve
Page Street (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-1-62414-921-4

George loses his grandmother but gains a baby sister in this touching picture book about family connections.

“George loved Saturdays. Saturdays were for Stella,” George’s grandmother, a black woman with a short, curly white Afro. Whether they spend the day out—at the park or the museum, or doing fun things downtown—or stay in and play and bake, days with Stella are filled with fun and love. One Saturday, however, the bespectacled brown-skinned boy is ready for his day with Stella, but he finds his parents (a black man and a white woman) crying. They explain that he won’t be seeing Stella again. “From then on, George hated Saturdays.” His favorable things become reminders of sadness and loss. But his parents are preparing for something—his mother is pictured in a maternity dress—and one day, a new Stella appears in his life: a brown baby with a light Afro. With baby Stella in his life, Saturdays become as much fun as they once were; George shows Stella everything he learned from his grandmother. This lovely story uses repetition and charming detail to celebrate life’s cycles and family connections that never end. The text and cheerful pictures work together to capture the warmth and comfort of togetherness as well as the gloom of loss, which, the story assures readers, needn’t last forever.

A beautiful story of remembering the departed by passing on traditions. (Picture book. 4-9)

**THE NERVIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD**

Wiley, Melissa
Knopf (208 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-0-375-87038-5

A spunky preteen girl goes from ostrich rancher to stunt performer in turn-of-the-20th-century moving pictures. Pearl doesn’t think about much beyond her family’s ranch until Mr. Corrigan, a movie director, brings his Flying Q Film Company to Lemon Springs, California. First he hires Pearl’s older brothers—cowboys all—to act in his silent moving pictures, but when he sees the stunts the 11-year-old can perform, he’s quick to sign on this “nervy” girl. Pearl narrates in short, action-filled chapters, packing in descriptions of caring for ill-tempered ostriches, her risky performances, and plenty of details about the craft of silent filmmaking (including why the film industry moved out west). While stunts are second nature to Pearl, she wonders what it means to act. It comes easily to her nemesis and on-set sister, town gal Mary Mason; their jealous-turned-respectful interactions also drive the plot. Expressive, black line drawings depict some of Pearl’s feats as well as an apparently all-white cast. (The Irish-immigrant cameraman does acknowledge the theft of Native lands by white settlers during filming).

An author’s note provides more information about the industry, early stuntwoman Pearl White (the inspiration for Wiley’s protagonist), and La Mesa (the inspiration for Lemon Springs) and its history of filmmaking—and ostrich farming! For another look at a girl in silent movies, this time on the East Coast, pair with Anne Nesbet’s *Daring Darleen: Queen of the Screen* (2020).

Plucky fun. (Historical fiction. 8-12)

**OUT OF THIS WORLD**

Wooding, Chris
Scholastic (320 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-338-28934-3

Jack has long wondered why his family moves every year and why his parents treat him more like a military recruit than a kid—now he’s about to find out. No question, Jack’s parents are weird. His dad’s survival training includes surprise attacks launched at dawn for Jack to evade; his mom, an academic coach, is disappointed in him—he can’t even recite Shakespeare’s complete works. At school, Jack daydreams about cool, pretty Jodie; evades seriously uncool, asthmatic Thomas; and enjoys sketching strange creatures inhabiting far-flung planets in outer space. When Thomas shows up with a celebratory cake on Jack’s otherwise uncelebrated 12th birthday, Jack can’t prevent Thomas from exploring his house until they stumble upon strange devices in the attic that Thomas—ignoring Jack’s
frantic warning—can’t resist touching. A chain of events ensues that leads to actual outer space, landing the boys in more trouble than they can handle. Never fear: Allies, human and otherwise, are at hand to teach lessons in teamwork. (Human characters skew white.) At times, slapdash execution and jarring stylistic inconsistencies threaten to derail this series opener. The tone veers from subversively sardonic (as in William Sleator’s *Interstellar Pig*, 1984) to drolly whimsical (à la Douglas Adams), with echoes from the Star Wars franchise. If not in top form here, Wooding’s never dull; the fast-paced plot features his signature twists and turns.

**Escapist fun for space-opera fans.** *(Science fiction. 8-12)*

---

**THE SHARED ROOM**

*Yang, Kao Kalia*

*Illus. by Reiter, Xee*

Univ. of Minnesota (32 pp.)

$16.95 | Jun. 9, 2020

978-1-5179-0794-5

A family grieving their child’s loss finds peace.

A family in St. Paul, Minnesota, suffered the wrenching loss of their older daughter seven months previously, when she accidentally drowned at a public swimming area. Ever since, quiet has settled over the household. The family struggles to cope: The parents find solace in the girl’s bedroom, imbibing their daughter’s lingering scent. Occasionally, the family watches videos of the girl. Then the mother asks her older son, who shares his younger brother’s bedroom, if he wants for himself his deceased sister’s room. He does but is confused about where he will sleep and store his belongings. With fresh bed linens and his sister’s clothes removed, the boy readily falls asleep in his new surroundings. The family feels comforted, an ending that is rushed and unconvincing. This story about a child’s death is understandably sobering but is also coolly distancing except for a painful scene in which the older son expresses pent-up emotions and sobs; the accompanying illustration is heart-rending. The narrative is written sparingly, with concrete details lending specificity. Apart from the aforementioned artwork, the delicate illustrations are serviceable and static. This Hmong-authored and -illustrated book places at its center a Hmong American family, giving children in an underrepresented community a valuable mirror. At the same time, both text and illustrations leave room for readers from many backgrounds to find themselves in the story.

**Comforting for readers who have suffered the tragic death of a sibling or young friend.** *(Picture book. 5-8)*
...these titles earned the Kirkus Star:

**GIRL, UNFRAMED** by Deb Caletti ................................................... 129

**DARK SKIES** by Danielle L. Jensen ............................................... 132

**I'LL BE THE ONE** by Lyla Lee ..................................................... 134

**THE KINDER POISON** by Natalie Mae ......................................... 135

**SARAH BERNHARDT** by Catherine Reef ........................................... 137

**WHERE WE GO FROM HERE** by Lucas Rocha; trans. by Larissa Helena ................................................................. 137

**TODAY TONIGHT TOMORROW** by Rachel Lynn Solomon ................. 137

**ALL THE THINGS WE NEVER KNEW** by Liara Tamani ...................... 140

---

**HUNTED BY THE SKY**

Bhathena, T anaz

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (384 pp.)

$18.99 | Jun. 23, 2020

978-0-374-31309-8

Series: Wrath of Ambar, 1

After 15-year-old Gul watches Sky Warriors murder her parents, she vows to assassinate those responsible. Her targets are King Lohar, the cruel ruler of Ambar, and Major Shayla, a ruthless commander of the Sky Warriors. Gul's parents died protecting her. She is a magus—a human capable of wielding magic—born with a star-shaped birthmark on her arm. According to an ancient prophecy, a magus girl with a similar mark will someday kill the king. While Gul is convinced she isn't the girl from the prophecy—she has been unable to perform magic since she was a baby—the world seems to believe otherwise. With the help of the mysterious Sisterhood of the Golden Lotus, Gul manages to get herself a job at the palace—and to fall in love with Cavas, a nonmagi with some dark secrets of his own. Weaving together Indian and Persian mythology, the story features a diverse cast of brown-skinned villains and heroes. The action is nail-biting, and the romantic scenes shimmer. At first, the intricately built world is so detailed that the story can be hard to follow; that being said, Gul's and Cavas' fascinating backstories and burgeoning relationship—all of which unfold in the final two-thirds of the book—make this initial effort worthwhile.

A fast-paced romantic fantasy set in a thoughtfully built, diverse world. (map, glossary, author's note) (Fantasy. 13-18)

---

**CHASING STARLIGHT**

Black, Teri Bailey

Tor Teen (336 pp.)

$17.99 | Jun. 9, 2020

978-0-7653-9951-9

In 1938 Hollywood, an aspiring astronomer with a tragic past finds herself at the center of a murder mystery.

Kate Hildebrand was only 13 when a highly publicized crime took her parents' lives, leaving her in the care of her Aunt Lorna. After her aunt's marriage to a wealthy mining magnate, Kate, now 17, is shipped off to live with her eccentric grandfather Oliver Banks, a once-celebrated silent movie star...
If there’s one hallmark of the adolescent years, it’s growth: growth that involves engaging with increasing autonomy with the outside world. This process contributes to critical identity formation as young people figure out who they are in relation to—and apart from—family, peers, and community. The physical restrictions necessitated by the current pandemic pose a great challenge to normal teen life, perhaps more than any other age group.

Vicarious travel through literature can open up new horizons and offer mental escape. All too often, travel literature centers on straight, white characters finding themselves in “exotic” new locales. The positioning of who is the explorer and who is the subject of scrutiny typically follows a one-way script. Here are five titles armchair travelers can enjoy while housebound, or at any time. Each shakes up the usual tropes by showing people of color and queer people out in the wide world, just as in real life.

Ever Wong is a Midwestern Chinese American girl whose parents send her to spend a summer in Taipei, Taiwan, attending what she believes will be an intensive program of cultural and academic immersion in Loveboat, Taipei by Abigail Hing Wen (HarperTeen, Jan. 7). But Ever is soon immersed in a whirlwind of social activity that is certainly educational—though not in the way her parents intended. Ever, used to being in a minority at home, also gains valuable insights into her Asian American identity and her life as the daughter of immigrants.

In the graphic memoir The American Dream? A Journey on Route 66 Discovering Dinosaur Statues, Muffler Men, and the Perfect Breakfast Burrito (Zest Books, 2019), Malaysian immigrant Shing Yin Khor presents an account of their road trip along the iconic U.S. highway. This road, which may have associations for many American readers, gains freshness when presented through the eyes of someone who is exploring questions of national and personal identity, Americanness, and suspicion of outsiders. Khor’s is a story of looking beyond popular narratives and comfortable bubbles to see for oneself the people and places less frequently encountered in the version of America typically exported for entertainment and consumption.

With the Fire on High by Elizabeth Acevedo (HarperTeen, 2019) centers the story of Emoni Santiago, an Afro-Latinx high school student and doting mother of a little girl. At home, Emoni expresses her creativity and shows her family love through her cooking, which is intuitive and instinctual. Taking a culinary arts class at school, one that includes a trip to Spain to study with professionals, presents Emoni with challenges to her feelings of mastery in the kitchen, however. There is a good reason food is at the center of so many stories about family, community, race, and culture. For a bright, capable young woman wrestling with all of these subjects, the passion and comfort food provides is both grounding and inspiring.

It’s still all too rare to find queer characters in historical fiction—as if queerness were a modern invention. Mackenzi Lee’s The Lady’s Guide to Petticoats and Piracy (Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins, 2018), the second book in the Montague Siblings series, reunites fans with Monty and his boyfriend, Percy—but Monty’s sister, Felicity, is at the heart of this story. If she were alive today, rather than in the late 18th cen-
tury, Felicity likely would identify as asexual and aromantic. She rejects an offer of marriage in Scotland and tries to reach Germany, where she believes she’ll be able to study medicine. Adventures ensue as Felicity teams up with an Algerian Muslim woman who can help her get to Germany—and has her own reasons for seeking the German doctor Felicity hopes to study with.

*Solo* by Kwame Alexander with Mary Rand Hess (*Blink*, 2017) is a verse novel about teen Blade Morrison, whose fast-living father was a rock star (now struggling with substance abuse) and whose mother died when he was young. Living a life of material privilege but emotional emptiness, the talented young musician ends up traveling to a remote area of Ghana, seeking answers to a family mystery. There he discovers truths about himself as much as he comes to learn about those he meets. It is a rare treat to find a work in which a young black American has the opportunity to travel to the African continent as part of his coming-of-age. The respect and sensitivity with which Blade’s story is told is a gift to readers.

*Laura Simeon is the young adult editor.*

who shares his crumbling, cluttered Pasadena mansion with a handful of boarders, all down-and-out aspiring actors. It’s not an ideal arrangement, but Kate’s plan to make a quick exit is thwarted when she meets Ollie’s neighbors: 15-year-old film ingénue Bonnie Fairchild and her glamorous mother, Dorothy. In short order, Kate snags a job as a production assistant on Bonnie’s new film and finds herself undeniably attracted to the dashing Hugo Quick, one of her new housemates. When Kate discovers another housemate dead in Ollie’s kitchen, Kate and Hugo team up to find a killer. But everyone seems to be hiding secrets, including Kate. Black delivers an atmospheric mystery with cinematic flair that’s chock full of period detail, highlighting women’s roles in front of, and behind, the camera during Hollywood’s golden age. And the brainy Kate, determined to control her own destiny, is no wilting flower. Most characters are assumed white, but there are two supporting characters of color.

A captivating crowd pleaser. (*Mystery. 13-18*)

**GIRL, UNFRAMED**
Caletti, Deb
Simon Pulse/Simon & Schuster
(368 pp.)
$18.99 | Jun. 23, 2020
978-1-5344-2697-9

A 16-year-old girl grapples with being objectified by men.

Sydney Reilly had a standout school year with her friends in Seattle; the thought of leaving for a summer in San Francisco with her famous mother, Lila, instills dread. She has a deep sense that “it” is about to happen—she isn’t sure exactly what, but something large that will change everything. At her mother’s ocean-view home, she’s alone with Lila and her new boyfriend, Jake Antonetti, a real estate agent–turned–art dealer. By turns needy and unavailable, Lila can seem more like the child than the parent. Syd hides out from Jake and Lila’s fights, wandering nearby beaches, where she meets and is immediately drawn to Nicco Ricci. Her desire for him feels all-consuming, and their relationship immediately triggers Jake, who views her virginity as something he must protect. Between Jake, the leering construction worker next door, and creeps in the city, Syd faces a barrage of unwanted male attention. Lists of courtroom exhibits prefacing each chapter provide clues to the climax. Syd thoughtfully processes her burgeoning sexuality and the ugliness that it breeds in men, tracing its effects back to her mother’s own experiences. Though the affluent backdrop provides little diversity, Syd’s story outlines important, uncomfortable experiences many girls face without either flinching or offering a picture-perfect ending. All major characters are white.

A frank, engrossing examination of the ways society complicates young women’s burgeoning sexuality. (*Fiction. 14-18*)
FELIX EVER AFTER
Callender, Kacen
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (368 pp.)
$18.99 | May 12, 2020
978-0-06-282025-9

Jealousies and deceit resolve into affirmation and artistic self-love.

Seventeen-year-old black trans boy narrator Felix Love wants romance but lacks self-understanding. No longer a girl, he thinks “boy” doesn’t always fit either. Felix’s dad deadnames him despite supporting his top surgery and hormone therapy, and he hates his mom for leaving when he was 10. Felix’s self-image shatters when his pre-transition photos and name appear in the school gallery—followed by relentless transphobic texts. A talented visual artist, Felix dreams of an art scholarship to Brown. His uber-rich, down-to-earth best friend, Ezra Patel, helps him navigate contentious relationships at their private art school’s summer intensive and shares copious pot and booze with Felix. But this friendship falters when Ezra starts dating Austin, and Felix thinks he likes Declan—Ezra’s ex and Felix’s rival for the art scholarship. Felix’s ethnicity seems to have no cultural richness, surfacing primarily when he’s being marginalized for his race, poverty, and gender. Keeping up with his devastating episodes of self-doubt and anxiety along with the story’s complicated plot details make this an exhausting read, and although Felix ultimately overcomes some oppressive transphobia, the barrage of blatant ignorance and bigotry he faces might haunt readers despite the book’s ebullient ending.

A trauma- and drama-filled demiboy’s story that’s not for the faint of heart. (author’s note, resources) (Fiction. 14-18)

GOODNIGHT MIND FOR TEENS
Skills To Help You Quiet Noisy Thoughts and Get the Sleep You Need
Carney, Colleen E.
Instant Help Books (208 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Jun. 1, 2020
978-1-44479473-1
Series: Instant Help Solutions

Advice for teens with sleep problems based on cognitive behavioral therapy techniques.

In 10 chapters, a sleep expert provides a menu of options for teenagers to use to first identify their specific problems and then create, test, and modify their own sleep solutions. The first chapter introduces the key sleep tracker tool, because without accurate data it is impossible to craft appropriate behavioral changes. The tracker, which is available online or through the free companion app, captures eight vital data points, including what time you get into bed and what time you wake up. Other chapters focus on understanding and using one’s body clock, winding down before bed, coping with anxiety that fuels sleeplessness, handling daytime sleepiness, developing strategies for getting out of bed in the morning and having more energy during the day, understanding substances that interfere with good sleep, thought patterns that promote good sleep, and revising plans as warranted. The tone is reassuring and empowering, giving readers many options for self-treatment while also making clear when professional help should be sought. The prose is easy to understand. Case studies, bulleted chapter summaries, and simple to-do lists add value. Unfortunately, worksheets and resources are not printed in the book.

Sleep is key to good health; this comprehensive resource helps teens take control of their sleep problems. (Nonfiction. 12-18)

THE ORPHANAGE OF GODS
Coggan, Helena
Hodder & Stoughton/Hachette UK
(416 pp.)
$13.99 paper | Jun. 9, 2020
978-1-44479473-1

None of the young people suspected of being gods have ever escaped from the Guard—until now.

Hero, Joshua, and Kestrel are orphans of the rebellion against the gods—a time when humans rose up and killed the gods and those descended from their bloodline. Afterward, all orphans were rounded up: Because of their unknown parentage, they could be gods as well. Under the watchful eye of the Guard, these orphans must wait until their 18th birthdays, or until their gifts manifest and their blood runs silver, whereupon they will be killed. To protect her friends, who have the blood of gods, Kestrel hatches a plan to break Hero and Joshua out of the orphanage, but in the process she captures herself. Now fugitives being hunted by the Guard, Hero and Joshua nevertheless embark on a journey north to rescue Kestrel from her imprisonment. Along the way, however, they must contend with the consequences of their own powers and the secretive resistance of fugitive gods who have their own power struggles. Though character development is uneven, the plot progresses to ever darker depths and a chilling conclusion. Few references are made to characters’ appearances, although some are dark skinned; one central character has romantic relationships with both a woman and a man.

Dark and atmospheric, though the implications of some themes are left tantalizingly underexplored. (Fantasy. 14-18)
The portrayal of mental illness is sensitive and insightful.

**KEEP MY HEART IN SAN FRANCISCO**

*Coombs, Amelia Diane*

Simon Pulse/Simon & Schuster  
(400 pp.)  
$19.99 | Jun. 23, 2020  
978-1-5344-5297-8

Caroline “Chuck” Wilson finds herself unraveling as she tries to keep her heart in San Francisco, trying to save Bigmouth’s, her family’s bowling alley.

Chuck dreams of going to San Francisco’s Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising after graduating from high school. Spring break is around the corner, and Chuck has a packed itinerary that she hopes will bring her closer to her fashion design dreams. However, in a twisted turn of events, Chuck learns that she has less than two weeks to help her father come up with $8,000 in overdue rent. Enter Beckett Porter, Chuck’s ex-best friend and crush, who seems to know the ins and outs of the Bay Area’s underground bowling scene. He has a plan to help Chuck save Bigmouth’s and avoid her family’s having to move in with grandparents in Arizona. Despite her doubts, desperate times call for desperate measures, and they are off on a thrilling adventure together. As the story unravels, Chuck finds herself trusting Beckett again, and the sparks she once thought to be snuffed out are rekindled. Chuck has clinical depression and is worried that she might develop bipolar disorder like her mother, Caroline. The author’s portrayal of mental illness is sensitive and insightful although Caroline is slightly underdeveloped. Readers who enjoy thoughtful, character-driven stories will appreciate this book. Main characters are presumed to be white.

Intriguing and charming. (author’s note, resources) (Fiction. 13-18)

**CLEAR CUT**

*Dodd, Melody*

West 44 Books (200 pp.)  
$19.95 | Jun. 1, 2020  
978-1-5383-8515-9

Heather discovers cutting by accident and encounters danger before finally getting help.

Heather’s parents’ severe fight sends the Maine high school freshman running to her best friend Liv’s house, but she finds Liv at home with Cooper, a popular older boy from school. As Liv becomes more preoccupied with Cooper, Heather takes action over the illegal developments destroying their forests and learns more about cutting from an online personality. She begins to use cutting to dull the pain of her home situation, helplessness, and loneliness. But she also comes second in an essay contest and discovers a theater camp, where she makes new friends: Trey, a Penobscot boy who is interested in Heather, and Josie, a bold and dynamic actress who turns out to be a cutter too. One night, Josie takes things too far. Both girls ultimately get the help they need from professionals. This novel, accessible to reluctant readers, presents short, powerful poems that convey vivid experiences. Dodds arranges the words against the blank space in creative designs that require readers to actively participate in making meaning of Heather’s thoughts, feelings, and senses. The story confronts gruesome truths—both physical and emotional—that help outsiders begin to understand the draw of cutting. It is implied that all the characters other than Trey are white.

Memorable and important representation of a poorly understood compulsion. (author’s note, resources) (Verse novel. 14-18)
Magical elements are seamlessly woven with storylines comparing the plight of common people to the games the powerful play.

**DARK SKIES**

As the plot unfolds, readers learn each of the characters’ origin stories—including their deepest secrets. The book’s thrilling plot is driven by a brilliantly clever, collective narratorial voice that frequently intercedes with historical tidbits, witty asides, and political statements ranging from critiquing America’s lack of gun control laws to the shameful genocide and violent displacement of Native Americans. While most of the characters are white, the story does include two Lakota characters and a protagonist who comes out as queer. Full of twists, turns, and laugh-out-loud humor, this tongue-in-cheek feminist alternative history is impossible to put down.

A thrilling alternative history that sparkles with wit and charm. (further reading) (Fantasy. 13-18)

**MY CALAMITY JANE**

A posse of werewolf hunters disguised as a traveling troupe of sharpshooters roam the Old West in search of a particularly vicious werewolf known as the Alpha.

Under the watchful eyes of the paternal Wild Bill Hickok, protagonists Calamity Jane, Frank Butler, and Annie Oakley track the Alpha, all while navigating budding romances and family quarrels. While each teen is dedicated to the collective, they are each driven by their own motivations. Frank, for example, hopes to one day give up werewolf hunting and be a full-time entertainer. Annie—who must convince the group to hire her as a sharpshooter in the show—flees a family that wants to force her into marriage. All Jane wants is to settle down on a plot of land somewhere, far away from prying eyes.

As the story begins slightly before Teriana’s arrival, continuing until her fateful encounter with Marcus—who has been ordered to kill her—before a leap of faith brings her to Mudamora’s capital, which is under an increasingly desperate siege. The magical elements of the story—from the miraculous works of the marked to disgusting blight and abominations—are seamlessly woven with storylines comparing the plight of common people to the complicated political games the powerful play. Responsibility is the grounding theme that unites the protagonists in their heroic strivings; trauma and the fully rounded characters’ emotional vulnerabilities take their tolls. Readers will be delighted both by further exploring the expertly crafted world and the story’s twists. Lydia is fair-skinned, Killian olive-skinned; race isn’t significant in this diverse world.

Readers will breathlessly anticipate their next venture into this exquisite world. (Fantasy. 12-adult)
THE GIRL OF HAWTHORN AND GLASS
Jerreat-Poole, Adan
Dundurn (304 pp.)
$12.99 paper | Jun. 9, 2020
978-1-4597-4681-7
Series: Metamorphosis, 1

A teenage assassin turns on her master to free herself and save the world from power-hungry witches.

Eli’s mother made her out of holly berry, spiderweb, wood, human, and other, unknown, components that she means to discover. The human parts of Eli help her travel between worlds undetected—one of monsters unbound by time and another of humans threatened by life-devouring ghosts. With the help of her seven magical daggers—and nothing and no one else—Eli hunts ghosts on the orders of the mysterious Coven that rules her home. If they ever decide she’s no longer of use, the Coven can also order her unmade, returned to her separate ingredients. When a mission goes wrong and Eli accidentally kills a human, she finds herself entangled in the conspiracy of a rogue witch. High stakes and a ruthless protagonist propel the plot at a fast pace. At times, sudden shifts make the story hard to follow, but the ragtag trio of main characters is worth sticking by nonetheless. Eli, who is white, joins forces with Cam, a queer, mustachioed, Vietnamese Canadian man, and Sen, a motorcycle-riding nonbinary person with spiky purple hair, golden-brown eyes, and dark brown skin. In the midst of this dark, murderous fantasy, debut author Jerreat-Poole explores complex themes of oppression, abuse, belonging, and identity.

An exceptionally ambitious debut from an author to watch. (Fantasy. 14-18)

GODDESS IN THE MACHINE
Johnson, Lora Beth
Razorbill/Penguin (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Jun. 30, 2020
978-1-9848-3592-5

A girl wakes up from cryogenic sleep in an unrecognizable world.

In 2161 Andra went into stasis for space travel to a new colony. When handsome-yet-snarky Zhade wakes her on an unexpectedly devastated desert world, worshiped as the last of the three goddesses (the other two having already woken), Andra’s expected to save the world. Along with differences between the world she knew and the one she awoke in, evolution of the English language into a futuristic dialect adds to her disorientation. While heavy use of this device will likely polarize readers, the dialect goes beyond a sprinkling of slang, possessing a strong intuitive internal logic, an authentic-feeling rhythm, and, sometimes, amusing origins. The characters aren’t quite as successful as the prose—love-interest Zhade is pretty stock for YA, and at times reading about Andra’s needing to be rescued gets old. Once readers (and Andra) get their bearings in Zhade’s storyline and Andra’s role, a series of twists and curveballs amps up stakes and tension, carrying the plot to its sequel-promising conclusion. Zhade is coded as white; Andra is fat and cued as biracial (with a redheaded mother and Hokkien-speaking grandmother); the world has diversity in skin tone, and Andra notes that those at the top tend to be lighter skinned.

An exceptionally ambitious debut from an author to watch. (Science fiction. 12-adult)

THE CROW RIDER
Josephson, Kalyn
Sourcebooks Fire (352 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 1, 2020
978-1-4926-7296-8
Series: Storm Crow, 2

The follow-up to the debut duology that began with The Storm Crow (2019).

The titular magical crows, large enough to ride, were once the cornerstone of Rhodaire’s power until they were all killed in the violent attack that launched the war and nearly destroyed Princess Thia. But now Thia has successfully hatched one of the few remaining crow eggs, fled evil queen Razel’s grip, and fought free of her own depression, leaving behind Razel’s son Prince Ericen, the enemy and fiance Thia can’t forget. Uneven pacing with a glacial opening eventually giving way to a rushed climax and some striking tonal shifts (especially scenes with the smirking, bantering Ericen) detract from notable original details, particularly the way mental health is deeply interwoven in the characters of Thia and her crow, Res. Thia must constantly grapple with the cost of violence, trying to choose mercy but finding it backfires on her, which conveniently propels significant plot movement. Overreliance on trite similes and centrally cast side characters, like the vaguely Asian Auma, who dispenses sage advice over steaming tea, are somewhat balanced by the generally diverse world, with named characters of varied skin tones and sexual orientations and gender identities (Thia is brown-skinned and straight).

Not a highflyer but fans will flock to it regardless. (map, guide to characters/setting) (Fantasy. 12-18)
THE PUFFIN PLAN
Restoring Seabirds To Egg Rock and Beyond
Kress, Stephen W. & Jackson, Derrick Z.
Tumblehome Learning (200 pp.)
$16.95 | Jul. 1, 2020
978-1-943431-57-1

Ornithologist Kress and his team restore puffins to Maine’s Eastern Egg Rock.

When Kress became a birdlife instructor at Maine’s Hog Island Audubon Camp in 1969, the seabird biologist discovered that puffins once nested on nearby Eastern Egg Rock. Overhunting of their feathers for hats in the 1800s led to their disappearance. Realizing that humans had a responsibility to save these colorfully beaked birds, Kress developed a plan. Kress and journalist co-author Jackson chronicle what came to be known as Project Puffin. Starting with six puffin chicks from Newfoundland, Canada, in 1973, Kress and his team spent years figuring out ways to make Eastern Egg Rock a viable nesting location. Rather than bog readers down in minutiae, the conversational narrative enhanced by archival photos blends the right amount of logistical details with accounts of harrowing setbacks, constant trial and error, and eventual success. And rather than end there, the authors include a look at climate change and its negative impact on the puffins’ still-fragile ecosystem. They offer readers hope, however, with examples of successful seabird restoration projects around the world, from the rescue of the Short-tailed Albatross on Japan’s Torishima Island to the African Penguin Relocation Project in South Africa. While calling on young people to help, the authors also don’t skirt such controversial topics as gull control (i.e., killing gulls to save puffins).

Sure to hatch activism in budding environmentalists. (Nonfiction. 12-16)

THE BOY IN THE RED DRESS
Lambert, Kristin
Viking (308 pp.)
$18.99 | May 12, 2020
978-0-593-11368-4

This LGBTQ–themed historical mystery is far from a drag. 1930 rings in with calamity at the Cloak and Dagger, a queer speakeasy hidden in the French Quarter of New Orleans. And while drama may normally run high at the club, things boil over when 17-year-old drag headliner Marion Leslie is accused of murdering society’s darling Arimenthia “Minty” McDonough. Thankfully, Millie, who is Marion’s best friend, de facto manager of the Cloak and Dagger, and the 17-year-old narrator, won’t let her friend be railroaded for the crime based on his orientation. Aiding Millie in her hunt for the real killer are her potential love interests, the bronze-skinned waitress Olive and Italian American bootlegger Bennie. (Subplot: Which, if either, of the two will Millie ultimately choose?) As Millie uncovers clues and stumbles over red herrings, the book seamlessly interweaves themes of class, race, abuse, and privilege. Readers will get a taste of what life was like for queer people, albeit white queer people, of the time. Lambert plays fair with the clues, allowing savvy readers to keep pace with Millie. The book is a glittering tribute to the end of the Roaring ’20s, and mystery aficionados of any sexual orientation will think it’s the bee’s knees.

A hotsy-totsy read! (Mystery. 13-18)

FOREST OF SOULS
Lee, Lori M.
Page Street (400 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 23, 2020
978-1-6414-9245

From orphan to assassin-in-training to...savior of the kingdom? Sirscha is focused on becoming the next queen’s Shadow. Training for the past four years, she has endured grueling trials and humiliations to prove herself among the elite. Less than a month from graduation, however, she intercepts a message that sets off a chain of events that derails her plans. Set on an unexpected path, Sirscha discovers new abilities and finds kinship with the persecuted shamanborn, those with elemental magic whom she once would have hunted down. If she can maintain some control, her powers may be able to help heal the rot in the kingdom, but Sirscha will ultimately question her loyalty to her queen and country. While the story skirts the “orphans of mysterious origins” trope, Sirscha’s path to discovery and acceptance is thoughtful and heartfelt. It is also refreshing to see a character too busy kicking butt to stop for romance. This is not an Asian fantasy per se but a fantastic adventure with some Asian touches, indicated through descriptions of landscape and food. Characters are described with a range of skin tones from deep bronze to gray. Also, it is implied that same-sex marriage is accepted as a given.

A refreshing fantasy for readers looking for more friendship and adventure, less romance. (glossary) (Fantasy. 14-18)

I’LL BE THE ONE
Lee, Lyla
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 16, 2020
978-0-06-293692-9

A plus-sized Korean American teen enters a K-pop competition in both the singing and dance categories. It was a long time coming, but at 16, Skye Shin is finally comfortable with her size-16 body. But that doesn’t mean she’s immune from the
The rich worldbuilding, a slow-burning romance, and a fantastic set of well-developed characters mark this exciting and refreshing tale. 

_A FAKE PLASTIC WORLD_  
Lisbon, Zara  
Henry Holt (304 pp.)  
$17.99 | Jun. 16, 2020  
978-1-328-15631-0  
Series: Fake Plastic Girl, 2  

The price of fame can be lethal in the edgy follow-up to 2019’s _Fake Plastic Girl_. Sixteen-year-old Eva-Kate Kelly was stabbed only once with a ceremonial Wiccan dagger, and her body was found in the canal just outside her Venice, California, home. Unfortunately, Justine Childs’ fingerprints are all over the athame, and she’s arrested for murder. Justine’s parents hire a brilliant forensic scientist to show that W ells has created a flu virus that will affect everyone. The ailing ruler of the Orkena kingdom calls for this brutal tradition, which will see his three heirs racing across the desert, the victorious one being the first to reach the end and kill the allegedly chosen-by-gods sacrifice. As a lowly Whisperer able to communicate with animals, living in a land where the rulers are the ones with the rarest magic, Zahru knows more than anyone what having power truly means. As she is traded among the three heirs traversing the desert, she needs to use all her skills to avoid being sacrificed in the end. Zahru’s unexpectedly humorous inner voice, the rich worldbuilding full of political intrigue, a slow-burning romance, and a fantastic set of well-developed characters (both friends and foes) mark this exciting and refreshing tale of power and accountability. Against a backdrop of danger, betrayal and challenges, Zahru opts for kindness and hope every time she faces a life-or-death choice, with thought-provoking results. Zahru has fair skin; secondary characters (including her love interest) have brown skin. This diverse world includes queer characters. 

_A SPIKED_  
McGoran, Jon  
Holiday House (352 pp.)  
$18.99 | May 5, 2020  
978-0-8234-4091-7  
Series: Spliced, 3  

Following soon after the events of _Splintered_ (2019), this volume concludes the Spliced trilogy. Jimi Corcoran once again finds herself embroiled in the conflict between chimeras—or modified people with animal DNA—and their allies and ultraconservatives who see chimeras as no longer human. This time, a militant chimera organization called CLAD is amping up the violence and may be responsible for recent terrorist acts. As the evil Howard W ells announces his bid for the U.S. presidency, Jimi and her boyfriend, Rex, try to discover who is behind CLAD. During their investigation, the teens discover that W ells has created a flu virus that will affect everyone who hasn’t inserted his Wellplant into their heads. The device is a souped-up smartphone connected to the wearer’s brain. The themes of sentient technology, climate change, intense hatred
Details from the Philadelphia setting center the story a bit, and frank discussions of rape, drugs, and abuse can be hard to stomach. Lex and her aunt are white, and her uncle is black; other second-generation nonconforming people, and a scarily true-to-life pandemic overreaches its mark. (Science fiction thriller . 14-adult)

for nonconforming people, and a scarcely true-to-life pandemic often clutter a plot that moves forward at a jarring warp speed. Details from the Philadelphia setting center the story a bit, and the frankness about teens’ sexuality is refreshing. Gasp-inducing reveals and heart-rending deaths near the end come a little too late in the game. The final chapter ties up things so neatly that fans might come away underwhelmed. Minimal physical descriptions of nonchimeric humans make racial diversity difficult to determine.

A valiant effort that attempts to wrap up the series but overreaches its mark. (Science fiction thriller. 14-adult)

WHAT UNBREAKABLE LOOKS LIKE
McLaughlin, Kate
Wednesday Books (336 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 23, 2020
978-1-250-17380-5

A trafficked teen readjusts to the outside world after her rescue. At the motel, she was Poppy, but now she has to find her way back to being Alexa “Lex” Grace. Although Lex’s stable and loving aunt, Krys, and uncle, Jamal, take her in, she makes supportive friends, and even adopts an adorable puppy; the voice in her head tells her she isn’t worthy of it all, and she struggles with trust. Plus, her pimp is still out there, so she knows she’s not truly safe. Lex starts dating Mike, who uses her for sex, which is what feels normal for her. Things go too far when Mike and his friends corner Lex in a school bathroom and sexually assault her. With the support of her aunt and uncle and a couple of new friends, Lex learns to value her self-worth and speak up. This story of resilience and recovery is gritty and heavy but ultimately hopeful. Lex’s first-person narration is straightforward and authentic. Frank discussions of rape, drugs, and abuse can be hard to stomach but are not overly graphic. Lex’s story ends well, but it’s made clear that, unfortunately, she is an exception. Other girls she knows return to prostitution and drugs, with grave consequences. Lex and her aunt are white, and her uncle is black; other secondary characters are racially diverse, and one new friend is gay.

A gut-punch story with an uplifting ending. (Fiction. 14-18)

10 THINGS I HATE ABOUT PINKY
Menon, Sandhya
Simon Pulse/Simon & Schuster (368 pp.)
$18.99 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-1-951491-02-4

In this companion to When Dimple Met Rishi (2017), two frenemies fake-date their way through summer vacation. Pinky Kumar wears her social justice warrior badge with pride. Her mother, though, is not here for her brand of unapologetic do-gooding. Affronted after another false judgement by her mother, Pinky impulsively makes up a fake, respectable boyfriend and reaches out to the boy who fits the bill: Samir Jha. A friend of a friend, Samir is the total opposite of Pinky’s “Ms. Counterculture.” Stranded in D.C. after a prized law internship fell through, Pinky’s dating scheme offers Samir the opportunity to extend his time away from home and get an in with Pinky’s well-regarded lawyer mom. As Pinky and Samir spend more time with each other, the line between fake and real blurs. But will her “chaotic energy” ultimately clash with his careful order? While romance is at the forefront, Menon explores issues of social pressure, identity, environmentalism, and more. Much of the turbulence stems not from the tribulations of a fauxmance but from parent-child discord. Told in alternating voices, transitions are seamless, and major conflicts and minor loose ends are resolved neatly and in quick succession. Self-aware of its rom-com tropes, the novel delivers to fans of the genre with self-assuredness and heart. Pinky and Samir are Indian American; Pinky’s stepfather is Chinese American, and her biracial (Indian/white) cousin, Dolly, has had both girlfriends and boyfriends.

A layered, entertaining, contemporary rom-com. (Romance. 13-18)

SHAME PUDDING
Noble, Danny
Illus. by the author
Street Noise Books (192 pp.)
$16.99 paper | May 19, 2020
978-1-951491-02-4

Noble, the British granddaughter of Russian and Polish Jewish immigrants, believed she had a wolf living inside of her.

Growing up, Noble’s inner wolf prevented her from being able to find her voice. While she was fascinated by werewolves, she was very shy with her peers and only really felt comfortable being herself when she was around her loud and vibrant family, especially “the Mas.” The Mas, Grandma Min and Ma, are Danny’s paternal and maternal grandmothers, respectively, and they are the true heart of this book: They are fully fleshed out in both prose and illustration and are therefore so real that they will be sure to make readers feel as if they knew and loved them too. The sometimes-disjointed narrative tells the story of Noble’s growth from a shy, offbeat girl to an activist, musician, and artist. The penciled illustrations’ exaggerated, slightly surreal forms sometimes make it difficult to see detail, but the unusual, expressive style truly brings to life the intricate eccentricities of Noble’s lively family. All of the main characters are culturally Jewish, celebrating both Passover as well as Christmas. Noble identifies as heterosexual but references crushes on women.

A coming-of-age tale of finding one’s voice with the support of family. (glossary) (Graphic memoir. 16-adult)
A scintillating portrait of the stage legend.

Reef brings to life for teen readers Bernhardt, a 19th-century icon and paragon of the French theater—and a single mother who went on to earn France’s highest recognition, the Legion of Honor. Industrious, multitalented, and wildly eccentric, this self-made artist had an exceptional gift for creating multiple personae. The author convincingly argues Bernhardt was indeed the world’s first superstar, wooing audiences of thousands on multiple continents with her ability to command the stage and capturing the devotion of fans with her indefatigable spirit and take-no-prisoners attitude. A biographer’s dream, Bernhardt the actor, patriot, world traveler, mother, sculptor, motion-picture star, and author packed countless professional and personal feats into her 78 years. Henry James also noted she had “in a supreme degree what the French call the génie de la réclame—the advertising genius,” pulling stunts such as having herself photographed sleeping in her coffin (to remind herself of “the mystery of death”) and acquiring scores of exotic pets, among them a lion cub, tortoises, chameleons, and—when on tour in New Orleans—an alligator named Ali-Gaga. Thoroughly researched and enhanced by illuminating illustrations, Reef’s account pulls out all the stops in showing both Bernhardt’s struggles and triumphs as the daughter of a Jewish courtesan who attained dizzying heights of success.

A captivating biography possessing as much verve as its inimitable subject. (author’s note, endnotes, bibliography, timeline, picture credits, index) (Biography. 12-18)

Three young, queer Brazilian men grapple with the realities of living with HIV in Rocha’s audacious debut.

The overcrowded clinic brims with impatient people, but for 18-year-old Ian Gonçalves, the only thing on his mind is his testing positive for HIV. The news sends him spiraling down, understandably. Enter 18-year-old Victor Mendonça, who’s also in the clinic, awaiting his results after a recent partner revealed his own HIV status. Fortunately, Victor’s in the clear, but he notices the distraught Ian and offers him the opportunity to connect with said partner, 21-year-old Henrique, for support. Readers follow all three young men—Ian, struggling with his newly defined life; Henrique, already HIV positive for three years; and Victor, afraid to be in love with Henrique—as Rocha depicts each of their perspectives with profound kindness and clarity. More a series of open-hearted conversations than a plot-driven narrative, this debut seeks to tear down the social stigmas surrounding HIV, offering life-affirming scientific facts and addressing prejudicial thinking. The cast of characters is solid: Ian feels alone, but as he adapts to the medicine that’ll help him, that isolating thought withers thanks to the supportive voices who gather around him, including those of Victor and Henrique, who are trying to mediate their newfound, complicated relationship. At times explicitly educational, this treatise on community provides comfort in an often homophobic world, with strong-willed drag queens; drunken, ecstatic nights; and blossoming lovers.

Simply fearless. (afterword, author’s note) (Fiction. 14-18)
THE AWARD-WINNING AUTHORS DISCUSS THE PROCESS OF ADAPTING 
STAMPED FROM THE BEGINNING FOR YOUNG READERS

By Anjali Enjeti

When it was published in 2016, Ibram X. Kendi’s *Stamped From the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* took the world by storm. Winner of the National Book Award in nonfiction, it examined the racist ideas, policies, and laws that formed the foundation of the United States. Not long after its publication, Kendi, executive director of the Antiracist Research and Policy Center at American University, began to imagine a version of *Stamped* for young readers. But he didn’t want to write it himself, so he asked award-winning children’s and YA author Jason Reynolds, recently appointed National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature, to take it on. *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You: A Remix of the National Book Award-winning Stamped From the Beginning* (Little, Brown, March 10) was born. Kendi penned the introduction and Reynolds wrote the book.

Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds phoned in from Washington, D.C., and New York City, respectively.

**How did the idea for a young adult *Stamped* come about?**

**Ibram X. Kendi:** It came from the people, from traveling around and talking about [the original] *Stamped From the Beginning*. Readers would say that this was the first time they’re learning this history and were upset that they didn’t learn it in school. And people were consistently saying that this history should be taught to young people, because if it was taught to them when they were younger, they wouldn’t have made a ton of mistakes in their life. And the more people that said that, the more I thought we should adapt *Stamped From the Beginning*.

And then I started thinking about who would be the best person to do it. It was critically important to find someone who had the ability to understand the history and all of its complexity and be able to translate it in a voice acceptable to young people. So I asked Jason, and he told me, “No.” But I persisted, and eventually he agreed to take it on.

**What made you say no initially?**

**Jason Reynolds:** Respect! I have a lot for respect for Dr. Kendi’s work and for what he’s done. We met each other at the National Book Awards when *Stamped From the Beginning* won and my book *Ghost* was a finalist. I didn’t know whether I wanted to tamper with something that felt so precious, that involved so much blood and sweat and tears. And I have my own insecurities. I wondered if I could execute the book in a way that respects the integrity of the work and is accessible to younger people. I wasn’t sure that I could do it.

But what pushed me over the edge, was that Ibram got sick. [Kendi was diagnosed with cancer in 2018.] I’d been running from the book, but suddenly it became about us having an opportunity to make a contribution to this important conversation for generations to come. As someone...
like myself who loves black people so much, it felt almost irresponsible for me to continue to say no.

What does this book include that wasn’t in the history books we read as children?
Kendi: This book has four histories wrapped in one. First, there’s the history of the U.S., particularly around prominent complicated leaders like President Jefferson and President Lincoln. I was taught to revere them, and this text complicates those figures. Second, there’s African American history. We’re often taught about African Americans’ contributions, but we’re not taught the ways African Americans were challenging prominent figures with high level intellectual debates and activism. Third, it’s a history of racist ideas. And finally, the book explains anti-racism and anti-racist ideas. I was not taught any of this as a child.

This book is light, conversational, and even humorous. Was this difficult to achieve with such a serious subject?
Reynolds: It took me a while to settle in. I had to work through the daunting nature of the project. But I’ve spent my life around kids, and I respect young people enough to have really difficult conversations with them. I also understand how the book had to prioritize engagement and how “cool” had to be the currency used for that engagement. I had to turn a history book on its head.

Dr. Kendi, when did you first see a draft of the book?
Kendi: I saw a draft only after Jason had completed it. I trusted Jason, and I leaned on that trust. And I was shocked—he was able to literally transform, and completely remix, and rewrite this book with a completely different register, a different tone, and a different narrative pulse for young people. And then, he was somehow able to maintain the bones of the narrative and the history itself, in one-fifth of the length of the original *Stamped*.

Was it a challenge to break these complex concepts about race into more easily digestible parts?
Reynolds: It was hard for me to do it for myself. It was like pouring a swimming pool into a glass. I had to read through the text five, six, seven times, top to bottom, over and over again, and use some of the notes Dr. Kendi had given me and figure out my own translation of it. The hardest part was making sure that I could understand and synthesize the book, that I could grapple with the language and the concepts.

What is your hope for this book?
Kendi: Some parents shy away, or are fearful, of talking about and introducing racism to their children. But any parent who introduces and engages with their children about the history of racism and anti-racism can protect them from consuming racist ideas. The kids won’t think they are less than or more than others because of their race. They’ll be able to establish more meaningful relationships with themselves, with their own racial groups, and certainly with other people.

Where is this book’s place in the larger conversation about racism?
Reynolds: This is a book that every teacher needs to read in order to teach, that every bookseller needs to sell, and that every parent needs to read to have these discussions with young people about racism. We need to be able to navigate these issues. It’s family discussion, a whole school read, and a whole community read.

Anjali Enjeti is an Atlanta-based author and a vice president of the National Book Critics Circle. *Stamped* received a starred review in the Dec. 1, 2019, issue.
ALL THE THINGS WE NEVER KNEW
Tamani, Liara
Greenwillow (384 pp.)
$18.99 | Jun. 9, 2020
978-0-06-265691-9

Two promising Texas basketball players navigate the ups and downs of first love.

For 11th grade star players Carli and Rex, it's love at first sight when he blows her a kiss from the free-throw line as she watches the game on the sidelines. Carli believes in magic and looks for signs in everyday life—like Rex's kiss—to help her make decisions. Who should she live with after her parents' divorce? What should she do with her future—one that won't include basketball, which she knows will disappoint her father and teammates? Rex is a nature lover like his mother, who died giving birth to him. His father is distant, and inside their big, lonely house, Rex dreams of the NBA. Carli and Rex's roller-coaster romance is rife with betrayal, heartbreak, grief, and family secrets. As narrators of alternating chapters, they are funny, smart, and unflinchingly candid. Well-written dialogue and fine attention to detail reveal Tamani's strong insight into Gen Z life. The intensity and depth of Carli and Rex's love story are conveyed as deftly as the high-energy play-by-plays in their basketball games. Tamani crafts layers of complexity around falling in love, making hard choices, and dealing with loss—on and off the court—in this deeply intimate story of two talented, sensitive teens. Carli, Rex, and their relatives and friends are black; Rex's teammates are white.

A superb, complex romance full of heart, humor, and unforgettable characters. (Fiction. 13-18)

THE PHANTOM’S CURSE
Wilson, Shelley
BHC Press (208 pp.)
$22.95 | Jun. 11, 2020
978-1-64397-071-4

The age-old battle between good and evil is fought in this swashbuckling feminist fantasy in which a courageous young woman saves the world from an evil phantom.

Davis Reign, a soldier and survivor of the apocalypse, kills the phantom's host and, with his novice sorcerer friend Cassias, rebuilds the world. When his wife dies, Reign loses his power and dark magic returns to the land. It's up to plucky 16-year-old Marianne Fitz to quell the rising powers of evil. Torn from her parents by Reign and left alone to care for her little brother, Newt, in the poor Link district, Marianne first encounters Reign's son, her intimidating yet seductive adversary Crawford, when she is invited to the city for a coming-of-age ceremony. Using her incipient magical powers and her pronounced street-fighting talents, Marianne rescues her brother from the jail he is thrown in by Crawford's henchmen, saves three maidens in peril, and helps to right the balance of good and evil in the world. Her true identity is finally revealed in the dramatic denouement. Marianne's story is told in a fast-paced, engaging first-person narrative that moves skillfully between sympathy-evoking personal experience and broad-ranging, sometimes violent action. The city of Obanac and the surrounding landscape are evocatively portrayed, adding richness and depth to an otherwise mundane plot.

A medieval-inflected fantasy that will appeal to female action-hero aficionados. (bonus short story: “The Black Riders”) (Fantasy. 12-16)
An Earth expedition to colonize distant worlds finds a placid, seemingly medieval alien culture that is actually part of an advanced civilization.

Alexander’s SF debut opens in the mid-22nd century. Earth officials send a long-distance starship with a group of scientists and military experts on a first-ever jump to a planet orbiting the star Kepler 452. The humans do not necessarily expect intelligent life standing in the way of their commercial colonization mission. But on a habitable planet dominated by a single continent, they meet the Haillar, a diminutive, almost fairylike race living in what looks like a feudal series of settlements. The aliens seem to take the Earth visitors politely in stride. But readers already know what the arrogant and ethnocentric humans do not: The Haillar are an ancient, sophisticated space-spanning race some 250,000 years old. When required, they can wield immense power and technology—indistinguishable from magic. (It may actually be magic, centering on the manipulation of a mystical, all-pervading force called eka.) But for 20,000 years, the Haillar have been at war with a diabolical, all-consuming enemy called the Scourge. Now, the surprise appearance of Homo sapiens at what is actually a Haillar outpost facing an imminent Scourge attack tips the balance for all the species. The author starts this series opener deliberately, with dizzying mouthfuls of first-person alien jargon (“They share the same house name but come from two different sides of the Sen Diessa Dichotomy. Remelda is a Healer and the leader of the local Academy, while Dioran’s affinity is Oblivion, the same as the Suzerain Queen’s”). But the narrative culminates with exciting cosmic battleground action worthy of E.E. “Doc” Smith. In between, Alexander manages to insinuate both a tragic romance and a compact critique of the typical capitalist/Western imperialist (aka earthling) mindset, unable to perceive the natives—in this case, a charming little ET queen and her peers—for the mighty, virtual demigods they really are. It’s a fine blastoff for the series and, smoothly wrapping up as it does, can be enjoyed just as much as a stand-alone.

The Force is strong in this intelligent launch of a mystic-tinged, space war saga.
CULTURE (BOOK) CLUB

Children’s books have a long tradition of highlighting diversity and de-mystifying cultural differences. Here are a few noteworthy examples that Kirkus Indie reviewed:

Andale Puss: Where to Next?, a 2019 picture book by Warren Handley, illustrated by Erin Gibbs, celebrates difference in its tale of the titular, English-speaking cat, who travels by boat, plane, bike, and train to Russia, where he eagerly learns about its culture—discovering books by Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, eating borscht, and encountering matryoshka dolls. She also hears many Russian words, rendered in Cyrillic text with pronunciation keys. The starred Kirkus review points out: “Endnotes describe how the author learned that a smile can bridge linguistic and culture gaps and help travelers make friends—a moral that the cat’s escapades wholeheartedly and effectively represent.”

In the 2019 illustrated children’s book Zazu Dreams by Cara Judea Alhadeff, illustrated by Micaela Amateau Amato, a youngster of Sephardi, Mizrahi, and African American descent goes on a journey through time to visit his ancestors and learn “history that we never hear about in school.” He also learns about science and ecology as he visits sites in the Caribbean and the Middle East. “The author is effective in showing the breadth, depth, and appeal of Jewish and Arab history, language, and culture,” says Kirkus’ reviewer.

The Poetry Friday Anthology for Celebrations (2015), compiled by Sylvia Vardell and Janet Wong, offers a wide-ranging set of poems for kids, in English and Spanish, about holidays and cultural events worldwide. Kirkus’ reviewer calls it “bubbly and educational,” noting that it “looks beyond the United States to educate students about festivals throughout the world…such as Nepal’s Dashain and Japan’s Obon. It also celebrates diversity at home, with poems observing holidays such as Gay Pride Day, Arab American Heritage Month, and National Blended Family Day.”

David Rapp is the senior Indie editor.

GEEZING ALONG AT 80
Living, Loving and Laughing After 80
Anastasi, Anthony J.
L.R. Price Publications (103 pp.)
$10.47 paper | $2.99 e-book
Apr. 16, 2019
978-1-916467-92-7

An octogenarian takes a lighthearted view of questions he now faces, such as “How Have I Lived So Long, Yet Learnt So Little?”

Debut memoirist Anastasi has accomplished what only a skilled writer in the genre can do—hook the reader with a purely personal life story that in less capable hands might have interested only family and friends. He’s writing for his cohort and those on the cusp of it as well as for young people who, he notes, consider themselves immortal—so, pretty much everyone. Anastasi tells an amusing tale in a format that fits him to a T: a mixture of memoir and musings that recount some of his exploits in the impish voice of the rascal he clearly was in his school days. A former writer for the Army and sportswriter at the old Washington Daily News, he hasn’t lost his touch for punchy writing. (When someone says at an open-coffin visitation that the decedent “looks so good,” Anastasi muses, “Well, I’ve seen him looking better!”) His sense of humor aside, his book has serious passages about widespread concerns, among them health, personal connections, and insomnia. Anastasi also touches lightly on his work as a public information officer for the federal government, which led to his writing a Mother’s Day speech for President Gerald R. Ford. He takes some contrary stances that are hard to argue with, such as that people his age have earned the right to eat and say anything they want and to skip exercise. Something of an icon among the 80-plus crowd, Anastasi proudly says that his photo was on the cover of GQ—not the tony men’s magazine but Geezer Quarterly. Anecdotes highlight his Italian American perspective, including a wry critique of various styles of pre-funeral viewings of the deceased. Family snapshots bring to life the memories in a book that, with just 73 pages, is a breezy read.

A fun memoir by a man who’s grown old without growing grumpy.

THE INEXPLICABLE GREY SPACE WE CALL LOVE
Augello, Chuck
Duck Lake Books (176 pp.)
Apr. 1, 2020
978-1-943900-41-1

A debut collection of short stories that examine love and death with flashes of dark wit.

“Pizza Monks,” the first of the 14 stories in this book, has an intriguing strangeness. Written in the first person, it tells of a
pizza shop worker who, when about to close up, is approached by two Buddhist monks who request 20 pizzas. The pizzas are a favorite of a member of their brotherhood who plans to set himself on fire at sunrise. That storyline helps to set up a collection in which the motif of fire is prominent throughout: In “Smoke,” a man agrees to torch his brother’s house as part of an insurance scam, and “A Lesson in Fire” describes a girlfriend’s father inexplicably self-combusting. Other stories tell of a man who learns that his father enjoys wearing women’s lingerie, a goat discovered in the bathroom at a McDonald’s, and a salesman who falls in love with the word “languid.” Augello’s writing is richly textured. In the disturbingly dark “Call Me Your Unbroken,” the conception, pregnancy, and birth of a daughter all happen over the course of one night. The author’s words are loaded with suspense: “She was naked, her body slender and taut, her hips small again, as if she’d never given birth. She held the baby at her breast as she took a step, then another, toward the edge of the balcony.” On other occasions, Augello employs a fiendishly macabre wit. Describing the recently self-combusted father, he writes: “We tried to put out the flames with glasses of water and little cups of coffee, but it just didn’t work.” Almost every story relies on a hook—an uncanny occurrence—to draw the reader in. Although the subject matter of the stories varies, the approach becomes predictably familiar and starts to feel programmatic toward the end of the collection. That said, this is a promising debut indicative of a wild imagination and a burgeoning talent.

A book that’s sometimes formulaic but alluring in its strangeness.

**The Revolving Heart**
Augello, Chuck
Black Rose Writing (244 pp.)
$18.95 paper | $6.99 e-book
Apr. 16, 2020
978-1-68433-477-3

A call from an old friend in need leads a struggling playwright to come to terms with his complex history in Augello’s debut novel.

Donatello “Duck” Marcino is a master pizza chef, an unsuccessful playwright, and a narcoleptic. Amy is a suicidal, alcoholic single mother. The two were inseparable in their teenage years, during which they often babysat for the much younger Sarah Carpenter, whose mother was a less-than-ideal parent. A day at the beach in the 1990s changed their lives immeasurably, though, as Sarah went missing. Duck still has no idea what really happened that day, as he fell asleep on the beach as a result of his narcolepsy. It was generally assumed that Sarah drowned, although Amy claimed that the school drama teacher, Michael Ronan, whom Duck idolized, kidnapped the girl. However, police found no evidence that this was the case. Duck later left New Jersey for California, but a distress call from Amy 20 years later draws him back to his hometown to confront old demons. Duck, accompanied by his remarkably tolerant girlfriend, Kelly, immerses himself in the world he left behind and comes to a new, harrowing understanding of the events surrounding Sarah’s disappearance. Augello’s novel is a beautifully crafted fictional study of the long-term impact of neglect and abuse. Although the initial setup is reminiscent of a crime novel, the story gradually settles into a more reflective narrative about the choices that people make, the bonds they forge, and the obligations they can’t escape, however much they might try. The prose style is first-rate, featuring hints of Douglas Coupland and Philip Roth, cut through with the flavor of Beat Generation narratives. Augello shows a knack for sharp, believable dialogue, and his character construction is impressive. The unsettling malice of male aggression simmers throughout the story, as well, without ever feeling over-the-top.

A superb, captivating work from a promising new literary voice.

**STAY, DAUGHTER**
Azad, Yasmin
Perera Hussein Publishing
House (249 pp.)
$11.99 paper

Strict traditions face encroaching modernity in this memoir of a Muslim girl. The author was a jeweler’s daughter in Ceylon, now known as Sri Lanka, in the community of Galle Fort—at first blush, a traditional Muslim neighborhood. But in the 1950s, things were changing; already, the women of the island went out more than they had in years past and veiled themselves less. Before she reached the age of 12, Azad was allowed to spend time with her Christian friend Penny, ride a bicycle, and wear a bathing suit in public, and her doting, conservative father (whom she calls “Wappah”) was rarely unable to deny his daughter’s wants. However, her father still was committed to “the fierce protection of female honor” and still expected the women of his family to make a “good marriage,” so the author was “brought inside” when she came of age. But she was still interested in furthering her education and charmed by her English friends and Western comic books, so she hoped to attend university in the near future. But after her cousin ran off with a young man and Wappah reacted to the situation in an unexpectedly violent manner, subtle changes to custom and culture became more difficult to achieve. Azad’s debut memoir focuses on her memories of childhood and how she struggled against the more stringent aspects of her Muslim upbringing. However, her story is also the story of Galle Fort as the old-school residents struggled with young people becoming more Westernized. The setting is beautifully drawn, and its history comes alive. Just as important is the author’s father’s journey as a man who’s open to change but unsure of it. The book introduces many facets of Muslim culture with great respect, and Azad stingly portrays Western prejudices, as when the author’s classmates face ridicule for using henna. She also relates her older family

---

**The prose style is first-rate, featuring hints of Douglas Coupland and Philip Roth, cut through with the flavor of Beat Generation narratives.**

**THE REVOLVING HEART**

**STAY, DAUGHTER**

---

**KIRKUS.COM | INDIE | 1 MAY 2020 | 143**
A loving and approachable coming-of-age story about generational change.

**STORY GLASS**  
_Baldwin, Billy_  
_Illus. by Bell, Liesl_  
Decozen Books (213 pp.)  
$35.00 | Jul. 20, 2019  
978-0-9791882-1-3

A girl on vacation stumbles upon a magical puzzle in this illustrated middle-grade adventure.

Jen is going to her grandmother’s for the summer. Grandma is “adventurous and wild, with a mischievous streak.” It will be a change of pace for the girl, because ever since her father passed away in an accident, her mom has been terribly cautious. Grandma picks up Jen on a motorcycle with a sidecar for the trip to Goose Neck Lane. In the seaside home, Jen feels lighter and happier than she has in months. When she learns that Grandma has an art studio in her shed, the girl asks to visit it; Grandma lets her go for a walk on the beach, and Jen spies the neck of a bottle in the sand. As she touches it, she encounters a “milky darkness” and the sensation of falling. A sand fairy named Gleeby coaches her on how to fly and then explains that the glass piece that she touched belongs to his Story Bottle. It’s the Key Piece that activates the adventure of finding the rest of the pieces and learning the secret of the Wizard King of Lillimount. The king, however, watches Jen’s progress by making use of another piece of the bottle, and he plans to stop her. Jen, meanwhile, isn’t sure what she does. “The danger is living an unchallenged life. In not taking risks.”

Baldwin, author of _Wipeout the Wave_ (2017), once again joins illustrator Bell in a sumptuous middle-grade fantasy. On the way to Bottletown, Jen and Gleeby sail on a storm-tossed ocean; the dangerous waves that batter their vessel are the perfect metaphor, for adults and children, of how life happens to us whether we’re ready for it or not. Bell’s scratchy art features figures with round, expressive eyes and wild hair that are reminiscent of Jim Henson’s Muppets, and the backgrounds are full of nature elements, such as flowers and trees. The prose is also very visual: “Drooling bugs as big as dogs hung from [flower] stalks, their sharp jaws and pincers snapping.” Frequent double-page spreads provide long-lasting visual interest. The Bottletown map reveals sand fairies in action as they farm sand, shape bottles, and perform enchanted spells, but the most charming and detailed spread of all is a cross-section of the king’s castle as he chases Jen through its many rooms, including the ghost-filled attic. Throughout the well-paced narrative, valuable lessons shine, such as the importance of doing things that scare you and of not judging someone by their appearance. The latter lesson is exceptionally illustrated with Oggie, a monstrous-looking character. In befriending him, Jen enhances Oggie’s life and her own in ways she doesn’t initially imagine. The king’s secret, and Jen’s response, flips the script of most fairy tales by introducing Prince Chadwick. However, the author and illustrator save their sweetest surprise for the final pages. A vivid story for young readers with just the right amount of danger.

**DOE**  
_Baller-Shepard, Susan_  
Finishing Line Press (102 pp.)  
$19.99 paper | Apr. 12, 2019  
978-1-63534-904-7

A debut collection of verse delivers meditations on nature, womanhood, and a wide range of other topics.

Novelists and poets use words differently. The first group heaps sentence on sentence, paragraph on paragraph, creating a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. In this context, individual words matter less. The same cannot be said for poetry. For the poet, words are precision tools, their internal tension heightened. Small alterations to the diction of, say, a Shakespeare sonnet might alter it entirely—or mar it irreparably. This truth is the motivating force behind Baller-Shepard’s fine verse volume. Accordingly, she quotes Twain, who argues that “the difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.” Throughout, the author plays in the tiny gaps between words, demonstrating just how significant those spaces can be. Her opening poem is an excellent example: “Doe a deer / in her muliebrity, that deer / loses when made plural, / becomes ‘does’— / third person singular / present tense of _do_. / She’s more than what she does.” Here, Baller-Shepard turns a tiny observation about the distinction between “does” (the plural for the female deer) and “does” (the simple verb) into a larger point about femininity, action, and identity. She pulls a similar trick in “Subtle Cues for the Non-Native Speaker,” which ruminates on the difference between “lay down” and “lie down,” an occasion to discuss much larger themes, like sex, friendship, male power, and sacrifice. Both these poems, and many others in the inspiring book, examine vital questions about gender roles and responsibilities. The author’s decision to take on such questions in verse is both brave and cannny, as her conscientious poetry proves an ideal form for tackling these and other compelling themes with care and concision.

Precise, carefully calibrated poetry that explores crucial issues.
Anyone who has ever dealt with cyberbullying will find useful insights in these pages.

**CYBERBULLYING CRASH COURSE**

Protect Your Kids From Cyberbullies, Cyber Violence, and Digital Peer Pressure

Beam, Bjorn

Beam Reach Ventures (74 pp.)

$8.99 paper | $2.99 e-book

Dec. 29, 2019

978-1-73426-732-7

A wide-ranging manual focuses on the world of cyberbullying.

When bullying happens to somebody in person, writes Beam at the outset of his compact nonfiction debut, it's fairly obvious. A fight erupts between children in a schoolyard; the kids are separated and brought to the principal's office; the matter is quickly sorted out; and the bully is cautioned or punished. But cyberbullying leaves no traces, the author points out, and it's far from being merely a childhood problem. “Plenty of adults are cyberbullied through dating apps, chat rooms, social media threads, and the posting of unwanted content, like in photo extortion,” he writes. “This problem does not just stop at cyberbullying; it also extends to cyberbullying, where people are targeted because of their religious belief, skin color, sexual orientation, or political views.” In other words, everyone lives every day in an environment fraught with many forms of cyberbullying, and Beam's book provides a wide-angle overview of some of the most prevalent forms it can take in the modern age. These range from the rise of online sexual predators “catfishing” students and young people online to cyberharassment designed to “target, embarrass, and silence the victim.” The author notes that new advances in technology make virtually every aspect of cyberbullying both easier and more pervasive: “The sky is the limit” for things like online impersonation. But even older forms of online activity can be enlisted for bullying, as when individuals make a website intended “to aggregate everything people—feelings that can push even a seemingly self-confident young person to despair and perhaps thoughts of revenge or suicide. For all of this, Beam offers some simple correctives: privatize online accounts, set internet times and enforce them, bolster self-esteem in kids and teens by “encouraging their passions (even if they deviate from your idea of cool).” The author quite rightly emphasizes the crucial importance of teaching children empathy, and the advice given here will help greatly with that. Anyone who has ever dealt with cyberbullying will find useful insights in these pages.

A wise and levelheaded look at cyberbullying and some possible remedies.

**WE OF THE FORSAKEN WORLD...**

Bhat, Kiran

Iguana Books (216 pp.)


Jan. 21, 2020

978-1-77180-366-3

Short stories and poetry tell a tale of a world that’s recognizable yet very different from our own.

A grandfather tries to tell an interviewer what it’s like to have lost so many of his family members to “the Incident,” but a language barrier keeps everything but the simplest words from getting through. In another story, a drunken man wanders the streets, complaining about being alone and missing his brother. He’s attacked by a strange woman who yells things that he only half understands and then gives him money to take a cab home if he promises never to return to the area. In still another tale, the Chief’s first wife speaks to her dishonored first son while another wife gives birth to a son who might redeem the abusive Chief in the tribe’s eyes. These and 13 other short stories take place in different parts of this fictional setting, and they come together to draw a much larger portrait of that world. In this fragmented way, Bhat pens an intriguingly unusual type of novel. As the short stories and occasional examples of poetry weave together, they effectively show how people live very different lives in the aftermath of tragedy but experience very similar emotions. These tales of grief, loneliness, homesickness, and vengeance are incredibly compelling, and the author’s piecemeal technique has the effect of making the overall story easier to digest—especially considering how deep and emotional some of the individual tales are. Overall, readers will find this work to be one that’s not merely worth a read, but also a reread, in order to get a better sense of the sum of its parts.

A compelling mosaic of worldbuilding.
A charming, knockabout travelogue and meditation on the 1970s international yoga scene.

Brandão was a 23-year-old yoga instructor in Brazil in 1976 when he decided to further his studies with a six-month training session at the Yoga Institute in Mumbai, India. The first part of his narrative is an atmospheric account of his voyage there on a cargo ship through rough weather—“Moving up to the top of a large wave….One has the impression that the hull will not be able to resist the impact and the ship will break in half”—and the dank monotony of maritime life. He was then bowled over by India’s color, bustle, and poverty; its chaotic streets full of vehicles and livestock; and its haughty, corrupt bureaucrats who hassled him endlessly about his travel documents. At the Yoga Institute, devoted to the teachings of founding guru Shri Yogendra, the author found an oasis of calm and learning. Brandão draws piquant thumbnails of students and teachers along with evocative scenes of yoga procedural. (“Seated on the floor with legs crossed and eyes closed, I feel my entire body expand and gain volume in an unusual way, as if I were turning into a giant that weighed tons.”) The final section of his memoir covers his ensuing overland trip by train, bus, and ferry from India to Wales, much of it an odyssey of grand sights, squalid accommodations, and gastrointestinal crises, including an emergency pit stop in Panama. Although Jasper comes off as something of a one-dimensional character, Clara is a fully realized human being whose relationships in Panama evolve in unexpected ways. Her quest to improve workers’ safety and support Gorgas’ goal of ridding the isthmus of mosquitoes are also portrayed in a believable manner.

Clara’s Way
Carr, Roberta R.
Bowker (308 pp.)
$12.00 paper | $3.99 e-book
Mar. 6, 2020
978-0-578-59152-0

In Carr’s historical novel, a nurse faces danger and unexpected love during the construction of the Panama Canal.

It’s December 1904 when 23-year-old nurse Clara Tyler sets out for Panama from rural Cutler, Ohio, because her 26-year-old railroad engineer brother, Samuel, is too sick from malaria and pneumonia to travel home from there on his own. Clara has never left home, except to attend nursing school, but she’s determined to go on the journey despite her fiancé Jasper’s disapproval. She already harbors doubts about her forthcoming marriage, and the prospect of moving in with Jasper and his parents “suffocates” her. In Panama, she finds that her brother is so shockingly gaunt that she leads him straight to a hospital, where he soon dies. On impulse, Clara crosses the Isthmus of Panama on a freight train, passing through the jungle to the excavation site where Samuel lived and worked in appalling conditions. There, she discovers that he’d been keeping notes about safety issues. After falling ill herself from yellow fever and recovering, Clara decides to stay, working at the hospital with Army Col. William Gorgas, a doctor who’s an actual historical figure. Overall, Carr delivers a well-researched story of a young woman breaking free from society’s expectations in this novel. Her research also yields appearances by other real-life historical personages over the course of the story, including John Frank Stevens, the chief engineer of the Panama Canal. Although Jasper comes off as something of a one-dimensional character, Clara is a fully realized human being whose relationships in Panama evolve in unexpected ways. Her quests to improve workers’ safety and support Gorgas’ goal of ridding the isthmus of mosquitoes are also portrayed in a believable manner.

Well-crafted fiction that offers little-known details about Panama Canal history.

Waltz in Swing Time
Caugherty, Jill
Black Rose Writing (300 pp.)
$20.95 paper | $6.99 e-book
Apr. 23, 2020
978-1-68433-478-0

An elderly woman looks back on her childhood on a farm during the Great Depression and her later career as a dancer in Caugherty’s debut novel.

In 2006, Irene Larsen is almost 90 and living in comfort at the Golden Manor retirement community. Despite some health problems, she has a pleasant existence that includes spending time with her group of friends at
A reflective tale of growing up creative in a stifling environment and finding true love.

THE BLAMELESS
Christison, Elisabeth
Belle Isle Books (255 pp.)
Jul. 22, 2020

A young princess adopted into an extended family of magic wielders discovers her own special powers in Christison's debut novel for children ages 10 to 14.

On the night the castle at Aldestone is attacked, 13-year-old Princess Briana, known as “Brie,” sees her parents and brother murdered. Brie flees but is hunted through the streets. She escapes thanks to three mysterious rescuers: Derek the archer; Kove the knife-thrower; and big, gentle Flinton, whose sword appears out of nowhere whenever it is needed. These three are “the Blameless,” or heroes who can “control the weather, heal the sick, and end wars.” Each has committed a great selfless act and, in consequence, has manifested magical abilities, as has Brie. By putting the kingdom’s interests first, the princess develops powers of her own. Derek, Kove, and Flinton become her honorary uncles. Vowing to protect and train her, they take Brie to Mount Elrad, the secret stronghold of the Blameless, where she joins Flinton’s household and becomes best friends with his sister Cassie and—begrudgingly—Kove’s brother, Tao. Despite the murders that caused her to flee her castle, Brie finds happiness at Mount Elrad. But her life is soon upended again. The ruthless usurper Yalec has found a way to take control of individual Blameless. By harnessing their powers, he snatches Brie and returns her to the castle at Aldestone. What cruelties does he have planned? Will Brie ever be reunited with her new family? Christison takes the tropes of epic fantasy and strips them of their angst, crafting a feel-good page-turner. Brie is a likable protagonist surrounded by good-natured, slightly larger-than-life companions. Flinton is especially striking with his bearlike size and caring nature, but even Yalec—the villain—has a personality and depth beyond the genre’s typical evilness for evil’s sake. Christison refuses to manufacture conflict, focusing instead on a central premise and the characters that underpin it. Though the plot is simple and the book is long, Brie’s story plays out with an enduring breeziness. As is often the case with series, the ending of this first novel comes as an interruption rather than a denouement. Nonetheless, there’s a great deal here to ensnare young readers.

A heartwarming and innocent upper-middle-grade fantasy.

UNTIL THE OCEAN FREEZES
Clemans, Alilda Durham
Self (183 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Feb. 17, 2020
978-1-08-173141-0

A preteen navigates the big and small challenges of life in this debut novel. Lizzy Zander stands on the doorstep of a whole new life after her family relocates from New Jersey to New York City. Although Lizzy knows the move to the city is the best thing for her dad, who is living with multiple sclerosis, she can’t help worrying that she’ll never fit in. Things start to look up when Lizzy becomes friends with Cassie, a fellow swimmer who lives in the building next door. Cassie introduces Lizzy to new friends and includes her in a secret club. As a different world of people and places opens up to Lizzy, she must deal with all the complicated feelings that come with big life changes. She is worried about starting a new school and deeply misses her old friends in New Jersey. Most confusing of all, she is both troubled and embarrassed by her dad’s deteriorating health. Clemans does an excellent job tackling the issues, both large and small, and the accompanying range of emotions that Lizzy is facing. The author handles Lizzy’s very real feelings about her dad’s disease with great care while deftly portraying the other hurdles, such as peer pressure and fitting in, that make up the daily lives of most adolescents. The author’s narrative, particularly appropriate for tweens who are struggling with upheavals in their lives or families, also features a diverse cast of characters. Lizzy with pale skin and freckles, envies Cassie’s “gorgeous skin…like coffee ice cream.” Funny emails from Lizzy to her friends back in New Jersey and sweet sketches help provide a window into the girl’s world.

A well-written tale for tweens that may spark conversations about dealing with crucial changes.
Sura Jeselsohn

Jeselsohn’s Essays Go Way Beyond “Stop and Smell the Roses”

By Hannah Guy

“IT’S A CONTINUOUS SOURCE of amazement and amuse-
ment,” says author Sura Jeselsohn. But at this particular
moment, she’s not talking about plants, flowers, pre-
historic rock formations, or even the notion of “deep
time,” where one refers to time in terms of millions and
billions of years. No, Jeselsohn is talking about how
positively New Yorkers have responded to her column,
“Green Scene,” published weekly in the Riverdale Press,
the same column that’s spawned hundreds of essays,
the very best of which have been collected in Jeselsohn’s

Within its pages, Jeselsohn’s botanical wander-
lust collides joyfully with science, paleontology, and
her warm and frank voice as she explores not only the
natural world in her travels, but also the mysteries that
we take so much for granted close to home. Mysteries
that, in some cases, were formed millions of years ago or,
in others, we observe growing, slumbering, and awaken-
ing over the course of each season in our own backyards.

Jeselsohn, who graduated with a Master of Sci-
ence from NYU with an eye on a career in biomedical
research before focusing on her family, now spends her
retirement exploring her home and our planet. With
eager, curious eyes, she focuses on the things so many
of us have stopped noticing. A Habit of Seeing, it turns
out, isn’t just a collection of essays for gardeners and pale-
ontology buffs. In what Kirkus Reviews calls a “lucidly
informative tour of the natural world’s astonishing com-
plexity, cheerfully conveyed,” Jeselsohn’s book is some-
thing of a philosophical ramble through our planet’s
varied and fascinating ecosystems and history. And in
order to share her wonder, all you have to do is look.

“It’s not that I see more,” says Jeselsohn thoughtfully
from her home in Riverdale, New York. “It’s that I think
I somehow register more, because I know when I walk
with people—let’s say we’re hiking or something like
that—and I’ll say, ‘Wow, look at that.’ And they’ll look
and be, like, ‘Huh?’ And this goes on all the time….It can
be very distracting, you understand. But it means I’m
a little bit all over the place in terms of what I see and
interact with, as well as what I’m interested in.”

With her book now in the library collections of the
New York Botanical Garden and the National Museum
of American History, Jeselsohn is finally able to share
her writing beyond her neighborhood. Her science
background and voracious love of learning seem to meld
almost seamlessly with what can only be described as a
poet’s soul and appreciation for beauty beyond a fleet-
ing thought or moment. Look closer, her essays seem to
whisper. Really see it from a fresh perspective. But Jeselsohn
doesn’t just want you to see the natural world around us and even beneath our feet. She wants us to interact with it and to move through a world imbued with all of our available senses.

“Sometimes you have to be a little careful about being adventuresome,” she admits, adding that not every plant should be touched (for example, poison ivy). “But a lot of things have a scent, and you’ll see a lot of gardeners walk around and touch things. First of all, just to touch it and see what texture it is. But also many things are scented…. So for me…it’s a very strong interaction between texture and scents.”

And that awareness and appreciation of fragrance has often sent Jeselsohn in search of particular plants and blooms, such as when she and her husband were enjoying the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, Richmond, United Kingdom, and she encountered something that smelled simply incredible. Finding it, however, was another matter.

“We were in the tropical conservatory, and my husband and I were—well, we go at different paces. People who are not as interested as I am will just walk through. ‘It’s very nice, I saw that, I saw that.’ ” Jeselsohn laughs, adding that people often run out of patience with her when she’s in her element. “And all of a sudden, there’s this fabulous scent. I mean, fabulous. Now, when you have eighteen different plants with flowers, which one is it?”

She describes this botanical encounter in *A Habit of Seeing*:

It always amazes me that plants, which presumably have no aesthetic sense—or do they?—have flowers of such extraordinary structural complexity and surprising coloration…. As I was walking down a particular aisle, the most extraordinary floral scent practically overpowered me. I retraced my steps several times in an effort to locate the responsible plant. As you know, your scent receptors wear out rapidly for a given scent, so it took several passes, with me sniffing each set of flowers, before I zeroed in on the right plant. It turned out that it has the unpronounceable name *Hedychium flavescens* (hed-i-kiyum fla-ves-ens) and is a member of the ginger family (*Zingiberaceae*). It is known colloquially as the cream garland-lily, yellow ginger, or cream ginger. I decided then and there that I had to have one.

There is the sense that Jeselsohn’s love of the natural world goes beyond just simple appreciation and environmentalism. It’s a means for readers to not just understand the existence of these wonders, but to place them in context of the history of our planet and life itself. Because for Jeselsohn, thinking of life in terms of “deep time” isn’t just context and scope, but a means of moving through the world and appreciating it for all its wonder and variation.

“I find something very comforting about it. Most people seem to find it terrifying,” she says. After all, Jeselsohn points out, in the cosmological sense, our planet isn’t immortal. “Human life span is so short compared to the—I think of it as the majesty of progression, maybe. And that doesn’t necessarily mean complexity. Just the option of all this time to work out the destiny of this planet. I mean, talk about waxing philosophical! But to me, I’m someplace between evolution and cosmology.”

Hannah Guy lives in Toronto and is a professional writer and copywriter who specializes in books, books, and more books.
A shy but imaginative girl struggles to make friends until she overcomes her fears in Daniel-Ayoade’s picture book, illustrated by newcomer Logina.

Third grader Kayla sits alone every lunch period. She wants to approach Naomi, Samantha, and Bianca to ask whether she can sit with them, but she’s afraid; her shyness makes her hold back. She thinks of her grandmother’s advice: “Face your fear, Kayla. What’s the worst that could happen?” Unfortunately, Kayla’s imagination is so vivid, she can come up with a lot of horrible results. She sits alone, and later, she avoids finding a partner in gym by hiding in the bathroom. At home, Kayla confesses to her brother, Eric, that she’s been avoiding her schoolmates because she fears what might happen: “Eric grunted a reply. He had autism and didn’t speak, but she knew he meant, ‘I know how you feel. Next time, take a deep breath and try to stay calm.’” The next day, when Naomi hands Kayla a party invitation, Kayla breathes deeply and accepts. At the party, Kayla soon forgets to feel shy and—with the encouragement of her new friend and an incentive to win a gift for her brother—finds the courage to sing for the guests. Some pages have just a couple of lines of text and others 10 or more, but Daniel-Ayoade’s straightforward narrative is inviting, even in the more text-dense pages. The open-ended titular question is answered in Kayla’s own imaginings, depicted in Logina’s soft-edged cartoonlike illustrations. While Kayla’s fears of being mocked are understandable, her imagined consequences finally become so ridiculous, as comically depicted by Logina, that readers will laugh along with her. Kayla and another girl have different shades of brown skin and curly hair, a third girl is pale and blonde, and Naomi is depicted as Asian American, but the text doesn’t call attention to the cast’s ethnicities (beyond giving Naomi the surname “Lau,” a variant on the Chinese “Liu”), making their differences feel natural.

A sympathetic protagonist finds common ground with a diverse group of friends.

HURRICANE WARNING
Poems
Defibaugh, Matthew Ryan
Self (58 pp.)
978-1-69078-827-0

In his second book of poetry, Defibaugh explores love and loss and living with a disability. Defibaugh began writing in his early teens, or roughly when he was confined to a wheelchair as a result of Duchenne muscular dystrophy. His debut collected 16 years’ worth of poetry, from his amateur beginnings to his later, more mature verse. This second book also deals with coming to terms with illness but with a greater sense of self-assuredness and poetic dexterity. The collection is divided into three parts—“Virginia Beach,” “Red Flags,” and “Broken Shells”—which underscore a coastal theme prevalent throughout. The collection opens at a point of innocence when the poem “Virginia Beach, 1990” offers a tableau of a small child making sand castles: “She’s flipping over / a fifteen-cent sand bucket, / her first real castle, / hastily constructed under / a flimsy yellow sun.” In a nod to imagism, Defibaugh deftly captures a fleeting and serene moment in the child’s life that is unselfconsciously carefree, soon to be interrupted by the turbulence of experience. He presents the trials of life in various forms that include stifling parental authority in “Bars”: “Being guarded isn’t the freedom / she was born deserving.” “Selective Service Exemption” links disability and estrangement in the phrase “how to love without being loved.” Defibaugh’s poetry has a cumulative impact. The poem “Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy” charts the progression of the poet’s illness from his diagnosis at age 4, remarking: “Pines replaced peers repulsed by awkward moving. / Nature disregarded disability.” Elsewhere the comfort of exploring nature is torn away by further deterioration: “By fourteen, I could not navigate the forest / Or even hobble from room to room.” Admirers of Defibaugh’s debut collection will note that this one has fewer moments of levity, and excursions into comedy can prove mordantly dark. In “vs. Modern Medicine” the poet notes: “Waiting for a cure is silly; / this chair will be my resting place, / and I’d settle even sooner / if it had a higher voltage.” This is a deep emotional excavation of hardship, carefully conceived and keenly executed from the author of Dynamic Parts (2014).

Tender yet mournful writing by a sharply observant poet.
This fantasy debut features a team that hunts monsters from parallel realms during World War I.

It is 1914, and the well-dressed Countess Mathilde von Covey is attending a meeting of “seditious Bosnian Serbs” in Sarajevo’s Kafe Zemljak. There, she encounters the diminutive Gavrilo Princip. He intends to make his mark on history; and, after falling under Covey’s strange spell, he hears her say, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” Princip goes on to assassinate Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, which instigates the Great War. Covey isn’t merely alluring, she’s possessed by the Dream Whisperer, an interdimensional being capable of manipulating human hosts, dreams, and global events. The creature’s true goal is to awaken the Sleepers, unearthly beasts that will act in concert as gate openers, ultimately allowing the Outer Gods to return and breed chaos. A handful of talented individuals have committed to stopping Covey, including Cmdr. Fleming of the British Secret Service; Mycroft Holmes, brother of the famous detective Sherlock Holmes; and Dr. Rebecca Mumm of the Museum of Natural History in Paris. When Covey succeeds in waking two Sleepers, Fleming helps destroy them. The heroes then use a rare travel guide by esoteric scholar Friedrich von Junzt to locate temples in Borneo, Bolivia, and elsewhere that house dormant Sleepers. To protect against interlopers, Covey keeps her manservant, the hulking Moloch, nearby. Yet should anything happen to the Dream Whisperer’s current body, he can always jump to another.

Draym’s series opener is a deep crawl through the historical trenches, the first half of which covers the years 1914 to 1917 before jumping to 1921. Much like Kim Newman’s Anno Dracula novels, this adventure peppers keen-eyed readers with references to everything from Jack the Ripper to 1908’s Tunguska event. Mycroft is a wonderful presence who at one point explains that Arthur Conan Doyle invented the nonexistent Watson to “offset my brother’s brilliance.” Throughout the book, whenever Draym sets a scene, readers are treated to a colossal amount of historical background. Realistic portraits of battlefields like Ypres make the ensuing supernatural moments that much more exciting. The author shows the same impressive flair for bringing believable science to the narrative. After studying a Sleeper’s corpse, Mumm says: “The cell walls are exceptionally rigid,” as in fungi, and yet “one would expect polysaccharides in there as long-chain polymers like chitin.” Readers also get the pulpy descriptions that help any genre fan get their kicks.

A fiercely independent young woman meets a nearly perfect firefighter and reconsiders her personal commitment to staying single in this sexy contemporary romance. Willa Frank may have grown up with an alcoholic single dad who struggled to support his family, but she now owns a successful business, and she’s not about to let anything threaten her success, least of all a man. To that end, she has a long-held policy that she won’t go on more than two dates with the same guy. Willa’s system seems to be working just fine until she meets Grady Billman. Approached by Grady during a girls’ night out, Willa first thinks he’s a stripper. Grady is actually a smokejumper who leaps from planes to put out fires for a living, a job that requires long periods of travel and makes him totally ill-suited for a relationship. Willa’s supposition that Grady is the perfect guy for her next two dates quickly proves problematic when date No. 1 sizzles with unique and electric chemistry. In order to circumvent Willa’s two-date rule, she and Grady devise increasingly ridiculous rationales as to why subsequent meetups don’t “count” as dates. (Hiking isn’t a date because there’s nothing romantic about exercise.) As they spend more time together, Willa begins to question her personal policies. Unfortunately, when she lets her guard down, she loses a big client and takes it out on Grady, making it unclear whether she will ever get out of her own way and allow herself true happiness. Told in the third person, the story shows both Willa’s and Grady’s thoughts throughout. As fun and flirty as the book first appears, Willa has serious anxiety caused by her difficult upbringing, and Grady has deep commitment issues of his own. Fenske, the author of Snowbound Squeeze (2020), handles these issues with insight and grace throughout this fast-paced, nuanced tale. The author also manages to include several interesting details about the lives of smokejumpers without interrupting the swift flow of the action-packed plot. Complete with hot sex scenes, snarky double-entendres, slapstick humor, and quirky girlfriends, this comedic romp through modern-day dating checks all the romance boxes.

A playful and engaging commentary on the pitfalls of attachment phobia.
A woman takes on powerful mining interests while serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ghana in Fischer's debut novel.

Twenty-nine-year-old civil engineer Louisa Lehmann challenges the profit-driven company West Africa Gold to redress the harmful consequences of its gold-mining operation. Her predecessor, Lynn Lubic, formed an organization known as “the Advocacy” after her research showed that WAG’s new dam was contaminating local water supplies with cyanide, arsenic trioxide, and other heavy metals. Lehmann is up against mine manager Finn Harrigan, a quintessential corporate villain with a callous attitude, a room-length desk, and a smoking habit. The strength of Fischer’s novel rests on Lehmann—a delightful, complicated character—and the keen attention that the character gives to the interrogative mode, as when she wonders, “How long does it take to walk past someone who is walking toward you?” She constantly reevaluates her internal life in an honest way and digs into her familial strife, her high-achieving childhood in Bakersfield, California, and her difficult relationship to establishment feminism, wondering at one point: “With what license could the feminists discount the lives of the men with whom I worked?” Later, as she works for and alongside local Ghanaians, she experiences ecstatic encounters with the divine. When Harrigan attempts to frame her and her organization for a crime, she at last stands up to WAG in memorable style. Lehmann never quite moves past the possessive attitude that she has toward Ghana at the story’s outset (“It is ugly and it is mine”), but she otherwise mines her psyche so deeply that readers can almost forget this lack of growth.

A consistently engaging work with a well-developed main character.
An exciting, well-written blend of thriller and historical reconstruction.

**STRANGE KARMA**
**Healy, Willow**
Manuscript (356 pp.)

In Healy’s novel, a young woman inherits a fortune and a mystery.

American Cynthia Graham assumed that her estranged grandmother had died years ago, so when a British solicitor approaches her with news of an inheritance, she’s more than a little surprised. The legacy is a neglected cottage in the Lake District of England, some land, and a small amount of money.

**BURNING JUSTICE**
**Green, Marti**
Yankee Clipper Press (296 pp.)
Apr. 28, 2020
978-0-9881980-4-3

A dedicated lawyer works to exonerate an innocent woman on death row for the murder of her three children in a legal thriller by the author of *The Good Twin* (2018).

In the late 1990s, Becky Whitlaw was a young working-class mother in Glen Brook, Texas, when her husband, Grady, was killed in an auto accident. Nine months later, a 23-year-old widow with two toddlers and a new baby, Becky feels old and exhausted, and her life seems out of control. She even wonders sometimes if she wouldn’t be better off if her children had never been born. When her house is consumed by flames with her children inside as she sobs on the porch, “It’s my fault,” it doesn’t take long for investigators to conclude that she set the fire herself. In spite of her denials, she is charged and brought to a courtroom and family drama.

A veteran author of novels about legal injustices, Green is a masterful storyteller, and her narrative fascinates from the first page to the last as she approaches her with news of an inheritance, she’s more than a little surprised. The legacy is a neglected cottage in the Lake District of England, some land, and a small amount of money.

Cynthia finds a cryptic letter, written by her great-grandmother Emma, among her grandmother’s things and then discovers a red gemstone hidden in a desk’s secret compartment. It’s not just any gem; it’s a red diamond, one of the most valuable stones on Earth. Moreover, she finds a batch of letters that indicates that she’s the great-granddaughter of Sandy Irvine, George Mallory’s climbing partner on the ill-fated 1924 Mount Everest ascent. Irvine, it turns out, acquired two gemstones from a local during that trip—only one of which reached Emma. Intrigued by the provenance of the diamond and the whereabouts of its twin, Cynthia heads to Kathmandu, where, aided by Gurkha ex-soldier Dorje, she sets about getting to the top of a mountain and the bottom of a mystery. It turns out that someone else acquired the second diamond through nefarious means and is hell-bent on getting the first. What ensues is an exciting, well-written blend of thriller and historical reconstruction; the latter element feels generic at times, but it’s convincing nonetheless. The quality of the prose is strong throughout, with the depiction of the frozen wasteland of the Himalayas being particularly effective. Things fall apart a bit in the closing chapters, though, with the risky and arguably unnecessary introduction of a mythological element that threatens to undermine the realism of what has gone before. That aside, this is an assured piece of writing from a promising new author.

An intriguing, if somewhat uneven, blend of historical speculation and fast-paced thriller.

**ENEMY OF THE GODS**
**Hofsetz, C.**
Chracatoa Press (376 pp.)
$14.95 paper | $5.99 e-book
Mar. 20, 2020
978-1-951832-00-1

An SF adventure novel set in a land of dreams.

Hofsetz follows up his SF novel *Challenges of the Gods* (2019) with this second installment, which sees protagonist Zeon in his second year in prison on Jora. Zeon hails from that planet, which is very similar to Earth, although his sentence is carried out in a place that brings to mind a desert island more than someplace like Alcatraz. One day, he receives a visit from Dooria, the vice governor of the Atlantic Alliance. She wants to send Zeon to Pangea, a place “where our consciousness goes when we’re asleep, while our bodies stay behind,” as Zeon describes it. As it turns out, Zeon is an angel who’s meant to protect Pangea, where a war between gods is raging. Zeon is initially hesitant to help, but he receives a personal message from Jane, whom he knows well, which convinces him that the mission is worthwhile. The pages that follow offer all sorts of SF wildness involving parallel universes, wacky outfits, a “bug general,” and loads of action involving hyperspheres—“holographic environments inside Pangea, created by the messengers of the gods.” From the outset, the narrative is as complex as it is ambitious. Readers learn much about Pangea and the rules that govern a
place so fantastical and dangerous. Although a plethora of characters march through the story, the focus remains on quirky Zeon, who’s hardly a stereotypical action hero: He doesn’t care for killing, he likes his alcohol sweet, and his idea of great sexual activity involves tickling. In a world that’s dense with rules and conflict, he doesn’t take himself too seriously. He is, in other words, a welcome change from the average laser-blasting SF-action protagonist. Following his journey isn’t always easy, but it never fails to entertain.

An often dense story with a refreshingly unique hero.

BOON ON THE MOON
Huddles, John
Notable Kids Publishing (216 pp.)
978-0-9970851-8-1

A young troublemaker on Earth has a chance to be a hero on the moon when he and other colonists face a natural disaster in this middle-grade SF tale.

Byron Barnett’s stirring imagination as well as a device he calls a “biomass transducer” allow him mentally to visit the moon and converse with José Ignacio, a 12-inch toy robot he sees as 7 feet tall. But the Arizonan’s love of adventure sometimes clashes with his parents’ rules. When he defies parental orders and spends his Saturday splunking, he gets stuck and needs police assistance. Now he’s in legal trouble for excessive use of emergency and utility services. To avoid a hefty fine and hard labor, the Barnetts accept the judge’s third sentence option, “corrective exile.” It’s on the moon, and the entire family can go, as Byron’s engineer father already has a job offer pending there. Along with his parents, the almost 10-year-old Byron and his older brother, Taji, make the move, and he’s soon taking the “lunar school bus” to school and sometimes exploring his new world on his own. But threatening conflict, he doesn’t take himself too seriously. He is, in other words, a welcome change from the average laser-blasting SF-action protagonist. Following his journey isn’t always easy, but it never fails to entertain.

An often dense story with a refreshingly unique hero.

PUANANI AND THE VOLCANO
Jeffries, Jo Ann
Illus. by Lydia and Isata of Worlds Beyond Art
Bluewater Publications (68 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Feb. 10, 2020
978-1-949711-05-9

After the 2018 eruption of the Kilauea volcano, a young girl organizes a beach cleanup in this debut illustrated chapter book for kids ages 5 to 8.

Puanani, a brown-skinned Hawaiian elementary schooler who loves turtles, is feeling nervous about giving a science presentation to her class. Then a mysterious earthquake interrupts the day’s lessons. After the students emerge from under their desks, school ends for the day. Puanani and her brother, Kua, learn from the night’s news reports that Kilauea is erupting and sending lava into the sea. Both of them are afraid until their parents talk with them about how to stay safe if another earthquake strikes. Puanani gives her science presentation without a hitch the next day, but she’s sad when a park ranger at Volcano Park later tells her that Kilauea’s lava kills sea life, including the turtles she loves, as it spills into the sea. She’s also unhappy to hear that people cause more harm to the sea than volcanoes—she wants turtles and other creatures to have “a clean place to live”—and sees refuse like fish hooks and partial fishnets along a shoreline that she and her family visit. Puanani begins to pick up trash and eventually gets help from her parents and a hui wa’a (canoe club) after she plucks up the nerve to speak to its board. Very little conflict occurs in the book’s 11 quick chapters; while Puanani is afraid of public speaking, she prepares copiously and encounters no significant difficulties in the moment. Young readers interested in sea life and volcanic activity will appreciate paragraphs detailing lava flow, and others may enjoy learning the italicized Hawaiian words that occur throughout the text and are defined in a box at the beginning of each short chapter. Bright, full-color illustrations depict key scenes; most adults and children are shown with different shades of brown skin and dark hair.

For high drama, look elsewhere—but a diverse cast and contemporary setting set this book apart from other volcano books.

THE SAGA OF OL’ RAUSCH
The Rauschmonstrum Collection
LaTorre, Nick
Nick Daydreams (250 pp.)
Dec. 25, 2019
978-1-73443-350-0

A supernatural being searches for meaning in the human world in this novel by LaTorre.
As this story begins, an amorphous, inhuman being called the Rauschmonstrum has existed about as long as humanity has been on Earth—but all that time, he’s felt truly alone. There’s no other entity like him, and he suffers from a profound lack of purpose and direction. For this reason—and for the sake of “a few chuckles” on his part—the Rauschmonstrum decides to intervene in human history in order to make some kind of mark. Humans want guidance, he observes, and a moral code set in stone; the Rauschmonstrum is aware that there is no God and, as a result, humanity lacks a “divine master.” He volunteers himself for the job, and he quickly decides to inspire a human from Nazareth named Jesus to live a morally exemplary life and lay out a moral framework for humankind. Much to the Rauschmonstrum’s surprise, Jesus is not in on the “abused joke that has been played on him,” up to and including the crucifixion. The monstrous protagonist then decides to turn Jesus’ death to his advantage, using his vast powers to convince people of Jesus’ resurrection (“If I do this, then the myths about him will never die,” he thinks). “Nothing is bigger than coming back from the dead”). The Rauschmonstrum later becomes a strange kind of media star—living through the centuries and interacting with humans as a well-known but otherworldly celebrity.

In the first of the novel’s three sections, readers follow the Rauschmonstrum as he shadows Jesus during the key moments of the Gospels, offering an effective, cynical counterpoint to traditional moralizing about the Rauschmonstrum himself, whom it sim- ply presents as a flat fact of existence—and a surprisingly likable one, at that. The book’s third section, which is essentially one long encounter between the Rauschmonstrum and Jesus, is the most strained, but the book’s overall cheery tone remains consistent throughout.

A strange but ultimately beguiling account of the life and times of mankind’s oddest companion.
them find their mother, the missing astrophysicist Dr. Octavia Jongler. But Arky came back empty-handed. Now it’s finally Iris’ turn. When the so-called Horn of Angels begins to play on its own, the mists that flow from it carry her back to Paris in 1894, at the height of the belle époque. The only problem is that Arky has somehow traveled back with her. “It wasn’t fair. He’d had his time voyage; why did he have to spoil hers?” Luckily, they quickly get wind of a Madame Jongler who performs as a spider woman at the famous Moulin Rouge. They are finally reunited with Octavia, but bringing her back to the present is not so simple. “While a Jongler can use the cor anglais to send a troubled soul to the past,” goes the legend, “the voyager must discover what’s needed from the past on their own.” Stuck in one of the past’s most colorful locales, Iris must find the lesson that they’re all supposed to learn before they can go home—if they even want to go home at all. Meehl’s prose mixes humor with sumptuous period details: “When the out-of-control bicyclist just missed an elderly man in the street, the old man shook his cane at the two-wheeled terrorist and yelled, ‘There should be a law against those damn machines!’” The novel features the requisite appearances by period figures like Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec, and fans of the series will enjoy watching Iris excitedly fatigable Jongler-Jinkses all along.

A family-centered time-travel adventure with a lot of heart.

FOR THOSE WHO DARE
Miller, John Anthony
Self (366 pp.)
Dec. 10, 2019
978-1-67386-263-8

A novel traces how the construction of the Berlin Wall affects a group of residents. In the early hours of Aug. 13, 1961, Kirstin Beck leaves her house in East Berlin with the intention of seeking refuge in the city’s Western sector. Doing so means leaving behind her husband, an older college professor with strong socialist convictions, but opens the door to new freedoms away from the oppressive Communist government. Yet as she approaches the border, she finds it milling with guards and workmen. In the following days, as barbed wire blockades are being constructed, it becomes clear that the perimeter is closing for good. Like many others, Kirstin has family in West Berlin that she may never see again, including her aging grandmother. Her only remaining option is to seek help from an acquaintance on the other side of the wall, an American writer named Tony Marino. With his foreign passport, Tony is one of the few able to cross the border at will. After a series of clandestine meetings, he finds himself committed to helping Kirstin and several of her neighbors. Among their number are Dieter Katz, a student undergoing rehabilitation for an attempted escape, and Jacob Werner, a former Nazi doctor under government scrutiny. As the operation grows, the danger mounts, and the government seems to always be a step ahead of their plans. With Stasi (the East German secret police) informants hidden among friends and family, it is impossible to know for sure who can be trusted. Miller includes many well-researched historical details, crafting a rich and descriptive setting. While the harrowing story focuses mainly on Kirstin and Tony, the point of view often shifts to members of the supporting cast. This allows for insight into the minds of many characters without ever revealing their true motives. The novel’s romantic elements are well executed, introducing an endearing subplot and further increasing the emotional stakes. The writing is full of tension and excitement, with compelling and realistically rendered characters. Although the ending is perhaps too neat, the buildup is riveting.

A suspenseful and moving work of historical fiction set in a divided Germany.

UNTAMED PASSIONS
Poems
N'Dalla, Alain
iUniverse (66 pp.)
Sep. 30, 2019
978-1-5320-8191-0

A debut collection delivers graphic poems about “Love’s terrors.” The epigraph for N’Dalla’s verse collection is from “The Raven”; it features the famous line “dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before.” But if the author is borrowing anything from Poe, it’s less daring dreams than the writer’s flair for gothic horror—and no small amount of gore. The book’s “Preface” is an uncredited, black-and-white illustration of a bare hand breaking into a glass flask to retrieve a bloody, anatomically correct human heart. The volume’s first piece is aptly titled “Jar of Hearts.” That poem ends: “I found that jar and became incensed / when I saw my throbbing heart wince and stowed / in cold blood amongst hearts that beat no more; / I fell prey to Love’s terrors and its lore.” Behind the text on this page—and all the rest—is an image of a thick liquid that appears to be blood dripping down and smeared behind the letters. N’Dalla is certainly bold. Many of the other pieces in the book are similarly striking. “Negatives From Your Photograph” features the speaker ejaculating on a picture of his one-time lover: “Saliva and semen drying, / staining a once fond face— / now a feast for flies. / Familiarity breeds contempt. / ... / On that window pane you will hang, / crucified by that pitied nail, / on display for all to see.” Such graphic imagery lingers, and the speaker’s pain—and his spite—haunts even more mundane poems like “Scrabble” and “Pretzel.” Of course, that’s part of the point: The most wrenching heartbreaks have a tendency to color all memories of loves past, darkening cherished moments both
moving and mundane. Some readers will undoubtedly dismiss the poet’s more explicit works as vulgar. But those who don’t will appreciate the brutally honest rendering of a soul laid bare. Raw, arresting poetry about the torments of heartache and loss.

SWALLOWED BY A SECRET
Nyman, Risa
Imortal Works (198 pp.)
$12.02 paper | $4.99 e-book
Jan. 21, 2020
978-1-73438-661-5

In Nyman’s middle-grade debut novel, a 12-year-old boy who hears the voice of his late father tries to unravel the mystery of his dad’s death. After losing his father, Ronald “Rocky” Casson Jr. and his mother leave Whitman, Massachusetts, for Milton. His new town is in the same state and relatively close, but Rocky still has to leave his friends. Having moved during a school year, he suffers new-kid woes, like becoming an easy target for Max the bully. But he quickly finds a friend in Olive, who tutors him in geography. Rocky’s primary worry involves his dad; after overhearing one of his mother’s conversations, he believes she lied to him about how his father died when she claimed his dad’s heart merely stopped. She also doesn’t want Rocky visiting Whitman, even to sign up for the summer soccer clinic there, and hasn’t given him a satisfying explanation for why he has to avoid the town. His father’s voice, however, which suddenly and regularly pops up in his head, tells him that answers lie in Whitman. Rocky ultimately confides in Olive, who concocits clever plans, including a way to sneak a peek at his file in the school counselor’s office. But after Rocky finally decides to return to his hometown, he braves a two-hour bike ride that will prove arduous and, Olive fears, dangerous as well. Nyman’s engaging tale features two immensely likable characters in Rocky and Olive. Though headstrong, savvy Olive is the standout, Rocky is a relatable protagonist, as his occasional peevishness is understandable. With Rocky’s goal established early, the story moves at a steady clip. Even a subplot (involving a camping trip with his uncle that leads to an emergency) neither feels extraneous nor decelerates the pace. In his charming first-person narrative, Rocky effortlessly drops quotable passages: “Monday mornings wouldn’t be such a drag if school started on Tuesdays.” Meanwhile, the father’s voice, though he insists he’s no ghost, is largely open to interpretation. And though most readers will decipher what Rocky’s mom is hiding from him, the ending is dramatically satisfying.

Sensational tween characters propel this lighthearted but sentimental tale.

ASTROBIA
A Sonny and Breanne Mystery
Paavola, James C.
Manuscript

Two eighth graders use supernatural powers to investigate why teens are disappearing through a school library window, among other mysteries, in this third middle-grade series installment.

Paavola, whose most recent novel is Call Me Firefly (2019), spins another paranormal adventure featuring Sonny Etherly, an African American youth who’s being raised by his grandmother, and his friend Breanne Thurman, who’s white. Both kids are fascinated by science, including esoteric ideas involving string theory and the concept of alternative worlds. Sonny and Breanne also have the ability to read each other’s minds and communicate with ghosts. A mystery is afoot when Sonny spies the number “202” written on a transom window in the school library. The kids soon encounter the ghost of Lorene Turner, a former school librarian, who last saw her brilliant teenage grandson, Bennett, when he disappeared through that very window 16 years before. Then Sonny and Breanne discover that he’s not the only person to have vanished in the same manner. In clear prose and short chapters with lots of cliffhangers, Paavola deftly integrates the supernatural (including the ghost of a Boston bulldog named Con) with more mundane mystery elements. Sonny and Breanne emerge as an entertaining team whose powers don’t distract from their real-life concerns. Breanne, for instance, has an especially close relationship with her grandfather, a retired police officer who’s still trying to crack a cold case involving the murder of a Vietnamese bank manager. Sonny, meanwhile, relies on his grandfather to help him deal with the death of his mom, who served in the U.S. Air Force in Afghanistan, and his feelings about his father, a U.S. Marine who’s still stationed there. At one crucial moment, Sonny even hears his grandmother’s advice in his head, urging him to be like his father: “Don’t let fear stop you. Figure a way out.”

A suspenseful, page-turning new episode in a lively paranormal mystery series.

GRACE’S GHOSTS
Peterson, Stephanie Wilson
Immortal Works (178 pp.)
Apr. 28, 2020
978-1-73438-662-2

Grace’s best friends are ghosts. So how can she say no when they ask her for help? It’s summer vacation, and 12-year-old Grace, the book’s relatable narrator, is happy to leave the daily bullying at school behind. Labeled a weirdo and a loner, Grace does have friends: the ghosts she has interacted with all her life. So when
Grace learns from them that a 300-year-old curse is keeping the ghosts in her small mountain town from moving on to their eternal rest—and that she might be able to help them—she agrees to try. Can Grace break the curse? And do witches—and mages, fairies, and mermaids—really exist? More than magic is happening here, however. Most male characters are sympathetic, including classmate Bain, who offers warmth and support. But this spooky tale is primarily female-centered and grounded in positive messages, as are the author’s previous two books for middle schoolers: *Nellie Nova Takes Flight* (2016) and *Nellie Nova’s Summer on the Run* (2018), about a time-traveling girl scientist. Grace grows as she sheds patterns of self-doubt and fear to realize her unusual gifts. Her mom and grandmother face their own, similar challenges, deepening the author’s message. One unfortunate distraction: Grace’s intermittent description of her ghostly friends as “ghouls,” a word customarily meaning the evil undead.

Facing a dangerous, otherworldly challenge, a resourceful young heroine discovers her strength.
around her naked white form in long strips resembling the final
dress of a mummified being.” The result is an imaginative medi-
tation on Haiti’s beauties and discontents and the mark they
leave on a writer’s soul.

An engaging tale of fractured families trying to cobble
their identities back together.

**A JOURNEY WITHOUT A MAP**
*Stories of Loss, Grief, and Moving Forward*
Sardella, John R.
Lioncrest Publishing (140 pp.)
Feb. 14, 2020
978-1-5445-0753-8

This slim memoir and self-help book offers ideas for navigating grief.

In April 2010, Sardella’s wife, Margaret, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Devastated, the
couple worried how they could maintain a normal life for their three school-age children as she pursued treatment. In 2013, the
cancer metastasized to her liver, and after battling the disease for three more years, Margaret died in January 2017 at the age
of 51. In this book, Sardella tells how he still grapples with the
pain of Margaret’s death while continuing to move forward
with his life. He also includes reflections from family members,
including his children, and from friends, such as Margaret’s col-
lege roommate, and they relate their own experiences with grief.
Although there are no written exercises, meditations, or orga-
nized assignments for readers that one usually finds in self-help
books, there is heartfelt, worthwhile advice from experience.
He also compassionately tackles some difficult topics, such as
how he and his wife told the kids that their mother was dying
and how hard it was to clean out the bedroom after Margaret
was gone. There are upbeat ideas here, too, that may encourage
a person who’s battling a disease; for example, the day that Mar-
garet began her chemotherapy regimen, the author asked family
and friends to send surprise photos to her phone of themselves
wearing yellow—Margaret’s favorite color. Some of the author’s
creative ideas for overcoming grief can be helpful to society as
a whole; for example, he memorialized Margaret by setting up
a lacrosse scholarship in her name. But perhaps the best take-
away from the book is in how it shows how Sardella surrounds
himself with consistently supportive people. It also includes 25
pages of black-and-white family photos.

An engaging act of catharsis for the author and a gentle
embrace for grief-stricken readers.

**NUMBERS**

Sever, Greg
Burning Leaf Press (294 pp.)
Jan. 6, 2020
978-1-944293-44-4

A massive lottery jackpot prompts the denizens of a New Mexico city to
contemplate riches and greed.

In Sever’s debut novel, when a lot-
tery’s potential payout climbs as high as
$1 billion, it seems as if all the residents
of Albuquerque have random chances
and massive payoffs on their minds. The Rev. Jon Holiday and
his wife, Grace, for instance, have differing views on the subject.
Jon attempts to take a distant, philosophical, even slightly dis-
approving attitude, reminding his wife that greed is the root of
all evil, whereas Grace never misses an opportunity to tell her
husband that their strip-mall storefront church is perennially
low on funds and could immensely benefit from such an astro-
nomical injection of cash. “Every Monday morning,” when the
benevolent reverend is at his desk, his wife “counts out the mea-
ger Sunday collection in an irritating whisper before depositing
the money at the bank.” Lin Tanaka of the Zeniscapes landscap-
ing company tries to take a Zen-like stance on the chance of
winning. Guy Springfield wishes his accountant neighbor Nick
Sterling good luck in the lottery and is sternly told that win-
ing has nothing to do with luck: “It’s about crunching num-
bers and reducing the odds to zero—pure mathematics.” The
author moves his intriguing story forward with economical skill,
believable philosophical inquiry, and a good deal of dry humor.
When a pious member of the congregation mentions that
Grace is well named, for instance, she muses: “Her dear mother
was flying high on magic mushrooms at Woodstock and heard
Grace Slick singing ‘White Rabbit’ with Jefferson Airplane
when her perfectly named daughter was conceived.” Sever also
skillfully explores the characters’ yearnings. Nick is so certain
he’s cracked the math of the lottery that he’s already dreaming
of his post-victory fame: “In anticipation of that, he’s prepared
an eight-page treatise on the Grand Sterling Algorithm for Sci-
ence. Of course, he simplified the mathematics for his TED T
alk which he’s confident will happen.” The book deftly builds to a
climax that’s both funny and genuinely touching.

An effective and amusing lottery tale.
ENTREPRENUMBERS
The Surprisingly Simple Path to Financial Clarity
Sheinin, Spencer
Lioncrest Publishing (260 pp.)
$18.99 paper | $8.99 e-book
Feb. 14, 2020
978-1-5445-0418-6

An accountant proposes a new vision of his profession for the 21st century.

“Imagine how much better your business would be if you understood with perfect clarity all of the stories buried inside your financial statements and you could make decisions based on sound financial data, not just a hunch,” writes Sheinin in his nonfiction debut. “Also imagine if you could do that intuitively and quickly, without having to dig into the details of your financial statements.” Sheinin, drawing on his 20 years as a CPA and as founder of Shift Financial Insights, seeks in these pages to declutter and streamline the conversation between accountants and entrepreneurs, maintaining that his profession has largely failed entrepreneurs. “We have been handing them financial statements in our language, the language we went to school understood with perfect clarity all of the stories buried inside,” he writes. “They don’t, and they never will.” Sheinin lays out the accounting basics for the entrepreneurial reader, explaining the rudiments of how to read accounting charts and graphs and how to follow accounting processes (he also periodically addresses advice directly to other accountants). Some of his advice is fairly commonplace, involving basic tips like “don’t lose sight of the big picture.” But most of the book consists of clearly expressed explanations that could be invaluable to any reader who lacks an accounting background or who has one but could use a refresher course (or is wondering how to explain vital concepts to accounting clients). Sheinin is an able, enthusiastic guide to his financial craft, slowly increasing the complexity of the material he covers as he layers the information from simple to advanced, giving entrepreneurs parallel paths depending on their circumstances. Entrepreneurs, bookkeepers, and business owners of all kinds will get a good deal of use out of Sheinin’s insights.

A highly readable, mystery-dispelling introduction for entrepreneurs to the world of accounting.

A VIEW FROM THE BORDERLINE
A Collection of Short Stories
Souby, Charles
Self (234 pp.)
Feb. 5, 2020
978-0-578-59169-8

A collection of tales that involve a quirky hodgepodge of comedy, romance, and satire from the author of A Shot of Malaria (2014).

In the opening story in this book, “Silver Slum Dog,” Leonard meets Hilda at a horse racetrack. The new acquaintances seem to connect, but Leonard may be too preoccupied with validating his betting system despite Hilda’s instinctual skill at picking winners—a situation described in a lighthearted tone, which all the tales herein showcase in some capacity but not every story maintains. In “Eloi Reduction,” Red Pupkin, a drunk well known to authorities, is determined to get into a popular Hollywood Boulevard club and simply dashes past the gatekeepers. That amusing setup turns horrifying when a police officer chases him—and encounters a scene of shockingly sadistic violence. Some of the author’s satire shows wit even when it’s bleak. In the case of “The Parable of the Nerd & the Antelope,” antelopes in Africa introduce human ideas into their midst but, like humanity, are soon in danger of spiraling into war and violence. Souby’s breezy prose eases readers into the assorted narratives, though it’s most effective with the handful of varied love stories. The titular tale, “Christa’s Case: A View From the Borderline,” is a romance between prep school students in 1973, one of whom a doctor has diagnosed with a borderline personality disorder. This story is followed by one of love lost; in “Attack of the Poker Face,” Teddy is certain he understands how his wife tips her hand, a “little tell with her left nostril whenever she was bluffing,” and he uses this conviction to prove she’s having an affair. Souby periodically returns to a theme of war mongering humans versus the more peaceful animal kingdom; though the collection leans toward despondency, his final two stories end the book on positive notes.

Motley stories that engage, provoke, and entertain.
Zanoyan paints a vivid tableau of Armenia in the wake of Soviet oppression.

**WAKING NOAH’S VINES**

Zanoyan, Vahan
Bowker Identifier Services (209 pp.)
$15.95 paper | $5.95 e-book | Dec. 5, 2019
978-0-9983924-1-7

A tale of murder and organized crime revolves around the blooming of the Armenian wine industry following the nation’s independence from Soviet rule.

Armenia boasts a rich tradition of winemaking that stretches back 6,000 years, but it was ingloriously interrupted by the depredations of Soviet despotism. In this novel, two close friends and wine aficionados—Haig Koleyan and Van Dorian—are committed to reviving the long dormant industry, a devotion expressed with defiant enthusiasm by Haig: “The Soviets turned everyone’s life upside down, but they couldn’t change geography. Neither Marx nor Lenin nor Stalin could take away our terroir!” Haig leaves Italy, where he made his mark as a winemaker, for Yerevan. He starts his own business, Vinoma Consulting, and becomes a prestigious producer of well-regarded wines. Dorian opens The Realm, the “most popular wine bar in the city,” a place where “he could develop his theories about wine and human emotions.”

After being rudely visited by a Russian—a “nasty character” who demands inordinately large orders for a mysterious client—Haig suspects a conspiracy on the part of the Russian mob to fraudulently dilute and resell his finest wine. Zanoyan conjures an enchanting combination of the transcendently beautiful and barbarous. After Sergei Petyan, the associate of a successful but morally dubious Russian wine merchant, is murdered, and Isabelle Karayan, a former employee of Haig, is brutally beaten up, wine entrepreneur Aram Almayan uses his police connections to investigate. The author’s ardor for wine is unmistakable and his knowledge, impressively prodigious. In addition, he weaves discussions of wine into every crevice of human affairs—at one point, Dorian wonders what kind of wine would pair well with one’s “disillusionment with justice.” Further, Zanoyan paints a vivid tableau of Armenia in the wake of Soviet oppression, both the humiliation suffered under it and the exhilarating hope after. The novel will intoxicate readers with its rare mix of historical astuteness, literary skill, and well-crafted drama.

A delightful fictional blend of history, suspense, and a love of wine.
LEVAR BURTON WILL READ TO YOU ON TWITTER

To the delight of literature lovers everywhere, actor and Reading Rainbow host LeVar Burton has been reading stories for both kids and adults on Twitter.

Burton, whose handle is @levarburton, reads stories for children on Mondays, young adults on Wednesdays, and not-so-young adults on Fridays. Burton is well known to book lovers for hosting Reading Rainbow, the children’s television show that ran for 23 years on PBS. Last November, he hosted the National Book Awards ceremony in New York.

On Twitter, Burton’s fans reacted to the news with unalloyed glee. “Yay!! #levarburton is back reading to us!!!!” enthused author Jacqueline Woodson. And journalist Bobby Rivers wrote, “This country is lucky to have @levarburton. Can I get an ‘Amen’ on that?”

(Hey, Bobby: Amen.)

JAMES PATTERSON DONATING $500K TO INDIE BOOKSTORES

Author James Patterson is donating $500,000 to help independent bookstores who have found themselves in dire financial straits because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Patterson announced the donation on Twitter, explaining that he’s partnering with actress and book club maven Reese Witherspoon to provide financial assistance to indie booksellers. His tweet linked to a website called Save Indie Bookstores, which is soliciting donations for a fund that will provide financial relief to independent book retailers.

Patterson has long been a supporter of indie bookstores. Every year since 2015, he’s given holiday bonuses to some employees of the retailers. He told the Los Angeles Times that helping independent bookstores weather the coronavirus storm should be a priority for the book world.

“It’s just so important culturally that we’re paying attention to the written word, that people are communicating with the written word,” he said.

ANGIE THOMAS WRITING PREQUEL TO THE HATE U GIVE

Angie Thomas is heading back to Garden Heights with her third young adult novel, People magazine reports.

The author revealed the title and storyline of her upcoming novel, Concrete Rose, a prequel to her critically acclaimed 2017 book, The Hate U Give. Her new book is set 17 years earlier and follows Maverick Carter, the father of protagonist Starr.

In the book, according to publisher HarperCollins, Maverick comes to terms with becoming a father at the age of 17 and deciding to quit his job selling drugs for a street gang.

“Of all the characters who really just stayed with me, Maverick was at the top of that list,” Thomas told People. “And what was fascinating to me was once readers started reading The Hate U Give and then when the film came out, he was the character that I was asked about the most.”

The Hate U Give is one of the most critically acclaimed young adult novels of the decade. The book won the American Library Association’s William C. Morris Award and Coretta Scott King Award, was longlisted for the National Book Award for Young People’s Literature, and was named a finalist for the Kirkus Prize.

Concrete Rose is slated for publication on Jan. 12, 2021.
Anthropologists are curious, nosy creatures who poke into the oddest corners of cultures and look at the world in decidedly unusual ways—analyzing, for instance, whether a language has a different kinship term for one’s mother’s brother and one’s father’s brother, and if so, what that means. (In English, we have “uncle.” In Yanomamö, an Indigenous language in the Amazon, there’s haya for the former and soaya for the latter.)

The founder of the discipline, Franz Boas, traveled the world over to gather answers to such questions. He truly was nosy, and, when he didn’t get the answers he sought while visiting the South, he complained about the “affected demeanor by which the Negro excludes the White observer effectively from participating in his true inner life.” Not to be thwarted, he sent Zora Neale Hurston, an African American woman, into the field to gather data in his place.

Hurston chose her hometown of Eatonville, Florida, as her point of study. “I didn’t go back there so that the home folks could make admiration for me because I had been up North to college and come back with a diploma and a Chevrolet,” she wrote in the opening of her book *Mules and Men*, published in 1935. Instead, she wanted to be someplace safe, no small consideration in the Jim Crow South, where curiosity could easily kill a person of color.

She took her notebook and questions to the kitchens, parlors, and shops of old neighbors, who regaled her with what they called “lies”: folktales and folk wisdom that revealed their outlook on the world, things expressed, as one neighbor put it, “when we’re jus’ sittin’ around here on the store porch doin’ nothin’.” Many of those stories involved the strange ways of white people, offering subversive and humorous explanations for why things were the way they were. One story, for instance, recounts a foot race at the dawn of humankind in which a black man outruns a white competitor only to choose a prize bundle that contained a pick and shovel, a hoe, an ax. The white man picked a pen and ink. And so, the etiological tale concludes, the black man has ever since “been out in the hot sun, usin’ his tools and de white man’s been sittin’ up figgerin’.”

*Mules and Men* is a book full of subtle resistance. It marks the first time that an African American scholar was able to write about her own culture, delivering an anthropological and folkloric study from the “native’s point of view,” as Boas, her teacher, would have it. Hurston was a bit of a trickster herself, telling some people she was born in 1900, others in 1910. (As it happens, she was probably born in 1891.) She went on to produce an impressive body of work—numerous collections of folktales, a fine study of Haitian voodoo, novels, stories, and the extraordinary memoir *Dust Tracks on a Road*. All the same, she died in poverty in 1960, forgotten. The white nursing home administrators took her archive out back to be burned, but some of it was saved, and more books have followed, a boon for students of American culture.

*Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor.*
A riveting, bittersweet tale that highlights the intergenerational impact and power of memory.

Displacement

A teenager is pulled back in time to witness her grandmother’s experiences in World War II-era Japanese internment camps in this historical graphic novel.