I recently had the pleasure of attending an inspiring new exhibition at the New-York Historical Society in Manhattan. “Picture the Dream: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement Through Picture Books,” curated by award-winning author Andrea Davis Pinkney, shows how children’s books have depicted the civil rights struggle in America through the power and immediate appeal of art. The show is a stunner.

Eighty works by 40 artists hang on the walls of three galleries. You’ll likely recognize pictures from many of the classics of the last few decades: A Wreath for Emmett Till by Marilyn Nelson, illustrated by Philippe Lardy; A Place To Land by Barry Wittenstein, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney; If a Bus Could Talk: The Story of Rosa Parks by Faith Ringold; and Child of the Civil Rights Movement by Paula Young Shelton, illustrated by Raul Colón are just a few of the 60 books represented here. Seeing these illustrations outside the pages of a book—and in many cases at a scale larger than a book’s trim size—gives them added impact, reminding the viewer that these are works of art, full stop.

The exhibition is divided into three thematic sections. “The Backward Path” details the realities of life under Jim Crow segregation, including separate water fountains for Blacks and Whites, the challenges of interstate travel for Black Americans, and lynchings like that of Emmett Till. “This exhibit does not sugarcoat,” explains curator Pinkney. “The Rocks Are the Road” highlights the work of the civil rights movement such as marches, freedom rides, and lunch counter sit-ins. Pinkney wanted to emphasize the central role of young people in this activism. Finally, “Today’s Journey” connects the earlier struggle with present-day activism such as the Black Lives Matter movement and reflects the “opening up of publishing today to a diversity of voices,” Pinkney says.

That diversity is precisely what we aim to celebrate in this, our fourth annual Diversity Issue. Exhibitions like “Picture the Dream” remind us that children’s literature has an important role to play—not just in capturing a wide range of human experiences on the page, but in chronicling our history and our struggle. In their own way, these children’s books are as vital as documentaries such as Eyes on the Prize or histories like Taylor Branch’s Parting the Waters and its sequels.

Why else would diverse books be the target of a campaign of censorship that has seen books on race and racism, as well as LGBTQ+ themes, challenged and banned across the country? A new report by PEN/America, “Banned in the USA,” offers alarming details about right-wing efforts to keep such books out of the hands of young people. The report found 1,145 titles by 874 different authors, 198 illustrators, and 9 translators impacted by such efforts in the nine months from July 1, 2021, to March 31, 2022. Book bans were initiated in 86 school districts in 26 states, accounting for 2,899 schools with a combined enrollment of more than 2 million students.

Clearly, exhibits like “Picture the Dream” play a crucial role in commemorating the very books—and history—that are under attack in so many places. Our Diversity Issue has a role to play, too. And we will continue to celebrate the diversity of literature in all our issues, year-round.
The Kirkus Star is awarded to books of remarkable merit, as determined by the impartial editors of Kirkus.

Andrea Davis Pinkney, a celebrated author of books on Black history, pens an “eloquent tribute” to the friendship between civil rights icon John Lewis and Tybre Faw, the boy he inspired. Read the review on p. 110.
MOLDY STRAWBERRIES
Abreu, Caio Fernando
Trans. by Bruna Dantas Lobato
Archipelago (200 pp.)
$20.00 paper | May 31, 2022
978-1-953861-20-7

A stark collection of short stories from a Brazilian writer who creates specks of beauty with every stroke of the pen.

In Abreu’s collection of 18 stories, readers navigate through a Brazil lost in time, stuck in the impasse of tragedy, and gasping for air in a space void of it. In the opening story, “Dialogue,” Abreu sets a scene that determines the rest of the book. Two genderless interlocutors declare their friendship for one another in an ever revolving cycle of affection. Such is the binary that Abreu develops in all his stories: Two individuals struggle to find the words to identify their feelings, communicate with affect and sensations, and ultimately find peace in not knowing. Known for his often dizzying syntax and provocative imagery, Abreu writes with an ease that sticks and with an intention that triggers. “Too much culture kills people’s bodies, man, too many films, too many books, too many words, I could only consume you by masturbating, there was the entire Library of Alexandria keeping our bodies apart,” writes the narrator of “The Survivors.” Struggling through the surplus of material to make sense of their existence, Abreu’s characters prefer to put on a record, light up a cigarette, and watch time pass. “The room was still under that burgundy shade, dull, stagnant, with the old yellow cushion shining in the dark, strangely greenish now, in the blue streetlight. He gestured toward the telephone. He even took one step forward, as if he were about to go back. But he didn’t move.” They speak on the phone to their loved ones, they drink copiously, they dance, they sweat, they have sex, they die. Some might live their entire lives without looking beyond the cloud of cigarette smoke hovering directly in front of them. Some might collect funerals. Abreu remarkably captures a feeling that escapes definition, a proximity to death so palpable that the words scream its song. Abreu’s prose is still, rich, and full of time lost and time future.

A profoundly moving collection on surviving stillness.
PATRICIA WANTS TO CUDDLE
Allen, Samantha
Zando (256 pp.)
$27.00 | June 28, 2022
978-1-63893-004-4

Reality dating show contestants are pitted against each other and whatever lurks in the wilderness in this genre-defying fiction debut.

The Catch is down to its final four contestants, and the penultimate episode is taking place on Otters Island, a formerly famous “LGBTQ getaway” whose popularity declined after three hikers mysteriously disappeared in the 1990s. The women competing to marry smarmy tech company co-founder Jeremy Blackstone largely conform to stereotypes: Lilah-Mae is pro-prosperity gospel and anti–all things sexual; Amanda is an airhead obsessed with maintaining her social media presence; and Vanessa is the too-horny mean girl poised to be this season’s villain. Only Renee seems singular from the jump; she’s repulsed by Jeremy, coming to terms with her long-repressed attraction to women, and, as the only remaining Black contestant, keenly aware that she hasn’t been eliminated already because of optics. Allen pings among each contestant’s point of view (along with that of producer Casey) as they fight, film, and contemplate the possibility that there’s a dangerous cryptid in the surrounding woods, but most fun are the interspersed experiments in form, including posts from a Catch fan site and secret letters from a teen in 1972 to her girlfriend. The novel’s abbreviated length gets in the way of its impressive ambition; the transition from reality TV satire to gruesome horror is a little bumpy, and while Allen is clearly interested in letting her characters expand into complicated human beings, some readers may be left wanting more.

A one-of-a-kind queer horror comedy for people who watch The Bachelor and The X-Files back-to-back.

A teenager who has no idea she has blood connections to the mob.

“...Leatherbury shows real skill at building suspense and describing action...”

“A fast-paced novel that delivers engaging action...”

—Kirkus Reviews

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There’s no such thing as a diverse book; books can only be diverse when seen as a group that includes a mélange of different voices. And diversity equals pleasure when it comes to reading—the more diversely you read, the more opportunity to experience new worlds and new perspectives. Here are some suggestions for your reading pleasure this spring.

*Tender* by Jabari Asim (Simon & Schuster, Jan. 11): On a plantation called Placid Hall, the enslaved people, who call themselves the Stolen, “hold onto as much of their humanity as possible. They dream of freedom, they fall in love despite knowing they could be separated from their partners or children at any moment, and they believe in the power of words and story-telling,” according to our review. “Asim demonstrates all a novel can be: soaring and grounded, personal and epic, thrilling and quiet.”

*The Verifiers* by Jane Pek (Vintage, Feb. 22): This “cool, cerebral, and very funny” debut tells the story of Claudia Lin, a young woman working at a detective agency that vets potential romantic partners for people using dating apps. “With an inquisitive, clever, and curious narrator, this adventurous mystery is both scary and hilarious,” according to our review.

*The Return of Faraz Ali* by Aamina Ahmad (Riverhead, April 5): Set against the backdrop of a murder investigation in 1960s Pakistan, “this novel has everything a reader could ask for: a sizzling, noirlike plot; political intrigue juxtaposed with a rich intergenerational family saga; capacious, conflicted characters...and sublime sentences.” Our review called it “a feat of storytelling not to be missed.”

*Probably Ruby* by Lisa Bird-Wilson (Hogarth, April 5): Born in the 1970s to a White teenage mother and a Métis/Cree father, Ruby is adopted by an alcoholic White man and his unhappy wife. “A bighearted portrait of an Indigenous woman whose transracial adoption spurs a lifelong quest to discover—and perhaps create—her identity,” according to our review.

*Your Nostalgia Is Killing Me* by John Weir (Red Hen, April 26): “Weir’s linked collection of bittersweet, often witty stories elucidates almost 50 years in the life of a gay White man in the U.S., from enduring school taunts in 1970s New Jersey to experiencing the horrors of AIDS to that epidemic’s continuing reverberations for a scarred (and mostly HIV-positive) generation....Sharp, elegiac, angry, funny stories with a searing loneliness often just underneath the surface,” according to our review.

*Love Marriage* by Monica Ali (Scribner, May 3): Ali returns with her first novel in more than a decade, in which “two London families—one Bengali, one White—collide spectacularly when their two eldest children decide to marry...Ali’s immersive novel...might be termed a comedy of manners of Britain’s urban middle class, but the comedy here has teeth: Though the book treats its characters with affection, the racial dynamics are treated with real, heart-rending bite,” according to our review.

*The Evening Hero* by Marie Myung-Ok Lee (Simon & Schuster, May 24): Lee’s novel follows Yungman Kwak, a Korean American doctor who’s forced into retirement. His son, Einstein, is also a doctor, but he’s happy working for the same company that shut down his father’s hospital, “enamored with an entrepreneurial tech-bro ethos Yungman doesn’t understand,” according to our review. In addition to the family dynamics and an exploration of Yungman’s past in the shadow of war, “a good portion of the book is a biting critique of the American health care system.”

*A Caribbean Heiress in Paris* by Adriana Herrera (HQN, May 31): Broadening the canvas for historical romance, Herrera introduces Luz Alana Heith-Benzan, a rum heiress from Hispaniola, who travels to the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris—where she meets Evan Sinclair, a Scottish earl who’s selling his family’s whisky. “With fascinating historical detail, suspenseful drama, and scorching hot intimate moments, this story hits all the notes of a superb romance,” according to our review. “In a word, marvelous.”

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.
**THE HOMEWRECKERS**  
*Andrews, Mary Kay*  
St. Martin’s (448 pp.)  
$26.09 | May 3, 2022  
978-1-2502-7836-4

A young Georgia widow flips a historic house and finds evidence of a long-missing woman while developing a growing attraction for a co-worker.

Hattie Kavanaugh married her high school sweetheart and lost him to a motorcycle accident after just a few years of marriage. Almost seven years on, she’s still living in her unfinished bungalow renovation near Savannah, grieving her husband, Hank, and flipping houses with his dad, Tug; her best friend, Cassidy Pelletier; and Cass’ mother, Zenobia. After a disastrous flip where she loses all her savings on a gorgeous—but dilapidated—157-year-old home, Hattie decides to take an offer to star in a Home Place Television Network production with Cass that will bring in a steady paycheck as she works on her next flip and tries to earn back the money she’s lost. The catch—which she doesn’t know but her producer, Mo Lopez, does—is that the show she signed on for has changed in concept from a straight house-flipping show to a house-flip–meets–dating-show, where the goal is for the handsome designer, Trae Bartholomew, to seduce her over the course of the series. Hattie digs deep to fund the flip, pawning her engagement ring and taking a loan from her father, a wealthy ex-felon who has served time in prison for embezzlement. Author Andrews has packed a lot into this story: Not only is there drama from the reality show and Hattie’s growing attraction to a co-worker, but 17 years earlier beloved local schoolteacher Lanier Ragan went missing, and the story follows both the renovation of the long-abandoned beach home Hattie buys and the discovery of evidence in the cold case of the teacher’s disappearance.

A fun story with twists and turns that will appeal to romantics and cold-case fans alike.

**THE MUTUAL FRIEND**  
*Bays, Carter*  
Dutton (480 pp.)  
$27.00 | June 7, 2022  
978-0-593-18676-3

Several New Yorkers struggle to put down their phones in this debut comic novel.

There’s an abundance of characters in Bays’ novel, and almost none of them know what they want. There’s Alice, a 28-year-old nanny who thinks she wants to go to medical school but takes forever to register for the MCAT. There’s her new roommate, Roxy, a 34-year-old Manic Pixie flibbertigibbet with a City Hall job whose desires are even more amorphous: “Roxy wanted what she wanted to want, nothing more, nothing less.”

Alice’s brother, Bill, is at loose ends after leaving MeWantThat, the shopping app he founded; he takes a sudden interest in Buddhism, which is met with skepticism by his wife, Pitterpat, who “made an activity of wanting” but also seems to realize that the tony real estate she covets won’t fill the emptiness inside her. The lives of the four characters (and several more, who move in and out of the novel) are all thrown into disarray when Roxy becomes embroiled in a scandal that transfixes the internet, Pitterpat gets diagnosed with Crohn’s disease, and Bill impulsively makes a sudden, drastic life change. Throughout the novel, the characters wrestle with their addictions to their smartphones and social media: “Something’s happened to my brain,” Alice laments. “I don’t know what it is. But I think it has to do with this phone I can’t stop looking at every thirty fucking seconds.” Bays was a co-creator of the sitcom *How I Met Your Mother*, so it’s no surprise his novel is highly comic—sometimes darkly so. (The characters watch a reality show called *Love on the Ugly Side*, one episode of which forces the contestants to watch “deepfake videos of their parents having sex in order to win a couple’s massage.”) What is surprising is how beautifully written it is and
how deftly the author balances humor and heartbreak. Bays writes with real compassion that never turns sentimental, and the structure of the book, told from the point of view of a mysterious omniscient narrator, is ingenious. This is a rare thing: an original, intelligent novel that’s not just a perfect summer beach read, but one that deserves serious awards consideration as well. Put down your phone and pick it up.

A major accomplishment.

ASHTON HALL
Belfer, Lauren
Ballantine (416 pp.)
$28.00 | June 7, 2022
978-0-593-35949-5

A woman’s attempts to uncover an archaeological mystery lead to a bigger discovery: herself.

Hannah Larson and her 9-year-old son, Nicky, have packed up their Upper West Side bags and moved into Ashton Hall, a stately manor near Cambridge, England. They were intending to keep Christopher, Hannah’s honorary uncle, company while he undergoes cancer treatment, but unbeknownst to Hannah, he has made other plans to get care in New York City. Thus Hannah has Christopher’s apartment to herself, as well as the time and space to work on her long-put-aside dissertation and to contemplate her husband’s betrayals. That is until Nicky, a quirky child with troubling outbursts of violence, makes a

Can you imagine being a dedicated therapist at an elite university where more than a quarter of the ‘best and brightest’ make appointments to get help with their anxieties, depression, body image issues and more?

The problem is that when someone dedicates her whole life to such a noble pursuit, and ends up not being as good at it as she had expected, it can have unintended consequences.

“Haylon has a distinctive narrative voice—attentive, witty, and all-knowing—and he wields perspective effectively, weaving the reader into the narrative as an active observer.”
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) ©

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shocking discovery: Hidden away in an enclosed room in the walls of Ashton Hall is a redheaded skeleton. A team of archaeologists descend on the manor to learn more about the skeleton, whom they discover lived in the 1500s and is named Isabella Cresham: “Isabella Cresham has never been a ghost, haunting us,” one of the manor’s other residents says to Hannah. “Tells you something about ghosts. If you don’t fear their presence, they leave you alone. We’ll see if she starts haunting us now.” Hannah, clearly haunted from the moment she lays eyes on Isabella, begins to see parallels between their lives as she deals with the nagging question: Did Isabella choose this life, or was she locked away? Hannah pours over Isabella’s sketchbooks and letters, piecing together Isabella’s life while interweaving her own anxieties and dreams into Isabella’s story. The first third of the book drags, and somehow the discovery of a skeleton in a hidden room is the least compelling part of the entire novel. That said, its strength comes from the archaeological details (did you know that the pigment that creates red hair is the slowest to break down?) as well as the grace and attention given to both Hannah and Isabella—two women separated by hundreds of years but bound by a common humanity.

A touching story about the themes that resonate through centuries.
THE MOST PRECIOUS SUBSTANCE ON EARTH
Bhat, Shashi
Grand Central Publishing (272 pp.)
$28.00 | June 28, 2022
978-1-5387-0791-3

Bhat’s candid novel follows Indian Canadian teenager Nina from ninth grade through her mid-30s as she slowly comes to terms with a devastating secret.

In 1990s Halifax, Nina is an awkward 14-year-old dealing with her loving but often worried parents, who are pious Hindus; her growing alienation from her best friend; and an experience with a teacher, the consequences of which will continue to ripple beneath the surface of her life for years. The novel, which is divided into 13 impeccably titled, short story–like chapters including “Why I Read Beowulf” and “You Are Loved By Me,” follows Nina as she goes in and out of an MFA program in Baltimore, teaches high school English (which is sometimes “almost a high” and other times “like being an air traffic controller—just.. too much”), and joins Toastmasters to try to manage her self-loathing. She navigates the alternately cringey and threatening world of modern dating with guys who would “take whatever [they] could.” Bhat approaches her weighty subject matter with grace and humor and, in doing so, finds a way of exploring trauma that is both realistic and tender. Unlike other coming-of-age novels that focus on the teenage or young adult years, in this one Bhat takes readers downstream and examines how those pivotal times continue to shape the protagonist as she approaches middle age. Suffused with pop-culture references including To Catch a Predator and the iconic line “We are the weirdos, Mister,” from the 1996 film The Craft, the novel could also be a parable for a modern world struggling to come to terms with its own secrets amid the reverberations of the #MeToo movement.

An empowering and liberatory coming-of-age novel for “the girls who stay quiet.”

WHERE DOGS BARK WITH THEIR TAILS
Bulle, Estelle-Sarab
Trans. by Julia Grawemeyer
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (304 pp.)
$27.00 | July 5, 2022
978-0-3742-8909-6

Three siblings are buffeted by family drama, culture, and history in Guadeloupe.

Bulle’s debut novel is framed around a young woman seeking to understand the lives of her father, known to his family as Petit-Frère, and her aunts, Lucinde and Antoine. Some of the disruption is a function of colonization: France’s possession of the Antillean archipelago is at once a source of social identity (Antoine long aspired to own a shop in Paris) and division, leading to a violent clash between police and citizens in 1967. There are cultural challenges too, as the siblings are mixed-race, complicating their status in a closed and class-conscious society. And then there is simple family drama—in alternating narratives, the siblings debate the causes of various incidents in Rashomon-like fashion. (Antoine’s urge to leave her impoverished home at 16 was either rash or necessary, depending on who’s talking.) Antoine calls the place “this little island where immorality reigns,” and the novel’s title refers to the backwardness of the family’s hometown. Still, Bulle conveys a deep sense of affection for the place in all its frustrations; translator Grawemeyer includes thoughtful, unobtrusive footnotes about Guadeloupean history and folklore while preserving much of the flavor of the original French and Creole in the text itself. So the novel’s flaws are largely matters of structure: Splitting the voices across the three siblings and Petit-Frère’s daughter diffuses the narrative, which at its heart is about Antoine’s struggles. But Antoine’s thread feels clipped; there’s a truncated subplot involving diamond smuggling and moments of magical realism that pass without much development, while
“An elegant and engaging work of historical fiction.”

JOAN
Chen, Katherine J.
Random House (368 pp.)
$27.00 | July 5, 2022
978-1-9848-5580-0

The author of Mary B (2018) eschews hagiography in this very human portrait of Joan of Arc.

Jeanne d’Arc became a symbol, rather than a person, the moment she joined the court in exile of the Dauphin, the outcast prince who would become Charles VII, King of France. Making her real requires imagination and empathy, and Chen brings both to the task of putting solid flesh on the charred bones of a legendary figure. The Joan we meet here is not a saint. She’s a savant, and her genius is for violence. She becomes an expert with a longbow the moment she releases her first arrow. She bests a knight after six days of training with a sword. And when she goes to war for the Dauphin, she is unstoppable on the battlefield. This Joan is earthy. Her encounters with saints do not take the form of mystical visions or spiritual instruction. St. Michael appears stamped into the dessert that gives Joan her first taste of cinna

FELLOWSHIP POINT
Dark, Alice Elliott
Marysue Rucci Books/Scribner
(592 pp.)
$28.99 | July 5, 2022
978-1-982131-81-4

A sweeping story of lifelong best friends from Philadelphia Quaker families who share a vacation spot and a moral exigency.

Dark confesses in her acknowledgments that she had “doubts about the appeal of two old ladies,” but she’s written the rare 592-page novel you’ll be sorry to finish. Eighty-year-old spinster Agnes Lee is the successful author of two series of books. She’s known for one of them, 30-plus children’s tales about a 9-year-old named Nan. The other is written under a pseudonym, six sharp social satires following a circle of upper-class Philadelphia girls like the ones Agnes grew up with. But as the curtain opens in March 2000, Agnes

ISBN: 978-1-7327900-3-2 [ebook]

“Gritty and gripping, powerful and sexy, Shadow and Poison will have your heart racing with each kill and every searing kiss.”
—Max Watson, Author of Chains of Nurture

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is having her very first experience of writer’s block, described in one of many astute passages about the writing life: “Agnes had lost hope for today, too, but her allotted writing time wasn’t up yet. So she sat. Her rule was five hours, and dammit she’d put in five hours.” Just as she packs it in for the day, her best friend, Polly Wister, a devoted wife and mother, arrives for a drink. “We have a problem,” says Agnes. The problem is that they are two of the last three shareholders in Fellowship Point, a large, and largely undeveloped, piece of coastal property in Maine where their families have vacationed for generations. After the two of them are gone, Agnes’ cousin, a wealthy dolt, seems likely to sell out to a developer who would tear down the 19th-century dwellings, destroy a nature sanctuary, and overrun an ancient Indigenous meeting ground to build a resort. Agnes and Polly have other problems, too, each of them held back by choices made long in the past, some of which will be dug out by a nosy young New York editor who’s determined to make Agnes write a memoir. You will surely want to read this book, but you may be able to use its essential wisdom right now: “There wasn’t time for withholding, not in this short life when you were only given to know a few people, and to have a true exchange with one or two.”

Elegantly structured, beautifully written, and altogether diverting, with a powerful message about land ownership in America.

KEYA DAS’S SECOND ACT
Deb, Sopan
Simon & Schuster (288 pp.)
$26.00 | July 5, 2022
978-1-982185-47-3

Years after a young woman’s death in a car crash, a hidden trove of her belongings kick-starts a Bengali American family’s healing.

Five years after his teenage daughter’s untimely death, middle-aged anthropology professor Shantanu Das finds a box in his attic. The box is full of notes passed between his late daughter, Keya, and her high school girlfriend, Pamela, along with a play they wrote together. Although Shantanu has tried to bury the shame of his homophobic reaction to Keya’s coming out, he’s haunted by the fact that he didn’t reconcile with her before her death. After he tells his other daughter, Mitali, about the play, her new boyfriend suggests they stage it. Despite an initial bout of reluctance, Shantanu gets on board, but Mitali and Keya’s newly remarried mother, Chaitali, wants to leave the past in the past…and then there’s the question of what Pamela thinks. This debut novel from Deb, a writer at the New York Times who has previously published a memoir, is a modest, readable effort that barely scratches the surface of its dark, complex premise. The novel is enjoyably stuffed with specific detail pulled from the author’s own life—he grew up in the Bengali community in the New Jersey town where the story takes place and draws on his experience reporting on New York City’s culture scene when writing about Broadway—but the characters remain stiff and two-dimensional. Though their explanations of their own feelings make sense, Deb has trouble conveying those feelings on a visceral level. Their grief is particularly difficult to access since Keya, despite being the novel’s title character, remains a vague presence. And it’s frustrating to read a novel about a young queer woman who died prematurely told primarily from the perspectives of straight people.

A story about grief that never fully comes to life.

PARIS IN RUINS
M.K. Tod
ISBN: 978-0-9919670-4-9

“A story of two women whose families were caught up in the defense of Paris is deeply moving and suspenseful.”
—Margaret George, Author of The Splendor Before the Dark: A Novel of the Emperor Nero

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In Kasim Ali’s debut novel, Good Intentions (Henry Holt, March 8), love has a lot to conquer. Nur, a young Pakistani British writer, falls for Yasmina, a Sudanese British doctoral student. Though they’re both Muslim, Nur hides their relationship from his family for four years, fearful of their rejection. In Nur’s community, children are expected to find a match for marriage with their parents’ guidance and live at home until they wed. With this captivating love story, Ali examines myriad aspects of modern masculinity, prejudice among communities of color, and the complex relationships children of immigrants have with their elders and themselves. We spoke with Ali by Zoom from his home in London; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

You’ve written thoughtfully about decentering Whiteness in this novel. Yet one of Nur’s literary touchstones is Stephen King. Why him?

Nur wants to be an SF writer, and I thought, well maybe he admires N.K. Jemison because I love her work. She’s incredible. But that felt somewhat expected. And Zadie Smith, Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, other writers I admire, seemed to feed an idea of the kind of stories we’re allowed to write. When I was at university, at that age, I was writing horror and science fiction, putting Muslims into fun spaces I read but had never seen them in before. Nur wants to write speculative stories, that’s what’s guiding him. So why not the best-known writer in that space?

Nur struggles with his mental health. How did this aspect of the story evolve?

I didn’t set out to write a book with such a strong mental health element, but this character just has this anxiety in him, which is why he waits so long to tell his family about his relationship and why Yasmina tolerates this decision to wait. In many books where the main characters have anxiety issues, they’re often self-aware that they have them. But Nur is so young; I don’t know if he has that awareness. He becomes frustrated he can’t articulate his feelings. Whenever anybody does try to talk to him, he gets defensive. The feelings can come out of nowhere and control your life a bit. But also, it can become something you get upset by, you just wish you didn’t have, and you don’t want to
I didn't want to portray Nur's South Asian culture as something he runs away from. It's something he wants to hold on to. Quite often in Muslim stories, we're given this idea that to assimilate properly, you have to leave your religion, your culture, all of that behind. But that's not true, and that's not who Nur is. So I wanted to talk about the anti-Blackness in the South Asian community that Yasmina would face seriously, though they're both Muslim, while also interrogating whether it really is as big a problem as Nur presumes. Often, we younger people put our parents into a box and don't allow them to change. Nur uses the assumption of his parents' bias as an excuse to avoid disappointing them in other ways. That has nothing to with who Yasmina is, but who he is and the story he's telling of himself.

Leena Soman Navani is a writer in New York. Good Intentions was reviewed in the Jan. 15, 2022, issue.
LOOK CLOSER
Ellis, David
Putnam (464 pp.)
$27.00 | July 5, 2022
978-0-399-17092-8

An unlikely ensemble recounts the devious events that led to a grisly Halloween murder.

Simon Dobias is a Chicago law professor vying for tenure. He’s been contentedly, if not happily, married to his wife, Vicky, a social worker at Safe Haven, for nearly a decade. He’s also reignited an affair with a beautiful woman from his distant past after a chance meeting outside of Bloomingdale’s on Michigan Avenue. What begins with matching burner phones and clandestine meetings ends with a Grim Reaper costume and the brutal slaying of Simon’s lover. But whatever else you think you know in this twisty, intricately plotted story is likely wrong. As narrated by Simon, the obvious murder suspect; the equally unscrupulous Vicky; and Sgt. Jane Burke, the Grace Village officer charged with solving the upscale suburb’s first homicide—and at least one surprise narrator—we learn about Simon’s relationship with ill-fated bombshell Lauren Betancourt, the circumstances surrounding her death, and the subsequent criminal investigation. Murder is far from the only crime committed among this shady lot, though, or even the most recent; the full extent of these devious characters’ various schemes and revenge plots is revealed in carefully scattered clues leading to a shocking, if somewhat improbable, conclusion. Even seasoned mystery readers won’t be able to predict all the knots in Simon and Vicky’s tangled web of deception.

A roller-coaster ride full of unexpected twists and turns.

NOTES ON YOUR SUDDEN DISAPPEARANCE
Espach, Alison
Henry Holt (352 pp.)
$26.99 | May 17, 2022
978-1-250-82314-4

In her second novel, Espach portrays a family coming to terms with, and never coming to terms with, the loss of their eldest daughter.

As a young teenager, Sally Holt is in awe of her older sister, Kathy, who seems to have all the answers to life’s questions. But when Kathy dies in a car crash, Sally is left to grow up in the shadow of her loss. Espach makes an interesting choice in her title, describing the event not as a death but rather a disappearance. What’s the difference? The first means gone forever. The second is more ambiguous. Like Schrödinger’s cat, neither alive nor dead, the disappeared one lingers, always just about to walk in the door. As Sally progresses through high school and into adulthood, Kathy is frozen in place—a confidante she addresses throughout the novel. And Sally doesn’t beat around the bush. Her unflinchingly honest, sardonic take on the dissolution of her normal family life and coming to terms with loss makes the novel. It’s as if Sally’s parents have forgotten that they still have another daughter. When Sally’s mother turns to electroconvulsive shock therapy to blot out the memory of her first daughter, she loses the rest of her memory as well. Sally’s father engages in risky behavior, from alcoholism to cutting down old-growth trees in the yard (he found a tutorial on YouTube). Through Sally’s eyes, Espach crafts her characters with an emotional depth that powers the story while still leaving room for laughter. Espach’s character development also helps make the romantic plots feel fresh. The story of 28-year-old Sally’s relationship with her bland but stable fiancé seems like it was pulled straight from the second half of Jeannette Walls’ The Glass Castle; a vanilla relationship provides the stability Sally needs even though they lack chemistry. On the other hand, Sally’s relationship with Billy, Kathy’s boyfriend and the driver in the fateful accident, brings some Dawson’s Creek incestuousness.

This tragicomic bildungsroman in the shadow of loss will invade your heart and hold on tight.
Danny Scudd is a 27-year-old Londoner with only a vague idea of who he is. He might be a journalist, if the clickbait content he writes for his job at a culture app counts as writing (he doesn’t think it does). He might be a boyfriend, if only Tobbs, the man he considers his partner, hadn’t sent him to the clinic with a mysterious disease that turns out to be sexually transmitted. He might also be a best friend to his childhood pal Jacob, the biracial, nonbinary performance artist who’s always the center of attention, which is fine by Danny. One thing Danny, whose parents own a small-town fish-and-chip shop, is sure of: He’s gay. But even in his late 20s, he’s struggling to figure out who he is and who he wants to be. For someone who would rather tend to his houseplants than mingle at a house party, those questions feel overwhelming. But thanks to a new therapist, a breakup with Tobbs, an eviction from his flat, and a new home in Jacob’s creative queer commune in East London, Danny is forced to question everything he once knew about himself, his style, and the people around him. A memorable cast of characters helps propel Danny through this pivotal time as he experiences bad dates, becoming an (embarrassing!) meme, an unexpected promotion, and more. The story—told through humorous prose, text messages, diary entries, and the inner ramblings of Danny’s unfiltered mind—is an entertaining, fast-paced read. A queer coming-of-adulthood story told with humor, tenderness, and quirk.

Based on a true story, Marti and Montserrat are destined to be the next Jack and Rose.

Already in development for a major motion picture, this historical romance novel is an unforgettable story that grew amidst the horrors of the Spanish Civil War.

“Lytle’s ambitious story is politically astute... The author’s command of the historical period is impressive. While this isn’t a principally political novel—it’s a love story first and foremost—the historical context isn’t negligible, and Lytle lucidly explains the complex internecine conflicts in Spain without burdening readers or distracting them from the central narrative line.” —Kirkus Reviews
JOBS FOR GIRLS WITH ARTISTIC FLAIR
Gervais, June
Pamela Dorman/Viking (384 pp.)
$26.00 | June 21, 2022
978-0-59-329879-4

An enterprising 18-year-old oddball seeks to break into the 1980s tattoo scene.

After graduating from high school, Gina Mulley can easily identify the jobs she doesn't want: bartender; typist; any position that removes her from Blue Claw, the Long Island town where she grew up. She's reluctant to part from her older brother, Dominic; amid a childhood punctuated by her mother's breakdowns and her own inability to connect with peers, he's the only source of stability she's ever known. Gina spends her time at Dominic's tattoo shop doing odd jobs, doodling strange, alien fish, and avoiding job applications—till she realizes a tattooist's career perfectly suits what Dominic dubs her innate “artistic flair.” After much persuasion, Gina convinces her brother to take her on as an apprentice, with the knowledge that making it as a tattooist in an almost exclusively male-dominated industry will be nearly impossible. As Gina tattoos sackfuls of oranges and sketches bizarre tattoo “flash”—crosses made of vegetables; hybrid animals—she meets the enigmatic and spellbinding Anna, the apparent protegé of a local clairvoyant; the two develop a long-distance correspondence that eventually becomes a close-knit friendship, and perhaps something more. As Gina fights tooth and nail to be taken seriously as an artist, she must navigate an increasingly fraught relationship with her brother, who resists seeing her as an independent adult—all while helping the struggling tattoo shop survive. From the start, the novel is immersive and wholly alive. Gervais painstakingly renders the fine-grained particularities of the 1980s body-art scene and locates its deeper emotional core: Tattoos are not just ink, but “something invisible made visible. A truth [that] you were finally willing to have out in the open, to be seen.” Gina is a touchingly complex, flawed character; her journey from childhood misfit to adult is gratifying to behold. Though some of the narrative threads feel underbaked—Gina’s relationship to her mother isn’t believably resolved; Dominic’s relationship struggles lie somewhat apart from the story’s center—Gervais’ characters are original and a pleasure to read; their narrative energy will easily carry readers through to the final page.

An enjoyable romp brought to life by its lovable, off-kilter protagonist.

MEANT TO BE
Giffin, Emily
Ballantine (368 pp.)
$25.20 | May 31, 2022
978-0-425-28664-7

Giffin’s latest charts the course of true love between an American aristocrat and a troubled fashionista.

Almost immediately, readers will guess that Giffin’s protagonist, Joseph S. Kingsley III, a media darling since birth, is a re-creation of John F. Kennedy Jr. In addition to Joe’s darkly handsome good looks, there are many other similarities, such as his double failure of the New York bar exam and his stint as a Manhattan assistant district attorney. But Joe’s late father was an astronaut, not the president, and locations associated with the Kennedys, such as Hyannis Port and Martha’s Vineyard, have been moved to the Hamptons and Annapolis. Instead of a sister, Joe has a protective female best friend, Berry Wainwright. Readers may be so obsessed with teasing out fact from fiction, and wondering if the outcome for Joe is going to be as tragic as JFK Jr.’s fatal 1999 flight, that they may be distracted from the engaging story of Joe’s co-protagonist, Cate Cooper, who is—apart from a superficial resemblance to Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy—largely a fictional creation. When Joe and Cate meet-cute on a Hamptons beach where Cate, a model, is
posing, both are immediately smitten. However, the paparazzi are determined to milk every ounce of scandal from the social chasm separating them. On the surface, Cate is the product of a middle-class upbringing in Montclair, New Jersey, but her interrupted education and her forced flight from an abusive home have shamed as well as strengthened her. Like her real-life counterpart, Cate rises in the fashion industry and becomes known for her minimalist style. The couple’s courtship drags a bit on the page despite witty banter and steamy encounters. It is the conflict brewing when their pedigrees clash, and, particularly, Cate’s consciousness of the disparity, that grips us. Whether these knockoffs can avoid the fates of the originals is the main source of suspense here.

An intriguing meditation on the meaning of “meant to be.”

“A remarkable novel. … Sheila Murray has created a haunting allegory out of the Caribbean’s relationship with Canada.”

— Rachel Manley, author of the Governor General’s Literary Award-winning Drumblair

Another voice of distinction from the publisher of The Marrow Thieves.
“At times witty, at others devastating, Grynberg’s first foray into fiction is a major triumph.”

I’D LIKE TO SAY SORRY, BUT THERE’S NO ONE TO SAY SORRY TO

Grynberg, Mikolaj
Trans. by Sean Gasper Bye
The New Press (160 pp.)
$19.99 | Feb. 8, 2022
978-1-62097-683-8

A series of monologues describing Jewish life in contemporary—and not-so-contemporary—Poland.

Grynberg, a photographer and psychologist as well as a writer, is known in his native Poland for his oral histories: collections of interviews with Polish Jews about their experiences. His first work of fiction—and his first work to appear in English—makes use of those interviews as a jumping-off point. The book takes the form of a collection of fictionalized monologues, each no longer than three or four pages. In several of them, the speakers are surprised to learn that they themselves are Jewish when older relatives reveal the truth that, for years, they’d been hiding. In one, a boy only learns he’s Jewish after his grandmother sends him off to a Jewish summer camp. In another, three little girls pretend they’re hiding through the war in a cellar, where their antisemitic father is surprised to find them. In a note at the end of the book, Grynberg’s translator, Bye, describes the book as “not so much polyphonic as clamorous.” It’s an apt description; the collection, in which dozens of voices clamor to be heard, is a moving and often wryly funny portrait of Polish Jewishness. Grynberg has zeroed in on a particular generation—one that is once or twice removed from the Holocaust, the children or grandchildren of survivors. Taken as a whole, the collection traces the commonalities as well as the differences among all these experiences. And while the result can be grim, Grynberg’s deft, light touch also provides a sense of levity, hope, and even laughter.

At times witty, at others devastating, Grynberg’s first foray into fiction is a major triumph.

HAWK MOUNTAIN
Habib, Conner
Norton (320 pp.)
$26.95 | July 5, 2022
978-0-393-54217-2

The reappearance of a childhood bully throws the life of a New England man into turmoil.

When the book opens, Todd Nasca is spending time on the beach with his 6-year-old son, Anthony. They moved to New Granard four months ago, and soon Todd will start his position as a high school English teacher and Anthony will begin school for the first time. After having kept the boy out of kindergarten, Todd is anxious about his son entering the world;
he feels like he's "pushing Anthony off a precipice." Todd and his wife, Livia, divorced four years ago after a brief and tepid marriage, but Livia is back from her travels in Europe with renewed interest in knowing the son she left behind. Todd is alarmed when a stranger approaches Anthony at the beach—except he turns out to not be a stranger at all. Jack Gates transferred to Todd's high school when both boys were seniors, but they haven't seen each other in years, and for good reason: Flashbacks detail how Jack viciously bullied Todd, calling him homophobic slurs, threatening him, and alienating Todd from their peers. Underlying the meanness was a tension that has followed both men to the present—a feeling it's possible they've been purposefully avoiding. When Todd presses, Jack is vague about the state of his marriage, how long he plans to stay, or if his sudden reappearance in Todd's life might be more than just coincidence. The longer Jack's around, the more Todd's discomfort grows, building to a shocking act of violence that inexorably links the characters and forces Todd down a path of alienation, lies, and madness. The tension is palpable on every page, and Habib skillfully illustrates the complexity of relationships and the pain of unmet desires, both queer and otherwise. His prose is as brutal as it is profound and beautiful: "Is everyone unhappy? Is everyone stuck? I think, Jack, I was happy sometimes; no, I _was_, I _was_ before you, before you showed up; and you were happy when you got here, and Livia was happy before she met me, and Anthony was happy; and then, what? Everything is fine and then something shows up and you can't be happy after that; what is that?"

A brutal and gorgeous tale of manipulation, control, and desire.
A young artist seeks the subject of her work within the teeming ontology of the city.

The unnamed narrator of this debut novel is an artist. This facet of her identity, the fact that she is an artist, is indisputable to her in spite of the fact that her art—its subject, its premise, and its form—is, as of yet, inscrutable both to others and to herself. The question of what exactly is her work is one that consumes her, occupying her near total attention as she walks the streets of her city, slots answers into the “completed” column at her absurdist job, eats unsatisfying, overpriced sandwiches, or moves items from place to place inside her tiny studio, aka apartment. It seems possible that the permutations of the question “what is my work?” could occupy the narrator’s thoughts more or less endlessly, especially in a time when, in the narrator’s words, it is acceptable “to make art from anything, with anything, about anything, the world constituting the art world in my time being undelimited in a liberating or terrifying manner”; however, a deadline of sorts has been superimposed on this question because the artist has a meeting. This meeting, set up by a well-known artist friend of the narrator’s whose artistic endeavor consists of “setting up situations,” is with a gallerist whose attention may just help the narrator place her work in the public eye, if only she knew what that work was. In recursive prose—mirroring the art-world use of deliberately abstracted language with an expert’s ear—the narrator circles the question of her identity, her interiority, her agency, and her originality, even as she circles the location of her long-anticipated meeting through familiar streets that have become defamiliarized by the intensity of her observation. Surreal, heady, and elliptical, this book reads like a Seinfeld episode if it were co-written by Beckett and Derrida. Unfortunately, much of the wit, trenchant observation, and insight are occluded by the density of the language. This clearly intentional, even integral, stylistic choice is at the heart of the novel’s attempt to elevate even the most utterly banal elements of modern life to the level of “the work,” and yet it will prove a barrier to all but the most dedicated of readers.

A book that toys with brilliance but falters in the bog of its own telling.

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A woman finds herself alone at a hunting cabin, cut off from the world by an invisible, impenetrable wall.

In this translation of a 1963 German novel, an unnamed narrator is suddenly forced to fend for herself at a hunting lodge deep in the Austrian woods. She’s isolated from all human contact by an invisible wall that appears overnight. “I shall set everything down as precisely as I can,” she writes, recording her life for posterity, if there is one. She also writes to stay sane. “I’m not writing for the sheer joy of writing; so many things have happened to me that I must write if I am not to lose my reason.” The wall, “this terrible, invisible thing,” hems her in and forces her to rethink everything about her existence. Everyone beyond the wall appears to be dead. The woman begins by limiting her space and establishing a garden. Her story is a study in survival but also a study of being human. The woman is left with a cat, a cow, and a dog for companionship; these creatures create meaning by giving her something to do. Caregiving fills the days and makes them bearable. So do manual labor and the completion of tasks, which comfort her and “[bring] a bit of order into the
huge, terrible disorder that had invaded her life." What is the wall? An allusion to the Cold War? An allegory for the Berlin Wall? Yes. But it also serves as a metaphorical stand-in for so many restrictions. It creates a situation that allows the main character and the reader to examine our ontology and what we think makes us real. Similarly, the main character has a sense that being read would give meaning to her words and, thus, her life: “I still hope someone will read this report...” she says, “my heart beats faster when I imagine human eyes resting on these lines, and human hands turning the pages.” She isn’t coy about the toll that the isolation and hard work take on her body, nor about her own inevitable demise. She considers the world before, but she doesn’t mourn it. All that matters is the present. “I may be in a position,” she says prophetically, “to murder time.”

Strangely relevant as we begin to reflect on our own experiences during the pandemic shutdown.

WITH A MIND TO KILL
Horowitz, Anthony
Harper/HarperCollins (288 pp.)
$26.99 | May 24, 2022
978-0-06-307-841-3

Horowitz completes his James Bond trilogy—begun in Trigger Mortis (2015) and Forever and a Day (2018)—by providing what would be the nonpareil British spy’s final adventure if only all those other earlier scribes hadn’t preceded him at the feast.

Brought back home in 1964 after executing Francisco Scaramanga in Jamaica in order to fake the assassination of M, his longtime superior in the Secret Intelligence Service, Bond performs so well that everyone who knows the actual position of Adm. Sir Miles Messery—perhaps 50 people all told—is fooled into thinking that he’s dead. This fraud only lays the groundwork for Bond’s real job: to continue pretending that he remains indoctrinated by the Soviets aligned with Scaramanga in order

Lam Son 719. The final major offensive operation of the Vietnam War. Sixty days. 750 helicopters. Who wants to be the last man killed in Vietnam?

“...a great book about men who control their fears and fly into action knowing they need to be prepared to handle whatever happens.”
—Bill McCloud, Vietnam Veterans of America

“...an exciting book.”
—Helicopter Life

“There are more than enough harrowing flying scenes and firefight on the ground that will keep readers of this genre interested.”
—VHPA Aviator

“This is a good read for those interested in aviation’s contribution to the war effort in Southeast Asia.”
—Tom Lokey, Major, USAF, Retired

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to infiltrate the ranks of Stalnaya Ruka, a cabal of officers in the USSR who are clearly up to no good. Accordingly, he lets himself be abducted out from under the English officers who clearly hate him for killing Sir Miles, though this deception is trickier than it looks. Whisked off to Leningrad, he’s drugged and interrogated by his old nemesis Col. Boris, who’s far from convinced that Bond has set queen and country aside for the Soviet Union. The colonel assigns clinical psychiatrist Katya Leonova to stick close to Bond, becoming his friend, his confidante, and, if necessary, his lover. From this point on the plot proceeds in a much straighter line, though Horowitz can’t resist several additional twists, the most notable of them the identity of the target Bond’s new masters send him to East Berlin to eliminate.

Not nearly as ingenious as Horowitz’s meta-whodunits but well above average among post–Ian Fleming Bonds.

“A tense, high-stakes read with a layered cast.”
—Kirkus Reviews

For information on publishing and film rights please email: bettylynn@gmail.com or visit: www.bettaferrendelli.com

THINGS TO COME AND GO

Howland, Bette
A Public Space Books (160 pp.)
$16.95 paper | May 10, 2022
978-0-9982675-6-2

THINGS TO COME

Howland, Bette
A Public Space Books (160 pp.)
$16.95 paper | May 10, 2022
978-0-9982675-6-2

Three novellas worth resurrecting.
In recent years, A Public Space Books has reintroduced the works of the undeservedly overlooked Howland (1937–2017), publishing a collection of her stories, *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, and *W*, a 1974 memoir of her time in a psychiatric hospital after a suicide attempt. Now the imprint has republished, with a new introduction by author Rumaan Alam, this slim volume of three novellas, which Howland originally released in 1983—the year before she won a MacArthur Fellowship and then, presumably overcome by the pressure of heightened expectations, stopped publishing. This is another unburied treasure, with Howland’s glimmering talent again on full display. Each story showcases the author’s intelligence, insightfulness, and incomparable eye for illuminating detail and ear for captivating dialogue as well as her ability to evoke a specific place and time (often gritty midcentury Chicago and its environs) and the emotional complexities of close relationships (family and otherwise). In *Birds of a Feather*, Howland’s young female narrator quietly comes of age amid the cacophony and oblique warmth of her father’s loud Jewish family, “the big brassy yak-yakking Abarbanels.” In *The Old Wheeze*, the events of a single snowy Chicago night following a divorced young mother’s date with an admired older man and captures the differing perspectives of the mother, her elderly babysitter, her nursery-school-age son, and her lover. In the third and final novella, *The Life You Gave Me*, a daughter reckons with her complicated relationship with her father as she is summoned to the hospital to visit him on two separate occasions. “My father’s size and strength were more than physical. Mental, temperamental. Character traits. Mind Over Matter was his motto….To see him brought down, laid low, damaged, hurting, like any other injured creature—was to see him disgraced,” Howland writes. “All of which is not to say that my father was ever a simple man. Only that he didn’t know his own strength. But I did.” Howland, too, may not have understood the strength of her own writing. But now, thanks to the reissuing of these and other stories, we do.

This rediscovered collection feels as clear and colorful as if it had been written today.
AN ISLAND
Jennings, Karen
Hogarth (224 pp.)
$25.00  |  May 17, 2022
978-0-593-44652-2

A lonely lighthouse keeper encounters a refugee and a host of uncomfortable memories.

At 70, Samuel has grown used to the occasional body of a drowning victim washing ashore, interrupting his existence as the sole occupant of an island off the coast of Africa. The latest arrival, however, is breathing, which brings both comfort and fear. Comfort because the stranger relieves Samuel’s extreme isolation; author Jennings slowly reveals that he spent 23 years in prison under a dictatorship and has been living on the island for more than two decades since. Fear, because the refugee speaks a different language, and though he seems docile, Samuel’s memories of cruelty and violence have reemerged, prompting an intensifying paranoia. In flashbacks, Samuel recalls how his (unnamed) home country escaped colonization only to lapse into a dictatorship and how the turmoil divided his family and brought him into the orbit of activists—and, eventually, prison. In deliberately plainspoken prose, Jennings makes a potent allegory out of Samuel’s relationship with the stranger. Who owns the territory Samuel is on? What does he owe a stranger arriving on it? Where’s the line between an urge to protect and a deranged fear of invasion? (The island itself is a craggy symbol of human nature. As one man told Samuel, “It’s no good trying to tame the island to your will. It will do as it wants.”) Jennings handles these questions supplely, rooting them in Samuel’s character, which deepens as this brief novel goes on. We learn, in time, about his childhood in poverty and a streak of cowardice that’s led to multiple poor decisions. The stormy mood Jennings conjures throughout the novel keeps Samuel’s decision regarding the stranger intriguingly uncertain until the final pages.

A stark, efficient, and compelling revision of Robinson Crusoe.
“A billionaire and a suburban family struggle to survive when power goes out around the globe.”

**AURORA**

Koepp, David
Harper/HarperCollins
(304 pp.)
$27.99 | June 7, 2022
978-0-06-291-647-1

A billionaire and a suburban family struggle to survive when power goes out around the globe.

This brisk thriller is set a few years in the future, after the world has been through the coronavirus pandemic and thinks it’s learned how to handle disaster. It hasn’t. A colossal mass ejection on the sun isn’t an unusual event, but this time one sends out a massive cloud of solar plasma aimed straight at Earth. Scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration see it coming and know it will fry electrical grids around the globe. Their attempts to shut down systems to protect them are shrugged off by anti-science politicians, and the world goes dark. No electricity means no internet, no phones, no TV or radio, no supply chain—‘Everything from a nuclear power plant to your coffee-pot,’ one expert says. “If it’s connected to the grid and turned on, it will blow.” Thom Banning is prepared for the catastrophe. A tech billionaire, he’s purchased a disused missile silo and spent $30 million to convert it to a secure underground bunker big enough to house a village—of Thom’s choosing. He and his family, plus selected employees, evacuate to the bunker and settle in, but things will not go exactly as Thom planned. Meanwhile, Aubrey Wheeler is not prepared at all. She’s been busy trying to steer her conference business through the pandemic, avoid her creepy ex-husband, Rusty, and cope with Rusty’s son, Scott. The boy is a typically surly teenager but wisely chose to stay with his stepmother when she and his father, who’s addicted to just about everything you can be addicted to, divorced. When the power goes out in their Illinois suburb, all Aubrey has on her emergency shelf is 11 cans of black beans. Koepp, a successful screenwriter (*Jurassic Park, Spider-Man*), brings those skills to this novel, crafting carefully placed revelations about the characters’ relationships and the bursts of violence in their increasingly chaotic world into an exciting and satisfying tale.

Engaging characters deal with disaster in this swiftly paced, well-written thriller.

**TRINITY, TRINITY, TRINITY**

Kobayashi, Erika
Trans. by Brian Bergstrom
Astra House (240 pp.)
$23.00 | June 28, 2022
978-1-662-60115-6

Japanese senior citizens become possessed by the spirit of radiation.

Japanese author and visual artist Kobayashi’s first novel to be published in English unfolds from the perspective of an unnamed divorcée who lives in a Tokyo apartment with her mother, her younger sister, and her 13-year-old daughter. Though everyone in the city is excited for the impending 2020 Olympics, tensions are running high due to Trinity—a previously unknown ailment with unclear causes that is plaguing the elderly. The condition initially presents as dementia, but as it progresses, those afflicted pick up shiny black rocks from the ground, which they hold to their ears as though listening to them speak. The individuals then begin hoarding radioactive objects, behaving erratically, and spouting impossibly detailed, seemingly firsthand knowledge about radiation’s discovery and world events in which the particles have played a role. Given the relative recency of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, the public treats those who are “going Trinity” as potential terrorists, so the protagonist panics when her mother starts showing symptoms and then disappears from her bed. Though Kobayashi’s core conceit is intriguing, the book as a whole lacks focus and direction. A subplot involving the narrator’s waning fertility and increasingly desperate use of a cybersex app also called Trinity feels hastily appended and tonally jarring, while efforts to thematically link Greek myth, Olympic history, and the nuclear arms race feel unnecessarily contrived. Choppy, digressive narration only compounds the fragmentation.

An ambitious but muddled meditation on the Atomic Age.

**VOICES IN THE DEAD HOUSE**

Lock, Norman
Bellevue Literary Press (288 pp.)
$16.99 paper | July 5, 2022
978-1-954276-01-7

Lock’s latest novel reckons honestly with the legacies of two beloved writers. Lock’s American Novels cycle of books has, since its inception, covered a wide amount of stylistic ground, from the surreal to the philosophical. While a few of the supporting characters in this book overlap with some of Lock’s earlier works, the bulk of it focuses on a few months in the lives of Walt Whitman and Louisa May Alcott, during a period when both were helping wounded Civil War soldiers convalesce. Through the writers’ proximity to the effects of war, Lock depicts both as grappling with their feelings on racial equality and the legacy of slavery in the United States. Each has a distinctive approach, with Alcott wondering whether her commitment to abolition is enough and the famously contradictory Whitman’s transcendentalist reveries occasionally interrupted by his use of bluntly racist language. What makes the novel, particularly its Whitman-centric first half, so gripping is the way in which Lock depicts Whitman’s inner conflict—sometimes offensive, sometimes empathic, and sometimes wounded when he’s called out for his hypocrisy. The legacy of John Brown looms over both Alcott and Whitman, offering an example of someone who turned his ideals into unambiguous actions. Lock also maintains distinctive narrative styles for each of his two narrators,
“This latest novel from Hendrickson is a briskly paced work of historical fiction that seamlessly blends action and a love story.”

“Brandy is an amiable hero whose romance with Edwards unfolds at a leisurely pace as she struggles with the question of whether to reveal her family history to him.”

“An appealing pirate adventure.”

—Kirkus Reviews

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with Alcott’s section memorably beginning with her calling Whitman "a shameless ass" and Whitman himself prone to more poetic reveries, as when he ponders the human cost of war: "I think there is a grand regiment of the dead, which is enlisting men and boys, white and black, from every corner of the nation."

A haunting novel that offers candid portraits of literary legends.

**LITTLE NOTHINGS**

*Mayhew, Julie*

Bloomsbury (272 pp.)

$26.00 | June 28, 2022

978-1-42660-644-1

A friendship is exposed as toxic during a luxury trip that ends in violence.

Growing up, Liv had few friends, a fact that upset her mother, whose advice to her daughter was to “eat the fucking cake” and stop being so sensitive. So when she meets fellow mothers Binnie and Beth, she’s thrilled to finally be inducted into the seemingly mythic world of female friendship. Through play dates and book clubs, dinners and the occasional trip, the three are supportive of each other’s highs and lows as only true friends can be. When Beth introduces Ange to the group, she immediately finds a core role as listener and organizer. When Ange wants to plan a trip for all four of them and their families to Corfu, everything seems perfect. They can lounge and drink, get dressed up for dinner and comment cattily on the other guests. An accidental revelation about another trip that didn’t include Liv leads her to realize that Ange, who once seemed like the glue of the foursome, has actually wormed her way into their group in service of her own narcissistic personality. Estranged from the other women, Liv strikes up a friendship with a wealthy socialite who has a wicked sense of humor—and the willingness to help Liv rid herself of Ange once and for all. Mead faithfully replicates all the loving artifice and teasing engagement of golden-age puzzlers in this superior pastiche.

**THE LIGHTNING ROD**

*Meltzer, Brad*

Morrow/HarperCollins (432 pp.)

$18.42 | March 8, 2022

978-0-06-289240-9

Zig and Nola are back in this fast-moving thriller laced with blood and wit. In "the last fourteen minutes of his life," Wojo the valet steals Archie Mint’s BMW and drives it to the Mint family home, led there by the car’s GPS. It’s a robbery scheme that’s worked before, but this time both the valet and Mint—who followed him—end up dead, shot by someone waiting in the house. Jim “Zig” Zigarowski works at Calta’s Funeral Home and is an artist in making the dead look their very best. One woman “hasn’t looked this good since Reagan was President," he’s told. Before Calta’s, he’d been a mortician at Dover Air Force Base, which houses “America’s most secretive funeral home,” for two decades. Zig’s gift is to be able to repair any body, no matter
how badly damaged. Now he’s called back to Dover to take care of murdered veteran Lt. Col. Archie Mint. He has no idea what the government is up to, and he just wants to show the greatest respect for the dead. As he works, he always talks to the deceased as though to comfort them—he’s odd but obviously decent. He’s also a beekeeper who converses with the hive. Then, at the funeral home in Dover, he sees the Army’s Artist-in-Residence, Sgt. Nola Brown, the lightning rod who attracts so much trouble. She’d not only saved Zig’s daughter’s life when they were Girl Scouts, but two years ago she’d shot her own foster father in the head to save Zig’s life. “Nola didn’t walk; she lurked,” and her “sheer intensity...radiated off her, like plutonium.” Zig and Nola discover something “fishy” about Mint’s death. He’d been about to take secrets of criminal activity to his grave, and Zig and Nola might get killed trying to uncover them. The plot carries the story to a government facility called Grandma’s Pantry, apparently a real place where the feds once stored supplies for the aftermath of nuclear war. The characters are mostly delightful, including Nola’s cop brother, Roddy, who is trying not to be the monster he’d apparently been as a kid.

“We each have a little monster inside us,” as he was told. Not so delightful are the Reds, two redhead killers who aren’t above sawing tracheas. There’s plenty of clever dialogue and details like the woman with the rhinestoned oxygen tank.

A smart crime package, both funny and serious.

THE SECRET WITNESS
Methos, Victor
Thomas & Mercer (304 pp.)
$15.95 paper | July 1, 2022
978-1-54203-818-8

A former Utah prosecutor who’s been idling since a defendant he was trying stabbed him in open court comes back to take on one more case that’s gotten well and truly under his skin.

In the eight years since a killer calling himself the Reaper stabbed and shot three victims before
Victor has insult added to those woes when his estranged sister, Jules, shows up with Sun Jianshui, his father Vincent's lethal protégé and, Victor recently learned, Vincent's killer. Can he really be Jules' lover? The good news is that Sun, who apologizes for slashing the elder Li's throat, is an ace in the hole—including an indictment of America's own duplicity. It's a lot of fun.

A cutting thriller with nonstop action and twisty consequences.

**THE MAKER OF SWANS**

O'Donnell, Paraic

Tin House (370 pp.)

$27.95 | June 7, 2022

978-1-953534-20-0

A labyrinthine journey from a master craftsman of language and storytelling.

Like O'Donnell's previous book, *The House on Vesper Sands*, this novel is determined to unfold at its own pace. There are layers of narrative within the framework of gothic suspense, with a limited but rich cast of characters whose backgrounds and motivations are revealed only slowly. One of the pleasures of this genre is seeing how the disparate threads of the novel come together, and O'Donnell weaves a careful tapestry. Central to the story is Eustace, butler—although really much more—to the mysterious Mr. Crowe, who possesses supernatural powers that are never really explained. An act of random violence (which turns out to be not so random) sparks a chain of events which draws Clara, a young mute girl who lives in Mr. Crowe's sprawling mansion, into the clutches of some shadowy villains and, ultimately, to the revelation of her own abilities. Significantly, those powers connect to the act of writing, of imagination, of creation. So it is fitting that the story is reflected by O'Donnell's use of language, which is unfailingly evocative and beautiful. He is able to find poetry in dowdy, simple things, even an arrangement of cutlery or a piece of fabric. The action, when it comes, has an edge like a razor, and even a knife fight is described like a dance. Readers who are looking for a sorcery-driven blockbuster of rollicking heroes will not find it here. This novel is more like a maze that has to be negotiated step by step, with paths that sometimes bend back on themselves or lead to unexpected turns. The conclusion, when it is reached, is strange but satisfying, with a sense of inevitability that is appropriate to the tone of the book. Not a happy ending, perhaps, but the right one.

**This story requires time and attention, but the rewards are worth the journey.**
“A thoroughly entertaining rendition of one woman’s search for belonging.”

THE CANDID LIFE OF MEENA DAVE

A young woman inherits an apartment from a total stranger and tries to figure out how she is connected to the person who bequeathed it.

Meena Dave lost her parents in a tragic accident when she was a child. Ever since, she’s refused to get close to others, always keeping people at arm’s length. She lives as a nomad, working as a photojournalist and traveling constantly for work. She’s therefore quite puzzled when a lawyer informs her that she has inherited an apartment from a woman she’s never met. The apartment in the Back Bay area of Boston is part of a building called the Engineer’s House, which was purchased decades earlier by an Indian immigrant. Each of the building’s apartments is occupied by other descendants of Indian immigrants, and Meena wonders if she, as a woman with dark skin but unknown background, might have a familial connection to the woman who left her the apartment. After learning she can neither sell nor sublet the home for six months, Meena decides to move in while she tries to uncover the mysteries of her past. She starts building relationships with the other people in the building and also discovers notes inside the apartment that have apparently been left for her to find. The longer she stays, the more connected she feels to the building’s other residents and to her past. Told from Meena’s perspective, the book has a light feeling, but it examines deeper issues like loneliness, abandonment, and cultural expectations. Through Meena’s interactions with her new neighbors, the author explores what constitutes a family and a home. With fascinating details about photojournalism, communal apartment living, and the experiences of Indian nationals who immigrated to Boston in the early 20th century, the novel illustrates the unconventional ways in which people attach to others in unfamiliar surroundings. Although the narrative is sometimes bogged down by unnecessary details, the supporting characters, with intertwined and nuanced histories, add richness to the absorbing story.

A thoroughly entertaining rendition of one woman’s search for belonging.

SHIFTY’S BOYS

Offutt, Chris

Grove (272 pp.)

$27.00 | June 7, 2022
978-0-8021-5998-4

Another excellent Mick Hardin thriller set in rural eastern Kentucky.

Mick Hardin, of the Army’s Criminal Investigation Division, once again finds himself back home in Appalachia, freeloding on his sister, Linda, the no-nonsense county sheriff, while he recovers from a roadside bombing. When the county’s heroin kingpin (or, it being a small place, the county’s heroin princeling) is found dead in a vacant downtown lot in the county seat, the city police are disinclined to investigate, on the “good riddance” principle of rough justice. Linda, who’s occupied with her reelection campaign—and the awful, endless round of glad handing, small favors, and pancake breakfasts it requires—is glad not to have the case on her plate. But when the dealer’s mother, the misanthropic and well-armed Shifty Kissick (a former love of Mick and Linda’s late father), asks Mick to investigate, he feels obligated to take a look...and the cycle of violence and revenge begins. As in The Killing Hills (2021), Offutt has fashioned a mystery plot that’s fast-paced, efficiently plotted, atmospheric, and compelling, but what again distinguishes the book is the author’s command of and affection for the setting and the people who live there. Come for the thriller, by all means; it delivers nicely. But stay for, and linger in, the marvelous incidentals and atmospherics: arguments about mall names; lore about snakes and birds and pancakes; descriptions of a local shade-tree tinkerer’s Slinky-like version of a perpetual motion machine.

Terrific characters; taut suspense. Another winner from Offutt.

THE CANDID LIFE OF MEENA DAVE

Patel, Namrata

Lake Union Publishing (315 pp.)

$14.95 paper | June 1, 2022
978-1-5420-3907-9

A run-down European hotel, now being restored by its new Chinese owner, becomes the temporary home of a Dutch writer recording memories of “love in times of mass tourism.”

Prolific Dutch poet, playwright, essayist, and novelist Pfeijffer delivers an epic new work featuring Leonard Pfeijffer, “an esteemed and popular writer,” who offers an account of his time with Clio, “the love of my life [who] isn’t my love any more.” Recollections of this intense, lusty Italian affair form a plotline that is sandwiched between the additional meat of the book—a disquisition on Europe, its history, significance, and decline under assault from tourists. Clio is an art historian whose work lends perspective to the view that Europe’s greatness is all in its past. The fictional Pfeijffer is writing a novel on the subject of tourism, setting up a hall of mirrors concerning fact and fiction. But the insistent, multifaceted focus on the continent and its identity, and the meanings and truths to be found therein—financial, philosophical, political, creative, and more—merge into a relentless drumbeat of a message, with every subtopic, whether Clio’s interest in a lost Caravaggio or visits made to Malta, Genoa, Amsterdam, or Abu Dhabi, expanding on or threading back to the thesis. Europe is in the business of selling its past to tourists, a “barbarian invasion” that is wringing “the
The love story takes second place to an operatic, chest-beating, stylish, but overstated exploration of place and perspective.

THE SEAPLANE ON FINAL APPROACH
Rupeyser, Rebecca
Doubleday (288 pp.)
$27.00 | June 7, 2022
978-0-385-54760-4

Rupeyser’s debut is a strange, dreamlike coming-of-age story set in coastal Alaska.

Mira, the 18-year-old narrator, is oddly obsessed with the concept of “sleaze”—defining it and identifying it. She spends a summer working as a baker at Lavender Island Wilderness Lodge, a homestead that functions as a sort of bed-and-breakfast for international tourists. She passes time fantasizing about her aunt’s stepson, Ed, and observing the strange coterie of personalities working at the homestead, which include a middle-aged married couple, two other teen girls, and a brooding addict. While she is obsessed with sleaze and with her imagined future with Ed, Mira is largely detached from her actual surroundings, participating mostly as an observer—until the drama among her colleagues becomes impossible to ignore. The detached perspective through which we experience this unfolding narrative adds to its rarified, dreamy quality. With a delicate touch, the story invites rumination on themes of obsession and fixation, the dichotomous beauty and eeriness of an isolated land, and the struggle of locating oneself within a new environment. It is a testament to the power and subtlety of Rukeyser’s voice. With its neat corners and tidily resolved patterns, this book is a quiet accomplishment.

With its neat corners and tidily resolved patterns, this book is a quiet accomplishment.

MID-AIR
Shorr, Victoria
Norton (192 pp.)
$26.95 | May 17, 2022
978-0-393-88210-0

One family finds its fortunes on the rise just as another sees its own begin to fall.

The two novellas that make up Shorr’s lovely new book describe the falling, in one, and, in the other, the rising fortunes of two American families. In the first piece, a young couple hosts a dinner party for a few remaining members of the husband’s WASPy family; Uncle Edward, now in his 90s, who still wears a three-piece suit every day; Cousin Betty, who once read all of Proust while pursuing a divorce; and their father staked the family’s security on a biography he was writing—a definitive one—of Benjamin Franklin only to lose, at the last minute, the only manuscript; etc. In the second piece, the White family arrives at Ellis Island from what might have been Poland, or Ukraine—somewhere in Eastern Europe, anyway—to a newly anglicized name as well as a new life. Eventually, he acquires a wife, three sons, and an auto wrecking yard in Ohio, and the family’s mobility is rapidly ascendant. In both pieces, Shorr takes the long view; describing years—decades, sometimes—within a single paragraph. In the first piece, this strategy works well. The dinner party provides the perfect framing device for the narrator to shift her gaze from guest to guest. Shorr’s prose is fluid and supple, and the story has a lively movement. The second piece, however, about the White family, becomes bogged down in places. This story is longer and includes more characters and a longer span of time, and though Shorr uses the same quickly moving narrative strategy, it doesn’t work quite as well as it did the first time. Still, her insights are so keen, and her storytelling so elegant and natural, it would be easy to follow her down just about any train of thought.

With its neat corners and tidily resolved patterns, this book is a quiet accomplishment.

ROUGE STREET
Shuang Xue Tao
Trans. by Jeremy Tiang
Metropolitan/Henry Holt (240 pp.)
$26.99 | April 19, 2022
978-1-250-83587-1

These three novellas are a magical and gritty tour through life in Shenyang’s Yanfen Street shantytown, set against the backdrop of Mao’s China.

Shifting continuously among the perspectives of multiple characters and sometimes reaching across generations, Shuang blurs the boundaries among memory, imagination, and historical events. In the first novella, The Aeronaut, flashily dressed Li Mingqi courts the daughter of his
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father’s former mentor at a Communist leaflet printing firm, who still resents his one-time apprentice for outshining him. Mingqi’s visit sets off a series of events that force him to reckon with his father’s death and its rippling effects on the family. The narrator of the second novella, *Bright Hall*, is a young man still suffering from his mother’s abandonment when he was a boy. When he and his cousin Gooseberry, a dancer, chase down the suspect in the murder of an illegal preacher, their escape leads them onto a frozen lake and into a dreamlike interrogation with a monster fish of biblical proportions. The final novella, *Moses on the Plain*, follows the aftermath of a string of taxi robberies and the people who are intertwined with them, including a young girl who has a fascination with fire and whose family falls into ever more dire financial circumstances. Shuang reaches the height of his literary powers when magical realism breaks through into the everyday lives of the characters, revealing the emotional and political stakes of their actions and desires. Patient and attentive readers willing to follow Shuang through the twists and turns of the characters’ shifting narratives will be rewarded with a surreal portrait of how history is made and remembered—expanding and contracting like an Escher cityscape.

An ambitious portrait of the struggle to thrive in the Chinese equivalent of the “American Wild West.”

**DROLL TALES**

*Smyles, Iris*

Turtle Point (304 pp.)

$18.95 paper | June 21, 2022

978-1-933527-61-1

Fourteen stories featuring deeply weird characters moving through surreal and—yes—droll circumstances. If it’s the case that the opening story of a collection sets the tone for it, then readers can learn a lot from the opening of Smyles’ third book—following *Dating Tips for the Unemployed* (2016)—which begins with a glossary of “terms not found in this book.” Sample entries include “Apostrophe: any event occurring after a rope” and “Lemon Merengue: to move like a whipped dessert.” This dad-joke bubble finally bursts after three pages, largely replaced by an approach that is part Monty Python and part René Magritte. (Though there are plenty of groaners like the above throughout.) Smyles knows her humor tends toward the surreal; she explicitly invokes that school in stories like “Exquisite Bachelor,” a nod to the exquisite corpse game favored by surrealists; the story itself imagines central figures of surrealism, from Dalí to Breton, competing on the reality show *The Bachelor*. The collection is bookended by two long stories: The opener, “Medusa’s Garden,” concerns a love triangle among the Guild of the Living Statues. In the closer, “O Lost,” a lovelorn professor meets a mysterious smuggler and her motley crew of friends who force the professor to question the very nature of reality. If any art is subjective, funny art is doubly so. Smyles’ jokes miss their mark as often as they land, partly due to the

long, sometimes nearly hallucinatory tangents that pervade the collection, which can feel like Smyles merely writing for her own amusement. But at their best, the stories are erudite, original, and surprisingly poignant, as in the memorable “Contemporary Grammar,” in which a love story is told entirely through diagrammed sentences on a fifth grade English test.

An entertainingly eclectic, if self-indulgent, journey through the odder corners of existence.

**THE FALCON’S EYES**

*Stanfill, Francesca*

Harper (832 pp.)

$29.99 | July 5, 2022

978-0-06-307-422-4

The author of *Shadows and Light* (1984) and *Wakefield Hall* (1993) presents a remarkable 12th-century noblewoman’s journey from a French country estate to the side of the greatest queen of the Middle Ages.

“Never before had I seen a woman who was old…yet alluring. Her fair skin was wrinkled, but her vivid dark eyes, framed by a luxuriant expanse of brow, were still beautiful and bespoke an undaunted spirit.” That’s our first glimpse of the legendary Eleanor, a brilliant young woman who tries and fails to fit the mold of baby-making machine that the age required. It’s disappointing that it takes 500 pages to get to this exciting encounter, but Stanfill amply fills the preceding pages with a portrait of the private struggles and desperation of aristocratic women like Isabelle who, despite their best efforts, fail to satisfy the ambitions of their husbands. For many, such failure left them with only two choices: going home to their parents or to an abbey. Isabelle eventually finds refuge in an abbey patronized by Queen Eleanor, who seeks a companion in old age. Not just anyone will do—Eleanor requires someone who can write, play chess, and keep up with her sparkling wit. Trained in the classics by her grandfather, Isabelle is the right person for that role.

Eleanor’s life and the complicated relationship between England and France play in the novel’s background until fate brings the two characters together. All the exotic, romantic elements of the medieval world—falconry, ancient ruins, rustic healers, feasts by warm candlelight, ominous prophecies—are here as well as a frightening figure from Isabelle’s past, intent on ruining her and those she loves. Brave and defiant, Isabelle comes to understand that doing great things, as Eleanor has done, isn’t necessary to triumph in life. Sometimes, as she realizes about the old motto *vinci qui pattitur* (“He conquers who survives”), the simple act of living is victory enough.

This whopper of a novel is perfect for readers who want to lose themselves in a long historical yarn.
THIS TIME TOMORROW
Straub, Emma
Riverhead (320 pp.)
$28.00 | May 17, 2022
978-0-525-53900-1

A woman who’s been drifting through life wakes up the morning after her 40th birthday to discover that she’s just turned 16 again.

Alice Stern wouldn’t say she’s unhappy. She lives in a studio apartment in Brooklyn; has a job in the admissions office of the Upper West Side private school she attended as a kid; still hangs out with Sam, her childhood best friend; and has a great relationship with her father, Leonard, the famous author of a time-travel novel, Time Brothers. Alice’s mother left her and Leonard when Alice was a kid, and father and daughter formed a tight, loving unit along with their freakishly long-lived cat, Ursula. But now Leonard is in a coma, and as she visits him in the hospital every day, Alice is forced to reckon with her life. After a drunken birthday evening with Sam, Alice returns to her childhood house on Pomander Walk, a one-block-long gated street running between two avenues on the UWS—but when she wakes up the next morning, she hears Leonard in the kitchen and finds herself heading off to SAT tutoring and preparing for her 16th birthday party that night. Straub’s novel has echoes of Thornton Wilder’s play Our Town: Every prosaic detail of her earlier life is almost unbearably poignant to Alice, and the chance to spend time with her father is priceless. As she moves through her day, she tries to figure out how to get back to her life as a 40-year-old and whether there’s anything she can do in the past to improve her future—and save her father’s life. As always, Straub creates characters who feel fully alive, exploring the subtleties of their thoughts, feelings, and relationships. It’s hard to say more without giving away the delightful surprises of the book’s second half, but be assured that Straub’s time-travel shenanigans are up there with Kate Atkinson’s Life After Life and the TV show Russian Doll.

Combine Straub’s usual warmth and insight with the fun of time travel and you have a winner.

THE POET’S HOUSE
Thompson, Jean
Algonquin (320 pp.)
$26.95 | July 12, 2022
978-1-64375-156-6

A young woman with a reading disability finds an unexpected way into the written word when she crosses paths with a famous poet.

A recent community college dropout, narrator Carla “doesn’t process words on a page very well” and claims to be perfectly happy working for a landscape gardener in Northern California even though her well-meaning, bossy mother and her live-in boyfriend, Aaron, both think she could do better if she would only apply herself. Aaron, an IT guy who likes to camp and go hear music in local bars, is also skeptical when Carla becomes involved in the life of Viridian, a renowned poet she meets while taking care of the elderly woman’s garden. “Why do you want to hang out with these people anyway?” he asks after they attend a party at Viridian’s house with various chatting members of the literati (each one a sharp character study). “I’m not sure we’ve got a lot in common.” But Carla had her world expanded when, on a whim, she attended a poetry reading featuring Viridian. “For the first time [I] really heard a poem,” she says. And later: “It all ended up inside me.” In her usual accomplished and sensitive fashion, Thompson invites us into the consciousness of a young woman tentatively entering a whole new world that may give her a clue to who she is meant to be, while at the same time fearing that the enticing, glamorous creatures who live there simply view her as a useful helpmeet. The plot is propelled by various people trying to persuade Viridian to make public the last poems of her lover Mathias, a poet even more famous than she by virtue of killing himself at 35, but the real story is Carla’s gradual realization of what she wants and what she can be. The brilliantly rendered mise-en-scène of quarrelsome, ego-ridden, yet touchingly fragile poets and the literary entrepreneurs who circle around them makes a vivid backdrop for this classic coming-of-age tale.

More thoughtful, elegantly written fiction in the classic realist tradition by the gifted Thompson.

CHINATOWN
Thuận
Trans. by Nguyễn An Lý
New Directions (184 pp.)
$16.95 paper | June 7, 2022
978-0-8112-3188-6

A Vietnamese novelist contemplates the complexities of her life, culture, and lost marriage while waiting on a stalled Paris Métro train.

At the heart of this novel is a single mother unable to let go of the memory of her former husband, Thụy, and her conviction that their marriage back in Vietnam was doomed from the start due to the clash between their cultural backgrounds. The book takes place in 2004. When an abandoned duffel bag is discovered on the Métro, the novelist and her 12-year-old son—heading to a table tennis match—are caught in an indefinite delay as they wait for the authorities to arrive and investigate the potential terrorist threat. With the possibility of their lives being in danger creating a tension with the interminable limbo of waiting for the police, she recalls falling in love with Thụy when they were teenagers in the 1970s, in the run-up to the Sino-Vietnamese War, despite the fact that he was from an ethnically Chinese family in Saigon. When Thụy leaves her and their baby, she immigrates to Paris and works as an English teacher, eventually meeting another man whom she identifies only as “the guy,” seeks connections to Thụy through Parisian Chinese culture and people, and continues to resist her...
Conflict is frequently conveyed through internal dialogue, driven, some people recur while others are featured only once. Fronts an act of emotional infidelity that destroyed her marriage and often regretted. Treadway will leave readers reflecting on the character as well. Whether the conflict is large or small, the characters are united by references in each story to a fictional Russian cream. A wondrous ointment that I could put on before going to bed that would make me white overnight. As scenes of her life unfold, the narrator reveals encounters with neo-Nazis, threatening to all who are marginalized; a breakup with her Vietnamese girlfriend; her job at a market research call center; trips to Vietnam, New York, and North Carolina. “In the U.S., I’m Blacker than in Germany,” she decides. A crucial question drives her: How have race, nationality, and “a Capitalist mentality” shaped the woman she has become? A prismatic novel, thoughtful and unsettling.

The adventures of a trio of genius kids united by their love of gaming and each other.

Thought-provoking and engaging.

“INFINITE DIMENSIONS
Treadway, Jessica
Delphinium (240 pp.)
$28.00 | June 7, 2022
978-1-953002-11-2

Flawed and struggling characters face their mistakes and suffer the consequences in Treadway’s short story collection. In “Providence,” a woman meets her addiction personified on the same night that she meets her idol. In “Sky Harbor,” another woman confronts an act of emotional infidelity that destroyed her marriage and broke her son’s heart. And in “A Flying Bird,” a third woman impulsively steals a cake out of someone’s car—and eats it. In the universe of Treadway’s stories, which are strongly character-driven, some people recur while others are featured only once. Conflict is frequently conveyed through internal dialogue, though the spoken dialogue is believable and true to each character as well. Whether the conflict is large or small, the characters are united by references in each story to a fictional Russian writer’s short story about a housewife and a talking sugar bowl; this weaves a whimsical link from story to story and also makes it clear that while each story stands alone, they are also meant to serve as parts of a whole. These passing references to the sugar bowl story provide a glimpse of the unifying themes of this collection: an exploration of the little voices we heed and the natural circuitous path of a person’s thoughts, with sentences being repeated and scenes frequently circling back to the same places. Unfortunately, the book’s style comes at the cost of real poignancy, as the reader tends to be lulled into a state of disconnected boredom.

An ambitious experimental novel that succeeds in form and subject but is sometimes tedious to read.

A young woman probes her identity. German musician, performer, and playwright Wenzel makes an auspicious fiction debut with a formally unconventional novel, translated by Layne, consisting mostly of responses from a biracial, bisexual woman to a questioner whose identity remains a mystery—and may even be the protagonist herself. Fragmented revelations swirl into a narrative that bounds through place and time as the narrator reflects on racism, xenophobia, colonialism, capitalism, class—and her abiding sense of loss. She grew up in East Germany, the daughter of a rebellious, angry, erratic mother who often left her in the care of her staunchly German grandmother. Her father returned to his native Angola shortly after her birth, but her mother, refused an emigration permit, was forced to stay in a country she hated. The narrator’s twin brother killed himself at 19. “All the men in my family are either dead or far away,” she reflects. “And the women left behind are damaged.” Anxious, depressed, often lonely, the narrator has been damaged by family trauma as well as by the “explicit racism” that victimized her and her brother: “smashed windows in our childhood bedrooms,” taunting and malice from “classmates, parents and everyone who was generally a fan of Hitler’s.” “When I was a kid,” she recalls, “there was nothing I wanted more than a cream. A wondrous ointment that I could put on before going to bed that would make me white overnight.” As scenes of her life unfold, the narrator reveals encounters with neo-Nazis, threatening to all who are marginalized; a breakup with her Vietnamese girlfriend; her job at a market research call center; trips to Vietnam, New York, and North Carolina. “In the U.S., I’m Blacker than in Germany,” she decides. A crucial question drives her: How have race, nationality, and “a Capitalist mentality” shaped the woman she has become? A prismatic novel, thoughtful and unsettling.

1,000 COILS OF FEAR
Wenzel, Olivia
Trans. by Priscilla Layne
Catapult (288 pp.)
$16.95 paper | July 5, 2022
978-1-64622-050-2

When Sam Masur recognizes Sadie Green in a crowded Boston subway station, midway through their college careers at Harvard and MIT, he shouts, “SADIE
MIRANDA GREEN. YOU HAVE DIED OF DYSENTERY!"
This is a reference to the hundreds of hours — 609 to be exact —
the two spent playing “Oregon Trail” and other games when
they met in the children’s ward of a hospital where Sam was
slowly and incompletely recovering from a traumatic injury and
where Sadie was secretly racking up community service hours
by spending time with him, a fact which caused the rift that
has separated them until now. They determine that they both
still game, and before long they’re spending the summer writ-
ing a soon-to-be-famous game together in the apartment that
belongs to Sam’s roommate, the gorgeous, wealthy acting stu-
dent Marx Watanabe. Marx becomes the third corner of their
triangle, and decades of action ensue, much of it set in Los Ange-
les, some in the virtual realm, all of it riveting. A lifelong gamer
herself, Zevin has written the book she was born to write, a love
letter to every aspect of gaming. For example, here’s the passage
introducing the professor Sadie is sleeping with and his graphic
engine, both of which play a continuing role in the story: “The
seminar was led by twenty-eight-year-old Dov Mizrah....It was
said of Dov that he was like the two Johns (Carmack, Romero),
the American boy geniuses who’d programmed and designed
Commander Keen and Doom, rolled into one. Dov was famous for
his mane of dark, curly hair, wearing tight leather pants to gam-
ing conventions, and yes, a game called Dead Sea, an underwater
zombie adventure, originally for PC, for which he had invented
a groundbreaking graphics engine, Ulysses, to render photore-
alistic light and shadow in water.” Readers who recognize the
references will enjoy them, and those who don’t can look them
up and/or simply absorb them. Zevin’s delight in her characters,
their qualities, and their projects sprinkles a layer of fairy dust
over the whole enterprise.

Sure to enchant even those who have never played a video
game in their lives, with instant cult status for those who have.

M A Y 2 0 2 2 | K I R K U S . C O M | 3 7

M Y S T E R Y

HARLEM SUNSET
Afia, Nekesa
Berkeley (304 pp.)
$16.00 paper | June 28, 2022
978-0-393-10912-1

There’s no rest for Harlem’s Hero as
another killer disrupts the high times of
the Harlem Renaissance.
Louise Lloyd is slow to recover after
the trauma and notoriety stemming
from a life-changing experience a year
ago, when she shot a serial killer who prowled Harlem speak-
esies and preyed on Black girls in Dead Dead Girls (2021).
Now, in 1927, Louise settles back into the nightlife of the Harlem
Renaissance. With her lover, Rosa Maria, at her side, she drinks
and dances every evening at the Dove, a hot new club opened
by Rosa Maria’s twin brother, Rafael. But trouble seems to fol-
low Harlem’s Hero like a shadow. One morning, Louise wakes
up at the Dove with little memory of the night before. Nearby
are the sleeping Rosa Maria and Rafael and the corpse of Nora
Davies, a young woman who reintroduced herself to Louise at
the club only hours ago after they’d met briefly a decade before.
Later, Louise finds the door of her apartment ajar, the word
“GUILTY” written on one wall in red paint. Feeling compelled
to find the killer, she turns reluctant sleuth again. Louise’s
investigation places her in mortal danger, strains her relation-
ship with Rosa Maria, and ultimately becomes a journey of self-
discovery. Afia’s second Harlem Renaissance mystery continues
the personal stories of her compelling cast and deepens her
atmospheric depiction of the Jazz Age in Harlem.

A vivid crime story and an engrossing depiction of an era.

THE WIDOW OF BATH
Bennett, Margot
Poisoned Pen (272 pp.)
$14.99 paper | July 5, 2022
978-1-72826-109-6

A disgraced underling of the British
Embassy meets up again with his betray-
ers—but this time the danger’s not to him.
While he was stationed in Paris dur-
ing World War II, Hugh Everton refused
a proposal from Freddy Ronson that he
do a bit of illegal smuggling in return for some cash that Ever-
ton needed very much. Next thing he knew, he’d been fish-
ked from the Seine and was on his way to prison. Now, reviewing
hotels for a travel agency back in England, he runs into Lucy
Bath, the bewitching woman who’d touched him for a loan,
leaving him short back in Paris, and her retinue, which includes
her husband, retired judge Gregory Bath; the judge’s niece, Jan
Deverell, who’d befriended Everton in Paris; Lucy’s friend Ger-
ald Cady; and hotel owner Col. Atkinson, who looks an awful
lot like a freshly groomed Freddy Ronson. Yielding to Lucy’s
pressing invitation, Everton accompanies the party back to her
place, where, shortly after an intimate dialogue with Everton,
his husband is killed. Bennett’s novel, originally published in
1952, turns up the cleverness at every turn. The plot behind the
judge’s murder is mind-bogglingly complex, the subsequent
developments a series of canny bait-and-switches, the obser-
vation of the familiar character types acidulous, and the killer
deftly hidden till the very end. What lingers most in the mind is
the arch dialogue, which is so relentlessly witty that some read-
ers will lick their lips with incredulous gusto while those craving
greater realism make for the exits.

A polarizing find, but those who love it will be eternally
grateful to the British Library Crime Classics for digging it up.
CASTLE DEADLY, CASTLE DEEP
Bond, Veronica
Berkley (288 pp.)
$8.99 paper | July 5, 2022
978-0-59333-478-2

An actress and reluctant sleuth juggles romance and murder.

Nora Blake’s life changed when she took a job at Castle Dark, a real-life castle doubling as a dinner theater and home to a theater production group. Owner Derek Corby and his brother, Paul, are having financial problems keeping the expensive place going but are working on solutions when disaster strikes in the form of another murder (following Death in Castle Dark, 2021). Nora’s best friend, fellow actress Connie, is part of such a happy couple with Derek that it makes Nora wonder what’s wrong with her romance with Detective John Dashiell, which seems strained of late. But she enjoys the company of her fellow thespians except for Dorian, who seems to spend an inordinate amount of time in Castle cellars, where the new dinner theater production takes place, they reveal the body of young Ben Boyle, a well-liked supporting player who seemingly had no enemies. The entire group is in shock, though the actors, who are also rehearsing for an Ibsen play Derek is directing at a local community theater, have little time for brooding. Nora, as much as she’s comforted by her three kittens and a visit from her mischievous twin brothers, can’t help but do a little sleuthing. She’s still suspicious of Dorian, who seems to spend an inordinate amount of time in the little library next to her room, and she often hears strange noises coming from there but can’t find the cause. Learning more about cast members opens doors to information that she hopes will provide a solution to both the crime and the Corby brothers’ financial woes.

A character-driven cozy that neatly wraps its puzzling mystery in romance.

A PERILOUS PAL
Bradford, Laura
Berkley (288 pp.)
$8.99 paper | July 5, 2022
978-0-59333-478-2

The risks mount as the oddball business venture Emma Westlake launched in A Plus One for Murder (2021) picks up steam.

It took a lot of guts, some ingenuity, and a little bit of prodding from her octogenarian pal, Dottie Adler, but it looks like A Friend for Hire, Emma’s service for folks who need someone to offer unconditional support in their hour of need, is going to be a decent earner after all. In addition to Dottie, who still pays Emma for having tea with her once a week, there are three other clients and a fourth in the works. But Kim Felder, Emma’s newest paying friend, comes with a lot of baggage. She’s sad and lonely because now that her kids are grown, she has no one who needs her. But she’s also really, really angry because her husband dumped her for his thin, blond secretary. Emma encourages Kim to vent her frustrations on paper, writing down all the things she’d like to do to her ex. Which might be good psychology but turns out to be terrible advice from a legal standpoint, since once someone actually does strangle that old cheat Roger, the list provides Deputy Jack Riordan ample evidence to arrest Kim. Now Emma has two problems: First, her client is in the hoosegow; and second, she’s fighting with Jack just as their relationship is moving from the “friends” to the “dating” column. There’s only one way to fix this mess, and it doesn’t take Sherlock Holmes to figure out who has to crack this case.

A novel hook introduces an otherwise standard cozy.

DEATH AND THE DECORATOR
Brett, Simon
Severn House (192 pp.)
$28.99 | July 5, 2022
978-0-72785-067-6

After coming upon a handbag hidden in a wall, a mismatched pair of women of a certain age seek the truth about what happened to the bag’s owner in the insular British town of Fethering.

Footscrow House is being revamped once again in another incarnation. The seemingly doomed manse locals have dubbed Fiasco House because it’s been the site of many unsuccessful ventures is being converted into holiday flats. Bohemian healer Jude is less interested in the reno than in engaging the project’s painter and decorator, Pete, to help redecorate Woodside Cottage, her own home. While she’s meeting with Pete at the Fiasco House site, the two discover a handbag hidden within the walls of the house. A passport in the bag suggests that it belongs to an Anita Garner, Jude, who knows a woman would never willingly leave her bag, feels an immediate kinship with the bag’s owner, who vanished without a trace more than 20 years ago. Jude consults her neighbor and partner in investigating, Carole Seddon, in search of further insight. Jude’s outside-the-box perspective and Carole’s old-fashioned doggedness make them a chalk-and-cheese team with a history of resolving other local mysteries. According to town gossip, Anita’s disappearance may have coincided with some impropriety relating to male attention, likely from someone still in town. Though longtime residents close ranks to stymie Jude and Carole in their pursuit of the truth, the surprising death of someone who might have known more spurs their investigation.

The familiar but still unlikely duo play to their strengths in this mannerly cozy.
“A honeymoon in 1900 London is sidetracked by murder.”

**A BRIDE’S GUIDE TO MARRIAGE AND MURDER**

Freeman, Dianne

Kensington (304 pp.)

$26.00 | June 28, 2022

978-1-49673-161-6

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A honeymoon in 1900 London is sidetracked by murder. Frances Wynn, Countess of Harleigh, plans to marry lawyer George Hazelton now that they’ve cleared his name in a strange case in *A Fiancée’s Guide to First Wives and Murder* (2021). Unfortunately, her house is full of relatives, including her mother, who’s driving her to distraction. The couple are supposed to leave for France for their honeymoon until a long-running feud between two American millionaires ruins their plans. Unfortunately, Frances’ brother, Alonzo, is quite taken with Madeline Connor, a daughter of one of the ruthless businessmen. Even more unfortunately, both families are invited to the wedding. Madeline is courted by Viscount Daniel Fitzwalter, heir of the Marquis of Sudley, and her father favors his suit. At a reception after the wedding, tensions flare, and when Connor is found dead in his study in the house next door to the reception, Alonzo is arrested by Frances’ old friend Inspector Delaney. Since George represents Alonzo, the pair realizes that their honeymoon must be put on hold until they can vindicate Alonzo by solving the case. Connor has a raft of enemies, a put-upon wife and a furiously unhappy daughter. And of course the other wedding guests have to be counted as suspects. On top of the murder, Frances’ mother suspects her husband of having an affair. When the Marquis of Sudley is also murdered, the dash- ing duo find themselves in double trouble.

The Victorian backdrop perfectly sets off this amusing and challenging romantic mystery.

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**UNDER A BROKEN SKY**

Calvin, Kris

Crooked Lane (304 pp.)

$26.99 | July 12, 2022

978-1-64385-904-0

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Yes, there’s more corruption in the Sacramento city government, and yes, it’s uncomfortably personal for ethics investigator Emma Lawson. As the newest member of the Hayden Government Ethics Commission, Emma expects to be confronted with a certain amount of dirty laundry. But she’s not prepared for the whirlwind that begins with the maybe-not-so-accidental drowning of Jonathan Hill, son of former Sacramento Mayor Frances Hill, and continues with arson at Ideal Storage that sends one victim to the hospital and another to the morgue. Lt. Alibi Morning Sun, head of major crimes in the police department’s investigative division, has one eye on a series of visions that confirm Emma’s sense that something’s rotten with the pricey expansion of the city’s rail system and the other eye on Emma herself. For quite a while, however, Alibi’s attentions barely register because Emma’s been seriously distracted by the unexpected reappearance of her artist father, Atticus Lawson, who abandoned the family when Emma was a child and has now been arrested for assaulting a man who threw a glass of wine at a painting he’d exhibited in a local gallery. How can she possibly make peace with her absentee father even as she’s bent on tracking down the person who’s already killed two people and targeted two more, including Emma herself? For all the shuttling between personal and institutional loyalties, Calvin doesn’t bring the same intensity that marked the search for the killer in *All That Fall* (2021), and readers who haven’t been paying close attention will blink in confusion when the criminal mastermind is unmasked.

Lots of interesting city employees given much too much to do.

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**A CATERED DOGGIE WEDDING**

Crawford, Isis

Kensington (304 pp.)

$26.00 | June 28, 2022

978-1-49673-496-9

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Sisters Libby and Bernie Simmons find catering a wedding for dogs a walk in the park until the threats arrive. The sisters, who own *A Little Taste of Heaven*, have agreed to make doggie delights for two golden retrievers belonging to Jennie, the girlfriend of their employee Googie. Jennie, who’s opening a doggie day care called *Woof Woof*, thinks holding the ceremony there will provide great publicity. Inevitably, there’s push back from financially distressed Renee, who owns the high-end dress shop next door. Soon someone slashes all four tires of the sisters’ van and sends threatening messages to the people providing flowers for the wedding and taking photos. Even after the sisters’ dad, former police officer Sean Simmons, points out that they have no proof that Renee did the deed, they still confront her and her boyfriend, Ivan. Googie suspects Jennie’s ex-boyfriend Liam Nelson, who denies any involvement—after all, he’s even been willing to help Tom Bannon, the carpenter working on the day care center. The police think Jennie’s drunk when she reports finding Tom dead in his car, especially when they can’t find it in the place where she said it was. When his body is finally discovered, though, Jennie’s the prime suspect. Bolstered by their long record of crime-solving, the sisters set out to find the killer.

A plethora of suspects and tangled subplots lead to mass confusion.
Feedback can be deadly.

Sycophantic fan and aspiring writer Leo charms his way into a friendship with successful author Hannah Tigone through a series of flattering letters. In return, she shares a strange incident that happened in the Boston Public Library, where she’s working on her new novel, an episode that begins with a scream and ends with this provocative sentence: “And so we go to the Map Room to found a friendship, and I have my first coffee with a killer.” This, it turns out, is actually the beginning of Hannah’s new novel, sent in morsels to Leo, who faithfully offers thoughts and encouragement after every chapter. Gentill mines similar metafictional territory as in After She Wrote Him (2020), teasing readers with the challenge of deducing which of two narrative threads presents the author and which his or her story. As the mystery unfolds, the book expands into psychological thriller territory, with Leo becoming increasingly unhinged and describing the world as a rage-filled dystopia. Winifred “Freddie” Kincaid, Hannah’s mystery-writer protagonist, is as curious and resourceful as Miss Marple, and Hannah’shuoyant whodunit provides a bracing contrast to Leo’s dark world. Based on their appearances and their behavior in the library, Hannah gives her suspects names like Heroic Chin, Handsome Man, and Freud Girl. Lines blur. Freddie is so caught up in the twists and turns of the puzzle that she feels unable to write. Does Hannah have the same problem? Can Leo help her, does he genuinely want to, and where does he fit into the larger picture?

A sharply drawn fictional hall of mirrors sure to tantalize and occasionally frustrate.

MISS ALDRIDGE REGRETS
Hare, Louise
Berkley (368 pp.)
$27.00 | July 5, 2022
978-0-593-43925-8

Hare harks back to the age of Agatha Christie in a sparkling murder mystery set on an ocean liner crossing the Atlantic in 1936.

Jazz singer Lena Aldridge, who narrates this charmingly reticent novel, boards the RMS Queen Mary with a hefty envelope of cash and a parcel of secrets. For one thing, she just witnessed a murder—or maybe more than witnessed. The scumbag owner of the night-club where she sings has been dispatched with a cyanide-laced drink, and just as she thinks it might be expeditious to skedaddle, she meets mysterious musical agent Charlie Bacon, who offers her an all-expenses-paid voyage to the New World. He says he’s working for a Broadway impresario, a friend of her late father’s, who would like to offer her a role on the Great White Way. In London, Lena didn’t conceal the fact that her father was Black, but Charlie advises her to pass for White while traveling in first class on the Queen Mary since “Americans could be funny about things like that.” Once onboard, she becomes entangled with the large and troubled Parker clan. The Parkers are one of those wealthy American families, complete with personal doctor and private secretary, in which everyone has something to conceal. Soon enough, one after another of the clan succumbs to murder. As the bodies are falling around her, Lena finds comfort in the company of Black musician Will Goodman, but he can’t prevent her becoming the target of several attacks before the mystery is finally solved. Lena—whose hard-won wisdom includes the fact that “four martinis on an empty stomach will always result in poor decision-making”—is an appealing heroine, and Hare handles her old-fashioned material with a light touch, a keen eye for period detail, and a sturdy grasp on her puzzle, a wenching new twists even after the killer is unmasked.

WHAT LIES BENEATH
Hetherton, J.G.
Crooked Lane (304 pp.)
$27.99 | July 12, 2022
978-1-64385-020-7

On the eve of a convicted killer’s execution, his case is reopened in the most disturbing way imaginable.

Back in 1996, Simon Barrow, the Shotgun Slayer, killed Bob and Linda Merritt in their North Carolina farmhouse; only Emily, their 8-year-old daughter, escaped. Now, as Hillsborough Gazette crime reporter Laura Chambers writes, his appeals have run out and he’s about to face the ultimate punishment. Before the last chapter in Barrow’s sorry life can close, Laura is pulled into what at first seems the fatal but otherwise routine death of a Jane Doe who ran in front of a truck. The preliminary investigation reveals that the victim was shot moments before she was run down and that in the hours before her death, she’d tried to phone Laura four times. Lt. David Whitley, of the Orange County Sheriff’s Office, demands to know what Laura’s connection to the dead woman was and refuses to accept Laura’s reply that she can’t identify the Jane Doe because they’d never met. Laura, who’s already demonstrated her strong inclination to go her own way, persuades retired sheriff’s investigator Don Rodgers to help her dig up information, and soon the two of them have crossed so many red lines that they’re in greater danger from the police than from the shooter. But Laura has meanwhile unearthed a crucial lead that suggests she may have known the victim after all. Imagine the reaction of Whitley, who’s already prepared to throw the book at Laura, when she tells him she thinks the corpse is that of her childhood friend Emily.

Hetherton keeps turning up the heat and tossing in wrenching new twists even after the killer is unmasked.
THE SACRED BRIDGE
Hillerman, Anne
Harper/HarperCollins (320 pp.)
$26.99 | April 12, 2022
978-0-06-290-836-0

Even though he sorely needs a break from his job with the Navajo Nation police, Sgt. Jim Chee, hiking the area around Lake Powell alone, really misses his wife, Officer Bernadette Manuelito. Little does he know that their separation is about to get much more fraught.

A fresh corpse Jim finds in the lake turns out to be that of Curtis Walker, the younger brother of Bernie’s clan brother, Doug Walker. At first glance Curtis appears to have drowned, but he’s actually died from head injuries inflicted before he tumbled into the lake. Deputized by Park Service chief ranger Ted Morris to put a sympathetic face on the questions that must be put to Doug’s Navajo connections, Jim finds himself with an embarrassment of riches, since Doug’s work with Laguna Blue Watercraft Sales and Rental, his brother’s Antelope Canyon Tours, and aging archaeologist Dr. Peter Hendrix provide possible motives for his murder ranging from bad romance to ecopolitics. While Jim is talking to a bevy of interested parties, Bernie is plucked into a case of her own when a hitchhiker who’s pleaded for her help is run over repeatedly by a Mercedes that speeds away before she can identify the driver. Because of persistent rumors of skulduggery at Dino Begay Perez’s K’é Hemp Farm, a task force is assembled to investigate possible links between KHF and the marriage; she’s disguised herself as a potential divorcée to interview Niko’s colleague Mindy Goodacre—and she’s gone looking for Trixie Steppes, the babysitter the Normans shared with another family, who seems to have vanished herself. It’s an excruciatingly familiar gambit, but veteran Malliet handles it with aplomb until the very end, dispensing with most of the suspects in a few sentences each, as if they didn’t bear much attention, to ground Augusta’s investigations in realistic-seeming rhythms, inducements, problems, and reasonable but unheeded warnings from Detective Narduzzi—until the climactic episode suddenly turns her into a damsel in distress whose behavior, as she acknowledges, is “like something out of a bad mystery novel.”

A flawed but mostly superior example of the nosy-neighbor-investigates subgenre.

And not just any people. In short order, she’s learned that the Garners, moved by suspicions and antipathy, hired private eye Kent Haworth to look into Niko’s background even before the marriage; she’s disguised herself as a potential divorcée to interview Niko’s colleague Mindy Goodacre; and she’s gone looking for Trixie Steppes, the babysitter the Normans shared with another family, who seems to have vanished herself. It’s an excruciatingly familiar gambit, but veteran Malliet handles it with aplomb until the very end, dispensing with most of the suspects in a few sentences each, as if they didn’t bear much attention, to ground Augusta’s investigations in realistic-seeming rhythms, inducements, problems, and reasonable but unheeded warnings from Detective Narduzzi—until the climactic episode suddenly turns her into a damsel in distress whose behavior, as she acknowledges, is “like something out of a bad mystery novel.”

A flawed but mostly superior example of the nosy-neighbor-investigates subgenre.

FLYIN’ SOLO
Peden, Peggy O’Neal
Severn House (192 pp.)
$28.99 | July 5, 2022
978-0-7278-094-2

A class reunion leads a Nashville travel agent into danger.

Campbell Hale is forced to attend her 20-year high school reunion alone when her sort-of boyfriend, homicide detective Sam Davis, catches a case. While there, she runs into Franklin “Fly” Young, the handsome football player who broke her heart at 17. Fly, now a wealthy businessman with a wife he doesn’t love, offers Campbell his company’s travel account, and they have a long conversation about their past and present lives. A few weeks later, after Campbell has started handling Fly’s travel arrangements, she’s having dinner with Sam one night at a restaurant next door to a marina when they run into Fly. He’s just bought a boat and is planning to sail it to Florida for refurbishment. Sam doesn’t seem happy to meet Fly, especially since it turns out that the murder he’s working was an executive at Fly’s company. When he drops his boat off in Florida, Fly rents a different boat to sail around for a few days, but then a storm comes up and he’s lost at sea. When the boat is discovered with no one aboard, Fly’s secretary, Marcella, asks Campbell, who’s headed for the Bahamas, to stop in Miami and pick up Fly’s laptop and anything else he left there. All hell has broken loose at the company, and there are suspicions of malfeasance. Campbell feels unsafe staying in the company’s Miami condo when she realizes someone’s tampered with the lock on the bedroom door. Back in Nashville, Campbell finds Fly’s wife dead in her pool, and Campbell is naturally the prime suspect. She has to depend on herself to get out of trouble.

A page-turner with plenty of riddles and the added fillip of nostalgia for young love.
Fourteen stories, originally published between 1930 and 1949, in which valuables are stolen from impregnable strongholds, victims are poisoned through inexplicable means, and, of course, murderers escape from rooms locked from the inside.

As Penzler warns in his introduction, readers “will inevitably be disappointed” by magic tricks whose logistics are eventually and necessarily, explained in detail. The greatest feat of prestidigitation here, in fact, may be the lack of overlap with Penzler’s monumental 2014 collection The Black Lizard Big Book of Locked-Room Mysteries. Although 10 authors are represented in both volumes, only one story, Ellery Queen’s novella The House of Haunts, also known as The Lamp of God, is duplicated—and no wonder, since this tale of a house that disappears overnight continues to impress despite its wild implausibilities. The other extended story, John Dickson Carr’s The Third Bullet, is cluttered, convoluted, and much less sharp than Carr’s many locked-room novels.


The second in a series, after The Yeoman’s Tale (2021), loosely based on The Canterbury Tales.

As Geoffrey Chaucer, Court Poet and Comptroller of Woollens, leaves on a pilgrimage to Canterbury, he little knows that his plans will be ruined by a peasant uprising. Chaucer’s traveling companions, a mixed bag of historical and fabricated eccentrics, range from his fellow poet John Gower to a prioress, Madame Eglantyne, and her lapdog. Their leader and organizer, Harry Baillie, owner of the Tabard Inn, gets them only a few days into their trip before they run into the hundreds of peasants led by Wat Tyler and the priest John Ball, who aim to make England a classless society. Stripped of all but their horses, they’re forced to return to London, where the powers that be ignore Chaucer’s warnings. Under the leadership of yeoman Tom Hardesty, the pilgrims make the Tabard Inn into a defensible fortress. Hardesty meanwhile discovers the body of a woman in the Thames with her throat cut and brings it to the inn, where the ever curious Chaucer can’t resist investigating. Even after a second murder, his sleuthing must play second fiddle to surviving when the peasants attack and King Richard’s advisers dither over what to do.

A grim but often amusing historical mystery leaving plenty of tales yet to tell.
A thrill-and-spills conclusion to the adventures of Sancia Grado.

Bennett concludes his Founders trilogy, preceded by *Foundryside* (2018) and *Shorefall* (2020), with characteristically high-spirited mayhem. The magic of scriving, which is to say, melding two objects together to form weapons, tools, and the like, has been extended to humans and even whole cities, so that the medieval-tinged metropolis of Tevannoe now roams the land, searching for transubstantiation: "Tevanne did not wish to have a body anymore. It had calculated many times that, should it shed this corporeal form, its intelligence should still persist in all the various lexicons and rigs throughout its empire." Against the bad-tempered and ill-intentioned Tevannoe stand characters we’ve met in Bennett’s previous volumes, but with considerable attention given here to their backstories: We learn, for example, that the keylike creature called Clef (naturally) once took quite different form, that Berenice and Sancia are more than comrades in battle, and that Gregor Dandolo has more resources than hitherto hinted at. And then there’s Crasedes Magnus, who has strong skills as a shape-shifter and, mercurially, is good one minute and bad the next; it’s for good reason that Clef in particular harbors deep hatred for him. Some of Bennett’s yarn concerns the origins of scriving, a bit of technological sorcery that, often put to bad uses itself, reveals some good sides as well and produces a happy ending—at least for the survivors. Bennett’s language sometimes runs blue, sometimes knotty ("The Keyship's esringly batteries wheeled about and sprayed the night skies as the shrieker bolts descended"), and readers will be lost in its idiosyncrasies and the story’s plot turns if they haven’t read the first two books. The effort to do so is well worth it, though, for Bennett is a master of worldbuilding, and for all the novel’s far-fetched moments, everything seems perfectly logical on its own terms.

Great fun, with nonstop action and with an escape hatch that would allow—dare we hope?—a sequel.

**THE INVISIBLE THINGS**

*Johnson, Mat*

One World/Random House (288 pp.)

$27.00 | June 28, 2022
978-0-593-22925-5

Kidnapped astronauts find themselves in a mysterious city on one of Jupiter’s moons.

Sociologist Nalini Jackson landed a gig that many of her colleagues would envy: She’s undertaking “an intensive field study of social dynamics” on a NASA cryoship orbiting Jupiter. The problem, she soon realizes, is that she doesn’t like people all that much, especially most of the overgrown frat-boy types who are her shipmates. Things get worse when their ship is suddenly taken by mysterious forces to Europa, one of Jupiter’s moons, and they find themselves in New Roanoke, “an American city of at least a million. On a freaking moon, 444 million miles away, for chrissakes. In a bubble. City streets. Expressways. Parks.” They’re made to attend an orientation, where a supervisor tells them, “You can either let it drive you crazy for the rest of your life—and it can—or you can just go with the flow and make the most of this. Do like the locals do: Accept it and live your life. You got no choice; this is your home now.” The ship’s mission leader, Bob Seaford, takes this advice and gets involved in the community’s ruling party, while Nalini’s friend Dwayne Causwell goes the other way, plotting to escape the city with a ragtag group of dissidents. Meanwhile, a crew consisting of a NASA admiral, a businessman, and his dopey assistant embark on a voyage to rescue the kidnapped astronauts, who find themselves dealing with “invisible things,” mysterious gravitational forces that the people of New Roanoke refuse to discuss. There’s a lot going on in this book, and the results are mixed. As a satire of American politics and class issues, it’s a little too obvious and clumsy. But as a science-fiction novel, it’s saved by Johnson’s charismatic writing and sense of humor. ("So we missed sentient life—so what?" Nalini tells Dwayne early in the book. "Have you ever met sentient life? A lot of them are assholes.") The book doesn’t quite live up to its high ambitions, and it’s far from Johnson’s best work, but it’s still unquestionably entertaining.

**Clumsy in parts but, overall, a lot of fun.**
KAGEN THE DAMNED
Maberry, Jonathan
St. Martin's Griffin (560 pp.)
$18.99 | May 10, 2022
978-1-250-78397-4

In the first of a series, epic fantasy blends with eldritch horror and folklore as a man seeks vengeance for the destruction of an empire.

Kagen Vale, sworn protector of the young heirs of the Silver Empress, awakens from a night of debauchery to discover himself naked and weaponless as the forces of the long-defeated Hakkians slaughter the royal family and conquer the Silver Empire in the course of a single night. Tormented by his failure to save his charges and by a vision of his nation's gods literally turning their backs on him, the apparently damned man wanders the countryside in a drunken and murderous haze while nursing vengeance against the usurping Witch-king, a sorcerer and disciple of Hastur, the sinister Shepherd God. Both the Witch-king and a desperate rebellious cabal are seeking Kagen, the former to capture and humiliate him, the latter because they believe Kagen is key to defeating the Witch-king, whose ambitions threaten the whole world. Meanwhile, having lost the protection of their destroyed empire's faith, two nuns seek the help of other, older gods. Lovecraftian pastiche remains a popular, some might say overused, subgenre, but it's usually presented in a more contemporary or recent historical setting rather than a high fantasy milieu as it is here. Maberry also blends in the mythology of Robert Chambers' The King in Yellow as well as references to Tennyson's poem “The Lady of Shalott” and Keats’ “La Belle Dame sans Merci.” While it’s difficult to garner any sympathy for the Witch-king and the gruesome god he serves, the author offers a shades-of-gray approach to most of the story, suggesting that not all the worshippers of the other Great Old Ones are evil, that the Hakkians had at least some justification for rising up against the Silver Empire, and that the Silver Empire's seemingly gentle Garden faith had some fairly ruthless underpinnings. Various characters warn Kagen and the reader that things are not always as they appear, and one of the stunning revelations at the end should probably be obvious, but that foreknowledge doesn't prevent the novel's thrilling denouement from striking like a hammer blow.

A vibrant, textured, and exciting admixture of subgenres that do not often play together.

ORDINARY MONSTERS
Miro, J.M.
Flatiron Books (672 pp.)
$28.99 | June 7, 2022
978-1-250-83366-2

In Victorian London, two foundling boys with unusual talents find themselves at the center of an ancient battle between the worlds of the living and the dead.

Charlie Ovid is a 16-year-old mixed-race orphan in Reconstruction-era Mississippi who has been convicted of murdering a White man. So far, he has been executed three times for his crime, but in spite of the nightly beatings inflicted upon him ever since, Charlie remains physically unscathed, his uncanny healing power a mystery even to himself. Marlowe is another orphan, found as a baby gently glowing in a freight train at a dead woman's breast and raised by two adopted mother figures, the timid Eliza and the muscular, tattooed Brynt. “The shining boy,” as he comes to be called, is raised in the slums of London and then as part of a sideshow act in a traveling circus crisscrossing the American heartlands. His origins, his powers, and his fate are as much mysteries to him as Charlie’s cycle of suffering and healing, until they’re each visited by Frank Coulton and Alice Quicke, a detective duo employed to find remarkable children like Charlie and Marlowe and bring them back to the mysterious Cairndale Institute in the far north of Scotland, where they will be protected and trained in the uses of their powers. Cairndale, a labyrinthine manor house on the shores of a dark, fathomless loch, turns out to be as full of secrets as the children themselves, and Charlie and Marlowe—along with a Japanese dustworker named Komako; Ribs, the invisible girl; and shy Oskar and the flesh giant Lymenion who sleeps under his bed—must unravel the true motives of their inscrutable guardian, Dr. Henry Berghast, before Jacob Marber, a figure of tremendous power who used to be an unusual child just like them, can tear apart the seal between the worlds of the living and the dead. A fast-paced novel whose action and intrigue make short work of its daunting page count, this tome is clearly set up to be Book 1 of a larger series. However, while the world is intricate and the characters finely drawn, there is such a sheer volume of people, plotlines, backstories, and lore being introduced that the autonomy of the novel itself suffers.

Epic in scope and size, this book sets itself up for many sequels to come.

“A vibrant, textured, and exciting admixture of subgenres that do not often play together.”

KAGEN THE DAMNED
CHEF’S KISS
Alexander, TJ
Emily Bestler/Atria (320 pp.)
$17.00 paper | May 3, 2022
978-1-9821-8908-2

When a high-strung pastry chef learns that her dream job is at stake, her carefully organized life transforms into a four-course meal without a recipe in this delicious debut.

Simone Larkspur, 28, is nothing if not by the book. After studying her apron off at Le Cordon Bleu, she scored her dream gig as a recipe developer and writer for The Discerning Chef, a cookbook and magazine publisher in Manhattan’s West Village. So when her boss, culinary giant Pim Gladly, lets Simone know that TDC is losing money, her pastry-perfect world is turned upside down. In order to save TDC’s empire, they’ll have to pivot to video, which is not in Simone’s comfort zone, to say the least. To Simone’s dismay, Pim hires an entire team of videographers, including “windbag” Chase McDonald, to help her and the other chefs record trendy recipe videos. Also new to the crew is kitchen manager Rachel “Ray” Lyton, whose positive energy and infectious laughter irk Simone most of all. It’s not that Simone is jealous of Ray for being out and proud or that she herself is private about being bisexual; it’s that Ray’s personality is the complete opposite of Simone’s. Ray is open, approachable, and flirtatious, whereas “innuendo and subtle interest bounced off Simone like off a good nonstick pan.” While Simone would like nothing more than to grapple with her feelings for Ray alone, their on-screen chemistry does wonders for TDC’s popularity, and they both become instant online celebrities. Also new to the crew is kitchen manager Rachel “Ray” Lyton, whose positive energy and infectious laughter irk Simone most of all. It’s not that Simone is jealous of Ray for being out and proud or that she herself is private about being bisexual; it’s that Ray’s personality is the complete opposite of Simone’s. Ray is open, approachable, and flirtatious, whereas “innuendo and subtle interest bounced off Simone like off a good nonstick pan.” While Simone would like nothing more than to grapple with her feelings for Ray alone, their on-screen chemistry does wonders for TDC’s popularity, and they both become instant online celebrities. But when Ray is discriminated against after coming out to the team as nonbinary, Simone realizes that maybe her perfect job isn’t so perfect after all. Alexander whips up a delectable couple with Ray and Simone; they are each on their own journeys for self-awareness and self-confidence, which they gratifyingly achieve on an individual level. Alexander’s romance confronts workplace discrimination, internal biases, and issues like transphobia and misogendering with ease.

Baked to perfection.

UP ALL NIGHT WITH A GOOD DUKE
Bennett, Amy Rose
Sourcebooks Casablanca (336 pp.)
$8.99 paper | June 28, 2022
978-1-72824-829-5

A teacher must educate herself on matters of the heart after she bargains for her future with an ostracized duke.

When she learns that her friend Lucy needs her help, Artemis Jones quits her job at a finishing school and travels to London. While she hopes her presence will make Lucy’s experience of her first season more bearable, Artemis has an ulterior motive: She aspires to find a wealthy and progressive benefactor willing to fund her dream of opening a ladies’ college. And Artemis has another secret: In addition to being a teacher, she’s the author of a series of popular Gothic romance novels. Given her circumstances, Artemis is perhaps the least suitable candidate for Dominic Winters, the widowed duke of Dartmoor, who’s looking for a wife to give him an heir and help handle his teenage daughter, Celeste—but his task is complicated by rumors that he had a hand in his first wife’s death. When Dominic and Artemis find themselves inexorably attracted to one another, they hatch a plan: She will help him reach Celeste, and he will, in turn, fund her school. When the plan leads to a fake engagement and real emotional attachment, Artemis must decide if she trusts the duke enough with her secret identity, and her future. The first installment of the Byronic Book Club series is not only peppered with meaningful references to books by Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters, but also borrows significantly from their aesthetic. As Artemis negotiates with a Byronic hero, windy moors, and the threat of ruin, she sets herself apart from the heroines who have inspired her with her fierce ambition and lack of inhibition. But even as Artemis emerges as a well-rounded, if slightly indecisive, character, Dominic seldom gets the opportunity to cast aside his solemnity. What Dominic and Artemis’ interactions lack in wit and humor, though, they make up for with heat and sexual chemistry, and their romance unfolds credibly in a skillfully woven plot.

An undemanding romance enlivened by an unconventional heroine.
“The warmth of steady family ties complements the heat of intense sexual chemistry.”

THE EMMA PROJECT

A SCOT IS NOT ENOUGH
Conkle, Gina
Avon/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
$8.99 paper | April 26, 2022
978-0-06-299900-9

In 1753, a sharply ambitious and straightforward London barrister finds his careful plans upended by the politics and personality of a rebellious Scotswoman.

Charismatic and worldly-wise, Ceceilia MacDonald is the leader of a league of Scotswomen. Formed a few years after the Scottish uprising of 1745, the main mission of the league is to reacquire the treasures that have been wrested from their clan. Ceceilia's primary goal is clear: She is to retrieve the sgian-dubh, a symbolically significant ceremonial dagger that once belonged to the chief of her clan. However, her path is littered with dangerous obstacles, including the steadfastly law-abiding barrister Alexander Sloane, who works for the Duke of Newcastle. Alexander is tasked with following Ceceilia, who, in the eyes of the magistrate, is a suspected Jacobite sympathizer. If he does the job well, he could achieve his long-cherished dream of becoming Baron of the Exchequer. Alexander and Ceceilia find themselves attracted to each other, engaging in a cat-and-mouse game with each seeking the upper hand. But when Ceceilia and her league catch the attention of several dangerous adversaries, the steady barrister is forced by the defiant "demirep" to reevaluate his ideas of loyalty, truthfulness, and love. The second installment in Conkle's Scottish Treasures series doles out angst and wit in equal measure. The characters are instantly likable, and it's easy to sympathize with their internal struggles. Ceceilia's relationships with other women, enlivened simultaneously by a smidge of uneasiness and dollops of steady solidarity, are especially well etched. Her pursuit of the dagger is replete with suspense, and Alexander's official pursuit of Ceceilia is intriguing, but the thrill flags when their goals shift and each becomes more interested in the other than in their long-held aims.

A satisfying romance that unpacks not only the joys of companionship, but also the adjustments it demands.

THE EMMA PROJECT
Dev, Sonali
Avon/HarperCollins (400 pp.)
$15.99 paper | May 17, 2022
978-0-06-305184-3

Two lifelong friends learn to see each other in a new light when forced to pursue a common goal.

Once betrothed to Yash Raje, heir apparent of the aristocratic Indian Raje family, and beloved by his sprawling clan, Naina Kohli has become persona non grata since she and Yash split up, acknowledging that the engagement had been a convenient sham. So when she finds out that the benefactor of her microfinance foundation wants her to work with Vansh Raje, Yash's youngest sibling, Naina is distraught: Not only does this development make it impossible for her to put some much-needed distance between herself and the Rajes, but it also forces her to hitch her wagon to the pampered prince who has, to her knowledge, never demonstrated a capacity for dedication or commitment. In his mid-20s, Vansh is relentlessly charming; coasting along easily on the strength of his looks and wealth, he has traveled the world working on do-gooder projects. He is extremely earnest about his latest and cares enough about Naina to be frustrated that she often underestimates his sincerity. But when circumstances force them to acknowledge each other's best qualities and become freshly aware of their own flaws, sparks begin to fly. Naina must now decide if she wants a real relationship with a different Raje brother altogether. The fourth and final installment in Dev's series of Jane Austen adaptations brims with humor, wit, and pathos. Naina, originally christened Knightlina, is modeled on Emma's steadfast Mr. Knightley, while Vansh shares Emma's compassion and tendency to make unfortunate errors in judgment. Dev's attention to detail—from descriptions of Naina's Bollywood-inspired attire to her mother's turns of phrase as she negotiates with English—brings every character to life and inspires instant empathy. While descriptions of the Rajes' family dynamics are consistently entertaining, their eventual change of heart toward Naina feels somewhat abrupt.

The warmth of steady family ties complements the heat of intense sexual chemistry.

ALWAYS BE MY DUCHESS
Howard, Amalie
Forever (368 pp.)
$15.99 paper | July 12, 2022
978-1-538-73771-2

A duke hires a ballerina to play the role of his fiancee in this historical romance reminiscent of *Pretty Woman*. Genevieve "Nève" Valery came to London to find work so she could financially support her injured sister back home in Paris, but she's been struggling to get hired as a dancer. When she rescues Lysander Blackstone, Duke of Montcroix, from cutpurses in Covent Garden, he offers her a proposal. In order to secure a business deal, he needs to prove he's a family man who intends to marry, so he will pay her handsomely to pose as a potential duchess he is courting. She accepts, but what starts as a one-night-only deal turns into more as they both realize the benefits of their partnership. As Nève discovers the kind heart beneath Lysander's stony exterior, the pretend relationship begins feeling all too real. The central couple have an instant connection, but their relationship grows so much richer as they become closer and open themselves up to love and passion. Nève is fierce and spirited and the perfect partner for the logical, stoic duke (Howard notes he is written as neurodivergent, which would not have been diagnosed in that
period). The external conflicts aren’t as well developed, and the baddies feel like caricatures. However, Nève’s friend group is wonderful, funny, and full of heart, which bodes well for future installments of this new series, as these ladies are sure to be the next heroines.

Some of the drama seems superfluous, but the main characters make an enticing, entertaining pair.

**WICKED BEAUTY**

Robert, Katee  
Sourcebooks Casablanca (400 pp.)  
$15.99 paper | June 7, 2022  
978-1-72823-179-2

Three aspirants to power in Olympus clash on a mock battlefield—and in the bedroom.

Achilles, second-in-command in Athena’s special forces, wants to become the new Ares in this third volume of Robert’s Dark Olympus series, a modern twist on the classical Greek pantheon. He’s taking Patroclus, his best friend and lover, with him into the competition for the title, but neither counted on spoiled rich girl Helen entering the fray. Helen is tired of being treated reductively by her poisonous ex, Paris, and as a pawn by her family, headed by the newly ascended Zeus. Winning the title of Ares, commander of Olympus’ army, is her path to independence. But then, surprising even her, a couple she’s competing against makes her want to trust them. Patroclus has always loved Achilles, his impulsive warrior partner, but seeing Helen stirs memories of a childhood friendship that’s turning into adult longing. Can these two wary overthinkers win their hearts’ desires while forming a throuple with the impulsive Achilles? As they all jostle to protect themselves while winning these brutal Olympics, their sexual and emotional needs could bind them into a fulfilling alliance or, if their ambitions get in the way, rip them apart. For readers who want a sexy updated mythology that’s mindful of current conversations about consensual play in a ménage à trois or those who enjoy romance novels with a Survivor motif, such as Kresley Cole’s Immortals After Dark series, this could be just the thing. The first-person narrative revolves among the three protagonists, and the intensive navel-gazing might detract from the sex scenes (featuring both couples and threesomes) for some readers.

*The Hunger Games* intersects with Greek lore in this male-female-male erotic romance.

**HEATED**

Simone, Naima  
Montlake Romance (253 pp.)  
$12.95 paper | July 5, 2022  
978-1-5420-3829-4

An inventive entrepreneur mixes business with pleasure when she strikes up a flirtation with a client’s ex in this steamy contemporary romance.

Zora Nelson is the president of BURNED Inc., a company that specializes in giving its clients amicable ends to their relationships. When Zora lands Valerie Summers—a wealthy woman who values discretion—as a client, she personally handles her assignment by way of reading a Dear John letter to her soon-to-be-ex. Cyrus Hart is surprised that his girlfriend of six months has sent someone else to break up with him. He’s not entirely heartbroken, though his job as an entertainment lawyer requires him to network and Val helped with that. Zora and Cyrus share an immediate attraction, and, after running into each other soon after, they fall into a friends-with-benefits scenario without Cyrus knowing the depth of Zora’s involvement in the end of his last relationship. Cyrus assumes Zora is a friend Valerie convinced to read the breakup letter for her, and Zora doesn’t bother to correct him. The fact that Zora was both paid to break up with him and is the president of the company hired to do so remains a secret for most of the book, like a storm cloud hanging over every sweet and sexy moment. Zora is characterized as the business-savvy president of BURNED Inc., having started the company with her two siblings. Despite initial doubts from investors, their parents, and even potential clients, Zora has proven them all wrong with plenty of satisfied customers. Her only minimal hesitation in getting involved with Cyrus and potentially jeopardizing her company’s reputation feels out of character. As Zora’s leading man, Cyrus is fine but not distinctive. There are a handful of bright spots amid Zora and Cyrus’ lukewarm connection, mainly Zora’s interactions with her darling siblings both in and out of the office. A fake dating element emerges around the halfway point but feels very much half-baked.

A mismatched romance with both too much and not enough going on.

**BET ON IT**

Slaughter, Jodie  
St. Martin’s Griffin (320 pp.)  
$16.99 paper | July 12, 2022  
978-1-2508-2182-9

Mental health and trauma take center stage in this small-town South Carolina contemporary romance.

When Aja Owens and Walker Abbott first meet, it’s in the frozen food aisle of Piggly Wiggly. Aja is in the midst of
a panic attack, something Walker immediately recognizes; he offers to stay with her until she feels comfortable enough to head home. Aja doesn’t expect to see him again, but when bingo night rolls around, she’s surprised to find him accompanying her favorite regular to the Greenbelt City Bingo Hall. Aja hasn’t seen Ms. May Abbott—“emphasis on the ‘miz’”—in some time, and she’s shocked to see her friend looking terribly bruised from a fall down the stairs. That’s why Walker, Ms. May’s grandson, is in town, helping her out while she recovers; his stay is supposed to be temporary. Walker has some demons of his own, and he’s been diagnosed with complex PTSD; being back home in Greenbelt begins to bring old memories to the surface. The small-town Southern setting comes alive through Aja and Walker’s intimate social circle, and the bingo-hall scenes are just delightful. Yearning is at an all-time high for Aja and Walker, as the pair navigate their attraction and how far things should go. With Walker only supposed to be in town for a limited amount of time, is it really smart to get involved? Is it possible to keep things casual with a person who sees and understands your own blend of baggage, mental health, and romantic desires? The meddling small-town residents push the two together through carefully orchestrated run-ins. While the author has no problem amping up the sexiness, this is still very much a slow, methodical burn. Slaughter thoughtfully includes content warnings, and readers should take them to heart.

An emotional sucker punch mixed with a nuanced and tender modern romance.

HOW TO FAKE IT IN HOLLYWOOD

Wilder, Ava
Dell (384 pp.)
$17.00 paper | June 14, 2022
978-0-593-35895-5

A fake relationship between an up-and-coming starlet and a down-on-his-luck actor threatens to turn into something real.

Grey Brooks has been acting since she was a child, but her career isn’t exactly where she wants it to be. Fresh off a campy teen soap and hoping for more, she’s writing a script with her best friend and trying to get cast in a new franchise. When her publicist brings up the idea of starting a fake relationship to get press, she’s skeptical—and then she hears the name of her proposed fake boyfriend. It’s Ethan Atkins, a former heartthrob who fell on hard times after his best friend died in an accident years ago. Ethan turned to alcohol, went through a divorce, got dropped from the big movie he’d been filming, and hasn’t acted since. Their publicist thinks that a few strategic outings could be good for both of them—Ethan could show that he’s more stable, and Grey could get attention for being on the arm of a major star. Ethan isn’t sure about the idea, either, but as soon as he meets Grey, he can’t deny his attraction. The two of them enter into a highly choreographed “relationship,” complete with scheduled paparazzi run-ins, mandatory public dates, and a strict nondisclosure agreement. But what they don’t count on is falling for each other for real, and soon they’re juggling their feelings, their careers, and their pasts. Ethan, in particular, struggles to cope with the loss of his best friend and his relationship with alcohol. Can he overcome his demons, or will his relationship with Grey become just another casualty of his self-destructive behavior? In her debut, Wilder creates an angst-y and compelling love story that feels realistically Hollywood. Grey and Ethan’s chemistry burns through the pages, especially in the numerous steamy scenes. Both actors come across sympathetically as humans who are trying their best to have creative careers they’re proud of. Wilder also populates their world with a cadre of richly drawn side characters, like Grey’s no-nonsense agent and Ethan’s supportive ex-wife.

Full of drama, fun, and scorching love scenes, this love story is worthy of the silver screen.
A novelist and trial attorney tells the true story of North Carolina landowners who fought for justice from a multinational corporation over the deleterious practices of large-scale hog farming.

Addison begins his absorbing and inspiring narrative with a group of landowners, mostly Black, who worked small plots of farmland in eastern North Carolina. Then neighboring farmers began to build massive hog farms, contracting to raise hogs owned by firms acquired by the Chinese-owned behemoth Smithfield Foods, “the kingpin of East Coast meatpacking.” In this page-turning exposé of corporate malfeasance, the author paints a vivid picture of four counties, 5 million hogs, and a hog density “higher than any other place on earth.” The animals are raised in abysmal conditions on farms that disperse massive amounts of noxious waste into the water (through leaky waste lagoons) and air (waste sprayed onto empty fields). The toxin- and bacteria-laden waste and the unbearable smell penetrate everything. Meanwhile, the “hog barons” live far from the stench. After they had exhausted regulatory and political remedies, the landowners retained a small but potent law firm to sue for damages, setting in motion a lengthy legal battle pitting small landowners and their lawyers, scientists, and activists against industry executives, their attorneys, fearful locals, and politicians in Smithfield’s pocket. Though Addison tints his portrayals of the plaintiffs and their lawyers with a heroic glow, he makes a persuasive case that their advocacy took enormous courage. The atmosphere of threat is palpable throughout the book, as the lawyers and their clients are surveilled and threatened. The author clearly explains the legal strategies involved, and he has a good feel for Southern society and the “historical, entrenched, pestilential prejudice” that still warps it. The book reads like a thriller (John Grisham provides the foreword) and strikingly underscores why American courts are so often a last resort for those wronged by structural economic injustice.

A gripping David-vs.-Goliath story that remains suspenseful to the final page.
The concept of diversity is nuanced and sometimes difficult to grasp, but it’s vital to a thriving society. We all benefit from hearing stories from the widest possible variety of life experiences. Here are eight recent books that reflect numerous different—and necessary—viewpoints and what our reviewers had to say about them.

**Take Up Space: The Unprecedented AOC** by the editors of *New York* magazine with Lisa Miller (Avid Reader Press, Feb. 22): “Following the biographical sections, the book [about Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez] presents diverse perspectives from a variety of contributors, including Josh Gondelman, Michelle Ruiz, Andrew Rice, Rebecca Traister, David Wallace-Wells, Pia Guerra, and Andrea González-Ramírez. Pages of art, opinion, photography, congressional testimony, and transcripts of seminal speeches deepen the chronicle of Ocasio-Cortez’s heritage, personal life, and career aspirations and accomplishments.”

**Rise: A Pop History of Asian America From the Nineties to Now** by Jeff Yang, Phil Yu, and Philip Wang (Mariner Books, March 1): “A fun and informative book about the explosion of Asian American culture in recent decades....This book—a collection of essays, interviews, illustrations, and even some comic-book pages—reflects [a] broad range...as imaginative in its presentation and stories as the generation it portrays.”

**Red Paint: The Ancestral Autobiography of a Coast Salish Punk** by Sasha taq*sablú LaPointe (Counterpoint, March 8): “A punk-infused memoir by a Coast Salish woman about her connection to her heritage....Throughout the book, the author deftly navigates multiple timelines, weaving in and out of family history, personal narrative, and a host of other tangential topics.”

**Different: Gender Through the Eyes of a Primatologist** by Frans de Waal (Norton, April 3): “World-renowned primatologist de Waal draws on a long career of investigating chimpanzees and bonobos—both equally close to humans genetically—to argue with wit and clarity against assumptions about sex and gender that generate inequality....The author enlivens his pages with attentive, sometimes moving portraits of animals he has encountered as well as anecdotes about his own experiences as one of six brothers.”

**We Are the Middle of Forever: Indigenous Voices From Turtle Island on the Changing Earth** edited by Dahr Jamail and Stan Rushworth (The New Press, April 5): “A welcome compilation of interviews with Indigenous Americans about climate change....Readers will be impressed by both the depth and breadth of the interviews as well as the contributors’ evocative, vivid storytelling and palpable emotion.”

**Constructing a Nervous System: A Memoir** by Margo Jefferson (Pantheon, April 12): “The Pulitzer Prize–winning critic and memoirist returns with an inspired and unstinting examination of American class, culture, and personal memory....In [her previous memoir] *Negroland*, the author revealed the burdens of membership in a class of ambitious Black Americans, and she further details the impact on their children.”

**Deaf Utopia: A Memoir—and a Love Letter to a Way of Life** by Nyle DiMarco with Robert Siebert (Morrow/HarperCollins, April 19): “Unique and vividly written, the memoir effectively serves a dual purpose: to showcase the author’s life and exuberant pride as a Deaf individual and to bring increased awareness to the Deaf community by spotlighting ‘the beauty, power, [and] magic of [American Sign Language]’....An honest, heartfelt, and thoroughly memorable portrayal of growing up Deaf.”

**Some of My Best Friends: Essays on Lip Service** by Tajja Isen (One Signal/Atria, April 19): “As a biracial Black performer who has done voice-over work in the U.S. and Canada for two decades, Isen has seen firsthand the many ways in which well-intentioned ideas on race, gender, and culture—whether promoted by liberals or conservatives—can hurt people they aim to help. In the nine essays in this stellar debut collection, the author probes the gap between expectation and reality.”

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.
FRUIT PUNCH
A Memoir
Allen, Kendra
Ecco/HarperCollins (208 pp.)
$26.99 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-0-06-304853-9

A Black woman's unflinching look at her childhood and adolescence in Texas in the 1990s.

Allen, the author of the acclaimed essay collection, When You Learn the Alphabet, grew up in the Dallas area with her father, Doll, and her mother, L.A., who broke up and got back together several times throughout her childhood and adolescence. “Men are jealous” is one of the first lessons her mother taught her, although her parents’ split was catalyzed by Doll’s infidelity. One night, long after her father moved to Houston, Allen woke up to L.A. and Doll having sex in the bed where she was sleeping. Most children, she writes, “don’t expect to see their married parents who live in two different cities and in two different residences having sex in the middle of a school night in the bed the child shares with their single mother.” However, the reconciliation didn’t last. As Allen and her mother felt increasingly alone, the author tried to “help L.A. raise me by growing up and entering of her childhood to an unnamed male therapist, who prompted could attend therapy sessions because they were “too codependent.” Throughout, the author uses prose inventively, employing vernacular language, nontraditional line breaks, nonlinear chronology, and deliberate obfuscation about her age. In a key moment in the book, Allen writes about how she was sexually assaulted by a family member and describes herself as “nine, but probably seven.” Later, the author describes relating memories of her childhood to an unnamed male therapist, who prompted her to share her childhood trauma with her mother (whose response was underwhelming). Allen’s rendering of the material is visceral and unique, and her insights are powerful. Sometimes, however, the framing device of the therapy sessions has the unintended effect of highlighting how certain passages are more confessional than narratively compelling.

A piercing coming-of-age narrative from an original voice.

WONDERLANDS
Essays on the Life of Literature
Baxter, Charles
Graywolf (304 pp.)
$17.00 paper | July 12, 2022
978-1-64445-091-8

A veteran author of the craft extolls the many rewards of literature.

In his third nonfiction book, novelist and short story writer Baxter unites the “personal and impersonal, the subjective and the objective.” He describes “Wonderland” as a “small but important subcontinent of Literature” where the “setting is as alive as the characters are, if not more so...The House of Usher looks out at you as you approach it. When you think of Stephen King’s or Stanley Kubrick’s The Shining, you think of the Overlook Hotel, which has a mind of its own, as does Poe’s House of Usher.” In the first essays, Baxter gently delves into the intriguing technique of how requests, like Lady Macbeth’s request that Macbeth kill Duncan, often set “stories with a particular urgency into motion.” The author ponders how some characters’ strange names—Ahab, Flem Snopes, Bathsheba Everdene—“are their story.” After “being used, the name has been retired.” He notes that “something in the nature of fiction loves inventories and lists,” as he works his way through works by Ayad Akhtar, Thomas Hardy, and William Maxwell. In a nostalgic piece about the author “curator,” Baxter champions writers who preserve “what everyone else is discarding” or forgetting. Rather than just letting a narrative simmer, some writers like to heat it up “in order to cook properly.” Even Chekhov, a master of the “low-temperature situation,” sometimes lets things “boil over,” as in Uncle Vanya. Baxter also probes Under the Volcano’s use of a “hot and often extravagant style” in a postmodernist age that encourages the “cooler end of the emotional spectrum.”

In a lengthy, incisive piece on charisma, Baxter writes that in “our literature, America is a breeding ground of confidence men,” pointing to Muriel Spark’s “female Ahab” in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (“reading it is a bit like watching laboratory mice jumping around after being given periodic shocks”) and James McBride’s John Brown in The Good Lord Bird.

Cozy, writerly advice and analysis delivered in a restrained, welcoming manner.

THE SPY WHO KNEW TOO MUCH
An Ex-CIA Officer’s Quest Through a Legacy of Betrayal
Blum, Howard
Harper/HarperCollins (532 pp.)
$28.99 | June 7, 2022
978-0-061-05421-9

Cold War-era CIA intrigue, dramatic and brutal.

Prolific author and reporter Blum tells a striking story, though his breezy narrative may put off readers familiar with more judicious CIA–related books, Tim Weiner’s Legacy of Ashes foremost among them. Blum’s central character is Tennent Bagley of the CIA’s elite Soviet Bloc division. He was working in Switzerland in 1962 when KGB agent Yuri Nosenko offered his services. After interviewing him, Bagley was convinced that Nosenko was precisely who he claimed to be. Promising to deliver secrets, Nosenko returned to Moscow be. Promising to deliver secrets, Nosenko returned to Moscow and brutal.

Promising to deliver secrets, Nosenko returned to Moscow and Bagley to Washington, D.C., where James Angleton, head of CIA counterintelligence, suggested that he read the file of Anatoly Golitsyn, another KGB agent who had defected in 1961. To Bagley’s amazement, Golitsyn had recounted incidents and lists,” as he works his way through works by Ayad Akhtar, Thomas Hardy, and William Maxwell. In a nostalgic piece about the author “curator,” Baxter champions writers who preserve “what everyone else is discarding” or forgetting. Rather than just letting a narrative simmer, some writers like to heat it up “in order to cook properly.” Even Chekhov, a master of the “low-temperature situation,” sometimes lets things “boil over,” as in Uncle Vanya. Baxter also probes Under the Volcano’s use of a “hot and often extravagant style” in a postmodernist age that encourages the “cooler end of the emotional spectrum.”

In a lengthy, incisive piece on charisma, Baxter writes that in “our literature, America is a breeding ground of confidence men,” pointing to Muriel Spark’s “female Ahab” in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (“reading it is a bit like watching laboratory mice jumping around after being given periodic shocks”) and James McBride’s John Brown in The Good Lord Bird.

Cozy, writerly advice and analysis delivered in a restrained, welcoming manner.
was a bogus agent sent to impugn Golitsyn but also that this indicated the presence of a highly placed mole inside the CIA. The plot thickened when Nosenko defected. Flown to the U.S., he responded to Bagley’s questioning with a mixture of boasting, self-promotion, contradictions, and lies, but he insisted that his defection was genuine. Nosenko was locked alone in a small, dark room for three years, taken out only for interrogation. Still maintaining his innocence, he received his freedom, an apology, compensation, and permission to remain in the U.S. Unconvinced and certain he was the victim of self-serving CIA politics, Bagley retired only to be galvanized years later by the apparent death of a CIA official, unconvincingly described as a suicide. Although he was barred from CIA archives, he launched an exhaustive search and ultimately concluded that the purported victim, John Paisley, was the mole. Blum admits that nearly everyone involved, Bagley included, was dead when he began his research. While many passages are pure speculation, tolerant readers will enjoy a largely entertaining spy story full of cutthroat CIA infighting and the occasional cut throat.

Novelistic, fast-paced history.

BLOOD ORANGE NIGHT
My Journey to the Edge of Madness
Bond, Melissa
Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster
(288 pp.)
$27.00 | June 14, 2022
978-1-982188-27-6

A harrowing memoir about a class of drugs as dangerous as opioids.

Making her book debut, journalist and poet Bond, a blogger for Mad in America, recounts her unintended overdose of popularly prescribed benzodiazepine drugs, which led to addiction and a long, painful process of withdrawal. In 2009, pregnant with her second child and caring for an infant son with Down syndrome, Bond experienced weeks of insomnia that left her physically and emotionally exhausted. “After nine weeks,” she writes, “my hands begin to shake. There’s the feeling of being broken, of the head and body not being connected. Some puppeteer jangles my legs, my head.” After the first trimester, her doctor finally prescribed Ambien, assuring her that the feeling of being broken, of the head and body not being connected. Some puppeteer jangles my legs, my head.” After the first trimester, her doctor finally prescribed Ambien, assuring her that it would be safe for her nursing infant and growing fetus. At first, Bond was relieved: Ambien worked. Soon, however, the effects sharply diminished. The author learned only later that the medical literature advised taking benzos only occasionally, for a few weeks; she kept swallowing Ambien for months. After her daughter’s birth, her doctor substituted Ativan, another benzo.

Each time its effects stopped, the doctor increased the dose and then added Xanax. Still suffering from insomnia, Bond experienced other symptoms as well: memory loss, olfactory hallucinations, fainting, nausea, digestive problems, and depression, which became exacerbated when she tried to taper the dose. A frantic internet search revealed information that startled her: She was undergoing active drug withdrawal, much more severe with benzos than with opioids. “While the physical withdrawal of opioids is safely done in seven to ten days,” she writes, “benzo withdrawal can be ten times that long.” Furthermore, sudden withdrawal can be fatal. Bond’s anguish affected her relationships with friends and family (her mother had been an addict) and especially with her husband. Marital stress added to her despair, as did her frustration in finding medical help. Bond’s sharp critique of big pharma and the broken American health care system sounds an urgent alarm.

A vivid chronicle of suffering.

RICKEY
The Life and Legend of an American Original
Bryant, Howard
Mariner Books (416 pp.)
$28.00 | June 7, 2022
978-0-358-04731-5

Sprawling biography of baseball great Rickey Henderson, whose accomplishments certainly merit a tome.

ESPN senior writer Bryant, who cut his teeth covering the Oakland Athletics, is wholly at home with A’s legend Henderson—though, of course, Henderson played for many teams as well as Oakland. Born in Chicago on Christmas Day, 1958, Henderson was named after teen heartthrob Ricky Nelson, and he excelled early on in sports, particularly football, worshipping O.J. Simpson. “O.J. and Rickey played the same position,” writes Bryant, “even though O.J. made you miss him and Rickey would never pass up a chance to flatten you.” Henderson grew up in a highly segregated Oakland, where the beneficiaries of the funneling of athletic talent were local high schools. Though he received scholarship offers to play college football, Henderson chose baseball on the sensible grounds that baseball players had greater longevity. Indeed, as Bryant notes, Henderson played well into his fifth decade, and “as a 40-year-old, he hit a robust .315 and would be named the National League Comeback Player of the Year.” Though Henderson was never the easiest player to get along with, he certainly racked up the scores, particularly as a base stealer. One insider reckons that if Henderson were playing today, he could garner a $50 million contract, while a high school math teacher developed a formula that put Henderson ahead of Ty Cobb as a “small ball player” and just behind Cobb as an all-around player. Small wonder that Henderson, who shares many points in common with all-time greats such as Willie Mays, Satchel Paige, and Al Kaline, went into the Hall of Fame at Cooperstown as soon as he was eligible. Near the end of this satisfying biographer, Bryant points out, “As of July 2021, 22,467 players had appeared in a Major League Baseball game, and no position player who began his career in the 20th century had played more seasons than the legendary Rickey Henderson.”

A readable, appropriately fast-moving portrait of a baseball giant.
Essinger immediately determined to move her school to Britain. Found it impossible to see “how humanity could progress in the kind of society Hitler was making.”

Though Anna Essinger (1879-1960) is largely forgotten, BBC producer Cadbury’s compelling, often disturbing narrative will convince readers of her historical significance. Traveling to the U.S. at age 20, Essinger obtained a degree in education and inspiration from Quaker humanitarian values. Returning to impoverished post–World War I Germany, she worked in famine relief and visited schools, which employed almost militarily strict methods. In 1926, Essinger opened a progressive school where children and teachers lived together, sharing responsibility for education as well as discipline. It succeeded and received praise from local educational authorities. Most of the students were Jewish (as was Essinger). When Hitler took power in 1933, most German Jews temporized, but the prescient Essinger immediately determined to move her school to Britain. Remarkably, she was able to bring 70 children to Bunc Court, an impressive if run-down country manor. After much labor from staff and students, the school took off, as Essinger was able to integrate the school “into the British educational system while retaining its essential uniqueness.” Soon, desperate Jewish families inside Germany were pleading with Essinger of Nazi behavior. Elderly and infirm, Essinger closed the school in 1948, but graduates continued to relish their experience and hold reunions. Mused one former student, “I can never understand why more schools are not run on a similar basis.”

An inspiring, well-researched life portrait of a spectacularly heroic teacher.
remains an emeritus professor. Higgs’ fame rests on three papers published in the 1960s. Several fellow physicists published on the same subject during that time, and Higgs himself has never claimed exclusive credit. “The great physicist Richard Feynman once remarked that he didn’t need any prizes; discovery itself was reward enough. Higgs had a similar attitude,” writes Close, who agrees that others covered the same ground but believes that Higgs delivered a more complete description of the physics involved. Many pop-sci writers describe Higgs’ discoveries as an explanation of how particles gain mass. While an oversimplification, this is not wrong. However, most lay readers want to learn about the universe, the Big Bang, stars, black holes, galaxies, atoms, relativity, and even quantum mechanics; the question of why particles have mass seems abstruse.

A lucid writer, Close chooses his words carefully and employs a torrent of analogies, but readers who skipped college physics may have to accept his enthusiasm on faith and enjoy an exciting account of the search, which required building the world’s most powerful particle accelerator (and the world’s biggest machine): the spectacular Large Hadron Collider beneath the French-Swiss border.

An expert examination of “the holy grail of particle physics.”

“...This book embodies groundedness and inner wisdom. It’s a beautiful collection that will change your life.”

—ALEXANDRA ELLE, author of After the Rain and How We Heal

ISBN 9781952692154

HEAL YOUR LIVING

The Joy of Kindness, Sustainability, Minimalism, and Wellness

FOUR ESSENTIAL PRACTICES TO HEAL AND DECLUTTER

WINSLOW HOMER
American Passage
Cross, William R.
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (560 pp.)
$50.00 | April 12, 2022
978-0-374-60379-3

A rich biography of the towering artist who captured the realities of 19th-century America.

Drawing on abundant scholarship and archival sources, Cross chronicles in vibrant detail the career, travels, friendships, and prolific output of Winslow Homer (1836-1910). With no diaries and few letters available to document much of his subject’s life, Cross speculates about what the artist “may have” or “appears to have” done or felt. But the author is so deeply cognizant of 19th-century art, history, and material culture that his inferences are thoroughly persuasive. Growing up in Boston, Homer was encouraged by his mother, an artist herself. As a young man, Homer worked for a prominent Boston lithographer, soon contributing wood engravings to illustrated magazines, notably Harper’s Weekly, which became his principal client. During the Civil War, he made several stays at the front, sketching scenes of camp life for Harper’s. The successful illustrator, though, aspired to be recognized as a painter. Moving from Boston to New York in 1859, Homer began to submit his work to group exhibitions. In 1866, he sailed for Europe, where he visited museums and galleries—Cross recounts the works he would have seen—and although no drawings survive from that trip, he brought back many pastoral scenes that he painted in the French countryside. By the time he returned 10 months later, Cross notes, “he returned to America penniless,” intent on marketing his work to wealthy buyers. The oils and watercolors that Homer produced for the next decades of his life, as he grew increasingly famous, reflect the landscapes in which he thrived: the White Mountains, Jersey shore, Caribbean, Adirondacks, and Prouts Neck, Maine, where his family had bought property. His subjects often were ordinary men and women—including those newly freed from slavery—engaged in work or pleasure. This deeply contextualized portrait features more than 400 images, including maps drawn specifically for this volume.

Gracefully written, empathetic, and authoritative.

THE ART OF TEACHING CHILDREN
All I Learned From a Lifetime in the Classroom
Done, Phillip
Avid Reader Press (440 pp.)
$30.00 | July 26, 2022
978-1-982165-66-6

An award-winning teacher shares tips and stories from his 33 years in the classroom.
After three decades teaching elementary school, Done has amassed hundreds of interesting stories about his students, and he demonstrates a strong grasp of what works (and doesn’t) in the classroom. His goal for readers, especially new teachers, is “to encourage, enlighten, and empower—to offer advice, guidance, and maybe even a little wisdom from the perspective of an experienced teacher.” The author shares amusing snippets of his interactions with students that show his deep compassion and consideration for each child. The only drawback is there are so many children that readers won’t feel deeply connected to any child in particular—unlike Done, who obviously remembers each individual he taught with great affection. Interspersed with his recollections, the author offers practical tips on the art of teaching. These include getting to know your students by asking about their pets; how to handle recess, lunch duty, and show-and-tell presentations; and the importance of greeting children each day at the door. Done explains how to make a classroom warm and welcoming through furniture choices, lighting, and indoor plants, and he evenhandedly discusses the complex mechanics of working with parents. He also shares ample advice on lesson plans on a variety of subjects, including reading, writing, math, art, singing, and geography. Given the author’s highly successful career, it’s clear that his methods are proven to work. For teachers seeking inspiration, Done provides numerous stimulating concepts that can be incorporated into any lesson plan; for prospective or aspiring teachers, the author has plenty of insights into the ups and downs of teaching young children. All readers will have no doubt that Done chose the right profession. “If you are a teacher, or learning to become one,” he writes, “my wish is that you also will have a rich and rewarding career.”

A well-rounded, satisfying look at the daily life of a teacher.

A LYNCHING AT PORT JERVIS
Race and Reckoning in the Gilded Age

Dray, Philip
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (272 pp.)
$29.00 | May 24, 2022
978-0-374-19441-3

An award-winning historian investigates a shocking incident of “spontaneous vigilantism” that “was seen as a portent that lynching, then surging uncontrollably below the Mason-Dixon Line, was about to extend its tendrils northward.”

In his latest, Dray—the author of At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America and other works of American history—offers a clear-eyed, powerful account of the lynching of Robert Lewis, a Black man, in the railroad town of Port Jervis, New York, amid a riot on June 2, 1892. As the author shows throughout his riveting text, while the heinous crime “lacked the ritualistic staging typical of many Southern lynchings...it was grounded in the same white insecurities that characterized the practice in warmer climes.” Although only White (mainly newspaper) accounts of the lynching and aftermath remain in the record, the actual story, as the author unravels, was yet another example of a horrible mishandling of justice regarding a Black citizen. Lewis, who had worked in town as a respected laborer, was accused of sexually assaulting a local young White woman, and Dray chronicles how Lewis would suffer the consequences of the toxic stew of rumors, gossip, and deeply ingrained racism that existed in Port Jervis. After his death, the town’s citizens unfurled a host of justifications, but the author is diligent and rigorous in his depiction of the racial animosity undergirding the entire ordeal. In the second part of the book, Dray examines the shameful legal ramifications and the crusading anti-lynching work of journalist Ida B. Wells and other activists as well as the fiction of Port Jervis–born Stephen Crane, whose father had tried to intervene in the mob that lynched Lewis. In his later work, Crane would confront an essential question: “How should a conscientious white person respond to the most egregious forms of racial prejudice?”

An important historical study of a topic that remains sadly relevant.
The principal investigator of NASA’s Psyche mission lays bare the challenges and rewards of succeeding as a woman in a male-dominated field and how the sublime beauty of the universe brought her strength and solace.

Winning a major NASA space exploration contract is an accolade that only two women in history have received—and one of them is Elkins-Tanton. In this enthralling and inspiring book, the author, a renowned geophysicist, shares her experience ascending the field, from her training at MIT to her current position leading the mission to explore the asteroid Psyche. In August 2022, she and her team are scheduled to launch a rocket to begin its 3.4-year trip to Psyche, which may be a piece of one of the first metal cores to form in our solar system and could provide never-before-seen data about how the Earth’s metal core formed. Elkins-Tanton describes the harrowing personal obstacles she overcame, from childhood abuse to cancer, and the sexism she encountered in each of her increasingly high-powered roles—a stark reminder that despite advances in equity, in the eyes of male colleagues, women are often “nothing but a symbol for sex” rather than being seen as “a whole person.” Of course, misogyny is not news; what makes the author’s story so compelling is her unrelenting effort to “make a change in culture, a change in expectation, that causes a change in our subconscious reactions and thus in our implicit bias.” Elkins-Tanton does not limit her scope to harassment, though that is a central concern. She innovated classroom learning and team building to create space for every person to contribute and thrive, an approach that was recognized by NASA’s review board and played a role in the success of the Psyche proposal. Ultimately, she created a matrix to allow for every voice and therefore space to “drive human knowledge farther.”

A fearless, riveting, and galvanizing book from a star in the U.S. space program.

**AFRICAN FOUNDERS**

_How Enslaved People Expanded American Ideals_

Fischer, David Hackett

Simon & Schuster (960 pp.)

$26.00 | May 31, 2022

978-1-982145-09-5

A highly valuable new study of African Americans as vital “agents of change in the early history of the United States.”

In his latest sweeping, scholarly history, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Fischer delivers an exhaustive, multidimensional work about the waves of enslaved Africans brought forcibly to America and how their cultural elements interacted with White-controlled society to create a variety of unique American regions. Skillfully delineating background stories and autobiographical details that were often lost or erased—where they came from, what languages they spoke, and the cultural and spiritual beliefs they brought with them—Fischer makes excellent use of primary sources such as slave narratives and records of resistance movements as well as recent advances in online databases. “For the history of African slavery in America,” he writes, “the leading example is the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, a major project of quantitative research, with free and open digital access to all who wish to use it.” In addition to archival research, Fischer clearly demonstrates “the importance of going there”—i.e., traveling to the places he discusses, including the port of Anomabu, on the Gold Coast, a significant source of enslaved labor during the 18th century. From the first Puritan colonies to the Hudson Valley and New York City to the Delaware Valley, Chesapeake Virginia and Maryland, the coastal Carolinas and...
Georgia, Louisiana, and throughout the Gulf Coast, Fischer thoroughly examines the regional cultural melding of White communities (British, Dutch, Scots-Irish, etc.) with clusters of diverse enslaved Africans. The author chronicles many examples of notable personages, such as authors, spiritual leaders, and highly skilled artisans. He also deftly tracks insur- 
egencies, which were often followed by punishment and further repression; literacy as a form of resistance; and the origins of “hyphenated ethnicity,” which, “in its many applications... greatly enlarged the idea of America itself” and “was put to work in many other nations of increasing diversity.”

A tour de force of fascinating, multilayered research that adds significantly to the literature on the early republic.
WORDS WITH...

**Julissa Arce**

A writer and social justice activist rethinks the narrative of the “good immigrant”

**BY GLENN GAMBOA**

Julissa Arce does not want to be hailed as an “ideal immigrant.”

Sure, her life story is extraordinary. She details how, as an undocumented immigrant, she worked her way up the ranks at Goldman Sachs to become a vice president in her 2016 memoir, *My (Underground) American Dream*, which she is currently developing into a network television series with America Ferrera. She is now a social justice advocate whose thoughts on equity are sought after by numerous journalists as well as Oprah Winfrey. And her memoir for young readers, *Someone Like Me: How One Undocumented Girl Fought for Her American Dream*, is now being taught in schools across the country.

But Arce knows how “good immigrant” stories can be weaponized against others—and she wants no part of it.

“I don’t want my story to be used as an example of what a good immigrant is supposed to look like,” she says. “I don’t want to be this model minority—like, See? If she can do it, you can do it too. The danger in perpetuating this myth of a good immigrant is I think it creates a lot of harm for immigrants who don’t go on to achieve all of these things. They deserve the same dignity as anybody else.”

In her latest book, *You Sound Like a White Girl: The Case for Rejecting Assimilation* (Flatiron, March 22), Arce argues that all Americans should be celebrated and that minorities should create their own spaces to make that possible. That includes maintaining control of her own story as a Mexican and an American.

“I tell reporters and documentary directors the nuances of my life—how it wasn’t all roses,” she writes. “I emphasize the thorns. But when I see their finished work, it’s like the Rose Day Parade. I struggle with how my life is used as inspiration for us, but also as a form of pandering to white people.”

Following a book tour stop in New York, the Los Angeles–based Arce spoke with us by phone about where these ideas came from and where she would like to take them. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

You write that your new book is “for the choir.” Why did you want to write a book that preaches to the choir?

I used to subscribe to the idea that the way that we would make progress, the way that we would create a more equitable society, would be to preach beyond the choir, to talk to people on the other side and try to come to a compromise. And while I still think that’s important, I personally don’t want to continue to do that work. I sort of fell into this trap of trying to convince people—that felt like, a lot of times, racist, White people—that I was hu-
man like them. And after doing that for some time, I felt like I was losing a little bit of dignity every time. When I wrote my first book, I thought, I’m going to use my book to change the conversation about immigration. I would say that everywhere. What happened, though, was that the best feedback was from people who read the book who had walked in my shoes, who saw themselves in the book, and who felt empowered by the book. That really created this big shift in my mind. Instead of trying to get somebody to see me as human, I empowered people who felt like I did [at] one time. Maybe they would feel less alone, seeing somebody else [with] their experience. I think many times we neglect the choir. I think it’s important that the choir feels seen, loved, understood. And a lot of change can happen by changing the way that we see ourselves.

Jeanine Cummins’ controversial book, American Dirt, also played a part in this realization. I felt like the author was very much writing for White people to give them sort of an out to say, “Oh my god, I love this book. I feel for this character. I cried when I read this book.” But what about the actual real people? The nonfictional characters? I think so many times it falls on us to explain to other people. And I just don’t want to do that anymore. I hope that a lot of people outside my community read my book and that they learn from the book. But I definitely felt strongly that I didn’t want to explain who we are. I’ve already done so much of that my whole entire life; I’ve had to justify my existence in this country. And I don’t want to do that anymore.

One thing that surprised me in your book was the colorism you describe existing among Mexicans. It’s similar to the way I have experienced it among Filipinos. Colorism is very much a result of colonization. And for me, it was important to just be gentle in the way that I called it out because I also understand that there’s a historical reason why this happened and that our parents and grandparents and their grandparents used it as a form of protection.

But you do call out the problem and raise the idea that in America, the privileges of Whiteness do not extend to non-White minorities. Looking back, you see how many times Mexican Americans tried to be folded into Whiteness and how, each and every time, it backfired on us. I’m also really trying to pull us away from the desire to have a proximity to Whiteness because it only offers the illusion of belonging. It only offers the illusion of protection. And then one day, everybody realizes that is fleeting and temporary and that real, true justice and progress don’t come from proximity to Whiteness. I say in the book that I don’t want to be accepted because somebody viewed me as White. I want to be accepted because as a brown woman, I deserve to be accepted.

Can you talk about the process of writing this book? It must have been so hard to be so straightforward and blunt.

My first draft was so bad and so ugly. It took so much editing and really sitting with it while continuing to mold it. I read so many history books before I sat down to write. I had a list of questions that I wanted to answer for myself. And 50% of what I actually wanted to write didn’t make it in the book because we wanted the book to have a certain lens and for it to have a certain lightness. So I have material to write probably another two books like this. The really difficult part was, How do I structure the book? Then, this lightbulb went off when I realized, OK, the first half of the book has to be about the lies of assimilation. And the second part of the book has to hit a more celebratory tone, a more uplifting tone about the reclaiming of things. Once I had that moment, I knew what to do, and the process became easier because then the process really was just about refining and the actual writing.

What is your next project?

For the first time since I’ve been a professional writer, I don’t have a plan for what I want to write next. I have ideas. But I don’t have anything concrete. I’m honestly exhausted. This book took so much out of me. This time, I really don’t have the energy yet.

Glenn Gamboa is a writer in Brooklyn. You Sound Like a White Girl received a starred review in the March 15, 2022, issue.
soldiers suffered facial trauma. In this often graphic yet inspiring, engaging book, the author focuses on Harold Gillies (1882-1960), a successful British ear, nose, and throat surgeon whose pioneering work in repairing faces places him among the war’s few true heroes. Sent to France early in the war, he observed freelance dental surgeons (the Royal Army Medical Corps had none) experimenting with facial reconstruction. He quickly established that the first principle of battlefield surgery—to close gaping wounds—was a disaster for jaw and facial injuries. Unless the damaged underlying structures were repaired first, the procedures guaranteed a grotesque end result. Returning to the Queen’s Hospital in London, Gillies persuaded the chief surgeon to establish a facial injury ward, which eventually grew to more than 1,000 beds and employed dozens of surgeons, dentists, artists, and sculptors who pioneered a new specialty: plastic surgery. The author’s case reports of individual soldiers are not for the faint of heart, but she delivers a consistently vivid account of the ingenious techniques involving skin flaps, grafting, reconstruction, and prostheses, most of which Gillies and colleagues invented. Many victims required dozens of painful procedures, and not all succeeded, but his accomplishments, along with his compassion, made him an object of worship from patients. A “genuine visionary in his field,” he received a good deal of favorable publicity in the media but only modest official recognition, including a knighthood in 1930, and he continued to practice until his death.

An excellent biography of a genuine miracle worker.

**SALMON WARS**

The Dark Underbelly of Our Favorite Fish

Frantz, Douglas & Catherine Collins

Henry Holt (368 pp.)

$29.99 | July 12, 2022

978-1-250-80030-5

An investigation of the hidden costs of the salmon-farming industry.

Frantz is a former managing editor of the *Los Angeles Times* and chief investigator for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Collins is a former private investigator. In this absorbing collaboration, the authors take us behind the scenes of the farm-raised salmon industry. According to their research, open-net salmon farms cause damage to the environment and threaten the wild salmon population. Farmed salmon frequently spend their lives in feces-ridden water, are more susceptible to parasites and viruses, and are often treated with dangerous pesticides. “When you eat salmon,” write the authors, “you are consuming all the pollutants and additives to which the fish has been exposed, which are stored in its fat.” In one study, researchers discovered that “farmed salmon contained up to ten times as much cancer-causing chemicals as their wild counterparts.” The authors also discuss the brutal treatment that salmon endure at hatcheries as well as the practice of killing predators that are attracted to the open nets of the salmon farms—sharks, seals, dolphins, and tuna. The authors convincingly demonstrate that the challenge for consumers is the lack of transparency and accountability in the industry. Akin to “Big Tobacco” or “Big Agribusiness,” they note, “Big Fish employs counter-science and public relations campaigns to undermine scientists and environmentalists who challenge its practices and products.” Although the outlook may sound bleak based on the extensive evidence that Frantz and Collins present, they also explore more sustainable commercial-scale salmon farming options, such as land farms and open-ocean farms. By exposing many of the unsavory elements of salmon farming, the authors hope to better educate consumers and encourage more responsible practices. In a closing call to action, the authors also warn that “the giants of the salmon-farming business will not abandon their profitable ways without pressure.”

A compelling investigation that will leave consumers reevaluating their food choices.
“A sensitive reflection on essential work.”

ESSENTIAL LABOR
Mothering as Social Change
Garbes, Angela
Harper Wave (356 pp.)
$25.99 | May 10, 2022
978-0-06-293736-0

A celebration of caregiving.
Garbes, a Filipina who describes herself as “a woman of color, a writer, and a mother,” melds memoir with social, political, and cultural critique to offer a thoughtful analysis of the social and personal complexities of mothering. Growing up with a mother who was a nurse and a doctor father, she admits, “one of the luxuries of my childhood was to remain oblivious to all the work that went into raising me.” Raising a child and caring for a home are only parts of what Garbes means by mothering, which, she writes, includes anyone engaged in “the practice of creating, nurturing, affirming and supporting life” within one’s family and community. The author argues persuasively that “the global economy is driven as much by care as so-called productive labor.” Garbes gives a historical overview to trace how care has become “gendered and racialized.” Her mother immigrated as part of a wave of Filipina nurses, recruited aggressively by hospital administrators, paid low wages, and often treated with hostility and resentment. As the author reports, 92% of domestic workers are women, and “fifty-seven percent of them are Black, Latina, or Asian American/Pacific Islander. We entrust the safety and cleanliness of our homes to Latinx workers, who comprise 62 percent of house cleaners.” As the global pandemic revealed to economically comfortable women who suddenly had to take on the work of primary caregivers, teachers, nannies, and house cleaners, servitude characterizes many workers that they depend on. Besides throwing necessary light on the need to recognize—and appropriately compensate—the value of mothering, Garbes draws on her personal experiences to consider “the details of caregiving, the small decisions that make up each day” in shaping children’s lives. The issues she has faced include talking about bodies and creating a world “that makes it possible for all bodies to thrive”; accepting one’s body and appetites; and fostering a love of nature.

A sensitive reflection on essential work.

HOW TO PREVENT THE NEXT PANDEMIC
Gates, Bill
Knopf (304 pp.)
$28.00 | May 3, 2022
978-0-593-53448-9

The tech mogul recounts the health care-related dimensions of his foundation in what amounts to a long policy paper.

“Outbreaks are inevitable, but pandemics are optional.” Thus states the epidemiologist Larry Brilliant, a Gates adviser, who hits on a critically important point: Disease is a fact of nature, but a pandemic is a political creation of a kind. Therefore, there are political as well as medical solutions that can enlist governments as well as scientists to contain outbreaks and make sure they don’t explode into global disasters. One critical element, Gates writes, is to alleviate the gap between high- and low-income countries, the latter of which suffer disproportionately from outbreaks. Another is to convince governments to ramp up production of vaccines that are “universal”—i.e., applicable to an existing range of disease agents, especially respiratory pathogens such as coronaviruses and flus—to prepare the world’s populations for the inevitable. “Doing the right thing early pays huge dividends later,” writes Gates. Even though doing the right thing is often expensive, the author urges that it’s a wise investment and one that has never been attempted—e.g., developing a “global corps” of scientists and aid workers “whose job is to wake up every day thinking about diseases that could kill huge numbers of people.” To those who object that such things are easier said than done, Gates counters that the development of the current...
The range of Covid vaccines was improbably fast, taking a third of the time that would normally have been required. At the same time, the author examines some of the social changes that came about through the pandemic, including the “new normal” of distance working and learning—both of which, he urges, stand to be improved but need not be abandoned.

Gates offers a persuasive, 30,000-foot view of a global problem that, he insists, can be prevented given will and money.

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**BLACK OAK**

*Odes Celebrating Powerful Black Men*

Green III, Harold
Illus. by Melissa Koby
Harper Design (144 pp.)
$17.99 | May 31, 2022
978-0-06-313556-7

Odes of praise for Black masculinity. This collection follows Green’s *Black Roses*, which presented “Odes Celebrating Powerful Black Women.” Following an introduction, the author offers 40 poems divided into six categories – Brave Hearts, Champions, Dreamers, Guardians, and Humanitarians. Green lauds figures ranging from businessmen (Tristan Walker, Excell Hardy Jr.) to public intellectuals (Henry Louis Gates Jr., Ta-Nehisi Coates) to professional athletes (LeBron James, Dwyane Wade, Colin Kaepernick) to musicians (John Legend, Chance the Rapper, Killer Mike).

In the introduction, the author highlights the “Black male role models” in his childhood and credits his father, grandfather, and uncles with passing on to him not just a love for poetry and music, but a keen sense of the possibilities inherent in both for liberating the imagination. Green identifies strong familial ties and male friendships as wellsprings of positive identify formation as well as a necessary condition of racial solidarity. The author’s verse celebrates these bonds in an effort to “expand on the language that Black men use to speak to and about each other,” making it possible for “us to be more comfortable rooting for each other no matter sexual orientation, disagreements, or status.” A resonant theme is Green’s admiration for the ramifying positivity of commitments to kin, as in his praise for his own father’s ability to “demonstrate / what proper pride looks like. / When you have enough for yourself, / it spills over into others.” Also potent are the author’s tributes to the courage of Black protest: “Colin’s Proposal” strikingly declares that “On September 1st, 2016, / Colin Kaepernick proposed to the United States— / she said, ‘No.’” Green also celebrates inspirational Black leadership—e.g., commending the Rev Dr. Otis Moss III for his ability to “speak as if / faith is part of the fabric / that creates forward motion— / aerodynamic optimism— / panoramic realism.”

A heartfelt assemblage of applause for America’s Black male exemplars.
Dear Papa

The Letters of Patrick and Ernest Hemingway

Ed. by Brendan Hemingway & Stephen Adams

Scribner (336 pp.)

$25.99  |  June 14, 2022

978-1-982196-86-8

A son’s loving memorial to his famous father.

“The man I knew,” writes Ernest Hemingway’s son Patrick (b. 1928), “tried very hard to be a good family man. I think our correspondence shows he was intimately connected with his wives and his children all his life.”

Patrick was the writer’s son with his second wife, Pauline Pfeiffer, whom he married in 1927; Gregory (Gigi) was born in 1931; and Patrick’s older half brother, Jack (Bumby), was the son of first wife Hadley Richardson. Edited by Patrick’s nephew Brendan Hemingway and grandson Adams, the letters reveal shared enthusiasms for fishing, hunting, African terrain, and rigorous adventure. As a father, Hemingway was doting, solicitous, and demanding. “I wish to hear from you and Gigi and Bumby on the first and the fifteenth of each month throughout the year,” he ordered Patrick. “The letters are not to be hurried, nor sulky, nor forced; but are to be as good letters as you can write at bi monthly intervals.” Some letters betray tensions that Patrick was eager to alleviate. “When I am acting stupid or disrespectful, please tell me and tell me plainly,” he wrote when he was 23. “I am not as talented or interesting as Mr. Gigi, but I want to be a dutiful son to you.”

Patrick’s older half brother, Gregory (Gigi) was born in 1931, and his father’s older half brother, Jack (Bumby), was the son of the writer’s first wife Hadley Richardson. The letters reveal shared enthusiasms for fishing, hunting, African terrain, and rigorous adventure. As a father, Hemingway was doting, solicitous, and demanding. “I wish to hear from you and Gigi and Bumby on the first and the fifteenth of each month throughout the year,” he ordered Patrick. “The letters are not to be hurried, nor sulky, nor forced; but are to be as good letters as you can write at bi monthly intervals.” Some letters betray tensions that Patrick was eager to alleviate. “When I am acting stupid or disrespectful, please tell me and tell me plainly,” he wrote when he was 23. “I am not as talented or interesting as Mr. Gigi, but I want to be a dutiful son to you.”

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Apparently, he did very well. “You were the only brother I had among my sons,” Ernest wrote. “Mr. Bumby admirable but not really intelligent and Mr. Gigi wonderful but always strange.” Later, he added, “I love you always and am very proud of you.”
As a creative writing student in the United States and England, Pyae Moe Thet War struggled with how much of her Myanmar heritage to include in her work. “I wanted my voice to be funny, and unflinching, and thoughtful; I didn't believe that my voice could be all of those things as well as being Myanmar,” she writes in her new essay collection, *You’ve Changed: Fake Accents, Feminism, and Other Comedies From Myanmar* (Catapult, May 3). Now, as a writer who has come into her own, War’s voice is all of those things and more, tackling topics that range from home and belonging to baking and loss in a debut that our starred review calls “a delight to read.” War spoke with Kirkus via Zoom from her home in Yangon, Myanmar; the interview has been edited for length and clarity.

In each essay, you describe aspects of Myanmar culture, but you never fall into a mode that feels too explanatory.

You stay focused on your personal narrative. How did you strike that balance?

I've always said that I write for myself, and this is the advice I give to younger writers. When you're a younger writer, you get into your head about who your audience will be. I would have panic attacks where I'd worry, What if this subset of readers doesn’t agree with this part? For a White American audience, do I need more exposition? Am I being disingenuous if I write like this even though that’s not how I would talk? I decided to approach these topics as if I were talking with a close friend. [In an actual conversation with a friend] at some points, I would say, “Go Google this yourself, this isn’t relevant to this story.” I had to tune out the idea of a target reader and think, How would I tell this story? and stay true to that.

Your essays have such witty beginnings and endings. What is your writing process like?

The writing process is very disjointed. I always write in chunks. Then I go back and restructure these chunks while thinking about how they connect. For “Tongue Twisters,” the essay on accents, I distinctly remember brushing my teeth one night when two paragraphs popped into my head. I ended up texting a friend, “Damnit, now I have to open my laptop again.” Other times, I write with an ending in mind, but then I have to figure out the beginning and middle. You're not always ready to write everything you want to write. The accent essay I wanted to write for years. I'd bring it up in conversations with friends, but I wasn't ready to write it. That essay took the most research. Eventually, I got to a point in my career where I finally felt like I could do it justice.

How do you approach research? You pull from so many sources, from the TV show *Key & Peele* to historical journalism to academic texts.

I owe a lot of my research skills to when I was an undergrad and I'd write academic papers all the time. When I'm work-
ing on an essay, I’m consumed by it. I’m always keeping an ear out in case I hear a reference on TV or someone sends me a story, and I’ll make a note of it. It’s very chaotic. I’ll have 50 tabs open [on my web browser] and think, *But I can’t close any of them! I might need them!* I love research. I didn’t think I would, because when I had to write papers in college, I’d say, *Once I’m an adult I’m never going to do research again, I’m never going to cite an article again.*

There were parts of *You’ve Changed* that took me by surprise, especially when I was expecting a happy or tidy ending. I’m thinking of “Paperwork,” your essay on the bureaucracy of immigration.

I wrote that essay thinking it would be wrapped up in a neat, little bow. I didn’t think it would be the most difficult essay to edit. I would cry over it, saying to myself, *Oh my god, you’re so naïve.* It originally ended at the section break before its current ending—[my life changed] as I was editing it. When I added the new ending, my editor asked me, “Are you comfortable with this?” Even though we’re writing for the public, writers need to have healthy boundaries. But when I’m committed to talking about a certain topic, I owe it to the reader to be as honest as possible. The old ending would have felt like lying because I know how this ends. I know it doesn’t end happily, nicely, or beautifully. To let the reader think otherwise would be disingenuous.

The essay does end beautifully. There is so much power in your voice. When did you know you were confident enough in your voice to carry a full essay collection?

Especially as a writer of color, you’re always wondering, *Oh, am I being arrogant?* For me, as a young, brown woman, [as my book approaches publication] I’m still like, *Oh my god, who do I think I am that I could write an entire essay collection?* But at some point, you’ve just got to go for it. It was important for me to write the book that I wanted to write. It would have been worse for me if I had written the book in a voice that wasn’t truly my own or was something that other people wanted from me. Even if other people had said, “This is a great book,” I would have known that it wasn’t honest. As a writer, not everybody in the [publishing] industry is going to be rallying around you. You have to make sure that you’re pushing for your stories.

Along the lines of what others might want from you, have you ever felt pushed to write about Myanmar from a foreign policy point of view?

When I was freelancing and doing some journalism, I never felt knowledgeable enough to write along those lines. There is this expectation, *You’re Myanmar, you should know everything about Myanmar,* but would you go up to someone in the U.S. and ask them, “Do you know everything about American history and foreign policy?” For young, brown writers, for Myanmar writers, your boundaries are so important, especially when there’s that temptation to just want your name out there. When you’re from a marginalized and underrepresented community, it can be so hard to say no, because you wonder if you’re shutting a door forever, but at the end of the day, you’re the one whose name is going to be on a piece.

And as a writer, you can’t be everything to everyone. Who are some other Myanmar writers you’d like readers to check out?

Thirii Myo Kyaw Myint’s memoir *Names for Light* is so beautiful. I reference MiMi Aye’s cookbook *Mandalay* a lot. I don’t really cook, but it’s one of the few cookbooks that I own. Charmaine Craig, who wrote *Miss Burma,* has a new novel [*My Némesis*] coming out [slated for February 2023]. I wish there were more names I could name. I can’t wait for a lot of Myanmar names to be dominating *Publishers Marketplace* deals.

Hannah Bae is a Korean American writer, journalist, and illustrator and winner of a Rona Jaffe Foundation Writer’s Award. *You’ve Changed* received a starred review in the Feb. 15, 2022, issue.
Beginning in 1900, the Dozier School for Boys housed thousands of young men sentenced for presumed crimes, mostly minor infractions, who were at the mercy of their jailers and a Jim Crow system of injustice. Many died there, buried in forgotten graves. Forensic anthropologist Kimmerle arrived with years of experience under her belt, including examining the killing fields of the Balkans, and set to work trying to identify the remains of young men whose bones lay intermingled in a sort of potter’s field. Inevitably, her work expanded not just to embrace the bones she and a legion of volunteers uncovered, but also to comprehend “a historical justice question”: finding the identities of the dead and the causes of their deaths. Along the way, Kimmerle unveils a corrupt, racially structured system that swept up young men, mostly Black, hired out to work for local plantations and factories in “a vicious cycle designed to keep the wheel of cheap labor turning.” Many of the deaths resulted from savage beatings by guards and fellow inmates goaded by their captors in a kind of fight-club scenario that enabled killing by proxy. The bones told stories: “a lot of boys between twelve and fourteen. One who was twenty-one and died while paroled to a farm, presumably to work for his bus fare home.” The Florida system has been dismantled—sort of, anyway, as “but one institution within a system structured to define people by color and class” that endures—but Kimmerle speaks eloquently to official crimes that have yet to be fully accounted for, giving a closely observed account of forensic investigation along the way.

A horrific story of true crime, unjust punishment, and the quest for justice for the victims of a cruel state.
the years when he was hiding in the caves of Tora Bora, and they reveal a complex pattern of negotiation and calculation relative to Iran, which proved to be a counter to al-Qaida at many turns and therefore an unacknowledged ally of the U.S. Many al-Qaida leaders died early on in battle or by drones in Afghanistan, forcing bin Laden to reach out to recruit successors, so that “in 2004, Usama’s remaining associates were second-tier leaders.” Other matters of interest include plans for further terror attacks in the U.S. and in Saudi Arabia. The latter has long been accused of complicity in 9/11, given the number of Saudis involved, but Lahoud recounts that by 2008, Saudi authorities had arrested “more than 5,000 political prisoners of the jihadi variety.” Along the way, Lahoud suggests that the pornography recovered from bin Laden’s computer might have been a legacy from a previous owner, since by that time he was so financially strapped that he had to buy used, virus-laden equipment.

Sometimes a slog, but a rich trove exposing a terrorist organization that persists even after its founder’s demise.

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YOUR RE-CO NN ECTION TO YOUR SOUL IS THE GOAL.

“A guidebook to meditation as a means of improving one’s health and achieving one’s potential.”

“Duggal introduces the concept of ‘rest and digest’ as a means to counteract the fight-or-flight response. By meditating, she says, one also achieves clarity, which helps one pursue happiness and create a fuller life.”

“Throughout, Duggal asks thought-provoking questions, offers basic instruction on introspective practice, and incorporates wisdom from other self-help authors…”

“An often useful...book on the practice and benefits of meditation and breathwork.”

—Kirkus Reviews

For All Inquiries, Please Email monica@monicagduggal.com
“A consistently engaging comparison-contrast look at the mechanics of empire.”

IN THE SHADOW OF THE GODS

HIGHLIGHT

IN THE SHADOW OF THE GODS
The Emperor in World History
Lieven, Dominic
Viking (528 pp.)
$40.00 | June 7, 2022
978-0-735-22219-9

A sweeping survey of the evolution of the role of the emperor in terms of geopolitical leadership, empire building, and diplomacy.

Moving chronologically from ancient times in Mesopotamia to the present, Lieven, a former professor of Russian studies at the London School of Economics and winner of the Wolfson History Prize, focuses on memorable monarchs as they evolved in their roles. Dynasties such as the Chinese, Mughal, and Ottoman were never efficient or meritocratic, yet despite the “self-evidently flawed system” of hereditary monarchy, it managed to survive as “by far the most prevalent type of polity in history.” As the author delineates, the “sacred monarchies” of the Near East—e.g., in ancient Egypt—were most closely aligned with divinity, while for subsequent empires (Persia, Rome), the rulers had to demonstrate exemplary military and political skills—e.g., Alexander and Hadrian. The enduring blueprint of dynastic style, notes Lieven, dictated that the ruler was backed by an inner circle of sycophantic functionaries dependent on his largesse—and willing to tell him what he wanted to hear. (Though largely focused on men, the book includes a few women leaders as well as those wielding power behind the throne.) Particularly appealing are the author’s significant discussions of the Chinese emperors, who were first endowed with a sense of the so-called “Mandate of Heaven.” These rulers relied heavily on both secrecy and ritual, the latter manifested especially via the three primary schools of thought—Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism—that influenced Chinese leaders across centuries. In contrast, the monarchies of modern Europe (see: Louis XIV and countless English kings) were fashioned for public display and lavish ceremony. Regardless of ruling style, the right type of emperor could be hugely influential, especially regarding religion: Ashoka (Buddhism), Constantine (Christianity), and the Safavid shahs (Shi’i Islam). In addition to illuminating analyses of political, social, and cultural matters, Lieven also includes a number of helpful maps to situate readers.

A consistently engaging comparison-contrast look at the mechanics of empire.
STILL ALRIGHT
A Memoir
Loggins, Kenny
Hachette (320 pp.)
$30.00 | June 14, 2022
978-0-306-92536-8

A breezy journey through a prolific musical career and some personal turbulence.

Loggins (b. 1948) comes across as a genial guy who is eager to please. He details relationships in which he was the disciple who followed the leader only to resist and resent that sort of direction. Case in point: Jim Messina, the author’s longtime collaborator. Loggins had the voice, songs, and onstage charisma, but Messina was indisputably the leader who retained control (and had a more lucrative contractual detail). We also see this pattern in the breakup of Loggins’ second marriage, to a younger woman who had served as a kind of therapist and spiritual guide. When he developed ideas of his own about the relationship that conflicted with hers, she left him. With such narrative framing suggesting a lot of soul searching, the author mostly keeps things light, hitting all the marks common to rock-star memoirs: family struggles during childhood; the salvation through rock music, especially the Beatles; confidence gained through successful performing; and the drugs, groupies, depression, and dependence on antidepressants. Loggins doesn’t come across as the deepest thinker, but he’s clearly someone who works well with others, as his relationships with Michael McDonald, Stevie Nicks, Barbra Streisand, and a host of top-flight producers and studio musicians attest. As changing trends scuttled the careers of so many of his peers, he was able to navigate his way from country-tinged rock to blue-eyed soul to what would become known as yacht rock. In addition, Loggins scored big with soundtrack hits such as “Footloose” amid the music industry’s upheavals through disco and MTV. It has been decades since the author’s commercial peak, and he lost his major-label contract in 1998, but he has a fairly interesting story to tell, and he enjoys telling it. “At this point in my life,” he writes, “the struggle for the kind of acclaim I knew in the ’80s is a waste of energy.”

A good beach read for the yacht-rock generation.

EMBRACE FEARLESSLY THE BURNING WORLD
Lopez, Barry
Random House (352 pp.)
$28.00 | May 24, 2022
978-0-593-24282-7

Collected essays from the 2000s by the eminent, late natural history writer. “Witness, not achievement, is what I was after.” So writes Lopez (1945-2020), the indefatigable world traveler. He sought witness, to be sure: Many of the essays and articles gathered here, first published in such venues as Orion and Granta, center on exploring landscapes and the animals and people within them. “I would bring my binoculars, find a place out of the wind, and pick over the land, acre by acre, watching for movement,” writes the author. The title of the book is suggestive of his concerns for a world being devoured by its human inhabitants. As he scanned the acres, Lopez was collecting images of and data on coal-fired power plants in the American West, linking anthropogenic destruction to natural beauty in order to raise big questions: “Why did you not prepare?” he imagines future generations asking the ancestors of today. “Why were you so profligate while we still had a chance? Where was your wisdom?” The wisdom Lopez sought, recorded here, was often that of Indigenous elders, whether in the Australian Outback, the Arctic, or the South African veldt. That wisdom, writes the author, so often comes in surprising forms, as when an Inuit elder describes how a young hunter learns to appreciate the ethical implications of taking an animal’s life by invoking psychologist Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Well aware of his impending death to a cancer undetected until it was too
late. Lopez gets deeply personal, writing with clear eyes of that death as well as of the horrific experience of sexual abuse as a child. Altogether, the pieces are honest and searching, engaging readers in the largest of questions: How do we live in the world? How do we see it? How do we protect it? The book features an introduction by Rebecca Solnit.

A sterling valediction. Lopez’s many followers will treasure this book.

THE WATERMEN
The Birth of American Swimming and One Young Man’s Fight To Capture Olympic Gold
Loynd, Michael
Ballantine (416 pp.)
$30.00 | June 7, 2022
978-0-593-35704-0

A biography of the first American swimmer to win an Olympic gold medal. Loynd, a sports attorney and chairman of the St. Louis Olympic Committee, chronicles the life of Charlie Daniels (1885-1975), focusing on his journey to the Olympics. Daniels was born in Dayton, Ohio, to parents who hailed from prominent families in Buffalo, New York, at the time “one of the wealthiest per capita societies in the country.” Loynd sets the scene by describing the social expectations of the Gilded Age, and he describes Daniels’ struggles with anxiety, depression, and, as a young boy, criticism from his father. When his father abandoned Daniels and his mother, she chose to hide the news to her son’s anxiety. At the time, while “swimming’s popularity had exploded across the British Empire,” in the U.S., the activity “remained synonymous with indecency, the uncouth, and the poorest and dirtiest of society.” Daniels, however, thrived in the water. Despite the odds—and numerous disputes and a “trick” by the British—he continued to persevere. Daniels went on to invent the modern freestyle stroke, win America’s first gold medal in swimming, and set numerous speed records, and he became a role model for American boys and girls, inspiring them “to take to the water.” Though informative, the narrative feels disjointed, as the author frequently shifts focus with interwoven narratives of other swimmers and family members. Although their stories are important in their own rights, these lengthy digressions hamper the flow of the main story. Throughout, Loynd makes speculative comments regarding the thoughts and actions of various characters; the word perhaps appears far too often—e.g., “perhaps Tom provided Charley with a bathing suit, but perhaps not, because nudity was common during the swimming hours reserved exclusively for men.” Still, the author creates an inspiring portrait of Daniels’ achievements. An enjoyable underdog tale for swimmers and general sports fans.

SISTERS IN RESISTANCE
How a German Spy, a Banker’s Wife, and Mussolini’s Daughter Outwitted the Nazis
Mazzeo, Tilar J.
Grand Central Publishing (336 pp.)
$30.00 | June 21, 2022
978-1-538-73526-8

A distinguished cultural studies scholar explores the web of intrigue surrounding the infamous Ciano Diaries.

Before he became famous for condemning the Third Reich and its leaders, Galeazzo Ciano (1903-1944) was better known as Mussolini’s playboy son-in-law and foreign minister. In her latest elegant book of European cultural history, Mazzeo offers a colorful account of Ciano and Mussolini, the affairs and double-crosses that surrounded the diaries, and the courageous women whose efforts saved the manuscripts for posterity. Ciano began keeping diaries about Hitler’s inner circle in 1939, the year he started to question the war in Europe and the Third Reich’s alliance with Italy. Though in the service of a dictator, Ciano realized Mussolini’s involvement with Germany would be Italy’s downfall. So he turned to his journals, where he expressed his virulent disgust with the Third Reich and recorded “the political squabbles” between men like Himmler and Goebbels who “vied for power and influence with Hitler.” By 1943, the foreign minister, who gossiped shamelessly about his diary, had become a liability to the Third Reich. The Germans then sent a beautiful, young, married spy to learn the location of the journals, which Ciano had hidden before using them as collateral for a passage into exile. Little went according to plan. The spy fell in love with Ciano and turned double agent for the Allies. In that role, she developed an unlikely alliance with Ciano’s wife, Edda, and an American socialite to protect as much of Ciano’s manuscript—portions of which still ended up in German hands—for postwar publication in the U.S. Intelligent and compelling, Mazzeo’s probing book delves intriguingly into the “moral thicket” into which a group of strangers found themselves plunged during the long, dark days of World War II. A tantalizingly novelistic history lesson.

BECAUSE OUR FATHERS LIED
A Memoir of Truth and Family, From Vietnam to Today
McNamara, Craig
Little, Brown (288 pp.)
$29.00 | May 10, 2022
978-0-316-28223-9

An aggrieved memoir by the son of a best-and-brightest architect of the Vietnam War.

“He never told me that he knew the Vietnam War wasn’t winnable. But he did know, and he never
admitted it to me.” So writes McNamara of his father, Robert S. McNamara, whose middle name—Strange—made its way into the iconic figure of the Atomic Age, Doctor Strangelove. The junior McNamara was a familiar in the White House under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. The author notes that it was Bobby Kennedy who told his father that Vietnam was a losing cause. Though McNamara reserves much of his indignation for the fact of the war itself, there is most definitely a personal dimension to his complaint: His father was an unrevealing man who kept his own counsel, so much so that his son had to learn the facts of his life from books. “I shouldn’t have had to learn about it through second- and third-hand sources,” he writes. Like the son of Dean Rusk, another friend, McNamara went to the counterculture and back to the land, to which his father dismissively responded, “Craig’s dream is to save the world through farming.” He also traveled, making a second home in a country that would undergo its own Vietnam at U.S. hands: Chile. Writing this memoir is clearly a cathartic exercise for McNamara, who decries his father’s “misleading statements” and “inadequate apologies.” Also cathartic was a visit to Vietnam a few years ago, where the author met the son of his father’s North Vietnamese counterpart, Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap. “I’ve lived my life through the lens of the Vietnam War,” writes the author. Despite the closeness of the writer to a key source, so did millions of people, and this memoir, though readable, sheds only a little light on the matter.

A footnote to history, of some interest to students of the Cold War and its hot theaters.

—Eric Alterman

An energetic activist asks difficult questions about food production and finds some interesting answers.

Monbiot, a Guardian columnist and founder of Rewilding Britain, covers many topics, but one of his primary subjects is soil. His interest started in his own backyard when he wondered why some plants failed while others thrived. This led him to study what was happening under the surface, where he found a teeming tangle of bacteria, subterranean plants, and tiny creatures. It’s a jungle down there, although the various armies usually find a balance. The problem is that the equilibrium has been upset by modern farming practices, which drain nutrients from the soil and eventually reduce yields and variety. While Monbiot has plenty of harsh words for industrial-level agribusiness, he is equally skeptical of organic farming and its militant advocates. This type of agriculture is impossible to operate on a large scale, he notes, and often generates its own environmental costs. Neither does the author have time for activists who want to make food more expensive, arguing that it will make people eat less. Such an approach might be acceptable for wealthy people but would be very hard on those who are already struggling. “Just as it’s impossible to feed the world on pasture-fed meat, it’s impossible to feed the world on low-yield agroecology,” Monbiot argues. “In every farming system, we should seek two properties: high yields and low impacts.” Within this framework, he sees a range of paths forward, and he chronicles the work of several farms that are making progress at revitalizing soils while improving yields. There is also promise in new types of crops, including perennial species. Monbiot is also interested in creating food in labs using precise fermentation methods. This method is in use, but there is untapped potential in the area. These are interesting possibilities, and Monbiot is willing to follow the research to useful solutions.

A fascinating, informative, eccentric look at the future of farming and food.
hand on my shoulder.” At the end, Owens includes a 10-page list of “all books referenced” in her memoir.

The author’s genuine voice and sincere storytelling are marred by clunky prose.

**RED SKY MORNING**
The Epic True Story of Texas Ranger Company F
Jo Pappalardo
St. Martin’s (400 pp.)
$29.99 | June 28, 2022 978-1-250-27525-7

Lively tale of a pioneering band of Texas Rangers and their adventures in a decidedly wild West.

James Brooks (1855-1944), the center of Pappalardo’s story, wandered into the Texas Rangers more or less by accident. Though in Texas for only a few years, he’d “already been a rancher, hired hand, mineral prospector, sheep farmer, aspiring groom—and nothing worked out.” At 27, he found a job that suited his “rootless disposition” and paid the satisfying sum of $45 per month as well as three meals per day. Brooks took to the job, which meant keeping order on the open range and trying to mediate conflicts among ranchers, farmers, and Native Americans, a complex tangle that eventually landed Brooks and two of his Rangers in jail, requiring a pardon from Grover Cleveland: “Backing the Texas Rangers…seems a risk-free way to send that message to intruding cattlemen and unwelcome settlers in the Indian Territories.” The author weaves an entertaining yarn in the Indian Territory.

The author weaves an entertaining yarn about the long-lasting feud in the dense forests along the Sabine River on the Louisiana border, where an argument over hogs in a place called Holly Bottom led to numerous deaths, starting with what amounted to a double execution. Regarding that incident, a local paper wrote, “Yesterday a company of ten Rangers, in charge of Sgt. Brooks, arrived here by rail and went into camp….Nothing can be learned of their mission. They are hunting somebody, and some developments will be made in a few days.” Those few days stretched out into years, and, as Pappalardo shows, lacked the neat resolution of most other Ranger operations—and, interestingly, still occasionally reverberate today. All of the author’s tales have many moving parts, and as he wryly notes at the end of the book, so many characters “require a cheat sheet” in the form of a dramatis personae that readers may want to consult it often.

Fast-paced and full of local politics and old-fashioned gunfights—a pleasure for fans of true crime and oaters alike.

**HOW YOU GET FAMOUS**
Ten Years of Drag Madness in Brooklyn
Nicole Pasulka
Simon & Schuster (336 pp.)
$27.99 | June 7, 2022 978-1-982115-79-1

An award-winning journalist takes a deep dive into New York City’s underground drag scene.

Pasulka, who writes about gender and activism for a variety of national publications, became a hardcore fan of the scene after a show in 2006. By early 2020, she had seen “at least 500 shows” and conducted more than 100 interviews with participants. In her first book, the author highlights the “freewheeling” and “avant garde” Brooklyn drag scene, which she argues is both “amateurish and world-class.” Pasulka follows the exploits of a group of young queer performers who have traveled the road from obscurity to various levels of fame. A Latinx local named Aja and an African American transplant to New York from Berkeley named Merrie Cherrie come from working-class backgrounds, characteristic of many aspiring Brooklyn drag artists. Each has experience being a social “pariah”: Aja, for her facial scars, “asthmatic wheezing [and] swishy walk,” and Merrie for being tall and overweight. As Pasulka shows, it was this very “outsider” and “rebel” status, in addition to considerable “guts and hunger,” that allowed them to take their brilliantly outrageous performances to the next level. It also helped that they came up during a time of increasing mainstream acceptance for LGBTQ+ lifestyles and stood poised to take advantage of the great drag “explosion” that happened between 2012 and 2016. Both became well-known and well-respected performers, with Aja eventually going on to become a contestant on *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, which she lost to fellow Brooklyn drag queen Sasha Velour. The author also reveals how these young stars subverted the more “polished” made-for-TV aesthetic of “hourglass shapes, heels, long nails, big wigs, [and] femininity”—e.g., Velour’s bald head, fierceness, and playfully intellectual approach to performance. The skilled reporting and storytelling that characterize the narrative make for an engaging book that will appeal to scholars of gender as well as anyone with an interest in queer culture.

An adventurously intelligent sociological study.

**THE WHOLE TRUTH**
A Cosmologist’s Reflections on the Search for Objective Reality
P. J. E. Peebles
Princeton Univ. (240 pp.)
$27.95 | June 14, 2022 978-0-691-23135-8

A Nobel Prize–winning physicist tries his hand at philosophy.
Peebles, emeritus professor of physics at Princeton, has spent a career studying the universe in the first seconds after the Big Bang. Now in his mid-80s, he looks back at the triumphs of physical science, which began with Newton in the 17th century but vastly accelerated with Einstein in the 20th, and asks a question that will appeal mostly to philosophers and sociologists: Is there an objective reality, and can science describe it? Peebles has no doubt, but there is no shortage of opposition. Perhaps the most stubborn is the postmodern view that scientific discoveries are social constructs that reveal less about reality than culture, class, gender, and politics. In research facilities such as particle accelerators, sociologists have observed for long periods and concluded that the scientists involved were not the traditional seekers of truth but rather ambitious strivers dedicated to their own advancement and heavily invested in theories that owed more to the proclamations of brilliant figures in their field than to actual evidence. Peebles agrees that scientists have their foibles, but he emphasizes the importance of the scientific method, which focuses on evidence and rules that make accurate predictions possible. To illustrate his arguments, he devotes lengthy, highly technical chapters to discoveries in his field, many of which began as social constructs. The author points out that Einstein developed general relativity in 1917 from pure thought and little evidence. Physicists loved it nonetheless, and 50 years passed before evidence for the theory became overwhelming. Peebles never claims that he is writing for a popular audience, and readers unfamiliar with college physics and calculus will struggle. They will also encounter an avalanche of footnotes and quotes from journals and books, often several per page. This book may appeal to scholars, but David Deutsch’s *The Beginning of Infinity* offers a far more accessible analysis of how scientists arrive at the truth.

Deep thoughts but heavy going.

**BATTLING THE BIG LIE**

*How Fox, Facebook, and the MAGA Media Are Destroying America*

Pfeiffer, Dan

Twelve (304 pp.)

$30.00 | June 7, 2022

978-1-338-0797-5

The co-host of *Pod Save America* examines the sweeping disinformation practices of Republicans and their media allies.

“If Democrats and the media do not fight back against the right-wing media machine bent on division and destruction, democracy has no chance of surviving,” writes Pfeiffer, who served as a senior adviser to Barack Obama during his second term. Hard words, but hardly alarmist given the evidence the author assembles. Though many believe this disinformation machine is a recent development, Pfeiffer recounts a smear campaign from 2004 mounted against South Dakota Sen. Tom Daschle, in which the GOP falsely claimed that Daschle had promised to return the Black Hills to the Sioux Nation if Sioux leaders delivered the votes necessary for him to win the election. Daschle narrowly lost, forcing Pfeiffer to rethink the conventional rules—e.g., don’t feed the beast by dignifying lies with a response. The author argues convincingly that the biggest beast is *Fox and Friends*, which “has all the accoutrements of a typical news program while being a right-wing clown show.” Fox News, he writes, is a wholly partisan wing of the Republican Party. “And here’s the most disturbing thing: there is a market for ‘crazier than Fox.’ These networks were able to siphon off some of Fox’s audience, and now they are in a race to the bottom,” writes the author. Pfeiffer is a master of cutting derogation: “Arkansas senator Tom Cotton makes Jared Kushner look like a magnetic personality”; “[Jerome] Corsi is a well-known nutcase and a shitty writer, but when your campaign is trying to elect a Black man with the middle name ‘Hussein,’ no threat can be ignored.” He proposes a recalibrated journalism to counter the Republican machine, with plank points such as “Build Immunity to the Big Lie” and “Build Trust,” but whose overarching, sensible argument is to abandon the pretense of balance in favor of “a progressive propaganda operation that can go toe-to-toe with the Right.”

A new playbook for Democratic messaging with a bite and a sting.

**WHO IS WELLNESS FOR?**

*An Examination of Wellness Culture and Who It Leaves Behind*

Róisín, Fariha

Harper Wave (320 pp.)

$26.99 | June 14, 2022

978-0-06-307708-9

An exploration of the ways in which the wellness industry simultaneously commodifies non-White cultures and renders services inaccessible to marginalized peoples.

Róisín, a freelance writer who was raised Muslim by Bengali parents in Australia, frames the book with the question: “If [wellness] was for someone like me, pilfered from my very own culture, then why couldn’t I afford it?” Seeking to answer this question and others, the author divides the narrative into four sections—mind, body, self-care, and justice—each of which weaves a specific aspect of health care in with Róisín’s personal experiences. In the section on the mind, for example, the author interrogates how her abusive mother’s lack of access to therapy passed on intergenerational mental trauma. During her healing process, Róisín began practicing meditation, which she later found out had been divorced from its ancient Indian roots to make it more palatable to Western nations and easier to commodify in a capitalist society. In the section on the body, the author explores how her history as a survivor of sexual abuse instilled in her the harmful belief that her body was not actually her own. She then documents how a massage therapist who had previously helped her gain relief from the physical manifestations of abuse on her muscles violated her trust by callously discussing a highly publicized incest case in a moment when
the author sought refuge from the triggering news cycles. Ultimately, Róisín calls for a more sustainable, equitable approach to healing. Only occasionally dense, the author’s prose is engaging, and she delves into her past with vulnerability and self-compassion. The book is deeply researched and laudably includes the work of a variety of Black and Indigenous scholars to make a unique and relevant case for the need for greater accessibility to healing.

A vulnerable, intensely trenchant analysis of the ways capitalism denies wellness for so many around the world.

TWO WHEELS GOOD
The History and Mystery of the Bicycle
Rosen, Jody
Crown (416 pp.)
$28.99 | May 24, 2022
978-0-8041-4149-9

A lively social history of the bicycle. As New York Times Magazine feature writer Rosen observes in this good-natured narrative, the bicycle has always been viewed through a complex moral lens. In China, where “the number of bicycles manufactured this year…will exceed the total worldwide production of automobiles,” it was viewed as a great equalizer—but then, when car culture took hold, as something of an anachronism confined to the poor, and now, in a time of inequality, a status symbol for the wealthy and their expensive machines. Just so, as the author notes, there’s always been a tension between “bicycle love and bicycle loathing” in the Western world, where the bicycle and its forerunners were heralded as cleaner than animal-drawn vehicles and criticized for such things as showing off a little too much leg. Rosen chronicles his travels around the world to look at bicycle culture. In Dhaka, Bangladesh, which has some of the most tangled traffic jams anywhere, countless bicycle rickshaws underscore the fact that the machine is usually meant for labor and not recreation and that “the most widespread form of freight cycling is the one devoted to human cargo.” Back home in New York, Rosen risks life and limb to travel a city in which “bicycle infrastructure is inadequate, and cyclists are forced into roaring traffic on streets where motorists operate with something close to impunity.” At the same time, however, bicycling is “the best way to comprehend and imbibe New York.” The author delivers the goods lightly and always interestingly: His opening, for instance, concerns the origins of the rubber tire thanks to the tinkering of a Belfast veterinarian tired of bumpy cobblestones, and the discussion of the worldwide bicycle-theft epidemic is eye-opening: Most locks are easily thwarted and law enforcement indifferent, all good reason to follow Rosen’s lead and buy only inexpensive bikes.

Fans of bicycling and how-the-world-works reportage alike will find this a great pleasure.

THE RISE OF THE NEW PURITANS
Fighting Back Against Progressives’ War on Fun
Rothman, Noah
Broadside Books/HarperCollins (388 pp.)
$28.99 | July 5, 2022
978-0-06-316000-2

A conservative writer attempts to link modern leftist moralizing and asceticism with the austere ideals of the Colonial Puritans.

Granted, the Puritans of yore believed in the perfectibility of humans, attained, in some instances, by regimes of social policing and self-denial. One might make a metaphorical stretch that pillorying someone on Facebook is the moral equivalent of putting them in the stocks. Rothman, associate editor of Commentary magazine, takes that stretch well past its breaking point in this denunciation of modern progressivism and those spoilsports who don’t like eating meat or jokes that play on ethnic slurs. To his credit, the author notes that moral policing was once the province of conservatives, but in his depiction of the modern left as a legion of fun-haters and life-deniers, he forgets that modern right-wingers are doing every bit of their part in keeping the culture wars going. “What I set out to do when I began to write this book was have some fun,” he writes, but his book is anything but. The author repeats his leftists-are-Puritans thesis to dulling effect (if anything, the true proponents of “cancel culture,” whether left or right, might be better likened to Red Guards), and his taunts about gender fluidity, veganism, taking a knee, and cultural appropriation wear thin very quickly. Indeed, the best glosses on much of Rothman’s material come from interlocutors such as the comedian Judy Gold, who remarks of potentially transgressive comedy, “When intent and context and nuance are taken out of the equation, it’s no longer a joke.” The author concludes by hoping his book gets publicly cancelled in order to boost sales. It’s perhaps likelier that it lands in the hands only of fellow true believers and won’t make much of a dent among anyone but them.

Readers already convinced that leftists are the Orwellian thought police will find merit. Everyone else can pass.

HIS NAME IS GEORGE FLOYD
One Man’s Life and the Struggle for Racial Justice
Samuels, Robert & Toluse Olorunnipa
Viking (416 pp.)
$28.00 | May 17, 2022
978-0-593-49061-7

An intimate look at the life of the Black man whose murder sparked worldwide protests and a reinvigoration of the movement for racial justice.
On May 25, 2020, George Floyd died beneath the knee of White Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin. The video of the killing made Floyd “a global icon for racial justice,” write Washington Post journalists Samuels and Olorunniwa. Through painstaking research and more than 400 interviews, the authors sought to learn, “Who was George Floyd? And what was it like to live in his America?” As a child, Floyd dreamed of making a name for himself. “He was young, poor, and Black in America—a recipe for irrelevance in a society that tended to push boys like him onto its margins,” write the authors. “But he assured everyone around him that, someday, he would make a lasting impact.” As an adult, Floyd faced challenges related to addiction, mental health, education, employment, poverty, and criminal activity. Samuels and Olorunniwa trace more than 300 years of American history and Floyd’s family history, placing his death within the context of the systemic racism that shaped his life. The authors got haircuts from Floyd’s barber, visited the communities he called home, and talked to his extended family, friends, lovers, teachers, and acquaintances “to help the world to see Perry [as Floyd was known] as they saw him.” Writing with cogency and compassion, the authors free Floyd from the realm of iconography, restoring his humanity. In these powerful pages, he emerges as a sensitive man with ambitions, successes, and failures. Both his loving nature and his despair are palpable, conveyed in heartbreaking detail. The recounting of his death is devastating to read, and the aftermath, despite his killer’s conviction, is somber. Sadly, the congressional police reform bill named for Floyd remains unpassed.

A brilliant biography, history book, and searing indictment of this country’s ongoing failure to eradicate systemic racism.

A lyrical exploration of grief and ecology.

After the death of her father from cancer, Savage sought answers in the detritus of Shoreham Yard, a polluted railyard in Minneapolis near where she grew up. “I live in a polluted ecotone,” she writes, “a porous patch of neighborhood where two systems that shouldn’t merge have, and one violates the other.” The author, who teaches creative writing at Minneapolis College of Art and Design, begins her prismatic debut in the guise of a grief memoir, but the narrative encompasses ecological investigations of brownfields and Superfund sites. Savage visited nearby sites and interviewed activists and displaced survivors, finding in many the shared sentiment that local pollution must be linked to an uptick in medical problems such as cancer, miscarriages, and asthma. Although there are some standout journalistic moments in which the author transcribes emails and letters from these associates, much of the book points inward to Savage’s processing of these facts and hypotheses: “Could there be something humbling and revolutionary in understanding myself as a site of contamination?”…Could restorative action and real redress grow out of this painful recognition?” The author is a deep thinker and exhaustive researcher, but many of her ideas drift into an academic rhetoric that may alienate casual readers. She cites bell hooks, Greta Gaard’s Critical Ecofeminism, Anne Carson’s poetry, and Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring. While the author pointedly notes that compromised, polluted environments are often populated by poor, non-White families and that race and gentrification are significant factors in a troublingly multifaceted crisis, she struggles to fit into the discussion. “At the community garden,” she writes, “I question my desire to seed my presence.” Later, she writes, “I feel disgust at the settler archetype I embody.” Despite a lack of resolve, the text resists classification. Savage creates a compelling meditation that flows beyond the typical stylings of memoir, journalism, and theory.

How a Pulitzer Prize–winning writer overcame his destructive demons.

Schultz, founder and director of The Writers Studio, chronicles the challenges he faced as a poet, fiction writer, and teacher that led him to see the aesthetic and psychological value of creating a writing persona. He has long confronted a pervasive inner critic that he calls “the shitbird,” whose “sole agenda is to negate and revoke; it uses confusion to disseminate remorse and self-reproach; its favorite phrases are ‘I don’t know,’ ‘I have no right,’ and ‘I don’t want to hurt anyone.’ ” To counter an inhibiting presence, which besets many writers, Schultz advocates finding “an opposing phantom voice” by borrowing another writer’s narrator, personality, attitude, and tone. Long fascinated with masks — “the ones we hide behind and those we create as friends, sources of inspiration, and companions” — the author discovered that a persona allowed him to distance himself from his material, such as his erratic, self-destructive father, and his own feelings of shame and fear of failure. Identifying with Walker Percy’s protagonist in The Moviegoer, for example, led Schultz to see the world “from a more gracious and philosophical perspective.” At times, the author adopted the “lusty bravado of a Walt Whitman or Ernest Hemingway,” the irony of Holden Caulfield, and the sass of Huck Finn. Finding a persona proved to be a successful teaching technique for helping students to transcend the autobiographical. The process requires careful self-examination, Schultz counsels, “into the cause and effect of old mistakes and wounds, into the realm of mixed feelings for what has been lost and left unresolved, all of
which requires an act of self-forgiveness and deliverance.” The memoir is enlivened with deft anecdotes about Schultz’s relationships with writers, including Philip Roth, Norman Mailer, Denise Levertov, Joan Didion, Wright Morris, George Oppen, and John Cheever.

Insightful encouragement for writers facing their own “shitbird.”

CLOUDMONEY
Cash, Cards, Crypto, and the War for Our Wallets
Scott, Brett
Harper Business (288 pp.)
$29.99 | July 5, 2022
978-0-06-293631-8

A finance journalist treks through the murky world of digital transactions, cryptocurrencies, and surveillance through data. Scott worked in a variety of roles in the finance sector before turning to an activist brand of journalism, and his 2013 book, The Heretic’s Guide to Global Finance, did much to demystify the world of banking. Here, the author applies his expertise to show how digital currency has become the norm, to the point that the use of cash seems eccentric, even reactionary. The move away from cash began before the internet, but it received a massive push by the banking sector and big tech companies, with each gaining access to millions of new customers. E-money advocates claim that the transition was led by consumers’ demands for convenience and flexibility, although Scott argues that it was mainly driven by corporations seeking to exert more control and generate more profits. Marketers claimed that a cashless society was the inevitable future, and anyone who opposed it would be left behind. Of course, electronic transactions generate fees, and online shopping often leads consumers to purchase unnecessary items. Perhaps the most worrying element is the way in which digitization allows for an unprecedented level of tracking and surveillance. For a while, writes Scott, it appeared that blockchain technologies would provide alternatives to corporate domination, but it’s increasingly apparent that many behemoths have absorbed the challengers. Are the giants as secure as they seem? Likely not, according to the author. In fact, the system of e-money is remarkably fragile, vulnerable to cybercrime and economic crises. Though the author doesn’t provide solutions to many of the problems involved in institutional-level digital finance, he offers a personal suggestion: “We must vigorously assert our right to use cash, and to see that as a political act….Deep down I am fighting for something personal. The right to be dirty and physical.”

Told with authority and clarity, this story will be disturbing to anyone who values their privacy and the freedom to choose.

I USED TO LIVE HERE ONCE
The Haunted Life of Jean Rhys
Seymour, Miranda
Norton (416 pp.)
$32.50 | June 28, 2022
978-1-324-00612-1

A fresh biography of the enigmatic British novelist.

Jean Rhys (1890-1979) was a mysterious, fragmented, complicated literary figure. Piecing together the puzzle of her subject’s life, veteran novelist and biographer Seymour takes readers on a wild and satisfying ride. The author begins with Rhys’ childhood on the Caribbean island of Dominica, where she struggled with the mismatched personalities of her doting father and jealous, abusive mother. Escaping into books, she went on to work as a chorus girl, traveling around England. In 1919, she married a French Dutch journalist and spy, and her subsequent experiences—e.g., economic instability, marital strife, and the devastating loss of her firstborn son—fueled her writing. Influenced by her contemporaries, including Hemingway, Conrad, and Joyce, Rhys was both talented and connected, but her career didn’t take off until later in life. For much of her adult life, Rhys relied on the kindness of relatives and friends, adopting a transient lifestyle that took her from city to city and often thrust her into squalor. Feuds with others involved in the publishing and adaptations of her work coupled with unchecked alcoholism—“my will is quite weakened because I drink too much”—did not serve her well professionally even as her talent gained her a significant following.

An elegant work that provides readers with a better understanding of a beloved author’s life.
THE CHURCH OF BASEBALL
The Making of Bull Durham: Home Runs, Bad Calls, Crazy Fights, Big Swings, and a Hit
Shelton, Ron
Knopf (272 pp.)
$30.00 | July 5, 2022
978-0-593-31977-2

A filmmaker’s memoir about the making of one of the best sports movies of all time.

Shelton’s book is not simply a jaunty recollection of his directing debut, with all its attendant breakthroughs and headaches. The author, who displays sheer, unadulterated love for his subject, also delivers a savvy, unusually informative tutorial on how to take a motion picture from the concept stage to script development, casting, production, and post-production. Shelton examines all of this in a charismatic style that decodes jargon and engages from first page to last. There’s plenty of gossip (mostly generous), surprising insights, useful screenwriting strategies, and tips for would-be directors on how to combat studio meddling. Even certified film buffs who have read numerous how-to books by those in the industry will find the author’s advice sound and clarity refreshing. “Making a good and successful movie is a minor miracle every time,” he writes in the introduction. He goes on to prove his point several times over, chronicling a montage of maddening impediments, unexpected reversals, scheming, happy accidents, and the unpredictable alchemy that is screen chemistry. The son of a born storyteller and baseball fan, Shelton, who mined his own minor league career to create his signature film, never understood why the literary and sports worlds should be distinct. “Sports is both absurd and ordered, and full of unknown consequences,” he writes. “A game means nothing and it means everything.” Having seen many sports movies growing up, Shelton realized most of them got it wrong, being long on sentimentality and faux inspiration but woefully lacking in complexity. He set about demystifying a game that clings to its mysteries like pine tar to a bat only to rediscover that some of those mysteries are real—and poetic.

Fans of the film will have new reasons to appreciate it—and the team that made it.

PHIL
The Rip-Roaring (and Unauthorized!) Biography of Golf’s Most Colorful Superstar
Shipnuck, Alan
Avid Reader Press (256 pp.)
$28.00 | May 17, 2022
978-1-4767-9709-0

A probing biography of the enigmatic golfer.

“[Phil] Mickelson has spent his career charming, and manipulating, the media,” writes veteran Sports Illustrated writer Shipnuck, author of The Battle for Augusta National, near the end of this eye-opening portrait of a superstar athlete who “is many things, but never boring.” In his latest book, the author seeks “to reconcile the multitudes within Mickelson”—extraordinary golfer, smart ass, loving husband, gambler, consummate professional. Shipnuck chronicles his subject’s life and game in great detail, employing excellent insider stories and quotes from a wide range of players. Early on, notes the author, Mickelson honed his short-game skills (arguably the best ever) in his backyard. “This little practice green, built and lovingly maintained by Phil’s dad, is where genius was made, not born,” writes Shipnuck, who touches all the bases when describing Mickelson’s burgeoning career, from qualifying for a PGA tournament during high school to joining Jack Nicklaus as the only other player to win the U.S. Amateur and the NCAA championship in the same year. Mickelson won his first tournament in 1991, as an amateur, and turned pro in 1992, the same year he met his future wife, Amy. As Shipnuck wryly notes, he took special pleasure in the lucrative pre-tournament gambling games and then unleashed his relentless “bomb ‘n’ gouge” playing style. The author also digs into the rivalry with Tiger Woods, noting how its “antipathy was born on the playing fields of junior golf.” Shipnuck keeps it lively as he recounts Mickelson’s many wins—including his first Masters in 2004 and a much sought-after British Open, in 2013—and his election to the World Golf Hall of Fame in 2011. The author doesn’t shy away from his subject’s dark side, chronicling his nasty breakup with his longtime caddie, Bones Mackay, as well as “very public gambling debts [and] shady Mob-adjacent associates.”

Golf and sports fans will enjoy this feisty, in-depth portrait.
A close look at a widespread human behavior.

Behavioral scientist Slepian, a professor of leadership and ethics at Columbia, draws on his research with some 50,000 participants in 26 countries as well as copious studies by other researchers to examine why, how, and to what effect people keep secrets. Distinguishing between secrecy and privacy, he considers secrecy “as an intention to hold specific information back, and privacy as a reflection of how much you broadcast personal information.” Among the many issues that people hide are sexual behavior, infidelity, financial problems, and drug use. While some secrets may feel burdensome, others may not. “Some of life’s most joyous and momentous occasions,” Slepian notes, “start off as secrets we keep in order to reveal: the gifts we give, pregnancies, marriage proposals, and more.” The author is most concerned, though, with secrets that make people feel shame; “the more it feels solitary and personal, the more it feels isolating. And the more it is based on emotion rather than logic, the less insight you feel you have into it.” Slepian suggests three coping strategies for gaining insight: realizing that past mistakes are in the past and need not blight the present; realizing that keeping a secret may benefit others and so have a positive value; and acknowledging that the secret may benefit you. Sometimes, he asserts, sharing our inner worlds helps to form and maintain relationships, “but sometimes we hold back in order to protect those relationships as well,” or to enjoy an activity—a hobby, for example—without worrying about others’ judgment. Nevertheless, Slepian advises, “If you have a secret that is bothering you, consider sharing it with someone you trust.”

An accessible, empathetic book.

IT WAS ALWAYS A CHOICE
Picking Up the Baton of Athlete Activism
Steele, David
Temple Univ. Press (200 pp.)
$23.00 | July 8, 2022
978-1-4399-2173-9

Sports journalist Steele probes the long history of civil rights protest on the part of athletes in America.

Former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick figures at the center of the story, though he is just one player in a rich heritage of athletic activism. The author begins with Paul Robeson, who began his career at Rutgers with letters in football, track, baseball, and basketball. “Sports had put him on the national radar,” writes Steele, “but his many other pursuits throughout segregated America had kept him there.” Part of the price Robeson paid for his activism was the loss of his passport, as happened to boxing great Muhammad Ali as he refused to stand for the national anthem, which might have gone overlooked had a reporter not asked about it; taking a knee added urgency to the issue while costing Kaepernick a spot on the roster. “The very nature of his protest, of course, lent itself to categorizing the reactions along racial lines,” writes Steele. Yet race is not a monolith. As Steele writes, Tiger Woods has been the embodiment of the American Dream, but once he was given a passport, as happened to boxing great Muhammad Ali as he refused induction into the military, Steele notes that Kaepernick’s protest began not by taking a knee but simply by refusing to stand for the national anthem, which might have gone overlooked had a reporter not asked about it; taking a knee added urgency to the issue while costing Kaepernick a spot on the roster. “The very nature of his protest, of course, lent itself to categorizing the reactions along racial lines,” writes Steele. Yet race is not a monolith. As Steele writes, Tiger Woods has been the embodiment of the American Dream, but once he was given a passport, as happened to boxing great Muhammad Ali as he refused induction into the military, Steele notes that Kaepernick’s protest began not by taking a knee but simply by refusing to stand for the national anthem, which might have gone overlooked had a reporter not asked about it; taking a knee added urgency to the issue while costing Kaepernick a spot on the roster.

A closely observed, well-argued examination of how athletes have used their fame to advance civil rights.
fact that ’Pac came from a lineage that tied him directly to the streets and the struggle painted in his music. He’d speak about injustices toward Black women in the same vein he’d talk about shootouts in public with rivals and the same way he’d hold America accountable for systemic injustices toward his people.” Tinsley mostly blames their falling out on Tupac, but he does hold Biggie accountable for his missteps in other relationships—especially regarding his wife, Faith Evans, and his extramarital affairs with Lil’ Kim and Charli Baltimore. He also goes much deeper into how Biggie was a loyal friend to his pals from his Brooklyn neighborhood than he does in explaining why he was a great musical artist.

A touching tribute to the Notorious B.I.G. balancing larger-than-life stories with poignant personal moments.

**ROUGH DRAFT**

Tur, Katy

One Signal/Attra (272 pp.)

$28.00 | June 14, 2022

978-1-982-11818-1

The award-winning MSNBC anchor reflects on her career and on the journalist parents who inspired her.

Tur spent her childhood watching her parents build the Los Angeles News Service, a “scrappy little company that covered big, breaking news stories.” While her mother, Marika, shot all the footage, her father, Bob, was “the brand.” A charismatic thrill-seeker, Bob piloted the LANS news helicopter to “scoop the competition” on news events like the 1992 Reginald Denny beating and the 1994 O.J. Simpson car chase. But behind the scenes, Tur also witnessed Bob physically abuse Marika. The adrenaline-fueled aggression her father used to build LANS led to its downfall and to a period of drug abuse, erratic behavior, and his eventual declaration that he was trans. Seeking to distance herself from the family business, Tur dismissed all thoughts of becoming a journalist until the events of 9/11 inspired her to be a witness to events unfolding in New York.

After college, a temporary newsroom job led to a meeting with MSNBC anchor Keith Olbermann and a move to New York, where their relationship became tabloid fodder. “I paid a price for that relationship,” she writes in her characteristically honest way. “When media reporters found out that Keith was living with a twenty-three-year-old, I became, in tabloid-speak, the bimbo.” A job at the Weather Channel brought her into unexpected contact with Brian Williams and marked the start of her own professional ascent. As her star rose, the problems with her father—now called Zoey—exploded. Unwilling to acknowledge the hurt she caused her family, Zoey instead made their relationship troubles public to extract “a public declaration of love and forgiveness” in the press and live once again in the public eye. As the author probes the pain behind a storied career, she offers unvarnished insights into the fast-moving, often unforgiving world of high-powered journalism.

A colorfully candid memoir from a dedicated journalist.

**UNDER THE SKIN**

*The Hidden Toll of Racism on American Lives and on the Health of Our Nation*

Villarosa, Linda

Doubleday (288 pp.)

$30.00 | June 14, 2022

978-0-385-54488-7

A damning account of how race and racism determine the quality and quantity of medical care in the U.S.

Patients in America enjoy what journalist and professor Villarosa characterizes as “the most advanced medical technology in the world.” Yet, she adds, by most measures, Black and other minority Americans are denied this technology. Though the author writes that there is nothing inferior or different about the Black body, for generations, a racist medical complex has persisted, supposing that, for example, Blacks possess “skin [that] is thicker than white skin” and feel less pain than do Whites. Less pain equals less anesthetic relief. So it is with many other aspects of health care. Daring to evoke critical race theory at a time when it arouses so many conservative legislators and school boards across the country, Villarosa examines the intersectionality of class, race, and gender. She notes, for instance, that George Floyd was suffering from Covid-19 at the time of his death, a fact that has bearing on the larger fact that there has long been significant “racial disparity in life expectancy” in the U.S. that was only heightened by the systemic lack of medical care in minority communities. Villarosa enlists numerous case studies to prove that point. On mental health, for instance, she observes that Black and other minority people are largely excluded de facto from treatment, a matter that again intersects with issues of “race and masculinity” that work to keep Black men from seeking help. Furthermore, whereas relatively few Whites died from AIDS after the development of the vaunted antiviral cocktail in the mid-1990s, it persisted long after in Black communities, which Villarosa, then writing for the *New York Times*, had to fight to report on, since “the epidemic was supposed to be over in America.”

A closely argued case for racial and class equity in health care, revealing a medical regime sorely in need of reform.
A WAY OUT OF NO WAY
A Memoir of Truth, Transformation, and the New American Story
Warnock, Raphael G.
Penguin Press (288 pp.)
$28.00 | June 14, 2022
978-0-593-49154-6

Georgia’s first Black senator reflects on family, faith, and democracy.
Warnock (b. 1969) recounts his unlikely journey from Savannah to Washington, D.C. His mother once had picked cotton and tobacco; his father, in the hauling business, also served as a minister. With 12 children, the family struggled financially, and when Warnock seemed headed for the ministry, he worried about earning a decent living as a pastor. A bright student, he decided to attend Morehouse College, Martin Luther King’s alma mater, where he thrived. At 19, he was selected to join a task force to study the correlation between teen pregnancy and infant mortality, “the only teen-ager,” he recalls, among appointees from 16 Southern states. The first college graduate in his family, Warnock went on to Union Theological Seminary, where he encountered “a fellowship of thinkers and disciples whose lives challenged me and changed me.” He became increasingly moved to speak out on issues such as HIV/AIDS, criminal justice reform, capital punishment, and voting rights. In 2001, Warnock was recruited to become senior pastor at Douglas Memorial Community Church in Baltimore. Four years later, he was the successful candidate in a pastoral search at Atlanta’s Ebenezer Baptist Church, whose congregation, he notes, “was full of political heavyweights, community servants, and civil rights movement icons, including Congressman John Lewis, Christine King Farris (Dr. King’s older sister), and Coretta Scott King.” With the encouragement of Lewis, Stacey Abrams, and others, Warnock entered the senate race in 2020, which resulted in his historic win. Still Ebenezer’s pastor, Warnock believes “that democracy is the political enactment of a spiritual idea. It affirms that we are all children of God, that we all have within us a spark of the divine, and therefore a right to help determine the direction of our country and our own destiny within it.”

A thoughtful celebration of a spiritually rich life.

AN IMMENSE WORLD
How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us
Yong, Ed
Random House (464 pp.)
$30.00 | June 21, 2022
978-0-593-13323-1

An ingenious account of how living organisms perceive the world.
In his 1974 essay, “What Is It Like To Be a Bat?” philosopher Thomas Nagel argued that other animals experience a world utterly foreign to us, one nearly impossible to describe. In this follow-up to I Contain Multitudes, Yong, a staff reporter for the Atlantic who won a Pulitzer in 2021 for his reporting on Covid-19, mostly follows the traditional popular science format (travel the world, interview experts), but he takes a different, realistic, and utterly fascinating approach, emphasizing that every organism perceives only a tiny slice of the world accessible to its senses. A tick searching for blood is exquisitely sensitive to body heat, the touch of hair, and the odor of butyric acid from skin. The tick doesn't willfully ignore the surrounding plants and animals; it doesn't know that they exist. This involves the zoological term umwelt, the German word for environment that refers to what an animal can sense: its perceptual world. The human umwelt includes excellent vision, tolerable hearing, mediocre smell (but better than dog enthusiasts claim), some chemical sensitivity (mostly in the nose and taste buds), a touch of echolocation, and no ability to detect electromagnetic fields. In a dozen chapters, Yong delivers entertaining accounts of how animals both common and exotic sense the world as well as the often bizarre organs that enable them to do so. “There are animals with eyes on their genitals, ears on their knees, noses on their limbs, and tongues all over their skin,” writes the author. “Starfish see with the tips of their arms, and sea urchins with their entire bodies. The star-nosed mole feels around with its nose, while the manatee uses its lips.” Building on Aristotle’s traditional five senses, Yong adds expert accounts of 20th-century discoveries of senses for echoes, electricity, and magnetism as well as perceptions we take for granted, including color, pain, and temperature.

One of the year’s best popular natural histories.
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

**LARK AND THE WILD HUNT** by Jennifer Adam ........................................... 81

**PUPPY BUS** by Drew Brockington ................................................................. 90

**HONEYBEE RESCUE** by Loree Griffin Burns; illus. by Ellen Harasimowicz ....... 90

**PRIDE** by Stella Caldwell .................................................................................. 91

**ABUELITA AND ME** by Leonarda Carranza; illus. by Rafael Mayani .................. 92

**TINY DINO** by Deborah Freedman..................................................................... 97

**JIGSAW** by Bob Graham .................................................................................... 98

**AVIVA VS. THE DYBBUK** by Mari Lowe............................................................ 106

**SEE YOU SOMEDAY SOON** by Pat Zietlow Miller; illus. by Suzy Lee ................. 108

**THE HANMOJI HANDBOOK** by An Xiao Mina; illus. by Jennifer 8. Lee ............. 109

**TWIN CITIES** by Jose Pimienta .......................................................................... 110

**BECAUSE OF YOU, JOHN LEWIS** by Andrea Davis Pinkney; illus. by Keith Henry Brown .............................................................. 110

**SPINELESS** by Samantha San Miguel ................................................................. 112

**I WON’T GIVE UP MY RUBBER BAND** by Shinsuke Yoshitake ................. 117

**ABUELITA AND ME**
Carranza, Leonarda
Illus. by Rafael Mayani
Annick Press (32 pp.)
$17.95 | April 12, 2022
978-1-77321-610-2

**LARK AND THE WILD HUNT**
Adam, Jennifer
Harper/HarperCollins (480 pp.)
$16.99 | July 5, 2022
978-0-06-298133-2

A young hero is unexpectedly called to help defeat a wicked, usurping king.

Twelve-year-old Lark is the last one to see her older brother, Galin, riding to the rescue of the Harvest King during the semiannual Wild Hunt, before he disappears. Lark’s home is close to the border separating the realms of humans and the immortal Fae. During the hunt, skilled riders, both human and Fae, clear the borderlands of rogue magical creatures known as...
When I was a child, books were a refuge, a second home, but a place where I rarely saw characters who looked like me. Decades later, kid lit depicts a far richer array of experiences and identities. Inclusive picture books are especially powerful; there’s something special about seeing yourself in a story even before you can decipher the words on the page. I’m heartened to see picture books with incidental diversity—neighborhoods and communities that happen to feature people of various races, genders, and abilities. But I’m particularly moved to see so many stories that move in for a close-up view of people from marginalized identities, books that allow all children to see themselves in radiant, resplendent color. Here are some new and upcoming examples.

*Gibberish* (Levine Querido, March 1) by Young Vo follows Dat, a young Asian immigrant and a stranger in an even stranger land. Dat’s new country is initially a black-and-white world populated by well-meaning but grotesque creatures who speak in indecipherable symbols, but it slowly fills with color as Dat acclimates—a dynamic visual metaphor.

*A Blue Kind of Day* (Kokila, April 5) by Rachel Tomlinson, illustrated by Tory-Jay Mordey, centers on a young Indigenous Australian boy grappling with depression. Featuring a muted palette that makes heavy use of the titular hue, this story matter-of-factly acknowledges that while depression can’t be “fixed,” the support of a loving family can still make a great impact as children confront big emotions.

In *Mommy’s Hometown* (Candlewick, April 12) by Hope Lim, illustrated by Jaime Kim, a parent and child return to the mother’s childhood home. Though things have changed since Mommy’s youth—the idyllic countryside town is now a bustling metropolis—the pair still find ways to recapture her memories. Cozy illustrations and upbeat text bring to life a quiet, heartfelt reflection on change, set in Korea.

With anti-Asian hate crimes on the rise, *Yes We Will: Asian Americans Who Shaped This Country* (Dial, May 3) by Kelly Yang is a stirring, all-too-necessary reminder that Asian American history is U.S. history. Concise text, accompanied by stunning illustrations from 12 Asian American artists, shines a glorious spotlight on politicians, designers, activists, and athletes, among others.

*The World Belonged to Us* (Nancy Paulsen, May 10) by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Leo Espinosa, is an exuberant love letter to Brooklyn summers. The retro-style artwork suggests a 1960s or ’70s setting, populated by Black, brown, and White children—a reminder that despite the overwhelmingly White landscape of kid lit, the real world has always been far more diverse.

Joanna McClintick’s *’Twas the Night Before Pride* (Candlewick, May 10), illustrated by Juana Medina, relies on verse modeled after Clement Clarke Moore’s ode to Christmas and cheery cartoonish images depicting a family made up of two mothers—one light-skinned, one brown-skinned—and two tan-skinned little ones as they prepare for a pride parade. Despite the buoyant tone, McClintick and Medina go on to offer an age-appropriate but honest explanation of Stonewall.

Following *Antiracist Baby* (2020), Ibram X. Kendi once again sets the youngest readers on the road to dismantling our oppressive status quo, this time with *Goodnight Racism* (Kokila, June 14), illustrated by Chabi Bayoc. Kendi’s verse is a quiet but potent call to action accompanied by soft, rounded, painterly images depicting a racially diverse cast.

*Tomatoes in My Lunchbox* by Costantia Manoli, illustrated by Magdalena Mora (Roaring Brook, June 21), uses elegant yet accessible language, paired with impressionistic artwork, to convey a young, brown-skinned immigrant’s alienation—biting into the tomatoes their mother packed for lunch “tastes like home” but leaves the protagonist feeling self-conscious when tomato juice spurts out onto their shirt.

Mahnaz Dar is a young reader editor.
wildkin. Long-held Accords between the realms offer time—something mortals possess and that offers the possibility of change—in exchange for magically enhanced tools from the Fae. Lark’s Ma breeds the part-Fae shadowbred horses ridden in the hunt; her Da is a tailor and dressmaker. Lark, who enjoys fixing things, begins to secretly reassemble the moonclock, a mysterious artifact that may have the power to help Galin return from the Fae realm. Ultimately, Lark’s courage and problem-solving skills help her to triumph in a final confrontation with the Briar King. Adam’s fantasy world is deftly constructed, and her use of language—which includes lots of compound nouns—convincingly suggests another time and place. The measured pace keeps pages turning yet offers readers time to understand Lark’s world and the way that magic operates within it. The explanations of magical mischief, charms, and rules for interacting with the Fae are marvelous. Human characters read as White.

Immersive, splendid, delightful. (Fantasy. 10-14)

HEY YOU!
An Empowering Celebration of Growing Up Black
Adela, Dapo
Nancy Paulsen Books (48 pp.)
$16.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-0-593-52942-3

A sincere ode to Black childhood. Nineteen Black artists—including author Adeola—from the United Kingdom, Nigeria, the Bahamas, and the United States, among other countries, collaborated to create the exuberant and varied illustrations that accompany this celebration of growing up Black. The focus is on Black children, though several White children appear on a few pages as classmates or spectators. The book was written in response to the global protests following the murder of George Floyd. Adeola was motivated by the question, “What might have been different had I felt more confident and assured in my skin at a younger age—if I’d seen my story told?” His uplifting text is bookended by images of beautiful Black babies. In between, he imparts life lessons, urging Black children to “Be curious” and “Keep searching” while assuring them that “Happiness, love and laughter will find you on your journey.” An illustration by Chanté Timothy shows a Black girl imagining herself as an astronaut, a soccer player, a singer, a veterinarian, a doctor, a judge, and a chemist. Bex Glendining’s purple sunlight–infused picture of teens in a school corridor accompanies the message, “Express your culture and heritage—even if it makes some people uncomfortable…” Backmatter includes brief bios of the artists, each identified by a portion of their illustration, and of the 13 men and women in Onyinye Iwu’s depiction of seven Black children quite literally standing on the shoulders of Black trailblazers. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Heartfelt, hopeful, and honest. (Picture book. 4-8)

SATO THE RABBIT, A SEA OF TEA
Ainoya, Yuki
Trans. by Michael Blaskowsky
Enchanted Lion Books (72 pp.)
$17.95 | May 3, 2022
978-1-59270-355-5
Series: Sato the Rabbit, 3

A fanciful collection of stories about a rabbit-child.

Sato, a light-skinned child dressed in a white rabbit suit, transforms an ordinary teatime into a series of whimsical adventures involving a raspberry room, a kite catching a slice of sky, a spoon that becomes a waterfall and collects golden stars, and more. Each story is a tiny journey into Sato’s vast imagination. The tales appear to take place across a calendar year, depicting the seasons in all their natural splendor. Though at times embodying Lewis Carroll’s absurdity, Ainoya’s stories also evoke the quiet pleasure of Arnold Lobel’s Frog and Toad series.

Perfect conversation starter for parents and teachers to help kids from K-4 understand the value of aquatic life and our responsibility to ensure its future.

“As in previous installments, Rose-Vallee’s rhyming text flows smoothly, with appropriately challenging vocabulary for emergent readers (angst, aquatic)...Dinosaur fun and an environmental message make this a sure winner.”
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)
Alternating vignettes and full-page illustrations immerse the reader in each boldly illustrated scene, with a lush, eye-catching palette that deserves repeat viewings to observe varying textures and lines in the artwork. Perhaps at times illogical for adults, Sato's adventures will resonate with young readers who imagine their rooms and backyards to be brand-new worlds filled with fantastical elements. These readers will find a kindred spirit in Sato. And the digestible stories are the perfect length for bedtime. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Bright, playful tales for bold young adventurers in a world of make-believe. (Picture book. 3–6)

**FRANZ’S PHANTASMAGORICAL MACHINE**

*Anderson, Beth*
*Illus. by Caroline Hamel*
*Kids Can (32 pp.)*
*$18.99 | May 3, 2022*
*978-1-5253-0325-8*

An Austrian farmer dreams of becoming an inventor.

As a child, Franz Gsellmann longed to create, but life on the farm didn’t leave much time for “dillydallying,” as his father put it. As an adult, he’s inspired by a visit to the 1958 World’s Fair in Belgium, especially by a “gleaming structure” encompassing an elevator, escalator, and lots of colorful lights. Vowing to achieve his dream of building a “fantastical magical phantasmagorical machine,” Franz tends to the farm in the mornings and spends his spare time gathering parts from the junkyard and tinkering in a spare room. No one in his family or the village can understand what he is doing, and when his first apparatus is complete and he flips the switch, it results in an electrical blackout. Despite ridicule from the villagers, Franz persists for 23 years, eventually producing an even bigger whirling, rumbling, and vibrating machine with 53 switches. Again misunderstood for its mechanical pointlessness, it becomes an object of kinetic energy and its mechanical pointlessness, it becomes an object of kinetic energy that mesmerizes the children who come to watch. Based on a true story, this account of one man’s pursuit will leave readers pondering the nature of inventions—does a creation need a clear purpose? Delicately detailed artwork featuring a deliberately discordant color scheme gives this quirky narrative a slightly surreal feel. Characters are light-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A thought-provoking and stimulating historical episode. (author’s note, information about Franz Gsellmann and his machine, bibliography, resources, puzzle) (Historical picture book. 5–8)

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**THE FINAL TRIAL**

*Armstrong, Kelley*
*Puffin/Penguin Random House Canada (320 pp.)*
*$16.99 | June 7, 2022*
*978-0-7352-7020-6*
*Series: A Royal Guide to Monster Slaying. 4*

Tensions between monsters and humans remain high as Princess Rowan sets out to defuse (or ignite) a dragon-sized situation in this series closer.

Our young royal monster hunter-elect finally has her future in sight. One remaining trial has sent Rowan, her twin brother, and their hunting party on a journey from Tamarel to neighboring Roiva. If she can settle the ongoing dragon dilemma, Rowan can officially take her place as her aunt’s successor. The expedition combines dangerous monsters with volatile politics, and it’s difficult to say which is more treacherous as their monster-hunting mission of mercy turns mercenary when Rowan and her friends are captured. Engineering an escape from abductors in the thick of a giant serpent’s hunting ground would be enough. Dealing with troublesome monsters while thwarting a coup would be more than enough. But there is still a dangerously agitated dragon in their midst. Rowan draws on every ounce of skill, courage, and knowledge she possesses, but it may not be enough as she faces the terrifying question: What kind of monster can frighten a dragon? Armstrong delivers a wild ride as rapid-fire monster fight (and sometimes flight) scenes are paced by Rowan’s intense introspection. New monsters (faithfully rendered with wonderful detail in Rowan’s accompanying guide) give way to satisfying answers to some series-long questions, though the hasty conclusion may feel discordantly tidy. Some new Roivan characters are described as light-skinned, but the majority of the Tamarel cast remains brown-skinned.

Good luck putting it down. (Fantasy. 9–12)

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**PIP AND ZIP**

*Arnold, Elana K.*
*Illus. by Doug Salati*
*Roaring Brook Press (48 pp.)*
*$18.99 | July 26, 2022*
*978-1-250-79698-1*

A world, closed up and waiting, sometimes holds small miracles.

Two eggs at the edge of a lake are found by a family (two adults, two children, all light-skinned) on a masked, socially distanced walk during the pandemic shutdown. Their neighbor Ted, who has brown skin, explains that this can sometimes happen with ducks with their very first clutch of eggs. Since the wildlife center is open only for emergencies, Ted lends them an incubator. The eggs stay warm and watched by the children for days—“but everyone was waiting / anyway / all across the neighborhood / all around the world.” At last the ducklings (Pip and
Zip, named for terms used to describe the hatching process) break out of the shells. The pair grow under Ted’s care, and by the time Pip and Zip are ready to be released into the wild, the world may have begun to come out of its shell as well. Emergence from a quiet, sheltered, strange time to the thrill of grown ducklings flying with others of their kind is a reminder that life contains moments of wonder. Friendly, cartoon, full-color illustrations offer the right amount of detail for the story, from a montage of the family waiting by the incubator to the flock of ducks in the sunshine. An author’s note describes the true story of the duck eggs; backmatter explains what readers should do if they find a duck egg. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Gently engaging and cheerful. (websites) (Picture book 3-7)

Attention, animal lovers!
A feast for budding zoologists, this fact-laden French import contains four main sections—“What Is an Animal?” “Animal Life,” “Animal Habitats,” and “Observing Animals.” Within sections, each page highlights a different relevant topic; for instance, under “What Is an Animal?” readers will learn about diet, mammals, and metamorphosis. (A final section, “More To Know,” includes dinosaurs, threatened/endangered species, and footprints.) Throughout, rudimentary data are presented via
“Arr! Bring out the piratical storytimes! This catchy read-aloud demands to be sung at the top of your lungs.”

MONSTERS IN THE BRINY

introductory sentences; charming spot-art illustrations of creatures and accoutrements with accompanying captions and labels, picture dictionary–style; and colorful sidebars that expand on the information and include cross-references to related pages elsewhere in the book. A “Let’s Review” feature concludes each main section and, through questions and picture games, helps reinforce what children have learned. This mini-encyclopedia of sorts for the very young offers much: basic, accessible information about numerous animals; appealing, colorful, cartoon-style illustrations of wide-eyed animals and racially diverse kids; and opportunities for vocabulary enrichment. Some pages are cluttered or confusing; at times the book adopts a hodgepodge approach, particularly in the “Observing Animals” section, which covers perhaps too many bases, including structured animal environments, e.g., a zoo, a safari park, an aquarium, and a pet store, which depicts cats and dogs for sale—a practice falling largely out of favor. Still, flaws aside, it’s an attractive, well-organized volume. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Fun for the smallest critter enthusiasts; will work best as a browser. (index) (Informational picture book: 3-6)

MONSTERS IN THE BRINY
Becker, Lynn
Illus. by Scott Brundage
Sleeping Bear Press (32 pp.)
$17.99 | April 15, 2022
978-1-53411-149-3

A reimagining of a classic song that reflects the recent viral popularity of all things sea shanty.

What shall we do with a drunken sailor? More like “What do you do with a grumpy kraken?” One by one, an array of “scruffy,” “sickly,” “tearful,” “hungry” creatures present themselves to a ship full of kids. As they appear, their ailments are tended to by the young sailors. Unfortunately, each time a monster finds respite, it accidentally gives the kids’ ship an awful battering, until inevitably time and tide take their toll. Now one of the sailors is grumpy, and it’s the sea critters’ turn to make things right. Standard cryptids like sea serpents and kraken rub shoulders with the less common Capricorn, Aspidochelone, and Hydra. Meanwhile, the perfectly scanned rhymes are complemented by exciting text colors and bullet points or a blank line. Colorful photographs, often captioned, break up the text. Many spreads include boxes with information on related subjects with particular appeal: chocolate, more environmentally friendly cars, the Women’s National Basketball Association, and panda babies, for example. Three spot-the-difference photo games add to the fun. Many of the topics were also subjects for slightly more extensive treatment in her previous books; they’re likely to generate considerable interest. But in reducing the information here to one or two sentences, the writer sometimes simplifies or generalizes to the point of inaccuracy. There’s little scaffolding to help readers retain what they’ve read and sometimes only the most general sort of attribution to what experts believe. A useful index provides a way into the collection for readers looking for specifics. But, like all such collections, the enjoyment will lie mostly in the discovery.

Another entertaining resource for the pursuit of trivia. (index, photo credits) (Nonfiction: 8-12)

TOTALLY RANDOM FACTS
3,128 Wild, Wacky, and Wondrous Things About the World
Bellerose, Melina Gerose
Bright Matter Books (224 pp.)
$19.99 | $22.90 PLB | July 12, 2022
978-0-593-45053-6
978-0-593-45044-3 PLB
Series: Totally Random Facts, 1

Chewing gum, robots, the Olympics, holidays, and a diverse range of men and women who changed the world are just a few of the wide-ranging topics in this collection of infobites.

The author of several volumes in the Totally Random Questions series packs several thousand factoids into this loosely organized compilation. Animals, the planet Earth, and the human body are some of the broad categories into which Bellorose has sorted page after page of facts, each separated by alternating text colors and bullet points or a blank line. Colorful photographs, often captioned, break up the text. Many spreads include boxes with information on related subjects with particular appeal: chocolate, more environmentally friendly cars, the Women’s National Basketball Association, and panda babies, for example. Three spot-the-difference photo games add to the fun. Many of the topics were also subjects for slightly more extensive treatment in her previous books; they’re likely to generate considerable interest. But in reducing the information here to one or two sentences, the writer sometimes simplifies or generalizes to the point of inaccuracy. There’s little scaffolding to help readers retain what they’ve read and sometimes only the most general sort of attribution to what experts believe. A useful index provides a way into the collection for readers looking for specifics. But, like all such collections, the enjoyment will lie mostly in the discovery.

Another entertaining resource for the pursuit of trivia. (index, photo credits) (Nonfiction: 8-12)

MONSTERS IN THE MIST
Brandt, Juliana
Sourcebooks Young Readers (320 pp.)
$16.99 | May 3, 2022
978-1-72824-544-7

Glennon discovers the sinister reason why the Lake Superior island he’s visiting isn’t found on any map.

Writing in a distinctly metaphorical vein, Brandt tells a tale that is chilling on more than one level. Accepting an invitation she claims she received, 13-year-old Glennon McCue’s mother has brought him and his emotionally fragile sister, Leeunah, to stay with their Uncle Job, a lighthouse keeper, on remote Isle Philippeaus while their father is away for a full semester fellowship. Readers will quickly cotton to the fact that all is not right—either on the island or in the McCue family—as,
SEAN MOSES IS

MARTIN LUTHER,
THE KING Jr.
Moses D. Powe
Illustrated by Angelina Valleva


"A boy gets to portray a hero in Powe’s picture-book introduction to several Black figures from U.S. history."

"Powe presents a hopeful narrative in this cleverly structured book, which also includes portraits of such men as Frederick Douglass and President Barack Obama. Each biography includes an inspirational quote from the person described and discusses his greatest achievements."

"A well-illustrated tale that’s also a great pick to expand libraries’ Black history sections."
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

For All Inquiries, Please Email
mail@mosespowe.com • mosespowe.com
Ecologist and debut author Tyus D. Williams believes that wildlife conservation and equity are inextricably intertwined

BY MAHNAZ DAR

Write what scares you, they say—it’s advice that ecologist Tyus D. Williams followed with his first book, *Big Cats: What Do Lions, Tigers, and Panthers Get Up To All Day?* (Macmillan/Neon Squid, April 5). The subjects of his book “could kill me if they wanted to, with ease, without breaking a sweat,” he says via a Zoom call from Berkeley, California. “There are still animals out there that can remind us of the fact that we’re not at the top of the food chain.”

Illustrated by Chaaya Prabhat, the book follows a day in the life of a variety of feline species. Hour by hour, Williams presents vignettes: a black panther slumbering, a snow leopard confronting a rival, and a tiger on the hunt. While the book isn’t gratuitous in its depictions of big cats taking down prey, the power of these awe-inspiring beasts comes through clearly.

As a neurodivergent Black man in science, Williams, a 26-year-old doctoral student in ecology at the University of California, Berkeley, finds big cats a compelling—and relatable—subject. “To be a Black carnivore ecologist is to often see myself in the carnivores I study,” he says. “I see a lot of their experiences as similar to the Black experience.” He explains that Western media has often depicted carnivores, such as big cats and wolves, as the enemy. “We think of the White European settler trying to live on the Western frontier, off the grid, and he has to deal with a pack of gray wolves taking his livelihood by eating all his cattle.”

However, says Williams, those images reflect a flawed understanding of ecology. “Yes, these animals are carnivores,” he says. “But in many cases, they really want nothing to do with you.” He adds that most cases of human-wildlife conflict stem from humans encroaching into these animals’ territories or from climate change forcing animals into areas populated by humans.

What also draws him to big cats is their environmental significance. “As keystone species, they have a tremendous influence on the ecosystem and its functionality and its health,” he says. Because big cats impact the behavior of so many other species, they are crucial to the environment, even if not everyone realizes that—something else he believes has parallels with the Black experience, “nobody really understanding how fundamentally important you are to the system that you reside in. And in many cases being the backbone for a lot of its success.”

He adds, “I always found that fascinating—to be so daunting, to be so cryptic, so misunderstood, in many ways terrifying, but to be so majestic and beautiful.”

Williams’ book is an inspired blend of facts and research; though he himself invented the stories of the big cats, they’re all rooted in actual animal behavior. One account involves a pride of lionesses deciding to back down when a clan of hyenas show up to steal their kill; another tale centers on cheetah cubs playing.

“It’s important to try to captivate the attention of the audience,” he says. However, he’s cautious not to anthropomorphize his subjects. “I’m not speaking on behalf of the animals as if this is what they’re thinking,” he says. “I’m speaking on behalf of the animals as a biologist. This is what the cat is doing, and this is the cause and effect for what’s unfolding.” With the sto-
ry of the cheetah cubs, for instance, Williams discusses how play helps young cats hone the hunting skills they’ll rely on as adults.

He believes that stories can also help children notice patterns and even develop a sense of logic. “I think it will naturally train children to be a little more observant.”

While *Big Cats* may be Williams’ first book, he has been making complex topics accessible to a lay audience for years. As a sophomore at the University of Georgia, he started a Twitter account (@sciencewithtyus) in part because he needed an outlet for his passions—the only biologist in his family, he didn’t encounter many others with his interests. He wanted “to take all this energy that I have, that I’ve been keeping inside ever since I was a kid, and share it with everybody else.”

In addition to providing Williams an affirming community of fellow scientists, Twitter is also a space where he can impart knowledge. He offers sharp insights into the fascinating, at times bizarre behavior of big cats, lizards, flatworms, and other creatures—in a Twitter thread from May 2021, he briefly analyzes a video of a tiger subduing a wild boar while a crocodile attempts to intercede; using GIFs of other big cats, as well as one of two housecats playing, he highlights the tiger’s grappling skills and its wrestling prowess.

Williams is also vocal, both on Twitter and as a podcast guest, about his experience being a marginalized individual in the sciences; in late March 2022, he Tweeted a photo of himself with Christopher J. Schell, his first Black science mentor. Williams believes that historically, institutional racism has played a big role in keeping the sciences an overwhelmingly White space—for instance, medical experiments that have targeted African Americans have left many with a sense of mistrust of the scientific community. He adds that many Black people, who during the Great Migration left rural, agricultural areas of the South for cities, often had to “forfeit their connection to natural landscapes.” Many White people, on the other hand, “had the monetary fluidity and flexibility to move between both spaces.”

And, he says, not all spaces are safe for everyone. As a child in Georgia, he loved hiking alone, but his parents often cautioned him against doing so. Williams emphasizes that many marginalized people must ask themselves, *Am I safe? Am I going to actually be considered here? Are people actually going to pay attention to my concerns and my fears?*

For Williams, diversity, equity, and inclusion mean ensuring that all identities are represented at the table. At Berkeley, he tells his students that “conservation is intersectionality.” When it comes to situations involving conservation, he notes that often people listen most to the hunters who pay for permits. “But what about the people who might be animists? What about the people whose religions might be based on the beauty of the wildlife?” He adds, “We have to include everybody in the conversation.”

He’s excited to see more queer ecologists, too, who are studying ways in which queerness has been a part of nature. “We know that there’s a fluidity to gender, there’s a fluidity to sex, and we see these things represented in the natural world….Just look at all the examples of populations of animals that literally are all females.”

Williams also wants people to recognize that many people in the sciences are neurodivergent. He has ADHD and dyscalculia and struggles with calculating arithmetic off the top of his head—something that flies in the face of the stereotypical image of a scientist. For many people, a scientist is “this perfect savant genius…[who] can do anything anybody asks you to…like [calculating] quadratic equations or rocket trajectories.” Williams adds, “I think it’s important for people to see a full representation of what the mind of a scientist is, because we’re not all the same….What makes neurodiversity so beautiful is that everybody thinks differently. Let’s respect that.”

*Big Cats* received a starred review in the April 15, 2022, issue.
along with fogs, oddly localized gales, feelings of formless dread, frequent encounters with staring rats, and like atmospheric portents, both Glennon and Lee exhibit clear signs of PTSD. Brandt piles on further clues to what’s going on: On the one hand, there are sightings of gruesomely disfigured specters and the ominous news that the island is completely cut off from the mainland, and on the other, there are Glennon’s memories of years of his mercurial father’s patronizing put-downs and sudden rages. In the wildly stormy climax, Glennon confronts multiple terrors as, to prevent him escaping with his family, the malign island attempts to sabotage his newfound determination through psychological means. The main cast defaults to White.

Zombie rats and ghastly ghosts galore—but the haunting comes from more than the spectral cast. (map, author’s note) (Paranormal 10:13)

THEY’RE HEROES TOO
A Celebration of Community
Brisson, Pat
Illus. by Anait Semirdzhyan
Tilbury House (32 pp.)
$18.95 | July 5, 2022
978-0-88448-936-8

A celebration of the everyday heroes who keep our world running smoothly.

While much of the pandemic zeitgeist involved praising the heroes who kept people healthy; fed, etc., there have not been many mainstream children’s books that have addressed these helpers. This book aims to change that but without the pandemic; the only mask is on a doctor examining a patient. Instead, Brisson and Semirdzhyan follow a young child in a red polka-dot dress and blue vest and their caretaker—both brown-skinned—as they move through their diverse city. Bouncy rhyming verses identify the heroes they see, only one of whom (a pizza deliverer) wears a superhero costume. These heroes cook and serve food, drive buses, haul away garbage, deliver mail, cut hair, and lead demonstrations (in this case, against climate change). The child points out that when kids are “brave or generous,” Brisson and Semirdzhyan follow.

When Mr. Connery, a beekeeper, hears his garage buzzing, he knows just what to do. He calls Mr. Nelson, who arrives with his bee-vac, a special vacuum cleaner designed for exactly this situation. Mr. Nelson uses it to gently remove some 35,000 honeybees from the wax comb they’ve built in Mr. Connery’s garage and keep them safe while the two White men reconstitute the bees’ comb in a new hive for Mr. Connery’s garden. Burns, a beekeeper herself, describes the action in vivid, economical prose: “Vacuuming bees requires both patience and stamina.” She interfaces contextual information into her narrative, so readers learn why bees swarm, how they build their hives, and how Mr. Nelson’s bee-vac works even as they follow the riveting story. Harasimowicz’s crisp photos document the process clearly (that it plays out on a gorgeous summer day helps); occasional superimposed arrows with labels orient readers visually. Readers in beekeeping households will note some oversimplification that allows Burns to dive right in to

PUPPY BUS
Brockington, Drew
Abrams (40 pp.)
$17.99 | July 12, 2022
978-1-4197-5191-2

A child winds up on the wrong bus on their first day at a new school.

The narrator, who is light-skinned with dark curly hair, isn’t excited about attending an unfamiliar school; things get even worse when it turns out that the bus is filled with dogs. At school, the protagonist tries to find a grown-up, but everyone here is a canine—even the principal—so it’s off to class with the puppies. When the child is feeling down, their seatmate from the bus cheers them up, and when they learn that this school has recess, things really improve. The cartoonish art and simple text offer humor on many levels, from bathroom jokes (the bathroom stall contains a fire hydrant) to witty background details (a poster of the food pyramid depicts a pile of bones). Brockington also explores what first days at new schools have in common, whether the students are human or canine: feeling confused, out of place, and lonely until an overture of friendship is extended. The child’s expressions shift from freaked out to grossed out to blissed out as they lie in a pile of puppies at recess. The child comes home happy, ready to return to puppy school tomorrow, but of course there’s a twist ending that will have readers laughing again. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A fabulous, funny take on the new-kid and first-day-of-school concepts, especially for animal lovers. (Picture book. 4-8)

HONEYBEE RESCUE
A Backyard Drama
Burns, Loree Griffin
Photos by Ellen Harasimowicz
Charlesbridge (40 pp.)
$16.99 | May 10, 2022
978-1-62354-239-9

When Mr. Connery, a beekeeper, hears his garage buzzing and finds a colony of bees setting up housekeeping inside, he knows just what to do.

He calls Mr. Nelson, who arrives with his bee-vac, a special vacuum cleaner designed for exactly this situation. Mr. Nelson uses it to gently remove some 35,000 honeybees from the wax comb they’ve built in Mr. Connery’s garage and keep them safe while the two White men reconstitute the bees’ comb in a new hive for Mr. Connery’s garden. Burns, a beekeeper herself, describes the action in vivid, economical prose: “Vacuuming bees requires both patience and stamina.” She interfaces contextual information into her narrative, so readers learn why bees swarm, how they build their hives, and how Mr. Nelson’s bee-vac works even as they follow the riveting story. Harasimowicz’s crisp photos document the process clearly (that it plays out on a gorgeous summer day helps); occasional superimposed arrows with labels orient readers visually. Readers in beekeeping households will note some oversimplification that allows Burns to dive right in to
the adventure, but her information is scrupulously accurate after that. They will also observe that Mr. Nelson works without a veil, a fact addressed in a closing Q&A. A glossary, sources, further reading, and acknowledgments round out the backmatter.

Both an excellent nonfiction adventure and a novel addition to honeybee lit. (Nonfiction. 6-10)

**TAYRA’S NOT TALKING**
Button, Lana
Illus. by Christine Battuz
Kids Can (32 pp.)
$18.99 | June 7, 2022
978-1-5253-0484-2

Sometimes actions speak louder than words.

It's tough to be the new kid. It's especially tough for Tayra, because Tayra doesn't talk. She won't make a single sound: not when her classmates try talking to her louder or even when the teacher asks her questions. The other kids find this silence strange; classmate Kitty wonders if Tayra's "stubborn" or "rude" or "just...in some / I'm-not-talking mood," and an accident leads some kids to wonder if, just maybe, she's "bad." But a little patience and understanding go a long way, and together the class learns that talking isn't the only way to make friends. This story, told in playful rhyme, is a deceptively simple exploration of making friends, something many children struggle with, whether they can speak or not. The story never explains why Tayra doesn't speak, but that why is less integral to the plot's development than the process of resolving misunderstandings, learning to communicate effectively with others, and creating an inclusive environment in which differences are respected and accommodated. The use of alternative modes of communication (e.g., gestures, drawings, music) plays out in a child-friendly manner that never feels patronizing. Expressive anthropomorphic animals, hand-drawn and digitally rendered, create a dynamic and warm visual landscape; readers will root for the class as much as for Tayra as they collectively navigate their new friendship. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Sweet without being sententious. (Picture book. 3-7)

**PRIDE**
An Inspirational History of the LGBTQ+ Movement
Caldwell, Stella
Penguin Workshop (128 pp.)
$14.99 | April 19, 2022
978-0-593-38294-3

There's pride everywhere! This stirring work affirms that LGBTQ+ people have existed for centuries. Caldwell notes that ancient cultures—Greece, Rome, Egypt, India, and China—all reflect stories of queer love and offers profiles of queer people throughout history—Oscar Wilde, Lili Elbe, and Andre Lorde, for example—who have embraced their authentic selves. “Have You Heard Of” boxes scattered throughout shed light on lesser-known people who advanced LGBTQ+ rights, such as AIDS activist Cecilia Chung (b. 1939), former drag performer and political hopeful Josep Sarría (1922-2013), and openly lesbian suffragette Lettice Floyd (1865-1934). Each of the seven chapters includes essays from young people articulating why they’re proud members of the LGBTQ+ community. Moments of history are explored in brief vignettes that range in length from a paragraph to approximately two pages. Bright digital illustrations, color and black-and-white photographs, and bold background colors that mirror various pride flags decorate the pages. As a whole, the information provided is far from exhaustive, but it serves to inspire, educate, and bolster—and it does these things exceedingly well. Curious readers will find a springboard for further research—and more potential role models.

The pride of any bookshelf, this is a delightful introduction to LGBTQ+ history. (timeline, glossary, index, further reading) (Nonfiction. 9-13)
“A soothing balm for children confronting an often angry, frightening world.”

ABUELITA AND ME

Carranza, Leonarda
Illus. by Rafael Mayani
Annick Press (32 pp.)
$17.95 | April 12, 2022
978-1-77321-610-2

Stepping outside your front door can be scary when you don’t know how the world will treat you and those you love.

A child and their Abuelita—both brown-skinned and cued as Latinx—love spending the day together. But the world outside is a different story. Not everyone knows how special Abuelita is; sometimes people make faces or get up and walk away when she sits next to them. Abuelita always says, “It’s okay, Amorcito”—she knows these people aren’t worthy of her time. But one day when Abuelita sits down on the bus before paying her fare—she’s worried about falling—the driver yells at them (“You people are always trying to get away with something”). No one speaks up, and the child feels helpless. Back at home, the protagonist doesn’t want to go out again for fear of a similar encounter, but with the help of Abuelita, the child finds the courage to face their fears. What could have easily come across as preachy or heavy-handed instead serves as a gentle but powerful reminder that even the smallest actions—a glance or a comment—can seem larger than life to a child. With bright, expressive illustrations, this is an accessible, tender exploration of the ways in which many marginalized people experience the world. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A soothing balm for children confronting an often angry, frightening world. (Picture book 3-6)

THE LAST BEEKEEPER

Cartaya, Pablo
Harper/HarperCollins (304 pp.)
$16.99 | July 12, 2022
978-0-06-300655-3

In a dystopian future ravaged by climate change, a 12-year-old tech genius must save her community from an evil government.

Raised on her family’s strawberry farm in the Valley, Yolanda Cicerón, who has Cuban roots, aspires to become a neurolink surgeon, install computer chips in human skulls, and live in Silo, the most developed city around. But Camila, Yoly’s older sister and her guardian since their parents’ exile, can’t afford the tuition. After Yoly secretly accepts a scholarship from Silo’s Mayor Blackburn to fund her studies—against Cami’s explicit wishes—she realizes the scholarship’s terms require her to go on Retreat, a life-threatening mission in territory plagued by extreme weather disasters. Terrified, Cami finally shares secret family history that Yoly belatedly understands that the System that purportedly keeps everyone safe from nature is actually oppressive and is spying on them. Looking for a way to pay off the scholarship and avoid the Retreat, Yoly and Cami discover a honeybee colony on their farm and recognize that the bees can pollinate fields and thereby reduce people’s dependence on Silo. But questioning and innovation are dangerous under an authoritarian regime, and when people dear to Yoly are taken away, she must fight to save them and bring down the whole corrupt System. Readers will root for Yoly, who is as kind and brave as she is smart, in this page-turning story that deals with all-too-relevant themes.

An insightful, action-packed, and thought-provoking adventure. (Fiction. 8-12)

CINDERELLIOT

Ceilley, Mark & Rachel Smoka-Richardson
Illus. by Stephanie Laberis
Running Press Kids (32 pp.)
$17.99 | May 3, 2022
978-0-7624-9959-5

A fairy-tale retelling with a sprinkle of gender swapping (and actual sprinkles!).
Cinderelliot absolutely adores baking, from measuring ingredients to putting on the finishing touches. But as fulfilling as baking can be, Cinderelliot wishes for more—for someone to love him as much as they love what he bakes. Unfortunately, his stepsiblings don’t fit that bill, though they do love his desserts—so much so that when the prince holds a competition to choose a new palace baker, the cruel pair demand that Cinderelliot make pastries that they can pass off as their own. Readers can guess what comes next—a desperate wish to attend the competition granted by a stylishly besuited fairy godfather; instant sparks with the smitten, sweet-toothed prince; and a midnight dash leaving only a chef’s hat behind. Gender play in fairy-tale retellings is hardly new, and some elements are a bit overdone here, but the baking spin and dash of fluffy romance sealed with a kiss keep the plot from going stale. Animated illustrations look as though they might jump off the page with cascades of color and all the frenetic energy one expects of a sugar-charged adventure. Cinderelliot and his stepsiblings are light-skinned, and Prince Samuel is dark-skinned along with a smattering of background cast in the palace. (This book was reviewed digitally.) Shamelessly saccharine and delightfully queer. (Picture book. 4-7)

WHAT WAS THE TURNING POINT OF THE CIVIL WAR?
Alfred Waud Goes to Gettysburg
Crenshaw, Ellen T.
Penguin Workshop (64 pp.)
$12.99 | $7.99 paper | May 31, 2022
978-0-593-22517-2
978-0-593-22516-5 paper
Series: Who HQ Graphic Novels

This latest in the series illustrates a small slice of the Civil War.
When Gen. Robert E. Lee’s Confederate Army of Northern Virginia met Union Gen. George Meade’s Army of the Potomac outside the small Pennsylvania town of Gettysburg, the bloody battle raged for several days but ended in the Union’s first big victory. Crenshaw tells the story primarily from the Union point of view, with Meade as a central character and “special artist” Alfred Waud as the protagonist. Waud followed the soldiers and drew images of the battles, including what is likely the only known eyewitness depiction of Pickett’s Charge. The graphic novel format works well for the story except that it’s hard to distinguish the individual Union soldiers, all dressed in blue and remarkably similar. The battlefield images convey destruction and loss without graphic horror and end on a note of hope with Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. Though all the soldiers at Gettysburg appear to be White, the story includes Black war journalist Thomas Morris Chester and discusses White supremacy and the spread of the deliberate false history of the Lost Cause.
A nuanced piece of history told simply and well. (timeline, bibliography) (Graphic history. 7-12)

FLY HIGH, LOLO
Daly, Niki
Catalyst Press (80 pp.)
$7.95 paper | May 3, 2022
978-1-946395-65-8
Series: Lolo, 4

The lighthearted and loving Lolo returns in the fourth book in the series. Lolo, a charming little Black girl from South Africa sporting Afro-textured hairstyles, is back for more tales also featuring her mama, Sisi, and Gogo. In the first chapter, “Lolo and the Eagle,” Lolo misses an opportunity to audition for the role of the eagle in her class play when she becomes sick. Her classmate Dana Rose, who “could do graceful leaps and land as softly as a feather,” earns the part, but when Dana Rose misses a leap during the performance, Lolo finds a way to save the play. In “Lolo and the Teen Queen,” Lolo learns about the importance of inner beauty. In “Lolo’s First Date,” Lolo feels angry and
TOO TAD LONGS TO TRANSFORM INTO A STAR KNIGHT LIKE THOSE TOLD ABOUT IN LOCAL LEGENDS. IN THE STORIES, FALLING STARS CONFERRED MYTH.

A YOUNG FROG FINDS A FRIEND AND EMBARKS ON AN ADVENTURE THAT UPENDS A MYTH.

TAD LONGS TO TRANSFORM INTO A STAR KNIGHT LIKE THOSE TOLD ABOUT IN LOCAL LEGENDS. IN THE STORIES, FALLING STARS CONFERRED MYTH.

STAR KNIGHTS

Davault, Kay
Random House Graphic (240 pp.)
$20.99 | $12.99 paper | $23.99 PLB
July 5, 2022
978-0-593-30365-8

A young frog finds a friend and embarks on an adventure that upends a myth.

Tad longs to transform into a Star Knight like those told about in local legends. In the stories, falling stars conferred humanlike forms on the animals living in the forest. They became knights who built a grand, prosperous city on the mountain, but a witch turned them into voracious wraiths known as Fallen Fauna. Tad relates this lore to another small creature and then approaches Sophos the old turtle to help with understanding details about the star wishes. However, the turtle viciously reviles the young frog for being one of the mud dwellers—frogs and salamanders—who are the villains of the story and allies of the Marsh Witch. Soon after, when a star seems to fall into the Milky Way Marsh, a sword-wielding, bright-haired person comes to Tad’s rescue. Tad believes this to be Stello, the Star King, and pledges to help Stello find a way to get back to space. Davault’s characters have a plump, big-eyed, punchy energy, and her angular panels in pleasing colors keep the complex narrative zipping along. Humanoid characters have skin colors ranging from dark brown to eggshell. Unlikely and unexpected heroes and cosmic royalty in disguise underscore the lively quest, while intriguing reversals serve to emphasize Tad’s emotional growth.

A lively hero’s journey, not least for a frog. (additional art) (Graphic fantasy. 8-12)

IF I HAD A KANGAROO

Dawny, Gabby
Illus. by Alex Barrow
Thames & Hudson (32 pp.)
$14.95 | July 5, 2022
978-0-500-65268-8

A young child Down Under, in considering a pet, imagines all the fun they could have with a kangaroo.

Readers may recognize the brown-skinned child with their cloud of black hair, blue dress, and yellow Madeline hat from previous outings about pets (If I Had a Unicorn, 2020). This time, they would like a pet with spring: a kangaroo. Not only could the kangaroo carry the child’s backpack, but she could carry the child, too, in her pouch! She could also mow the grass (she’s an “herbivore”), deliver mail, and kick up a froth of bubbles in the bath. Not all the things the duo do together require the specific skill set of a kangaroo, though—barbecuing, dancing in the rain, and snuggling on the couch for book time—but those things are certainly nice to do with a loved pet companion. Australian vocabulary makes an occasional appearance in the rhyming verses—*Giday, billabong*—along with a sport from Down Under: "Kangaroos are good at sports, / so in a cricket match she’d bowl a spinning googly… / And she’d use her pouch to catch!” (The illustration here does a pretty good job of putting this in context.) And this entry includes the series’ requisite scatological references. The child’s friends are diverse, and their parents appear to be an interracial couple. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Be prepared for some unusual pet requests after sharing this one. (Picture book. 3-7)

ON MY PAPA’S SHOULDERS

Daly, Niki
Catalyst Press (32 pp.)
$17.99 | May 18, 2022
978-1-946395-68-9

The view from Papa’s shoulders is sometimes the best view in the world.

In an endearing homage to fathers and sons, a boy relates his daily routine of walking to school with different family members. Our young narrator tells us that walks to school with Mama take them past the rumble and flash of fast traffic, cars and trucks and feet moving to their own beats; walks to school with Gogo they veer off the beaten path to avoid the busy roads, and with Tata, who has to stop to rest, the walk ends with a super big hug. But on the rare days when Papa walks him to school before heading to work, our narrator is treated to the grandest view—from atop strong shoulders, overlooking the world. Daly delivers the tale with musicality and joy through uncomplicated yet poignant prose. He captures the feelings of a simple routine and cosmic royalty in disguise underscore the lively quest, while intriguing reversals serve to emphasize Tad’s emotional growth.

A wonderful tribute to the father-son bond. (Picture book. 4-7)
“Let this winning pair sashay onto your shelf.”

MISS RITA, MYSTERY READER

Donovan, Sam & Kristen Wixted
Illus. by Violet Tobacoo
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (40 pp.)
$18.99 | May 3, 2022
978-1-250-77476-7

Sparkle is serious business—and so are storytimes.
Tori’s father is scheduled to be the class mystery reader today—an event that initially makes Tori feel elated, but as Daddy gets dressed, emotions shift from joy to apprehension. Daddy is a drag queen who goes by the moniker Miss Rita, and Tori is afraid that their classmates won’t love Miss Rita as much as they do. Thankfully, drag queens are used to thinking on their feet, and with the right words of comfort, Miss Rita reminds Tori that everyone wears different clothes for work. This, and the antics of Tori’s pet cats—named for queer activists Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson—raises Tori’s spirits and inspires them to transform into “Miss Tori Teller,” a fabulously dressed assistant in a bow tie and a silvery skirt. The story is amusing and reads well. Drag performers should have this at the tops of their lists for drag-themed storytimes for the next several years—and a talented storyteller will be able to milk this for all it’s worth. The digital illustrations are slightly generic—a terrible thing in drag—but the realistic depiction of Miss Rita as a middle-aged parent as opposed to an overfiltered drag fantasy is commendable. Tori and Daddy are light-skinned with dark hair; the students have a range of skin tones and hair textures. There’s no mystery here; Miss Rita is going to work all Pride Month! (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Let this winning pair sashay onto your shelf. (author’s note) (Picture book. 6-10)

WHAT IS MATH?

Dotlich, Rebecca Kai
Illus. by Sachiko Yoshikawa
Christy Ottaviano Books (40 pp.)
$17.99 | July 26, 2022
978-0-316-33777-9

Another collaboration by Dotlich and Yoshikawa brings a school subject to life.
As in 2006’s What Is Science? jaunty rhymes introduce readers to many different answers to the titular question, the illustrations showing an array of children, diverse in terms of race and ability, exploring their world, attending school, and interacting with friends. By Dotlich’s account, math encompasses: ages, counting, money, addition and subtraction, the calendar, time, matching, weighing, baking, patterns, building a house, height, distances, selling, sorting, comparing, number stories, shapes, multiplication, and charts and graphs. But whereas the science topics were easy to discern (dinosaur fossils versus stars), children may have more trouble picking out the things listed in the rhymes in the illustrations. For instance, “It’s a matching game, / it’s a blastoff chart. / It’s a block of days. / It’s a whole, it’s a part.” The busy classroom scene shows a birthday pizza party in progress. Only diligent eyes will pick up on the bingo game that a few kids are playing, the two students measuring height against a wall, and the chart that shows the weekly schedule, all backgrounded by the giant pizza that’s front and center. Still, this is a great way to show even the math-averse or math-phobic the many ways that math is hiding in their everyday lives. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A solid definition of math that shows its ubiquity. (Informational picture book. 3-7)

AT THE POND

Elliott, David
Illus. by Amy Schimler-Safford
Candlewick (40 pp.)
$18.99 | May 3, 2022
978-1-5362-0598-5

“It springs to life! Another day has dawned.”

Whimsical, energetic, impressionistic poems and luminous, layered illustrations bring the world of a pond to life and show how its inhabitants move, behave, and interact throughout the day. “The water lilies open / in the morning sun. / Frog sits on a lily pad: / the show has just begun. / She’s come to watch / the lilies open / one / by one / by one.” Occasional bits of advanced vocabulary sometimes work more to further the rhythm than the description—words like enigmatic, domésticité, ancestral, and charismatic will likely be unfamiliar to young readers and are hard to define from the illustrations or immediate context. However, overall, these are evocative, memorable, and gently humorous poems that artfully capture the atmosphere and details of the environment. Interesting scientific facts and descriptions of the creatures are included in the backmatter. As in Elliott’s other titles that focus on particular habitats, these poems showcase the natural world in breathtaking detail. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An engaging portrayal of pond life that will draw young readers in and lead them to further explore both poetry and nature. (Picture book. 3-8)

REPAIRING THE WORLD

Epstein, Linda
Aladdin (352 pp.)
$17.99 | July 5, 2022
978-1-5344-9855-6

Ask anyone in Roosevelt Cove, New York: Daisy Rubens and Ruby Affini come as a pair.
Daisy—Jewish, curly-haired, and freckled—approaches the world with caution and an analytical mind. Meanwhile Ruby—Catholic, with olive-toned skin and straight, dark hair—sees magic everywhere and isn’t afraid of anything. When Ruby dies in an
accident the summer before sixth grade, Daisy finds herself bereft of wonder. With the patience and compassion of her loving parents, her whimsical Aunt Toby, and some unfamiliar faces at school and synagogue, she slowly discovers new joy in life. Each character is richly imagined, their idiosyncrasies pondered and celebrated as Daisy parses her way through a world of connections without her best friend by her side. The novel finds its title in the Jewish idea of tikkun olam, and Daisy’s journey is one of repairing herself. Depictions of Jewish life and belief—in all its contemporary formulations—ring true, but where the novel really shines is through its use of sensory and emotional details. With incredible specificity and heart, Epstein carries Daisy through her grief, demystifying the experience of tragedy for her middle-grade audience. The book reads like a field guide for surviving the unimaginable: the prose simple but clear, the plot an unassuming canvas against which characters and emotions bloom.

An accessible look at grief, spirituality, and growth. (Fiction. 8-12)

**MR. DARCY**
Field, Alex
Illus. by Peter Carnavas
New Frontier Publishing (32 pp.)
$17.99 | May 3, 2022
978-1-913639-86-0

Mr. Darcy, a mallard wearing a top hat, learns to accept help from his friends.

The extremely cute Mr. Darcy lives in a fancy park and wants nothing to do with Lizzy and her sisters, ducks who live in an ordinary park. They encounter each other repeatedly, and Mr. Darcy ends every interaction flustered and fleeing, presumably because he either finds Lizzy too low-class to interact with or because he is embarrassed to admit he does not want to accept her invitation to tea. When Mr. Darcy gets stuck in a mud puddle, Lizzy, a horse named Bingley, a cow named Caroline, and a mouse named Maria conspire to help him despite his being too proud to ask. Mr. Darcy decides to go to tea, and in the end he feels “not alone at all”—a problem of his that was only hinted at previously. The moral finally becomes clear on the last page—sort of. Through Lizzy’s efforts, Mr. Darcy seems to have learned not to be so prideful and to accept help from his friends. The message and humor largely depend on prior literary knowledge, making for a bewildering story for children who presumably have not yet read *Pride and Prejudice*. The adorable and simply colored line drawings are the highlight. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A charming book whose message will be lost on all but adult fans of Jane Austen. (Picture book. 4-6)
felt warm and fuzzy. His toes danced. His fingers tickled the air.” Yet each time he sees how disappointed people are with him, he feels terrible. The bold cartoon outlines and expressive faces in Player’s illustrations pair perfectly with Frazier’s infectious text. Dash’s zest for life is palpable, as are both the tension that builds as he’s about to do something wrong and his contrition afterward. It’s clear that Dash is a good kid whose big feelings overwhelm him. Luckily, his supportive mom gives him a hug and teaches him a practical exercise for calming down his feelings, which he uses to great effect at school the next day. Dash and his parents have light skin and dark, curly hair, while his grandmother has gray hair and light skin. Other characters are racially diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A humorous yet compassionate portrayal of the challenges of self-regulation. (Picture book. 4+)

TINY DINO
Freedman, Deborah
Viking (40 pp.)
$17.99 | April 19, 2022
978-0-399-35264-9

Who’s a tiny dinosaur? You’ll be surprised. “I’m a DINOSAUR!” proclaims a hummingbird proudly. A turtle points out that dinosaurs had huge feet that “stomped and clomped.” The hummingbird responds, “Look at my toes! They are just like T. rex! I’m a dinosaur!” The background illustration shows T. rex toes and a close-up of hummingbird toes with the caption “Four toes, three forward-facing.” A frog notes that dinosaurs had huge bones, but the hummingbird replies that many dinosaur bones were hollow, just like hummingbird bones. A shrew joins the chorus of naysayers and argues that dinosaurs were fierce. “I am FIERCE!” says the hummingbird. And when a crocodile sticks its head in to ask if it heard correctly “that dinosaurs still roam the earth,” the hummingbird proves its fierceness by standing firm. Then the little bird discusses the similarities between itself and the crocodile; they are cousins. It has finally convinced the other animals. Freedman’s main text is entirely in speech bubbles, and as the animals converse, supporting facts and diagrams appear in the background. Her usual stunning watercolors are splats and spatters of bright color that follow the mood of the taxonomic debate. Though the exchanges are humorous, Freedman also folds in lessons on self-regulation.

An innovative introduction to the relatedness of all animals that will delight budding biologists and dino mavens alike. (author’s note, resources list, website) (Informational picture book. 4+)

IGUANA BE A DRAGON
Frost, Maddie
Bloomsbury (40 pp.)
$17.99 | July 12, 2022
978-1-5476-0653-5

Will Iguana’s plan be a splash or a flop?

While getting settled in his new house, Iguana receives an invitation to Cheetah’s pool party. He is worried. Cheetahs are fast. Cheetahs are amazing. Surely all the other guests will be amazing, too. Iguana makes a checklist that shows he’s green, sun-loving, and, well, green. Nothing amazing there. Iguana decides not to go, but he later sees a sign for a shop called Dragon Donuts, and inspiration hits. Dragons are amazing—they can fly, they have magical horns, and they shoot fire. After many hilarious costume changes at a thrift store, Iguana transforms into a dragon, with party hats for horns and a pair of purple kites for wings. But something is missing. Fire! Iguana chows down on several dishes spicy enough to make his eyes pop. The pressure builds, and Iguana is finally rewarded with a humongous fiery burp that turns him bright red and launches him into the air and, eventually, right into Cheetah’s pool during the party. Iguana’s rocket-fast swim to cool off impresses Cheetah and the guests—and he realizes that he is rather amazing just the way he is. Frost’s cartoonish art is simple yet endearing, filled with bright, saturated colors. The story is loaded with humor and offers a strong yet never heavy-handed message. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A lovable iguana reminds us to be ourselves—a lesson that readers young and old can embrace. (Picture book. 4+)

SUNFLOWER SISTERS
Gangotra, Monika Singh
Illus. by Michaela Diaz-Hayes
Sourcebooks Jabberwocky (32 pp.)
$17.99 | June 7, 2022
978-1-72825-231-5

A young girl encounters colorism. Amrita is celebrating her sister Jas’ wedding on the same day that her neighbor and best friend, Kiki, is celebrating her brother Yemi’s wedding. Extended family joining in the celebrations reveal their traditional biases against dark skin by offering suggestions on how to lighten Amrita’s and Jas’ warm brown skin and attempting to dissuade Amrita from wearing a yellow outfit (because it might make her skin appear darker). Amrita’s mother later explains these outdated notions of beauty to her with gentle honesty, reassures her that “the skin we are in is EXACTLY as it is meant to be,” and encourages her to wear yellow (“just like the tall sunflowers”). Amrita’s family is cued as being from the Indian diaspora, and Kiki’s family is cued as being of African descent. Illustrations are vibrant, filled with festive celebrations and family members in various shades of brown wearing colorful traditional outfits. The text is at times clunky and uneven, but the empowering relationship...
A rhyming war of words erupts between Pug and Bug—but (spoiler alert) Slug arbitrates and helps the sparring duo under-stand each other and offer apologies. All agree that nothing’s wrong—but his clever ruse backfires when Pug soon realizes that his (reputedly) powerful magician Nerlim on a rescue mission. Accompanied by village idiot Ferkle, whose habit of shoving mud in his pants effectively lowers the level of humor even fur-ther, the two erts knights weather the Forest of Doom, the River of Doom, and a “troll bridge” across the Chasm of Doom despite a suspicious lack of assistance from either the prince or the magician...and arrive to discover that neither the stinx nor the princess is quite as expected either. In fact, the princess ends up being the rescuer (“That’s what you call irony,” she com-ments) when Ruprecht and Nerlim announce their intention to seize her and do away with any inconvenient witnesses. Tim and Belinda are rewarded with promotions for their efforts; readers will come away with both a cogent warning from Gibbs about the dangers of falling for fake news and better vocabularies due to his penchant for flagging significant words like gullible and malodorous in the narrative and then pausing to define and use them in sample sentences. Along with a full-spread map, Curtis supplies frequent pen-and-ink sketches of the cast in comical poses and straits. The races and ethnicities of the characters are not specified in the text, though cover art depicts characters of various skin tones.

Budding heroes defeat class and gender expectations as well as the occasional monster in this wry outing. (Fantasy. 8-12)
In the midst of a diversely hued cast, Gaia, portrayed with dark skin and long green hair festooned with earthly flora and fauna, maintains a strong if sometimes vulnerable presence as her power-hungry husband, Ouranos, binds her up in order to rule over the titans uncontested. Later, she sees her likewise authoritarian son Cronus (“Down the hatch!”) eat all of his children (except Zeus) and then is forced to watch as her arrogant Olympian grandchildren, led by Zeus (“He’s such a brat!”), spread fire and ruin over her creations in their battles with giants and titans. She herself loses her temper (“Enough! You want war? I’ll give you war!”) and creates the fearsome Typhon... but then repents and, gathering a sisterhood of Fates and Furies together, invites readers to join in a different sort of war: “We will never stop fighting.” “For peace.” “For justice.” “For a better world.” Though offering a considerably sanitized version of the original myths—Ouranos is identified as Gaia’s “husband” with no mention that she’s also his mom, for instance, and to free her, Cronus attacks his dad but doesn’t appear to castrate him—the mix of sequential panels and larger scenes includes nods to many of Gaia’s immortal offspring as well as Hercules and the Trojan War.

Snarky rendition of an old tale, highlighting both sisterhood and a cogent contemporary message. (glossary, bibliography) (Graphic mythology. 8-12)

WHERE’S SPEEDY?
Gregory, Nici
Berbey Publishing (40 pp.)
$17.99 | June 14, 2022
978-0-648-95339-5

The adventures of a sneaky slug. George and his little sister, Lotta (who appear to be anthropomorphized puppies), are hunting for little critters in the garden when they come upon a slug munching greens. They put him in a lidless jar with a leaf and a rock and take him to show their father, who is making pretzels. The kids pause for a snack and return to find Speedy has gone for a sluggy stroll…or has he? George and Lotta run off to the car—if they have seen Speedy. No one has. The whole family, along with three kittens from next door, agree to help search. They find plenty of critters but no Speedy (though eagle-eyed readers will notice that the slug is never actually that far away). Then Grandad returns with a slimy passenger on his head. After a celebration, it’s time to return Speedy to his family (and have another pretzel). Gregory’s simple tale of a lost short-term yard pet is a fun game of spot the gastropod. Once kids realize Speedy is on every page, they will demand to read it again to find the miniscule mollusk. Cartoon illustrations with scribbly lines are a good match for the text. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Animal lovers will have a field day with this fun story that also offers a seek-and-find element. (Picture book. 2-7)
In the second, interconnected story, Florizella tries to release a mute bear they liberated from the sideshow into the wild, leaving him alone in the forest. But, wracked with guilt, Florizella discovers that she has a fairy godmother—one who is frankly exhausted from all the wishes her many, many godchildren regularly demand of her. Lessons of friendship and fair play drive these lively, humorous, fairy-tale–style stories. Florizella’s family reads as White; previous volumes cue Bennett as Black. (Final art not seen.)

Principled princess fun. (Fiction. 8-12)

THE SECRET FOREST FRIENDS
Harra, Kyoko
Illus. by Kazue Takahashi
Museyon (82 pp.)
$14.99 | June 1, 2022
978-1-940842-64-6
Series: Forest Friends

Mayu goes back to the forest to meet her new forest friend in the summer.

Ever since she spent her winter vacation at her grandparents’ house, second grader Mayu has been writing letters to her grandpa and her secret forest friend, Konta the fox. Now it’s summer, and Mayu is spending another vacation at her grandparents’ house near the forest. Excitedly, she writes letters to both her grandpa and Konta, sharing when she’ll arrive. Mayu even plans to do her summer project on the different plants of the forest so she and Konta can play. Preparing for her trip, she goes hat shopping with her mother and even thinks of a gift for Konta. When her vacation finally arrives, she and Konta happily explore and find plants for her project together. One day Mayu loses a sandal in the river and can’t walk back home. Konta must find the courage to venture out of the forest and call on Mayu’s grandpa. This sequel to The Mailbox in the Forest, translated from Japanese, is another charming tale of everyday life, friendship, and intergenerational kinship. There are letters scattered throughout, written in different fonts. The adorable illustrations switch between black and white and full color. A blank letter template and Mayu’s research on the forest flowers are included. Mayu and her family are Japanese.

Another sweet story of friendship and family. (Fantasy. 5-8)

TOO PIG TO FAIL
Harrell, Rob
Dial Books (248 pp.)
$14.99 | June 28, 2022
978-0-593-35420-9
Series: Batpig, 2

Holy sequel, Batpig! In this thoroughly enjoyable graphic follow-up to Batpig: When Pigs Fly (2021), Gary the pig and his alter ego, Batpig, return for more goofy adventures. Harrell’s tale is broken into three vignettes consisting of two longer chapters and a shorter interstitial section. In “The Class That Wouldn’t End!” Gary and his best friends, Brooklyn (a bat) and Carl (a fish), head to math class, and it seems like time is barely passing. They’re caught in a collective haze of boredom—even Brooklyn, who loves math, notices it. The trio soon discovers that time is slowly inching along thanks to the evil, vengeful Time Guy (the name Timekeeper was already taken). Batpig must now figure out how to make time fly if they ever want to escape the monotony of endless fractions. The briefer middle story, “Aquarium Dreams,” stars Brooklyn and Carl and sets the stage for the final tale, “Lights, Camera, Chaos!” This closing story is a comedic delight, with a pompous Hollywood superhero, meddling pastel aliens, a giant kitten/bee chimera (adorably monikered the Bumblekitten), and a deluge of stinky gym socks. No sophomore slump here: Harrell’s newest offering blends snicker-suffused action with a gentle emphasis on the importance of friendship. In Gary’s world, animals and humans coexist; humans (both young and old) are depicted with a range of skin tones.

More hilarious, high-energy, hammed-up hijinks. (Graphic fiction. 7-12)
The final chapter in the series picks up where *Ghosts of Weirdwood* (2021) left off. Book 2 ended with Wally having to make a difficult decision: trust the Wardens or his, brother, Graham. He followed his heart and picked his brother, who is determined to tear down the Veil by creating Rifts to meld the Real with the Fae. By turning his back on his friends and Lady Weirdwood, Arthur becomes his former friend and No. 1 enemy. Arthur has officially become a Novitiate with the Wardens of Weirdwood and is tasked with keeping Lady Weirdwood—who is now in infant form—safe, finding and rescuing the manor that was stolen by Wally and Graham, and defending the border to prevent chaos. And if that wasn’t enough, a mysterious and massive Void is moving through both realms, erasing everything in its path. This installment features more adventure than before, and the imaginary realm continues to evolve through excellent worldbuilding. The twists and turns will keep readers on their toes as each chapter brings as many questions as answers. While humor is still present, it is decidedly less so than in the other two books in the series. With war as the backdrop, difficult decisions are made that have lasting consequences for each character. Although not everyone gets a happy ending, the final fates are fitting.

**A satisfying conclusion.** (Fantasy 9-12)

**SUMMER’S CALL**
**A Michigan Day**
Hellewell, Amber Lynn
Illus. by Gretchen Ellen Powers
Sleeping Bear Press (40 pp.)
$17.99 | March 15, 2022
978-1-53411-142-4

An homage to summer in Michigan. Two little children wake up one morning and, along with their parents, spend the day outside reveling in the summer’s day by one of Michigan’s lakes. Hellewell has created a nostalgic, rose-tinted narrative enhanced by illustrations that harken back to the idealized childhood world of Tasha Tudor’s picture books (which the illustrations very much resemble, with cute children, adults who look like taller versions of the children, and copious homey details). The use of second-person narration (“The summer sun rises // and kisses you awake”) suggests less a child’s perspective and more that of an adult’s fond look back. The narrative lacks tension as the children swim, daydream, roast marshmallows, and look at fireflies.

Powers’ atmospheric illustrations underscore this misty-eyed nostalgia, and the overall effect is one of undiluted romanticism. The protagonists, as well as the majority of other illustrated characters, are White; a few characters have brown skin and black hair. Backmatter with instructions on how to make a mobile to capture summer memories will spark the imaginations of creative readers. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**Narratively bland but pretty to look at.** *(Picture book 4-7)*

**THE LONGEST JOURNEY**
**An Arctic Tern’s Migration**
Hevron, Amy
Neal Porter/Holiday House (40 pp.)
$18.99 | July 12, 2022
978-0-8234-4700-8

Hevron traces an Arctic tern’s annual 60,000-mile round trip from Greenland to Antarctica and back.

Marking the route with dotted lines on simplified maps, the author depicts and describes her young bird’s wandering flight, which she bills as the longest of any animal, and imagined but likely experiences along the way—pausing for a rest in Tenerife, winging over flamingos in Liberia, following a “raft” of macaroni penguins to the Crozet Islands—to an Antarctic summer on pack ice in the Weddell Sea and then back, riding prevailing winds northward. Aside from one stylized glimpse of a ship in heavy seas, there is no visible sign of human activity, but Hevron does mention twice that the ocean waters from which the tern snatches krill and other food are “ever-warming,” then notes in the backmatter how rising temperatures drive those sources of nourishment to less accessible depths and also lead to seasonal storms severe enough to endanger nesting grounds. The backmatter also includes more information about this bird’s life cycle (Arctic terns can live for 30 years and so “fly the equivalent of three times to the Moon and back”) and generous lists of resources for further information. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**Well-deserved recognition for a migratory avian superstar.** *(Informational picture book, 7-9)*

**THE SECRET DIARY OF MONA HASAN**
Hussain, Salma
Tundra Books (296 pp.)
$17.99 | May 3, 2022
978-0-7352-7149-4

A Dubai sixth grader finds her life and plans upended when the Gulf War breaks out and her family decides to change course. Pakistani 11-year-old Mona Hasan has big plans for the new year. It’s January 1991, and among her resolutions are no longer rolling her eyes behind her parents’
backs, and being nicer to her little sister. She is also super curious about boys, her changing body, and the popular new girl at school. Mona pours her feelings about all these things into her diary, often writing poems about the events of the day. When Iraq invades Kuwait, her parents begin whispering about immigration, a new word she looks up—and is not pleased to learn about. The text takes readers from Dubai, on a visit to Pakistan, and then eventually to Canada, where the family settles in a small Nova Scotia town. Mona is reading Sue Townsend’s The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole, Aged 13 3/4, which this work is clearly a tribute to. Hussain effectively captures the tone and format of the original classic: Mona’s diary entries and poems are often quite moving and unintentionally hilarious. However, the book’s many topics, including a creepy family friend and the boy who is Mona’s first crush, at times feel underdeveloped. Mona’s story is at its strongest when she’s describing the intricacies of life in Dubai and the cultures and religions of its diverse populations.

An ambitious novel that is both heartfelt and tongue-in-cheek. (Fiction. 10-14)

GIGI AND OJIJI
Iwai, Melissa
HarperCollins (32 pp.)
978-0-06-320805-6
978-0-06-320806-3
Series: I Can Read!

Can a young American girl navigate cultural and linguistic differences with her Japanese grandfather?

Gigi, a girl with pale skin and short, dark brown hair, can’t wait until Ojiisan (grandfather) comes to live with her family, which includes her Japanese mother, her white father, and Roscoe, their playful dog. But when the family meets Ojiisan at the airport, Gigi’s hopes for instant connection are dashed in the face of language and culture barriers. Disappointed, Gigi tearfully confides in her mother, who helps to clear up the misunderstandings. Though Gigi is upset that her grandfather tucked away the drawing she made instead of opening it, Mom explains, “Most Japanese people his age think it’s rude to open a present in front of the person who gave it to them.” With support from Mom, Gigi reaches out again to Ojiisan and finds that they can teach each other the words to Ojiisan and finds that they can teach each other the words.

SKELETINA AND THE IN-BETWEEN WORLD
Jaramillo, Susie
Roaring Brook Press (32 pp.)
$18.99 | July 19, 2022
978-1-945635-46-5
Series: Skeletina and the In-Between World

“"The in-between world is the one place where the dead and the living come together,” and Skeletina is the mistress of that universe.

As the friendly, playful skeleton provides a tour of this space, which evokes the vibrant images of el Día de los Muertos, she explains that the living come here when they dream and describes several of its residents. Fluidz, a smiling blue ocean wave, for example, helps children overcome their fear of water. Skeletina serves as a guide through dreams, helping with anxieties and warding off nightmares. Jaramillo’s artwork is captivating, with details, bold colors, and intricate use of delicate grays and blacks that result in an ethereal look. The endpapers preview inhabitants of the in-between world; however, confusingly, not all of them appear in the book, and some who are featured in the book are not included there. The story reads like wisdom from ghosts ("This is a strange place indeed, but always remember you get to decide what happens next!"") but also contains suggestions for pacifying spirits and taking control of dreams. While all of the pieces are connected, there isn’t a tight hold on the various threads. Most characters are nonhuman, though their world is infused with references to Latinx folklore; human characters are racially diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Unique characters and rich illustrations anchor a multifaceted but scattered story. (Picture book. 4-6)

GRAVE DANGER
Johnston, Mike
Illus. by Marta Altés
Putnam (304 pp.)
$13.99 | May 3, 2022
978-0-593-32547-6
Series: Confessions of a Dork Lord, 2

The Dork Lord returns.

In this follow-up to 2020’s Confessions of a Dork Lord, Wick—or Azrael Bal Gorath the Wicked—remains a ne’er-do-well White tween desperate for his people’s approval. When a big gamble doesn’t pay off, Wick is thrown out of his own castle and banished to a far-off land as an exchange student. Wick does his best to make the most of things, chronicling his plan for vengeance in his journal along with his petty grievances, his loneliness, and his quest for friendship. The novel continues its predecessor’s stylization as a mashup of Dungeons & Dragons and Diary of a Wimpy Kid, but where the first entry erred by indulging its uneven pace, this sequel tightens things up. The weight of the worldbuilding is still a bit of a drag during the
novel's opening pages, but once everything is laid out readers will slip easily enough into this fantasy-shaded tale of the struggles of a snarky underdog. The course correction is admirable, though the novel is just as overlong as the series opener. A little bit of Wick and his world goes a long way, and readers will get far too much of him here. Wick's unpleasant nature continues to be a bug rather than a feature, and so this entry clocks in as a mixed bag. Altés' illustrations add an amusing touch.

A slightly improved second entry in a clunky series. (Fantasy. 8-12)

KIARA FIGHTS BACK
Kaye, Marilyn
Holiday House (208 pp.)
$16.99 | April 5, 2022
978-0-8234-4611-7
Series: The Spyglass Sisterhood, 3

A middle schooler takes a stand for victims of cyberbullying.

This latest in the Spyglass Sisterhood series, whose installments each follow a member of a group of friends who use a magical spyglass to see visions of what might be, focuses on Kiara. Kiara has trouble discerning others' intent and reading body language, and though the book doesn't explicitly refer to her as neurodivergent, she is often referred to as "different." Following a suspension from her old school, where she was bullied, Kiara, her father, and her aunt Molly move to Lakeside for a fresh start. There, she befriends Alyssa, Ellie, and Rachel, the other members of the Spyglass Sisterhood. Through the spyglass in the turret at Ellie's house, the girls see classmate Jim Berger being beaten up on the playground. As they learn that Jim and other students are being bullied online, they take action. The book moves slowly toward a somewhat predictable resolution, and characterization is superficial. Early in the book, Kiara describes Rachel, a White-presenting Latinx girl, as "seriously white" and "the prettiest of us"—"us" being Kiara, who is Black; Alyssa, who is South Asian; and Ellie, who is White. This unfortunate choice of words seems to reinforce the idea that beauty is synonymous with Whiteness.

A lukewarm read. (Fiction. 8-12)

PET THAT CAT!
A Handbook for Making Feline Friends
Kidd, Nigel & Rachel Braunigan
Illus. by Susann Hoffmann
Quirk Books (128 pp.)
$14.99 paper | July 12, 2022
978-1-68169-314-7

A young Twitter and Instagram sensation imparts whiskey wisdom.

Kidd and his mother, Braunigan, who created the social media accounts "I’ve Pet That Cat" on the heels of Kidd’s older brother’s “I’ve Pet That Dog,” offer advice and information aimed at helping youngsters cozy up to kitties. With ample colorful and inviting line drawings by Hoffmann, the book begins with a chapter on how to go about petting a strange cat, then covers how to approach, where to pet (stay away from the belly), and even how to pick up the cat if things are going well. Kidd and Braunigan provide sound guidance on interpreting cat sounds and body language and explain some feline behaviors. There is a brief history of cat-human relations and several short biographies of famous or heroic cats. Instructions for choosing and caring for a cat and there is an interview with a cat expert follow. A quiz helps the reader discover their cat personality, and there’s a log to keep track of the cats encountered. The book is dotted with “Tips From Nigel” and “Feline Facts,” and myth busters disprove common misconceptions (no, cats don’t actually enjoy milk). The artwork depicts a diverse group of people interacting with cats.

A solid primer on fostering human-feline relations. (Nonfiction. 6-12)

A MONSTER IS EATING THIS BOOK!
Kilpatrick, Karen
Illus. by Germán Blanco
Henry Holt (40 pp.)
$18.99 | July 19, 2022
978-1-250-81759-4

It’s going to be hard, but keep the giggles down. Don’t wake the monster up!

This is “no ordinary book. // You see, inside this book lives a monster... so we have to be VERY CAREFUL." But not to worry—a group of friendly, neon guides teaches readers to become monster experts. Ironically, the guides themselves look a lot like monsters; some have a single eye, while others have horns, scales, or long legs. But when the narrators accidentally awaken the sleeping monster, words begin to disappear from the book’s pages—a wide-awake monster is a very hungry monster that eats words. Will the narrators (and readers) be able to finish the book? Quickly, the guides stuff the monster full of random words so it will leave their book alone. The monster, an ominous shadow puppet wolf with sharp teeth, hovers over the anxious guides and gobbles up most, but not all, of the word treats. At last, the shadow softens and the dangerous teeth disappear to reveal the monster’s message and the book’s punchline (hint: The monster isn’t nearly as frightening as the narrators had anticipated). Visual humor and brightly colored monsters set against uncluttered backgrounds make this a good read-aloud. Beginning readers might also enjoy creating their own messages from the words offered to the monster. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A whimsical metanarrative turns a pleasantly scary monster into readers’ new best friend. (Picture book. 4-7)
“Fishy hijinks at high verbal and visual volume.”

**BANANA FOX AND THE GUMMY MONSTER MESS**

**THE BIG SLIDE**  
*Kirk, Daniel*  
Nancy Paulsen Books (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | July 12, 2022  
978-0-399-16938-0

Little Pup screws his courage to the sticking place at the playground.

All spring and summer and into the fall, Little Pup and his mom visit the playground. Each time, he gazes longingly at the big slide, which he’s not brave enough to attempt. His supportive mother never pressures him, leaving the timing to him. Twice he tries the slide, once escaping the line at the bottom, the second time making it to the top only to climb back down again, the other anthropomorphized animals clearing the ladder for him. Mom helpfully suggests using the concrete stair edge of their apartment building as a slide—she’ll hold his hand. This is fun, and he can even do it without her support. In his room, he makes a big slide for his toys, telling them to “be brave.” And after school starts in the fall and Little Pup meets Little Duck, a new school friend, on the playground, he decides that perhaps with Little Duck by his side he can tackle the big slide after all. And so he does, his joy and pride infectious. Kirk’s many animal characters are highly expressive in both facial expression and body language, especially Little Pup’s eyebrows, and Little Duck is a model of empathy for young readers. The rather muted palette keeps the focus on the characters. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

_Little readers will find a ready role model here for tackling their own fears.* *(Picture book. 3-7)*

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**OUT OF RANGE**  
*Lang, Heidi*  
McElderry (320 pp.)  
$17.99 | June 7, 2022  
978-1-66590-334-9

Lost in the woods, feuding sisters confront their deteriorating relationship while trying to survive.

The story opens with 14-year-old Abby, 12-year-old Emma, and 9-year-old Ollie on a disciplinary hike with their camp counselor. When the counselor leaves them to scout the trail, Abby decides to return to camp, with Emma and Ollie reluctantly following. Soon lost, the presumably White sisters flee from a forest fire down to a river, where Emma falls in and is swept away and Ollie vanishes trying to follow her, leaving Abby on her own. In the ensuing hours, Emma nearly drowns, Ollie injures her ankle, and Abby encounters a bear. Their harrowing, sparring, lost-in-the-woods present-day drama alternates with critical backstory from each sister’s perspective. A recent family relocation from California to Utah has left Abby friendless; after joining the cross country team, she abandons Emma. Equally displaced, Emma’s hurt Abby has ditched her, while Ollie pretends to not mind moving but resents being ignored by both her sisters. Their feelings culminate in a series of cruel, humiliating pranks against one another. The artful movement of plot between past and present gradually reveals why they have been sent to camp together. In this story that blends nail-biting adventure with a relationship story, siblings learn through being physically lost and forced to face life-threatening danger that they can discover who they are and what really matters.

_A realistic, riveting survival story.* *(author’s note) (Fiction. 9-12)*

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**TOO MANY PIGS IN THE POOL**  
*Lanier, Wendy Hinote*  
Illus. by Iris Amaya  
Sleeping Bear Press (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | April 15, 2022  
978-1-53411-060-1

When a pig comes over for a pool party, trouble, hilarity, and math problems ensue.

Mr. Jenkins has a pretty nice setup. He has an aboveground pool all to himself, but after a while, his solo routine grows lonely. On Sunday he invites over his neighbor Ms. Peal, and she brings her pig, Percy. On Monday, Percy comes over with his friend.
ANSWERS IN THE PAGES
Levitman, David
Knopf (176 pp.)
$17.99 | May 10, 2022
978-0-399-34868-5

A parental challenge to one line in a fifth grade reading assignment gets an overwhelming response.

Interweaving three storylines connected by little beyond the timely issue under discussion, Levitman sets fifth graders Gideon White and Roberto Garcia on course to a tender and delicious (there is chocolate involved) love story. Fast-forward a generation to chronicle the upwelling of support humiliated young Donovan Johnson gets from his contemporary fifth grade class when his mom kicks off a formal challenge to an ambiguously worded passage—that may or may not signal romantic love between two boys—in an adventure novel their openly gay teacher has assigned (occasional melodramatic episodes from said novel, constituting the third strand in the book, are interspersed). Levitman’s book, which features passionate speeches and revelations before and at a packed school board meeting, comes across primarily as a platform for attitude modeling. It certainly succeeds as a manifesto to validate, amid much love and laughter, the rights of young people to seek, experiment with, and express their own identities. What is missing is a deeper exploration that goes beyond character types to present a unified story that discusses these critical subjects through nuanced engagement and growth. The cast reads as White except for Roberto, who is Latinx.

Looks like a novel, or pieces of several, but fails to coalesce.

(author’s note) (Fiction. 8-12)

HAVEN
A Small Cat’s Big Adventure
Lloyd, Megan Wagner
Candlewick (144 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-5362-1657-8

“You don’t have to be big to be brave.” Haven is perfectly comfortable being a “strictly indoor cat.” She loves the warmth and the smell of treats and baking bread. Most of all, she loves her human, Ma Millie. Ma Millie, who saved her from the cold and lonely forest when she was just a kitten. Ma Millie, who grows so sick that she can take care of Haven forever. Ma Millie, who grows so sick that she can take care of her no longer. To save her owner, Haven will do anything—even brave the shadows of the forest to find help. Along the way, she meets new allies, including a cunning fox, and faces dangers unlike any she could have imagined from the safety of home. Lloyd’s tale of a pet cat learning to survive in the wild hearkens back to the original Warrior Cats series; punctuated with action scenes, however, Haven’s story is ultimately one of
friendship and finding oneself through others. Haven’s journey progresses at an unhurried, unflagging pace. Simple prose evokes a sense of tenderness, although the narrative takes some time to settle into itself emotionally, occasionally coming off as detached. But the primal energy of the climactic fight and the final chapters’ heart-rending subversion of the death narrative typical of animal stories more than make up for the first half’s meandering. Ma Millie’s race and ethnicity are not specified.

*A sweet, sincere tale of self-discovery.* *(Fiction. 8-12)*

**AVIVA VS. THE DYBBUK**

*Lowe, Mari*

Levine Querido (176 pp.)

$17.99 | Feb. 22, 2022

978-1-64614-125-8

Is Aviva’s dybbuk helping her through the hard times or just making life more difficult for her?

Aviva’s life changed when her father died in the “accident”; not only do she and her mother have to leave their home to live over the mikvah (ritual bath in Judaism) where her mother works, but a dybbuk now lives with them, causing trouble that is often blamed on Aviva. But the dybbuk is also the only one who pays attention to Aviva; her bestie, Kayla, doesn’t like her anymore; and it is all her mother can do to get out of bed some days. Forced to work together on the Bas Mitzvah Bash, Kayla and Aviva tentatively revive their friendship, battle the dybbuk, and face the reality that antisemitism is as near as the swastika etched into the sidewalk in front of the shul. Aviva is a realistic and complicated heroine, negotiating life after loss and the changing dynamics of friendship as well as figuring out who is the grown-up in her relationship with her mother. A rare find, a modern-day, middle-grade novel that focuses on, and honors, everyday Orthodox Judaism, this unforgettable story makes for a sensitive, loving variation on a perennial picture-book theme. *(Picture book. 4-6)*

**TIME TO FLY**

*Lyon, George Ella*

Illus. by Stephanie Fizer Coleman

Atheneum (32 pp.)

$18.99 | July 26, 2022

978-1-5344-7410-9

A timorous fledgling needs some gentle persuasion when it’s time to leave the nest.

“You’ve outgrown this woven home,” says a mother bird. “It’s time to fly!” But the sky is so big, the nest so safe and cozy… even a quick flutter to a nearby branch seems too much. “Don’t you want to see the meadow? / Taste new bugs beside the creek?” “Nest is best. / Maybe next week.” Capturing both the lyrical quality of Lyon’s rhymed colloquy and a sense of how scary the wide world looks to the little bird, Coleman offers spare, delicately detailed views of an adult robin and her mottled offspring on separate leafy twigs suspended against a seemingly boundless sky or, sometimes, a broad expanse of white space. Instead of resorting to force, the mother wisely allows the little bird to persuade themselves (“My sister and my brother flew. / I guess if they can, I can too!”) and take the leap: “I’m on my way // to everywhere!” Similar in message if very different in tone to Drew Sheneman’s more theatrical *Nope!* (2016), this kinder, gentler alternative reassures both prospective grads and younger children heading off to preschool or day care that they are ready to take wing. *(This book was reviewed digitally)*

*A timorous fledgling needs some gentle persuasion when it’s time to leave the nest.* *(Picture book. 4-6)*

**HILDE ON THE RECORD**

*Lysiak, Hilde*

Chicago Review Press (192 pp.)

$17.99 | April 19, 2022

978-1-64160-581-6

Read all about it! A teen journalist opens up.

At 4, by happenstance, Lysiak went with her reporter father to the scene of a breaking news story, a murder. Watching him work, she became hooked on journalism. She started her own newspaper, the *Orange Street News* in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania, just before she turned 8 and even scooped more traditional journalists on the news of a murder there. By 14, she’d published a book series inspired by the TV series *Home Before Dark,* and been the subject of countless news articles. Despite her accomplishments, however, the White-presenting teen grappled with emotional turmoil: “But on the inside, I felt nothing except pain.” This memoir describes the loss of self-esteem felt by many confident girls as they enter adolescence. Lysiak’s years of writing experience come through in this conversational account that includes many specific details and direct quotations. Along the way, she sheds light on how a news story is researched and organized, the importance of a free press, and her issues with food. Readers will find plenty to admire in Lysiak’s determination, her love and respect for her family, and the freedom that her parents have given her to pursue her passions.

*The inside story from the perspective of a still-developing teen reporter.* *(Memoir. 9-12)*
When a mystery envelope containing pieces of an unsolved and help out. Reunited with all her friends, she tries to harness although the pace drags in some places. Chester is biracial: His of the relationship between Chester and his mother—and gained for while discovering that they have more in common springs into action. He is soon offered help by Skye, a school—especially common than they initially realized. Strong characterization—especially the relationship between Chester and his mother—and a multilayered plot provide overall excitement and interest, his need for Chester's assistance with an important mission. When a mystery envelope containing pieces of an unsolved puzzle arrives at his doorstep, surely left by his father, Chester moves into action. He is soon offered help by Skye, a schoolmate who turns out to hold missing pieces of the puzzle. As they work together to solve it, they uncover more than they ever bar that they have more in common than they initially realized. Strong characterization—especially the relationship between Chester and his mother—and a multilayered plot provide overall excitement and interest, although the pace drags in some places. Chester is biracial: His mother is White, and his father is Black; Skye is also biracial, with a Japanese American mother and White father.

Engrossing and heartwarming: explores belonging, love, and forgiveness in families and friendships. (Fiction. 9-12)

In this sequel to Kiki Kallira Breaks a Kingdom (2021), the Kikiverse is grappling with yet another curse: Will Kiki be able to harness her magic in order to save the day a second time? Kiki is back to living her regular life in London after closing the tear in the Kikiverse when Lej suddenly appears in her bedroom saying Mysore is in trouble once again—the Kaveri River has disappeared, and everyone in Mysore will soon be wiped out if their water source is not restored. Kiki agrees to return and help out. Reunited with all her friends, she tries to harness her powers within the realm of this universe, which came to

life through the art in her sketchbooks, only to realize things have changed, and her old approach will not work. Mandanna explores Kiki's mental health in more detail in this book, referring to understanding that the things we create never fully belong to us once we release them into the world. Readers get to see Kiki rewrite her own story and find nuanced ways of understanding how her mind works. Those unfamiliar with Kiki's story will find this novel accessible but will gain more from having read the previous book. Kiki is of South Indian and Scottish descent.

Enchanting and deeply captivating. (Fantasy. 8-13)

Frog and Toad aren't friends—but could they be?

When Frog and Toad snap their tongues at the same “juicy fly” within moments of each other, the insect cries, “I'm being eaten by two frogs!” Frog and Toad take immediate offense, and their prey escapes as they vociferously proclaim their differences amid a barrage of insults. Soon their respective amphibian brethren join in, and verbal gibes devolve into a raucous mud fight. Mantle's bright, cartoon-style illustrations make great use of layout by separating frogs from toads with the book's gutter immediately before mud starts flying—for instance, one spread depicts Frog's and Toad's tongues in a tug of war over the fly. Mantle again uses this compositional technique to ratchet up tension when an angry alligator appears, their sleep disturbed by the fight. Toad blames the frogs for the noise, and the alligator ultimately says they don't care who started the fuss since frogs and toads are "related" and they all taste the same. Instead of fixating on the threat of a hungry alligator, Frog and Toad express surprise at being relatives and quickly patch things over. “Thanks for showing us we’re all the same, Crocodile!” they say in gratitude, thus sparking a laugh-out-loud twist with the alligator's outrage at being mistaken for a croc.

Friendly amphibious fare for storytime. (Picture book. 3-6)
A touching depiction of love across the miles between a grandmother and a grandchild.”

SEE YOU SOMEDAY SOON

Though “loyal and loving,” Goldie’s grandfather proves to be quite a character. At Grandparents’ Day at school, his loud greeting and incessant flatulence are embarrassing, but Goldie is confident that he—and all grandparents—can be handled with the “right care and treatment.” The young narrator notes that playtime should involve the imagination rather than technology—and NO video games. It’s just too much for them. Goldie observes that grandparents “live on a diet of all the things your parents tell them are bad for them” but finds that Grandpa’s favorite fast-food restaurant does make for a great meal out. The narrator advises that it’s important for grandparents to get plenty of exercise; Grandpa’s favorite moves include “the Bump, the Hustle, and the Funky Chicken.” The first-person instruction and the artwork—drawn in a childlike scrawl—portray this grandfather in a funny, though unflattering, stereotypical light as he pulls quarters from Goldie’s ears, burps on command, and invites Goldie to pull his finger. Goldie’s grandfather seems out of touch with today’s more tech-savvy grandparents to get plenty of exercise; Grandpa’s favorite moves include “the Bump, the Hustle, and the Funky Chicken.” The first-person instruction and the artwork—drawn in a childlike scrawl—portray this grandfather in a funny, though unflattering, stereotypical light as he pulls quarters from Goldie’s ears, burps on command, and invites Goldie to pull his finger. Goldie’s grandfather seems out of touch with today’s more tech-savvy health-oriented older people who are eager to participate with their grandchildren in contemporary activities. Though some grandparent readers may chuckle, kids may wonder how this mirrors their own relationships. Goldie and Grandpa are light-skinned; Goldie’s classmates are diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Intended as an amusing parody, this groans with outdated irrelevance and immaturity. (Picture book: 4-6)

TISHA AND THE BLOSSOMS
Meddour, Wendy
Illus. by Daniel Egnéus
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$17.99 | April 26, 2022
978-1-5362-2198-5

A young girl models mindfulness as she savors each moment. This charming and vibrant picture book opens in Tisha’s backyard, where she is reaching skyward as falling blossoms float toward her. Her joy and anticipation are disrupted by a series of “hurry up” commands from those around her, who prod her to rush for the school bus, attend an assembly, and make sure that she doesn’t miss lunch. The externally imposed directions conflict with Tisha’s natural curiosity, which compels her not only to “listen to the sounds” and to count the spots on a ladybug she finds during recess, but also to create connections between a book she finds about space and the space shuttle she imagines but cannot draw. Finally imposed directions conflict with Tisha’s natural curiosity, which compels her not only to “listen to the sounds” and to count the spots on a ladybug she finds during recess, but also to create connections between a book she finds about space and the space shuttle she imagines but cannot draw. Tisha and her family are tan-skinned with dark hair; her classmates are diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A sweet reminder to pause and ponder life’s everyday wonders. (Picture book: 3-7)

A NEW FRIEND
Menzies, Lucy
Illus. by Maddy Vian
Frances Lincoln (48 pp.)
$18.99 | June 7, 2022
978-0-7112-7571-3

To be or not to be…a friend? This book’s innovative “One Book, Two Stories” design, featuring two parallel stories on each spread, presents protagonists Mae, a brown-skinned, dark-haired Muslim girl (Mom is depicted wearing a hijab), and Joe, a blond, White boy who’s moved into the neighborhood with his dad. Ebullient, outgoing Mae can’t wait to befriend and play with her new neighbor; she even has a welcoming, illustrated letter to give him. Wary Joe, though shy about his newcomer status, wouldn’t mind making new friends. Scouring the busy schoolyard, Mae asks if anyone’s seen the new kid. Meanwhile, Joe wants to join the fun but, feeling ignored, hides at the bottom of the slide’s enclosed tunnel and wistfully reminisces about old friends. Temporarily abandoning her search, Mae whooshes down the slide and collides harmlessly into guess who?—and a new friendship is born. Mac’s and Joe’s winsome, simply expressed narratives, written in first person, should ideally be read one after the other, page by page. Reading them aloud in tandem as the book proceeds permits audiences to pick up on and compare and contrast these characters’ differing behaviors, points of view, and emotions from the outset. Colorful, appealing illustrations deftly portray big-eyed Mae and Joe and their energetic activities; schoolmates are racially diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Nothing new, but a sweet, reassuring tale about making friends. (Picture book: 3-7)

SEE YOU SOMEDAY SOON
Miller, Pat Zietlow
Illus. by Suzy Lee
Roaring Brook Press (48 pp.)
$19.99 | June 14, 2022
978-1-250-22110-0

A touching depiction of love across the miles between a grandmother and a grandchild.

Miller’s first-person text shares the voice of a child longing for their grandmother, who lives far away. Since they don’t know when they’ll see each other again, they keep in touch via phone calls, video chats, and letters, with the child imagining playful,
And what is a tonal language? Using crisp layouts, thoughtful descriptions and examples, and illustrated charts, this comprehensive primer entertains while explicating a high-context language family without overgeneralizing or oversimplifying. It also incorporates Chinese culture and philosophy and educates readers about the history and process of emoji creation, among other topics. Through their broad, comparative approach, the savvy creators also demonstrate the hybridity and constantly evolving nature of languages in general.

A visual manual employs digital-age symbols to introduce one of the world’s oldest living forms of writing.

Leveraging widely recognizable and pictographic emoticons, this innovative work appeals to humans’ language instinct and innate playfulness, dismantling potential psychological barriers when approaching something that may feel difficult or inaccessible. The colorful and icon-filled design creates explicit connections between Hanzi—Chinese characters—and emoji, enticing readers to browse and explore together with the anthropomorphic porcine narrator, Jiji, whose profile shows the emoji representing his hánmoji name, Snout Snout. Comparing Hanzi with other logographic languages including Egyptian hieroglyphs, Sumerian, and Mayan, the contents inform and intrigue regardless of one’s prior knowledge of the Chinese language. How might two tree emojis make the word forest? How many spoken language groups and written forms does Chinese currently have? (Answer: 10 and two, respectively)

Clever, complex, yet concise and fun: This guide promises to engage language learners and curious readers. (Nonfiction; 11-18)

Seventh grader Bea stars on her suburban New Jersey softball team until news spreads of her lawyer father’s one-year suspension for professional misconduct and the emotional stress takes a toll. Suddenly, she can’t play. Not only was Bea unaware of her dad’s misuse of funds, she soon finds out other family news that’s been kept from her, something that is especially hurtful when she thought her parents shared everything. To get away from her friends and their gossip about her personal situation, she arranges to stay with a maternal aunt she barely knows and attend a softball camp on the Massachusetts island where her mother grew up. Bea has never understood why her mother hated the island and seems to dislike her own sister. During the two-week summer camp, she regains her confidence, makes new friends, and gets to know her Aunt Mary, who has always wanted them to have a closer relationship. She also learns about the impact that mental health struggles have had on her family, knowledge that is tied to long-held secrets. There are lots of sports scenes for softball fans, but this is also a novel that realistically explores deeper psychological truths around friendship and family relationships. There’s even a bit of sweet budding romance. Bea’s family is White; Aunt Mary is cued as lesbian.

A tween girl explores changing relationships in this sincere, character-driven story. (Fiction; 10-13)

A great guide to growing young gardeners!

This book lives up to its name with a straightforward question-and-answer format that’s perfect for interested toddlers and preschoolers. Children by a raised garden bed plant lettuce seeds with a “sprinkle, sprinkle, sprinkle.” / Pat, pat, pat.” The first steps of planting peas are different, but all newly planted seeds need a drink. The garden rules of insect etiquette are clear. “How do you say hello to a worm? / Gently, very gently.” And to a ladybug? “Let her crawl onto your finger. / Count her spots. / Say, Hello, Ladybug! before she flies away.” A bee? “Look but
don’t poke… / Listen but don’t grab.” As they follow the growth of their garden, the children experience the joy of feeling pea tendrils curling around their fingers, having a tea party inside a play hut made from pea plants and tall sticks, and making mud. Backmatter suggests creating a “dig zone” with a clear border so kids can play and the main garden can stay safe. Finally, the children get to taste the food they’ve grown. In a slight mismatch, the children plant lettuce and peas but carefully and joyfully harvest strawberries, carrots, and peas. Illustrations created with silkscreen and collaged in Photoshop pop against a white background and show children of various ethnicities. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Eye-catching art and simple, clear text plant the seeds for a young gardener. *(Picture book. 1-4)*

**DON’T EAT BEES** *(Life Lessons From Chip the Dog)*

Petty, Dev  
Illus. by Mike Boldt  
Doubleday (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | May 31, 2022  
978-0-593-43312-6

A dog’s guide to what to eat.  
Oblivious to the amusement—or, considerably more often, outrage—of the beige-skinned family in the background, an overstimulated pooch proudly tallies the “dog things” they know. These begin with “how cats are awfully self-important for animals who poop in a box” but go on quickly to proven or potential yummies, from socks and homework to cat food (“Who’s a dumb dog now, Mittens?”), furniture, unguarded sandwiches, a whole turkey snatched off the table, and Grandpa’s teeth. There are some no-nos, though, including lemons, lit candles, and most especially bees: “No sir! Never…ever…ever…//…again.” Boldt brings suitable ballyhoo to his depictions of wild domestic carnage, and though he dials down the perpetrator’s reaction to the bee experiment from realistic anguish to sheepish embarrassment, the scene with the dentures is hilarious, and the dog’s expression after munching on a lemon will dry up plenty of viewers’ mouths in sympathy: “I am a smart dog,” the flop-eared foodie repeatedly proclaims. Readers seeing the pooch eagerly eyeing the potted cactus in the final picture may side with Mittens. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A chewy treat for dog lovers. *(Picture book. 5-7)*

**TWIN CITIES**  
Pimienta, Jose  
Random House Graphic  
(256 pp.)  
$20.99 | $12.99 paper | $23.99 PLB  
July 12, 2022  
978-0-593-18063-1

Twelve-year-old twins forge individual paths—and begin to lead diverging lives—at separate schools along the Calexico-Mexicali border. Sixth grade is officially over. For Teresa and Fernando, summer vacation zips by in a series of frolics and chores, perhaps their last season as an inseparable pair. Then the first day of seventh grade arrives. Teresa prepares herself early to cross the border into Calexico to attend an American middle school; Fernando remains behind in Mexicali to continue school in their town. Different school beginnings greet each sibling. Without his sister (and two best friends, who are at Teresa’s school), Fernando spends his time alone, counting down the minutes until school ends. Teresa, meanwhile, finds new peers and seems right at home in her new American school. Those initial steps prove only temporary. In an ingenious use of panel sets to separate each twin’s journey on the page, Pimienta masterfully builds the tension and pressure between Fernando and Teresa, together at home and apart at school. Wandering off one day, Fernando befriends an older student who gradually exerts his considerable influence and introduces him to weed. High academic stress and lofty parental expectations chisel away at Teresa, and her initial enthusiasm falters slightly under the weight of her new reality. Sibling squabbles and confrontations—captured in all their raw nuance thanks to the author’s deft writing and scrappy artwork—build to a wonderful breakthrough point. Transcendently good. *(author’s note, sketches, map, supplemental note)* *(Graphic fiction. 8-12)*

**BECAUSE OF YOU, JOHN LEWIS**  
The True Story of a Remarkable Friendship  
Pinkney, Andrea Davis  
Illus. by Keith Henry Brown  
Scholastic (40 pp.)  
$15.99 | June 7, 2022  
978-1-338-75908-2

A picture-book biography in verse highlighting the friendship between John Lewis and the young African American boy whom he inspired. In her signature expressive and soulful style, Pinkney introduces readers to young Tybre Faw, a boy from Tennessee who learns about Sen. Lewis from reading books. Inspired by Lewis’ lifelong fight for justice and equal rights, Tybre convinces his grandparents to make a 4-hour drive from their home in
“Delightfully odd and steadfast in the warming power of love.”

_Mr. Coats_

“In this quirky Dutch import, a man searches for a way to get warm.

Mr. Coats is endlessly cold. He lives in a house with many stoves and surrounds himself with piles and piles of electric blankets. He has hot water bottles and heat lamps, to no avail. His house is so scorching that no one ever visits. But Mr. Coats still shivers. So he goes to the shops for more supplies. When he returns home, he has so many coats layered one on top of the other that he can no longer fit through his front door! His coats form a comically large bell shape, each color peeking out from underneath the next, with just enough room for his head at the top. So Mr. Coats does the only thing he can do—he turns his coats into his new home. A warming fire puffs out smoke from the sleeves. But can he live that way forever? Luckily there just might be a special friend who is able to warm his heart. The cheery patterns of the various coats and the fancifully shaped hats that most townsfolk wear add levity to Mr. Coats’ plight. Mr. Coats and others all have paper-white skin, which takes on the color of the background at times. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Delightfully odd and steadfast in the warming power of love. (Picture book. 4-7)"

_Violet and the Crumbs: A Gluten-Free Adventure_

Reidy, Abigail

Illus. by Molly Ruttan

NorthSouth (40 pp.)

$17.95 | April 19, 2022

978-0-7358-4485-8

“Though a medical diagnosis makes social situations tough for a young girl, she finds a way to cope.

After Violet learns she has celiac disease, birthday parties and school lunches are a drag. Her peers try to be understanding about how she can't partake in cakes and cookies, but what they don't understand is that gluten is everywhere—even the crumbs. “Safe” foods like fruit become off-limits as soon as someone handles them with fingers that previously touched gluten-filled snacks. Her protective measures leave her isolated at school, but Violet gradually becomes a bit of a superhero when she advocates for animals like ducks, who are often fed foods not suited to their digestive systems. But she still has to figure out a way to fit in with her classmates so she can make some friends. The protagonist is White, and the supporting cast is diverse in skin tone and ability. Accompanied by artwork rendered in a muted palette, the text balances Violet's narrative with more scientific explanation without feeling preachy or didactic. Anyone who feeds other people would be well served by this tale. An illustrated glossary of gluten-full and gluten-free grains makes up the endpapers. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

_Kids with celiac will feel seen. (Information on celiac disease) (Informational picture book. 6-10)"

_A Grand Day_

Reidy, Jean

Illus. by Samantha Cotterill

Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster

(40 pp.)

$18.99 | July 5, 2022

978-1-5344-9976-8

“Every day is a grand day when family members have fun together.

Children and parents and most especially grandparents gather to enjoy one another's company while sharing a wide variety of activities. Brief, simply expressed rhymes capture the excitement the children feel while participating in each adventure. The rhymes appear within brightly hued double-page spreads that enlarge and enhance every aspect of the events. Families are seen enjoying breakfast on the porch, backyard gardening, making art, and visiting the park to play, have picnics, and read. They cook together, play dress-up, dance, discover treasures in the attic, have a family feast, and roast marshmallows around a fire pit. Cotterill's stunning mixed-media, three-dimensional illustrations flesh out the tale and depict every activity and setting in minute detail while conveying the love and joy of the extended families with laughter and loads of hugs. (Informational picture book. 4-7)
and kisses. Family members are diverse in skin tone; one child uses a wheelchair. The phrase *grand days* has a subtle added meaning, referring to both the fun of the day and the special closeness children feel with their grandparents. “Family ties so strong and true / Part of me / is part of you.” Young readers and their grown-ups will appreciate this homage to familial love and will return to it again and again. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A heartfelt, exuberant ode to intergenerational bonding. (Picture book 3-9)

**THE HIKE TO HOME**
*Rinker, Jess*
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (288 pp.)
$16.99 | July 5, 2022
978-1-250-81274-2

Feeling abandoned by her filmmaker mom, who’s on a yearlong residency in the Dry Tortugas, a tween finds friendship, mystery, and adventure in a small New Jersey town.

Lin loves her family’s unusual lifestyle. Her dad restores old houses around the country, while her mom films the process for their popular YouTube channel. The three occupy a souped-up bus that they move from location to location. With Mom away and Dad occupied, Lin—formerly home-schooled, now enrolled in public school summer rec camp—is bored and disgruntled. That is, until she’s befriended by pink-haired classmate Tinsley. When Lin confides her intention to make a film about her summer, Tinsley’s thrilled. Their friendship evolves to include Leo, a shy, overparented King Arthur buff who tells Lin about an abandoned castle believed to lie nearby, off the Appalachian Trail. Tinsley confides that her dad’s Freemason lodge has long unsuccessfully sought the castle. Lin persuades them to break into the lodge to search for clues to its presumed whereabouts and then to join her on an overnight camping trip to find it. Things get more complicated when they’re pursued by a trio of bullies who intend to capitalize on any exciting discoveries. Meandering at first, the pace picks up with the search for the castle—as do the stakes. Rinker’s affinity for treasure-seeking quests serves readers well, as do her clear interest in and affection for the natural world. Characters default to White.

An enjoyably alfresco romp. *(Fiction. 8-13)*

**SOLIMAR**
The Sword of the Monarchs
*Ryan, Pam Munoz*
Disney-Hyperion (208 pp.)
$17.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-4847-2835-2

A girl’s determination, combined with a little bit of magic, has the power to save kingdoms and the ecosystem. Solimar is the daughter of Mexican royalty—though she won’t become a princess until she celebrates her quinceañera in a few weeks. While her family seems to excel at fulfilling the royal duties, Solimar pushes back against expectations—especially gender roles—and yearns for adventure. An encounter with the beautiful monarch butterflies that migrate annually through Solimar’s kingdom leaves her with a gift—her rebozo, or shawl, which now appears to be covered in butterfly wings, grants her intuition about the future. The newfound ability may also be draining the butterflies’ energy, so Solimar must keep it a secret to preserve them. A rival king discovers her power and plans to exploit it along with the butterfly territory through underhanded deals and hostage taking. Solimar manages to escape and must make a treacherous journey to foil the plot. The story moves briskly from problem to resolution. The text gives a nod to the colonialism that has impacted Mexico, mentioning the original borders of the country as well as Solimar’s Spanish and Indigenous heritage. Solimar’s mother is European and Indigenous and has dark brown skin; Solimar is described as having dark brown eyes and short black curls. Though the story is written about a teen, the engaging plotline and whimsical elements will appeal to a younger audience.

An energetic romp with a conservation motif. *(Information about monarch butterflies)* *(Fiction. 7-10)*

**SPINELESS**
*San Miguel, Samantha*
Union Square Kids (256 pp.)
$16.99 | June 7, 2022
978-1-4549-3762-3

A budding young Gilded Age naturalist discovers more than he ever dreamed possible.

Twelve-year-old Algie Emsworth of Chicago has asthma and possibly the tuberculosis that killed his father three years earlier. His mother, hovering and anxious, decides to take him and his 16-year-old brother, Everett, to the Hotel Paraíso in Florida for the winter season. As the steamer is about to dock, Algie sees two men in a boat catch a small octopus. Overhearing one of the men saying he will cut it up for bait, Algie jumps onboard to save the little creature—which he does, only finding out later that the man is a famed naturalist and author whose magazine adventure stories have enthralled him. On his way...
A PARLIAMENT OF OWLS
Scillian, Devin
Illus. by Sam Caldwell
Sleeping Bear Press (32 pp.)
$17.99 | July 15, 2022
978-1-5341-144-8

Readers learn the collective nouns for groups of animals in this picture book.

Rollicking rhymes introduce each group: “A parliament of owls was the first to arrive. / They perched in a tree up high. / A tower of giraffes glided in next, / their heads nearly touching the sky.” A light-skinned child with a cloud of red hair sits in a tree clutching a camera, but readers will only learn the reason for the gathering at the end. Animals from all habitats, from earth, sky, and water, all answer the call of this child: a prickle of porcupines, a barrel of monkeys, a cauldron of bats, a raft of otters, a rhumba of rattlesnakes, a shiver of sharks, and even a culture of bacteria are among them. And what to call this final huge group of diverse animals? The child has the perfect collective noun. The jaunty rhymes briefly lose their way, turning more toward a list and losing a bit of the bouncy rhythm. The cartoon animals ham it up, many times exhibiting anthropomorphic behavior (one crow surveys the reader murderously, some pandas walk on two legs, and the dazzle of zebras almost look like they are in a conga line). While unrealistic in the animal world, the ending could speak to an ideal for the human world to aspire to, especially in our current times. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

As colorful and raucous a collection of animals as ever was. (Informational picture book: 3–8)

IF YOU FIND A LEAF
Sciarro, Aimée
Random House Studio (40 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | July 12, 2022
978-0-593-30660-4
978-0-593-30669-8

A rhyming celebration of imagination.

A child with brown skin offers gentle, artful ideas about what to do with autumn leaves. The picture book’s idyllic setting seems Northeastern in nature, with deciduous trees shedding leaves, which the child scoops up. Could a leaf from a tree become a hat, a Halloween mask, a hammock, or something else entirely? “It could be a horn that blows, announcing that we’re here. // A leafy parade to celebrate our favorite time of year.” Rhyme rules the text but isn’t forced in the least. Collaged leaves against painted illustrations encourage play and imagination. A nod to winter and spring make this a year-round read. Endpapers with realistic labeled images of leaves provide an injection of information in this otherwise dreamy musing. The backmatter includes instructions on collaging—a meaningful and fun activity that builds upon the text. While there’s nothing groundbreaking here, there is opportunity for both learning and whimsy. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A sweet, poetic ode to autumn. (Picture book: 3–5)

MOLLY AND THE MACHINE
Slangerup, Erik Jon
Aladdin (416 pp.)
$17.99 | June 7, 2022
978-1-5344-9799-3
Series: Far Flung Falls, 1

Summer vacation 1983 is about to get a lot more exciting in Far Flung Falls, Ohio.

Ever since her mom ran off with a mullet-haired, van-driving stranger, 11-year-old Molly McQuirter’s depressed dad spends his time eating junk food and watching TV, leaving her to look after her nose-picking 8 1/2-year-old brother, Wally. Which is exactly how she doesn’t want to spend her summer. Tinkering and inventing run in her family’s blood, and when Wally won’t leave her backyard Rube Goldberg machine alone, Molly banishes him to the wide-open space of the yard, where he is spotted by a giant robot and snatched up. Hopping on her tricked-out bike, Pink Lightning, she and her four-legged friends—dog Darryl, cat Crank, and chameleon Don Carlos—set off to rescue Wally. They are soon joined by neighborhood kids Arvin and Leonard and Molly’s bootlegging, armadillo-owning, heavy metal-playing, motorcycle-riding Great-Uncle Clovis. Their adventures are filled with obstacles, but Molly brings all of her powers of invention and ingenuity to the rescue mission. The 1980s slang and pop-culture references keep readers firmly planted in the decade, and, as expected from the Cold War-era setting, fear of the Soviet Union is a recurring theme. The amusing tone and

to the hotel, Algie meets Lulu and Frankie, the rambunctious, highly competent Cuban and White American daughters of the hotel’s owner. Meanwhile, strange things are occurring around the hotel, including odd lights and washed-up sea creatures, and as the three children sleuth, they discover something incredible. Algie (whose name astute readers may figure out holds significance) must come to grips with his physical weaknesses and, in the process, discovers his strengths. This exception-ably well-written story gives a nod to the era’s fascination with creepy hauntings and dastardly secrets as it expertly transports readers into the atmosphere of 19th-century Florida, uniting well-drawn, nuanced characters with imaginative and tension-building plot twists. Most characters default to White.

Pure storytelling at its best. (Historical fiction: 9–14)
A delightful adventure with a nostalgic twist. (Adventure. 8-12)

THAT'S NOT MY NAME!
Syed, Anoosha
Viking (40 pp.)
$17.99 | July 12, 2022
978-0-593-40517-8

The first day of school is always hard—even when your classmates can't say your name.

Mirha is excited about her first day, raring to learn and play. But to her disappointment, she feels that she doesn't quite fit in because her classmates and some of her teachers can't pronounce her name correctly. When Mirha confesses to Mama that it might just be easier to change her name, her mother tells her why her name is special. Armed with this knowledge, Mirha decides to take action the very next day. Featuring wide-eyed, adorable youngsters, Syed's illustrations are endearing, and the text is thought-provoking yet fun. As Mirha struggles to explore that it becomes easier over time. Mirha and her family are diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Affirming and empowering; a story that will resonate with many children and a lot of adults, too. (Picture book. 3-5)

MY KINGDOM OF DARKNESS
Tan, Susan
Illus. by Wendy Tan Shiau Wei
Branches/Scholastic (96 pp.)
$24.99 | $5.99 paper | June 28, 2022
978-1-338-75633-3 paper
978-1-338-75634-0 paper
Series: Pets Rule!, 1

A rescue dog takes on the neighborhood scrouge to get one step closer to world domination.

When the Chin family brings home new Chihuahua Ember, he immediately boasts of his plans for a kingdom takeover. Unfortunately, none of the household's humans understand their would-be overlord's barks. Not even his "favorite minion," Lucy, seems phased. The "not cute" but "EVIL" Chihuahua tries his luck with the other pets—a hamster named Steve, a bird named Neo, and a beetle named BeBe. As luck would have it, someone already rules the neighborhood: a mean squirrel named Masher. To get to the top, Ember needs to take Masher down—and brave some very scary trash cans in the process. Is this the "great and terrible destiny" he has been dreaming of? Told in 13 chapters from Ember's first-person point of view, this early chapter book expertly cultivates a larger-than-life pseudo-antihero. Tan's tone is light, with bursts of high drama and action. Tan Shiau Wei's black-and-white cartoon illustrations further enhance the comedy, creating dissonance between the pup's expectations and reality. The Chin family is cued Chinese. Future installments are already in the works.

An infectiously silly series starter. (questions and activities) (Humor. 6-8)

I SURVIVED THE ATTACK OF THE GRIZZLIES, 1967
The Graphic Novel
Tarshis, Lauren
Illus. by Berat Pekmezci
Graphix/Scholastic (160 pp.)
$10.99 paper | May 3, 2022
978-1-338-76691-2

A child mourning the loss of her mom "bears" witness to the consequences of strewing the natural landscape with garbage.

In this graphic-novel adaptation of a 2018 entry in Tarshis' long-running I Survived series—in which invented storylines are layered over historical incidents—it's 1967, and Mel (Vega in the original, though her last name is never mentioned here) has reluctantly agreed to continue a family tradition in the wake of her mother's death by visiting her grandpa in Montana's Glacier National Park. She is terrified when a bear attacks the cabin door one night. Later, she and Cassie, a writer friend of her mom's, meet up with a researcher whose own father had been bloodily killed in an earlier attack and discover that a local resort has been dumping garbage nearby to draw bears for a nightly show that people, including even park rangers, avidly gather to watch. That evening, in a narrow escape that is also put to use as an opening teaser, Mel herself is savagely wounded. Two deaths that occurred in real life that summer, plus the shooting deaths that occurred in real life that summer, plus the shooting of the bears involved (talk about blaming the victims!), happen off stage, but the live and dead bears in Pekmezci's neatly drawn wilderness scenes look ferocious enough to have readers attending closely to the safety guidelines in the backmatter—and understanding the dangers of letting wild animals become dependent on our detritus. Like others in the series, this one follows a predictable trajectory, but readers should find it absorbing. Mel is brown-skinned, Cassie appears to be Black, and the researcher is light-skinned.

Formulaic but rousingly gruesome in some spots and thought-provoking in others. (afterword, photos, timeline, resource lists) (Graphic novel. 9-11)
“No one who reads this can remain unmoved by this tiny bird’s tenacity.”

A WARBLER’S JOURNEY

THE GARDEN WE SHARE

Tucker, Zoë
Illus. by Julianna Swaney
NorthSouth (32 pp.)
$18.95 | March 22, 2022
978-0-7358-4484-1

A quiet celebration of gardens and loved ones.

In a tidy urban garden, a child with pigtailed and their elderly caregiver—both beige-skinned—sow seeds in a raised bed with a diverse group of neighbors. Prose and illustrations are gentle, with a palette of relaxing greens, oranges, browns, and reds prevailing. The line “The cool air turns to a warm breeze, and the sun shines down to feed our souls. And our garden” is paired with negative space and seedlings that dance softly around the text. While young children will certainly learn about the general way plants grow, this tale will also encourage them to embrace relaxation and connect with older relatives or neighbors. The growing process becomes a way for the child to remember their caregiver, who unexpectedly is “gone” when the season turns to fall after a jubilant harvest dinner.

The ambiguity of the word gone may prompt unexpected discussion about death in an otherwise mild tale. What sets this one apart from other garden fare is the exploration of the community garden as a space for relaxation and gathering.

Tender as a spring seedling. (Picture book, 4-7)

LIES I TELL MYSELF

Vrabel, Beth
Atheneum (288 pp.)
$17.99 | June 21, 2022
978-1-66590-088-1


When Raymond is sent to spend the summer with his grandparents in Maine, he’s sure it’s punishment for the trouble he and best friend Trissy caused during his dad’s last music tour. Raymond doesn’t remember his mother Abigail’s parents, probably because Abigail abandoned Raymond, his sister, and dad years ago. His grandparents sure don’t know Raymond: they call him “backward” and encourage him to go biking, swimming—make friends! Raymond doesn’t know how to do any of those things, but he’s determined to learn. Despite his doubts and discomfort, Raymond is genuine and funny in all his interactions. The colorful cast of mostly White characters is well drawn, as is the small town of Winter’s Peak. Raymond slowly realizes he’s making connections with people of all ages, plus one chicken, and that each individual’s story is becoming intertwined with his own. He draws on them all—his experiences and theirs—when Abigail shows up for an unannounced, self-serving visit to her parents. Raymond thinks he tells himself lies, but he bravely confronts the truth about Abigail: She cannot love him the way he deserves to be loved. It’s a gut punch made bearable because Raymond has developed the core strength and friendships to help him through. This heartfelt, emotionally insightful companion to To Tell You the Truth (2021) is accessible to readers unfamiliar with the previous book.

Proof positive that an open heart can overcome hurt. (Fiction, 8-12)

A WARBLER’S JOURNEY

Weidensaul, Scott
Illus. by Nancy Lane
Gryphon Press (32 pp.)
$17.99 | May 10, 2022
978-0-940719-47-7

The story of one bird’s nearly 4,000-mile migratory journey.

The female yellow warbler has lived in the highlands of Nicaragua for five months, but on this day, she feels different, and that night, she takes off to the north. She flies every night for a week until she reaches the Yucatán Peninsula, where she prepares for the unceasing 600-mile crossing of the Gulf of Mexico. Several weeks later, she finally reaches the shores of Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories, Canada, where she was born and where her mate waits. Along the bird’s journey, Weidensaul introduces three children who spy her: a young brown-skinned girl picking coffee on her family’s plantation, a Black boy in his grandmother’s backyard garden on the U.S. Gulf Coast, and a Native girl celebrating the protection of her people’s land around Great Slave Lake. Lyrical language will entice readers: “The tropical night air was warm and steamy. Snakes slithered. Bats swooped on leathery wings.” Lane’s realistic oil paintings take up three-quarters of each double-page spread, immersing readers in the habitats the yellow warbler passes through. The artwork varies perspective, sometimes focusing on the bird, other times pulling back for a wider view and giving kids an opportunity to seek out the tiny yellow creature. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

No one who reads this can remain unmoved by this tiny bird’s tenacity; this is sure to create avid new bird-watchers. (map, ways to help migratory birds) (Informational picture book, 4-10)

MYSTERY OF THE LOST LYNX

Wight, Tamra
Illus. by Carl DiRocco
Islandport Press (216 pp.)
$14.95 paper | June 21, 2022
978-1-952143-36-6
Series: Cooper & Packrat, 5

The sight of a lynx kitten wearing a collar in the wintry Maine woods catalyzes a host of increasingly dangerous escapades for Cooper, Packrat, and friends.
Fans of aspiring game warden Cooper Wilder and his friend Packrat—whose useful collection of miscellany resides in his jacket’s many pockets—will enjoy following the boys as their attention turns from setting up (with friends Roy and Summer) the premier winter festival at the Wilder family’s campground to learning about a probable fur poacher nearby. When dog-sledder Wynter and her mother show up, the friends are torn between welcoming Wynter and distrusting her mother’s questionable behavior. Warden Kate proves a reliable female role model as each short, accessible chapter skillfully weaves information—including descriptions of lynx habits and laws protecting them, the mechanics of ice-fishing, building a snow fort, the sport of skijoring (which involves being pulled by a dog while wearing cross-country skis), and the difference between legal trapping and illegal poaching—into a suspenseful tale. First-person narrator Cooper’s voice is believable as a young teen who is both daring and mostly responsible—and who is starting to feel a change in his feelings toward his friend Summer. Part of the fun for readers is trying to outguess Cooper’s changing assessments as the clues pile up. Stylized, grayscale spot art is appropriately lighthearted and reassuring. All characters follow a White default.

Snowy fun and suspense Down East. (Mystery. 8-12)

**THE WILLS AND THE WON'TS**

Woolfe, Angela  
Illus. by Roland Garrigue  
Viking (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | July 5, 2022  
978-0-593-35258-8

When two neighbors’ bickering gets out of hand, their communities back up their own, to everyone’s detriment. The Wills and the Won’ts look identical—bulbous bodies of different sizes and shapes, stick limbs, and black hair—save for their skin color: Wills are brownish-orange, Won’ts are blue. But no matter their similarities, when two who share a hill finally lose their patience and begin to build a wall, it doesn’t take long or much provocation (blame her!) for each side to see—and treat—the other as hated enemies. Soon, the walls are all anyone can see. Vocabulary emphasizes negative feelings and names: fool, anger, fury, meanness, spite, danger. “The walls made it tricky for people to hear, / so insults were guessed at and doubt became fear.” That is, until a young, brownish-orange May, dismayed at being trapped by a wall that sports an ironic sign—“Losers! We win!”—dislodges a single brick and sees a friendly blue face on the other side who declares maybe they are a Could instead of a Won’t. The new peace spreads just as quickly as the hate did, and the walls come down, differences mattering less than what’s in their hearts and their desire to be free. The rhyming text keeps the Seussian tale moving, and Garrigue’s characters’ facial expressions and body language are easy to read. While his scenes are full of whimsical details, the palette is rather somber and bland. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Timely and important. (Picture book. 3-8)

**LIA PARK AND THE MISSING JEWEL**

Yoon, Jenna  
Aladdin (304 pp.)  
$17.99 | May 3, 2022  
978-1-5344-8793-2  
Series: Lia Park, 1

A Korean American tween unlocks hidden magical powers to fulfill her destiny and save her family from a vengeful ancient spirit.

Twelve-year-old Lia Park aspires to one day work at the International Magic Agency, fighting monsters and protecting the world. But Lia’s unsure about her future because, unlike best friend Joon, she hasn’t yet manifested any magical abilities. Before she can take the annual entrance exam for the IM Agency school, her skills are unexpectedly tested when she discovers her California home ransacked and her parents missing. A message to bring Gaya the missing jewel in exchange for her parents leaves her confused and bewildered. She has no idea who Gaya is or what jewel the kidnapper is talking about. Following
clues left by her parents, Lia travels with Joon to Korea to find the jewel that will save her family. While motivated to solve the mystery, Lia also becomes frustrated that her parents’ overprotectiveness kept her from knowing the truth about her powers and the threat Gaya poses. Tense scenes set up the high stakes involved in her quest. This contemporary tale incorporates Korean history, national landmarks, and mythology in an engaging way. Korean words and phrases are also woven throughout the text, reinforcing Lia’s connection to her culture and its integral role in the story.

An intriguing, fast-paced fantasy adventure. (Fantasy. 9-12)

If possessions don’t bring joy, what good are they?

With unfeigned, unreserved delight, a child imagines all the things they might do with a chance-found rubber band. “This is my rubber band!” they proclaim. Not only can the child keep it for themselves, but they can use it, bundle up future love letters or “all the bad people in the world,” drive off invading aliens, fly away to visit distant lands, and much else besides. This leads to ruminations about how everyone has or is forever searching for things to keep and value—big thoughts that suddenly come to an end when the rubber band breaks. Again humorously plumbing philosophical depths just hinted at by a brief text and minimally detailed art, the author of The Boring Book (2019) and There Must Be More Than That! (2020) takes readers on a journey that illuminates both a child’s fertile imagination and our own understanding of what does, or should, matter in life. This small, cute child—their own worth.

I WON’T GIVE UP MY RUBBER BAND
Yoshitake, Shinsuke
Chronicle Books (52 pp.)
$15.99 | May 3, 2022
978-1-79721-492-4

To avoid failing eighth grade, Mari- anne Blume joins the school’s trivia competition team to earn extra credit. Who knew she had to actually try to win, too? Whenever Mr. Garcia introduces a new math concept Marianne’s sure she won’t understand, her mind goes into “drift” mode, and now she is struggling and in danger of repeating the grade. On a whim, Marianne joins Quiz Quest, the trivia team Mr. Garcia runs, in order to earn extra credit—but she’s shocked to learn that she not only has to participate, but sincerely help her team. In this pitch-perfect narrative that never moralizes, Marianne represents an often overlooked type of character in middle-grade fiction: She’s a student who’s slipped under most radars, always struggling academically but usually able to scrape by. As Marianne studies intensively with her diverse team members, she begins to understand various ways people learn and recognize her own strengths in emotional intelligence and team building. Quiz Quest also makes her confront her usual coping strategy—acting “stupid,” something she starts to recognize with discomfort that’s often equated with more girly behavior—as deflection. She considers whether she truly embodies this persona, especially when bullies mock her intelligence. Shifting friendships and her older sister’s budding same-sex relationship round out Marianne’s life-changing experiences that conclude with an imperfect yet uplifting end to the school year. Marianne, who comes from an interfaith (Christian and Jewish) family, reads as White.

A winner, indeed, especially for readers who question their own worth. (Fiction. 10-13)

PATCH OF SKY
Yulo, Nic
Dial Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | July 12, 2022
978-0-593-35384-4

“Looking up” takes on a whole new meaning. Pia, a yellow-skinned, blue-haired girl, has a best friend—Patches, a pig from whom she’s inseparable. Apart from Patches, Pia’s favorite thing is the sky. Unfortunately, her father explains that the anatomy of pigs’ necks is such that pigs can’t look up. Pia is desolate because, she tells Patches, the sky isn’t only wonderful, it also reflects emotions, and she’s determined that her bestie should see it. She devises several ingenious stratagems to solve the dilemma, including rolling Patches onto his back and pushing him up a hill; sadly, each attempt ends in disappointment. However, Pia’s chance glimpse at a clear rain puddle gives her one final idea—and voila!
By peering down into the puddle, Patches finally beholds the sky. This endearing, lighthearted tale rests on an easy science concept, though some kids might not get it, even as depicted; adult explanations may be needed. The tale makes a fine springboard for imaginative thinking and art activities focused on helping pigs look upward. The colorful, lively, expressive illustrations, set mostly in square or rectangular panels, are appealing; readers will also appreciate the text, often set in colored type and including onomatopoeic sound words used to very dynamic effect. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Notable for bringing easy STEM concepts to interesting, inventive life for very young readers. (Picture book. 4–7)

I REALLY WANT A BIGGER PIECE!
A Really Bird Story
Ziefert, Harriet
Illus. by Travis Foster
Red Comet Press (48 pp.)
$12.99 | April 12, 2022
978-1-63655-019-0
Series: Really Bird Stories, 2

How would you share a blueberry pie?

Readers of this second book in the series learn more about Really Bird, Pup, and Cat when they have a pie picnic in the park. True to their name, Really Bird is really hungry and really wants a piece of the blueberry pie now. After a quick argument about who is better at serving pie, Cat challenges Dog to cut three pieces that are all the same size, and that’s when things become really complicated. Should everyone get the same size piece? After all, they are all different sizes. But Really Bird is “REALLY STARVING.” Who should get the biggest piece? And what happens when one piece is messier than another or is missing part of the crust? Luckily, Pup keeps trying and finally finds a solution that makes everyone happy. There’s even one piece left over that Really Bird is really happy to share with new park friends, a rabbit, a squirrel, and a mouse. Brightly colored speech bubbles and cartoon illustrations with minimal details against a neutral background make reading both the text and the illustrations easy for new readers. The book closes with discussion questions about what to do in a real-life situation involving cutting slices of pie or cake and what to do when sharing isn’t “purr-fect,” as Cat would put it. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

The true natures of these three characters shine as they problem-solve and share fairly. (Picture book. 5–7)
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

**INTO THE SUBLIME** by Kate A. Boorman ............................................. 121
**WAKE THE BONES** by Elizabeth Kilcoyne ........................................ 125
**WE WEREN’T LOOKING TO BE FOUND** by Stephanie Kuehn ........ 128
**THE ARC** by Ben Oliver ................................................................. 130
**GOTH GIRL, QUEEN OF THE UNIVERSE** by Lindsay S. Zrull .......... 134

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**BLADE BREAKER**

Aveyard, Victoria
HarperTeen (576 pp.)
$19.99 | June 28, 2022
978-0-06-287266-1
Series: Realm Breaker, 2

Follows Corayne’s continuing quest to save the world from the demon god who is seeking to invade.

The Companions—Corayne and her fellow ragtag band of unlikely heroes—have won the first battle, but the war is far from over. Readers may need to refresh themselves with *Realm Breaker* (2021), as this sequel drops readers right in the thick of the action involving numerous individuals (many of them point-of-view characters) and countries in the story’s complicated geopolitical landscape. Most of the viewpoints are those of Corayne and her present Companions, with occasional perspectives from other characters (such as Queen Erïda, sympathetic in her struggles against sexism despite her evil goals, and Ridha, searching for allies and finding something more) who offer peeks at the rest of the world. The first act is slow, as the characters plan their next moves and their individual story arcs are established. The journeys of Amhara assassin Sorasa and former Gallish squire Andry, who grapple with changed loyalties, are especially notable for how they play out within the group’s dynamics. Once the action starts, however, the heroes’ breaks between facing all manner of men and monsters—notably undead Ashlander armies—become shorter and shorter, building to a nail-biting reckoning of a climax. The cast has a wide variety of skin tones, and there’s positive, casual representation and acceptance of queer and nonbinary characters.

*Will leave readers gasping for more.* (Fantasy. 12-18)

**GALAXY**

The Prettiest Star
Axelrod, Jadzia
Illus. by Jess Taylor
DC (208 pp.)
$16.99 paper | May 17, 2022
978-1-4012-9853-1

Taylor struggles with hiding her secret.

When the Vane attacked the planet Cyandii 6 years ago, its princess, Taelyr, fled to Earth. Now, in order to stay hidden, she must live as Taylor, a human boy who presents as White. Sacrificing her true
My friend Ariana Sani Hussain—librarian, Kirkus critic, and founding member of the young readers’ literature blog Hijabi Librarians—recently reached out, urging me to read Matthew Salesses’ *Craft in the Real World: Rethinking Fiction Writing and Workshopping*. It’s clear, concise, and truly extraordinary—essential reading for reviewers, educators, and anyone else who would like to engage more deeply with the processes of reading and writing. He provides a framework that makes visible many tacit, unquestioned assumptions in Western conversations about literature, particularly subjective evaluative terms such as innovative, relatable, and believable. “What is considered ‘good writing’ is a matter of who is reading it,” Salesses writes.

Salesses helped me understand the common yet puzzling phenomenon in which those who angrily speak out against diversifying reading lists typically add that they themselves are neither Victorian street urchins nor Russian aristocrats and yet they enjoy books about such individuals. Inadvertently proving the very point they are trying to contradict, they omit examples from non-Western literary traditions as they extol their ability to appreciate books about people unlike themselves.

Western YA literature is expanding to include more works that go beyond an older type of “diversity” that shoehorns a multiplicity of voices, story structures, and perspectives into the narrow expectations of an implied, equally narrow audience. Daniel Nayeri’s *Everything Sad Is Untrue* (2020) and Darcie Little Badger’s *A Snake Falls to Earth* (2021) are two recent examples of novels for young people that refreshingly break free from traditional Western narrative structures.

What follows are some 2022 releases that speak to Salesses’ points about what is assumed to be familiar versus what is overtly explained as well as the importance of being more expansive in our appreciation of what makes for a compelling story arc or skillful characterization. He observes that while “the fulfillment of expectations is pleasurable” for readers, and “research suggests that children learn more from a story they already know,” there is also a cost to sticking with the known. After all, “what they do not learn is precisely: other stories.”

**Diamond Park** by Phillipe Diederich (Dutton, March 15): Mexican American teenagers on a desperate road trip seek justice following a murder, arrest, and threat of deportation.

**Right Where I Left You** by Julian Winters (Viking, March 15): Queer Black and Latinx teen boys grow up, fall in love, consider the future, and celebrate the present.

**The Color of the Sky Is the Shape of the Heart** by Chesil, translated by Takami Nieda (SoHo Teen, April 3): Familiar themes of identity and marginalization are explored in the context of descendants of Korean immigrants to Japan.

**High Spirits** by Camille Gomera-Tavarez (Levine Querido, April 12): This collection of stories immerses readers in a multigenerational tale extending from the Dominican Republic to the U.S.

**Confessions of an Alleged Good Girl** by Joya Goffney (HarperTeen, May 3): Purity culture, parental love, and personal growth collide for the daughter of a Black Baptist preacher in Texas.

**The Summer of Bitter and Sweet** by Jen Ferguson (Heartdrum, May 10): A Métis teenager wrestles with her sexuality, painful family history, changing friendships, and the question of where she belongs.

**Breathe and Count Back From Ten** by Natalia Sylvester (Clarion/HarperCollins, May 10): A coming-of-age story that centers Peruvian American Vero, a young woman negotiating physical disability, faith, shame, romance, and family.

**Flip the Script** by Lyla Lee (Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins, May 31): A bisexual Korean American actress who is a rising K-drama star negotiates a love triangle and societal pressures.

Laura Simeon is a young readers’ editor.
“Straddles the line between mystical and psychological horror to keep readers guessing.”

INTO THE SUBLIME

Bayron, Kalynn
Bloomsbury (400 pp.)
$18.99 | June 21, 2022
978-1-4476-0920-8

Briséis goes on an even riskier journey with more menacing enemies in the sequel to This Poison Heart (2021). Sixteen-year-old Briseís Greene’s story continues as she is tasked with reuniting all the pieces of the Absyrtus Heart in order to save Thandie, one of her adoptive moms, who is being held by Hecate in the underworld. Bri finds out that Circe (the biological aunt whose existence she only recently learned of following her supposed death) is actually alive and has been searching for the pieces of the Heart as well. This revelation marks just the beginning of the discoveries and twists that Bri has to deal with: The history of her biological family and their connections to mythological gods go deeper than she realized, and the adversities she has to face are even more dangerous than anything she’s experienced thus far. But saving her mom is paramount, and Bri is willing to do anything and face anyone in order to do so. Readers who were hooked after reading the previous book with its cliffhanger ending will be pleased to follow more of Bri’s story. Bayron highlights themes of sisterhood, familial bonds, and intergenerational trauma in this novel centering Black characters. Bri’s story showcases how love can help give one the strength and courage needed to confront fears and weather uncomfortable truths.

This duology closer delves deeper into mythology while depicting textured, realistic relationships. (Fantasy. 13-18)
Benefactors. Slowly dawning realizations are limited to narrator Ava’s perspective, and the action is largely centered on her internal struggle. Ava questions whether Mentalists are inherently evil, and as she helps Elm dismantle devices created by the Benefactors to control public perception, she learns that the Benefactors are abusing their power. She also recovers memories about her parents. This first book in a new series is focused on worldbuilding and introducing the default White cast. The innocent romance between Ava and Elm and the hint of a battle to come will hook readers for the next installment.

Compelling magical fare for early teens. (Fantasy. 12-15)

**THAT SUMMER NIGHT ON FRENCHMEN STREET**

*Clarkson, Chris*

Tu Books (400 pp.)

$21.95 | June 13, 2022
978-1-64379-501-0

A New Orleans love story for these ages.

One 17-year-old Tennessee Rebel Williams moved to New Orleans from Oxford, Mississippi, he thought he was leaving behind the explosive fights between his often absent mom and his bigot of a father and that he might even be able to reinvent himself. His parents’ separation doesn’t stick, and his mom fails to put in any effort to care for him, but Tennessee quickly falls for Jessamine Grace Monet, a high school senior and NOLA native with her guard up and a lot to work through. Jess and her twin brother, Joel, were 5 when they lost their father and home in the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, which was followed by a series of violently traumatic events. Getting close to either sibling is understandably difficult. Tenn and Saint Olivier Baptiste, his new bestie at Magnolia Prep, stubbornly give it a shot anyway despite predictable star-crossed obstacles. Saint is flamboyant and confident, while Joel is closeted and cautious; Jess, who is Black, is reluctant to even fall in like with anyone but especially with a small-town White boy like Tenn.

Socio-economic differences likewise separate them from the twins, who are far from wealthy. In this slightly overlong dual first-person narrative where the queer characters sometimes fade into the background, Tenn’s and Jess’s respective journeys are refreshingly heartfelt.

No big surprises but the familiar still elicits investment in these fun and caring characters. (Fiction. 13-18)

**GABE IN THE AFTER**

*Doleski, Shannon*

Amulet/Abrams (240 pp.)

$17.99 | June 28, 2022
978-1-4197-5438-8

An Anne of Green Gables homage set in a post-apocalyptic near future.

It’s been two years since the end of the world, and Gabe Sweeney, now 14, hasn’t seen a human soul other than the 17 other kids and two adults he eked out an existence with on a small coastal Maine island. They are apparently the only survivors of a mysterious, lethal virus even worse than the one that came before. Then, on a routine scouting mission to the mainland, Gabe meets red-haired, green-eyed Relle Douglas. This changes everything: Not only might there be other survivors, but Gabe finds himself smitten with this fey girl (who talks just like Anne Shirley: “The very stars made our meeting happen,” she tells Gabe). When two other survivors are spotted, Gabe and fellow island kid Wynnie hike to Massachusetts to learn more about this new world. The narrative leans more on romance than action, with Gabe mooning after Relle throughout. The trek south is dotted with the occasional post-apocalyptic rubble but is remarkably free of hazard (and corpses); some feral pigs only stare, and an armed woman quickly befriends them. Even the encounter with a quasi-militarized community of survivors is anticlimactic. Readers who know the region will alternately scoff and blink in confusion at the descriptions of the setting. Gabe and Relle present White; tan-skinned Wynnie is nonbinary, and the island community is multiracial.

A genre mashup that doesn’t quite come together. (author’s note) (Post-apocalyptic romance. 12-14)

**THAT’S DEBATABLE**

*Doll, Jen*

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (352 pp.)

$18.99 | July 19, 2022
978-0-374-30604-5

High school debaters discover that opposites attract.

For Millie Chalmers, winning the Alabama state debate tournament is everything. It guarantees lucrative scholarship opportunities—a boon for Millie and her overworked single mother. She can’t let anything interfere with her college plans: not pervasive sexual harassment and double standards, not dating, and certainly not saying how she really feels. But aspiring chef Tag Strong just wants to speak his mind, dismaying his ambitious parents and private school teammates. After an active shooter scare at a tournament brings Millie and Tag closer, they fall in love despite their opposing personalities. But as the final tournament approaches, mishaps and a vicious harassment campaign against Millie threaten to
ruin not only her chances of winning, but the teens’ relationship. In alternating first-person chapters, Millie and Tag reflect on each other, parental expectations, and their debate topics, which—echoing the plot—include gun ownership, income inequality, and speaking out against injustice. Footnotes pepper their narratives with definitions, citations, and snarky asides. Twitter threads and recipes for Tag’s culinary creations add variety and verisimilitude. Though the pacing is occasionally uneven, Millie’s unapologetic battle against sexism is inspiring, and Tag’s reckoning with his privilege is heartening. Eighty issues and the quirky rivals-to-lovers romance are given equal attention. Millie and Tag are White; secondary characters bring some ethnic diversity.

An unusual, thought-provoking take on advocating for oneself and others. (author’s note) (Fiction. 14-18)

THE PROMISE OF LOST THINGS
Dunbar, Helene
Sourcebooks Fire (320 pp.)
$10.99 paper | July 5, 2022
978-1-4926-6740-7

Welcome back to St. Hilaire, the town of spirit mediums, which is now being targeted by a show debunking the supernatural.

In this companion to Prelude for Lost Souls (2020), high school senior Russ believes the controlling Guild that runs the town is dangerous and wants to dismantle them. Russ, who is leader of the Guild’s Youth Corps, only wants to help people, including his maybe-boyfriend, Ian, who happens to be a ghost. Willow, Russ’ mentor, also wants to take down the Guild—but that’s because she wants power and has discovered she can gain more of it through vanquishing spirits. Asher, an outsider, makes a connection with Russ, but Russ doesn’t know that Asher’s parents are skeptics who created the TV show Ghost Killers. Meanwhile, the Guild debates whether they should allow Ghost Killers to film in town—the show is offering a cash payment which they desperately need, but the Guild members worry they won’t be able to summon a ghost on camera (since spirits can, of course, be finicky!), which could ruin the town’s reputation. Told in alternating first-person narration, the novel’s three distinct voices together weave a delightfully atmospheric tale, and the story shines in presenting a refreshing, surprisingly uplifting exploration of grief and love. In particular, Russ’ romance with charming ghost Ian contrasted with the tentative friendship with sweet and very much alive Asher will make readers swoon and ache. All characters are presumed White.

Hauntingly good. (Paranormal mystery. 14-18)
blood, Deka is rattled when a rescue mission turns into a trap and she is unable to use her powers to subdue the jatu as she usually can. Eventually she is led down a path that makes her question everything she knows about the goddesses—including how and why she even came into being. In this outing, Otera is just as beguiling a setting as before, and it’s easy to dive deep in the richly developed characters and culture Forna has created. The book moves quickly, with surprising plot twists that showcase the complex and exciting structuring of the story. However, a couple of passages—one where a character’s trans identity is revealed by the protagonist, who has the ability to view the essence of all beings (“I saw you. All of you.”), and another where a trans woman is described as being “much stronger than the usual human woman”—feel at odds with the book’s message of gender inclusivity.

A well-developed and fast-paced sequel. (Fantasy. 13-18)

DAYS OF INFAMY
How a Century of Bigotry Led to Japanese American Internment
Goldstone, Lawrence
Scholastic Focus (288 pp.)
$19.99 | June 7, 2022
978-1-338-72246-8
Series: Scholastic Focus

A perspective that situates a blight on U.S. history within a broader history around race and citizenship.

Three years after the statement by President Franklin D. Roosevelt that lends the book its title, the Supreme Court ruled that Executive Order 9066—which sent more than 100,000 people of Japanese descent (most of them U.S. citizens) into what the government then termed concentration camps—did not violate the Constitution. Goldstone describes discussions of race at the time the Constitution was written, traces mid-19th-century Japan–U.S. relations, and shows the rising vitriol following the later arrival of Japanese laborers in America. The narrative describes campaigns by White supremacists, particularly in the American West, to limit access to immigration, birthright citizenship, union membership, property ownership, and naturalization and to generate a frenzy of anti-Asian hatred. Pivotual court cases challenging discrimination against Chinese and African Americans help readers understand the groundwork leading to Executive Order 9066. The author closes with a sober warning about the necessity of remaining vigilant in protecting democracy, particularly in light of recent Islamophobic rhetoric. This comprehensive yet concise and readable work adds value to the body of literature about the treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II by showing how, far from being an aberration, these events “were inevitable byproducts of a nation that had spent a century either perpetuating or acquiescing to slander and bigotry.”

An informed, persuasive overview of the environment leading to Japanese American incarceration. (bibliography, source notes, photograph and illustration credits, index) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

WE MADE IT ALL UP
Harrison, Margot
Little, Brown (384 pp.)
$17.99 | July 12, 2022
978-0-316-27576-7

Kray’s Defile is a place with charm. Just don’t look too closely.

When her father moves them to small-town Montana from Montreal so he can study bats in the nearby caves, high schooler Celeste Bergstein wants only to blend into the background. It’s an opportunity to start over, free from a frightening and abusive relationship with the director of her drama workshop. With her new friend, fey orphan Vivvy Kray, Celeste starts writing stories about a steamy romance between two of their classmates—presumably straight golden boy Joss Thorssen and gay weed dealer Seth Larkin. The lines between fantasy and reality soon begin to blur, and Vivvy arranges for the four of them to get drunk in the woods near the caves. The next day, Joss is found murdered. With no memory of that night, Celeste has to figure out what happened before she ends up taking the fall for the crime. While investigating the caves with Vivvy’s twin brother, Bram, they discover evidence of a long history of sinister activities by a group called the Defilers. Implicit sexual abuse is a recurring theme, as are psychological manipulation and self-harm. A reference to historical crimes against Indigenous people and accusations that undocumented workers at a meatpacking plant were responsible for Joss’ murder contrast with the presumably White cast. The unreliable characters are well drawn, and the dialogue masterfully replicates the teenage voice.

A polished tale that is twisted and disturbing. (Thriller. 14-18)

FUNNY GYAL
My Fight Against Homophobia in Jamaica
Jackson, Angeline with Susan McClelland
Dundurn (240 pp.)
$12.99 paper | June 21, 2022
978-1-4597-4919-1

An LGBTQ+ activist chronicles her experiences growing up in Jamaica, where same-sex activity is criminalized.

The summer Jackson got her period, she wondered, “why couldn’t I like girls and also love God?” From her spiritual and sexual awakenings as a Christian schoolgirl to being recognized for her courage and global activism by
President Barack Obama during a state visit to Jamaica, Jackson traces the painful path of her fight against homophobia and rape culture in her native country. Despite being forced into conversion therapy by her conservative parents, a teenage Jackson came to embrace both her sexuality and her faith, though her relationship to the church as an institution remained complicated. After enduring “corrective rape” (a crime in which the perpetrators claim to “fix” the gay person through assault), Jackson navigated a less-than-sympathetic legal system to pursue justice. Her story is one of tragedy and heartbreak but also of curiosity, first love, and longing. She emerges from these traumatic experiences as a fierce advocate for queer youth and a riveting, deeply reflective storyteller. Readers with similar struggles will find encouragement and comfort in these pages.

Of concern, however, is Jackson's uncritical recounting of a sexual relationship she describes as an “affair” with her 32-year-old tutor, Miss Campbell, when she was 17.

Searing, tender, and beautifully written. (note by Jackson) (Memoir. 14-adult)

WAKE THE BONES
Kilcoyne, Elizabeth
Wednesday Books (320 pp.)
$18.99 | July 12, 2022
978-1-250-79082-8

Nineteen-year-old Laurel and her friends grapple with a curse on their town in this Southern gothic debut. In the small farming town of Dry Valley, Kentucky, Laurel faces her family legacy. Her mother had strange gifts before her mysterious death in their old well, leaving Laurel to grow up orphaned (and with a less useful gift: As a taxidermist, Laurel can read death stories from bones). When she and her best friends—turned—farm co-workers discover a grisly scene by the reopened well, it’s only the beginning of the seemingly impossible—and increasingly dangerous—happenings. While confronting the past, Laurel and her friends, all distinctly drawn, also look to the future and who they want to be—for Laurel and Ricky, it’s a charmingly bristling courtship dance. For Laurel’s best friend, Isaac, and Ricky’s brother, Garrett, it’s more complicated. Garrett, happily a country boy, loves Isaac, but Isaac can’t let himself love Garrett back as, to survive and escape Dry Valley (and an abusive situation), he knows he must leave. The characters, who default to White, are easy to get invested in as personal stakes climb so high that survival isn’t a given. Told in the third-person, the novel’s poetic language is atmospheric and evocative. Grounding depictions of the natural world are as vivid and lush as the descriptions of haunting horrors that are beautiful in their gruesomeness. These passages never slow the plot and frequently enhance the tension and suspense.

In Kilcoyne, YA horror has found a new standard-bearer. (Horror. 13-up)

HEAT WAVE
Klune, TJ
Tor Teen (384 pp.)
$18.99 | July 19, 2022
978-1-250-20373-1
Series: The Extraordinaries, 3

The last installment of the Extraordinaries trilogy is everything a devoted fan could want: dramatic, action-packed, sentimental, and steamy. It’s the summer before Nicholas Bell’s senior year of high school, and though he really should be working on his college admissions essays, he’s got other priorities, like making out with his incredibly handsome boyfriend, Seth Gray. Oh, and also training to become one of the vigilante superheroes called Extraordinaries. Thankfully Nick’s got an amazing support group in his friends and their families, including Seth, aka the fire-powered Extraordinary Pyro Storm; the self-proclaimed, pun-ready Dad Squad; Miss Conduct, another...a valiant tale of achieving your dreams and overcoming the odds to do so.” —LoveReadingUK

“...Mahoney throws light on the neglected contributions of female pilots in World War II. She conveys not just the importance of the work, but also its dangers and, often, its tremendous fun.” —Kirkus Reviews

For Information on Film Rights, Email danniemahoney136@gmail.com • redcardinalwriting.com
Mayra Cuevas and Marie Marquardt were friends at first sight. “It was an instant connection,” Cuevas tells Kirkus on a Zoom call with Marquardt. They met at a Romance Writers of America conference, both of them in search of a critique partner. “I am very much about intention and very much about asking for what you want,” Cuevas shares. “I sat in the parking lot before the conference, praying I’d find my person.” But when she went inside, the organizers couldn’t find her registration. She was left to her own devices to find a seat, and every table was packed. Every table, that is, but Marquardt’s.

“We quickly became good friends,” Marquardt remembers. “We developed a deep connection. We started to critique each other’s work, and that’s how it went for many years.”

It was a while before the stars aligned for a collaboration. “We both had our own projects,” Cuevas says, “and then when we started saying, Oh, we should really work on something together, we wanted to wait for the right idea to come along.”

In 2018, that idea revealed itself to the pair in the form of myriad teen-led protests against oppressive school dress codes.

“When you talk about dress codes, I feel like many people think, Oh it’s just a dress code, you know, It’s not that important,” Cuevas says. “But it is important, and we found that all the research and all the data say that these dress codes are perpetuating sexism, victim blaming, rape culture, racism. And they’re hindering the education of girls and people that belong to marginalized communities, because they are being unfairly targeted.”

Their first novel together, Does My Body Offend You? (Knopf, April 5), explores these ideas, following two teens—Malena, who is Latinx, and Ruby, who is White—as they unite to oppose their high school’s draconian dress code. In the course of their battle, they learn how to be effective activists and, in Ruby’s case, a good anti-racist ally. The story links race, gender, and spirituality as the characters come to understand their relationships to their own bodies through experiences both traumatic and revelatory.

“We noticed that a lot of young adult books that were tackling this issue weren’t diving into the issue of intersectionality,” Cuevas says. “This whole idea of White saviorism and how that not only applies to the dress code itself, but to the issues of student activism and social justice.”

The choice to highlight intersectionality in activism was empowered by the writers’ real-life experience.
friendship. “I recall writing a conversation between Malena and Ruby that we were committed to making as right as we possibly could,” Marquardt says. “Every word and every gesture was so important because it was a hard, nuanced conversation. We sat together and we spoke it, back and forth and back and forth, to each other. It was a privilege to have our characters enter into these conversations, and we wanted to do our very best to honor them.”

“Co-authoring, we pushed new limits in our writing,” Cuevas notes. “We had to.”

Malena and Ruby certainly swim through dark waters, weathering sexual assault and the loss of a homeland. “I really credit our friendship for those moments,” Marquardt says. “We already had a solid foundation for moving into vulnerable spaces together. I think it allowed for some creative work that we would not have approached otherwise.”

Spirituality is another delicate piece of ground deftly traversed by the co-authors. Cuevas shares, “It’s one of the things that I feel is really missing from many fiction books. I grew up Catholic and I’m a practicing Buddhist. I think for me and Marie, in our hearts, we’re spiritual beings.” It’s something held lovingly alongside every other facet of the characters’ identities.

Throughout the novel, Malena draws strength from her necklace of the Virgencita, although her relationship to Catholicism remains ambivalent. The focus on the figure of the Virgin Mary is no coincidence: “The image of the Virgin is absolutely used as a bludgeon against women,” Marquardt says. “But I’m a big fan of resignifying Mary: For me, she’s really this model of courageous action, of human connection, and compassion.”

Marquardt, a scholar of anthropology, is the co-founder of the Georgia nonprofit El Refugio, which supports detained immigrants, asylum seekers, and their families. Cuevas, who has a background in journalism, is the co-founder of the Latinx KidLit Book Festival, where she works to bring more Latinx voices into classrooms across the United States and the world. With the efficiency born of painfully necessary repetition, she explains, “There’s a huge disparity right now between the number of books published about Latinx culture and the number of Hispanic and Latinx students in public school classrooms.”

The authors’ experiences in advocacy informed the philosophy of the book. “Mayra and I both are true believers that fiction is an important tool in justice work because it builds empathy,” Marquardt says. “Without empathy, change will not happen.”

Ilana Bensussen Epstein is a writer and filmmaker in Boston. Does My Body Offend You? was reviewed in the Feb. 1, 2022, issue.
Extraordinary who happens to be a drag queen—and his mother, who’s always been there for him. Nick has taken on his mother’s mantle of Guardian, honing his still unsteady telekinetic powers. This book is jammed with plot twists, making it a real page-turner. Klune also doesn’t shy away from incorporating real-life events into his story, such as discussions related to racial bias in policing and the extremism of a wealthy businessman who is running for public office. Nick and Seth have several open, practical conversations about the next physical steps in their relationship, modeling healthy communication and consent in a queer relationship. The lead protagonists are White; the supporting cast includes racial diversity.

A touching, utterly satisfying conclusion. (Fantasy. 14-18)

Two teenage girls’ paths intersect at a low point in their lives, but where they go from there is anything but certain. Danielle Washington and Camila Ortiz meet at Peach Tree Hills, a suburban residential treatment facility for adolescent girls outside Atlanta, where they’re roommates as well as the only brown-skinned girls. Originally from a well-off Black political family in Dallas, Dani’s relationship to addiction and dependency is the primary focus of her recovery, but her resentment toward her mother and how that impacts her sense of self is complicated even further by learning to be honest with herself. Similarly, Cams has self-harm tendencies that her Latin American parents—one a Colombian immigrant and one Mexican American—in small-town Georgia have struggled with for some time. Kuehn is careful not to offer easy answers for why both girls find themselves in overlapping and distinct moments of despair and desperation, self-harm and self-sabotage, but the connections among family, race, and the widespread societal harm inflicted upon young girls in particular are presented thoughtfully in the dueling narrations of these two deeply intelligent and expressive teens. Dani and Cams complement each other well as earnest storytellers and, eventually, reluctant friends, but their experiences are as raw as their struggles may feel futile. Still, the professionals in the novel provide a tremendous and optimistic amount of care.

An insightful, grounded, and compassionately messy meditation on adolescence, institutional support, and helping oneself. (content warning, resource list) (Fiction. 13-19)

Breakups are awful, but they are even worse when your ex hustles off to another continent. Seventeen-year-old Sayed Nizam, a recent high school graduate, is left behind in Los Angeles, twiddling the ring his ex-boyfriend, Farouk, gave him and dealing with Baba, his harsh father, who governs the household with a firm hand. But one day at Sy’s cafe job, help arrives with a literal bang with the dramatic appearance of mysterious Reggie, a wealthy and eccentric English teen heiress in distress who offers him three wishes in exchange for his help (and an egg salad sandwich). After Baba discovers he is gay and kicks him out of their house,
Sy finds himself on a private plane with Reggie, crossing the ocean to London in search of Farouk. As the story alternates between the struggles faced by present-day Sy and flashbacks to scenes from Sy and Farouk’s charming romance, it also tells a parallel heroic quest through the story “Hamza and the Djinn.” Replete with pop-culture references, elements of fabulism, and dollops of romance, Kutub’s debut is ambitious. It succeeds in covering a gamut of themes, including what it’s like being brown-skinned and facing Islamophobia, experiencing heady first love, and exploring one’s identity. As Indian American Muslim Sy recalibrates his idea of family and love, he discovers facets of himself and his relationships, adding poignancy to the story that packs a punch.

An intense read that’s packed with adventure, humor, and lots of soul. (Fiction. 12-18)
Lions. Fly” by Morgan Baden. These are among the short stories in this anthology that includes works by well-known authors such as Axie Oh, Danielle Paige, Anna-Marie McLemore, and Lyga himself. Varian Johnson’s “The Knight’s Gambit” is particularly powerful: Following the son of a celebrated superhero who unearths his familial legacy, it underlines how trauma can shape a person’s trajectory. Sarah MacLean’s “Fire That Lasts” provides a standout setting—a world where strong emotions are illegal, starring a protagonist who falls in love. The collection as a whole satisfies, with a wide range of lived experiences represented. Dramatic and impactful illustrations by cartoonist Doran open each story.

Thirteen solid stories from an all-star lineup. (about the authors) (Science fiction anthology. 13-18)

**THE DARKENING**

_Mara, Sunya_

Clarión/HarperCollins (400 pp.)

$18.99 | July 5, 2022

978-0-358-56198-9

A prince and a rebel’s daughter must find a way to stop a dangerous storm from consuming their city.

Years ago, Vesper’s parents led a failed revolt against their city’s ruler, the Regia. Her Ma was lost to the unceasing Storm that surrounds them all; her Pa, a talented ikonomancer, became a fugitive, hiding with Vesper in the city’s fifth ring among the poor and the outcast. When Pa is captured by Prince Dalca, the current Regia’s son and the leader of the Wardana, the city’s guardians, 17-year-old Vesper vows to rescue him. She finds an ally in Izamal, a revolution-minded Wardana from the fifth ring who helps her gain access to the ikonomancers’ headquarters—and to Dalca—as an apprentice. Vesper’s proximity to Dalca allows her to see an unexpectedly vulnerable side to the prince, complicating her animosity toward him, and when she learns about the true natures of the Regia and the Storm, Vesper realizes that she and Dalca may actually share a common goal. The book’s setting—a city trapped within a storm, ruled by a powerful deity in human form—is intriguing, as are the descriptions of its magic system, ikonomancy, which utilizes symbols to activate spells. The story moves briskly from start to dramatic finish, driven by the characters’ urgency and desperation to save their families and their city from destruction. Characters are diverse in appearance.

_A dark and emotionally charged fantasy._ (Fantasy. 13-18)

**THE ARC**

_Oliver Ben_

Chicken House/Scholastic (220 pp.)

$18.99 | July 19, 2022

978-1-338-58936-8

Series: The Loop, 3

In the final installment of the Loop trilogy, the ongoing mission to take down the world’s operating system becomes a battle to save humanity.

Ever unpredictable, Oliver opens this follow-up to *The Block* (2021) from the perspective of an Alt named Chester. The youngest member of the government’s science team, which is housed in a protective Arc, Chester goes rogue after questioning the government’s leader and discovering that Happy, the world’s operating system, is planning to end humanity in nine days. Following a surprising connection with the Loop rebels, the story transitions back to the Loopers’ ongoing fight to destroy Happy. With only days left to achieve this dangerous goal, the taut narration builds in intensity, with chapter headings serving as a countdown clock. The author continues with what he does best, weaving twists and turns, difficult decisions, adrenaline-fueled confrontations with Happy and its minions, and a touch of humor into a story filled with teamwork, friendship, hope, and love. This time, with the end of the world looming, the narrative becomes more existential as the characters consider what it means to be human. Issues of privilege, addiction, fear, and PTSD will resonate with today’s post-pandemic readers. Equally rewarding is that this third book is not simply an extension of the overall story arc, but a culmination that ties it together with its predecessors.

_A thrilling, thought-provoking, and ultimately deeply satisfying series conclusion._ (Dystopian. 14-18)

**THE RUNAWAY’S DIARY**

_Patterson, James & Emily Raymond_

Illus. by Valeria Wicker

Little, Brown (280 pp.)

$17.99 | April 26, 2022

978-0-316-50023-4

A teenager runs away to Seattle, hoping to locate her missing sister.

Fifteen-year-old Eleanor idolizes her older sister, Sam, despite their being complete opposites: Sam is outgoing and wild, while socially awkward Eleanor is known as Little Miss Perfect, always doing the right and safe thing. After Sam runs away from home, the only communication she has with Eleanor are three postcards sent from Seattle. Eleanor decides to trace her 18-year-old sister’s footsteps, leaving her messages and hopping on a bus to find her. But when Sam doesn’t meet her at the bus depot, Eleanor, who has no real plan, has to learn how to survive on her own while searching the city for her sister. While
the close bond between the girls is well depicted through flashbacks, the reveal of an important secret ultimately feels anticlimactic. A major plot point relies too heavily on chance and coincidence to be fully believable. While the color scheme, cityscapes, and background illustrations are atmospheric, the manga-inspired drawing style comes across as dated and flat. The depiction of the fabricated stories Eleanor tells is intriguing, as are the themes of friendship, living in the moment, and maintaining hope; unfortunately, none are thematically strong enough to resonate. The emotional impact of Eleanor’s experiences is diluted by her at times humorous narration. Eleanor and the main cast read as White.

A somewhat entertaining, fast-paced journey that fizzles at the end. (Graphic novel. 12-15)
as carefree teens, but everything culminated in a devastating tragedy, a complicated love triangle, severed familial relationships, and ruined friendships. The members of the central cast are believable, flawed, impulsive teenagers, and the secondary characters—like sharp-witted, elderly Clara VanHill, a legendary Black Broadway star—are full of personality. Main characters are White; important secondary characters bring diversity in race and sexual orientation. Mackinac Island, with its lake views and old-timey charm, is itself an atmospheric presence. While aspects of Lexi’s trip require some suspension of disbelief, overall Platt handily closes the loop on the book’s many open ends. This is a lengthy read, but Platt’s twists and turns do not disappoint, and the pacing keeps readers engaged.

An all-encompassing story full of deep romance and searing tragedy. (Fiction. 12-17)

**A DISASTER IN THREE ACTS**
Rodkey, Kelsey
HarperTeen (368 pp.)
$17.99 | July 5, 2022
978-0-06-299449-3

An aspiring documentarian finds her new subject in her estranged ex-best friend.

Eighteen-year-old high school senior Saine Sinclair hopes to secure a coveted spot in a documentary pilot program at Temple University. To complete her application, she’ll need to submit a short documentary. When her original subject, a woman competing in the Vice and Virtual video game competition, drops out and the deadline looms, Saine turns in desperation to another competitor, Holden Michaels. Not only is Holden her childhood best friend, but he’s also the ex-boyfriend of her current BFF, Corrine Baker. Saine has done her best to avoid Holden since an awkward spin-the-bottle incident in sixth grade, but now she’ll be filming his every move. The two’s journey plays with rom-com tropes as Rodkey explores the messiness of feelings—including growing pains and miscommunication—through flawed characters who don’t always take the easy road. Saine, who is single-minded about filmmaking and not above manipulation if it’ll make for a better movie, has to reckon with the consequences of her actions. Some plot points are clearly foreshadowed, but with a well-developed secondary cast and lots of places for the protagonists to go, the fast-paced story maintains readers’ interest. Main characters are White; there is some diversity in race and sexual orientation in the supporting cast.

A rom-com that deftly hits many emotional beats. (Romance. 13-18)

**SKYWARD FLIGHT**
The Collection: Sunreach, Redawn, Evershore
Sanderson, Brandon & Janci Patterson
Illus. by Charlie Bowater & Ben McSweeney
Delacorte (640 pp.)
$19.99 | April 5, 2022
978-0-593-56785-2
Series: Skyward

In a trio of novellas, supporting characters take center stage to battle treachery and cement alliances with aliens while the series’ protagonist is off on a quest.

Separately published in 2021 as e-books, the three tales included here string together both personal and political developments: Sunreach sees empathetic fighter pilot FM and engineer Rig, both White, awkwardly reach the smooching stage while learning how to work with adorable talking slugs that have cytonic powers. Violet-skinned Alanik has to overcome mistrust of humans to enlist their aid in fending off an attempt by supporters of the oppressive galactic Superiority to take over her planetary government on gas giant Redawn in the eponymous second story. Finally, in Evershore, Skyward Flight leader Jorgen, who reads as Black, discovers both command potential and superpowers of his own while coordinating a defense of the valiant (if furry and squirrel-sized) kitsen. All three episodes kick up the action with both large- and small-scale battles in air and space—all brisk if remarkably low in explicit fatalities—dovetailing neatly in the end into the closing events of Cytonic (2021). Sanderson credits Patterson with the lion’s share of the writing but adds five deleted scenes from his series opener, Skyward (2018), with commentary as a literary lagniappe. Each novella opens with skillful character portraits in contrasting styles by the two illustrators.

Hot pilots slug it out with the galactic overlords in a collection that will please series fans. (Science fiction. 12-15)

**A CRUEL AND FATED LIGHT**
Shuttleworth, Ashley
McElderry (704 pp.)
$19.99 | May 24, 2022
978-1-5344-5370-8
Series: Hollow Star Saga, 2

Exiled immortals and treacherous fae vie for power and dominance over the mortal world in this second installment of the Hollow Star Saga.

Arlo Jarsdel, an ironborn on the cusp of Maturity, cast aside her fate, claiming the mantle of the Hollow Star to save herself and her friends from the machinations of Hieronymus Aurum, a practitioner of dark magic. Now, with the secret power to manipulate events through a magical 20-sided die, Arlo approaches a crossroads of possibilities. With an invitation from Riadne Lysterne—Seelie Queen of
Summer, longtime enemy of Arlo’s family, and mother of her new friend, Prince Vehan—Arlo finds herself thrust into high-stakes political intrigue and has an unprecedented opportunity to learn alchemy. Meanwhile, mysterious evidence suggests that the work of Hieronymus Aurum was only a small part of a much larger plot. Tension and suspense escalate as the chapters alternate between flashbacks and the perspectives of a cast of predominately White, queer characters with conventionally attractive muscular or thin bodies. A trail of clues tightly intertwines the world’s history with the present conflict between the fae courts, ironborn alchemists, and immortals. The exploration of trauma and recovery is as significant as the overarching fantasy plot. Casual, affirming representation of queerness—as well as of the process of questioning sexuality—adds to the high appeal of the fraught, romantic drama. The villain is deliciously ruthless in her charisma and cruelty.

A ferocious fantasy. (content warnings) (Fantasy. 14-18)
missing—and various points in the past when the group spent time together, a story emerges of a deeply felt but unconvincing camaraderie among the four and romances between Grace and Wesley and Nora and Rand. Grace’s role as the star that holds the other three in her orbit is made clear from the start, though her character isn’t developed deeply enough to make her hold on the others believable. The realistic subplot about Nora’s and Wesley’s strained relationships with both their parents is a poignant one, and it proves more compelling than the central drama. All of the characters are White.

A somewhat engaging but ultimately meandering and uneven story. *(Fiction. 14-18)*

**THE DREAM RUNNERS**  
*Thakrar, Shveta*  
HarperTeen (448 pp.)  
$17.99 | June 28, 2022  
978-0-06-289466-3

Ever since the serpentine nagas fled Prithvi, the human world, to escape from the eaglelike garudas, they’ve used stolen dreams to satisfy their craving for mortal experiences. Seventeen-year-old Tanvi, who is Indian American, was only a child when she was spirited away to Nagalok, a world influenced by Hindu mythology. In exchange for forgetting her most painful memories, she became a dream runner. Each night, she travels to Prithvi to harvest dreams that are sold to naga nobility. The promise of a wish-granting boon, earned according to the quality of the dreams, ensures that Tanvi and her fellow runners remain adequately motivated. Presiding over them is Venkat, a human boy with a rare dreamsmithing ability, who is the adopted son of the naga court historian. Though his role only requires him to assess dreams and parcel out boons, Venkat can’t help feeling concern for the runners, who all eventually suffer burnout. When Tanvi begins behaving oddly, Venkat worries that she has also reached her limit. But the truth is worse: Tanvi is dreaming during her sleep, something no runner should be able to do. The central mystery unfolds in careful layers amid evocative descriptions of Nagalok’s wonders. As the darkness beneath the opulence reveals itself and the threat of garuda invasion intensifies, Venkat and Tanvi must choose between comforting illusions and unpleasant truths in order to save themselves and those they love.

A lush fantasy. *(Fantasy. 13-18)*

**GOTH GIRL, QUEEN OF THE UNIVERSE**  
*Zrull, Lindsay S.*  
North Star Editions (352 pp.)  
$14.99 paper | July 19, 2022  
978-1-63583-078-1

Self-proclaimed goth queen Jess, constantly moving among foster homes, has learned to embrace the label *freak* and keep everyone at arm’s length. Her Instagram fans feel like her only real family—until a woman claiming to be her biological mom reaches out, wanting back into her life. But wards of the state face challenges in securing unsupervised contact with their bio parents, and Jess, who is White, can’t risk getting social services involved and jeopardizing this chance at closure. Enter Oscar, Mexican American cosplay geek extraordinaire. Admiring Jess’ makeup and design skills, he asks her to join his team in competing in a cosplay expo in New York City—where Jess’ bio mom now lives. Determined to reunite with her, Jess agrees despite her initial reservations about cosplay. As she gets more invested in the team, however, Jess must decide whether chasing the dream of the family she once had is worth more than her chosen family. Zrull, whose author bio indicates she was herself a foster kid, delves with remarkable grit and heart into many sensitive issues, including mental health and body positivity. First-person narrator Jess’ voice is a mix of jaded, too-cool-for-school snark and stirring vulnerability, and each supporting character feels like a fully realized, perfectly imperfect individual. Moments of teen angst and triumph are weathered realistically, and the ending provides a welcome sense of closure after the characters’ sometimes-harrowing emotional journeys.

These geeks will warm even the coldest, darkest hearts. *(Fiction. 14-18)*
Teenage twins scour a mesmerizing world to search for their missing grandfather in this debut fantasy/adventure.

Explorer Sir Quidby Forsythe III has made a habit of disappearing. Though he’s been presumed dead before, this time it may actually be true. He’s left behind his 15-year-old grandchildren, Ozzie and Alex, who live in a decommissioned lighthouse off the coast of England. While Sir Quidby’s “pursuit of debunking” has sparked his share of enemies, the twins are still surprised when assassins raid their grandfather’s funeral. Ozzie and Alex find safety aboard the airship Angelus with probable allies who are convinced Sir Quidby is only missing and needs rescuing. He’s likely in the place he regularly explored—the Terrave-num, once part of an immense world with Earth until wars split them apart. The Terrave-num brims with a wide range of creatures, including evil mutant kittens and Layla, an upright, goggles-donning lizard. She helps the twins evade Skhaar the Annihilator, who has a tendency to disembowel subordinates who fail him. What Skhaar—and many others—want is Sir Quidby’s enigmatic journal, which Ozzie and Alex must fight to keep out of villainous hands. Abbott jampacks his delightfully lush series opener with varying species, extraordinary weapons, and curious places, like Aeronoth, a sky city. It’s a lot to take in, especially as the story hits the ground running with the twins stumbling from one frenzied action scene to the next. But the author pulls the reins just enough to further develop the charming protagonists—athletic Alex and nerdy Ozzie. Though violence seems second nature in the Terrave-num, the book is mostly a comedy, from misspoken passwords nearly triggering a “death duel” at a library to goofy, often irrelevant footnotes. The sequel may deliver much more information regarding the twins’ parents’ supposed kidnapping years ago and a powerful baddie whom characters name-drop. The story ends on a stellar cliffhanger.

Appealing heroes and a colorful cast traverse a wonderfully bizarre, uproarious planet.
INDIE | Karen Schechner

QUEER LIT THAT SURPRISES

**WHITE STORKS OF MERCY**
*Book One: Formation*
*Anderson van Berkel, Joni*
Self (345 pp.)
978-0-578-95780-7

Supernatural storks face unexpected obstacles in their quest to unify earthlings in Anderson van Berkel’s debut, which blends fantasy and world history.
Born during the Bronze Age, snowy white stork Zendala has the ability to travel through time. She rescues women of varying eras and lands from certain death, including a queen and a Christian martyr. They’re all recruits for the White Storks of Mercy, supernatural avian creatures whose purpose is bringing peace to the world. Each woman transforms into a stork, but all can change back to humans (in that form, they’re called the Merciful Ones). Zendala confers immortality on them, but that doesn’t make them immune to such things as distrust, which threatens to shatter their unity.
Their greatest menace, however, may be Reba, Zendala’s Siamese cat sister. She blames Zendala for her near death and for splitting “the Mischief Makers,” the rabble-rousing duo of Reba and pharaoh Maatkare Hatshepsut. Reba, who has the power of persuasion, plots revenge against her sister. Her morphing ability excludes bird or human forms, but she befriends a druidess who can help with the latter, giving Reba a new way to make mischief. Anderson van Berkel’s tale is dense with plot and characters. Zendala and Reba, for example, have a complicated history; Reba’s antagonism started when the two shared their stork mother’s egg while surrounded by Egyptian deities. As the author has sequels planned, this book centers on Zendala’s amassing her team and only touches on her “humanitarian mission.” Still, the extensive cast impresses, from apprentice stork Iona to the sisters’ father, Egyptian sun god Re. The story is rich in history as well; the White Storks traverse ever changing countries and bump elbows (or wings) with real-life figures like Joan of Arc and Napoleon. The author rounds out her novel with indelible imagery, such as a sunset that “painted the sky the color of ripe nectarines.”

**SHE WHO RIDES HORSES**
*A Saga of the Ancient Steppe: Book One*
*Barnes, Sarah V.*
Lilith House Press (278 pp.)
$22.95 paper  |  May 1, 2022
978-1-73696-733-1

A teenage girl in ancient times starts a sacred journey to become the first person ever to tame and ride a horse in Barnes’s debut novel.

Within Indieland, we have the good fortune of reviewing lots of starworthy queer lit that ranges widely in genre, scope, and style. Here, we highlight LGBTQ+ fiction with a twist or two. In one novel, queer siblings team up to battle small-town bigotry; another mixes horror, SF, and lesbians in love; and a short story collection recalls the early days of AIDS and its effects on the world of showbiz.

In the 1960s-set *The Moonstone Girls* by Brooke Skipstone (see the review on p. 150), a gay brother and lesbian sister stick together while contending with their homophobic, conservative father in their homophobic, conservative town. Our reviewer says, “Skipstone has delved into a vibrant era of rapidly changing values with empathy and authenticity...The book adeptly captures the zeitgeist of social repression and change that energized the 20th-century counterculture movement.”

Hailey Piper’s *Queen of Teeth* unfolds in the distant future on a planet that is probably Earth, which is home to those who contain multitudes. This sentence sums up a funny, unique novel that’s full of shockers: “When chimera Yolanda ‘Yaya’ Betancourt wakes up one day after a sex romp with a woman named Docia ‘Doc’ Hall, an AlphaBeta Pharmaceutical agent, and discovers teeth between her thighs, she thinks the vagina dentata is nothing to worry about and probably related to her medical history.” The review calls *Queen of Teeth* a “powerful, beautiful horror story.”

Philip Dean Walker’s “tales set fictional and real-life creative figures—drag queens, sitcom stars, Broadway impresarios, movie divas—in the early 1980s, when gay entertainers were emerging from the closet just as the HIV virus was starting to decimate their ranks.” Our reviewer says *Better Davis and Other Stories* is full of “rich, elegiac meditations on art, sex, and death.”

Karen Schechner is the vice president of Kirkus Indie.
In this story set in 4000 B.C.E. in what is now southeastern Europe, Naya is the 14-year-old daughter of Potis, the chief of her clan. She chafes against traditional rules, wishing for the freedom that the boys in her tribe are afforded. An encounter with a wild, red filly which appears to telepathically communicate with her, secures the girl’s belief she's meant for something more—but she must also convince her family. Her grandmother proclaims the quest Naya’s “soul journey,” but Potis is resistant, realizing that the horses could be a source of both great power and great danger. Naya tracks the herd through the grasslands, but just as she finds them, a young nomad named Aytal accidentally impales her with an arrow. Guilt-ridden, Aytal tends to Naya while his father, Oyuun, and younger brother race to find Naya’s clan. Eager to move the clan before winter, Potis agrees to let Aytal and Oyuun watch over the injured girl with Naya’s mother, Sata; in exchange, Aytal’s brother remains with the clan as a hostage. The bulk of the story centers on Naya’s recovery and reconnection with the filly, Aytal’s sacrifices as atonement, and the forbidden feelings Sata and Oyuun start to have for each other. This impeccably detailed novel illuminates Naya’s journey on the ancient Pontic-Caspian steppe. Barnes skillfully develops key relationships in a manner that will make readers invested in the narrative. She also captures the tentativeness of romance and conflicts between traditions and other strong beliefs. As this is the first book of a planned series, some story elements are only hinted at—including a potential overthrow of Potis and Aytal’s punishment—and the book may have benefited from a bit more resolution. Also, the inclusion of 20 pages of supplemental material, showcasing the research that went into this book, seems overly extensive.

An often enjoyable story of a brave girl’s journey with a well-developed setting and characters.

“A lyrical narrative tapestry that expresses a lifetime of love and lament.”

**Nightmares & Miracles**

*Bitting, Michelle*

Two Sylvias Press (119 pp.)

$16.00 paper | April 15, 2022

978-1-948767-16-3

A diverse selection of existential poems that chronicle ongoing emotional journeys.

One of the main themes of this lush tapestry of poetic works is self-examination—peeling back layers of one’s experiences to understand one’s identity and what one can become through that understanding. To that end, the 50 poems in this collection, which won the 2020 Wilder Series Poetry Book Prize, often bare the souls of their speakers. In the powerhouse “Boxing Day,” for example, the speaker remembers finding her alcoholic brother dead in their parents’ house on the day after Christmas, and her regrets are brilliantly symbolized by an image of a “raggedy / home-sewn angel / atop her green and spiky / throne...watching the whole thing unravel.” In “Legacy,” the speaker, who’s now a parent herself, grapples with a painful memory of her mother: “I tried to peel my mother’s words from my head, remove them like tape from the backs of poems I’d pressed to office walls in need of clearing when I left. But another layer of beige paint—stripped.” Other poems in this book address such topics as the era of Donald Trump’s presidency (“Tender Cages”), a son’s post-top surgery (“Through a Window in Winter” and “As He Now Lets Fall”), and the Covid-19 pandemic (“Ghost Campus” and “Sissy Spacek Telekinesis Ain’t Got Nothin’ on a Pandemic,” the latter of which references the bloody 1976 horror film *Carrie*).

One of the most noteworthy aspects of this collection, as a whole, is how the poems subtly blend together images and ideas to create a powerful, cumulative effect. In “Pasiphae,” for example, the title character contemplates having sex with the Cretan Bull and considers what offspring that union could produce: “What rough beast is born of our coupling / will suckle at my breast / swaddled in unraveled leagues / of my sea-like hair.” Much later in the collection, the Minotaur returns, as does the labyrinthine imagery, in the poem “Labyrinth,” which begins with “Here we are at the entrance again.” In “No One Told Me About the Death,” the speaker’s parents perch like birds on the couch on Christmas morning: “Mother fed us pie, father, seeds of grief. / Birds on a couch, a wire, they waited / To feel filled up / With more than pie and seeded grief. / We ate ourselves in silence.” That imagery of birds feeding their young is effectively revisited in “Stilled Life,” in which the speaker and her two brothers—both suicides—are likened to baby birds: “We learned to open wide and swallow it all—liquor, pills, the barrel of a gun, when it came to that.” As the collection goes on, these connections contribute to its three-dimensional, immersive quality, which readers may liken to experiencing a sprawling art exhibit. And, like the works of visual art in such exhibits, these poems, and their kaleidoscopic images, will resonate with readers for a long time after they’ve closed the book.

A lyrical narrative tapestry that expresses a lifetime of love and lament.

**The Million Dollar Man**

*Jack Dempsey*

Brennan, Thomas

Regent Press (288 pp.)

$35.00 | $19.95 paper | Oct. 1, 2017

978-1-58790-613-8

978-1-58790-401-1 paper

A biography argues for a heavyweight champion’s iconoclastic status. The Roaring ’20s are still renowned as a time of splendor and excess, and no figure better exemplifies this than Jack Dempsey, the greatest athlete of the time. “Jack Dempsey is America’s first mega sports hero,” writes Brennan in his introduction. “His style of boxing had never been seen before in the annals of pugilism. Dempsey ushered in the modern era of boxing. He single-handedly brought shock and awe to the sport of boxing like no one before or since.” With this book, the author traces the rise of Dempsey from his hardscrabble origins as a
runaway and copper miner to his celebrity status and eventual enshrinement as one of the greatest boxers in history. The so-called “Manassa Mauler” was known for his especially ferocious offense in the ring, which won him an exceptional percentage of knockouts. Brennan is particularly interested in Dempsey’s five unprecedented “million-dollar gate” fights—matches in which ticket sales totaled at least $1 million—against Georges Carpentier, Luis Firpo, Jack Sharkey, and Gene Tunney (twice). Along the way, the author documents the extent to which Dempsey captured the popular imagination of the time, bringing out 1920s legends like Harry Houdini, Babe Ruth, Damon Runyon, and Lucky Luciano to see him box. The author’s prose does not unearth much that was previously unknown about Dempsey’s importance outside of his skills in the ring. As such, the book resembles a fairly typical sports biography. But the author succeeds in painting an evocative portrait of Dempsey’s milieu. The fighter’s journey from the dusty periphery of the West to the canvas of Madison Square Garden is a classic tale of grit and blood. A solid, well-illustrated lesson about social relationships.

A dog-rescuing second grader struggles with her self-esteem when a big kid mocks her new winter wear in Cameron’s debut illustrated chapter book.

Lissy is excited about her new winter coat, which she bought from her favorite store. She’s sure that her friends will be wowed by her fashion prowess. But when third grader Jett yells out that her coat looks like “chicken feathers,” she decides never to wear it again—she’ll just suffer the cold Texas weather in her hoodie. When Lissy and her dad discover a lost dog at the park, it’s just the latest in a series of canine assists for the youngster: “She was practically a professional dog rescuer, even though she had never officially been paid for her services.” When it turns out that the dog’s owner is Jett, she finds herself experiencing a mix of emotions. She wears her beautiful new coat while returning the pet, determined to stand up to Jett’s ridicule—but what happens next exceeds Lissy’s expectations. Cameron uses short chapters with accessible vocabulary designed for young, independent readers. DuBar’s grayscale cartoon illustrations enhance every scene they accompany and will make the text density feel more approachable for reluctant readers. The drawings communicate Lissy’s natural pizzazz as well as her emotional dilemmas. Lissy’s fashion sense (which is sure to appeal to readers graduating from Fancy Nancy books) and her animal advocacy are core parts of her personality; however, readers may wonder why they don’t find out anything about Lissy’s own dogs (present in illustrations but unmentioned in text) until the canine rescue, midway through the book. Although the prose has some clunky moments, including odd tense shifts and occasional punctuation errors, Lissy’s determination and her decision not to let teasing keep her down smooth over any awkwardness. Cameron’s conclusion effectively humanizes Jett and Lissy in a way that an account of simple revenge wouldn’t have, and the choices that lead to the final pages offer adults conversation starters on ways to deal with teasing.

An engaging and passionately told account of one of America’s earliest sports superstars.

UNSTOPPABLE
Forging the Path to Motherhood in the Early Days of IVF

Casey, Ellen Weir
River Grove Books (232 pp.)

In a heartfelt debut memoir, a Colorado kindergarten teacher tells of her determination to conceive a child in spite of an infertility diagnosis. In 1979, Casey and her husband, Peter, were both 29 years old when she received the unwelcome news that blockage of her fallopian tubes would make it impossible for her to become pregnant. She traced the problem back to a uterine infection five years before—a complication that occurred after the implantation of an experimental contraceptive intrauterine device. At first, her doctors were sanguine; the tubes might just “pop open,” they said, with a small amount of very painful pressure. Failing that, a simple surgery would doubtless fix the problem, they asserted. Driven by a deep desire to bear and raise a child, Casey underwent eight surgeries in four years. Along the way, she faced insensitivity from physicians and friends and repeatedly endured what she calls the “knee-buckling agony of loss” as each attempt to open the blocked tubes failed; other options, such as adoption, also remained out of reach. Finally, a sympathetic doctor and an emerging field of medical technology offered the author the life and family she sought; she was approved for participation in an experimental in vitro fertilization program, and she became the mother of “Colorado’s first test-tube baby.” Casey’s narrative is intimate and revealing, and she effectively conveys her personal struggle, which included feelings of guilt and anguish over her inability to conceive through traditional methods. The text is further enriched by the author’s regular placement of informative sidebars on such topics as the history of birth control, ectopic pregnancy, and
surviving the loss of a pregnancy. Overall, she recounts her story with frankness and vulnerability, catching the reader up in her story despite the fact that its outcome is revealed at the beginning.

An emotional and educational account of one woman’s journey toward motherhood.

AN EMBARRASSMENT OF ITCHES

Dean, M.K.
Independently Published (380 pp.)
979–8-454866–36–5

A small-town veterinarian practicing near the Virginia–North Carolina border makes a house call and discovers the lifeless body of one of her human clients in Dean’s series-starting mystery.

Readers meet 39-year-old veterinarian Dr. Ginny Reese as she’s administering deworming medication to Dolly, a ball python currently wrapped around her torso. It’s just the start of her eventful day; her next stop is a visit to local resident Amanda Kelly’s home, with its breathtaking view of the Blue Ridge Mountains, to begin treatment for her cantankerous Siamese cat Ming’s hyperthyroidism. Amanda, a successful artist, is both a client and a friend; unfortunately, as Ginny discovers, she’s also deceased—lying at the bottom of her swimming pool. Ginny, a weak swimmer, jumps into the water fully clothed in a futile attempt to save her, almost drowning herself in the process. Fortunately, her 90-pound German shepherd, Remington, is there to pull her to the shallow end. When the police arrive, Ginny discovers to her dismay that the new sheriff is Joe Donegan, her former high school boyfriend, who left her—and her 10-year-old son, Matthew—behind after she was shot in the head by someone he knew. Now his best friend, Ledge Carver, runs the company, and Formula Media performs research for the International Department of Defense—something Bill never wanted. Ledge has also discovered that the man, who’s wearing a red ringer for Bill; even Jill, the lens wearers’ AI assistant, notes that James’ “psychic residue” is familiar. When Ledge is called to Washington, D.C., to speak with representatives of the Department of Defense, James visits Molly and Matthew at home. The boy has been emotionally distant since his father’s death, not quite believing that his dad is in heaven. James knows that Matthew sneaked into his father’s lab two years ago and stole special lenses that can cut through government security protocols. Meanwhile, Ledge learns that two mysterious domes have appeared near the Earth’s poles. Could they be connected to magnetic storms that are rendering the world uninhabitable?

A well-paced and entertaining series opener with a healthy mix of humor and political intrigue, despite occasional duplicate phrases, which might have been caught by a stronger edit. Animal lovers will appreciate Dean’s knowledgeable, affectionate descriptions of Ginny’s interactions with her furry patients.

A well-paced and entertaining series opener with an appealing protagonist.
book’s overall structure—essentially a grave, twisty murder mystery—may also remind comic-book fans of Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’ 1980s classic *Watchmen*.

A fun, socially conscious graphic novel that keeps both eyes on the near future.

**KILLER TIME**
*Edwards, Bill*
FriesenPress (324 pp.)
Nov. 10, 2021
978-1-03-912880-4
978-1-03-912879-8 paper

In this debut novel, a series of baffling murders and mysterious threats leads three men on a quest for the truth.

In April 1987, life is routine and uneventful for Ed Underwood of Providence, Rhode Island. The personnel director for Barton Jewelry, Ed enjoys spending time with his girlfriend, Liz Reynolds, and practicing karate. When Henry Cohen, president of Barton Jewelry, receives a series of cryptic notes threatening payback, he asks Ed, who was a psychology major at Wesleyan, to review them and let him know if they are a prank or something more serious. Meanwhile, Mike Langan of the Providence Police Department is perplexed by the brutal and random killings of a man leaving a bar and a clerk working at an all-night donut shop. These murders attract the attention of Stan Osiewicz, a police reporter for the *Providence Journal-Bulletin*. Osiewicz initially suspects that the clerk’s murder may be Mafia-related, and his stories strongly suggest an organized crime angle until he receives anonymous letters indicating the deaths are connected to Barton Jewelry. As the murder investigations intensify, the danger hits close to home for Ed. He discovers that in a case this complex, everyone is a suspect, even Ed himself. Edwards’ tale is a taut and absorbing mystery that successfully weaves together several well-developed stories that unfold with calculated precision. At the center of the action is Ed, a mild-mannered man whose life is turned upside down when his employer's business is threatened.

The author does a fine job of developing Ed’s life outside work, including his relationship with Liz and his friendship with his sensei at the karate dojo, without losing the focus on the tale’s central mysteries. Langan and Osiewicz are similarly well drawn and would make compelling protagonists in future mysteries.

The narrative is fast-paced and nuanced, with the perspectives in each chapter shifting among Ed, Langan, and Osiewicz as well as Lou DiNova, the head of the New England branch of the Mafia, a man concerned that he could be implicated in the unsolved murders.

A satisfyingly twisty thriller from a promising new voice in crime fiction.

**SOPHIE WASHINGTON**
*Lemonade Day*
*Ellis, Tanya Duncan*
Page Turner Publishing (158 pp.)
July 19, 2021
978-1-73533-895-8
978-1-73533-893-4 paper

A young girl faces a few hitches when she launches a lemonade business with friends.

National Lemonade Day is approaching, and Black sixth grader Sophie and her diverse group of friends are certain that they can earn some serious cash in their Houston school’s lemonade stand competition. With Sophie’s mom, a consultant for women entrepreneurs, volunteering to act as their mentor and dentist dad helping them construct a whiz-bang lemonade stand, the friends decide to give a portion of their expected profits to the local animal shelter. To maximize their fundraising potential, Sophie plans to wow customers with her grandmother’s lemonade recipes; Carly will bake cookies; fashionista Chloe will decorate the stand; Nathan will create a financial spreadsheet and get his dad to act as sponsor; and Sophie’s artistic little brother, Cole, will make posters. If only jokester Cole doesn’t get in the way of their success—and if only Sophie’s crush on popular Toby doesn’t make “class brainiac” Nathan feel unwelcome.

In this chapter book, the 12th in author Ellis’ Sophie Washington series, messages of teamwork, empathy, and creative thinking are woven seamlessly into the story as Sophie and her friends pull together for a common goal.

(Ellis also has her young cast model contingency planning: If they aren’t permitted to bring a few of the shelter dogs to the on-campus Lemonade Day in hopes of getting them adopted, they will encourage interest with a photo display.) Sophie’s struggle with sibling rivalry rings true (she appreciates Cole’s artistic talent but feels he is Mom’s favorite), and so does her reaction to others getting credit that she feels she deserves. Significantly, too, Sophie learns that character counts more than popularity as she sees Toby’s true colors, works through her discomfort in realizing that she has hurt Nathan’s feelings with a thoughtless remark, and makes an effort to put it right.

A fun mix of healthy messages and appealing tween characters in relatable situations.
THE WAYMAKERS
Clearing the Path to Workplace Equity With Competence and Confidence
Frank, Tara Jaye
Amplify Publishing (272 pp.)
978-1-63755-180-6

A consultant urges businesspeople to embrace equity in the workplace.

In this powerful, passionate book, Frank laments the tendency of many executives to equate “niceness with fairness.” Instead, she writes, they should strive to be “waymakers”: leaders who “make a way for other people” to find real success. She draws on her personal experiences as a Black woman in corporate America and her subsequent leadership coaching role as she notes the many advantages of equitable workplaces. Early chapters concentrate on how to assess a company’s current culture and, in so doing, learn to face “hard truths.” Throughout, the author offers salient, sobering observations that are relevant to larger societal issues, as when she notes that “We look for signs of dissent before we look for signs of agreement, and as human nature would have it, we usually find exactly what we’re looking for.” Still, she reassures readers that “Anyone can be the kind of leader who makes a way for others, if they want to be.” Most importantly, Frank provides clear, concrete strategies and tools for her goal of waymaking, pointing out “four roadblocks that have the most profound effect on the underrepresented employee experience,” for example, and four positive “business and culture outcomes” that can result from fair and equitable practices. Frank’s convincing argument presents a well-balanced blend of big-picture thinking and granular, practical advice, with references to the works of others, including Malcolm Gladwell and Soraya Chemaly, and examples from her own experience and other sources. She makes a compelling case that a leader who’s sensitive to workplace equity issues is a better leader in other areas, since such sensitivity requires such things as transparency, collaboration, and humility. Frank also points out the larger goal of such a proactive executive: “If we make the system work better for marginalized talent, we make it work better for everyone.”

A timely and profound dissertation on equity and leadership.

THE NOSFERATU CONSPIRACY
Book Two: The Sommelier
Gage, Brian James
Self (654 pp.)
$6.99 e-book | March 20, 2022

A supernatural rivalry fuels World War I in this alternative-history sequel. Vampire attacks have ravaged St. Petersburg and gutted the Russian royal family. An ancient castle has reappeared on a German mountaintop, and a coven of demon worshippers has just resurrected an entity known as the Death Witch in the body of a teenage girl. Germany’s Kaiser Wilhelm II is desperately seeking a small bottle of blood—so frantically, in fact, that he was willing to orchestrate the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand rather than let his rival find it before he did. (The ghost of the archduke now haunts the Kaiser as an act of posthumous revenge.) The blood belongs to none other than the famous medieval warlock Vlad Draculea, and the Kaiser believes it will grant immortality to him and his mistress. The bottle is currently in the possession of Vlad’s younger brother, Radu cel Frumos, an immortal witch hunter who has survived the intervening centuries using a series of false identities, the latest of which is the Sommelier. The only things standing in the way of the Kaiser and the domination of Europe by a cabal of diabolical forces are the Russian vampire hunters Prince Felix Yusupov and Rurik Kozlov, who recently helped prevent great devastation in Russia. A clash is coming, and it will happen in the vicinity of the French city of Arras. Gage excels at unsettling readers through his sharp, startling imagery: “The sound of animal hooves and snorting filled the room, followed by a loud bang. Felix looked up and was astonished to see the officer being gored against the wall by a large boar with sharp tusks. The man looked panicked and surprised as he slid down the wall, finally falling unconscious.” The story takes a while to get rolling, leading with a lot of complex mythology that at times feels weighty or silly. But once things begin in earnest, the tale proves an immersive and monster-filled epic. It turns out the only thing scarier than the vampires and demons is World War I itself.

A tangled but rich horror story that imagines a secret occult history of Europe.

A BOY’S HAMMER
Grass, Alex
Dickinson Publishing Group (618 pp.)
$13.99 paper | $0.99 e-book | Jan. 4, 2022
978-1-73588-854-5

Grass’ audacious mix of dark fantasy, horror, apocalyptic fiction, and Finnish folklore pits a lost boy against a mythic goddess of death who is trying to remake the world in her dark vision.
A fast-paced, funny, and ultimately enchanting story of a little girl’s adventures in small-town America.

“A CRACK IN THE TEACUP

The further adventures of mischievous young Celia Canterberry.

This follow-up to Hoff’s delightful The Canterberry Tales (2021) returns readers to the long-ago world of Happy Valley and to the adventures of its foremost little citizen, 8-year-old Celia Canterberry, who was dropped off by her unknown parents at birth and raised by her long-suffering Nan. Celia’s uproarious misadventures have made her so infamous that she’s the subject of her own comic strip in the Happy Valley Journal; she’s a living cautionary tale for her babysitter, Old Lady Griggs; her teachers at the Happy Valley School for Reluctant Children; and all her fellow grade schoolers. As this new adventure opens, Celia is preparing for her first day of second grade when she gets dire news. Her hated first grade teacher, Miss Dobbs, has had a job switch: She’s now going to be teaching second grade. And this time around, there are far more serious matters brewing, like the fact that Nan has auctioned off her house to Griggs, who’s now charging her rent to live in her own home. And Doc Marley is threatened by a new competitor, Dr. Whitford (his motto: “I’ll Only Touch You When I Have To.”). And a complicated relationship seems to be developing between Miss Dobbs and Oswald Elliot, the publisher of the Happy Valley Journal. Watching and commenting wryly on all of this is Celia, brought wonderfully to life with a pitch-perfect blend of childlike innocence and Mark Twain–style fabulist humor. Hoff very intentionally crafts the events of her narrative in the soft glow of nostalgia, not only for the sweet simplicity of childhood, but also for the comparative innocence of small-town life half a century ago. She writes Celia in a deft register right between those two sentiments: sharp as an adult but with the hilarious viewpoints and priorities of a child.

A fast-paced, funny, and ultimately enchanting story of a little girl’s adventures in small-town America.

WINGS FOREVER

The True Story of Donn Deisenroth: American WWII Fighter Pilot

Kay, Verla
Self (146 pp.)
$17.95 paper | Nov. 1, 2021
978-0-977952-2-0

A biography of World War II fighter pilot Donn Deisenroth, written by his daughter.

Kay offers a nonfiction work about her father’s life before, during, and after World War II, in which he fought as a pilot in
North Africa and Italy. It draws extensively from his personal “War Log” as well as “newspaper clippings, books, flight training ‘yearbooks,’ and photographs,” which were discovered only after both of her parents were deceased. The resulting account puts readers right into the chaos of a war in which communication was relatively primitive and short bursts of aerial dogfights were followed by long stretches of restless boredom in the North African heat. There were some scary moments: “When I landed the other day my nose wheel fell off,” Deisenroth recounts in a 1943 letter; later, he wrote that he went on a “dive-bombing mission...and got jumped by eight ME109s. Have never been so scared in all my life.” While flying into Italy later that year, Deisenroth nearly died in an aerial attack: “They shot my ship to ribbons.” He was captured first by Italian soldiers, escaped, and then was captured by German soldiers. As a prisoner of war for nearly 19 months in a prison camp in Barth, Germany, he bunked in a room with up to 10 other American officers; they tried and failed to create an escape tunnel and were eventually released after the surrender of the Axis powers. Some of the book’s most engaging moments lie in Kay’s research, which contextualizes her late father’s journals and letters about his experiences with informative footnotes such as “Approximately half of all of the US military pilots who fought in WWII received their initial flight training in Stearman PT-13 Kaydet biplanes.” She also provides revealing details of social mores of early 1940s America, as when Kay’s mother, Norma, “was invited to play the violin in the Sacramento Symphony Orchestra...but she turned down that job offer so she could marry Donn.”

An educational account of an American pilot’s experiences.

THE MONSTER HOTEL
Kibbe, Mark & Susan Kibbe
Illus. by Lianna Witherspoon
Self (27 pp.)
$4.95 e-book | Aug. 17, 2020

A crow takes readers on a tour of a monster-filled hotel in Mark Kibbe and Susan Kibbe’s rhyming picture book.

On “Hallows of Eve,” a top hat- and bow tie–wearing crow named Old Carnie guides readers through the Monster Hotel, a decrepit old dwelling that may remind some readers of the Victorian home of TV’s Addams family. Though the place is dark, filled with cobwebs and dust, and “smells like gym socks,” it’s a coveted year-round destination for spooky guests, including monsters, trolls, mummies, and more. Although these creatures have a blast at the hotel, Old Carnie warns that human visitors should stay away, explaining that the Monster Hotel guests “have never seen children” before and would be frightened: “They would jump out of windows and climb under chairs.” However, the crow muses that maybe, just maybe, on Halloween night: “If you dress like a monster and your costume is right, you can visit the Monster Hotel in disguise.” Children will enjoy following Old Carnie’s rhyming descriptions of the quirky happenings at an atmospheric place: “The doors are all broken; there are weeds for a lawn. The tree in the yard is all shriveled and black.” The spooky characters are more friendly than scary—even the skeletons smile—making the story suitable for young readers. Witherspoon’s full-color illustrations offer cartoonish depictions of the Monster Hotel’s amusing scenes, such as the snoozing Vlad the vampire wearing an eye mask. The book also has goblins swimming in the hotel pool, trolls playing chess, and singing and dancing ghosts.

A fun and festive Halloween story.

HEROES OF TIME LEGENDS
Murdoch’s Choice
Kramer, Wayne D.
Heroes of Time Productions (312 pp.)
$24.43 | $17.99 paper | $0.99 e-book
Aug. 11, 2021
978-1-955997-30-0

An adventurous fantasy series starter that follows a captain and his crew as they search for the fabled Grimstone.

In the year 3203, in the kingdom of Tuscawny, Capt. Zale “The Gale” Murdoch is incredibly close to reaching a level of mastery in his seafaring guild, which would allow him to semiretire. Then the bar for mastery is raised again, so Zale is eager to take on something big—something guaranteed to make him a lot of money. Nobleman Vidimir Tefu has a mission, but it doesn’t seem promising at first; he wishes Zale to hunt down the mysterious and powerful Grimstone, which Zale isn’t even sure exists. Zale’s new healer tells him about the stone’s legendary power—and how Zale’s family name is attached to it, which changes his view of the assignment. After his ship is nearly destroyed by magical fire, he and his crew are forced to set sail earlier than planned, but he’s more determined than ever to find the stone. Then Zale’s semi-estranged teenage daughter, Starlina, is found onboard despite the fact that she loathes the sea; she’s enmored with a member of his colorful crew and ended up on the craft by accident. Her presence adds an unexpected element to what proves to be quite an adventure. Kramer’s introductory installment to a new series is set in another time and another world, and the necessity of describing these things means that the narrative can get bogged down in details of the setting and its history; the introductions of the various crew members, as well as the backstory of the Grimstone, may also overload casual readers. Others, however, will enjoy the feeling of immersion in a complex setting with well-developed characters. Once the search begins in earnest, however, the story moves at a quick, steady pace and becomes more enjoyable to read. The novel also includes maps of relevant places and a diagram of Zale’s ship, both of which prove useful.

A somewhat dense but ultimately enjoyable questing tale.
“An edifying and humanizing peek into the life of a reporter.”

MORE AFTER THE BREAK

TOOFER & THE GIBLET
LeBlanc, Paulette
Illus. by Dmitry Morozov
Dragon Horse Publishing (94 pp.)
$18.99 | Dec. 9, 2021
979-8-985150-70-4

Two mice embark on a series of misadventures in this chapter book.
Best friends Toofer and The Giblet live together in Humble Tree, which stands somewhere in sprightly, forested Nimblewood. The mice get along well despite their opposite personalities; Toofer is a homebody, while The Giblet yearns for adventure in the great outdoors. Though they don’t venture much farther than Nimblewood, they still find plenty of action. The Giblet, for example, wants to try his paw at swinging through trees after seeing “silly little monkey” Finnegan Flynn glide so effortlessly. But even on quiet days in the woods, The Giblet is such a ham that he keeps things lively. When he finds a new hat, he struts through Nimblewood, positive that everyone will stop to admire and compliment it. He’s also certain that all the animals will show up for his birthday bash, the one Toofer must be secretly planning. They claim they’re getting ready for the River Races, but surely that’s a ruse so as not to spoil a surprise party, right? Through all of The Giblet’s escapades, Toofer stays a loyal chum who keeps him grounded—sometimes literally as the mouse is prone to climbing trees much higher than he should. The two friends are surrounded by amiable animal neighbors, from Miss Molly the motherly goose and the often feuding tree frog brothers Felipe and Thaddeus to Arthur the mole, whose calm temperament matches Toofer’s. Their everyday lives make Nimblewood a homey place chock-full of stories.

LeBlanc’s endlessly fun children’s book features a winsome cast, starting with the titular pals. It’s clear that his roommate’s shenanigans exhaust Toofer, but he’s never mean and always accommodating. The rest of the cast comprises an array of animals; there’s Jack the brush-tailed rock-wallaby, who plans to take over the world, as well as the ant kingdom that serves “gracious and honorable” Queen Sofie. There are likewise copious jokes that readers will glean. For example, The Giblet fancies a jar of marbles mostly because Grace the squirrel has her eyes on it, but he learns a selfless gift can be an even more prized possession. Though each of the volume’s chapters has a self-contained story, the tales are all part of one cohesive world. Supporting characters pop up throughout the work, as do recurring jokes, like Toofer’s complaints about his consistently messy housemate. LeBlanc aims this smart book at intermediate readers, and spry, entertaining dialogue harmonizes with lyrical details: “They stood at the water’s edge, and The Giblet bent forward, taking in the view of himself mirrored in the moonlit river.” Morozov’s cozy, watercolor illustrations sublimely capture the animals and their forest homes. The artwork is just as irresistible as the characters, such as Finnegan’s donning goggles on his furry head and Miss Molly’s leading her tiny goslings to the beach. Luckily, the author promises there will be more stories about the two fetching heroes and their friendly neighbors.

Charming animal tales starring captivating characters.

MORE AFTER THE BREAK
A Reporter Returns to Ten Unforgettable News Stories
Maxfield, Jen
Greenleaf Book Group Press (256 pp.)
$26.95 | July 12, 2022
978-1-62634-960-5

Maxfield recollects the travails and triumphs, as well the moral challenges, of her work.

A reporter with experience covering news in both her home state of New Jersey and beyond, Maxfield is a seasoned veteran of the industry. She graduated from Columbia Journalism School and taught there as an adjunct professor and has worked for CNN. At the heart of journalistic practice is improvisation in the face of the unexpected, a key theme in this heartfelt memoir. She reflects with admirable candor on her diverse experiences, recollected in 10 vignettes that reflect on professional and personal dimensions of being a journalist. She discusses covering national news, like Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, and smaller but equally poignant stories, like that of Yarelis Bonilla. Yarelis, a 5-year-old girl, had leukemia and was in dire need of a bone marrow transplant. The only viable candidate, her sister, Gisselle, lived in San Salvador and had great difficulty obtaining permission to enter the United States. Maxfield is impressively forthcoming about her own foibles. She charmingly calls a nightmare about her work a “newsmare”—and furnishes examples of her mistakes, including ones that resulted in some harm for those she interviewed. She reflects sincerely on her right to interject herself uninvited into the lives of those about whom she reports: “Did they resent that I monopolized the time after a trauma when they should have been comforted by family and friends? Did they wish that their family’s struggle had been kept private? Did they feel they didn’t have a choice when I came knocking at the door?” Her answer—that such intrusions are justified because they “inspire introspection in our viewers”—is not a searching or plausible one and won’t likely be convincing to a public increasingly hostile to journalism as a profession. However, this memoir remains an edifying and humanizing peek into the life of a reporter.

An instructive, illuminating tableau of a reporter’s mission.

MERLIN’S APPRENTICE
The Mage
McCayley, Susan
Celtic Sea (180 pp.)
978-1-951069-16-2

A young mage sees his family enslaved and joins King Arthur’s fight against evil.

In this dynamic fantasy series opener for middle-grade readers, Mordred of Arthurian legend is recast as the sinister king of northern Britain. He decrees that all “ordinarius,” or
Mallory lost his parents to a car accident. Now 16 years old, Mordred’s mages in his upcoming war against King Arthur in the south. Village Pip Gwynhoed, 12, is the only one in his family with magical abilities. He wants to stay with his relatives, but when they are separated on the auction block—realistically depicted—Pip loses control of his untapped gift. Drawn to Pip’s raw power, Merlin appears, takes him as his apprentice, and buys the boy’s mother and sister, freeing them all for a perilous journey to join Arthur in advance of Mordred’s forces. When Pip’s mother and sister are brutally taken by bandits along the way, the tween’s desperate attempt to find them threatens his own life. With vivid scene-setting, McCauley expertly draws readers into a perilous, sometimes ruthless world as experienced through the eyes of a boy consumed by guilt and grief over his family’s plight and the uncertainty about who he is becoming. Pip is haunted by ravens that twist “in the sky, their wings nearly blacking out the pale winter sun.” He sees Arthur’s “massive hill fortress” with wooden battlements reaching “like fingers into the sky.” It may be a predictable trope that Pip is seemingly central to a prophecy—he does, after all, carry a powerful runestone passed down from his magus grandfather—but there is no loss of authenticity in the protagonist’s character development. Pip’s struggle to rise above his personal anguish to fight for all who suffer under wicked Mordred’s cruelty rings true. But the author ups the stakes and sets the stage for the sequel when it appears that Pip may pay a high price for Arthur’s solution to preventing others from seizing magical power.

A deft twist on familiar source material and a tween hero’s relatable struggle with destiny.

THE TIME TRIALS
McConnell, Jon & Dayna McConnell
Tiny Fox Press (330 pp.)
$24.96 | $14.09 paper | $3.31 e-book
Sept. 21, 2021
978-1-946501-69-1
978-1-946501-34-9 paper

In this YA novel, four disparate schoolmates must team up to survive a deadly contest involving time traveling.

A few years have passed since Finn Mallory lost his parents to a car accident. Now 16 years old, Finn is on full scholarship at an elite boarding school. Most of his fellow students look down on him. One exception is the school’s social queen, Everly Caldwell, who is also an orphan. Unfortunately, Finn mistakes her friendliness for ridicule and rebuffs her overtures—a self-sabotage that recurs throughout the story. Finn and Everly are soon thrown together as part of the school’s Young Historians Club, an extracurricular group run by the girl’s grandfather. There are only two other members: confident go-getter Valerie Konrad and Finn’s high-functioning autistic roommate, Edison Pellegrin. Together, the Young Historians will compete in the Time Trials—a secretive contest that sees teams from four schools travel back in time and interact with history. The past itself cannot be changed, yet the trials are not without risk to the participants. Injury is entirely possible—even death. Can Finn come to terms with his own inner demons, or will the trials be his undoing? The McConnells, a husband-and-wife team, structure an engaging, third-person narrative, primarily from Finn’s point of view but occasionally moving to that of one of the other protagonists. The prose is polished and the dialogue unobtrusive, allowing the characters to stand out. The authors present an unusual take on time travel and causality. The trials’ organizers (the voyeuristic, coldhearted timekeepers) offer plenty of intrigue along with steampunk vibes, while the central tenet—that history is inviolable save for how it affects the individual—is a master stroke, especially when combined with issues of teenage trauma and self-esteem. In bringing these themes to light, grunge guitar-playing Finn is a natural viewpoint character. At times, he fluctuates too wildly and quickly toward self-defeatism, but this is representative of a more general heightening of character traits. (The exaggeration is more evident in some players than others.) Though well executed thematically, the book’s ending is too abrupt. Nonetheless, adolescent readers will love the journey and thrill at the prospect of a sequel.

A resonant blend of teen drama and SF adventure.

ROOTS & BRANCHES
A Family Saga Like No Other
Meguid, Michael M.
M3 Scientific Media (348 pp.)
978-0-9992988-5-5

A surgeon recalls his family history and remembers growing up in Egypt, Germany, and England in this debut memoir.

Meguid begins his story in 2009 by describing a fraught airport transfer in New York City when he suffered a cardiac episode while riding in a taxi. The prospect of dying compelled him to recount his ancestral past for the benefit of his children. The autobiography steps back in time to 1905 to recall his paternal grandfather in the village of Beni Harem, Upper Egypt, and relate how his father was sold into bondage. The author swiftly goes on to tell how his father later won a scholarship to a teacher training school in England, where he met Meguid’s mother, a German au pair. They married, and the author was born in Cairo in 1944, to the distaste of his jealous older sister. The siblings were then sent to postwar Hamburg to live with their maternal grandparents before reuniting with their parents in Manchester, then returning to Cairo. Meguid recalls coping with the death of his father at age 11 and attending school in England again at 16 to avoid conscription. The second installment of his memoir, Mastering the Knife (2021), about the author’s medical student years, is narrated in a cold, detached matter. This volume, which includes family photographs, begins in a similar vein, highlighting Meguid’s often tedious obsession with precision: “We have 175 minutes to get from Newark to JFK.” But when he begins
“Mossman renders the punks, criminals, and parishioners of Blackpool with affection and humor.”

OLD SCHOOL PUNK

In addition, the author’s descriptions teem with vivid details, including one man’s big nose; thick, multicolored hair; and badly shaven face of “little nicks and cuts.” A compelling collection of tales that delight and enlighten.

FIRE IN THE NIGHT & OTHER STORIES

Morgan, Dick
AuthorHouse (350 pp.)
Aug. 9, 2021
978-1-66553-272-3
978-1-66553-273-0 paper

Lonely people search for peace and stability in this volume of fictional and true stories.

Spc. Vincent Parker and his fellow National Guard members get lost in rainy Vancouver in Washington state in this book’s title novella. The Guard had failed to control a civil demonstration, which became a riot and “a war of independence” against the authorities. The soldiers later stumble on a cabin apparently owned by street preacher John Monk, whose accidental death may have sparked the riot. Signs of Monk’s messages of tranquility fill the cabin, both haunt and inspire Parker, who’s tormented by the memory of a civilian he fatally shot. The opening tale, “May Eleventh,” also features a soldier—the author himself. In 1970, he was a Navy veteran at Portland State University in Oregon. Although he saw no combat in Vietnam, he witnessed the campus war protests turning violent not long after the Kent State shootings. The collection’s stories showcase literal and figurative loners. For example, Morgan’s home porch repair project in “Before the Rains Come” involved work he handled solo despite an escalating sickness and the fact that he lacked the skills his carpenter father had wielded. Others, like Parker, feel alone even when surrounded by people. The author aptly ties his profound tales together; Fire in the Night, which concludes the book, features entertaining nods to earlier stories. But the collection is occasionally repetitive; nearly every protagonist is a writer or an aspiring author. And “Rains” mirrors another tale, “The Sound Garden”—a hefty backyard project for a not-so-skilled Morgan. Still, myriad highlights brighten the pages, such as “Vido’s Stone.” In this memorable fable, reclusive sculptor Vido allows art student Giovine to watch him work. But Vido’s surprisingly unhurried progress repeatedly tests Giovine’s patience.

to describe his childhood in Egypt, his writing becomes supple and evocative: “I could see the white ibises noisily nesting in the neighboring eucalyptus trees. When they ignored my hoots, I would throw a shoe at them and a few flew away.” He also keenly pinpoints and explains his emotions, offering moving commentary on his father’s absence: “I wanted my father’s touch, the once familiar scent of his skin, his mere presence to hold my hand.” One criticism would be that the author glosses over the period when his father was sold as a child—events readers would be eager to learn more about. Yet mapped against the political turbulence of the era, the expressive memoir powerfully captures Meguid’s shift from a childhood punctuated with uncertainty to the bolstered confidence of adolescence.

A frank and richly described account of a surgeon’s childhood.
JUST A KID FROM MAINE
Mulligan, Matthew & Stephanie Mulligan
Illus. by Rick Parker
McSea Books (42 pp.)
$17.95 | Jan. 18, 2022
978-1-954277-08-3

In this picture-book autobiography co-authored with Stephanie Mulligan, Matthew Mulligan describes becoming a professional football player.

Growing up in a small Maine town, Matthew excels at sports and aims to “be the star of a big-league” team. He plays basketball at Husson University until a coach asks him to try football. Matthew hasn’t played football but agrees to try it. It turns out he’s a natural. He transfers to the University of Maine, spends a year “perfecting his technique,” and plays for the school’s team. Following dedicated training, he eventually becomes a tight end in the NFL, where he plays for “millions of fans.” Delighting his family and friends, Matthew sets a record as the only “Mainer… in the NFL to date…to catch a touchdown pass.” The book encourages readers to pursue their passions, courageously try new things, and acknowledge “where you came from” and who helped along the way. Featuring simple but effective language and short sentences, this fast-paced read depicts Matthew’s journey in a compelling, kid-friendly way. Parker’s comic-book illustrations feature bright colors and lifelike imagery. Spreads incorporate speech and thought bubbles, supplementing the story’s breezy, approachable narration.

A motivating, personal account of an NFL star.

MURDER IN THE MASTER
Murray, Judy L.
Level Best Books (270 pp.)
978-1-68512-008-5

A gruesome discovery turns a Maryland realtor into a sleuth in Murray’s series-starting mystery.

Realtor and detective-story enthusiast Helen Morrissey finds herself in a quandary when she discovers a body in the bedroom of a property she’s showing to clients: “One glance at the bluish cast around his lips and the vacant, staring eyes” and Helen knows the corpse is that of “top dog” housing developer Al Capelli. What makes it even more upsetting is that Helen knows that her best friend and fellow realtor, Susan Edwards, was having an affair with the dead man, who was married. Helen puts her love of whodunits featuring such sleuths as Jane Marple, Trixie Belden, and Nancy Drew to good use as she agrees to assist “rather hunky” detective Joe McAllister in solving the case. Though she’s attracted to Joe, recent widow Helen is set on remaining true to her inner Jessica Fletcher: “Sensible, methodical….Not interested in romance.” Yet the two find a deep connection while hunting for clues. After Helen and Joe uncover nefarious business practices, a suspicious car accident leads to another death and Helen becomes a target herself. This is a solid debut mystery with plenty of romance, surprises, and a climax that’s quite the cliffhanger. Murray’s vivid prose captures the details of the idyllic setting of Port Anne, Maryland: “Striped buoys and nautical flags flapped in the sunshine….The smells of crab cakes and rockfish reminded the hungry this was still a real water town.” It also details the beauty of the surrounding Chesapeake, as when a sunset “turn[s] tips of waves into tiny stars.” But Murray’s greatest accomplishment is her Twizzler-chomping citizen detective whose devotion to fictional female investigators guides her through her own adventures.

A strong debut whodunit with a memorable main character.

BREAKDOWN DANCER
Nathan, Vijay R.
Poets of Queens (70 pp.)
$14.99 paper | Dec. 15, 2021
978-1-73514-784-0

In this volume of poetry, the pains of heartache and mental health become the rhythms of performance.

Music inflects nearly every line of Nathan’s poetry. From Lady Gaga playing in the narrator’s headphones in “An Indian-American Travels in Poland on a Night Train” to the poet talking to God in line for a Vampire Weekend concert in “Now Is the Time,” music provides the texture and sensibility of these pop-conscious verses. Playlists start and finish the book, with another in the middle for good measure, setting the mood in which readers should access Nathan’s words. The poems grapple with memories of childhood, early romances (or would-be relationships), moments of love, and flashes of heartbreak. The poet finds aspiration even in times of despair, as in the poem “How To Unlock Your Heart in 8 Steps,” which begins: “Pluck your memories — / our past kaleidoscopic lives / are firm, mahogany cherries / at flavor peak.” The title poem imagines a mental health episode as an ecstatic performance even as it spirals into confusion and violence: “An ambulance screams / Applesauce! / Applesauce!” / I feverishly clap my hands. / The hospital’s floor lights up as the music pumps. / I start to moonwalk. / The guard face punches me / in an attempt to bring me back to my senses.” From the early awe the poet senses from looking at a photograph of his mother’s guru to the triumph he feels pretending to be He-Man and his indulgent daydreams about Nietzsche bicycling across Mars, these poems celebrate the potential brilliance of everyday life. As Nathan writes about the time a tourist asked him for help finding the New York skyline while standing in the middle of the city, “Yes, I know the feeling / of being there, not seeing / what is all around you, always forgetting / to look up.”

The poet writes in a slam-influenced style, with occasional rhymes and an emphasis on rhythm. He tends not to do much scene-setting, and sometimes the poems have the disjointed, announcement quality of battle raps: “I am this breath
A young inventor’s negative words manifest as monsters in this picture book.

Sammy, who has brown skin and purple hair, loves crafting gizmos but gets frustrated when the outcome isn’t successful. After she gets zapped turning on her latest device, Sammy utters discouraging words, which create a “Thought Monster,” a scowling creature who generates chaos in her workshop. When Sammy’s invention malfunctions, sparking earthquake-like shaking, she voices self-deprecat ing statements—including “I’m not smart enough!”—causing more monsters to emerge. Sammy mulls quitting but finds inspiration when she reads a note of encouragement she had written to herself on the gadget’s blueprint. After she acknowledges that pessimism prevents her from “becoming an amazing inventor” and that mistakes are an inevitable part of the process, the monsters disappear. Soon, Sammy’s diligence and dedication pay off; the gizmo (a piece to a rocketlike contraption) works perfectly. Spotlighting a spirited, young protagonist, Pedersen’s tale deftly encourages youngsters to persist in their creative pursuits even when things get tough. The personification of negative talk as a trouble-making monster is clever and kid-friendly. Sammy’s experience emphasizes how treating yourself with kindness and compassion aids in success. Neipp’s bold, full-color cartoon illustrations offer vibrant scenes of the treehouse workshop filled with gadgets and amusing details like Sammy’s teddy-bear sidekick. Dialogue and active words like BOOM and PLOP are enlarged and integrated into the scenes. Shapes, lines, and squiggles indicate movement, emotions, and sounds.

An imaginative, quirky tale about perseverance and the importance of patience.
“An inventive, timely fantasy that’s nonstop fun.”

THE ORCS OF NEW YORK

A businessman plans to exploit a portal to a magical realm in this fantasy adventure.

Marc Aaron has a knack for finding oil. He’s traveled all over Africa and the Middle East, guiding his small company, Epoch, to success.
When billionaire Roland Griff summons him to New York, Marc leaves Libya immediately. In anticipation of a thrilling new job prospect, Marc asks his wife, Diane, and their children to meet him in Manhattan. The oilman reunites with his family at the Waldorf Astoria hotel after two years apart. Marc receives a chilly reception from his wife and his daughter, who asks, “So, how’s the greenhouse-gas biz going?” Soon, the family is touring the Griff Corp building. To his astonishment, Marc learns that the company’s success with importing goods and materials is the result of a magical gateway. In a subterranean chamber, a strange glowing orb gives Griff access to a medieval realm of elves, orcs, and other magical beings. Griff wants Marc’s expertise in acquiring this Fourth World’s resources. When armed soldiers prepare to enter the gateway, the general, an orc, launches his invasion plan. Robertson has ensured that there’s fun, heart, and excitement in every scene of his latest novel. Marc and Diane’s rocky marriage is a drama on par with the orc invasion; he takes Griff’s offer without consulting her so the family can finally live together. When war hits the city’s streets, events remain entertaining, with a measured amount of gore that never feels gratuitous (“The headless troll turned and felt awkwardly for its missing cranium”). Robertson’s comedic timing is phenomenal, as when a blowhard general admires his vanilla latte by saying, “If our boys had these in ‘Nam we’d have won that war.” Moral and environmental reckonings factor into the finale, e.g., Griff tells Marc, “Drilling for oil, exploiting the local, is what we do, you and I.” A last-minute gambit sets up a potentially bold sequel.

An inventive, timely fantasy that’s nonstop fun.

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### This Issue’s Contributors

#### ADULT
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**ONE STAR AWAY**

*Salva, Imogene*

Self (344 pp.)


Salva dramatizes the story of her mother’s expulsion from her native Poland by Soviet forces and her new life as an exile in India.

Józefa “Ziuta” Nowicka’s life changed forever in 1940 when Soviet soldiers ransack her family’s farmhouse in Poland and put them on a train for a Polish work camp in the “vast Siberian wasteland,” aka the “Inhuman Land.” The ride is hellish. They suffer debilitating cold and persistent hunger as well as confusion and fear. Ziuta’s parents struggle to keep the family together and morale up even after they realize the dreary conditions of the settlement camp where they’re imprisoned. Ziuta and her parents are subjected to Stalinist propaganda masquerading as education—dramatic lessons in the “greatness of Bolshevist communism.” Finally, the Nowickas escape, and Ziuta makes her way to India by way of Iran. She settles there thanks to the generous offer of the “Good Maharaja” Jam Saheb Digvijay Sinhji, a delegate to Great Britain, to rescue Polish exiles. Salva, Ziuta’s daughter, movingly relates the extraordinary story of her mother’s expulsion from Poland and resettlement in Gujarat, India, as well as her later life in New York City as a nurse. Her account is a “dramatized narrative,” a novelistic rendering as cinematically gripping as it is emotionally affecting. And Ziuta’s mother is portrayed as especially brave—her spirit tethers this disoriented family in the throes of crisis. “Wherever life takes you, the first star in the eastern sky will remind you of tonight. Your father and I will be gazing upon it too. We will never be apart as long as we look for the star.”

A historically fascinating, poignant story.

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**THE MOONSTONE GIRLS**

*Skipstone, Brooke*

Skipstone Publishing (338 pp.)


In this coming-of-age novel set in the late 1960s, a young lesbian challenges her bigoted father and rigid society to claim her identity with pride and hope.

In 1967 San Antonio, Texas, gay
siblings Tracy and Spencer Franks are faced with more than the usual teenage problems and family secrets. Both are talented musicians, but this engenders little pride from their harshly conservative father, who perpetually finds Spencer too feminine and Tracy not feminine enough. With the gay liberation movement still years away, Spencer and Tracy support each other in exploring their queer identities. They go so far as to stage heterosexual double dates, during which they switch partners as soon as they are out of the public eye. Tall and athletic, Tracy soon finds that she can gain a degree of safety by dressing as a boy, daring in an era in which girls are seldom permitted even to wear pants. In disguise as “Tray,” she can relax with her girlfriend in public. But Tracy also discovers that she has more overall freedom when she is no longer trapped by the societal expectations tied to being a girl. Still, public scrutiny is relentless, and it is not long before both siblings are unmasked and their gay identities exposed. While the tidal wave of repercussions threatens to drown Spencer and Tracy, she finds the inner resources to stand up to public condemnation and force a grudging respect from those who would ridicule her. She looks toward a life in which shame is replaced by affirmation and joy. Skipstone has delved into a vibrant era of rapidly changing values with empathy and authenticity. Tracy is a fiercely sympathetic protagonist as she resists the numerous forces trying to drive her toward self-hate and conformity. Her story is satisfyingly positive, perhaps a little too much so for realism, but readers will find it hard to complain about her upbeat journey. Some anachronisms, such as “That’s so gay” and “her binary mind,” which were not in common usage until decades after the ’60s, demonstrate that the author is not a member of the baby boomer generation. Nonetheless, the book adeptly captures the zeitgeist of social repression and change that energized the 20th-century counterculture movement.

A moving and romantic coming-out story and a triumphant celebration of lesbian liberation.

**ALL MEN GLAD AND WISE**

*Stevenson, Laura C.*  
Rootstock Publishing (244 pp.)  
$27.99 | $17.99 paper | April 19, 2022  
978-1-47869-080-0  
978-1-47869-079-4 paper

A changing British social structure provides the backdrop for Stevenson’s mystery, set in 1919. Set in the Cotswolds region of England during the months following the end of World War I, this tale focuses on Harriet “Harry” Green, a girl who’s been passing as a “stable lad” on the estate of baronet Sir Thomas Chandace Willingford for her entire life. After she discovers the bludgeoned corpse of Willingford’s steward, John Vanter, in the woods of the estate, her investigation reveals a number of secrets. She also discovers that the changes she has noticed on the estate since the war (“five horses in the stable instead of twenty...seven servants...at dinner instead of fourteen; one gardener and a boy...instead of five”) all signal the end of the “whole wretched system” of primogeniture. Harry’s motive for helping to bring the murderer to justice is partly self-interest. The exposure of the truth about her gender puts her at risk: “Bright stable boys are generally accepted by other men, whereas women...well, the wretched class system isn’t the only one that represses without meaning to be unjust.” But if she helps to solve the crime, perhaps she’d be “Somebody. A girl...whose brain and bravery had given her some say in her future.” Overall, Stevenson delivers a tight historical mystery that feels realistic and believable throughout. The author makes great use of the setting of the aftermath of the Great War, and the changing social structure effectively serves as an engine that motivates major characters’ actions over the course of the narrative. Her use of period patois ("You don’t plow a field in an afternoon,” says Barth Goodwin, a local plowman) also helps to create a convincing portrait of England during a time of great transformation.

A well-researched and convincing period whodunit.

**THE SHELL AND THE OCTOPUS**

*A Memoir*  
*Stirling, Rebecca*  
She Writes Press (296 pp.)  
$16.95 paper | $8.99 e-book | July 26, 2022  
978-1-647423-23-0

A memoir of life with a peripatetic father who had an unquenchable passion for the sea. Stirling first boarded a sailboat in the early 1970s, when she was just a toddler. The small custom-built sailing yacht *Cattle Creek*, which her father constructed in Peng Chau, Hong Kong, would become the most consistent home that Stirling would know for more than 20 years. Her earliest memories are of being at sea with her parents; she describes her young-child wonderment, lying on her mother’s lap on deck, looking at the moon: “She comes bright in the black night sky like a surprise, illuminating her path to us. She instigates the plankton in our wake and they glow like fairy dust.” By the time she was 4, she’d sailed from Peng Chau to Manila, on to Singapore, across the Indian Ocean to the Seychelles, and then flown with her mother to Europe, winding up on the Isle of Wight, where she briefly attended kindergarten. In between voyages, the American family was based in Colorado, where the author’s father built houses and acquired real estate holdings. When she was 10, her parents divorced, but by then she’d absorbed her father’s love of sailing as well as his restlessness. Over the next years, she joined him, his friends, and his girlfriends on journeys traversing the Caribbean and the South Pacific. This is a memoir of coming of age on the high seas, and in it, the author offers a collection of vivid portraits of places and relationships, including her first serious romance. Readers will almost feel the misty saltwater coming over the bow; the discomfort of the primitive in-cabin accommodations, and the raw frustrations of a young girl dealing with a father who was “so happy when...leaving port” but...
sullen, agitated, and often intoxicated onshore. Although the accounts of Stirling’s early memories are fragmented, recollections from later years, culled from her journals, are viscerally and eloquently detailed descriptions of the beauty, loneliness, and rowdiness of the extraordinary world of her formative years.

A poignant and lyrical read that will ring true with sailors and interest landlubbers.

**TARSIER SINGS HIS SONG**
*Tatechell, Terri*
*Illus. by Ivan Sulima*
Fielding House Press Ltd (32 pp.)
$22.95  |  $10.99 paper  |  $2.99 e-book
Feb. 26, 2022
978-1-77728-684-2
978-1-77728-686-6 paper

A tarsier finds a partner with the help of some pals in this picture book.

Every night, Tarsie unsuccessfully sings a quiet, melancholy song, hoping to attract a love interest. Bear, a cuscus, invites the primates to walk through the forest and sing a more uplifting tune. They encounter animals who sing lyrics that describe themselves. For instance, the crested macaque sings: “I…eat ripe fruit. Sometimes I get it on my face. But I still look quite cute.” Tarsie resumes his nighttime singing but is discouraged by the lack of response. The animals offer tips to help him sing louder and bolder, including the hornbill, who recommends flapping his arms to elevate his song. Tarsie implements the instructions and finally receives a response from a tarsier who sings: “I’d love to meet and see you soon.” The animals rejoice. Tarsie’s mate joins “their singing gang,” and their love grows “with every song.” These days, the animals happily “love and sing and teach” their own partners and families. Readers will enjoy this sweet story that emphasizes making friends, helping pals, and learning from others. Tatchell skillfully introduces readers to less commonly depicted animals (including endangered and vulnerable species) in an informative but amusing way. Sulima’s delightful full-color illustrations offer animated portrayals of the animals in their natural habitat. Detailed forest backdrops feature large trees, greenery, vivid skies, and striking sunsets. Appealing accents include floating music notes as the animals sing.

A wonderfully illustrated and charming friendship tale that features unusual animals.

**THRIVING**
The Breakthrough Movement To Regenerate Nature, Society, and the Economy
*Visser, Wayne*
Fast Company Press (368 pp.)
$27.95  |  $9.99 e-book  |  March 8, 2022
978-1-6908-007-6

An accomplished scholar discusses societal transformation in this expansive study.

Visser’s pragmatic perspective on humanity’s challenges as expressed in this work is reason for optimism. An academic, poet, and author of 40 books, he brilliantly addresses the interrelationship of humans with nature, society, the economy, and organizations under the broad umbrella of regeneration. Drawing from his own research and others’, Visser identifies “six keys to thriving”—complexity, circularity, creativity, coherence, convergence, and continuity—deftly explaining each in the first chapter. “Six” is a recurrent theme; the author subsequently talks about the shift from “six forces of breakdown” to “six counterforces of breakthrough,” a concept that helps establish the foundation for a wide-ranging, erudite discussion of regeneration. A section on “Nature” delves into restoring ecosystems and developing a circular economy, the subjects of Visser’s *Closing the Loop*, a 2018 documentary. In the next two sections, the author writes elegantly about an inclusive, healthier economy along with the effects of technology and such crises as climate change on the world’s societies. Finally, Visser tackles how systems integration and forward-thinking leaders can play integral roles in regenerating businesses. The quality of the writing is superb throughout the work; the author clearly, thoroughly, and convincingly covers each topic. One distinctive feature of the book is the frequent use of sidebars highlighting a “Key Concept,” “Fresh Insight,” “Hot Trend,” “Case Spotlight,” “Breakthrough Solution,” or other intriguing tidbit of information. Such additions serve to enrich and illustrate the text with engaging, timely content. Another unusual aspect of the book is its poetry. To close each chapter, Visser appends a relevant poem he wrote. For example, “Giving Up” begins: “I’m giving up— / Not on life, but on those actions that threaten life / Not on living, but on those habits that distract from living / Not on
loving, but on those fears that get in the way of loving.” These poems insert a warmly creative literary element into an otherwise scholarly text. Extensive notes and an exhaustive bibliography demonstrate the rigorous research conducted by the author.

An exceptional, encyclopedic, and hopeful vision of the future.

“A LONG ROAD TO JUSTICE
Stories From the Frontlines in Asia
Yu Friedman, Sylvia
Penguin Random House SEA (294 pp.)
$27.95 paper | $16.99 e-book | Sept. 28, 2021
978-9-814954-34-1

Victims of sex trafficking fight for freedom with the help of Christian compassion in this nonfiction work.

Filmmaker, journalist, and anti-trafficking activist Yu Friedman recounts her investigation into coerced sex work across eastern Asia. She tells of the danger she encountered while filming seedy storefront bordellos on a 2012 trip to the Chinese province of Yunnan and revisits the Korean women forced into sex work during World War II, about whom she wrote in Silenced No More (2015). She interviews North Korean women who were driven by starvation to immigrate to China and then sold as brides to farmers; talks to Hong Kong nightclub hostesses who toil to pay off debts to traffickers; and tells of preteen Cambodian children in Thailand driven into sex slavery. Somber patterns emerge from the stories: Impoverished women are lured from home by false promises of high-paying jobs and then imprisoned by traffickers, who beat and rape them until they submit to forced sex work; many struggle with addiction and have unwanted children, and a lack of education and a victim-blaming culture leave them with few options. But Yu Friedman finds inspiration in Christian groups such as Door of Hope, which offers counseling, shelter, and job training to women trying to break free. Her narrative sometimes takes a melodramatic tone—“I felt a sense of dread and oppressive danger looking out at this pit of hell,” she writes of one red-light district—and is often framed around redemption arcs that culminate in turns toward God; one describes a Chinese crime boss who embraced Christianity and shuttered his brothel after an angel visited him in a dream. But her reportage is sympathetic and perceptive, and her prose is often evocative: “When I first met Kat, she was bright-eyed and cried easily at the thought of entertaining men. A few months later, she was emaciated, her skin had turned sallow, her long jet-black hair was limp and greasy, and her eyes had the wide-eyed bloodshot look of a regular drug user.” The result is a revealing look at a shocking humanitarian crisis.

A searing but ultimately hopeful indictment of sexual exploitation.
Episode 254: Sara Gran, author and publisher of *The Book of the Most Precious Substance* (Dreamland Books, Feb. 8), on writing sex scenes for the book:

I’ve done a little bit in my TV and film stuff—most of which has not been produced—some more sexually explicit stuff. In a book? No. One thing I wanted to do is find a new challenge for myself. And I think writing about sex in an intelligent, thoughtful way is really, really hard. I had never done it before both because I backed off from the challenge and because it would have been not as natural of a fit with my other books and stories and whatnot. A big challenge I set for myself—and I hope I pulled off—was writing about sex in a way that is neither juvenile nor pornographic nor strictly titillating but is really a part of this character and a part of her arc.

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Episode 257: Anton Hur, translator of *Violets* (Feminist Press, April 12), on what Man Asian Literary Prize–winning novelist Kyung-sook Shin is known for:

Kyung-sook Shin is basically a god of Korean literature. She’s kind of like—oh god, like what is the equivalent in English—maybe Elena Ferrante? There’s something about Kyung-sook Shin where her books are just miraculous. She doesn’t use elaborate language, she doesn’t use elaborate plots. There’s nothing overtly fantastic about any of her books, really. Her *New York Times* bestseller *Please Look After Mom*—that book is about a family that [loses] their mom who has Alzheimer’s. It has a very simple plot; it might as well have no plot, that book. All of her books are like that....There’s some kind of rhythm, some kind of magic in her very simple-seeming prose that no one can quite put their finger on.

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Episode 259: Aisha Saeed, author of *Omar Rising* (Nancy Paulsen Books, Feb. 1), on exploring complex thoughts and emotions through art:

Art is the way that I process difficult emotions for myself and tackle things that I may not want to tackle directly but that I want to explore. It’s this avenue for me to peek beneath trauma, to peek beneath hurt, and to excavate truth. Art as a way to foster difficult conversations is—I think it’s one of the most powerful ways.
“I’m a sick man, a mean man.” So says the narrator at the start of Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *Notes From Underground*, releasing a flood of malcontent on anyone who will listen. The nameless narrator—he has a name, but he won’t share it with us—of Ralph Ellison’s 1952 novel, *Invisible Man*, is just as unhappy with the world as it is. But, he assures the reader, “I am not complaining, nor am I protesting either,” even as he does Dostoyevsky one better by actually living underground in a New York subbasement in a building “rented strictly to whites.”

Ellison’s narrator gets away with living rent-free, his quarters comfortably lighted by siphoned electricity, because he is invisible. Not literally invisible in the H.G. Wells–ian sense: Our narrator is Black, and as such, he says, “I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.”

Sometimes that invisibility yields anger, as when, early in the novel, he bumps into a man who, catching a glimpse of him, hurls a racial slur and is very nearly knifed for his transgression. Most of the time, however, the narrator bears his burden with uneasy resignation.

He was not always invisible. While attending college in the South, he is visible enough that he blunders into a boxing ring for a battle royal—“Get going, black boy! Mix it up!” the crowd urges—only to discover his self-preserving skills as an orator and not a fighter. Indeed, he’s “the smartest boy we’ve got out there in Greenwood”—smart enough, at least, to gloss over his earnest call for social equality before that crowd of hostile Whites and, after a subsequent misadventure on campus, to head north to New York, the university president’s words ringing in his ears: “You’re nobody, son. You don’t exist—can’t you see that?”

Invisibility is a survival mechanism of a kind, for when he’s seen at all, he finds trouble, whether through the agency of a Black separatist or a White do-gooder. When visible, it takes him a while to find a job, that university president having written a poisonous letter of reference. For a time, he lands at a factory that hires Blacks only to sidestep having to pay union wages; it’s not for him, but his choices are ever more limited. Finally, tired of his travails, unseen, badly used, and scarcely alive, the narrator descends into the subterranean world, the only place where, he declares, “I’ll be free.”

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, a forerunner of existentialism, is never far from Ellison’s pages. Neither is Ellison’s contemporary Albert Camus. Perhaps surprisingly, Ellison’s great friend Shirley Jackson also figures, her terse story “The Lottery” lending weight to Ellison’s conviction that unreason wins out over reason every time out, particularly when it comes to the madness of the crowd.

Ellison’s book—the only novel he published in his lifetime—was widely lauded on its release, including in these pages. It was the first novel by an African American writer to earn the National Book Award. Though often challenged by school board censors, 70 years on, *Invisible Man* holds a central place in the American literary canon, eminently visible, demanding to be seen and read.

*Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor.*
Don’t miss the action-packed middle-grade fantasy from Jesse Q. Sutanto, author of *Dial A for Aunties*

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“Full of sparkling humor!”
—Debbi Michiko Florence, author of *Just Be Cool, Jenna Sakai*

“Middle-grade fantasy at its finest.”
—Alex Aster, award-winning author of the Emblem Island series

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