Tori Amos
The singer/songwriter gets political in a new book, Resistance p. 50

Also in the issue: Daniel Mason, Lauren Castillo, Adibah Jaigirdar & more
FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK:
Life During Wartime
BY TOM BEER

During times of stress and strife, many readers long for books that deliver pure escapism—the lushly imagined worlds of science fiction and fantasy, the tidy puzzles of a cozy mystery, or the reassuring happily-ever-after of a romance. (A friend who never read a romance novel in her life tells me that while sheltering in place she now consumes them like candy.)

Other, harder souls stare the beast directly in the eye: They’re the ones currently racing through Lawrence Wright’s new thriller, The End of October (Knopf, May 12), about a deadly global pandemic and the American microbiologist fighting to control it. “Featuring accounts of past plagues and pandemics, descriptions of pathogens and how they work, and dark notes about global warming, the book produces deep shudders,” says our reviewer. (Not now, thanks—I’ll wait for the paperback.) Book clubs everywhere are embracing epidemic classics: The Knopf Doubleday club is tackling The Plague by Albert Camus (1948) while the Guardian’s reading group has turned to Daniel Defoe’s A Journal of the Plague Year (1722).

Through these long days of lockdown in New York, I find myself drawn instead to tales of WWII London during the Blitz—the original source of the phrase “Keep Calm and Carry On,” now emblazoned on T-shirts, mugs, and tote bags. As Erik Larson recounts in his new book, The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz (Crow, Feb. 25), the Germans unleashed a relentless aerial assault on the city of London in 1940-41: “57 consecutive nights of bombing, followed by an intensifying series of night raids over the next six months.”

Larson wondered how Churchill, newly appointed prime minister, and his circle endured this trial—“the dark moments and the light, the romantic entanglements and the debacles, the sorrows and laughter, and the odd little episodes that reveal how life was really lived under Hitler’s tempest of steel.” Larson draws a rich portrait of Churchill’s world, with a focus on lesser-known figures such as his children, bodyguard, and private secretary. The Kirkus reviewer deems it “captivating.”

The Blitz has been the inspiration for numerous novels showcasing the pluck—and occasional pettiness—of ordinary Britons going about their daily lives under harrowing circumstances. The protagonist of Henry Green’s Caught (New York Review Books, 2016) is a member of the Auxiliary Fire Service shuttling between his London service and his family in the countryside; it was first published while World War II was still being waged. Classics such as Elizabeth Bowen’s The Heat of the Day (1948) and Graham Greene’s The End of the Affair (1951) offer atmospheric renderings of life in wartime London drawn from the authors’ own observations and experiences. For a nonfiction account of writers in London, turn to Lara Feigel’s The Love-Charm of Bombs: Restless Lives in the Second World War (Bloomsbury, 2019), which follows Green, Greene, Bowen, Rose Macaulay, and Hilde Spiel through the wreckage of 1940 and ’41.

Wartime London has remained a favorite subject for inventive contemporary novelists born well after the last bombs had fallen. Among the highlights of Kate Atkinson’s Life After Life (Reagan Arthur/Little, Brown, 2013) are the passages that drop its continuously reborn protagonist, Ursula Todd, into the bombed-out city of 1940. Chris Cleave’s Everyone Brave Is Forgiven (Simon & Schuster, 2016) offers some of London’s Bright Young Things a painful education in the realities of war. Sarah Waters’ The Night Watch (Riverhead, 2006) opens in 1947 and slowly works backward to reveal the lives of a circle of characters living through the war in London—among them Kay Langrish, a lesbian ambulance driver on the titular night watch. The final section brings us to the awful destruction of the Blitz, as Kay comes to assist the inhabitants caught in the rubble of a bombed-out Pimlico house.

Perhaps I find something consoling in these tales of ordinary lives carried on at an extraordinary moment in history. Or maybe I’m just an inveterate Anglophile. Either way, these books have much to offer readers living in this extraordinary moment of our own.
The Kirkus Star is awarded to books of remarkable merit, as determined by the impartial editors of Kirkus.

In her latest genre-defying book, *Just Us*, National Book Critics Circle Award winner Claudia Rankine offers a work that should move, challenge, and transform every reader who encounters it. Read the review on p. 86.

Don’t wait on the mail for reviews! You can read pre-publication reviews as they are released on kirkus.com—even before they are published in the magazine. You can also access the current issue and back issues of Kirkus Reviews on our website by logging in as a subscriber. If you do not have a username or password, please contact customer care to set up your account by calling 1.800.316.9361 or emailing customers@kirkusreviews.com.
A mother’s quest to find her estranged daughter is wrapped around another, earlier mother-daughter story of secrets and superstition, violence and desperation, rooted on a wind-whipped island.

A fevered intensity drives British writer Aitken’s debut, along with an unrelenting stress on femaleness and maternal attachment. In parallel timelines, it traces the lonely, burdened life of child and adult Oona Coughlan, daughter of an obsessively restrictive mother on the Irish-speaking island of Inis. The free-spirited child, born while her mother was having a vision of the Virgin Mary, lives a narrow life compared to her brothers—“There’s no leaving the island. Not for a woman”—and Oona strains against her bonds, yearning for a different mother, like Aislinn, the incomer and healer who lives on the cliff edge. Aitken’s lyrical voice evokes the perilous fishing community and the harsh beauty of the island while piloting on the high-colored, often blood-drenched events. There’s a miscarriage, a witchy outcast who gives birth on the beach, a murder, a fire, a rape, a drowning, a home birth that shocks a child, a shipwreck. Meanwhile, in the other, interleaved narrative stream, dating some 20 years later, adult Oona, married to Pat and living in Canada, is desperate to reconnect with her own daughter, Joyce, who has disappeared. An intermittent third narrative, spun like a fairy tale, punctuates events with suggestions of the Persephone myth, adding one more layer of emphasis to the matrilineal theme. These overlapping, parallel threads, nearly always delivered at the same (high) emotional pitch and from Oona’s fixated perspective, run an immensely long course as she travels her physical and psychological journey of emigration, postnatal depression, second pregnancy, loss, more loss, and, in a final circular spin, a return to the island where her two worlds may eventually become one.

A stylish but overburdened fable of suffering and expiation.
THREE HOURS IN PARIS
Black, Cara
Soho Crime (360 pp.)
$27.95 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-64129-041-8

Black takes time out from chronicling the neighborhood-themed exploits of half-French detective Aimée Leduc to introduce a heroine as American as apple pie.

Kate Rees never expected to see Paris again, especially not under these circumstances. Born and bred in rural Oregon, she earned a scholarship to the Sorbonne, where she met Dafydd, a handsome Welshman who stole her heart. The start of World War II finds the couple stationed in the Orkney Islands, where Kate impresses Alfred Stepney of the War Department with the rifle skills she developed helping her dad and five brothers protect the family’s cattle. After unimaginable tragedy strikes, Stepney recruits Kate for a mission that will allow her to channel her newly ignited rage against the Germans who’ve just invaded France. She’s parachuted into the countryside, where her fluent French should help her blend in. Landing in a field, she hops a milk train to Paris, where she plans to shoot Adolf Hitler as he stands on the steps of Sacré-Coeur. Instead, she kills his admiral and has to flee through the streets of Paris, struggling to hook up with the rescuers who are supposed to extract her. Meanwhile, Gunter Hoffman, a career policeman in a wartime assignment with the Reichssicherheitsdienst security forces, is charged with finding the assassin who dared attempt to kill the Führer. It’s hard to see how it can end well for both the cop and the cowgirl. The heroine’s flight is too episodic to capitalize on Black’s skill at character development, but she’s great at raising readers’ blood pressure.

A killer thriller.

THE BONES OF WOLFE
Blake, James Carlos
Mysterious Press (272 pp.)
$26.00 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-8021-5688-4

Hold on to your hats. The Wolfe family saga continues in Blake’s newest Border Noir.

The Wolves run many legitimate businesses on both sides of the Mexican border, but smuggling is deeply ingrained in the family’s history. When a delivery of weapons to Mexico is hijacked and several family members are killed, brothers Rudy and Frank Wolfe and their cousins Rayo and Jessie, all of them involved in the family business, resolve to get revenge and recover the shipment. The brothers, field agents for the family law firm, track down witnesses. Along the way, they pick up a box of porn movies, and when Rayo and Jessie barge in while they’re screening them, Jessie asks her Uncle Charlie to make a few black-and-white stills of one of the girls in the film because she’s recognized “Kitty Quick” as the spitting image of Sandra Little, the long-missing sister of family doyenne Aunt Cat. Now 115, Cat, who looks and acts 10 years younger, has allowed Jessie to write her life story, which she expects to be published after her death. After seeing the photos, Aunt Cat sends Rudy, Frank, and Rayo on a quest to track down Kitty and bring her to Cat, who claims that she’ll know whether they’re related. Drawing on the family resources, they start their search in Tucson, the home address of the film company, but discover that Kitty’s already moved back to LA. Her agent says she’s gone to Mexico with a wealthy man. Therein lies the rub, for the man is El Chubasco, a violent drug lord who’s not likely to give her up. Undaunted, the three dig deeper into the family network to plot a rescue fraught with violence and danger.

An action-packed story of family loyalties with some surprisingly sentimental undertones.
Lately I haven’t wanted to leave my brain too much idle time, because I’m afraid of where it might end up. To avoid the inevitable between-books floundering about what to read next, I’ve been working my way through a couple of different series: Lisa Kleypas’ The Ravenels and Laura Lippman’s Tess Monaghan books.

Most of you probably don’t need to be told to read Lippman, but her last three novels have been stand-alones, and she hasn’t written about Tess in five years, since Hush Hush. In case your memory needs refreshing, private investigator Tess is a former journalist—like Lippman, who was a reporter for the Baltimore Sun and other newspapers. Her Baltimore roots go deep, and between the various colorful members of her half-Jewish, half-Irish family, she seems to be connected to everyone in town.

I started at the beginning of the series, listening to the audiobook of Baltimore Blues (1997) after a weekend visit to that charming city, and I enjoyed being back on its rowhouse-lined streets. Feisty Tess is a blunt talker who makes good use of her newspaper training by asking the questions no one else would ask while also knowing when to shut up and let the other person fill the silence with incriminating statements. Lippman delves into the worlds of politics, law, journalism, and greyhound racing—and that’s just in the first three volumes, Baltimore Blues (1997), Charm City (1997), and Butchers Hill (1998).

In between gritty Baltimore mysteries, I’ve been listening to Kleypas’ engaging Victorian romances about the Ravenel sisters, their friends and relatives, and even their father’s illegitimate son. Though the family is headed by an earl, they’re an unusual bunch, willing to study up-to-date farming techniques and befriend England’s only female doctor, Garret Gibson—who gets a romance of her own in Hello Stranger (2018).

In Marrying Winterborne (2016), Lady Helen Ravenel falls in love with a man who actually works for a living: the Welsh department-store tycoon Rhys Winterborne, who promises to sell the board game developed by Helen’s sheltered but strong-minded younger sister, Pandora. In Devil in Spring (2017), Pandora refuses to marry the man she loves, Gabriel, Lord St. Vincent, until he finds a way to let her keep her own property rights after their marriage. Smart, independent women, the strong yet nurturing men who love them, and guaranteed happy endings add up to perfect reading for these uncertain times.

Now that I’m finished with the Ravenels, I’m planning to move on to Joanna Shupe’s series about Gilded Age New York, The Four Hundred, which begins with A Daring Arrangement (2017). I’m especially looking forward to reading the second book in the series, A Scandalous Deal (2018), about Lady Eva Hyde, a British architect who must sail to New York, even though she hates boats, to fill in for her ailing father and save his reputation. She has a fling—her first—on the trans-Atlantic trip, only to discover that the handsome stranger is her client.

Then I may try Tade Thompson’s Wormwood Trilogy, which began with Rosewater (2018), about a Nigerian detective with psychic powers; our review called it “a captivating, cerebral work of science fiction that may very well signal a new definitive voice in the genre.” I’m also planning to catch up with A Howl of Wolves, the most recent book in Judith Flanders’ smart and witty series of mysteries about London book editor Sam Clair, which came out two years ago. I hope there are more to come! Flanders uses Sam’s job as a way to peek behind the scenes of the fashion, theater, and art scenes, and reading them might be the next best thing to actually getting out of the house.

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.
Brioche in the Oven
Brownlee, Victoria
Amberjack Publishing (224 pp.)
978-1-948705-66-0

A fresh romance is put through its paces when an accidental pregnancy complicates a business expansion.

Building on Brownlee's last book, Fromage à Trois (2018), Australian expatriate Ella and French cheesemonger Serge's Parisian relationship is tested when Ella announces she's pregnant. Having dated for less than a year, the couple must navigate the prospect of starting a family at the same time Serge is opening another shop. But Serge insists that their cramped Paris apartment is no place to raise a baby, and they make haste to some farmland in the bucolic Loire Valley. It's an adjustment for the more metropolitan Ella, and the somewhat isolated countryside exacerbates the fact that Ella and Serge are still relative strangers to one another. The language is a bit twee and quaint, lapsing into caricatured, italicized French from time to time. Food and, of course, cheese play a large role in Ella and Serge's relationship, from discussing it to making it to eating it; this is an unusual aspect of their life, but it becomes tedious around the halfway point. The pacing and tone feel a lot like a lazy Sunday afternoon watching made-for-TV movies. Even if you fall asleep, you won't miss much, and it's not necessarily worth it to rewind and catch up on what you've missed. Though the book feels like a love letter to France and its culture, most of the magic of exploration and new experiences seems to have been used up in the first volume.

An uninspiring sequel.
As she deals with boredom and isolation after being uprooted to Brazil for her husband’s career, the wife of an academic forges interesting, fraught connections with two other women.

At the opening of Burnham’s debut, lapsed writer Linda is on the brink of leaving her historian husband when he learns that he has earned a visiting professorship in São Paulo. Rather than end the marriage, she travels with him, embarking on her own journey of self-discovery. Their university-provided apartment in São Paulo comes with a maid, Marta, who cooks and cleans, exacerbating Linda’s sense of purposelessness as she wanders the streets of São Paulo aimlessly or else sits at home feeling useless. Linda’s situation begins to change as she first takes up painting, finally finding a means of personal expression, and then meets Celia, a beguiling theater artist who serves as a vehicle for Linda’s self-discovery. Unfortunately, the novel falters slightly at the end; Burnham sets up Linda’s dynamic with Marta as an emotionally, socially, and socio-economically complex one that will inevitably lead to some kind of emotional breakthrough, but when it does, it feels forced and clichéd—even a little white savior-ish—and does not ring entirely true. In addition, the novel’s ambitious second-person narration becomes grating and strange at times. Nevertheless, the fact that the narrative is addressed to a man—Linda’s husband—lends it additional power, transforming it into a sort of feminist rejoinder to patriarchal dismissiveness of domestic work, a document of the unseen complexity of women’s lives, no matter how quiet. At its best, the novel is a subtle and adept character study that reveals the power of connections between women. The novel is buoyed as well by Burnham’s dreamy prose, with which she conjures memorable images of Brazil. Though the plot is not entirely coherent, specifically when it comes to the development of Linda’s relationship with Marta, the...
A doctor works to develop an addictive drug for women in this absurdist critique of class inequality.

**ORNAMENTAL**

Cárdenas, Juan
Trans. by Davis, Lizzie
Coffee House (444 pp.)
$16.95 paper  |  Jun. 2, 2020
978-1-56689-580-4

A doctor works to develop an addictive drug for women in this absurdist critique of class inequality.

In addition to having written a half-dozen novels, Colombian author Cárdenas also dabbles in art criticism and curation and uses that knowledge to acidic effect in a social drama that borders on the phantasmagorical. In a laboratory based in a remote forest somewhere outside an unnamed city, a doctor works diligently to test a new drug on four underprivileged women. Designated simply as numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4, the women experience radically different trips on this new drug, which enhances both perception and libido. The most interesting to the doctor is 4’s stream-of-consciousness “discourses” involving her mother and a vision of a dystopian future, which might be simply senseless, drug-induced inventions or vital memories of a life that came before. Parallel to the doctor’s fascination with his patient is his volatile relationship with his cocaine-addicted wife, a prosperous visual artist who’s extremely anxious about her imminent exhibition of new work. There’s not much of a cohesive storyline here—the doctor is clearly infatuated with 4, as is his wife, with whom the doctor shares a penchant for sexual experimentation and, later, a relationship of sorts with his patient. That said, the narrative mainly serves as a construct through which Cárdenas can muse upon society’s unheard voices, the clash between those with the artist’s inherent privilege and people with lives more like single mother 4, and the interplay between the ideologies held by those disparate classes. Its progression is equally strange—Cárdenas devotes one segment entirely to one of 4’s dreamy reveries and another to the doctor’s dreams and nightmares, but occasionally he interrupts these relatively conventional passages with the revelation that the doctor’s new security guards are spider monkeys. Altogether it’s quite uneven but with captivating moments.

An archetypal and oddly curious slice of magical realism.

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**YOU WOULD HAVE TOLD ME NOT TO**

Coake, Christopher
Delphinium (240 pp.)
$24.95  |  Jul. 28, 2020
978-1-883285-90-6

Seven sharp stories that dwell on relationships both good and bad but never fully resolved.

In “That First Time,” the first entry in Coake’s bittersweet story collection, Bob, a middle-aged man in a dying marriage, learns that Annabeth, a high school fling, has died. She didn’t mean that much to him, but Bob was the first person Annabeth had sex with. Her friend Vicky, who delivers this news, seems oddly on edge about Bob’s relative lack of emotional investment, but the twist ending is both crushing and shows just how differently our pasts can shape us. Coake, who won the PEN/Bingham Prize for his debut collection, We’re in Trouble (2005), has developed a deceptively simple style that
nicely serves his setups, which turn on simple tensions that grow increasingly complex. In “Waste,” a day laborer is joined by a new employee who looks remarkably like him, sparking questions about whether they’re father and son and about the fate of the young man’s mother. Lisa, the protagonist of “This Will Come As a Surprise to You,” learns that her abusive ex-husband is planning to remarry and is at odds about what she should say (if anything) to his new fiancee. The conflict is predictable in “Getaway,” about a wayward young man working at a summer resort who’s torn between his budding relationship with a girl and his admiration of the Don Juan who brings a new beauty to a deluxe cabin every weekend. But with room to play with, Coake can make simple conflicts sing: The closing novella, “Big Guy,” concerns an obese man (336 pounds at his heaviest) whose weight-loss plan opens new frontiers for him physically and romantically but leaves unresolved his anxiety over sex, accomplishment, and how to address past romantic wounds. Fitness can make us better, Coake suggests, but what if it just makes us better at cultivating resentment and spite?

**Clean, unfussy storytelling in service of messy lives.**

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**FLORIDA MAN**

Cooper, Tom

Random House (416 pp.)

$28.00 | Jul. 28, 2020

978-0-593-13331-6

A beach bum who’s a magnet for bad juju struggles to maintain his hard-knock life and idle pleasures amid the heat-seeking trouble headed his way.

Gulf Coast native Cooper made a memorable debut with *The Marauders* (2015). This second act delivers an even messier, nastier, more brutal, and engaging yarn that spans decades on a remote outpost deep in the wilds of Florida. Most crime novels zero in on a single target: a murder, a heist, or just regular bloody revenge. In this fascinating decadeslong trek, we follow perpetually stoned Reed Crowe and his nearly endless run of bad luck. Our titular loser is stuck, both psychically and physically, on Emerald Island, one of those fabled tourist traps from the
1950s, where Reed, circa 1980, manages a run-down motel and a pathetic amusement park, The Florida Man Mystery House. There’s an ex-wife, an internationally known artist named Heidi, as well as the memory of their dead little girl, Lily, which haunts him daily. As in many small towns, the denizens of Emerald Island live in a state of perpetual, tentative détente that threatens to erupt into violence at any moment. Among them are Wayne Wade, Reed’s pervy, drug-addled buddy; a kid named Eddie Maldonado who insists on helping with Reed’s various schemes; and most importantly, Henry Yahchilane, a quiet but dangerous loner who marks Reed as a threat to one of his most closely held secrets. Things get way out of hand when a villain named Hector “Catface” Morales, a Mariel boat-lift veteran and sadistic assassin long thought dead, resurfaces with a plan to punish Reed for a dope deal gone wrong years ago. Add a few biblical hurricanes, the occasional sea monster, and Jimmy Buffet and stir.

This cocktail’s recipe would be one part Travis McGee, one part Carl Hiaasen, and a salt shaker full of magical realism.

**HEAVEN AND EARTH**

Giordano, Paolo
Trans. by Appel, Anne Milano
Pamela Dorman/Viking (416 pp.)
$28.00 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-1-984877-31-4

Summers in Puglia forge fraught bonds between a privileged girl from Turin and three local boys in a through-the-years saga jam-packed with events. Bern, Nicola, and Tommaso live on the farm adjacent to Teresa’s grandmother’s home, and Teresa is fascinated by the trio from the instant she spots them taking an illicit nighttime swim in her grandmother’s pool when she’s

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**THE LIONS OF FIFTH AVENUE**

Davis, Fiona
Dutton (368 pp.)
$27.00 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-1-5247-4461-8

Returning to her trademark depictions of historic Manhattan buildings, Davis has set her latest in the New York Public Library. The NYPL has a special significance for three generations of the Lyons family, whose surname appears to be a nod to the institution’s sentry lions. In 1913, library superintendent Jack Lyons, his wife, Laura, and their two children, Pearl and Harry, inhabit seven rooms on the library’s mezzanine. In alternating sections set in 1993, Sadie Donovan, Pearl’s daughter, is also a library administrator, curating the Berg Collection of rare books. This collection includes mementos of Laura Lyons, whose reputation as an early feminist essayist is enjoying a resurgence. Shortly before Pearl, who lives with Sadie’s brother, Lonnie, dies at 87, she hints at a long-kept secret concerning *Tamerlane*, a volume of Edgar Allan Poe’s poetry that disappeared from the library on Jack Lyons’ watch. As it happens, this novel is less a paean to architecture than a tale of two book heists, 80 years apart. On the continuum of crime, pilfering books—even invaluable artifacts like a first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the last diary Virginia Woolf kept before her suicide, and that priceless edition of Poe—ranks rather low on the thrill-o-meter. So Davis attempts to inject juicier conflicts. Laura’s struggle to get a degree from Columbia’s journalism school is doomed to fail thanks to flagrant sexism (though a professor plagiarizes her thesis). Sadie, who’s still reeling from a difficult divorce, is a suspect in the book thefts, as was her grandfather, Jack. The tension needle is hardly moved by flat characterizations or improbable plot developments while the writing is strictly functional: long on exposition, short on atmosphere. A story as lively as those stone lions.
14. By the time she’s 17, she and Bern are lovers, which arouses Nicola’s and particularly Tommaso’s jealousy. Bern’s devotion to Italo Calvino’s novel *The Baron in the Trees* none-too-subtly flags him as given to extremes, and as the novel flashes forward to 2012, Tommaso’s drunken revelations to 32-year-old Teresa reveal that the boys’ bond was closer and weirder than she ever knew. Then we’re whisked back to 2003, when Teresa inherits her grandmother’s estate, which includes the farm where Bern, Tommaso, and some new friends—Nicola glaringly not among them—are now squatting. Still fixated on Bern, Teresa joins their commune devoted to sustainable living and guerrilla activism in defense of the environment. Incident piles on top of incident: The commune breaks up; Teresa and Bern have trouble conceiving a child and decide to get married to raise money for infertility treatments; those don’t work, so she sets Bern free by pretending she’s been unfaithful. What all this has to do with the insistently reiterated theme of Bern’s yearning for absolutes is murky—until Tommaso’s confession resumes, and readers learn what drove Bern to the act that results in his fleeing Italy. His final meeting with Teresa has touching moments, muffled by the extreme improbability of the circumstances. Grappling with material similar to Richard Powers’ masterful *The Overstory* (2018), Giordano gets bogged down in plot and fails to persuasively convey his characters’ ideological passions. Bern remains an enigma, as does Teresa’s devotion to him.

Some interesting ideas don’t mesh well with a whole lot of melodrama.

**KINGS COUNTY**

*Goodwillie, David*

Avid Reader Press (432 pp.)

$28.00 | Aug. 11, 2020

978-1-5011-9213-5

After the death of a former friend, a Brooklyn couple finds their lives beginning to unravel.

In his second novel, author and memoirist Goodwillie paints a captivatingly vivid portrait of young love in New York in the early 2000s. Drawn by the promise of the city, Audrey and Theo are a creative couple who both escaped their respective dead-end towns and broken families. Struggling to make it in Bushwick, Audrey, a jack-of-all-trades for a well-known indie label, and Theo, a literary scout for a Hollywood production company, seem like polar opposites at first. After meeting at a concert, they fall into a deep love built on trust and devoid of secrets—or so they thought. When Audrey hears a rumor that someone from her past jumped off the Williamsburg Bridge, her life and relationship start to come apart at the seams. An old secret rises to the surface, putting Audrey and Theo in danger. The novel’s characterizations of people—from Brooklyn musicians to Upper East Siders—and the city itself are its biggest strength: “It had taken [Theo] a decade to gain his footing, but New York was funny that way. Occasionally, he thought he understood the city in a profound way. Most of the time he was confused about everything.” It’s a simple yet perfect encapsulation of the perpetual intimacy and elusiveness of Manhattan. Goodwillie’s writing is full of not only impressive detail and fondness, but also self-awareness: “Audrey and Theo were not true pioneers. They’d arrived, instead, with the first swell of settlers, and had watched with timeworn gentrifiers’ dismay as the swells became waves.” Throughout the novel, the Occupy movement beats wildly in the background, and the pages are littered with current and lost locales like Café Loup, Saint Vitus and Balthazar. Aside from the plot (which sometimes falls on the overdramatic side), the novel is a panoramic time capsule of youth and self-discovery in the aughts in New York City.

A compelling—if slightly melodramatic—portrait of youth, love, and a lost era of New York.

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**Song of LATVIA**

V. Z. Byram

*Song of LATVIA*  
V. Z. Byram

With her husband’s name on a hit list, the fight got personal.

A debut historical novel focuses on the plight of Latvians during World War II.

“An authentic and tense portrait of everyday people dealing with war.” —Kirkus Reviews

For information on publishing or film rights, email vzbyram@gmail.com • vzbyram.com
Like its heroine, intelligent and lusty; full of real joys and sorrows.

**ARTIFACT**

Heyman, Arlene
Bloomsbury (288 pp.)
$27.00 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-63557-471-5

The making of a woman scientist over four decades of change in the middle of the 20th century.

“So what do you actually do?” Dr. LOTtie Kristin Hart Levinson—aka Dr. Rat WESTheimer—is asked at a cocktail party in 1984. “This may sound odd to you,” she replies, “but I study rat salivary glands. They’re more important than people think.” Her subsequent explanation details the role of cunnilingus in rat sex. Neither Lottie nor her creator is squeamish in any way—not about rat sex, or rat dissection, or human sex, all described with brio in these pages. As Lottie tells her football-star high school boyfriend, who becomes her first husband, “I want to know everything about my body, about your body, I want to try everything there is in the world, I want to try it all with you.” Actually, she saves some for her intrepid second husband 30-odd years later; there hasn’t been a menstruation sex scene like this since Scott Spencer’s *Endless Love*. Heyman’s debut novel after a successful story collection, *Scary Old Sex* (2016), also brings to mind Marge Piercy’s domestic dramas of the 1980s, which told the stories of women whose consciousness and lives were changed by the feminist movement and the new options it created in American life. From Lottie’s childhood in Michigan in the early 1940s through her struggles in the Vietnam War era to her maturity as a scientist, mother, and stepmother in the mid-1980s, her curiosity and intellect drive her as strongly as her hormones. It takes decades to tunnel her way through the walls sexism builds around her potential and find her way to the career in science she was made for. Caring as much about her work as she does about domestic life is a constant issue in Lottie’s adulthood; tragic consequences threaten and are not always averted.

*Like its heroine, intelligent and lusty; full of real joys and sorrows.*

**SECRETS OF THE ORCHARD**

by Jean Kelly

Set in 1950s Massachusetts, a debut novel reminds readers, as Faulkner did, that the past is never dead.

“Kelly has created a vivid cast of characters.”

“The final twist certainly is stunning...”

“...the book comes to a very satisfying conclusion, with the mystery solved and the slate cleaned.”

“...this engaging and unpredictable mystery delivers strong characters.”

—Kirkus Reviews


For information on publishing and film rights, email jeank535@verizon.net • www.jean-kelly.com
Medicine runs through the career of Daniel Mason, physician and novelist. Mason was in medical school when his first novel, The Piano Tuner, was published in 2002. His third novel, The Winter Soldier, is the story of a Viennese medical student who is sent, grossly unprepared, to the Eastern Front during World War I; by the time it was published in 2018, Mason was a practicing psychiatrist and assistant professor of psychiatry at Stanford University.

Mason’s new story collection, A Registry of My Passage Upon the Earth (Little, Brown, May 5), features a cast of doctors and scientists throughout history (among other colorful characters including a 19th-century English boxer and an 18th-century French female balloonist). Kirkus calls it “an enchanting cabinet of curiosities and wonders.”

Mason, based in Palo Alto, spoke about the book a few weeks into the nationwide lockdown prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic; he observed that the crisis has put medical professionals squarely in the public spotlight. “Most doctors aren’t used, in their regular day to day, to passing crowds of people with signs saying THANK YOU or getting applauded on the way home,” Mason reflects. He says that he thinks of today’s medical students, like Lucius in The Winter Soldier, being “thrust into this dangerous situation and trying to practice medicine that they’re really unprepared to practice....Doctors are filled with anxiety all the time about whether or not we’re up to snuff.”

The doctors in Mason’s stories are not all heroes. “On Growing Ferns and Other Plants in Glass Cases, in the Midst of the Smoke of London” features a rogues’ gallery of condescending physicians attempting to treat an asthmatic boy in the polluted English capital during the Industrial Revolution; their bizarre treatments only make the patient worse. Forbes, a final doctor, seems more promising. “He starts out by being quite a wonderful doctor,” Mason says. “He’s like the dream doctor that you want. He does this endless detailed physical exam. But then when the patient’s not getting better, he’s not so interested anymore.”

A mysterious medical condition underlies “The Second Dr. Service,” in which a 19th-century country doctor begins to experience blackouts—during which time he is apparently going about his regular life. Except this “other” Dr. Service is a marked improvement on the original—a crack shot, less brooding, more pleasing to his wife.

“Here’s someone who repeatedly falls ill and is transformed,” Mason explains, “but one of the great divergences is the way he interprets that transformation and the way other people interpret it.” Like so many of Mason’s stories, it developed out of historical research: “There’s this historically interesting case report of a guy who has a seizure and continues to work during the seizure, where he’s impaired, but he’s not that impaired. It was published under a pseudonym, so there’s this mystery around it.”
The story that gives the collection its title is inspired by the real case of Arthur Bispo do Rosário (1909-1989), a Brazilian outsider artist who spent most of his life in a Rio de Janeiro mental asylum, creating elaborate sculptures and textiles out of found objects, including a spectacular Cloak of Presentation. When Mason stumbled upon a photo of Bispo in the cloak, he recalls, “he looked like a patient I had had back at San Francisco General Hospital, whom I just loved, who had made a suit out of traffic signs....At the time I was very interested in the psychiatric understandings of art produced by people in psychosis.”

In the story, narrated by Bispo, Mason mimics the artist’s own writing style, characterized by lists of things and idiosyncratic grammar (punctuation in all sorts of unexpected places, for example). For this veteran novelist, re-creating a voice like Bispo’s is one of the unique pleasures of writing short fiction. “A lot of the attraction of the stories is the different language, whether it’s 19th-century medical language or Bispo’s language or the boxing language,” Mason offers. “I love these different kinds of sounds, but I’m aware that it would be hard to sustain a lot of these voices for an entire novel. That’s the day-to-day pleasure of writing them.” Of reading them, too.

*Tom Beer is the editor-in-chief. A Registry of My Passage Upon the Earth received a starred review in the March 1, 2020, issue.*

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**NO PRESENTS PLEASE**

*Kaikini, Jayant*

*Trans. by Niranjana, Tejaswini*

Catapult (240 pp.)

$16.95 paper  |  Jul. 28, 2020

978-1-948226-90-5

A sampler of work by a veteran Indian writer with a talent for exposing the irony and humor in everyday lives.

All of these stories, culled from Kaikini’s work between 1986 and 2006, are set in Mumbai, but the breadth of their subject matter speaks both to the diversity of the metropolis and his reach as a writer. He can be intimate, as with the young man in “Interval” planning to run away with his girlfriend or the man in “Partner” thrust into caring for his suddenly ill roommate. He has a fine grasp of twists and comedy: The picture framer in “Unframed” is torn over whether he should lend abandoned family portraits (“like prisoners no one comes to visit”) to a theater that wants them as props while the steed in “Dagadu Parab’s Wedding Horse” has gone loose, calamitously unraveling the relationship between two brothers and the man who loaned the animal. And he can tell sweeping stories within tight confines: In “Water,” two men at personal crossroads spend the night together in a taxi when a massive storm drenches the city, and the young woman in “Mogri’s World” gets a crash course in city life while working at a restaurant. Kaikini’s heroes are usually stymied in their efforts to improve their stations. Still, the mood he conjures is often on the optimistic side of ambiguity, exemplified by the poor couple in the closing title story that strives to select the best invitations for their wedding. Niranjana’s translation from the Kannada thoughtfully weaves native phrases with their translations, removing the need for a glossary and immersing readers in Kaikini’s world. His style and themes will have a familiar ring for Western audiences; there are echoes of Jhumpa Lahiri and George Saunders. But his vision of a bustling city, his sense of its drama and magical moments, is his own.

A welcome introduction of a commanding writer to a wider audience.

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**GROVE**

*Kinsky, Esther*

*Trans. by Schmidt, Caroline*

Transit Books (287 pp.)

$16.95 paper  |  Jul. 21, 2020

978-1-945492-38-9

Poetic and painterly, a meticulously observed contemplation of the world that was, the world that is, and the world that might have been and the boundaries that join and define them.

Following the death of her partner, known only as “M.,” an unnamed narrator travels to Italy, where she briefly settles among the muted rhythms of a small town nestled in the hills.
surrounding Rome. Able to approach this loss only obliquely, her mourning takes the form of meditative walks, deep immersion in memories and dreams, and explorations of strangers’ gravesites in cemeteries to which she has no connection, a habit instilled by her late father during their travels through Italy in her childhood. Her father was a German speaker whose bond to Italy was formed at the borderland of cultures, through his affinity for its language, art, and history. This he passed on to her as well, and she retraces these earlier journeys and embarks on new discoveries, her thoughts unfurling slowly across the landscape, rising and falling with the hills of Lazio. Light and shadow, color and shape, time and distance shift vertiginously according to her vantage point and the scope of her focus, which dilates from minutest detail to sweeping panorama, then narrows again; her sense of place within the landscape and the wider world alters, too, with each change in perspective, suggesting that how one sees is at least as important as what one sees. Ancient Etruscan necropolises and the untended graves of the long dead speak to the persistence of presence even through the absence of anyone left to remember, as symbols continue to signify where no one exists to decipher their meaning. As she wanders unhurried on the perpetual threshold of spring, the observed nesting upon the remembered upon the fictive realities of literature and film, the narrator bestows equal care and attention on rusted-out construction materials and blowing trash as on blooming mimosas and elegant herons in the marshland around Ferrara, where she contemplates the works of Giorgio Bassani and the great palimpsest that is Italy. Here at last she untangles the question central to her explorations of memory and place: whether she belongs to the side of the vivi, the living, or of the morti, the dead.

A philosophical jewel seeking revelation in interstices, absences, ruptures, and the passages between existence and memory.
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Anette Bloch Jespersen
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CROSSINGS
Landragin, Alex
St. Martin’s (384 pp.)
$26.99 | Jul. 28, 2020
978-1-250-25904-2

Romance, mystery, history, and magical invention dance across centuries in an impressive debut novel.

Landragin layers historical fiction, metafiction, mystery, fantasy, myth, and romance in a way that might remind readers of such books as Cloud Atlas, Life After Life, The Time Traveler’s Wife—or even Dan Brown’s conspiracy-based adventures, albeit with more elegant prose. Its preface begins with a metafictional tease: “I didn’t write this book. I stole it.” The narrator sets forth the history of three manuscripts delivered to him for bookbinding by a wealthy client in contemporary Paris. Each novella has a different author/narrator, including two based on real people: There’s a creepy story supposedly written by poet Charles Baudelaire, a World War II noir romance by critic/novelist Walter Benjamin, and a surrealistic memoir by someone described as “a kind of deathless enchantress.” The tales’ relation to one another, the preface narrator promises, will be revealed, whether we read the three in order or in the “Baroness sequence,” named for the manuscript’s ill-fated owner, which interlaces chapters from all three into one novel. “The Education of a Monster” is Baudelaire’s self-portrait of a colossally self-centered snob. His poetic reputation endures, however, in Benjamin’s “City of Ghosts,” as the posh Baudelaire Society becomes the epicenter of a breathless mystery, playing out as the Nazis advance upon the city. “Tales of the Albatross” is the fantastic story that lies behind the other two, beginning with the arrival of the first Europeans on a remote island in Polynesia. Narrated by a young woman called Alula, its tragic love story is set in motion when a crossing, or rather two of them, occurs. Long practiced by the island’s people, the crossing is a spiritual exchange in which two carefully prepared individuals pass into each other’s bodies. But these crossings go terribly sideways, and Alula’s search for her beloved, Koahu, will take her through seven bodies and across two centuries, through the lives of a globe-circling sailor, a woman born enslaved on a Louisiana plantation, a terribly disfigured Belgian heiress, and a hypnotist-turned-psychologist, among others. In whatever order you read, Landragin carries off the whole handsomely written enterprise with panache.

This novel intrigues and delights with an assured orchestration of historical research and imaginative flights.

REDEFINING NORMAL
PAUL NANKIVELL

Pushing the boundaries of self-advocacy

In this novel based on a true story, a boy with cerebral palsy struggles to find his place in a dysfunctional school system.

ISBN #: 978-1-48359-688-4

“An engrossing, painful, and disturbing tale of education against the odds.” — Kirkus Reviews

For information on publishing or film rights, email pnankivell427@gmail.com • paul-nankivell.com

SOME GO HOME
Lindsey, Odie
Norton (288 pp.)
$26.95 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-0-393-24952-1

Memories of a 1964 murder in Mississippi are forced back to the surface, reopening old wounds over race and class.

Lindsey’s ambitious debut novel—an admirable bid to compete with William Faulkner at his own game—concerns two forms of PTSD. Colleen, a white Iraq War vet, has returned home to the small town of Pitchlynn (“the poorest slice of the poorest state in the nation”) and is struggling toward normalcy. After a period of drinking and drugging laid her low, she’s started a tenuous new life with her husband, Derby, with whom she’s pregnant with twins. (Not that it keeps her from sneaking the occasional cigarette.) The other form of PTSD involves all of Pitchlynn: Derby’s father, Hare, is being retried for the murder of Gabe, a black man who stoked resentment among the white locals for owning land outright on a sharecropper farm. Derby has disowned Hare, but his half brother, Sonny, is sure Hare is innocent, though his efforts to defend dad’s honor end when his Cessna crashes, sending him to the ICU. Amid the anxiety over the retrial, another battle is brewing over the mansion once owned by the family that may have commissioned
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Lauren Francis-Sharma
“An epic novel that recreates the hybrid history of Native and African peoples during the era of American exploration and expansion. Lauren Francis-Sharma’s care for her characters and skill with her subject shine through every page.”
—LAILA LALAMI, author of The Other Americans

$26.00 - May 12, 2020 - Hardcover

CLEAN HANDS
Patrick Hoffman
“An old-fashioned private investigator yarn—a terrific story—but skillfully brought up to date . . . Hoffman never slows the pace and always keeps the reader guessing.”
—SUSAN ISAACS, author of Takes One to Know One

$26.00 - June 2, 2020 - Hardcover

CROOKED Hallelujah
Kelli Jo Ford
“Ford’s storytelling is urgent, her characters achingly human and complex, and her language glittering and rugged. This is a stunner.”
—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY (starred review)

$26.00 - July 14, 2020 - Hardcover

PRIVATE MEANS
Cree LeFavour
“This feels like an Ian McEwan novel. Served on a bed of Cheever. I can’t offer higher praise than that. But written by a woman, which is even better.”—ELIZABETH GILBERT

$26.00 - August 11, 2020 - Hardcover
Hare to lynch Gabe; a massive magnolia tree on the property, and the abuses it receives over the course of the story, serves as a symbol for this complex interplay of blood and memory. Perhaps too complex: Some characters are underdrawn, as the ties among Hare’s family, friends, and enemies acquire ever thickening knots. (An issue in Faulkner’s fiction too, of course.) But the novel has some sturdy support beams in its central characters, especially Colleen, whose journey from soldier to almost–drug casualty to beauty queen to conflicted new mom is bracing at every turn.

A compassionate and complex debut, assuredly encompassing post–Iraq War fiction and old-fashioned Southern gothic.

THE BOY IN THE FIELD
Livesey, Margot
Harper/HarperCollins (272 pp.)
$26.99 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-0-06-294639-3

A random act of violence opens vistas into the vagaries of fate and the complexity of human experience for three teenagers.

Walking home from school in a town near Oxford, Matthew, Zoe, and Duncan Lang spot a boy lying in an adjacent field, wearing “what appeared to be long red socks.” This is a characteristic Livesey description, subtle, with a lurking sting: The socks are trails of blood. Karel Lustig, the siblings learn later, has been stabbed and left there by a stranger who picked him up hitchhiking home from work. Each of the trio deals with this unsettling event differently. Eldest Matthew, haunted by memories of a childhood friend abused by her father, avidly follows the police.
A young woman undermines the state-controlled system that determines motherhood to near-disastrous effect in this chilling follow-up to *The Water Cure*. In early puberty, Calla's father takes her to a lottery station, where she chooses a blue ticket from a mysterious machine. Once her fate is determined, Calla must make her way to a city, alone and on foot. If she manages to avoid the roving packs of boys and men who prowl the woods and roadways, Calla will start her adult life as a "blue ticket." In the city, Calla is outfitted with a copper IUD and expected to contribute to society solely through her position as a chemist in a laboratory. "Blue ticket: I was not motherly," Calla thinks. "It had been judged that it wasn't for me by someone who knew better than I did." Her days are filled with work and visits to the combative Doctor A, who monitors blue tickets like Calla. Her evenings are filled with drinking and casual sex. Soon, however, Calla can't resist the pull of the "new and dark feeling" inside her, a "strange, ravaging ghost." Coveting the forbidden lives of the few women who bear white tickets, she removes the IUD on her own using tweezers and enough booze to numb the blinding pain. When Doctor A discovers Calla's inevitable pregnancy, she's cast out of her house and once again left to fend for herself. Mackintosh renders Calla's internal struggle with deft, lyric precision. What is it about Calla the state determined unmotherly? How will she care for a child without the protection of a family or community? Can she trust the other women she meets on the road, who have also decided to take their fates into their own hands? Like Sarah Hall in *Daughters of the North* or Leni Zumas in *Red Clocks*, Mackintosh brings a new sense of pathos to the dystopian novel. Late in the book, Mackintosh reveals that Calla, like other women in her country, has little to no medical knowledge about her own body, especially when it comes to pregnancy and childbirth. They're shocked to learn about the placenta, for example, and have no instinct for how to hold a baby. This detail transforms Calla's haunting quest to become a mother into a heartbreaking bid for self-determination, self-worth, and self-knowledge—no matter the cost.

A moving and original meditation on freedom, fate, and women's rage.

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**A Serving of Revenge**

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—Kirkus Reviews

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TOM CLANCY FIRING POINT
Maden, Mike
Putnam (480 pp.)
$29.00 | Jun. 9, 2020
978-0-593-18806-4

President Jack Ryan and son save the world again in this latest Tom Clancy thriller by Maden.

“Alive, not dead.” That is young Jack’s task in South Korea—to bring a bad guy back for interrogation—but he knows there’s a long, nasty road of hurt between life and death. Later, he’s in a Barcelona restaurant sipping vermut when he unexpectedly meets an old flame. They chat, and he leaves just before an explosion kills everyone inside. Rushing back—because that’s what Ryans do—he hears his dying friend whisper “Sammler.” Enraged, he will stop at nothing to find her killer. Later on, a woman from Spain’s security service also dies in Jack’s presence. No wonder he’s single; the guy’s a walking danger zone. In typical Clancy style, the action spans four continents and the Pacific Ocean, where a container ship carrying illegal cargo is sunk. In “a new kind of piracy,” drones disguised as tiger sharks sink enough ships to warrant the attention of President Ryan, whom one character calls “sharp as a tack, and blunt as a hammer.” That’s much better than what a bad guy calls his son: “this Ryan asshole.” Father and son go to great lengths to keep their relationship from being known, yet it’s still curious that no one seems to noodle on the idea they might look alike for a reason. A geek named Gavin, a “one-man wrecking machine when it came to hacking,” pointlessly reminds Jack that he’s “not authorized to do anything.” If Jack follows that advice, half the story disappears. The ultimate stakes are much higher than sunken ships: The theft of trillions of dollars may cause an “economic apocalypse,” and what’s a Clancy thriller without a ticking clock (Jack’s watch, really) and a threat of World War III? Fast action and dead bodies abound in this enjoyable bit of hero worship.

It’s assembly-line Clancy: high-quality entertainment, few surprises.

NIGHTSHADE
McAfee, Annalena
Knopf (272 pp.)
$26.95 | Aug. 6, 2020
978-0-525-65829-0

Walking across London after dark, an artist reviews her past and fears the future in McAfee’s pitch-black new novel. Eve Laing grows and then paints plants in jewellike works that have garnered her some success but also condemnation as a dainty, feminine artist. This infuriates her almost as much as the fame of her one-time friend, a confessional performance artist Eve dissed years ago with a widely reprinted wisecrack: “Wanda Wilson’s sole talent is for monstrous self-pity.” She’ll live to regret that remark in the jaw-dropping finale to a masterfully orchestrated narrative that fully justifies its pervasive atmosphere of lurking dread. When we meet Eve, she’s looking through the window of the town house where she used to live with her husband, Kristof. Eve left him five months ago, consumed by her new project and by Luka, the young assistant who has become her lover. At 60, Eve has decided to finally silence her patronizing critics with Poison Florilegium, a seven-panel depiction of deadly plants “lovely as their innocent sisters, venomous as snakes”; she views it as a tribute to “all those female artists…who laboured in the shadows.” As her memories unfold during her walk, we learn that Eve’s bitter determination stems from ancient wounds: an unhappy childhood, a humiliating affair with her famous art teacher, frustrations as a wife and mother. These injuries have rendered her both cruel and vindictive: “stringy Nancy, with her unfortunate recessive chin” is among Eve’s kindest comments about her daughter; and her revenge on an old friend who had a fling with Kristof is shockingly excessive. Eve isn’t meant to be likable—McAfee’s whip-smart text implicitly makes the point that no one objects
“A collection of unpredictable postmodern jests with more than a little pathos underneath the levity.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“Ridge can make you both laugh and wince, but he can also kick up your pulse with a storytelling urgency that thrums under the attractively fragmented surfaces.”

—Jonathan Lethem, author of *Motherless Brooklyn*

A Terminator statue comes to life at the Hollywood Wax Museum; a coyote laps up Colt .45 as a passerby looks on in existential quietude; a detective disappears while investigating a missing midwestern cam girl. Set in Kentucky, Hollywood, and the afterlife, these bright, bold short-shorts and stories construct an uncannily familiar, alternate-reality America.

2018 Linda Bruckheimer Series in Kentucky Literature
Available May 19, 2020  978-1-946448-56-9
Sarabande Books  www.sarabandebooks.org
“Your job when you’re translating is to read something with extraordinarily close, nerdy hypersensitivity,” Daniel Hahn tells me. Hahn has translated literary fiction from Portuguese, French, and Spanish into English. His latest, *I Don’t Expect Anyone To Believe Me* (And Other Stories, May 5), by Mexican novelist Juan Pablo Villalobos, is a brilliantly weird book about a young literature student who moves from Mexico to Barcelona, happens to share a name with the author, and becomes hopelessly entangled in a complicated gangster plot.

“The novel is playful, and it’s funny, and it’s clever in a slightly flashy, showy sort of way,” Hahn says. It’s also deliciously vulgar, to the point that Hahn included an afterword in which he described some of the challenges he faced as a translator—not least the challenge of translating swear words into English.

In your afterword, you note that “voice is so much of this book; not least because the characters draw attention to their language use so conspicuously.” Can you explain what you mean?

I think that this is a novel about language and the way that people use language as well as being about all the other things it’s about….For a translator, that’s immense fun, because language, obviously, is all we have. And because as translators, we don't have to worry about plot, and we don't have to worry about structure, and we don't have to worry about themes, really—I mean, all of that is a given. I don't have to decide what is going to make a satisfactory ending on a structural level or on a narrative level. All I have is: Which are the words I am going to use, which are the little bits of punctuation I’m going to use, on quite a micro level. Are they going to have an effect on the reader in the same way that the original has an effect on the reader?

Could you talk a little more about the difficulty of rendering all those Spanish variants into English?

So we have a main character who’s from Mexico, and he’s living in Barcelona, which is Spain, but it’s also Catalonia. He has a flatmate from Argentina. There’s an Italian guy who speaks Spanish, but you can tell that he’s Italian when he’s speaking Spanish. There are all of these different inflections for the different Spanishes that are being used. The difficulty for a translator is finding a way of marking these out as different—because they’re very clearly different, in many respects, in the original—without creating an English that locates them in the English-speaking world.

Could we talk about the swearing a little?

Oh, yes. The swearing is incredibly fun. In Spanish you can tell from the kind of swearing that a character uses where in the Spanish-speaking world they are. And again, I wanted to avoid one character with Irish swearing and one character with New Zealand swearing and one character with Canadian swearing—it would be preposterous in English. So that's...
one of the challenges. But the other challenge is that swear words across the English-speaking world are very varied in terms of their weight and their acceptability. There are some words which are very casual, very colloquial, not even that highly offensive in Glasgow that over in Australia are the most taboo words that you could use.

You wrote a column on translation for Asymptote from 2015 to 2016, and in one of your posts noted that, “writers being translated into English tend to be far more involved in the process than writers being translated out of it.” How did Villalobos fit into that pattern?

Villalobos is himself a translator, so he knows what it is I’m trying to do, and so if I say to him, “In order to make this funny, I’m going to have to change it completely, because the only way of making it funny is, we take it all apart, see what the moving parts are of this joke and then build a new joke with the same moving parts. If I just translate what you’ve done, it will be sort of accurate in semantic terms, but it won’t be funny anymore.” He, of course, as a very good translator and a funny writer, completely understands what my job is. So having a writer who has some understanding of the terrible things I’m going to have to perpetrate upon his beautiful Spanish-language novel in order to make it a different but still, I hope, quite good English-language novel—that is sort of the dream.

Natalia Holtzman’s writing has appeared in the Los Angeles Review of Books, Bookforum, the Minneapolis Star Tribune, and elsewhere. I Don’t Expect Anyone To Believe Me received a starred review in the March 1, 2020, issue.

THE BELL IN THE LAKE
Mytting, Lars
Trans. by Darwicin, Deborah
Overlook (400 pp.)
$27.00 | Jun. 16, 2020
978-1-4197-4318-4

In a small Norwegian village, an ancient church is demolished. A young pastor arrives in a remote Norwegian village. It’s 1880, but the village of Butangen could be a century behind the rest of the world. The pastor, Kai Schweigaard, arrives with modernizing ambitions. “The newspapers,” he observes, “published articles on inventions and changes in politics, a new era was on its way. This new era, this seismic shift in the times, required sound leadership, firmness and spiritual health.” But Butangen, which is overrun with Norse legends even older than the Christian faith that Schweigaard professes, presents a major challenge. That challenge is embodied in Butangen’s ancient church, built in the traditional stave method. With its intricate carvings of pagan gods, the church is a contradiction in terms. Schweigaard decides it must come down. Numerous obstacles stand in his way, chief among them a fiercely intelligent, independently minded young woman named Astrid. Initially, the two are attracted to each other, but as they find themselves, increasingly, on opposing sides, their relationship sours. Meanwhile, a young architect arrives from Dresden to oversee the demolition of the church. Mytting handles all this complicated material with a wonderful finesse. In Schweigaard, Astrid, and Gerhard, the architect, he has created distinct and memorable characters who echo each other in some ways and mute each other in others. Astrid is a particularly strong character, so it’s unfortunate that Mytting seems to lose track of her as the book goes on, choosing to focus instead on Gerhard, a romantic and idealistic figure. The book’s great strength, though, is its depiction of remote village life: It’s a tiny world a world away from any other. Mytting hits rather heavily on some of the book’s other themes—Astrid’s choice between the icily rational Schweigaard and the dreamier Gerhard, for example—but, all in all, his first novel to appear in English is a major triumph.

A mesmerizing if occasionally heavy-handed book about architecture, fate, legend, and faith.
THE FIVE BOOKS OF (ROBERT) MOSES
Nersesian, Arthur
Akashic (1504 pp.)
$44.95 | Jul. 28, 2020
978-1-61775-499-9

Three decades in the making, Nersesian's pentalogy—one book for each New York borough—imagines a very strange alternative past.

Roaming from the 1930s to the 1980s, Nersesian's five books imagine a New York vacated after a bombing campaign during the 1969 Days of Rage and relocated to the Nevada desert. As the sprawling story opens, Ulysses Sarkisian (who shares the pop star Cher's family name) is roaming, biblically, out in the sand. Uli, as he's called, is amnesiac, knowing only that he has to get across town to fulfill a mission. Eventually he connects with his sister, who's in the thick of a gang war between the "Crappers" and the "Piggers," a contest that takes Uli all across a Rescue City in which, like the real New York of yore, nothing works well. "When the sewers got blocked and Staten Island flooded, the homes became uninhabitable, even after it drained," a Crapper leader tells him, dodging Uli's conspiracy-theory question about why the place was built even before the bombing campaign began. Those terror attacks are the product of another gang war of sorts, the very real fraternal struggle between Robert and Paul Moses, each of whom does his bit to destroy the old city. The story plunges ever deeper into the surreal as Uli morphs into Paul and vice versa even as Paul's daughter, Beatrice, runs for office disguised as would-be Andy Warhol assassin Valerie Solanas ("I think we want to downplay that," Bea says of the attempt). Allen Ginsberg, Jane Jacobs, Mark Rudd, Ronald Reagan, Timothy Leary, and other real-life figures play parts in Nersesian's decidedly centrifugal story, which, though challenging, follows its own rigorous logic across a landscape of mirages and hallucinations. Or, as Uli replies when Bea asks him whether he's figured out why he's there, "No, not really. But I don't know, I saw a lot of weird things."

A postmodern masterwork that outdoes Pynchon in eccentricity—and electricity, with all its dazzling prose.

LOVE AND THEFT
Parish, Stan
Doubleday (272 pp.)
$26.95 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-0-385-54524-2

After pulling off an audacious jewel heist from a Las Vegas hotel boutique, Alex Cassidy decides it's time to get out of the game. But his criminal associates won't let him quit until he does their bidding one more time.

Alex has good reasons to retire—not only his slice of the $22 million grab, but also Diane Alison, the charismatic celebrity caterer he falls for while hiding out in New Jersey. Alex quickly realizes that he met her once before—some 20 years ago with his teenage partner in theft, Clay. Clay and Diane subsequently entered into an ill-fated romance that ended when he was shot to death. She later gave birth to their son, Tom. Now, during an impromptu family gathering in Mexico that started out as a romantic getaway for Alex and Diane, the wayward Tom is swept away by Alex's spirited daughter, Paola. She is visiting from Colombia, where she lives with her mother. Things go south for everyone when Tom and Paola are abducted as a way to convince Alex to go to the south of Spain and deliver to the bad guys a Chinese fat cat threatening to sue Vegas power brokers over the loss of his pre-purchased $7 million necklace. Though furious at Alex for putting her child at risk, Diane flies off with him to Spain and becomes a key player in the Mission: Impossible–style team he assembles. Her transformation happens rather quickly. And Tom (introduced in Parish's Down the Shore, 2014) and Paola drop out of the book rather abruptly. But like Don Winslow, Parish is both a hard-bitten storyteller and...
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a very good writer. A drug-altered scene “liquefies and darkens like sugar over heat.” And the plot heats up just right.

A hard-boiled thriller that’s equally good at love and theft.

MUSICAL CHAIRS

Poeppel, Amy

Emily Bestler/Atria (416 pp.)

$27.00 | Jul. 21, 2020

978-1-5011-7641-8

Now that her adult children are safely ensconced in their lives, a Manhattan cello player has a summer of romance planned at her Connecticut weekend home with her boyfriend. It does not work out as planned.

Bridget Stratton, daughter of globally renowned conductor Edward Stratton, is an excellent musician in her own right. She is also a single mother to two grown children, twins Isabelle and Oscar, and sister to Gwen, the well-known host of a Netflix series. With her children busy with their own careers, she has a relaxing summer in rural Connecticut planned with her boyfriend. But instead, both her children show up with different crises, much to her surprise, and her boyfriend breaks up with her—gently, politely—via email. Her embarrassment runs deep. Will, her long-term friend and partner in the chamber music trio they created three decades prior, comes from Manhattan to Connecticut to be a shoulder to lean on and, while visiting, falls for a local woman. On one level, this is a story of deep friendship between Bridget and Will. It is also a story of motherhood, of daughterhood, and of sisterhood—when to help, when to let go, and when to celebrate. It is also a story of fixing up a house. A story of music. A story of aging. A story of being scared to change and yet still wanting to. And a story of falling in love. There is a large cast of characters, but they are all distinct individuals with their own personalities and voices who work together seamlessly in the novel as both soloists and supporting characters. Author Poeppel has created a story that is well thought out, well plotted, well written, and fully developed.

A delightful novel that celebrates the messiness and joy to be found in real life.

THE OK END OF FUNNY TOWN

Polanzak, Mark

BOA Editions (200 pp.)

$17.00 paper | May 5, 2020

978-1-950774-05-0

Sly and witty stories that warp our world to shine a spotlight on people’s many foibles and flaws—without quite losing hope in human goodness.

With a nod toward García Márquez’s masterful “A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings,” Polanzak opens his debut collection with the tale of a giant who settles down in the middle of a town. While the stranger initially fascinates the local residents, as soon as they realize he has no interest in them, they grow completely bored, if not angered, by him, “a tired monster, not interesting enough to even hurt us.” It’s a theme that Polanzak explores throughout the first section: our failure to empathize with others simply because they are different from us. In the next group of stories, titled “Travel to Fantastic Places!” Polanzak lovingly satirizes things we’ve lately come to revere in the fantastic place that is the present moment. In “A Proper Hunger,” a logical extension of the trendy locavore movement are restaurants where part of the experience is hunting for your own food while in “Our New Community School,” the idea that everything is a teachable moment means that everyone’s both a teacher and a student, every moment a learning opportunity: “Buying milk and eggs can be done with deeper Distraction from Lost Ambition.” Polanzak’s brilliance is that he strikes the perfect balance between irony and sincerity; cleverness and sweetness. “How You Wish,” for example, offers a smart disquisition on different
wish opportunities (e.g., lit birthday candles, shooting stars) and the categories of wishes they support (e.g., selfish, whimsical, meaningful) while also recounting the ups and downs, joys and sorrows of the narrator’s long relationship.

Engaging stories that journey through the fantastic to show us the absurdities and bittersweet truths of our present moment.

**THE HOUSE OF WHISPERS**

*Purcell, Laura*

Penguin (336 pp.)

$17.00 paper | Jun. 9, 2020

978-0-14-313553-1

In Purcell’s third creepily atmospheric historical novel, a young woman flees London under a dark cloud only to discover new threats in superstition-haunted early Victorian Cornwall.

After serving as Lady Rose Windrop’s maid in elegant Hanover Square, Esther Stevens, having assumed the name of Hester Why, is unprepared for the stark contrast of her new position as a nurse and personal maid to the silent and partially paralyzed Louise Pinecroft, mistress of the cliffside Morvoren House. In the remote, eerie mansion she finds a strange household enacting bizarre local customs. Salt lines the doorway of Rosewyn Pinecroft’s bedroom. Wearing her dress inside out, Rosewyn, Louise’s childlike adult ward, gives the startled Hester a ball of bible pages “for protection.” Creeda, Rosewyn’s caretaker and the longest serving member of the staff, warns Hester against being “pixy-led.” Alternating with Hester’s increasingly unreliable first-person narrative (aided by gin and stolen laudanum) are two other storylines. One reveals Hester’s hidden guilt at the events that drove her from London. The other goes back 40 years to when a young Louise assists her grief-stricken physician father as he embarks on a radical experiment using prisoners to find a cure for the tuberculosis that killed the rest of their family. Purcell excels at creating a spooky Gothic ambiance, and the wild Cornish coast with its ancient folklore makes a wonderfully evocative
backdrop. She also does a good job at establishing psychological ambiguity in her characters so they (and readers) aren’t sure if what they see is real or if they are going mad.

A dark and unsettling novel for lovers of Rebecca and Jane Eyre.

**THE TWO MRS. CARLYLES**

*Rindell, Suzanne*

Putnam (432 pp.)

$27.00 | Jul. 28, 2020

978-0-525-53920-9

Rindell, who exhibited her own skill at noir romances in *The Other Typist* (2013), borrows heavily from Charlotte Brontë, du Maurier, and Hitchcock in this gothic yarn about secrets not shared by a young wife and her wealthy older husband.

When the San Francisco orphanage where she lives mysteriously burns down, 13-year-old Violet and two older friends—flashy Cora and common-sensical Flossie—end up in a bordello run by Mr. Tackett, who hires the 16-year-olds as dancehall girls and mousy, sensitive Violet as a maid. Two unhappy years later, Violet finds miserly, vicious Tackett dead from a suspiciously violent stomach ailment. Violet, who suffers from strange blackout spells, has reason to worry he’s been poisoned. Serendipitously, the 1906 earthquake occurs almost immediately, leveling the bordello with the dead man inside and leaving his money for Violet, Cora, and Flossie to divide. Reinventing herself as a respectable shop girl, Violet is wooed by dashing, wealthy Harry Carlyle, whom Rindell could easily have named Edward Rochester or Maxim de Winter. Harry’s first wife, Madeleine, evidently died in the earthquake. Or did she? Harry and Violet agree not to discuss their pasts, one of the novel’s many convenient contrivances. Despite Cora’s grouchy disapproval, Violet marries Harry with Flossie’s support. Enter prune-faced housekeeper Miss Weber. Whether jealous over Harry or loyal to Madeleine, she makes Violet’s life miserable in all the ways readers of Victorian melodrama know well. Meanwhile, strange nocturnal events of the standard tinkling piano and lit candle variety lead Violet to fear a ghost is stalking her. Given Harry’s flashes of temper and Violet’s insecure curiosity, the marriage understandably becomes strained. Then Harry is hospitalized for—guess what—stomach problems! Is he being poisoned, and, if so, by whom? Who may not be whom they seem? Who is a criminal? Or a ghost? Since everything revolves around secrets and distrust, readers may gleefully assume they shouldn’t trust Violet as narrator. Or should they?

Entertaining escapism but a too-obvious pastiche of classic literary memes.

**WHEN SHE WAS GOOD**

*Robotham, Michael*

Scribner (352 pp.)

$26.00 | Jul. 28, 2020

978-1-982103-63-7

Forensic psychologist Cyrus Haven returns in Robotham’s gripping follow-up to *Good Girl, Bad Girl* (2019).

Cyrus has finally tracked down Sacha Hopewell, the London special constable who carried little Evie Cormac out of a house of horrors seven years ago, where a man was tortured and killed trying to protect her. The little girl, whose true identity remains a mystery, was dubbed Angel Face and made a ward of the court; eventually she was given the name Evie and moved to Langford Hall, a secure children’s home. Meanwhile, Sacha and her family were threatened, and she eventually fled London. Cyrus hopes Sacha can shed light on what really happened to Evie in the days following her rescue and offers to take Sacha to see Evie, but she declines. Cyrus is then called to the scene of retired police officer Hamish Whitmore’s suspected suicide, where he finds evidence that suggests Whitmore was murdered.
Cyrus advises his old friend Detective Lenny Parvel to treat the death as a homicide. Cyrus soon finds out that Whitmore had been investigating a series of child murders attributed to recently deceased pedophile Eugene Green, and, shockingly, the last name on his list is Angel Face. Whitmore's family also reveals that a man with pale blue eyes and a half-moon scar, claiming to be police, had already questioned them. That's no police officer, and it's not long before Cyrus, with Sacha's help, is racing to find out Evie's true identity in a bid to save her from a powerful group of people who want her silenced at any cost. Once again, Robotham delves into some very (very) dark territory, and the horror steadily mounts as Evie, who has a strange ability to tell when people are lying, finally reveals what really happened to her before her rescue. Cyrus and Evie, both trauma survivors, are quirky, complex, and endlessly fascinating creations, and Robotham's meticulously crafted tale is propelled by their alternating first-person narratives. Readers will be putty in this supremely talented author's capable hands.

An urgent, poignant, and terrifying thriller. More please.
of a looping mystery, perhaps a member, perhaps the very embodiment, of a group called Bakteria, which "leaked a trove of undeclassified material related to a Japanese bacteriological warfare unit from the Second World War, whose crimes the U.S. government had notoriously helped cover up, shielding its members in exchange for their data harvested from human experimentation." Was her disappearance a prank, a kidnapping, a CIA plot, an act of terrorism? We're left to guess. In another story, some of the last pilots of the Imperial Army, knowing that they won't return, lift off into the sky to "meet several hundred enemy fighters," dutifully plunging like so many Icaruses into the ocean. A Japanese woman recalls the hoods that she and her neighbors wore to protect themselves from American firebombing: "they were just padded pieces of cloth, another thing our government cooked up. Still, we put them on, you know, half of us running around with our hoods on fire." Serizawa writes elegantly if matter-of-factly of the horrific and the nostalgic alike, as when one narrator recalls a childhood visit to her grandparents in Japan, learning an ancient ritual: "clapping her hands three times and pressing her palms together, eyes closed, a prayer for Fuji-san, his mountain god. Keeper of health."

Cultures collide and sometimes meld in an assured debut.

RODHAM
Sittenfeld, Curtis
Random House (432 pp.)
$28.00 | May 19, 2020
978-0-399-59091-7

How would Hillary Rodham's life—and our world—be different if she had never married Bill Clinton?

In American Wife (2008), Sittenfeld imagined her way into Laura Bush's head in the guise of a character named Alice Blackwell. In her new novel, she doesn't bother to change the protagonists' names, and we're introduced to Hillary Rodham as she's about to give her famous Wellesley College graduation speech and has an intimation of her "own singular future." She goes to Yale, meets a charismatic former Rhodes Scholar, falls in love, catches him cheating on her, and follows him to Arkansas anyway. They try to come up with ways to tame Bill's libido: "Maybe—what if—if I wanted it and you didn't," he asks her, "would you think it was disgusting if I laid next to you and touched myself?" That works for her. "Mapping out the future, coming up with strategies and plans—these were things we were good at," she thinks. But then she decides not to marry him, and the history of the United States goes off in a different direction. The captivating thing about American Wife was imagining an inner life for Laura Bush, a first lady who was something of a cipher, and in particular imagining that her politics were different from her husband's. Sittenfeld sets herself an opposite task in this book, creating an interior world for a woman everyone thinks they know. This Hillary tracks with the real person who's been living in public all these years, and it's enjoyable to hear her think about her own desires, her strengths and weaknesses, her vulnerabilities and self-justifications; it's also fun to see how familiar events would still occur under different circumstances. (Watch what happens when Bill Clinton appears on 60 Minutes with a less-astute wife at his side.) But there isn't much here that will surprise you.

Pleasurable wish fulfillment for Hillary fans.

KEEP SAYING THEIR NAMES
Stranger, Simon
Knopf (304 pp.)
$28.95 | May 19, 2020
978-0-525-65736-1

The Holocaust comes to Norway. Though its stated goal is to preserve the story of Hirsch Komissar, the author's wife's Jewish great-grandfather and the owner of a thriving boutique in
Trondheim, Norway, before the German invasion in April 1940, Stranger’s fact-based novel is more a portrait of one of the collaborators who abetted the process of killing hundreds of that country’s Jews and others during the Holocaust. Arrested by the Germans in January 1942 for the offense of spreading news from the BBC, Hirsch is executed later that year in a Norwegian labor camp. Meanwhile, following his recruitment by the Nazis shortly after the invasion, Norwegian Henry Oliver Rinnan, the source of the information leading to Hirsch’s arrest, skillfully infiltrates the nation’s resistance network and, with his accomplices, runs a ruthless interrogation operation out of a house that came to be known as the “Gang Monastery.” In an ironic twist, when Hirsch’s son and his family return from Sweden to Trondheim in 1948, they move into the former torture headquarters, where grisly evidence of Rinnan’s cruelty remains. Stranger employs an unusual storytelling technique, labeling each section with a letter of the alphabet, followed by a series of words—“A for accusation. A for arrest. A for all that will disappear and slide into oblivion”—that launches him into the pieces of nonchronological narrative that compose the novel. Not for lack of interest in Hirsch’s story, but seemingly more because of the better-documented record of Rinnan’s treachery and brutality, the novel’s focus shifts, gradually but unmistakably, to become the chronicle of an amoral man, motivated to kill by little more than greed, lust, and a desire for revenge for the torment inflicted on him as a child because of his small physical stature and his rural family’s poverty. While he doesn’t lack for vivid scenes, Rinnan never comes close to qualifying as a truly complex or tragic figure, and the tragedy of Hirsch’s death never fully comes to life.

The story of a Nazi collaborator in Norway and one of his victims fails to engage the emotions.

\[\text{THE COLOR OF AIR}\]

**Tsukiyama, Gail**

HarperVia/HarperCollins

(304 pp.)

$26.99 | Jul. 7, 2020

978-0-06-297619-2

In 1930s Hawaii, a tightknit community grows even closer in the weeks after the eruption of a nearby volcano threatens their town and brings up old secrets. Tsukiyama delivers the reader to the lush landscape of Hawaii on the day in 1935 when a prodigal son’s return coincides with the eruption of Mauna Loa, a true event. Daniel Abe is a successful doctor in Chicago, but two years after his mother Mariko’s death, a secret drives him home to Hilo, Hawaii. As he arrives, the volcano erupts. In the weeks it takes for the lava to flow toward the town, Daniel’s childhood community comes together as they always have. With interludes of “ghost voices” and “island voices,” the book reveals characters and events from decades prior, deepening the richness of the community. Told in close third person from various perspectives, the narrative draws the reader into the family ties and abundant landscape of Hilo, Tsukiyama writes her characters into the fabric of a time and place where the sugar cane industry was king; people from all over the world are recruited as workers only to be exploited by the plantation owners, and attempts at unionization are violently extinguished. In Hilo, “a chorus of Portuguese, Chinese, Tagalog, and Japanese languages all melded into one indistinguishable song,” but people were kept “separated by ethnic groups, just as the owners planned.” Yet the mosaic of characters creates a family: “Not born to be, yeah...but chosen to be.” Through tragedy and joy, Tsukiyama crafts characters whose reliance on each other is their greatest strength, with many strong women leading the way. The dialogue flows easily, and the landscape is rendered with such vibrance that the reader will become fully immersed in the sensory details.

Well-paced and lush, this is a captivating historical novel that shows the power of love and human resilience.
A young married couple struggles to survive Ceaușescu’s Romania. Alina and Liviu’s marriage has begun to disintegrate. It’s the 1970s, and they live in a small Romanian town; Ceaușescu rules the country, which is gripped by suspicion and fear. When Liviu’s brother defects to the West, the couple falls under increasing scrutiny, and Alina finds herself forced to entertain a Secret Services agent every Tuesday afternoon. This short debut novel, by a Romanian writer who lives in Germany, is narrated in even shorter chapters that skip around in time and point of view. The chapters are as brief and intense as flashes of lightning in a storm. So is van Llewyn’s prose. “I can see no point in sharing a bed with Liviu,” she writes, from Alina’s perspective, “if all I do is turn my back to him, wincing at his smell of alcohol.” Some chapters take the form of lists, like an early one strikingly titled “How To Attract (Unwanted) Attention From the Communist Authorities.” For the most part, van Llewyn’s experiments with the novel’s form work well. The only moments where she falters can and about the forms that anti-American sentiment can take in times of crisis; the setting during a pandemic, however, one can assume was less intentional. Reading the novel in the time of COVID-19 adds an even greater resonance, and horror, to the description of the fatal spread of that 1918 flu. The pathos inspired by the sheer scale and indiscriminate nature of pandemic death is almost overwhelming, especially given current events.

A coming-of-age story that hits a bit closer to home than Wiseman may have intended.
You have to love a gal who takes chances while staying true to herself.

**THE FATE OF A FLAPPER**

Calkins, Susanna  
Minotaur (320 pp.)  
$17.99 paper | Jul. 28, 2020  
978-1-250-19085-7

The Roaring ’20s approach a dark and dangerous end as criminal activity, bombings, and plunging stocks rock Chicago.

Gina Ricci works as a cigarette girl and drink server at the Third Door, a speak-easy run by the iron-fisted Signora Castallazzo, who also has several legitimate businesses and a good relationship with the cops. Gina works to support her father, who has palsy. She’s recently resumed a tenuous relationship with her wealthy great-aunt and great-uncle after the murder of their son, her cousin Marty, a photographer who left her the little he owned. Gina becomes involved in yet another murder when Marty’s sister, Nancy, an ambitious cop who wants to become the first woman detective, asks her to take photos at a crime scene. The dead woman had been drinking heavily with a friend and two stockbrokers at the Third Door the night before, and there’s a chance Fruma may have been poisoned by bad hooch. Naturally curious and hoping to save the speak-easy from ruin, Gina takes advantage of her insider position to snoop even though she’s blindsided when the war veteran she’s attracted to suddenly has a wife turn up out of the blue. The death of one of the stockbrokers Fruma was partying with makes the case more complicated and places Gina in a perilous position.

You have to love a gal who takes chances while staying true to herself.

**THE DAUGHTERS OF FOXCOTE MANOR**

Chase, Eve  
Putnam (368 pp.)  
$27.00 | Jul. 21, 2020  
978-0-525-54238-4

Working as a nanny for the wealthy Harrington family, Rita Murphy is anxious about being secluded in England’s beautiful yet ominous Forest of Dean for the summer. She should be.

Toggling back and forth between the events of 1971 and present-day London, Chase deftly constructs a shadowy puzzle born of multiple daughters with tangled connections to the titular Foxcote Manor, lurking in the dense forest. Recently separated Sylvie Broom frets over her mother, who has been hospitalized after a fall, as well as her daughter, Annie, whose troubled relationship with a man named Elliot has his posh mother, Helen Latham, harassing both Annie and Sylvie. As Sylvie deals with Helen and her own mother, Chase begins to untwist threads connecting her back to 1971 Foxcote Manor, where a gangly 20-year-old Rita is recovering from a broken engagement. Her employer, Walter Harrington, has sent her and his family (perhaps banished would be more accurate) to his broken-down ancestral home in the aftermath of his wife Jeannie’s postpartum breakdown and the subsequent fire that ruined their posh London residence. While the glamorous Jeannie recovers from the stillbirth, Rita tends to rambunctious 5-year-old Teddy and his 13-year-old sister, Hera. Once in the forest, however, characters and events obstruct any healing. First, Marge shows up, a brash housekeeper who offers obscure...
advice—watch out for weird Fingers Jonson in the woods—and strange gifts, such as the woodsman's boots for Rita's big feet. Then, Don Armstrong, Walter's best friend and Jeannie's ill-concealed lover, descends on Foxcote, trailing testosterone fumes and asserting his dominion over everyone. The situation is already precarious when Hera and Rita discover a foundling baby in the woods. Suddenly, Jeannie's maternal instincts kick in, but then a dead body is also found in the woods, and everyone's world upends.

A delicious mystery full of dark labyrinthine curves.

**HIS & HER**

*Feeney, Alice*

Flatiron Books (320 pp.)

$27.99 | Jul. 28, 2020

A news presenter and a police detective are brought together by murders in the British village where they both grew up.

There is precious little that can be revealed about the plot of Feeney's third novel without spoilers, as the author has woven surprises and plot twists and suspicious linkages into nearly every one of her brief, first-person chapters, written in three alternating narrative voices. "Hers" is Anna Andrews, a wannabe anchor on a BBC news program whose lucky break comes when the body of one of her school friends is found brutally murdered in their hometown, a woody little spot called Blackdown. "His" is DCI Jack Harper, head of the Major Crime Team in Blackdown, where major crimes were rather few until now. The third is unnamed but clearly the killer's. Happily, none of the three is an unreliable narrator—good thing because plenty of people are sick of that—but none is exactly 100% forthcoming either. Which only makes sense, because you can't have reveals without secrets. In a small town like Blackdown, everybody knows everybody, so it's not too surprising that Anna and Jack have a tragic past or that each has connections to all the victims and suspects while not being totally free from suspicion themselves. Who is that sneaky third narrator? On the way to figuring that out, expect high school mean girls, teen lesbian action, mutilated corpses, nasty things happening to kittens, and—as seems de rigueur in British thrillers—plenty of drinking and wisecracks, sometimes in tandem. "Sadly, my sister has the same taste in wine as she does in men; too cheap, too young, and headache-inducing."

Feeney improves on her debut with a taut suspense plot, many gleeful twists and turns, and suspects galore.

**THE SILENCE OF THE WHITE CITY**

*García Sáenz, Eva*

Trans. by Caistor, Nick

Vintage Crime/Black Lizard (400 pp.)

$16.95 paper | Jul. 28, 2020

978-1-9848-9859-3

After a long hiatus, has a notorious serial killer returned to terrorize a city in northern Spain?

On the eve of Día de Santiago in Vitoria, Inspector Unai “Kraken” López de Ayala is summoned to a bizarre murder scene. A young couple has been found in the crypt of an old cathedral, murdered and artfully arranged with flowers near their heads and feet. Estíbaliz Ruiz de Gauna, Kraken's colleague in the Criminal Investigation Unit, is shaken by the similarities to the crimes of a notorious serial killer who terrorized Vitoria 20 years earlier. Famed archaeologist Tasio Ortiz de Zárate is serving a lengthy prison sentence for those crimes. Kraken, who urges caution in linking the new case to the earlier serial crimes, is surprised to find that his new superintendent, Alba Díaz de Salvatierra, is the woman he just flirted with on the street. Tension rises with the discovery of more victims, similarly arranged. The investigative path does indeed lead to Tasio, who has become a successful screenwriter behind bars and fashions himself a criminologist and has reached out to Kraken, offering his expertise. Unnervingly, Tasio continues to shadow Kraken's investigation and send him messages about the crimes. Flashbacks take the reader to 1969, when an alarmingly composed man named Álvaro Urbina is grimly determined to kill one Javier Ortiz de Zárate, whose relationship to Tasio is incrementally revealed. As Kraken tries to ferret out the killer, flashbacks move the complex backstory forward and into clearer focus.

The first installment in García Sáenz's White City Trilogy is a work of impressive scope and depth, compellingly written.

**THE HOUSE ON WIDOWS HILL**

*Green, Simon R.*

Severn House (192 pp.)

$28.99 | Jun. 30, 2020

978-0-7278-9030-6

An alien who doesn't believe in ghosts spends the night in a haunted—or is it?—house in Bath.

The morning after solving the case of the killer in a railroad car relayed in *Night Train to Murder* (2020), Ishmael Jones and Penny Belcourt, his partner in life and work, are mulling how to spend their time in Bath after Penny polishes off her full English breakfast. Something about being an alien come to Earth makes all that junk less appealing to Ishmael, who's more invested in his paranormal but vaguely defined skill set and more distracted
by the suggestion of Mr. Nemo, a mysterious psychic connected to their last investigation, that he’s not the only one of his kind on Earth. That’s certainly exciting news, but what does it mean? Before Ishmael can think through the who/what/where of his own life, he and Penny are approached by Mr. Whisper, a jauntily dressed man who’s clearly also employed by the Organization. In the absence of Ishmael’s boss, the Colonel, who isn’t available to vouch for Mr. Whisper’s account, the newcomer proposes a case that intrigues the couple: Look into the supposedly haunted Harrow House to see if there really is an on-site ghost or if it’s all a rumor to scare away buyers. Penny would love to confirm her own belief in ghosts; Ishmael is more skeptical—sure, aliens, but ghosts?—yet willing to accede to Penny’s interests. Their night of investigation teams them with a ghost hunter, a celebrity psychic, a cynical reporter, a self-proclaimed white witch, and a requisite murder that leads the whole group to wonder whether there’s a human killer or something supernatural afoot.

A fast, fun supernatural thriller that never takes itself too seriously.

STRONG FROM THE HEART
Land, Jon
Forge (368 pp.)
$27.99 | Jul. 28, 2020
978-0-7653-8470-6

Making her 11th appearance, Texas Ranger Caitlin Strong sets her sights on “the largest drug operation that had ever permeated the planet.”

The opioid scourge, which can be traced to top branches of government, hits home for Caitlin and her boyfriend, reformed mob enforcer Cort Wesley Masters, when his teenage son, Luke, nearly dies of an overdose. Then, bizarrely, nearly 300 people suddenly die in the border town of Camino Pass. The novel flashes back to 1898, when all of the same town’s children are kidnapped just as Texas Ranger William Ray Strong—Caitlin’s great-grandfather—is about to deliver the young Pancho Villa to stand trial. Cort Wesley, who is angrily determined to avenge Luke’s near death, has a direct connection to the past in the form of an apparition named Leroy who appears in the back seat of his car. As tough as she is, Caitlin has her hands full with the present. The book is stuffed with incident and characters, including Native American activist Yarek Bone, aged Ranger-turned–DEA agent Doyle Lodge, and Caitlin’s loose cannon of a half sister, Nola Delgado. A gun for hire whose mother was the feared Mexican crime boss RED WIDOW, Nola has gotten involved with Luke’s vulnerable college-age brother, Dylan. Both Dylan and Luke have been targeted by bad guys in the past. While some judicious trims would have made the novel less of a slog for some readers—the Pancho Villa storyline is pretty half-baked—fans of the series will be more than happy to indulge in all its trimmings.

A sprawling return to well-worn paths.

DEEP RIVER BLUES
Morris, Tony
Northampton House (283 pp.)
$27.95 | Jul. 1, 2020
978-1-950668-01-4

The discovery of a body in a Tennessee river brings to the surface a simmering conflict between the Acre County Sheriff’s Office and a radical commune in this debut novel. Social arrangements at Glad Earth Farm are apparently so informal that it’s hard for Sheriff Cordell McRae to even find out the last name of 20-year-old Zoe Chandler, a member of the commune found floating in the French Broad River. In fact Levon Gladson runs the place with
an iron fist, maintaining his unchallenged authority over his followers and the harem of women he labels Magdalenes when he posts intimate footage of them on a website that charges an entrance fee. Levon and meth kingpin Thornton Reevers would be formidable adversaries for Cord even if he weren't struggling with his fondness for home-brewed liquor and his string of broken promises to his wife, Lucinda, and their son, Blu. As Cord gradually realizes, however, fault lines have erupted not only between the faithful disciples at Glad Earth and the local drug dealers, but also within the commune itself. The death of a hotheaded veteran and his farmer father both mark and inflame the passions that swirl around the town of Falston until it seems that everyone Cord runs into is capable of shocking violence toward everyone else.

Morris’ depiction of this troubled community and its even more troubled leaders is as deeply felt as it is overfamiliar.

OF MUTTS AND MEN
Quinn, Spencer
Forge (304 pp.)
$26.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-250-29769-3

A sterling tale of love between a man and his dog.

The Little Detective Agency consists of Bernie Little and Chet, his canine companion. Chet, who narrates all their adventures, constantly tries to articulate his own feelings and his understanding of what Bernie’s trying to accomplish. A chance meeting at a party introduces them to hydrologist Wendell Nero, who invites them to visit his trailer in Dollhouse Canyon the next day, where they find him with his throat cut and his wallet and personal items missing. The sheriff is dying and his deputy is useless, so Bernie and Chet investigate, quickly turning up clues to a suspect they track down. Even after Florian Machado is arrested, Bernie feels there’s a lot more to the story than simple theft. He persuades Wendell’s exes to take time out from fighting over his RV to hire him to find the killer. Florian’s lawyer, an Ivy League big shot who works for a law firm that never touches this sort of thing, gets him to agree to a plea bargain that only deepens Bernie’s suspicion that big money and water are involved. Since Chet can’t communicate all the information his super nose has discovered about the killer, they have to break the case the hard way.

You don’t have to love dogs to enjoy this idiosyncratic mystery, which is both amusing and introspective.

THE MOUNTAINS WILD
Taylor, Sarah Stewart
Minotaur (416 pp.)
$27.99 | Jun. 23, 2020
978-1-250-25643-0

Long Island detective and single mother Maggie D’arcy tracks her missing cousin in a cold case that reaches across Dublin and the Irish countryside.

Maggie studied Irish history and literature at Notre Dame, but her hopes of traveling to find her roots were crushed when her mother died during her junior year. Instead, her feckless cousin, Erin, was the one to set off for Dublin, where she disappeared. Maggie spent the autumn of 1993 tracing her footsteps through pubs and walking trails, questioning everyone from Trinity students to IRA gunrunners. She returned home with nothing but Erin’s distinctive amethyst Claddagh necklace and the determination to become a police officer. Now, 23 years later, the Gardaí ring up Erin’s father, Danny, at his bar. Erin’s scarf has been found near where Maggie found the necklace—and where another young woman has just gone missing. When Uncle Danny pleads with Maggie to go back and see if she can find out what truly happened, Maggie agrees. Fortunately, the detective leading cold cases, Roland Byrne, is the same one who was kind to Maggie during Erin’s initial missing person investigation. He’s followed Maggie’s career, including her vital work stopping a serial killer. Revisiting the files and her old haunts, Maggie realizes that the key to Erin’s disappearance may have been back home all along.

This mystery, evocative of the Irish diaspora, interrogates both a young woman’s disappearance and the meaning of homeland.

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

AFTERLAND
Beukes, Lauren
Mulholland Books/Little, Brown (416 pp.)
$28.00 | Jul. 28, 2020
978-0-316-26783-0

It’s been about three years since HCV, a fatal cancer-causing virus targeting men, began sweeping the world.

Now, in 2023, there’s no cure in sight and reproduction has been made illegal to cut down on further infections in baby boys. Men and boys
A slow-building tale of court intrigue that picks up lots of steam on its way to a shocking finish.

**AXIOM’S END**

Ellis, Lindsay
St. Martin’s (384 pp.)
$27.99 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-1-250-25673-7

Ellis, a Hugo-nominated media critic and YouTube star, finds alien encounters in our not-too-distant past.

It’s 2007, but not the 2007 you remember. In this timeline, a meteor has struck Los Angeles—at least that’s what the government wants people to believe. Rogue conspiracy theorist Nils Ortega has convinced his followers that the so-called “Ampersand Event” was actually the arrival of an alien spacecraft. College dropout Cora Sabino isn’t convinced. She learned long ago not to trust anything her estranged father has to say. But then her mother and siblings disappear the same night she’s—

extraterrestrials and advanced technology, though; instead, it deploys these devices to talk about us in the here and now. Like countless authors before her, Ellis uses first contact to interrogate our tendencies toward xenophobia and prejudice and challenge our conceptions of what humanity means. She also explores trauma and its aftereffects. Nils’ crusade for government transparency and questions about privacy feel contemptuous without adding much depth. The same goes for references to financial crisis. The heart of the novel is the relationship between Cora and the part-biological, part-synthetic entity she calls Ampersand. What begins with a physical attack and an abduction turns into a partnership and, ultimately, a deep friendship. As Cora helps Ampersand navigate life on Earth, she learns more about his world and his past. Ellis doesn’t break new ground here, and her prose is uneven. The injections of quirky humor feel particularly strained. But this hits all the necessary notes for a first contact narrative, and this trope might be fresh for at least a portion of Ellis’ fan base.

This is a solid, if not especially imaginative or polished, science fiction debut.

**WE RIDE THE STORM**

Madson, Devin
Orbit/Little, Brown (328 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Jun. 23, 2020
978-0-316-53626-4

The first in a bold new series, Madson’s novel interweaves the lives of its narrators to tell the story of three civilizations on the brink.

Miko is a princess of Kisia, an empire left in fragments following the recent coup that cost her father his life and saw her stepfather take the Crimson Throne. Rah hails from the loosely associated clans of Levanti—horse riders without kings who resist fighting others’ wars. Cassandra makes her living in sex and murder and moves through the world with another’s voice in her head. They do not know one another, but their lives will soon become hopelessly entangled. Miko’s family falls apart, shattering their alliance with Chiltae, the rival nation that has forced Rah and his Swords into its service and whose agent Cassandra has agreed to assassinate. Although Madson takes her time putting the critical pieces into play, the betrayal that dooms the Kisian nobility to ruin sets off narrative fireworks, exposing the questionable motives of three nations’ leaders in a seemingly unending struggle for dominance.

A slow-building tale of court intrigue that picks up lots of steam on its way to a shocking finish.
In this sequel to the post-apocalyptic *Bird Box* (2014), perpetually blindfolded, scared-hopless mom Malorie must contend with her now-teenage son’s perilous desire for freedom.

Nearly 20 years ago, Malorie’s hometown in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula was visited by creatures that made people who merely glanced at them go mad—and in many cases kill themselves. Ever since, Malorie has been on the run, her eyes tightly covered, somehow surviving any and all obstacles. Since becoming a mother, she has holed up with her son, Tom, and daughter, Olympia, in an abandoned library and one-time summer camp, living on the edge of her fear that one or both of her kids will take off their “fold” and meet a grisly fate. Their lives change when a stranger claiming to be a census taker leaves them with a list of survivors that, to Malorie’s astonishment, includes her parents. The stranger also tells them of a working train, “right here in Michigan,” that will take them to the U.P. On the “Blind Train,” whose windows are painted black, Malorie is unhappy to find herself among casually unblindfolded people who say it’s perfectly safe to look at and even live among the creatures. That’s music to Tom’s ears; chafing under his mother’s strict rules, he will do anything to break free of her and her acceptance of “a life in which the only aim is to keep living.” Coming from an author as wildly imaginative as Malerman, whose original *Bird Box* was way more eerie and chilling than the lousy Netflix adaptation with Sandra Bullock, this follow-up is surprisingly humdrum. A one-note character, Malorie becomes as much a drag for the reader as for her son.

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A disappointing creature feature.

A philosophical wrangle culminates in a lethal real-world confrontation, with creation itself in jeopardy.

On planet Heaven, where everything has religious connotations, the 10 major human religions—most of them identifiable, if sometimes in unfamiliar guise—have their own territories, known collectively as the Decalivre, each ruled by a hegemons. Religions with fewer adherents have their own villages of belief, and there are skeptic areas, too. Hegemons and lesser authorities wield powers derived from an ability to manipulate reality at the quantum level. Harmony is enforced by surveillance satellites, directed-energy weapons, and beings such as Corvyn, who functions as a sort of policeman, conscience, and judge. He remembers untold past civilizations destroyed by religious strife. So when an unknown power burns the image of a black-flamed trident into the holy places of the Decalivre, Corvyn recognizes both a challenge and a threat. To determine what’s going on, he tours the cities, interviewing hegemons or their delegates. Some prove accommodating, others hostile; some fence verbally, others attempt violence. Corvyn himself must traverse the Sands of Time, a type of hell where almost anything can happen. Religion and belief are thorny topics, but Modesitt tackles them and the passions they inspire with impressive skill and respect and a deep knowledge of holy books, religious commentaries, mythology, and much besides. Indeed, it’s a venture quite unlike anything this talented and versatile writer has attempted before, notwithstanding that he’s earned recognition in various science-fiction and fantasy modes by always offering clear, concrete explanations of how and why things work. What readers will take away depends largely on what they themselves bring along. Certainly the work feels uncommonly subtle and, tantalizingly, not altogether finished. The premise, ultimately, may just be too obvious.

Absorbing and thoughtful yet not entirely rewarding.

**THE BOOK OF DRAGONS**

*Ed. by Strahan, Jonathan*

Harper Voyager (576 pp.)

$35.00 | Jul. 7, 2020

978-0-06-287716-1

Including 29 original short stories and poems, Strahan’s stellar anthology of dragon-powered narratives features works by a veritable murderer’s row of genre fiction luminaries, including Peter S. Beagle, Patricia A. McKillip, Scott Lynch, Ken Liu, Kate Elliott, and Todd McCaffrey, among others.

Complemented by subtle illustrations throughout, the power of this gem-filled anthology is not only in the consistent quality of stories, but the impressive diversity of plotlines. Many selections derive inspiration from various folkloric tales and myths while others envision dragons in wildly untraditional—and at times metaphorical—ways. Seanan McGuire’s heartfelt “Hoard” chronicles a single woman who lovingly takes in foster children and helps them flourish. The system, however, sees her as something different. McCaffrey’s “Small Bird’s Plea” blends elements of science fiction and fantasy to create a story about a young girl on a quest to save her village, which she believes is being attacked by demons. Brooke Bolander’s “Where the River Turns to Concrete” follows a hulking amnesiac who, after being found naked in a parking garage by a local crime boss and hired on as muscle, finds something unexpected on his brutal journey of self-discovery. Beagle’s “Except on Saturdays” reimagines...
the French myth of Melusine with the story of a California high school history teacher who, after meeting a wheelchair-using woman on a bus, realizes that she is much more than she seems. In K.J. Parker’s “Habitat,” a local hero is tasked by a prince to catch and deliver him a living dragon. The hero delivers—with karmic results. There are no weak links in this anthology, and every selection is noteworthy in some way, but arguably the most memorable story is Ann Leckie and Rachel Swirsky’s “We Continue,” set on a planet where human colonists struggle to survive while dragons thrive in hivelike communities that regenerate with the birth of a new queen.

A heaping hoard of literary gems that fans of dragon-powered stories will surely treasure.

**ROMANCE**

**THE WRONG MR. DARCY**
Lozada, Evelyn with Lorincz, Holly
St. Martin’s Griffin (288 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Jun. 9, 2020
978-1-250-62214-3

A sports reporter from Portland, Oregon, travels to Boston for the interview of a lifetime.

Hara Isari works at a small city newspaper. She recently submitted an article to a contest for sports reporters, hoping to gain a broader audience for her work. When she wins the contest, Hara’s prize is the opportunity to fly to Boston to interview Charles Butler, star player for the Boston Fishers professional basketball team. Once she lands in Boston, Hara meets Derek Darcy, another Fishers player and one of Charles’ closest friends. Although there is sexual chemistry between Hara and Derek, the ingrained distrust between professional athletes and reporters keeps them at a distance. However, as a series of implausible events throws them together, Hara and Derek realize their animosity might truly be attraction. The novel is full of huge, meaty plot events: bribery and gambling; winter storms and flooding; secret girlfriends and broken friendships. However, most of these storylines are nonsensical or poorly developed, and none of it deepens the relationship between Hara and Derek. Hara is ostensibly a trained reporter, but she misses a huge story right under her nose until Derek inexplicably blurts it all out to her and then swears her to secrecy. Characters are thinly developed; for instance, Derek and Hara are each disappointed in their parents, but there is very little detail about what makes them tick as adults. Despite the title, the connections to Pride and Prejudice are meager and likely to disappoint readers looking for a stronger Austen connection.

Fails to deliver a coherent plot or satisfying central romance.

**UNTIL THE END**
Rushdan, Juno
Sourcebooks Casablanca (448 pp.)
$7.99 paper | May 26, 2020
978-1-4926-6179-5

A hacker winds up under the protection of a stalwart government operative as they race to stop an outbreak of biological warfare.

After her whole team of fellow white-hat hackers is murdered, Kit Westcott is on the run with incredibly sensitive information regarding a bioweapon called Z-1984. To get the knowledge about the creation and sale of Z-1984 out of her hands and into the public view, Kit reaches out to a blogger to stage a leak. When Kit’s secret meeting is interrupted by a hail of gunfire, she’s rescued by undercover Gray Box operative Castle Kinkade. Gray Box is an off-the-books government agency that operates in the gray areas of the law for the sake of national security. It’s a setup that feels all too real in the current global climate, and the doom-and-gloom scenario of a dangerous biological weapon feels like an insurmountable obstacle to a happily-ever-after. As in the previous books in the romantic suspense Final Hour series, including Nothing To Fear (2019), the nonstop jet-setting action will make this more appealing for fans of global thrillers. Both leads are likable enough in their bid for good to triumph over evil, but when compared to the truly Machiavellian villain, they are often the least interesting characters on the page. Kit, who lives with debilitating anxiety and PTSD, is frequently immobilized during times of danger. Given the number of gunfights that happen in this book, her passivity is overwhelming, which may provoke the reader’s own anxiety. Romance is supposed to provide a beacon of hope in the darkest of times, but all that was spotted here was a glimmer, at best.

A thrilling spy adventure without a romantic payoff.

**GIRLS OF SUMMER**
Thayer, Nancy
Ballantine (304 pp.)
$27.00 | May 26, 2020
978-1-5247-9875-8

A single mother and her adult children reconnect with each other and explore complicated romantic situations during one eventful summer on Nantucket.

Lisa Hawley has been living on Nantucket year-round for decades, since long before her husband left her for another woman. She raised her children on her own, opened a successful women’s clothing shop, kept a warm home, and swore off dating. Now that her kids are grown and flown, she finally has time to focus on the physical deterioration her house has suffered over the years. When the local restoration expert, Mack Whitney, walks into her home to inspect it,
sparks fly. There's only one problem: He's 10 years younger than Lisa. Even so, Mack convinces her to go to dinner with him, and their chemistry can't be denied. It can, however, be interrupted: first by the arrival of Lisa's daughter, Juliet, who's come home to nurse a broken heart, and then by Lisa's son, Theo, who's returned home to recuperate after a surfing accident in California. As Lisa's children consider their mother's budding relationship, they too discover love interests on the island. First Juliet is enticed by a newcomer and then Theo learns his high school crush is back home. Crazier still, the young woman is Mack's daughter. Can Lisa's relationship with Mack move forward without destroying her son's chance at happiness? As the chapters alternate among Lisa's, Juliet's, and Theo's perspectives, the author deftly builds each of the characters' complex personalities by showing them through the eyes of others. A central concern of the story is the preservation of Nantucket as a sanctuary for both people and wildlife, and it's full of information about the island's weather, topography, and landmarks. Although the romantic relationships develop at a fast, and perhaps unrealistic, clip, the sentiments described are so sweet that readers might forgive the characters their hasty emotions. Told in straightforward prose, the story is both wholesome and hopelessly romantic.

A formulaic but engaging story about how one family handles summer love.
A detailed exposé of how our democracy has been eroded—and a plan to fix it—from an up-and-coming national leader.

“My parents raised the six of us in Mississippi, my mother an underpaid librarian and my father a dyslexic shipyard worker,” writes Abrams, whose earliest memory of the voting process involved accompanying her parents to the polls. Her more recent memories are more bitter: In 2018, she lost the Georgia gubernatorial race to Brian Kemp in what she believes was an unfairly conducted election. “For a New American Majority—that coalition of people of color, young people, and moderate to progressive whites—to be successful, we have to stop letting them tell us who we are and how to succeed,” she writes. In succinct but thorough chapters, she lays out the grim history of voting rights, both in policy and practice, from the crafting of the Constitution to the present day. The devious creativity of the techniques used to suppress votes is jaw-dropping, and Abrams provides detailed examples from around the country. Among them are obstacles to registration, voter ID “exact match” policies and other restrictions, unexpected poll closings, restriction of early and absentee voting, ballot rejection, miscounting, manipulation of provisional ballots, gerrymandering, and a broken infrastructure, including malfunctioning machines and interminable lines. The author’s plan to solve the problem “short-circuits” debate about identity politics, and she clearly explains how to enact change at the federal level. The census, for example, can be “an organizing tool we can use to salvage democracy.” Abrams informs readers how “democracies rarely fail today because of military coups or foreign invasion. Instead their death is gradual, coming slowly and over time with an erosion of rights and an accumulation of attacks on the institutions that form their backbone.” An afterword on COVID-19 emphasizes the urgency of the 2020 election.

If you are feeling hopeless about politics, this well-informed blueprint for change may begin to restore your faith.
I love comedy, and especially in these tense, often depressing times, I appreciate a comedian who can make me laugh without constant F-bombs, lewd sexual humor, or borderline-racist jokes. Don’t get me wrong; I enjoy the occasional dick-and-fart joke as much as the next guy, not to mention the raunchy acts of any number of comedians, from Eddie Murphy and Richard Pryor all the way through Dave Chappelle and Sarah Silverman. But there’s something heartening about well-timed, relevant, observational humor that doesn’t rely on shock value.

While comedic material, whether from stage or screen, often fails to translate to the page—recent notable exceptions include books by Tina Fey, Mindy Kaling, Patton Oswalt, Judd Apatow, and the editors at The Onion—there are two releases by comedians that deliver enough humor to keep the pages turning but also offer genuine insight along the way.

Mike Birbiglia’s upcoming book, The New One: Painfully True Stories From a Reluctant Dad (Grand Central Publishing, July 14), is a worthy sophomore effort. (Kirkus was not a fan of his debut, Sleepwalk With Me.) This time around, in “self-deprecating reflections on the peaks and valleys of modern fatherhood,” the author is on-point. As the father of an almost 5-year-old, I very much relished the countless moments in Birbiglia’s book that brought up fond—and not-so-fond—memories of raising an infant. The author capably captures all of the joy and frustration of the seemingly endless days and nights of new parenthood, and Birbiglia’s wife, J. Hope Stein, intersperses “evocative” poetry that dovetails nicely with the main text.

“Never clinical or overly extreme,” writes our critic in a starred review, “Birbiglia’s lighthearted, refreshingly droll approach to starting a family will appeal most to readers who can identify with both his reluctance to couple up and his acceptance and embrace of parenting. There are also shared moments of introspection and maturity, not to mention useful wisdom.” Whether he’s lamenting the travel that his work requires or opining on the lack of acceptable role models for children—“the men we used to think were great were priests, politicians, and gymnastics doctors. It hasn’t ended well for great”—Birbiglia delivers a “hilarious, relatable, cringeworthy, and effortlessly entertaining” narrative.

There’s little cringeworthy material in the latest book from comedian Tom Papa, You’re Doing Great... and Other Reasons To Stay Alive (St. Martin’s, May 12), but there is plenty of wholesome entertainment from the stand-up comic and NPR contributor. (Like Birbiglia’s, Papa’s first book did not thrill Kirkus.) Much of the narrative will be familiar to listeners of the author’s charming “Out in America” segment on NPR, in which, just as in this book, he “muses on life, love, and simple pleasures.” That word, “muses,” is a useful descriptor here, as there is little revolutionary or groundbreaking in Papa’s observations; he just tells it like it is—and no, not like Donald Trump—in a manner that is altogether pleasant and almost entirely PG-rated.

Throughout, the author refreshingly displays little anger or annoyance, remaining generally positive, encouraging, and, most importantly, open to the wonderful, diverse possibilities that life in America has to offer. In this “collection of funny, warmhearted essays whose overarching messages are, ‘we should be grateful for what we have’ and ‘shouldn’t take life all that seriously,’ ” Papa proves a fun, “genial guide” to life in these times. It’s the perfect bathroom book, and I mean that in the best possible way.

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.
The stealthy rise of humble Bavarian-style pilsner as the world’s everyday beer. Acitelli, a James Beard Award finalist who has written widely about beer, wine, and whiskey, shrewdly connects the story of the quintessentially plebeian tipple to time and place, starting with early European experiments in fermentation. By 1900, he writes, “barely fifty years old, [pilsner] was the ascendant beer style and one of the bestselling alcoholic beverages ever.” In a humorously meandering narrative, the author ties pilsner’s popularity to Europe’s cycles of violence and upheaval, which spread it to America alongside immigration, even as the beer barons embraced innovation. For example, although Louis Pasteur originally intended to aid European winemakers, “Pasteurization instead proved much more popular and durable among brewers.” When backlash threatened, “brewers hardly noticed. They were in the midst of a remarkable run of growth.” Yet, temperance advocates harnessed the World War I-era anti-German hysteria to propel their agenda. The resulting Prohibition “all but killed off the American brewing industry and its favored style.” Although the large brewers roared back following the repeal of Prohibition, writes Acitelli, “it was as if [beer] had been run through a decontextualization machine.” Such water-sheds as the 1935 introduction of canned beer by a smaller brewer contrasted with the dominance of the giant brewers Anheuser-Busch and Pabst, which increasingly snapped up smaller concerns, as well as competition for market share by foreign entities like Heineken. After World War II, brewers continued to pursue consolidation and new technologies even as their signature product declined in consumer cachet beginning in the 1950s. As Acitelli notes, “so many breweries...had unwittingly set themselves up to fail in the 1960s [once] the positioning of pilsner as a lifestyle choice did not work.” This would only change decades later, as better-marketed beers like Anchor Steam returned via foodie culture and the microbrew explosion.

Though sometimes repetitious, Acitelli’s confident, precise approach produces an entertaining narrative.
“Ma’s Folks,” Anderson explores the life of his maternal grandfather, Anthony, a navy man who, though pro-British, “changed his smuggling habits” when the Germans occupied Ireland. Simmering violence bubbles underneath the entire text, often boiling over, and Anderson ably plumbs the salvatory theme of how his peaceable father, despite his mysterious past, helped break the cycle of violence for his son. Though different in mood and tone, this thoughtful memoir will appeal to readers of Patrick Radden Keefe’s *Say Nothing*, among other chronicles of the Troubles.

An impressively pensive, impressionistic work from an attentive writer.

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**TWILIGHT OF DEMOCRACY**

*The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*

*Applebaum, Anne*

Doubleday (224 pp.)  
$25.00 | Jul. 21, 2020  
978-0-385-54580-8

Equal parts memoir, reportage, and history, this sobering account of the roots and forms of today’s authoritarianism, by one of its most accomplished observers, is meant as a warning to everyone.

Known for her historically grounded commentary and such well-received histories as the Pulitzer Prize–winning *Gulag* (2003), *Atlantic* staff writer Applebaum, a reflective, deep-thinking, conservative, explores the “restorative nostalgia” and “authoritarian predisposition” of the far right in the U.S. and Europe. Her motivation in writing is a fear of the possible “fall of liberal democracy.” Sadly, she writes, “given the right conditions, any society can turn against democracy. Indeed, if history is anything to go by, all of our societies eventually will.” Well-acquainted with many of the figures she discusses, Applebaum analyzes the forces that have caused so many of them to turn ugly, revanchist, and unreasoning. She takes her examples mostly from Europe—Hungary, Poland, Spain, and Britain in particular—but also from Trump’s America. Sometimes too discursive, sometimes overlong (as on Laura Ingraham), the book is nevertheless critically important for its muscular, oppositionist attack on the new right from within conservative ranks—and for the well-documented warning it embodies. The author’s views are especially welcome because she is a deliberate thinker and astute observer rather than just the latest pundit or politico. In the spirit of Julien Benda, Hannah Arendt, and Theodor Adorno, Applebaum seeks to understand what makes the new right “more Bolshevik than Burkean.” Needless to say, any attack that places Viktor Orbán, Boris Johnson, and Donald Trump in the company of Lenin and Stalin is worthy of close attention. The author is highly instructive on what is happening in the increasingly grim realm of the far right: a hardening of bitterness and unreasoning vengefulness and a resulting shift of the spectrum that puts a growing number of conservatives like Applebaum in the center.

A knowledgeable, rational, necessarily dark take on dark realities.

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**GOING BACK**

*by Andrea von Treuenfeld*

Sixteen Holocaust survivors describe returning to Germany after the war in von Treuenfeld’s work of oral history translated from the German by Siegal-Bergman.

“A vital, understated contribution to the body of Holocaust literature.”  
—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

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CRAIGSLIST CONFESSIONAL
A Collection of Secrets From Anonymous Strangers
Bala, Helena Dea
Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster
(256 pp.)
$24.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-982114-96-1

Anthology of dramatic first-person testimonials collected by a driven author for whom a personal pastime became a public obsession.

This book reflects the website CraigslistConfessional.com, which Bala developed due to dissatisfaction with her demanding career as an attorney and lobbyist. She describes her work as “a project about hearing and seeing what others don’t—about pulling back the curtain that separates our secretive inner lives from our perfectly curated outer lives. My ‘job’ is to listen when no one else will.” At first, she was only seeking mutual catharsis; eventually, “I amended my original Craigslist ad to include a plan: I wanted to write these stories down and, hopefully, some day, publish them.” She was so determined to pursue this that she curtailed her career to do so. The resulting volume is organized broadly, along the themes of “Love,” “Regret,” “Loss,” “Identity,” and “Family,” with 40 subjects across a spectrum of gender, social class, and age. Bala deftly captures these diverse voices—some gloomy, others hopeful—resulting in lively, empathetic biographical tableaux. She stays attuned to her anonymous subjects’ lived experiences, following arcs that sometimes lead from deviance or despair to redemption. One former prisoner notes after 15 years’ imprisonment, “the outside is cruel. It doesn’t care if you did the crime or you deserved your punishment, or you served your time.” Many stories concern flight from addiction or abuse, such as that of a young woman still ashamed of her years as an escort during college: “I was constantly trying to convince myself that it wasn’t so bad.” Episodes of loss include an older man reeling from the death of an alcoholic wife (“Up until the very end, I thought I could cure her”) and mothers haunted by the sudden deaths of children. Though some tales are maudlin or follow predictable patterns, readers should respond to the redemptive twist or optimism that often appears in the stories she has collected.

A book that focuses appealingly on the visceral complexities of our private lives.

QUITTER
A Memoir of Drinking, Relapse, and Recovery
Barnett, Erica C.
Viking (336 pp.)
$26.00 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-525-52232-4

A Seattle-based political reporter recounts her tumultuous, nearly deadly dance with the bottle.

Writing a recovery memoir seems to be Step 13 for many professional writers of nonfiction who make it out the other side of addiction: Pete Hamill, Leslie Jamison, Mary Karr, David Carr, Caroline Knapp, and Sarah Hepola are just a few of the names that spring to mind. Perhaps because such authors have claimed truth-telling as their life’s work, and because addiction involves so many lies, putting an honest version of this story in print is a necessary part of reclaiming their identities as writers. The problem, of course, is that it’s usually the same story, which puts a heavy burden on prose style. Barnett rises to the challenge with a witty, self-deprecating, sometimes snide voice. (She describes her boyfriend’s friends as “well-adjusted in ways that made me nervous, with carefully curated lives filled with long-haired, gender fluid children, camping trips, and backyard chicken coops.”) The author engagingly chronicles her Southern roots and her school years in a Houston suburb, including some heavy teenage drinking, and then moves on to her first jobs, at the Texas Observer and the Austin Chronicle. In Austin, she found that “the grown-up world replicates high school in ways we don’t always recognize
NEW AND UPCOMING
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The Unexpected Guest:
How a Homeless Man from the Streets of L.A. Redefined Our Home
by Michael Konik
9781635767292 | 5/5/20

"Heartwarming, compassionate, and well-crafted, The Unexpected Guest gives voice to those rarely heard, compels you to look closer when you want to look away, and reveals the joy of caring for others."
—Pete Earley, author of Crazy: A Father's Search Through America’s Mental Health Madness, 2007 Finalist for the Pulitzer Prize
Tori Amos’ new memoir isn’t so much a call to arms as a call to instruments. To paints, pastels, and pens. To cloth, stone, laptops, phones, and Photoshop.

“Some artists are called to perform now from their homes, and I applaud them,” Amos says by phone from England, in an interview about her new book, *Resistance: A Songwriter’s Story of Hope, Change, and Courage* (Atria, May 5), just 10 days after Prime Minister Boris Johnson took the unprecedented step of putting the U.K. on lockdown to stem the COVID-19 pandemic. The artist is exploring the contours of quarantine while continuing to write and record what will be her 16th studio album.

“I’m being pushed to go to a place of writing and observing and listening—really listening—to what people are discovering,” she says. Like the story of a 28-year-old woman who plumbed an unknown reserve of resourcefulness to feed five people, every day, from pantry staples and sporadic shopping trips to understocked stores. “I’m also discovering that I need to value myself better and not look for it in men,” the woman told Amos, instantly inspiring a song.

“She’s someone I know, and the fact that she trusted me with that [revelation inspired me]” Amos says. “I asked her, could I write to that—could I write a song to that? She said, ‘Write the whole album about it!’ ”

Amos has served on active duty in the music industry for nearly four decades, striving to create songs that move legions of fans to epiphany. For a solo tour in support of her last studio album, 2017’s *Native Invader*, she played a Bösendorfer grand piano with one hand and a keyboard with the other, commanding stages at sold-out shows around the world. Still, her set lists differ every night, depending on where she is and whom she’s performing for.

“The most important skill a songwriter needs is to be able to listen,” Amos writes in *Resistance*. “Like an elephant: ears the size of Kansas. Not only do you need to hear every beat of breath between what is being said; you have to hear what isn’t being said.”

“He came to see me on tour, during Native Invader, after the [2016] election,” Amos says. “He, being a New Yorker, a son of immigrants, a proud gay married man, talked to me about our time and talked to me about what I’d be willing to write toward. ‘What do writers and artists have to offer? What is your value in this time, where freedoms and democracies are on the line?’ And that was really the beginning of the book.”

Amos wagers her stories and her songs, the latter interwoven throughout the text, in an attempt to answer these and other questions. She begins with “Gold Dust”—lyrics lying across three pages, italicized—preceding a deep dive into life as a teenage piano prodigy in Washington, D.C. Chaperoned by her father, the Rev. Dr. E.M. Amos, she honed her performance chops in a gay bar and learned the mechanics of power in a hotel bar not far from the White House.

“The young artist’s journey is made up of a number of components, not least the ways they see older people act when it comes to issues of morality and accountability,” Amos writes. “It was no coincidence that a father like mine—who bucked Christian conventions that would have stopped me entertaining a gay clientele, conventions that would have stopped me from sharing my piano playing with a diverse crowd of patrons—would lead me to a job from which I could observe the interactions of people of great influence.”

She enlists “Little Earthquakes,” “Bang,” “I Can’t See New York,” and “Silent All These Years” to enrich readers’ understanding of her pilgrimage from a young artist on the rise to a human rights activist whose art speaks truth to power. But later songs, in the book’s last chapters, chronicling her mother Mary Ellen Copeland Amos’ last years, hold the keys to the whole endeavor.

“When I wrote the Mary chapters, right after she died in May [2019], Rakesh called me up and said, ‘Hey, T., I really hate to tell you this but now you have to rewrite the whole book.’ ” she says. “ ‘Because you found your voice—through Mary, you found your writing voice—for the book. So now you have to take that to every chapter.’”

Guided by her mother’s wisdom and wit, Amos rewrote the manuscript in two months. What emerged was as much a manifesto as a memoir—one that, ultimately, may help readers find their own artistic voices in the current political moment.

“Honoring the grief of this moment is huge,” Amos says of our strange new era. “Having experienced personal grief of the loss of a mother, now, this grief is...it’s different, but it’s deep.” The collective grief of the pandemic is physical, emotional, and upending. It’s causing some to confirm their faith and others to lose it; raising so many moral and practical questions.

Amos says let them all in. “In my humble opinion, I think you’ve got to let them come, these questions that you didn’t have—I didn’t or you didn’t have—time for [before] because we would just push them away,” she says. “But now we can’t hide from ourselves. And I would say, why would you want to? Yes, you can get lost in social media and spend your whole day there, possibly running down all kinds of rabbit holes, but it’s also a chance for all artists to decide what kind of art they want to make.”

Whatever your medium, whatever your instrument, the time is now.

“Once Mary died, I was in a deeply dark place for several weeks. Then, though, I had to crawl—really, little by little—and begin to walk, step by step, back into the world,” Amos says. “But there was a world to walk back into. So, we have to help create that world together to walk back into. And I think it will be the artists that do it.”

Megan Labrise is the editor at large; hear her full conversation with Tori Amos on the Fully Booked podcast. Resistance was reviewed in the March 15, 2020, issue.
or acknowledge,” and her attempts to fit in with her new peer group led to her first blackout drinking. Barnett’s journey involved an almost unbearable number of relapses, and readers may begin to feel the way her family and friends did: out of patience and sympathy. Nonetheless, this is the truth, and she tells it openly. Like many others, she utterly denied that AA was right for her—until it became the only way to save her life.

If you’re in the mood for a well-written, relatable, rock-bottom recovery memoir, this will hit the spot.

**YOU’RE FIRED**

*The Perfect Guide to Beating Donald Trump*

Begala, Paul

Simon & Schuster (368 pp.)

$27.00 | Jul. 28, 2020

978-1-982160-04-3

A Democratic strategist weighs in on the 2016 and 2020 presidential races, offering a compendium of do’s and don’ts.

In the rueful wake of 2016, Clinton adviser Begala confesses, he “forgot Bill Clinton’s First Law of Politics...elections are about the lives of the voters, not the candidates’ lives.” Every time Donald Trump, who the author says possesses a “sewer-level character,” committed some outrageous—mocking a reporter’s disability, dismissing John McCain’s wartime service, bragging about not paying taxes—the Democrats made ads highlighting the faux pas, to no avail. The great overarching mistake was to have treated Trump as if he were a politician. “He’s not,” Begala’s brother told him. “He’s a reality TV star. So when he got caught lying, it wasn’t because he’s a lying politician; he’s just a bullshit artist on TV.” In 2016, argues the author, the Clinton team should have run ads from working Americans whom Trump stiffed, who lost their jobs when his casinos flopped, who were bilked by his so-called university. “We should have shown how Trump has hurt people like you,” he writes. Digging deeper, he looks at ways to get under Trump’s skin: Remind voters in these days of COVID-19 that Trump really did fire the pandemic response team and cut funding to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to the point that it had to abandon monitoring disease outbreaks on the ground in China; highlight that Trump has run up staggering deficits in good times, leaving little room to maneuver in bad, and that he’s resisted oversight for stimulus spending during the pandemic. Begala counsels Democratic candidates to speak to emotions and the “American Dream” and remind voters that Trump is trying to cut Social Security and Medicare. “He wants a world of entitlement for the few; we want a nation of opportunity for all.”

Solid advice for anyone running for office, whether against the current occupant of the White House or not.

**THE COLD VANISH**

*Seeking the Missing in North America’s Wildlands*

Billman, Jon

Grand Central Publishing (368 pp.)

$28.00 | Jul. 7, 2020

978-1-5387-4757-5

True-life accounts of wilderness disappearances and the families desperately seeking closure.

Journalist Billman, a regular contributor to *Outside*, is “obsessed with writing about missing persons in wild places,” particularly those stories that “defy conventional logic...the proverbial ‘vanish-without-a-trace’ incidents, which happen a lot more (and a lot closer to your backyard) than almost anyone thinks.” In his nonfiction debut, the author focuses primarily on the case of Jacob Gray, who stepped off his red bicycle in Washington’s Olympic National Park in April 2017 and disappeared into the wilderness. Billman takes us along on his journey with Gray’s family as they retrace Jacob’s steps, examine the few available clues, and encounter excessive bureaucracy in their search efforts. As he chronicles their trek across North America following leads, the author shares the rampant conspiracy theories, the skeptical yet hopeful encounters with psychics, and the emotional strain of a family who put their lives on hold in search of answers. “For someone close to someone missing,” writes Billman, “the world is reduced to this binary: missing and searching. Two awful gerunds.” Gray’s father, writes the author, “will liquidate his world in order to find his son. Or die trying.” Intertwoven into Gray’s story are detailed accounts of other individuals who have gone missing in the wildlands of North America, many that eerily echo the mystery surrounding Gray’s disappearance. According to data cited by Billman, more than 600,000 individuals go missing in North America each year. While most are “quickly found alive,” those who vanish in the wilderness face much steeper odds of being found—and the author engagingly follows these sad yet absorbing cases. Some have been discovered in places previously searched; some have walked out on their own; some remain unexplained.

A compassionate, sympathetic, and haunting book sure to make you think twice before stepping out into the wilderness alone.

**HAVING AND BEING HAD**

Biss, Eula

Riverhead (288 pp.)

$26.00 | Sep. 1, 2020

978-0-525-53745-8

The poet and essayist considers her affluence and what—and who—has been sacrificed for it.

“My adult life, I decide, can be divided into two distinct parts—the time before...
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—Ilya Kaminsky

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I owned a washing machine and the time after,” writes Biss. She means it: Acquiring a home and its attendant creature comforts has radically changed her relationships to money, labor, and domesticity. In the same way her previous books explored the hidden social contracts around racism (Notes From No-Man’s Land) and vaccination (On Immunity), her latest interrogates capitalism’s relationship to upper-middle-class living, particularly hers. Most of the brief, potent essays consider particular objects and actions and the questions they spark about value: a piano (“Dada da dum—middle class! Let the lessons begin”), redlining, investments, lines at amusement parks, the game of Monopoly, and poetry. Biss marvels at the uncertainty and discomfort people display when assigning costs and value to their work—and the way these discussions are further burdened by problems of race and gender, particularly in terms of how slavery and marriage turned people into property. Calling on her own experience and past writers (Emily Dickinson, Joan Didion, Virginia Woolf) and economists (John Kenneth Galbraith) who have addressed these matters, the author comes to recognize that income inequality runs deeper than matters of dollars and cents. Some are truly members of the precariat, on the edge of poverty, while others merely think they are, but everyone is compelled to scramble for more. Biss prescribes no solutions except perhaps to encourage more candor about the problem. When she told a friend she was unsure how to end this book, the friend responded: “The only way to end it would be to burn your house down.” Spoiler: She doesn’t. But what to do instead?

A typically thoughtful set of Biss essays: searching, serious, and determined to go beyond the surface.

THE BOOK OF ATLANTIS BLACK
The Search for a Sister Gone Missing
Bonner, Betsy
Tin House (280 pp.)
$26.95 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-947793-77-4

When a troubled young musician disappears, her sister searches for something more profound than answers. In her debut memoir, poet and educator Bonner reflects not only on her sister Nancy’s (she renamed herself Atlantis Black) disappearance, but also on the shadows that have haunted her family. What begins with a resume of the sisters’ youth transforms into a psycho-thriller murder mystery with a charmingly unreliable narrator. The author lays the blame for her sister’s mental illness, the root of her demise, unambiguously on their father’s abuse, their mother’s manic depression, and the sexual entitlemente of the boys at school. Wrought in unsentimental, candid prose, the depictions of their childhood showcase Bonner’s poetic sensibilities, as she displays powerful control over imagery, suspense, and irony. As the girls matured, the author achieved a high level of education, professional success, and some stable relationships. Meanwhile, Atlantis revealed only glimpses of her precarious existence to her sister. Shady characters, illegal activity, drug abuse, and financial desperation pepper their correspondence, which Bonner intersperses through the primary narrative. Atlantis’ voice, rich with suffering and paranoia and tender with love and vulnerability, lives on through this dramatic memoir. The author clearly tried to strike a delicate balance between helping without derailling her own life, being supportive without enabling, and living fully without abandoning a needy loved one. The secrets of Atlantis’ life eventually became a chasm in which Bonner began to lose her stable sense of reality. By the end, the lucky sister has begun to embody some of her female relatives’ instability, and she constantly questions herself. She believes, at least partially, the official story of Atlantis’ drug-related death in Tijuana, and while she does want to know what happened, she’d prefer to know why and how it could have gone differently.

Carefully crafted, haunting, and absorbing, this thrilling memoir echoes in the head and heart long after the final page.

Film fans will love this massive compendium of intellectually savvy reviews from the long-defunct New York Press.

With great research and effort, editor Colvill has brought together more than 200 long-form film reviews and essays from the “raucous, drunken, snotty and punk rock” NYPress, as former staffer Jim Knipfel describes it in his highly informative introduction. Reviews were first written by Cheshire, later joined by Seitz and White. As Colvill notes in his foreword, their work represented “three distinctly different voices,” and it wasn’t unusual to have one contributor “directly challenging” another’s opinion. There were also interviews with directors, including Abbas Kiarostami, Edward Yang, and Crispin Glover, and thoughtful articles on film festivals and cinema in general. The encyclopedic, retrospective essay “The 1990s in Film” is a lengthy dialogue with all three critics, who engage in a spirited discussion of the state of foreign and independent films, Hollywood, and cinema’s future. Cheshire, “wise, clear-eyed and eloquent,” loved “indie arthouse cinema.” His “seminal” essay, “Death of Film,” sparked a “nation-wide debate” and “got him fired.” Seitz was a “genre specialist” while White was a “provocateur.” In “The Magnolia Syndrome,” White writes that it takes “imagination to review movies worthly.” The NYPress writers were plenty imaginative. Cheshire admires Pulp Fiction’s “astonishing narrative architecture.” Gus Van Sant’s To Die For is a “tour de force...so brilliant as to suggest a mistake on the part of Columbia Pictures.” In a review of the “inventive, graceful and passionate” Mission to Mars, Seitz takes on its “indifferent-to-hostile critical reception.” He loves the
“shaggy, funny, perverse and overflowing with life” Wonder Boys—a "sublime achievement." The contributors rarely mince words. White calls Jim Jarmusch's Ghost Dog a "patronizing failure," and Seitz criticizes Hannibal as "glossily incompetent."

Literate and reflective, these reviews rival those by more famous critics like Pauline Kael and Andrew Sarris.

NOTES ON SILENCING
Crawford, Lacy
Little, Brown (400 pp.)
$28.00 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-0-316-49155-6

A novelist's account of how she struggled to come to terms with a traumatic sexual assault that the boarding school she attended actively tried to cover up.

Crawford entered the prestigious St. Paul's School when she was 14. The daughter of socially ambitious upper-middle-class parents who believed in “the value of education,” she immediately felt out of place among her privileged, preternaturally sophisticated classmates. On the first day of school, she discovered that many of her age-mates already had older lovers whom they visited without their parents’ knowledge. Other aspects of St. Paul's—racism, social hierarchies, and faculty sexual harassment of female students—also disturbed the author, who was diagnosed with clinical depression, but left her parents “unmoved.” The year after she started, Crawford was forced to perform oral sex on two popular senior athletes who threatened to report her for breaking school curfew. She developed a bleeding sore throat the school infirmary diagnosed as stemming from canker sores. Crawford later learned that the school doctor had actually noted she suffered from herpetic lesions. Branded overnight as a “whore” by fellow students, the author soon found herself excluded from female peer groups and scornfully pursued for sex by male students. When her parents became involved, school administrators told them that the “encounter...had been consensual,” implied that Crawford already had herpes,
At 976 pages, Blake Gopnik’s *Warhol* (Ecco, April 28) might seem like the last word on the sphinxlike artist famous for his paintings of Campbell’s soup cans and silk-screened portraits of pop-culture icons (Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley), not to mention his Studio 54 partygoing. But Gopnik, a former art critic at *Newsweek* and the *Washington Post*, says that he “could easily have written another volume or two.” He recently discussed the biography that Kirkus calls “a fascinating, major work that will spark endless debates.”

**Warhol lived much of his life as a public figure. What was something you didn’t know about him until you started researching the biography?**

The most exciting discovery I made was how intelligent he was in a very traditional sense. He read widely. When he wasn’t in front of the TV cameras, when he wasn’t being taped, when notes weren’t being taken, he wasn’t monosyllabic. He had extremely interesting views on art, on life, on everything you could imagine. And that was partly because he had a superb education [at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh]. Was Andy Warhol an academic? No, that wasn’t the way he thought. But he had an incredibly agile mind that came at things from different angles than anyone else might, and that really was the source of his greatness.

**There’s a popular conception of Warhol as being freakish. But the Warhol that we encounter in the book is a gay man with relationships, with lovers, with desires, with heartbreaks. Put it this way: [He was] as normal as someone raised gay in 1940s Pittsburgh could be. I mean, there is no way you would come out of the experience of being raised in such a homophobic society as someone who was absolutely stable and confident about who they were. But given that background, I think he was no more wildly neurotic than most of the rest of us. He was loving and generous when he wanted to be, cruel and skinflint when the occasion called for it. He was really an incredible collection of contradictions—but so are most of us.**

**What was so revolutionary about Warhol’s early work—the soup can and Coke bottle paintings, the Brillo boxes?**

Most of the artists involved with pop art were taking stuff from the everyday world and transferring it into works that are pretty obviously living in the world of high art. That’s not so far from what Dutch artists were doing when they made their still lifes of kitchen scenes. Warhol created much more confusion between low culture and high culture. He really erased the boundary between the two in a thorough way that confused critics and viewers about what they were looking at and whose work they were looking at. He was much more like Marcel Duchamp taking a urinal and declaring it to be an important work of high art than he is like Vermeer painting a scene of a maidservant with a jug of milk.
You make claims for Warhol as an artist who belongs on Mount Parnassus alongside Picasso, Michelangelo, and Rembrandt.

Warhol really bears close examination over and over again. Every time you look at a Warhol you discover something new in it. I thought it was obvious that he was one of the great artists of all time. But it turns out there are people who disagree strenuously with that. There are still people who hold the view that was held in 1962 that he was a fraud and a fake and that his art is a sellout. So, to my amazement, he’s still a contentious artist—and that’s actually good for him. When I compare Warhol to Picasso, many people get up in arms, because for them Picasso is such an obviously great artist now. Of course, not that long ago, Picasso would have been seen as as radical and problematic as Warhol.

One of the complaints lodged against Warhol is that his draftsmanship is nothing special and that other people were often producing his work anyway.

One of the threads in my book is that Warhol is fundamentally a conceptual artist, that he’s in the tradition of Marcel Duchamp but also a forerunner of the conceptualists of the late ’60s. But I also believe that the mark of the artist’s hand is almost never as important as people think. At any given period, there are usually a bunch of artists who have the same manual skills, and it’s really the artists who have conceptual skills that matter more than anything. I mean, there were people who could handle a chisel and marble as well as Michelangelo did—that wasn’t the issue. The issue was what he could do with the skills he had.

In 1963 Warhol announced he was abandoning painting and becoming a filmmaker. How important are Warhol’s films?

I believe that Warhol is easily as great a filmmaker as he is a painter. I’ve sat through all five and a half hours of Sleep [a document of John Giorno asleep] several times. I’ve sat through Empire, which is just a camera focused on the Empire State Building, more or less for eight hours in a row, and enjoyed it tremendously. The four-minute film portraits that he did of his acolytes and friends that are called Screen Tests—they honestly rank up there with Rembrandt and any other great portraitist you can imagine. The public still thinks of Andy Warhol, essentially, as the guy who painted Campbell’s soup cans and pictures of Marilyn Monroe, and they just don’t realize the range of his art. If there’s any one thing I hope my book accomplishes, it’s to expand the view of Andy Warhol for people who haven’t been studying him for years and years.

You’re offered one Andy Warhol artwork as a gift, free of charge. What do you choose?

You know, I’d have to take his repeated portrait of the Mona Lisa—30 Are Better Than One is the title he gave it. Only because he declared it his greatest work of art, and I’m quite willing to believe he was right when it came to thinking about art—not just his art, but anyone’s art.

Warhol received a starred review in the Jan. 1, 2020, issue.
and threatened to destroy her Ivy League future if she did not remain silent. Even after detectives found proof of the school’s wrongdoing more than 20 years later, Crawford’s case was dropped because St. Paul’s influence extended deep into New Hampshire state government. Trenchant in its observations about the unspoken—and often criminal—double standards that adhere in elite spaces, Crawford’s courageous book is a bracing reminder of the dangers inherent in unchecked patriarchal power.

A powerful, topical, and incisive memoir.

**SAY IT LOUDER!**
**Black Voters, White Narratives, and Saving Our Democracy**
Cross, Tiffany D.
HarperOne (176 pp.)
$23.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-06297-677-2

A compelling exploration of how black voters have the power to shape the country's future.

Journalist and political analyst Cross, a resident fellow at Harvard Kennedy School’s Institute on Politics, mounts a convincing argument, warmly endorsed by Michael Eric Dyson, that democracy’s future depends on blacks’ participation in civic life. Democracy, she writes, “dies in whiteness,” notably the dominance of whites as reporters, talk show hosts, and news editors in all media—i.e., those who decide what news is disseminated and how issues are framed. In 2000, beginning as an entry-level journalist at CNN, Cross encountered both lack of diversity and hostility among her colleagues, even when she moved to the station’s D.C. location. Her dissatisfaction led her to create The Beat DC, “a daily news platform at the intersection of politics, policy, and people of color.” By 2017, recruited back to CNN as an on-air analyst, Cross noticed some changes in diversity staffing—but not in the assumptions that shaped coverage. Besides recounting her own experiences in journalism (including makeup and hair-styling nightmares for TV appearances), the author discusses an eruption of violent racism following World War I, recent police brutality (the killings of Rodney King, Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and others), voter suppression (purchasing voters from rolls, redistricting, requiring felons to pay large fees before they can vote), the Georgia governor’s race between Stacey Abrams and Brian Kemp, and Kamala Harris’ campaign. Throughout, she highlights prevalent racist rhetoric from the GOP and others. “White supremacy,” she writes, “has always been America’s greatest weakness,” and she contends that Russian election interference targeted “toxic race relations” to convince black voters not to go to the polls. Contending that there is no such thing as “the Black vote,” Cross urges readers to become informed and engaged.

An urgent plea for black involvement in the political process, essential in this election year.

**CITY ON FIRE**
**The Fight for Hong Kong**
Dapiran, Antony
Scribe (336 pp.)
$20.00 paper | Jun. 23, 2020
978-1-950354-27-6

Australian lawyer and journalist Dapiran, a longtime resident of Hong Kong, gives a commanding firsthand account of the recent—and ongoing—protests there.

The author opens by first noting how freely Hong Kong police were in deploying tear gas to counter the seemingly unending chain of demonstrations that enveloped Hong Kong in 2019—in November, at a rate “approaching two rounds for every single minute of the day”—and how bravely the demonstrators fought back. As with the Tiananmen Square demonstrations of 1989, the protests were touched off by a seemingly minor event, the question of whether an accused murderer sheltering in Hong Kong should be extradited to Taiwan, where he had committed his crime. That event gave rise to a broad-based discussion of whether the government in Beijing would observe the jealously guarded rights of the former British colony. “The year 2019 may be remembered as the year that defined post-handover Hong Kong: China’s answer to that question will determine whether 2019 will also be remembered as the last year of Hong Kong as it once was,” Dapiran writes.

Beijing talks a good game of honoring those rights while taking an active role in trying to sway elections and inserting undercover soldiers and police on the streets, all the while attempting to avoid a Tianamen-like crackdown at the cost of its international high standing. Dapiran argues that the 2019 protests were the continuation of the earlier “Umbrella Movement” of 2014. By implication, the author, who breathed in plenty of tear gas himself while monitoring them, suggests that the protests are likely to begin anew until Beijing honors the terms of the “One Country, Two Systems” model with which it has been trying to woo Taiwan to reunify—and he would seem to endorse the protesters’ claim that they “were freedom fighters not only for their own city, but for the world.”

Excellent reportage that is of critical importance in understanding contemporary Chinese politics.

**THE SPRAWL**
**Reconsidering the Weird American Suburbs**
Diamond, Jason
Coffee House (256 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Aug. 25, 2020
978-1-56689-582-8

A scion of the suburbs considers how housing shapes destiny.

Suburbia was a largely postwar phenomenon, born of the need to provide homes for returning veterans eager to start families and trading on a long-standing dream that was hitherto reserved only for the
NEW AND FORTHCOMING NONFICTION FROM GROVE ATLANTIC

VESPER FLIGHTS
Helen Macdonald
From the author of the New York Times bestseller H Is for Hawk comes “[an] altogether memorable collection . . . Exemplary writing about the intersection of the animal and human worlds.” —KIRKUS REVIEWS (starred review)

$27.00 - August 25, 2020 - Hardcover

THE YELLOW HOUSE
Sarah M. Broom

$17.00 - July 7, 2020 - Paperback

THE LOST PIANOS OF SIBERIA
Sophy Roberts
“This is an amazing journey, the ultimate quest for the oddest objects—pianos—in the most unlikely place—Siberia. But Sophy Roberts makes it much more than that . . . I loved this book.” —PAUL THEROUX

$27.00 - August 4, 2020 - Hardcover

THE RISE OF THE G.I. ARMY, 1940–1941
Paul Dickson
“A richly detailed history…One of the best treatments to date of America’s rapid transition from the Depression to the wartime power it became.” —KIRKUS REVIEWS (starred review)

$30.00 - July 7, 2020 - Hardcover

GROVE ATLANTIC
GROVEATLANTIC.COM
Atlantic and Lemuria. But not so with Dickey, whose book

Hughes. Now there are suburbs made up of people of diverse eth-

cratic subjects no quarter, eschewing the paranormal in favor

finds alluring about these particular cryptids has to do with

Ghostland explored haunted places. Here, the author allows his

film such as, yes, John Hughes’ oeuvre and Sofia Coppola’s inter-

as written by the likes of Dave Eggers and Jonathan Lethem, and

of thought to the “faux-pastoral” nature of the suburbs and their

continue to grow. Diamond is interested in demographics but

not exclusively. As the narrative progresses, the author becomes

increasingly eloquent about such things as pop music—for much

pop is driven by suburbanites, who share a “belief that you’re

doing something bigger than the place you’re from”—literature

as it was written of the likes of Dave Eggers and Jonathan Lethem, and

film such as, yes, John Hughes’ oeuvre and Sofia Coppola’s inter-

pretation of The Virgin Suicides. Clearly, Diamond has given a lot

of thought to the “faux-pastoral” nature of the suburbs and their

tendency to resist the formation of true communities. If the cul-

tural aspects of his narrative tend to be a touch repetitive, the

point is well taken, as is his thought that now-dying shopping

malls across North America (cue Arcade Fire) might well be con-

verted to community centers, “making the ones that remain into

places that serve a greater purpose.”

A literate meditation on clipped-lawn places easily taken

for granted but that well deserve such reflection.

THE UNIDENTIFIED
Mythical Monsters, Alien
Encounters, and Our
Obsession With the
Unexplained

Dickey, Colin

Viking (320 pp.)

$27.00 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-0-525-55756-2

A cultural historian digs into the mys-
tique of “fringe topics like Atlantis, or

cryptids (Bigfoot, the Loch Ness Monster, and other associated

‘hidden’ animals), or UFOs, or ancient aliens.”

Traditionally, there has been no limit to the amount

of theory, conjecture, and speculation that awestruck authors

have heaped onto aliens, Bigfoot, or the lost civilizations of

Atlantis and Lemuria. But not so with Dickey, whose book

Ghostland explored haunted places. Here, the author allows his

Fort-ean subjects no quarter, eschewing the paranormal in favor

of a steadfast adherence to earthbound explanations of the

unknown. In Dickey’s eyes, Sasquatch and the Yeti may not be

the strange hairy outliers they have always been considered, but

that does not make them any less captivating. What the author

finds alluring about these particular cryptids has to do with

another kind of phenomena entirely—namely, how they have

been used in the sublimation and appropriation of Native cul-

tures. “Not unlike sports mascots with their racist caricatures,
or hippie boutiques selling dream catchers and peace pipes,”

writes Dickey, “the Wild Man lore of the Chehalis and the Nep-

alese had become a way for white people to romanticize what

they were destroying, and a way for disaffected members of

the colonizers to find a kind of melancholic reflection in these

endangered cultures.” Turning to Betty and Barney Hill’s har-

rowing tale of alien abduction on a dark New Hampshire road

in 1961, Dickey quotes a UFO skeptic that the depiction of the

otherworldly kidnappers as “gray” aliens was not fantastic but

rather a “way out of the complicated racial politics of the 1960s.”

Any true sense of wonder that the author exhibits is aimed at

often inscrutable characters like Tom Slick, Charles Fort, and

Madam Blavatsky, some of the leading purveyors of extraordi-

nary hokum through the decades.

An intriguing mix of myths and monsters that lacks much

of the inherent fun but should appeal to UFO and Bigfoot

watchers.

OUR LADY OF
PERPETUAL HUNGER
A Memoir

Donovan, Lisa

Penguin Press (304 pp.)

$28.00 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-0-525-56094-4

The debut memoir of family and

food from a renowned pastry chef and

food writer.

Donovan, who received a James

Beard Award for her work in Food & Wine, chronicles her career

as a chef and her unrelenting passion for the culinary arts, but

she also digs into her family history, offering keen reflections

on the intersections of race and gender and spirited discussions

of work, class, and opportunity. Donovan grew up in a mixed-

race military family that featured both Southern and Mexican

lineages, and she ably conveys the assimilationist pain of reck-

oning with the family pretense that it “was better to be invisible

than to not be white.” From childhood to adulthood, the

author unpacks her complex heritage through fascinating sto-

ries of trials, persistence, and success. At times, overly nostalgic

flashbacks cloud the narrative—Donovan admits that she is

“faulty for romanticizing all number of things. I know this about

myself”—but a compelling voice holds everything together.

The author integrates harrowing accounts of abuse, rape, abort-

tion, marriage, and motherhood with discussions of her varied

professional experiences, most of which have included work-

place sexism. Donovan pointedly shows how women’s labor

behind the scenes is often exploited to advance profits and egos.

“Women are revered straight into abjection,” she writes, “useful

only as a totem of inspiration. When we go to make that work

our own, we are unable to survive in the industry the men built,

the one they sell our wares within.” Occasionally, the author’s

underdetailed representations flatten the impact of her experi-

ences, but Donovan is to be commended for bringing exploi-

tive work relationships to light while tackling the ego-driven
REVEAL YOUR BURSTS of BRILLIANCE

Is your inner artist awake and inspired, bursting with brilliant ideas? Or, has it been slumbering so long you almost forgot you had one?

In this heartfelt and uplifting book, award-winning author and creative entrepreneur Teresa R. Funke draws on nearly three decades of experience to show you in quick, readable bursts:

- What makes you uniquely creative
- Why your art or ideas matter
- How to silence your inner critic and access the courage to create
- How to carve out time to follow your passion
- How to trust your intuition and tap into your Higher Self

Today’s chaotic world requires an army of creative thinkers—and you are one of them. This transformative book will help you ignite your creative spirit and rediscover your passion, your purpose, and your power.

A compassionate and encouraging look at the costs and deep rewards of the artistic way of life. Funke’s prose throughout this volume is brightly engaging and strengthened by her rapid-fire insights into the creative process, as well as by her recollections from her own life...

- Kirkus Reviews

Whether you need a boost in energy, morale, or an increase in your happiness-factor, Bursts of Brilliance for a Creative Life is a must-read.

- Kathryn Kemp Guy/iy, bestselling author and founder of Make Everything Fun

Teresa Funke’s insights on the creative journey are thoughtful and inspiring. Bursts of Brilliance is like having your own personal coach providing support and cheering you on. Highly recommended.

- Stephanie Chandler, author and CEO of Nonfiction Authors Association

To follow the writings of Teresa Funke is the most Brilliant choice ever.

—Hilary Blair, CEO and speaker, Articulate Real and Clear

world of celebrity chefs. As such, the book is not just a lively story of a talented pastry chef at the top of her game; it’s also a profoundly relatable memoir of the pervasive push back against female success.

A fresh voice with a recipe for empowerment.

**TO START A WAR**

*How the Bush Administration Took America into Iraq*

Draper, Robert

Penguin Press (496 pp.)

$30.00 | Jul. 28, 2020

978-0-525-56104-0

An authoritative account of the background to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. A writer at large for the *New York Times Magazine*, Draper contrasts American Middle East policy with Iraq’s under Saddam Hussein since he took power in 1979; disturbingly, it remains unclear which was more dysfunctional. The author reminds readers that the U.S. supported Iraq after it invaded Iran in 1980 despite widespread atrocities perpetrated by Hussein. In 1991, American forces crushed Iraq’s army after it invaded Kuwait. Convinced that this humiliation would lead to Hussein’s overthrow, the U.S. withdrew. The war and ongoing sanctions impoverished Iraq, but Hussein’s rhetoric convinced everyone that he remained a threat. Draper paints George W. Bush as a decent man aware of his ignorance who surrounded himself with men of vast experience: Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and Secretary of State Colin Powell. The author, who ably distills his deep research and reporting into a fluid narrative, is not the first to focus on Paul Wolfowitz, deputy secretary of defense and a veteran adviser since the Reagan administration, who took a dislike to Hussein after the First Gulf War and never ceased urging his overthrow. Unconvinced but then horrified by 9/11, Bush vowed not to be blindsided a second time. As a result, he came to accept that Hussein, rather than Osama bin Laden, was the major figure behind terrorism. It helped that Cheney and Rumsfeld were on board. What followed makes excruciating reading because the true believers got everything wrong. Under pressure to find evidence justifying war (weapons of mass destruction, a Hussein–bin Laden connection), the CIA waffled, so the hawks created their own intelligence group that found it. An evenhanded chronicler, Draper reminds readers that most Americans, most congressmen, and even the *New York Times* supported invasion. Today, almost everyone has changed their minds, and the trillions of dollars wasted would be useful right now.

A painful yet gripping, essential account of a disastrous series of decisions.

**SHUTTLE, HOUSTON**

*My Life in the Center Seat of Mission Control*

Dye, Paul

Hachette (320 pp.)

$28.00 | Jul. 14, 2020

978-0-316-45457-5

A passionate look at the U.S. space shuttle program through the life’s work of the longest-serving flight director in NASA’s history.

As with many of his peers in the space and aeronautical industries, Dye’s occupational choice was inspired by SF literature and the romantic longing to live out such cosmic possibilities in real life. The author was among the earthbound heroes at NASA flight control who helped guide space shuttles through all aspects of a mission. A former scuba instructor who studied aeronautical engineering at the University of Minnesota, the author fondly recalls in scrupulous detail the highlights of his three-decade career as a top NASA flight controller. He combines folksy anecdotes (he uses the term “folks” a lot) with esoteric mechanical details to convey how these technologically remarkable yet fragile, temperamental shuttles worked—or sometimes didn’t. Although Dye’s impressive recall of every aspect of his job history is largely both engaging and informative, he is overly indulgent with the aeronautical shoptalk, severely testing general readers’ tolerance for acronyms (a common pitfall that both space and military memoirs share). On the whole, it’s the author’s simple anecdotes about everyday working life at mission control that make for the most readable, entertaining sections. For instance, Dye’s recounting of the 1990s Shuttle–Mir program, a famously cooperative gesture between Russia and the U.S., is an insider’s look at how two countries’ very different work philosophies merged to successfully complete an unprecedented mission. We also read about the unforgettable time employee negligence led to the spontaneous combustion of the office coffee maker, creating widespread panic among the caffeine-addicted mission control employees. Most insightful are Dye’s reflections on the 1986 Challenger disaster and the problematic mission control culture that led to this infamously televised catastrophe.

Dye’s memoir is a balanced mix of moments both banal and breathtaking.

**ANALOGIA**

*The Emergence of Technology Beyond Programmable Control*

Dyson, George

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (304 pp.)

$28.00 | Aug. 18, 2020

978-0-374-10486-3

A pleasingly eccentric, impossibly wide-ranging tech treatise/memoir.
“Every parent’s weeknight cooking bible!”
— Catherine McCord, author and creator of Weelicious

“This are the chicken recipes of my dreams!”
— Nicki Sizemore, author of Fresh Flavors for the Slow Cooker and creator of From Scratch Fast

**Stacie Billis** is a veteran food editor and on-air personality, and the cohost of Didn’t I Just Feed You?!, a popular food podcast for parents. Her recipes and nonjudgmental cooking advice have been featured in dozens of publications, including *Parents* and *Every Day with Rachael Ray*, and on *TODAY*.


Storey Publishing
storey.com
Dyson, an independent historian of technology and son of noted physicist Freeman and brother of tech maven Esther, opens his account of the arc of technology with Gottfried Leibniz, who, after vying with Isaac Newton to invent calculus, took a commission from Peter the Great of Russia that had several elements: one, to mount an expedition to Siberia, find out if and where Asia meets North America, and claim some land; two, to found a Russian academy of sciences to jump-start scholarship there; and three, to use computers to build “a rational society based on science, logic, and machine intelligence.” Thus the opening of one of the four ages, by Dyson’s count, of technology, another of which we’re just entering, one inaugurated when “machines began taking the side of nature, and nature began taking the side of the machines.” Racing from the Stone Age to the coming singularity, Dyson is in fine fettle. Leibniz figures, but so does the author’s beloved kayak-building hobby. So, too, does the Apache warrior Geronimo, who occasioned the development of a technology that prefigures the modern age of communicating devices—from heliograph to iPhone, that is, and in mighty leaps of prose (but never logic). “Nothing is to be gained by resisting the advance of the discrete-state machines,” Dyson memorably writes, “for the ghosts of the continuum will soon return, when the grass is eight inches high in the spring.” With luck, the machines will tolerate us, for the culminating point in Dyson’s lively, if deeply strange, narrative is that the intelligence of tomorrow will not be human alone but will be shared with machines and nature (plants and animals and microbes and such) in time to come, fulfilling Leibniz’s dream.

A thoughtful—and most thought-provoking—exploration of where our inventions have taken and will take us. (32 pages of b/w illustrations; 15 b/w chapter-opening illustrations)

**SIGNS OF LIFE**

*A Doctor’s Journey Around the Edges of the World*

Fubes, Stephen

Pegasus (336 pp.)

$27.95 | Jul. 7, 2020

978-1-64313-195-5

From the Arctic Circle to Patagonia, an intrepid cyclist and doctor recounts an epic journey.

Physician and travel writer Fabes was working in a prestigious London hospital when, after a few years of rotating through departments, he faced the decision of choosing his own specialty. “I sensed a narrowing not just of my field of practice, but in my life and opportunities,” he writes in his vivid debut memoir. Nearing 30, he felt at a crossroads, impelled to seek “more space, more time, more risk.” Recalling a cycling trip with his brother down the coast of Chile, he decided to take a leave from medicine and embark on a rigorous adventure: cycling the length of six continents. The author’s animated report of his trip of more than 53,000 miles—and the crossing of “102 international borders”—highlights perils and drama: weather (monsoons, snow, hail, sandstorms, debilitating heat); wildlife, including antelopes, monkeys, and warthogs; insects (huge spiders, mosquitoes, leeches, a Peruvian giant centipede, fire ants, and “all manner of flying nasties”); a volcano belching out “thick plumes”; “cranky immigration officials”; and frequent damage to his trusty bike. Physical ailments often were severe, including boils, rashes, and dengue fever, a mosquito-borne virus that laid him low for 10 days and nearly killed him. When he wasn’t camped by roadsides, he spent nights in guesthouses, barns, schools, churches, and assorted rooms infested with fleas, bedbugs, or other vermin. Physical ailments often were severe, including boils, rashes, and dengue fever, a mosquito-borne virus that laid him low for 10 days and nearly killed him. When he wasn’t camped by roadsides, he spent nights in guesthouses, barns, schools, churches, and assorted rooms infested with fleas, bedbugs, or other vermin. Cycling confronted Fabes with evidence of oppression and exploitation, poverty and vulnerability; yet, invited to visit several clinics, he saw evidence, as well, of “connections, empathy and hope.” Overall, he admits, it was “the intense unpredictability of being outside in wild places that I treasured most, the various erratic, overlapping sensations I was left with: fear, despair, transcendence, solitude, weariness and awe. Upheavals of thought.”

A brisk, panoramic view of peoples and lands.
As the author also delves deeply into gender identity and the many confusions and complications involved. In the opening piece, “Finger of God,” Faliveno chronicles the disastrous F5 tornado. She recounts how her mother confronted the sight of the brewing storm and hustled the family to the basement, reminisces about her love for the film *Twister*, and tells of her 2019 return to talk to residents who witnessed the original event. In “Tomboy,” the author discusses her education and adult life in New York, where she experimented with kink as well as various expressions of her gender identity and struggled with being misgendered and misunderstood. “Sometimes, I call myself a woman,” she writes. “But sometimes I avoid the word... Uncertainty is hardly unique among those of us born into female bodies, but as my own body moves through the world, it is marked by one common question: What are you? And the honest answer is—I don’t really know.” Throughout the collection, Faliveno remains inquisitive and resistant to labels, always maintaining her empowering agency. While some of the passages are repetitive, the majority of the essays are well-rendered investigations of self-identity.
An expressive voice evolving deliberately, resisting having to be one thing or the other.

**THE KIDS ARE ALL LEFT**

How Young Voters Will Unite America

Faris, David

Melville House (224 pp.)

$16.99 paper | Jun. 30, 2020

978-1-61219-821-7

A political analyst asserts that younger voters can sway the next election.

Faris, a political science professor, mounts a convincing and rousing argument about the influence of voters in their 20s and 30s to shape a progressive political agenda for the nation. These younger voters, he writes, form a powerful threat to the Republican Party, which increasingly leans heavily on “male, religious, white, and older” voters and which has been “systematically repulsing and alienating” a new demographic: millennials and Generation Z. More diverse, more educated, and less religious than previous generations, this cohort holds progressive views on a variety of issues, including climate change, economic inequality, racial justice, and gun control. Moreover, they are revolted by “the unseemly antics, misogynist ravings, and racist policies of today’s Republican Party.” Faris marshals considerable evidence—laid out in tables and graphs—to support his assertion that identifying as Democrats is nothing new among young voters, who have been “marching left for twenty years.” Contrary to common belief, young liberals don’t morph into older conservatives. Instead, Faris finds that voting affiliation is set in early adulthood and persists throughout a person’s life. He focuses some attention on the “brash, telegenic” provocateurs intoxicated on the dizzying combination of hyper-partisanship and grifter-doofus scamming that characterizes the thought leaders of the young right.” Although these outspoken conservatives are not representative of their cohort, they do find outlets—Fox News, for example—to noisily disseminate their views. Polarization, Faris speculates, will end “when one side wins a series of decisive national victories, forces people to evacuate from the losing party and convinces those who remain to change that party’s trajectory.” A high voter turnout and a unified Democratic Party may portend that decisive victory in 2020, but a fractured left, warns the author, would lose to a hard-right GOP.

Cautious hope for democracy’s future.

**MODERN FAMILY**

Freeman, Marc

St. Martin’s (528 pp.)

$29.99 | May 19, 2020

978-1-250-26003-1

Dozens of those responsible for making the popular ensemble comedy, which ended in 2020, reflect on their experience in this amiable account.

In his first book, journalist Freeman assembles excerpts from interviews with the show’s cast, writers, directors, production team, guest stars, and two showrunners into brief chapters that roughly follow the show from conception to conclusion, leaving plenty of room for detours along the way. Those looking for dirt or gossipy details won’t find them here: Most of the interviewees are polite and cautious, happy to offer up amusing anecdotes but seemingly eager to leave professional bridges unburned. However, that doesn’t mean that dramatic tension is lacking. Most of it comes from the long-simmering conflict between showrunners Steven Levitan and Christopher Lloyd, who, a few episodes into the series, realized that their narrative styles and goals were so incompatible that their only solution was to take turns masterminding the episodes, which they continued to do—not without resentment and writerly feedback—for the duration of the series. While the focus is squarely on *Modern Family* and its cast and crew, readers curious about the making of TV shows in general, and network sitcoms in particular, will find plenty to interest them, including the process of casting a show, the mechanics of a “table read,” the construction of a temporary set, and the designing of a title sequence. Freeman occasionally dips a toe into controversy, as in a chapter featuring some of the show’s female writers, who made up a very small percentage of the writing staff, reflecting on their less-than-ideal experiences. As Freeman notes, the show “gained an industry reputation…for letting women writers go or not asking them back.” Though some might wish for a stronger editing hand in chapters in which the same point is made by several different interviewees, true aficionados may be happy for the excess.

A glossy look behind the scenes and a satisfyingly ample memento for fans.

**A SHORT HISTORY OF RUSSIA**

How the World’s Largest Country Invented Itself, From the Pagans to Putin

Galeotti, Mark

Hanover Square Press (224 pp.)

$27.99 | Jul. 7, 2020

978-1-335-14570-3

A fine introduction to a nation that “has responded to its lack of clear frontiers by a steady process of expansion, bringing new ethnic, cultural and religious identities into the mix.”
“Russia is a country with no natural borders, no single tribe or people, no true central identity,” writes Galeotti, an expert on Russian history and culture. The country’s written history only begins in the ninth century, when the Vikings took notice. Readers aware that Norse raiders sailed west as far as the Black Sea to trade and plunder. Called Rus’ by the Slavs, by 900 they had settled in Kievan, adopted Christianity, and established a nation that neighboring Byzantium took seriously. The Mongols conquered Russia around 1240. While conventional histories describe “two centuries of Asiatic despotism,” Mongol rule was fairly benign. By 1500, Moscow was the leading city, and four centuries of spectacular conquests began. Peter the Great (reign: 1682-1725) introduced European culture and technology. Under Catherine the Great (1762-1796), Russia became a European power. Although American and French revolutionary ideals penetrated Russia, Napoleon’s traumatic 1812 invasion convinced the czars that democracy was “a product of dangerous, foreign-inspired freethinking.” As a result, in the 19th century, the country sank into despotism. As a visiting French aristocrat noted, “this empire, vast as it is, is only a prison to which the emperor holds the key.” Galeotti reaches the 20th century only 50 pages before the end but delivers a fine, abbreviated chronicle. Lenin’s Bolsheviks won Russia’s revolution after a brutal struggle, but his early death meant that the Soviet Union was largely the creation of his heir, Stalin, whose epic cruelty disguises the fact that economic decline and misgovernment, not despotism, doomed his empire. The author blames the Soviet collapse on corrupt, unresponsive leaders, but, as Russia under Putin demonstrates, a corrupt kleptocracy remains popular as long as it provides stability, national pride, and jobs.

A slim, accessible account of the megacountry.

UNCONDITIONAL
The Japanese Surrender in World War II

Gallicchio, Marc
Oxford Univ (320 pp.)
$27.95 | Aug. 3, 2020
978-0-19-009110-1

The tortuous history behind America’s decision to insist on Japan’s unconditional surrender.

In this tightly focused narrative, history professor Gallicchio writes that when Franklin Roosevelt announced in 1943 that the war would end when Germany and Japan surrendered unconditionally, few objected. It became a controversy in 1945 when Japan’s defeat seemed inevitable to everyone except Japanese leaders, who maintained that all their countrymen would die before surrendering. Two administration camps existed. Secretary of War Henry Stimson led those convinced that Japanese leaders were more likely to surrender if assured that the emperor would keep his throne. Dean Acheson, who would become secretary of state in 1949, led those who argued that this would prolong the war by convincing the enemy that America was weakening. Harry Truman listened but did nothing, and the Navy was lukewarm to any assurance. Having annihilated enemy naval and air defenses, Navy leaders were certain that a blockade would starve Japan into submission. Army leaders, led by Gen. George Marshall, argued that this would take years and that war-weary Americans would lose heart. In any case, public opinion supported unconditional surrender. The Army argued for an invasion of the home island, an immense project. In the end, a second atomic bomb and the Soviet invasion persuaded Japan to give in. Its offer to surrender included a clause protecting the emperor, which the U.S. rejected, returning a softened version that Japanese leaders, after heated debate, accepted. But as the author points out, the controversy persisted. During the war and until the 1960s, advocates of modifying unconditional surrender were conservatives who proclaimed this would save American lives while liberals protested that “the real aim of the ‘emperor worshippers’...was to maintain Japan as a bulwark against Russia and revolution.” After the ’60s, matters reversed when liberal “revisionist” historians claimed that Japan was on the verge of surrendering and that Truman brushed off the evidence and insisted on dropping the bombs to intimidate Russia.

A definitive account of complex political maneuvering that accomplished little.

THE DEVIL’S HARVEST
A Ruthless Killer, a Terrorized Community, and the Search for Justice in California’s Central Valley

Garrison, Jessica
Hachette (336 pp.)
$27.00 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-0-316-45568-8

Most contract killers view their acts as a job. BuzzFeed News West Coast investigations editor Garrison portrays one who took pleasure from murder.

Jose Manuel Martinez killed nearly 40 people in a 30-year period, sometimes for pay, sometimes simply because, in one case, someone parked in his driveway. He was finally convicted in three different states, but it took the police more than three decades to catch up to him even though they suspected him. There were a couple of reasons for the lag. Martinez claimed it was because he was “so damn good,” but Garrison has a different take: Of the Golden State Killer, who killed mostly white women, some 2,800 stories were written, whereas in the case of Martinez, “there were fewer than fifty.” The author ventures that Martinez, whose victims were mostly Mexican Americans and immigrants presumed to live in crime-ridden places with no advocates in law enforcement, “had found an ideal place to ply his trade” in California’s impoverished Central Valley. Garrison constructs a horrifying portrait of a man who began to kill when a relative was raped and murdered, found he was good at it, and made it a profession alongside drug-dealing and other crimes. The police caught up with him time and time again but...
could never make the charges stick beyond short sentences—as when he killed “a rat” and failed a lie-detector test on the matter but soon walked away because polygraphs aren’t admissible evidence in California courts. Garrison’s story involves a lot of personal back and forth with the now-imprisoned Martinez, who called her during his Florida trial to ask, “What is a sociopath?” “When I told him it referred to someone who had no conscience ‘Huh,’ as if he wasn’t quite sure what to make of that.”

An urgent, highly readable work of crime swiftly committed and justice long delayed.

FATHOMS
The World in the Whale
Giggs, Rebecca
Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)
$27.00  |  Jul. 28, 2020
978-1-982120-69-6

Seafaring scrutiny of whales, their oceanic environment, and the dangers to their survival.

For Australian journalist Giggs, the sighting of a humpback whale beached on a local shoreline sparked her curiosity for the life and lore of the storied marine mammal. She became captivated by the animal after an informative encounter with the wildlife officer who euthanized the whale. The entire ordeal inspired a research project that encompasses not only physical and ecological elements, but also artistic representations and philosophy. Giggs presents the bounty of that scholarship in crisp, creatively written chapters addressing the many layers of the whale population’s unique physiology and evolutionary history, sociality, above-water balletic athleticism, and enigmatic “biophony” of their vocalizations. Most importantly, she analyzes how their behavior can be predictive for the Earth’s future. An adventurous explorer, the author immerses readers in an Australian whale watching tour and then dips into the deep international waters of Japan, where whaling ships flourish. With a conservationist mindset, Giggs reiterates that the whale and its life, legacy, and precarious environmental state are reflective of the greater issues the Earth faces, from ecological upheaval to overconsumption. Whether describing the majesty of the blue whale or the human assault on sea ecology due to paper and plastic pollution, the author’s prose is poetic, beautifully smooth, urgently readable, and eloquently informative. Her passion for whales leaps off the page, urging readers to care and—even more so—become involved in their protection and preservation. Throughout the book, the author’s debut, she brilliantly exposes “how regular human life seeped into the habitats of wildlife, and how wildlife returned back to us, the evidence of our obliviousness.” Refreshingly, she also reveals glimmers of hope regarding what whales can teach the human race about our capacity to ecologically coexist with the natural world.

A thoughtful, ambitiously crafted appeal for the preservation of marine mammals.

A magisterial, multidisciplinary study of Faulkner that shakes the dust off his canonization.

THE SADDEST WORDS
William Faulkner’s Civil War
Gorra, Michael
Liveright/Norton (400 pp.)
$29.95  |  Aug. 25, 2020
978-1-63149-170-2

An exploration of the South’s greatest novelist and his fiction’s complicated relationship to the Civil War.

Though William Faulkner’s legacy is as an author obsessed with the interplay of the South’s shameful
past and haunted present, shaped by slavery and the Civil War, he didn’t write much about the war as such. Aside from a handful of scenes that evoked moments like Pickett’s Charge at Gettysburg, he tended to write about its prehistory and aftereffects. That approach, argues Gorra, a longtime American literature scholar, is a central strength of Faulkner’s fiction. By addressing violence and slavery obliquely, he blurs incidents in ways that allow them to stretch across time. (The “saddest words” of the book’s title are “was” and “again,” terms that spotlight the inescapability of violence and racism that serve as the war’s grim legacy.) Gorra’s shifts among biography, Civil War history, and literary analysis can make readers feel whipsawed, but they’re always engaging and purposeful. The author takes a close look at the history and literary texts of Faulkner’s time to show how slavery’s role in the war was soft-pedaled, explaining his sometimes embarrassingly racist pronouncements about his native Mississippi. But Faulkner’s literary mind was more open and nuanced. He “couldn’t keep from remembering what other people wanted to forget,” Gorra writes, arguing that signature works like *The Sound and The Fury, Light in August,* and (especially) *Absalom, Absalom!* encompass the private fears of white Southerners about mixed-race relationships and Southern honor. Much as Malcolm Cowley’s *Portable Faulkner* (1946) demystified the complexities of Yoknapatawpha County for Americans still willing to ignore Jim Crow, this book looks at Faulkner in an era in which Confederate statues are at long last getting pulled down. Faulkner had his flaws, Gorra writes, but he “gets the big things right.”

A magisterial, multidisciplinary study of Faulkner that shakes the dust off his canonization.

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**The Good State**

*On the Principles of Democracy*

Grayling, A.C.

Oneworld Publications (256 pp.)

$26.95 | Aug. 4, 2020

978-1-78607-718-9

The noted British political and economic philosopher examines modern democracy and finds it—well, not very democratic.

Democratic, Churchill once remarked, is the worst form of government except for all the others. Grayling agrees, holding that democracy along the “Westminster Model,” which includes the U.K. and, in modified form, the U.S., “is either dysfunctional or in danger of becoming so as a result of the model’s essential weaknesses.” Both the U.K. and the U.S., he adds, are the most pronounced examples of its failures because both have become thoroughly politicized—and, he notes, “government is not the place for politics. Politics is the place for politics: in election campaigns, in the negotiations to form government, in the public debate in general.” When government is politicized along party lines, someone doesn’t get represented, and the foremost goal of a democratic state is representation for all and the opportunity for everyone to flourish. This is far from the case, writes Grayling, since too many people are excluded from the benefits of the state “as a result of political and economic choices made by those who still get control of the levers respectively of government and economic activity.” Rather than monolithic party rule, the author favors broad-based parliamentary coalitions, which further the goal of arriving at a majority opinion “composed of the overlapping Venn diagrams of a sufficient number of minorities.” He is particularly disparaging of the “first-past-the-post” system that has taken over both the U.S. and the U.K., which leaves voters for the losing side without a voice in governance. Fortunately, to trust Grayling, there are ways to reduce politics in government and get democracy back on the road to functioning properly, even if the powers that be will surely struggle against any such reversion to the ideal.

A brilliant exploration of democracy as it is and as it should be.

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**2030**

*How Today’s Biggest Trends Will Collide and Reshape the Future of Everything*

Guillén, Mauro F.

St. Martin’s (288 pp.)

$28.99 | Aug. 25, 2020

978-1-250-26817-4

Wharton School professor Guillén examines demographic, economic, and climatic trends to project a vision of the world 10 years hence.

Forecasting the future is always a project fraught with peril, as the authors of *The Limits to Growth* might tell you. Yet some trends of the present seem bound for a harvest of ineluctable results. The number of hungry people will grow in the next decade, but so, too, will obesity; by the author’s projections, 50% of Americans will be obese in 2030. This speaks to another growing trend: inequality, a neat solution for which seems unlikely. Even so, Guillén prophesies that middle-class markets will grow in Asia at a much faster clip than in Europe and North America while Africa, which now has the world’s fastest-growing populations, will be on the brink of either disaster or a renaissance that will finally bring it wealth. “For better or worse,” he writes, “its fortunes will matter globally.” Regarding the issue of population, the world will be older almost everywhere. Interestingly, Guillén links the success of Airbnb and other aspects of the “sharing economy” to older persons who want to remain in their homes but find them large enough to offer rooms to rent. Bearing the financial weight of this increasingly older population will be millennials and Gen Zers, many of whom, ventures the author, will not be able to accumulate much wealth over their working lifetimes. Some of the seemingly intractable problems of today—immigration and climate change, foremost among them—will not be fixed until the conversations surrounding them become fact-based. As Guillén
Indeed, the very lack of clean water, soap, and sanitation among the poor for centuries, bathing was viewed as suspect in Western culture, Hamblin notes. A wide-ranging study that shows how cleanliness was not always next to godliness.

A staff writer for the Atlantic and lecturer at the Yale School of Public Health, Hamblin notes that for centuries, bathing was viewed as suspect in Western culture, in which Christianity celebrates baptism but otherwise lacks the ritual washings of other religions. Germ theory changed all that, launching a hygiene revolution that followed the Industrial Revolution. Entrepreneurs made millions creating an ever-expanding soap and skin care industry promising baby-soft, germ-free skin. The author believes we have gone too far. The skin that shields us from the outside world is also home to millions of bacteria. Like their kin in the gut, the bugs are useful, aiding the skin’s protective and immune functions. Wash them away and you throw the immune system out of whack, so it attacks the body’s own cells in a frenzy that gives rise to allergies, eczema, and other conditions. To demonstrate that less is better, Hamblin gave up showering while writing the book. (He did wash his hands.) He did not become a public nuisance, he writes, and his skin improved. As he admits, this is not for everyone. Indeed, the very lack of clean water, soap, and sanitation among impoverished groups across the globe leads to needless disease and death. Hamblin, however, is not a righteous crusader exposing marketers of skin lotions and potions as phonies. He does call out some products, but most are benign. Cosmetics, which are not subject to safety and efficacy rules, can often cause dangerous side effects. Ultimately, Hamblin argues for more skin microbiome research and greater biodiversity in all aspects of our lives, underscoring the value of pets and plants and parks to enhance our lives—and those that live in and on us.

A rich mix of sociocultural history detailing how marketing transformed beliefs about cleanliness.

In 2011, while working as a reporter for the Center for Public Integrity, Hamby often came into the orbit of “factory workers, men and women who’d lost loved ones in accidents, or survivors whose lives had been forever altered” by some malfaisance or another on the part of the bosses. Nowhere was this truer than in coal mining, where fires, cave-ins, and other occupational hazards were ever present but where the greater toll came in the form of lung disease. Countless lawsuits have been filed to obtain compensation for affected workers and, more often, their widows. However, as the author writes, “companies would rather spend stacks of cash fighting each case to the bitter end than pay the modest benefits to their former employees.” It was up to “a small but scrappy coalition” of crusading attorneys, labor organizers, health care professionals, and citizen advocates to piece together evidence proving a pattern of deception: Coal companies would convince willing politicians (Donald Trump among them) that environmental regulations were too burdensome, commission doctors to cast doubt on miners’ claims for compensation, and engage in other evasions. In the end, as the roster of victims of pulmonary illnesses grew as the decades passed, that coalition finally managed to push through legislation at the national level that, among other things, “would allow attorneys to collect partial fees as the claim progressed, rather than having to wait years for an uncertain payday at its conclusion,” and made provisions for retesting of miners whose claims had been denied due to suspect medical claims on the part of the coal companies. Hamby’s book is a touch long but full of memorable moments; it sits well in the tradition of advocacy journalism that includes recent books such as Carl Safina’s A Sea in Flames and Karen Piper’s Left in the Dust.

A vivid and compelling portrait of a dysfunctional family.

For the first eight years of his life, Hamill and his two brothers lived like
blue bloods. Their father's family was "pure white-Anglo-Saxon-protestant, Mayflower-descendant, white-butler-rich." The only life they knew was filled with servants, private clubs, and luxurious New York real estate. But when his family's "dormant demons were rustled from their slumber" and his parents divorced, the three boys moved to Bermuda with their mother, where she had grown up in a working-class family. The book, Hamill's debut, is not a typical riches-to-rags reversal, though that's a prominent theme. Instead, the author explores in visceral detail how children of addicted caregivers struggle to construct meaning, establish their own identities, and simply survive while living in the wake of a family illness. Hamill is a gifted storyteller, crafting scenes and dialogue that read like a riveting novel. There are casualties in this tale, both real and figurative, but there are also many triumphs. In his early 30s, the author embraced his sexuality as a gay man, a reckoning that arguably took a back seat to all the chaos and collateral damage that surrounded him. Though Hamill is unflinchingly honest about the flaws of all of the characters in the story (including himself), by the end, readers will have at least some affection for each one. The author absorbingly narrates a complicated story fraught with betrayal, abandonment, and grief, and he shows us—via his own recovery—that beauty, pain, and love can all coexist in the same space. "I started to see my mother as somebody caught in darkness," he says, "doing whatever she could to steal glimpses of light, knowing they wouldn't last for long. I saw how brave that was, and how sad."

A stunning, deeply satisfying story about how we outlive our upbringings.

**SURVIVAL OF THE FRIENDLIEST**

*Understanding Our Origins and Rediscovering Our Common Humanity*

_Hare, Brian & Woods, Vanessa_

Random House (304 pp.)

$28.00 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-0-399-59066-5

A fresh look at evolution in the animal kingdom—including us.

According to Duke evolutionary anthropology professors Hare and Woods, a husband-and-wife writing team who co-authored _The Genius of Dogs_ (2013), the concept of survival of the fittest really refers to the survival of the friendliest. In the animal kingdom, alpha males are not necessarily the fittest because they have no peers, thus they can become lonely and develop psychological problems—and the same goes for humans. Regarding the history of animals, the authors emphasize that cooperation advances a species. They devote many interesting pages to comparing adult chimpanzees, which are among the friendliest animals in the animal kingdom, even toward other bonobos they do not know. The authors also discuss how offering friendship to humans is how wolves and jungle cats became domesticated dogs and cats. Today, dogs and cats outnumber wolves and jungle cats by astounding numbers, and they have evolved in amazing ways as well. It's human evolution, however, that comprises the bulk of the narrative. The authors engagingly show how, unlike dogs and cats, we domesticated ourselves; learning to cooperate with one another, especially groups with other groups, made us what we are today. The authors also note that evolution continues, and the next major change could come quickly via any animal that can overcome its fear of humans and express friendliness to us. Hare and Woods fill the text with reports of experiments that bolster their case, and although some of the scientific explanations might be a little much for general readers, they're necessary to prove their gee-whiz results.

A book for anyone who wants to know more about themselves.

**MAKING SENSE**

*Conversations on Consciousness, Morality, and the Future of Humanity*

_Harris, Sam_

Ecco/HarperCollins (384 pp.)

$29.99 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-0-06-285778-1

The text version of the popular, hyper-articulate, interviewed-based podcast. So much of public debate in America, circa 2020, takes one of two forms: people arguing in order to generate controversy or conversations in which the interviewer is little more than a set piece for an unchallenged monologue. Harris aims for something eminently more useful. This lightly edited sampling of his podcast of the same name includes long-form interviews with scholars and intellectuals on a range of topics. Whether the discussion is about artificial intelligence, the future capacities of knowledge, politics, philosophy, intuition, history (philosopher Thomas Metzinger shares experiences from post–World War II Germany that are hard to look away from), religion, reason, or the nature of consciousness, Harris grounds lofty discussions with concrete examples and his gift for analogy. Few of the interviewees are household names—perhaps aside from psychologist Daniel Kahneman and Timothy Snyder—but readers will not question their credentials or motives. If you're bright, well read, and secure in yourself, you don't mind having your arguments examined, even by thinkers with the intellectual chops to poke holes in the fabric of your life's work. Case in point: The interview with physics professor David Deutsch contains the guest's criticism of the host's self-described "cherished" thesis from Harris' book _The Moral Landscape_. This critique wasn't spontaneous; Deutsch had initiated a private conversation, and Harris asked for permission to press record. This speaks to the author's agenda: free and open debate, in the best sense of the word. Nonacademics may hit intellectual potholes when encountering words like...
epiphenomenalism and panpsychist and, to be sure, this is no breezy read. But the book’s advantage over the podcast is that readers can linger as they need to and cherry-pick interviews at will.

Recommended for anyone who wants to spend time with intelligent minds wrestling not with each other but with understanding.

YOUR SECOND ACT
Inspiring Stories of Reinvention
Heaton, Patricia
Simon & Schuster (272 pp.)
$26.00 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-1-982141-60-8

How to engage in acts of change instead of a midlife crisis.

Heaton acknowledges that aging and growth are difficult; however, she writes, “there are countless people in the world right now finding drive, purpose, and passionately reinventing themselves in all kinds of beautiful ways.” In the first short essays, the author shares her personal story of growth and the changes she’s made recently as an “ambassador for the Christian aid organization World Vision.” After her tale of transformation, she describes those of others across the country who have felt an inner need to do something different with their lives in middle age and beyond. Some followed their passions while others were forced into change due to external circumstances. Yet each person mustered the strength, oftentimes by relying on a strong Christian faith, to overcome obstacles and achieve success, however they defined it. Liz Smothers created a lucrative pie-making company; Lisa Johnson, a night-shift nurse and single mother of four, began a lucrative medical staffing company; and then settled down in a rented house in a district she loved for its walls and soft landings, mother tropes and father tropes….I have degendered the family and made it both structure and playground,” she writes, “walls and soft landings, mother tropes and father tropes.”

A series of encouraging narratives of reinvention.

A British-born entertainment journalist’s account of how an unplanned pregnancy and single motherhood became the starting points for an unexpected adventure in self-acceptance.

Heawood always imagined that her future would involve “a lovely farmhouse…a dog and storybooks and trees and long invigorating walks” as well as children and a “yet-to-materialize” husband/father. Her present, however, involved singlehood, parties, quirky friends, and lively but unsteady freelance work as a Hollywood celebrity journalist, and the doctors told her that her polycystic ovary syndrome would make natural conception impossible. The next time she visited her long-term on-again, off-again long-distance musician lover, she became pregnant. Despite the lover’s misgivings about their fitness to be parents (“he said a child deserved better than us”), Heawood set a determined course for motherhood. But rather than give up her lifestyle, the author carried on along her free-spirited way. She fought through morning sickness at an interview with Jodie Foster while indiscreetly questioning the then-closeted actress about her lesbianism. Later, her “swollen breasts…and…bump” in full view, she attended the Coachella Music Festival with two young “one of whom she had only just met.” She gave birth in London and then settled down in a rented house in a district she loved for its “psychodrama and paranoia and spilt beer.” Floundering in the world of postpartum dating, the author desperately tried to navigate sexuality and motherhood, often with hilarious results. Still single in the end, Heawood realized that her truest love was her small daughter, with whom she formed a small but happy “republic of two.” “A single parent is both structure and playground,” she writes, “walls and soft landings, mother tropes and father tropes…I have degendered the situation and don’t see myself as a mother, but as a parent, as the adult, as the introduction to what the world can be like. As neutral as passion, as pretty as heat.” Raw and funny, Heawood’s memoir celebrates the messiness of life and motherhood with boldness, panache, and unexpected moments of real poignancy.

An uncensored and eccentric delight.

SMOKE BUT NO FIRE
Convicting the Innocent of Crimes That Never Happened
Henry, Jessica S.
Univ. of California (264 pp.)
$24.95 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-0-520-30064-4

A former New York City public defender turns a spotlight on those wrongly convicted for crimes that were never committed.
It’s bad enough when the wrong suspect is convicted of a crime and the guilty party goes free. But what if there was no crime at all? In a study that will make readers question many of the foundational elements of the American legal system, Henry, now a professor of justice studies, draws from academic research, case studies, anecdotes, and personal experience to show how often the innocent have been punished—e.g., murders that were actually suicides; alleged drug deals in which police planted drugs and there was no other criminal transaction; or even “murder convictions for the deaths of people who never existed.” Why does this happen? As the author demonstrates, cognitive biases lead police, lawyers, and judges to suspect that certain minorities—young black men in particular—are more likely to be guilty, and confirmation bias causes them to lock in on the narrative they are already convinced is true, even when it is obvious from a different perspective—perhaps that of an appellate court—how flimsy the evidence was to begin with. In a series of damning chapters, Henry shifts the focus among the various participants in the process, showing how forensic scientists see themselves as part of the law enforcement team and sometimes testify to proof that isn’t scientifically conclusive; how police must boost arrest numbers to meet quotas; and how prosecutors and judges elected on tough-on-crime platforms rely on convictions to keep score. Henry systematically exposes widespread corruption and lies and also points out the surprisingly frequent instances of innocent suspects pleading guilty because the process of plea bargaining makes it a gamble worth taking. While the prose isn’t riveting, the author’s accumulation of evidence is revelatory.

An eye-opening book that suggests how commonplace are miscarriages of justice in the U.S.

### THE NAZI MENACE

**Hitler, Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin, and the Road to War**

Hett, Benjamin Carter

Henry Holt (336 pp.)

$29.99 | Aug. 4, 2020

978-1-250-20523-0

Looking into the minds of World War II’s most important leaders.

In the 1930s, the world was wracked by a fundamental conflict: Should the nations be democratic, where the people decide what their governments will be, or authoritarian, where dictators make all decisions? The democracies were led by the U.S., England, and France, and the authoritarians by Germany, Russia, Italy, and Japan. Hett, who has written widely on Hitler and the Third Reich, delves into why five of those nation’s most important leaders—Franklin Roosevelt, Hitler, Stalin, Churchill, and, although his name isn’t included in the title, Neville Chamberlain—made the decisions that led to World War II. How did they see the world? What did they fear? What did they hope? What motivated them? What did they see as their strengths? Their weaknesses? In addition to a collection of minibioographies of these pivotal figures, the text is a sometimes-dry, sometimes-gripping, always authoritative story of the 1930s and ‘40s and the close parallels that exist with today’s world. Though Donald Trump is never mentioned, the parallels between him and Hitler are obvious throughout. For example, Hitler wrote that a dictator must tell lies, big lies, and keep on telling them even if they are proven false because many will believe them anyway. Also, never apologize. Primarily, though, Hett sticks to the history and motivations of his principals: why Chamberlain appeased Germany at every turn; how Hitler used Chamberlain’s weaknesses to build a war machine; why Roosevelt feared that entering any war with Germany would turn America into a military state; how Churchill almost forced Roosevelt into the war by showing him what America would face with Hitler leading a totalitarian Europe; and why Stalin wanted anything but a war. The 12-page cast of characters, divided by nation, is highly useful.

An excellent read for anyone who wants a deeper understanding of the thinking behind World War II.

### HUSTLE HARDER, HUSTLE SMARTER

Jackson, Curtis

Amistad/HarperCollins (304 pp.)

$27.99 | Apr. 28, 2020

978-0-06-295380-3

The successful rap artist and media mogul reflects on surviving the streets of Queens, New York, blowing up in the 2000s hip-hop scene, and now thriving in the executive boardroom.

“I’ve managed to make it to the top twice,” writes Jackson, popularly known as 50 Cent, who distinguishes himself from the gangster persona he adopted “in order to help deal with the chaos and insanity that I saw all around me growing up.” After semiretiring from a generation-defining hip-hop career (more than 30 million albums sold worldwide), his transition into Hollywood with the hit drama series Power landed him one of the biggest deals in premium cable history. Jackson’s previous book, *The 50th Law*, co-written by *48 Laws of Power* author Robert Greene, was a bestseller; here, the author emphasizes the maturity and growth, as well as the ruthlessness, that come with “moving in corporate America.” Through nine interrelated principles—fans will know he survived being shot nine times—Jackson lays out a key framework for improving one’s personal and professional lives. While the Machiavellian-esque advice (see “how to influence others,” “maintain control”) may read a little rehearsed and rehashed, what promises to keep readers intrigued are the scintillating short stories that reveal the advice’s utility. The author has consistently made headlines through the detailed advertising of the behind-the-scenes lives of celebrities. Indeed, that is one of the lessons: “How To Control the Conversation.” Just like his rhyming, Jackson is adept at delivering a big punchline, such as his call to embrace honesty: “Whether you’re the boss, a partner, or just a worker, you have to
create an environment where people can be honest about their character with you. Otherwise, you’re going to build unsustainable situations. That’s what ruined Ja Rule’s career."

Savor the celebrity gossip and push through to the lessons of one of hip-hop’s most successful businessmen ever.

**YOU OUGHT TO DO A STORY ABOUT ME**

**Addiction, an Unlikely Friendship, and the Endless Quest for Redemption**

*Jackson, Ted*

Dey Street/HarperCollins (336 pp.)

$27.99 | Aug. 25, 2020

978-0-06-293567-0

The emotional tale of a “Super Bowl hero” who ended up homeless in his hometown of New Orleans.

The story of how Jackie Wallace was lost and found—and lost and found again—is about many things, none of them simple: racism, professional sports, New Orleans, addiction, and the gaping holes in the societal safety net that even someone who was once deemed so successful can fall through. It’s also about the transformational power of journalism; Jackson, a freelance photojournalist who worked for three decades for the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, was profoundly changed by his work with Wallace. As Jackson’s newspaper article went viral, it moved and inspired countless readers to examine their own lives—and to remain connected and get clean or stay clean.

Though Wallace was by no means a household name in the NFL, he was on the roster of three teams that made the Super Bowl, and he played in two of them. His light was brighter in his first team from a black high school to compete against white NFL, he was on the roster of three teams that made the Super Bowl, and he played in two of them. His light was brighter in his first team from a black high school to compete against white players. At the University of Arizona, where he enrolled in 1970, his coach “didn’t need another quarterback, especially a black one,” so Wallace switched to cornerback and eventually became a first-team All-American—and then a second-round draft pick in the NFL. The author found him while shooting a series on homelessness; Wallace suggested, “You ought to do a story about me.” The rest of the story is consistently complex and absorbing, as Jackson chronicles how Wallace cycled through rehab and relapse and a series of failed jobs and relationships. The author continued to stay in touch, more or less, before writing the follow-up story about losing Wallace, finding him again, and then losing him again. There are few easy answers here, but there are glimmers of hope.

A rich and rewarding narrative about the possibilities—and the challenges—of redemption.

**ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ**

*Jones, Brenda & Trotman, Krishan*

Plume (208 pp.)

$18.00 | Jun. 30, 2020

978-0-593-18987-0

As part of their Queens of the Resistance series, Jones and Trotman offer an admiring look at the unexpected political career of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (b. 1989), a “trailblazer” who won election to Congress in 2018 representing New York’s 14th District.

“I was born in a place where your zip code determines your destiny,” Ocasio-Cortez says, referring to the Parkchester neighborhood where her father, an architect, and Puerto Rican–born mother had settled. When she was young, the family moved to Yorktown Heights, in Westchester, so she and her brother could attend better schools, and the young Alexandria found herself a minority among nearly all-white classmates. Excelling in science, she set her sights on a career in medicine, majoring in pre-med at Boston University. But after a semester abroad in Niger, where she witnessed shocking poverty, she changed her major to economics and international relations and later took an internship with Ted Kennedy, which served as “her first real-life brush with national politics.” Participating in a protest against a proposed oil pipeline at Standing Rock proved “spiritually transformative,” she said.

That fight against government and corporate forces taught her a lesson about change, and she gravitated to Bernie Sanders’ campaign for president in 2016. The progressive organizations Brand New Congress and Justice Democrats tapped her to run against longtime representative Joe Crowley in the 2018 midterms. Her Puerto Rican heritage and working-class experience (cleaning homes, tending bar) earned voters’ respect, and, to her astonishment, she won. Ocasio-Cortez quickly took the spotlight, promoting the Green New Deal and speaking out about racial, economic, and immigration injustices. “Well-behaved women rarely make history,” she believes. “Justice is about making sure that being polite is not the same thing as being quiet. In fact, the most righteous thing you can do is shake the table.”

A lively overview of a woman working to shape the nation’s future.

**MAXINE WATERS**

*Jones, Brenda & Trotman, Krishan*

Plume (240 pp.)

$18.00 | Jun. 30, 2020

978-0-593-18987-0

An ebullient biography celebrates a longtime California congresswoman.

In this entry in the Queens of the Resistance series—the other three books focus on Nancy Pelosi, Elizabeth Warren, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez—Jones and Trotman once again offer a succinct, breezy
overview of their subject’s life: this time, Maxine Waters (b. 1938), a “ferocious, fiery leader” who began her political career in 1976 in the California State Assembly. One of 13 children, she grew up “on and off welfare” in racially segregated St. Louis, with aspirations to become either a social worker—many visited the family during Waters’ childhood—or a dancer like the famous African American dancer Katherine Dunham. Marrying just after graduating from high school, Waters soon had two children. Besides raising her family, she worked as a service representative for the Pacific Telephone Company. When a friend told her about an ad for assistant teachers for African apartheid and job training. In 1990, she was elected Deputy for a city councilman, she won election to state assembly. Hume and Richard Lower, who made the decision to take Tucker’s deposition for “defending physicians named in medical malpractice suits,” and Doug Wilder, the Tucker family’s attorney and “one of the best-known African American trial lawyers practicing in the state capital.” This is a powerful story that examines institutional racism, mortality, medical ethics, and the nature of justice for black men living in the American South. The author also offers two chilling codas, one involving the discovery of a mass grave and the other chronicling his search for Tucker’s son some 50 years later.

A moving exploration of an unthinkable trespass against an innocent man.

**THE WORLD AFLAME**

**A New History of War and Revolution: 1914-1945**

Jones, Dan & Amaral, Marina with Hawkins-Dady, Mark

Pegasus (432 pp.)

$39.95  |  Aug. 4, 2020

978-1-64313-222-8

An image-driven history of the tumultuous period between and including the world wars.

Jones, an accomplished popular historian of the medieval era, turns to the recent past in this collaboration with Brazilian artist Amaral, who—following the lead of film director Peter Jackson and the World War I footage he restored in *They Shall Not Grow Old*—colorizes images from the years 1914 to 1945. That colorization, which Jones calls “an emotional enhancing agent,” serves to underscore just how recent this past is: When we look into the unblinking eyes of a dead German machine-gunner from 100 years ago, we could be looking at a neighbor. Jones rejects the idea of considering the period a “second Thirty Years War” even though many historians have traced the causes of both wars to antecedent events much like those of the past, including failed efforts at peace and imperial rivalries, marked here by an affecting portrait of the Archduke Ferdinand and Archduchess Sophie lying in state side by side after having been assassinated in Sarajevo. The text amounts to mostly a series of extended captions, but Jones capably limns some of the big-picture elements, including the Russian defeat at the Battle of Tannenberg, which helped precipitate the Russian Revolution and the rise of Hindenburg to power in Germany; and the Battle of the Marne, which halted a German offensive and caused the invaders to dig themselves into trench fortifications: “Little did they know what a trend they were setting.” Many of the photos are unsettling, even horrific, such as an image of a Japanese soldier’s skull that emblazoned the February 1943 issue of *Life*. Others, such as that of Brazilian singer and actor Carmen Miranda dancing on a Hollywood street on VJ-Day, are little known.
Fans of the companion volumes to Ken Burns’ film series will find this a familiar, and worthy, approach. (200 color photos)

**GEORGE HARRISON ON GEORGE HARRISON**
**Interviews and Encounters**
*Ed. by Kahn, Ashley*
Chicago Review Press (432 pp.)
$30.00 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-64160-051-4

A literary playlist to the mind and music of the “Quiet Beatle.”
After writing about John Coltrane, Miles Davis, and Carlos Santana, Kahn turns his attention to the second Beatle, after John Lennon, to be selected for the popular Musicians in Their Own Words series. Kahn has collected more than 40 interviews that span the period from 1962 to 2001, when Harrison died. They include interviews with magazines, newspapers, and TV and radio shows as well as a "number of never-published gems." (Foremost among these are the columns he wrote for the *Daily Express* in 1964, "offering a peek inside the bubble of the band’s ascendancy.") The collection reveals a humorous, witty, self-deprecating, guileless, spiritual man. In 1963, shortly after the group's debut, Harrison joked, “we should have another two years at least, I think.” In an interview with Larry Kane, who covered their early American tours, Harrison opined on his band mates, noting how Paul was “the lovely one” and “Ringo was the cuddly one.” As early as 1967, Harrison called Ravi Shankar his “musical Guru.” Then hang, it’s 1970, and the Beatles have broken up, barely 100 pages into this 500-page collection. Harrison claimed he wasn’t sad. “Eric’s...been a close friend for years,” he said, and “I’d rather she was with him than with some dope.” In 1988, talking to Kurt Loder, Harrison enthusiastically discussed the Traveling Wilburys and his illustrious band mates, including Bob Dylan, and he was irked by McCartney’s decision to skip their 1988 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction: “Paul is a hypocrite sometimes.”

A terrific collection for Beatles fans to savor.

**SIX DAYS IN AUGUST**
**The Story of Stockholm Syndrome**
*King, David*
Norton (288 pp.)
$26.95 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-0-393-63508-9

A historian painstakingly reconstructs the crime that gave rise to the pop-psychological term Stockholm syndrome.
In August 1973, a furloughed Swedish convict armed with a submachine gun burst into a Stockholm bank and took four hostages, who, during their ordeal, seemed to grow attached to the gunman and a prison mate brought in at his request. The crime inspired the catchphrase Stockholm syndrome, which King defines as “the psychological tendency of a hostage to bond with, identify with, or sympathize with his or her captor.” It is often applied to high-profile kidnapping victims such as Patty Hearst and Elizabeth Smart. The “syndrome,” however, has been little studied and isn’t an officially recognized psychiatric condition; rather, it is “more a media phenomenon than a proper psychiatric diagnosis.” As such, King reconstructs the six-day standoff by drawing largely on sources other than academic studies, ranging from FBI materials to interviews with hostages and with gunman Jan-Erik “Janne” Olsson and his prison friend Clark Olofsson. In a suspenseful, chronological narrative, the author shows how missteps by the police, the media, and Prime Minister Olof Palme, combined with small acts of kindness by the hostage-takers, drew the group together. Early on, for example, the police barricaded the entrance to the bank vault in which the captors and captives hid, leaving the group with nothing to eat or drink, which made the hostage-takers look like heroes when authorities yielded to their demands for food. The most startling sign of a bond arose after the standoff ended when hostage Kristin Enmark asked captor Olofsson to father her child and was “devastated” when the resulting pregnancy was ectopic. King keeps a tight focus on ties that arise in hostage crises, but readers may suspect that some of his findings apply to the “terror bonding” that results from other crimes, such as domestic violence or child abuse.

A true-crime page-turner about one of the more notorious bank heists of the past half century. (8 page b/w photos)

**AVOID THE DAY**
**A New Nonfiction in Two Movements**
*Kirk, Jay*
Perennial/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
$17.99 paper | Jul. 28, 2020
978-0-06-235617-8

A creative writing professor’s memoir about coming to terms with his father’s impending death.
With his father on his deathbed, Kirk couldn’t bear to face the inevitable. They had a troubled
relationship, and, as much as the author tried to distinguish himself from his minister father, who “only showed me how to put on the spectacle of holiness,” he fears that they are too much the same. While his father had issues with alcohol, Kirk’s own struggles were worse, with other substances intensifying the effects of the booze—and rendering him an unreliable narrator. The author also suspects that he, like his father, is something of a hypocrite, a charlatan at his own chosen altar of journalism. “It was almost as if I’d been suddenly deprogrammed from a faulty cult of my own making,” he writes. “That cult having something to do with the rigors of my trade….I had developed an acute allergy to experience.” Nevertheless, Kirk dove into a piece of long-form investigative journalism involving Hungarian composer Béla Bartók and a missing musical manuscript. The author’s quest took him from archives and a series of locations in his native Northeast to Transylvania, where the composer first heard the folk music that would subsequently inform his own work. All of this builds to a delirious vision of Kirk’s father’s being torn apart while, in fact, the Bartók story seems to be deteriorating: “The trail has gone cold. I’ll never know any more than this.” His half-baked account subsequently finds him embarking on a wilder adventure to the Arctic Circle, toward the heart of darkness in the eternal sunlight, without much of an epiphany or resolution. While some readers may applaud the author’s approach—essentially, writing around a topic that is difficult to explore—as audacious and psychologically harrowing, many will find the work required for the payoff to be too arduous.

An ambitious, strange psychodrama for fans of chimerical nonfiction odysseys.

THE RULES OF CONTAGION
Why Things Spread—and Why They Stop
Kucharski, Adam
Basic (352 pp.)
$30.00 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-5416-7431-8

A geeky but fascinating exploration of the mathematics of things that go viral—not least of them viruses.

“If we want a better grasp of contagion, we need to account for its dynamic nature,” writes Kucharski, who does mathematical modeling of disease transmission at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. He elaborates throughout: Contagion is constantly in motion as it courses through a population, finding its “susceptibles” and slowing down as the number of susceptibles declines. By the author’s capable account, the math works out pretty much the same whether applied to some negative force, such as a COVID-19 category virus or the concomitant financial crumbling that has surrounded it, or some positive force—e.g., a cultural innovation such as a pop song or dance move. Kucharski works his way through some key epidemiological ideas, including one advanced by the scientist who put it together that malaria was spread by mosquitos, earning him the Nobel Prize—although that scientist later protested that his larger achievement was formulating “general laws of epidemics.” These laws embody a mathematical formula that looks rather like an hourglass turned on its side, representing three key groups: the susceptible, the infectious, and the recovered. There are also the dead, of course, but they don’t move, as the dynamic model does. Kucharski takes his readers down provocative detours, such as the use of public-health models of disease transmission to examine how social networks figure in urban gun violence, with algorithms that take into account such things as “age gang affiliations, and prior arrests.” When things go viral, all kinds of interesting mathematical and real-world effects can happen, from stock market bubbles to horrific explosions of disease. Kucharski is there, calculator in hand, to suss it all out, and highly numerate readers will enjoy going along with the ride to guesstimate the R value of a contagion’s spread.

Utterly timely and readable, if not terribly comforting in the midst of the current pandemic.

ALL STIRRED UP
Suffrage Cookbooks, Food, and the Battle for Women’s Right To Vote
Kumin, Laura
Pegasus (336 pp.)
$28.95 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-64313-452-9

Part cookbook and part spirited history lesson, this book examines a little-known aspect of the women’s suffrage movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Among the many techniques used by American suffragists to persuade voters was the production and distribution of “suffrage cookbooks” with titles such as Little Tastes of Enfranchisement. Kumin, a former Washington, D.C., attorney who now teaches cooking and food history, makes a case for the importance of “mainstream” suffragists, who often play second fiddle to their more colorful “militant” sisters in history books. The author opens with an extensive timeline of the history of the suffrage movement in the U.S., including not just noteworthy political events, but such culinary landmarks as the invention of the Moon Pie (1917) and the opening of the first A&W root beer stand (1919). Kumin intersperses the history of the movement with sizable collections of recipes in categories such as “Breads, Breakfast, and Brunch” and “Condiments, Pickles, and Preserves.” For each recipe, the author provides the original and a modern reinterpretation, often tossing in more vegetables and seasonings and including more detailed instructions. Some readers might complain that the portion of the book devoted to analysis of significant cookbooks and booklets and their roles in the suffrage movement is relatively small compared to the pages devoted to rehashing others’ studies of the movement as a whole—not to mention that many of the recipes are comparable to others of the day. However, it’s difficult to question the author’s enthusiasm and impossible to resist the kind
of historical tidbits that pop up frequently along the way—e.g., novelist Jack London’s recipe for stuffed celery, which he suggests is “a very appropriate prelude to a dinner of roast duck.”

Kumin makes some thorny history go down easily.

**CHASING CHOPIN**
*A Musical Journey Across Three Centuries, Four Countries, and a Half-Dozen Revolutions*

LaFarge, Annik
Simon & Schuster (240 pp.)
$27.00 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-1-5011-8871-8

LaFarge delves passionately into the history and culture—up to the present day—surrounding Chopin’s legendary Opus 35 sonata, whose third movement contains “the world’s most famous funeral march.”

In a singular work combining historical research and personal and musical passion, the author, who is also an accomplished pianist, demonstrates how Opus 35 encapsulated many components of the brief and stormy life (1810-1849) of its composer. Exiled from his native Poland, the innovative young pianist, teacher, and composer set out on a series of “peregrinations” throughout Europe, finally settling in the piano capital of the world, Paris, where he was swept off his feet by author George Sand. As LaFarge makes abundantly clear, Chopin’s time living with Sand and her family deeply informed his best work.

Both artists were visionaries in their chosen mediums: Sand day—surrounding Chopin’s legendary Opus 35 sonata, whose third for a new tone, made possible by the technological advances in day, and Chopin pioneered a distinct style via a diligent search endures today, “as fresh, inspiring, and inventive as ever.”

A seamless blend of the musical and literary verve, with just enough research to ground and elucidate.

**OUR BODIES, THEIR BATTLEFIELD**
*War Through the Lives of Women*

Lamb, Christina
Scribner (320 pp.)
$17.00 paper | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-5011-9917-2

The chief foreign affairs correspondent for the London *Sunday Times* shows the horrific effects of the mass rape of women and girls in conflict zones around the world.

Lamb’s editors have put “Disturbing Content” warnings atop some of the stories she’s filed about hot spots from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. “Disturbing” is too mild a word for this superb exposé of the use of mass rape as a “systematic weapon of war.” Crisscrossing the globe to interview survivors, the author makes it abundantly clear that the devastating effects of rape transcend borders. She chronicles her discussions with Nigerian women kidnapped as schoolgirls by Boko Haram and forced to serve as the terrorists’ “bush wives.” She met Yazidis abducted by the Islamic State group and used as sex slaves or sold through online forums that “advertised women along with PlayStation consoles and second-hand cars.” She spoke to female survivors of the Rohingya genocide and of a “rape camp” where Bosnian Serbs raped Muslim women “all night every night to the point of madness.” Legal justice mostly eludes these and other victims. The International Criminal Court has made only one conviction for rape as a war crime, overturned on appeal, and such cases have had a similar fate elsewhere, often because male judges or prosecutors “do not see sexual violence as a high priority compared to mass killings.”

Some victims have been ignored until championed by celebrities like Angelina Jolie or Denis Mukwege, the Congolese physician and co-winner of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize whose hospital the author visited despite the risks of Ebola and dangerous militias in the area. To tell some of these stories, Lamb clearly has put herself in peril, and it’s difficult to overpraise her courage or a book that—for the breadth and moral force of its arguments—is perhaps the most important work of nonfiction about rape since Susan Brownmiller’s *Against Our Will* (1975).

A searing, absolutely necessary exposé of the uses of rape in recent wars and of global injustices to the survivors.

**THE SEDIMENTS OF TIME**
*My Lifelong Search for the Past*

Leakey, Meave with Leakey, Samira
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (400 pp.)
$30.00 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-0-358-20667-5

Another member of human anthropology’s “First Family” carries on the high standards of her predecessors.
Patriarch Louis Leakey (1903-1972) demonstrated, after a considerable struggle, that humans evolved in Africa and made pioneering discoveries in Kenya along with his wife, Mary, who added her own. Louis’ son, Richard, carried on the family tradition. Meave is Richard’s wife, and readers need not fear that absence of founder DNA diluted the Leakey genius, because it’s clear from this memoir that baby Meave hit the ground running. Daughter of a surgeon in rural Britain, before age 10, she was cultivating and selling eggs, geese, and lambs. As a teenager, she traveled the world, attended a nearly all-male technical school, and fell in love with the ocean during holidays at the beach. After obtaining a degree in marine biology, she discovered that no jobs existed because research ships in the 1960s could not “accommodate” women. Phoning to answer an ad for a research position in Africa, she found herself speaking to Louis Leakey, who hired her after determining that she would work for little money under difficult conditions and possessed the ability to repair a car. She started at a research center in Nairobi, where she cared for and dissected monkeys to obtain her doctorate and met Richard Leakey. She joined him in his field research and proved herself as hardy, obsessive, observant, opinionated, and—essential in searching for human remains—as lucky as her relations. Aided by daughter Samira, who lives with her family in Kenya, Meave describes a life that many readers will envy. Her discoveries, often after numbingly tedious work in a brutal climate, added new species to our family tree, teased out more information about existing ancestors, and increased our knowledge of how evolution, geology, and climate change gave rise to modern humans. She is not shy about explaining all this, although some details will overwhelm general readers.

An illuminating memoir of an impressive scientist.

**BUTCH CASSIDY**
*The True Story of an American Outlaw*
Leerhsen, Charles
Simon & Schuster (304 pp.)
$28.00 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-5011-1748-0

A lively, necessarily speculative biography of the notorious desperado. Journalist Leerhsen, former executive editor of *Sports Illustrated*, correctly points out that while the hit 1969 movie *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, starring Paul Newman and Robert Redford, made Butch Cassidy’s (1866-1908) name familiar to most readers, Cassidy and his circle did not often put pen to paper, so contemporary evidence consists largely of legal documents, police reports, and newspaper accounts of his crimes. Modern biographers often fill the gaps with fiction, personal theories, or highly suspicious memories from Cassidy’s descendants, and movies muddy the water with a romantic portrait of life on the frontier when in fact it was usually miserable. The eldest of 13 children of a hardscrabble rancher, Cassidy had his first brush with the law at age 12, and he left home permanently just before he turned 18 to take up a life of crime. “Crime” on the frontier mostly involved stealing cattle or horses; it was rarely lucrative, and Cassidy regularly worked as a ranch hand to make ends meet. After years of low-paid labor, petty thievery, a prison term, and companions with similar loose morals, added to a talent for leadership, he took up a full-time life of crime, and newspapers happily recorded a series of spectacular bank and train robberies. This spree lasted only a few years before advancing technology and the end of the frontier made this life too risky. No psychopath like Billy the Kid or Jesse James, Leerhsen’s Cassidy is likable and mostly sensible. He escaped to Argentina in 1901 with considerable cash and a companion (the Sundance Kid, a more shadowy figure). For several years, they apparently worked as honest ranchers but returned to robbery in 1905, when they “dropped any pretense of being law-abiding citizens.” They moved to Chile and Bolivia, where, cornered by soldiers in 1908, they probably committed suicide, an event absent from the movie.

Perhaps the most successful of the frontier outlaws, Cassidy receives an entertaining and likely definitive account.
Levesque, whose research “is focused on understanding how the most massive stars in the universe evolve and die,” got her first taste of formidable telescopes while a student at MIT. Hardly an amateur endeavor, the author was dealing with serious, massively expensive machines—e.g., at Las Campanas Observatory in Chile, Kitt Peak in the Sonoran Desert, and Mauna Kea in Hawaii. Regardless of the gravity of her studies, MIT. Hardly an amateur endeavor, the author was dealing with serious, massively expensive machines—e.g., at Las Campanas Observatory in Chile, Kitt Peak in the Sonoran Desert, and Mauna Kea in Hawaii. Regardless of the gravity of her studies, there is plenty of romance and adventure in the recounting of her nights, whether she is standing in the cold beside the telescope looking through the eyepiece or contending with the giant tarantulas that find a home in the observers’ room. In a bright voice, Levesque covers wide ground, observing details both atmospheric—“the dark cool nights, the quiet hum and shift of moving telescopes”—and mundane: “laboring through the repetitive and tiring efforts required to get the data in the first place.” She tells fun stories of scorpions in the dormitories and swarms of ladybugs plaguing the telescopes, but she also looks at the history of sexism at the observatory and the cultural friction that may erupt around the positioning of a particular telescope. Perhaps where Levesque shines brightest is in her descriptions of the “raw human appeal” that comes from experiencing celestial phenomena, whether it’s accessible (eclipses) or arcane (evidence of gravitational waves and gamma ray bursts). There are moments of gratifying serendipity in discovering a new star classification. However, the author suggests, today’s remote viewing (i.e., the telescope in southern Argentina and the viewer in New York City), while a critical advancement regarding data collection, robs the thrill of making difficult journeys to distant telescopes.

Entertaining, ardent tales from an era of stargazing that may not last much longer.

A fascinating, expertly guided exploration of a little-known corner of the recent past.
A kaleidoscopic view of Los Angeles that looks beyond stereotypes of “freeways, sprawl, movie stars, and New Age nonsense.”

Lunenfeld, a native New Yorker who is now a professor of design media arts at UCLA, pens a valentine to his adopted city, where he moved to attend graduate school. Erudite and fact-packed but self-indulgent and inefficiently organized, his book rests on the conceit that LA has moved through interlocking phases corresponding to the five elements of alchemy—“from earth to fire to air to water” and the more elusive “aether” or “the quintessence.” That framework gives Lunenfeld ample and welcome room to cover often overlooked topics such as the city’s once-powerful aerospace industry and the ports of LA and Long Beach, whose waters are “the largest and busiest in the United States.” Throughout, the author forges many offbeat connections. He links, among others, Walt Disney and Hugh Hefner (both of whom let people enter a “dreamscape” and interact with its denizens, Mickey at Disneyland and the bunnies at Playboy clubs) and two married couples who blazed trails as they combined work and love: midcentury-modern designers Charles and Ray Eames and the authors Will and Ariel Durant. Lunenfeld’s “alchemical” stages overlap and progress in nonlinear ways, which leads to continual jump-cuts back and forth in time, place, and theme, an approach that can be disorienting. The text sometimes devolves into tourist-board prose: No other metropolitan area, writes the author, “can boast of the presence of two presidential libraries,” Nixon’s and Reagan’s. Unlike Joan Didion—that austere, minimalist bard of California—Lunenfeld is a maximalist who overstuffs his argument that LA triumphed through “its ramp-up of the arts, architecture, design, cuisines, music, theater, and literary cultures, not to mention technical and scientific accomplishments, at a speed and with a reach unprecedented in human history.” He makes a strong case for the city’s exceptionalism, but via a route that requires the patience of navigating the LA freeways.

Slouching toward Los Angeles on an alternately pleasant and frustrating detour-filled highway.

Exemplary writing about the intersection of the animal and human worlds.

VESPER FLIGHTS
Macdonald, Helen
Grove (288 pp.)
$27.00 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-0-8021-2881-2

Falconer and writer Macdonald follows on elegant memoir H Is for Hawk (2015) with a set of essays on nature.

“I choose to think that my subject is love,” writes the author at the beginning, “and most specifically love for the glittering world of non-human life around us.” Love sometimes turns to lamentation as she notes how much of the natural world has been destroyed in her lifetime. There are some particularly wonderful moments in this altogether memorable collection, as when Macdonald recounts retreating from a shy girlhood, teased and even bullied by her schoolmates, with the aid of binoculars and field guides that allowed her to escape into a different, better world: “This method of finding refuge from difficulty was an abiding feature of my childhood.” Later in that passage, she continues, “when I was a child I’d assumed animals were just like me. Later I thought I could escape myself by pretending I was an animal. Both were founded on the same mistake. For the deepest lesson animals have taught me is how easily and unconsciously we see other lives as mirrors of our own.” The author also recounts her treks looking for wild boars, the descendants of once-domesticated pigs that are now not quite like pigs at all, having reclaimed ancestral fierceness. Macdonald allows that while her encounters with such creatures are eminently real, she’s fully open to the possibilities of symbolic encounter as well. Anthropomorphism may be a sin among biologists, but as long as it doesn’t go to silly lengths, she writes in a perceptive piece, are as class-inflected as anything else in class-conscious Britain. Perhaps the finest piece is also the most sobering, a reflection on the disappearance of spring, “increasingly a short flash of sudden warmth before summer, hardly a season at all.” Exemplary writing about the intersection of the animal and human worlds.

THE END OF WHITE POLITICS
How To Heal Our Liberal Divide
Maxwell, Zerlina
Hachette (256 pp.)
$27.00 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-306-87361-4

An insider’s analysis of what the Democratic Party must do to win as white voters become the minority in the U.S. in the next 25 years.

“White Americans have had over a three-hundred-year head start in this country, so it’s time for everyone else to catch up,”
wrote MSNBC political analyst Maxwell in a clear message to the Democrats establishment. “And the starting line is the ballot box.” With white people expected to be a minority of voters by 2048, the author argues that Democrats must engage those constituencies who will have the numbers, and therefore the power, to shape the future. As the Democratic electorate becomes “younger, increasingly female, and incredibly diverse,” the future of the party does not “look like a seventy-year-old white man.” Maxwell, a 2016 campaign staffer for Hillary Clinton and a field organizer for President Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign, warns that Democrats cannot gain traction by continuing to prop up candidates who don’t understand privilege and the country’s historical racial divide. With solid statistics to back her up, she asserts that “the 2020 election is not about the 77,744 white votes that won Donald Trump the electoral college” and whom Democrats are fixated on courting. Rather, the key to victory is the 4.4 million people who voted for Obama in 2012 but didn’t vote in 2016; “a third of those people were black voters.” How does Maxwell know that directly engaging these disengaged voters and focusing on their needs is a winning strategy? Because Obama did it, twice. With a style that is as infectious as it is cogent and accessible, the author outlines of not just the Democratic Party, but the future of all but the most privileged Americans.

The Democratic Party ignores this wake-up call to become more relevant and inclusive at its peril.

THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT
Insects and the Making of the Modern World
Melillo, Edward D.
Knopf (288 pp.)
$27.95 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-1-5247-3321-6

An exploration of how insects have influenced every corner of the world.

“As of 2020,” writes environmental studies professor Melillo, “there are 1.3 billion insects for every human on the planet.” That alone makes them a vital presence in our lives. In this succinct, colorful contribution to entomological literature, the author also reminds us that they are dominant actors in the processes of reproduction and decay as well as important players throughout human history. While Melillo doesn’t completely ignore the destructive aspects of our interactions with insects—from insects as vectors to illness to the harmful use of insecticides—he spends more time examining how “insects make many of the substances that pervade our daily lives: fabrics, dyes, furniture varnishes, food additives, high-tech materials, cosmetics, and pharmaceutical ingredients.” The author looks at the long, diverse historical traditions involved with honey and the making of “iron gall ink,” an “indelible, waterproof substance [that has] served as Europe’s most important ink for the past two millennia.” He also discusses the production of shellac, the resinous, amber-colored secretion of the tiny lac bug that has been used as a coating for wooden products—not least of which were the violins of Antonio Stradivari—as well as a key ingredient in pioneering phonographic discs. Silk is an even more ancient product of insect industriousness, and Melillo draws a captivating picture of China’s 5,000-year-old sericulture industry and the extraordinary structural qualities of the silk thread. The cultural significance of the color red makes for especially good reading about the cochineal insect, the rare source of a peerless red pigment. The author also tells entertaining tales of the role of fruit flies in biomedical research; bees, pollination, and colony collapse disorder; and the future of entomophagy, “the eating of insects.”

A taut, vibrant story of awesome creatures and how humans have found countless ingenious uses for them.

LOOKING FOR MISS AMERICA
Dreamers, Dissidents, Flappers, and Feminists—A Pageant’s 100-Year Quest To Define Womanhood
Mifflin, Margot
Counterpoint (320 pp.)
$28.00 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-64009-223-5

The Miss America program heads toward its second century still trying to shed its image as a “leg show” or “cheesecake with a side of culture.”

Journalist Mifflin offers a lively and probing appraisal of a pageant that will observe its centennial in 2021. Drawing on research that includes interviews with former Miss Americas from different eras, this well-balanced account shows that while the program has helped many contestants envision futures beyond their hometowns, it has always had unsavory aspects at odds with its organizers’ efforts to invest it with a wholesome image. The most egregious of these, formally adopted in 1940 and in effect until the 1950s, required contestants to be “in good health and of the white race.” Fresh troubles hit in later decades as feminists’ protests and expanding women’s rights made the program look out of touch. Organizers tried to adapt by killing the swimsuit competition (2018) and having each contestant choose a “social issues platform” to promote (1990). Still, the TV ratings tanked, the number of entrants plunged, and the pageant CEO was forced out after emails surfaced showing that he had “slut-shamed” contestants. Perhaps the most disturbing fact in this book is that since 2007, entrants have had to engage in what Kate Shindle, Miss America 1998, calls “pay to play.” Each contestant “must raise a minimum amount—by soliciting donations—to compete,” and while some of the proceeds go to children’s hospitals, much of it goes to pageant scholarships, so that “contests themselves have funded 85 percent of Miss America’s scholarships.” Mifflin relates all of this without descending into ridicule or screech and with a keen sympathy for...
A massively ambitious study, largely accessible and percolating with ideas for further study.

**GOD’S SHADOW**

_Sultan Selim, His Ottoman Empire, and the Making of the Modern World_

Mikhail, Alan

Liveright/Norton (512 pp.)

$39.95  |  Aug. 18, 2020
978-1-63149-239-6

The chair of the history department at Yale offers an impressive revisionist history of the great Ottoman expansion circa 1500 and its impact on East-West relations.

In what he calls “an innovative, even revolutionary” history, Mikhail draws on world-spanning source material to demonstrate the enormous, long-felt influence of the Islamic empire under Ottoman sultans Mehmet II, who captured Constantinople in 1453; and his son Bayezid and grandson Selim who tripled the empire’s territory. The author, whose previous books have focused on other elements of the Ottoman realm, convincingly argues that it was the Ottoman monopoly on trade routes, combined with military advances, that thrust Spain and Portugal out of the Mediterranean, forcing the “merchants and sailors...to become global explorers.” This included Christopher Columbus, who cut his military teeth as a “Moor-slayer.” Mikhail concentrates on Selim as the leader who consolidated his grandfather’s successes in a stunningly brief time, eschewing “palace intrigue, factionalism, and greed” in favor of a quest to restore the empire to its former military glory. “Whoever they were,” writes the author, “Selim wanted men who would fight with zeal and inspiration, soldiers who were willing to sacrifice.” Selim took on the rival Safavid empire and then pushed his brother out of the way to conquer the Mamluk empire in 1517. Selim’s conquest of Yemen allowed his army to control the “first truly global commodity”—coffee—and subsequently made it the “phenomenon it is today,” a product that “energizes nearly every kind of social interaction across the world.” In sharply drawn chapters, many of which contain enough ideas for a separate book, Mikhail restores the Ottoman Empire to its rightful place as a “fulcrum” of global power. The chronology (1071-1566) is helpful, and an ominous coda delineates how the current Turkish president has appropriated Selim’s legacy for his own authoritarian purposes.

A massively ambitious study, largely accessible and percolating with ideas for further study. (maps, illustrations)

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**STAR SETTLERS**

_The Billionaires, Geniuses, and Crazed Visionaries Out To Conquer the Universe_

Nadis, Fred

Pegasus (352 pp.)

$27.95  |  Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-64313-448-2

Scientific and philosophical testimony on the possibilities of interstellar relocation.

In his third book, Nadis merges space science and technology in an intermittently fascinating exploration of the human quest to mine extraterrestrial lands for habitation. Admittedly “slow to warm to science fiction,” the author eventually came to appreciate the genre’s creative exploration of new worlds and how real-life space programs expound on those same ideas to make them a reality. Nadis discusses the increasing relevancy of human spaceflight and entertainingly details how the possibilities of space travel moved from the conceptions of astronomer Camille Flammarion, German aerospace engineer Wernher von Braun, and author H.G. Wells into the contemporary landscape, in which some believe in the possibility of terraforming Mars. Nadis smoothly weaves in the progressive history of artificial biospheres and space colonization. However impressive these details may read and despite ambitious modern technological advances, however, experts report the effort of “rejuvenating a dead planet and creating of it a new Earth” will remain an enormously costly and risky project fraught with unseen complications. Leading the way in the space tourism business is billionaire Elon Musk, a spaceflight visionary whom Nadis spotlights prominently for his aggressive pursuit of Mars colonization. The author shows how initiatives like his SpaceX international rocket, along with Jeff Bezos’ Blue Origin program and smaller-scaled NASA programs, are collectively remapping the future possibilities of space travel. Noting the ever evolving social acceptance of interplanetary spaceflight, Nadis stresses that what was once considered “fringe thought” has now become a cosmic race very much in the mainstream. Citing journals, exhibits, academic texts, and interviews with space innovators and other experts, the author provides a solid, sometimes wondrous introduction to a field that is just beginning to show signs of promise.

A futuristic, optimistic, and intellectually stimulating report for space enthusiasts or readers with celestial wanderlust. (16 pages of color photos)
HORSE CRAZY

The Story of a Woman and a World in Love With an Animal

Nir, Sarah Maslin
Simon & Schuster (304 pp.)
$28.00 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-328-56630-0

A New York Times staff reporter profiles horses and horse lovers across the country while delving into her own lifelong passion.

Born into an upper-middle-class Jewish family, Nir began riding horses when she was 2. Equines became her source of comfort as she grew up "outsourced to...nannies" and feeling like an outsider in the world of wealth she inhabited. In her debut book, Nir weaves "the lifelong dialogues I've had with these animals" into a narrative about her life as a horse lover. She begins with the dawn horse, the predecessor of the modern equine. The author returned to a place she would often go as a child—the American Museum of Natural History—to see the remains of this proto-horse. Her journey then took her to Kentucky, where she visited a yearly gathering of the Breyer model horse collectors. As a girl, she writes, "the perfect plastic replicas called Breyer model horses were my solace and fixation." Nir's study of horse icons in the American imagination led her to travel to the two Virginia coast islands, Chincoteague and Assateague, that served as the setting for Marguerite Henry's beloved book Misty of Chincoteague. Throughout the book, Nir remembers horses she owned—e.g., Amigo and Willow—and how they eased the pain of a lonely childhood. Conversations with a veteran California horse "listener" helped her better understand how equines communicate, and she explores the history of black cowboys via her visit to an African American–owned riding academy for disadvantaged New York City children. Later in the text, a ride-along on a high-society fox hunt brought Nir into an unexpected—and personally affirming—contact with the master of the hunt, who reveals his personal hero was a Holocaust survivor—Nir's own father. This thoughtful, well-researched book offers a charming portrait of horses in America as well as of a woman who found self-acceptance in their graceful company.

A bighearted debut book sure to please horse lovers.

THE BOHEMIANS

The Lovers Who Led Germany’s Resistance Against the Nazis

Ohler, Norman
Trans. by Mohr, Tim & Yarbrough, Marshall
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (320 pp.)
$28.00 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-328-56630-0

The story of a valiant group of resisters who stealthily undermined the Nazi regime.

Drawing on a trove of unpublished and archival documents from the German Resistance Memorial Center, the Institute for Contemporary History, and German, British, Russian, and American national repositories, screenwriter, novelist, and journalist Ohler creates a taut, absorbing tale of anti-Nazi resistance. Told in the present tense, the narrative conveys a sense of immediacy and encroaching terror. Central to the history are Harro Schulze-Boysen and his wife, Libertas, an attractive bourgeois couple, "apparently ‘Aryan’ through and through," who become the vortex for a daring movement. Harro began as an idealistic publisher of the Gegner, a prominent journal dedicated to raising consciousness about threats to society from the rise of Nazism. "A people divided by hate...cannot get up again," Harro wrote in one piece. He felt optimistic that Hitler would fail and that Germans’ enthusiasm for the Nazis could be directed "toward a genuine social revolution." After he was arrested and tortured for his activities, however, Harro was forced to adopt a new strategy: "to appear outwardly unsuspicous in order to change the system from within." To further that strategy, he enlisted in the air force. Libertas, a publicist for MGM and a member of the Nazi Party, radically changed her "immature, Nazi-oriented worldview" after falling in love with Harro, soon becoming a valued, if sometimes erratic, member of their "social network," which spread and surfaced, focused in part on printing and disseminating pamphlets and flyers. Harro, whose military position put him "at a nexus of information of the German war machine," had a vital role in producing documents with which to "flood the country with sensitive information about how the war is going and bring about a popular revolt." Ohler capably recounts theintrepid activities, alliances, and betrayals that led to sweeping arrests and executions.

Sharply drawn characters enliven a tragic history.

BORGE S AND ME

An Encounter

Parini, Jay
Doubleday (320 pp.)
$27.95 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-0-385-54582-2

The renowned biographer, novelist, and poet recounts his transformative youthful journey with a famed literary master.

In 1971, when he was a graduate student at St. Andrews University in Scotland, Parini took two short journeys—here combined into one weeklong trip in order to maintain "narrative efficiency"—in the company of Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), who was visiting one of Parini’s mentors. At the time, Parini had not read anything Borges had written, and he was surprised that his friends not only knew of the Argentine writer, but held him in the highest esteem. At first, Parini saw Borges only as a garrulous, “difficult and self-involved” old man, given to nostalgic memories of a lost love and disquisitions on an astonishing range of literature. He needed constant attention due to his blindness and constant acquisescence to his
impetuous needs. Still, Parini agreed to squire Borges around the Scottish Highlands, serving as his guide, aide, and, especially, his eyes. Parini delivers vibrant descriptions of clouds and rain, earth and sun: “the bright lakes, the fertile land with stone barns and hillsides smudged with white-and-gray sheep,” the oaks with crooked limbs, and the dark waters of Loch Ness, in which their rowboat capsized. Parini decided that one should never take a “childlike, irascible, and unpredictable” old blind man in a rowboat. But by the end of their travels together, Parini realized that Borges was extraordinary: a man who glowed with “an enigmatic brilliance. One felt somehow more intelligent, more learned and witty, in his presence. The universe itself felt more pliable and yielding, and so available.” Parini’s vividly detailed memoir, replete with verbatim conversations, is the result of much shaping and retelling, first in fragments over the years, later as a novel, and then as “a kind of novelistic memoir,” which, Parini writes, “survives in its transformation into this text.”

A captivating chronicle and homage.

**CHRONIC**

**Phillips, Steven & Parish, Dana with Loberg, Kristin**

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (288 pp.)

$28.00 | Aug. 4, 2020

978-0-358-06471-8

A doctor and his former patient explore what they posit is the pathogen-spread rise of autoimmune illnesses, with millions of victims.

Diseases such as multiple sclerosis, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, and fibromyalgia are not single illnesses as such but instead clusters of symptoms with many points in common. Because their etiology is hard to pin down, many sufferers are often dismissed with the simple notation that the illness is psychosomatic. Yet, writes Phillips, who suffers from a parasitic illness wrought by a spider bite, “maybe you were referred to a psychiatrist or prescribed an antidepressant by your general practitioner.” For various reasons, he and Parish write, pathogens are on the rise and ever more ubiquitous as a result of climate change; these pathogens include viruses, parasites such as protozoa, and bacteria. By 2050, they project, 12% of the U.S. population will be affected by a kind of “Lyme+” disease, costing billions annually in medical expenses and lost productivity. The list of vector-borne ailments is long, and too often our understanding of them is incomplete. The authors write, for instance, that Lyme is not strictly a tick-borne disease but can be transmitted by fleas, lice, and even ants, “along with its stereotypical transmission via a cat scratch or bite.” Apart from the fact that a spirochete is involved, everything else about Lyme is “bitterly debated,” with no agreed-upon treatment regimen. What’s worse, the range of illnesses that may be hidden by Lyme-like symptoms can include cancer, hepatitis, and tuberculosis. Phillips and Parish suggest a range of treatments, from anxiety-reducing exercises to herbal remedies such as oregano oil, cinnamon bark, and cumin seeds that have been shown to have “strong killing activity against ‘persister’ forms of the Lyme bacterium”—though none of those proposed treatments is definitive.

An informative guide to what the authors call “the pandemic in plain sight,” urgent without undue alarmism.

**PERILOUS BOUNTY**

**The Looming Collapse of American Farming and How We Can Prevent It**

**Philpott, Tom**

Bloomsbury (272 pp.)

$28.00 | Aug. 11, 2020

978-1-63557-313-8

The food and agricultural correspondent for *Mother Jones* takes a focused look at the ecological degradation caused by industrial agriculture in the U.S.

Philpott offers a view—primarily of California’s Central Valley and the Midwest Corn Belt—of what the political and economic forces of corporate-dominated agriculture are contributing to the decline of the environmental resources of these two main production regions. The author is deeply invested in—and knowledgeable about—all the ins and outs of the virtual oligarchy that controls American agriculture, from the seeds to the market destinations. It’s hardly surprising—though depressing nonetheless—that fewer than a dozen giant companies have so concentrated agricultural production that they have stretched resources such as natural soil fertility and freshwater resources to the point of environmental calamity. As Philpott amply illustrates, via enlightening interviews with hydrologists, geologists, soil chemists, and entomologists, the demands that corn/soy/ meat culture have put on the Corn Belt, as well as the water burden of the industries of the Central Valley, are not only unsustainable, but likely catastrophic for future farming on that land. In the absence of cover crops to protect the land from increasingly severe storms, the Midwest’s once-deep soil is often washed away down the Mississippi River, ending up in the Gulf of Mexico, where its fertilizer loads spawn algal blooms that transform into dead zones. Philpott is especially good in his explanations of alternative agricultural modes of production, which, for the most part, involve increasing diversity, mixing it up, and spreading it out. The author also explores the unique problems facing midsize farmers—too small for the national chains and too big for local farmers markets—and the complete overhaul of production required to break the monoculture mindset. Philpott is not optimistic about the current political landscape, with a “climate change denier” as president and crucial regulatory agencies “shot through with former oil and agribusiness industry execs and flacks.”

A solid, keenly drawn critique of American agricultural circumstances and consequences.
LOSERS
Dispatches From the Other Side of the Scoreboard
Ed. by Pilon, Mary & Thomas, Louisa
Penguin (304 pp.)
$17.00 paper | Aug. 18, 2020
978-0-14-313383-4

Essays from the realm of competitive sports focusing on losing, which “reveals something raw about what it means to be human.”

A few of the bylines are well known, especially Gay Talese (his oft-anthologized 1964 Esquire profile of Floyd Patterson) and Arthur Conan Doyle (1908 Olympic marathon). Refreshingly, though, most of the contributors are less well known to general readers, and their subjects range from obscure to famous. Some of the essays were previously unpublished while others appeared in the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, the Believer, and other venues. As a collection, the book holds together well even for non-sports fans, though some readers may wish for value-added material such as postscripts or updates. Pilon and Thomas, who both write for the New Yorker and other publications, each contribute an essay. In her piece for that magazine, Thomas focuses on the pressures of the professional tennis tour via a profile of Nick Kyrgios, the volatile Australian who cannot seem to reach his potential in front of tournament crowds. “At some point in every match,” she writes, “he tends to do something brilliant—or he snaps.” Pilon’s piece, published in 2013 in the Times, is set in the world of low-level mixed martial arts, “shadow fighting circuits” that are “far from the bright lights of professional matches.” For basketball fans, Charles Bock offers “The Sporting House,” about an ill-fated star in 1980s Las Vegas, a time when UNLV was the best show in town. Baseball fans will enjoy Bob Sullivan’s “Yankee Strike” and Abby Ellin’s “Larry and the Ball.” In “Banderillero,” Barry Newman writes about bullfighting, an endeavor relatively unknown to American readers. Mike Pesca investigates the many faces of losing and how many “come so close they can taste it, only to be left lapping at the dust of their rivals.”

In the introduction the editors write, “this book is for the losers—which is to say, for all of us.” They deliver.

JUST US
An American Conversation
Rankine, Claudia
Graywolf (352 pp.)
$30.00 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-64445-021-5

A cross-disciplinary inquiry into race as the determining construct in American life and culture—and how it is perceived and experienced so differently by those who consider themselves white.

Rankine—a Yale professor, renowned poet, and MacArthur fellow whose groundbreaking book Citizen: An American Lyric (2014) won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award—resists being pigeonholed, particularly by white critics. “Another white friend tells me she has to defend me all the time to her white friends who think I’m a radical,” she writes. “Why? For calling white people white?... Don’t defend me. Not for being human. Not for wanting others to be able to just live their lives. Not for wanting us to simply be able to live.” In this genre-defying work, the author, as she did so effectively in Citizen, combines poetry, essay, visuals, scholarship, analysis, invective, and argument into a passionate and persuasive case about many of the complex mechanics of race in this country—especially how white people barely acknowledge it (particularly in conversation with other white people) while for black people, it affects everything. Rankine writes with disarming intimacy and searing honesty about pointed exchanges with white friends and colleagues, fissures within her marriage, and encounters with white strangers who assume some sort of superiority of rank. Throughout this potent book, the author ably conveys the urgency of the stakes regarding race in America, which many white people fail to acknowledge as an issue. The way she challenges those close to her, risking those relationships, shows readers just how critical the issues are to her—and to us. Rankine examines how what some see as matters of fact—e.g., “white male privilege” or “black lives matter”—seem to others like accusation or bones of contention, and she documents how and why this culture has been able to perpetuate itself.

A work that should move, challenge, and transform every reader who encounters it.

OLIVE THE LIONHEART
Lost Love, Imperial Spies, and One Woman’s Journey to the Heart of Africa
Ricca, Brad
St. Martin’s (400 pp.)
$29.99 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-1-250-20701-2

Intriguing tale of a young Scottish woman who traveled to Africa to find her lost fiance.

Cleveland-based author Ricca clearly relishes the discovery of strange, off-the-beaten-path stories. While researching Dunvegan Castle on the Isle of Skye, he managed to secure the heretofore undisclosed diaries of Olive MacLeod (1880-1936), a Scottish aristocrat who was distraught when she learned that her fiance, naturalist and adventurer Boyd Alexander, had disappeared in West Africa in 1910. Letting his subject “tell [the story] herself” while avoiding the temptation to “reach in from the future and fix things,” the author engagingly re-creates her relationship with Alexander and determination to find him when he went missing. MacLeod met the dashing explorer on an outing in Kent in the summer of 1908; she was much taken
by his stories of danger and intrigue, and he was fascinated by his quick mind and liveliness. Alexander had lost his brother on a previous expedition, and he sought to return to Africa for “unfinished business.” Before he left in December, he remarked, “once one is a marked man one is not allowed to stop,...I don't suppose I shall get any rest till I leave my bones in Africa.” Through their correspondence, interspersed throughout, we learn that she first declined to marry him and then changed her mind. In a sometimes elliptical narrative, Ricca tracks MacLeod’s African trek in the company of the Talbots, friends and fellow traveling companions of Alexander’s whom the author also fleshes out. They ventured through Nigeria, Chad, and elsewhere, meeting native tribes, facing dangerous wildlife; eventually, they arrived in Maifoni, where MacLeod learned the sad truth about her fiancé. Some readers may become slightly disoriented by the abrupt switches in time, but the author successfully conveys the powerful, nearly hallucinatory state of grief that MacLeod must have endured over the course of her journey.

A swift-moving re-creation of an intrepid, rare spirit of her age.

**WHO IS ALEX TREBEK?**
A Biography
Rogak, Lisa
Dunne/St. Martin’s (256 pp.)
$27.99 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-1-250-77366-1

An entertaining if superficial biography of the host of America’s best-known quiz show. As in previous biographies of Stephen Colbert, Jon Stewart, and Rachel Maddow, among others, Rogak relies almost entirely on secondary sources to piece together the story of Trebek’s steady rise through the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the game show circuit, and, eventually, in 1984, *Jeopardy!* The author has combed through the likes of *People* and *TV Guide*, along with articles from multiple daily newspapers, for pithy quotations and amusing anecdotes. Trebek fans will enjoy stories about his one-month stint at a Trappist monastery (“I’m not one to keep my big mouth shut,” he noted), a brief early marriage to a former Playboy Bunny, and his surprising fondness for musk oxen. Hints about a more complicated family history—e.g., a half brother who was conceived and secretly given up for adoption after Trebek’s parents divorced—will leave readers wanting more. Although the *Trebek* that emerges in these pages has a few flaws, including a hot temper, a colorful vocabulary, and a tendency to overspend at Home Depot, he generally comes across as the bright, steadfast father figure generations of fans have come to depend upon. Rogak forgoes any hint of scandal to dutifully show her subject as a loving husband and father and generous philanthropist. Followers of the show will appreciate the details of the production; the conception, based on an idea by producer Merv Griffin’s wife; the incremental mechanics, usage, ways to write a character’s thoughts, and so on. Maybe another volume is on the way? The author remains positive and encouraging throughout, but as most aspiring writers know, success is highly elusive.

**27 ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES OF STORY**
Master the Secrets of Great Storytelling, From Shakespeare to South Park
Rubin, Daniel Joshua
Workman (304 pp.)
$19.95 paper | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-5235-0716-0

A self-help book for those who yearn to be story writers.

Rubin has considerable experience in this arena—a graduate of the Yale School of Drama, he is the founder of the writing studio Story 27 and has written for TV and theater—but little is novel here. He writes in conventional self-help format (chapters with identical subheadings, bullet points, continual encouragement) and employs informal diction throughout, including the final sentence: “You got this.” In one of the major sections, “How the Master Did It,” the author summarizes, sometimes quite extensively, a salmagundi of works including computer games, songs, short stories, novels, plays, films, TV scripts, and comic books. Among the many iconic authors Rubin cites are Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, James Baldwin, Arthur Miller, and Toni Morrison as well as more current artists such as Quentin Tarantino and Tina Fey. Rubin’s point, well taken, is that great stories are similar in foundational ways, and he devotes most of the text to showing novices how to become adepts, if not maestros. The 27 chapters, introduced by quotes from the likes of Aristotle, Voltaire, Buddha, and others, are arranged into large themes—plot, character, setting, dialogue, etc.—and each has an urgent and/or encouraging title: “Drop the Hammer,” “Escape Risk,” “Hunt Big Game,” “Peel the Onion,” “Confront Evil.” The prose is readable yet sprinkled with cliché (“getting into the appropriate mindset”) and platitude (“the more you do something, the better you get at it”). Rubin does display a wide range of reading, but he does not delve into language, mechanics, usage, ways to write a character’s thoughts, and so on. Maybe another volume is on the way? The author remains positive and encouraging throughout, but as most aspiring writers know, success is highly elusive.

Enthusiastic and chockablock with varied examples but tightly bound by the ropes of convention.
A profoundly humane essayist, novelist, and nature writer finds glimmers of hope for a world in peril.

**THE WAY OF IMAGINATION**

**VERITAS**

A Harvard Professor, a Con Man and the Gospel of Jesus’s Wife

Sabar, Ariel

Doubleday (416 pp.)

$29.95 | Aug. 11, 2020

978-0-385-54258-6

Intriguing religious/true-crime story involving a possible wife of Jesus.

News outlets came alive in 2012 when Harvard Divinity School professor Karen King announced the discovery of a papyrus fragment suggesting that Jesus may have had a wife. The fragment, soon dubbed “The Gospel of Jesus’ Wife,” stirred interest as well as controversy, as scholars across the world warned it may be a fraud.

King, who had obtained the fragment from a mysterious and anonymous collector, doggedly defended the ancient piece of papyrus even as the evidence of its authenticity grew weaker.

Journalist Sabar—whose book *My Father’s Paradise* (2009) won the National Book Critics Circle Award for autobiography—happened to be following the story from the beginning, and he shares a sometimes-riveting, occasionally odd tale of academia gone awry. Though the author goes to great pains to portray King in a positive, compassionate light, a central reality emerges: The professor’s excitement over the social impact of the fragment blurred her sense of what was historically accurate. After introducing King biographically as a brilliant and respected scholar, “a dazzling interpreter of condemned scripture,” Sabar moves on to the story of how King came across the fragment and decided it was most likely legitimate. Her debut of the fragment at a conference in Rome led to a storm of media attention. Over time, however, other scholars began to see signs of forgery in the way the document had been created, and the media tide turned against King.

The sordid source of the fragment—a former student of ancient languages–turned-pornographer—overshadowed King’s hopes that what it represented for women in the church was worth believing in, above the papyrus’ actual authenticity. “Her ideological commitments,” Sabar concludes, “were choreographing her practice of history. The story came first; the dates managed after.”

A lengthy yet fascinating tale of how one scholar was duped, both by a con man and by herself.

**THE WAY OF IMAGINATION**

**Essays**

Sanders, Scott Russell

Counterpoint (272 pp.)

$16.95 | Aug. 11, 2020

978-1-64009-365-2

A profoundly humane essayist, novelist, and nature writer finds glimmers of hope for a world in peril.

Sanders, the author of more than 20 books of fiction and nonfiction, investigates our unprecedented rate and scale of environmental destruction, species extinction, and cultural disintegration, locating some familiar culprits: the fundamental scaffolding of capitalism, unrestrained (and unsustainable) growth, wealth defined only in terms of money, grotesque income inequities, overpopulation, squandered resources, and an utter lack of political will to do anything substantive about it. He explores what drives our risky behaviors and antiquated mindsets, painting a grim panorama of human follies and their consequences. However urgent, none of this is terribly original, nor does Sanders, who is often intensely personal, claim it to be. What sets this collection apart is the...
manner in which he connects these crises and, even in his most despairing moments, assays our capacity for change. One may argue that Sanders overestimates the power of art (literature especially) to sway the multitudes—particularly the comfortable denizens of developed nations—when history shows that the arts have exerted comparatively little direct influence on human actions. The author is no Pollyanna, but he puts his trust in our individual and collective imagination—not just science or the more benign tenets of religion—to conceive of and walk a more constructive path. “Imagination breaks the shell of the status quo,” he writes, “summoning up objects that do not yet exist, actions that no one has yet performed, and wiser ways of living that have yet to be realized.... Time and again, bold acts of imagination have given rise to profound shifts in our ethical views and social practices.” Given his focus on domestic foolishness, some will criticize Sanders’ exhortations as anti-American or socialistic, but this is a narrow, misguided view.

Changing attitudes is our most difficult task. Sanders, an insightful guide, knows we have no choice but to try.

GRAND A Memoir
Schefer, Sara
Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster
(288 pp.)
$25.99 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-1-982102-21-0

A comedian and Emmy-winning TV writer recounts her whitewater rafting journey through the Grand Canyon and her struggles with unresolved family issues.

In her 40th year, Schaefer decided to take members of her family on individual vacations, culminating in a rigorous guided rafting journey down the Colorado River with her younger sister, Ross. At the outset, she confesses to having a deep fear of rafting, and she shows how their eight-day adventure evolved into a series of challenging feats, both physically and psychologically. In alternating chapters, Schaefer delves into her past, beginning with a pivotal event from her childhood when her father confessed to his family and community that he’d been embezzling clients’ funds from his business. This led to significant downsizing from their affluent way of life and work while the family’s reputation would be forever tainted in their community, and the revelation dramatically affected Schaefer’s future. “Inside of me,” she writes, “the story got smaller and closer together as I memorized an easily digestible version of what had happened. Dad became his own cautionary tale. He had made a lot of bad choices. Then, he had made a crucially good one by telling the truth. Mom forgave. Jesus forgave. We forgave. That’s a wrap, folks!...I swore to myself that I would never repeat his mistakes, and the lesson set permanently inside me like a bone healing out of place.” In addition to chronicling her adventures on the river, she examines, with varying levels of insight, family relationships, intimate relations, professional achievements and setbacks, and, more recently, her deeply felt loss after her mother’s death. Though the book contains passages of vivid storytelling, both on and off the river, the narrative is overly angst-driven and heavy-handed—more levying humor from this talented comedy writer would have been welcome—and her many underlying issues ultimately feel unsettled.

An uneven exploration of family bonds and the pursuit of identity and self-esteem.

THE SMALLEST LIGHTS IN THE UNIVERSE
A Memoir
Seager, Sara
Crown (485 pp.)
$28.00 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-0-525-57625-9

The memoir of an astrophysicist whose extraordinary accomplishments reflect her exceptional complexity.

As a scientist, Seager has achieved considerable renown. She won the prestigious Sackler International Prize in Physics as well as a MacArthur fellowship, and she was named by Time as “one of the twenty-five most influential people in space.” Her prominence and how she achieved it would merit a book about her, but her personal struggles fitting in and finding a balance between her work and life are what make this memoir so compelling, even for readers who know little about science. For someone who has devoted so much of her life to exploring the possibility of life on other planets, which she believes is almost a mathematical certainty, it was a more personal discovery—that she was autistic—that made her feel like “I’d been struck by something, a physical impact. So much of my life suddenly made sense.” It wasn’t until the public’s response to an extensive personal profile in the New York Times Magazine that Seager realized that her “feelings of otherness” and her inability to connect with others and to feel like she belonged were part of her diagnosis. This book obviously goes much deeper into how she found her vocation after something of a wayward, “vagabond adolescence” in Canada and how she and her husband opened a whole new world within which she had devoted her scientific research. Seager also engagingly explores how a widows’ group that she was reluctant to join showed her that she was not alone and how finding her second husband opened a whole new world within her. The interior journey she traces here is as extraordinary as her scientific career.

A singular scientist has written a singular account of her life and work.
A useful addition to the discussion though unlikely to change Mitch McConnell’s mind on election security.
A rich exploration of friendship by the talented women behind the Call Your Girlfriend podcast.

Sow and Friedman have been best friends since 2009, when they instantly clicked at a Gossip Girl viewing party, but it hasn't always been easy. They both struggled for years to juggle what David Sedaris calls life’s “four burners”—family, friends, health, and work. Here, the authors delve psychologically and emotionally into the nature of the concept of a “Big Friendship,” whether it’s a long-distance relationship like their own or anyone deemed appropriate to include in one’s “chosen family.” Written in an almost novelistic style, this chronicle of their experiences include Friedman’s difficult decision to strike out on her own as a writer as well as Sow’s medical issues. Those who follow the podcast will be familiar with the authors’ philosophy of “Shine Theory,” described by its creators as “an investment, over the long term, in helping a friend be their best—and relying on their help in return...a conscious decision to bring our full selves to our friendships and to not let insecurity or envy ravage them.” In other words, as Sow told Friedman after one particularly satisfying professional triumph, “I don’t shine if you don’t shine.” Though both authors have achieved remarkable professional success, that doesn’t mean they don’t goss over their rough patches, including difficult spells that challenged the bonds of their friendship and a conflict involving a painful sociological phenomenon dubbed the “trapdoor of racism,” which forced both women to reevaluate their bond, ultimately resulting in a trip to couples therapy. Having honed a relationship they compare to the one between Oprah Winfrey and Gayle King, the authors are well equipped to deliver honest and helpful advice to anyone struggling to maintain a healthy union over time and distance.

A soul-searching reflection that delivers an emotional journey to amplify the self-help tips.

An absorbing history of a vanished world.

The celebrated and controversial filmmaker chronicles his journey “from the bottom back to the top of the Hollywood mountain.” Stone knows how to grab a viewing audience—and readers. He begins by describing a complex, dangerous scene he was filming in Mexico for his “epic-scale” Salvador (1986). “It’s everything that made the movies so exciting to me as a child—battles, passionate actions, momentous outcomes,” he writes. This book covers Stone’s first 40 years. Those who read the author’s novel A Child’s Night Dream (1997) will be familiar with his early years: French mother and soldier father who divorced when he was at boarding school; teaching in Saigon; time in the Merchant Marine. After Yale didn’t work out, he enlisted in the Army and went to Vietnam. Stone engagingly describes his harrowing experiences, which included being bombed by friendly fire. At NYU, he learned his first basic lesson in film: “chasing the light.”
Readers might think—based on the title and subject matter—that this is some kind of self-help, New Age text. It’s not....

The author delivers a thoroughly researched text.

“Teacher Martin Scorsese critiqued Stone’s short about Vietnam: “Well—this is a filmmaker.” After splitting with his wife, Stone worked on a number of screenplays, including one about his fellow soldiers and the “lies and war crimes” he observed: “I had to find meaning in that shitty little war.” His screenplay for Platoon was “good, solid work—maybe some of the best stuff I’d done yet.” Al Pacino was interested, but the time wasn’t right. Stone’s screenplay for Midnight Express won him a Golden Globe and an Oscar, which made him “a commodity in demand.” However, he made errors in judgment with Seizure and The Hand, and he also had a “devil in my closet,” cocaine, which he later kicked. His screenplay for Brian de Palma’s Scarface opened doors and led to his writing and directing Salvador and Platoon. Stone recounts his life of ups and downs well; besides being an accomplish ed screenwriter, he’s also a fine prose writer. To be continued?

In the often tacky world of movie memoirs, Stone’s will stand out for its hard-earned insights, integrity, and grace.

THE WELL-GARDENED MIND
The Restorative Power of Nature
Stuart-Smith, Sue
Scribner (352 pp.)
$28.00 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-4767-9446-4

An analysis of and tribute to the beneficial effects of gardening on the heart and mind.

Stuart-Smith—a veteran psychiatrist, psychotherapist, and devoted gardener in the U.K.—employs several tactics in her debut work. She relates her personal history with gardening (she didn’t care for it initially); explores the history of gardening in various cultures and contexts; describes how gardening has been used in a variety of therapeutic situations—including such institutions as mental hospitals and prisons—and in ravaged communities in need of restoration (urban farms and gardens). The author notes that she’d once been an English major, and many of her allusions are sturdy confirmation: William Wordsworth, who is prominent early in the text; Henry David Thoreau; William Wordsworth, Michel de Montaigne, who wanted to die in his garden; and Virginia Woolf are some who stroll through the garden of Stuart-Smith’s text. Also present are numerous luminaries in psychology (Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Erik Erikson, and Jean Piaget), medicine (Oliver Sacks), and researchers in a variety of fields. Readers might think—based on the title and subject matter—that this is some kind of self-help, New Age text. It’s not. The author delivers a thoroughly researched text based on her deep and wide reading about the history of gardening, her visits to many of the therapeutic garden sites she mentions, and her interviews with many people, professionals and patients alike. Yes, there are a few sentences that, taken out of context, sound a little bit precious (“an environment can be a spiritual as well as a physical home”), but most of these sentences blossom in beds of substantial research. Stuart-Smith ends with a tight chapter about the climate crisis and its effects on both our physical and psychological health. “Just as the state of the planet is unsustainable,” she writes, “so our lifestyles have become psychologically unsustainable.”

Full of surprise and wonder—and relevant research.

GHOSTING THE NEWS
Local Journalism and the Crisis of American Democracy
Sullivan, Margaret
Columbia Global Reports (166 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Jul. 28, 2020
978-1-73362-378-0

A dire warning on the decline of daily newspapers and the danger that their disappearance poses for democracy.

Anybody who follows the media business is familiar with the broad outline of the problem the author lays out in this unapologetically dour book: Newspapers have shuttered with distressing speed in recent years—more than 2,000 since 2004, she reports—and many of the ones that remain are shadows of their former selves. Sullivan, a media columnist at the Washington Post, used to be the top editor at one of those, the Buffalo Evening News, and she shares her own glimpses of the decline. However, the author’s goal isn’t to lament the good old days of once-mighty businesses. Instead, she trains her eyes on the “news deserts” that now litter the landscape and voices concern about how corruption will consume communities that no longer have media watchdogs. For instance, the Vindicator in Youngstown, Ohio, used to send reporters to all area school-board meetings, a manager told her, and “people knew that... and they behaved.” But now TV news and online outlets aren’t picking up the slack, and though nonprofit news sources have emerged, they don’t have the reach or stability that newspapers once claimed. Combine that with social media platforms that allow misinformation to spread, and it’s no wonder local civic discourse has degraded into meme-vs.-meme slap fights. (Sullivan is careful to note that this is hardly just an American problem.) What to do? The author chronicles her discussions with the leaders of some promising startups and considers more radical ideas, such as federal subsidies for media. But her glass is resolutely half-empty: She predicts that “American politics will become even more polarized; government and business corruption will flourish, the glue that holds communities together will weaken.”

A no-nonsense retort to the notion that we live in a time of abundant information.
ELLIS ISLAND
A People's History
Szejnert, Małgorzata
Trans. by Bye, Sean Gasper
Scribe (400 pp.)
$28.00 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-950354-05-4

A Polish journalist chronicles the history of America's famed immigration station through the stories of individuals who worked there or passed through on their way to a new life.

In an afterword, Szejnert notes that she wrote this account after discovering that there were no books about Ellis Island available in Polish, but her people-centered narrative fills an English-language gap as well. Making extensive use of primary documents, including letters written by immigrants to family in the old country, the author captures the mingled hope and fear experienced as people entered the massive main building, equipped with modern accoutrements few had seen in their ancestral villages, and faced numerous bureaucratic barriers. Quotes from John Weber, the first Commissioner of Immigration at the Port of New York, and his successors make palpable the massive logistical effort required to process all these people—more than 1 million in the peak year 1907—and the officials’ commendable determination to do it fairly, efficiently, and humanely. Szejnert does not scant the fear of “degraded, backward” people “unfit to join into American life” that culminated in the 1924 law that basically slammed the door on Italian and Jewish immigration. But her emphasis is on the immigrants’ fortitude and resilience and the empathetic assistance of Ellis Island personnel—many themselves immigrants, such as interpreter Francesco Martoccia and social worker Cecilia Greenstone, one of several redoubtable matrons charged with protecting female immigrants from human trafficking. Szejnert reveals countless intriguing historical tidbits: the luggage room with space for 12,000 passengers’ bags, sick immigrants required to wash who “had never seen a bathtub and…were afraid to get in the water.” The author also evokes the island’s ghostly atmosphere after it was abandoned in 1954 and the determined efforts that led to its triumphant 1990 reopening as a museum, visited by 2 million people each year.

Warmly human and extremely moving—a welcome addition to the Ellis Island literature.

THE NAMES OF ALL THE FLOWERS
A Memoir
Valentine, Melissa
Feminist Press (296 pp.)
$17.95 paper | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-936932-85-6

A nonfiction writer’s account of losing a brother to the streets and, eventually, gun violence.

The daughter of a white Quaker man and his black Southern wife, Valentine grew up in 1990s Oakland, an environment saturated with “hip-hop, R&B, absolute pride in blackness and our culture, and also a crack epidemic, a war on drugs, the three-strikes laws, and pervasive violence.” She looked up to her mischievous older brother Junior for guidance, watching him “as if he [were] my mirror.” Junior began stealing in early adolescence to win the respect of bullies who taunted him, and Valentine’s parents put him in different schools to keep him safe. However, he continued to engage in petty theft and seek out the company of other troubled boys. Eventually his parents sent him to live briefly with a relative in North Carolina. Valentine observes that this was not so much to punish Junior as much as it was an act to protect a “young black boy body” from negative influences and the police. He returned not long afterward, wearing a “cool disguise” of toughness. In a bid for “cash and power,” Junior became involved in car theft and using and selling drugs, including crack. Valentine hid her rage and sadness at Junior’s transformation by earning good grades, which she used as a shield from being discovered for smoking marijuana and cutting class. At 18, Junior went to jail for kidnapping and assault. At the same time, Valentine’s home life deteriorated, and her outlook became increasingly hopeless. Just one week after her brother was released from prison, he was gunned down on the streets of Oakland. Moving and profound, this book not only offers a poignant depiction of a woman’s undying love for her departed brother. It also tells the story of a cycle of racial violence not only fed by society, but history as well.

An eloquently poignant memoir of family, trauma, and loss.

COUNTDOWN 1945
The Extraordinary Story of the 116 Days That Changed the World
Wallace, Chris with Weiss, Mitch
Avid Reader Press (520 pp.)
$30.00 | Jun. 9, 2020
978-1-982143-34-3

What it took for Harry Truman, after fewer than three months in the White House, to decide to drop the atomic bomb—and how the plan was executed.
Readers will want to add in the many COVID-19 falsehoods, but all in all, this is an extremely valuable chronicle.

DONALD TRUMP AND HIS ASSAULT ON TRUTH

The end of World War II in the Pacific was as decisive as the mushroom cloud and firestorm produced by the weapon that brought it about. Fox News Sunday anchor Wallace describes a moment in history when both intense deliberation and decisive leadership were essential. On April 12, 1945, Truman, then the vice president, was summoned to the White House, where he expected to meet President Franklin Roosevelt. Instead, he was received by the president's wife, Eleanor, who told Truman that Roosevelt had died, only a few months into his fourth term. Truman was shaken by the news, but it was a cryptic message from Secretary of War Henry Stimson that would define the rest of that year—and the war. Stimson informed the new president about Roosevelt's top-secret project to build a nuclear weapon, and he did not prevaricate in describing the weapon's potential to the new president: “Modern civilization might be completely destroyed.” Wallace describes how Truman thought that there was every reason to believe that the alternative to using the new weapon—a ground invasion—would result in hundreds of thousands of deaths, on both the American/Allied and the Japanese side. The author peppers in the story of Hideko Tamura, a young Japanese girl who was sent away from her home in Hiroshima only to beg her mother to return—just in time to survive the detonation of the first atomic bomb. Wallace presents a mostly entertaining, if familiar, history of the three months between Truman’s taking office and the dropping of the bombs, but he only briefly engages with issues like the suffering of innocent Japanese and the intense misgivings of scientists like Albert Einstein.

A brisk work of history that weaves together the various factions responsible for the deployment of the first nuclear bombs.

DONALD TRUMP AND HIS ASSAULT ON TRUTH

The President’s Falsehoods, Misleading Claims, and Flat-Out Lies

Washington Post & Kessler, Glenn & Rizzo, Salvador & Kelly, Meg

Scribner (368 pp.)

$20.00 paper | Jun. 2, 2020

978-1-982151-07-2

All politicians lie. But the current occupant of the White House? Yikes....

Kessler, editor of the Washington Post “Fact Checker” column, allows that every recent president is associated with “one big lie”—e.g., not having sex with “that woman,” fudging about overflights over the Soviet Union, dismissing concerns about illness. Donald Trump is transcendent. He is, by Kessler and his colleagues’ account, “the most mendacious president in U.S. history,” the author not of one big and sometimes necessary lie but of thousands of little, useless ones. As of the third anniversary of his inauguration, they reckon, the lie count was 16,241—which means that Trump publicly lied 15 times per day on average, though some days were richer than others, such as November 5, 2018, which rang in 139 false claims. The lies are part of a program of an attack on truth, the authors assert, and given that “Republicans have grown less concerned about presidents being honest than they were a decade ago,” the lies find a willing audience. Parsing those 16,241 lies, the Post staffers calculate that immigration is the single subject most likely to be lied about, “accounting for 15 percent of the total…we fact-checked in the first three years of Trump’s presidency.” But everything else is fair game, too, with concomitant fits of projection—accusing others of lying, for instance—and refusal to accept responsibility for anything except the rare success. Then there are the simple misunderstandings, as when he called his impeachment “illegal and unconstitutional” even though, Kessler and company observe, “it’s literally spelled out in the Constitution.” Most valuable, in this rather depressing catalog of untruths, are the fact checkers’ point-by-point analyses, lie by lie, of the relative falsehoods uttered, measured by “Pinocchios.” They even give Trump credit for those extremely unusual moments when his outbursts are “mostly accurate.”

Readers will want to add in the many COVID-19 falsehoods, but all in all, this is an extremely valuable chronicle.
Unspeakable Acts
True Tales of Crime, Murder, Deceit, and Obsession
Ed. by Weinman, Sarah
Ecco/HarperCollins (416 pp.)
$18.99 paper | Jul. 28, 2020
978-0-06-283988-6

A collection of perceptive essays reveals the range of true-crime writing featured in magazines today.

The essays, all published in the past few years, veer away from the typical true-crime formula, which tends to focus, as editor Weinman notes, on “beautiful dead white girls.” In this collection, women are at least as likely to be perpetrators of crime as victims, and the contributors are hyperaware, sometimes to a fault, of their inherent fallibility in reporting the truth of the events they’re considering. Weinman, who has vast experience in the genre, divides the book into three sections. The first includes relatively traditional crime stories told from unusual angles. Pamela Colloff’s careful, thorough “The Reckoning,” for example, considers the 1966 University of Texas clock tower shooting not from the point of view of the gunman but by looking closely and compassionately at the decadeslong effects of the shooting on Claire Wilson, who was wounded in the tragedy and lost the baby with whom she was eight months pregnant. The provocative second section features essays on the intersection between crime and culture, such as Alex Mar’s incisive examination of two girls seemingly compelled to attempt murder by the internet meme of the “Slender Man.” Over the course of the essay, Mar establishes parallels to the girls who incited the Salem witch trials and another pair of girls in 1950s Australia. The third section widens out to include stories that wouldn’t necessarily seem to fit the true-crime formula. These include Jason Fagone’s graphic “What Bullets Do to Bodies,” in which he chronicles his experiences with the chief trauma surgeon at a Philadelphia hospital, and Melissa Del Bosque’s insightful “Checkpoint Nation,” which explores the question of whether the Border Patrol often oversteps its authority. Other contributors include Michelle Dean, Alice Bolin, and Emma Copley Eisenberg.

A well-chosen sampling of writings from a rapidly expanding and developing field.

Gatecrasher
How I Helped the Rich Become Famous and Ruin the World
Widdicombe, Ben
Simon & Schuster (272 pp.)
$27.00 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-982128-83-8

An Australian-born New York Times social columnist dishes on celebrities and wealthy elites while offering his take on the modern relationship between fame and money.

In 1998, Widdicombe left Sydney to pursue a new life in New York City. By day, he sold hot dogs at a downtown kiosk; by night, he sneaked into celebrity parties where he learned “the three golden rules” of gate-crashing: “dress the part, act like you belong, and always be ready to sail with the tide.” His early journalistic work involved covering—and sometimes gleefully skewering—the New York fashion industry. Widdicombe took another job at a photography gallery patronized by one of the Koch brothers, who discreetly propositioned him at a dinner party. As the author’s network grew, so did his access to the rich and famous. When a British daytime talk show expressed interest in transforming a column Widdicombe wrote into a television show, the author was asked to meet with the show’s production company head, Elisabeth Murdoch, at her father Rupert’s penthouse. The show never aired; but the author’s next gig landed him on the “Page Six” gossip beat at the Murdoch-owned New York Post. There, he had the opportunity to observe firsthand how “immense wealth was rebranding itself not as some arbitrary privilege…but as a bold lifestyle choice.” His work there and at such entertainment outlets as Showbiz Tonight and TMZ led him to posit the ingenious theory that it was heiress Paris Hilton who, at the turn of the century, began the trend of “performing [wealth] for the purpose of gaining celebrity.” This witty and insightful book suggests how the gossip journalism meant as entertainment has not only diminished “the impact of shame in public life.” It has also led to a grab for celebrity among America’s elites, who are using the fame they once eschewed to get “more of everything.”

A sharp-eyed and disturbing chronicle.

Women in the Kitchen
Twelve Essential Cookbook Writers Who Defined the Way We Eat, From 1661 to Today
Willan, Anne
Scribner (320 pp.)
$28.00 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-1-5011-7331-8

The founder of La Varenne Cooking School in Paris offers a succinct history of her female predecessors.

In this tasty, digestible volume, Willan, a member of the James Beard Foundation Awards Hall of Fame with more than...
six decades of experience in the world of food and cooking, explores a semialternative narrative of American and British cuisines. Female cookbook authors, she argues, have not only offered sound guidance to the millions of women feeding their families and guests since the 1600s; they have also gained financial independence and prestige, set trends, and paved the way for each other’s success. A collector of cookbooks herself, Willan clearly draws from a deep well of knowledge and passion in her biographies of 12 influential female writers. Via their stories, she crafts a clearly written, cohesive chronicle of the evolution of American and British cuisine, complete with colorful anecdotes about the movement and fashion of ingredients, the influence of class and education on women’s private and public culinary lives, and the gradual acceptance of cultural diversity into the mainstream palate. Occasionally repetitive—we learn multiple times about how “tomatoes were regarded with suspicion when they were brought to Europe from the New World” or that corn, a staple for Native Americans, “was a challenge for early American cooks”—Willan’s accounts of early British and American kitchens will leave contemporary cooks grateful for our modern conveniences and abundant flavor options. Each biography is accompanied by some of their subject’s most delectable recipes, first from the original texts and then reinterpreted by Willan. The older recipes are marvelous and entertaining historical documents that rely on the author’s translations to make them accessible. By the time she gets to Julia Child and Alice Waters, who wrote rigorously tested recipes in an easily recognizable style, Willan’s adaptations contribute little.

Approachable and charming, this text allows readers to learn about the lineage of women cooks while participating in it.

**THE MYSTERY OF CHARLES DICKENS**
Wilson, A.N.
Harper/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
$32.50 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-0-06-295494-7

The world-renowned ant expert cleans out his desk, which—no surprise—contains many gems.

**TALES FROM THE ANT WORLD**
Wilson, Edward O.
Liveright/Norton (288 pp.)
$26.95 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-1-63149-556-4

A marvelous exploration by an author steeped in the craft of his subject’s elastic, elusive work.

The mystery of the iconic novelist’s divided self as beautifully parsed by accomplished English biographer and novelist Wilson.

In this utterly satisfying investigative narrative, the author moves from Dickens’ death in 1870 back through his career and childhood trauma being sent to work in a blacking factory at age 12. It’s clear that Wilson fully comprehends the many complexities of the wily novelist, public performer, and secret lover. Beginning with the mystery of his death, the author re-creates the last day of the famous novelist’s life as he made the habitual hour’s journey from his home at Gad’s Hill, Kent, to his mistress’s house in Peckham (places have major significance in Dickens’ work). There, he suffered a seizure and was returned to his home to die a respectable death, surrounded by his estranged wife—tortured, as Wilson calls her—and some of his many adult children. Wilson gradually, engagingly unravels the circumstances surrounding his death. “Dickens was good at dying,” he writes. “If you want a good death, go to the novels of Dickens.” The novelist had been consumed by his love affair with the former actress Nelly Ternan for the previous 13 years and had bought the house where she lived with her mother and sisters. Just that morning, Dickens had been working toward the conclusion of _The Mystery of Edwin Drood_, a book that was destined to be left incomplete, and was saturated with a sense of raging passion for a young, unobtainable girl. (Wilson ably dispels the myth that Dickens did not write about sex.) Wilson writes with precision, intuition, and enormous compassion for Dickens’ senses of social justice and outrage, especially regarding children in the mercilessly materialist Victorian era. The author also charmingly conveys his own early enchantment with Dickens’ books.

Pulitzer Prize–winning author and naturalist Wilson’s writing on broader scientific subjects have won him awards and no lack of controversy. Now 90, largely retired from fieldwork and scholarship but an indefatigable writer, he has assembled scraps of autobiography and anecdotes on his favorite insect. The author provides evidence that the secret of happiness lies in having an obsession rather than money, talent, genius, or even a cheerful disposition. From childhood, passion for natural history consumed him, beginning with all creatures, then focused on insects and, eventually, ants. Other memoirists agonize over dysfunctional parents, questionable friends, disappointment in love, or poor life decisions. Wilson has had his share, but he also has ants, which provide contentment in his life. With regular detours into personal experiences, the author delivers two dozen chapters on their history, ecology, diet, and the organization of the colony (no ant lives alone), without ignoring the dozens of parasites it supports. Ants make up the dominant land carnivore in their size range, and estimates show that “all the living ants weigh about the same as all the living humans.” Though infectiously enthusiastic about ants, Wilson is no sentimentalist; he warns that nothing about an ant’s life provides moral uplift. Males are useless except as sources of sperm for the queen. Females do all the work, and “service to the colony is everything.” Young ants work at safe jobs such as attending the queen. As they grow older, their jobs become riskier—from sentinel to forager to guard to warrior. Put more plainly: “where humans send their young adults into battle, ants send their old
ladies.” Workers who encounter a dead ant in the nest dump it “in the colony refuse pile,” unless they eat it. If it’s only injured and dying, they eat it.

Though somewhat disorganized, the content and quality of the writing is consistently top-notch.

**LADY ROMEO**
The Radical and Revolutionary Life of Charlotte Cushman, America’s First Celebrity
Wojczuk, Tana
Avid Reader Press (224 pp.)
$27.00 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-5011-9952-3

A biography of the 19th-century stage actress praised by Walt Whitman for the “towering grandeur of her genius.”

In the early years of American theater, women did not receive good roles; they often played prostitutes and harlots, and men characterized many of them that way offstage. Nonetheless, Charlotte Cushman (1816-1876), who “was often described as ‘mannish,’” was determined to become a famous actress, and she spent her life doing just that. Known throughout America and, later, abroad, she rose to heights that inspired envy among her male contemporaries. In this engaging and entertaining biography, Guernica senior nonfiction editor Wojczuk packs the narrative with well-chosen, vibrant details of Cushman’s life as she traveled and worked at a variety of theaters. “To men,” writes the author, “she embodied the man they wanted to be, gallant, passionate, an excellent sword-fighter. To women, she was a romantic, daring figure, their Romeo. American artists and writers who later became famous were starstruck by her, and she was a household name on two continents.” Early on, Cushman took simple roles, but her talents were soon appreciated, and she rose to the lead positions, playing her own rendition of Lady Macbeth and, later, Romeo, beating out other talented women. The author also respectfully discusses elements of Cushman’s private life, including her sexuality and the people with whom she spent much of her time, “an entourage of female friends, ambitious, unorthodox artists like herself who longed for more freedom than they could find in America or in England.” Regardless of Cushman’s intimacies outside the playhouse, both men and women loved her performances of classic Shakespeare roles, which she embodied with new energy, making them accessible to the masses. Wojczuk successfully reinvigorates this significant 19th-century artist.

An animated, refreshingly vivid biography of a woman who made the stage her home.

**25 GREAT SENTENCES AND HOW THEY GOT THAT WAY**
Woods, Geraldine
Norton (256 pp.)
$25.95 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-1-324-00485-1

A self-described “language enthusiast” analyzes memorable sentences. Woods, author of *English Grammar for Dummies*, among dozens of other books on writing and literature, offers an upbeat, informative guide for writers and readers, focused on the power of sentences. Each of the 25 chapters highlights one exemplary sentence, supplemented by many others that illustrate the same technique, drawn from a capacious range of sources, including Virginia Woolf, Stephen King, Dylan Thomas, Bob Dylan, the King James Bible, and even ads for potato chips, candy, and soda. Woods avoids literary jargon and carefully explains terms that might be unfamiliar to nonspecialist readers. Looking at structure, for example, she identifies several interesting constructions—parallelism, reversed sentences, questions, for example—and “crossed sentences,” which she calls “the neon signs of the sentence world. They attract attention.” Her primary example is John F. Kennedy’s “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country,” and she also cites Groucho Marx: “Money will not make you happy, and happy will not make you money.” Some sentences, notes the author, succeed through surprise, such as Lucille Ball’s “The secret to staying young is to live honestly, eat slowly, and lie about your age.” A section on diction examines verbs, tone, word shifts (Gertrude Stein’s “There is no there there” is one example), and inventive coinage. Poetry appears most frequently in chapters on sound (onomatopoeia, repetition, and matching sounds) and visual presentation. A section on connection/comparison analyzes use of the first person and second person, synesthesia, and contrast—e.g., Neil Armstrong’s famous “That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.” A final section on “Extremes” focuses on unusually long “marathon sentences” and sentences that are marvels of concision, such as E.M. Forster’s “Only connect.” Each chapter ends with inventive writing exercises.

A practical, nonboring companion for writers aiming to hone their style.
Blunt, essential reading on today’s Appalachia that is less elegiac and more forward-thinking than most.

**APPALACHIAN FALL**

*APPALACHIAN FALL*

*Dispatches From Coal Country on What’s Ailing America*

Young, Jeff with Ohio Valley Resource

Tiller Press/Simon & Schuster (256 pp.)

$24.99 | Aug. 11, 2020

978-1-982148-86-7

A collection of on-the-ground reporting from one of the country’s most misunderstood and misrepresented regions.

Before the 2016 election, Donald Trump promised Appalachians that the coal-mining industry would come roaring back; since then, it remains on life support thanks to competing energy sources hammering a business that, for its workers, is economically and literally toxic. In *Hillbilly Elegy* (2016), J.D. Vance blamed the region’s woes on lack of initiative among its residents, but a host of unique pressures trap the area in poverty. Such clarity comes thanks to the reporting of Ohio Valley ReSource, a media collective launched in 2016 by seven public media outlets in Kentucky, Ohio, and West Virginia. This book, drawn from the collective’s reporting and overseen by Young, its managing editor, shows how mining companies have dodged taxes and fines while polluting the region and eluding blame for the illnesses their practices have caused; how exploitative pharmaceutical companies bred the opioid epidemic; and how efforts to launch retraining and revitalization programs tend to disappoint: “How do you bring in people and businesses if you can’t promise them a clean glass of water?” one story concludes.

But while the articles paint stark portraits of the region’s troubles, the reporting team doesn’t indulge in ruin-porn clichés about the region; rather, they deliver profiles of people shouldering ahead despite governmental and corporate missteps—e.g., farmers making an uneasy transition into hemp farming and activist efforts to better hold mining companies accountable. The reporting doesn’t aspire to flashy style or epic sweep—the articles are modeled after Sunday-newspaper features—the plainspoken reporting grabs the attention. Bemoaning the newfound emphasis on fracking, one man laments: “I don’t understand why fossil fuel extraction is the only kind of job this area is offered. We want jobs that won’t kill us.”

Blunt, essential reading on today’s Appalachia that is less elegiac and more forward-thinking than most.

**AMERICA IN THE WORLD**

*A History of U.S. Diplomacy and Foreign Policy*

Zoellick, Robert B.

Twelve (560 pp.)

$35.00 | Aug. 4, 2020

978-1-5387-6130-4

A history of American foreign policy from a veteran in the field of “pragmatic diplomacy.”

Zoellick, now a senior fellow at Harvard’s Belfer Center, has vast experience in the diplomatic realm: Since the early 1990s, he has served in a wide variety of relevant roles, including deputy secretary of state, deputy chief of staff at the White House, and president of the World Bank. As such, the author has a unique perspective, and the narrative is “rich with tales of human endeavor, problem solving, and political insights.” Unfortunately, women are absent, as Zoellick fails to note the stellar diplomatic contributions of Madeleine Albright, Hillary Clinton, and others. The author delineates five diplomatic traditions that have been crucial to U.S. foreign policy: a strong sense of the geostrategic potential of North America; trade, transnationalism, and technology; the alliance system, which helps maintain international order; garnering Congressional and public support; and recognizing “America’s purpose” in the world, whether that be advancement of democracy or the power of the U.S. financial system. Benjamin Franklin, America’s “first diplomat,” knew expertly how to play the Old World rivalries off each other, didn’t mind using deceit, and “put practice before theory,” as Stacy Schiff wrote in *A Great Improvisation*. Alexander Hamilton, writes Zoellick, “employed financial means to attain political, economic, and social ends.” Woodrow Wilson underscored the ideological justification for war—“the world must be made safe for democracy”—yet ultimately lacked the diplomatic team to employ the leverage to pass his peace proposals. From John F. Kennedy, the “crisis manager,” to Lyndon Johnson, a brilliant congressional operator who learned bitterly from the defeat in Vietnam, to Henry Kissinger, the master of realpolitik, to George H.W. Bush, the “alliance leader,” Zoellick accessibly demonstrates how they plied their diplomatic methods. However, the failure to acknowledge women diplomats is a sizable flaw.

A useful, knowledgeable history that is missing a major piece of the puzzle.
EVA EVERGREEN

Eva Evergreen

by Julie Abe

Little, Brown (400 pp.)

$16.99 | Aug. 1, 2020

978-0-316-49388-8

Eva must discover her own strength on a quest to become an official witch.

Eva Evergreen has just turned 12 and is ready for the quest she must undertake in order to gain the rank of Novice Witch. Unfortunately, she only has a smidgen of magic, and casting spells isn’t easy for her. When Eva’s quest takes her to the small coastal town of Auteri, she struggles to convince the townspeople that she is capable of helping them. Eva sets up a “semi-magical” repair shop and does little fixes around town. Slowly, she begins to make friends and earn the trust of Auteri, but the Culling, a mysterious, cursed weather phenomenon, threatens to destroy everything she’s worked toward. Abe has penned a spectacular, whimsical coming-of-age fantasy, with magic, exciting adventure, and even an adorable magical pet, a mischievous flamefox she names Ember. Eva’s quest challenges her to fight expectations and doubt and to find her voice and power. Abe creates a dazzling, magical world with well-developed characters, relationships, and challenges. The epilogue leaves readers on a cliffhanger, nicely setting up a sequel. There is a hint of Japanese influence throughout, seen in the names of towns and people, like Okayama or Isao, and foods, like yuzu. Eva has straight, black hair and brown eyes, and she tans in the sun.

Bewitching—a must-read for fantasy lovers. (Fantasy. 8-12)

OVER IN THE WOODLAND

A Mythological Counting Journey

by Nicole & Abreu, Shar

Familius (32 pp.)

$16.99 | Aug. 4, 2020

978-1-64170-241-6

Snuggle up to savor the familiar and the fantastical.

As day dawns, a mother griffin sends out her pride to protect the Woodland. “Guard,” said the mother. “We will guard every home.” So her young griffins flew where the mythic creatures roam.” Each verse introduces a new mythological
I’ve learned to read picture books three times.

The first was the way many of us do, cuddled next to my mother as she read aloud. Decades later, I have vivid memories of the books we held together: *Snowy Day* (Viking, 1962), *Where the Wild Things Are* (Harper & Row, 1963), *Corduroy* (Viking, 1968).

The second was under the tutelage of Caroline Barnett, an early mentor at my first professional librarian job at the Memphis–Shelby County, Tennessee, library system. If you hold the book open in front of your torso and read upside down, she told me, the children will stay engaged. It was magic. I remember those books, too: *Go Away, Big Green Monster!*, by Ed Emberley (Little, Brown, 1993); *Freight Train*, by Donald Crews (Greenwillow, 1978); *Pretend You’re a Cat*, by Jeanne Marzollo and illustrated by Jerry Pinkney (Dial, 1990).

The third time was with my own daughter, snuggling in our special reading chair. There are too many books to enumerate, but I remember *Pat-a-Cake*, by Tony Kenyon (Candlewick, 1998), a board book she gummed so energetically she wore little semicircles in the edges of all the pages; *The Wheels on the Bus*, by Paul O. Zelinsky (Dutton, 1990), a pop-up book whose moving parts, miraculously, lasted through countless trips “all through the town”; *The Genie in the Jar*, by Nikki Giovanni and illustrated by Chris Raschka (Henry Holt, 1996), a book she pulled out of our bag night after night—she cried when we had to return it. Letting her take the lead and direct the experience allowed me to see the books through her eyes.

Each of these reading experiences was intensely physical, the object as important as the pictures and words. The librarian or teacher reading to a group chooses a book all the children in the room will be able to see, one with pages that turn easily and, crucially, type that’s big enough to be read upside down. The adult caregiver sharing a cozy one-on-one read gives the child the opportunity to touch the pages, leaf through to recall an important detail, run a marveling finger over a word set in a flashy display type.

But what happens when you can’t get the physical books? Unsurprisingly, digital borrowing from libraries is way up with buildings closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. I suspect that when the numbers are in, we will see surges in individual digital purchases of children’s books as well. Fundamentally, this is a win: Children are still getting books. But it is also a tremendous loss, as picture books are designed to be read physically, not with an eye to optimization for screen reading. Leaving aside the fundamental difference in feel between a print book and an electronic device, the adjustments necessary to fit a book onto a screen—be it desktop, laptop, or tablet—result in a degraded aesthetic experience. My library’s digital version of the ebullient *Bear Came Along*, by Richard T. Morris and illustrated by LeUyen Pham (Little, Brown, 2019), splits the double-page spreads so that they are seen sequentially, in separate views, rather than all at once, as intended. *Stop! Bot!*, by James Yang (Viking 2019), has an unusual trim so that, when closed, it echoes the proportions of the skyscraper the titular bot slowly ascends over the course of the story. Its atypical proportions allow interior double-page spreads to appear in a single screen view, but the gutter has, unsettlingly, disappeared, and the simulated page turns hinge at the far left of the screen rather than the middle.

A picture book that captivates a child so much that they repeatedly cry, “Again!” is the result of profound care and intention on the part of author, illustrator, and publisher. Can a digital version do the same? I desperately hope that as we look past this time to the “new normal,” physical picture books are part of it.

Vicky Smith is the children’s editor.
Readers willing to suspend disbelief will enjoy rooting for Callie and her new friends.

**THE CASSANDRA CURSE**

Acevedo, Chantel
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (368 pp.)
$16.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-06-294769-7
Series: Muse Squad, 1

Callie decides whether to accept the role of one of the nine Muses in this duology opener.

Weird things start happening to and around Miami sixth grader Calliope Martinez-Silva, but when she crawls under her bed and then finds herself in London, that takes the cake. Callie discovers she’s been chosen to fulfill the role of Muse of Epic Poetry. It’s Callie’s job to inspire people, especially Fated Ones who have the potential to make a great impact on the world. Using the past tense, Callie chronicles her journey navigating her muse powers, getting to know the other new kid muses, protecting a Fated One at her school, and managing big changes with family and friends. The four 11-year-olds who make up the Muse Squad have distinct personalities and hail from around the world; in addition to Cuban American Callie, there’s Mela, an Indian girl from New Delhi, Nia, a black girl from Chicago, and Thalia, a white girl from London. Strangely, the adult muses put great responsibility on the Muse Squad, who receive minimal training before being expected to perform difficult tasks. The messages the narrative sends sometimes seem confused, when not downright contradictory. Readers willing to suspend disbelief and overlook these weaknesses will enjoy rooting for Callie and her new friends. Callie describes herself as “chubby,” so it’s too bad the cover illustration does not reflect a plus-size protagonist.

*Flawed but fun.* (Fantasy. 9-12)
Beginning with the jacket art, Barroux expertly propels readers through this fast-paced picture book.

THE RUN

WHAT’S THE WEATHER?
Arbordale
Arbordale (32 pp.)
$17.95 | $9.95 paper | Sep. 10, 2020
978-1-64351-820-6
978-1-64351-827-5 paper
Series: What, Why or Where

“Weather is all around us”—look around; what do you see?

This survey of weather trends and phenomena uses observations and prompts to boost children's critical-thinking skills. Loose topics covered include temperatures, cloud types, wind, precipitation, and severe weather. For the most part, the United States-centric text is focused and minimal, but in a couple of instances the amount of information offered jumps to severely overload spreads. A strong participatory element dominates, as young readers are encouraged to consult the pictures or their personal environments to consider such prompts as, “Describe what you see in the sky around you.” The book also applies discussions to daily life through questions referencing the different kinds of activities and clothes appropriate for different weather. Such are distinguishable from the descriptive text only through italicization, blurring the distinction. Stock photographs featuring children of multiple racial presentations dominate the pages, providing strong visual representations of discussed topics but likely garnering little investment from readers. Backmatter includes additional activities for temperature and cloud observations, definitions of key concepts (including some not addressed in the main text), a cloud picture chart, as well as a discussion and accompanying pop-quiz questions on the differences between weather, climate, and seasons (with answers at the bottom of the page). A Spanish edition publishes simultaneously in paperback only.

The book’s uneven structure makes for bumpy sailing through these self-directed waters. (Informational picture book 3-7) (Cómo está el tiempo? 978-1-64351-814-3)

THE RUN
Barroux
Illus. by the author
Aladdin (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-5344-0886-9

A metafictive, mystery-and-potty-book mashup that actually...works!

Beginning with the jacket art, Barroux expertly propels readers through this fast-paced picture book. The cover shows a group of animals crowded at the spine as a very young child runs to the right, compelling readers to open the book. Inside, pacing is akin to Sue Williams and Julie Vivas' I Wont Walking (1990) or one of Jan Brett’s cumulative stories, with a guessing game at each page turn. Kicking things off, a rhino runs across the verso copyright page following a creature that’s barely visible at the recto title page’s edge. Only a webbed foot and black wing

Alya and the Three Cats
Aminatou Hachimi
Illus. by Fidawi, Maya
Trans. by Penn, Nathaniel
CrackBoom! Books (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Jun. 16, 2020
978-2-89802-236-4

Cats Minouche, Pasha, and Amir share a home with Myriam and Sami, who are expecting a new baby.

Black Pasha looks serious and “regal”; gray tiger Minouche is shy, possibly because she was rescued from the streets; and Siamese Amir is interested in everything. They play and lounge around all day in the rooms and around the courtyard of the traditional Arab house where they live. Middle Eastern design is ambient around them, in furniture, decorations, and the family’s clothes. Slowly, the cats’ favorite place to snuggle, Myriam’s belly, starts to expand. One day, it even moves! After their guardians disappear for a few days and come back with a pretty basket, the three cats are super curious. What could be inside?

In one particularly comical spread, a curious Amir stands on the keyhole into the room where Myriam has taken the basket. The door is finally opened, a close-up painting of the pets looking dubiously at two pudgy feet clearly communicates how they are feeling about the newcomer. Grandma reassures them: “Say hello to Alya....Myriam will take care of you and the baby too. To love is to share.” The cats remain nervous but eventually grow “calm and confident again,” and even find new pastimes that include the baby in their “life full of love and tenderness.”

A delightful addition to the new-baby shelf. (Picture book 2-4)

require Josh to use a wheelchair, Jadran must reside full-time at his special school. Vowing to stay together, Jadran and Josh embark on a daring road trip to release the crane, and Josh learns that Jadran understands more than anyone realized—including the circumstances of their father’s departure. In a thought-provoking role reversal, Jadran becomes a caregiver, and Josh is treated as if he “could no longer answer for [himself].” Unfortunately, the depiction of a disabled character as an eternal child—a pernicious stereotype—prevails here. Despite Jadran’s unique experiences and growing self-assertion, Josh still views him as his little brother at heart; Jadran himself is a heartstrings-yanking plot device. Van der Linden’s black-and-white double-page illustrations introduce each of the book’s multiple parts. Though characters’ races default to white, naming conventions cue Murad and Yasmin as Middle Eastern.

Patronizing depictions of cognitive disability render this portrait of brotherly love disappointingly uneven. (Fiction 8-12)
MYSTERY ADVENTURES IN THE WORLD OF NATURE
A Middle Grade Series by Susan Yaruta-Young

The Great Snapping Turtle Adventure
A Mom's Choice Awards (R) Honoree

"Yaruta-Young tells a good story, and the descriptions of the Eastern Shore steal every scene."
—Kirkus Reviews

Let's Make Tracks: A Christmas Story

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—Midwest Book Review

Only the Wild Goose Knows

When Will It Happen?

"...compellingly realistic and absorbing..."
—Midwest Book Review

Who’s Been Stealing Grandpa’s Fish?

Wonder Lands Are Calling

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appear there, acting as a visual page-turner speeding up progress to the main text. There appears a trio of webbed-footed, black-winged penguins running toward the gutter. On the facing recto, a tufted yellow tail leads to the next page turn under a yellow speech balloon reading “Hello? Hello?” The speaker remains offstage for several spreads, continually asking why the animals are running. Are they being chased? In a race? Pursuing a special treat? Finally, a large, red speech balloon reads “STOP”—and the page turn reveals the child from the book’s cover seated on a toilet and reading a book. This book, in fact. But why were the animals running? Knocks on the bathroom door hold the answer: “WE WANT TO PEE!” cry the animals when the child, who appears white, opens the door.

Run to pick up this one. (Picture book, 3-6)

MOONBEAMS
A Lullaby of the Phases of the Moon
Bausum, Ann
Illus. by Han, Kyung Eun
Little Bee (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 23, 2020
978-1-4998-1033-2

Based loosely on the lullaby that begins, “I see the moon, and the moon sees me,” this book takes young readers on a journey around the world while following the phases of the moon.

From the plains of Mongolia to the Taj Mahal in India to a ship on an unnamed sea, the rhyming text simultaneously describes the status of the moon and the people and places it shines over. The words are a dialogue, alternating between a child asking the moon a question and the moon’s answers. Each call-and-response pairing is presented on a separate double-page spread and is accompanied by illustrations that show the moon phase described. While informative, the text is often clunky and lacks a logical flow. For example, it is unclear why the author mentions specific destinations in Europe and Asia and leaves other locations up to readers’ imaginations. Furthermore, the presentation can be confusing for a picture-book audience. At one point, for instance, the text mentions that what appears to be a half-moon is actually a quarter moon, but this mystifying statement is explained only in the backmatter. Where the book truly shines is in its visuals: Han masterfully uses a rich, dark palette to create pictures full of depth and life; in particular, the book’s two wordless spreads use light brilliantly. The illustrations include characters with a variety of hair textures and skin tones. The backmatter includes a general note on the moon, a glossary, and a description of the phases with accompanying illustrations; all is well written and fascinating for young readers.

A mixed bag: disappointing text but stunning illustrations. (Picture book, 3-6)

Refusing to soft-pedal hard issues, the novel speaks with an astringent honesty, at once heartbreaking and hopeful.

FIGHTING WORDS

Bradley, Kimberly Brubaker
Dial (56 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-1-9848-1568-2

Her beloved older sister has always kept Della safe; now that both are secure in foster care, why is Suki pushing her away?

Della, 10, barely remembers their mom. For five years after the meth-cooking incident that got her incarcerated in a Kansas penitentiary, the girls lived with her predatory boyfriend, Clifton. (He’s now in jail awaiting trial thanks to Suki’s quick thinking.) With their plainspoken foster mother, Francine, providing needed stability, Suki, 16, lands a part-time job, and Della makes friends. Far behind academically, Della’s advanced in reading predatory behavior. Her friends have been taught to ignore boys’ physical bullying, so they’re shocked when Della fights back at school. (She’s punished but undeterred.) Suki appears to thrive until she learns her “permanency plan” to achieve independence at 18 and gain custody of Della is unworkable. As Suki unravels, Francine’s urgent requests to arrange counseling for the girls go unheeded, with near-catastrophic results. The focus throughout, rightly, is on the aftermath of abuse, the content accessible to middle-grade readers but not graphically conveyed. Believable and immensely appealing, Suki, Francine, and especially Della (all are white, though Della is a bit “browner” than Suki) light up what might have been an unremittingly bleak story: Charting a path to whole-ness is hard enough; the human roadblocks they encounter make it nearly insurmountable. Readers will root for these sisters along every step of their daunting journey.

Refusing to soft-pedal hard issues, the novel speaks with an astringent honesty, at once heartbreaking and hopeful. (author’s note) (Fiction, 9-13)

THE WORRY (LESS) BOOK
Feel Strong, Find Calm, and Tame Your Anxiety!
Brian, Rachel
Illus. by the author
Little, Brown (64 pp.)
$15.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-316-49519-6

A comic-book primer on anxiety.

In this follow-up to the remarkable Consent (For Kids!) (2019), a variety of cartoon characters learn what anxiety is, how it can affect the body and mind, and how to manage or even overcome it. Anxiety is depicted as a lumpy gray blob, like unappetizing oatmeal with eyes and the occasional limb, but isn’t demonized. At first readers learn that “Anxiety can alert us to a threat,” as the blob helpfully yells, “Look out!” while pointing at a sign labeled “Danger.” Brian continues: “But it can also feel uncomfortable,”
as a child gets stuck in the blob. The brain also shows up as a character, a strangely endearing figure that talks back but can also be fooled. This entertaining, appealing, and friendly guide will be immensely helpful for readers of all ages, and it succeeds in being simple, direct, and clear without a hint of condescension. In the grayscale art with pops of yellow, child characters are depicted with various skin tones and hairstyles; one uses a wheelchair. Brian encourages readers to work hard to confront their anxieties, without assigning blame or fault if they can't, and the concrete, practical tips offered are invaluable. Despite the serious topic, it's also consistently funny, with fears both familiar and ridiculous presented in similarly arch tones.

Excellent and absolutely necessary. (Graphic nonfiction. 6-10)

WILD SYMPHONY
Brown, Dan
Illus. by Batori, Susan
Rodale Kids (44 pp.)
$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-593-12384-3
978-0-593-12385-0 PLB

Through 20 short poems, Maestro Mouse invites readers to meet a series of animals who have lessons to impart and a symphony to perform.

Brown, author of The DaVinci Code (2003) and other wildly popular titles for adults, here offers young listeners a poetry collection accompanied by music: a “symphony” performed, for readers equipped with an audio device and an internet connection, by the Zagreb Festival Orchestra. From the introduction of the conductor and the opening “Woodbird Welcome” to the closing “Cricket Lullaby,” the writer/composer uses poems made of three to eight rhyming couplets, each line with four strong beats, to introduce the animals who will be revealed in the final double
Lauren Castillo wowed the picture-book world with her illustrations for Emily Jenkins’ *What Happens on Wednesdays* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007). Since then she has illustrated over a dozen books, some she’s also written, such as her Caldecott Honor-winning *Nana in the City* (Clarion, 2014), and many with text by others, including the 2019 Kirkus Prize finalist *Imagine*, by former U.S. Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera (Candlewick, 2018). With *Our Friend Hedgehog: The Story of Us* (Knopf, May 5), Castillo steps away from picture books—or does she?—with a heavily illustrated chapter book about Hedgehog, who lives on an island in the middle of a river with her friend, Mutty, a white dog with “a chocolate-brown stitched nose.” One wild night, a storm picks Mutty up and swirls him away, launching Hedgehog on a quest that tests her courage and wins her friends she never imagined. Castillo spoke with me by phone from her home in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where she has put down roots after a peripatetic spell that involved not one, but two transcontinental moves.

You’ve made such a name for yourself as an illustrator and a creator of picture books. Where did the impulse to write a novel come from?

The character [of Hedgehog] came first. While I was bouncing around from place to place, I was drawing her kind of as myself and how I was making my way. And so she became my little alter ego character.

I had never developed a character first. My other picture books started out with an idea. So for Hedgehog it was like, “Oh, there’s this character and I don’t know what to do with her.” As she sat with me, I sat with her. I started to make the first dummy thinking that it would actually be a picture book. I sold it not actually knowing what the format of the story was going to be.

My editor, Katherine Harrison, was like, “Don’t put any limitations on yourself.” And so as we went back and forth with it, I realized that the language was less sparse than I usually write, because my picture books are supershort. And then as soon as [I heard] the words *chapter book*, I tensed up. Honestly, it was a little bit of a scary moment, because I was like, “Oh, I don’t write chapter books.” I had to let it evolve organically and I would work on it a little bit every day.

I’m so happy that I ended up going in that direction because I absolutely loved it. I had such a blast. It felt really good to say, “Hey, I can make it look like this.” But also I want these characters to live on in a series, and I’m working on the second one now.

I think that you could call it a really long picture book, because it has that critical interaction between text and illustrations.

I like hearing that. That’s the sensibility I carried to this. Whether I tried to force it or not, it was probably going to come out this way anyway. The reason that I really love that this is labeled as a book for early readers is that I definitely
had a little bit more difficulty as an early reader, and so I really relied on pictures, even in chapter books. Hopefully this is a book that beginning chapter-book readers will kind of cling to, and it’ll be a help for them as they’re moving on.

**Will we ever find out if Mutty is sentient or not, or are you leaving it up to readers to decide on their own?**

Yeah, it’s not said, just to let [kids] read into the character how they will. That’s specifically why I didn’t say “Hedgehog’s stuffed animal,” because that was truly Hedgehog’s only companion at first. And I didn’t want to downplay [that] at all. Also, Mutty is actually still my stuffed animal. We had to change him a little bit just so he would be his own character, but, yeah, Mutty very much was my comfort animal and, I guess, first best friend.

The other characters too. When I was developing them, I looked to what I knew around me. All the characters have a little bit of my own personality in them, but also Mole and Beaver are taken so much from my two dogs. And then my partner gets some of the qualities of Owl.

**Is there anything else you’d like to say about the book?**

I would like to say that it’s about friendship and bravery. But it’s also about making our own way in the world, finding our people. I liked that I was able to bring those pieces of my life journey into the story, so I hope it’ll continue that way. Hopefully my life doesn’t become too boring.
The vibrant illustrations in cool, deep blue hues capture the beauty of the natural world and lift the work up to near-mythical proportion.

**THE OCEAN CALLS**

Cho, Tina M.

Illus. by Snow, Jess X.

Kokila (48 pp.)

$17.99 | Aug. 4, 2020

978-1-9848-1486-9

As the granddaughter of a haenyeo diver, young Dayeon yearns to learn this honorable trade from her grandmother.

On Jeju Island, at the southern end of the Korean peninsula, there lives a community of women called haenyeo who dive up to 30 meters underwater to gather shellfish. Without using any oxygen masks, the haenyeo divers harvest abalone, octopuses, and sea urchins by hand. The tradition is considered an Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO, and the women who do this work are described as “indigenous marine biologists.” Many of them are over 70 years old. Dayeon understands the dangers involved with diving. “What if I can’t breathe? What if a shark comes? What if I can’t escape?” The familial determination that has been handed down along with diving skills helps her relax and reach the treasures at the bottom of the sea. The vibrant illustrations in cool, deep blue hues, punctuated by ochers and brick reds, capture the beauty of the natural world and lift the work up to near-mythical proportions, befitting Dayeon’s perception that they are mermaids. The captivating endnotes provide more information on the tradition, with mesmerizing quotes from actual divers. In Cho and Snow’s celebration of this fascinating tradition, the risks and rewards are given only to the worthy—which takes practice, courage, and a grandmother’s love.

The sea, with equal parts danger and thrill, makes an exciting training ground for a young haenyeo diver. (Picture book. 5-9)

**TIME TO ROAR**

Cole, Olivia A.

Illus. by Gibson, Jessica

Bloomsbury (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020

978-1-4476-0370-1

There’s a time to speak softly—and a time to speak out.

Sasha the bear is peaceable, and like any good bear, she enjoys a good nap. And what better place for a bear to slumber than a serene, grassy meadow in a vibrant forest? Unfortunately, when “great yellow beasts [tear] into the meadow,” Sasha and the other animals fear their home and tranquility might be destroyed. Can the animals save the day? Sasha offers to roar at them, but the animals decide to try other strategies. The bluebird sings to the beasts, which children will of course recognize as bulldozers and diggers; the rabbit tries to distract them by thumping the ground; the deer tries to lead them away from the forest. All is to no avail—the beasts are making too much noise to pay attention. But Sasha’s anger rises, and she approaches the beasts to roar, “fill[ing] the meadow with her bellow,” driving the beasts away. Cole delivers an environmental tale that is sweet, cheerful, and empowering—if simplistic—offering a meaningful message in just the right language for young listeners and learners. Gibson’s use of color and light to distinguish the quiet from the bold helps Cole’s story when it’s time for Sasha to deliver her big moment.

Should spark budding activists and little bears everywhere. (Picture book. 4-8)

**CALL ME FLOY**

Cooke, Joanna

Yosemite Conservancy (192 pp.)

$17.99 | May 12, 2020

978-1-930238-99-2

A young girl dreams of climbing mountains but must defy expectations to do so.

Having grown up in Yosemite, 11-year-old Floy now feels stifled by the classroom walls and gray skies of San Francisco, where her family was forced to move some months earlier. But all that changes when family decisions lead her back to Yosemite. Once she arrives, Floy feels more alive than ever, determined to summit Half Dome. But society’s expectations for a “young lady” in 1876 threaten that goal. Floy must either convince her father to take her along on one of his expeditions or scale it alone. Based on the life of Florence Hutchings, the first European American born in Yosemite, the story offers encouragement on its surface for children to follow their dreams. However, the premise itself—a white girl bucking conventions—limits its readership. While Floy lives fully, setting lofty goals beyond her station, Native character Sally Ann exists merely to serve; unlike Floy’s, her life is defined by the time “before,” and her dreams are likewise tied to tradition. Other moments prove problematic as well. Although describing Yosemite as a “sublime land” and Floy as a “pilgrim” might reflect white sentiments of the time, without clear counterbalances it reinforces the mythic principle of Manifest Destiny. And when Floy realizes that a changing world means “there will no longer be a place” for Sally Ann and her family, unacknowledged white privilege allows her to dismiss the uncomfortable feelings she experiences and avoid confronting truth.

Struggles to reach the summit. (hiking tips, author’s note) (Historical fiction. 8-12)
NEW from What on Earth Books
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Age range: 6-10

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Patrick Skippworth
Illustrated by NichoIiS Stevenson
“The accomplished, striking, and vividly colored two-page spreads that cunningly work each word into the overall design of an illustration are the real draw.”
—Kirkus Reviews
Format: Hardcover
Extent: 27 pages
Size: 6 3/8 x 9 1/4 inches
Pub date: May 5, 2020
ISBN: 978-1-902022-1-6
Age range: 6-11

Every Second
100 Lightning Strikes, 5,000 Scoops of Ice Cream, 200,000 Text Messages, 1 Million Gallons of Cow Burps... and Other Incredible Things That Happen Each Second Around the World
Written and illustrated by Bruno Gibert
“Graphically stylish exploration of what might happen in a second.”
—Kirkus Reviews
Format: Hardcover
Extent: 56 pages
Size: 7 1/4 x 10 1/2 inches
Pub date: May 5, 2020
ISBN: 978-1-902022-0-3
Age range: 5-10

Amazing Islands
100+ Places That Will Boggle Your Mind
Sabrina Weiss
Illustrated by Kerry Hyndman
“Curious kids may enjoy browsing through this encyclopaedia island facts.”
—Kirkus Reviews
Price: U.S. $24.00 / CAN $32.50
Format: Hardcover
Extent: 64 pages
Size: 10 1/2 x 11 inches
Pub date: June 2, 2020
ISBN: 978-1-902022-2-6
Age range: 7-11
A ghost haunting prompts a Chicago girl to investigate her local history.

Seventh grader Claire loves the predictability of science while her father relishes the paranormal, running a ghost-tour business in Chicago. Their worlds collide when Claire must help out her father at the last minute, and a ghost boy not only becomes an unwanted passenger on the bus, but follows her home and around the city. Currie’s visceral descriptions of the boy’s haunting—scratching behind walls, dripping water, icy air, scrawled notes, and more—exude creepiness. Also scary to the middle schooler is losing Casley, her best friend and science fair partner, to Emily, the new girl in school who’s preoccupied with makeup. When Claire can no longer keep the ghost a secret, she recruits her older brother, along with Casley and Emily, to help her discover his identity. As she tries to apply the scientific method to the paranormal mystery, Claire realizes as well that there’s a human story behind the supernatural events.

Mary Downing Hahn fans will enjoy this just-right blend of history and spooky. (author’s note) (Paranormal suspense. 10-13)
Inspire values that are especially important right now:

**LOVE, RESPECT, KINDNESS, and HELPING OUR NEIGHBORS.**

“A book that would have put a smile on Fred’s face.”
—Morgan Neville, director of *Won’t You Be My Neighbor?*

★ “Essential for storytime . . . and bedtime snuggles in neighborhoods everywhere.”—*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred Review

★ “Gorgeous.”—*Booklist*, Starred Review

★ “Open, affectionate . . . in keeping with Rogers’s quiet strength and generous heart.”—*Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review

★ “[A] warm, respectful tribute to Fred Rogers.”
—*School Library Journal*, Starred Review

Share the kindness of the beloved

**MISTER ROGERS**

Hello, Neighbor!
*The Kind and Caring World of Mister Rogers*
by Caldecott Medalist
MATTHEW CORDELL

For more books that support emotional wellness and free resources visit HolidayHouse.com/Holiday-House-Resources

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NEAL PORTER BOOKS
HOLIDAY HOUSE
HolidayHouse.com @HolidayHouseBks
A gripping, thought-provoking adventure to read and discuss.

THE LONGEST NIGHT OF CHARLIE NOON

Eleven-year-old Charlie and her friend Dizzy set off for an afternoon, searching for “Old Crony,” who left the secret messages Dizzy found in the woods—or so their classmate Johnny Baines has claimed. Instead, frightened by Johnny’s masquerade as a bloodied monster, they run blindly into the trees. Shortly, all three are lost in what is suddenly a trackless, endless forest amid a fearsome storm. Using science theories about time, edges of time dissolve.

A girl in a U.S. military family navigates the days and months following Sept. 11, 2001.

Tennessee is only the most recent place that seventh grader Abbey has lived: her dad’s an Army sergeant, and his career means the family has moved frequently. DuBois uses her first-person narration, skilfully conveying her protagonist’s pained and halting thoughts, occasionally integrating a lone, subtly meaningful rhyme. Themes weave loosely: Abbey’s first period (arriving “like a punch to the gut / like a shove in the girls’ room”); the terrorist attacks; grieving a beloved aunt, lost on the 86th floor of a New York tower, the entire building “also missing”; sublime peer friendship and run-of-the-mill peer bullying; Abbey’s artwork; longing for roots. As Dad deploys to Afghanistan, the stress and suffering of military families are written with breadth and warmth. Potential suffering of humans on the other side of that war receives only one dubious and dismissive mention, however. Abbey’s Muslim, Kurdish American classmate, Jiman, is kind and artistic, and Abbey eventually befriends her. However, Jiman and her family might be the only characters of color in this small Tennessee town, and Jiman is portrayed as so confident, dignified, invulnerable, and inscrutable—rarely reacting even when facing racism and Islamophobia—that she exists mostly for Abbey’s (and readers’) edification.

A sensitive portrayal of art and roots pulled under by a narrow cultural perspective. (author’s note) (Verse fiction. 10-13)

Crisp, full-color photographs illustrate sparsely worded comparisons of randomly selected objects and ideas.

The opening page states: “Everything you will see in these pages is shown at its real-life size: it’s a life-size book.” The word “almost” should have begun the sentence, but most viewers will understand and forgive two long-distance shots. The first spread—as in most others—is not the simple size comparison implied by the cover art. A snail has moved across a piece of bright green graph paper, the text explaining that it took the snail two minutes to travel the 10-inch trail. (Most, but not all, English measurements are followed by metric equivalents.) It is a hand squeezing an udder leads to a foldout showing some of all kinds of measurements in our wide world. A vivid image of a changing lineup of deciduous leaves) to silly (a musical (the observation that “time can be measured in colors” accompanies a changing lineup of deciduous leaves) to silly (a Saint Bernard’s owner is about to step into a one-pound “surprise gift”). Wry commentary adds to the fun while backmatter lays bare the tenacity and hard work required to achieve a goal.

A lighthearted introduction to the Korean martial art—this lively kitty entertains. (glossary) (Picture book 4-7)

THE PLACES WE SLEEP

DuBois, Caroline Brooks

Holiday House (272 pp.)

$16.99 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-0-8234-4421-2

A girl in a U.S. military family navigates the days and months following Sept. 11, 2001.

Tennessee is only the most recent place that seventh grader Abbey has lived: her dad’s an Army sergeant, and his career means the family has moved frequently. DuBois uses free verse for Abbey’s first-person narration, skilfully conveying her protagonist’s pained and halting thoughts, occasionally integrating a lone, subtly meaningful rhyme. Themes weave loosely: Abbey’s first period (arriving “like a punch to the gut / like a shove in the girls’ room”); the terrorist attacks; grieving a beloved aunt, lost on the 86th floor of a New York tower, the entire building “also missing”; sublime peer friendship and run-of-the-mill peer bullying; Abbey’s artwork; longing for roots. As Dad deploys to Afghanistan, the stress and suffering of military families are written with breadth and warmth. Potential suffering of humans on the other side of that war receives only one dubious and dismissive mention, however. Abbey’s Muslim, Kurdish American classmate, Jiman, is kind and artistic, and Abbey eventually befriends her. However, Jiman and her family might be the only characters of color in this small Tennessee town, and Jiman is portrayed as so confident, dignified, invulnerable, and inscrutable—rarely reacting even when facing racism and Islamophobia—that she exists mostly for Abbey’s (and readers’) edification.

A sensitive portrayal of art and roots pulled under by a narrow cultural perspective. (author’s note) (Verse fiction. 10-13)

THE LONGEST NIGHT OF CHARLIE NOON

Edge, Christopher

Delacorte (176 pp.)

978-0-593-17308-4
978-0-593-17309-1 PLB

Lost in the woods beyond their English village, three schoolmates spend a terrifying night during which the boundaries of time dissolve.

A gripping, thought-provoking adventure to read and discuss.

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WHERE HAPPINESS BEGINS
Eland, Eva
Illus. by the author
Random House (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-0-593-12770-4

Sometimes Happiness skips right in step with your stride; other times it’s hard to locate or hold onto.

Readers find Happiness within this winning book’s covers, where it takes shape as a cheery neon pink, amorphous figure (with stumpy appendages and a funny little twisty topknot). Bright cartoon illustrations show a pale child in T-shirt and slacks engaging Happiness in myriad (literal) ways. Happiness hula-hoops, reads, marches, and eats ice cream with the youngster; it also gets lost in a dark forest, runs away, and nods off to sleep. The narrator, a steady and soothing voice, sums up what’s so very hard to understand about Happiness. “You can try to understand it, collect it, or protect it. / You can try to catch it….But most of the time Happiness appears to have a will of its own.” Vivid, straightforward vignettes are done in a springtime palette on spacious cloud-white backdrops with nary a black line in sight. They succinctly illustrate just how exhilarating, elusive, and ephemeral Happiness can be. A powerful spread of the child riding out mammoth waves in a small boat aptly describes the bravery and resolve required to submit to overwhelming feelings and see them through. A culminating image of the sleeping child curled in bed, cuddling Happiness close with lemony morning light filling the room, provides great comfort.

A playful, poignant, and wonderfully reassuring book for children as they encounter emotional hills and valleys. (Picture book. 4-10)

STORM DOG
Elliott, L.M.
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (240 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-0-06-243000-7

Ariel, smart but a bit plain, is her mother’s constant disappointment.

She can’t begin to reach the bar set by her gorgeous, blonde older sister, Gloria. Their mother has big Hollywood plans for Gloria, and Ariel is, sadly, just in the way. So when she discovers a lost and frantic German shepherd she calls Duke and meets Staff Sgt. Josephina Martinez, a former K-9 handler who’s retired to a lonely cabin in the Blue Ridge Mountains to recover from her PTSD, they become more than just solace to the frustrated eighth grader. Ariel finally has a supportive adult in her life, and she has a mission: to help Duke overcome his fears. Since Gloria has been selected to be one of the princesses of the huge annual parade, Ariel decides to train Duke to dance among the marchers, at first hoping to upstage Gloria but later because she’s determined to have pride in her own and Duke’s abilities. Then she acquires six other dogs from the local animal shelter—not quite stolen, but nearly so. All of this combines to create a triumphant parade performance but also a major public confrontation with her nasty mother and sister. Ariel’s narration initially feels more authorial than young teen, but later in the tale she hits a more believable stride. With the exception of Ariel, characters seem rather predictable. Ariel and her family are white; Sgt. Josie is Puerto Rican.

An entertaining tale of angst, good dogs, and satisfying achievement. (author’s note) (Fiction. 10-14)

WHAT IF A FISH
Fajardo, Anika
Simon & Schuster (240 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-1-5344-4983-1

It is the summer before sixth grade, and Eddie Aguado’s life is taking several unexpected turns.

Eddie’s best friend has moved away; he’s looking forward to the arrival of his older half brother from Colombia; and he’s just partnered with a new girl in town to enter a fishing competition. Neither one of them can fish, but Eddie is hoping his brother, Big Eddie, will teach him. Eddie’s biracial. His Colombian father died when he was little and he hardly remembers him now, but he has his dad’s black hair and brown eyes (his mom is white), and his skin is “the color of coffee ice cream.” Because of his looks he’s asked where he’s from, when all he’s ever known is Minneapolis, and he wonders if he can be Colombian if he doesn’t speak Spanish. Summer suddenly changes when Big Eddie announces he’s not coming because his abuela
is very sick and asks if Little Eddie can come to Cartagena instead. Though she’s not his abuela, she would like to meet him. It is this monthlong stay in a new environment, culture, and language followed by his subsequent return to Minnesota that helps Eddie come to an understanding of family, friendship, and identity. It all unspools in Eddie’s perceptive present-tense narration, which is both poetic and believable.

Multilayered and convincing, the book will have readers rooting for its sweet and smart protagonist. (Fiction. 9-12)

THE BARNABUS PROJECT
Fan, Terry & Fan, Eric with Fan, Devin
Illus. by the authors
Tundra (72 pp.)
$18.99  |  Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-7352-6326-0

This epic tale of escape and liberation, set in a clandestine underground lab producing genetically engineered Perfect Pets, stars courageous Barnabus, half mouse, half elephant.

Along with a collection of creatures, Barnabus is a Failed Project, dubiously destined, according to cockroach pal Pip, to be “recycled.” Barnabus and his roommates—Light-Up Lois, Mushroom Sloth, and others—spend banal days imprisoned in bell jars, fed, poked and prodded by the Green Rubber Suits. With their fates sealed, Barnabus avows, “We need to escape!” Discovering that his elephantine trumpeting can break glass, Barnabus frees the others. The brave misfits, pursued by their creators and captors, escape through venting, emerging into another lab. The band works together to free a fellow captive, and identity. It all unspools in Eddie’s perceptive present-tense narration, which is both poetic and believable.

Multilayered and convincing, the book will have readers rooting for its sweet and smart protagonist. (Fiction. 9-12)

In a fairy-tale kingdom full of all types of anthropomorphic animals, Siamese cat Arietta works in the garden and orchard she inherited from her grandparents, selling the flowers and fruit weekly at the castle market. In order to earn extra money for seeds, Arietta has decided to sell her grandfather’s violin, but just as she is carrying it into the store, she meets Princess Cassia, a rabbit. Music lover Cassia mistakenly supposes Arietta is a musician, and her interest changes Arietta’s mind about selling the instrument. When they meet again, Princess Cassia invites Arietta to perform at her birthday party in two months’ time. Arietta can’t say no, but there is a problem: She doesn’t play. Her friend Emily, a sheep, offers to teach her, and they find she has a natural talent. Her newfound love of music causes her to neglect her garden, and soon she has no flowers to sell. Can she learn her song so as not to disappoint the princess and keep her garden (and livelihood) alive? Farina’s endearing story about doing what you love never preach- es, and her pastel-hued artwork (colored by Fortson) will catch the eyes of manga lovers. The pudgy animals with giant, sparkling eyes are expressive and endearing.

This sweet graphic offering will entertain and warm hearts. (Graphic fantasy. 7-11)

V IS FOR VOTING
Farrell, Kate
Illus. by Kubwuald, Caitlin
Henry Holt (40 pp.)
$18.99  |  Jul. 21, 2020
978-1-250-23125-3

An alphabet picture book that presents the ideal of a democratic society.

Seeing its standard ABC formula—“A is for...” etc.—and a rhyming text, readers may be inclined to think that nothing substantial is in the offering. They would be wrong. If ever an alphabet book packed a punch, this one is it. Leaving no effort to empower unturned, the text goes from, well, A to Z with an energetic propulsion that will educate readers to become informed, engaged citizens. Exhortations (“Z is for zeal. Please bring yours!”), nods to bastions of a democratic society (“F for a free press to find facts and share”), and celebrations of diversity (“D is for difference—our strength and our beauty”) share space with history (“S is for suffrage”) and critical thinking (“R is for represent. They work for me!”). They all combine to deliver a timely message of citizen empowerment. This lively activist theme is visually echoed by bold, full-color illustrations depicting a diversity of humans whose skin colors range from white to all shades of brown and include, prominently and frequently, a woman in a hijab. The people in the illustrations often face directly forward, engaging—all almost confronting—readers. Many historical figures are illustrated, and the backmatter both names them and encourages readers to learn more on their own. Backmatter also gives suggestions to young readers for contributing to voter empowerment and includes a voting rights timeline.

Forceful and exhilarating. (Informational picture book. 5-10)
A compelling speculative premise helmed by a realistic female protagonist.

**THE LAST LIE**

**AND THAT’S THE TOOTH**

**LITTLE TAD GROWS UP**

Guess each animal from facts about their teeth combined with hints about their behavior, location, or anatomy.

A large white speech bubble appears on each recto page, mostly obscuring a photo of an animal. A statement about that animal’s teeth (or lack thereof, in the cases of anteaters and humpback whales) is followed by a hint about the animal’s traits to facilitate guessing. For example, “You can tell how old I am by the growth rings on my teeth. I am… / Hint: I live in water and am smart and social.” Bits of animals visible around the speech bubble also offer some clues. Some kids may have the answer; many young children will not. The page turn reveals a full-page photo, the animal’s name (dolphin, in this case) in large type, and a callout box with facts about its dental characteristics: “Bottlenose dolphins only get one set of teeth for their entire lives. They use their teeth to catch their food, and then they swallow it whole.” The book matter-of-factly introduces information about 11 land and sea animals as well as a human representative, a young child with Asian features. Backmatter defines herbivores, carnivores, and omnivores along with a short guessing game about these categories and presents a diagram of the human mouth with descriptions of its teeth. The full-color stock photos vary in quality.

**A useful title on a kid-friendly topic.** *Informational picture book. 5-7*

**THE LAST LIE**

Forde continues the post-apocalyptic adventure begun in *The List* (2017) with a look at the way that struggles for what is right and who wields power collide in a new world order. Now, long after the world-changing global warming event remembered as the Melting, young Letta, wordsmith of the survivors in her part of the world, is caught up in the resistance against the established order of the surviving organized city, Ark. Amelia, the current leader of Ark, regards language as something to be controlled and used only by those in power. To that end, she has removed dozens of babies from their families and created a nursery where they will be raised without language. This dark experiment with raising feral children seems to offer homage to *The Giver*, Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Omelas*, and other worlds where safety and security are guaranteed at the price of something intrinsically human. As intriguingly ambitious as Forde’s idea is, it suffers somewhat in the extensive telling of Letta’s story of danger and flight, where often the peril results from Letta’s impulsive, believable adolescent impetuousness. Fortunately she is several times saved by Marlo, the friend she hopes will return her affection. A default white is presumed; markers of color, class, and language aren’t given.

**A compelling speculative premise helmed by a realistic female protagonist.** *Science fiction. 11-14*

**LITTLE TAD GROWS UP**

Tad loves life in the pond with his friends, playing underwater baseball and using his tail to defend against bullies. When the inevitable progress of a frog’s life cycle leads to his developing legs, he worries that he’s “turning into a monster.” When Aunt Salamander reassures him that he’s “just growing up,” the young amphibian grumps that he doesn’t want to. He mopes around, railing against the loss of his beloved tail and seething with jealousy around younger tadpoles. A sinister snake tries to gain his trust, agreeing that “Legs are useless,” and tries to lure him closer. Under threat, “Tad’s legs reacted naturally. With very little effort, he sprang high out of the water and landed beside the pond!” The illustrations, mostly of underwater scenes, are lovely, fluid and lush in a muted palette and populated with a variety of expressive aquatic creatures. Unfortunately, the story, translated into English from German, is encumbered by unnecessary detail, the prose is stilted, and the dialogue teeters between whiny and preachy. Children with an attachment to little green hoppers will enjoy the illustrations, but caregivers reading it aloud will wish for something better.

**This story about finding one’s legs doesn’t stand up.** *Picture book. 3-6*
Episodes are detailed and fast-paced, each one moving the tale forward.

THE ARTIFACT HUNTERS

Fox, Janet
Viking (384 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-0-451-47869-6

Potent, otherworldly, evil magic seeks domination, feeding on terror and upheaval in a time of war, while a Jewish refugee must find a way to counter it with some good magic of his own.

In 1942, Isaac’s parents send him from Nazi-occupied Prague to Rookskill Castle in Scotland, where he meets magical children and some strange creatures who are using their skills to help Britain win the war, first met in The Charmed Children of Rookskill Castle (2016). On his journey he finds hints that his long-held feeling of being different is true. Amazingly, before arriving at Rookskill, he meets his parents in another century and is given two artifacts, a time-travel watch, never to be relinquished, that will inform another century and is given two artifacts, an eternity knot and a similarly small-winged dragon watches covertly) make him a sidekick. But one day, as a runaway train hurtles toward town, besides, she is a small business owner, not a superhero in need of help. Rosie sails to the island and delivers a pep talk, concluding that the only difference between Rasmus and the others is his kind heart. As the pair play and celebrate, the other small-winged dragon asks to join. After some kite flying, the new pals say goodbye to Rosie, “a treasured [friend].” Another dragon watches with interest, hinting at another friendship. With soft edges and close perspective, Geddes’ pastel-hued illustrations sympathetically express Rasmus’ anger, sadness, and joy. However, Rasmus’ passivity offers little encouragement to similarly lonely readers. His friendship with Rosie remains uneven, and her pivotal ice-breaking risks implying that Rasmus wouldn’t have made his new friends without her—good thing she knows how to sail! Rosie is white.

Muddled messages overwhelm endearing illustrations in this friendship tale. (Picture book. 3-6)

WHERE THE DRAGONS LIVE

Geddes, Serena
Illus. by the author
Aladdin (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-4814-9876-0
Series: Rosie and Rasmus

The sequel to Rosie and Rasmus (2019) finds Rasmus, a small dragon with short wings, facing bullying and loneliness in his new home.

When Rasmus reaches “the island where the dragons live,” he receives a harsh welcome. In speech-balloon dialogue, much-bigger dragons mock his stature, small wings, and lack of horns, sneering “Keep on walking, baby monster.” His amusingly unsuccessful attempts to roar, kick rocks, and breathe fire (as a similarly small-winged dragon watches covertly) make him first sad, then angry. He fires off a note to Rosie, his human pal, denying their friendship because Rosie hasn’t visited. As in the previous book, Rasmus is primarily an object of Rosie’s help. Rosie sails to the island and delivers a pep talk, concluding that the only difference between Rasmus and the others is his kind heart. As the pair play and celebrate, the other small-winged dragon asks to join. After some kite flying, the new pals say goodbye to Rosie, “a treasured [friend].” Another dragon watches with interest, hinting at another friendship. With soft edges and close perspective, Geddes’ pastel-hued illustrations sympathetically express Rasmus’ anger, sadness, and joy. However, Rasmus’ passivity offers little encouragement to similarly lonely readers. His friendship with Rosie remains uneven, and her pivotal ice-breaking risks implying that Rasmus wouldn’t have made his new friends without her—good thing she knows how to sail! Rosie is white.

Muddled messages overwhelm endearing illustrations in this friendship tale. (Picture book. 3-6)

MAY SAVES THE DAY

Geb, Laura
Illus. by Lombardo, Serena
Capstone Editions (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Aug. 1, 2020
978-1-68446-102-8

May is a successful businesswoman who does not need a sidekick...until she does.

May, a brown-skinned girl with puffy hair, has a booming business called Word Saver, Inc. She fields calls to “save [the] day” in emergency situations, when she uses her letters to change words and neutralize threats. Angry bees heading for the playground? May dashes over with her “T” to turn them into beets. A snake in a classroom? May throws in a few letters to turn the snake into a sneaker. Her adoring fans love her, but Stu, a blond, white boy in a wheelchair, wants to be her sidekick. His skill is with a lasso, which May sees no use for, and besides, she is a small business owner, not a superhero in need of a sidekick. But one day, as a runaway train hurries toward town, May has an accident, and Stu arrives just in time to lasso the T, turning the TRAI...
Gibbons draws on years of experience introducing the natural world to very young readers and listeners to explain an important concept: animal migration. Using a wide variety of examples, she explains both the why and some theories about the how. After a brief introduction, she organizes her presentation topically: migration routes; migration in the sky, on land, and in the water; and finally, how people see and learn about migrations. Each colorful spread includes exposition in large font, definitions in a smaller font, and vignettes of many different species, each pictured on a relevant background (penguins on ice floes, reindeer in a snowy evergreen forest, zebras on grasslands, etc.). Most include hand-drawn maps of the globe showing species-specific migration paths. The animals are generally recognizable and always labeled. Where humans are shown, they are usually white-skinned. An afterword, curiously titled “Let’s Get Going,” includes a variety of additional facts including a mention of one effect of global warming. While there are many titles about specific migratory journeys for a young audience, few are so encompassing. Marian Berkes’ Going Home, illustrated by Jennifer DiRubbio (2010), presents examples but does not pull back for an overall look at the topic till the backmatter.

A straightforward, wide-ranging survey that should be a welcome addition to the nature shelf. (Informational picture book. 4-8)

**NOODLE BEAR**

Gravez, Mark

*Illus. by the author*

Candlewick (32 pp.)

$16.99 | Jul. 14, 2020

978-1-5362-1107-8

When Bear can’t find the oodles of noodles he craves, he says toodles to the forest.

When Fox invites Bear to her spring party and he doesn’t come, she investigates. She discovers that Bear didn’t hibernate but, instead, watched the popular TV game show Noodle Knockout and gorged on noodles. Now he’s obsessed with them and spurns forest-animal delicacies. Eventually Bear ventures to the city, hoping to become a contestant on the show. As luck would have it, he makes the cut and is ultimately crowned “Grand Noodle Champion.” Now a celebrity, Bear hosts his own cooking show with all the noodles he wants. He should be happy, right? As stories like this go, though, Bear realizes he misses the forest, his cave, and, especially, his BFF, Fox. He returns home and is heartily welcomed by his friends...albeit sans noodles. Unsurprisingly, Bear has returned with a generous supply for everyone. This Australian import aims at being a fresh take on the leaving-one’s-comfort-zone-before-finally-understanding-where-one-genuinely-belongs genre, but its premise, though mildly amusing, is weak and unconvincing. The extent to which youngsters will understand the concept or conventions of game or cooking shows will vary, though Bear’s passion for noodles should resonate. The lively cartoon illustrations are child appealing and feature assorted animal characters.

A slight offering focusing on the familiar be-careful-what-you-wish-for trope. (Picture book. 4-7)

**MASK**

Hannigan, Kate

*Illus. by Spaziante, Patrick*

Aladdin (272 pp.)

$17.99 | Aug. 18, 2020

978-1-5344-3914-6

Series: The League of Secret Heroes, 2

The puzzle-solving kid superheroes from *Cape* (2019) team up with real-life World War II heroines. Josie and her friends Mae and Akiko have secret identities: the Emerald Shield, the Violet Vortex, and the Orange Inferno. The three comics-loving girls now have superpowers and a superhero mentor, but the war is still endangering them all. Now Akiko’s mom has gone missing from the Manzanar internment camp, but they don’t have time to focus on that. San Francisco’s being attacked by Side-Splitter and his army of evil clown clones. Pitch-perfect action scenes right out of golden-age comics—“Curses on you, Infinite Irritants!” wails Side-Splitter, as his red-nosed, floppy-shoed clowns attack—are complemented by sequences illustrated in comics-panel form. As white, Irish American Josie, African American Mae, and Japanese American Akiko receive help from some of the war’s real-life female cryptographers and spies, they solve numerous puzzles, including Morse code, acrostics, and a cryptic message that reads “∞ ∞” “X = F.” Most of the puzzles are presented with enough information to be cracked by interested readers, as well. Historical racism and segregation are absent except for the internment camps, but the contrast between the injustice of the internment camps and the patriotic sacrifice of the deported internees is front and center.

A winning blend of comedy, superheroics, inspirational women from history, and puzzle-solving. (historical note) (Historical fantasy. 9-11)

**A PINCH OF MAGIC**

Harrison, Michelle

HMH Books (416 pp.)

$16.99 | Aug. 4, 2020

978-0-358-19331-9

Series: Pinch of Magic, 1

When an ancient curse threatens her life and the lives of her sisters, Betty Widdershins seeks a way to break it. Adventurous, 13-year-old Betty and her two sisters—Fliss, elder, and Charlie, younger—all live on the island of Crowstone in a decrepit village inn operated by their grandmother Bunny, who has always been strangely reluctant to let her granddaughters go anywhere. After Betty’s abortive attempt to surreptitiously
A gripping, atmospheric tale of sorcery, secrets, and sisterhood, infused with the titular pinch of magic. (map) (Fantasy, 8-12)

**SNOW DOVES**
*Hartry, Nancy*
Illus. by Grimard, Gabrielle
Second Story Press (32 pp.)
$18.95 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-77260-135-0

Welcome to the neighborhood! A heart-warming entry to a winter wonderland.

Reminiscent of a vintage photo album, this wordless picture book situates readers close to the action as sympathetic witnesses to a child's experience of having just moved to an unfamiliar place. As olive-skinned Sami looks out the window of a new home at an unfamiliar landscape, fear and anxiety manifest in the ominous, oversized shadow cast by a kitty cat belonging to neighbor Joy. (The children are unnamed within the book; monikers are supplied in jacket copy.) Joy appears similar in age to Sami and also appears to be a child of color, with thick, straight, jet-black hair and skin paler than Sami's. Eager to show Sami around nature's playground, Joy schleps to the newcomer's house with warm clothing and accessories. Even though they do not seem to speak the same language, Joy's gestures eventually encourage Sami to venture outdoors, albeit reluctantly. They play in the falling snow, go sledding, feed sunflower seeds to chickadees, and make snow angels that Sami envisions as doves. Muted, simple sketches capture the frost-veiled sunlight, rustic setting, as well as an idyllic faith in friendship and peace. The story's wordlessness neatly decenteres the presumption of a particular dominant culture.

Quaintly rendered nostalgia for the innocence and idealism of early childhood. (Picture book, 3-6)

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**CITY OF GOLD**
*Hobbs, Will*
Harper/HarperCollins (256 pp.)
$16.99 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-0-06-170881-7

Miners, cowboys, outlaws, and lawmen get a genre revival in Hobbs' new historical adventure.

Owen Hollowell is the man of the house at just 15 since his father's untimely passing from the scourge of tuberculosis eight months earlier. The Hollowell clan—Owen, Ma, and younger brother Till—are trying to stake a claim on a new life in turn-of-the-20th-century southwestern Colorado when a rustler steals their two prized mules. Without the mules to help plow and cultivate their inherited land, the widow and her boys face destitution. Owen sets off across the San Juan Mountains on the trail of their stolen mules, later joined by Till, who is itching for an adventure to call his own. Along the way they encounter corrupt lawmen, greedy mining corporations, workers advocating for safe and humane work conditions, and two of the most famous outlaws to ever rob a train: Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. Like a steam locomotive, the story takes a bit to get going, but once it does it chugs right along. While Hobbs at times applies artistic license to the true history of Telluride and surrounding areas, the story is vividly moored to its setting. Tying in true events, real people (most white, like the Hollowells), and a clearly intimate knowledge of the terrain of the Four Corners region, Hobbs weaves a tale that will transport readers back in time and never let them get bored.

A Western romp with anchors in history and geography that will leave readers anxious to explore more. (historical note) (Western, 8-14)

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**COLIN KAEPERNICK**
*Hoena, Blake*
Illus. by LeDoyen, Sam
Graphic Universe (32 pp.)
$27.99 | $8.99 paper | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-5415-7817-3
978-1-72840-293-2

This slim graphic biography of the former NFL player begins at his birth and adoption and ends with his life as an activist.

Hoena shows Colin's childhood: Born to an unwed white mother and a black father, he is adopted as a baby into a white family. He excels academically and in sports, starting football at age 8 and standing out for his strong arm. Readers then see Kaepernick playing football, baseball, and basketball in high school. He is later recruited to play college baseball, but his heart is in football, and he finds success on the college gridiron before the San Francisco 49ers pick him in the 2011 draft. The fourth and final chapter moves from routine athletic coverage when Eric
Nino’s character will resonate with kids, capturing a child’s perspective and emotions well.

I JUST WANT TO BE SUPER!
Katz, Andrew
Illus. by Luzano, Tony
CrackBoom! Books (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Jun. 16, 2020
978-2-89802-193-0

After gaining superpowers, Nino discovers what it really means to be super.

When Nino tries on a superhero mask, he gains superpowers, suddenly soaring above the kitchen floor. When he tries to show Papa, he is told to put away his dishes. Nino uses his powers to put them away “SUPER style,” even though he doesn’t want to. And before he exits from the league, and his work with youth occupy the final pages.

When Super Potato goes up against a giant robot, the battle lasts 17 ½ seconds. This seems fitting, because a skirmish fought by a potato lacks a certain gravitas. His story is tragic, in a way.

This graphic novel is a superhero epic for people with short attention spans.

In Marvel superhero movies, the plots often feature dozens of characters fighting battles that have been building for years. In an anti-hero novel, the battle lasts 17 ½ seconds. This seems fitting, because a skirmish fought by a potato lacks a certain gravitas. His story is tragic, in a way.

Before he was transformed into a potato, he was brawny enough that he would have fit right in among the Justice League. Every major character is white, and most are blond. This is not always obvious: Super Potato’s love interest, Dr. Clementine Mandarin, has also been turned into a potato, and most of the humor...
Using only 26 onomatopoeic sounds and picture cues, this clever take on the alphabet book lets readers fill in the story on their own.

**Eek!**

Animals run amok from A to Z in this noisy alphabet book. A mouse in tweed trousers plucks a flower and carries it away. But allergies kick in, and the mouse’s “achoo” scares away the bee that had been resting between the flower's petals. As the bee flies off with a “buzzz,” a red bird gives out a “chirp,” and a nearby cat’s bell goes “ding-a-ling.” Just when the mouse turns to look, the cat’s paw reaches over the gutter: “Eeek!” Lucky for the mouse, a black dog takes hold of the cat’s tail first. The cat flips over with a shocking “swomp.” The dog lets out a playful “grrrr,” clearly aiming for some fun. The mouse’s story—and sounds associated with the rest of the alphabet—continues as more animal characters enter the action. But where is the mouse going? Will they ever make it there? Using only 26 onomatopoeic sounds and picture cues, this clever take on the alphabet book lets readers fill in the story on their own. Though hints on the recto pages signal what might happen next, each double-page spread contains a surprise—including the constantly changing background colors. Paschkis’ folk-art–inspired illustrations, filled with movement, pattern, and color, practically leap off the page. The endpapers depict each of the letters in no particular order, with enough space between them that readers can practice letter knowledge.

**An absolute zoo of an ABC book—in the best possible way.** *(Picture book. 2-5)*

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**RISE OF ZOMBERT**

LaReau, Kara
Illus. by Andrews, Ryan
Candlewick (144 pp.)
$15.99 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-5362-0106-2
Series:The Zombert Chronicles, 1

There’s something strange about Mellie’s foundling cat…is Bert a zombie?!
Nine-year-old Mellie has no interest in being a part of her parents’ food-and-family blog. Her mother and father (a former freelance writer and former chef, respectively) are so busy with the blog and her twin younger brothers that she’s pretty free-range. She spends a lot of her time helping her best friend, Danny, make horror movies. When the two of them discover a diseased cat in a dumpster, Mellie feels drawn to the sickly feline; she sneaks him home, names him Bert, and doesn’t tell her parents. Meanwhile the Big Boss of a local lab is not pleased that two of his workers have allowed test subject Y-91 to escape, and he orders them to find it. Bert isn’t interested in cat food or even salmon, but he brings Mellie headless animal corpses…could he be a zombie eating only the animals’ brains?! When Bert’s accused of hurting the school bully’s pet rats (and thus brought to the attention of Mellie’s parents), she may not be able to keep him. This slim series opener feels like the start of a novel more than a whole book, as so much is left unresolved at the close. The parallel stories of Mellie’s discovery of Bert, the search for Y-91, and Bert, as he pursues a mission of his own, will keep young fans of the slightly spooky turning pages…and eager for the next installment. In Andrews’ illustrations, Mellie and her mom have dark skin while her dad and the twins have light skin.

**Enjoyably mysterious.** *(Science fiction. 7-10)*

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**PENNY AND THE \_PLAIN PIECE OF PAPER\_**

Leshem-Pelly, Miri
Illus. by the author
Philomel (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-1-984-81272-8

A character, bored of the piece of paper she exists on, ventures forth.

From pigtails (three, going straight upward) through football-shaped head and skinny limbs to high heels, Penny is entirely made up of rainbow-colored scribbly lines. No wonder she finds it so monotonous to loll about on an undecorated white sheet of paper. Her eyelids droop with ennui. However, Penny’s “plain piece of paper” is anything but. Slightly smaller than—and set askew from—the page of Leshem-Pelly’s actual book, Penny’s piece of paper has mild crinkles and the faint shading that those crinkles bring, creating an optical illusion that begs to be touched. It seems impossible for Leshem-Pelly’s page to feel perfectly smooth, but of course it does. Penny visits other types of paper: an amusingly dull and pompous...
newspaper, a map with trompe-l’oeil folds, a coloring book. All are hyper-realistic in their portrayal of the material, and each forces an oppressive aesthetic rule on Penny. The arc’s explicit message (“Let’s make our own rules!”) is forgettable, but Penny’s journey through varying visual styles is bright, fascinating, and funny, especially when she busts out of a geometric shape that graph paper bullies her into or when a pair of children (one black, one white) cheerfully offers gifts—and offers gifts, and offers gifts. Their textured and confettied realm is, of course, wrapping paper with a repeating design.

Irresistibly touchable. (Picture book. 4-8)

**A VERY BIG PROBLEM**

Levine, Amy-Jill & Sasso, Sandy Eisenberg
Illus. by Bowler, Annie
Flyaway Books (40 pp.)
$18.00 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-947888-11-1

Using the first two chapters of Genesis as a starting point, this story reimagines the Earth’s parts and inhabitants, created by God and at odds with each other.

Written in rhythmic style, reminiscent of the Old Testament chapters with their repetitive refrains, this text reads aloud well. As Levine and Sasso’s story goes, God creates Land, Rain, Plants, Sun, Birds, Earthworms, Quadrupeds, and Children in order to fashion the “very first garden,” but each “brag[s] and boast[s] and bluster[s],” thinking they must be the most important part. Land asserts, “God should love me the most. It is only fair,” and all the others follow suit, until God states “my love is big enough for every one of you.” Then, as God intended: “There was peace. / And it was very good.” An authors’ note mentions the legend is written in “the storytelling form from rabbinic literature known as midrash.” Although it focuses on Creation, it does not retell the story of Adam and Eve but pictures contemporary diverse children, their descendants. The note goes on to suggest various ideas for use (even to introduce the story of evolution), but the focus is on the story’s moral and imaginative qualities. The text uses no gender pronouns, and the layered, richly colored illustrations occasionally evoke Eric Carle’s collages.

A well-crafted story of cooperation and sharing within the context of the biblical story of Creation. (Picture book. 4-8)

**WE THE PEOPLE**

The Constitution Explored and Explained

Lewis, Aura & Sargent, Evan
Illus. by Lewis, Aura
Wide Eyed Editions (128 pp.)
$24.99 | Jul. 1, 2020
978-0-7112-5404-6

An introduction to the U.S. Constitution, with case studies, commentary, and debate questions to spark rumination and discussion.

Using simplified language, as the original is replete with “old-fashioned terms and some of the looongest sentences you will ever see,” the authors go over select parts of each article and amendment in turn. Along with blowing off originalists by characterizing the document as designed “to be reinterpreted and revised over time as our society evolves,” they point to ways racial and gender inequities, beginning with enslavement, have so often been “silently woven between the lines” and caution readers to be wary of historical “whitewashing.” They also profile notable reformers, women who have served in Congress and/or run for president, and hot-button issues such as gun control and abortion rights. Budding political activists are encouraged at the close to get involved: “Power is fun!” Lewis populates the pages with mixes of stylized individual portraits and thoroughly diversified clusters of small figures waving protest signs, marching, or, like a rainbow row of women celebrating the 19th Amendment and the biracial couple raising glasses at Prohibition’s repeal, posing in triumph. Occasional bobbles notwithstanding—the Federalist Party was hardly “the nation’s financial system,” Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation did not “end slavery,” and it’s not 100% true that “police shootings of Black people...continue unchecked”—this view of the foundational document of our national system is both nuanced and reasonably easy to understand.

Buoyant if occasionally simplistic, with a distinct lean to the left. (glossary, index, reading list) (Nonfiction. 9-11)

**ALL ABOUT ANXIETY**

Lewis, Carrie
Illus. by Touliatou, Sophia
Beaming Books (88 pp.)
$14.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-5064-6320-9

This handbook directs children to exercises and further resources for managing serious anxiety.

What is anxiety? Where does it come from? What are some things that make people anxious? How is anxiety affecting my life, and how can I start to manage it? These are the questions that are addressed in this slim illustrated book, with the longest chapter describing some of the things that make people anxious, such as the news, the dark, social situations, hormones, and peer pressure. The information about what anxiety is and where it
comes from is most useful; the chapter helping readers to identify the role of anxiety in their lives is important, but its vague instructions will be useful only to highly motivated readers. The concrete action steps that round out the book include breathing, muscle relaxation, visualization, and choosing someone to talk to. It is unclear when readers should practice these techniques in order to achieve benefits in anxiety reduction. While the font is fairly small, each spread consists of large pictures and separated chunks of text, and bold headers make browsing easy. The pictures of people are diverse and expressive; the personified embodiments of anxiety itself are anthropomorphic red scribbles that evoke the internal disruption it causes.

A solid introduction to anxiety management. (resources)  (Nonfiction. 10-14)

WHEN DARWIN SAILED THE SEA Uncover How Darwin’s Revolutionary Ideas Helped Change the World
Long, David
Illus. by Kalda, Sam
Wide Eyed Editions (80 pp.)
$19.99 | Jul. 1, 2020
978-0-7112-4968-4

Long retraces the courses of both Darwin’s voyage aboard the Beagle and the growth of his epochal insight into evolution’s driving mechanism.

Trailing a flotilla of publications over the past decade celebrating the 200th anniversary of the naturalist’s birth and the 150th of his magnum opus, this unexceptional account sails a not all of them) and that Origin actually kicked off the “long-running battle between science and religion” (Galileo, among others, might disagree). Stick with more seaworthy vessels.

Late, lumberly, unlikely to survive fitter treatments. (glossary, timeline) (Illustrated biography. 9-11)

CY YOUNG An American Baseball Hero
Longert, Scott H.
Ohio Univ. (152 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Jun. 16, 2020
978-0-8214-2419-3
Series: Biographies for Young Readers

A worshipful portrait of a nice farmer’s boy from Ohio who grew up to become (by far) the winningest pitcher in major league baseball history.

Pitching Denton True (“Dent,” later “Cy” for “Cyclone”) Young as role-model material from the get-go, Longert introduces him as “a good man, a good husband, a loyal friend, and a gentleman both on and off the baseball field” before going on to a bland account of his long and lustrous career. Students of the game’s history may be able to draw some juice at least from the generous set of period team, town, ballpark, and trading card photos and perfunctory notes on how baseball’s rules and playing fields evolved. Even team names hark to a different era, as between 1890 and 1911 Young compiled totals that will never be surpassed while hurling for the Spiders and the Naps of Cleveland, the St. Louis Perfectos, and the Boston Americans and Braves. But the author is a better historian than storyteller, and his narrative alternates dry strings of season overviews with anemic anecdotal hacks: “He did not allow a run until the eighth inning, when the Spiders already had a big lead. The final score was Cleveland 12, Cincinnati 3. While batting, Cy had gotten a single and scored a run.” A final 10-page chapter barely skims Young’s four post-retirement decades, including his 1937 induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame and the posthumous creation of the award that justly bears his name. Stats geeks will have to look elsewhere for a table or even a summary list of his awesome achievements.

A utilitarian tribute more likely to find itself in the dug-out than the lineup. (timeline, glossary, endnotes, source list) (Biography. 10-13)

THE DARING OF DELLA DUPREE

Lowe, Natasha
Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster (272 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-5344-4397-9
Series: Poppy Pendle

Eleven-year-old witch Della Dupree must muster all her courage when she’s stranded in the 13th century.

If only Della were brave enough to stand up against the school bullies. But Della knows that if she does, the mean girls will turn on her next. It’s already hard enough to share a name with the famous Della Dupree, who founded Ruthersfield Academy in 1223 to educate witches. Della lives in a Britain
where nonmagical people know about and love witches, and her own nonwitchy family is supportive. But what if Della were to travel back in time to meet the historic Della, who was so small when Wren was taken that she doesn’t remember her, but whose magical necklace that enabled her spur-of-the-moment illicit jaunt into the past. As Lowe writes it, history smells atrocious and features hideous food—one particularly “nasty pottage” prompted Della to make a quick magical lasagna, and a disgusting pheasant stew leads her to magic up a chicken curry—but the witch girls Della meets are lovely. She just wishes she were brave enough to save them from the dungeon. In the mildly anachronistic past of her apparently all-white village of Potts Bottom, Della finds her spunk. Slightly awkward prose with odd explanatory asides distracts from both humor and pacing, but scenes in which these medieval characters first experience modern food are mouthwatering.

Amusing, if a little clunky. (recipes, crafts) (Fantasy. 8-11)

**WANDA SEASONGOOD AND THE ALMOST PERFECT LIE**

Lurie, Susan
Illus. by Harney, Jenn
Disney-Hyperion/LBYR (356 pp.)
$15.99 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-368-04322-9
Series: Wanda Seasongood, 2

A misplaced sibling means more fantastical adventures for a girl just trying to do her best.

Newly 11-year-old Wanda is about to set off on another adventure into the Scary Wood, accompanied by her talking bluebird companion who fancies himself to be his namesake—Voltaire. Now that a spell has been lifted from her family, as recounted in *Wanda Seasongood and the Mostly True Secret* (2020), it’s revealed that she has an older sister named Wren, who’s being held captive by the evil witch Raymunda. Wanda was so small when Wren was taken that she doesn’t remember her, but that won’t stop Wanda from going to save her despite her parents’ blunt lack of faith in her capabilities. As before, “there’s no right or wrong way” in the Wood, since “they all lead to trouble.” Wanda and Voltaire face off against trolls, a giant, a banshee, fairies, a pooka, and the returning Royal Prince Frog, who pesters likely contenders for a kiss, all while avoiding Raymunda and her equally witchy sons. Structured much like Wanda’s first adventure, the episodic story features all the standard tropes of a fairy tale for modern sentimentalities. Lurie’s narrative is heavy-handed at times, emphasizing the ridiculousness of said tropes for comedic effect. Fairies and the witch family are multiracial while Wanda’s family presents white, with Wanda sporting bushy red hair, freckles, and brown glasses.

A zany, over-the-top romp in the woods. (Fiction. 8-12)

**TY’S TRAVELS All Aboard!**

Lowe, Jacket
Illus. by Mata, Nina
Harper/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
$4.99 paper | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-06-295107-6
Series: Ty’s Travels

Ty loves adventure, but he is having a little trouble finding someone to join him.

Ty, a little black boy, wants to play, but everyone in the house is too busy to take time for him. After being turned down by his dad, mom, and big brother, Corey, Ty wanders downstairs to the family room, where he finds an empty cardboard box. He and his puppy inspect the box, draw some wheels onto it, and make a locomotive that rumbles and whistles down an imaginary track. Ty steers his train past farmland and a city and through a tunnel, picking up familiar and eager passengers along the way. This My First I Can Read book will engage young beginning readers. They will relate to Ty’s playfulness, sense of adventure, and energetic imagination. Readers will also enjoy the vivid and playful illustrations that take them from Ty’s home and into the world he imagines. Repeated onomatopoeic phrases build anticipation: “Woo-woo,” “Chugga-chugga-chugga-chugga,” and “Clickety-clack.” These are framed around the pickup of each passenger, helping to control pacing while giving readers an opportunity for fun. Mata renders the imaginary scenes in a childlike crayon that blends nicely with the warm visions of this black family’s middle-class home.

Both an excellent book for guided reading and a winning read-aloud. (Early reader. 4-6)

**ARE YOU EATING CANDY WITHOUT ME?**

Malesevic, Draga Jenny
Illus. by Bruijn, Charlotte
Penguin Workshop (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-1-5247-9201-5

Childhood is a time fraught with questions: Why is the sky blue? Why is grass green? What do grown-ups do when kids aren’t around?

In this whimsical flight of fancy, four children—diverse in racial presentation and family type—seek answers to questions of their own. The children’s initial questions revolve around how the adults behave at home and work when the children are not present. They ask: “What do you do without me?” and “Do all the rules still apply when I’m not home?” and “Do you tell other people what to do?”—a question hilariously paired with an image of one child’s mom telling a man not to pick his nose. The next round of questions express concern that the grown-ups are having childlike fun without them, including the obvious query, “Do you go to fancy parties with ice cream,
Avid bookworms and die-hard book resisters alike will find sympathetic mirrors.

THE TIME OF GREEN MAGIC

As a child, Jonas Salk saw things from a unique perspective. While his friends played games, he preferred to read but was called to act as a referee because of his awareness and even-handedness. While others rejoiced at the end of World War I, he saw the soldiers who had sustained injuries. Growing up as an observant Jew whose family had fled Russian persecution, “Jonas prayed that he might, someday, help make the world a better place.” Appealing illustrations and accessible text show how Salk, as an adult, pursued the same ideals through his work as a doctor and researcher, eventually working as a young researcher to help create the first flu vaccine and later, famously, the polio vaccine. This timely, quickly paced selection is straightforward, showing the value of research, experimentation, hard work, and testing while presenting Salk’s dedication and accomplishments within the context of the epidemics he sought to control. Though the text skims a bit on the role of trial and error in experimentation, this tale of a quiet hero is engaging and enlightening as it celebrates Salk’s accomplishments while showcasing the attributes and attitudes that led to his success.

An exciting, informative introduction to medical research, the work of Jonas Salk, and the man himself. (author’s note) (Picture book/biography. 6-10)

THE POLIO PIONEER

Marshall, Linda Elovitz
Illus. by Anchin, Lisa
Knopf (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-0-525-64661-8

Portrait of a hero, scientist, and dreamer.

A WORLD TOGETHER

Manzano, Sonia
National Geographic Kids (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-4263-3738-3

Large color photographs (occasionally composed of montages) and accessible, simple text highlight global similarities and differences, always focusing on our universal connections.

While child readers may not recognize Manzano, the Puerto Rican actress who played Maria on Sesame Street, adults will recognize her as a trusted diverse voice. In her endnote, she explains her desire to “encourage lively conversations about shared experiences.” Starting out with the familiar, home and community, the text begins with “How many WONDERFUL PEOPLE do you know?” Then it moves out to the world: “Did you know there are about 8 BILLION PEOPLE on the planet?” The photo essay features the usual concrete similarities and differences found in many books of this type, such as housing (a Mongolian yurt opposite a Hong Kong apartment building overlooking a basketball court), food (dumplings, pizza, cotton candy, a churro, etc.), and school. Manzano also makes sure to point out likenesses in emotions, as shown in a montage of photos from countries including China, Spain, Kashmir (Pakistan/India), and the United States. At the end, a world map and thumbnail images show the locations of all photos, revealing a preponderance of examples from the U.S. and a slight under-representation for Africa and South America.

Engaging, well-chosen images and a clear, coherent text illuminate the importance of empathy for the world’s inhabitants. (Informational picture book. 3-8)

cake, and ponies?” This ultimately leads to the most important question of all: “ARE YOU EATING CANDY WITHOUT ME???” The playful illustrations are bright and appropriately candy-colored. They vary among busy but never overwhelming full-bleed, double-page spreads and large comic-book-like panels incorporating images, text, and speech bubbles. The font is large, which makes it excellent for trailing with a finger for a read-along. Inviting both conversation and giggles, this tale will work well as a lap read or bedtime book.

A book as sweet as the candy that fills its pages. (Picture book: 3-7)
THE CASE OF THE MISSING CAKE
McLaughlin, Eoin
Illus. by Boutavant, Marc
Candlewick (40 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-1-5362-1267-9
Series: Not an Alphabet Book

Bear frantically and very dramatically searches for a thief who has stolen the delicious chocolate cake. Bear is distraught that the cake, which was supposed to appear on Page 5 of his simple alphabet book, has disappeared. Bear pleads directly with readers for help in finding the thief somewhere within the book. The furry protagonist then questions suspects, barreling through the alphabet letter by letter. Even inanimate objects draw suspicion, for it’s possible that the helicopter or the kite might have helped the culprit escape. Bear continues to blame everyone and everything he encounters, but most have strong alibis and witnesses. Finally he fingers Pig as his prime suspect, punishing him severely. But Octopus, Robot, and Walrus are skeptical and have noticed some anomalies. Sharp-eyed young readers will take note as well, for there are clues in plain sight from which Bear tries to divert attention. There’s the empty plate on his own page, dark stains around his mouth, and several pauses for ice cream and yogurt. When confronted, he denies knowledge or tries to silence his accusers. But he is truly caught. However, his punishment actually delights him, for he must bake a new cake. Boutavant’s bright, large-scale illustrations are filled with delightful details, and Bear’s overwrought reactions are positively loony. This is a perfect vehicle for reading aloud or reading together over and over, with lots of opportunities for highly expressive emoting and giggles galore.

Unfortunately unsuccessful in its absurdity. (Fiction 8-11)

GET ME OUT OF HERE!
McNab, Andy & Earle, Phil
Illus. by Boydon, Robin
Scholastic (256 pp.)
$6.99 paper | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-338-61503-6

Danny’s inclination toward dangerous feats makes a school trip one catastrophe after another. Danny, who is white, is excited to go on the end-of-the-year trip to Tickledown Farm. It promises students a chance to “go wild,” with kayaks and rapids, zip lines and treehouses, and even a steep mountain to climb and then jump from the top of. It will also give Danny a break from his older brother and nemesis, Dylan, who’s 18 and about to enter the Army. Though it’s funny at times, the book’s pacing is unfortunately set askew, giving over a third of the book to Danny’s exploits trying to raise money for the trip and often sacrificing logical plot development to a forced cleverness. Unrealistically, Dylan is chosen as a chaperone, and, starting with giving Danny nettle instead of toilet-paper substitute, he repeatedly sabotages all of Danny’s activities, turning them into disasters. The insistence that readers suspend disbelief remains high throughout, as these city kids don’t seem to know the difference between a cow and a rhinoceros, expect tents to come with light switches and internet modems, and assume they can use Uber while on a hike. The book ends with no real resolution or character growth. The frequent grayscale cartoons present most characters as white, with a few side characters of color.

Goofy, hilarious, laugh-out-loud fun for all. (Picture book. 3-6)

ONE BOY’S CHOICE
A Tale of the Amazon
Menezes, Sueli
Illus. by Siems, Annika
Trans. by Bishop, Kathryn
Minedition (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-988-8342-01-3

In this story translated from German and set in the Amazon jungle, a boy and his grandfather go on an all-day fishing outing. A young boy looks forward to going fishing with his grandfather and to bringing home a big fish that he hopes will put an end to his being laughed at by his friends. Exuberant illustrations that overflow their pages set the stage for the story. Grandad and child—who appear to be Indigenous—navigate their canoe through lush mangroves and past the magnificent victoria amazonica lily pads as enormous fish swim beneath them. As they set their bait and wait, then wait some more, then move on to another spot and cast their net, Grandad tells the boy stories of the different fish that live under the water lilies. When they eventually catch a big arowana, the boy is dismayed when his grandfather wants to release it. The male arowana carry their young in their mouths, so catching the adult fish implies killing its young as well. Grandad tells the boy “You must decide what is more important—taking the fish to show your friends, or letting this dad and his children live peacefully in the great river.”

For another glimpse at life in the Amazon rainforest, read also Along the Tapajós by Fernando Vilela and translated by Daniel Hahn (2019). A thoughtful contemplation on how our actions affect life on our planet. (Picture book. 4-7)
OVER AND UNDER THE RAINFOREST

Messner, Kate
Illus. by Neal, Christopher Silas
Chronicle (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-1-4521-6940-8

A child-and-caregiver pair hike through the South American rainforest, observing animals in their natural habitats.

The “symphony of sound” up in the trees prompts the child narrator to ask what lives above. Tito answers that above them is “a whole hidden world” where monkeys, insects, and birds live. As they hike along the trail, each spread shows specific animals “up in the trees” and “down in the forest,” doing what they do best. Oropendolas “gurgle in low-swinging nests”; a parrot snake hunts frogs on the trail. The child and Tito climb to a hanging bridge that crosses the river; beneath them, crocodiles bask in the sun and an emerald basilisk skims the water’s surface while they walk “eye to eye with capuchin monkeys” swinging through branches. The afternoon brings rain and a snack of dried fruit. The evening brings new sounds to the forest as dark settles in and the child and Tito leave the last bridge, heading home, where Abuelita and a supper of arroz con pollo await. The colorful, matte illustrations alternate views of the ground, the sky, the river, and the treetops from various vantage points; close-ups and silhouettes of animals in action channel the mystery and magic of the natural world. Part outdoor adventure, part animal nonfiction book, this exciting blend will delight children interested in fact and fiction. Extensive endnotes offer more information about the animals. The only humans pictured are Tito and the narrator, both characters of color.

Draws you right in. (author’s note, further reading, sources) (Picture book. 4-8)

THE MAYFLOWER

Messner, Kate
Illus. by Meconis, Dylan
Random House (224 pp.)
$7.99 paper | $12.99 PLB | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-593-12039-4 PLB | 978-0-593-12038-7 paper
978-0-593-12032-3 PLB | 978-0-593-12031-6 paper
Series: History Smashers

Adopting a casual, colloquial tone, Messner dismantles one received truth after another, drawing on a variety of resources and evidence to give readers the “real-deal story of the Mayflower” and its storied passengers.

Never underestimating the capacity of her readers, she begins with a brief history of the Reformation in England before following William Brewster’s group of separatists as they eventually made their way to the shores of Massachusetts and seized Wampanoag land for their colony. Shifting tone as appropriate, copious sidebars include a discussion on the relative reliability of primary sources, the inglorious history of Plymouth Rock, and modern efforts to reclaim the Wampanoag language, Wópanáak. Quotations from primary sources are presented in an antique-looking display type and then translated into modern English: “[The mussels] caused us to cast and scour, but they were soon all well again.” —Edward Winslow / Translation: They threw up and had diarrhea but felt better in a while.”

Most notable is the care with which Messner covers relations between the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag; her description of first contact is brilliant in its refusal to cast the Indigenous people as other: “After [Myles Standish and his party had] gone about a mile, they saw five or six people and a dog.” Meconis’ humorous cartoons—sometimes presented as comics-style paneled sequences—complement archival illustrations, which readers are frequently invited to examine critically. The second in the History Smashers series, Women’s Right To Vote, publishes simultaneously.

Critical, respectful, engaging: exemplary history for children. (author’s note, further reading, bibliography, index) (Nonfiction. 8-12) (Women’s Right To Vote: 978-0-593-12034-7 paper, 978-0-593-12035-4 PLB)

MONKEY WITH A TOOL BELT

Blasts Off!

Monroe, Chris
Illus. by the author
Carolrhoda (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-5415-7757-2
Series: Monkey With a Tool Belt

A toolbelt-clad monkey named Chico Bon Bon flies out to fix the Moon Malt machine at the Superstar Space Station and discovers an unlikely suspect plugging up the machine.

With his trusty co-pilot, an elephant named Clark, Chico Bon Bon flies the Banana 5 into the space station and is greeted by a captain eager to get the Moon Malt machine fixed. Chico checks the machine but cannot discover the problem until he opens the top and removes a part. A fast-flying purple entity bursts out of the machine and zips through several levels of the space station before Chico catches it in a net. It’s a small, fuzzy creature, “possibly THE CUTEST ALIEN IN THE WHOLE ENTIRE UNIVERSE!!” Clark and Chico take good care of the frightened creature, finding out where she came from with the help of a translating bot who deciphers Boodie Boo language, getting her back to her pod, and repairing it so she can head home. Monroe’s detailed drawings, done in an appealingly childlike style, combine with narration and speech bubbles to tell this humorous, imaginative tale, which is lighthearted and silly but has enough heart to merit space on the shelves of space lovers, handy kids, and anyone looking for a giggle and a smile. Chico’s serene competence, particularly when juxtaposed against Clark’s good-natured bumbling, may mitigate concerns some readers will feel about yet another anthropomorphic-monkey book.

A fun and satisfying journey. (Picture book. 4-8)
The various anecdotes are underscored by a painful coherence as they work to illuminate not only a larger story, but a life.

**EVERYTHING SAD IS UNTRUE**

A veteran nature writer explores and explains the work in progress of restoring the near-extinct California condor population.

Montgomery, no stranger to science in the field, opens her introduction to this ongoing captive breeding program with a visit to the Santa Barbara Zoo. The zoo’s director of conservation, Estelle Sandhaus, introduces the writer and her readers to the species and the restoration process. They join ongoing California fieldwork in the form of condor checkups. These birds are still so endangered that wildlife specialists attempt to recapture each condor living in the wild every year, to check on its health and tracking devices. In an immediate, present-tense narrative, the writer describes the details of these checkups and some of the hazards: While holding birds, she was pooped on and bitten. They visit a biologist watching a nest site and see a nest of bones and wakes with a mission: “Gonna getcha bone.”

They visit a third graders who’ve been studying condors. Close-up and long-range photos enliven every page. Most but not all of the researchers are white; the students are mostly Latinx, and one uses a wheelchair.

Hopeful news in the natural world. (timeline, epilogue, what you can do, bibliography, to learn more, index) (Nonfiction. 9-14)

**WHERE BONE?**

Moss, Kitty
Illus. by the author
Page Street (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-64614-000-8
(A True Story)

A pet dog named Balthazar, unaware that a tasty bone sits underneath the pillow it rests upon, dreams of bones and wakes with a mission: “Gonna getcha bone.”

The dog looks outdoors and indoors, wreaking havoc inside the elegant home. Despite reminders to itself to “keep calm,” the dog panics, leaving a mess in its wake and even flooding the bathroom. Weary from the frenzied search, Balthazar manages to make it across the now-destroyed interior of the home back to the bed to happily reunite with the bone that was there all along. The way in which the humans will react to the extended destruction is left to the imaginations of readers. The cutey way in which Balthazar speaks (“Bone? must be home-home” and “dear Bone, it really you!”) becomes tiresome, and exceedingly busy and cluttered spreads may occasionally make it difficult for readers to follow the action, though they do capture Balthazar’s frenzy. Some of the renderings of Balthazar are jarring, even alarming. In one illustration, the dog struggles to stay afloat in the flooding bathroom; its right eye is distorted and protruding, its left eye brown and bruised-looking, its facial features twisted, and its teeth bared on only the right side of its face (Batman’s Two-Face has nothing on Balthazar).

A discordant, one-note story that can’t seem to find its funny bone. (Picture book. 3-6)

**CONDOR COMEBACK**

Montgomery, Sy
Photos by Strombeck, Tianne
HMH Books (96 pp.)
$18.99 | Jul. 28, 2020
978-0-544-81693-4
Series: Scientists in the Field

A discordant, one-note story that can’t seem to find its funny bone. (Picture book. 3-6)

**EVERYTHING SAD IS UNTRUE**

Nayeri, Daniel
Levine Querido (368 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-1-64614-000-8

“Every story is the sound of a storyteller begging to stay alive.”

Khosrou, the child, stands before his class in Oklahoma and tells stories of Iran, lifetimes’ worth of experiences compressed into writing prompts. Daniel, the adult, pieces together his “patchwork” past to stitch a quilt of memory in a free-wheeling, layered manner more reminiscent of a conversation than a text. At its most basic level, Nayeri’s offering is a refugee’s memoir, an adult looking back at his childhood and the forced adoption of a new and infinitely more difficult life. Yet somehow “memoir” fails to do justice to the scope of the narrative, the self-proclaimed antithesis of just another “‘poor me’ tale of immigrant woe.” Like Scheherazade, Nayeri spins 1,001 tales: In under 400 pages he recounts Persian myth and history, leads readers through days banal and outstanding, waxes philosophical on the nature of life and love, and more. Not “beholden” to the linear conventions of Western storytelling, the story might come across as disjointed, but the various anecdotes are underscored by a painful coherence as they work to illuminate not only a larger story, but a life. And there is beauty amid the pain as well as laughter. The soul-sapping hopelessness of a refugee camp is treated with the same dramatic import as the struggle to eliminate on Western toilets. The language is evocative: simple yet precise, ripe with the idiosyncratic and abjectly honest imagery characteristic of a child’s imagination.

A modern epic. (author’s note, acknowledgments) (Memoir. 10-18)
Characters are lovingly developed, resulting in a deeply engaging coming-of-age story.

**HARVEY HOLDS HIS OWN**

*Nelson, Colleen*

*Illustrated by Anderson, Tara*

Pajama Press (224 pp.)

$18.95 | Aug. 11, 2020

978-1-77278-114-4

Austin, Maggie, and West Highland white terrier Harvey are all back for a second outing following *Harvey Comes Home* (2019).

Can Nelson follow her excellent debut for middle-grade readers with another fine effort? Last time, Austin found the missing Harvey but, desperate for a dog of his own, held on to him longer than he should have, leaving rightful owner Maggie with ambivalent feelings toward the middle schooler. Those have not gone away. Needing to do community service, she chooses the retirement home where Austin volunteers, not expecting to find two fast friends there: Austin, who turns out to be a kindred spirit, and Mrs. Fradette, a feisty elder. She tells Maggie tales from her challenging youth, crafting another story within a story, as in *Harvey Comes Home*. Surprisingly, since this seems at first to merely re-create the earlier novel, a fresh tale emerges. Maggie's struggling to find a place all her own with her two BFFs, who seem to be pushing her away, and Mrs. Fradette tells of striving to find her right place—becoming an auto mechanic—as a youth in 1950, not a common story but eminently believable. Characters, likely the white default, are lovingly developed, resulting in a deeply engaging coming-of-age story. Anderson's soft, pencil illustrations set up each chapter.

Another fine effort that wraps up some loose ends but also explores worthy new ground. *(Fiction. 9-12)*

**THE ELEPHANT'S NEW SHOE**

*Nune, Laurel*

*Illustrated by Landy, Ariel*

Orchard/Scholastic (40 pp.)

$17.99 | Aug. 4, 2020

978-1-338-26687-0

A true, heart-tugging tale about an injured baby elephant.

Animal rescuer Nick Marx first encountered Chhouk (Khmer for “lotus”) wandering in a forest in Cambodia in 2007. A wire snare had cut off one of the tiny animal’s front feet. The elephant was brought to Nick's rescue center, where the humans faced two daunting problems: Would Chhouk ever walk normally? And what about the orphan’s loneliness? The second dilemma was easily solved: Lucky, an older female elephant, accepted Chhouk as her own. But Chhouk's foot hurt when he tried to walk with her. Clearly, something needed to be done. Nick called doctors and makers of animal prostheses in Thailand and Cambodia to no avail. Finally, the Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics, established to serve human victims of armed conflict, agreed to try. After several attempts, Chhouk was successfully fitted with a new, durable, comfortable shoe.

Today, a teenage Chhouk requires and receives a new shoe every six months. This sweet, simply told story will capture animal lovers’ hearts and sympathy. The endearing, cartoonish illustrations depict a sweet-faced, often smiling Chhouk; his injured foot is presented without gore. Nick presents white; the rescue and medical team members have brown skin. Marx himself contributes a foreword; the backmatter includes elephant facts, photos of Chhouk, and an author’s note.

A captivating story. *(Informational picture book. 4-7)*

**BILLY JOHNSON AND HIS DUCK ARE EXPLORERS**

*New, Matthew*

*Illustrated by the author*

Capstone Editions (144 pp.)

$15.95 PLB | Aug. 1, 2020

978-1-68446-150-9

Could an ambitious young janitor become an explorer?

Young Billy Johnson works as a custodian at the Explorers League, where he aspires to be an Ace Explorer, just like Hal Hardwick. Clad in his omnipresent tie and bearing a sword named Mr. Jabbers at his side, the pompadoured Billy and his best friend—an anthropomorphic white duck named Barrace who is a renowned college professor—embark upon swashbuckling adventures. In this episodic graphic novel, Billy and Barrace set out on four thrilling quests, including a trip into a volcano near the ruins of the once-great Monkey Kingdom, the capture of an enchanted ring in the hall of the Ghost King, an expedition to find the mysterious desert-dwelling Atlas Bear, and a battle against magical monsters in the Hero Trials. Once he completes his missions, will Billy finally be allowed to join the Explorers League? First-time author and illustrator New’s full-color, blazingly paced tale will Billy finally be allowed to join the Explorers League? First-time author and illustrator New’s full-color, blazingly paced tale is self-contained so readers may pick up and enjoy the abundant madcap silliness out of sequence. Despite the bite-sized vignettes, there is an overarching and unresolved narrative thread, leaving just enough intrigue to fuel subsequent exploits. While only a handful of humans are present in this volume, Billy and the majority are white; unnamed background characters encompass a more diverse spectrum.

A quirky graphic debut. *(Graphic fantasy/adventure. 7-11)*

**CHILD OF GALAXIES**

*Nuto, Blake*

*Illustrated by Ager, Charlotte*

Flying Eye Books (40 pp.)

$16.95 | Jun. 2, 2020

978-1-912497-42-3

Following the trend of mindfulness books for little ones, a poetic ode to the universe that exists inside each child.

Children are made from the stars and filled to the brim with potential, and there’s a universe for them to explore, both inside...
and out. In rhyming text that speaks directly to readers, Nuto seeks to empower children to be themselves and stay present in the moment even when doubts and fears encroach. Humans with a variety of skin tones and hair colors/textures inhabit a variety of imaginary and realistic environments. As the book closes, readers are encouraged to “EMBRACE the MYSTERIOUS MORNING.” The complex vocabulary is enticing advice: “It’s not about the answers to a riddle; it’s about what lies beyond. But taking that extra step only happens when we have the curiosity, showing and not telling the concepts. At times the rhymes feel a tad forced, but overall the effect is pleasing. The painterly illustrations shine as they toggle between fantastical images of kids floating among stars and planets and scenes of everyday life in the city and country, at the beach and art museum. Textured linework and warm colors create a playful world. In many ways, the illustrations support inclusivity. However, the effectiveness of an illustration that includes a person in a wheelchair is somewhat undermined by the previous exultation that “You have LIMBS, and a mind that SPROUTS WINGS!”

Those already familiar with mindfulness concepts may be this book’s natural audience. (Picture book. 5-8)

IKENGA
Okorafor, Nnedi
Viking (240 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-0-307-95745-0

A 12-year-old seeks revenge after his father is murdered.

It seems that every great hero’s origin story begins with unthinkable trauma, and Nnamdimma “Nnamdi” Icheteka’s beginning is no different. A year after his father, the police chief of Kaleria, is gunned down, Nnamdi chases a figure through his town and is gifted a mysterious Ikenga—which means “place of strength” in Igbo—tometer that gives him superpowers and guides him through different, herculean tasks to discover his father’s killer. Set in a small province in Southeastern Nigeria, Okorafor’s tale features an eclectic cast of villains—whose curious quirks and storied names don’t make them any less lethal—and literal ride-or-die friendships that are tested by Nnamdi’s ongoing struggles to control his powers. She creates a believable, flawed superhero who, even when he transforms, is still very much a 12-year-old boy: confused, scared and frustrated about why his path seems to be particularly difficult; his best friend, Chioma, has this sage life advice: “It’s not about the answers to a riddle; it’s about what you learn by solving it.” Okorafor’s thoughtful mixing of West African traditional religions with Christian beliefs flows easily throughout the narrative alongside her regular inclusion of Igbo greetings and phrasings, although the actual story pacing can be slow and uneven.

A memorable middle-grade murder mystery that’s darkly humorous in some places and delightfully creepy in others. (Mystery. 9-12)

A LITTLE SPACE FOR ME
Olson, Jennifer Gray
Illus. by the author
Roaring Brook (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Jul. 28, 2020
978-1-250-20626-8

A child learns to create a little private space to find peace and recenter in order to once again share with others.

Sometimes even a loving home can feel a little too loud or crowded. Whether it’s a younger sibling playing the piano or grandma slurping, at times it’s too noisy for the bespectacled protagonist, who wears a high bun. Smells and lights on the bus and at school can also overwhelm, and sometimes the inexplicable can be too much. So one day, the narrator climbs to the top of a kid-filled jungle gym to grab some space. Olson as both author and artist plays with the homonym, as the child literally and figuratively grabs for space and captures some universe in a bottle. Wanting even more, the kid grabs jars and buckets until the cosmos is all around. Finally able to meditate, rest, and dream, the child is then able to rejoin the multigenerational family—and still keep a bit of private space, shown in the replacement of each family member’s hair with a starry infinitude. While the characters are drawn in a simplified style, inventive compositions will transport readers into the thoughts and emotions of the protagonist. Both text and art show familial experiences, but Olson also leaves them open to interpretation, showing people can interact with the world in different ways. The family is interracial, with Asian-presenting mom and grandparents and white-presenting dad.

Ripe for discussion. (Picture book. 6-8)

OLIVER THE CURIOUS OWL
Otis, Chad
Illus. by the author
Little, Brown (40 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-0-316-52987-7

One little owl dares to fly into the unknown.

When most owls are born, they ask only one question for the rest of their lives: “Who?” Not Oliver. When he hatches, he adds “What?” “When?” “Where?” and “Why?” to the mix. Like his family, Oliver lives in a big tree, the only world they’ve ever known. Yet all too soon he’s wondering about what lies beyond. But taking that extra step only happens when his best friend, Bug, falls into the river and is swept away. Comically flying to the rescue (the spherical bird does not look particularly aerodynamic), Oliver meets new animals (some further facts about which appear in the backmatter) and sees new sights. Some of it is good and some of it is bad, but in the end, when he tells his family of his adventures, they’re inspired to explore the world for themselves. With skill, the book deftly avoids the pitfall of preachiness, showing and not telling the
Ellie’s shenanigans result in cringe comedy that (despite the
embarrassment of the situations she creates) is always respect-
ful of her devastating anxiety. The light touch leads to some
too-easy solutions, with Ellie, at 12, effectively self-inventing
cognitive behavioral therapy for anxiety disorder before anyone
else even knows she has a condition. Ellie’s concern with her
own mental health finds her selfishly ignoring Zoe’s well-being,
and working through the complications created by her unthink-
ning cruelty requires getting through more anxiety spirals about
damaged friendships. Humor keeps the tone light, nevertheless,
perhaps never more so than in a massive and squishy food fight
at a classmate’s bar mitzvah.

A gentle, heartwarming introduction to the world of
therapy dogs. (Picture book: 3-7)

It’s My Party and I Don’t Want To Go
Panitch, Amanda
Scholastic (224 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-338-62120-4

It can’t be that difficult to sabotage your own bat mitzvah.

Ellie’s shy, quiet, and afraid of interacting with almost everyone but her
family and her only friend, Zoe. At older sister Hannah’s bat mitzvah, Ellie had such a panic attack about
appearing before strangers that she thought she was dying. Now she’ll do anything to prevent her own bat mitzvah from happen-
ing—anything, that is, except tell her parents. Ellie (white
and Jewish) harangues Zoe (black and Christian) into a series
of increasingly goofball attempts to stealthily deep-six the bat
mitzvah. From hiding the invitations to faking her own death,
Ellie’s shenanigans result in cringe comedy that (despite the
embarrassment of this tale. The old message exhorting readers to try the
new is also nicely tempered by the dreadful rainstorm Oliver
and Bug suffer through, showing that not every new experience
is purely joyful. Deeply saturated colors, particularly the blues
and orange-reds, pulse on the page, giving lift and verve to Ol-
iver’s story.

Who Who Who could resist the gentlest tale of adventure?
Not you you you. (Picture book: 3-6)

Madeline Finn is a resourceful child who starred in two previ-
ous stories about therapy dogs. In the first story Madeline was
helped in learning to read by a huge, white therapy dog named
Bonnie, and in the second installment Madeline adopted one of
Bonnie’s puppies, Star. Now Star is old enough to be trained by
Madeline as a therapy dog with the help of Bonnie and her owner.
Madeline practices with Star, and the pair then successfully com-
plete a series of three tests at the retirement home. At each visit
Madeline and Star reach out to an older man in a wheelchair, Mr.
Humphrey, who at first will not speak or interact. The cheer-
ful little girl and appealing dog keep trying to connect with Mr.
Humphrey, and Madeline finally reaches him by reading aloud with Bonnie and Star at her side. The first-person present-tense
story includes lots of dialogue and expressions of encouragement
for both Madeline and Star. Charming, soft-focus illustrations
provide extra details and capture the personalities of the deter-
mined child and irresistible dogs. Madeline presents white, Mr.
Humphrey, black, and some of the other residents of the retire-
ment home are also people of color. This touching story stands on
its own, but fans of Madeline’s previous outings will particularly
enjoy reading this account that ties all the previous tales together.

A special jacket flourishes in a family
over time.

It arrives in shiny, metallic gift wrap. The jacket has a rich,
multicolored pattern in a nubby, carpety texture and a white
collar and cuffs like fleece or sheepskin. It has “four dazzling
buttons down the front.” Amelia immediately nuzzles it to her
face, then proceeds to wear it everywhere—preschool, the park,
bed—until the sad day it no longer fits. Now it’s little sister Lil-
ly’s turn. Lily, too, wears it everywhere: the library, the swingset,
even—despite its warmth—the beach. Eventually Lily out-
grows it, and the family cat blissfully has kittens on it. When
it’s old, a bit worn, and a bit dirty, Mom remakes it into a teddy
bear. The jacket seems to shift somewhat in size, which requires
a small suspension of disbelief—no problem—but why does
Mom make the jacket into a bear rather than passing it down as a garment to the youngest (third) sibling? (Surely not because the
youngest sibling, short-haired, might be intended as a boy
and the jacket is festive, even perhaps feminine?) This question,
while baffling, doesn’t override Pashley’s toasty-warm story and
Baker’s captivating collaged layers of fabrics, papers, and tex-
tures. Amelia has light brown skin and straight black hair; Lily
has similar skin and corkscrew blonde curls; the toddler sibling
has straight, straw-colored hair; and Mom has brown skin and
wears her black hair in a bun.

Snug and enchanting. (Picture book: 3-7)
A sweet tale of animal adventure. (Fiction. 7-10) (A Kitten Called Holly: 978-1-5362-1027-9, 978-1-5362-1571-7 paper)

A COLLIE CALLED SKY
Peters, Helen
Illus. by Snowdon, Ellie
Walker US/Candlewick (160 pp.)
978-1-5362-1026-2
978-1-5362-1572-4 paper
Series: Jasmine Green Rescues

A girl goes on an unexpected journey to save her little sister in this series opener.

Pacey Packer daydreams of being the “brave and powerful” Lady Pacey, vanquishing foes and “bringing peace and justice to the world all by herself.” Tasked with babysitting her younger sister, Mina, adventure-loving Pacey refuses to play tea party with Mina and her plush unicorn. But when she tries to relent, Pacey walks in on Mina being ferried out the window by a real live unicorn! Equally shockingly, Mina’s unicorn toy is actually Slasher, a real unicorn who has been transfigured into the body of a plushie and can talk. Pacey follows them, but just as they arrive in the unicorn land of Rundalyn, Pacey and Slasher are separated from Mina. With snarky Slasher as her guide, Pacey uses her sense of adventure to brave carnivorous plants, oversized fauna, and other dangers to reach Mina. When Slasher and Pacey arrive at the Alpha unicorn’s castle, a Mr. Tumnus-esque betrayal by Slasher reveals the cruel, haughty Alpha’s plan to turn Pacey and her sister into stone statues. It’s up to Pacey and her sister to save themselves, combining their styles of imaginative play. Two-color illustrations (a dull grape purple with black and white) lack the magic and energy that the story really needs, flattening the already two-dimensional style and lacking a clear intentionality. Pacey and Mina both have pale skin and straight, black hair.

For settings where the Phoebe and Her Unicorn series has ravenous fans. (Graphic fantasy. 7-10)

LIFT AS YOU CLIMB
The Story of Ella Baker
Powell, Patricia Hruby
Illus. by Christie, R. Gregory
McElderry (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 9, 2020
978-1-5344-0623-0

Early in life, Ella Baker listened to her grandfather’s sermons, her grandmother’s stories about life during slavery, and her mother’s advice to “Lift as you climb”: the lodestars that guided Baker to her purpose and accomplishments.

Powell’s verse biography chronicles the professional life of civil rights leader Ella Josephine Baker. Not as widely familiar as Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Dorothy Height, she nevertheless played a pivotal role in educating African Americans of all backgrounds about freedom, voting, and their rights. The book cites Baker’s working relationship with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as they formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, as well as her work with the NAACP and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Christie’s illustrations are in the style of African American folk art, a harmonious choice for the subject matter. Vivid colors abound, and the typeface alternates between black and white, both clearly legible against solid backgrounds. Centered in distinctive display type is Baker’s oft-repeated question, “What do you hope to accomplish?” There is an urgency to the clipped text, accentuated by frequent use of the em dash: “Ella thought [Dr. King] should ask— / not command. / Still, she agreed— / for the cause.” Substantial backmatter includes an author’s note with further information about Baker’s personal life, a glossary of the initialisms, a timeline, and a bibliography.

A beautiful book and a welcome addition to the picture-book–biography shelf. (Picture book/biography. 5-8)
Sauer uses simple sentences and repetition to build a tightly constructed story.

MALINA’S JAM
Radivoeva, Svetla with Sauer, Tammi
Illus. by Radivoeva, Svetla
Disney Press (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-0-7636-9410-4
Series: Walt Disney Animation Studios Artist Showcase

This entry in the Walt Disney Animation Studios Artist Showcase, which publishes the books of Disney animators, is about a tea-loving, raspberry-eating bibliophile hedgehog.

Malina is shy and spends more time with her raspberry patch and books than with other creatures. Having built herself an impressive collection of preserved raspberry jam, she learns that her neighbors want to try some and ends up giving it all away. Her new friends return the favor by giving her some of their own favorite snacks as well as by helping her grow more raspberries, thereby replenishing her favorite treat and forging new friendships. Though the story concept and illustrations come from a Disney animator, the text comes from co-author Sauer, who uses simple sentences and repetition to build a tightly constructed story. There’s an overt sweetness to the illustrations, with the kind of bright-eyed, curly-lashed characters one sees in animated Disney films. Malina is an endearing character, though there’s not much else about this story and its execution that distinguishes it from other picture books about friendship and generosity. Disney fans may be interested in seeing an animator switch forms. Appended is a note from the illustrator about her background in animation and why she was happy to try her hand at a picture book. Also appended is a jam recipe—with a reminder to share.

If it’s sugary-sweet stories you like, then this is your jam. (Picture book 3-6)

JEFFERSON MEASURES
A MOOSE
Rockliff, Mara
Illus. by Schindler, S.D.
Candlewick (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-0-7636-9410-4

A rivalry between Thomas Jefferson and a French naturalist is detailed in this lengthy picture book.

In Rockliff’s rollicking tale, Jefferson jots down numbers everywhere he goes. He reads a new book by a famous Frenchman named Buffon, claiming that “America [is] a terrible, miserable, cold, damp place where nothing good could grow” and animals are unnaturally small. Jefferson is mystified by these claims from a person who has never even been to America, and he sets out to prove him wrong. Amid the Revolutionary War, Jefferson finds time to compile enough numbers for a book, Notes on the State of Virginia. When he is asked to represent the new United States in France, Jefferson hopes to have his book presented to Buffon, but “the famous Frenchman had already made up his mind.” Jefferson compiles more numbers—measurements of animals small and large—and finally has a rotting moose carcass sent to Buffon. Anticlimactically, Buffon dies without acknowledging the huge animal. Schindler’s finely detailed illustrations are well suited to the subject and impress with period detail; they include one background character of color among the otherwise all-white cast. Children obsessed with the early republic and with science may find this obscure tale entertaining, but adults familiar with Jefferson’s writings and biography will hesitate to share this frivolous anecdote with children, as it ignores his legacy of racism and slavery even in the backmatter notes, which span six pages.

Though engagingly conveyed, this slight account grievously lacks context. (sources) (Informational picture book. 5-9)

QUEEN
The Unauthorized Biography
Romero Marínó, Soledad
Illus. by Castelló, Laura
Sourcebooks eXplore (64 pp.)
$14.99 | Aug. 1, 2020
978-1-7282-1091-9
Series: Band Bios

An illustrated exploration of the iconic British rockers.

In a tongue-in-cheek “Recipe for Queen,” this picture book describes its subject as “an intense, sophisticated dish with surprising ingredients.” Despite an equally startling formula, Romero Marínó’s account will leave readers who want it all from their band biographies yearning to break free. Though the narrative follows a roughly chronological sequence, it can’t seem to decide whether it’s focused on Freddie Mercury, who dominates its pages, or the entire band. An opening spread sharing key dates from Mercury’s life gives way to a timeline of the band’s career, then careens into a full 10 pages solely devoted to the legendary frontman. (Excepting the ethnically Parsi Mercury, all band members are white.) Brief profiles of each band member separate a section conveying their origin story from a capsule history of their early years. The text—an uncredited Google Translate-esque interpretation of a Spanish-language original—stumbles along, rife with passive voice, strange syntax, and awkward phrasing. Imagined scenes depicting key moments in Queen’s history suffer from stilted dialogue while pull quotes seem more filler than enticing highlight. The book concludes with the radio debut of “Bohemian Rhapsody,” but images ostensibly intended as appendices drag this chronicle beyond its obvious terminus. Despite it all, Castelló’s whimsical illustrations shine, offering die-hard fans a reason to keep themselves alive.

Less rhapsody than lost opportunity. Let this one bite the dust or risk going stone-cold crazy. (Informational picture book. 6-10)
THE MULBERRY TREE
Rushby, Allison
Candlewick (304 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-5362-0761-3

Villagers believe the huge tree dominating the back garden steals young girls, but Immy, 10, convinces her parents to rent Lavender Cottage anyway.

Immy’s family left Australia so her mother, a heart surgeon, could take a job in England. Immy knows clinical depression has left her general-practitioner father unable to work, but she finds it hard to be understanding when he loudly disparages village beliefs to local kids (including Caitlyn, whose parents own the cottage) and she’s hit with the angry backlash. Jean, an elderly neighbor, is concerned to learn Immy will soon turn 11; she too fears the tree was responsible for two girls’ disappearances—one was her best friend—on the eve of their 11th birthdays. While sensing the tree’s malevolence, Immy’s increasingly fascinated by it and the eerie rhymes she can’t get out of her head. At school the intentions are great, but the story itself disappoints. The backmatter includes some unexpected guest appearances.

Crafted from shivery supernatural elements, this fable celebrates the power of empathy and forgiveness. (Fantasy. 8-11)

MOTOR MOUSE DELIVERS
Rylant, Cynthia
Illus. by Howard, Arthur
Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster (72 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-1-4814-9128-0
Series: Motor Mouse

This murine essential worker returns in three small stories packed full of charm.

Everyone’s favorite delivery mouse returns after his eponymous debut (2019) with tales as succinct as they are comforting. “The Radio Mystery Book” informs readers that Motor Mouse loves mysteries but doesn’t read them at bedtime because they keep him up at night. When a radio station starts playing an audiobook, a chapter a day, he discovers there’s more than one way to enjoy a good book. “Day of the Double-Decker” begins with tragedy (a motorcar in need of repairs) and quickly turns around when our hero finds that his public transportation system is “full of kindness.” Finally, “A Good Game of Croquet” shows what happens when peaceful intentions wreak havoc with Motor Mouse’s regular croquet game with his brother Valentino. Conveyed with Rylant’s customary charisma, the tone of these tales retains its light touch with familiar characters and safe, comfortable settings. The art takes great pleasure in the smallest details, such as Valentino, natty in straw hat and spectator shoes, or, in another scene, a keen example of what would happen if Andy Warhol had ever painted chickens.

As comforting as a hot cup of tea, a scone, or the view from a double-decker bus on a beautiful sunny day. (Picture book. 5-8)

BLING BLAINE
Throw Glitter, Not Shade
Sanders, Rob
Illus. by Rizzo, Letizia
Sterling Children’s Books (32 pp.)
$16.95 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-1-4549-3456-1

Sparkles are not gender specific.

Say hello to Blaine, a brown-skinned boy who loves things that sparkle. Blaine’s motto is “throw glitter, not shade!” and he embodies it by accessorizing everything from his hat to his backpack in shimmery sparkles. For the most part, Blaine’s classmates, a diverse bunch, embrace the title character’s dazzling accessories and help explain his passion to unfamiliar people by relating it to similar enthusiasms in their own lives. When the haters’ words eventually get to Blaine and bullying starts, the sparkles are abandoned, and Blaine becomes a shadow of his former glitzy self. Blaine’s friends notice the change and fix the problem by wearing their own scintillating accessories and engaging in (implied) in-depth conversations with the haters. The intentions are great, but the story itself creaks, treating Blaine like a plot device and not a real character. His only proactive stance throughout is to offer a sparkly present to one of his detractors as a peace offering, a one-sided gesture, as the kid never apologizes. The bland cartoon artwork does little to enhance the story, while the diversity of characters is welcome, the use of slits to represent the closed eyes of an Asian student (as compared to every other character’s, which resemble u’s when closed) disappoints. The backmatter introduces readers to the term “ally,” but the subsequent best-practices advice does little to further the conversation.

Costume jewelry at best. (Picture book. 6-10)

THE FARM THAT MAC BUILT
Sauer, Tammi
Illus. by Urbanovic, Jackie
Clarion (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-0-544-11302-2

This Animal Theater production, way off-Broadway, has some unexpected guest appearances.

Beet microphone in hand, the scarecrow from Old
MacDonald’s farm narrates this stage production of a “mostly true story.” The MC begins: “This is the farm that Mac built. / These are the ... pigs (Oink!) that live on the farm / that Mac built.” The suit-clad pigs are followed by cows in tasteful frocks. Pig-and-cow pairs dance around the barn stage. Next come the...monkeys? The scarecrow shoos them off the stage, and the sheep “(Baa!)” enter in tutus, with one performing a graceful grand jeté. Much better...but they are followed by...break-dancing kangaroos?! The scarecrow apologizes, and a one-horse band joins the production “(Neigh).” Next, of course are—Wagnerian elephants? Sheesh. Eggs arrive, and that’s all well and good...but these hatch into penguins. After a short moment, the scarecrow assembles everyone (who belongs) for a curtain call of animal sounds that includes one more giggle-inducing oopsie. Sauer’s cumulative mashup of “Old MacDonald Had a Farm” and “The House That Jack Built” will delight audiences familiar with both. Urbanovic’s cartoon illustrations of (mostly) clothed animal performers elevate this nightmare production into a hilarious comedy of errors. There are plenty of details in the illustrations to prompt new laughs in subsequent reads.

No owls here, but this one is definitely a hoot. (Picture book: 2-7)

NOT YOUR ALL-AMERICAN GIRL
Shang, Wendy Wan-Long & Rosenberg, Madelyn
Scholastic (256 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-338-03776-0

Music, friendship, and the definition of “American” are humorously and realistically explored in this companion to Rosenberg and Shang’s This Is Just a Test (2017).

Sixth grader Lauren and her best friend, Tara, audition for the school musical. A natural-born singer, Lauren has a stunning audition, but the director casts Lauren in the ensemble and blue-eyed, freckle-faced, milky-skinned Tara as the “all-American” lead, implying that Jewish, biracial (Chinese/white) Lauren and her straight, black hair, brown eyes, and tan skin are the opposite. Lauren tries to be supportive of her best friend, but her jealousy and discontent grow as she struggles to process overt and subtle racism at school, in the community, and in media. Lauren’s mostly white friends don’t understand why she’s upset, and even Tara makes off-handedly racist comments. Luckily, Lauren has just discovered a lifeline: the country music of Patsy Cline (even as a case of mistaken spelling leads her to believe “Patsy Klein” is a Jewish country singer). Whether familiar with or new to the Horowitz family, readers will be drawn into Lauren’s first-person narration, filled with witty observations and droll character development. Set in Virginia in 1984, the book weaves accessible and engaging historical markers into the plot. Illustrations of buttons with funny sayings, Lauren’s trademark, punctuate the text, adding a humorous counterpoint. An unnecessary subplot about a theatrical ghost feels tacked on but is easily overlooked. With so many references to singers, musical groups, and songs, readers may wish for a playlist!

A nearly pitch-perfect middle school exploration of race and friendship. (Fiction: 10-13)

MR. NOGGINBODY AND THE CHILDLISH CHILD
Shannon, David
Illus. by the author
Norton Young Readers (40 pp.)
$17.95 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-1-324-00.0463-9

In a second installment, the well-intentioned but naïve protagonist takes on a babysitting gig.

Egg-shaped like its guardian, the pint-sized terror sports a sailor suit. “Snookums” is first seen guzzling a chocolate soda with a straw. In a comedic bit that kids will love, the hand-lettered “shuurrpp!” is inhaled into the glass over four pages. The subsequent “Buurrrp!” erupts over three, wilting the vase of flowers on the host’s table. Too late, Mr. Nogginbody is informed that the soda is supposed to follow the homework, but the now-energized child has the TV remote, and the chase is on. The ink drawings on white paper are activated with swaths of color. Panels of varying sizes signal discrete actions, and perspectives shift to focus attention and create interest. As the babysitter turns playful—and the two bounce on the couch—he observes: “You are a childish child!” The upside-down charge retorts (in text that is also upside down): “You’re a grownupish grownup!” The climax portrays the adult crashing the sheep “(the sheep “(the...monkeys? The scarecrow shoos them off the stage, and the upside-down charge retorts (in text that is also upside down): “You’re a grownupish grownup!” The climax portrays the adult crashing the ceiling and breaking the couch on the way down. The two have an emotional exchange, each fearing they will be “in deep doo-doo” when the mother returns. Luckily, Mr. Nogginbody knows his way around a hammer; repairs, homework, and mutual soda partaking are completed in short order. A visual joke awaits close observers on the final page.

Once again, a spirited Shannon narrative shows that when hearts are opened to each other, affection and harmony follow. (Picture book: 4-7)

FISH FEUD!
Sherry, Kevin
Illus. by the author with Dzioba, Wes
Graphix/Scholastic (96 pp.)
$22.99 | $7.99 paper | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-338-63667-3 paper
978-1-338-63668-0

A self-serving squid learns a lesson about friendship.

Set many leagues under the sea on a bright and cheery ocean bed, this series opener introduces
With mischievous feylings, goblins, and magic this is an exciting, fast-paced middle-grade fantasy.

THE BOOK OF FATAL ERRORS

Squizzard, a tomato-red squid with an outsize personality. His best friend is Tooth, a vegetarian great white shark who has legs and wears pants. They may be fish and cephalopod, but the routines of their friendship are familiar: They hunt for shells, build reef forts, and concoct elaborate games of pretend. However, a power imbalance is quickly evident as Squizzard casts himself in all the best roles, always leaving Tooth overshadowed. When Squizzard carelessly forgets his report and asks Tooth to cover for him in class, Tooth finally gets mad and declares friendship over. With the help and gentle guidance of a kind seahorse, Squizzard decides to find the right path to win Tooth back. Readers will delight as Squizzard tries to change his egotistical ways; it is not a quick nor easy transition, and his silly missteps ring comically true. Author/illustrator Sherry brings an empathetic tale of self-examination and change to life with easy-to-read chapters and an eye-catching comics format, with colors by Dzioba. Sherry also skillfully weaves facts about ocean life into the narrative. Bubbly and undeniably cute, this is a must-read for fans of the Narwhal and Jelly series. (Graphic fantasy. 7-10)

FAUJA SINGH KEEPS GOING
The True Story of the Oldest Person To Ever Run a Marathon
Singh, Simran Jeet
Illus. by Kaur Baljinder
Kokila (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-0-525-55509-4

A short, illustrated biography of Fauja Singh, who was the first 100-year-old to ever run a marathon.

As the picture book begins, Fauja Singh, a clever child with a good sense of fun, often feels left out, as he is unable to walk and run like his friends. His family worries about his weak legs, but the boy learns to walk at the age of 5 after much practice and effort. He cannot go to school, however, as the only school is several miles away from his village, and his legs are still weak; instead, he learns to farm, and by the age of 15, he can walk a whole mile. As the years pass, Fauja gets married, has children, and even gets his own farm. After his wife passes away, Fauja goes to live with his family in England at the age of 81. It is here that Fauja begins to run and even signs up for his first marathon. In his narrative, author Singh (no relation) focuses largely on the life and achievements of his subject, emphasizing the importance of working hard and holding on to dreams, while being selfish.

A charming undersea tale stressing the importance of not being selfish. (Graphic fantasy. 7-10)

“Can you be friends with somebody who is...not at all like you?”

This cheerful account of surprising animal friendships assures readers and listeners that they can. The author/illustrator of Found Dogs (2017) and Mail Duck (2020) addresses a just slightly older audience with this simple but effective message. The stories of Owen and Mzee (hippo and tortoise), Kumbali and Kago (cheetah and puppy), Themba and Albert (elephant and sheep), Koko, a signing gorilla, and various kittens, and Ben and Duggie (dog and dolphin) demonstrate that friendship can grow unexpectedly. Each story is told in two double-page spreads. The first introduces the two animals with a pair of questions; the second poses the question “Can we be friends?” and answers it positively on one page. On the facing page is a description of the friendship, naming the animals and explaining where and how it happened. The final spread shows a child of color and a variety of animals, asking “Whose friend will YOU be?” Sirotich uses heavy black line to outline her cartoon creatures and their settings. The text is relatively simple, appropriate for fledgling readers to read with an adult or on their own. Some of these stories may be familiar; others, not so widely publicized. A glossary defines animal-related words such as “animal shelter,” “runt,” and “sanctuary.” The author includes a list of her sources and suggestions for further exploration on the internet.

Child-friendly and appealing. (Picture book. 4-8)

THE BOOK OF FATAL ERRORS
Slater, Dashka
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (336 pp.)
$16.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-374-30119-4
Series: Feylawn Chronicles, 1

When 12-year-old Rufus Takada Col- lins finds an old train, it puts him in the midst of a magical, life-or-death scavenger hunt. After a school year characterized by what he thinks of as a series of Fatal Errors, Rufus is looking forward to spending the summer with Grandpa Jack at Feylawn, the family property that encompasses forest, meadow, creek, and orchard. At Feylawn, Rufus finds an old-fashioned locomotive. Unfortunately, Grandpa Jack is hurt falling through rot ting floorboards before he can learn about the train, and Rufus’ father bans Rufus from Feylawn. Rufus sneaks back and finds he can now see fairylike creatures called feylings. He discovers
The theme of rejection due to difference is an intrinsic part of Claude’s story, so readers develop sympathy and empathy as they also learn facts.
paired profile and groups Filipino American labor activist Larry Itliong with Dolores Huerta and César Chavez, carefully noting that these high-profile individuals represent many. Organizations and movements include the Hollywood Ten, the “It Gets Better” Project, and March for Our Lives. The variety succeeds in introducing readers to a wide range of civil-disobedience and nonviolent-protest tactics, such as boycotts, legal challenges, marches, music, sit-ins, and walkouts. Opposite each single page of text is a textured illustration rendered in muted colors, using colored pencil and watercolor. Holding his walking stick, Gandhi appears against a route map for the Salt March. A youthful Ruth Bader Ginsburg rolls up her sleeve in a muscle-making pose, speaking the feminist slogan, “We Can Do It!” In an author’s note, Stanley emphasizes the youth of many of these activists and encourages readers to discover their passion.

Brief and thoughtful, this informative introduction to change-makers gives inspiration to future activists. (Further reading) (Nonfiction. 7-10)

SILLI’S SHEEP
Stone, Tiffany
Illus. by Thomas, Louis
Schwartz & Wade/Random (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-9848-4852-9

Silli is a lovable fool who lives in an alpine meadow and solves his problems in the most unlikely ways.

The rosy-cheeked fellow is completely content to sleep next to his large sack of belongings, with “nothing but moonbeams for a bed”—until the wind blows. Then, “Silli felt…chilly.” The cartoon caricatures have a childlike feel; they portray a white, wispy-haired man with a long, oval face, a prominent, red nose, and a mobile expression. Having decided to search for sheep (so he can make yarn and knit a sweater), he spots five likely candidates on a neighboring pasture. He eventually—inadvertently—does create a wind barrier. As it starts to snow, Silli drifts off dreaming of a cow so he can make hot chocolate, an actual sheep peers in at him. Stone’s narrative has the cadences and pacing of a classic tale, and she knows just where to leave room for Thomas to fill in his own comical touches. The result is a rollicking good time.

A fresh and funny story of a good-natured soul who marches—with perseverance and gusto—to his own drummer. (Picture book. 4-7)

NANA SAYS I WILL BE FAMOUS ONE DAY
Stott, Ann
Illus. by Joyner, Andrew
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-0-7636-9560-6

A grandmother dog supports her grandchild in many sports and school activities, pushing the pup to achieve greater results and future fame.

Nana is an old-fashioned grandmother dog with a curly, gray topknot, glasses, plaid skirts, and sensible shoes. However, her attitude as a pushy-parent stand-in embodies the worst modern-day aspects of poor sportsmanship and sideline second-guessing of coaches, umpires, and teachers. She inserts herself on the team bench at a swim meet in order to ensure her grandchild is first in line to compete, gives the football coach unsolicited tips on plays, and interrupts a band concert by dancing in the aisle. At a baseball game, Nana screams at the umpire that he needs to get his eyes checked. When Nana breaks her ankle after a fall, her grandchild helps her in many kind, loving ways, with a final page showing the pup on Nana’s lap as her biggest fan. Nana is presented in the first-person narration by the young dog as a competitive character who “always has to win,” even at card games with her devoted grandchild. There are no consequences for her poor behavior other than glaring looks from other parents, and Nana doesn’t change her ways even when she is reminded of the posted rules of good sportsmanship. Humorous, cartoon-style illustrations with a cast of dogs and cats add some exuberance with lots of motion and clever details.

A supportive grandparent is a joy; a pushy grandma is not, and readers may not wish to spend much time with this one. (Picture book. 4-7)

PART OF YOUR NIGHTMARE
Strange, Vera
Disney-Hyperion (224 pp.)
$6.99 paper | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-368-04825-5
Series: Disney Chills, 1

A new middle-grade series featuring Disney stories’ scary elements opens with The Little Mermaid’s Ursula. Shelly Anderson has struggled to make friends ever since she changed schools following her parents’ breakup. Even though she’s the eco-conscious daughter of an aquarium owner, the spineless Shelly allows her new, popular-clique friends to peer-pressure her into tossing a disposable coffee cup into the ocean. After littering, she’s stalked by sea witch Ursula, who offers a deal: She’ll make Shelly a fast swimmer in exchange for a favor to be named later. Of course, there’s something fishy with the deal: Shelly starts slowly transforming into a fish (first gills, then webbing between her digits and scales); to reverse it, she must retrieve
the old trident that’s in the aquarium for Ursula. The narrative’s insistence on telling over showing causes it to fail to capture any visceral sensory details needed for the body-horror storyline to succeed. Ironically, the most successful horror moment is the least logically connected to the magic at play (her brother’s dead goldfish appears in the school toilet to warn her off from the deal). The half-baked environmental storyline features after-school–special levels of heavy-handedness. The ending’s unhappy for Shelly, though there’s a touch of humor and her safety’s implied. Most characters lack descriptions; Shelly has olive skin, and one significant secondary character is coded Latinx.

**Coasting on a popular villain isn’t enough to keep the watered-down story afloat. (Horror/fantasy. 8-12)**

### THE CANDY MAFIA

*Tidhar, Lavie*  
_Ilus. by Duncan, Daniel*_  
Peachtree (300 pp.)  
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-1-68263-197-3

Preteen detective Nelle battles organized crime during her city’s prohibition on candy.

From the start, snappy dialogue and mannered narration spoofs the traditions of film noir when 12-year-old candy smuggler Eddie de Menthe hires private detective Nelle Faulkner, also 12, to find a missing teddy bear while a candy prohibition hangs over their neighborhood. As Nelle pursues leads in a playground hideout, store backroom, and lonely mansion, she encounters more kid bootleggers as well as crooked adults also on the hunt for the missing teddy bear. Similarities to the real Prohibition reveal government corruption and the difficulties inherent in denying a population what it wants. When Eddie also goes missing, Nelle’s case turns to recovering a candy fortune, locating a hidden chocolatier, and restoring peace—and all kinds of sweets—to her sugar-starved city. Food fights, an abandoned candy factory break-in, and more sweets-themed antics add to the fun and intrigue. Breaking up a mostly white cast is Nelle’s South Asian friend, Bobbie Singh, who’s also integrally connected to the illegal candy trade. In film-noir fashion, grayscale cartoons highlight Nelle’s escapades and exaggerate the criminals. While poking fun at the genre, in his debut for children, thriller writer Tidhar also recognizes young people’s need for respect.

**Combining chewing gum and gumshoes, this comical mystery begs to be read aloud. (Mystery. 8-12)**

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### EVERY LITTLE LETTER

*Underwood, Deborah*  
_Ilus. by Ruiz, Joy Hwang*_  
Dial (40 pp.)  
$17.99 | Aug. 4, 2020  
978-0-525-55402-8

In a land where high walls separate each of the 26 letters (seen in the endpapers), life is rather monotonous. The H’s live only with other H’s and therefore speak just one letter: H. The same is true for the rest of the alphabet, all walled off and safe from one another. Then an intrepid lowercase h discovers a hole in the wall, reaches through, and discovers...a lowercase i! Ecstatic, they greet each other, but their happiness is cut short when the capital letters discover and forbid their friendship. Disheartened, the two friends send letters (in the form of paper airplanes) that soar over many walls, unexpectedly offering new opportunities to x’s, b’s, y’s, and more. Once again the capital letters try to interfere, but the lowercase letters have discovered that the most important words of all—“courage,” “kindness,” “trust”—are made up of many letters and can break down walls. Expressive, anthropomorphic letters, set in a bright, pastel palette, lend the book a cartoon look and feel that keeps the story lighthearted. Spreads alternate between vignettes and full-page illustrations to keep readers engaged. Even pre-readers will recognize letters set in bold, big shapes, enabling caregivers to incorporate early-literacy lessons into the read-aloud experience.

**This message of friendship, though oft told, bears repeating, especially for the youngest readers. (Picture book. 3-5)**

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### HELLO, FUTURE ME

*Ventrella, Kim*  
Scholastic (272 pp.)  
$17.99 | Aug. 4, 2020  
978-1-338-57617-7

Magic helps a 12-year-old girl cope with her parents’ impending divorce.

June has always been a problem-solver and is quick to tell readers so directly in her lively, conversational narration. She questions her skills, however, when her mother returns from a five-week art retreat with a new guy and her parents decide to divorce. The author tempers June’s natural shock, anger, and desire to keep her parents together with her setting, a whimsical locale that celebrates Bigfoot sightings and magic from the newly opened Shop of Last Resort. As June schemes to make her parents love each other again, she also receives a refurbished laptop from this oddities emporium, which connects her via social media to child and young adult versions of herself. While child June shows her burgeoning strains in her parents’ relationship, her “Future Me” warns her about intervening. Against her own advice, so to speak, a
desperate June tries out some of the shop’s unusual spells. The ensuing mishaps not only create intrigue, but allow June to realize and accept that she can’t control everything in her life. Particularly lovable throughout these mysterious events are June’s dad, a burly, tattooed handyman who’s also not afraid to cry, and best friend, Calvin, another supportive male and possible first love interest. Characters default to white in this quirky town located near Oklahoma and Arkansas’ Ouachita Mountains. This light fantasy cases the tension of a tough topic. (Fantasy. 8-12)

A father and son are forced from their longtime neighborhood. Leo and his dad love their rented “old blue house” despite its quirks (peeling paint, a mossy roof, leaks and creaks). The house is filled with so many memories that make it theirs. In the winter, the duo make cozy forts and bake pies to warm up when the old heater breaks. They dance to “Spruce Springsteel” on vinyl. As the garden fills with raspberries and tomatoes in the summer, Leo plays in the yard until sundown. But, lately, developers have been building “big, new apartments” nearby. Their landlord informs Leo’s dad that the blue house is next to be torn down. Leo and his dad dance, stomp, and rage together. Will their new home ever feel the same? Walsh’s latest is a moving portrait of a single-parent family’s resilience and love amid redevelopment. The textured, deeply colorful art utilizes collage, and the text appears handwritten, giving the rich spreads the feel of a scrapbook. The detailed illustrations enrich not only the memories, but the characters’ colorful personalities and relationship. The third-person narrative’s tight connection to Leo and his emotions positions the text as Virginia Lee Burton’s The Little House retold for a new generation. Endpapers depict Leo’s neighborhood before and after redevelopment, effectively showing the impact. Both Leo and his dad present white. An exuberant and wondrous testimony to the power of one little brown boy’s imagination. (Picture book. 4-8)

The early beginnings and professional life of the prolific singer and activist are presented in this LP–shaped picture book. The text is presented in rhyming couplets, one per double-page spread, with a spelled-out lead word printed in block letters setting each one up. “B-L-E-S-S-E-D” leads off, and the titular “R-E-S-P-E-C-T” introduces the final couplet. The short stanzas move the book quickly from one point in Franklin’s life to the next, hinting kaleidoscopically at who she was and why she was so important. Children with no previous familiarity with the subject will require context from caregivers to understand most points. (A narrative biographical note sums up the main points in the backmatter.) Weatherford acknowledges that Franklin’s mother left the family when her preacher father was unfaithful: “Clarence and Barbara Franklin can’t seem to agree. An exuberant and wondrous testimony to the power of one little brown boy’s imagination. (Picture book. 4-8)
THE LAURA INGALLS WILDER COMPANION
A Chapter-by-Chapter Guide
Whipple, Annette
Chicago Review Press (240 pp.)
$18.99 paper | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-64160-166-5

Learn about the real and fictional life and times of Laura Ingalls Wilder with hands-on activities and historical tidbits.

The first part of this educational companion title focuses on the first eight Little House books, each chapter focusing on a different book. The First Four Years and Wilder’s life after are covered in Part 2. Historical and geographical information, along with miscellany about daily life (cooking, farm work, animal husbandry, clothing, etc.), are presented in bullet points, with more general information in callout boxes, some specifically delineating fact from fiction. Offensive/dated terms found in Wilder’s texts are highlighted. Each segment also includes crafts, games, recipes (lengthy and targeting experienced cooks), and other activities prompting readers to “live like” Laura or Almanzo. Chapter-ending questions, educational and moralistic in tone, often prompt specific answers rather than natural discussion. Whipple applauds Wilder for writing her family’s story “realistically,” including racial prejudices of the time, asserting that she “let readers like you decide what to think.” In her introduction, Whipple acknowledges the “complicated pioneer history,” noting that the way “white settlers treated the American Indians...was often shameful.” Unfortunately, although Whipple encourages readers to reflect on these “uncomfortable” issues and consider also the Osage side of the story, closing her introduction by chipperly quoting the virulently racist Ma’s “All’s well that ends well” sounds a particularly sour note. Unless otherwise noted, characters are assumed white and Christian.

For die-hard fans. (glossary, further reading, and places to visit) (Nonfiction, 7-12.)

DUCK AND PENGUIN DO NOT LIKE SLEEPOVERS
Woolf, Julia
Illus. by the author
Peachtree (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-68263-201-7

Ducks, penguins, and overnights don’t mix.

Duck and Penguin don’t want to sleep in a “teeny-weeny tiny tent” outdoors. The stuffed animals are the companions of Betty and Maud, respectively. The girls love doing things together; their toys—no. Duck and Penguin dislike what their guardians get up to and dislike each other. As introduced in Duck & Penguin Are Not Friends (2019), the girls believe the toys enjoy their activities. While Betty and Maud excitedly don jammies,
snuggle in sleeping bags, and luxuriate on supersoft pillows. Duck and Penguin scowl in tight onesies (Penguin wears duck PJ’s) and “drink” soda pop. The girls’ own liquid overindulgence forces a rushed bathroom trip. Duck and Penguin, alone, also dash houseward, surrounded by nighttime noises. Scared they’re being watched, they head back to the tent, the cramped space suddenly comforting. Next morning, the girls (who slept indoors) peek inside, observe the toys ensconced with the cat, and conclude they love sleepovers. The humor in this British import arises from the girls’ smiley cluelessness and the toys’ impressively effective glowers. The appealing illustrations are lively and expressive; the cat plays a pivotal role in some scenes. Betty is white and wears blue glasses. Maud is black with her hair styled in two Afro puffs. Duck and Penguin frolic on endpapers. Young readers will awaken to the idea that sleepovers aren’t for everyone. (Picture book. 4-7)

ON EAGLE COVE
Yolen, Jane
Illus. by Dulemba, Elizabeth O.
Cornell Lab Publishing Group (32 pp.)
$16.95 | Sep. 5, 2020
978-1-943645-48-0

A bird-loving child walks to a lake with Mom and their dog and gets a special view of two eagles and their nest.

In rhyming, first-person verse, the enthusiastic narrator tells about trips to Eagle Cove, a remote area near a nearby lake. In winter, the child sees two large birds in flight grasp each other’s talons and “cartwheel” through the sky: “They chased each other to and fro, / Then parted—quite an aerial show.” One eagle flies up to the nest, and the other grabs a fish from the water with its sharp talons. Two months later, the child returns with Mom. They “climbed a big hill, found a cliff, / Both sat down and wondered if / We’d see into the eagle’s nest.” Indeed, they see a parent eagle feeding two fuzzy gray eaglets—a magical sight, though the illustration on this spread fails to clarify how they can see it, since the perspective is a bit off. Yolen expertly keeps her text within the young child’s fresh observations of nature, inviting readers to share in amazement at the majestic eagle, its habits and life cycle. Dulemba’s illustrations resemble watercolor and pencil, and the mix of close-ups, panoramic views, and varying perspectives keeps interest fresh on each page. Informational backmatter shares photographs and fascinating details about the bald eagle as well as tips on how to see one in real life. Both Mom and child have brown skin and long, straight hair.

A memorable adventure. (Picture book. 3-8)
the physical characteristics and behavior of the Himalayan ungulate to describe a change-maker as important as Jackie Robinson. Without adult explanations they will certainly not understand that this retelling parallels the life of an actual, very important human being. Accurate biographical information embedded in sentences that liken Robinson’s family to a “herd of five yaks, grazed by...a hardworking single yak” may seem like clever wordplay. But when applied to an African American who broke a significant color barrier in sports, it is just plain offensive. Playing with concepts requires prior understanding of the content. Toddlers lack this context. In the pictures, “Yakkie” and his “herd” are painted brown, with no attempt to overlay Robinson’s facial features on Yakkie’s; white yaks are pale versions of Yakkie.

Criminally diminishes the real Jackie Robinson’s dignity and grace in the face of enormous obstacles. (Board book. 1-4)

BABY ANIMALS
Scholastic Early Learners
Illus. by Barker, Scott
Cartwheel/Scholastic (14 pp.)
$7.99  |  Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-338-64570-5
Series: Touch and Explore

This baby-animal primer features embedded touch-and-feel textural elements.

Each page features one cartoon creature on a brightly colored background with the diminutive name of the critter captioned below. One small portion of the animal has one or two fabric elements securely inserted into the thick board pages. There’s a gray “kitten” with a slender, soft tail, a “guinea-pig pup” with a felted body, a “lion cub” with a leathery nose, and a “penguin chick” with a sparkly, gently scratchy belly. Some of the touch-and-feel surfaces are on the scanty side, like the mane on the “donkey foal,” but there is a nice diversity of sensations. The animals are endearing, with oversized googly eyes and larger-than-normal heads in bright colors. On the cover is a puppy fully constructed in fabric, but it doesn’t appear within. Most compositions feature suitable contrast, but the ochre guinea pig against a pink background and gray donkey foal against a green background may be a little difficult for developing eyes to pick out. Babies will enjoy playing with (and chewing on) the red tag that protrudes from the front cover.

A simple and satisfying sensory experience. (Board book. 6 mos.-2)

ALIEN BABY!
Barks, Elias
Illus. by Hunt, Meg
Hazy Dell Press (12 pp.)
$8.95  |  Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-948931-09-0
Series: Hazy Dell Flap Book

Entertainment for tots that’s visually and conceptually out of this world.

“They’re here...” and they’re babies! That’s the message from this delightful bedtime diversion. A classically bug-eyed ET and their otherworldly friends charm and amuse in this small, sturdy exploration of the paranormal for toddlers. Eye-catching artwork evokes the great science-fiction and fantasy pulp art of yesteryear, only with playful, toddler-sized creatures with big grins and a sense of adventure. The text is a series of rhymed couplets presented over bright and dazzling double-page spreads. Each vignette poses a question on the first page that is answered by opening a well-secured but mercifully easy-to-open flap on recto: “Who’s zipping past in a flash of light?” Opening the flap reveals the answer: “It’s Alien Baby taking flight!” The die-cut flaps won’t tear easily, and little fingers can grab and open each one with ease thanks to the unusual thickness of the pages and the generous amount of space between the edge of each flap and the rest of the page upon which it resides. UFOlogists will recognize Alien Baby as a “Roswell Gray.” The supporting cast includes a “space baboon,” a robot, a “lizard man,” two startled human astronauts (one brown skinned and one pale), and two adoring parents to tuck Alien Baby in to a whispered “night, night!” Companion title Bigfoot Baby! is earthbound and equally charming.

Stellar fun for any astronaut-to-be. (Board book. 1-4) (Bigfoot Baby!: 978-1-948931-08-3)

TRAP THE MONSTER
Baruzzi, Agnese
Illus. by the author
Sourcebooks Jabberwocky (24 pp.)
$8.99  |  Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-72820-945-6

Children turn the tables on an impressive array of not-too-scary monsters in this interactive celebration of toddler empowerment imported from France.

Young readers show a big bad wolf, a toothy sea serpent, a furry four-eyed monster, a vampire, and a growling ogre who’s boss in this clever board book. Each four-page encounter begins, on verso, with the question, “If you are afraid of this [wolf/monster/etc.]. . .”, this is followed by the instruction to “...turn the page...” on recto. On the page to be turned is a die-cut pattern. Four rectangular cutouts that serve as tree trunks on recto prove to be the bars of a jail cell in which the wolf from the previous spread is imprisoned on verso, for example. The facing page exclaims, “You sent it to jail! Now lock the door with the key.” Similarly, an enormous “sea dragon” menaces a
This unabashed celebration of this little fox’s uniqueness and the grown-up fox’s unconditional admiration is completely sincere.

**YOUR NOSE!**

Boonyton, Sandra  
Illus. by the author  
Workman (24 pp.)  
$7.95 | Mar. 31, 2020  
978-1-5235-1021-4  
Series: Boynton on Board

A sing-along assurance that this little fox is totally special.

Originally included on Blue Moo, Boynton’s 2007 album of children’s music, this board-book version hits all the right notes. The fact that it lampoons Neal Sedaka’s “Angel Eyes” will no doubt go right over the heads of young children—and possibly even their parents—but they can hear Sedaka himself singing this version via a link on the publisher’s website (noted on the copyright page). That version is slightly longer than the board-book text, but nevertheless, children and adults will happily sing along. Several animals rendered in Boynton’s distinctive style make appearances. Nose-to-nose pairs of rhinos, bears, ducks, pigs, and bunnies accompany the species-inclusive line “everyone can find a way to happiness, I suppose.” But a dotting fox and its kit are the book’s main characters. Their expressive eyes make their mutual delight clear, and their noses are very much in evidence. The refrain—“YOUR NOSE!”—is set in a larger font, helping even young children start to recognize the words. This unabashed celebration of this little fox’s uniqueness and the grown-up fox’s unconditional admiration is completely sincere and sure to be appreciated by toddlers.

Boonyton knows how to please young kids while also entertaining the adults who will inevitably be asked to “read it again.” (Board book 1-4)

**THE KIDS ON THE BUS**

Boonyton, Sandra  
Illus. by the author  
Workman (24 pp.)  
$7.95 | Mar. 31, 2020  
978-1-5235-0643-5


In this bus-shaped board book, a group of animals stands in for the “kids” on the bus. As the passengers—including a fox assisting a hippo who sits in a wheelchair—come on board, the lyrics riff off the original: “The feelings on the bus go round and round, all ‘round the town.” Then, spread by spread, a pig “waves Hi, hi, hi”; a monkey “says Sit! sit! sit!”; a bird “says Look! look! look!”; a bear “laughs Hee, hee, hee”; and the hippo “yells Whee! whee! whee!” Meanwhile, as the passengers’ antics increase, the face of the driver (a tiger) is slowly changing from placid and smiley to a big open-mouthed yell: “The driver on the bus calls Shh! shh! shh!” As readers sing along with the book they may wonder what makes it a book on emotions. What they have probably overlooked is a small, round die-cut hole that focuses images on a wheel that children can spin to match the actions with an emotion that’s portrayed emoticon-style, with the word underneath. As the matching of emotion to action isn’t always obvious (“hi” goes with “shy,” and “sit” goes with “friendly”), children will only know they got it right if they spin the wheel in exact order with the pages.

There are clearer ways to teach children about feelings than this. (Board book 1-4)
The layout of this book is familiar—a boon for little listeners, who will enjoy the confidence that predictability provides.

**WHAT IS BABY GOING TO DO?**

*Peek-A-Boo Little Dinosaur*

Huang, Yu-huan
Illus. by the author
Little Simon/Simon & Schuster (10 pp.)
$7.99 | May 5, 2020
978-1-5344-5179-7

It's a day in the life of a playful little green sauropod, complete with peekaboo felt flaps.

When readers lift the egg-shaped flap on the recto of the opening double-page spread, the dinosaur hatching is born. The youngster immediately explores her world by wondering who is behind a bush made of green felt. Spoiler alert: It's her new friend, a pink triceratops. This duo rolls in the mud, which is a swatch of tan felt, and looks for a place to clean up, which turns out to be a strip of white felt evoking a waterfall. Fortunately, the fabric flaps are sturdy and can withstand substantial yanks. Each double-page spread is presented in the simple question-and-answer format of many lift-the-flap offerings: "Who's that hiding behind the bush? / It's a new friend!" The pictures on these 10 pages are stylized cartoons drawn with a cozy, rounded line and featuring creatures with oversized eyes. Except for a few swaths of hot pink, the color palette employs muted shades of ochre, yellow, green, and black. It is slim on content, but the fabric flaps will provide toddlers with some sensory fun.

The cozy flaps are more engaging than what they reveal underneath. (Board book: 6 mos.-2)

**ABC Dance!**

*An Animal Alphabet*

Moyle, Sabrina
Illus. by Moyle, Eunice
Workman (26 pp.)
$7.95 | Mar. 31, 2020
978-1-5235-0746-7
Series: Hello!Lucky

Animals dance their way through the ABCs. This board book is not only a celebration of the alphabet, but also an exuberant adventure in rhyme and alliteration. Each letter is represented by a different animal with its own part in the dance. Sabrina Moyle's text skillfully reads with its own playful cadence, carefully playing with word sounds without tying tongues. It's this finesse that makes lines like "Quail quickly quickstep—they're queens of the dance!" both fun to read aloud and appealing to little listening ears. The vocabulary is rich and unusual, with featured animals such as vicuña and xenomes (a type of gull) and words like "pivot" and "winsomely." Unlike so many alphabet books that announce each new page with a large, lonely letter, this one showcases the letter by subtly emphasizing its appearance in each word. The text fits in well with Eunice Moyle's illustrations, appearing as an intentional part of the larger design instead of a typeface selected after the fact. The words "Rhinoceros ROCK OUT!" look almost as if they could be part of the set design for the energetically jamming rhinoceroses. Each page features bright backgrounds; animals are equally dazzling, with simply drawn yet emotive faces. Sure to be enjoyed by adults and children alike.

Readers can't help but smile and tap their toes through this one. (Board book: 6 mos.-3)

**Forest**

*Peek-a-Boo Little Dinosaur*

Huang, Yu-huan
Illus. by the author
Little Simon/Simon & Schuster (10 pp.)
$7.99 | May 5, 2020
978-1-5344-5179-7

Little ones learn about some forest-animal families in this lift-the-flap board book.

Introducing four animals that can be found in a North American forest, the book teaches young readers that there's more to identifying them than just naming the animal species. For example: "A mommy fox is called a vixen. A daddy fox is called a dog. Baby foxes are called.../kits!" Double-page spreads introduce each one of the four animals: foxes, deer, rabbits, and bears.
The “mommy” is on one side, the “daddy” on the other; lift the shaped right-hand flap, and the baby information is revealed. A striking gatefold ending reveals there is even more to learn: “There are also names for animal families. Groups of these animals are called… / a skull of foxes.” The screen-printed illustrations use plenty of eye-catching neon pink for a very attractive effect. Companion book *Safari* introduces four African animals: leopards, zebras, lions, and rhinos. The format and sentence structure is the same as in *Forest*, though here the color playing the lead role is a warm and glowing yellow with an equally attractive effect. Limiting the books to just four animals each makes them very accessible to the youngest readers; the more verbal preschoolers might take a step further and find themselves asking if the same also applies to other species.

*Attractive, interactive, and informative. A winner all around.* *(Board book. 1-3)* *(Safari: 978-1-5362-1199-3)*

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**LET’S GO OUTSIDE!**

Pixton, Amy
Illus. by Trukhan, Ekaterina
Workman (12 pp.)

$5.95 paper  |  Mar. 31, 2020

978-1-5235-0986-7
Series: Indestructibles

Young children are encouraged to imagine all the fun they can have when they “go outside!”

Five simple outdoor scenes focus on natural elements that toddlers will easily recognize: the sun in the sky, tall trees, buzzing bees, a sunset. Even a swimming-hole scene is sufficiently generic so either city children or country kids might picture themselves in it. The children and families (depicted with various skin tones) exude cheerful companionship and love. Details for little ones to notice and talk about are scattered throughout the uncluttered, cut-paper illustrations. Saturated colors against high-contrast backgrounds keep the design clean. One line of engaging text per spread is just right for the age group. Instructions to “Look up at the big, blue sky!” and “Now STRETCH like a tall, tall tree” are followed by questions that invite listeners to “SPLISH like a fish” and buzz like a bee. The final spread includes eight recognizable animals and an open-ended question to spark more vocabulary-building interaction. Branded “indestructible,” the Tyvek-like material may actually be just that. With a typical board-book trim size and light paperback weight, this one is sturdy enough to survive teething babies stuck at home as well as trips to the park or woods.

*Useful for both the very youngest listeners and their caregivers when they long for outside.* *(Board book. 6 mos.-2)*

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**MUMMY, WHAT’S IN YOUR TUMMY?**

Romero, Bernardita
Illus. by the author
Barefoot (20 pp.)

$8.99  |  Mar. 15, 2020

978-1-78285-976-5

A toddler imagines all the different creatures and things that could be growing or hiding in Mummy’s pregnancy bump.

This trousers-wearing tyke with brown skin and short curly brown hair hugs Mummy and, in the gentle if uninspiring rhyming text, asks a string of questions about her belly: “Is it a watermelon? That would be funny! / Or is it a little jumping bunny?” The tot goes on to wonder with fanciful logic if the bump could be an odd assortment of things of wildly different shapes and sizes, including an elephant, some new toys, a lion, and a mouse. In the end, the youngster realizes that it must be a baby sister and a new playmate. Here the preschooler is joined by a pink-clad toddler girl with matching coloring and straight, brown hair. The art, consisting of highly stylized cartoons adorned with swaths of colors and occasional patterned designs, appears strangely cropped, as if the original, Chilean edition were a different trim size than this 6 1/2-inch-square book. Key figures often appear at the edges of the pages, and readers never see the mother in toto.

Despite the book’s design flaws, this offering featuring an expecting family of color is a welcome new arrival. *(Board book. 1-3)*

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**HELLO, FRIEND / HOLA, AMIGO**

Salguero, Andrés
Illus. by Palacios, Sara
Scholastic (20 pp.)

$8.99  |  Aug. 4, 2020

978-1-338-34368-7

One half of the Latin Grammy–winning music duo 123 Andrés and Pura Belpré honoree Palacios team up in this bilingual (Spanish/English) book on friendship.

Presenting two versions of the same song—one in English and one in Spanish—by 123 Andrés, the book has been designed so it can be read just in English or just in Spanish—and, for some lucky ones, in both languages. The two versions are not meant to be exact translations of each other, but the sentiment is the same: “It doesn’t matter. There’s nothing wrong, / we can all get along. // Tú y yo podemos llevarnos bien. / No hay nada que temer.” As the book opens, three children can be seen: one walking a dog, one playing the guitar, and one playing a trumpet. Bit by bit, more and more children join in until a large group representing different cultures, ethnicities, and physical abilities is gathered together. The sweet, never saccharine text tells children that friendships are possible no matter where they’re from or what language they speak, ending with an
OPEN THE CHURCH DOOR...
Illus. by Santoro, Christopher
Random House (22 pp.)
$6.99 | Feb. 11, 2020
978-0-593-12769-8

Various children from diverse families participate in church activities as a Q&A text encourages readers to lift flaps.

An Asian-presenting child with pigtails stands in a bedroom, and the narration asks: “It’s time for church! What will I wear?” Little fingers can then open the closet door to select the appropriate Sunday-best outfit. This pattern is repeated on the subsequent 10 double-page spreads, with a brown-complexioned preschooler packing a Bible in a knapsack (the flap is the flap of the bag); families gathering at the titular church door, which readers can open; and a Sunday school teacher reading a Bible story to a racially diverse group of tots (the flap is one of its pages). The flaps are relatively sturdy, but they are difficult to pry open on the first attempt and have pointy, sharp corners. Often the flaps represent actual doors or lids, such as the top of the plastic container holding Sunday school arts-and-crafts supplies, but others don’t make much sense, like the flap with a picture of a contemplative white-presenting child that gets folded down to reveal a praying one. The theology is light here, as there is only one mention of God and none of Jesus, but the activities discussed will be familiar for the intended audience. The cartoon images depict a mostly generic, nondenominational set of family figures, with only a few racial or gender markers. The final spread shows a brown-complexioned little girl with pigtails playing a panpipe, with the question: “What will you play?” The answer is “The Hymn.”

A simple and approachable introduction to churchgoing from a child’s perspective. (Board book. 1-3)

THE SASQUATCH AND THE LUMBERJACK FAMILY
Sheridan, Crix
Illus. by the author
Little Bigfoot/Sasquatch (22 pp.)
$12.99 | May 5, 2020
978-1-63217-270-9

Those unlikely pals, the sasquatch and the lumberjack, return in this exploration of the meaning and nature of family.

Sheridan’s sequel to The Sasquatch and the Lumberjack (2018) is sparse in text and rich in visual detail, like its predecessor. Unfortunately, though the artwork is as delightful as ever, this book lacks the clarity of the first; here, the message is ambiguous and the cast confusing. Even the title confuses. Is this the story of the sasquatch and the family of the lumberjack or a meditation on family presented by the sasquatch and the lumberjack? The spine suggests the latter; the typeface for “Family” is twice the size of the rest of the title. The front cover seems to say “...the Lumberjack Family.” Maybe a colon is in order? Ten successive double-page spreads with a single word of text apiece present a series of terms: “friends” (our titular pals), “Ma,” “Pa,” “Grammie,” “Gramps,” “Sister,” “Brother,” “Aunt,” “Uncle,” and, finally, simply, “family.” The spare text invites kids to create their own narrative, but the concepts in the first book (“autumn,” “slide,” and “forage,” for example) were more easily depicted and inferred than the familial connections portrayed here. The lumberpersons are racially mixed (white, black, Asian) but the relationships aren’t clear, and there are sasquatch siblings and baby bigfoots, too. Is this two families? One family? What is a family? Readers open to pursuing the possibilities will have much to think about.

No narrative but many questions. (Board book. 2-6)

CURIOS ABOUT BIRDS
Sill, Cathryn
Illus. by Sill, John
Peachtree (22 pp.)
$6.99 | Mar. 1, 2020
978-1-68263-190-4

Fine feathered friends preen in this informational board book.

Somewhere between art book and early bird-watching guide, this board book introduces various avian factoids. Short, matter-of-fact sentences do an adequate job of conveying the most basic bird-related information. But while statements such as “birds have wings” or “most birds fly” are the right length for toddlers, they verge on being clinical. Although the surface-level information might satiate some young readers, inquisitive listeners may want to understand more deeply why “some birds are hard to see” or how exactly “birds are important to our world.” To some degree, the simple text seems an excuse to show off the elegant watercolor bird illustrations, repurposed from previous picture books by the Sills. With a single bird species per page situated on a meticulously accurate, full-bleed background of their habitat, birds soar, hunt, nest, and perch. John Sill illustrates birds from various vantage points and perspectives, including a bald eagle gliding above viewers and a tiny ovenbird face to beak with readers on the ground. Always, the respect for the natural world is apparent in the realistic colors and poses. Under the compelling art, a plain contrasting band of color holds the drab text (printed in a stiff, serif typeset that matches the text’s formal tone) along with a well-appreciated italicized identification of every species that’s shown.

Solid—but never soars. (Board book. 1-3)
WAKE UP, LET’S PLAY!

Törnqvist, Maria
Illus. by the author
Floris (22 pp.)
$8.95 | Jun. 16, 2020
978-1-78250-626-3

A celebration of childhood and friendship, replete with imagination, ambition, and even a bit of mischief.

Vivid, bright watercolors in warm and soft tones and the innate sense of play conveyed in each double-page image beautifully depict the shared experience of two inseparable playmates. The book opens at the home of one toddler, a white child, on the morning of a bright, sunny day; the minimal text exhorts, “Wake up, let's play! What shall we play today?” Nine gorgeously rendered, highly detailed scenes of play follow, bookended with a final bedtime picture of the home of this child’s young friend; this character, who presents black, looks out the window as the text reads: “Night, night, sleep tight. What shall we play tomorrow?” Intervening scenes take place indoors, outdoors, and across seasons, so the book simultaneously conveys the sense of a full day of play and the passage of time as well. A single, brief description accompanies each scene; the image conveys most of the content: “Let’s play birthday parties,” “…castles,” “…snowmen,” etc. Toddler imagination is on full display, for better and for worse. “Let’s play stormy seas” shows them fully clothed in an overflowing bathtub, spraying water everywhere. The black child, playing “chef,” strews paper cupcake liners all over the kitchen; the white child scrawls a crayon masterpiece on a wall while playing “artist.”

Touching, memorable, exquisite. (Board book. 2-5)

The book simultaneously conveys the sense of a full day of play and the passage of time.

WAKE UP, LET’S PLAY!

BUNNY BREATHS

Willey, Kira
Illus. by Betts, Anni
Rodale Kids (26 pp.)
$7.99 | Feb. 25, 2020
978-0-593-11985-3
Series: Mindfulness Moments for Kids

A colorful bunny practices a morning mindfulness routine that young children can imitate.

Just what is needed in this stressful time: a book that shows young children and their caregivers how to slow down and just breathe. This latest in the Mindfulness Moments for Kids series, written by a children’s yoga-and-mindfulness musician, features a bunny hungry for a carrot but unsure where to look. Simple breathing exercises help Bunny focus until she becomes aware of subtle smells, even the scent of a carrot growing. Multicolored pastel animals—a squirrel, a hedgehog, a fox, and a mouse—follow Bunny’s example, sitting up tall, holding still, and making “bunny paws.” The repeated instruction is especially effective: “Take quick little sniffs with your nose. SNIFF! SNIFF! SNIFF! Then let aaaaall the air out.” It is almost impossible to read those words without slowing and calming the breath. Without excess words or pedantry, Willey gives even adults new to mindfulness practice a way to help young children let go of anxiety and pause before reacting. Bunny and her animal friends are drawn in whimsical pastel colors against light backgrounds. The pictures become brighter and more energetic as Bunny awakens and bounds off to start her day with a carrot treat.

Age-appropriate mindfulness practice that’s fine for tucking into an Easter basket and useful throughout the year. (Board book. 2-5)

CONTINUING SERIES

BILLY STUART IN THE LAIR OF THE CYCLOPS

Bergeron, Alain M.
Illus. by Sampar
Orca (160 pp.)
$9.95 paper | May 12, 2020
978-1-4598-2346-4
Series: Billy Stuart, 4
(Graphic/fantasy hybrid. 7-10)

AMAZING ATHLETES

40 Inspiring Icons

Billioud, Jean-Michel
Illus. by Gonoh
Wide Eyed Editions (96 pp.)
$15.99 | Jun. 2, 2020
978-0-7112-5254-7
Series: 40 Inspiring Icons, 7
(Nonfiction. 7-10)

SHIRLEY CHISHOLM

Calkhoven, Laurie
Illus. by O’Connor, Kaitlyn Shea
Simon Spotlight (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 16, 2020
$4.99 paper
978-1-5344-6557-2 paper
Series: You Should Meet...
(Early reader/biography. 5-8)

THE SILVER SWAMP

Charman, Katrina
Illus. by Tondora, Judit
Branches/Scholastic (96 pp.)
978-1-338-56531-7 paper
978-1-338-56532-4 PLB
Series: The Last Firehawk, 8
(Fantasy. 6-9)
DUCK STAYS IN THE TRUCK
Cronin, Doreen
Illus. by Lewin, Betsy
Simon Spotlight (32 pp.)
$17.99 | $4.99 paper | May 5, 2020
978-1-5344-5415-6
Series: Click Clack Moo
(early reader. 4-7)

SOLAR SYSTEM
Jenkins, Steve
Illus. by the author
HMH Books (40 pp.)
978-1-338-35097-8
978-1-338-85098-6 paper
Series: By the Numbers
(informational early reader. 6-9)

POOL PARTY
Cronin, Doreen
Illus. by Lewin, Betsy
Simon Spotlight (32 pp.)
$17.99 | $4.99 paper | May 5, 2020
978-1-5344-5418-7
978-1-5344-5417-0 paper
Series: Click Clack Moo
(early reader. 4-7)

MINDY KIM AND THE BIRTHDAY PUPPY
Lee, Lyla
Illus. by Ho, Dung
Aladdin (96 pp.)
$17.99 | $5.99 paper | Jun. 9, 2020
978-1-5344-4014-2
978-1-5344-4015-9 paper
Series: Mindy Kim, 3
(fiction. 6-9)

TAKE A HIKE!
Flowers, Luke
Illus. by the author
Acorn/Scholastic (64 pp.)
978-1-338-54754-2 paper
978-1-338-54756-6 PLB
Series: Moby Shinobi and Toby Too!, 3
(graphic early reader. 5-8)

WHAT IF YOU COULD SNIFF LIKE A SHARK?
Explore the Superpowers of Ocean Animals
Markle, Sandra
Illus. by McWilliam, Howard
Scholastic (40 pp.)
$5.99 paper | Jun. 2, 2020
978-1-338-35607-6
Series: What If You Could...?
(informational picture book. 5-9)

ANGELINA BALLERINA TRIES AGAIN
Holabird, Katharine
Illus. by Craig, Helen
Simon Spotlight (32 pp.)
$17.99 | $4.99 paper | May 5, 2020
978-1-5344-6446-9
978-1-5344-6445-2 paper
Series: Angelina Ballerina
(early reader. 4-8)

INSECTS
Jenkins, Steve
Illus. by the author
HMH Books (40 pp.)
978-1-338-85099-7
978-1-338-85100-1 paper
Series: By the Numbers
(informational early reader. 6-9)

CALL OF THE SOUND DRAGON
West, Tracey
Branches/Scholastic (96 pp.)
978-1-338-54028-4 paper
978-1-338-54029-1 PLB
Series: Dragon Masters, 16
(fiction. 6-9)

THE GREAT BEACH CAKE BAKE
Siwa, JoJo
Amulet/Abrams (224 pp.)
$6.99 paper | May 5, 2020
978-1-4197-4597-3
Series: JoJo and BowBow, 6
(fiction. 7-10)

DUSTY
Mason, Jane B.
Scholastic (304 pp.)
978-1-338-36206-0
Series: Rescue Dogs, 2
(fiction. 8-12)

PUPPY PRINCE
Mews, Melody
Illus. by Stubbings, Ellen
Little Simon (128 pp.)
$17.99 | $5.99 paper | May 5, 2020
978-1-5344-6358-5
978-1-5344-6357-8 paper
Series: Itty Bitty Princess Kitty, 3
(fantasy. 7-10)
THE DAMNED
Ahdieh, Renée
Putnam (416 pp.)
$18.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-984812-58-2
Series: The Beautiful, 2

Following The Beautiful (2019), Bastien and Celine struggle with the consequences of her deal with Nicodemus. After Celine traded her memories of them in exchange for his powerful vampire uncle Nico’s turning him, Bastien’s reborn as a vampire—and he’s not happy about it. Volatile, he embraces vices until his uncle, having given up on molding Bastien as a human legacy, decides on even higher aspirations for Bastien, ambitions in the Otherworld that the vampires had been banished from. The mythologies hinted at before (the Fallen, the Brotherhood, the Otherworld, the Sylvan Wyld’s Winter Court, and the Summer Court of the Sylvan Vale) are unveiled in expansive worldbuilding. On top of that, multiple members of the Saint Germains’ vampire family gain greater prominence in third-person point-of-view chapters that frequently reveal their backstories. Meanwhile, Celine recovers from residual traumas from experiences that she can’t remember—because of a head injury, or so she’s been told. Handsome detective Michael is patient with her every step of the way; she wishes she could return his feelings, but nagging flashes of memory have her looking for someone else. But those returning bits of memory shouldn’t be possible, not with how powerful Nico is. Eventually, the romantic storyline gets quite steamy. Historical, multicultural New Orleans is depicted with all its racism—Bastien is multiracial (quadroon and Taíno) and Celine’s French father was always secretive about her Asian mother.

Decadent escapism. (map) (Fantasy. 14-adult)

ACE OF HEARTS
Augustine, Myriad
James Lorimer (160 pp.)
$8.99 paper | $27.99 PLB | Aug. 1, 2020
978-1-4594-1500-3 paper
978-1-4594-1502-7 PLB

Alvin plans to enter grade 11 out and proud, but when he befriends a group of queer students at his new school, he finds that he still doesn’t quite fit in.
Working as a school librarian during two previous pandemics—H1N1 and SARS—I noticed how students with a science bent were fascinated and eager to learn more. One young man who wanted to become a doctor lit up as he talked to me about wanting to someday heal people. I wonder what he and others like him are doing now: How has the current crisis in so many hospitals affected young people with similar interests and ambitions? What would they like to know? And what about teens who haven’t thought much about these topics before—those who may feel even more bewildered, disoriented, and fearful, especially given the mixed—often contradictory—messages they are hearing from adults?

Many parallels have been drawn between COVID-19 and the 1918 influenza, making it a particularly timely subject to read about—one that shows the strength of the human spirit in the face of terrible adversity and the parallels between efforts to contain it and present-day measures. Below are some highly informative works for teens that provide an excellent overview of events from just a century ago, as well as titles on related subjects.

Albert Marrin’s Very, Very, Very Dreadful: The Influenza Pandemic of 1918 (Knopf, 2018) offers a detailed account of the origins, global spread, and impact of the terrible virus. This multi-faceted work puts events into context, from conditions in the trenches of World War I to the limitations of past scientific knowledge to the avian flu of the late 20th century. The Kirkus review stated, “Not one to shy away from unnerving details, Marrin relays what researchers and scientist express today: another influenza pandemic will unquestionably strike again.”

Readers who enjoy historical fiction will be well served by A Death-Struck Year by Makia Lucier (HMH Books, 2014). Although it takes place during the 1918 influenza pandemic, many of the challenges the characters face will seem eerily familiar. Cleo, the protagonist, at first feels remote from events taking place on the East Coast, far from her Portland, Oregon, home. But soon her school is quarantined, and places where people normally congregate are closed down. This young woman from a privileged background faces a difficult decision: Stay put and wait to see what happens, or put her own life on the line by volunteering with the Red Cross?

The Invisible War: A World War I Tale on Two Scales by Ailsa Wild, Jeremy Barr, Gregory Crocetti, and Briony Barr and illustrated by Ben Hutchings (Graphic Universe, 2019) is a superbly evocative and imaginative graphic novel. The flu was not the only contagion to benefit from conditions created by World War I: Shigella bacteria, which causes dysentery, flourished in the overcrowded, unsanitary conditions of the battlefield. This slim volume spares no details in showing how an Australian nurse contracts dysentery from a wounded soldier. The dual storyline follows both the nurse and the bacteria themselves as they wreak havoc upon her body—sharing an environment with viruses and other microorganisms.

The clear, comprehensive Pandemic: How Climate, the Environment, and Superbugs Increase the Risk by science writer and nurse Connie Goldsmith (Twenty-First Century/Lerner, 2018) offers readers an overview of pandemics past, present, and future. The book is packed with relevant information in a highly accessible format, covering both the big picture (e.g. the World Health Organization, human environmental destruction, and mass travel) as well as, on a smaller scale, efforts to tackle and prevent specific outbreaks. This work will give readers important context for understanding how we have ended up in the situation we’re in today.

Much hope has been pinned on the development of a vaccine for COVID-19, but readers may wonder how vaccines work and, if they are so effective, why they remain controversial in some circles. Vaccination Investigation: The History and Science of Vaccines by science journalist Tara Haelle (Twenty-First Century/Lerner, 2018) answers these questions and more. This title, which our review deemed “essential,” also covers “common thinking patterns—cognitive biases—that lead people to readily embrace unscientific reasoning.” That makes it especially relevant for teens following news reports from public health experts and trying to understand public protests against precautions in some parts of the country.

Laura Simeon is the young adult editor.
When their ship is attacked by pirate hunter Jonathan Bar-
alvin is Caribbean Canadian with a South Asian surname and
read's intersecting timelines are rearranged, Caddy maintains
readers will find a lot to like in this book.
Everyone seems to be obsessed with sex, and Alvin isn't sure
Jesse. As Alvin tries to navigate his crushes, a new issue arises:
Calico's crew were formerly enslaved; one is also implied to be
boat, Calico's crew flees, leaving an injured Bonny behind. She
the hunt. Bonny's first-person narration is punctuated by chap-
softens and a little awkward but quickly takes
it in stride. Alvin's best friend, Melissa, is proudly fat positive.
Readers will find a lot to like in this book.
A fun romance for reluctant teen readers that explores
asexuality. (resources) (Fiction. 14-18)

DEVIL'S BALLAST
Caddy, Meg
Text (320 pp.)
$11.95 paper | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1925773-46-0

A swashbuckling fictional account of
two of the world’s most infamous pirates.
Fiery 18-year-old Anne Bonny flees
her abusive husband into the arms
Calico Jack Rackham and a life at sea.
Disguised as a boy, she sails as a pirate
aboard Calico's ship—only he knows her true identity.
When a dalliance with Calico leads to an unwanted pregnancy, Bonny
plans to wait out her pregnancy in Cuba, where they are headed.
When their ship is attacked by pirate hunter Jonathan Bar-
et, Calico's crew flees, leaving an injured Bonny behind. She
befriends Martin Read, an even-keeled sailor from Barnet's
crew, and the duo escape to Havana, where Bonny waits out her
pregnancy. However, both Barnet and Bonny's husband are
on the hunt. Bonny's first-person narration is punctuated by chapters
following Barnet in close third person; Bonny's narrative
voice is compelling while Barnet's portions mostly just work
to keep the plot at a clip. While some aspects of Bonny's and
Read's intersecting timelines are rearranged, Caddy maintains
historical authenticity throughout, neither dampening the violence
of the setting nor the dangers of having a marginalized body. Most characters are white. The two black pirates on
Calico's crew were formerly enslaved; one is also implied to be gay. The author plays with gender and identity, maintaining the spirit of the traditional story while adding much-needed trans representation.
A satisfying seafaring adventure. (map) (Historical fiction. 14-18)

THE VOTING BOOTH
Colbert, Brandy
Disney-Hyperion (304 pp.)
$18.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-368-05329-7

An African American teen activ-

Colbert skilfully manages both serious and playful elements throughout the novel. Marva has an infectious personality, and her politics and identity are realistically portrayed. Duke's grief, still raw, is palpable and will engage readers' empathy. The chapters feature alternating first-person narration, giving the novel an intimate feel. Secondary characters add rich texture to and understanding of the primary characters.
A warmly entertaining story at the nexus of teen relationships and activism. (Fiction. 12-18)

PROM KINGS
Correia, Tony
James Lorimer (176 pp.)
$8.99 paper | $27.99 PLB | Aug. 1, 2020
978-1-4594-1407-5 paper
978-1-4594-1409-9 PLB

A teen must take a step back to rec-
ognize that the boy he should be chasing
is right beside him.
Charlie is an extroverted, gay teen with ambition to spare but no love life to speak of until Andre, new to Vancouver from Montréal, walks into an outNproud meeting that Charlie attends religiously. Recently asked to serve on the planning committee for outNproud’s queer prom, Charlie is determined to make Andre his date but must contend with pretty boy Chad, his rival at outNproud, for his attention. After talking with best friend Geeda, Charlie comes to the conclusion that he needs a wingman. Enter quiet, closeted Luis, who, after watching Charlie try to impress Andre with the perfect prom song, creates an algorithm that analyzes clichéd plot points of popular teenage romantic comedies in hopes of helping
Charlie get the boy. Despite the uphill battle, Charlie is resolute in his desire—but is he overlooking someone else? Charlie comes across as a high-strung teen looking for validation, which readers may come to find endearing. This straightforward, first-person narration clearly demonstrates the honest, frustrating feelings of navigating first crushes as a queer teen. Short chapters and light detail make this an accessible read. Charlie and Chad are white, Andre is black, Luis is Mexican, and Geeda is Asian.

For reluctant readers looking for a quick, light, romantic read. (Romance. 12-18)

**BEING TOFFEE**

*Crossan, Sarah*

Bloomsbury (416 pp.)

$17.99 | Jul. 14, 2020

978-1-4476-0329-9

In Cornwall, a 16-year-old runaway and a senior with dementia form an unusual friendship that leads to mutual solace.

Allison has always been able to cope with her angry, widowed father’s abuse, especially with Kelly-Anne, her father’s fiancee, there to mediate. But when Kelly-Anne leaves suddenly and her father burns her face, Allison runs away. Crossan, the Children’s Literature Laureate of Ireland, conveys the teen’s story in raw verse. While seeking refuge in a presumably empty house, Allison quickly discovers that it’s occupied by Marla, an elderly woman with dementia. Confusing Allison for a childhood friend named Toffee, Marla invites the teen into her home. At first Allison pretends to be Toffee simply to live with Marla and survive, but when she secretly observes the disrespect and abuse Marla receives from caregivers and family, she uses her predication to give Marla the life she deserves. Crossan weaves in flashbacks from Allison’s past to help readers understand her thoughts and actions during this transition. Despite Marla’s dementia and the age difference, it’s clear that both women understand each other’s hardships and grow in friendship because of this mutual sympathy. The effect is at once painful and beautiful. Although the spare format forces readers to fill in gaps, it also renders lovely imagery as Allison seeks the family she needs. All characters seem to be white.

An uncommon, successful approach to a tough topic. (Verse novel. 14-18)

**I WILL BE OKAY**

*Elenbark, Bill*

Walrus Publishing (250 pp.)

$9.95 paper | Jun. 30, 2020

978-1-940442-28-0

Under the flashes of fireworks, 15-year-old Matt kisses his best friend, Stick, and soon everything changes.

The pair conclude that July night with an abrupt separation, leaving Matt unsure of what comes next. Then Stick loses his father to a massive heart attack, and their world alters once again. At first, Matt wants to be there for his friend, even though he can’t stop mulling over their kiss. When the two boys initiate a secret one-week relationship trial that abruptly ends once Matt’s mom discovers the pair canoodling, their friendship ruptures amid Matt’s internal struggles over his queerness and Stick’s uncertainties about his sexuality. It’s a long, wounding road for Matt and Stick in Elenbark’s solid debut, a tortured, moody rumination on young queer love. Matt, a Puerto Rican, Naruto-obsessed teen with a dash of self-deprecation, struggles to overcome his uneasiness in his own skin, an inner battle amplified by his father’s machismo. For Stick, a white teen who finds solace in drugs and alcohol alongside a reluctant Matt, his father’s death casts doubt over his life, multiracial family (he has 12 mostly adopted siblings), and estrangement from his mother. The author explores the weight of coming out to one’s family and oneself with gentle thoughtfulness, although Matt’s at times unreliable narration threatens to derail this process. It’s all a little messy, uplifting in parts, yet committed to a triumphant finale that withers somewhat under scrutiny.

Fumbling toward graceful sweetness. (Realistic fiction. 12-18)

**SHIELDED**

*Flanders, KayLynn*

Delacorte (432 pp.)

$17.99 | Jul. 21, 2020

978-0-593-11853-5

Series: Shielded, 1

A princess fights to save her kingdom while trying to conceal her magic.

On the eve of her 17th birthday, Princess Jennesara learns of her betrothal to the prince of Turia, an alliance made by her father to secure the neighboring kingdom’s military support in quelling the fighting at his borders. Before she is sent away to safety in Turia, she learns of other worrying developments brewing at home: A burned letter references a search for the mages’ library, illicit magic is being used in skirmishes at the borders, and there is a potential betrayal within her father’s circle of trust. She frets, too, about her own secret magic being discovered, for only her older brother, Ren, is supposed to possess
magic. On their way to Turia, Jenna’s party is ambushed and she narrowly escapes. She is forced to fend for herself and find her own way to Turia to discover who betrayed her family and what secrets lie in the rumored mages’ library. Jenna conceals her identity and ingratiates herself with her betrothed’s family as she eludes the threat of a shadowy, sinister foe. Though overflowing with common fantasy tropes and featuring lengthy expository passages, this series opener nevertheless features affable characters and moves at a solid clip that will keep readers entertained. Jenna’s people are fair-haired while Turians are olive-skinned with dark hair.

May well beguile readers with its mix of magic and political intrigue. (Fantasy. 12-16)

LOVE, JACARANDA

Flinn, Alex

HarperTeen (368 pp.)

$18.99 | Jul. 7, 2020

0-06-244786-9

Talent trumps disadvantage in this romance about a teen whisked off by an anonymous benefactor to a prestigious boarding school for the arts in Michigan. Sixteen-year-old Jacaranda Abbott has spent years moving between foster homes due to her mother’s imprisonment for attempted murder of an abusive boyfriend. When a video of Jacaranda singing at the Miami Publix supermarket at which she works goes viral, it changes the course of her life. The admission essay she writes to Midwestern Arts Academy sets up the details of this story, giving way to a long series of confessional, heartfelt, and unanswered emails directed to Mr. Smith, as she dubs the mystery man responsible for the fairy-tale scenario now playing out. Jacaranda’s voice is quick, witty, and frank, making her an easy, if archetypal, character to root for. Her relationships with her new peers, almost all of whom are dramatically more privileged than she is, provide fertile ground for some convincing points about class and stigma. Jacaranda’s romance with Jarvis, the wealthy, kind cousin of one of her suitemates, is a sweet one, predictably weaving its way through some rocky points with a final twist that will be spotted a long way off by many readers. Jacaranda and Jarvis are white; some racial and ethnic diversity is suggested by secondary characters’ names and textual cues.

An engaging but exceedingly familiar tale of underdog triumph. (Romance. 14-18)

CHAOS THEORY

Harris, Susan

Clean Teen (300 pp.)

$11.95 paper | May 20, 2020

978-1-63422-388-1

Series: Sanguine Crown, 1

Ryan Callan might be mistaken for an average, angst-y 17-year-old girl who loves vampire novels and listens to Taylor Swift—except she happens to be a vampire herself.

At a vampire compound in Ireland, Ryan hopes to become a member of the Royal Guard, like her parents before her—but they died 10 years ago in a rebel attack. When blood shortages threaten the vampires’ survival, they decide to introduce themselves into human society to gain easier access to volunteer blood donors. So the crown prince Nickolai joins a private school where he can take night classes, with Ryan along to protect him. But danger lurks as a rogue vampire starts murdering...
Kirkus’ review describes Adiba Jaigirdar’s debut, *The Henna Wars* (Page Street, May 12), as “impossible to put down” and with good reason: It’s simultaneously a charming rom-com, a thoughtful work of social commentary, a testament to strong female relationships, and a fresh addition to YA literature. In too many teen novels, queer characters and characters of color—and we still rarely meet queer characters of color—in a mostly white Catholic school, yet an entrepreneurial project strikes at the heart of thorny questions of appreciation versus appropriation.

Jaigirdar describes her book as essentially being about “growing into who you are and being comfortable with who you are.” She wrote it, she says, “because of family, community, culture—it was a way to express all of these things that are all so important to me.” Jaigirdar, 26, attended an all-girls’ Catholic school after her family arrived in Ireland from Bangladesh when she was 10. Today, she teaches English as a foreign language to immigrants in Dublin, many of them Brazilian, and she has a 16-year-old sister and young cousins, all of whom helped inform the authentic teenage voices in the story.

Jaigirdar’s M.A. in post-colonial studies motivated her to take on the challenge of writing about cultural appropriation in teen literature. When the girls’ business class teacher assigns them to launch their own businesses, artistic Flávia sees nothing wrong in doing henna designs—after all, she loved the ones she saw at the Bengali wedding where she and Nishat reconnected. For Nishat, on the other hand, henna is a lot more than just something cool and pretty: It’s a deep emotional connection to the grandmother in Bangladesh who taught her how to do it and to her own heritage, which is a source of great comfort but also makes her a target for bullying.

Jaigirdar wanted to explore what cultural appropriation means when the conversation is between two marginalized characters. “I brought this up with a friend who is white,” she explains. “I mentioned that I wanted to write a story about two people of color and that one of them had culturally appropriated from the other. I explained that I thought it would be a very different story than if the other...
character was white. She reacted very defensively, saying it’s the same thing and it wouldn’t be any different. It inspired me even more to write the story and to think about all of the ways it would be different if it were two people of color.”

As a queer Muslim woman living in a predominantly Christian nation, Jaigirdar is also acutely aware of the narrow ways Muslims are often portrayed as well as responses straight Muslims have to different sexualities. Regarding Nishat’s family, Jaigirdar points out that “even though they are Muslim, they are not particularly pious—they don’t pray very often—but you still see them using religion as a reason for their homophobia. I see that a lot within my own community. People who aren’t necessarily religious when it comes to most things will bring out religion and use it for their own motivations.”

Bullying and marginalization in school come up in The Henna Wars as well. Jaigirdar says that “even now, in a lot of schools you would be very hard-pressed to find much diversity, so I think sometimes teachers aren’t aware of how to deal with bullying when it comes to race.” She says she “loved writing about Bengali culture, especially because growing up, I never saw that in books or in the media. When I first started writing the book, I was really just writing it for myself. It was a way for me to see a reflection of myself in books because nobody else had provided that for me. I knew that other Bengali people were also starved for this representation, so I hope that they will resonate with this.”

students on campus—and sets his eyes on Ryan, wanting to make her his queen. Though sometimes forced and over-the-top provocative, Ryan’s constant snarky quips keep the story entertaining. She enjoys needling Nickolai, and the chemistry between them builds throughout the book. Mentions of pop culture—TV, movies, and music from Saved by the Bell to the Backstreet Boys—occasionally seem out of place. Vampire fans who can overlook weak worldbuilding will encounter a gruesome cliffhanger ending that will leave them thirsting for more. All main characters are white; two of the older vampires are a gay couple. (This book will release as a digital edition on May 20, 2020, with print release scheduled for Jul. 20, 2020, at time of review.)

A satisfactory vampire tale. (playlists) (Paranormal romance, 14-18)

THE GLARE
Harrison, Margot
Disney-Hyperion/LBYR
(336 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-368-00565-4

Teens discover a computer game said to be deadly.
When Hedda’s mother needs to visit a sick friend, Hedda gets to leave the technology-free desert ranch she’s been sequestered at since she was 6 to stay with her tech-developer father in California. Based on Hedda’s neurological episodes which prompted the desert move, her mother’s convinced that “the Glare,” Hedda’s childhood nickname for technology, is addictive and dangerous. Plagued by strange nightmares and some missing memories, Hedda wants to go to a real school and be a regular teen, and so she takes advantage of the temporary move to give technology another try. But when she finds a mysterious message written by her child-self, she ends up on the Dark Web encountering a game called the Glare. By the time she learns the creepypasta viral legend about it (if you die 13 times on the unbeatable 13th level, you die for real), it’s already too late—and worse, it’s gotten out to her fledgling circle of friends. The psychological manipulations mirror augmented reality games, and the theories behind the game are built on too-real conditioning techniques used by ads, games, and social media. The teens struggle to tell what’s real, what can hurt (or kill) them, and if they can escape. The expertly balanced reality-blurring storyline and strategic technology depictions seed psychological scares that will linger long after reading. Side characters’ names signal ethnic diversity.

A chilling way to turn screen time into scream time. (Horror/science fiction, 12-adult)
**EVER CURSED**
Haydu, Corey Ann
Simon Pulse/Simon & Schuster (304 pp.)
$18.99 | Jul. 28, 2020
978-1-5344-3703-6

Five years ago, a powerful witch named Reagan cast a Spell of Without on the Queen of Ever and her five daughters, each of whom succumbs on her 13th birthday. Jane, the eldest at 17, can’t eat; Nora can’t love; Alice can’t sleep; Grace can’t remember; Eden will soon have no hope; and the queen lies in stasis in a glass box. After Reagan returns from her banishment, she comes to terms with the consequences of her actions, borne of rage, which could destroy the complex balance between witches and royals. She has four days to Undo the spell before her 18th birthday, when it becomes permanent (and for Jane and Alice, deadly). Jane crosses the castle’s moat for the first time (royals must maintain a Royal Distance from their subjects) to gather the objects needed to break the spell, and after learning Reagan’s reasons, Jane must reconsider everything she thought she knew about witches, the people of Ever, and her beloved father. Quirky details enliven Haydu’s magic-infused world, and themes like sexual assault and rampant misogyny are deftly explored while allowing for hope and healing. There are a few surprises, but Haydu doesn’t rely on gimmicky twists: This one is all about compassion, female solidarity, fighting for change, and smashing the patriarchy. Jane’s family and Reagan are white, Alice is trans, Grace is lesbian, witches, and ordinary citizens are diverse in skin tone.

*A fiercely feminist #MeToo fairy tale.* (Fantasy. 14-18)

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**THE LOST CITY**
Hocking, Amanda
Wednesday Books (384 pp.)
$10.99 paper | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-250-20426-4
Series: Omte Origins, 1

Growing up ignorant of her true parentage, a troll makes it her mission to discover her origins.

Ulla Tulin was abandoned as a baby, left behind by Orra, an Omte troll warrior. Growing up in Iskyla, a frigid village in central Canada, surrounded by Inuit villagers and brown-skinned, good-looking Kanin trolls, tall, pale, sturdily built Ulla stood out. As a teen she ends up in Förening, Minnesota, the Trylle tribe’s capital, where she finds work as a nanny. Though she loves her employers, she yearns for more. An internship in the Mimirin, the troll world’s research and history center in the city of Merellä, means she can research Orra. Immediately, there are hiccups, however: 12-year-old Hanna, one of the children she nannied, stows away, and a runaway with rainbow-colored hair crash-lands on her Jeep. Flirtation blooms between Ulla and fellow researcher Pan as well as with a mysterious stranger she keeps running into. Information about Orra is redacted, and higher-ups in the Mimirin discourage her from digging deeper; the more Ulla learns, the more the mystery expands. Though the world and its lore are impressively expansive, the weight of detailing them often causes Ulla’s journey to drag. A side character’s mysterious past offers more tension than Ulla’s, heralding a much needed but ultimately flat flash of action at the climax. Pan is part Kanin troll and part Inuit.

Deep worldbuilding offering little magic to keep the pages turning. (Tribal facts, glossary) (Fantasy. 16-18)

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**THE PRINCESS WILL SAVE YOU**
Henning, Sarah
Tor Teen (352 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-250-23742-2
Series: The Princess Will Save You, 1

When Princess Amarande’s true love is kidnapped, she doesn’t hesitate to set out to rescue him.

Princess Amarande and Luca, who is in charge of the king’s stables, have always shared a special bond. But recently, it’s felt different; a charged feeling simmers between them. Before either finds the courage to confront it, tragedy strikes: Her father, King Sendoa, falls dead. Amarande reels; she doesn’t believe the Warrior King died naturally—it must have been murder. But the royal council cares more about succession: In order to rule, Amarande must wed. Despite her resistance, it isn’t long before other kingdoms send eager suitors. The princess finds them abhorrent, conniving, and power hungry. Amarande spits in the face of tradition, pulling her sword on a suitor at her father’s funeral and declaring that she won’t settle. In the midst of her rebellion, Luca is kidnapped. A note left behind instructs her to marry a specific suitor or she’ll never see her love again. Ever fearless, Amarande sets off, determined to save Luca and her kingdom. Though the princess rallying against entrenched patriarchy, Amarande reads as one-note. Well-plotted action sequences and intricate political machinations can’t make up for Luca’s similar one dimensionality, which makes their love story—the backbone of the story—difficult to care about. Most characters appear to be white; some have brown skin.

*A high-fantasy riff on The Princess Bride lacking both humor and heart.* (Fantasy. 14-18)
Belief in the power of social movements shines through.

THIS IS MY AMERICA

Johnson, Kim
Random House (416 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 28, 2020
978-0-593-11876-4

Showcases one family’s persistent and courageous fight for freedom against a broken criminal justice system.

At the center of this story is Tracy Beaumont, a black 17-year-old. Every week she’s been writing letters to Innocence X (think Innocence Project or the Equal Justice Initiative) on behalf of her father, who has been sentenced to death row in their home state of Texas, wrongfully accused of murder. There’s less than a year until it will be all over. Yet Tracy holds on deeply to hope that in her small-town neighborhood and across the U.S. people will recognize failures in justice. This is thrown into jeopardy when her older brother, Jamal, a local track star, is accused of killing a white girl. Could these two cases be connected? Tracy, an emerging journalist, has to wrestle with the present-day legacy of an overwhelmingly racist history, needing support not only from family, but also a strong legal team and, just maybe, a good cop, if there are any to be found. Johnson’s debut draws on her own experiences as an activist to offer a realistic depiction of reckoning with the complex and too-often-fatal issues that plague black Americans today. Her belief in the power of social movements shines through, inciting a new generation of social change activists to be called into service of transformative change.

Harrowing and worthwhile; a call-to-action from the anti-racist insights of a generation of black activists. (author’s note, additional resources) (Fiction. 12-18)
A cinematic, page-ripping debut.

**STAR WARS: QUEEN’S PERIL**

*Johnston, E.K.*  
Disney Lucasfilm (288 pp.)  
$17.99 | Jun. 2, 2020  
978-1-368-05714-1

Fourteen-year-old Padmé Naberrie becomes Naboo’s latest elected monarch, and Capt. Quarsh Panaka of the Royal Security Forces prepares for a peaceful transition of power.

Much work awaits the young leader, who hopes to guide her homeworld beyond the isolationist policy of her predecessor. But first, Padmé and Panaka must assemble the queen’s handmaidens, a group of five girls who will act as advisers, guards, and decoys for the queen. Against Panaka’s wishes, Padmé tightens the bonds between herself and her handmaidens, particularly with her dearest Saché, to craft a cunning, bold group loyal to Queen Amidala, Padmé’s regal alter ego. As Queen Amidala navigates Naboo’s political sphere, she organizes a summit with neighboring planets to foster and restore alliances. Meanwhile, the villainous Darth Sidious hastens his plans to acquire more power, inciting a brutal invasion of Naboo by the Trade Federation. A prequel to the 1999 film *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace* as well as Johnston’s *Queen’s Shadow* (2019), this look into Padmé’s ascent both honors its source material and colors in its scope. Johnston builds Padmé into an icon worthy of her reputation while underscoring her strong camaraderie with the handmaidens. Remarkably, readers receive a glimpse of Naboo’s politics as the narrative inevitably unfolds into the events chronicled in the film, though here there are glimpses of the more urgent struggles lurking beneath the latter’s grand heroics. There is diversity in race and sexual orientation.

*Solid and intriguing.* (Science fiction. 12-18)

**MAYHEM**

*Laure, Estelle*  
Wednesday Books (304 pp.)  
$18.99 | Jul. 14, 2020  
978-1-250-29793-8

It’s 1987, and everybody in the fictional coastal town of Santa Maria, California, knows the dangerous Brayburn women.

When Mayhem Brayburn was 3, she and her mother, Roxy, left Santa Maria trying to escape the burden that generations of Brayburn women have carried. Thirteen years later, May and Roxy flee May’s abusive stepfather, returning to the family home to stay with Roxy’s twin sister, Elle, and her foster kids: Neve and siblings Jason and Kidd. Now May engages for the first time with all the secrets Roxy kept all these years and the truth behind the Brayburn women’s burden—and self-appointed mission—just as a serial kidnapper is on the loose on the beaches of Santa Maria. Paying open homage to the ’80s movie *The Lost Boys*, the novel addresses issues such as domestic abuse, suicide, sexual assault, and addiction, interweaving them with magic, deadly violence, and vigilante justice. May’s move from innocence to being an eager vigilante who feels empowered by killing as well as her sudden romance with Jason feel too hurried, but the story’s focus on May and Roxy’s relationship, its interrogation of revenge, as well as the exploration of destiny versus agency are ultimately rewarding. Journals and letters from Brayburn women through the years add to the story. May’s mother is white and her father was Brazilian; Jason and Kidd are biracial (black/white), Neve is white, and Elle is lesbian.

*An uneven but worthwhile read.* (Fantasy. 15-18)

**A WICKED MAGIC**

*Laurens, Sasha*  
Razorbill/Penguin (368 pp.)  
$17.99 | Jul. 28, 2020  
978-0-593-11725-5

California teens get caught up in a witchy misadventure.

Though Daniela and Liss, who live in a small coastal town in Northern California, share a close friendship, each wrestles with private demons. Dark-haired Dan copes with depression through self-harm, feeling each time she cuts herself that it might bring her some peace. And blonde-haired Liss struggles with poor self-esteem thanks, in part, to an abusive, overdemanding mother with a drinking problem. Together the best friends hope their discovery of the mysterious Black Book in the giveaway box outside a grocery store will fill their inner voids, offering them an irresistible spell for becoming witches and other magical charms, each promising to be one that will change their lives for the better. Unfortunately for these would-be witches, the spell that really changes things results in the abduction of Liss’s boyfriend by an evil spirit and a terrible breach in the girls’ friendship. It is only when the two begin to open up to each other and trust mutual friend Alexa, who has hidden magical powers, that they summon the moxie to try to undo the damage they wrought. In her debut, Laurens weaves an intricate, suspense-filled tale mingling every-teen angst with otherworldly sorcery. Alternating among the perspectives of the three lead characters, the shifting narrative tantalizes teen readers with the possibility of magic. Dan is Mexican American; Liss and Alexa are cued as white.

*A cinematic, page-ripping debut.* (Fiction. 14-18)
UNRAVEL THE DUSK
Lim, Elizabeth
Knopf (368 pp.)
$18.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-525-64702-7
Series: Blood of Stars, 2

Cursed, heartbroken, and still trying to save her country.
In this sequel to the Asian-inspired fantasy Spin the Dawn (2019), readers are reintroduced to Maia, now more hardened yet emotionally torn. Though she has discovered great powers and successfully created dresses with elements from the sun, moon, and stars, the country of Aland is in more turmoil than ever. As she fights alongside an emperor she is quickly coming to despise, Maia also battles a curse that is slowly transforming her into a monster with no memory of her past, love, or family. Her powers, both demonic and magical tailoring skills, however, may help her face the demon controlling the other side of the war. The pacing is a bit uneven, and it is recommended to read the previous book to be able to follow along with the events. The beginning jumps from crisis to crisis without much breathing room but later takes more time for character development, including that of two other strong females. The strength of this story lies in Maia’s internal struggles and the ways the author weaves in lessons learned through various Asian myths and legends.

Readers who enjoyed the first book will find everythingamped up here, including the violence and drama. (Fantasy. 14-18)

B*WITCH
McKenzie, Paige & Ohlin, Nancy
Freeform/Disney/LBYR (336 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-368-02876-9
Series: B*Witch, 1

Teen witches are tasked with finding those who are threatened by their existence. Sorrow Point, Washington, seems like a typical American small town except for the two secret covens of sophomore witches who have been feuding since junior high. When newcomer Iris—who is just doing her best to manage her anxiety and sensory processing disorder—arrives, Greta (the levelheaded leader), Binx (the technomancer rebel), and Ridley (the studious and artistic one) make plans to recruit her before the rival coven does. Since the new president started stirring up venomous hatred toward witches, there have been more Antima (Anti-Magic) members lurking around. Suddenly, the girls start receiving threatening shadow messages. Their entire existence is illegal and could spell trouble if anyone ever found out who they truly were. As they attempt to track the notes’ sender, tragedy strikes, and now the covens will have to band together to find out who murdered a fellow witch. The author crafts an honest, promising story narrated through a third-person omniscient voice and featuring an inclusive, distinct cast of young women who detail their unique struggles. The story fizzes at the very end with the setup for another installment, however readers will relish the character-building as they get to know these young witches. Greta is cued as Latinx, Iris is white, Binx is Japanese American, and Ridley is black and trans.

For readers seeking a diverse, witchy mystery. (Fantasy. 12-16)
THE INVINCIBLE SUMMER OF JUNIPER JONES
McQueen, Daven
Wattpad Books (304 pp.)
$10.99 paper  |  Jun. 16, 2020
978-1-98936-516-8

An unlikely friendship emerges between an angry boy and a girl whose outlook rivals Pollyanna’s.

Rising 10th grader Ethan Charlie Harper can’t believe his white father sent him from Arcadia, Washington, to Ellison, Alabama, to spend the summer with his paternal aunt, Cara, and her husband, Robert, to punish him for hitting a white boy in school who called Ethan a half-breed and his mother the N-word. In 1955, blacks aren’t welcome in lily-white Ellison, but Ethan’s divorced, single father seems unconcerned. While Ethan is tending his uncle’s malt shop, Juniper Jones, a loquacious, redheaded, blue-eyed tornado of a girl, barges into the shop and entices Ethan to become her summer adventure buddy. Talkative as Anne of Green Gables and imaginative as Bridge to Terabithia’s Leslie, Juniper breathes life into Ethan’s hot, dreary days and helps him process his anger and resentment toward his parents. She is an appealing, well-drawn character who steals the show. When Ethan hits another white bully, the plot turns deadly. Set in the year of Emmett Till’s murder, this story portrays a close and visible friendship between a white girl and a black boy that would not likely have been possible or tolerated in Alabama.

Come for the ballet costumes, stay for the exposé of corruption. (Fiction. 12-18)

SPLINTERS OF SCARLET
Murphy, Emily Bain
HMH Books (400 pp.)
$17.99  |  Jul. 21, 2020
978-0-358-14273-7

Issues of servitude and sacrifice simmer beneath the surface of a lush 19th-century fantasy.

Marit Olsen has lost her father (mining accident); her sister, Ingrid (magic overuse), and her place at the orphanage but is determined not to lose little 11-year-old Eve too. When Helene Vestergaard—a ballet dancer and former orphan who married rich—adopts Eve, Marit abandons her thankless seamstress job, following Eve to Copenhagen and into service. Like the other servants, Marit relies on her minor magic; all risk the inescapable, seemingly incurable, icy and fatal Firn by using their powers to keep the Vestergaards comfortable. Blaming the Vestergaards for her father’s death, Marit investigates the family, endangering everyone, even Eve. Chapters from the point of view of Philip Vestergaard explore how powerlessness, patriotism, and greed can lead to villainy. In addition to class inequality, Murphy tackles racism, with biracial Helene (Crucian mother/ Danish father) and Eve (West Indian mother/father unknown) facing prejudice despite their talent and wealth in this otherwise white world. Part wish-fulfillment fantasy, with lavish descriptions of clothing, food, and flowers, part gritty whodunit, beneath the familiar upstairs-downstairs drama and glitter, the novel is also an extended (if sometimes obvious) metaphor for how the luxuries of capitalism, commerce, and colonialism ultimately cost lives.

Come for the ballet costumes, stay for the exposé of corruption. (Fiction. 12-18)

FAITH
Murphy, Julie
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$18.99  |  Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-06-289965-1

Series: Faith Herbert, 1

A loud-and-proud fangirl finds herself living a fan’s dream.

Faith Herbert runs a popular blog for her main obsession—the popular show The Grove. This past summer, Faith took a chance to secretly have her latent psiot abilities activated and gained the ability to fly. She’s not sure what she’s meant to do with her new superheroic powers, but she’s been trying to keep her “feet on the ground” as she starts her senior year. When The Grove moves its shooting location to Faith’s small Minnesota town, she can’t believe her luck. Then she meets, and starts hanging out with, the show’s star, Dakota Ash. In the meantime, a string of local pets, homeless people, and then Faith’s classmates all go missing. It’s scary, but she’s determined to help if she can. Faith’s character is the true star here; she has a sweet disposition and genuine dedication to her friends and family. She’s also good-humored, which makes moments of emotional stress, like dealing with her grandmother’s emerging memory issues, all the more poignant. As in all her work, Murphy’s portrayal of a plus-size protagonist is nuanced and heartfelt. Faith is blonde, white, and questioning. Dakota is biracial (white/Latino) and lesbian.

Destined for great heights. (Fiction. 13-19)
Fresh exploration of identity, first love, and the impact of Title IX.

**GIMME EVERYTHING YOU GOT**

A crush leads to self-discovery when a teen girl joins the soccer team.

Seventeen-year-old Susan Klintock is starting junior year without a boyfriend or goals…until she sees Bobby McMann, a new, young faculty member who looks great in shorts. But Bobby wants to do more than teach algebra. It’s 1979, and in the wake of Title IX, he’s intent on starting the school’s first all-girl soccer team. After most of the girls realize they’ll have to do more than just ogle Bobby, only Susan, her best friend, and a handful of wannabe players are left to face copious challenges with no real games on the horizon. Soon, Susan strikes up a friendship with Joe, a punk rock-loving former goalie at nearby Catholic St. Mark’s high school, who offers to help Susan become the player she didn’t know she wanted to be. When Susan challenges the St. Mark’s boys to a match, she finds herself reckoning with her own strength, her skills as a newly minted team captain, and her feelings for both Bobby and Joe. Susan is a flawed and sympathetic heroine, and her quest for fulfillment is packed with humor and heart. The fresh exploration of identity, first love, and the impact of Title IX make this novel broadly appealing. Susan and her family and friends are assumed white, but the author signals background diversity through the surnames of a few minor characters.

A sassy yet sweet girl-power tale that transcends time.

**RIVER OF DREAMS**

**FICITION | NONFICTION | CHILDREN’S | YOUNG ADULT | INDIE**

A fantasy with a tantalizing cliffhanger ending. (Fantasy. 13-17)

**THE FAITHLESS HAWK**

Plague and power struggles continue to ravage a kingdom in this sequel to 2019’s *The Merciful Crow.*

Unlike the 11 other bird-named castes of Sabor, only the Crows can handle the Sinner’s Plague victims, dispatching fatal “mercy,” handling corpses, and taking teeth as payment, yet they are reviled. Fierce young Fie, now a chieftain, and her Crows already delivered Prince Jasimir to safety once, but their promised protection—from daily abuse and nighttime Oleander Gentry raids—is threatened again by Queen Rhusana’s ruthless rise to power. When Rhusana interrupts Fie’s too-brief reunion with Jasimir and Tavin (his half brother, a royal bastard, and Fie’s love interest) via gruesome zombielike skin-ghasts and new mind-control magic, Fie goes solo. Familiar with death, decay, and discrimination, Fie is a refreshingly earthy and grimly determined protagonist with borrowed powers but innate pugnaciousness; romance clashes with her self-reliance. In a world where the dead gods may be reincarnated and every caste has witches and Birthrights, inequality and prejudices nevertheless fester, albeit along caste and class lines (rather than explicitly racial ones). If the first installment was a hair-raising road-trip/hardscrabble survival tale, this one is a proper court intrigue laced with looming social revolution, cryptic religious prophecies, and a fair amount of gore. Owen also raises the stakes, forcing self-reliant Fie to save all Sabor in order to protect all Crows, not just her band, while sustaining the suspense and adventure.

A richly textured story of rage, romance, and rebellion. (Fantasy. 14-18)
Explores loss, futility, honesty, and love with a richness of prose.

**THE STEPPING OFF PLACE**

_**Burn Our Bodies Down**_

**Pow, Rory**

Delacorte (352 pp.)

$18.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-525-64562-7

A 17-year-old Nebraska girl's desperate search for her roots takes her down a path more twisted than she could have imagined.

Margot Nielsen has lived her whole life under the thumb of her emotionally distant, manipulative mother and her strange set of rules. They have no connections to any family that Margot is aware of, but when a clue about their family history surfaces, Margot follows it. She finds the grandmother her mother never wanted her to know living on the family homestead in an economically depressed town where the Nielsen name seems to be shrouded in a cloud of suspicion that inspires trepidation among locals. Despite ominous foreshadowing, Margot still longs to find in her stoic grandmother, Vera, the love and connection that have been withheld from her. Their relationship is quickly complicated by a fire on the farm that results in the death of a girl with an uncanny physical resemblance to Margot—and whose existence her grandmother refuses to explain. Tension builds as the questions pile up, though the clues do not keep pace with the repetitive language. All major characters are white.

_A sinister story about the vicious cycle of generational abuse that falters under the weight of an unwieldy plot._ (Fiction. 14-18)

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_**Accidental**_

**Richards, Alex**

Bloomsbury (368 pp.)

$17.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-5476-0358-9

A teen unexpectedly faces the harsh realities of gun violence.

Sixteen-year-old Johanna Carlson has spent her life yearning to know what her mother was like; the maternal grandparents who raised her won't discuss the daughter they lost. Johanna is resigned to live a quiet, stifling life in Santa Fe, New Mexico, with her besties, Gabby and Leah, and maybe shake things up with the cute new transfer student, Milo. When her estranged father writes asking to meet, she hesitantly accepts his offer. Her father brings years of memories and pictures to share, but he also reveals that the story of the car accident she thought her mother died in was a lie her grandparents told. The truth: As a toddler, Johanna found an unsecured, loaded handgun and accidentally shot her mother. With her world in a tailspin, Johanna must find a way to forgive the adults who have abandoned and lied to her but also, more importantly, herself. The first-person narrative moves along at a steady pace, offering readers the rarely heard perspective of a child who is both the cause and victim of gun violence while also covering social issues such as bullying and religion. Johanna is white, Gabby is black, and Leah is Jewish and bisexual.

_A valuable take on a timely issue._ (Fiction. 14-18)

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_**The Stepping Off Place**_

**Rosenblum, Cameron Kelly**

HarperTeen (480 pp.)

$18.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-06-293207-5

Series: The Stepping Off Place, 1

A rising high school senior copes with her best friend's unfathomable suicide.

For six years Reid, 17, has warded off anxiety, social awkwardness, and the loss of her mother's attention (her younger brother is autistic and her mother has thrown herself into fundraising for autism research) by hiding behind vibrant Hattie. But since Hattie summers on her affluent family's private island in Maine, with unreliable cell service and no Wi-Fi, Reid hadn't seen her in weeks when, days before the start of school, she learns that Hattie has drowned, and her death is likely a suicide. The storyline bounces back and forth between past and present to fill details of Reid and Hattie's relationship, including all Hattie deliberately hid from Reid—and quite a lot that Reid hid from Hattie. Reid always understood that her role in Hattie's life involved not demanding answers or intimacy. At the same time, Hattie was central to Reid's life, and learning to navigate each day without her seems impossible. Reid and Hattie are white and straight; other important characters are Asian, Latino, and gay. The large cast of characters, particularly the high school students, are well and sensitively drawn. The novel doesn't glorify suicide or dwell on the details of Hattie's death. Instead it explores loss, futility, honesty, and love, with a richness of prose and excellence of characterization rare in a first-time author.

_Despite the difficult topic, a story to savor._ (Fiction. 14-18)

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_**Girl From Nowhere**_

**Rosenhan, Tiffany**

Bloomsbury (416 pp.)

$17.99 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-1-5476-0303-9

A teen fleeing from international terrorists takes refuge in a small town in Montana.

Sixteen-year-old Sophia, daughter of American diplomats, arrives in small-town Waterford, Montana, less than 48 hours after a traumatic incident inside a safe house in Tunis.
Though fluent in 14 languages, an expert skier, a concert-level pianist, and a skilled survivalist accustomed to carrying a loaded pistol at all times, Sophia hasn’t been to school in 18 months. However, she quickly makes friends and is intrigued by a senior boy named Aksel, whose marksmanship saves her, on the first day at school, from an attack by a grizzly bear. Aksel lives alone in a lush mountain home, his parents having died in a plane crash two years before; he confesses to remembering Sophia from seeing her inside the U.S. Embassy in Berlin. She doesn’t question this coincidence, preferring to dwell at length on Aksel’s stunning green eyes. But a man she vaguely recognizes seems to be stalking her. Rosenhan’s debut is absolutely crammed with action, international name-dropping and intrigue, and sizzling, though PG, scenes between Sophia and Aksel. It’s missing consistency, clearly defined characters, and a well-developed plot—many things happen, but not all of them make sense. Sophia’s desires are never clear, and she often doesn’t ask obvious questions. Neither Sophia nor Aksel are credible high school teens; they read much older. Main characters are white.

Adeptly written but full of inconsistencies. (Fiction. 14-18)

**Talk Nerdy to Me**

Schmidt, Tiffany

Abrams (336 pp.)

$9.99 paper | May 19, 2020

978-1-4197-4010-7

Series: Bookish Boyfriends, 3

Fans will be thrilled with this third installment in the Bookish Boyfriends series that focuses on brainy Eliza and her intellectual equal.

In the first two books, it was the Campbell girls who fell under the spell of Ms. Gregoire’s English class and found romance. But Eliza has absorbed the evidence her scientist parents provided demonstrating that dating is detrimental for adolescents. Or is it as she fears: that she is not lovable? Her parents are always off on research expeditions, monitor her actions from afar, and do not prioritize emotions. Eliza knows rationally they must care about her, but the lack of warmth and affection she feels becomes painfully clear when Eliza begins to identify with Frankenstein’s monster, an outcome Ms. Gregoire may have feared when she tried to steer Eliza away from using the book for the class project. Eliza switches to another book, *Anne of Green Gables.* As Eliza relates to Anne, she wonders if class clown Curtis is her Gilbert. Readers will be charmed by Curtis’ gentle consistency and Eliza’s confusion as her feelings change from combative to happy. As Eliza develops in confidence, her relationship with her parents improves, too, allowing her to finally feel settled. Eliza and most main characters are white; Curtis is biracial (white/Egyptian).

Sure to leave romantics with an afterglow. (Fiction. 12-15)

**Jo & Laurie**

Stohl, Margaret & de la Cruz, Melissa

Putnam (384 pp.)

$18.99 | Jun. 2, 2020

978-1-9848-1201-8

Josephine “Jo” March struggles to manage her emotions, write a sequel to her successful novel, and support her poor family financially.

Her editor and readers desire a story of love and marriage, which 18-year-old Jo rejects. Jo refuses marriage for herself and rebuffs the affections of her charming, wealthy, longtime friend Laurie in this spinoff of Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* that takes place in 1869, between the publication of the two parts of the original novel. The meticulously imitated historical language includes the perhaps overused exclamation “Christopher Columbus!” Scenes from the classic are reimagined or referred to in ways that alternately stir feelings of nostalgia, confusion, and disappointment over the absence of the rich, nuanced character development found in the original. Readers might also struggle to believe certain plot points, such as the beloved March father’s choosing to be an absentee dad or younger sister Amy’s falling ill in a manner oddly similar to Beth in the classic. Those who want to believe Jo’s defiance of societal norms might be puzzled by the extent to which she and other members of the “gentle sex” quickly blush in the company of men and are susceptible to jealousy. While some might appreciate this new interpretation, fans of the classic may prefer to stick to their own imaginings. Main characters are white.

Inspired by a classic, this story is best suited for those eager to revisit romance in the context of *Little Women.* (historical note) (Romance. 14-18)

**Night Owls and Summer Skies**

Sullivan, Rebecca

Wattpad Books (288 pp.)

$10.99 paper | Jun. 30, 2020

978-1-980365-25-0

Emma’s parents are divorced, and she dreads her upcoming summer visit with her mother, who refuses to accept that she is gay.

After she leaves the Boston home she shares with her father and arrives in Maine, Emma’s reluctance turns to astonishment: Her mother reveals she has gotten married, is going on a honeymoon, and is dumping Emma at Camp Mapplewood. Emma’s astonishment then turns to dread. Five summers ago, when she was 12, fellow campers Lauren and Mike inflicted trauma on her at that very camp, leaving her trapped high up in a tree above a wasps’ nest—despite her serious allergy to their stings. Emma has been managing depression and PTSD ever since. Emma is additionally disturbed when...
she discovers Lauren will be one of her cabin mates. Over the next two months, Emma learns many lessons as she copes with her fears, forms close relationships with members of the family who run the camp, and engages in a slow-motion romance. Told from Emma's point of view, the book is rife with implausible situations, such as counselors setting up an activity designed to encourage campers to act out violently against one another. The stilted dialogue tries too hard to be witty banter, the characters are underdeveloped and their motivations are unclear, and the plot is flimsy. Whiteness of all characters is implied.

A disappointing lesbian romance in the woods. (Fiction. 13-18)

THE ARCHER AT DAWN
Teerdhala, Swati
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins
(464 pp.)
$18.99 | May 26, 2020
978-0-06-286924-1
Series: The Tiger at Midnight, 2

When rebel Esha and soldier Kunal join forces to fight for the land they love, they risk their lives—and their budding relationship.

In this sequel to The Tiger at Midnight (2019), Esha and Kunal travel to the royal city of Gwali for the annual Sun Mela alongside the Crescent Blades, the rebel group that Esha leads. This time, their mission is to save deposed Dharkan prince Harun's sister, princess Reha, from Varadaan, the usurper king of Jansa, who is also Harun and Reha's uncle. Harun's interest in his sister goes beyond family ties: Reha's magical blood is necessary to seal the ancient janma bond with the gods that protects the lands of both Dharka and Jansa. Before performing the ceremony, Harun plans to use his sister to restore his family to the throne. As Esha and Kunal work together with the Crescent Blades, loyalties are tested, trusts are betrayed, and promises are broken—especially after Esha discovers that the soldiers who killed her parents are attending the Mela, providing her with a chance to avenge her family's deaths, but only at the cost of the mission. Teerdhala's Hindu-mythology–inspired world is richly drawn, and the book's fight scenes are detailed and action packed. At times, however, her prose is confusing, making the plot difficult to follow, especially for readers unfamiliar with the first book.

A South Asian–inspired fantasy with a strong female lead. (map) (Fantasy. 14-18)

ALL THESE MONSTERS
Tintera, Amy
HMH Books (464 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-358-01240-5
Series: Monsters, 1

The world is being ravaged by scrabs, ferocious monsters who target highly populated areas in order to kill humans. The U.S. has closed its borders and turned a blind eye toward Asia and Europe, where the scrabs are most rampant. Meanwhile, Clara Rivera Pratt has been fighting her whole life against another terrifying monster: her abusive father. Feeling hopeless about graduating high school, she's failed two classes but excels at combat. When Grayson St. John, wealthy heir of a weapons company, puts out an international call for a fight squad to help defeat scrabs abroad, Clara responds to the call and escapes her home for the first time, joining an ethnically diverse team of American teenagers from different socio-economic backgrounds. It may be a death sentence, but staying put will surely lead only to an even worse outcome. She is a steely, sarcastic survivor readers will cheer for as she battles scrabs and also faces the deep wounds left by her father's abuse. What appears to be a dystopian science-fiction adventure turns out fundamentally to be about a young woman's emotional path to transcendence over the cycle of abuse. Tintera gracefully balances heart-pounding action with compelling connections between Clara and her teammates, all told through snappy dialogue and prose. Clara is biracial, with a Mexican immigrant mother and white American father.

A thrilling and worthy #MeToo story with frightening monsters of all kinds. (Science fiction. 14-18)

A PECULIAR PERIL
VanderMeer, Jeff
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (656 pp.)
$19.99 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-0-374-30886-5
Series: Misadventures of Jonathan Lambshead, 1

Family secrets give way to a madcap marathon portal fantasy. Tasked with cataloging his dead hoarder grandfather's mansion's contents, 16-year-old recently orphaned naturalist Jonathan also puzzles over his grandfather's nonsensical instructions. Strange and dangerous things lead Jonathan to conclude his grandfather was murdered—a conclusion reached too late to prevent school friends Rack and his good-natured, athletic sister, Danny, from arriving to help. Meanwhile, on parallel world Aurora, Aleister Crowley, aided by his grotesque familiar, Wretch, and the head of Napoleon, is the Lord Emperor of the Franco-Germanic Empire, seeking to conquer Prague (with mecha-elephants) and
Weaves an intense and spectral atmosphere with vivid prose.

**GHOST WOOD SONG**

Waters, Erica
HarperTeen (368 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-0-06-289422-9

A fiddler with a magical instrument and a haunted family history unleashes her music to solve a mystery and free her brother from jail.

Sixteen-year-old Shady Grove grieves for the sound of her dead father’s fiddle, a family heirloom with the power to raise ghosts. She yearns to play bluegrass with the same darkness and emotion. However, Sarah, Shady’s best friend, crush, and band mate, only wants to play new music, folk-rock songs that Shady doesn’t feel a connection to. When Shady’s stepdad gets murdered and her brother is arrested for the crime, she digs up her father’s old instrument and uncovers the secrets of her family’s past. Debut author Waters weaves an intense and spectral atmosphere with vivid prose. A love triangle complicates bisexual Shady’s feelings as mutual attraction and interests draw her to mandolin-playing cowboy Cedar. The romantic conflict heightens the sense of urgency into the narrative. The resolution of this stand-alone thriller ties up loose ends in both Shady’s past and present, offering healing for her family and ending on a positive, hopeful note. Apart from Shady’s friend and band mate Orlando, a Cuban American boy who loves guajira music and is a budding entomologist, the cast is predominantly white.

**Haunting and alluring.** (Paranormal mystery. 14-18)

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**NOW & WHEN**

Wealer, Sarah Bennett
Delacorte (304 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-0-593-12722-3

A hackneyed premise with some solid emotional notes.

Wealer’s debut hovers uncertainly between rom-com, complete with a premise reminiscent of Jay Asher and Carolyn Mackler’s *The Future of Us* (2011), and a thoughtful portrayal of female friendship in a town where many are struggling after the close of the largest business. In predominantly white and straight Alton, Skyler’s fortunate life —two best friends, a perfect boyfriend, and parents who are happily, albeit less profitably, reemployed after the mill’s closing—has two major problems: best friend Harper’s self-harm and hospitalization and glitchy phone updates from 11 years in the future indicating she’s going to end up with insufferable (but attractive) Truman. The uneasy marriage of the two stories initially clash, but their underlying romantic attraction is happily, albeit less profitably, reemployed after the mill’s closing.

**Trevelyan’s sleepy Cornish village witnesses the arrival of the wealthy, glamorous Cardews.**

Lou has a bustling, loving, ordinary family—and dreams of something more. Her older sister is content to marry and settle down, but at low tide Lou sneaks across the causeway and into the empty Cardew House, where she writes installments in her ongoing adventure story. When 23-year-old Robert and his sister, the anachronistically named Caitlin, come down from London for the summer, Lou is drawn into their circle, becoming a pet project and confidante for Caitlin, whose fast-living friends flock to her sumptuously decadent parties. Robert and Lou initially clash, but their underlying romantic attraction is heavily signaled. Beneath the sparkle, Lou senses the orphaned, noble Cardews’ dysfunction, though concrete facts are tantalizingly mysterious. As the summer wears on and the gap between

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**A SKY PAINTED GOLD**

Wood, Laura
Random House (384 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 23, 2020
978-0-593-12722-3

Seventeen-year-old Louise Trevelyan’s sleepy Cornish village witnesses the arrival of the wealthy, glamorous Cardews.

Lou has a bustling, loving, ordinary family—and dreams of something more. Her older sister is content to marry and settle down, but at low tide Lou sneaks across the causeway and into the empty Cardew House, where she writes installments in her ongoing adventure story. When 23-year-old Robert and his sister, the anachronistically named Caitlin, come down from London for the summer, Lou is drawn into their circle, becoming a pet project and confidante for Caitlin, whose fast-living friends flock to her sumptuously decadent parties. Robert and Lou initially clash, but their underlying romantic attraction is heavily signaled. Beneath the sparkle, Lou senses the orphaned, noble Cardews’ dysfunction, though concrete facts are tantalizingly mysterious. As the summer wears on and the gap between
Lou’s indulgences and her family’s modest lifestyle becomes more glaring. Lou faces the difficult question of what next: Should she find a local boy and abandon her dream of becoming a novelist? Throw herself at wealthy American Charlie? Face her true feelings about Robert (who is engaged to Charlie’s sister)? While the story is charmingly frothy and the descriptions of clothing delight, there is little chemistry between Lou and Robert, and the characters feel as insubstantial as the glossy veneer on their high-society lives. Main characters are white; there are significant black secondary characters.

A light, escapist read. (Historical romance. 13-18)

HE MUST LIKE YOU
Younge-Ullman, Danielle
Viking (336 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-9848-3571-0

Libby just wanted to make enough in tips to save for college, not be the sacrificial victim of her small town’s #MeToo moment.

After discovering that her parents ended up spending her college fund, Libby, who aspires to work in a museum—an ambition her father considers frivolous—has no choice but to earn as much as she can as quickly as she can. A scant few months into her waitressing job, 18-year-old Libby has already dealt with a proposition from obtuse co-worker Kyle and an unwanted butt grab and leering ridicule from Perry, a rich older man. Libby’s short-lived retaliation against Perry gets her fired—and infamous on the internet. Worse, she’s coping with trauma from two other sexual assaults and her father’s dysfunctional dominance. As Libby receives guidance from Dahlia, her school nurse, the town mobilizes against Perry for harassing servers, and Libby soon faces an agonizing choice. The novel takes on the topic of nonconsent and how deeply it is baked into male-female interactions in American society, a subject as fraught as things can get. Libby’s frank, wisecracking narration bolsters the reader through difficult scenes and occasionally uneven pacing. Though the story ends on a hopeful note, its honesty can be brutal. Mental health and racism are touched upon glancingly. Most main characters are white; Dahlia is brown-skinned, and Libby’s best friend is Chinese American.

A thoughtful indictment of white, cisgender, heterosexual rape culture. (Fiction. 14-18)
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

DEAR RAY by Donna Dunlop ................................................................. 176
WITHOUT EXPIRATION by William R. Hincy .............................. 178
FOREVER FRIENDS by Melanie Moyer & Kathe Hudson; illus. by Maileys Pitcher .............................................................................. 181
THE SIKH HERITAGE by Dalvir S. Pannu ........................................... 182

A history of the cruelest sport, told in brutal, poignant vignettes of boxing greats. As Thomas Hauser, the author of Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times (1991), notes in this book’s foreword, few newspapers or magazines today employ full-time writers devoted to boxing, and substandard boxing websites have proliferated. But Acevedo, the founder of The Cruelest Sport website, stands out in this landscape; his prizewinning writing has been featured in Boxing Digest, Boxing World, and other publications, and this book may cement his status as one of today’s best boxing journalists. In these 21 tales of boxing legends, he looks at tragic heroes of yore, such as early-1900s sensation Jack Johnson, and adds nuance to the stories of well-known later fighters, such as Mike Tyson. With his expertise in boxing technique and form, Acevedo expertly weaves together fighters’ private lives and dramas inside the ring. He’s particularly adept at placing boxers in historical context, such as the Jim Crow South that produced Johnson, and the Northern, racist judicial system that targeted him because he dated white women and defeated many white men in the ring. Many essays challenge prevailing notions about boxing icons; for example, Acevedo focuses on aspects of boxing great Muhammad Ali’s life that white “middle-class baby boomers” and “activist liberals” may take issue with. Ali, he says, was a conservative Muslim who had a strict moral code against drinking and smoking, adhered to traditional gender roles, and not only rejected civil disobedience as a protest strategy, but also opposed the integrationist ideals of 1960s activists. By the 1980s, Acevedo says, Ali had befriended right-wing authoritarians Idi Amin and Ferdinand Marcos as well as prominent American conservatives such as Ronald Reagan and U.S. Sen. Orrin Hatch.

Acevedo’s crisp, efficient essays will be accessible to general audiences who may be unfamiliar with many of the fighters, such as Don Jordan, Johnny Tapia, or Eddie Machen, but his fresh insights will still appeal to hardcore fans, as he looks at the greats in new ways. Ringside photographs and artistically shot portraits of fighters complement each chapter and give the book a powerful visual aesthetic. The author compellingly begins his first chapter on Ali with a touching story of his own father’s giving him a comic book featuring Superman and Ali as
LOOKING FOR LAUGHS

FACING A PANDEMIC, some readers find solace in a comforting classic, a taut thriller, or a frothy romance. Or they vow to devour the final volume of Hilary Mantel's complex Tudor trilogy. But others search for a story filled with humor or zany antics. Kirkus Indie recently reviewed three comic novels that should brighten readers' moods.

In Matthew Rowland's Cinematic Immunity, key grip Sam Agonistes struggles to write a clever screenplay for a superstar. Sam's midlife crises involve an ex-wife and a hostile adult son. But bigger troubles lie ahead in this amusing crime tale. After a gorgeous woman claims that Sam is in danger, some thugs show up wielding Glockes. “A gnarly, satisfying caper set among moviemakers in Hollywood,” our critic writes.

Wake Up, Wanda Wiley by Andrew Diamond features Hannah Sharpe, a difficult character who remains trapped in a farmhouse in an author's subconscious. Hannah hasn't appeared in any of Wanda's 18 romance novels. Soon, Hannah gets a roommate: Trevor Dunwoody, a hero in a thriller that Wanda is ghostwriting. “You've been living in a world of male fantasy,” Hannah tells Trevor about his series. “In the real world, not every woman is a hot babe.” Will Hannah finally join the cast of one of Wanda's books? Our reviewer calls this work “a well-crafted literary satire with something to say about genre fiction.”

A young film fan deals with a series of mundane jobs in Smiley McGrouchpants' Crouching Schuyler, Hidden Dragon. During the 1990s, Chris Schuyler works as an accountant, a copy editor, a vacuum cleaner salesman, and a fundraising canvasser. According to our critic, Chris' ruminations could have been claustrophobic, but McGrouchpants expands them into a keenly subversive portrait of workplace social psychology, delivering “a funny, caustic tale of a slacker's deserted resistance to mainstream success.”

Myra Forsberg is an Indie editor.

characters, which launched Acevedo's lifelong passion for boxing. This passage is so beautifully written that it may well leave readers wanting more of the author's insights on his own life and career. However, each vignette that follows is provocative in its own way, and the book's structured framework attempts to tie them into a larger, overarching narrative. That said, introductory and concluding chapters might have helped to better unify the book's common themes of triumph, tragedy, self-destruction, and brutality and made the book a more cohesive read from start to finish. Despite this deficiency, Acevedo still delivers one of the better books on boxing in recent years.

An often engaging set of boxing profiles that packs a powerful punch and rarely misses its target.

THE PEACENIKS
The Thankless Job of Trying To Keep America Out of War
Amchan, Arthur J.
Self (195 pp.) $18.95 paper | Aug. 24, 2019 978-0-9617132-8-7

A historical study profiles United States senators who took unpopular stands against wars. Amchan explores the actions of a handful of senators who tried to block a rush toward war or end an ongoing conflict, often at serious cost to their political careers. He devotes the bulk of the book to opponents of the Vietnam War. These include Democrats Wayne Morse of Oregon and Ernest Gruening of Alaska, the only two senators to vote against the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution giving the Johnson administration a blank check to prosecute the war. At a time when Cold War anti-communism was virtually unchallengeable, they called the conflict illegal and unconstitutional, with Gruening denouncing the “plain murder” of American servicemen. Both lost their seats in the 1968 election. Democratic Sens. George McGovern of South Dakota and Frank Church of Idaho were more circumspect but more effective, in the author's telling. Both hesitantly voted for the Tonkin Resolution but took increasingly dovish positions as the war dragged on. McGovern became the anti-war Democratic nominee in the 1972 presidential election while Church co-authored measures that banned funding for the war in Indochina in 1973 and then chaired groundbreaking hearings into abuses by U.S. intelligence agencies. Both kept their seats until the 1980 Ronald Reagan landslide. Amchan also spotlights Democratic Sen. Paul Wellstone of Minnesota, a more recent dove, who opposed former Presidents H.W. Bush's and George W. Bush's wars against Iraq and died in a plane crash amid the 2002 re-election campaign. The volume finishes with a look at Republican Sen. Robert La Follette Sr. of Wisconsin, a leading opponent of America's entry into World War I. His epic anti-war speeches, which harped on the supposed machinations of profiteers, provoked cries of treason and a move to expel him from the Senate.
Amchan’s biographical sketches note the importance of ideological commitments and conscience in anti-war activism. Gruening, for example, was a member of the Anti-Imperialist League and a critic of U.S. support for Latin American dictators while McGovern, a pilot in World War II, was haunted by the belief that he may have killed innocents by accidentally bombing a farmhouse. But the author also examines the fog of political calculation and uncertainty that shaped the senators’ moves—La Follette had a sizable German American constituency, for example, while McGovern and Church were taken in by misleading government claims about the Tonkin Gulf incident—and how changing facts on the ground altered public opinion and opened or closed possibilities for dissent. Amchan’s prose is lucid, if somewhat dry, and his narrative features dramatic confrontations—“This chamber literally reeks of blood,” thundered McGovern in a speech to pro-war colleagues—set against knowledgeable and insightful (but sometimes repetitive) backgrounds on the conflicts. While the author is sympathetic to his subjects’ stances, he is also clear-eyed and judicious about the blind spots in anti-war politics. (“The hawks were deluding themselves into believing they could bomb the Vietnamese Communists into submission,” he writes, while “the doves were deluding themselves into believing that the Vietnamese Communists would accept any arrangement that did not ultimately result in a united Vietnam under Communist rule.”) The result is a sophisticated and illuminating discussion of some iconically courageous and divisive political stands.

A perceptive, well-informed take on a vital though rarely celebrated tradition in American politics.

**HOMO TRANSFORMANS**
The Origin and Nature of the Species

*Ames, Mary Elizabeth*

XlibrisUS (586 pp.)

$34.99 | $23.99 paper | $3.99 e-book

Mar. 29, 2018

This debut work combines an introduction to genetics with an SF adventure.

A supernova within the Milky Way exposed the Earth to tremendous amounts of gamma radiation. This “Stella Ignis” event stripped the ozone layer and caused mass extinctions. Some people went underground for protection, taking plants and animals along, and so “human society and knowledge had been preserved, albeit under severely constrained environmental conditions.” The ensuing centuries give rise to *Homo transformans*, whose genetic mutations allow them to shape-shift into various animals, including dragons. Two groups would like nothing more than to capture and exploit these individuals—the Biogenetics Company and the Cassius Foundation, which is led by Angus Cassius. To protect against these aggressors and the bounty hunters who would earn kidnapping fees, two forward-thinking *Homo transformans* named Edvar and Ruth H’Aleth create a refuge. Initially, the House of H’Aleth declines to conduct experiments using its citizens. But eventually, the goals of maintaining genetic knowledge and defending against the world’s evils bring philosophical offshoots into being. In a safe region, the House of Erwina conducts selective breeding and schools children. Farthest away is the House of Gregor, which practices genetic engineering. Can the houses remain intact across the generations against greedy individuals? Ames’ hybrid of science education and adventure provides anyone newly interested in genetics with an excellent foundation. Key vocabulary is defined in the text, like chromosome (“an extended strand of DNA that was...compressed into a microscopic package”), and always accompanied by uncredited explanatory illustrations. The plot goes on to detail how evolution works through trial and error—most early *Homo transformans* didn’t shape-shift expertly or completely and so died—and “patterns of inheritance”; Edvar and Ruth’s children possess combined and expanded traits. Throughout, black-and-white artwork showcases fantastic scenes or anomalies, as when the arrogant Rafe Cassius fails to transform fully and becomes a grotesque. The author’s imaginative tale follows H’Aleth descendants who work to merge *Homo sapiens* and *Homo transformans* into one society despite the Cassius family’s machinations. The first two sections strike the best balance between science and adventure while later ones rely more on character development and worldbuilding.

An inventive mix of SF and fact that should engross a wide range of readers.

**FELA’S STORY**
Memoir of a Displaced Family

*Beran, Phyllis*

IPBooks (220 pp.)

$29.95 paper | Oct. 21, 2019

978-1-949093-42-1

In this memoir, a psychoanalyst tracks her family’s displacement, due to World War II, and tries to piece together her personal history.

The book begins in the 2000s, when Beren had to move her aging mother to a nursing home. The elderly woman had always been reluctant to share her memories, and the author describes how difficult it was to construct her own history when she was young: “I was caught between my mother’s desire not to look back, to begin a fresh life, and my father’s reticence towards his new country; his mourning of what had been lost.” Born in Russia at the end of the war, Beren moved to the United States with her parents when she was 9; with the help of an American relative living in Chicago, the family was able to leave the German displaced persons camp where they’d been living. The book collects stories of several family members, including the author’s mother, her father, her cousin Elizabeth, and other relatives who were either killed or uprooted by the war and its aftermath. The author’s father was from a small town in Poland, and her mother was from Russia.
One of the mysteries that the book sets out to solve is the circumstance of their meeting and marriage. At one point, the author puts it bluntly: “I have no sense of their relationship.” As she gathers more material—recorded oral histories, old documents, her mother’s handwritten account—she slowly sketches a portrait of a European Jewish family.

The author writes with tremendous detail, turning her own memories and others’ into stirring scenes. In the book’s longest chapter, “Behind the Iron Curtain,” she writes about traveling to Gomel, Russia (now Belarus), in 1966 to meet her maternal grandparents, and she vividly captures the poignancy of the family reunion, a young person’s excitement abroad, and her unease regarding traveling between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Although the book somewhat haphazardly ricochets through time, this reflects the author’s effort to keep the many individual stories straight. The chapter divisions help to organize the narrative, but they don’t stop it from looping back on itself, reiterating snatches and bits of family lore. At times, the sequence of events seems repetitive or hard to follow. Although the chapters set in two displaced persons camps aren’t riveting, they do clearly depict the author’s family trying to figure out where it belonged. Such questions persisted long after the family left Europe for Chicago, and the writer frankly states that she doesn’t really know where she’s from, even now. In prose marked by wit, elegance, and searching candor, her frustration becomes the guiding light of this book: “It is the frustration I’ve felt my entire life,” she writes, “in not having a coherent picture, call it a map, of my origins, of the place where I was born.” The book also includes family photos.

A clear-eyed remembrance in which the author’s personal history is both a point of pride and a painful burden.

**A LIGHT ON ALTERED LAND**

Bohan, Becky  
Self (292 pp.)  
$14.00 paper | $3.99 e-book  
Jan. 11, 2020  
978-1-65411-087-1

An unsought, late-in-life love blooms between two women in Bohan’s quiet gay romance.

When Ellie Belmont, a 65-year-old retired writing teacher, spots 68-year-old, retired psychotherapist Kathryn Kepler in a Minneapolis Starbucks, she experiences the first twinge of desire she’s felt since the death of her wife, Mary, three years before. Kathryn, whose husband recently divorced her to take up with a younger woman, is straight, but that proves no obstacle to their bonding over tea and dirty chai latte—so simpatico are their personalities and outlooks. Their relationship builds very slowly over lunch dates, shopping excursions—in which Kathryn gives the couture-allergic Ellie a style makeover, although both abjure makeup as being unhealthy and unnecessary—and deep, heart-to-heart talks. Along the way, Ellie introduces Kathryn to her circle of gal pals, and Kathryn feels a growing appreciation for Ellie’s “finely sculpted lips” and “long black lashes.” The narrative kicks up a gear when Kathryn tags along on Ellie’s road trip to her niece’s marijuana farm in California to score some illegal cannabis oil for a friend with Lyme disease, with a stop in Yosemite National Park for sightseeing and snowshoeing; in a hotel room, their brewing attraction finally explodes into rapturous passion. They also pay a visit to Kathryn’s daughter, Jenn, a prickly, insecure woman who’s affronted by the fact that her mother is now dating a woman. A more pressing crisis erupts when Ellie and Kathryn are caught in a multilane highway accident.

Despite this, there’s not much overt drama in most of Bohan’s story of second chances and newfound intimacy, which mainly plays out in long conversations that tend toward serious and even grave matters. There’s much talk of coping with caretaking duties, end-of-life arrangements—“Cremation appeals to me more, even though it consumes fossil fuel”—and assisted living options for seniors; on a spiritual note, Ellie recalls Mary’s numinous presence in the house for a few hours after her passing while Kathryn tells of a dream visitation from a departed friend who told her that death is simply a transition to another plane. Ellie introduces Kathryn to lesbian culture, music, and politics, and they discuss gender roles—including Ellie’s resentful opinions regarding “young butch lesbians…becoming transmen” and trans women identifying as lesbians, which Kathryn challenges. Bohan’s prose is refined and psychologically nuanced, but it sometimes feels bloodless, and the couple’s interactions often lack a spark. However, as their relationship deepens and grows more carnal, so does the author’s writing as she explores the wounds and wisdom that accrue to women of a certain age: “She contemplated the sag in her abdomen that all the crunches in the world would not reduce. The creped neck, the fine hatch work around her eyes and mouth. This is what she had to give to Kathryn, bless her….But one day it would all be empty, just as Mary’s clothes had been, and all this all this wonder would be gone.” When Bohan puts her characters’ love to a harder test, it achieves more resonance.

**LOVE IN THE CTHULUCENE (CHTHULUCENE)**

Caple, Natalie  
Wolsak and Wynn Publishers (112 pp.)  
$16.00 paper | May 7, 2019  
978-1-928088-79-0

A poet delivers verse for a new world historical era.

Many scientists now say that people are living in the Anthropocene, a time in which the dominant force impacting the environment is human activity. Not so for pioneering feminist scholar Donna J. Haraway, who calls the current period the Cthulucene. For Haraway, the Cthulucene is characterized
Chalmers creates a vivid sense of Oxbow Island and its close-knit, year-round residents.

BEAR AND THE OXBOW ISLAND GANG

by a tighter connection between the human and the nonhuman, “inextricably linked in tentacular practices,” as she puts it in her book on the topic, Staying With the Trouble (2016). If this is all sounding pretty academic, it is. Which makes it all the more impressive that Caple is able to distill such dense scholarship into engaging, moving poetry. Readers get some sense of the ways humans and nonhumans are wrapped up together in her opening poem, “I Try Not To Think too Much,” an extended riff on the word “mind.” At the beginning, the piece feels like simple wordplay: “You are your mind / you know your mind / no two know the same mind.” But quickly, readers will realize that the author is on to something bigger: “Do flowers have minds?...speak to my dog’s mind! things in the garbage have no mind / they do not mind...God is a kind of mind.” Here, “mind” becomes something more than human—and something that dwells in various and unexpected places. Elsewhere in the book, Caple matches words with images, creating pieces that are more collages than poems. One of these is “Wildness,” which features an uncredited photograph of the Canadian poet Pat Caple matches words with images, creating pieces that are more collages than poems. One of these is “Wildness,” which features an uncredited photograph of the Canadian poet Pat Lowther pasted over a field of text with words cut out. The cut-outs then appear on Lowther’s face, enigmatically forming the phrase “how is memory a wildness.” The meaning here is elusive, but the effect is real. In this, Caple resembles modernist authors who came before her. Like them, she is able almost magically to build emotional momentum without narrative structure. The effect is mesmerizing.

Powerful work from a bracingly original poet.

BEAR AND THE OXBOW ISLAND GANG

Chalmers, Rae
Illus. by Hogan, Jamie
Maine Authors Publishing (197 pp.)
$11.95 paper | Mar. 1, 2020
978-1-6381-211-6

A sixth grade boy and some friends team up to try to foil a poacher/plant thief in this debut middle-grade novel.

Oxbow Island, off the coast of Portland, Maine, is a special place for Berend “Bear” Houtman, 11. He spends summers there with his grandmother Sally Parker, and he loves its natural beauty. But now sixth grade has begun, and Bear is visiting after being suspended from school for acting out in response to bullying and being betrayed by his former best friend. Bear feels disgraced, but kindness from others—plus the island’s magic—soon improves his mood. While exploring in the woods, Bear is dismayed to find that someone has been uprooting, stealing, and destroying delicate orchids—and worse, setting illegal traps. Honey the Wonder Dog, Sally’s pet, is injured by one such trap, and Bear finds a dead beaver in another. It seems the area’s beaver ponds are being targeted, perhaps on behalf of rich summer residents. Bear forms a bold plan with old friends and new to scout out beaver ponds, catch the trapper, and protect his beloved island. In her novel, Chalmers creates a vivid sense of Oxbow Island and its close-knit, year-round residents. They’re a quirky bunch, coming in a wide range of ages, races, and backgrounds: a 90-year-old woman; a middle-aged black professor; a Hispanic wheelchair user and his daughter; a taxi driver; and a newspaper deliveryman. While the rescue plot is compelling and cheeryworthy, it has wider effects. Bear’s investigation doesn’t just benefit plants and animals, it also brings the island community closer. In addition, Bear comes to a new, more mature understanding about

articles and included them as chapters). The second half of the book moves from the general to the more specific as the author delves into several market sectors, including mining, oil and gas, high tech commodities, gold and silver, and real estate investment trusts. He assesses some of these sectors as well as the American economy in blunt style; for example, he asserts, “The next chapter in the history of gold and silver will be written in Asia where it is adored and not in the west where it is scorned and regarded as a barbaric relic.” Carach lists some of his favorite stock picks with only spotty details about them. Readers may, of course, regard these choices as recommendations, but he cautions investors to do their homework: “Research your stocks before and not after you buy them. Diversify broadly, no more than 5% in any position, and the riskier the play the less of your money should be in it.” While some of the prose seems amateurish, the author’s unorthodox investment advice may spark serious interest.

A wily stock market strategy presented in an informative, if somewhat muddled, manner.
the conflict with his ex-friend, with some well-earned reflections on growing up. The chapter head illustrations by Hogan are charming additions.

Funny, warmhearted, and involving, with a timely ecological message.

A poetry collection offers a bracing call to be your own hero.

A diva is someone “who exudes great style and personality with confidence, expresses her own style, and doesn’t let others influence who she is or who she wants to be—fierce!” writes Cosmic Girl, who gives no indication of whether that name is a pseudonym. This last word, “fierce,” is the most important one for understanding both the soul of the diva and Cosmic Girl’s poetry, which is all about channeling ferocity. Not surprisingly, then, the author shows a leonine spirit: “Behold the mighty lion! / Fierce and majestic, / Yet gentle and nurturing. / He is one who will give his all for those close to him / And strike fear into the hearts of those / Who cross him. / Being no stranger to adversity, / The mighty lion pulls strength from / These life lessons / To guide others with his wisdom.” Obviously, the fearsome beast is a complex symbol for the poet: tough yet supportive, intimidating yet wise. These many virtues, found in unexpected combinations, yield power. But make no mistake: That power is hard won; it is a strength gained through adversity. In “Warrior,” Cosmic Girl writes, “Battle! / I am a child witness of rape, / A daughter of divorce, / The child of a mother who was more / A woman of cunning and resourcefulness / Than a nurturer.” The poem goes on: “I am a single mother / Battling a crack-addicted baby daddy, / Trying to make ends meet, / Doing whatever I have to, / To make sure my son is safe, / To be sure he grows up as / A strong black man.” The poem ends: “I may be war-torn, / At times weary, / But never weakening. / I am a warrior!” There is subtle but powerful wordplay here, with “war-torn” giving way to “warrior.” It is our battles that make us resilient. This is a hard lesson, but it is all the more valuable for its hardness.

A stirring reminder—full of joyful shouts and stern admonitions—that it’s often our wounds that make us strong.
Curtis deftly explains the religious and cultural context of the plot without didactic commentary.

THE NUN’S BETROTHAL
Curtis, Ida
She Writes Press (248 pp.)
978-1-63152-685-5

In this romance set in France in the early ninth century, an inexperienced nun and a sophisticated aristocrat wrestle with their mutual attraction.

Gilda and Lord Justin seem an unlikely, if simply impossible, pair—he’s a “worldly man” and she’s romantically naïve, a nun who’s lived the bulk of her short life in a convent. She’s set to soon take her final vows. Nevertheless, despite their constant bickering, the connection between the two is an electric one, a truth Gilda cannot deny following their first kiss, tantalizingly described by Curtis: “There was a melting inside me. I forgot everything but my desire to continue the kiss. I wanted to get closer, but Justin pulled away.”

They’re forced to grapple with their unresolved connection between the two. In the book’s opening section, he shows how institutional problems have led to the betrayal of “the American promise of public education.” According to him, the public education problem is primarily a problem of access, and he blames educational redlining. It’s a form of systemic discrimination that creates “attendance zones,” and these, “as drawn by district bureaucrats,” give school administrators a policy tool to exclude children who live in certain neighborhoods—particularly black and brown communities. The book presents a series of maps of attendance zones in several major metropolitan areas to show how many school districts can be mapped onto their redlined boundaries from 1939. “Today’s geographic discrimination,” he writes, “still reflects the patterns of racial and geographic discrimination of the mid-1900s.”

Attendance zones, he says, also drive some parents to take desperate measures such as address fraud, in which a parent pretends to live in a different zone to gain access to its schools. In later chapters, the author enumerates the ways in which attendance zones are illegal and what litigation battles might look like in state courts.

DeRoche, who previously wrote The Ballad of Huck & Miguel (2018), writes with purpose and clarity, and he makes a strong, decisive case against current attendance-zoning practices. He draws most of his examples from populous cities: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta. The sheer number of students in these systems leads to a pressurized, ruthless environment, he asserts, in which parents will do anything for the few open spots at high-achieving schools. The book capably integrates statistics and data with visual representations, including maps, charts, and graphs, which help support the author’s arguments. Its 12 chapters in three sections are further subdivided with headings and bullet points, which makes information easy to digest. Although there’s plenty of blame to go around, DeRoche is more interested in working to reform the current dysfunctional state. He takes a forgiving approach to parents who manipulate the system: “They’re all working within the system that exists now,” he writes, and they’re “just doing what they think is best for their kids.” However, he doesn’t shy away from the root of the problem—institutionalized racism. He writes especially well when articulating a rallying cry for change: “We should all
In Trace, debut author Melanie Figg explores the complex emotions of being a survivor of sexual assault. In the powerful feminist poetry collection, Figg “kindles broken, dying embers into a roaring memorial for the voiceless,” per Kirkus Reviews. The book won the Many Voices Project Prize from New Rivers Press, a validating experience for the poet, who worked for 15 years to publish her book. Figg, who has a master’s in fine arts in poetry, was also the recipient of a 2017 National Endowment for the Arts poetry fellowship.

What was the writing process like when tackling difficult topics like sexual assault, mental illness, and loss?

I like to explore an issue over time to find emotional clearings. I like to tackle big ideas or trace complicated emotion-al shifts in my poems. How does one move from being a sexual assault victim to a survivor, from feeling fragmented to being whole, from being overwhelmed with grief to cultivating a daily relationship with absence? What does that process look like? Poetry can articulate that complicated process and show us how to engage in, and with, ourselves and the world in a way that is thoughtful, curious, and hopeful.

Trace has been hailed as a feminist work depicting various kinds of women and their relationships. Were there other, similar works that you had in mind while writing your book?

The long poems of Larry Levis were important guides—in their length, use of space, and how they braided stories. But mostly, visual artists were my main companions while I wrote this book, such as Doris Salcedo and David Maisel. Over a dozen poems in Trace are ekphrastic, including the two long poems that anchor the collection—so the book is really in conversation with the visual arts. A lot of my poems braid the visual arts, personal and global history, and myth to launch lyric investigations into the stuff I’m interested in: identity, loss, memory, forgiveness, and the creative impulse.

Spirituality and religion are evident throughout, starting with the first line in the collection, “God save the devils.” How much of your work reflects your own beliefs?

I’m not religious at all; I am a preacher’s kid. I trace the musicality of my poetry to that immersion in spoken word and ritualized song. But in my poems, I use religion more as a trope to talk about forgiveness and redemption as well as power and abuse.

I have a very strong sense of the spiritual—in nature, in art, in meditative acts of communion—and I hope that comes through in my work. I search for ways to include absence as a formal element in a poem. White space or fragmented phrases and images not only sit in for what is absent, but also create momentum. Space, whether a visual absence or a syntactical loosening, becomes a way for form to document a growing acceptance of loss and create the place—the space on the page.
itself—where confusion and hope can reside. For me that’s a spiritual endeavor.

What was most challenging about writing this collection?
The most challenging aspect was getting it published! Part of me is embarrassed to confess that, but the braver part of me knows it’s important to share how hard this process can be, how essential it is for writers to have faith in their vision, to be fierce advocates for their own work. I really believed in these poems and wanted to do right by them.

I had actually stopped sending out my manuscript for a few years. But that decision broke my heart, so I got back on the horse. In the same week that I won an NEA, I also won New Rivers’ award to publish Trace. This may be a “debut” book to readers, but for me this has been a “long experience of love,” a face palm, a WTF, a blessing, a long-ass time coming.

You’re a poet, teacher, and personal coach, and in your bio, you talk about finding mission-driven work; did you create this project with that same intention?
If Trace is on any kind of mission, I’d like it to be as an ambassador for poetry and the power of the arts to lance and salve and heal us. Art offers us tools with which to do the difficult emotional work and craft something powerful from the journey. That’s why, despite the content of what I tackle, I want my poems to be full of music. Song and image can lead us into difficult places, and they will lead us out.

Virginia Isaad is a writer and editor based in Los Angeles focused on lifestyle and culture content for women and the Latinx community.
DEAR RAY
A Love Poem for Raymond Souster

Dunlop, Donna
Contact Press Toronto (87 pp.)
Dec. 16, 2019
978-0-9938210-2-8

A sharp outpouring of grief in free verse.

Dunlop is a Canadian poet, novelist, and singer/songwriter based in Toronto.

In this single, long poem, she reflects on the passing of fellow poet Raymond Souster, the precious time that they spent together during the last decade of his life, and the deceased poet’s painful absence, which is, paradoxically, a kind of presence. The book’s open structure, including sporadic empty spaces, allows Dunlop to trace the nonlinear, fragmented paths of mourning. As she asserts in her customarily plain yet evocative language: “Your many last words / are memory maps.” Addressing Ray directly, she shows how his verbal legacy remains a part of her life in the form of reclaimed speech: “‘Carry On Canada’ / I heard myself say today, / your phrase, your voice / giving you back to me.” Likewise, visual reminders can catch her off guard, as seen in the breathless quality conveyed by these short lines: “Today it was / an old man / bundled against / the cold March wind / in his wheelchair / being pushed / across the intersection / that took me by the throat / as I sat safely / inside the hard shell / of my car.”

Everyone has emotional defense mechanisms, Dunlop implies, and no one is immune from sorrow. She’s able to balance these universal themes with elements that are particular to her lived experience, as in how she refers to Ray as “little sparrow” or “tender sparrow” throughout the text. At the end of the poem, she suggests that writing is not just a way to memorialize, but also an act of survival. Dunlop envisions her own mortality (“the big silence / will swallow me whole”) as a way to reunite with Ray in some form. Anyone who’s watched a loved one fade away will be able to connect with this accessible, plain-spoken poetry.

A simultaneously gorgeous and gut-wrenching tribute to a lost companion.

EXCEPT THE LORD BUILD THE HOUSE
A Biblical Examination of the Return of Jesus Christ and the Rapture of His Church

Eberly, Norman
AuthorHouse (314 pp.)
May 8, 2019
978-1-72831-103-6
978-1-72830-623-0 paper

An architecturally themed work examines the Christian end times.

Taking the title of his book from Psalm 127 (“Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it”), Eberly lays out the step-by-step procedure necessary for his fellow Christians to construct their “doctrinal house” from the ground up. The author starts with the blueprint and proceeds to explicate the shape and sequence of what he refers to as “endtime prophecy.” Eberly creates his outline of that prophecy in chapter after chapter of extensive scriptural quotations. Every page of the volume rests on quotes from sources like the book of Zechariah, the Gospels, the book of Ezekiel, and, of course, the book of Daniel, the typical mother lode of end times extrapolation. The author’s decision to present all this material in an oversized, workbook-style format is an extremely sound one. The technical sequences of the end times, the tribulation, and the rapture are here broken down in ways that make them immediately accessible. Eberly indents all of his quotes, includes graphics to show the timeline of events as predicted in Scripture, and adds simple but colorful uncredited illustrations in order to keep the pages smoothly turning. The book’s exegesis is likewise invitingly straightforward. “Before we even attempt to interpret a particular Scripture, we must first establish what that passage is literally saying,” the author writes at one point, and he follows this simple approach throughout the volume. The main aim here seems to be to make the intimidating mass of Christian eschatology as clear and graspable as the step-by-step plans for building a house. Eberly’s Christian readers, many of whom will have only the haziest conception of this part of their faith, will appreciate the work’s clarity.

A winningly open, lucid, and eye-catching explanation of the apocalypse.
The author paints vibrant portraits of the key players using the words of these figures and their biographers.

**THE GROWTH AND COLLAPSE OF ONE AMERICAN NATION**

**Fraser, Donald J.**

Fraser & Associates (664 pp.)

$24.95 paper | $12.99 e-book

Jan. 15, 2020

978-0-9970805-2-0

This second installment of an American history series focuses on the causes of the Civil War.

Fraser’s sequel to *The Emergence of One American Nation* (2016) explores two views of the United States: one based on traditional racial or ethnic views, the other on ideals of equality of all humans and their attendant, inalienable rights. One of the main factors the author highlights as leading eventually to the Civil War is that the nation’s creators essentially kicked the can down the road: “The founders left behind the twin problems of slavery and federalism, which were often two sides of the same coin, and they continue to bedevil their progeny.” Throughout this well-researched volume, Fraser elaborates on the signposts on the road to war. First was Thomas Jefferson’s westward-looking “Empire of Liberty” approach and the question of whether slavery would be allowed in America’s new lands. Then there was the ascent of Andrew Jackson, champion of racist “ethnonationalism.” Next came the rise of Stephen Douglas, by using the words of these figures and their biographers. Fraser reveals the philosophical struggles of those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it. The author deftly shows that, even from this nation’s earliest days, there were those who were concerned only with the prosperity of themselves and their families and others who thought it morally proper to help those who were less fortunate. So what’s happening in the U.S. today isn’t something that’s new and different. These stances recur again and again throughout this engrossing tome (and will likely appear in Fraser’s future volumes as well). The author also paints vibrant portraits of the key players and others, such as Henry Clay, John Calhoun, and Stephen Douglas, by using the words of these figures and their biographers. Fraser reveals the philosophical struggles of those in the rooms where crucial decisions were made. He succeeds in putting human faces on what could be dry, drab history.

This monumental history brings to life the political leaders swept up in the slavery battle.
WHITE AS SIN
A New Paradigm for Racial Healing
Garber, Scott
Outskirts Press (370 pp.)
$22.95 paper | Sep. 15, 2019
978-1-977208-13-2

A writer offers an indictment of six centuries of white Christianity and a guide to racial reconciliation in today’s church.

As a white minister who spent most of his career affiliated with majority black or multiracial churches, Garber is attuned to the “ecclesiastical apartheid” of America’s houses of worship. He devotes the first half of his narrative to a systematic history of the intertwining of Christianity and racism. Beginning with Pope Nicholas V’s 1455 papal bull that encouraged Roman Catholic nations to subjugate non-Christians through Protestant defenses of slavery in the 19th century based on Pauline epistles and an amorphous “Curse of Ham,” Christians justified white supremacy for centuries. Even after the abolition of slavery, white Christians passed Jim Crow laws, participated in lynchings, and responded at best with skepticism, if not outright hostility, to the civil rights movement. The author extends this historical pattern to contemporary Christians who embrace a convenient ideology of “colorblindness” that self-servingly benefits whites and ignores racial injustices like the mass incarceration of black men.

The second half of the book centers on healing, which Garber suggests must begin with the confession of racist sins, both historical and contemporary “colorblind” iterations that treat structural and historical racism with ignorant ambivalence. After confession comes redress, which centers not on ignoring race and treating everyone “equally” but on providing justice to those harmed, which often comes at the expense of the culprits, as shown in biblical stories about repentance. Though Garber does not pull any punches in this illuminating and vital work, his analysis is particularly nuanced in differentiating between Catholic, Evangelical, mainline Protestant, and Pentecostal histories and approaches to race. And while his focus is on the white church, he deftly highlights an alternate black religious universe that spans from the liberation theology of James Cone to the Beloved Community of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. But this extreme thoroughness comes at the cost of an often overwhelmingly dense book whose central points are sometimes overshadowed by a deluge of supporting evidence.

An indispensable work that challenges white Christians to confront and atone for past sins.

WITHOUT EXPIRATION
A Personal Anthology
Hincy, William R.
Self (150 pp.)
$9.95 paper | $3.99 e-book | Nov. 1, 2019
978-1-73275-790-5

Flawed, despondent characters show a surprising wit and humanity in a collection of 12 tales, most of them previously published.

Two lovers are lying together in this book’s opening story, “Bermuda Triangle.” Their mutual fondness is evident, but it’s clear they aren’t likely to divorce their spouses. This is the attitude that characters in this collection adopt, simply accepting their reality, however imperfect it is. In “Left To Soak,” for example, Helen’s 46-year union with her shiftless husband, Hank, has involved endless days of washing the dishes alone. As she returns home from her three-day hospital stay, she unhappily anticipates the stack awaiting her. Hincy saturates the pages in sardonicism, primarily aimed at marriage. In the gloomy but superlative “A Study in Discontinuity,” geologist Edward had been having an affair with a student when his wife, Christa, was in a debilitating accident. She winds up comatose but periodically awakens over the course of years to berate Edward mercilessly. Nevertheless, there’s a fair amount of wit and satire in this new book by the author of A Fire for Christmas (2016). The comedic highlight is “Amen,” which parodies religion, primarily Catholicism. But it’s a lighthearted tale without spite: This religion’s God, who narrates, causes some trouble by inadvertently passing misinformation to a priest whimsically named Poopé Hal. Hincy’s taut prose makes the entire collection a quick read but still fills the stories with indelible passages. In “A Thousand Counted and Unrepentant Debts,” life coach Bill blatantly describes himself as “not a man of my word; I’m a man of words, none of which I’m particularly committed to.” Similarly, “A Study in Discontinuity” is rife with often amusing footnotes that are considerably more revealing than the narrative itself. The book strikes a chord with characters whose defects make them simultaneously believable and with descriptions of moments involving a loved one’s death, either its prolonged aftermath or its inevitability.

Cynicism and cheekiness abound in brief but memorable stories.
In this enjoyable story, Lloyd remains faithful to the voice of George Bernard Shaw.

**PERILS OF IMMORTALITY**

An unexpected relationship blooms in rural Montana in James’ latest romance novel, the second in her Wish-River series.

After her widowed mother died, Sarah Turner suddenly found herself in charge of the vast Montana ranch that had been in her family for generations. She’s shy but strong-willed; however, she feels overwhelmed with the staggering responsibility of running the ranch. Thankfully, she has her loyal housekeeper, Edna Casey, by her side, but even Sarah knows she’ll need to hire more help if she’s to get the ranch back on its feet. So when she puts an ad in the local paper for a ranch foreman, the last thing she’s expecting is romance. But that’s just what she gets when the ruggedly handsome Cade Walker comes into her life. Cade and Sarah seem to come from two different worlds, but that doesn’t stop the sparks from flying every time they’re together. As their feelings for each other become undeniable, Sarah feels that she must choose between her newfound independence and a chance at true love. The shadow of Sarah’s family tragedy offers a solid overview of six attributes of a business brand (Purpose, Promise, Principles, Experiences, Presence, Description), relating those traits to a personal brand. King employs an “Authenticity Rating” scoring system to evaluate the clarity of each of the attributes, both for a business brand and a personal one. The author includes an example of each and then encourages readers to assess the authenticity of business and personal brands. Finally, readers are guided through a process of self-assessment using the same scoring system. This technique very effectively demonstrates how to apply the concept of business branding to personal branding. The third part of the book covers what King calls “Your True North”; it briefly explores ways to stay focused and authentic even “when life derails your brand.” Part 4 discusses the characteristics of authentic leaders, again relying on several tales as examples. It also encourages readers to identify their own unique strengths and to develop and share “purpose” statements. The manual does require readers to engage in considerable self-evaluation, so it is not for the faint of heart. Still, those willing to make the commitment should benefit from the personal examination and begin to understand whether the potential to be a leader exists. King’s passion for building leaders is evident: “The world needs authentic leaders, leaders who are true to themselves and purpose driven.”

A useful, systematic, and logical approach to leadership development.

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**COWBOY FOR HIRE**

*James, Victoria*

Entangled: Amara (359 pp.)

$7.99 paper | Mar. 31, 2020

978-1-64063-821-1

*Ingenium Books (196 pp.)*


Nov 20, 2019

978-1-989059-35-7

*Self (329 pp.)*

$2.99 e-book | Feb. 24, 2020

A heartwarming story about faith and starting over.

A useful, systematic, and logical approach to leadership development.
This on occasion may make reading through Higgins’ thicket of Messina’s (he claims chronic victimization by “Big Blue,” a talking bird) in this enjoyable story, Lloyd remains faithful to the Cinderella does so through the commonly used technique of an acronym, friend Melbray that he can pass her off as a masterpiece of car - torting. In addition, Higgins may well be an unreliable narrator (he claims chronic victimization by “Big Blue,” a talking bird that may or may not exist), and key elements of the setting go undeveloped. The author may provide more embellishments in future volumes of the series.

Cyberpunk meets George Bernard Shaw in this engaging SF tale.

A business consultant emphasizes effective communication in this debut book about managing change.

Change is a business topic of seemingly unending variations. Here, Marmon has managed to find a different perspective by connecting change to leadership communication. She does so through the commonly used technique of an acronym, in this case, “LESS” (listen, empower, speak, solve). The volume is divided into four parts, each centered on one of these elements. In some respects, “LESS” might also describe the content, because the work, at under 170 pages, is shorter than most business books. This is not to say the material is lacking; on the contrary, despite the abbreviated length, the author does an excellent job of providing both insightful observations and authoritative counsel on change management. From the outset, she is blunt about a leader’s responsibility: “If you lead an organization, it is your fault.” Part 1 of the book offers several reasons why people may not be listening, client anecdotes that demonstrate the importance of “organizational alignment,” and a description of a change-management “Readiness Assessment.” Part 2 is largely focused on engaging others within the organization to help champion a leader’s cause. Marmon advises, perhaps surprisingly, “Your most valuable players are your middle managers.” Part 3 comprehensively covers communicating through a six-step channels strategy and offers valuable insights into such techniques as storytelling and slanting language usage to particular audiences. Part 4 concerns why and how to measure message effectiveness. The only part with just one chapter, this section seems somewhat light on details. It could have offered an opportunity to further reinforce the other parts of the volume. The author points readers to her website for additional resources, including checklists and articles, but perhaps a few of these items could have appeared in an appendix. Still, Marmon’s specific focus on the importance of communication in change management is a welcome shift from the more typical broad approach. Her own written communication skills make this book eminently readable as well.

Tightly structured and deftly delivered; an original take on change management.

A physicist joins a secretive philosophical society in Modis’ fictionalized account of true events.

Ted seems as if he was destined to become a scientist, as he “had been passionately attracted to physics from a tender age.” But long after achieving professional success and respectability working in Geneva for CERN, “the most important laboratory for particle physics in the world,” he experiences a nagging “disenchantment” with “hard science.” He feels that it has failed to generate practical applications for ordinary life and to tackle big questions such as the purpose of humanity. With Aris and Mihali, two of his friends from graduate school, he forms a group that meets for “intellectual introspective get-togethers”—free-wheeling discussions that are unrestrained by the strictures of academic science. The trio becomes particularly intoxicated by the ruminations of George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff, a 20th-century philosopher for whom a European institute is named, which Ted tracks down and joins. Modis meticulously chronicles Ted’s fascinating philosophical awakening, which expresses itself first as an exercise in being “unfaithful to science” and then in an exploration of ways to mine science for far-reaching wisdom. At one point, Ted forcefully answers an objection that he’s “cheapening” science: “Science is not meant to be locked up in ivory towers and be accessible only to a select group of people. It is meant to deliver value by all possible means, including ways not anticipated by scientists.” Although the story is presented like fiction, with a third-person perspective, the book is Modis’ self-proclaimed “personal account of true events and real people,” and it reads like a memoir more than it does a novel. The real drama of the book is in
Nathan proves himself a versatile poet, switching registers between the cosmic and the serious.

**Celebrity Sadhana**

Nathan proves himself a versatile poet, switching registers between the cosmic and the serious.

**Celebrity Sadhana**

Nathan proves himself a versatile poet, switching registers between the cosmic and the serious.

the tension between the intellectual and the emotional, and the author provides a thoughtful, if sometimes forbidding, account of his characters’ philosophical peregrinations. Overall, Modis offers a lively discussion even if it frequently feels like excerpts from a textbook.

An intellectually intriguing, if sometimes-dry, account of a physicist’s philosophical growth.

**Forever Friends: A Yoga Storytelling Adventure**

Moyer, Melanie & Hudson, Kathe
Illus. by Pitcher, Maileys
Moving Tale (31 pp.)
$11.95 paper | Jan. 25, 2020
978-1-73409-840-2

Two animals form an unbreakable friendship in this cheerful, yoga-inclusive picture-book sequel.

A gray and purple royal elephant has everything he could wish for—except a friend. Then a stray dog enters the palace grounds and asks to share the elephant’s food, and the two form a bond. Later, a merchant visiting the palace takes the canine with him. It’s only after the palace adviser explains the elephant’s heartbreak to the king that the two animals are reunited once again. Moyer and Hudson, the authors of the previous Yoga Storytelling Adventure *The Impossible Dream* (2017), offer a simply told story in accessible English with a few Hindi words, defined in an introductory glossary. All of the human characters refreshingly try to do their best; they realize their error in separating the animals and react with kindness. Pitcher’s playful illustrations beautifully show the elephant’s emotions; when she and the dog meet again, the elephant’s coloring changes to a joyful purple-pink. At the end of the book, Moyer and Hudson, both yoga teachers, clearly encourage young readers to do yoga poses named after the story’s characters, including the elephant, the king, and the dog.

A pleasant tale of friendship with a happy ending—and extra yoga inspiration.

**The Black Madonna and the Young Sculptor**

*Müller, Eric G.*
Alkion Press (322 pp.)
$20.00 paper | $9.99 e-book
Dec. 18, 2019
978-1-5439-4438-9

Hollywood stars seek enlightenment in this volume of poetry. Sadhana is a yogic term for “a means of accomplishing something.” In this collection, Nathan imagines the sadhana of various Hollywood celebrities with his tongue very much in cheek. Natalie Portman admires the quirkiness of Winona Ryder: “Winona is the kind of crazy that Natalie will love / even after she drinks all her beer / & wrecks her truck.” Shia LaBeouf takes inspiration from Joaquin Phoenix’s esoteric performance art: “Shia remembers / that time when everyone thought / Joaquin went AWOL from / acting & became a rapper / Shia is a bona fide fashion icon / & Joaquin
has rounded up the actor-artist’s finest ‘fits to prove it.’ Jeff Bridges encounters Keanu Reeves eating a sandwich. “Now, let’s just permit/this fear to engulf us for a moment/& not do our normal thing,” the grizzled actor tells the famously serene one. Jodie Foster and Sasha Baron Cohen discuss ancient Buddhist masters: Baron Cohen’s “joke is to show Jodie/a doughnut, eat it, tell her where/it’s been, then reveal/that it wasn’t a doughnut.” These celebrities search for wisdom in one another, music, isolation, and snippets of Eastern philosophical traditions that they may or may not completely understand. (Baron Cohen discusses the 15th-century monk Drukpa Kunley in his Borat voice: “When will I have big penis like/this Bhutanese poet yogi?”) Are these stars any closer to understanding than the rest of humanity? Are they further away?

Nathan proves himself a versatile poet, switching registers between the comic and the serious as well as impersonating different voices. Several poems are written from the perspective of a TMZ-likesentertainment news service, which is just as interested in celebrities’ spiritual pursuits as it is in whatever else they do: “You may not have heard, but / our sources tell us Joaquin Phoenix, the star / of Gladiator, aged 42, prepares / to spend the next year on retreat/in a cave. / We were like, ‘OMG / WHAT? / Phoenix renounces / his Hollywood lifestyle in favor / of an underground chamber / in the Mojave Desert where / he expects to achieve complete & total / enlightenment.’” The author also summons the aesthetics of various filmmakers in poems like “A Shia LaBeouf Dream (dir. Terrence Malick)” and “A Winona Ryder Dream (dir. Tim Burton).” The poems are narratives and very much flow one into the next, with the same cast of actors reappearing and comingling. Nathan is skilled at crafting a succinct, evocative image. He describes Bridges as “a man who fits/perfectly into the clothes /of passing strangers.” LaBeouf’s sex dream includes the lines “Hands tighten around the shaft /as minds prong off/to starlit savannas.” But the most impressive aspect of the collection is that it transcends its gimmicky conceit to challenge readers to engage sincerely with the notion of enlightenment. By the end of the volume, neither the author nor the poet is condescending to LaBeouf or Ryder. Instead, all are acclimated to the reality that they are all blindly searching, all absurdly lost.

A deftly composed collection of poems on the struggle to find meaning in modern life.

The book looks at 84 such sites, providing a great deal of information alongside stunning color photos by the author. Pannu searches through the Janamsakhis, the Sikh scriptures, and seeks to “incorporate logic and rationality in their interpretation,” and then supplies readers with images of many of the places mentioned in these and other Sikh writings. The book covers a broad expanse of history, from the days of Sikhism’s founder, Guru Nanak, in the late 15th and early 16th centuries to the India-Pakistan Partition of 1947 to the present day when relations between India and Pakistan remain raw and turbulent. In his introduction, Pannu expresses the hope that his crossing of borders in search of a shared cultural heritage might be a harbinger of the future: “I remain optimistic that a day will eventually dawn when everlasting peace will prevail, and works like this book will prove to be both educative and enlightening.”

Over the course of 400-plus pages, the work covers Pakistani sites in Sheikhupura, Kasur, Nanakana Sahib, Narowal, and Lahore. In each chapter, the author pairs historical mentions of the place and shrine at hand with photos of its current appearance, and the juxtapositions between past and present often result in a compelling dissonance.

With a minimum of fuss, Pannu intriguingly deploys quotations from scriptures and historical accounts alongside his photos, which he’s taken over the course of years. The prose tells readers of places sacred to Sikh tradition, featuring locations as sacred to Sikhs as Bethlehem or Gethsemane are to Christians. Yet the excellent photographs very often show dilapidated, sometimes defaced ruins that no passerby would ever guess held greater significance. One example of a lone gurdwara—a type of block-tower that’s ubiquitous throughout the book—is all that remains of the Gurdwara Lahura Sahib in the village of Ghavindi, where Guru Nanak once rested beneath a Lahura tree. Guru Hargobind’s visit to the village of Padhana, as recorded in the Mahima Prakash Vartak, was an occasion for the Sikh holy man to dispense calm wisdom—but Pannu’s photos of the interior views of Gurdwara Patshavi VI display a squallor and decay that even the author, as an optimistic guide, can’t ignore: “The decoration inside the smaller, third-story structure is quite beautiful, despite the aging and deteriorating floral embellishments on the ceiling.” Parked mopeds lean against the chipped and flaking walls of buildings where living saints once shared the peace and insight of the Sikh faith’s central tenets; street lamps and power cables obscure once-glorious gurdwaras from street views. And the juxtaposition is ultimately spellbinding; readers will be able to feel the weight of centuries on these holy places as Pannu shares religious passages that have better weathered the passage of time.

A substantial and visually arresting guide to five centuries of Sikh shrines.
The more conceptual discussion of algorithms is well done, and the story is satisfying overall.

MERLIN RAJ AND THE SANTA ALGORITHM

Priya, D.G.
Illus. by Hampe, Shelley
Vulcan Ink Media (108 pp.)
978-1-931767-00-6

In this middle-grade novel, a service dog and his human learn about algorithms in daily life.

Author Priya (who writes for adults as Priya Ardis) introduces readers to Merlin Raj, a sock-loving golden retriever who goes to class with his 10-year-old owner, Matthew, who misses “Mom Raj,” who’s traveling for work. Miss Babbage teaches Matthew’s class about algorithms and assigns the kids to create their own, and Merlin eagerly joins in—devising algorithms for everything from locating a missing recipe to keeping the local bully from snagging the best Christmas tree. Matthew uses the Christmas tree experience for his algorithm assignment, and Merlin realizes that what the boy wants most is to have his mother home for Christmas. So the dog implements a series of his own algorithms to make it happen, leading to a happy holiday for everyone. The book presents a lighthearted approach to introductory STEM lessons, explaining the fundamental concept of an algorithm outside the context of computer programming. However, the examples presented seem insufficiently granular to present the concept effectively. For instance, Merlin’s algorithm for getting Matthew a forbidden box of sugary cereal at the grocery store involves hiding the box in the cart and making puppy-dog eyes at the checkout. However, the more conceptual discussion of algorithms is well done, and the story is satisfying and emotionally resonant overall. Merlin’s narrative voice is child-friendly and distinctive (“Research sounded like a pile of socks fresh out of the laundry,” he notes approvingly at one point). Merlin is described as being a service animal for Matthew, who has some difficulties with walking, and the dog’s description of his role (“I’d been taking care of my best friend for a whole year now”) includes enough detail to make it easy to picture the two making their way through school. A glossary defines scientific terms in the narrative, and Miss Babbage’s pronouncements on algorithms are in bold text, making them stand out. Hampe’s black-and-white illustrations add depth to the story, giving readers another window into Merlin’s determination and creativity.

A basic but enjoyable STEM-centered novel for young readers.

PARTNER WITH PURPOSE
Solving 21st Century Business Problems Through Cross-Sector Collaboration

Schmida, Steve
Rivertowns Books (272 pp.)
$24.95 | $16.95 paper | $9.99 e-book
Jun. 2, 2020
978-0-9790080-8-5
978-0-9790080-6-1 paper

A business consultant touts cross-sector partnerships as the best way to meet major challenges. In the introduction to this intriguing debut book, the author relates the story of the unexpected symbiotic relationship between global food conglomerate PepsiCo and a poor farmer in India whom the company depended on to supply potatoes. As Schmida writes, “We can start to see why increasing productivity and the incomes of farmers in the company’s supply chains is important to PepsiCo.” This dramatic example sets the tone for a work that explores why partnerships are vital to attempting to solve the world’s “wicked problems,” which have “economic, social, and environmental dimensions that interact with one another in ways that are ever-changing and unpredictable.” The volume first describes the nature of cross-sector partnerships, how they work, and their importance. It then delves very thoroughly into the nuts and bolts of building and managing such alliances. One of the more compelling aspects of the book is the way the author integrates stories into the realm of global partnerships. Virtually every chapter begins with a captivating anecdote, each from a different part of the world, that illustrates and supports the content of that section. This technique is effective because cross-sector partnerships are by their very nature intricate. For example, a project to introduce “affordable broadband internet to rural communities” in Sri Lanka is a springboard for exploring a partnership framework called LABS (Learn, Align, Build, Scale/Sustain). In describing the Sri Lanka project, Schmida is able to fully explain the individual components of LABS, relate them directly to the project’s phases, and demonstrate the practical application of a conceptual framework.

Throughout the engaging text, the author continues to utilize a well-honed, case study approach—setting up a difficulty, discussing its complexity, showing why the problem could not be solved without the help of partners, and looking at the collaborators. Schmida does a superb job of covering all aspects of partnerships: examining types, identifying high-potential ones, forging and managing a collaboration (including a seven-step process), securing commitments, effectively structuring an alliance, negotiating, and writing agreements. He also deftly addresses how to get things done with partners, citing and dissecting “the six attributes of successful partnership implementation” as well as how to track and measure results of the collaborative efforts. Not surprisingly, partnerships often tackle projects that begin with a pilot and grow exponentially. A chapter entitled “Moving Up or Moving On” discusses conditions surrounding the scaling of projects as well as sustaining a partnership’s results and, if need be, responsibly ending an alliance.
In a concluding chapter, Schmida offers his expert counsel on the personal qualities required of individuals who want to excel at building and managing partnerships. In addition, he clearly portrays the specific roles individuals need to play in a partnership: networker, champion, project overseer, organizational sage, relationship manager, and, if benefactor agencies are involved, donor navigator.

Authoritative, all-encompassing, and richly detailed; a highly valuable partnership playbook.

**UNDERTOW OF MEMORY**

Sgambati, Vince

Fomite (258 pp.)

$15.00 paper | $4.99 e-book

Feb. 1, 2020

978-1-947917-35-4

A short story collection offers 11 vignettes about love and loss.

The unifying theme in Sgambati’s tales, many of them previously published in journals, is the effect of memory on the present. In “Forgiveness,” Lena’s health and mental faculties are failing in her advanced age, and she relies on her son, Charlie, to take care of her. She contemplates how she and her now dead husband treated Charlie, especially their meanness about his gay sexuality, and she seems amazed and thankful he’s still willing to take care of her. In “Oxford Avenue Station,” Colin is still tortured about whether his wife committed suicide or simply slipped and fell in front of a train on the El and is comforted by a stranger’s beautiful lie. In “Lila’s Cinema,” a woman in a nursing facility is surprised to realize the impact she’s had on her granddaughter Olive, through her love of movies, and how she has provided joy to her fellow residents by curating screenings.

In “What Took You So Long,” a man has an epiphany about his happiness while exploring some family history in a small town after his divorce. The heartfelt and finely realized stories are surprising in their twists and turns and provide a panoply of human relationships with many LGBTQ characters. The author explores the personal and physical hell that gender reassignment recipients often endure through the eyes of Emma, a bed-and-breakfast owner who caters to patients of a local plastic surgeon. It’s an effective choice—Emma has experienced abuse of her own and empathizes with the struggle of young Avi, seeking to become whom he has always been. Sgambati’s characters are complex and tragic but also beautiful. And his language is precise and evocative. In “Grave Companions,” he puts readers in the setting with sensory details: “The diner smelled of damp raincoats, drenched umbrellas, coffee and bacon, hot grease from the grill, and of the hot layers of paint that bubbled and peeled away from old radiators like crumbling memories.”

Artful and moving tales; a treasure trove for fiction fans.

**DANCING WITH LANGSTON**

Skeeter, Sharyn

Green Writers Press (206 pp.)

$19.95 paper | $9.99 e-book

Nov. 12, 2019

978-1-950584-19-2

A busy woman’s visit to an estranged relative reveals an unexpected family connection to a famous poet in this debut novel.

Tomorrow night, Carrie Stevens will be on the red-eye to Seattle, where her husband, Bill, has just accepted a new job. This afternoon, she needs to meet with her lawyer to finalize the sale of their condo. But first, she has to go to Harlem to keep a promise she made to her recently deceased father. Her dad’s cousin Ella is being thrown out of her apartment—the entire building is about to be demolished—and Carrie needs to get her into an assisted living facility. “She has a gift for you,” her father’s final note reads. “It’s something of value that I’m ashamed that I couldn’t give you—and too afraid to give you myself. Carrie, I want this to make it right. I want you to be happy.” Carrie only met Ella as a baby. Carrie’s mother thought Ella, a cabaret dancer who lived for years in Paris, would be a bad influence. When Carrie arrives, the elderly Ella immediately insists that she is not moving anywhere. Ella turns out to be full of surprises. She has severe, mysterious facial scars, for one. She has a man named Jack living there with her, for another. Perhaps craziest of all, she has lots of pictures and books by poet Langston Hughes, who it turns out was her cousin—and Carrie’s father’s cousin as well. Langston and Carrie’s dad didn’t get along, unfortunately. As Carrie desperately tries to pack some of the woman’s things into the bags she brought, Ella offers hints and anecdotes about her past—and draws a few out of her visitor as well. But what is this mysterious gift that Ella supposedly has? Well, in Ella’s words, Carrie will have to earn it.

Skeeter’s prose is as smooth and confident as Ella herself: “I saw that Jack’s cane was on the sofa and he was leaning on Ella. They were dancing jerkily, as fast as their old legs would let them. Actually, they kept up with the beat very well. In that living room with its many decades-old artifacts, they could have been dancing in Paris or Harlem in their heyday.” The novel cleverly mourns the lost world of Jazz Age Harlem, as represented by an apartment full of artifacts that is literally about to be knocked down. The supporting characters—including Hughes, a ghost who casts his iconic shadow over all the rest—are well drawn, and Carrie is a relatable and likable protagonist. The roles that Carrie and Ella play in regard to each other—Carrie wanted to be a dancer herself, and Ella is essentially a fairy godmother—are perhaps a bit too neat, and readers will quickly surmise where the story is headed. That said, the author is a capable writer, and the world that she creates is evocative and amusing enough for readers to happily linger in for the book’s breezy, 206-page length.

A family tale that skillfully brings the magic of the Harlem Renaissance into the present.
Stevenson creates a humorously ludicrous dilemma that children can especially appreciate.

WHO’S FIRST?

Chicken and Egg Book 1

Stevenson, Deborah
Illus. by Stedmond, David
Frog Prince Books (32 pp.)
$11.95 paper | $2.99 e-book | Apr. 1, 2020
978-1-73254-103-0

Two overly polite pals can’t decide who should go first in this picture book.

On a scorchingly hot day, Chicken and Egg both agree that a banana split would be a perfect way to cool down. But when they get to the ice cream shop, they can’t even get through the door because each friend insists “After you.” To decide who should cross the threshold first, they try playing rock paper scissors, flipping a coin, and running a race. For various reasons, no method breaks the deadlock; by the time they finally agree on drawing straws, the shop is closed. Maybe a grilled cheese sandwich—if they can agree who gets to decide where to go. In this series opener, Stevenson creates a humorously ludicrous dilemma that children, who are so often on the receiving end of etiquette instructions, can especially appreciate. The plot offers the repetition kids like, as seen in the refrain “This went on for a ridiculously long time”—perfect for reading aloud expressively. The nicely varied and dynamic digital images by debut illustrator Stedmond contribute to the fun, including the image capturing the pals’ comically grim determination to win the race.

An enjoyably absurd friendship tale sure to cause giggles.

PESTILENCE

Taylor, Pamela
Black Rose Writing (234 pp.)
$18.95 paper | $6.99 e-book
Jun. 11, 2020
978-1-68433-481-0

A new king returns his realm to a darker age in this third volume of a fantasy series.

A horse-riding accident has resulted in King Edward’s death. John now occupies the throne, the older of two sons who has never been known for his intellect or manners. Lord Alfred, Edward’s younger son, beloved in court for his curiosity and compassion, stands ready to aid the transition. But John is a lout and immediately begins reordering royal life in ways that flout tradition. He tries, for example, to hold his father’s funeral and his own coronation in the same week. Lady Alice, the dowager queen, and the bishop of London incite violence in the streets. Knights and their checkpoints become ubiquitous to halt immigration. To save the last century of progress, drastic action must be taken. In this installment of her series, Taylor deftly depicts the fragility of a society in the grip of a madman. History buffs will appreciate how she illustrates the progressive mechanisms that launched the Renaissance, such as books being cheap enough to buy at markets. John is perhaps too perfect a villain, the type readers will want to reach through the page and strangle. The author speaks directly to Americans suffering in the current political climate, especially when Alfred wonders: “How do I teach my children that they have a duty to respect...the king despite the fact that he regularly fails to embody the virtues they are asked to demonstrate?” Alfred isn’t a perfect character himself, but he becomes a more rounded one when he has an affair with businesswoman Amelia Greslet. The next installment promises a massive emotional payoff.

This engaging series entry delivers a nuanced critique of despotism.

WOMEN OF COLOR IN TECH

A Blueprint for Inspiring and Mentoring the Next Generation of Technology Innovators

Tedrick, Susanne
Wiley (288 pp.)
Apr. 14, 2020
978-1-119-63348-8

In her debut business book, Tedrick shares her experiences as a woman of color working in technology and offers guidance for others looking to pursue similar career paths.

Tedrick describes the variety of work and workplaces that fall under the heading of “technology,” making it clear that careers in technology extend well beyond writing code at Google and Facebook. She details the variety of jobs available—including data science, computer networking, cybersecurity, and technical sales, among many others—and lists the education and certification readers will likely need for each type of job. The guide provides copious links to industry organizations, training resources, and further reading and covers standard job hunting and career development aspects like writing a resume, building a LinkedIn profile, networking, and negotiating salaries. The author recounts particular challenges that women and people of color face in the workplace and in technology roles—offering stories of how she has dealt with microaggressions, hostility, and dismissiveness. She helpfully outlines how she moved past the setbacks to pursue success and includes advice from other women of color. The book is most valuable in its close focus on the realities of the tech world, providing detailed information in a well-organized format about the many options that go
far beyond coding, like project management and user experience design. Tedrick’s writing is clear and readable (“Much of a UX designer’s time is spent making sure that they understand the needs of both the business and the end user of the product or service they’re working on”), making this a solid resource for readers without specialized knowledge of the industry. While these lessons are valuable for anyone exploring a tech career, addressing the needs of women of color gives Tedrick a unique hook and sets the book apart from the rest of the career development pack.

Solid guidance from a woman who has made her mark in a technical role.

**CHILDREN’S & TEEN**

This Issue’s Contributors

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**CHILD BRIDE**

Turner, Jennifer Smith

SparkPress (209 pp.)

$16.95 paper  |  $9.95 e-book

Apr. 14, 2020

978-1-68463-038-7

In 1950s Louisiana, an African American teenager must leave childhood and her ambitions behind when she marries an older man in this coming-of-age novel about the black diaspora, resilience, and courage.

Until the age of 16, Nell Jones’ home is a ramshackle house on “one of many small hog and pecan farms owned and worked by the descendants of sharecroppers and former slaves.” There, her mother teaches her how to cook, her father shows her how to use a pocket knife to peel an apple in one long spiral strip, and her oldest brother, Robert, tells her how to find the North Star in the night sky. Most of all, Nell loves school, where Miss Parker, a teacher, nurtures her naturally inquisitive nature and her passion for reading. Cocooned in the love of her family and her small community, Nell knows little of the outside world, but she later realizes, “for black southerners racism lived in the air we breathed.” Nell is still an innocent teen when Henry Bight turns his warm and personal narrative to the power of her story lies in the fact that it is grounded in African American society. White characters make an occasional appearance, but the tale is centered on the black experience. It is disappointing that Nell’s eventual fate seems to rely heavily on the trappings of class privilege, but much of the power of her story lies in the fact that it is grounded in African American society. White characters make an occasional appearance, but the tale is centered on the black experience. It is disappointing that Nell’s eventual fate seems to rely heavily on the trappings of class privilege, but the book as a whole is uplifting and dynamic.

A captivating story of a strong African American woman who pursues her dreams.
Ultican’s straightforward prose makes the science and engineering interesting and the action scenes gripping.

THE EMPRESS OF THE CLOUDS

A female airship pilot battles an evil industrialist, a Prussian militarist, and a sexist society in this debut steampunk adventure.

THE WEREWOLF OF POLNOYE AND OTHER STORIES

Characters burdened by guilt, regret, and ostensible madness populate White’s collection of provocative tales.

Amy Sullivan is excited to be on her own attending the University of Minnesota in “The Enigma Man.” She’s ready to explore the wonders far away from her Iowa hometown, like the mysterious titular figure who frequents the library where she works. But learning about this man may not bring her the answers she wants. It’s a dispassion that characters experience throughout White’s book, Joseph Singer of “Winter Journeys,” for example, is a man who’s never accepted his biological father as a dad and considers himself an unwanted child. The author typically fills his stories with metaphors. In the case of “The Antijew,” a legendary creature’s most recent incarnation is

GOING TO EMPTY
Through the Tunnel of Jealousy

A passionate woman battles her debilitating jealousy in this relationship-oriented novel.

As a recent college graduate, Olivia DeMarco follows her impulsivity from California to Algonquin Island, off the coast of Maine. There, she meets Dane Hanson, a handsome sculptor, carpenter, and physical therapist. Although both families object to the match, Dane and Olivia marry within months of their first date, secure in nothing other than the fact of their love. But when Olivia becomes unexpectedly pregnant, Dane’s passivity and inability to bring “home the bacon” stir up resentment in their relationship. Forced to go back to work when her children are still young, Olivia finds herself irresistibly attracted to Samuel Ferrell, one of her new co-workers. He’s rugged and charming—or so readers are repeatedly told, despite his wince-inducing dialogue—and over time, they both admit that they can’t imagine being with anyone else. But even though Samuel commits himself to her in every conceivable way, her rationality tussles with a “demonic presence” in her internal monologue: “Get a grip,” she’ll rue, before continuing to dig into Samuel’s past, monitor his whereabouts, and interrogate him about every woman he meets. Her self-awareness adds texture and nuance to what could otherwise be a slog of repetitive scenes. Ucci smartly emphasizes that one of the worst things about insecurities is that they recur, day by mundane day. And as Olivia constantly discovers, it takes more than willpower and self-castigation to combat them. Her narration often overexplains situations to readers, but ultimately, her head is both a predictable and a captivating place to be trapped for 383 pages.

A typical romantic setup turns intriguing when jealousy becomes the central character.

THE WEREWOLF OF POLNOYE

A wonkish but rousing fantasia.

THE EMPRESS OF THE CLOUDS

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A typical romantic setup turns intriguing when jealousy becomes the central character.
Sol Pinsky, who, despite little recognition, inexplicably earns 93% of the popular vote in the U.S. presidential election. The stories are multilayered, including those with overt religious themes. “A Brief History of Madness,” for one, follows Joseph Christman, an orphan who ultimately becomes an apprentice carpenter. But it’s also about a boy at a Catholic college whose professor deems him insolent merely for questioning biblical stories. White’s prose is simple yet elegant: A rabbi describes a reputedly invisible wagon as, “A magic wagon to be sure, but magic or no, it makes a lot of noise if you drive it too fast. I am afraid that there is no magic for that.” There are instances of wry humor as well. In the title story, a werewolf in the town of Polnoye is primarily a nuisance, disrupting men’s prayers and making “shambles” of bar mitzvahs. How the townsfolk handle said wolf is pleasantly surprising. The book features Chicago-based artist Segedin’s work in various media (acrylic, watercolor, etc.), showcasing a consistent style spanning decades.

Funny, allegorical, and profound stories.

DOGS BARK AND PEOPLE DIE
A Jackson Wade and Dog Novel
Wilson, Leon
Self (438 pp.)
Jan. 30, 2020
979-8-6052-0414-5

A Delta Force team leader gets unexpected help on an off-the-books mission from a feral dog.

Wilson’s ambitious debut novel blends two popular genres that would seem to be at odds: the last mission adventure and the man and his dog story. Jean-Claude Van Damme and Chuck Norris might kick themselves that Jackson Wade hadn’t been created for them in their 1980s action movie heyday. A “living legend” as a college wrestler who later hardened his skills in Bangkok mixed martial arts cage matches, Wade forged a new patriotic path by enlisting in the Army following the United States’ invasion of Afghanistan. As a Delta Force golden boy, he became “the king of getting results” while developing a badass reputation (when a psychiatrist asks how he sleeps after killing a man, Wade responds, “On my right side”). Is he a rule bender? “Sometimes...if it means accomplishing our mission,” he proclaims. Rule-breaking is what it will take when he and his Team Echo colleagues are recruited for a mission to take out a Taliban cell along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. By the time he is told confidentially, “You won’t like this operation, but the brass wants it done,” readers will be all in, especially when he develops a seemingly psychic bond and life-changing friendship with a de Kochyano spay, which translates to “dog of the nomads.” Wilson, a retired Air Force brigadier general, deftly brings his military knowledge and experience to bear in this series opener. He has a vivid sense of place, from a Bangkok backwater warehouse where fight crowds “smoked Marlboro cigarettes, guzzled Singha beer, and popped yaa baa, a mixture of methamphetamine and caffeine,” to a Taliban village complex in Pakistan. He writes great action set pieces and has a good ear for military banter. A glossary of military acronyms would have been helpful, but that’s what Google is for.

Entertaining escapism with old school military heroics.
INDIE
Books of the Month

INNOCENCE IN A TURBULENT WORLD
Enda (Raudsepp) Bardell
A fond remembrance of a rural childhood in Estonia charms with its story and pictures.

A QUIET HERO
Dwight Harshbarger
A vivid, dramatic, and believable tale of a courageous and self-effacing war hero.

DISCUSSION MATERIALS
Bill Keenan
A gripping and revelatory behind-the-scenes look at investment banking.

RINN'S CROSSING
Russell Heath
A thrilling, engrossing work of serpentine intrigue and crisp characterization with a conservationist conscience.

LHOSA
Carey Allen Krause
An enthralling coming-of-age story that unfolds in a land both strange and recognizable.

THE LAUNDRESS
Barbara Sapienza
An acutely observed, tenderly philosophical novel that tells a wonderfully bitter-sweet story.
LGBTQ+ TITLES DOMINATE CHALLENGED BOOKS LIST

The American Library Association released its list of the most challenged and banned books of 2019, with eight of the 10 titles having drawn objections for LGBTQ+ content.

The No. 1 most challenged book was Alex Gino’s *George*, which also topped last year’s list. The middle-grade novel tells the story of a fourth grader who realizes that she’s not a boy, the gender she was assigned at birth, but rather a transgender girl.

Other books addressing transgender themes that made the list include Susan Kuklin’s *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out* at No. 2 and Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings’ *I Am Jazz* at No. 6.

Other titles, all drawing objections for LGBTQ+ themes, are Cory Silverberg’s *Sex Is a Funny Word*, Daniel Haack’s *Prince and Knight*, Raina Telgemeier’s *Drama*, and Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson’s *And Tango Makes Three*.

NYC LIBRARIES MAY QUARANTINE RETURNED BOOKS

There’s no telling how long the New York Public Library is going to remain closed. But even when its locations do reopen, books returned by patrons might be quarantined, Yahoo Finance reports.

“We may need to quarantine our books...to make sure that we’re not passing germs from one person to another,” CEO Tony Marx said. Scientists believe that the coronavirus can survive on a variety of surfaces for up to three days, although how long it might last depends on the type of material.

The question of how to handle returned materials is one that libraries across the country are struggling to answer during the pandemic. Using disinfectants to treat books could damage them, as could ultraviolet light.

As for when libraries in New York might reopen, Marx said he wasn’t sure. “This is a new world,” Marx said. “Let’s open a few. Let’s learn and see how it goes.”

REPORT: TRUMP’S EX-LAWYER WRITING BOOK

Michael Cohen, President Trump’s former lawyer who was convicted in 2018 of campaign finance violations and perjury, is writing a tell-all book about his ex-boss, the *Daily Beast* reports. Cohen is currently serving a three-year sentence in an Otisville, New York, prison but will be discharged from the jail and allowed to serve the rest of his time under house arrest.

Actor Tom Arnold, an acquaintance of Cohen’s, said that the lawyer will use the book to settle scores. “He told me he’s been writing a book and he’s pissed,” Arnold said. “He told me he is going to spill the beans. What has he got to lose now?”

Cohen plans to publish the book before the November presidential election, the *Daily Beast* reports, citing “three people familiar with the project.” There’s no word on who might publish the book or how much Cohen might make from it.

Michael Schaub is an Austin, Texas–based journalist and regular contributor to NPR.
Behind every great man there’s a woman. That’s a hackneyed, sexist expression of uncertain origin. But in the case of John Peabody Harrington, there was truth to it, even if he meant for the woman in question, Carobeth Laird, to stand very far behind him, obediently and quietly at that.

Harrington was a man of staggering intellect, a gifted linguist who could absorb languages in days. He had a few dozen Native American languages under his belt when he grudgingly took a job teaching linguistics in the summer of 1915 at what would become the University of California at San Diego. There he met Carobeth, nee Tucker, who was fascinated by science but couldn’t enroll in regular college courses because she hadn’t finished high school. An obliging dean admitted her under the assumption that she would find work at a museum—which, he told her, wasn’t much different from women’s housework.

“I loathed housework and experienced instant disenchantment,” she wrote in her memoir *Encounter With an Angry God* decades later. Yet she enrolled, sat rapt as Harrington lectured, and delivered what he declared to be a perfect paper as her first assignment.

There the romance began. Each evening, Laird writes, she and Harrington would stroll around San Diego, and he would complain. He hated teaching. He refused to get a doctorate, Laird noted, “because it would involve lectures and offers of teaching positions, and social contacts which he considered artificial and wasteful.” He finally proposed to her after first checking carefully to be sure that she was not Jewish, as he thought her features suggested. She took Harrington to meet her parents, where, at table, he commandeered the conversation, waved his knife about, talked with his mouth full. “I explained that a man of such genius could not waste time and thought on social niceties,” she wrote.

Harrington’s manners and moods grew worse. He corrected Laird on every aspect of her behavior and being—demanding, for instance, that she scrape out every eggshell carefully to avoid wasting the tiny bit of yolk that clung on. “Thereafter, I tried to cook eggs only when his attention was engaged elsewhere,” she wrote. They argued over money, food, how she dressed, having children. Meanwhile, he hid his manuscripts away, sure that other scholars, especially if they were Jewish, were trying to steal them.

Worn down by his abusive treatment, Laird plotted escape, planting the idea in Harrington’s head that they could work more efficiently if she went off separately to gather linguistic data in Arizona. There she fell in love with a Chemehuevi named George Laird and divorced the man “who loved words more than flesh and blood,” Harrington having made a very bad impression on the judge who heard her petition.

Laird, herself a gifted linguist and observer, went on to write an ethnography of the Chemehuevi people of the Colorado River. At the age of 70, she wrote *Encounter*, which was published to little notice by a small California press in 1975. Harrington had long been forgotten while Laird’s ethnography, published just after her death in 1983, has been acknowledged as exemplary. So is her memoir, a brilliant portrait of a marriage gone sour.

Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor.
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