Featuring 315 Industry-First Reviews of Fiction, Nonfiction, Children's and YA books

KIRKUS REVIEWS

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SPECIAL SUMMER READS ISSUE

Featuring 53 cool books to keep you refreshed all season long

Plus interviews with Emily Henry, Sarah Stodola, Ebony LaDelle, Dan Abdo & Jason Patterson
FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK | Tom Beer

A CELEBRATION OF VACATION READING

There are a lot of reasons to look forward to summer, but if you’re a book lover, surely the top one is a relative abundance of vacation reading time. But what to read? In this, Kirkus’ third annual Summer Reads issue, our editors have rounded up some of the best new fiction, nonfiction, children’s books, and young adult literature so that readers of all ages are ready to hit the beach—or simply stay home—with just the right entertainment.

In our interview with Beach Read author Emily Henry on Page 14—her latest novel is Book Lovers (Berkeley, May 3)—she offers an excellent definition of the type of book we’re celebrating here: “A beach read is all about compulsive readability,” Henry says, “a hook that’s so powerful you just keep your nose in your book despite any and all stimuli around you—your job, your real life, and even your vacation just fade into the background.”

That pretty much describes Ebony LaDelle’s YA debut, Love Radio (Simon & Schuster, May 3), an engrossing Detroit love story full of Motor City’s Black music and culture; our interview with LaDelle runs on Page 138. During summer vacation, it can be hard to keep kids interested in books, but few will be able to resist the zany charms of Barb, the wise-cracking heroine of Barb and the Ghost Blade (Simon & Schuster, May 1), the sequel to last year’s Barb the Last Berzerker; we speak with creators Dan Abdo and Jason Patterson on Page 90. And if you want to know more about that beach resort where you’ve booked this summer’s trip, pack a copy of The Last Resort: A Chronicle of Paradise, Profit, and Peril at the Beach (Ecco, June 28); author Sarah Stodola answers our questions on Page 54.

I don’t know if there’s a beach in my future yet, but after editing this issue I’ve already added a few titles to my own list of summer reads:

Jackie & Me by Louis Bayard (Algonquin, June 14): For a dose of Camelot-era glamour, I’m looking forward to this novel about the courtship of JFK and Jackie, as seen through the eyes of the future president’s semicloseted friend. “Romance with bite: the perfect escapism for today’s anxious times,” says our reviewer.

The Angel of Rome by Jess Walter (Harper, June 28): I’ve been a dedicated reader of anything Jess Walter writes since falling under the sway of his 2012 novel, Beautiful Ruins. “Prepare for delight,” says our reviewer of this new story collection, and that sounds like just what I want in a summer read.

The Adventures of Miss Barbara Pym by Paula Byrne (HarperCollins, June 7): The author of Excellent Women and other wry novels of English life seems to be forgotten and rediscovered every decade or so; let’s hope that this biography makes Pym canonical once and for all. A “gift to fans, novices, and aspiring writers,” writes our reviewer.

Joan by Katherine J. Chen (Knopf, July 5): I’m a sucker for a good historical novel, and this iconoclastic imagining of Joan of Arc, from the author of the Pride and Prejudice spinoff Mary B, looks like one I can really immerse myself in. Our review: “An elegant and engaging work of historical fiction.”
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The Kirkus Star is awarded to books of remarkable merit, as determined by the impartial editors of Kirkus.

**LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI**

Rinker Buck returns with an invigorating blend of history and journalism, both of which inform his chronicle of his journey down the Mississippi in a wooden flatboat. Read the review of *Life on the Mississippi* on p. 52.

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.
KISMET
Akhtar, Amina
Thomas & Mercer (336 pp.)
$24.95 | Aug. 1, 2022
978-1-5420-3426-5

A submissive young woman trades family pressure for friendship with a wannabe New Age influencer involved with murder in a Southwestern mecca.

Ronnie Khan can’t believe she’s out from under her Aunt Shameem’s thumb after all these years. Sure, Pakistani culture emphasizes honoring her elders, but did that really mean shrinking in the shadows as Shameem abused her for so many years after her parents’ deaths? Now she’s moved with her best friend, empowerment coach Marley Dewhurst, from New York City to Sedona to embrace the New Age lifestyle Marley’s promised. Instead of bringing Shameem her chai, Ronnie takes desert hikes with Marley. Not yet self-aware enough to know that neither of these brings her the happiness she seeks, she’s confident that yoga, caftans, and crystals will make her feel centered. In fact, crystals are something Ronnie genuinely connects to, along with Brit and Star, the twin owners of BritStar Crystals, who offer her a job and their friendship. And not a moment too soon, because Marley, whom Ronnie’s considered her savior, has taken on shades of Shameem, taking Ronnie for granted and ordering her around. Ronnie’s convinced it’s the influence of Caroline, a social climber with a bad aura who’s attached herself to Marley and plans to brand Marley as Sedona’s biggest influencer. After Ronnie and Marley find human remains on a desert hike, Caroline pushes Marley to create Marley’s Eyes, a vigilante group designed to keep Sedona safe. The effect may be the opposite, and Ronnie wonders if she should trust in her friend or her instincts.

An amusing takedown of influencer culture.

THE FORGERY
Barrera, Ave
Trans. by Ellen Jones & Robin Myers
Charco Press (120 pp.)
$15.95 paper | July 26, 2022
978-1-9138-6715-7

A labyrinthine short novel, in which each turn sends the reader down another rabbit hole, from an artistically ambitious Mexican writer.
There are at least three possibilities, not mutually exclusive, from which the reader of this novel might choose: Painter José Federico Burgos is narrating the story of a life that has gone totally bonkers. Burgos himself has gone bonkers, and much of the story he’s telling takes place inside his head. Or maybe a remarkable painting Burgos has been hired to forge is driving everybody in this novel bonkers. The book begins with the narrator leaping from a high wall, his hand already broken, a jump so dangerous that he’s suspected of attempting suicide. Yet he survives, discovered by golfers, though there is no golf course in the vicinity. And by the end of the novel, he finds himself in a hospital, treated by nuns, his imagination and fantasies unleashed. In between, he recounts a story of struggle, impoverishment, eviction, and his truck being towed, before he is offered a lifeline—a commission to forge a mysterious painting by a black marketeer who resides in an architecturally extravagant domicile, where the man’s father disappeared to his presumed death and his mother remains behind bedroom doors. The reluctant protagonist had previously fallen afoul of the law in a forgery scheme, but his original art has provided little remuneration. And the windfall he is being offered, amid circumstances so desperate, is too good to pass up. And so, one thing leads to another. And another. And another.

A wild ride for protagonist and reader alike.

**NOT EXACTLY WHAT I HAD IN MIND**

*Brook, Kate*

Dutton (352 pp.)

$17.00 paper | June 28, 2022

978-0-593-18682-4

A classic tale of miscommunication, star-crossed lovers, and artificial insemination.

When London roommates Hazel Phillips and Alfie Berghan sleep together, they make a pact that it won’t be a big deal...so of course it will be a big deal. In a poor attempt to appear casual, Alfie...
Welcome to summer reading season! Pull up a hammock, a beach blanket, or a park bench and get lost in one of this season’s absorbing novels.

**Trust** by Hernan Diaz (Riverhead, May 3): This ingenious tale of high finance is told through four separate narratives; “no one document tells the whole story,” according to our review, “but the collection of palimpsetts makes for a thrilling experience and a testament to the power and danger of the truth—or a version of it—when it’s set down in print.”

**This Time Tomorrow** by Emma Straub (Riverhead, May 17): On the morning after her 40th birthday, Alice Stern wakes up in her childhood bedroom, about to turn 16 again. “Combine Straub’s usual warmth and insight with the fun of time travel and you have a winner,” according to our review.

**Counterfeit** by Kirstin Chen (Morrow, June 7): Ava Wong, a Stanford grad–turned–full-time mom, gets involved with a scheme to sell fake Birkin bags. Our review calls it “a delightfully different caper novel with a *Gone Girl*–style plot twist.”

**The Hotel Nantucket** by Elin Hilderbrand (Little, Brown, June 14): The queen of the beach read returns with an instant-classic grand hotel saga featuring the ghost of a teenage chambermaid, a hotel manager trying to get top honors from an undercover reviewer, and, of course, a hot chef. As our review says, “Honestly, who needs Nantucket. It could hardly be more fun than this book.”

**The Mutual Friend** by Carter Bays (Dutton, June 7): In this darkly comic first novel from the co-creator of *How I Met Your Mother*, a loosely connected group of New Yorkers tries to put down their phones and figure out what they want out of life. Our review says the surprising thing about the book “is how beautifully written it is and how deftly the author balances humor and heartbreak....A major accomplishment.”

**Fellowship Point** by Alice Elliott Dark (Mary sue Rucci Books/Scribner, July 5): Two 80-ish Philadelphia women try to save a piece of land in Maine where their families have vacationed for generations. “Elegantly structured, beautifully written, and altogether diverting,” according to our review.

**Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow** by Gabrielle Zevin (Knopf, July 3): Three brilliant college kids invent a video game that makes them famous and keeps them orbiting each other for decades. “Zevin’s delight in her characters, their qualities, and their projects sprinkles a layer of fairy dust over the whole enterprise,” our review says. “Sure to enchant even those who have never played a video game in their lives, with instant cult status for those who have.”

**Winter Work** by Dan Fesperman (Knopf, July 12): Take your mind off current affairs with what our review calls an “engrossing, deep-in-the-weeds thriller” set just after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Or maybe the book is timely, as Russians battle Americans and Germans for intelligence and a former Stasi agent searches for information that will help him get out of East Germany.

**The Daughter of Doctor Moreau** by Silvia Moreno-Garcia (Del Rey, July 19): On a ranch in 19th-century Yucatán, young Carlota Moreau lives with her father and the strange hybrids he experiments on. “This spin on H.G. Wells’ classic is “a fun literary remix” from a novelist who loves to explore different genres, according to our review.

**The Last White Man** by Mohsin Hamid (Riverhead, Aug. 2): Hamid’s first novel since the brilliant *Exit West* (2017) opens with a formerly White man named Anders waking up one morning with brown skin. Our review calls this “a provocative tale that raises questions of racial and social justice at every turn.”

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.
(harboring secret feelings for Hazel) starts talking too much about his ex-girlfriend. Hazel, also secretly smitten, decides that he’s not into her and it’s time to move on. Thus Hazel starts dating pretentious, controlling, man-bun-sporting artist Miles—who she hopes will help her with her stilted illustration career but whose wrongness for Hazel is evident to all from the start, except Hazel: “They ate voraciously, and when the bill came they split it neatly, fifty-fifty, as they always did, because bill-splitting was a core principle of feminism to which Miles, in spite of his wealth and her relative poverty and his having chosen all the food, liked strictly to adhere.” Meanwhile, Hazel’s sister, Emily, and her wife, Daria, are trying to conceive and hunting down the perfect sperm donor, but Daria has a secret: a deep, intractable phobia of pregnancy. When Emily and Daria start thinking that Alfie might be the answer to their problems, all the tension bubbling beneath the surface comes to a head. Brook’s ability to balance humor with explorations of heartbreak, anxiety, and betrayal is admirable, and while she doesn’t quite get to the meat of the story until about 200 pages in, she nonetheless provides an entertaining tale from start to finish, with characters you’ll miss right after finishing the epilogue.

Not a whole lot happens, but you'll cling to every word.

ANY OTHER FAMILY
Brown, Eleanor
Putnam (368 pp.)
$27.00 | July 12, 2022
978-0-593-32854-5

Who makes up a family, and what does being a family even mean?

These are the questions that propel much of humankind, particularly three unique sets of parents who have adopted four young biological siblings. On a summer vacation in Aspen, this extended family convenes to bond and give their hyperorganized leader, Tabitha (perfectionist mom to twins Tate and Taylor), a chance to spend time with the other mothers, who are something like the sisters she never had. There’s Ginger, adoptive mother to Phoebe, the eldest sibling, and Elizabeth, who’s recently adopted the baby of the family, Violet. It’s an unusual combination of people and personalities that seemingly works, until Brianna, the birth mom of all four siblings, calls to announce that she’s pregnant again, thanks to a quick visit from the children’s absent biological father. And she’d like Elizabeth and her husband, John, to adopt the newborn come the December due date. Only Elizabeth is overwhelmed with new motherhood and the prolonged grief of infertility and miscarriage. John has lost his job, and Tabitha and her husband, Perry, feel too old to adopt a baby. Ginger, Phoebe’s single parent, is also happy with her status, especially with the upcoming uncertainty of middle school looming. Thus, the family members must sort out dynamics and relationships to each other, figuring out which new parents they want to add to their unconventional cluster and which of many, many potential adopters they will leave childless. Told from the alternating perspectives of the three adoptive mothers and interspersed with written adoption applications from eager parents-to-be, the novel moves thoughtfully, precisely, and sometimes humorously through the psyches of the parents, pushing the readers into the quick-paced, perfectly detailed story while never forgetting the looming questions of family and belonging.

A prismatic story of family, adoption, and how the people we choose to keep close shape who we are.

Seinfeld meets Pulp Fiction in this buddy comedy, ripe for a TV adaptation.

“A gleefully unorthodox gumshoe leads a worthy thriller with series potential.”
—Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation or Information on Publishing and Film Rights.
Email axelmilens@gmail.com • www.axelmilens.com
THE NEW NEIGHBOR
Cleveland, Karen
Ballantine (304 pp.)
$28.00 | July 26, 2022
978-0-593-35802-3

“How well do any of us know our neighbors?” This question anchors Cleveland’s latest novel as a CIA analyst fights against the clock to keep Iranian intelligence from infiltrating the Joint Worldwide Intelligence Communications System.

Beth Bradford’s life is in transition: Her youngest son has just started college, and she and her husband are moving out of the house where all three of their kids grew up, away from the McLean, Virginia, neighborhood where their best friends still live. Their marriage is also fading; Beth’s only solace is that she will have more time to devote to preventing Iranian intelligence from infiltrating the network using an asset only known as “The Neighbor.” Despite her almost 20 years on the case, however, she is suddenly reassigned to a teaching gig, losing her high-level security clearance and her professional raison d’être. The last bit of intelligence she (surreptitiously) accesses is a short message: “The Neighbor has found a new cul-de-sac.” Determined to figure out the identity of The Neighbor before national security is compromised, she begins to surveill her old neighborhood, noticing for the first time how most of her friends, in addition to the woman who bought her house, have their own secrets and could potentially be guilty. But no one will believe her; her family, friends, and co-workers chalk up her suspicions to midlife crisis paranoia. Will she uncover the identity of The Neighbor before it’s too late? Despite a rather predictable pattern—no one seems to understand that Beth’s concern is rooted in more than her chaotic life changes—there are a number of satisfying twists in the second half of the book. To answer the rhetorical question: No, it’s clear that we never really know our neighbors—or our own families—but must rely only on ourselves. A stark takeaway, yes, but that doesn’t make it wrong.

Cleveland engenders deep paranoia for the susceptibility of U.S. intelligence—under the guise of entertainment.
The wacky world of books and the people who love them, as seen through a week in the life of a Washington, D.C., bookstore.

Recently widowed bookstore owner Sophie Bernstein, 54, is trying to find her footing after the death of her beloved husband and the other disorienting events of 2017 (Charlottesville looms large), but it’s not easy. For one thing, almost all the people in her life are her employees and are much younger than her. Comic novelist Coll, herself a longtime bookstore events manager, brackets this winsome midlife picaresque by placing Sophie at two young people’s parties. At the opener, the youth have gathered to guzzle some vile but dangerously potent liquor (they chant “Miss...es...Bern...stein” to get her to take a swig); at the close, they suck down Penumbra Punch at a rooftop solar eclipse party. Along the way, Sophie faces extreme drama of all kinds, from the threat of a protest over the visit of a rapacious British poet blamed for his wife’s suicide to having her car towed because her keys have been sucked up by her vacuum cleaner, the fearsome Querk III. Her other vacuum cleaner, a Roomba, is the closest thing she has to a new boyfriend. Meanwhile, the book jokes don’t stop coming. The fiction debut of a 25-year-old Parisian-born Afghani Irish woman titled The Girl in Gauzy Blue—of course they can’t keep it in stock. A book called The Uncommon Quayle—speculative fiction featuring Vice President Dan Quayle as an undercover narcotics agent—not so much. And literally everyone Sophie meets, including a lawyer threatening reconciliation, and strikes up a surprisingly heartfelt correspondence with her husband’s estranged son. Vincent and Loup finally initiate an affair whose intensity is entirely befitting of Paris: wandering through the city aimlessly at night; meeting at Loup’s band’s smoky, busy shows; and discovering one another physically. But as Vincent’s son’s wedding approaches, ensuring a reunion...
between her and Cillian, she’s compelled to reevaluate the person she’s become during her marriage and must decide whether her time in Paris will prove life-altering or nothing but a brief, beautiful mirage. Though its plot sometimes proves predictable—the love triangle at the book’s center is its almost-exclusive focus, and it presents few unexpected turns (or character developments, at least on the men’s parts)—this is a smoothly written, enjoyable novel that gives due to the social and emotional complexities of middle age. Vincent is a lovable protagonist; the narrative is also interspersed with her diary entries and letters, creating a self-aware, three-dimensional character. Cross-Smith sensitively explores the many permutations of romantic and platonic love and the idea that, especially in Paris, one’s love may not be limited to a single other person.

Charming and lively, if somewhat predictable.

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**THE MISSING WORD**
De Gregorio, Concita
Trans. by Clarissa Botsford
Europa Editions (112 pp.)
$16.00 paper  |  July 5, 2022
978-1-60945-762-4

Inspired by a heartbreaking true story, De Gregorio’s remarkably restrained novel follows the events that ripple out in the aftermath of tragedy.

The story is simple but mysterious. Shortly after Italian attorney Irina separates from her controlling Swiss husband, Mathias, he disappears with their twin 6-year-old daughters. Five days later, he kills himself, and the girls are nowhere to be found. The police are of little help, and Irina is left to try to assemble a new life for herself, always hoping the children will somehow be located. By the time the novel takes place, several years have passed, and Irina, though still grief-stricken, has fallen in love with gentle Spaniard cartoonist Luis and is surprised to find that suddenly “everything feels like a surprise and a gift.” De Gregorio constructs her brief but potent novel out of sharp fragments: There are letters from Irina to her beloved grandmother and to the marriage counselor who refused to speak to her after Mathias disappeared, Irina’s matter-of-fact recollections of the events leading up to the kidnapping, and lists of things that make Irina angry (the inefficiency of the police) or happy (humpback whales and “red wine, when it’s good”). There are also sections labeled “Me About You,” in which the narrator, a writer who has become close to Irina, lets loose her own emotions about the case and her feelings about how Irina has survived. It’s a story about that “missing word” of the title, a word lacking in most languages, a word for parents who have lost children, and the narrator affirms that “losing a child is the touchstone of grief, the gold standard of pain.” The daring of the novel is that Irina is not defined simply by that loss, as she might be in a lesser one: Her life is shaped by the disappearance of the children but not destroyed by it.

A quietly devastating but somehow hopeful tale.

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**THE SHEHNAI VIRTUOSO**
Dhumketu
Trans. by Jenny Bhatt
Deep Vellum (336 pp.)
$15.95 paper  |  July 26, 2022
978-1-646051-68-7

A curated collection of 26 stories from Dhumketu (1892-1965), a celebrated Gujarati writer who wrote more than 500 in his lifetime.

The book begins with “The Post Office,” Dhumketu’s most anthologized work, about an elderly man waiting for a letter from his daughter, who’d married and moved to her husband’s faraway town years earlier. The opening line sets the tone: “The
hazy dawn sky was glittering with the previous night’s stars—big and small—like happy memories shimmering in a person’s life.” The title story invokes the beauty of nature, with the shimmer of moonlight, and of music, with its sonorous joys and sorrows, and the way they can stir the soul; the rest follow suit in demonstrating the ways literature can do the same. While many of these stories portray the lives of ordinary folks, others feature leaders engaged in questions of politics and power. What unites them is their lush language and the author’s skill in addressing a myriad of subjects with hope and humility. Bhatt selected at least one significant story from each of the author’s 24 published volumes, setting out to demonstrate his stylistic and thematic range. She accomplishes her mission with grace; the stories are as varied as they are rich with description about everything from their characters’ inner struggles to their settings, whether a small lakeside village, the Himalayas, or an alternate reality where individualism is eradicated, as in the “The Rebirth of Poetry.” This story is a love letter to the power of art and the human spirit that feels like the engine of the whole book. Gujarati speakers represent a large portion of the Indian diaspora in the U.S., the U.K., and Canada, and Bhatt’s translation is a significant contribution to an English-speaking audience’s appreciation of Indian literature.

These stories invite readers to rediscover the wonder in the quotidian.

**SHUTTER**

*Emerson, Ramona*

Soho Crime (312 pp.)

$25.95 | Aug. 2, 2022

978-1-641-29333-4

Emerson’s striking debut follows a Navajo police photographer almost literally to hell and back.

Rita Todacheene sees dead people. Since most of her attempts to talk to someone about her special power while she was growing up on the reservation ended in disaster, she’s tried to keep it to herself during her five years with the Albuquerque Police Department. Her precarious peace is shattered by the death of Erma Singleton, manager of a bar owned by Matias Romero, her common-law husband. Although lazy Detective Martin Garcia has ruled that Erma fell from a highway bridge, her body shattered by the truck that hit her on the roadway below, Erma insists that she was pushed from the bridge. “Help me get back to my baby,” she tells Rita, “or I’ll make your life a living hell.” Since Rita, a civilian employee, has few resources for an investigation, Erma opens a portal that unleashes scores of ghosts on her, all clamoring for justice or mercy or a few words with the loved ones they left behind. The nightmare that propels Rita forward, from snapping photos of Judge Harrison Winters and his wife and children and dog, all shot dead in what Garcia calls a murder-suicide, to revelations that link both these deaths and Erma’s to the drug business of the Sinaloa cartel, is interleaved with repeated flashbacks that show the misfit Rita’s early years on her Navajo reservation and in her Catholic grade school as she struggles to come to terms with a gift that feels more like a curse. The appeal of the case as a series kickoff is matched by the challenges Emerson will face in pulling off any sequels. A whodunit upstaged at every point by the unforgettably febrile intensity of the heroine’s first-person narrative.

**GIRLS WITHOUT TEARS**

*Finlay, T.L.*

Crooked Lane (356 pp.)

$27.99 | Aug. 9, 2022

978-1-63910-080-4

A public relations manager with a rare malady is called back to the home she put behind her to help someone she never wants to see again. Back in high school, Zack Flynn may have been Noa Romwell’s one and only, but...
she clearly wasn’t his, as he showed when he took her virginity and then left her for beautiful Taylor Spells. Now karma has turned on Zack and Taylor, whose 6-year-old daughter, Skye, has disappeared. After leaving Everglades City for Miami specifically to get away from Zack, Noa is in no mood to go back. But her parents, who run the Bramble Rose B&B, wear her down, and soon she’s left South Beach for her hometown to help with the search for Skye. Zack’s so distracted that it’s hard to get close to him, and Taylor is still Taylor. That leaves Jamie Camden, Zack’s best friend in high school and more recently Skye’s godfather, and Noa finds herself warming to him once again. One big obstacle stands in the way of their renewed friendship, though: Noa’s announcement that she’s been cured of congenital insensitivity to pain with anhidrosis even though no one ever is cured of CIPA. If it doesn’t sound so bad to be unable to weep or sweat or feel pain, rest assured that Finlay has pointed out dozens of ways Noa’s disorder will have consequences that range from inconvenient to life-threatening. Be warned: Some of her adventures may be even more trying to her readers, like the second time she gets knocked out and locked up.

A so-so mystery upstaged by the determined heroine it’s clearly designed to showcase.

Covering 250 years, Ford’s new novel traces the way states of consciousness involving extreme moments of pain or joy interconnect seven generations of Chinese women.

Embedded images—airplanes, ships, waves—and the occasional ghostly vision highlight how these women’s lives reverberate as the focus moves back and forth in time. In 1942 China, Faye Moy, a nurse in her 50s who’s working with American forces, feels an eerie connection to a dying young pilot in whose pocket she finds a newspaper photograph of herself as a teenager and a note in her own handwriting that says, “FIND ME.” Finding oneself and/or one’s soul mate becomes the throughline of the book. Faye’s great-grandmother Afong Moy, the first Chinese woman in America, dies in childbirth after a short career being exhibited as a curiosity in the 1830s. Faye’s mother, Lai King (Afong’s granddaughter), sails to Canton after her parents’ deaths in San Francisco’s Chinatown fire of 1892. Onboard ship she bonds with a young White boy, also an orphan, and nurses him when contagion strikes. When Faye is 14, she has an illegitimate daughter who is adopted and raised in England. Presumably that girl is Zoe Moy who, in 1927, attends the famously progressive Summerhill School, where a disastrous social experiment in fascism destroys her relationship with a beloved poetry teacher. In 2014, Zoe’s emotionally fragile granddaughter, Greta, loses both her skyrocketing tech career and the love of her life at the hands of an evil capitalist. While several earlier Moys receive aid and guidance from Buddhist monks, Greta’s troubled poet daughter, Dorothy, turns to both Buddhism and radical scientific treatment to uncover and understand how past crises, emotional, physical, and spiritual, are destabilizing her current life in 2045. Expect long treatises on anamnesis, quantum biology, and reincarnation before traveling with Dorothy’s adult daughter in 2086.

Ford raises fascinating questions, but a rushed ending too neatly ties up the answers in an unconvincing, sentimental bow.
“This latest novel from Hendrickson is a briskly paced work of historical fiction that seamlessly blends action and a love story.”

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

“An appealing pirate adventure.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*
Emily Henry was the successful author of four YA novels when she tried her wings in the adult market with 2020’s *Beach Read*. Things took off, to put it mildly, and she followed up the next year with another *New York Times* bestseller, *People We Meet on Vacation*. On the eve of the publication of *Book Lovers* (Berkley, May 3), which our reviewer deemed “a warm, sparkling romance brimming with laugh-out-loud banter, lovable characters, and tons of sexual tension,” Henry, 31, sat down for a Zoom conversation about her road to the proverbial beach. Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Let’s start with your decision to cross into adult fiction. How did that come about?

When I started writing *Beach Read*, I didn’t think I would be pursuing publication—I saw it as a fun escape from writer’s block I was having elsewhere. But as I got into the story, I realized that I was actually writing another coming-of-age novel, only the characters were in their late 20s and early 30s—as I was at the time—instead of their teens. They are finding their place in the world, solidifying their identities, shedding parts of their personalities that once seemed permanent—just as I was. Then I had the semihorrifying realization that this was just going to keep happening for my entire life. I think I’ll end up writing coming-of-age stories about 65-year-olds.

As a 64-year-old, I wouldn’t doubt it. So—why *Beach Read*? What did that shorthand mean to you?

A “beach read” is all about compulsive readability, a hook that’s so powerful you just keep your nose in your book despite any and all stimuli around you—your job, your real life, and even your vacation just fade into the background. If it doesn’t have a beach, that’s no big deal. But if it doesn’t have an irresistible question that must be answered, then it’s probably not a beach read.

Who are some of your favorite beach read authors?

Elin Hilderbrand is one go-to.

You remind me of her! You put similar types of fun decorations on the story—food, clothes, bars and restaurants, books and authors, even exercise, which you both seem to think is a gas.
Good thing, because Elin Hilderbrand makes me starving. Whenever I write food descriptions, I think of her as the gold standard. I also love Emma Straub; her new book, *This Time Tomorrow*, is amazing. Many of my beach reads are thrillers. I just read this [holds up *The Hacienda* by Isabel Cañas]—*Mexican Gothic* meets *Rebecca*, a truly sumptuous period novel. Such flair!

Tell us where the idea for *Book Lovers* came from.

After *People We Meet On Vacation*, I was brainstorming day and night. I came up with a long list of three-word premises that added up to...nothing. Then I started watching made-for-TV Christmas movies and homed in on this one recurrent character, the hardened city woman who’s the foil to the real romantic lead. The one the guy needs to let go to find true love and purpose. I started wondering, what about this woman who storms off the elevator, throws her purse at her assistant, and starts barking orders? What would make a character like that? What would her happy ending be?

Your version of her is Nora, a literary agent, a classic shark whose secret dream is to be an editor. Are those professions you know firsthand?

Oh, no. But I love books about the publishing industry, and fortunately, both my current and former agents, [the latter] who’s now a writer herself, were totally up for helping me. Both of them patiently read along throughout the whole process.

Nora’s love interest, Charlie, is an editor, too. My idea was to pair Nora with someone who was exactly like her. Instead of opposites attract, I wanted to see if I could create tension with two people who are basically the same. Could I make that as fun as two people who have nothing in common?

For some reason, I was picturing Luke from *Gilmore Girls* the whole time.

I love that comparison! I am part of a subgeneration that was basically raised by Nora Ephron and Amy Sherman-Palladino, and I think a lot of my writing sensibilities come from those two writers. As I got older, I also discovered the earlier roots of that work. I am obsessed with [the 1945 film] *Christmas in Connecticut*—I keep pitching my editor a modern take on it—and I think the Thin Man movies are a perfect early example of that sharp and quick banter I’m always going for.

I see those influences in the banter between Nora and Charlie—also between Nora and her sister, Libby. Your banter is top-notch.

That means so much to me! I don't read bad reviews, but my mom does, and she told me they claim my dialogue is unrealistic, no one talks like this in real life. She was fuming. “You and your friends, that’s exactly how you sound!” You know that magic feeling when you meet someone who has the same sense of humor as you, and the conversation just goes like a tennis match? It doesn’t happen every day, but it does happen.

Though much of *Book Lovers* is set in a small town—a kind of Stars Hollow if we’re talking *Gilmore Girls*—it’s really more of a love letter to New York City.

Yes! In those same made-for-TV movies, the city is often a symbol of materialism and capitalism and everything bad. But Nora loves it. It’s where she grew up, and it’s her home. She explains, for people who have never had that emotional connection to a city, why it means so much to her. I’m from Cincinnati, but at the end of undergrad I did a residency in New York and fell in love with the place.

I wrote this book during the pandemic; like everyone else, I was in seclusion. So I just stuffed the book with candy, filled it to the brim with everything that I missed. Like being in a crowded, exciting city. Coffee shops. Neighborhood places where everyone knows you.

*Continued on next page*
boyfriend texts to dump her for her roommate, and she’s pronounced dead after drinking and fighting too much at a reception—that Las Vegas copywriter Hallie Evers’ real problems kick in. When she wakes up some time after Dr. Reed Smith, another guest at the reception, miraculously restarts her heart, she starts being plagued by vivid, disturbing dreams that feel “more like memories…someone else’s memories.” She has vivid, detailed recollections of Boston, a city she’s never visited. The name of Tyler Reyes, the founding CEO of Boston-based medical device developer Hyppolex, seems as familiar as if they’d met, despite the fact that they clearly haven’t. Her dreams about the death of a young woman named Savannah make her feel as if this is her sister, though she’s an only child. A pair of assailants nearly kidnap her before they’re run off, and Todd Kivel, the private eye who appears out of nowhere to rescue her, gets killed for his trouble. Clearly Hallie’s being tracked by unknown parties plotting some deeper game, and many readers will figure out what that game is before Freeman confirms their suspicions. But this big reveal isn’t the climax; it’s only the pivot to a new set of mysteries Hallie steps into when she leaves Las Vegas for Boston and begins to sense what an extravagant set of crimes, past and present, underlie the dreams that don’t feel like dreams at all.

Wheels within wheels within wheels, cunningly intermeshed by a master who sweats every nightmarish detail.

ROBERT LUDLUM’S THE BOURNE SACRIFICE
Freeman, Brian
Putnam (384 pp.)
$28.00 | July 26, 2022
978-0-593-41985-4

Jason Bourne confronts a strange and frightening enemy in the latest entry in the series created by Ludlum and written by Freeman.

Let’s face it, Bourne is never going to learn the secrets of his past. In this latest episode, he reunites with Canadian journalist Abbey Laurent, who plays a key part in this fast-moving thriller. He had left her behind two years earlier because “when you’re with me, you’re in danger….I’m a killer.” For her part, she is known in her profession as “one of the few people who calls out the bullshit on both sides.” A woman is stabbed to death near the Potomac, and Abbey wants to know why. The killing is the work of the Pyramid, a secretive organization that ostensibly fights lies and misinformation around the world but does so with lies of its own. She asks too many questions about the murder and runs afoul of the organization, which ruins her career by planting false stories about her on social media. But worse, the Pyramid wants her dead. “It doesn’t matter what’s true and what’s a lie,” she’s told. In Iceland, Bourne silently awaits his prey, an evil dude named Lennon who enjoys sharing a surname with the late Beatle, so much so that he even has an evil girlfriend named Yoko. Hero and villain meet several times, each missing or simply passing up...
chances to kill the other, apparently because they'd rather talk than pull the trigger. As fans know, Bourne has lost all memory of his life before being shot in the head. The CIA doesn't want him to learn of his past, which is the mystery that drives the series. Meanwhile, he's a loner by necessity, because “nothing gets you killed faster than trust.” There are odd coincidences, such as Bourne and Abbey meeting again and the hero and the bad guy meeting again and again, but readers won't mind. Can Abbey Laurent get her life back? Or even survive? Will she have sex with Jason Bourne?

Colorful characters and solid plotting continue to make this series a pleasure.

**ALL THE RUINED MEN**

Glose, Bill

St. Martin's (288 pp.)

$27.99 | Aug. 2, 2022

978-1-2502-7988-0

The lives of combat soldiers in America’s “forever wars.”

Glose adds his impressive voice to those of writers like Kevin Powers and Phil Klay who have produced powerful fiction about the experience of American soldiers fighting in the 21st-century wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The 18 linked stories in this debut collection follow the fortunes of six members of a single platoon of paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division (in which Glose served during the 1991 Gulf War), some of whose members have experienced four tours of combat duty in four years. They gaze with an unblinking eye at the physical and emotional tolls exacted from soldiers who aren’t fighting for a great cause but instead “because it was their job, each man risking everything because he loved the man next to him. Simple as that.” The relentless fear that grips these men and their anxiety and nightmares only partially quelled by cocktails of prescription drugs when they return to a country that has little understanding of all they’ve sacrificed are recurring themes. Accounts from the war zone like “Dirge,” in which one character is killed by an IED and another sustains a disfiguring facial wound, or “The Dead Aren’t Allowed To Walk,” in which an avoidable friendly fire incident takes the life of a key member of the platoon, reveal the omnipresence of random sudden death or catastrophic injury. In settings that range from an upscale suburban neighborhood in Princeton, New Jersey (“Sacrifices”), to a seedy bar in Pensacola, Florida (“First Drunk Night Back”), Glose exposes painful truths about the devastation wreaked on these soldiers and the families that ached for their safe returns and now struggle to relate to them when they arrive home. Throughout, he makes no effort to conceal the harsh realities of these damaged lives.

A collection of painfully honest and consistently empathetic glimpses of modern American soldiers in war and peace.

**THE LAST WHITE MAN**

Hamid, Mohsin

Riverhead (192 pp.)

$26.00 | Aug. 2, 2022

978-0-593-53881-4

A brilliantly realized allegory of racial transformation.

Hamid’s latest opens with a scenario worthy of Kafka: A young man named Anders awakens “to find he [has] turned a deep and undeniable brown.” Faced with the shock of this metamorphosis, he punches the mirror that reveals the stranger who is he. He then calls in sick, at which his boss growls, “You don’t work, you don’t get paid.” Meanwhile, his old girlfriend, Oona, returns to the unnamed town—perhaps somewhere in South Africa, although, this being a fairy tale of sorts, it’s in an aoristic nowhere—and takes up with the new Anders even as Oona’s mother sighs that “our people” are changing. It’s true, for the whole town is slowly turning brown.
Writes Hamid in a characteristically onrushing sentence, “The mood in town was changing, more rapidly than its complexion, for Anders could not as yet perceive any real shift in the number of dark people on the streets...but the mood, yes, the mood was changing, and the shelves of the stores were more bare, and at night the roads were more abandoned.” Anders returns to work at a local gym, where he finds that the few remaining White people are looking at him with “quick, evasive stares,” no longer trusting the man they called “doc” for his sore-muscle healing powers. When Anders’ father—the last White man of Hamid’s title—dies, there are no more of the “pale people who wandered like ghosts” in the town, and as time passes those who are left slowly lose their “memories of whiteness.” Hamid’s story is poignant and pointed, speaking to a more equitable future in which widespread change, though confusing and dislocating in the moment, can serve to erase the divisions of old as they fade away with the passing years.

A provocative tale that raises questions of racial and social justice at every turn.

THE WORK WIFE

Hart, Alison B.
Graydon House (368 pp.)
$26.99 | July 19, 2022
978-1-525-89976-8

Inside the perfectly curated fortress of privilege that is the estate of a Hollywood billionaire, threatening tremors of a #MeToo earthquake are felt. “Ted Stabler—the wunderkind who’d directed The Starfighter trilogy...was a late riser, but once he began his day he worked tirelessly, often until one or two in the morning. Tearing up the conditions he needed to task-shift seamlessly without squandering a minute would take all of Zanne’s focus.” Hart’s knowing, ripped-from-the-headlines debut takes us behind the scenes of Ted’s world on a day of reckoning—the day the Stablers host a “Bump and Pump” benefit for low-income women. Things get off to an insidious start when the party monkey pisses on the computer server, and sure enough, this is the day each of Ted’s three wives (first wife, second wife, work wife) will watch the ugly truths of her position explode. Zanne Klein—described by her girlfriend as “Snow White, if Snow White was a daddy”—is the work wife, a queen bee in the hive of workers that includes everything from Ivy League graduates to a retired NFL star. Thanks to this group of people, Holly Stabler, Ted’s second wife, spends her days in what looks like glamorous ease but is actually infantilized hell. “Joe paid her bills, Flora made her bed, Erin made her doctor’s appointments and filled her prescriptions, Ilya and James drove her children to school, Katya packed their lunches, Mark hired and fired her household staff, Lauren tried on her clothes, Erin signed her name and impersonated her voice, Dawn and Zanne delivered her messages to Ted when he ducked her calls.” Holly is one of the few who know that Ted was previously married to a Korean American woman named Phoebe Lee, now an English teacher in the Bay Area. Phoebe was co-producer of the first two Starfighter flicks, but the couple split up before following through on their plan to produce her passion project, and she dropped out of sight. Now, after 20 years, she’s back in town. This book flies on a magic carpet of seamless, intricate detail, much of it from work experience the author acknowledges in an afterword. Whether we’re dropping in on Holly with her glam squad or watching in wonder as headset-wearing assistants track the movements of their bosses like world leaders, there’s never a moment’s slip in authenticity or momentum.

Riveting details of a fascinating hidden world support a ruthless takedown of misogyny and entitlement. One hell of a debut.
“In DiMaria’s debut SF novel, a nanotech-implant corporation faces the possibility of frightening, potentially fatal hacker attacks.”

“...a modest breath of fresh air in a subgenre that too often feels like reboots of the same operating system.”

“An offbeat and refreshingly different cybercrime mystery.”

—Kirkus Reviews
Heathcock’s dystopian tale, set in a near-future America decimated by the ravages of climate change, conjures a haunting mood despite an abundance of familiar tropes. These primarily derive from Suzanne Collins’ Hunger Games series: Both follow the tribulations of a tough, competent young woman from an impoverished family struggling to survive in a hostile natural setting, plucked from obscurity by a totalitarian system eager to exploit her as a symbol to sway the hearts and minds of a desperate populace. Our protagonist, Mazzy Goodwin, like Katniss Everdeen, is motivated by concern for a younger sister and assisted by a stalwart boy from back home as she navigates the treacherous schemes of an oppressive governing body that cloaks its atrocities in the rhetoric of freedom and salvation. Also like Katniss, who took on the mantle of the Mockingjay, Mazzy embodies an avian theme: She’s called the Seraphine, named for the angelic wings that grow from her back. This is where the two works diverge: Where Collins concentrates on realistic worldbuilding and grounds her heroine in a wealth of naturalistic detail, Heathcock crafts something closer to a fable; Mazzy’s wings are desultorily explained late in the narrative, and the workings of the sinister Novae Terrae, a militaristic cult led by the enigmatic visionary Jo Sam, are conveyed in fleeting glimpses and evoked in poetically vague descriptions. Miraculous technological wonders and climatological disasters buffet the suffering multitudes who, as ever, are subject to the whims of Mother Nature and human nature, equally destructive forces immune to reason. Mazzy remains a passive character through much of the action, becoming embroiled in a revolutionary plot she doesn’t really understand, and her dour, humorless perspective, while understandable, casts a pall over the punishing narrative. Ultimately, though, Heathcock produces striking alchemy from these unpromising elements, as the cumulative impact of elusive, evocative details and a growing sense of moral horror deliver an emotional wallop that leaves the reader feeling unnerved and strangely bereft.

The dystopian ingredients are familiar, but Heathcock combines them in a potent metaphorical stew.
destroy a large Atlanta cryo facility and its contents, effectively committing genocide, so the Resurrectionists woke Alabine to help sway public opinion. Alabine protests—until the rebels disclose that Max is also frozen, and they plan to liberate and resuscitate him, as well. Howes thoughtfully extrapolates from current events to create a chilling, all-too-plausible future. Vividly sketched, deeply sympathetic characters and high-stakes, adrenaline-fueled plotting propel the tale to a cathartic close. 

Intelligent, action-packed, and emotionally charged.

**God’s Children Are Little Broken Things**

Ifeakandu, Arinze

A Public Space Books (224 pp.)

$16.95 paper | June 7, 2022

978-1-7345907-1-5

Nine blazing stories about the joys and tribulations of queer love in contemporary Nigeria.

The stories of Ifeakandu’s debut collection are nothing less than breathtaking and daring, each exploring queer relationships in all their nuanced and unpredictable configurations: secret romances, brief but passionate encounters, relationships that are tested by cultural pressures. At the centers of these carefully constructed stories are queer men whose identities and romances are constantly ruptured by political turmoil and by stratified social and cultural ideas of masculinity. What, these characters ask themselves, makes a man? How to reconcile the tension between one’s interior self—one’s burning hopes and desires—and the expectations that family and tradition have foisted on him? The opening story, “The Dreamer’s Litany,” examines the relationship between Auwal, a small-business owner, and Chief, a wealthy and flamboyant man who promises to help Auwal with his business for a price; the two men develop a sexual relationship, though Auwal is not convinced he can really trust Chief and his wife begins to suspect there’s something taking place between them. “Where the Heart Sleeps” is a moving tale of Nonye, a young woman returning to her father’s house for his funeral. There, she gradually opens up to Tochukwu, her father’s partner, whom she has resented for taking her father from her mother and her. The title story follows the romance of Lotanna and Kamsi, two college boys who must constantly renegotiate their commitments to each other as family and social pressure threaten to pry them apart. In “What the Singers Say About Love,” a young musician’s ascent into the public eye requires that he subdue major pieces of himself and pull away from the man he loves. Using a variety of forms, including stories broken up into numbered sections and stories employing first-, second-, and third-person narrators, many of these tales bear the emotional weight and complexity of novels, with the reader pulled forward by lucid prose and excellent pacing. Most compelling, though, are the unforgettable characters and the relationships that hurl them into the unknown and dangerous depths of their desires.

Deftly capturing the richness and dangers of romantic connection, these stories complicate and reimagine queer narratives.

**The Family Remains**

Jewell, Lisa

Atria (384 pp.)

$25.20 | Aug. 9, 2022

978-1-9821-7889-5

In this sequel to *The Family Upstairs* (2019), two siblings continue to deal with the fallout of their traumatic childhoods. Lucy Lamb is living with her brother, Henry, after the two have been reunited, and she’s focused on reconnecting with her eldest daughter, Libby, and building a more stable life for her younger kids. But when Libby locates her birth father, Phin Thomsen, who lived as a teenager with Lucy and Henry—all
their parents were part of a cult led by Phin’s father and died together in a suicide pact—the family begins making plans to go visit him in Botswana until word comes that Phin has taken a leave of absence from his job. After tracing Phin to Chicago, Henry leaves abruptly to go find him and cuts off all communication, prompting deep concern in Lucy, who knows of Henry’s dangerous obsession with Phin (which goes so deep that Henry has fashioned himself to look like Phin). Meanwhile, human remains have been found in the Thames and traced to the childhood home Libby inherited, which leaves all three wanted for police questioning when it is determined the victim lived with Henry, Lucy, and Libby in their childhood home and was murdered. Separately, an unrelated character named Rachel Rimmer remembers her disastrous marriage when she is contacted about her abusive husband’s murder. In this latest thriller, Jewell dives back into the psyche of Henry Lamb, one of her most unsettling characters. She attempts to weave together four narratives but takes too long to develop connections among the disparate stories (especially Rachel’s), which means the novel is weighted down with unrelated murder victims and minor characters, both of which detract from the suspense of Henry’s pursuit of Phin.

An unevenly paced thriller that fails to match its predecessor’s level of intensity.

RARE STUFF
Kaplan, Brett Ashley
Spytyn Duyvil (354 pp.)
$20.00 paper  |  Aug. 1, 2022
978-1-956005-57-8

Yiddish-speaking whales, a suitcase packed with secrets, and one young woman’s desperate attempt to find answers.

When Sidney Zimmerman’s father, Aaron, dies, she doesn’t feel any longed-for closure. Instead, cleaning out his apartment, she uncovers a suitcase hidden in the back of the closet and full of such seemingly random items as a red high-heeled shoe, a paperweight, and a photograph of a man in a fedora, and, on his desk, the manuscript of the unpublished novel Slobgollion. The items in the suitcase turn out to be cryptic clues about Sid’s mother, Dorothy, an amateur cetologist—a scientist who studies whales—who disappeared when Sid was a child. Sid’s search for answers about what happened to her mother spurs the novel along. Things fall into place as Sid and her boyfriend, André, follow Aaron’s mysterious breadcrumbs, and people spring up to help as if placed there by magic: “We’ve been scripted, we’re in one of dad’s books, surely, yet another person hails us as if he jumped out of the suitcase, breathing.” The novel alternates among Sid’s perspective, the long-suffering André’s perspective, and chapters from Aaron’s unpublished manuscript featuring Yiddish-speaking whales trying to save the world from environmental collapse. Kaplan packs a lot into her novel, from cautionary tales about conservation to somewhat superficial discussions on interracial relationships, police brutality, and genocide. And while the novel’s ambitious scope could easily have been its downfall, it’s saved by descriptions of tender longing for connection and purpose, particularly realized in André’s chapters, as well as a soft, magical tone.

A dreamy story with surprising emotional resonance.

CYCLORAMA
Langer, Adam
Bloomsbury (352 pp.)
$27.00  |  Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-63557-806-5

A troupe of teenage actors confronts Anne Frank’s legacy.

“We don’t need the Nazis to destroy us; we’re destroying ourselves.” Langer takes Otto Frank’s chilling remark as the epigraph for an ambitious novel that
This is my story in all its nakedness. It is the truth as much as I remember it. I tell you this because it’s been many years since it occurred and sometimes, even I don’t believe that it happened. Yet, it did.

Replete with mystical, magical details, this novel deals with transcendent themes that relate to our very existence.

“This a deeply moving story of spiritual awakening! East meets West in the life of John Asanga, a young man of Indian ancestry coming of age in America.”
—Soul & Spirit Magazine

“One man’s personal and spiritual adventure makes for a profound and intriguing tale.”
—Kirkus Reviews

For All Inquiries, Please Email douglas@yogaalovestory.com • yogaalovestory.com
reminds readers that the social and political seeds of Nazism have not been obliterated. It’s 1982, and in a suburban high school north of Chicago, 10 students are vying for a part in *The Diary of Anne Frank*, the annual spring play. Who will be chosen, and who will star, depends on the whims of their director, Tyrus Densmore. Abusive, predatory, and manipulative, Densmore is filled with shame and anger. Mired in an unhappy marriage, the father of a son with mental illness, and a failed actor himself, he knows that the power he wields over his vulnerable students “was inversely proportional to the power he had over his own life.” The teenage characters include some predictable types—bully, nerd, slut, rebel, closeted gay; a few are arrogant and entitled, others are needy and wounded. Insecure about who they are, they perform for one another, not only on stage. As one boy later admits, he “often had trouble telling the difference between when he was feeling an emotion or just acting it out.” Langer focuses each chapter on one character’s role (Anne, Mr. Frank, Peter Van Daan), underscoring the novel’s connection to the play, which becomes more overt when we meet up with the cast members in 2016. No longer angst-riddled teens, they are adults in their 50s who, it turns out, have been indelibly shaped by their performance in *Anne Frank* and, they painfully realize, by their interactions with Densmore. The drama of the second half of the novel recalls the persecution and victimization that led to Anne’s tragic end and raises the novel’s overarching question: What responsibility does each of us have to one another? A somber warning about the insidious consequences of hatred.

THE BEST IS YET TO COME
Macomber, Debbie
Ballantine (304 pp.)
$21.99 | July 12, 2022
978-1-98481-884-3

In Oceanside, Washington, an injured veteran undergoing court-ordered therapy and community service after a drunken brawl finds purpose as he puts his war-induced demons to rest. John Cade Lincoln Jr. joined the Army after a screaming match with his father, making it clear he wouldn’t be entering law school and joining the family law firm. Fast-forward nearly six years, and Cade is an angry veteran who’s still reeling after having been injured and seeing his two best friends die in Afghanistan. He doesn’t want to do physical therapy, and he doesn’t want to go to counseling. When he’s arrested following a drunken brawl, the judge—the mother of a vet who took his own life—orders him to do both as well as community service. Hope Goodwin has moved to Oceanside in an attempt to redefine her life after the loss of her twin brother, an Army Ranger, in the Afghan desert. She’s a teacher and school counselor, and she gets to know Cade when they end up volunteering at the same animal shelter. A second plotline follows a handful of Hope’s students: Spencer, a geeky computer nerd, is infatuated with Callie, who’s on the dance team and dates the high school quarterback, Scott. Callie’s twin brother, Ben, is also on the football team, and when Callie discovers that he’s been using drugs, she convinces Spencer to hack into his computer to try to figure out where they’re coming from so she can stop him. Macomber has a staccato writing style that takes some getting used to, and her storytelling leans toward telling rather than showing, with characters who deviate only slightly from archetypes: the wounded vet, the woman who loves him, the lecherous female barfly, the bullying high school quarterback, the beautiful dance-squad girlfriend, the nerdy computer kid, etc.

A story that focuses on the idea of redemption through love and understanding.
An international and unforgettable collection of memoir and fiction that explores experiences of mental and physical illness, and of care giving.

“...an extraordinary anthology, an astutely put together collection, that peels away the layers of health so we can see the complexity underneath... a visceral understanding of the fierceness of being alive and the love that forms the scaffold of how we care for one another.”
—Michelle Johnston, Emergency Physician & Author of Dustfall: A Novel

“I only wish that this anthology would find its way into the hands of every trainee health professional.”
—Joanna Nell, Author of The Single Ladies of Jacaranda Retirement Village

“A rich and varied set of ailment-related works.”
—Kirkus Reviews

For All Inquiries, Please Email sarahsasson01@gmail.com sarahsassonblog.wordpress.com/signs-of-life-anthology
Menopause brings more gains than losses for three women in this entertaining thriller.
When menopause arrives for the three women who are the protagonists in this book, they don’t bother with estrogen therapy or worry about chin hairs. They develop superpowers. Harriett Osborne kicks her high-powered advertising career and her dweeby husband to the curb and lets her gift for botany flourish, growing plants for pleasure and for poison (and to really annoy the head of her homeowners association). Jo Levison is first alarmed by the rage that literally sets fire flowing from her hands—hot flashes with a vengeance—but she learns to channel it and starts a successful fitness and self-defense business. Nessa James’ emerging gift is a somber one that’s been handed down by the women in her family: The dead speak to her, but only the dead who need help. All three women live in the manicured little beach town of Mattauk, where bad things aren’t supposed to happen. But when Jo and Harriett accompany Nessa to a secluded beach, where one of those voices is calling to her, they find the body of a young woman decomposing in a garbage bag. And, Nessa says, hers is not the only ghost there. The response from local police is barely apathetic; the cops seem to be protecting someone, or all the someones who live behind gates at the high-priced end of the island. That just makes the trio push harder to find out what’s going on. What they uncover echoes the Jeffrey Epstein case and too many other cases of powerful men exploiting women and getting away with it—or maybe not. The novel takes on serious issues but doesn’t take itself too seriously; there’s plenty of mordant humor, a suspenseful plot, and mostly brisk pacing.

Crime fiction, superpower fantasy, and sharp satire about sexism and ageism mesh for a satisfying read.

THE DAUGHTER OF DOCTOR MOREAU
Moreno-Garcia, Silvia
Del Rey (320 pp.)
$28.00 | July 19, 2022
978-0-593-35533-6

A new spin on the H.G. Wells classic from the genre-hopping Mexican Canadian novelist.
Young 19th-century woman Carlota Moreau has spent her whole life in Yaxaktun, a ranch in northern Yucatán, Mexico, and that’s just fine with her: “I feel as if Yaxaktun is a beautiful dream and I wish to dream it forever,” she tells a visitor to the isolated property. She lives there with her beloved father, Dr. Moreau, whom she considers “the sun in the sky, lighting her days.” They’re not the only ones on the ranch, however—it’s populated by Dr. Moreau’s “hybrids,” part human and part animal, the results of the doctor’s bizarre experiments. Looming over everything is Hernando Lizalde, Dr. Moreau’s patron, who bankrolls the doctor’s laboratory in hopes that he’ll eventually create hybrids that are fit to work on his haciendas, but he seldom visits the ranch. On one of those visits, he brings along Montgomery, a self-loathing, hard-drinking English hunter whom Dr. Moreau hopes to hire as a mayordomo, an overseer of the property and its hybrids. Montgomery takes the job, and six years later things begin to fall apart: Hernando loses patience with the doctor’s slow pace, and his son, Eduardo, visits the ranch and falls for Carlota; the results of their relationship threaten to destroy everything Dr. Moreau has worked for. Meanwhile, Carlota begins to question her adored father’s experiments; the doctor acknowledges the creatures suffer greatly but insists that “pain must be endured, for without it there’d be no sweetness.” Moreno-Garcia’s novel starts a little slowly, but there’s a reason for that—the setup is crucial to the book’s action-packed second half, and the payoff is worth it. Moreno-Garcia’s previous work has spanned genres—horror in *Mexican Gothic* (2020), noir in *Velvet Was the Night* (2021)—and in this volume, she deftly combines fantasy, adventure, and even romance; the result is hard to classify but definitely a lot of fun. This isn’t the first book to riff on H.G. Wells’ *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), but it’s definitely one of the better ones.

A fun literary remix.

THE CHANGE
Miller, Kirsten
Morrow/HarperCollins (480 pp.)
$27.99 | May 3, 2022
978-0-06-314404-0

*Menopause brings more gains than losses for three women in this entertaining thriller.*

When menopause arrives for the three women who are the protagonists in this book, they don’t bother with estrogen therapy or worry about chin hairs. They develop superpowers. Harriett Osborne kicks her high-powered advertising career and her dweeby husband to the curb and lets her gift for botany flourish, growing plants for pleasure and for poison (and to really annoy the head of her homeowners association). Jo Levison is first alarmed by the rage that literally sets fire flowing from her hands—hot flashes with a vengeance—but she learns to channel it and starts a successful fitness and self-defense business. Nessa James’ emerging gift is a somber one that’s been handed down by the women in her family: The dead speak to her, but only the dead who need help. All three women live in the manicured little beach town of Mattauk, where bad things aren’t supposed to happen. But when Jo and Harriett accompany Nessa to a secluded beach, where one of those voices is calling to her, they find the body of a young woman decomposing in a garbage bag. And, Nessa says, hers is not the only ghost there. The response from local police is barely apathetic; the cops seem to be protecting someone, or all the someones who live behind gates at the high-priced end of the island. That just makes the trio push harder to find out what’s going on. What they uncover echoes the Jeffrey Epstein case and too many other cases of powerful men exploiting women and getting away with it—or maybe not. The novel takes on serious issues but doesn’t take itself too seriously; there’s plenty of mordant humor, a suspenseful plot, and mostly brisk pacing.

Crime fiction, superpower fantasy, and sharp satire about sexism and ageism mesh for a satisfying read.

AN HONEST LIVING
Murphy, Dwyer
Viking (288 pp.)
$26.00 | July 26, 2022
978-0-59-34924-6

When a lawyer’s investigation leads him into the New York rare book world, he finds himself embroiled in a drama of corruption and lies.

Hired by wealthy Anna Reddick to prove that her husband, whom she’s about to divorce, has been selling her rare books, the unnamed narrator infiltrates the Poquelin Society, “a scholarly society dedicated to the art, science and preservation of the book, whatever that meant,” in order to entrap him into a “controlled buy.” This seemingly easy job will lead the narrator to a second one that involves a probable suicide wrapped in a convoluted web of impersonation and misdirection and book auctions, and then leads him to a small-time crook who’s suddenly hit it big with waterfront development in Brooklyn. The investigation also puts him in the path of an eccentric female novelist who seems to have stepped out of the pages of Hemingway or Chandler with an edgy charm and casual cruelty that only make her more fascinating. The novel is set in 2005, but the style and the narrative voice feel comfortably rooted in earlier decades. The self-conscious tone and the nostalgia—characters go see old
movies and talk about old books—render the plot almost secondary to the setting. In the end, not that much happens, but the characters live and love and fight and die against a backdrop of New York City, its seasons and its landmarks, its underbelly and its flaws. The lawyer/detective ends his quest a little more jaded, a little sadder than he began. To quote a movie that is frequently invoked here, “Forget it...it’s Chinatown.” A bitter-sweet love letter to New York and times gone by.

More style than substance, but fans of noir fiction will feel right at home.

SMALL ANGELS
Owen, Lauren
Random House (400 pp.)
$27.00 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-0-593-24220-9

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep...and haunted?
Chloe's plans for a picture-perfect destination wedding in the small English town where her husband-to-be, Sam, grew up start to go astray when, during their combination stag and hen party—Hag Night—at a village tavern, she learns some disquieting local lore about the quaint church she's booked for the nuptials. The looming presence of the nearby Mockbeggar Woods makes itself more and more evident as the wedding draws near, and soon Chloe herself is drawn into a centuries-old struggle to appease a menacing force which occupies those woods. The battle to manage this supernatural situation has been

THE LIFE OF A MAYFLY CAN BE HARROWING OR HILARIOUS, BUT IT IS ALWAYS SHORT. SO, TOO, THE SHORT STORY.

“...funny and soulful... riveting to the end.”
—IndieReader, 4.5/5 stars

“...little short of miraculous.”
—The BookLife Prize, 10 out of 10
shrouded by the reclusive Gonnes family, including four spirited girls, who for generations have run Blanch Farm at the edge of the woods. The Gonnes have endured inexplicable losses despite the rites and rituals they have developed to protect themselves (and their neighbors) from an angry specter that seems to be growing more demanding as the wedding approaches. Owen weaves together stories told by many voices — past and present — in her updated gothic ghost story, creating a portrait of the damage done by ancient injuries and the toxic legacy created by family secrets. The strong bonds between the Gonnes sisters are tested by misunderstandings, and a shy romance between one of the sisters and a village girl has unforeseen repercussions years later. While including elements of gothic literature (young women in trouble! haunted places! an unhappy ghost!), Owen updates the genre slyly with references to Chloe's awareness that she's like the girl in a ghost story she's envisioning inside her head and the encouraging, therapeutic advice dispensed by a well-meaning member of the spirit world who aids in the fight against the disgruntled ghost in the woods.

Owen tells an old story in a satisfying new way.

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**PINA**

*Peu, Titaua*

*Trans. by Jeffrey Zuckerman*

Restless Books (320 pp.)

978-1-63206-155-3

A Prizewinning Tahitian novelist Peu exposes the human toll of colonialism and poverty in this polar opposite of a picture postcard.

“Every story begins with a family story. Every family has its people bound by blood.” Nine-year-old Pina, living in a shack on the outskirts of Papeete, the eighth of nine children, has her mean, worn-out mother and Auguste, her violent, alcoholic father. When he falls into a coma after a drunken-driving accident, Pina goes to live with relatives in the countryside. But her relief from abuse is short-lived. Against all expectation, Auguste survives, now convinced he’s on a mission from God to cleanse his family and Tahiti itself of immorality. Told in symphonic chapters from varying points of view, the novel follows the family and community through violent events and political unrest, culminating in a rapid-fire series of shocking crimes. Peu paints a blunt, unsparring picture of island life: Young girls are drugged and assaulted at Epstein-esque orgies; gay men are beaten in homophobic hate crimes; poverty, alcoholism, and abuse are rampant. Pina’s sister Hannah fled to Paris yet can’t escape the legacy of colonialism: “Vaita, the first prophet, the visionary, had foretold: in one or two or three centuries the earth will be despoiled, the oceans emptied out, desecrated forever. And their children tormented and lost for having forgotten the very name of the moon that saw their birth.” Colonialism, one character says, “is limited to no era, to no age. It's simply there. It's simply, always been there. It's changed a bit over time, but fundamentally it's all the same. The soldiers are gone, replaced by Golden Boys straight out of France's fanciest business school.” And the burden is borne by people like Pina, “a tender sacrifice on the altar of squalor.”

A scalding corrective to the romantic Western view of French Polynesia written with authority, urgency, and compassion.
“A British classics professor intersperses her lockdown diary with a taxonomy of ancient systems of prophecy.”

DELPHI
Pollard, Clare
Avid Reader Press (208 pp.)
$26.00 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-982197-89-6

A British classics professor intersperses her lockdown diary with a taxonomy of ancient systems of prophecy.

The unnamed narrator of Pollard’s debut novel titles each of her short chapters with a method of foretelling the future, starting with “Theomancy: Prophecy by Foretelling Events” and ending with “Dactylomancy: Prophecy by Means of Finger Movements.” Upon a random check, even the kookier-sounding ones—“Urticariaomancy: Prophecy by Itches,” “Ololygmancy: Prophecy by the Howling of Dogs”—are authentic. The entries narrate experiences and emotions familiar from our recent collective experiment in uncertainty, from home schooling to craft cocktails to Zoom exhaustion and news addiction. In fact, except for some slight variations since the book is set in the U.K., it all feels so familiar and real that it has the feeling of a time capsule that’s been opened many years too soon—though Pollard, the author of six books of poetry, is at pains to bookend her narrative with assurances that it is fictional. The narrator teaches a screenful of students with their cameras off, deals with her 10-year-old son’s increasing dependence on screens even as she follows on her own screen the unfolding nightmares of Sarah Everard (a young woman who was murdered in London) and Donald Trump. She tries an I Ching app, visits an online psychic, does tarot readings. She keeps getting the family happiness card even as her husband steps up his drinking and the marriage frays. Finally she decides to jump the fence and go for a walk only to run into an acquaintance who complains about her au pair, leading her to rush home in horror. “I haven’t missed small talk” is one of many wry, relatable moments—but these might be funnier later on. Here and there, big plot elements drop in like stones, with little buildup or aftermath, including a last-minute bit of terrifying melodrama with mythic overtones.

Re-creates the particular frustration, tedium, and fear of 2020 and 2021 with depressing verisimilitude.

STOOD BEFORE A WORLD
THAT TEEETERS WITHIN YOUR REACH
WOULD YOU DARE? WHICH WAY?

While this is obviously a character-driven tale—even secondary players are adeptly developed—it’s the meticulous worldbuilding and extensive backstory that make Magleby’s series opener so effortlessly immersive.”

“...masterful worldbuilding, a rich tapestry of character-centric threads, and nonstop action and adventure make this a must-read for those who enjoy shelf-bending and genre-blending storylines.”

“An absolute grand-slam first installment of an SF/fantasy series.”
—Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation or Information on Publishing and Film Rights, Email Sterlingktb@gmail.com • reddit.com/r/Magleby
Thirty years in the future, following widespread environmental disasters, a newspaper reporter tracks down a pipeline manager responsible for massive crimes against the planet.

The target, Robert Cave, has been hiding in Mexico, having escaped Nuremberg-like trials in Toronto that sent a rogues’ gallery of energy executives to prison in the wake of sweeping global protests known as the Upheavals. The reporter, Jack Henry, who is from the Pacific Northwest, first encounters Cave in a Mexican coffee shop. The men instantly bond over Mark Twain: Jack is reading Huckleberry Finn; Cave, Tom Sawyer. They go to a museum and a bullfight together and have great chats. Increasingly, Jack is torn between his affection for the elderly and elegant Cave and his plan to set Cave up for “the Donaldson”—sandbagging his subject with tough questions, on camera, in the manner of Sam Donaldson, the famed TV reporter of yore. Shortly after witnessing a full solar eclipse with his new girlfriend, Sobie, Jack is stricken with a debilitating sickness. Is he experiencing the swell? Or is it just a very bad cold? Sobie is convinced that he’s overly controlling and possibly abusive. Her concern is only to be expected—after all, Mikki and Cave have met with a “publishing legend” who was among his rejectors.

Saddled with the name of his “father’s favorite writer” by his colonialthrowback Jamaican parents, aspiring author Kipling Darling is desperate to be published and will do seemingly anything to realize his dream. Encouraged in writing by his schoolteachers and believing himself “useless at anything but,” Kip built himself “useless at anything but,” Kip built his personality from the expectations and literary opinions of others and the blueprint for his future from those he saw as his predecessors, assimilating Dostoevsky’s style by repeatedly rereading Crime and Punishment and leaving his family in London for New York because fellow “skinny gay black” writer James Baldwin had found success in America. More than recognition of his work or talent, Kip seems to crave the legitimization that acceptance from the predominantly White world of publishing would signify, as he “flounder[s] in the wake of a peculiar invention called Whiteness.” Having been kicked out of his MFA program and despairing over a spate of rejections for his historical novel about E.M. Forster’s relationship with Egyptian tram conductor Mohammed El Adl, Kip receives an inexplicable invitation to meet with a “publishing legend” who was among his rejectors. In the meeting, she implies that a rewrite from Mohammed’s time, “a commercial media conglomerate” will acquire the publisher, and the editor expresses nebulous doubts that she will be

**AN EXCITING, ADRENALINE-FILLED TALE OF SURFING AND ROCK SCRAMBLING.**

**THE SWELL**
Reynolds, Allie
Putnam (368 pp.)
$27.00 | July 19, 2022
978-0-593-18787-6

The author of Shiver (2021) moves from the mountains to the beach as a passionate surfer finds herself caught in a deadly adventure.

As this psychological thriller opens, sports therapist Kenna Ward flies into Sydney from her home in England, determined to rescue her best friend, Mikki, from her new fiance, Jack: Kenna hasn’t met Jack, but from what she’s gathered long-distance from Mikki, she’s convinced that he’s overly controlling and possibly abusive. Her concern is only to be expected—after all, Mikki and Sydney from her home in England, determined to rescue her best friend, Mikki, from her new fiance, Jack: Kenna hasn’t met Jack, but from what she’s gathered long-distance from Mikki, she’s convinced that he’s overly controlling and possibly abusive. Her concern is only to be expected—after all, Mikki and

**DENIAL**
Raymond, Jon
Simon & Schuster (240 pp.)
$26.00 | July 26, 2022
978-1-982181-63-3

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allowed to continue acquiring literary fiction after the merger is complete. Thus Kip is launched on a frenzied three-week rewrite quest, and he barricades himself in the basement of the Brooklyn brownstone he shares with his well-intentioned but oblivious White psychotherapist husband, Ben. As boundaries between Mohammed and Kip in his isolation begin to dissolve and a mysterious entity appears, Kip is propelled into a still larger quest to find his “true voice” in a wilderness beyond the confines of Whiteness itself. Though the result is an over-plotted and lopsided narrative with a sometimes-tedious start crawling toward a rushed ending, the book still shines at times in the elegance of its prose and its depictions of a stark arctic landscape and in Kip’s musings through Mohammed’s story on the intersections of colonialism, White supremacy, and queer love, particularly the liberatory potentialities of queer love between Black men.

An ambitious if uneven debut exploring the possibilities of love, self-realization, and art under and beyond the White gaze.
Sarah. Commentators quickly break out the hashtags (SaraswatiShame) and liken her to Rachel Dolezal, the White college instructor who presented herself as Black. But Saraswati doesn’t retreat. She insists that race, much like gender, can be fluid and that her leaning into racial issues represents a noble rejection of Whiteness. “So it’s okay to transcend your gender, but a category as obviously made-up as race should be more fixed and inflexible than sex?” she asks Nivedita, and the narrative is thick with such questions. Sanyal mocks Saraswati’s privilege and sanctimony but takes her perspective seriously; the book refers often to writers on race, gender, and postcolonialism, from Frantz Fanon to bell hooks to Zadie Smith. Though the novel is effectively a long series of conversations in an apartment among Saraswati, Nivedita, and other interlocutors, it has a surprising liveliness thanks to Sanyal’s knack for sending up academia and social media pile-ons and her canny interweaving of Hindu mythology. (The goddess Kali provides an extended metaphor.) “What it means to be white must be allowed to change and expand,” Saraswati insists, and the novel is an eyebrow-raising prompt to debate the matter.

A deliberately over-the-top but sensitive take on multiple touchy subjects.

THE DEEPEST BLACK
Silvis, Randall
Poisoned Pen (320 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-72822-361-2

The latest mind-bending thriller from Silvis is “inspired by true events”—though provoked might be more exact.

Sitting at a Chinese buffet minding his own business, the narrator, one Randall Silvis, is accosted by Thomas Kennedy, who, accurately categorizing Silvis as a veteran crime novelist, sits down unbidden, unfolds a wild story about potential connections between a triple murder and the discovery of an abandoned baby the following day, and invites Silvis to look into the case, or cases, himself. There doesn’t seem to be much mystery about the murders: Justin Cirillo, who broke into the home of Dianne Burchette with Jolene Mrozek and Eddie Hudack, has already confessed to shooting Dianne; her boyfriend, Barry Faye; and her 7-year-old daughter, Michelle Jordan. But nobody can identify Baby Doe or explain why she was abandoned in the woods near New Wilmington, Pennsylvania, with a concussion and a broken leg. Unable to find Kenneday after their initial meeting, Silvis approaches Eddie Hudack’s sister, Phoebe, a tenant in Dianne’s house, for the first of several maddeningly elliptical interviews about the facts behind Justin’s unexplained rampage. But his discoveries about the possible relationships among Justin, Dianne, and Baby Doe are rapidly overshadowed by a series of hints about the possible involvement of “men in black, Dan Aykroyd, UFOs, time-traveling cops, Hells Angels, child sexual abuse, disappearing police and prosecutors.” Dazzled and dazed by the otherworldly revelations visited on him, Silvis can only conclude that “a war is being fought on this planet for the minds and souls of all of us.”

A fearfully ambitious muddle whose most lucid feature is the appended Reading Group Guide.

DARK EARTH
Stott, Rebecca
Random House (320 pp.)
$27.00 | July 19, 2022
978-0-8129-8911-3

The author of In the Days of Rain (2017) and Darwin’s Ghosts (2012) returns to fiction with a mix of history and fantasy.

“Dark earth” is the name geologists give to the layer of dirt—rich in organic matter, sometimes flecked with artifacts—that indicates a long period of human settlement. The narrative that Stott constructs here is built from an actual archaeological find—a Saxon brooch unearthed in the ruins of a bathhouse—and the figurative dark earth of the city once called Londinium. Beginning in the first century B.C.E., Britain was a Roman province for almost 400 years, and the historical record for the 500-year period after the occupiers withdrew is scant. Stott builds a rich world from fragments of fact and mythic imagining. Her central character, Isla, lives with her sister, Blue, and their father on an island in the Thames. A smith with the rare gift of making “firetongued” swords, Isla’s father is captive to Osric, Seax Lord of the South Lands; when he dies, Isla must deliver a sword to Osric without revealing that her father broke the taboo against teaching a woman his craft. Once she and Blue arrive at Osric’s court, they have to navigate complex politics after having been raised in isolation. Ultimately, they will have to flee for their lives into the “Ghost City” that has fallen into ruin since the “Sun Kings” disappeared. Stott presents a diverse Dark Ages. Isla and Blue are friends with—and protected by—Caicus, descended from a line of African soldiers recruited by the Romans and now working for the Saxons who rule the south of Britain. There are Christian priests and Wiccans and a woman named Crowther who is a priest to Isis. In the Ghost City, Isla and Blue meet runaways from many lands. Most of them are women, and Isla falls in love with one of them. The conflict at the climax of this novel is not a clash of arms but a battle between brute power and cunning, between selfish greed and communal strength.

Stott fills holes in written history with magic, mythic resonance, and 21st-century wish fulfillment.
GOLDEN AGE
Wang Xiaobo
Trans. by Yan Yan
Astra House (288 pp.)
$26.00 | July 26, 2022
978-1-662-60121-7

The late Chinese writer’s (1952-1997) comic take on oppressive regimes, large and small.
Wang was a so-called intellectual youth when he was sent from Beijing to rural Yunnan Province during China’s Cultural Revolution, which used such rustication to battle perceived bourgeois elements. A similar fate befalls 21-year-old Wang Er, his main character and narrator in this loosely structured novel, originally published as three separate novellas. The book’s opening section (which appeared in English in the collection Wang in Love and Bondage, 2007) has him recalling the Yunnan years from two decades later. He works as an ox herder but falls afoul of officialdom mainly for sleeping with a married doctor. Their affair is conveyed with an earthiness that runs throughout the book, including several mentions of Wang’s generous endowment (though that’s nothing compared to the more than 25 references in five pages to another man’s injured member). In the second section, Wang is a 30-year-old college lecturer dealing with academic bureaucracy and pettiness. In the last, he’s 40 and recalls one teacher’s romance and another’s suicide. Coming from a country known for political and cultural censorship, the book is noteworthy for its sexual candor—even amid wonderful euphemisms—and wide-ranging irreverence, abetted by a voice that is variously smart, quirky, or sarcastic. The narrative often has the casual disorder of journal entries, and the narrator sometimes calls to mind the hapless but resourceful hero of Jaroslav Hašek’s The Good Soldier Schweik, though he’s not so much the faux naïf. While entertaining, however, Wang’s book suffers from unevenness in the writing, rough spots in the translation by Yan, and an overall lack of cohesion.

An unusual writer worth discovering, flaws and all, for his humor and flair.

“She who rides horses...”
Sarah V. Barnes
A Saga of the Ancient Steppes: Book One

ISBN: 978-1-7369673-3-1

“...impeccably detailed novel...”
“Barnes skillfully develops key relationships in a manner that will make readers invested in the narrative.”
“...a brave girl’s journey with a well-developed setting and characters.”
—Kirkus Reviews

For All Inquiries, Please Email lilithhousepress@gmail.com • sarahvbarnes.com
KALEIDOSCOPE
Wong, Cecily
Dutton (120 pp.)
$26.00 | July 5, 2022
978-0-593-18445-5

The Brighton family—biracial Chinese American owners of the chic, globally sourced clothing empire Kaleidoscope—may look enviable, but they are far from being as perfect, and as glamorous, as they seem.

Riley Brighton grows up in the shadow of her older sister, Morgan. Two years her senior, Morgan is the popular, artistically talented counterpart to Riley’s shy, studious self. In the early 2000s, the inseparable duo grow up at their parents’ Oregon health foods store until a fateful trip to India leads the family to shift into selling imported apparel and accessories at their new venture, Kaleidoscope. The brand launches to enormous success, and when both daughters enroll in college in New York City, their parents tag along, purchasing a massive Upper West Side townhouse as the new Brighton headquarters despite Riley’s desire for independence. When Riley’s high school crush, James, visits the townhouse to profile the Brightons for a magazine, worlds intersect and continue to collide when Riley spots James at her favorite under-the-radar downtown noodle joint. Told in beautiful detail with quippy dialogue and visceral New York details, the first half of the book ends with a tragedy that threatens to break apart the family and their business. Riley finds it hard to cope, and she and James eventually jet off to India, traveling the globe while questioning everything they once knew and learning more about the people they love than they ever wanted to know. Told from various perspectives, skipping backward and forward through time, the kaleidoscopic narrative allows readers to form their own opinions about the Brightons and their decisions, getting a glimpse of the way people behave on the worst days of their lives and thereafter.

A deftly written family saga that explores—and challenges—the contemporary American dream and the meaning of home and family.

TILL THE WHEELS FALL OFF
Zellar, Brad
Coffee House (328 pp.)
$17.95 paper | July 12, 2022
978-1-56689-639-9

A novel about the power of music for a misfit teen in 1980s small-town Minnesota—like a more rueful, meditative High Fidelity.

It’s 1999, and Matt Carnap is back in his dying hometown, living in the apartment his uncle has created for him in the press box of a disused municipal football stadium. Matt is spinning his wheels, wandering downtown to catalog its ruins and reminiscing about what he now considers his golden age—the tween years, when his mom (now dead) was married to Russ, a charming, ambitious record collector who spent his time and passion DJing in the roller rink he owned. Matt’s mother was distant, even neglectful, and the marriage was never hearty, but she couldn’t fail to see the value in the alliance her awkward boy, suffering from attention-deficit issues and a lifelong, horrendous case of insomnia, forged with his stepfather around rock and funk and skating. Eventually she took up with another man, a nightmarish theater and music teacher/blowhard in a nearby town, and Matt had to move with her into what seemed wretched exile. The rink closed, and Russ took up the itinerant life of the DJ who insists on naming his own tunes. In the years since, Matt’s lost track of Russ, and part of the impetus for moving back is the hope of reconnection. This novel has several features that sound fatal: It’s relentlessly inward (the insular Matt rarely engages with anyone), backward-looking (about 90% flashback), with minimal plot; the tone is nostalgic, even in the end a little hokey; long sections consist largely of playlists of cool music of the 1970s and ’80s. And yet it’s a pleasure: smart, with lots of sentence-level snap, and with much to say about the way that music—really any of life’s animating pleasures and passions, but especially music, for a lonely child of late-20th-century America—becomes not merely a backdrop or soundtrack, but the thread along which one strings a life.

Can a book that’s languidly paced and discursive also be a joy? Yes.

MYSTERY

SOMETHING FISHY
THIS WAY COMES
Allan, Gabby
Kensington (304 pp.)
$15.99 paper | July 26, 2022
978-1-4967-3107-4

A feud worthy of the Hatfields and the McCoys rolls peaceful Santa Catalina Island.

Whitney Dagner, returning from the mainland for a quiet life and the company of her brother and her grandparents, rents a house with her best friend, Maribel Hernandez, who works for the police along with Whitney’s boyfriend, diving expert Felix Ramirez. Even though she grew up on the island, Whitney was never aware of the long-running feud between the Franklins and the Aherns. When Leo Franklin is found dead on the golf course with members of both families on hand, the sheriff, a stalwart Ahern, calls his death a suicide, though his deputy’s willing to consider other avenues suggested to Whitney by the tracks of a golf cart on Leo’s body. Although her grandparents are supposed to be retired, her
grandmother Goldy, who’s come up with a great idea for Whitney’s gift shop, encourages Whitney to investigate while Goldy runs the store. Since no one seems to know just what started the feud, Whitney must do a lot of research at the local newspaper office and ask a lot of nosy questions. Leo’s possible involvement in a Romeo and Juliet romance with an Ahern would certainly have provided a motive for murder. As Whitney soon discovers, however, there are plenty of other possibilities, and it’s up to her to find which of them is behind Leo’s death.

The same stunning background and intriguing characters as Allan’s debut and a much stronger mystery.

Twelve years after his reported death in 1870, Katharine Holloway’s husband is still making trouble for her. Not till after the Devonshire sank with all hands off the coast of Antigua did Kat realize Joseph Bristow wasn’t even her husband; he’d already been married to another woman when he took Kat to the altar and to bed and left her pregnant. Now Charlotte Bristow has come to Mount Street, where Kat works as the Bywater family’s cook, with a bold-faced request: Could Kat join her in looking for a substantial pot of money Joe was reputed to have left behind? Kat, already dedicated to spending every free hour with Grace, the daughter she’s placed with her friend Joanna Millburn so that she can keep the girl’s
existence secret from her employers, is far from eager to collaborate with the woman who looks down on her as a paramour. But encouraged by Daniel McAdam, a friend who does dangerous freelance jobs for Scotland Yard, she agrees to make inquiries and soon learns that Joe not only wasn’t really her husband, he wasn’t really Joseph Bristow, either. He was the leader of a thieving gang who’d surreptitiously returned to London after being transported to Australia, and he wasn’t aboard the Devonshire when it went down but was bashed to death shortly afterward. Apart from the difficulties of reopening a 12-year-old case, Kat finds herself drawn into the orbit of a series of powerful men who’ve linked Joe to a robbery of the Royal Mint that would have provided a handsome legacy well worth it for Kat to have killed him for.

The plotting is a tangled mess, but veteran Ashley gets the upstairs-but-mostly-downstairs milieu just right.

THE MURDER BOOK
Billingham, Mark
Atlantic Monthly (416 pp.)
$26.00 | July 26, 2022
978-0-8021-3968-7

A female serial killer is only the tip of the latest iceberg for DI Tom Thorne. Richard Sumner, who’d planned to find some online “no strings nookie” while his wife was in Liverpool at a conference, ends up minus his ears and his life. Hari Reddy’s latest hookup in Clapham cuts out his tongue before killing him. Only then does a phone tip alert the copper to the mutilated three-week-old corpse of Thomas Bristow in Hadley Wood. The murders are clearly the work of the same woman, and thanks to the panoptic surveillance apparatus of contemporary London, it’s not long before she’s identified as supermarket clerk Rebecca Driver. Only after her arrest do the twists start to come. Instead of denying her guilt, she seems to take pride in it and in her subservient direction by a man Thorne quickly decides is Stuart Nicklin, a prolific killer who escaped prison and kidnapped pathologist Phil Hendricks six years ago. When Thorne interviews Rebecca in prison, she all but laughs in his face. Nicklin, meantime, has started to assert himself in more direct and baleful ways that have Thorne scurrying to protect his girlfriend, forensic psychiatrist Melita Perera; his former partner, Helen Weeks; his current partner, DI Nicola Tanner; and of course Hendricks. But when he can’t even keep his emotions in check successfully enough to avoid threatening another officer whose complaint gets him removed from the case, how can he possibly stay one step ahead of a criminal who’s evidently spent years preparing his revenge?

Another return-of-master-criminal sequel better in parts than as a whole.

A KILLING IN COSTUMES
Bissonnette, Zac
Crooked Lane (320 pp.)
$26.99 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-1-72826-112-6

A pair of unlikely best friends find that the road to acquiring an unmatched collection of materials for their film memorabilia shop is paved with murder. Cindy Cooper and Jay Allan aren’t just best buddies, ex-co-stars of the same soap opera, and business partners; they’re also ex-spouses who ended their marriage when they came out to each other. Now, as they struggle to keep Hooray for Hollywood Movie Memorabilia afloat, a possible lifeline emerges in the person of Yana Tosh, an ancient femme fatale of stage and screen who’s used her late husband’s fortune to assemble an ensemble of costumes, knickknacks, and other stuff fans of classic movies would die for. Along with her financial adviser, Ben Sinclair, Yana plans to award a contract for selling items from her formidable collection to either Hooray for Hollywood or Cypress Auctions. Naturally, Cypress is older and richer, with a killer mailing list. So it’s no surprise when Dylan Redman, who runs Cypress’ entertainment memorabilia program, summons Cindy and Jay to his swanky hotel room in Palm Springs and offers to pay them off if they’ll withdraw from the competition. The idea goes against everything the pair stands for, and they indignantly refuse. Next thing they know, Detective Simon Fletcher calls on them to tell them that Dylan’s been poisoned by someone who visited him that afternoon—someone like them. The other suspects include Yana’s son, Warren Limon; Dylan’s assistant, Eydie Jackson; and Ben Sinclair. But readers who’ve seen the classic movies on which Bissonnette keeps dishing gentle dirt won’t be fooled.

Fans of movie memorabilia will have a field day. Others will wonder what all the fuss is about.

TILL DEATH DO US PART
Carr, John Dickson
Poisoned Pen (272 pp.)
$14.99 paper | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-72826-112-6

Dark rumors lay the groundwork for another vintage locked-room puzzle from the acknowledged master of the form.

A mere six months after Lesley Grant’s arrival in Six Ashes, playwright Dick Markham has persuaded her to let him announce their engagement, thwarting all the villagers who’d been nudging him to pop the question to Cynthia Drew. There’s only one fly in the ointment, but it’s a whopper. Home Office Pathologist Sir Harvey Gilman, who, as The Great Swami, has been telling fortunes inside a tent at a local fete, informs Dick that his beloved has
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fatally poisoned two husbands and one fiance under impossible, and remarkably similar, conditions. No sooner has the pathologist finished his announcement than he’s shot through the tent by Lesley—accidentally, she maintains—and before dawn the next morning, while Harvey is still recovering from his wound, Dick, brought to the scene by an anonymous phone call, finds him poisoned to death inside a locked room. The mystery cries out for Dr. Gideon Fell, that expert in impossible crimes, and he solves this one brilliantly, though the actions he takes against the killer lead abruptly to another murder that somewhat damps the closing pages. According to Carr biographer Douglas Greene, the puzzle turns on the author's own “favorite gimmick” from his storied output, and devotees of the formula will devour it, and the prewar trappings that already made this a period piece when it was first published in 1944, with relish.

Even readers who spot the killer will be hard-pressed to explain exactly how this impossible crime was committed.

**DESPERATE UNDERTAKING**

_Davis, Lindsey_

Minotaur (352 pp.)

$27.99 | July 26, 2022

978-1-25079-988-3

The thespians of ancient Rome are terrorized by a serial killer with a flair for the theatrical.

The piquant 10th case for Flavia Alba begins with a brutal bang, as the intrepid sleuth cradles Phrygia, a dying woman who’s been mauled by Buculus the bull at the Theatre of Balbus; when asked who’d set her up, the woman declares that she was killed by “the undertaker.” The story then flashes back to another murder at the theater, that of Chremes, an actor/man who was hung naked and left to die on a cross earlier that day. Though Flavia’s husband, Tiberius, is a stalwart sidekick, she craves the insights of her father, Marcus Didius Falco, and her batting average.

In her second hunt for a killer, a bookstore owner improves her love life and her batting average.

Though Lizzie Hale owns a romance bookstore in Tinker’s Creek, Ohio, her own romantic prospects were dismal until she solved a murder with the help of baseball player–turned–national park investigator Max Alvarez, who seems to share her attraction. Roped into helping plan the rapidly approaching nuptials of her friend Al Little, who’s marrying Svetlana Anatov,
McFarland as someone else involved with Miranda, pushing Miranda Fox, one of her scoopers, in the back of the ice cream truck. There are plenty of obvious suspects. Miranda was being stalked by Mona’s son, Chet, and she and some fellow scoopers were living it up in a rental along with a handsome local boy who’s dating the daughter of a famous wealthy couple. But Lynette can’t help fearing that Miranda was the object of her husband’s affections. Hayley, who’s been involved with many a murder, learns that Miranda was killed with a rare poison hidden in the odd ice cream flavor she preferred. Chet admits his infatuation but fingers Dustin’s old high school bud Spanky McFarland as someone else involved with Miranda, pushing Hayley to investigate further.

Plenty of suspects interspersed with ice cream recipes beloved of the foodie sleuth.
rack up a slew of homicide arrests and made countless enemies along the way. Even after Zimmer claims ownership of the case for Division North, Vaughn and Monk make it clear that they’re not going away, and Annalisa’s left to figure out whether the well-insured Leo was killed by his cheating wife, one of his partners, or an intruder in a frogman suit Kayla insists she saw in the house. The list of suspects swiftly grows to include Moe Bocks, the used-car dealer Leo was convinced strangled Josie Blanchard back in 1988, and David Edwards, who’s been released years after his conviction for killing Bass Lounge waitress Sandra Romero in a botched robbery that came to a hard ending when the Fantastic Four, arriving in response to her 911 call, shot club owner Cecil Barry dead. As Annalisa, who’s not one to back away from confrontations, gets taken off the case and then placed on medical leave when she’s suspected of murder herself, Schaffhausen piles on the complications and then faces the serious challenge of winding up the case, or cases.

Maybe too much of some very good—that is, very wicked—things.

DEAR LITTLE CORPSES
Upson, Nicola
Crooked Lane (336 pp.)
$26.99 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-1-64385-902-6

As certain war with Germany looms, the evacuation of children from London provides the perfect backdrop for mystery writer Josephine Tey’s latest round of sleuthing.

The arrival of two buses filled with Shoreditch children in the Suffolk village of Polstead is marked by utter chaos. There are so many more arrivals than anyone had expected that the careful arrangements Hilary Lampton, the vicar’s wife, had made for placing the children are turned upside down. When siblings Lillian, Florence, and Edmund Herron refuse to take in Noah Stebbing along with Betty, the vicar’s daughter, and the visiting fete judge Mrs. Carter, better known as fellow mystery writer Margery Allingham. An intensive three-day search for Annie ends when she’s discovered alive and safe, reassuring her mother back in London, though her disappearance is linked to the murder of Hoxton rent collector Frederick Clifford outside Castlefrank House, the home of Noah and Betty’s mother. Neither writer carries off detecting honors, but the historical background and the central situation Upson spins out of it are so strong that few readers will care.

A depressingly timely historical village cozy guaranteed to disturb anyone who cares about Ukrainian refugees.
When Summer runs into Aiko Holt, her high school crush, at a job as an investigator for alcoholic lawyer Jack Finnegan, an old family friend who’s working on a case that will change her life again. Charles Holmes, who’s in prison for multiple homicides, now claims that the murder of Lance Legard, a big man in the music scene, was not one of his. Lance’s widow, Sophia, hires Jack, her ex-lover, to protect the interests of her twin daughters, Cecelia and Olivia, whose father was suspected of molesting them. Cecelia lives at home and never goes out; Olivia graduated from college and moved to California. Finley still lives in the half-finished house Derrick bought when they married, but now she starts to learn things that shake her faith in him. Messy affairs and a love-hate relationship between the twins are only a few of the things that the highly intuitive Finley must work through to solve the mystery.

A complex case fraught with angst and danger ends with surprising revelations.

ROMANCE

CAN’T RESIST HER

Alexander, Kianna
Montlake Romance (300 pp.)
$12.95 paper | July 19, 2022
978-1-5420-3409-8

When two women who were high school flames end up on opposite sides of a controversial building project, sparks fly—and a few sharp nails.

When Summer Graves returns to her hometown, the Ivy neighborhood of Austin, she’s dismayed to find that much has changed from her childhood memories. The neighborhood is rapidly gentrifying. The Sojourner Truth Charter Academy—a school founded by Summer’s grandmother that has been closed for the past 10 years—is slated for demolition to make way for a new multiuse development, and Summer is determined not to let that happen. When Summer runs into Aiko Holt, her high school crush, at the work site, she realizes that she can’t let Aiko be the one who gets away (again!). The only problem: Aiko is the architect in charge of the Sojourner Truth tear down. Will steamy romance prevail, or will the building project tear them asunder? The best moments of this novel are the nuanced explorations of the impact of gentrification on communities of color, portrayals of queer people of color and their stories, and some pretty hot bedroom scenes. As Summer and Aiko’s relationship develops, they each must examine and adjust their opposing perspectives, ultimately mapping out a compromise for the building project that could serve as a model for conscious development projects in the real world. Unfortunately, the writing is uneven, featuring flat dialogue, odd descriptions, and weird choices in narration. Why do we need to know every single outfit every character wears in every scene down to the details of jewelry? Why are all the main characters’ stray thoughts italicized and isolated from the narration? And it’s hard to escape the feeling that we’ve heard this story before: It’s a steamier version of Two Weeks’ Notice starring Sandra Bullock.

A sexy, fun romance that can get dragged down by its own prose.

THE FIXER UPPER

Forsythe, Lauren
Putnam (352 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Aug. 2, 2022
978-0-593-42251-9

In Forsythe’s debut, a woman starts a business “fixing up” hapless men for their frustrated partners, but things get complicated when her former best friend becomes a client. Aly Aresti didn’t grow up with a perfect model of romantic love—her parents’ relationship was rocky, and she often found herself being the one to console or encourage her mother as her father flitted in and out of their lives. As she gets older, she finds herself devoting her energy to helping her boyfriends recognize their true potential—pushing them to dress better, attend classes, and find better jobs. Even at work, Aly can’t help spending her time mentoring younger employees instead of focusing on her own work. As a result, her ex-boyfriends all become vastly more successful after receiving a push from her, and her colleagues are succeeding while she can’t get the promotion she so desperately wants. Together with her work friends, Tola and Eric, Aly starts a side hustle called The Fixer Upper. Together, they’ll work with women who wish their partners were slightly more—more focused on work, more involved in parenting, more invested in personal hygiene. Aly’s track record is so great that eventually she gets hired by a social media influencer and reality TV star named Nicki, who needs help motivating her app developer boyfriend to level up in his career—and propose. It would be a great gig—if Nicki’s boyfriend, Dylan James, didn’t happen to be Aly’s former best friend, whom she hasn’t spoken to since they had a disastrous kiss as teenagers. Now, she has to help Nicki turn Dylan into someone Aly isn’t sure he wants to be—and Aly realizes that her feelings for Dylan never really went away. Aly and Dylan never have quite enough chemistry for the reader to get fully invested in their relationship, and many of the plot points feel a bit far-fetched. However, Aly’s desire to stop being a people-pleaser and start working on herself is relatable, and her journey to personal fulfillment follows a satisfying arc.

A pleasant, if sometimes slightly unbelievable, look at the importance of taking responsibility for your own happiness.
A LADY’S GUIDE TO FORTUNE-HUNTING

Irwin, Sophie

Pamela Dorman/Viking (336 pp.)
$27.00 | July 12, 2022
978-0-59-349134-8

She’s looking for a fortune—any fortune.

Kitty Talbot’s not like other fortune hunters of the ton. She was raised in Dorsetshire, far from the well-bred life of the season, and she has no interest in staying in town. She’s only in London because she has three months to snag a fortune, plus the man attached to it, so she and her four younger sisters can pay off her family’s debts and stay in their beloved home. She and her sister Cecily quickly get their feet on the first rung of the social ladder when they arrive, and Kitty employs some quick subterfuge to gain the interest of Archie de Lacy. He may not be the oldest son of his noble family, but he’s still good for “at least eight thousand a year,” and he nearly proposes to her—until his brother, Lord Radcliffe, comes home to put a stop to her conning. At first she’s furious with Radcliffe, but they come to a mutual understanding, and he agrees to help her make a match with another high-born man who is debt-free and entitled to an allowance. Over several weeks, she and Cecily find their way into one society event after another, even snagging tickets to Almack’s Assembly Rooms, so Radcliffe and Kitty spend more time together as she tries to better understand the men she’s meeting. On the eve of a marriage proposal that could save her family, though, simultaneous family emergencies send Radcliffe off in pursuit of his sister and Kitty in pursuit of his brother, and the aftermath makes it difficult to deny what they have come to mean to each other. Irwin’s debut is charming, if a bit paint-by-numbers, recalling Georgette Heyer and other classics of the genre. In contrast to recent trends in historical romance, the hero and heroine don’t do much more than kiss on the page, and their romance develops quite late in the story; much of the plot focuses more on Kitty and Cecily’s introduction to the layers and intrigues of 1818 London. But it isn’t all Austen-esque; Kitty’s honesty about her aims, and Radcliffe’s acceptance of them, allows the story to suit modern sensibilities without sacrificing too much of the vintage feel.

A sweet Regency debut for contemporary fans of classic romance.

THE ACCIDENTAL PINUP

Jackson, Danielle

Berkley (320 pp.)
$16.00 paper | July 19, 2022
978-0-593-43733-9

A curvy businesswoman running a boudoir-photography studio must collaborate with a male rival for an unexpected project in this debut romance.

When her pregnant best friend, who’s launching a size-inclusive collection of lingerie for a larger brand, proposes that Black photographer Cassie Harris pose for the ad campaign instead of taking the pictures, she’s leery, especially if it means being photographed by the White male competitor who often edges her out for jobs. Reid Montgomery has skill, but he’s used to skating by on his charm and doing what clients expect, mimicking his personal life of casual ties courtesy of emotionally uninvolved parents and a ne’er-do-well sibling. The lucrative offer to feature Cassie in a lingerie shoot in which she’d get art director credit while Reid secretly ensures the parent company’s traditional vision offers a tempting opportunity for both of them. Despite their attraction, Cassie is wary of sharing top billing with someone who’s been in the way of her success before, while Reid worries about his secret deal with the lingerie company executives—and its inevitable revelation threatens to split apart their budding relationship, professional and erotic. Set in Chicago, which functions as a romantic backdrop to location-hunting and photo shoots, and with a multiracial and queer supporting cast, this debut has a lot of promise. Cassie’s background as the artistic child of high-achieving and wealthy parents challenges racial stereotypes, as does Reid’s history of being a popular photographer from a dysfunctional home who’s slow to recognize his racial privilege. The infodumping about their lives and the heavy-handedness of Cassie’s having to explain why it’s hard to be a Black entrepreneur and artist is resolved effectively by his eventual big gesture.

Questions of race, class, and sexism test the possibility of a happy-ever-after in this interracial romance.

FOR BUTTER OR WORSE

La Rosa, Erin

HQN (384 pp.)
$15.99 paper | July 26, 2022
978-1-335-50634-4

A celebrity chef and the owner of a restaurant chain clash as co-hosts of a television cooking show but are required to fake date to save their reputations.

Nina Lyon is a James Beard Award-winning chef who’s well known in the
Los Angeles food world. Leo O’Donnell, who has an MBA, is the owner of Vinny’s, a chain of family-friendly restaurants started by his father. Both signed on to become hosts of *The Next Cooking Champ!* to help boost the visibility of their restaurants. But over the past three seasons, Nina’s honest critiques have earned her the nickname “Nasty Nina,” and her falling popularity has caused her to close two of her restaurants. Despite Leo’s genial persona, their acrimonious TV exchanges are not endearing them to anyone, and Leo’s businesses are also stuttering. Nina’s publicist advises them to conduct a showmance, fake date each other to boost their popularity. But enemies pretending to be lovers is difficult to pull off convincingly, and their online fans alternately laud them and savage them. Trust is slow to grow between them, but eventually it is only with each other that they can relax and truly be themselves. Their acceptance of each other as they truly are allows them to give each other space to be their best selves. After his father’s death, Leo took charge of growing the business and took on the emotional burden as head of family so zealously that it has become his life and has given him low self-esteem, crippling anxiety, and panic attacks. La Rosa sensitively shows Leo’s work on his mental health recovery. Nina has lost her focus as an innovative chef, and the closure of her last restaurant is inevitable. La Rosa convincingly shows how Nina recovers her passion for food and the story she wants to tell as a chef while finding a way to empower other women in the culinary world.

A heartwarming tale of trust and absolution from a skilled novelist.

When a beleaguered lawyer books a trip to visit her best friend, her three-week vacation turns into a trial run for their romance in Lee’s friends-to-lovers novel.

At 30 years old, Elizabeth Chung can’t help but feel the waning thrill of living a high-stakes, career-oriented life in the big city. As a senior counsel at top Los Angeles law firm Nelson Peters, Lizzy has a workaholic lifestyle that’s placed her well on the path to becoming a partner. Although her choice of profession keeps her strict mother appeased, “conflict-averse” Lizzy can’t help but feel burned out despite her success. When a trip to visit her best friend, her three-week vacation turns into a trial run for their romance in Lee’s friends-to-lovers novel.

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A hacker is determined to stop a person trying to incite war between two galactic empires.

Kee Ildez is a legendary hacker and an integral part of the crew of the spaceship Starlight's Shadow. The crew's human ex-soldiers served together in the war against the Valiffs and now work across the galaxy as bounty hunters. Kee has one goal: Find Commodore Frank Morten, the man who betrayed them during the war, and bring him to justice. She suspects Morten is trying to rekindle war between the Federated Human Planets and the Valolian Empire by staging an incident on Bastion, a remote space station. Kee arranges to leave the Starlight's Shadow crew behind for a few weeks to run a solo investigation on Bastion—which will also give her a much-needed break from Varro Runkow, a Valolian munitions expert and telekinetic who recently joined the group. Kee is wildly attracted to Varro, but he has made it clear there can be no future between them. When Varro discovers she's alone on Bastion, he leaves the ship, determined to protect her. As Kee and Varro hack into Bastion's systems, they conclude that Morten might cause trouble at a high-profile fashion exhibition featuring human and Valolian designers. Kee and Varro's adventures on the space station are full of action and intrigue. They make a good team, but their romance is underdeveloped and more of an afterthought than a well-integrated part of the plot. Of note: Kee's staunch defense of why she continues to fight evil, even against what seems like impossible odds, is clearly meant to bolster readers who might find her life upended by both an unexpected kiss with her editor and the sudden death of her beloved father. Returning home comes with its own set of baggage, though Florence holds out hope that her father's ghost will appear for one last goodbye. She's shocked, however, when the spirit that visits her isn't her father but Ben Andor, mysteriously dead only a day after she'd met him. Now Florence must not only navigate her grief and fulfill her dad's last wishes, she must also contend with Ben's confused ghost following her around until they can correct his unfinished business. The zippy banter between Florence and nearly everyone she meets keeps things moving at a sprightly clip. Every interaction is a delight, and getting to know the cast of characters in Florence's orbit adds excitement to the book. The romance takes a bit longer to build, though, and fits in and out of focus. Florence and Ben share such chemistry that it's a cogent reminder of why readers are drawn to speculative fiction in the first place.

A romance-light space adventure that still has plenty to please readers.

A woman who aspires to become the first female Royal Guard finds herself wrapped up in the do-gooder hijinks of the Wynchester family—and falling for one of the siblings.

Kunigunde de Heusch is a companion to the princess of Balcovia, a fictional abolitionist country near the Netherlands, but she wants to follow her father's footsteps into the Royal Guard. To prove her worth, she journeys to London to compile useful security information. Graham Wynchester is a master of information. When he notices a series of newspaper advertisements that contain a coded message, he believes a woman is in danger and sets out to rescue her only to find Kuni—who has no interest in his intentions. Kunigunde is chagrined by his family and awed by how much they believe in her. Graham always wished to be acknowledged by royalty, but now all he wants is Kuni, who is returning to Balcovia in just a few weeks. Fans of the previous Wynchester books, most recently The Perks of Loving a Wallflower (2021), will be delighted to encounter this eccentric crew again. Kuni's romance may be with Graham, but she bonds with each of the adopted siblings. The story is fun and playful, but weighty topics are deftly mixed in. Graham discusses how being Black has affected his opportunities. Kuni is also Black, but it's her gender that causes a barrier to her life goals. Workers' rights issues and class disparities are addressed. The romance itself
sometimes feels lacking in tension or growth, but the whole cast of characters is endearing and warm.

Another pleasing and joyful addition to the Wild Wyncasters series.

**FROM THE JUMP**

Waldon, Lacie  
Putnam (352 pp.)  
$16.00 paper | July 19, 2022  
978-0-593-32827-9

An inhibited designer rethinks her paint-by-numbers approach when a leap of faith lands her in closer quarters with a friend.  

Graphic designer Olivia Bakersfield has carefully cultivated her image as a successful—if somewhat cold—career woman. Raised by a single mother and traumatized by a brief brush with homelessness in her childhood, Liv feverishly clings to advice dished out by self-improvement books and blogs as if they are life rafts that will save her from further harm. But when she is forced to make a hard financial decision quickly, Liv decides to shelve some self-prescribed diktats: Not only does she finally refuse to work on yet another uninspiring assignment at her workplace, but she also impulsively decides to join her friends on their trip to South Africa. Although the holiday bonds her more thickly with her group, it puts her in uncomfortably close proximity with her extremely gorgeous and equally aloof friend Lucas Deiss. As the group prepares to return home, Liv tries to ensure that she and Lucas revert to their old equation. But when a series of crises force her to lean more on him than ever, Liv must reevaluate not only Lucas’ place in her life, but her entire attitude toward careers and companionship. Waldon charts Liv’s epiphany and eventual transformation with convincing attention to detail. Although Liv and Lucas’ gradually blossoming intimacy is the centerpiece, the shifts in Liv’s relationships with several other people are also crucial to her coming-of-age story. Liv’s friend circle is fun and their dynamic is charming, but owing to their tendency to withhold crucial parts of themselves from each other, they seldom appear as close-knit as they seem to think they are. Liv and Lucas take a tantalizing amount of time to become lovers, and the slow burn makes for delightful reading. But their journey from that point onward feels slightly rushed, especially since Lucas’ perspective remains conspicuously absent.

A fluffy and comforting romance that bolsters faith in the power of friendship.

**CINDER-NANNY**

Wilson, Sariah  
Montlake Romance (330 pp.)  
$12.95 paper | June 21, 2022  
978-1-5420-3058-8

A nanny loses her shoe and attracts an earl instead of a prince.

Diana Parker has sworn she’ll never tell lies again. After a dysfunctional childhood with her mother, a con artist, and her sister have promised to abandon the dishonest skills that allowed them to survive. That changes overnight when her sister becomes sick and needs a kidney transplant, though; Diana tells a whole pack of untruths in order to get an elite nannying gig, selling herself to an affluent couple as fluent in French, an accomplished skier, a child development expert, and more. Feeling guilty as she flies out to the short-term job, she commits to doing her best work in order to help her sister and then returning to the comforts of home and truth-telling. But she’s not the only babysitter in Aspen; Griffin Windsor, Earl of Strathorne, is also there, watching his niece. When they meet by chance at a charity ball, he’s instinctively smitten with Diana, while her instinct is to keep him at a distance so she can focus on being the nanny she promised to be. But when their two young charges, both delightfully odd in their own ways, become friends, Griffin has ample chances to win Diana over, and he soon does. Though Wilson’s “Cinderella”-inspired story has many charming moments, any time the plot gets close to a meaningful conflict, it is resolved almost immediately, making the narrative energy a bit flat. Along the same lines, Griffin’s aristocratic charms and complete perfection are wish fulfillment but dull, though Diana’s inner struggles give some extra depth to her character. Diana and Griffin’s slow-burn closed-door passion is authentic, and the book might appeal to readers who love a “Cinderella” story.

A serviceable contemporary fairy tale.
ANIMAL JOY
A Book of Laughter and Resuscitation
Alsadir, Nuar
Graywolf (296 pp.)
$17.00 paper | Aug. 16, 2022
978-1-64445-093-2

An Iraqi American psychoanalyst and poet investigates the social and psychological dimensions of laughter.

The book begins with Alsadir admitting to her fellow students at clown school that she is attending the course in order to research a book on laughter. From there, the author follows her thoughts and memories through a stream-of-consciousness series of observations on the roles that humor and laughter play in our lives. She remembers, for example, “corpsing,” or “breaking into convulsive laughter,” at a panel discussion during which a microphone glitch unexpectedly amplified the author saying the word *ejaculation*. As she describes it, “the sudden surge of my voice came at me through the speakers as a kind of *horror vox*, a disconcerting eruption of my interior into the external world.” In trying to understand her reaction, Alsadir ruminates on the roles that society asks us to play and what happens when we refuse to inhabit those roles. Over the course of a wide-ranging, sometimes scattered narrative, the author explores a host of topics: the relationship between joke structure and Donald Trump’s penchant for belittling others (“When we treat another being as inferior—try to disappear them—our underlying goal is to evacuate a threat to our boundaries of self that destabilizes the story we tell ourselves and others”), Sacha Baron Cohen’s discovery of “undercover comedy,” the effect of the superego on laughter, and the differences among candid camera shows around the world. Throughout, she weaves in personal stories about her family as well as concepts, quotes, and theories developed by Freud, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Barthes, Schopenhauer, Lacan, and many other philosophers and thinkers. At its best, the book is vulnerable, lyrical, and refreshingly incisive. At times, the author’s expansive, meandering style makes the prose feel more like a series of interesting anecdotes than a cohesive argument, but Alsadir’s quiet wit and depth of knowledge lead to unique insights and profound self-reflection.

A sprawling, poetic meditation on humor in all its forms.
“Readers will gain unprecedented insight into an otherwise insular aspect of the tech world.”

**THE METAVERSE**

**And How It Will Revolutionize Everything**

Ball, Matthew

Liveright/Norton (352 pp.)

$27.95 | July 19, 2022

978-1-324-09203-2

A robust explanation of a “persistent, 3D, virtual world—a network of interconnected experiences and devices, tools and infrastructure, far beyond mere virtual reality.”

What is the metaverse? Over the past year or so, it has become one of the most buzzworthy topics in the tech world, but do we understand what it does and why it matters? Since “much of the tech community continues to dispute key elements” of the metaverse, consider tech maven Ball, CEO of EpyllionCo, former global head of corporate strategy for Amazon Studios, and our knowledgeable guide on this journey of discovery. A foremost expert on the metaverse, the author defines and demystifies what has yet to materialize, encouraging readers to suspend disbelief and instead consider the concept as they did their former global head of corporate strategy for Amazon Studios, our knowledgeable guide on this journey of discovery. A foremost expert on the metaverse, the author defines and demystifies what has yet to materialize, encouraging readers to suspend disbelief and instead consider the concept as they did their early interactions with tech innovations such as touchscreens, app stores, and Zoom. Although not yet fully unified or conceptualized, certain elements of the metaverse presently exist in tech services such as video games and virtual reality systems.

The author nods to tech grandparents like GE and Honeywell while noting the rise of NFTs, cryptocurrency, and blockchain, explaining how they function. Though it will be a long time before a fully realized metaverse becomes an everyday reality, once in place, it could be used in myriad ways to improve human life. “It’s rare,” writes Ball, “that the world’s largest companies publicly reorient themselves around such ideas at an early stage, thereby setting themselves up to be evaluated by employees, customers, and shareholders on the basis of their success in realizing their most ambitious visions.” The author lucidly lays out the background, current state of affairs, and fantastic possibilities for the future.

Readers will gain unprecedented insight into an otherwise insular aspect of the tech world.

**GOOD GRIEF**

**On Loving Pets, Here and Hereafter**

Bartels, E.B.

Mariner Books (272 pp.)

$27.99 | Aug. 2, 2022

978-0-358-21233-1

A pet dies. Then what? “When we open our hearts to animals,” Bartels observes, “death is the inevitable price.” At the age of 5, she grieved for her first pet: a fish. A bird died when she was 9; a friend’s hamster, in her care, unexpectedly succumbed; another fish died when she was in college; and she’s mourned many other animals, too, including several dogs. In her appealing debut book, the author examines the process of grief that follows the loss of a pet, recounting her own experiences; talking with veterinarians, ministers, archaeologists, and many pet owners; reading pet owners’ memoirs; and looking at ways that other cultures deal with animals’ deaths. She also recounts her visits to pet cemeteries, some of which allow humans and pets to be buried together. Japan has established hundreds of pet cemeteries, many operated by Buddhist temples. At Dog Mountain, in St. Johnsbury, Vermont, founded by an artist known for his woodblock prints of his black Lab, a small chapel welcomes pet owners who come to “reflect on and memorialize and remember their pet” with photographs and written tributes. Although Bartels acknowledges that pet ownership falls largely to White Americans with disposable income, she discovered that attachment to pets has a long history. For example, an Egyptologist specializing in animal mummies told her that some mumified animals surely were beloved pets. Grieving pet owners have resorted to taxidermy and even cloning to keep some physical evidence of their pet’s existence. At a cost of $50,000, though, cloning is a choice most people can’t afford. Bartels warmly describes her connections to all of her pets, even her first fish. Pets, she writes, “bolster your emotional state,” accept your hugs and kisses, listen to your most intimate confidences, and provide “companionship, completely without judgment.” Because sadness over an animal’s death is rarely shared, the author hopes her book will help grieving pet owners find solace.

A warm homage to a special bond.

**TALES FROM THE BORDERLANDS**

**Making and Unmaking the Galician Past**

Bartov, Omer

Yale Univ (392 pp.)

$30.00 | July 19, 2022

978-0-300-25996-4

A powerful combination of history and personal memoir of a small town in Galicia, a representative narrative of the multilayered stories of the Jews who populated a region decimated in World War II. Bartov’s mother came from the small town of Buczacz, on the Strypa River, now in Poland and depopulated of the diverse Jewish community that once thrived in the area largely from the 16th to the early 20th centuries. The author, a professor of European history at Brown, uses this agricultural center as a point of departure to create a fascinating cultural and social history of Galicia, a swath of territory stretching from the Black Sea to the Baltic Sea, once known as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Originally ruled in the 16th century by Polish nobles who invited Jews to run their estates, then annexed by the Austrian Empire in 1772, the land was always on the “periphery, made up of a bewildering mix of humanity of dubious loyalties.”
Welcome to our annual Summer Reads issue. Please enjoy these 10 engaging books of non-fiction that are perfect for beachside, poolside, or bedside; here’s what our reviewers have to say about them.

*Pig Years* by Ellyn Gaydos (Knopf, June 14): “A writer and transient farmer chronicles multiple seasons of work and life....Lyrical and cleareyed insight into farming from a writer devoted to both crafts.”

*Fire Island: A Century in the Life of an American Paradise* by Jack Parlett (Hanover Square Press, June 14): “Parlett first ventured to the island in 2017 while furthering his doctoral research on American poetry and cruising. His experiences during this visit, as a curious researcher who was also actively engaged in the gay party scene, serve as the launching point for this uniquely insightful and colorful cultural history.”

*Explorer: The Quest for Adventure and the Great Unknown* by Benedict Allen (Canongate, June 28): “Allen discusses what being an explorer means to him and attempts to set the record straight about the 2017 headlines that reported him missing in Papua New Guinea....A compelling story about the need to satisfy one’s yearnings at all costs.”

*Rogues: True Stories of Grifters, Killers, Rebels and Crooks* by Patrick Radden Keefe (Doubleday, June 28): “In this gathering of his *New Yorker* articles, the author covers subjects ranging from the counterfeit wine business to Swiss banking to the illegal arms trade....Thought-provoking examinations of human motivation, choices, follies, and morality.”

*The Last Resort: A Chronicle of Paradise, Profit, and Peril at the Beach* by Sarah Stodola (Ecco/HarperCollins, June 28): “Stodola organizes her book according to locations she has visited, detailing both the similarities of beach vacations across the globe as well as regional differences. She acknowledges the Western gaze that has informed much of what constitutes the traveler’s ideal, but she also emphasizes that the international traveler base is growing and changing....A thorough and appropriately alarming analysis of how we made paradise and how it might be saved.” (See our interview with the author on Page 54.)

*The Church of Baseball: The Making of Bull Durham* by Ron Shelton (Knopf, July 5): “Shelton’s book is not simply a jaunty recollection of his directing debut....The author, who displays sheer, unadulterated love for his subject, also delivers a savvy, unusually informative tutorial on how to take a motion picture from the concept stage to script development, casting, production, and post-production.”

*Illuminated by Water: Fly Fishing and the Allure of the Natural World* by Malachy Tallack (Pegasus, July 5): “Even for those who have never picked up a fishing rod, this poetic book has a lot to say about the process of finding the things that are truly important....The author alternates between his ruminations about fishing and his experiences of visiting streams and lakes around the world.”

*Imagine a City: A Pilot’s Journey Across the Urban World* by Mark Vanhoenacker (Knopf, July 5): “Philosophically rich without being ponderous, belonging on the same shelf as books by Saint-Exupéry, Markham, and Langewiesche, Vanhoenacker’s book is unfailingly interesting, full of empathetic details...
Bartov refers frequently to the work of Hebrew-language author S.Y. Agnon, also from Buczacz. The winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1966, he minutely delineated the lost shtetl life of Eastern Europe just as Bartov’s mother had experienced it. (The author’s excavation of his mother’s difficult life is especially poignant.) As Bartov demonstrates, the ethnic makeup of Galicia underwent numerous convulsions over the centuries. These changes included the growth of Hasidism as a reaction to the forces of Enlightenment currents from the West; “the revolutions of 1848 that swept across Europe” and the full emancipation of Jews in 1867, when the Hapsburgs were defeated by Prussia and the empire of Austria-Hungary was created; and the rise of nationalism (especially in Ukraine) and antisemitism. Bartov deftly employs much of the relevant literature to show how disastrous the rise of nationalism was in vilifying the Jews as outsiders.

A richly contextual, skillfully woven historical study.

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.
threat of patriarchal brutality. “I knew that female supremacy was manufactured in the dungeon,” writes Belcher. “Still, when I was in there, it did sometimes feel good to say no.”

A provocatively lucid, impressively rendered memoir.

LIKE, COMMENT, SUBSCRIBE
Inside YouTube’s Chaotic Rise to World Domination
Bergen, Mark
Viking (464 pp.)
$30.00 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-593-29634-9

A tech journalist traces how YouTube works—or fails to.
Bloomberg reporter Bergen seeks to bring the behemoth into the light.
Though YouTube has billions of users and countless hours of content, the founders of the company—Steve Chen, Chad Hurley, and Jawed Karim—are largely unknown outside of the tech industry. YouTube’s current CEO, Susan Wojcicki, has a low profile by the standards of the social media business. When it started in 2005, the concept of having users provide content was simple, but the mechanics were complex. Once the site was operational, the growth rate was astonishing. Videos about games, music, fashion, celebrities, and, of course, cats: There seemed to be something by—and for—everyone. When Google paid $1.65 billion for YouTube 10 months after its launch, it seemed like an incredible amount. Of course, it turned out to be an excellent investment. The massive size of YouTube, however, presents a host of managerial problems. “It’s a tanker, an enormous business steered with small, careful turns,” writes Bergen. “Even if she wanted to, Wojcicki probably couldn’t steer it entirely in a chosen direction. She is a steward of a platform with a life of its own.” A central issue has always been the proliferation of posts that were unsuitable, including fake news, pornography, conspiracy theories, and terrorist videos. They appear faster than the algorithms and moderators can deal with them. The deluge stemmed from the open-to-all business model, and constant changes to the rules have often generated more confusion than clarity. As the author shows, all this raises fundamental questions: When does content moderation become censorship? Where is the line between disinformation and a different opinion? What are the obligations of a social media platform? There are no easy answers. Bergen mostly keeps the story straight, but any account of the company is going to be a tale of barely controlled disarray. That is part of YouTube’s attraction—for better or worse.

Powerful insight into a ubiquitous yet still shadowy company.

SILENT INVASION
The Untold Story of the Trump Administration, Covid-19, and Preventing the Next Pandemic Before It’s Too Late
Birx, Deborah
Harper/HarperCollins (496 pp.)
$29.99 | April 26, 2022
978-0-06-320423-2

The often silenced Trump Covid adviser has her say about the pandemic and its mismanagement.

Birx, who regularly appeared before the microphones with Anthony Fauci before being sidelined, was brought into the battle against Covid-19 as a result of her successful, ongoing work battling AIDS in Africa. Interviewed for the new job, she found herself having to explain to a resistant Trump that the virus was not just a bad flu. “He holds up his hand,” she writes. “He smiles that glib grimace of a smile. I stop speaking.” The interview was symptomatic of her treatment thereafter, her messaging often at odds with Trump’s, Mark Meadows’, and other White House figures’. She found a sympathetic, behind-the-curtain ally in Jared Kushner as well as unnamed members of the presidential...
communications staff, who found ways for her to get the word out. Yet her foes in the administration—particularly right-wing doctor Scott Atlas, “the worst purveyor of misinformation”—contradicted or stifled her warnings that masks, isolation, and mass vaccinations were needed, and she blames many of the hundreds of thousands of subsequent deaths on those insiders. Much of the narrative offers lessons for fighting the next pandemic, and there her writing can be—well, clinical. Still, her arguments are sound: Health agencies must be better coordinated, the CDC should be decentralized and its workers placed in underserved regions, and a single strong message about the risks and dangers of any given illness needs to be sent out. Readers will come to her book, though, not for her epidemiological prescriptions but instead for her anecdotes of battles against recalcitrant political appointees and assorted yes men as epitomized by Meadows, the object of an uncharacteristically sharp outburst from Birx: “This is the kind of unbelievable level of fuck-up that ends up killing people. We can’t keep doing this!” Yet keep doing it they did, and the death toll mounted.

A frontline view of a bungled battle against a lethal pandemic.

Broers continues his run of satisfying books on Napoleon.

The relentless fascination with Napoleon and his empire continues to generate books, mostly biographies, and this is another fine entry by Broers, a professor of Western European history at Oxford. Controlling land that stretched from Rome to the Baltic, Napoleon had defeated continental rivals and established friendly relations with Russia, and his forces were having some success suppressing the gruesome Spanish rebellion. Fruitless efforts to cut off British trade finally made a painful impression when he placed Atlantic ports under military rule to suppress smuggling. “Napoleon always wanted war during this period of relative peace,” writes Broers, “just not the one he got in 1812.” His plan to invade Britain—this time with a proper navy—was derailed when Czar Alexander “opened Russian ports to neutral shipping in December 1810” and fended off bullying efforts to bring him into line. By summer 1811, Napoleon was determined to invade Russia. At this point, the text still has 500 pages to go, but few readers will complain as the author describes Napoleon’s preparations from a sullen French nation exasperated by massive taxes, mourning massive casualties, and oppressed by another round of brutally efficient conscription. The titanic army that trundled into Russia in June 1812 began shrinking long before meeting the enemy, led by a ruler Napoleon had consistently underestimated. Fans of War and Peace will learn that Tolstoy and Broers share a modest admiration for Alexander and a lower opinion of the emperor, although, having read all Napoleon’s correspondence, Broers’ opinion is more nuanced. After a gripping account of the Russian debacle, the author recounts Napoleon’s return to Paris. Returning without much of an army left, he wrung another fighting force from his exhausted nation and won several victories before he was forced to abdicate and retire to Elba, from which he returned to power, lost at Waterloo, and ended his life in humiliating exile.

An outstanding addition to the groaning bookshelves on one of the world’s most recognizable leaders.
THE PALACE PAPERS
Inside the House of Windsor—The Truth and the Turmoil
Brown, Tina
Crown (592 pp.)
$28.99 | April 26, 2022
978-0-593-13809-0

Veteran journalist Brown examines the alternating currents of “deep dullness” and pitched controversy surrounding the House of Windsor.

“We don’t want another Diana.” Thus runs a mantra among Britain’s royal family, whose more retiring members—most notably Queen Elizabeth II—harbor a deep fear of scandal. Yet, as Brown’s account opens, scandal and controversy emerge as the coin of the realm, in this case with the brouhaha surrounding Prince Harry’s marriage to Meghan Markle, marked by “the Palace’s inaction at her character assassination by the press.”

As the author remarks, the royal family, headed by a 96-year-old with a 74-year-old waiting to assume the throne, “cannot be expected to be nimble.” Indeed, many of its members are downright boring, if dutiful, in contrast with rebels such as Diana and Meghan, to say nothing of disgraced figures such as Andrew and Fergie. In the case of Diana’s gruesome death, writes Brown, “the Queen’s usual impeccable sense of how to do the right thing…was beset by the need for a new kind of emotional response that met the moment of the crisis,” which Elizabeth couldn’t muster. Indeed, she emerges as remote, even cold, some of which, Brown allows, can be traced to the requirements of rule, some to a marked distaste for confrontation. So it was that she ordered Charles to delay his wedding to Camilla Bowles by a day in deference to the funeral of Pope John Paul II, at which “the otherwise stalwart Camilla went into melt-down.” Brown, superbly equipped to dig deep into the Windsors, turns in scathing, nicely gossipy portraits of some of them, especially Andrew, a corrupt, venal “horndog eternally on the hunt,” mixing them with quietly admiring portrayals of figures such as Kate Middleton, who exemplifies “duty and loyalty to the Crown” and an avenue to a brighter future.

Fascinating and fast-paced, Brown’s blockbuster is a must for royal watchers.

LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI
An Epic American Adventure
Buck, Rinker
Avid Reader Press (320 pp.)
$32.50 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-1-5011-0637-8

An invigorating blend of history and journalism informs this journey down Old Man River.

Buck walks the walk, or perhaps rows the row: As with his previous book on the Oregon Trail, he follows the path of preceding generations in the hope of seeing something of what they saw. That’s not easy in the case of the Mississippi River, which, along with one of its principal tributaries, the Ohio, is “jointly managed by the U.S. Coast Guard and the Army Corps of Engineers exclusively for the benefit of commercial barge traffic.” With those massive strings of barges, some as many as 25 containers long, clogging the river, traversing it by means of an old-fashioned wooden flatboat seems an invitation to disaster. Yet that’s just what Buck did, building his own craft in the manner of the 19th-century pioneers who saw in the river system a means of knitting far-flung territories into a nation. Building the boat was a challenge, and the author “would shortly learn that the flatboat was indeed an ideal school for acquiring a knowledge of human nature.” Buck populates his invigorating narrative with a memorable cast of characters, some people who traveled with him, some people he met along the way. The author was courtly to all of them, save a loudmouth Trumper who “considered it absolutely vital to explain to me that the “nited states
of ‘merica’ was being ruined by ‘librals and buree-cats.’” Buck’s adventures alternate between nearly being swamped by massive commercial vessels and dealing with more mundane disasters; as he noted to his first mate, “Clusterfuck is our new normal.” Besides being a willing and intrepid traveler, Buck is also an able interpreter of history, and it’s clear that he’s devoured a library of Mississippiana. It all makes for an entertaining journey in the manner of William Least Heat-Moon, John McPhee, and other traveler-explainers.

For armchair-travel aficionados and frontier-history buffs, it doesn’t get much better.

**YOGA**

Carrère, Emmanuel  
Trans. by John Lambert  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (336 pp.)  
$27.00 | Aug. 2, 2022  
978-0-374-60494-3

A writer’s journey to find himself. In January 2015, French novelist, journalist, screenwriter, and memoirist Carrère began a 10-day meditation retreat in the Morvan forest of central France. For 10 hours per day, he practiced Vipassana, “the commando training of meditation,” hoping for both self-awareness and material for a book. “I’m under cover,” he confesses, planning to rely on memory rather than break the center’s rule forbidding note-taking. Long a practitioner of tai chi, the author saw yoga, too, as a means of “curtailing your ego, your greed, your thirst for competition and conquest, about educating your conscience to allow it unfiltered access to reality, to things as they are.” Harsh reality, however, ended his stay after four days: A friend had been killed in a brutal attack at the magazine Charlie Hebdo, and he was asked to speak at his funeral. Carrère’s vivid memoir, translated by Lambert—and, Carrère admits, partly fictionalized—covers four tumultuous years, weaving “seemingly disparate” experiences into an intimate chronicle punctuated by loss, desperation, and trauma. Besides reflecting on yoga, he reveals the recurring depression and “erratic, disconnected, unrelenting” thoughts that led to an unexpected diagnosis; his four-month hospitalization in a psychiatric ward, during which he received electroshock therapy; his motivation for, and process of, writing; a stay on the Greek island of Leros, where he taught writing to teenage refugees, whose fraught journeys and quiet dreams he portrays with warmth and compassion; his recollection of a tsunami in Sri Lanka, which he wrote about in Lives Other Than My Own; an intense love affair; and, at last, a revival of happiness. Carrère had planned to call his yoga book Exhaling, which could serve for this memoir as well: There is a sense of relief and release in his effort to make sense of his evolving self.

Reality and imagination infuse a probing memoir.

**IS REMOTE WARFARE MORAL?**  
Weighing Issues of Life and Death From 7,000 Miles  
Chapa, Joseph O.  
PublicAffairs (272 pp.)  
$29.00 | July 5, 2022  
978-1-5417-7445-2

An exploration of the morality of armed drones by an Air Force officer who has piloted Predator strikes and instructed other service members in their use.

Chapa, the Air Force’s chief artificial intelligence ethics officer, who holds a doctorate in philosophy from Oxford, is concerned with the ethics of a war fighter who takes enemy lives without being exposed to danger. It is a common conception that “war is defined by the courage of, risk to, and potential sacrifice by combatants.” By this criterion, how can someone who strikes down an opponent from thousands of miles away be considered to have risked themselves? Is it ethical? How about when the opponent is thousands of miles away, but only a computer program is actually making the decision? Chapa explores these and other ethical questions in a thoughtful and comprehensive way.

Reality and imagination infuse a probing memoir.
Wouldn’t it be great if you were at the beach? Your answer may have formed before you even really thought about it: Yes, I would much rather be at the beach than wherever I am right now.

Why is that? Sarah Stodola has some ideas. Stodola, travel and culture writer and founder of Flung, a digital travel publication, is well versed in the “always-sunny disposition required of destination coverage,” endorsements that have contributed to the massive growth of international tourism, making it the world’s third-largest export. International arrivals totaled almost 1.5 billion passengers in 2019, up from 25 million just seven decades prior, and seaside resorts are a major attraction.

In The Last Resort, Sarah Stodola takes a critical look at the beach tourism industry and its impacts on ecosystems and economies worldwide. Based on research and trips to locales across the globe, Stodola explores how the beach resort came to be a titan of tourism and yet one that faces an uncertain future. A reviewer for Kirkus calls the book “a thorough and appropriately alarming analysis of how we made paradise and how it might be saved.” Stodola spoke to us over Zoom, and the interview below has been edited for length and clarity.

You talk about an essay by Zadie Smith in which she describes a two-story beer ad on the side of a building bearing only three words: “Find your beach.” How did this idea of the beach gain so much cultural power?

I think it was centuries in the making. Before the 17th and 18th centuries, people feared the beach and the ocean. Then there was this gradual shift, starting in the 1700s, that had a lot to do with spas and convalescence. Ocean water and air came to be seen as health-giving. The first resorts, in England, weren’t really meant for leisure; they were meant to improve one’s health. From there, there was this gradual incorporating of fun and leisure into the experience. Monte Carlo was kind of the first place where the health-giving aspects of beach and seaside resorts were combined with decadence and fun. Even then, it was more of a winter activity: People would go to the south of Europe, where it was warmer and more pleasant. In the U.S., people were using these destinations to escape the heat of the cities for the first time. When Americans brought that back over to Europe, that’s when we got the full, early-20th-century idea of hot weather, having fun on the beach, R&R, the whole beach-as-paradise.

You talk about the cycle of development: how, when a destination first becomes popular, it’s like a hidden gem, then overdevelopment eventually leads to its decline. You also write, though, that some destinations ex-
experience a “rejuvenation stage” when they come back into favor. What’s a destination that has experienced a successful rejuvenation, and why?

I think some really good examples are the original seaside resorts in England that fell into bad times when air travel became ubiquitous for the middle classes—people weren’t staying at the shores near them in England, they were going further afield. A lot of these resorts have pivoted to offering attractions that aren’t completely focused on the beach, though the beach is still an attraction. I talk about Brighton in the book, which has become a countercultural attraction—they have the biggest Pride weekend in England now—as well as places like Margate, which opened a big art museum. There’s also a couple of other destinations [like Bournemouth] that focus on attracting tech workers. So there’s been a series of rejuvenations in the English seaside towns based on pivoting to attractions that aren’t necessarily just beaches.

In hindsight and in light of Covid-19, we can see just how precarious it is for the bulk of a country’s economy to rely on tourism, especially foreign tourism. Do you think the pandemic will promote considerable, long-lasting change to how people vacation?

Obviously, some of that still remains to be seen. But I do think that, generally speaking, a lot of countries are re-examining their reliance on getting foreigners into their countries to boost their economies. I think a lot of countries are starting to pivot their focus more to domestic tourism and looking to diversify away from tourism—not altogether, but to diversify.

Would you consider expanding The Last Resort in the future to include even more insights we’ve learned about travel through Covid-19?

Yes. I think that this is an ongoing development that definitely bears monitoring and further research.

What’s one travel trend that you would like to see become less common, and what’s one that you hope becomes more common?

I would like to see travelers focusing less on long-haul trips, especially when you’re talking about beach resorts. You don’t necessarily have to go to the other side of the world to get a great beach. I would love to see a focus more on the best beach destinations in a region and maybe even figuring out different ways to get to them, such as more train travel or more road trips. I would love to see resorts become less excluded from the communities and the cultures around them. I think incorporating them into the local culture has a big benefit for both the locals and the travelers, and there’s only upsides to doing it.

You talk about St. Kitts and Nevis, which was one of the first places—if not the only place—where you felt like you were coexisting alongside the local population and the culture rather than being excluded from it.

Yeah, that’s exactly right, and going to bars and restaurants there just felt very different from most other beach destinations. There, you felt like the local bars and the tourist bars were the same bars, and it doesn’t always feel that way.

Do you have your next trip planned? And if so, where?

I don’t. I mean, we’re obviously in a strange time for travel in general, but no, I do not have my next trip planned yet.

Was that a conscious decision after taking so many trips for this book, or is it something you just haven’t gotten around to?

It’s really funny—in March 2020, when the pandemic lockdown started, I had two research trips left to do for the book, and one was scheduled for the end of March. At that point, I had been traveling so much that I was telling everybody, ‘I just want to be home for a while. I’m so sick of traveling.’ And then the joke became to be careful what you wish for, because now we’ve all been home for two years. As soon as I was vaccinated, late last spring, I was able to complete those two final trips I needed to do. And I’ve done some small trips since then, but no travel travel. It’s not my focus right now.

Nina Palattella is the editorial assistant. The Last Resort was reviewed in the April 15, 2022, issue.
of miles away be a legitimate warrior rather than an assassin? “Though war ought to remain a dreadful last resort,” writes the author, “remote weapons threaten to make warfare commonplace.” Chapa focuses on the “humanity” of drone crews, who are faced with life-and-death decisions on an almost daily basis. He divides the ethical considerations into the strategic—on the level of national policy—and the tactical, involving individual crew members. He traces a significant change in the former to the aftermath of 9/11, when the focus of policy changed from state-level actors to individual terrorists and their leaders. Such counterterrorism missions were not suited to heavy bombers or artillery barrages. The rise of the Predator drone (and subsequent drone models) was the direct result of a war that didn't take place on a traditional battlefield. Chapa presents a number of stories of drone pilots who disobey orders, noting, for example, a child in the field of fire or unusual behavior on the parts of people in nearby areas. Though general readers may find Chapa’s account dry and occasionally abstract, even those who have already made up their minds about the morality of war will find a challenging examination of questions to which we are still developing answers.

A hard-nosed look at the morality of drone warfare from a writer who has seen it close-up.

**RACE AND RECKONING**

*From Founding Fathers to Today’s Disruptors*

Cose, Ellis

Amistad/ HarperCollins (256 pp.)

$27.99 | July 12, 2022

978-0-06-307244-2

A survey of ethnic relations in America that links past and present injustices. “To understand the current efforts to disenfranchise likely Democratic voters,” writes Cose, “you have to understand what happened at the end of Reconstruction.” The end of Reconstruction returned White conservative Southerners to power and introduced an era of Jim Crow laws that seem all too current today. At stake, notes the author, is the vision of an American nation made up of equals as opposed to one in which only some Americans are entitled to the benefits of citizenship, including voting rights. Cose begins at Jamestown and the introduction of African slavery to the American Colonies, showing how the enslavement of Blacks and the removal of Native Americans from their homelands were conjoined efforts to secure White supremacy. Every state was once complicit, given the requirements of such laws as the Fugitive Slave Act, which Cose examines through the lens of the real-life case that inspired Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved*—a book, he reminds us, that figured in a campaign ad for Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin as one to be banned in public schools. In many cases, Blacks enslaved before the Civil War became enslaved in practice, if not in name, afterward even as immigration officials tried to sort out other racial classifications. One such official, reported the *Washington Post*, held that “Syrians and their racial kindred... were yellow, not white, and that they were barred therefore from naturalization.” In the face of civil rights advances after World War II, racism is growing today through social media and dog whistlers such as Donald Trump, whom Cose links to a eugenicist from the previous century who complained that Latin American countries “furnish very undesirable immigrants.” The author ends with a well-reasoned defense for teaching this history against those who “doggedly refuse to acknowledge how our past affects our present.”

A book that merits a place on ethnic studies—and American history—curricula.
The Life of Crime
Detecting the History of Mysteries and Their Creators
Edwards, Martin
Harper360 (736 pp.)
$29.99  |  Aug. 16, 2022
978-0-00-819242-6

How the literary imagination of crime has evolved over two centuries.
In this ambitious historical survey, novelist and scholar Edwards charts the development of crime fiction from the late 18th century to the present moment, covering authors from around the globe. This is a big, sweeping text, with 55 chapters and 100 authors given close consideration. Each chapter, arranged in rough chronological order, introduces the work of one or more authors along with key biographical information, followed by extensive footnotes that provide additional commentary. Edwards examines pioneering figures—Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Raymond Chandler, and others—next to an impressive range of less-well-known authors, including Erskine Childers, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and Frank Castle Froest. Edwards devotes several chapters to authors of special merit, though most are organized around significant themes: narratives located in and seemingly influenced by a particular historical period, those dependent on framing devices such as courtroom or police procedures, or those defined by particular moods, as in noir and macabre fiction. The author’s efforts at inclusiveness extend to his exploration of East Asian detective fiction, Scandinavian crime writing, and “women writing about private investigators.” His descriptions of particular works, and of specific contributions to the genre, are often incisive and provide genuine insights, though the approach is generally to provide an overview of essential facts and patterns rather than close interpretive arguments. Among the most intriguing chapters are those that examine works by major authors primarily known for their contributions to other genres, such as Charles Dickens and Jorge Luis Borges. Ultimately, Edwards offers a thorough sketch of the genre’s origins, its complex evolutions, and its flexibility in response to cultural shifts. The author also includes a 20-page select bibliography.

A broad and absorbing overview of one of the most popular and enduring genres of fiction.

Heavy Metal
The Hard Days and Nights of the Shipyard Workers Who Build America’s Supercarriers
Fabey, Michael
Morrow/HarperCollins (320 pp.)
$28.99  |  June 14, 2022
978-0-06-299625-1

Maritime journalist Fabey takes a close look at the building of a new kind of aircraft carrier.
Newport News Shipbuilding has been in business for a long time, constructing commercial and military ships at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. In times past, the work was piecemeal, highly specialized, and clumsily coordinated, “leading to delays, misinterpretations, and production miscues.” These days, writes Fabey, much of the work of shipbuilding has shifted to the digital realm, leading to fewer such problems. Still, as he
notes, there are plenty of other hurdles and headaches attendant in building a warship, especially in light of the fact that China is now floating an aircraft carrier (bought, ironically, from Ukraine), that add urgency to the work. Newport News had been busily working on the first of its new-generation nuclear-powered carriers, the Gerald R. Ford; throughout Fabey’s account, it adds to the new class with CVN-79, in time formally named the John F. Kennedy. At seemingly every turn, the shipbuilders face difficulty. It’s hard work to begin with, but then there are change orders from the Pentagon, labor-management conflicts, political currents that push for a bigger Navy on the one hand and belt-tightening on the other, the pandemic, and technical failures, “common enough for a new ship class, but the testing of this one dragged on and on, because it took longer than they thought it would to find and fix all the issues.” Fabey’s storyline plods at times, especially in technical matters. Even so, the text is a definitively thorough portrait of how a ship comes into being. In the hands of a John McPhee, the tale would have more zip, but it’s clear that a fitting amount of hard work and thought went into it, as befits the complex nature of the subject.

INVENTING THE IT GIRL
How Elinor Glyn Created the Modern Romance and Conquered Early Hollywood
Hallett, Hilary A.
Liveright/Norton (400 pp.)
$32.50 | July 26, 2022
978-1-63149-069-9

A terrific biography of a revolutionary 19th-century British author and sexual trailblazer.

Inspired by her dissertation on “the sexual politics of early Hollywood,” Hallett, a history professor and director of American studies at Columbia, rediscovers the overlooked literary legacy of Elinor Glyn (1864-1943). Born in the Channel Islands, she was raised by her grandmother, who molded her in the ways of British aristocracy. Despite an awareness of 19th-century “wifely duty” and Victorian ideals, Glyn’s early “mistrust of womanly submission ran deep.” As an adult, she bedazzled society circles with her bright red hair and green eyes. She married a wealthy landowner, birthed two daughters, and traveled extensively across Europe and Egypt, journeys the author describes in pleasingly lavish detail. A “sexual and temperamental mismatch” sunk the marriage, but not before Glyn began straying with assorted men and penning feverishly scandalous novels in the early 1900s. In time, she would become known as the “founder of the modern sex novel,” even amid the strict media and censorship rules of the era. Indifferent to ostracism from naysaying British society, she defiantly continued publishing erotically focused books—including Three Weeks (1907), a massive bestseller that was translated into “every major European language”—featuring her cultural touchstone Tiger Queen, a temptress character known for bawdy escapades. Eventually relocating to Hollywood, Glyn popularized the concept of the it girl, a sobriquet for a woman with remarkable sex appeal. Renowned flapper Clara Bow was one of the first to fondly embody this moniker and openly recognized Glyn as “the original model of a new kind of sexually emancipated, professionally independent, and spiritually brave woman who inspired so many.” In this appealing follow-up to her first book, Go West, Young Women: The Rise of Early Hollywood, Hallett creates a vivacious, intellectual, and fascinating narrative, and her impressive research effectively highlights an extraordinary life that aimed to “let loose the genie of women’s sexual liberation.”

A brilliant, thought-provoking portrait of a forgotten 20th-century influencer.
AMERICAN CARTEL
Inside the Battle To Bring Down the Opioid Industry
Higham, Scott & Sari Horwitz
Twelve (368 pp.)
$30.00 | July 12, 2022
978-1-5387-3720-0

A meticulous examination of how unscrupulous drug manufacturers, aided by thousands of pharmacies and doctors, produced and concealed a public health crisis.

Higham and Horwitz, who published groundbreaking exposés of the drug industry for the Washington Post, document how American opioid manufacturers, especially Purdue Pharma, recklessly distributed billions of pain pills across the country, generating an unprecedented drug epidemic. Their account of widespread corruption does, indeed, “open a horrifying panorama on corporate greed and political cowardice” while also showing “the efforts of community activists, DEA agents, and a coalition of lawyers to stop the human carnage.” In brisk, often harrowing chapters, the authors present riveting descriptions of government investigations into the crisis, struggles to thwart those investigations by targeted corporations and their allies, and the (ongoing) courtroom proceedings that have revealed an astoundingly expansive web of negligence, greed, and callousness. Along the way, Higham and Horwitz lay bare a series of alarming facts about the institutions that fostered the epidemic, including how several opioid manufacturers exerted extraordinary influence over members of Congress, their attempts to launch public relations campaigns that undermined faith in science, and the pronounced indifference of some of their executives to the catastrophe they helped create. A particularly gripping thread of the narrative follows the heroic efforts of whistleblower Joseph T. Rannazzisi, a retired and ostracized member of the DEA who called out both the amorality of the drug industry and the inefficacy of his former employer. Also striking are the descriptions of certain loosely regulated Florida clinics, which attracted enormous and sometimes unruly...
crowds of clients from across the country. The authors could have offered a little more attention to the voices of epidemic victims—for that, see Beth Macy’s potent duo, *Dopesick* and *Raising Lazarus*—but they effectively acknowledge the suffering that hundreds of thousands have endured, creating an unforgettable portrait of unthinkable corporate greed and malfeasance.

A stunning depiction of corruption in the drug industry and those who confronted it.

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**EXISTENTIAL PHYSICS**

*A Scientist’s Guide to Life’s Biggest Questions*

Hossenfelder, Sabine

Viking (272 pp.)

$28.00 | Aug. 9, 2022

978-1-984879-45-5

A German physicist digs into a host of existential quandaries.

In her 2018 book, *Lost in Math: How Beauty Leads Physics Astray*, Hossenfelder, research fellow at the Frankfurt Institute for Advanced Studies, excoriated her colleagues for falling in love with theories that bear little relation to reality. In her second book, she turns her gimlet eye on popular beliefs. More than other scientific fields, notes the author, physics asks profound questions about the meaning of everything, including life and death, the origin of the universe, and the nature of reality. Religious leaders ask the same questions, as do philosophers, gurus, mystics, alternative healers, and outright quacks. Unlike many other science writers, Hossenfelder is less interested in denouncing pseudoscience than revealing that many spiritual ideas are compatible with modern physics. Natural laws contradict others, and still others are “ascientific”—i.e., neither true nor false but unprovable: “Science has nothing to say about it. At least, science in its current state.” Some fashionable beliefs are “more appealing the less you understand physics,” but Hossenfelder avoids low-hanging fruit (Deepak Chopra and Elon Musk make fleeting appearances), preferring to interview and often argue with fellow physicists, including Nobel laureates. Casting her net widely, she investigates God and spirituality, free will, universal consciousness, dualism (whether the mind is separate from the body), the Big Bang theory about the origin of the cosmos, the possible existence of parallel universes, and whether we live in a computer simulation. As the author notes, the “simulation hypothesis” annoys her because it represents “a bold claim about the laws of nature that doesn’t pay any attention to what we know about the laws of nature.” Separating reality from nonsense has preoccupied philosophers for centuries. Nonsense remains as popular as ever, but readers who wonder how to tell a good from a bad explanation can now consult two good books: David Deutsch’s *The Beginning of Infinity* and this one.

An intriguing book fully of highly opinionated and convincing arguments.
“This well-crafted memoir is a bracing reminder of how a few choices can separate success from a troubled life.”

SPLIT DECISION

A joint memoir from rapper and actor Ice-T and his former partner in crime.

Ice-T (born Tracy Morrow) has been ahead of the cultural curve his entire career, so it’s hardly surprising that this collaboration takes multiverse storytelling conventions and applies them to nonfiction. The result is much more than a gritty, Sliding Doors–style story. Though he has been in the public eye for decades, Ice-T, whose two-decade-plus portrayal of detective Fin Tutuola on Law & Order: Special Victims Unit made him the longest-running Black actor in TV history, is a relatively private guy. Ice-T opens up about being orphaned at age 12 and being quickly attracted to the trappings of criminal life, where he began working on jewelry store heists with his friend Spike. His love of hip-hop was connected to that life, but once he started drawing attention for his music, he realized he had to make a choice, and he chose music. “I’m going to show you the glamour and fast money that entice cats to want to be players, but also how they end up getting shot, overdosing, doing life in prison,” he writes. “There are no success stories among gangsters and players unless, like me, they manage to get out in time. No one’s invincible. You stay in the game long enough and you will go to prison or get killed.” Spike chose to stay in the game longer, telling himself he would get out after he had saved enough money to comfortably focus on his music. Spike got caught and went to prison, while Ice-T went on to fame and fortune. What makes their fascinating stories so effective is that neither one is told with any judgment or jealousy. They both own their decisions and recognize the consequences, good and bad.

This well-crafted memoir is a bracing reminder of how a few choices can separate success from a troubled life.
FOODTOPIA
Communities in Pursuit of Peace, Love, & Homegrown Food
Kelley, Margot Anne
Godine (384 pp.)
$28.95 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-56792-730-6

An educator and editor shares her appetite for health and justice.

The back-to-the-land movement associated with the 1970s is part of a long trajectory that began in the 19th century and continues in the present. Kelley, an enthusiastic vegetable gardener, looks at five periods—in the 1840s, 1900s, 1930s, 1960s, and, most recently, in the 2010s—during which similar efforts took root. “These utopian experimenters,” she writes, “have daisy-chained into being an enduring counterforce to the mainstream ethos, one that’s based on a love of freedom, equality, reciprocity—and good food.” In 1845, industrialization and “agricultural capitalism” sent Thoreau to Walden Pond. “The young freedom seeker recognized this change made farming and food production more centralized, more monopolistic, less healthful, and less conducive to freedom,” Kelley asserts. “He set out to prove that an alternative conducive to freedom was still possible.” Thoreau’s singular experiment was echoed in some 80 communities—Fruitlands and Brook Farm are two of the most well known—scattered throughout New England and the Midwest. All “sought a greater sense of freedom, equality, the abolition of slavery, and communal sufficiency.” Later, inequality of access to food, alarm about adulteration and pesticides, and the rise of supermarkets promoting canned and frozen food all inspired efforts to find viable ways to reject agribusiness. Kelley’s well-populated narrative includes Scott and Helen Nearing, whose Living the Good Life became a transformative text for many idealistic farmers; Mollie Katzen, author of The Moosewood Cookbook; and Alice Waters, who sparked a food revolution from her Berkeley restaurant. Recounting her visits to farms, conferences, and farmers markets, Kelley offers lively profiles of men and women “intimately and integrally connected to utopians who came before or after them, who inspired or affirmed them, who believed that land is a common good, that farming should be a healthful enterprise, that food should nourish bodies and spirits.”

An informative, fresh history of food in America.
II, he maintained a timorous disposition in the face of their increasing aggression—Kertzer reminds us that “Hitler had long viewed the Duce as his role model”—despite the piles of documentation that reveal how he was frequently informed of the brutalities committed by the Nazis and their willing collaborators. During this time, countless victims beseeched him to stand up and do something as a moral leader. The pope, casting himself as a peacemaker, managed to play his cards skillfully even when the Allies invaded and took pains not to bomb the Vatican. As a result, the institution of the Catholic Church emerged largely unscathed from the war, effectively scrubbing clean its Fascist and Nazi collaboration. Kertzer is to be commended for bringing it all to light in page-turning fashion.

A riveting history and valuable lesson for our time about the perils of neutrality.

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PROVING GROUND
The Untold Story of the Six Women Who Programmed the World’s First Modern Computer
Kleiman, Kathy
Grand Central Publishing (320 pp.)
$30.00 | July 26, 2022
978-1-5387-1828-5

A riveting history and valuable lesson for our time about the perils of neutrality.

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LUXURIANT ENVIRONMENTALISM
Make a huge, positive, global difference from your home!

“A grassroots do-it-yourself guide to environmentally friendly living.”

“Wheaton is a practiced communicator who relays lessons about the environment in clear, simple terms...”

“...readers...find an enormous amount of useful information about living a greener and simpler life, generously illustrated with black-and-white artwork.”

—Kirkus Reviews
from the history of the Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer. “It is up to oral histories to fill in the gaps and share the important stories and lives left out,” she writes. In an engaging narrative in the vein of Hidden Figures, Kleiman shares the background of each of these women as well as how they became a part of a secret U.S. Army project. During World War II, the Army hoped to increase the accuracy of its artillery, and the desktop calculators used to calculate missile trajectories were too slow. “On average,” writes the author, “it took about thirty hours to calculate a trajectory using a desktop calculator.” As the Army’s arsenal increased, it required new firing tables and needed faster calculations. Many believed the ENIAC was the answer. Due to their educational backgrounds and experience calculating missile trajectories using the standard method, these women were asked to participate in the programming of the ENIAC. Because many men were in battle, “the war greatly expanded opportunities for college-educated women with backgrounds in engineering, science, and math.” As the author shows, despite their skills, the women still faced discrimination. In fact, in attempting to tell their stories, Kleiman received “discriminatory pushback” herself, including being accused of writing “revisionist history.” She persisted, however, and achieved her goal of restoring these women to their rightful place in computer history. The author includes a helpful five-page cast of characters.

An important and inspiring little-known narrative in modern computing history.

THE LITERARY MAFIA
Jews, Publishing, and Postwar American Literature
Lambert, Josh
Yale Univ. (272 pp.)
$35.00 | July 26, 2022
978-0-300-25142-5

A chronicle of the rise of Jewish editors to important positions in the literary establishment by the 1960s and how they shaped the book industry and the reading public.

On one hand, the concept of a Jewish literary mafia rings antisemitic, especially as decried by predominantly Protestant male authors like Truman Capote and Jack Kerouac. On the other hand, the fact remained that in the early 1900s, the finest publishing houses began to be led by Jews, among the first being Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., founded in 1915, and Simon & Schuster, founded in 1924. Lambert, the director of the Jewish Studies Program at Wellesley College, begins by emphasizing that, until the turn of the 20th century, Jews were largely “literarily disenfranchised” from these positions (as were African Americans, Natives, and other minorities). They were also barred from faculty positions in English programs until the 1930s. The author shows how the next half-century marked enormous changes to Jews’ socio-economic status in the U.S. As significant editors—including Irving Howe, book reviewer at TIME magazine; Barbara Epstein and Robert Silvers, co-founders of the New York Review of Books; and Gordon Lish at Esquire—came on the scene, the publishing industry, both in the U.S. and abroad, experienced an “unprecedented expansion.” Exploring themes like kinship (especially to “fellow ethnics”) and homophily (a kind of “cultural gatekeeping”) Lambert, in prose best suited to academics, turns to specific texts to show how the literary establishment grew both nepotistic and meritocratic. Some of the author’s illuminating case studies involve the winners of the National Book Award from 1954 to 1974; Columbia University academic Lionel Trilling’s glowing blurbs for his students (their “shared Jewishness…clearly mattered in the relationships that developed between them”); “whisper novels” by women authors about their paternalistic editors; and the founding of Atheneum in 1949 by Alfred Knopf Jr.

A multilayered scholarly argument for the continued study of “the development of ethnic niches.”
AGENT JOSEPHINE
American Beauty, French Hero, British Spy
Lewis, Damien
Public Affairs (592 pp.)
$32.00 | July 12, 2022
978-1-5417-0066-6


Rather than crafting a conventional biography, Lewis concentrates on the wartime years, creating a heroic portrait of the selfless, brave, somewhat reckless, pioneering, unswervingly patriotic spy for the Allies who was active even before the Nazi occupation of Paris, where she lived and worked. In a suspenseful, serpentine narrative, the author piles on the detail about Britain’s Secret Intelligence Service in France, an agency that worked closely with the Deuxième Bureau, France’s counterespionage service. All were locked in an intelligence battle with the Abwehr, “Nazi Germany’s much expanded intelligence service,” which “sought to overwhelm and subvert her enemies.” Baker, who had been performing in Paris since the early 1920s—after fleeing her impoverished Jim Crow youth in St. Louis and experiencing further hardship in New York City—was running her own club, Chez Josephine, and hobnobbing with admirers of all nationalities. Due to her line of work, she was effective in feeling out the allegiances of significant figures from Italy, Japan, and Spain without raising suspicion. Baker’s Deuxième Bureau supervisor, Capt. Jacques Abtey, also became her lover. “Theirs would prove an intense and tumultuous affair,” writes Lewis, “but one with a special magic all of its own.” After being forced to retreat during the occupation, they worked in various remote locales and slipped effortlessly across national borders. Lewis shows readers how Baker’s difficult life experiences served her well as an agent. “Josephine had never once had it easy,” he writes. “At every stage she had had to fight, to graft and to work unbelievably hard to get ahead. Josephine was blessed with a core of steely fortitude—an unbreakable spirit that was hard wired into her soul.”
The author also explores how her wartime work profoundly affected the rest of her life, imperiling her health but also setting her on the postwar course of civil rights activism.

A complex, entertaining story of intrigue and sangfroid involving a beloved, courageous hero.

**WALKING IN MY JOY**
**In These Streets**

*Lewis, Jenifer*
Amistad/HarperCollins (256 pp.)
$28.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-0-06-307965-6


In the essay titled “Dicktimized,” Lewis describes her brief relationship with a man named Tony, who she later discovered was imprisoned for committing fraud. In “Age of Innocence,” the author reminisces about her relationship with her cousin Ronnie, a talented, gay hairstylist who hid his HIV-positive status while supporting Lewis through the ups and downs of her early career. “Without him around,” she writes, “I would have to put on a hat and any sweat suit for an audition.” Several essays deal with Lewis’ commitment to activism, including a revelatory moment involving climate change while aboard a cruise in Antarctica and her vocal and organized resistance to Donald Trump, who revealed “the bones of the nation—a country that has been quietly lusting after crooks for centuries. The only good thing that man ever did was pull back the curtain on the hate the US is fueled on.” Lewis also reflects on the pandemic, which she spent living with her nephew, Jason, and his “Blasian” family, while also caring for friends who suffered from both physical and mental health issues. In an essay about meeting the Obamas in the White House, Lewis writes, “My whole life is made up of moments grand enough for me to pinch myself,” a description that truly fits the scope and grandeur of the stories she narrates throughout this collection. The author’s voice is alternately hilarious and compassionate. Her frankness about living with bipolar disorder is particularly insightful, and her commentary on the state of mental health in the U.S. is trenchant and sincere. While the book does not have a clear structure, the essays generally connect enough to create a mostly coherent narrative.

A funny and poignant essay collection by a celebrated Black actor.

**MEMOIRS**

*Lowell, Robert*
Ed. by Stephen Gould Axelrod & Grzegorz Kosc
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (464 pp.)
$35.00 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-0-374-25892-4

A collection of the renowned poet’s personal writing.

At the heart of this hodgepodge of Lowell’s work is what editors Axelrod and Kosc call “My Autobiography,” mostly previously unpublished childhood memories written in the 1950s followed by writings about his severe bipolar disorder. Taken together, the editors write, “they tell a powerful story of a soul in pain and a writer searching, with courage and discipline, for a way forward,” and they provided the source material for Lowell’s influential 1959 poetry collection, *Life Studies*. Highly detailed, lucid, and precise, Lowell’s writing is witty, sarcastic, and revealing about himself, his parents, his beloved grandfather, and others in his orbit. The well-off Bostonian, as the editors put it, wanted “to both mock and mourn his family, his social world, himself.” Some of the writing is tinged with the elitist racism of his clan, a “declining yet still powerful white” family who “insistently disrespect[ed] people who are not ‘of the right sort.’” At 8, he recalls, he was “thick-witted, narcissistic, thuggish,” and...
Available in print, eBook, & audiobook (narrated by the Author).

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“Soldiers and military families will get the most out of this, but general readers looking for an introduction to financial planning can also benefit from his advice. Ultimately a unique take on personal finance, with practical steps geared towards military professionals, Financial Dominance will give money-minded readers much to consider.”

—Booklife Reviews
poet and biographer relative “Amy Lowell was never a welcome subject in our household.” These memoirs end in 1937, followed by a section called “Crisis and Aftermath,” highlighted by “The Balanced Aquarium,” one of the longest pieces, what the editors call “postmodern psychomachy, an invocation of his internal turmoil.” In many pieces, Lowell recounts his mental torments and hospitalization. Composed from 1959 to 1977, the section titled “A Life Among Writers” is a collection of perceptive, image-laced essays, some never published before, of authors he knew: Pound, Eliot, and his “dear old friend” Randall Jarrell. Visiting elderly Tennessee poet Allen Tate, Lowell writes, “Here, like the battered Confederacy, he still lived and was history.” Robert Frost was the “best strictly metered poet in our history.” An acquaintance of Lowell’s, Sylvia Path wrote the “most perfect and powerful poems...among the melancholy triumphs of twentieth-century imagination.”

A rich book for scholars and fans of Lowell’s poetry.

DEER CREEK DRIVE
A Reckoning of Memory and Murder in the Mississippi Delta
Lowry, Beverly
Knopf (368 pp.)
$29.00 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-0-525-65723-1

The details of a 1948 murder in small-town Mississippi anchor a personal account of class, race, and justice.

The author of numerous novels and works of nonfiction, Lowry has created a signature genre that combines deeply researched true crime with memoir—e.g., Crossed Over (1992); Who Killed These Girls? (2016). Her latest focuses on the murder of Idella Thompson in Leland, Mississippi, just a few miles from the author’s hometown of Greenville. Thompson was hacked to death in her home in the middle of the afternoon, suffering more than 150 blows from a pair of pruning shears. Her daughter Ruth Dickins, who reported the death and was found at the scene in blood-soaked clothing, claimed to have interrupted “a Negro” in the act of murder. Despite a two-week manhunt, this hasty fabrication could not be supported, and Mrs. Dickins was tried, convicted, and sent to a prison farm. Police never uncovered the true motive, though both women were known to be “high-tempered and difficult.” Lowry was 10 at the time of the crime and followed the trial and its aftermath along with everyone else in the Delta. Though few doubted Dickins was guilty, the governor received petitions for her release every year. Others saw class bias in the call for clemency and thought she should stay right where she was. “Before suspending Mrs. Dickins’s sentence,” one woman suggested, “the governor [should] get the pictures of Mrs. Thompson’s body and see for himself the mercy and consideration she gave her mother.” Lowry chronicles the checkered fortunes of her own, less prominent family alongside those of the Thompson/Dickins clan, and though these stories have no real reason to be conjoined, the author uses both to illustrate the effects of the changing mores and social structure of the period. At one point, she was selected by her school to appear in a TV segment in which White students—“dumb as fence posts”—made the case against desegregation.

Lowry’s dry wit, honed sentences, and careful way of connecting the dots make her case: This is quite a story.
A sensitive and compelling life of the great, ill-treated athlete Jim Thorpe (1887-1953).

Born into the Sac and Fox Nation in Oklahoma, his birth name that of the title, Thorpe was an otherworldly athlete. As two-time Pulitzer winner and Washington Post associate editor Maraniss notes, Thorpe was so phenomenal that he remains “one of the few Native Americans of the twentieth century whose people could cite and praise even if they knew little else about the indigenous experience.” He excelled at every sport he played, making his coach at the Carlisle Indian School, Pop Warner, famous in the bargain. In 1912, Thorpe dazzled spectators at the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm, though his gold medals would soon be retracted after a newspaper reported that he had played pro baseball a couple of years earlier, violating the Games’ demands that participating athletes be amateurs. Maraniss rightly objects that in the aftermath, “most of the lies and feignings of innocence involved officials trying to save their own reputations, not his,” Warner and future U.S. Olympics head Avery Brundage among them. Thorpe spent the rest of his life trying to clear his name and have his Olympic record restored to him, alternating between poverty and one doomed business venture after another, moving from town to town to join various teams or escape his past. Of course, racism was a powerful element in Thorpe’s life, and Maraniss explores this topic with insight and nuance, just as he did in his biography of Roberto Clemente. Particularly pointed is the author’s closing anecdote about how Thorpe’s widow, apparently a skilled grifter, convinced a Pennsylvania town to rename itself after him with the promise of a well-funded hospital and other income-generating ventures; instead, it got his bones but nothing else.

A tale that, though well known in outline, Maraniss enriches with his considerable skills as a writer and researcher.
which he could deem Trump a “despicable human being” yet twice vote against impeaching him; Kevin McCarthy, so hungry for power that he allowed that Trump bore responsibility for the coup attempt yet rushed to declare fealty to the boss; Lisa Murkowski, who expressed wonder that so many Americans believe the 2020 election was stolen and questions that calculus of McConnell’s, saying of the impeachment vote, “I wish that it had been different.”

Red meat for politics watchers, unsparing in its depiction of a time of torment.

A librarian and anti-racism educator offers would-be White allies lessons in how to lift up Black women and begin healing the cancer of American racism.

For Whites serious about being allies to African Americans, “words aren’t enough.” Adding hashtags to a social media site or acknowledging that the Black Lives Matter movement is important does nothing to change the systemic injustices that Black Americans—and especially Black women—face every day. Michelle provides a step-by-step guide for committed Whites to evolve beyond race “fragility” and take the hard, sometimes painful actions the author sees as determinants of true allyship. She divides the book into four sections, each representing one week in an ally crash course. The first week begins with learning to recognize one’s own racism and giving Black women the opportunity to take the lead in expressing their feelings, struggles, and discontent, no matter the discomfort on the part of allies. The next step consists of seeing and discussing how race privileges White people and how unexamined relationships with White men support White supremacy. White allies must then actively seek to educate friends, family, and everyone in their sphere about racism and be prepared to fight against push back. They must also use their privilege, especially in mixed-race groups, to prioritize Black women and grant them the space to speak their truths while inspiring other Whites to follow their lead. For every action she details, Michelle offers ideas for journaling and sharing with accountability partners, books and websites to (self-)educate, and starter questions for honest conversations in anti-racism “affinity groups.” Though it focuses mostly on Black women, this timely, no-nonsense handbook offers an important blueprint for White allies to carry out the often uncomfortable but necessary work of promoting racial equality among all marginalized people. Michelle’s work is a useful complement to Sophie Williams’ Anti-Racist Ally and, for parents, Britt Hawthorne’s Raising Antiracist Children.

Welcome straight talk for a new age in race relations.
“At times inspiring, at times heartbreaking, this account of a small Jewish community is always engrossing.”

THE PROPHET OF THE ANDES

An Unlikely Journey to the Promised Land

Mochkofsky, Graciela

Trans. by Lisa Dillman

Knopf (288 pp.)

$30.00 | Aug. 2, 2022

978-1-101-87518-6

One man’s road to Judaism in Peru. Journalist and educator Mochkofsky, a contributing writer for the New Yorker, chronicles the inspiring, sometimes astonishing tale of Segundo Villanueva (1927-2008), whose spiritual journey and personal magnetism made him the center of an extremely dedicated group of followers from the 1960s until his death. Finding a Bible in a trunk he had inherited, at a time when the Catholic Church deeply discouraged Bible use by laity, Villanueva read the book with fervor, finding great inconsistencies between what the church taught and what the Scriptures presented. His conversational and questioning nature caused a small group of family and friends to follow his leadership in looking for a church home that would more closely align with their findings in Scripture. Initially called the Assemblyists, they aligned with the Seventh-Day Adventist Church for a time but eventually parted ways. Pushing deep into the Amazonian jungle, they set up a village where they could live in community without the oversight of outside religious leaders. As he continued to immerse himself in biblical study, Villanueva rejected Christian teachings altogether and decided that he and his followers were, in fact, Jews, a decision that led to splintering within the community. In 1986, “they drafted the new organization’s founding document” and changed their name to Children of Moses (Bnei Moshe). They embarked on the lengthy process of being officially recognized as converted Jews and moving to Israel. Though some members of the organization managed to immigrate, they found life in Israel to be fraught with problems of its own. Readers will be swept up in this story of one man’s unshakeable quest for truth and the people who followed him through every obstacle, from poverty to jungle predators to Israeli bureaucracy.

At times inspiring, at times heartbreaking, this account of a small Jewish community is always engrossing.

LISTENING WELL

Bringing Stories of Hope to Life

Morris, Heather

St. Martin’s (320 pp.)

$29.99 | Aug. 2, 2022

978-1-250-27691-9

How to use listening skills to find inspiration and enrichment. Morris based her novels The Tattooist of Auschwitz and Cilka’s Journey on the emotional, intimate details told to her by Holocaust survivors, who were eager for her to hear their stories. In a heartfelt, occasionally self-congratulatory memoir, the author extols the act of listening as an expression of love and empathy. Growing up in New Zealand, she was taught that children should be seen and not heard. “As an inquisitive child, and one who already instinctively understood the value of the story, and in hearing what others had to say, this had the opposite effect on me,” she recalls.

2022 BRONZE MEDAL AWARD WINNER IN THE POETRY/VERSE CATEGORY FOR THE GLOBAL BOOK AWARDS

“A Piece of Me

an arrangement of words to inspire reflection

ARIF AHMAD

ISBN: 978-1-7373929-2-7

“The varied essays and poems of the autobiographical collection A Piece of Me are shared to inspire the community involvement that they model.”

—Foreword Reviews

“A powerful collection of poetry and prose that reflects on religious and racial discrimination.”

—Booklife Reviews

“A novice poet delivers intriguing meditations on culture, politics, and humanity.”

—Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation or Information on Publishing and Film Rights, Email cardeps@gmail.com
“I wanted to know what it was adults talked about, wanted to know everything.” That inquisitiveness has transformed her into what she calls an active listener, for which she has devised some basic rules: “to concentrate, to understand, to respond, to remember what is being said, to withhold judgment or opinion.” Too often, she writes, we listen to another person only to look for an opening in which to express our own ideas. Listening, though, whether to elders, children, or one’s own feelings, is an act of generosity and attention. For more than 20 years as an office manager in the social work department of a Melbourne hospital, she came into contact with patients in considerable distress. “To have someone listening without being personally connected to them,” she discovered, “unleashed a torrent of past and present concerns.” Offering comfort and support for patients and caregivers, she was praised as an “honorary social worker.” Her most significant act of listening came in her relationship with Lale Sokolov, the tattooist she memorialized in The Tattooist and a central character in her memoir. She recounts their growing closeness over the three years that she visited with him and his sensitivity in helping him relate the traumatic details of his life.

A celebration of human connection.

THE WORLD’S WORST ASSISTANT

Movsesian, Sona
Plume (272 pp.)
$26.00 | July 19, 2022
978-0-593-18551-3

Conan O’Brien’s longtime personal assistant dishes on the career she never saw coming.

Growing up, Movsesian couldn’t get enough TV, from Sesame Street and Mister Rogers to TGIF programming on ABC. “I eventually made it to HBO,” she writes, “and from there, any dreams of a more ‘productive’ hobby were over.” After an adolescence spent egging houses and not doing homework, she decided her future was in TV. While a student at USC, Movsesian was hired as an alternative programming intern at NBC without knowing “what the fuck” the job entailed. That experience gave the author her first, most invaluable lesson about work: “Never ask questions and always pretend like you know what you’re doing.” She also learned that bosses mistreating their employees was the norm. “I’ve seen people mistreat others because they themselves were mistreated,” she writes, “and think it’s a rite of passage to treat someone like garbage.” At age 26, when a random joke landed her a job as Conan O’Brien’s personal assistant, everything changed, and their mutual “juvenile tendencies” began to feed off each other. As he made fun of her and her unadulterated lust for junk food, Movsesian struck back. O’Brien recalls that she retaliated with “ingenious time-sucking distractions”—like watching TV and napping at work—that revealed her “unquenchable thirst to stick it to The Man,” which, in this case, was O’Brien himself. Nonetheless, as he reveals in the foreword, even though he calls Movsesian the “World’s Worst Assistant,” he also praises her as “one of the most honest and really caring people I know.” This lighthearted, often amusing book, which also includes black-and-white line-drawn comics, will have greatest appeal to fans of Movsesian (who has appeared on several of Conan’s shows, including a special filmed in her ancestral Armenia) and of Conan himself.

Playfully surreal reading about the comedy of human foibles.

LETHAL TIDES

Mary Sears and the Marine Scientists Who Helped Win World War II

Musemeche, Catherine
Morrow/HarperCollins (320 pp.)
$28.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-0-06-299169-0

In war, sometimes the most important weapons are information and expertise, as this biography of a remarkable woman demonstrates.

Musemeche, a veteran pediatric surgeon, recounts the career of Mary Sears (1905-1997), who advanced the science of oceanography while making critical contributions to the war effort. Originally a marine biologist specializing in plankton, after Pearl Harbor, she was sent to the Oceanographic Unit at the Hydrographic Office of the Navy. Though she was meant to be a “placeholder for a man” who had enlisted, her abilities soon became apparent. One of her first projects dealt with studying undersea temperatures, which were especially significant for submarines. As she gathered a (mostly female) team around her, the focus shifted to providing maps for amphibious assaults on Japanese-held islands. The near-disastrous landing on Tarawa had underlined the need for better intelligence, especially about hazards like tides, reefs, waves, and weather. Sometimes, information was available in archives and had to be painstakingly excavated. Ironically, Japanese fishing surveys often turned out to be useful, but otherwise, charts had to be developed from observations of a target. Musemeche notes that Sears had a talent for sifting through huge amounts of raw information to find the important parts. In an era when female scientists had to battle for credibility, the value of her work was quickly recognized, to the point that keeping up with the demand for data and information was a constant strain. There is no telling how many lives were saved due to her work was essential. No doubt the men on the front lines would have agreed. Musemeche tells the story with a sense of restraint that fits the subject, and she notes that a few years after Sears died, the Navy named a new oceanographic survey ship the USNS Mary Sears—a fitting tribute to someone who made a difference.

Overdue acknowledgment of an important figure in American military history.
A full portrait of the fascinating life of a famed disruptor.

Novelist, biographer, and science-fiction writer Nevala-Lee draws on abundant archival material to fashion a thoroughly researched, comprehensive biography of architect, inventor, and “serial entrepreneur” R. Buckminster Fuller (1895-1983), who famously created the geodesic dome. Fuller, the great-nephew of transcendentalist Margaret Fuller, grew up in Milton, Massachusetts. He entered Harvard in 1913 but did so poorly that he withdrew after a semester. After a stint in the Navy and a job in sales with a meatpacking company, Fuller joined his father-in-law, a designer with an interest in architecture, to invent lightweight building blocks for the construction of efficient, affordable housing. Together, they established the Stockade Building System, with Fuller as chief salesman and promoter—a role he inhabited throughout his long career in many ventures. His interest in housing led him to build his own “scientific housing company,” Fuller Houses, to produce components that could be delivered as a package and assembled quickly on site. Cars and airplanes inspired him to design a blimp-shaped house and car. As Nevala-Lee notes, Fuller’s self-aggrandizement, mythmaking, “expansive claims” and “messianic language” informed many previous portrayals of him as a Renaissance man in the mold of Leonardo da Vinci. While not underestimating the fertility of Fuller’s imagination, Nevala-Lee reveals his subject’s reliance on colleagues and students. Like a virus, he had “a unique talent for using a host to reproduce.” When he taught at various colleges, he recruited students as unpaid labor, taking their discoveries “to the next school on his list, burningishis image as a genius by assimilating the work of many others.” Hailed as a futurist, among his predictions were online education and remote working. He influenced architects such as Norman Foster and Frank Gehry, and his conviction “that economic forces favored gargantuan service industries,” has been borne out by Amazon.

A perceptive and cleareyed biography of a unique figure.

An examination of the meaning of home in the current state of climate change.

“Everywhere, the weather, the sky, the water, even the terrain on which we have built our homes is becoming unruly,” writes science journalist Ostrander in this disturbing yet beautifully written book. As the Earth continues to warm—a problem caused primarily by the fossil fuel demands of humans—weather extremes such as severe drought, mega-fires, and catastrophic flooding are becoming commonplace. Near-constant fires in the American West continue to force people from their homes, as do the increasing number of tropical storms and hurricanes in the Gulf and along the Atlantic Coast. For decades, as Ostrander shows throughout, researchers have “called for a reckoning with evidence that had been ignored.” As the author points out—along with countless other experts before her—we can no longer ignore the evidence, and “everything that we took for granted is now in question.” Focusing on the U.S., Ostrander shares four memorable narratives about specific areas already suffering from the effects of climate change: a small town in Alaska being forced to relocate due to thawing of the land; a community in northern California attempting to recover from repeated refinery pollution; towns in Florida and Maryland facing the dire consequences of rising sea levels; and Pateros, Washington, where residents cleaned up rubble and debris after a fire destroyed the town. Interspersed among these stories are Ostrander’s pertinent, engaging essays that speak to the theme of home, including the loss of safety and the homesickness that many will likely face from being uprooted. Speaking to the strength and power of community, the author writes, “to have safe homes in the twenty-first century, we cannot keep acting as if we are isolated individuals.”

A hopeful, urgent, and universal message about our collective ability to face the climate changes we can no longer ignore.
FANTASTIC NUMBERS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM
A Cosmic Quest From Zero to Infinity
Padilla, Antonio
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (352 pp.)
$30.00 | July 26, 2022
978-0-374-60056-3

A fascinating book that guides us through the labyrinth of numbers and what they mean.

Theoretical physicist Padilla, whose research focuses on the intersection of advanced mathematics, physics, and cosmology, sees the world as a collection of particles, waves, and forces described by a spectrum of numbers ranging from the vanishingly small to the unbelievably large. Dividing the book into “big numbers” and “little numbers,” the author traces the history of each of his fields of study, providing sketches of the people who made the key breakthroughs. This is lively history, from the Newtonian world of movement and collisions to the mysteries of quantum mechanics, with Einstein and a host of others making appearances. Finding numbers large enough to make sense of the universe has been a constant problem. Graham’s number, usually written as a mixture of numerals and esoteric symbols, was the standard for a while; Padilla describes it as a “black hole head death,” too big for the human brain to handle as anything but an abstraction. Graham’s number was eventually surpassed by TREE(3), the product of a self-replicating series. At the other end of the numerical scale, Padilla stares into the abyss of supertiny particles and components of atoms, confronting the randomness of the way they stick together, or don’t. “It worries me to think that everything I know should never have existed: me, my family, my closest friends,” he writes. “This book should never have existed and yet, somehow, you’re reading it, right now, in a moment that might never have arrived.” Padilla has a knack for effectively deconstructing difficult concepts, using explanations that include Usain Bolt, Lego, and Squid Game. Though parts of the book are extremely challenging, like James Gleick’s Chaos and Stephen Hawking’s A Brief History of Time, it is a remarkable piece of work that is well worth the effort.

Astonishing in its sweep and depth, this book offers a unique way of looking at the universe.

TWO CHEERS FOR POLITICS
Why Democracy Is Flawed, Frightening—and Our Best Hope
Purdy, Jedediah
Basic Books (304 pp.)
$29.00 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-1-541-67302-1

A nuanced prescription for a politics remade in the wake of the Trump era.

“Our lives depend on the choices we make and those we are unable to make,” writes Columbia Law School professor Purdy, who opens with a thought experiment that imagines four textbooks published in 2050. One tells the story of a triumphant authoritarianism, another of political fragmentation, yet another the surrender of functions of civic life to a technocracy. “These three futures are already with us,” he notes, while the fourth and most desirable has yet to take shape: a movement of citizens who took charge of their own lives and made a history that addressed flaws in government, economic inequality, the climate change crisis, and other existential issues. Even though many of us claim that we are sick of politics, we all make demands of it: the left for reforms in policing and a stronger commitment to civil rights, for instance, and the right for nationalist trade policies and an end to immigration. A healthy body politic, writes the author, will recognize the plural, diverse nature of American society and the fact that “majority rule is not a license for the majority to do whatever it wants with everyone else.” He goes on to examine various theories of democracy and its discontents, from Alexis de Tocqueville to Samuel Huntington, the conservative theorist whose “clash of civilizations” thesis was predated by his view that democracies in action often undermine the premises of democracy itself, proven by a “minority-rule president who led a minority-rule party”—i.e., Donald Trump and the GOP. Purdy argues convincingly that reforms must address issues such as economic and social inequality, predatory capitalism, and “systems of relentless, hierarchical pressure.” The alternative is to lose democracy, he warns, which is to surrender any decision-making authority over our own lives.

A thoughtful consideration of issues in sore need of solution by democratic means.
“The late, prolific adventure writer returns with a fresh account of an epic yet little-known Arctic expedition.”

INTO THE GREAT EMPTINESS
Polar and Survival on the Greenland Ice Cap
Roberts, David
Norton (368 pp.)
$30.00  |  July 12, 2022
978-0-393-86811-1

The late, prolific adventure writer returns with a fresh account of an epic yet little-known Arctic expedition.

Polar explorers Robert Falcon Scott, Roald Amundsen, and Ernest Shackleton are household names, but Henry George “Gino” Watkins (1907-1932) rings few bells. In this fascinating biography, Roberts (1943-2021) points out that, unlike his predecessors, Watkins was neither a military man nor a seasoned traveler. Rather, he was a carefree Cambridge student fond of risky antics and mountain climbing but no expert explorer. Inspired by a Cambridge don who had traveled with Scott and Shackleton in the Antarctic, Watkins decided to explore the Arctic. Dropping out, he led a 1927 expedition to a poorly explored island in the Svalbard archipelago, north of Norway, and to Labrador a year later. Despite his youth, he turned out to be a good leader. Building on these successes, he organized and led the British Arctic Air Route Expedition of 1930-1931, aiming to survey the obscure east coast of Greenland and gather climate data to plan a shorter air route to North America. By this time, others had crossed the island, but no one had overwintered in Greenland’s unspeakably cold, stormy interior. Roberts devotes most of his book to a gripping account of this expedition, with equally fine asides on Greenland’s history and Indigenous inhabitants. Despite the usual mishaps, the men accomplished many of their goals. They established a weather station 140 miles inland, although reaching it proved far more difficult than anticipated, and occupants spent frightened weeks waiting for relief. One man volunteered to spend the entire winter; by spring, his tent was sealed under 20 feet of icy snow, and the relief expedition did not find it until it was nearly too late. Ultimately, everyone returned to wide acclaim. Watkins drowned during a 1932 expedition, but Roberts blames his obscurity on the fact that he left no popular writing, never sought fame, achieved no iconic discoveries, and experienced no disasters.

An outstanding account of a great expedition led by “a child prodigy who died before his full genius could flower.”

DISPATCHES FROM THE GILDED AGE
A Few More Thoughts on Interesting People, Far-Flung Places, and the Joys of Southern Comforts
Reed, Julia
Ed. by Everett Bexley
St. Martin’s (320 pp.)
$28.99  |  Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-250-27943-9

A selection of sparkling essays by a great Southern wit, foodie, fashionista, and prose stylist.

Reed (1960-2020) was a 19-year-old undergrad at George-town when the headmistress of her former boarding school killed the doctor who created the Scarsdale diet. An editor Reed had interned with at Newsweek remembered the connection and sent her to cover it. So began a brilliant career. The breezy foreword by Roy Blount Jr. fails to tell the novice a few things that bring the joys of this sampler of Reed’s magazine work, dated and organized by theme, into sharp focus. The details about Reed’s death, following a long battle with cancer, affect one’s reading of the essays she wrote that year, hilarious accounts of her “first world problems” during the pandemic—e.g., pest infestations; the complexities of quarantine cooking and dining.

“On Mother’s Day, [my mother and I] sat at opposite ends of my outdoor table and shared a rack of lamb with an inspired mint sauce,” she writes. That was their last Mother’s Day, and they both knew it. Her decision not to mention her illness in this or any other essay that appeared in her long-running column in Garden and Gun recalls Nora Ephron, another seemingly candid but actually quite reserved personal essayist always ready with the bright, deflecting wisecrack. Similarly poignant are essays that touch on Reed’s friendship with André Leon Talley, the late Vogue editor at large and kindred spirit. Talley helped her order her trousseau for a huge Mississippi wedding she cancelled at the last minute in 2011—then took the honeymoon anyway, she and her ex-fiancé joining Talley and other friends in Paris. Also preserved in this collection are prime examples of Reed’s droll, incisive writing about her Southern roots alongside puff pieces on the Bush twins and surprising angles on Nixon, Cheney, and others. As Blount points out, Reed was “a Republican—of a decidedly secular, anti-Trump, anti-death-penalty, gender-and-race-friendly, Delta-pride variety all her own.”

There is life after death—at least for an essayist with this much verve on the page.
I, the empire disintegrated, but Vienna remained a crucial capital. Robertson leads readers through the labyrinthine politics associated with the city and notes the many famous figures—Mozart, Freud, Hitler, Stalin, Mahler, Klimt—who lived there at one time or another. In the aftermath of World War I, the empire disintegrated, but Vienna remained a crucial pivot point for the region. A dark period began when the Nazis invaded in 1938—and were largely welcomed. After World War II, Vienna was occupied by the Soviets and the Allies, and it was a whirlpool of Cold War espionage for a decade. The Russians left in 1955 after the Austrian government declared permanent neutrality. Even now, Austria is not a part of NATO. Robertson does a good job of keeping the complicated narrative straight, although the book is decidedly top-down history. Some readers might leave readers who are thirsty for gossip feeling parched. The play, however, is an imaginative portrait, with Capote coming across as the needier of the two, wondering if he’s wasted his years while maintaining he was “the one and only real true genius in America.” Meanwhile, Warhol was his concerned caregiver, eager to protect the man he was so obsessed with in his youth that Capote’s mother had to tell him to stop pestering her son.

A poignant drama about two influential yet fragile figures grappling with the “very excruciating life” of an artist.
“A rewarding debut memoir in which a sensitive soul finds salvation in poetry and a life in literature.”

CRYING IN THE BATHROOM

Erika L. Sánchez

Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter, a young adult novel that became both a New York Times bestseller and a National Book Award finalist, is now a faculty chair at DePaul University. In her first memoir, Sánchez gives voice to all of her “musings, misfortunes, triumphs, disappointments, delights, and resurrections.” The author begins by examining her offbeat sense of humor—e.g., her assertion that greyhound dogs “look racist… like they would call ICE and ruin your cookout”—but much of her life story tends toward the tragic. Sánchez writes candidly about her painful abortion, debilitating depression, suicidal thoughts, and time at a psychiatric hospital. She became an atheist at age 12 “when I realized the Catholic Church hated women,” and she eventually found salvation in poetry, “the closest thing I had to religion.” In a life “defined by letters, words, and books,” Sánchez is drawn to melancholia. In Lisbon, while listening to the “beautifully mournful music” of fado, she “felt as if my soul was being purged”—similar to the “duende” she felt watching a flamenco dance, “a deep and satisfying ache.”

The author defines “a pleasure you suffer, an ailment that you enjoy,” and she’s after something similar in her memoir. She describes great professional successes in academia and the literary world as well as significant personal satisfactions with a loving husband and daughter, but she also recounts every bump she felt along the way. Nonetheless, she has the ability to tease out humor and meaning in the face of oppression, racism, and “colorism and anti-Blackness in Mexican culture.” To her, an ordinary life promises only “slow, excruciating death,” but in the end, Sánchez finds true gratitude for her gifts: “I always believed that I felt too much, cursed my sensitivity, but where would I be without it?”

A rewarding debut memoir in which a sensitive soul finds salvation in poetry and a life in literature.
As the title suggests, this is a book about Hootie & the Blowfish, the South Carolina–based band that made it big in the mid-1990s before seeing its popularity decline and a backlash intensify, as if Hootie embodied everything that was wrong with rock. Not that there was anything wrong with the band, a group of regular guys who made regular-guy music, melodic songs about love and other universal subjects that went down easy. They become a popular phenomenon well beyond the college circuit, but after a few years, they were unable to meet the considerable challenge of sustaining such success. Sonefeld chronicles their rise and fall, but the book is also a straightforward autobiography filled with boyhood stories of growing up in the Chicago suburbs. As the author notes, he was an indifferent student at the University of South Carolina before he hooked up with his future band mates. Though he offers a fair number of entertaining anecdotes about life on the road, Sonefeld isn’t interested in dishing dirt on Hootie. In most ways, they were normal guys playing catchy pop rock, mostly distinguished by having a standout frontman, Darius Rucker, who has continued to enjoy success as a country artist (he also provides the foreword). This becomes a very different book about midway through, as Sonefeld recounts the hard partying common on the rock circuit, a lifestyle that led—as it often does—to a destructive reliance on alcohol. Eventually, the author committed to recovery, the band went on an extended hiatus, and his marriage ended in divorce. In sobriety, he found faith, got married again, had kids, and inaugurated a new career as a Christian singer/songwriter and an adherent of Celebrate Recovery, a faith-based program. A well-intentioned, middle-of-the-road rock bio.

**SWIMMING WITH THE BLOWFISH**
*Hootie, Healing, and One Hell of a Ride*

*Sonefeld, Jim*  
Diversion Books (304 pp.)  
$28.99 | June 28, 2022  
978-1-63576-652-6

A drummer’s memoir of life in a band that enjoyed huge, surprising, and short-lived success.

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**ALL SIGNS POINT TO PARIS**
*A Memoir of Love, Loss, and Destiny*

*Sizlo, Natasha*  
Mariner Books (304 pp.)  
$28.99 | Aug. 16, 2022  
978-0-358-65326-4

A Los Angeles real estate agent’s memoir about her journey to Paris to find her soul mate. A divorced, single mother of two children, Sizlo worked for a high-end real estate company that caters to celebrities and business executives. In L.A., she writes, “Appearances mattered.” To that end, despite admittedly living paycheck to paycheck, she felt compelled to purchase expensive, trendy accessories to appease her potential clients. For her 44th birthday, her best friend bought her a reading with a “sought-after” astrologer even though she admits that she did not believe in astrology. When the astrologer stated that her soul mate was born in Paris on Nov. 2, 1968, the same birth date and location as her ex-boyfriend, Sizlo became intrigued. Over the course of the book, we see her intrigue turn to obsession as she jets off to Paris with the goal of meeting all men (and women) born on that date. The author also shares the poignant story of her father’s recent death and her promise to bravely face his destiny on his own terms,” she writes, “the perfect balance of fate and free will.” At the beginning of each of the 12 chapters, Sizlo includes a passage related to the relevant house of the zodiac. While the storyline is captivating on a soap-opera level, the author’s often self-centered behavior—especially multiple instances in which her relentless pursuit caused her to ignore the interests and feelings of her sister and friends who accompanied her—may strain readers’ ability to feel compassion. Furthermore, in the early stages of the narrative, Sizlo provides little meaningful information about herself, making it difficult to be engaged in the outcome of her quest. The author eventually arrives at some level of self-realization near the end of her trip, but the overall narrative lacks depth or memorable insight.

Largely superficial, perhaps a guilty pleasure for fans of stereotypical beach reads.
out to be, in many cases, as potent as the desire for social justice and national emancipation or the struggle against racism and colonial exploitation.” Spector is wary of the view that the violence was a matter of Cold War proxies. “It might be more accurate,” he writes, “to say that the Cold War did not spread to Asia; it was invited in.” In fact, it is impossible to find a single definitive model, as the conflict ranged from the open warfare of Korea to the insurgency of the Malayan Emergency. China was in a class of its own for complexity and clashes. Gradually, the politics of the region stabilized, sometimes through compromises and sometimes through military victories. There would be more violence in the following decades—most notably, the Vietnam War—but by 1955, the political framework was largely established. Spector does an admirable job exploring the tumultuous events of his large canvas, and he is willing to look past the headlines for the underlying reasons, motivations, and dynamics of each conflict.

An excellent starting point for anyone who wants to understand modern Asian history.

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“A thoughtful, inspiring book that will have readers pondering their own ancestors and their presence in the kitchen.”

KOSHERSOUL

THE DIGITAL REPUBLIC

On Freedom and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century

Susskind, Jamie

Pegasus (304 pp.)

$27.96 | July 5, 2022

978-1-64313-901-2

A British attorney makes a thoughtful case for regulated digital media.

The central problem of the modern internet, writes Susskind, is its "unaccountable power." Whereas in the earliest days of cyberspace, power was largely wielded by libertarian-inclined technologists who knew how to code, today it's in the hands of corporations and wealthy individuals who resist being regulated and tend to a kind of “market individualism.” As the author writes, “unlike in medicine, there are no mandatory ethical qualifications for working as a software engineer or technology executive. There is no enforceable industry code of conduct. There is no obligatory certification. There is no duty to put the public ahead of profit. There are few consequences for serious moral failings; no real fear of being suspended or struck off.” Susskind suggests the development of a code, even a body of law, that protects individuals from depredation and manipulation while at the same time calling for “as little state intrusion as possible.” The author takes a cautious, reasoned approach to the attendant problems, noting, for example, that “the simplest form of platform power is the ability to say no.” While he reckons that Trump had it coming when he was banned from Twitter, the hammer could also come down on anyone who displeases an administrator or owner—say, Elon Musk. The question of free expression and what constitutes transgressions against community standards looms large, beginning with “clearer policies, digestible summaries, standardised language,” and the like, including standards specifying that media platforms employ one moderator for every 5,000 users instead of relying on dubious algorithms that too often mistakenly censor comments. Susskind’s analysis of inadequate government is well presented, though those who currently control the internet are unlikely to yield power unless compelled to do so. The author closes with the hope that social media platforms will recognize that regulation will lead to greater public trust in them.

Students of communication law will find much to ponder—and argue—in these pages.

KOSHERSOUL

Twitty, Michael W.

Amistad/HarperCollins (320 pp.)

$28.99 | Aug. 9, 2022

978-0-06-280175-4

A searching sequel to The Cooking Gene that explores the intersections of “food and identity.”

Black, Jewish, gay, earthy, intellectual: Twitty is a man of parts, all of which come together in the kitchen. The first two ingredients are perhaps the most important, where the bitter herbs of exile manifest in a dish of collard greens. “Blacks and Jews and their Venn diagram have seen considerable turmoil and pain,” he writes, and the cuisine of diaspora is one expression of it. “Being Black and being Jewish is not an anomaly or a rare thing,” writes the author, enumerating, among others, ancient Ethiopian and Eritrean Jewish communities and the actor Yaphet Kotto, “whose Panamanian mother kept strict kosher and whose Cameroonian father reminded him of their deep Jewish roots as African royals”—just one African family among many to whom Judaism had arrived long ago. Then there are the converts, sometimes uncomfortable participants in a social dance by which one is placed within the “networking system of American Jewish identity.” White Jews are more accepting of Blacks than “the rest of self-identified white America,” and in that context, Twitty lauds the “world’s nicest white lady,” who unquestioningly accepted him into the Jewish community without prerequisites. The author chronicles his discussions with a range of Jewish foodies and chefs of many ethnicities to limn what “koshersoul” cuisine might encompass: chicken bone instead of lamb shank bone at seder; hoecakes as “the closest analog to matzoh, the flatbread of slavery”; diaspora gardens teeming with za’atar, yellow onions, eggplant, garlic, field peas, and hundreds of other delicious plants. He follows with recipes both gathered from his research and invented, from those moror-like collard greens to all-healing chicken soup made soulful with the addition of Senegalese ingredients and yam latkes. He also includes a helpful glossary.

A thoughtful, inspiring book that will have readers pondering their own ancestors and their presence in the kitchen.
JOSEPH SMITH AND THE MORMONS
Van Sciver, Noah
Abrams ComicArts (464 pp.)
$29.99  |  July 26, 2022
978-1-4197-4965-0

A graphic novelist takes a deep dive into the early history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

“I was born the eighth of nine children into an LDS family,” writes Van Sciver in the author’s note, going on to describe how his “faith evaporated” even as he still maintained interest in the church since childhood. “I spent years immersed in an independent study on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” he writes. “I traveled to historic sites all over the country and read books, went to church, listened to hymns, and wrote and drew like the Devil was chasing me.” This graphic history/biography is intensive with dialogue and text, but it’s particularly eloquent on the wordless pages, which allow Van Sciver’s artistry to shine through. The author ably captures the world in which Joseph Smith and his followers made their way west through the wilderness, facing persecution and charges of perfidy at every turn. (Van Sciver takes Smith and his followers to Missouri, ending well before they continued to Utah after his death.) Though the book will likely displease strict LDS followers, the author insists that he seeks to tell the story “as straightforwardly as I can and to let readers draw their own conclusions.” The book suggests that the young Smith was something of a con man, perhaps from a family of swindlers, well before he allegedly experienced heavenly visions. Van Sciver renders those visions expertly, the illustrations cast in a ghostly blue and white, providing a pleasing contrast with the otherwise full-color narrative. As the author shows, Smith was duplicitous in wooing his wife and keeping from her the sexual dalliances that led to a doctrine of polygamy. Furthermore, his bank cheated depositors, and his deceptions were spread by muckraking newspapers. One page proclaims him, “Swindler, Charlatan, Crook, Fraud,” as if the universe itself were passing judgment.

Beautifully drawn, contentious, and word-heavy, offering everything about early Mormonism that anyone might like to know.

BEHIND THEIR SCREENS
What Teens Are Facing (and Adults Are Missing)
Weinstein, Emily & Carrie James
MIT Press (264 pp.)
$29.95  |  Aug. 16, 2022
978-0-262-04735-7

A disturbing look at the turbulent world of social media and its impact on adolescents.

Weinstein and James, researchers at Project Zero at Harvard, structure their book around surveys and interviews that get at the heart of a simple yet fraught question: “What worries you most about today’s digital world?” The responses varied so much that the authors often found it difficult to reach any definitive answers, but the process revealed numerous surprises. A predictable but significant finding was that many teens are concerned that they spend too much time on social media, distracting them from the real world. Many are not getting enough sleep because they are constantly worried that they might miss something. However, they also believe that disconnecting is not an option. “For many teens, technologies are a non-negotiable for friendship preservation,” write the authors. “There’s no way to opt out without major social repercussions. They wish adults would acknowledge this reality.” There is also a sense of constantly being under scrutiny. One wrong text, post, or action can result in ostracism or worse. For example, one boy who rejected the romantic advances of a girl found himself accused of being a rapist on social media. Some teens refuse to reveal their political views because of the possible consequences, and the result is an echo chamber of enforced consensus. In fact, one of the most vicious debates that Weinstein and James encountered was whether it was acceptable to even consider the views of people who disagree with you. It all sounds like a labyrinth of constant pressure, image comparison, and virtue signaling. In the concluding chapter, the authors offer advice for parents, emphasizing the need to avoid simplistic solutions, to understand the complexity of the social media environment, and to listen with empathy.

For anyone who wants to know where the social media road is leading, this is an important, worrisome book.

BAD SEX
Truth, Pleasure, and an Unfinished Revolution
Willis Aronowitz, Nona
Plume (352 pp.)
$28.00  |  Aug. 9, 2022
978-0-593-18276-5

A writer reflects on the breakdown of her young marriage and the history of feminism, sexuality, and pleasure.

At 32, Willis Aronowitz, the sex and love columnist for Teen Vogue, decided to end her marriage.
One of her chief complaints with the union was the “bad sex” of the title. In the wake of her divorce, she embarked on a journey to discover what good sex would look like for her as a young, liberated feminist living in the 21st century. These circumstances led the author to the “broader question of what cultural forces interfere with our pleasure, desire, and relationship satisfaction.” She turned first to the work of her late mother, the “early radical pro-sex feminist” Ellen Willis. The author narrates her mother’s life engagingly: her escape from a stifling early marriage, questioning of monogamy, and later marriage, on very different terms, to the author’s father, a “husky hedonist” who “had a reputation as a bed hopper and had trouble managing his often concurrent love affairs.” Pre-divorce, Willis Aronowitz often “cringed” at the thought of her late mother knowing that her daughter remained in an “unsatisfying partnership” out of fear of “stepping off the heterosexual conveyer belt” at an age when many of her peers were settling down and starting families. Alongside her personal experiences, the author digs into the cultural history of marriage and sexuality, mostly through the lens of feminism, with a focus on the developments of the 20th century. Near the end of the book, Willis Aronowitz describes a visit to an erotic massage therapist where she struggled to orgasm. At the time, she writes, she found it “impossible to parse out my own motivations from the din of characters in my head, ranging from girl bossy pep talks to radical feminist rallying cries.” While the author is skilled at synthesizing large swaths of social theory and her passion for the subject is clear, the historical sections are less compelling than the personal elements.

A courageously frank, sometimes uneven hybrid of memoir and social history.

YEAR OF THE TIGER
An Activist’s Life
Wong, Alice
Vintage (352 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-593-31539-2

A mixed-media collection of prose and other work by Asian American disability activist Wong. In the introduction, the author, who was born with a form of muscular dystrophy, claims that she never intended to be an activist. On the contrary, she writes, “Ableism conscripted me into activism.” Throughout the book, Wong supports this claim in a series of pieces that describe what it is like for her—and members of the disability community in general—to navigate an ableist world. In one essay she combines traditional prose with screenshots of text-message chains to recount how she had to drop out of her dream college because changes to Medicaid made it impossible for her to retain the health aides she needed to survive on campus. In another essay peppered with screenshots and newspaper headlines, Wong describes the injustices she faced in trying to access a Covid-19 vaccine as a high-risk individual. The essays are not just limited to writing about disability; though, the author also includes a StoryCorps conversation she recorded with her mother about Lunar New Year traditions, a guide to conducting interviews for radio and other media, and an illustrated ode to cats. As a result, Wong’s collection provides a truly multidimensional portrait of a disabled writer effectively fighting the tendency of able-bodied people to treat the disability community as a monolith, an idea the author effectively deconstructs throughout the book. Not just beautifully written, the book is formally innovative, incorporating fiction (most notably, science fiction) and illustrated elements that are both profoundly insightful and consistently creative. Wong’s grasp of social justice issues is as impressive as her ability to explain complex ideas clearly, passionately, and often humorously. “A memoir can only provide a glimpse of a person,” she writes, “and I am presenting one that is framed by me for nefarious purposes that you will discover one day if you dare.”

A stunningly innovative, compulsively readable hybrid of memoir, cultural criticism, and social activism.
A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CAVEMAN, A QUEEN AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN by Mike Barfield; illus. by Jess Bradley

THE MORE YOU GIVE by Marcy Campbell; illus. by Francesca Sanna

FOREVER HOME by Henry Cole

MUSIC IS A RAINBOW by Bryan Collier

ETTA INVINCIBLE by Reese Schumann; illus. by Gretel Lusky

LEMON BIRD by Paulina Ganucheau

THE MIDNIGHT CHILDREN by Dan Gemeinhart

KEEPNUMUK by Danielle Greendeer; Anthony Perry & Alexis Bunten; illus. by Gary Meeches Sr.

SAL BOAT by Thyra Heder

THE BUTTON BOX by Bridget Hodder & Fawzia Gilani-Williams; illus. by Harshad Marathe

CHOOSING BRAVE by Angela Joy; illus. by Janelle Washington

MARCEL’S MASTERPIECE by Jeff Mack

THREE STRIKE SUMMER by Skyler Schrempp

THE MIDNIGHTERS by Hana Tooke; illus. by Ayesha L. Rubio

SOMETIMES I GRUMBLESQUINCH by Rachel Vail; illus. by Hyewon Yum

THE BLANKET WHERE VIOLET SITS by Allan Wolff; illus. by Lauren Tobia

BRIDGES by Dan Zettwoch

MARCEL’S MASTERPIECE
How a Toilet Shaped the History of Art
Ack, Jeff
Henry Holt
$19.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-250-77716-4

ALLIANA, GIRL OF DRAGONS
Abe, Julie
Illus. by Shan Jiang
Little, Brown (336 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-0-316-30035-3

A girl forced into a life of servitude befriends a dragon and a witch as she chases her dreams and freedom.

Eleven-year-old Alliana longs to leave Narashino, a small town at the edge of a dangerous abyss where her father died while seeking gold. She daydreams about attending the Royal Academy and years to escape her horrible stepfamily and endless chores. Alliana finds solace with Grandmother Mari, who tells her Japanese folktales and stories about Queen Natsumi. When Grandmother Mari passes away, Alliana is left with memories, hopes, and a ledger full of debt to her stepmother. One night, as she is grieving in the meadow near the abyss, she rescues a young nightdragon whom she names Kabo. Later she meets Nela Evergreen, an apprentice witch who needs her help. Taking a chance, Alliana risks everything for a taste of freedom and friendship, joining Nela on her adventures and accompanied by Kabo. This page-turning retelling of “Cinderella” is set in a world that seamlessly incorporates many Japanese cultural elements. Exploring themes like courage, friendships, chosen family, and changing one’s future, the story also touches on classism and greed. The novel, set in the same universe as Abe’s Eva Evergreen series, is accessible to new readers; returning fans will discover more of this world’s history, culture, and creatures while reuniting with some familiar characters at younger ages. Charming, atmospheric spot art opens each chapter.

A thrilling take on “Cinderella” with magic and dragons.
(Fantasy. 8-12)
THE JUNETEENTH STORY
Celebrating the End of Slavery in the United States
Agostini, Alliah L.
Illus. by Sawyer Cloud
becker&mayer! kids (32 pp.)
$18.99 | May 3, 2022
978-0-7603-7514-3

The story of how Juneteenth came to be.
Agostini narrates the history of the holiday that marks the date when enslaved people in Texas finally learned they were free: June 19, 1865, 900 days after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation and 339 years after slavery began. Juneteenth has been celebrated in some cities and regions since 1866 (then called Jubilee Day or Emancipation Day), but in 2021, President Joe Biden made Juneteenth a federal holiday. Throughout this straightforward account, a contemporary Black mother, father, and young daughter observe images of these historical events unfolding: Lincoln signing the Emancipation Proclamation, the jubilation of enslaved people receiving news of their freedom, and the disappointment of a Black family, subject to Jim Crow laws, who cannot visit a park where a White family is picnicking. This split visual narrative likely represents the parents teaching their daughter this history, but readers might find it confusing when the family eats in a park alongside families wearing historical clothing. Agostini brings readers up to the summer of 2020, connecting Juneteenth with the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the Black Lives Matter movement. Cloud uses an array of skin tones to portray the diversity among African Americans, but sometimes the cartoonish style conflicts with the seriousness of the book’s content. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An important look at Juneteenth history, made accessible for young readers. (timeline, author’s note) (Picture book. 7-10)

THE NEW ROOSTER
Alexander, Rilla
Simon & Schuster (48 pp.)
$18.99 | July 12, 2022
978-1-5344-9345-2

Can the new rooster overcome a language barrier to succeed at his job?
A rooster arrives in a new country to start his job rousing lodgers at the ZZZ Hotel and plans to crow the way he always has, with a hearty “OCKCAY AWAY OODLEDAY OODAY.” Unaccustomed to this call, the guests (depicted as anthropomorphic animals in the lively, cartoon-style digital art) stay fast asleep. When a second try fails to stir them, the rooster employs a megaphone. Instead of being grateful for the wake-up call, however, the animals respond with multilingual cries of protest before returning to sleep. The rooster is baffled—not to mention concerned about job security. To soothe himself and prepare for another move, he cooks up a big breakfast. As the aroma wafts into the hotel, the guests follow their noses to the feast. Now, instead of protesting, they praise the meal in different languages. Food is the great equalizer: “It was something everybody understood,” reads text on the penultimate spread, with an accompanying illustration showing a long line of animals in silhouette waiting to enter the hotel. Intracolonic menu text on the final spread introduces the “OCKCAY AWAY OODLEDAY OODAY DINER,” a new business spurred by the rooster’s culinary success and delivering a feel-good ending to this newcomer’s tale. (This book was reviewed digitally.)
Humorous fare to welcome into storytime. (Picture book. 3-6)

WHO STOLE MY LEG?
Andrés, José Carlos
Illus. by Myriam Cameros Sierra
Trans. by Robin Sinclair
nubeOCHO (44 pp.)
$16.99 | July 5, 2022
978-84-17673-65-9

The world’s most frightening pirate meets his match...rubber ducky-style.
“Grishlygrin was the scariest pirate of the Seven Seas of all time,” begins this import translated from the Spanish. How scary is he? So scary that every time he walks the deck, his crew (depicted as kids with a variety of skin tones; Grishlygrin is tan-skinned) run in fear. Fear, that is, until the day one of his crew sneaks into his room at night and exchanges his wooden leg for a rubber duck. On subsequent nights, the leg is swapped for a spring and then a rambunctious dog. It’s only when his leg is exchanged for a pencil that Grishlygrin starts writing stories with every step, and everyone is happier for it. Much of the repetition in the text (“The whole crew was afraid...very veery afraid!”) makes it clear that this is a book earmarked for read-alouds. The vibrant, exuberant art appears to always be in motion and can easily be seen across the room. The child crew itself straddles the line between terrified and delighted as they run from their leader. However, some readers may be put off by the notion of changing out the limbs of people with disabilities for gags. The energy is high, but the book cannot avoid its central premise. (This book was reviewed digitally.)
Swashbuckling abounds, but even lively antics can’t quite keep this ship afloat. (Picture book. 3-6)

EMPTY SMILES
Arden, Katherine
Putnam (356 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-0-593-10918-2
Series: Small Spaces, 4

Arden’s quartet of seasonal horrors concludes with sinister clowns at a carnival.
A dry summer in East Evansburg sends friends Brian, Coco, and Phil to Lethe
Summer is here, and whether readers are looking to relax, enliven a dull day, or just get the giggles, these picture books will do the trick.

*Daddy and Me and the Rhyme To Be* by Chris Bridges and Halcyon Person, illustrated by Parker-Nia Gordon (Scholastic, June 7): Bridges (rapper Ludacris) and Person (head writer of *Karma’s World*, the basis for this original tale) team for a story about a Black girl trying to write a rap for her musician father’s birthday. With onomatopoeia galore, this is a vibrant testament to the power of collaboration and the strength of the father-daughter bond.

*Frances in the Country* by Liz Gar- ton Scanlon, illustrated by Sean Qualls (Neal Porter/Holiday House, June 7): City dweller Frances longs for the freedom of rural life—an urge that’s satisfied when the young Black girl visits her country cousins. Joy pervades Qualls’ collage illustrations in this gentle tale that offers a far more rewarding conclusion than that of “The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse.”

*I Want To Be a Vase* by Julio Torres, illustrated by Julian Glander (Atheneum, June 7): A toilet plunger with lofty ambitions spurs other household objects to rethink their places in life. Illustrations in a psychedelic color scheme ramp up the humor, but when readers stop chuckling, they’ll be left pondering: Why can’t we step out of our circumscribed roles?

*Arab Arab All Year Long!* by Cathy Camper, illustrated by Sawsan Cha-labi (Candlewick, June 14): From making maamoul at Easter to browsing hijab fashion sites for cosplay ideas, a diverse group of Arab families express their heritage throughout a calendar year. Winsome cartoon art and simple text that brims with well-chosen details convey the richness of the Arab experience.

*The Adventures of Robo-Kid* by Diane deGroat (Neal Porter/Holiday House, June 28): Henry’s favorite comic-book character, the indomitable Robo-Kid, leaps into action to help the light-skinned boy brave swimming lessons. The contrast between cartoonish Robo-Kid—tiny and powerless off the page—and Henry’s lavishly illustrated world is delightful; little ones dreading the pool will be heartened.

*Two Dogs* by Ian Falconer (Michael di Capua/HarperCollins, June 28): Bored household pets Perry and Augie escape to the backyard, where they do what dachshunds do best: make mischief. Falconer’s tale exudes playfulness, from the utterly expressive images of the doggie duo to the archly hilarious prose.

*Jigsaw: Mystery in the Mail* by Bob Graham (Candlewick, July 5): Aptly dedicated to “those with time to spare,” this languidly paced tale follows a family who assembles a puzzle, then seeks the final, missing piece. Graham’s minimalistic art and matter-of-fact text will have young readers and their adults taking a cue from the protagonists and slowing down.

*A Day by the Sea* by Barbara Nascimbeni (Thames & Hudson, July 19): A day at the beach means time to take it easy for Frido’s owner, but the little dog has a packed schedule of swimming, dancing, and much more. Nascimbeni’s spare illustrations pop with color, and the pages burst with activity—readers will long to follow Frido’s enthusiastic example.

*Pip and Zip* by Elana K. Arnold, illustrated by Doug Salati (Roaring Brook, July 26): A family channels their listlessness during pandemic shutdown into an appreciation for nature as they watch over two abandoned duck eggs. Richly textured colored-pencil illustrations and lyrical text combine for a reminder to take in the everyday wonders around us.

*Giant Island* by Jane Yolen, illustrated by Doug Keith (Flashlight, Aug. 1): Giant Island seems a misnomer for such a tiny piece of land, but two kids eventually realize that the island itself is a giant—a living, breathing one. The sumptuous gouache artwork slowly reveals clues and will have readers returning to pick out intricate details.

Mahnaz Dar is a young readers’ editor.
By day, it’s a fun-filled paradise. By night, the carnival’s clowns hunt wayward children to turn into dolls. Without the keys, Ollie and friends will be next. While predatory clowns and humans-turned-dolls are far from new territory, Arden once again flexes her gift for atmospheric writing to envelop readers in the story’s eerie mood. The expert use of pacing and sensory cues—sights, sounds, and smells—helps heighten the genuinely terrifying chase scenes. Chess matches and conversations between Ollie and the smiling man humanize the shape-shifting villain, exposing just enough of his motives to wrap up unanswered questions. Earlier volumes establish that most characters are White and Brian is Black.

Brand-New Bubbe

Aronsos, Sarah
Illus. by Ariel Landy
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-62354-249-8

Jillian likes her new stepfather but isn’t sure about her new grandmother.

Bubbe, Yiddish for grandmother, is very loving, but Jillian does not appreciate this affection. She already has two grandmas—Gram and Noni—and a great-grandma. She doesn’t need a person who gives lipstick-laden kisses and introduces new holidays and words (kvelling and kvetching) she doesn’t understand. When her mom insists that Jillian “give Bubbe a chance,” Jillian, tanned and brown-haired, reluctantly agrees to join her “brand-new” grandmother as Bubbe prepares soup and teaches Jillian to make perfect matzah balls. After tasting the delicious concoction, Jillian plans a celebration for everyone: her mother, her stepfather, her father, and all her grandmothers (and her great-grandma). The three grandmas make their special soups and create a feast for everyone—a lovely way to bring a blended family together. Humorous, expressive illustrations track Jillian’s many moods; the interactions between Bubbe’s dog and her cat are especially funny. Filled with good tastes and intentions, the story will ring true where families have stayed friendly after divorce and remarriage. Jillian’s family is a diverse one—Bubbe is Jewish, and the family members range in skin tone. Backmatter includes recipes for all three grannies’ soups (Bubbe’s matzah ball soup, Noni’s Italian wedding soup, and Gram’s gazpacho). (This book was reviewed digitally)

A thrilling and chilling end to a standard-setting series. (Horror 9-13)

The Best Kind of Mooncake

AuYeung, Pearl
Page Street (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-64567-556-3

A child’s special treat is given to a man in need, setting off a chain reaction of kindness.

It is a regular day on Tai Yuen Street in Hong Kong, full of “beeping, bickering, and bartering,” as a child’s parents set up their hawker stand. Suddenly, the usual bustle is interrupted by a THWUMP! as a man who has traveled “a thousand miles” by foot and boat to cross the border into Hong Kong falls to his knees. Bystanders turn away, “uninterested in hearing their own stories retold to them.” However, the protagonist’s mother hears the grumbles of the man’s stomach, and her kids watch horror-struck as she pulls out the special mooncake they were saving—the kind with the double-yolk center (“the best kind!”)—and asks the narrator to bring it to the hungry man. It takes two pages to slowly and sadly walk the treat over and only one gulp for the man to devour the entire cake. However, this single act of kindness unleashes a torrent of generosity from the nearby hawkers. Sepia and cool colors give this tale a historical feel, while delicate cartoon renderings of the bustling market street and crowds of people lighten the tone. In the backmatter, AuYeung explains that this story was based on an incident from her childhood, notes the historical significance of the refugee’s flight to Hong Kong, and shares family photos. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A historically specific setting with an eternal lesson. (Picture book 4-7)

Thirst

Bajaj, Varsha
Nancy Paulsen Books (192 pp.)
$17.99 | July 19, 2022
978-0-593-35439-1

A girl from a Mumbai slum defends the right to water.

Minni may only be 12, but she’s already well aware of how water issues in her neighborhood affect the health and safety of the people around her. While her brother, Sanjay, left school after 10th grade in order to work in a restaurant, Minni dreams of finishing school and getting a good job. But when Minni, Sanjay, and two of their friends witness water being stolen from their community, their families are terrified that the thieves will retaliate against the children. After Minni’s mother comes down with an illness that leaves her unable to go to work as a servant in one of the city’s high-rise buildings, she suggests Minni take her place while she recovers. Minni is thrust into a world of wealth and privilege and develops an uneasy friendship with the daughter of the house. It comes as a shock when she discovers the source of the water thefts is

A winning reminder that though family might evolve, it’s always anchored by love. (websites related to blended families) (Picture book 5-7)
closer than she could have imagined. In this poignant, relatable work, Bajaj expertly depicts class and wealth differences; Minni’s worries for her mother and anger at the injustices inflicted on her community are especially moving. 

A valiant call for justice. (author’s note) (Realistic fiction. 8-12)

NIGHT OF THE VAM-WOLF-ZOM
Banks, Steven
Illus. by Mark Fearing
Holiday House (304 pp.)
$13.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-0-8234-5217-0
Series: Middle School Bites, 4

In his fourth outing, middle school multimonster Tom Marks does an old zombie a solid and just maybe launches a theatrical career amid thrills, chills, and lots of kissing.

Tom has no intention of trying out for the school play, which is a thinly disguised version of “Beauty and the Beast” (in outer space) that was plainly written by the drama teacher with him in mind as the beast. Nonetheless, he finds himself dragooned into the role…and minding it considerably less when he discovers that he gets to kiss the lead—or actually her understudy, as the original lead turns out to be prejudiced (“he’s not normal…he’s a Vam-Wolf-Zom”) and quits. Meanwhile, the pheromones fly as he gets more smooches, including from Martha, the 244-year-old teenage vampire who originally bit him. As further proof that he’s not one to hold a grudge, Tom also frees the zombie who infected him from an abusive carnival barker and delivers him to a secret free-range zombie refuge. Banks tucks in plenty of byplay, from bits of outhouse tipping and bully deflection to encounters with a skunk and with the menacing shape-shifter who bit Tom back in the first episode, as he sets the stage for a bravura on-stage performance and follows up with the customary startling development to lead into the next outing. In the monochrome scenes Fearing supplies for nearly every spread, Tom, his family, and the various monsters present White, but his classmates show a range of skin tones.

Mostly about the laffs, but not entirely, what with some weighty issues rising up. (Fantasy. 8-12)

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CAVEMAN, A QUEEN AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

Barfield, Mike
Illus. by Jess Bradley
Buster Books (128 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Aug. 1, 2022
978-1-78055-713-7

Human history is told in a series of bite-size, point-of-view cartoons covering lots of ground.

What if the Age of Enlightenment were encapsulated by Isaac Newton’s cat, Spithead? What if a Greek vase could talk, providing insight into ancient pottery making? This delightful, informational, and necessarily loopy book tackles history in three parts: “Ancient History,” “The Middle Ages,” and “The Modern Age.” The book goes in strange directions, giving inanimate objects, locations, and animals the same weight as, say, a day in the life of a “movie writer” from 1927 or the queen of England. As with the duo’s previous book, A Day in the Life of a Poo, a Gnu and You (2020), pages featuring panels are intercut with “Bigger Picture” spreads, fictional diaries, and “Newsflashes” that detail other events happening around the same time. Those features break up what might otherwise be an exhausting read, not because the energetic, playful writing and versatile drawings aren’t entertaining but because there is so much factual material being covered in between Game of Thrones references, talking poop, and on-point critiques of, for instance, Christopher Columbus’ inhumane treatment of Indigenous people. The book is worth returning to again and again for new nuggets of knowledge (“Neolithic humans used flint axes and wedges to work me into shape,” says a Standing Stone from 2100 B.C.E., “Talk about a ‘splitting’ headache!”). Characters range in skin tone throughout.

A delightful volume that deftly and wittily balances learning with humor and approachable perspective. (glossary, “About Mike and Jess”) (Graphic nonfiction. 9-12)
Wendy continued to explore, and when she was 17, she discovered a fossilized dinosaur eggshell, which prompted a full-blown paleontological excavation. Since becoming a paleontology technician, Wendy has traveled the world and discovered thousands of dinosaur fossils, including a new species—named after her—the Wendiceratops. The book’s colorful illustrations both enliven the narrative and, through their simplicity, feel completely accessible to young readers. A notable design feature is a double-page foldout that takes readers from the present-day desertlike area of the Alberta badlands to (when the pages are unfolded) the same area 80 million years ago. Another foldout opens an illustration of a fossilized dinosaur egg to show the embryo contained within. Wendy is light-skinned; secondary illustrated characters vary in terms of skin tone and ability; one character wears a hijab. Copious backmatter includes more information about Wendy, fossil formation, how to find fossils, and more. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An entertaining account of a remarkable fossil hunter and an educational journey into the world of dinosaur fossils. (glossary, books and websites) (Informational picture book. 5-8)
Feeling afraid, overheating, and running on low batteries, Pi from East Asia, among others. The stories are short and sweet, from East Africa, a retelling of “The Ants and the Grasshopper” different cultures.” She offers a version of “The Heron” from eastern North America, a version of “The Lion and the Mouse” from East Asia, among others. The stories are short and sweet, but better than the neat retellings are the beautiful block-print illustrations, which evoke both the Grecian aesthetic of antiquity and the various other settings for the tales. Gorgeously made with love—even if it’s served on a different plate. Written in a mix of English and Spanish, the story emphasizes the importance of family customs and the connections between generations. Expressive illustrations create a sense of emotion throughout. Anita’s grandparents are from Cuba and have light brown skin; Anita has lighter skin and dark brown hair. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A tale as sweet as flan. (glossary, recipe) (Picture book. 4-8)

TOLD AND RETOLD Around the World With Aesop’s Fables
Retold by Berry, Holly
Philomel (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 16, 2022
978-0-593-35152-9

A vivid, charming take on these beloved fables. (Picture book. 4-8)

A CASE OF THE ZAPS
Boniello, Alex & April Lavalle
Illus. by James Kwan
Abrams (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 16, 2022
978-1-4197-5672-6

A young robot experiences the system malfunctions associated with anxiety. Pi is a young robot who loves all the usual things young robots on Robot-Earth enjoy: sipping DW-40, spending time with their Parental Units and friends, and playing music. Unfortunately, their imagination kicks into overdrive when their teacher announces an upcoming field trip to Olde Silicon Valley, and their excitement turns into a case of the dreaded Zaps. Feeling afraid, overheating, and running on low batteries, Pi tries and fails to carry on as usual until they crash. A hard drive–to-hard drive conversation with Mother-Board and Father-Board prompts a trip to the doctor for some advice, which helps Pi on their field trip and beyond. With their expressive blue and yellow face, Pi is a charming young protagonist who provides a welcome introduction to the normality of the Zaps—or nerves—along with some coping mechanisms and words to boot up a conversation with friends or caretakers. While many of the puns, real-world references, and computer terms may be lost on a young audience, the story and accompanying backmatter—a note from the authors on coping with anxiety and a list of resources—will be helpful add-ons to any system update. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A solid selection to spark up a dialogue on anxiety. (Picture book. 5-9)

DAYBREAK ON RAVEN ISLAND
Bradley, Fleur
Viking (320 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-0-593-40463-8

Three middle school social outcasts find hidden clues to an unsolved mystery during a field trip to an abandoned prison. A school field trip takes a group of seventh graders to an island prison that hasn’t been visited in over 50 years. Three of them—White soccer player Tori, Korean American aspiring horror filmmaker Marvin, and anxious Black science buff Noah—decide to stay behind on Raven Island instead of returning with their class. They investigate a 1972 prison break by three inmates while waiting for the ferry to return the following morning. Also involved in their quest are Ms. Chavez, the owner of the island and daughter of the prison’s last warden; some resident ravens; and a few ghosts that the kids can see—but that are not visible to the host of a ghost-hunting TV show who is also present on the island. Complicating matters is the discovery of a dead body. There is an overall tone of real and imagined horror throughout. The topics of excessively harsh sentencing, inhumane treatment of prisoners, and profiteering by the prison system are woven into the story. The island itself, reluctant to release its secrets or people, is spookily personified: Trees whisper to the three friends, plants attack them, and the passage of time seems to shift. Horror devices and skillful pacing are employed to great effect.

An enjoyable paranormal mystery imbued with social commentary. (author’s note, resources) (Mystery. 9-13)
SEAN MOSES IS

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


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

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

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

For All Inquiries, Please Email
mail@mosespowe.com • mosepowe.com
Don’t make Barb angry. You wouldn’t like her when she’s angry.

Actually, you definitely would—especially if you’re a young reader with a taste for action-packed comics, goof-ball characters, and off-kilter humor. Barb is the pint-sized hero of two graphic novels for kids from longtime friends and creative partners Dan Abdo and Jason Patterson: Barb the Last Berzerker, and the new Barb and the Ghost Blade (Simon & Schuster, May 31).

The books follow Barb as she tries to protect the land of Bailiwick from an evil demon with the help of a magical sword and a kindly, sausage-loving sidekick: Porkchop, a blue yeti.

Abdo, 44, and Patterson, 45, were working in animation when they had the idea for their defiant, curly-haired hero who hates taking orders and despises bullies.

“We were talking about when we were kids, how Star Wars was really huge,” Abdo says in a Zoom interview. “On the playground, everyone was like, ‘I’m going to be Han’ or ‘I’m going to be Luke’ or ‘I’m going to be Chewy.’ And we asked ourselves, ‘Who are our kids, our daughters specifically, going to be like?’”

That was the birth of Barb—as Abdo describes her, “a total badass. She’s really funny and she’s brave and she’s wild, but she’s also a hero. She really cares about doing the right thing.”

Barb made her first appearance in a self-published black-and-white zine that Abdo and Patterson wrote for fun. The comic helped flesh out the character and her distinctive way of speaking—she’s given to exclamations like “Rad!” and “Total drag!”

“Her language kind of breaks against the fantasy trope, where sometimes they talk in old English, you know?” Patterson says. “But this is more of a rock-and-roll fantasy world. It’s just kind of silly. I think silliness is an important part of what we’re always trying to bring to every page.”

Abdo and Patterson—self-described nerds—come by their love for silliness and adventure honestly. They met in high school in Montpelier, Vermont, where they quickly bonded over their shared interests.

“We were both big into art, and our high school had this independent art room, this little closet that you could go into and play music and draw and read comics and stuff like that,” Abdo says. “So Jason and I and a bunch of other nerds would go back there and draw and come up with comic stories and stuff. We started working together back then and just never stopped.”

They bring that youthful 1980s and ’90s energy to the Barb books, although it wasn’t necessarily intentional.

“We were big afternoon cartoon fans: He-Man, DuckTales, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles,” Abdo says. “We ate that stuff up. I think it was kind of subconscious, but we wanted kids who read Barb to have that same feeling of like, ‘I’m going to sit down and have an adventure. I’m going to have a session with these characters and it’s going to be fun and familiar and wild.’”

Abdo and Patterson were lucky enough to have a dedicated focus group for the Barb novels: their own kids, who offer feedback to their dads about their works in progress.

“I’ve got twin daughters, they’re 8,” Abdo says, “and they always have suggestions. They’re always like, ‘I think it should be like this,’ or ‘I’m not sure about this color.’ They’re full of critique, which I love. It’s great.”

“My son, who’s 9, he’ll read the book in an hour; he speeds
straight through,” Patterson adds. “He’s like, ‘When’s the next one?’ and I’m like, ‘Six months from now.’ He’s like, ‘Why is it taking so long?’ He doesn’t understand.”

Patterson’s son might have to wait a little longer, but there will be a third Barb book. And the duo is also preparing for their June launch of the fourth installment in their Blue, Barry & Pancakes series of early-reader graphic novels, which follow the friendship between a worm, a frog, and a bunny. The two projects are pretty different, but that doesn’t bother Abdo and Patterson.

“We’ll be really into Barb, and then a Blue, Barry & Pancakes deadline comes up, and it’s actually kind of like a nice breather,” Abdo says. “Let’s take a break from all sword fighting and heavy family drama and just do some straight-up silliness, because Blue, Barry & Pancakes [books] really lend themselves to just absurd, silly craziness.

“Barb’s totally like Led Zeppelin,” he adds. “Blue, Barry & Pancakes is like Weird Al.”

They’re also preparing to meet some of their young fans in the coming months at both virtual and in-person events. They look back fondly to their recent appearance at the Tucson Festival of Books.

“If we could go back in time and tell ourselves that we got to go to a book festival and talk to kids, and then bring up a book that we actually made and get to sign it—it’s like we have to keep pinching ourselves,” Patterson says. “It’s a dream come true. Once kids read it, that’s when the story comes to life, when they get to read it and get excited about it. It’s absolutely amazing.”

Michael Schaub, a journalist and regular contributor to NPR, lives near Austin, Texas. Barb and the Ghost Blade was reviewed in the May 1, 2022, issue.

DADDY AND ME AND THE RHYME TO BE
Bridge, Chris & Haleyan Person
Illus. by Parker-Nia Gordon
Scholastic (40 pp.)
$17.99 | June 7, 2022
978-1-338-79633-9
Series: Karma’s World

A father and daughter find that the best way to write a song is together.

Karma already knows she’s bound to be a musical superstar, but she’ll acknowledge that there is maybe someone out there who can share her spotlight—her daddy. A musician and producer, Karma’s dad can make music out of everything they do together, from riding bikes to playing pretend. But for Daddy’s birthday, Karma wants to write a song on her own to give him as a gift. The only problem is, they’re used to riffing off each other, and Karma’s not accustomed to rhyming on her own. “He makes me feel safe from when I sleep to when I wake” is a nice enough sentiment, until she finds herself left with “and at night he tucks me in under a giant pancake!” What’s a co-writer to do without her other half? Based on characters from the Netflix series Karma’s World, this original story from Person (head writer of the show) and Bridges (better known as rapper Ludacris) delightfully captures the frustration and occasional absurdity that can come out of brainstorming sessions. Though the beginning and end of the story are a little on the saccharine side, Act 2 is where the magic is. Gordon’s colorful, cartoon-style illustrations are accentuated by big, bold, onomatopoeic words describing instrumentation and beatboxing. Karma and her family are Black. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Cheerful and charming. (Picture book. 4-8)

SAM’S SUPER SEATS
Brown, Keah
Illus. by Sharee Miller
Kokila (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-0-593-32389-2

A child with cerebral palsy describes how resting helps them to have fun.

Every morning, as Daddy combs Sam’s hair, Sam, a Black child sporting glasses, lists qualities they like about themselves. Today, Sam likes their dance skills, their eyes, and their fingers, which are slightly crooked on their right hand. But cerebral palsy makes Sam’s legs tired if they overdo things. And Sam has a busy day ahead: Mommy is taking them and their best friends, Sydney and Sarah, shopping for back-to-school clothes! Fortunately, Sam has a team of “super seats,” which she creatively anthropomorphizes, so she can rest up and join the fun. Misty, a couch named for ballerina Misty Copeland, is a partner for pirouetting and playing I Spy. And Laney, the back seat of Mommy’s car, tells hilarious jokes. At the mall, Sam and their supportive friends don clothes that make them feel strong and confident,
Employing the use of a few relaxation techniques, Butterfly is (“Best Nocturnal Friends Forever”) will do together. Porcupine decides to be nocturnal, too. Porcupine tries to help Butterfly and Sam “walk[s] the runway, limping with pride,” in adaptive of time to share how first a grandmother and grandson, then the colored speech bubbles amps up the wit, with Porcupine’s mea er’s bright cartoon illustrations radiate joy and affection; Sam’s grin is infectious. Sydney has light skin and curly brown hair; Sarah is Asian. (This book was reviewed digitally.) A spirited celebration of self-confidence and self-care. (Picture book. 4-6)

GOODNIGHT, BUTTERFLY
Burach, Ross
Scholastic (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-338-61501-2
Series: A Very Impatient Caterpillar

In the great green...(ahem) tree, there is a butterfly who learns about nocturnal life.

Everyone’s favorite frantic insect is back (The Very Impatient Caterpillar, 2019), this time trying to sleep. But a porcupine is loudly munching on their breakfast. Breakfast?! “I’m nocturnal,” the spiky friend explains. “I know you’re NOT a turtle,” the protagonist retorts. Butterfly has a ton of questions. “Are you scared of the light?” (No.) “Ever seen a cow jumping over the moon?” (No.) “Can cows even jump?” Unable to sleep, Butterfly soon nodding off to dreamland. But it wouldn’t be Burach’s style to stave off sleep. Butterfly makes a long list of everything the new “BNNFs” (“Best Nocturnal Friends Forever”) will do together. Porcupine is concerned. “I think we need to get you back to sleep.” Employing the use of a few relaxation techniques, Butterfly is concerned. “I think we need to get you back to sleep.” Employing the use of a few relaxation techniques, Butterfly is concerned. “I think we need to get you back to sleep.”

Fun bedtime fare that’s sure to have little ones nodding along before nodding off. (Picture book. 4-7)

THE MORE YOU GIVE
Campbell, Marcy
Illus. by Francesca Sanna
Knopf (48 pp.)
978-0-593-37273-9
978-0-593-37274-6 PLB

The old saying that the important things in life aren’t things gets the picture-book treatment.

There’s a lot packed into the spare text, which spans decades of time to share how first a grandmother and grandson, then the grandson grown up with a daughter of his own, and finally that daughter with her son share their love. They value the intangible gifts they give and receive in relationship with each other—patience, hugs, stories, and so on. Sanna’s art deploys characters with a range of skin colors and hair textures. The act of planting trees and watching them grow on the land where the family lives helps convey the passage of time while also serving as metaphor for the family’s history and how their love for one another sustains them across generations. Moments of loss also arise, as do connections with community beyond the small family units. Throughout, Sanna’s expressive art employs a warm palette and a soft visual texture befitting the tenderness of the text, which often evokes The Giving Tree (“And they were happy”) but with a far more community-minded message. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A book to give and to share with loved ones. (Picture book. 3-8)

LOWRIDERS TO THE RESCUE
Camper, Cathy
Illus. by Raúl the Third
Chronicle Books (140 pp.)
$22.99 | $9.99 paper | May 31, 2022
978-1-4521-7948-3
978-1-4521-7949-0 paper
Series: Lowriders

When fires hit right in the middle of the monarch migration, a butterfly named Sokar flees to the city to find help for her family.

After a dramatic opening in which Sokar’s father is killed, the book shifts gears to the Lowriders in Space garage, where we see Lupe Impala, Elirio Malaria, and El Chavo Flapjack. In town to get El Chavo glasses, the Lowriders meet Sokar and offer to help her. Readers learn how climate change and pollution are impacting the environment, leading to wildfires, and that much of it is due to the influence of big business taking over the neighborhood. Lupe, Elirio, and El Chavo have their eyes opened by Sokar and come up with a plan to save the neighborhood and the monarchs. Though the message is a good one, at times it feels heavy-handed. However, the inspired art will entice readers. The black-ink outlines pop against a warm palette of reds and oranges, and the illustrations have a vintage comic book vibe. The Lowriders are Latinx, while Sokar and her family are Arab and Muslim. Sokar, who resembles a human with wings, wears a hijab, and at one point the new friends discuss similarities between Arabic and Spanish.

Vibrant visuals will draw kids into a story with an optimis tic message about standing up to injustice. (glossary of Span ish and Arabic words, author’s note) (Graphic novel. 10-14)
APPRENTICE LORD OF DARKNESS
CED
Illus. by Jean-Philippe Morin
Yellow Jacket (200 pp.)
$24.99 | July 5, 2022
978-1-4998-1275-6

It takes work to make a villain lovable. Two hundred years ago, a hero drove Stearas, Master of Absolute Evil, from the Land of Alkyll. Things have been peaceful since, but the Lord of Darkness—a tiny, hooded, masked creature—has some nefarious plans. But just about every scheme to take over the kingdom or conquer the world ends up making people safer and happier. This graphic novel is filled with reversals. The princess loves the adventure of being kidnapped and helps out her captors again and again. A monster who works for the Lord of Darkness is cheerful and adores housework. It’s possible the book has too many surprises, but almost every time the story starts to feel repetitive, something astonishing or hilarious happens. In one scene, a golem is defeated by advertising flyers. Morin’s design for the golem is also inspired, although the artwork may be something of an acquired taste. The anatomy is so stylized that the characters barely look like human beings. But of course, large portions of the cast are golems or goblins or slug soldiers. The human beings tend to be light-skinned. If the plot is sometimes exhausting, the biggest twists are enormously satisfying, and the final surprise is such a huge reversal that it feels close to inevitable.

Just the thing for readers who think they’ve seen it all. (Graphic humor 8-12)

TOOFER & THE GIBLET
BY AUTHOR PAULETTE LEBLANC & ILLUSTRATOR DMITRY MOROZOV

For publication, licensing, or film rights please visit dragonhorsepublishing.com/pages/licensing-rights-requests to order, please visit dragonhorsepublishing.com

ISBN 979-8-9851507-0-4
Whether readers are seeking fairy-tale retellings, fantasy, or realism with a hint of magic, they’ll find something to love among the bevy of middle-grade novels publishing this summer.

*The Secret Forest Friends* by Kyoko Hara, illustrated by Kazue Takahashi, translated by Alexandrea Mallia (Museyon, June 1): In this sequel to *The Mailbox in the Forest* (2021), a Japanese girl named Mayu visits her grandparents one summer and reconnects with Konta, a fox whose existence she conceals—until a minor mishap occurs. This whimsical, low-stakes tale brims with the quiet joys of friendship.

*Onyeka and the Academy of the Sun* by Tolá Okogwu (McElderry, June 14): British Nigerian Onyeka learns to embrace her vibrant hair after discovering it’s part of her powers, or Ike. Attending a boarding school with other magical Solari is just the beginning of the adventures she has in this exciting futuristic story.

*Valentina Salazar Is Not a Monster Hunter* by Zoraida Córdova (Scholastic, June 28): The Salazars, a family of monster protectors, left Ecuador and settled quietly in upstate New York following the death of 11-year-old Valentina’s dad. But a rare oří puma egg changes everything in this novel that is equal parts heartwarming and page-turning.

*Manatee Summer* by Evan Griffith (Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins, June 28): Peter and Tommy, two White Florida boys, hope to record the 100th entry in their animal Discovery Journal during the summer before middle school. A manatee becomes a catalyst for change and growth in this textured novel about emotional growth and environmental activism.

*Tâpwê and the Magic Hat* by Buffy Sainte-Marie, illustrated by Buffy Sainte-Marie and Michelle Alynn Clement (Greystone Kids, June 7): When Tâpwê, an Indigenous boy, visits his cousins, his grandmother gives him a hat inhabited by talking animals—but can they guide him through encounters with a Trickster rabbit? With this tale that publishes simultaneously in Cree, Sainte-Marie offers a delightful blend of the magical and the everyday, featuring a relatable young protagonist.

*Order of the Night Jay: The Forest Beckons* by Jonathan Schnapp (Top Shelf Productions, July 26): A timid bear feels woefully out of place at summer camp, but with a new friendship and a mystery to be solved, things look up. Debut graphic novelist Schnapp’s cartoon illustrations ooze hilarity and pathos, and the cliffhanger ending will have readers begging for the follow-up.

*Alliana, Girl of Dragons* by Julie Abe (Little, Brown, Aug. 2): In this Japanese-influenced “Cinderella” retelling, an orphan with dreams of joining the Royal Court flees the tyranny of her stepmother with the help of a dragon and a witch. This exhilarating fantasy takes place in the world of the Eva Evergreen series.

*Lemon Bird: Can Help!* by Paulina Ganucheau (Random House Graphic, Aug. 23): Stranded, Lemon Bird and her pal Pupkin must find their way home. Ganucheau’s graphic novel has a manga-flavored vibe, with endearingly rounded characters (most of whom are blends of flora and fauna) whom readers will cheer on.

*Fire on Headless Mountain* by Iain Lawrence (Holiday House, Aug. 23): Virgil, 11, and his older brother and sister set off to scatter their mother’s ashes in a remote lake, but their van breaks down, a forest fire is raging, and the siblings become separated. This gripping story includes fascinating scientific content.

*Bunnicula: The Graphic Novel* adapted by James Howe and Andrew Donkin, illustrated by Stephen Gilpin (Atheneum, Aug. 30): House cat Chester is convinced that the new family pet is a vampire—to the consternation of Harold, the book’s canine narrator. Dynamic artwork ratchets up the drama and the humor in this adaptation of Deborah and James Howe’s prose novel.

Mahnaz Dar and Laura Simeon are young readers’ editors.
“A patient and gentle reminder of the importance of each voice, no matter how small.”

MY BEAUTIFUL VOICE

A shy student admires their teacher’s voice while searching for their own. A child with brown hair and skin observes in amazement as their teacher bursts into the room. An illustration of Miss Flotsam, an older, brown-skinned, bespectacled woman with flowing gray hair, scarf, and coattails, depicts her surrounded by flowers, tropical birds, and pops of color. The poetic narrative reveals Miss Flotsam as a world traveler with tales of “cycle rides in / booming hurricanes” and surviving “flights through / scary storms.” As the students start to write poems, Miss Flotsam encourages them: “We all have songs to sing / and will sing them when we choose.” Though the narrator’s classmates tease them for being so quiet, bit by bit, savoring the flavors of Miss Flotsam’s stories and spirit, the protagonist builds their own stanzas. Colpoys’ artwork matches the whimsy and sparkle of the narration as the child’s creativity flows, but they are still hesitant to read their poem aloud. A warm pastel palette brings to life a cliff and hostile landscape that symbolize the narrator’s anxieties as they struggle to speak in front of the class. Eventually the warmth and comforting tone and backdrop return as the student comes to realize that their voice is beautiful. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Honest and affirming, this story celebrates the love and opportunity for growth created by blended and found families. (Picture book. 3-8)

Little Again, an Adoption Story
Story & Pictures by Brian Corey

“Corey’s picture book offers a fable about growing up as an adopted child.”

“...Corey acknowledges adoptive children’s feelings of loss and disconnection from their origins...”

“A reassuring, beautifully illustrated book with empathy for adopted kids.” —Kirkus Reviews

For General Inquiries or Agent Representation, Email brianthomascorey@gmail.com • briancoreyillustration.com
“There was an old scientist who swallowed a dinosaur. / I don’t know why she swallowed a dinosaur, but she went to explore.”

She swallows a fern to feed the saurian, then a rock and a pick and a dustpan. In between the old scientist’s gastronomical feats, two children, one tan-skinned and one light-skinned—ask each other questions or spout facts about dinosaurs and paleontology: “Fossils are rocks containing traces of the past.” “Evidence of plants and animals built to last!” The book, the latest of Colandro’s many takes on the “There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly” song, closes with the old scientist, the kids, and the dinosaurs visiting a museum of natural history. With a rhyme scheme that is often as strained as the conceit of the voracious old lady, Colandro makes another foray into nonfiction that is relatively light on facts (previous titles have explored holidays, the seasons, astronomy, and undersea life). Lee is again along to offer his signature bug-eyed and scribbly illustrations that can be a bit unnerving at times. The children’s rhyming banter in speech bubbles interrupts the old lady patter, and the old scientist’s gastronomical activities often vie for attention with the children’s own queries. The pair are joyfully reunited at the dog shelter, embarking on new adventures and grateful to be together. Cole excels at creating expressive background characters and realistic details with precise ink crosshatches and linework that reward closer inspection. The child is light-skinned with spiky black hair. One parent is light-skinned; the other is dark-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An exquisitely rendered, touching story of companionship and belonging. (author’s note) (Picture book. 3-8)

MUSIC IS A RAINBOW
Collier, Bryan
Little, Brown (48 pp.)
$18.99 | June 7, 2022
978-0-316-53742-1

Sometimes something unexpected can guide us away from the darkest parts of ourselves into a magnificent, glorious light.

Collier delivers a visually arresting tale as simple as a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich yet more layered than an opera cake. A young Black boy loves his mama and daddy, and they love him right back. But the boy’s mother becomes ill, and he feels lonely. Trouble beckons in the form of friends encouraging him to accompany them as they make mischief, but each time, music somehow finds him and sets him on the right path—he overhears a young girl playing the piano, is swept up in the swells of a powerful score at the movies, and finally discovers a piano. Using stunning panels that combine rich watercolors with collage, Collier has created a character whose facial expressions and body language tell the whole story—his joy, anxiety, and promise. The author/illustrator captures that little voice inside us all, the one that calls out when we see something breathtaking. The use of light and color is superb—music is a radiant, swirling rainbow that leads the boy out of the shadows. Collier writes in an author’s note that he was inspired by Maya Angelou, Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken,” and Quincy Jones. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A poetic collage of emotion and purpose and a vibrant testament to the power of music. (Picture book. 5-10)

FOREVER HOME
A Dog and Boy Love Story
Cole, Henry
Scholastic (48 pp.)
$18.99 | July 19, 2022
978-1-338-78404-6

In this wordless tale, a lonely dog and a child yearning for a pet find solace and purpose together.

Alone on a stoop, an abandoned dog sits in front of a locked door and a nearby “for sale” sign. The dog sadly roams the neighborhood, searching for a new home. Meanwhile, a child pester their parents with pleas for a dog. The child shows them photos and a bright red leash and collar, the only color amid full-bleed black-and-white spreads. The parents visit the child’s room, exasperated with its unkempt state. Undeterred, the child takes the leash for walks around town, even in the pouring rain, the crimson hue of the leash radiating hope amid the gloomy gray. On one such walk, the two main characters meet, and, in hopes of convincing their parents to let the dog come live with them, the child is motivated to help with chores and tidy their room. The pair are joyfully reunited at the dog shelter, embarking on new adventures and grateful to be together. Cole excels at creating expressive background characters and realistic details with precise ink crosshatches and linework that reward closer inspection. The child is light-skinned with spiky black hair. One parent is light-skinned; the other is dark-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A poetic collage of emotion and purpose and a vibrant testament to the power of music. (Picture book. 5-10)

DETECTOR DOGS, DYNAMITE DOLPHINS, AND MORE ANIMALS WITH SUPER SENSORY POWERS
Couch, Christina & Cara Giaimo
Illus. by Daniel Duncan
MIT Kids Press/Candlewick (176 pp.)
$24.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-5362-1912-8

Introductions to animals that have been selected for their special senses or abilities to perform tasks ranging from testing treated water to predicting earthquakes.
Focusing on eight main subjects but including briefer notes on many more, the roster includes homing pigeons and honeybees but otherwise goes well beyond the usual sorts of animal “helpers.” The book follows a herd of California brush abatement goats employed to reduce wildfire hazards in terrain that is hard for human firefighters to tackle; introduces Eba, a terrier who helps researchers track endangered orcas and is “possibly the only dog in the world trained to sniff killer whale poop”; and describes how the ICARUS program monitors the movements of tagged livestock from space as a way of predicting earthquakes. Along with explaining how dog noses (those “booger-resistant marvels of engineering”), goat stomachs, whiskers, and other specialized body parts function, the authors suggest simple experiments to test our own abilities to follow a scent trail, use echolocation, detect various (nonpoisonous) foreign substances in water, and other tasks that parallel what these animals can do. Musings on the ethical ins and outs of putting other species to sometimes-dangerous work provide food for thought, as do some of the photos (of, for instance, trained dolphins being airlifted in coffinlike stalls) interspersed with Duncan’s lighthearted cartoon illustrations. Both sorts of pictures portray a racially diverse assortment of human figures, and the source notes and bibliography offer unusually wide arrays of leads to information sources, technical or otherwise, for each chapter.

An engaging survey, thoroughly documented and as ethically nuanced as it is lively. (Nonfiction. 10-13)

I’LL BE YOUR DOG
Crumble, P.
Illus. by Sophie Hogarth
Orchard/Scholastic (32 pp.)
$7.99 paper | April 5, 2022
978-1-338-78993-5

Ten dogs prepare themselves for their forever homes while waiting at a shelter.

Reg the Retriever wants his canine friends to get ready for a big day. It could be time for any one of them, from Grace the Greyhound to Bruce the Boxer, to get adopted from the shelter where they’ve all found themselves. Reg, however, has been at the shelter long enough to see his friends come and go. Will this be the day he finds a family, too? (Spoiler: It wouldn’t be much of an ending if he didn’t.) Reg and his nine pals each get a page or two in the spotlight, their fates revealed in rhyming couplets (“Meet this tiny snuffy chap / Who will snooze in your lap. / Settle in, nap time’s begun, / Peter the Pug is the one!”). Not all the text lands so lyrically (“All worries will shrink down to none. / Matt the Maltese is the one!”), but the sentiment is sweet throughout, and the dogs are each illustrated with their distinct physical characteristics and personality, which are restated after the story with a roundup of what traits each breed is known for. The huge, adorable “adopt-me” eyes may be a little exaggerated, but the moment Reg is chosen still lands with its intended emotional heft, as does a concluding two-page spread of all the rescue dogs with their new families, a racially diverse group of humans. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A gentle, well-paced reminder that shelter dogs need humans to love and care for them. (Picture book. 3-5)

A MIND LIKE MINE
21 Famous People and Their Mental Health
Davis, Rachael
Illus. by Islenia Mil
Wide Eyed Editions (64 pp.)
$24.99 | July 5, 2022
978-0-7112-7401-3

Through profiles of 21 historical figures and contemporary celebrities who have endured challenges with mental health, Davis aims to reassure readers that mental illness is no barrier to success in life.

Tucked between entries on Ada Lovelace, Greta Thunberg,
and others are “spotlights” on these mental disorders, their symptoms, and current treatments. Though the introduction notes that “people living with mental health disorders have excelled in their passions” and assures readers that “anything is possible when you put your mind to it,” that message is hard to reconcile with disturbing details (Vincent van Gogh’s suicide, John Nash’s involuntary institutionalizations) in the spare bios—most ending tragically—of historical figures. Readers learn that autism and/or obsessive-compulsive disorder might explain Michelangelo’s perfectionism and Nikola Tesla’s eccentricities. (Much of the mental health information on historical figures is largely speculative given that few of these individuals were diagnosed with mental disorders.) Accompanied by dynamic illustrations, profiles of contemporary figures read like social media success stories. The bios conflate mental health disorders requiring lifelong accommodation (schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, OCD) with the mental health impacts of culturally induced racism, sexism, fatphobia, and heteronormative expectations. (David Chang’s and Greta Thunberg’s bios include both, Michelle Obama’s only the latter.) Reflecting the book’s U.K. provenance, a famous cricketer and Bollywood star are profiled; Indigenous or Latinx individuals are not. All but one of the online resources provided are health care–related websites in the U.K., and no mental health care professionals are credited.

A superficial survey enlivened with interesting historical factoids and conjectures. (glossary) (Nonfiction. 9-13)

**DOÑA ESMERALDA, WHO ATE EVERYTHING!**

de la Cruz, Melissa
Illus. by Primo Gallanosa
Orchard/Scholastic (40 pp.)
$18.99 | July 26, 2022
978-1-338-75161-1

Doña Esmeralda will slurp up anything with her magic straw, but what happens when she finally bites off more than she can chew?

Doña Esmeralda is a hero to children everywhere. All they have to do is say, “I don’t want to eat this,” and she sneaks along and sucks up their yucky giniling or zucchini bread. But some- one, even a tiny, ancient, magical someone, can only eat gross leftovers for so long before getting curious about what else is out there that children DO want to eat. Once she starts, she cannot stop herself! Chicken nuggets, hamburgers, pizza, samosas, bulgogi, and more—all get sucked up through her straw; until the inevitable happens and...BOOM! Doña Esmeralda explodes, and without her, the children must learn to eat the food they don’t like themselves, but they still keep an eye out for her, just in case. Though the text is lengthy and at times clunky, the premise of the story is fun, and the illustrations are bright and vibrant, full of silly antics. Doña Esmeralda has light skin and a black bouffant; the children depicted throughout are diverse. In an author’s note, de la Cruz explains that she drew inspiration from the Filipino legend of the aswang and sought to honor the Filipino foods she ate growing up; included is her mother’s recipe for lumpia. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A cute but wordy offering that will have children peeking under tables in search of the titular character. (Picture book. 5-8)

**SOMETHING ABOUT GRANDMA**
de Regil, Tania
Candlewick (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-1-5362-0194-9

Julia and Grandma have their first summer together, just the two of them.

Grandma lives in a small town outside of Mexico City. Her house is covered with pink bougainvillea, and her garden is filled with herbs and fruit trees. Things feel magical here— in the mornings, Grandma buys sweet bread from a woman who carries it all in a basket on her head, and at night she writes secrets in her notebook. And Grandma has a strange intuition; she always seems to know when Julia is sneaking into the garden for daisies and limes and when the girl is about to fall off her bike. A letter from home makes Julia realize how much she misses her parents, but Grandma knows just what to do to make her feel better, and when Julia’s parents return for her with her new baby brother, she has learned a few new tricks to soothe her crying sibling. Straightforward text moves the narrative along smoothly, while whimsical and soft illustrations imbue the story with wonder; some pages have excerpts, in Spanish, from Grandma’s notebook layered softly in the background. Readers will emerge feeling just as calm as Julia. Julia and her family are brown-skinned and cued as Latinx. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A quiet book about the love between a grandmother and her granddaughter. (Picture book. 5-9)

**FRANKIE’S WORLD**

Dooley, Aoife
Graphix/Scholastic (272 pp.)
$12.99 paper | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-338-81311-1

A realistic graphic novel about a young autistic girl.

Eleven-year-old Frankie, who lives in Ireland, struggles socially. For one thing, people tell her she talks way too much, and they often react like she’s said the wrong thing at the wrong time. There’s a bunch of other stuff that makes her feel different—her taste in music, her small size, her sensitivity—so she feels about as weird as the class bullies say she is. Frankie’s family—Mam, stepfather, and annoying little sister—is pretty great though, especially her supportive mother. When an upcoming competition in art, Frankie’s
favorite school subject, focuses on the theme of your true self, Frankie wonders if she might be more similar to her absent father than the family she lives with. To find out more, she and her friends begin a quest to locate her dad. With positive endings to the various storylines, the narrative demonstrates just how validating an autism diagnosis can be. Frankie goes from feeling like an alien to understanding and appreciating how her brain works. Dooley, who is autistic herself, uses clean, comic-style art in black, blue, and orange. The illustrations are fun, playful, and endearing—just like Frankie. Frankie and her family are White; diversity in health, ability, and race is woven naturally into the story.

Validating for those who need it, delightful reading for all. (autism information, guide to being a friend, superhero name generator) (Graphic fiction. 8-12)

HOUSE FINDS A HOME
Duffield, Katy S.
Illus. by Jen Corace
Viking (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 16, 2022
978-0-593-20460-3

A house shares life and love with every family that lives within. When House’s family moves away, his once-full heart breaks. He’d been there with them while they made lots of happy memories, and when they leave, it becomes quiet, and House feels alone. Eventually another family moves in, and he becomes exactly what they need him to be, until they leave. More families come and go; some stay for a while, and every family is a little different, but all of them enter with exactly what House is missing when he’s alone: love. It’s clear that it’s the people who make House a home, and when his latest family comes, they bring with them the opportunity for House to help them make new happy memories. Though it’s sad when a family leaves, House realizes something important: “When one door closes, another opens.” The way House becomes a home for the various families is conveyed through the physical changes outside and inside as well as through the various functions each family has for different rooms. House’s inhabitants vary in age and race. Bright and warmly textured, the illustrations are simple but brim with cozy details. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A new way to appreciate “home sweet home.” (Picture book. 4-8)
“A humorous approach to the dilemma of choosing just one bedtime story.”

**BATTLE OF THE BOOKS**

The books on Josh's shelf are at war. Each one is vying to be the book that the boy wants to read most for “story time tonight!” Pirate Book says, “Josh wants a rousin’ tale with deadly swords and treasure hoards!” Poem Book states, “Let me through! Roses are red. Violets are blue. Josh will pick me. He will not pick you.” Joke Book counters with, “At least I make Josh laugh!” Spouting hilarious dialogue, the amusingly rendered books, pictured with anthropomorphic features—Joke Book with Grouch-like glasses, nose, and moustache; Pirate Book with a black eye patch and red bandanna; and Poem Book with daisies for eyes—jostle and push. Space Book, Dinosaur Book, and Pop-Up Book join the crowd, all fighting against each other until poor Pirate Book is pushed to the floor, where shark toys lurk under the bed. Quickly, the books unite to rescue Pirate Book. Pop-Up Book has a “spectacularly designed staircase” that tumbles out of its castle to save the day. By the time Josh and Grammie (who both have light brown skin and dark hair, with Grammie's turning a little gray) come in to choose a bedtime story, all the books are tucked away on their shelves, still worried over Josh's pick. The boy surprises them by choosing his many favorites (the six featured books), and Grammie agrees to read them all. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A humorous approach to the dilemma of choosing just one bedtime story. *(Picture book. 5-7)*

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**THE UNOFFICIAL HARRY POTTER HOGWARTS HANDBOOK**

*Mugglenet's Complete Guide to the Wizarding World's Most Famous School*

*Editors of MuggleNet*

Media Lab Books (224 pp.)

$14.99 | June 21, 2022

978-1-948174-95-4

Series: Unofficial Harry Potter Reference Library

Everything entering students need to know, from class and holiday schedules to notable ghosts and headmasters and headmistresses.

Compiled by a team of MuggleNet editors, this fourth annual entry in the Unofficial Harry Potter Reference Library mines the Potterverse's books, films, games, discussion boards, and possibly even pensives for fictive “facts” about the school's buildings, grounds, curriculum, history, and prominent residents—living and otherwise. The entries are thoroughly spoilerific, but that hardly matters as there are no illustrations, and only rabid fans are going to last long plowing through wea...
The acorn, the moss, and the bark who sit on the shelf with Rick try to convince him simply to stay with them, but Rick is bored with his sedentary existence; he wants adventures! Cleverly figuring out how to escape life as a mere shelf sitter, Rick finds himself outdoors among others of his kind but soon learns their lot isn’t so hot (though their existence was the result of very hot circumstances—exploding out of volcanos)—nor is it exciting or dangerous. In fact, it’s dull and lonely. Luckily for Rick, a student rescues him, returning him to his shelf and grateful pals. Rick has a rock-solid epiphany: Life in Room 214 is more rewarding than he’d realized. This sweet, gentle tale reinforces for children the reassuring idea that it’s OK to try new things and explore new paths, but it’s equally OK, not to mention comforting and important, to return to familiar territory. The charming digital illustrations, many set in panels, are delightfully expressive and deeply appealing; young readers will appreciate the costumes worn by the inhabitants of the Nature Finds shelf, presumably concocted by the students, who are racially diverse. One child wears a hijab. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

This story rocks. (Picture book. 4-7)
instructions, demonstrating the topic in action, such as playing with a homemade bubble wand. Both have rosy cheeks, contributing to the vintage paper doll illustration style. A range of projects—from planting a “three sisters” garden to mixing up homemade shampoo—ensures many interest levels are met, including those of children who may not be outdoorsy. Recipes as simple as a raw melon pizza are complemented by the challenge of baking a summer solstice cake. The solstice cake seems a bit out of season, as few may want to fire up an oven in June. However, the earnestness with which both information and ideas are presented outweighs the blemishes overall. Almost all the activities require adult supervision, developed motor skills, and multiple items, some of which may need to be purchased. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Accessible, sincere, screen-free fun. (Informational picture book, 6-11)

FLIPPING FORWARD TWISTING BACKWARD
Fullerton, Alma
Peachtree (144 pp.)
$16.99 | July 12, 2022
978-1-68263-366-3

When letters on pages flip around faster than her tumbling routines, a young girl tries to perfect a tricky skill in this verse novel.

Claire excels at gymnastics and plans to compete at the state championship soon. But she struggles with reading and writing skills and feels that a fifth grader like her should be able to do what her 5-year-old cousins easily can. She gets by with a stellar memory, her best friend, Emma Lea, writing out her homework, and good improvisation skills. Still, Claire’s teacher chastises her for both her schoolwork and her frustrated outbursts in class. Her divorced parents can’t help much, what with her dad living across the country and her mom refusing to believe Claire could have a learning disability. Thankfully, a supportive vice principal, Emma Lea, her team, and Claire’s older sister all make an effort to help Claire push through her learning disability, which she desperately wants. The resolution feels a tad rushed, but it’s an uplifting one nevertheless. Designed with accessibility in mind (the typeface is meant to be easily decoded), the text stresses that learning disabilities are in no way a bad thing. Fullerton offers readers a glimpse into what it’s like to try to read with difficulties. Based on the occasional illustrations, Claire and her family are light-skinned, while Emma Lea is dark-skinned.

A positive representation of perseverance. (Fiction, 8-12)

MY PET FEET
Funk, Josh
Illus. by Billy Yong
Simon & Schuster (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-0-593-12267-9

What would a world without R’s look like?
When a brown-skinned child awakens, they greet their pet feet, Doodles, who’s in apparent distress. Wait. Pet feet? This is all wrong! Something is missing, but the young narrator cannot immediately identify what it is. A glance at the alphabet artwork on the bedroom wall reveals a telltale gap. Readers in the know will quickly identify the missing letter R; the stolen letter no longer exists in this world. The child decides to hunt down the missing letter but must dodge silly obstacles of R-less mayhem along the way. The child seeks the help of a friend, but without the R finds a fiend in his place. Flying cows (crows with bovine bodies) attack. Then Doodles runs away, or rather is leading the way to the R thieves! Featuring delicious wordplay, this tale hits all the right notes for early primary audiences; parents and educators will appreciate this engaging story’s many opportunities to build phonemic awareness and letter knowledge among early readers and writers. Depicting wide-eyed characters and busy scenes bursting with sight gags, the digital illustrations also provide many opportunities to explore the impact of an R-less world. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Silly and playful alphabet fun. (Picture book, 4-8)

LEMON BIRD
Can Help!
Gamucheau, Paulina
Random House Graphic (112 pp.)
$12.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-0-593-12267-9

Lemon Bird has to save the day when she and her pal Pupkin get lost.

Lemon Bird, naturally, is a bird who is also a lemon. Pupkin is a puppy who is also a pumpkin. After some light mischief, they fall asleep in a truck full of produce and are transported to a strange new place. Now they must journey back to the farm where they live. On their adventure, Lemon Bird and Pupkin encounter and help a variety of flora-fauna hybrids and friendly people. They meet Keylime Bird, who bullies Lemon Bird but regrets her actions, while a kind old woman and her pet Boarnana set the two friends on the right path. Some of the animal hybrids are puns, and some are not, but all are adorable. The two humans who appear most, Pupkin’s owner and the old woman, have light skin, but other people appear in a rainbow of natural and unnatural skin tones. Many pages have minimal text, and it only gets a bit—compared to the occasional—wordy on a few pages at the end, when Lemon Bird and Keylime take some time to explain the lessons they learned. Featuring endearingly rounded characters, this delightful, colorful
A cornucopia of wholesome cuteness. (how to draw Lemon Bird, concept art) (Graphic novel, 5-10)

THE MIDNIGHT CHILDREN
Gemeinhart, Dan
Henry Holt (352 pp.)
$16.99  |  Aug. 30, 2022
978-1-250-19672-9

Ravani Foster and the whole town of Slaughterville are changed by the arrival of seven unusual children.

Skinny, lonely Ravani is the only one who sees the children arrive and move into the house across the street, and he soon finds a comrade in tough, golden-haired Virginia. Despite the local newspaper owner’s assertion that Slaughterville is not the kind of town where exciting things happen, Ravani’s life changes dramatically as Virginia and her chosen family of parentless kids calling themselves the Ragabonds let him in on their secret: They are on the run.

When vicious bully Donnie learns that the Ragabonds are being pursued, he blackmails Ravani, who is desperate to protect them and equally desperate for Virginia, his first friend, to stay. She introduces him to the quietly revolutionary idea that things don’t have to be the way they’ve always been. The omniscient narrative voice is a strong presence throughout, drawing readers’ attention to themes including choices that make a difference, connections between people (“Sometimes, when two souls find each other in the darkness, the darkness goes away”), deciding who you want to be and not letting others define you, and the importance of home and family. Brief chapters from the perspective of the man hunting the Ragabonds ratchet up the suspense, culminating in an exciting sequence of events followed by a heartwarming ending. All main characters are coded White.

A story of fierce friendship, bravery, loyalty, and finding—or making—a place to belong. (Fiction, 8-12)

LAND OF GIANTS
The Biggest Beasts That Ever Roamed the Earth
Gifford, Clive
Illus. by Howard Gray
Welbeck Children’s (64 pp.)
$16.95  |  Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-78312-850-1

Outsize animals have thrived in diverse environments since before the age of dinosaurs and can still be found today.

The prolific Gifford here introduces a selection of some of the largest reptiles, amphibians, mammals, fish, birds, and insects ever to live on Earth. The information is presented in topical spreads, with one to several big animals to a page. On the introductory spread, Gifford speculates about possible reasons for such extraordinary sizes. An accompanying illustration shows a brown-skinned scientist studying fossils in the field. Gifford’s selections are organized into three sections, covering animals of the past on land and in water followed by animals of today. Short descriptions of each animal make up most of the text. Each spread includes silhouettes comparing the sizes of the animals on the page to a human adult and child. A center gatefold shows a timeline of life on Earth, and a final spread introduces some smaller animals that are the largest of their kind (the goliath frog, the Komodo dragon). Gray’s illustrations feature colorful dinosaurs and accurately portrayed modern animals, many in appropriate environments. The clear organization and bite-sized chunks of information make this quite accessible to young lovers of animals past and present. No sources are provided, but a palaeontologist is credited as consultant.

Overall, an appealing collection for readers who like superlatives. (index) (Nonfiction, 7-9)
Hand-drawn and painted digitally, Tavis’ illustrations rely on a muted palette and rounded images, depicting an appropriately cozy world. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A perfect story to enjoy on a “no bones day.” (author’s note) (Picture book: 3-7)

The Thanksgiving story, told from the perspective of the Wampanoag people.

A Wampanoag grandmother plants her garden with weeâchumun (corn), beans, and squash, or the Three Sisters. When her grandchildren ask to hear the story of Thanksgiving, N8hkumuhls tells them that their people call it Keepunumuk, the time of harvest, and explains what really happened. The tale opens with Seagull warning Weeâchumun—depicted as a woman with a translucent body—of the Pilgrims’ arrival; Weeâchumun worries because many of the First Peoples who cared for her have gone to the Spirit World, and she fears this will be her last winter. Fox keeps an eye out and in spring tells Weeâchumun and her sisters that the newcomers endured a hard winter; many died. Weeâchumun and her sisters want to help: “We will send the First Peoples to help the newcomers.” The Wampanoag people teach the survivors how to plant corn, beans, and squash. The settlers hold a feast to celebrate the harvest; though it’s remembered by many as the first Thanksgiving, back then the settlers, for the Wampanoag people, it is remembered as a day of mourning. Rich, saturated acrylics imbued with a touch of magic add to the vibrancy of this important, beautiful story. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A much-needed Thanksgiving retelling that centers the Wampanoag people. (glossary, information on the Wampanoag, map, recipes) (Picture book: 3-7)

The peaceful, safe life three mice enjoy is threatened when the homeowner introduces a “rather large tabby.” The mice flee and, while hiding, try to come up with a plan to bell the cat.
Several failed though innovative ideas later, the clever rodents come up with a Trojan horse-style plan. They hide within the stuffing of Fluffy, a toy dog, and approach the napping feline with loud woofs, hoping to scare the newcomer away. The cat is unimpressed, but the three mice are relieved when the feline states, “I’m not a mouser. I’m just a cat who fancies canned food, friendship, and harmonious living.” The cat is warmly welcomed, and a lasting friendship is formed between the new and existing housemates. Then, ominously, the humans bring home “a rather large pup.” The foregone cliffhanger conclusion leaves readers with some anticipation and intrigue. Pleasing, emotive, cartoon-style illustrations enhance this straightforward, sympathetic narrative with characters who are apprehensive though amenable to a changing situation. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A familiar story told with a bit of pathos, ending with camaraderie and some suspense. (Picture book. 3-6)

SONNY SAYS SORRY!
Hart, Caryl
Illus. by Zachariah OHora
Bloomsbury (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-476-0903-1

A mysterious present at the park offers temptations.
Sonny, a fox whom readers may recognize from Sonny Says Mine! (2021), has a problem. Should he or shouldn’t he? He finds a box wrapped in polka-dot wrapping paper with a tag that says “For: Honey,” and he’s eager to know what’s inside. He pokes and sniffs the box. “Something smells delicious.” When Sonny’s friends join him, he gives in to his curiosity and opens the box. Boo, a bespectacled rabbit, looks inside with him, but Meemo, a dog clad in wristbands and a headband, disapproves, repeatedly pointing to the gift tag, barking, and finally silently leaving with slumped shoulders. Meanwhile, Sonny and Boo do more than just peek inside the box. They dismantle the cake one delicious decoration at a time and then chunk by chunk. Honey arrives, sees Sonny’s chocolaty hands, Boo’s chocolaty face, and the open box, and sobs. Sonny and Boo feel horrible and apologize, but Honey continues to cry. Finally, Sonny suggests that they all bake a delicious new cake together, and even Meemo joins them, the friendships restored. Brightly colored illustrations and simple text combine for an all-too-relatable tale—with a delightful ending and a solid lesson—that will appeal to preschoolers. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Just the thing to help children deal with making a mistake—and amends. (Picture book. 3-6)

INDIANA BONES AND THE LOST LIBRARY
Heape, Harry
Illus. by Rebecca Bagley
Faber & Faber (288 pp.)
$8.95 paper | Aug. 9, 2022
978-0-571-35352-1
Series: Indiana Bones, 2

Wisecracking dog Indiana Bones and his spirited young human sidekick, Aisha Ghatak, resume their hunt for lost treasure in this lively mystery.
Indiana and his owner, Aisha, have arrived back in England in a hot air balloon following their adventure in Egypt and are eager to return home to Aisha’s father, archaeologist Dr. Satnam Ghatak. But Aisha is startled when her dad introduces them to his new friend, a blond woman named Celia Kane, whom he’s gotten very close to, leaving Aisha worried that she’ll no longer have his undivided attention. Aisha and her
When Aisha’s father announces that he is heading to Turkey, Avenger, an ancient book Aisha and Indiana found in Egypt that they believe will provide clues about the knight’s lost treasure. When Aisha’s father announces that he is heading to Turkey to investigate, Aisha and Indiana are sad to learn they’ll be left behind and wonder how they can solve the mystery from afar. Heape has written another fast-paced, funny mystery; Bagley’s expressive illustrations enhance the atmosphere. Returning bad guys Philip Castle and Ringo continue to be outsmarted by the clever Aisha, Indiana’s one-liners are as snappy as ever, and Satnam and Celia’s side plot is heartwarming.

Another fun addition to this adventure-filled series. (Mystery, 8-12)

**SAL BOAT (A Boat by Sal)**
Heder, Thyra
Abrams (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 30, 2022  
978-1-4197-5750-1

A boy can build a boat by himself, but launching it is another matter.

Small in body but large in determination, solitary Sal starts his newest project by ransacking his mom’s garage and then proceeding to gather old boards, discarded paint, and seemingly random junk from all over his small seaside town. What he constructs has walls, windows, and a peaked roof. But Sal shrugs off the skeptical comments of passersby (“What, have they never seen a boat before? Zero imagination in this town”). When it’s done, it is indeed a (house)boat and, in the luminous illustrations, a magnificent one, solidly assembled from bric-a-brac and splashed with intense colors. Triumph gives way to frustration, though, as an onlooker’s questions about how he’s going to drag it down to the shoreline leads to a series of devastating failures. Along with effectively capturing the setting’s small-town feel in her watercolors, Heder depicts a light-skinned protagonist whose changing facial expressions and body language offer a positive study as he goes from intense, scowling concentration to delight, dismay, then despair, resignation, and, bit by bit, anger. But just as he’s about to smash his boat to splinters, up come all the townsfolk with flags, balloons, and a construction hoist to pitch in and see the great launch done right. A final view of the floating house out on the water at sunset, strung with party lights and surrounded by boatloads of diversely hued neighbors, ends the episode on a properly celebratory note. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A literally buoyant reminder that sometimes it takes a village. (Picture book: 5-8)

**BALLET BRUCE**
Higgins, Ryan T.
Disney-Hyperion (32 pp.)
$6.99 | July 5, 2022  
978-1-368-05960-2  
Series: World of Reading

Bruce helps the geese get ready to learn ballet in this new early reader installment.

Inspired by a poster of Swan Lake (with a swan as the ballerina), the geese decide they want to dance. Will Bruce help? Bruce, who is comfortably sitting and reading The Art of Sitting and Doing Nothing, does not want to. But the geese give him “sad goose eyes.” Even curmudgeonly Bruce can’t resist those. So he hops on his motorcycle to go to the store to buy ballet shoes. But the ride to and from town is filled with challenges (who dropped nails in the road?). Once Bruce finally gets home, the geese realize they also need “fancy dance pants.” So Bruce goes to the store once again. Poor Bruce rides to town multiple times as the geese think of more and more ballet necessities. Bruce becomes increasingly bedraggled with each trip. Then, in an abrupt turn of events, the geese suddenly have a new idea. Higgins’ rich, textured illustrations are as appealing as ever. The winks and nods toward adults who deal with children’s fickleness every day are a bit lost in an independent reader format, but the ride is still a fun one to take. Silliness and frustration abound. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Graceful pirouettes can be found elsewhere; giggles take the stage here. (Early reader: 4-7)

**THE BUTTON BOX**
Hodder, Bridget & Fawzia Gilani-Williams  
Illus. by Harshad Marathe  
Kar-Ben (152 pp.)
$17.99 | April 1, 2022  
978-1-72842-396-8

Ava is Jewish, her cousin Nadeem is Muslim, and they both love their wise, possibly magical, Jewish Granny Buena.

The children are being bullied because of their religions and seek comfort from Granny. She selects a silver button covered in rubies from a gilded box. As she begins the tale of how their Jewish ancestor Ester acquired the button from the Muslim prince Abdur Rahman and his servant Bedir, the action shifts to North Africa 1,000 years ago. When Granny stops midtale, Ava takes the button and sews it onto her sweatshirt—which magically transports the children and Granny’s cat Sheba to the marketplace at Sabtah. At the moment Granny stopped the story. They are recognized as visiting cousins but retain their modern perspective. Ava, Nadeem, and Sheba are involved in all the ensuing activities and adventures. But Ester is the real hero, aiding the endangered prince’s
escape by sailing him across to Spain (where her family will follow) to fulfill his destiny, ruling over Jews and Muslims working together pursuing knowledge. The authors describe sights, sounds, and daily life in beautiful, meticulous detail, seamlessly weaving in historical and cultural information and emphasizing the similarities in Jewish and Muslim philosophies. Both the modern and medieval characters are presented in emotionally charged language as unique individuals with strong personalities. Are there more stories in Granny’s magical button box? Granny’s wink indicates a possible sequel. Though religion plays a major role, the characters’ races aren’t made explicit.

Fascinating, intense, and gripping. (photos, glossary, authors’ note) (Historical fiction/fantasy. 9-14)

I AM AMAZING!
Holder, Alissa & Zulekha Holder-Young
Illus. by Nneka Myers
Flamingo Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | July 26, 2022
978-0-593-32732-6

Ayaan loves being a superhero.

On the playground, Ayaan, who has dark brown skin and black hair, runs from friend to friend with his cape trailing behind him, helping however he can. When Aria needs a push on the swings, he is there. When Elijah and Atara need help scaling the rock wall, he is happy to lend a hand. But when he hears David and Brian (brown-haired with dark skin and black-haired with light skin, respectively) laughing at him (“You don’t look like a superhero to me”), Ayaan removes his cape and loses his fire. After school, his father, who has dark brown skin and long black locs, can tell that Ayaan is upset. When Ayaan tells him why, his father says, “Even though your friends may not have seen many superheroes that look like you, superheroes are everywhere,” and he explains that “anyone can be a superhero, including you.” He asks Ayaan what makes him amazing, and Ayaan comes up with several things—he’s kind, brave, and helpful—before donning his cape again. This short, simple tale is a strong social-emotional read-aloud. The illustrations are bright, colorful, and engaging, and Ayaan is an appealing protagonist who faces the unkindness of his peers but rises above it.

A heartfelt forward pass from one generation to the next (and the next). (Picture book. 4-7)

MY FOOTBALL FAMILY
Holloway, Andy
Illus. by Honee Jang
Roaring Brook Press (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-1-250-84715-7

A pigskin-themed paean to family and family traditions.

As images depict a football-shaped newborn growing up, marrying, and helping to produce another—the second actually dressed in a football onesie, which is adorable—sports podcaster Holloway notes rookie season fumbles and triumphs, team huddles on the sofa to watch the big games, the passage of quarters and seasons, and major life events (like the wedding: “One day you may get drafted / To a franchise of your own”). All the while, Holloway promises to cheer from the sidelines in victory or defeat, to be there when needed, and to give each “wonderful expansion / of our football family” both a welcome and proper coaching. The family in Jang’s shiny, reasonably realistic illustrations includes three children. The verse’s language is nonspecific enough to apply to offspring of any gender as well as adoptees. In school settings and on playing fields of several sorts, the child, at various ages, light-skinned like their parents, joins a diverse group of peers, including one wearing a hijab and another who uses a hearing aid, while the child’s own family includes a dark-skinned sibling and, by the end, a child with, like their spouse, Asian features. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A heartfelt forward pass from one generation to the next (and the next). (Picture book. 6-8)

CHOOSING BRAVE
How Mamie Till-Mobley and Emmett Till Sparked the Civil Rights Movement
Joy, Angela
Illus. by Janelle Washington
Roaring Brook Press (64 pp.)
$19.99 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-1-250-22095-0

The brutal killing of a Black youth turns his mother into an activist for justice.

This poignant volume about the murder of Emmett Till focuses on his mother, Mamie Till-Mobley; and how her son’s death drove her to seek justice, first for him and then for the Black community. Mamie and her family moved from Mississippi to the outskirts of Chicago, hoping for a better life. Mamie married young boxer Louis Till. Their baby boy had many medical problems, but Mamie refused to institutionalize him. When a chance came for Emmett to spend time with family in Mississippi, she was reluctant but gave in. He had not been there long before word came that he was missing. When his body was found, it was barely recognizable and Mamie was told not to open the casket. However, she was determined that the world would know what was done to Emmett, and the images from
the open viewings had a major impact on the growing civil rights movement. Although those accused of his murder were allowed to go free, Mamie continued her fight for social change, ensuring Emmett Till's story would not be forgotten. This story is told with hauntingly lyrical language that successfully captures the tenor of the time and brings to life its subjects. The text is enhanced with powerful expressionistic art crafted from cut paper and silhouettes. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A devastating, uniquely told story that will resonate. (author's and illustrator's notes, soundtrack, glossary, timeline, sources) (Picture-book biography 8-12)

**PHOENIX FLIGHT**
*Khoury, Jessica*
Scholastic (304 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-338-65246-8
Series: Skyborn, 3

In a kingdom torn apart by disease and unrest, will good finally prevail?

This third and final series installment jumps right in after the nail-biting conclusion of *Call of the Crow* (2022). Thelantis, a fantastic world of winged people, is in dire trouble. Denizens are losing their wings due to wingrot, a debilitating, incurable plague; their liberty, thanks to evil King Garion; and their lives, when stone monsters known as gargols bombard them. Plucky hero Ellie Meadows, a Sparrow low clanner, has become a Katniss Everdeen–like folk hero who suffers from unrelenting insecurity after being told she’s worthless. Her friends have their own demons: Twig is adjusting to life after being afflicted with wingrot, and Nox and Gussie have complicated family histories with which they struggle. With a trifecta of terrors descending upon Thelantis, Ellie, Nox, Twig, and Gussie must find a way to work together to save their beloved home. Those who have followed the series should find this installment riveting: Khoury does not shy away from the horrors of war with her lightning-paced battles, daring escapes, and plentiful secrets and surprises revealed, but she balances this with reaffirming notions of friendship and self-acceptance. Ellie, Knox, and Twig present White; previous volumes establish that Gussie has brown skin.

An altogether thrilling and satisfying conclusion. (map, clan list) (Fantasy. 8-12)

**BUTT SANDWICH & TREE**
*King, Wesley*
Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster (272 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-66590-261-8

Brothers, one neurodivergent, team up to shoot baskets and find a thief.

With the coach spit-bellowing at him to play better or get out, basketball tryouts are such a disaster for 11-year-old Green that he peels out of the gym—becoming the chief suspect to everyone except his fiercely protective older brother, Cedar, when a valuable ring vanishes from the coach’s office. Used to being mis-understood, Green is less affected by the assumption of his guilt than Cedar, whose violent reactions risk his suspension. Switching narrative duties in alternating first-person chapters, the brothers join forces to search for clues to the real thief—amassing notes, eliminating possibilities (only with reluctance does Green discard Ringwraiths from his exhaustive list of possible perps), and, on the way to an ingenious denouement, discovering several schoollmates and grown-ups who, like Cedar, see Green as his own unique self, not just another “special needs” kid. In an author’s note, King writes that he based his title characters on family members, adding an element of conviction to his portrayals of Green as a smart, unathletic tween with a wry sense of humor and of Cedar’s attachment to him as founded in real affection, not just duty. Ultimately, the author finds positive qualities to accentuate in most of the rest of the cast too, ending on a tide of apologies and fence-mendings. Cedar and Green default to White.

Slick sleuthing punctuated by action on the boards and insights into differences that matter—and those that don’t. (Fiction. 9-12)

**SET SAIL FOR PANCAKES!**
*Kley, Tim*
Viking (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-0-593-40429-4

Set sail for sweetness, whimsy, and pancakes.

Margot and her grandfather both wake up hungry for pancakes but find they do not have the ingredients they need. To gather eggs, milk, and flour, they must visit Chicken Island, Cow Island, and Flour Mill Island. The duo set sail on their boat, the Beluga Blue. They gather eggs among the chickens and practice “speaking cow” on Cow Island. Margot manages Flour Mill Island on her own, with a bit of rescue from Grandfather at the end. A storm forces them to harbor, where they must wait out the weather in their cozy ship only to discover, after the rain clears, that they are at Banana Tree Island. Then it’s time for Margot and Grandfather to whip up some banana pancakes on the Beluga Blue. The text is charming and playful (“My tummy is grumbly for pancakes, Grandpa!”), enhanced
by beautiful digital artwork with fun details gracing each page (the inhabitants of Cow Island sport adorable hats), including the bright endpapers. The book concludes with a recipe for the “best banana pancakes in the history of pancakes.” Margot and Grandmother are brown-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

If readers aren’t hungry for pancakes now, they will be at the end of this book! (Picture book. 5-8)

**TINY FOX AND GREAT BOAR**

*There*

Kolomycka, Berenika
Trans. by Natalia Kreczmar
Oni Press (64 pp.)
$14.99 | April 12, 2022
978-1-63715-020-7

Two wild critters navigate seasons along with the ups and downs of an unexpected friendship.

Tiny Fox lives in a valley with just an apple tree for companionship, and, “like most small animals, he went about his day believing he was happy.” All that changes when Great Boar arrives and plops down beneath the tree. Perturbed, Tiny Fox now has to share everything. When he leaves for a short time and returns, however, he discovers Great Boar is gone and a newfound loneliness has settled in his place. Happily, the two are reunited in the first story in this collection (“Here”), and as the seasons change (“Together” takes place during fall and winter, snowy weather continues in “Apart,” and “There” takes the pals into spring), the two learn to trust one another and, when called upon to do so, trust themselves as well. Watercolors capable of evoking not simply the splendor of a new dawn, but also this little book’s emotional pitch are wielded with surgical skill. The smallest dab of a line beneath an eye can indicate remorse or, more often, worry. This storyline provides an elegant bridge between picture books and graphic novels; for fans of similarly early, gentle comics like *Fox and Rabbit* by Beth Ferry (2020) and *Bug Boys* by Laura Knetzger (2020).

An early comic drills home the lesson that you never know how much you need someone until you find a friend. (Graphic early reader. 6-9)

**ROCKET SHIP YOGA**

*An Out-of-This-World Kids’ Yoga Journey for Breathing, Relaxing and Mindfulness*

Koral, Bari
DragonFruit / Mango Publishing
(64 pp.)
$16.95 | May 10, 2022
978-1-64250-860-4

Blast off! It’s yoga time!

It might seem antithetical that a children’s book teaching readers yoga postures and the concept of mindfulness—which focuses on the here and now—would use space and space travel as a backdrop. But the playful conceit makes sense considering this title instructs children (and adults sharing the book with kids) to stretch various body parts—arms, hips—up, out, and toward the sky as it demonstrates and describes poses, relaxation techniques, and measured-breathing exercises. It also empowers kids to soar with their minds and imaginations. Simply written, comprehensible text explains the movements and breathing methods required for each pose (which become more complex as the book advances). Colorful illustrations feature lively, space-themed scenes, affiriming a sense of adventure as a young, light-skinned child with a ponytail models different, clearly depicted postures. Backmatter elaborates on the physical and emotional benefits inherent in each included pose. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Count down to physical fun and mind and body awareness. (Informational picture book. 4-9)

**THE ROBBER RACCOON**

Kuenzler, Lou
Illus. by Julia Woolf
Faber & Faber (32 pp.)
$16.95 | July 26, 2022
978-0-571-36181-6

A sneaky raccoon steals unexpected items.

Enticed by treasures, Rosie Raccoon cannot stop her life of crime. The beam of her flashlight shines on many possibilities. She breaks into Bear’s house and sees a gleaming trophy. Flamingo has many sparkling jewels. And Snake has a collection of glitzy eggs. But Officer Skunk is closing in (armed with a flashlight). Trapped in a corner, Rosie freezes. “‘Caught you! You robber!’ cried Officer Skunk. Then he looked at the loot and said, ‘Hold on, it’s… // junk!’” Contrary to raccoons’ predilection for shiny objects, Rosie has bypassed all of the expensive items and instead stolen from everyone’s wastebaskets. Their trash is much more tempting! She likes to turn it into art. (She does get a stern talking to about stealing, nevertheless.) A rollicking rhythm propels Rosie’s caper forward; however, the Briticisms from this import are kept in order to preserve the rhyme, which may cause some head-scratching. Laser-beam security systems and fun flashlight perspectives increase the drama of this heist. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Sure to spark a discussion about right and wrong (and maybe a craft project, too). (Picture book. 3-6)
Can Bert complete his mission of rescuing all the animals in his friends, free of the influence of mind-control drug Y ummconium and mesmerism. As in the actual encounter on which this is based, Sunny is set free at last by marine biologists who clip off the loop—though the author’s admission that the real shark was caught by fishermen a few months later rather spoils the happy ending. Still, Sunny’s suffering will be palpable to young readers and makes Lai’s closing plea to reduce the use of plastics that can entangle or be eaten by sea life all the more cogent.

A wrenching cautionary tale but buoyant enough to float its serious message. (Graphic nonfiction. 8-10)

REVENGE OF ZOMBERT

LarRae, Kara
Illus. by Ryan Andrews
Candlewick (144 pp.)
$17.99 | July 19, 2022
978-1-5362-0108-6
Series: ZomBert Chronicles

Can Bert the cat and his human girl, Mellie, save their town (and maybe the world)?

Picking up right where the second volume left off, Bert, aka Y -91 (not a zombie but a victim of medical experiments who now has sort-of superpowers), has been captured by the Big Boss of Y ummCo. Mellie and her friends, free of the influence of mind-control drug Y ummconium, are intent upon rescuing Bert and finding an antidote for the townpeople of Lambert. All the while, the Big Boss and her lab tech henchmen Greg and Kari are focused on getting control of the world population via Y ummconium and mesmerism. Can Bert complete his mission of rescuing all the animals in the lab? Can Mellie rescue Bert and her mind-controlled family? Or will the Big Boss succeed in turning the world’s population into mindless consumers of everything Y ummCo? Even readers who have worked their way through the previous two (slim) volumes might be a bit lost at first, as there’s little attempt to catch readers up on the slightly silly plot. Alternating perspectives in the chapters can be a bit jarring. Weak character development and a predictable plot limit this one’s appeal to readers of the other volumes. Andrews’ cartoon black-and-white illustrations are the best feature. Images depict Mellie as dark-skinned. Final art not seen.

Not quite funny, not quite exciting, not quite worth your time. (Science fiction. 6-10)

BE A BRIDGE

Latham, Irene & Charles Waters
Illus. by Nabila Adani
Carolrhoda (32 pp.)
$19.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-72842-338-8

An exuberant ode to the virtues of kindness and inclusion.

Latham and Waters take readers through a day in the lives of a diverse group of students who cross a literal bridge to school—and a metaphorical one toward a world of compassion and respect. Upbeat, rhyming text urges readers to persevere, connect with others, stand up to bullies, and be respectful, complemented by digital, watercolorlike illustrations depicting kids being welcoming to their fellow students in art class, in gym, at lunchtime, and at storytime. The theme of rainbows and bridges can be found throughout. Brimming with colorful details, each page is a visual delight that reminds teachers, librarians, and caregivers of the need to model kindness and compassion to little learners. The backmatter includes a “Bridge Builder Pledge” with statements such as “I will be the one to reach out and say hello,” and “I will keep an open mind.” Uplifting and accessible, this one pairs well with The Day You Begin (2018) by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Rafael López, and Be a King (2018) by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by James E. Ransome. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A charming and welcome read bound to help cultivate a kinder next generation. (authors’ note, activities, further reading) (Picture book. 4-9)

FIRE ON HEADLESS MOUNTAIN

Lawrence, Iain
Margaret Ferguson/Holiday House (256 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-0-8234-4654-4

A trip by three siblings to scatter their mother’s ashes in a wilderness lake turns dire.

Eleven-year-old Virgil, 15-year-old Kaitlyn, and 19-year-old Joshua Pepper are taking Rusty, their family’s old camper van, to Little Lost Lake, miles into the Pacific Northwest wilderness, to scatter their mother’s ashes. It is a place filled with special memories for Virgil, as it’s where his beloved science teacher mother taught him wilderness skills
“Rousing tales of heroic deeds for causes just or otherwise.”

**SPIES**

**THE MONSTER ON THE BUS**

Lieh, Josh
Illus. by Hannah Marks
Razorbill/Penguin (48 pp.)
$18.99 | July 5, 2022
978-1-984835-51-2

There’s a monster on the bus...and a lot more in this take on “The Wheels on the Bus.”

Angelique, her best friend, Cassius, and all the other elementary school-aged children board the big yellow school bus on their way to school. But today’s journey is no ordinary ride. The monster on the bus is just the first of a range of characters who overtake the children on their way to school. After eating the bus driver, the pink, fluffy monster drives the vehicle as it is boarded by a villain (who says, “Earth will pay”), a dinosaur (who roars, “Grr, grr, grr!”), an astronaut (who yells, “Fire main fire rages closer. Clutching the box with his mother’s ashes, he must remember everything she has taught him in order to survive. This page-turning and atmospheric adventure story also teaches fascinating science skills. Characters read as White.

A superb tale of survival and courage. (Adventure. 9-13)

**HUMMINGBIRD**

Lloyd, Natalie
Scholastic (368 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-338-65458-5

Wildwood, Tennessee’s own Olive Miracle Martin is a girl of great, sparkly confidence and passions.

She loves her oddball family, church, writing, birding, her wheelchairs, and the idea of attending Macklemore Middle School after years of being home-schooled. Macklemore is the land of her hopes, full of potential friends and wild adventures, yet her osteogenesis imperfecta makes the prospect a challenge. While navigating new social mores and finding her niche within the quirky theater crowd, Olive and intrepid new friend Grace Cho hunt for the local hummingbird said to grant one fantastical wish. In a town where vividly described magic is taken as a point of fact and white feathers fall from the sky like snow, Olive’s fairy-tale wish is for bones like steel, not glass. Now she must contend with the question of whether she should—or even wants to—be anyone but who she already is. Olive can lean a tad pitch-perfect, and the world Lloyd builds is at times saccharine, but the energetic first-person narrative, interspersed with Olive’s thoughts in free verse, is full of bold personality. Refreshingly, her obstacles don’t come from being a wheelchair user but from navigating an inaccessible world. Her grappling with fears and bold dreams offers a rare depiction of physical disability that is allowed to be both complicated and empowering. The book follows a White default; Grace is described as East Asian.

A spirited tale of self-belief. (author’s note) (Fiction. 8-12)

**SPIES**

Long, David
Illus. by Terri Po
Faber & Faber (224 pp.)
$19.95 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-0-571-36184-7

Tributes to the courage of over two dozen secret agents of the World War II era and afterward—not all of them on the same side.

Drawing largely from the annals of Britain’s Special Operations Executive, historian Long highlights the daring exploits of roughly equal numbers of men and women plus one homing pigeon, with briefer mentions of several others. Most worked to support the French Resistance, but Roald Dahl, for instance, spied for the British on the then-neutral U.S. in the war’s early days. The roster also includes double agents who played both sides; Klaus Fuchs, who shared nuclear secrets with the USSR; and war criminal Adolf Eichmann’s Mossad kidnapper, Zvi Aharani. Except for renowned entertainer Josephine Baker and radio operator Noor Inayat Khan, the cast is all White. If the
three-to-four-page entries are skimpy on biographical specifics and no sources are given, there’s no shortage of thrilling feats, narrow escapes, tragic fates, and occasional insights into character or motive. Few of these figures are familiar today; of those who ought to be better known, Charles Fraser-Smith may lead the pack as inventor of the exploding rat and other ingenious gear for spies and saboteurs. Along with attractive, full-color portraits and spot art with a retro feel, Po adds modest quantities of visual drama with painted scenes of explosions, parachutes, and neatly dressed agents hiding from or calmly posing with enemy soldiers.

Rousing tales of heroic deeds for causes just or otherwise. (epilogue) (Nonfiction. 10-13)

KING OF THE ICE
Lyons, Kelly Starling
Illus. by Wayne Spencer
Penguin Workshop (96 pp.)
$6.99 paper / $15.99 PLB / July 19, 2022
978-0-593-38349-0
978-0-593-38350-6 PLB
Series: Miles Lewis, 1

A first-time ice skater frets about an upcoming field trip to the rink.

When Miles’ friend RJ bets that Miles can’t skate without falling, Miles reluctantly accepts the challenge. After school, Miles learns that his nana, who lives with his family, was an ice skater when she was young; she tells him that though, as a Black woman, she didn’t see many skaters who looked like her on TV, she wanted to change that. At dinner, his father, a Black history professor, tells Miles about Willie O’Ree, the first Black man to enter the National Hockey League, and Miles researches O’Ree online. But soon Miles’ world begins to spiral out of control—a rift grows between him and RJ over the bet, and when he sees flyers for luxury apartments for seniors, he fears that Nana is thinking of moving. Readers of Lyons’ Jada Jones books will recognize her friend Miles in this new series spinoff. Miles is a smart, sensitive character in a relatable scenario: navigating friendship and learning to speak up for himself. Miles’ tightknit, multigenerational family exudes warmth, and Lyons deftly folds in information on a little-discussed but important Black trailblazing athlete. Bringing to life the text are black-and-white illustrations with pops of blue. Miles and his family are Black.

A thoughtful protagonist makes his series debut; sports lovers and the athletic-averse alike will be charmed. (Biographical information about Willie O’Ree) (Chapter book. 6-8)

MARCEL’S MASTERPIECE
How a Toilet Shaped the History of Art
Mack, Jeff
Henry Holt (48 pp.)
$16.99 / Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-250-77716-4

Marcel Duchamp’s use of a urinal to challenge assumptions about art in 1917 New York has inherent kid appeal—and Mack exploits the possibilities.

The artist is first glimpsed holding a pen and standing next to Mona Lisa, who sports an inky mustache and goatie. Readers then see a star pattern shaved into Duchamp’s hair—examples of how a bizarre sensibility permeated his art. The book is primarily concerned, however, with the furor caused when Duchamp purchased the toilet from a sanitation company (“Come to Dada,” he croons affectionately) and submitted it to the “fancy art show.” Collages employ acrylics, watercolors, digital ink, and materials with interesting textures. The narrative is set on strips of colored paper, while the dialogue is presented in capital letters in different colors and fonts; some appear pasted on. These techniques are characteristic of the Dada art movement, contextualized in a more straightforward (but still engaging) addendum. The design is inspired. Potty humor and wordplay abound: “It says here there’s a toilet in an art show and everyone will be going.” Mack takes some liberties with the truth; the exhibition’s organizers actually excluded the piece from the show (it appeared in the catalog), whereas Mack has visitors reacting to it. This decision does focus attention on actual responses (people were amused or aghast at the concept) and on the questions Duchamp provoked about the nature of art. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A funny, clever consideration of an iconic object. (Informational picture book. 4-8)

THIS APPEARING HOUSE
Malinenko, Ally
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (288 pp.)
$16.99 / Aug. 16, 2022
978-0-06-313657-1

A tale of survival, friendship, and the strength that comes from overcoming fears.

Middle schooler Jac is dealing with the fallout of a real-life nightmare: childhood cancer. But it’s not just the fear of recurrence that she has to handle, but the reality of surviving and carrying the burden of her mom’s constant worry. When Jac discovers a large house that wasn’t there before looming at the end of a street in her suburban New Jersey neighborhood, she worries it’s a hallucination, which could mean a recurrence of her illness. But after her best friend, a boy named Hazel, sees the house too, her sense
of adventure takes over. Provoked by a couple of bullies who dare them to enter and then follow them inside, Jac and Hazel explore the house and are met with surprises—like a key with Jac’s likeness on it—that suggest her connection to this strange and terrifying place is personal. Before long, the kids realize they are trapped inside. Shocks follow with every new door they open as they search for an exit and discover ever increasing frights. Delightfully nightmarish visions chase Jac, offering the feel of a thrilling game with twisted and terrifying imagery, as she navigates the house, seeking to understand her connection to this unusual place in this emotionally resonant story. Characters seem to default to White.

Offers a hauntingly truthful view of secrets and strength. (Paranormal: 8-12)

**BLOOD! NOT JUST A VAMPIRE DRINK**

McAnulty, Stacy  
Illus. by Shrawana J.C. Tenney  
Henry Holt (40 pp.)  
$18.99 | Aug. 30, 2022  
978-1-250-30405-6

Why do humans make blood, if not for thirsty vampires?

McAnulty teams up with illustrator Tenney to follow up her *Brains! Not Just a Zombie Snack* (2021) with a closer look at blood—specifically, human blood. Two movie-style vampires (pointy ears, widow’s peaks, and prominent canine teeth) engage in a funny yet edifying discussion about this essential liquid. The taller, older, purplish vampire, amusingly dressed in a pinstripe suit, really just wants to drink someone’s blood. They’ve walked from their spooky hilltop castle and bellowed up to the bar at the “I Don’t Want To Suck Your Blood Smoothie Shop,” having misread what’s on offer. To the older vampire’s dismay, the younger, shorter, rounder, blue-skinned one states that blood is more important to humans and belongs “in the cardiovascular systems” rather than in smoothie blenders. The little vampire clearly describes why blood is essential for human bodies; how it moves around the body via arteries, arterioles, and capillaries; what’s in it (white and red blood cells, plasma, and platelets); and what these components do (white blood cells fight disease).

The tall vampire’s increasing disappointment is hilarious, but his new friend’s accomplishment of adventure takes over. Provoked by a couple of bullies who dare them to enter and then follow them inside, Jac and Hazel explore the house and are met with surprises—like a key with Jac’s likeness on it—that suggest her connection to this strange and terrifying place is personal. Before long, the kids realize they are trapped inside. Shocks follow with every new door they open as they search for an exit and discover ever increasing frights. Delightfully nightmarish visions chase Jac, offering the feel of a thrilling game with twisted and terrifying imagery, as she navigates the house, seeking to understand her connection to this unusual place in this emotionally resonant story. Characters seem to default to White.

**A SYNAGOGUE JUST LIKE HOME**

McGinty, Alice Blumenthal  
Illus. by Laurel Molk  
Candlewick (40 pp.)  
$18.99 | Aug. 9, 2022  
978-1-5362-1086-6

A shul’s congregants renew their temple.

Rabbi Ruben loves his synagogue, a place he believes should feel like “a happy home.” When he discovers a kitchen sink leaks, library floorboards creak, and sanctuary windows permit drafts, he springs into repairman mode, wanting to put things to rights as a Shabbat gift for his flock. With trusty toolbox and dog in tow, the rabbi attempts repairs and comes up with some ingenious ideas—e.g., stuffing challah dough into the faucet to stanch the leak. At first, Rabbi Ruben’s efforts seem to pay off, Friday night services proceed, and the rabbi is rightly proud, but
then, alas, his skills as a spiritual leader prove to outshine those of a general contractor. After services, numerous congregation members—particularly women and kids—pool their know-how and pitch in to do the repairs correctly, confirming Rabbi Ruben’s theory that a synagogue, like a home, is for helping, sharing, and caring (crucial when a watery near disaster occurs). Happily, the following Friday night’s services take place without problems—or more fix-its. This warm, humorous tale is ably supported by lively mixed-media, digitally finished illustrations that affirm the story’s guiding principles of collaboration and cozy hominess. Rabbi Ruben is light-skinned; congregants are diverse in terms of skin tone and age. Jewish audiences will appreciate familiar details in text and art, but the important message about the spirit of togetherness is universal. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A delightful testament to the power of community. (glossary) (Picture book 5-8)

THE BABY-CHANGING STATION
Miller, Ribett
Illus. by Dan Santat
Little, Brown (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-0-316-45932-7

What if the baby-changing station in the men’s room could change a baby brother into something much cooler?

James—a 10-year-old with large brown eyes and a mop of green-tinted, dark hair—immediately catches readers’ attention by saying he has done something he feels badly about. No, James hasn’t actually done anything wrong, but he feels guilty about his jealousy of his new little brother and his thoughts of returning the infant through the U.S. mail. When baby Joe poops just as the family begins a meal at their favorite pizza place, the hungry, exhausted parents assign James his first “diaper duty.” Adults may bristle at this unexpected burden on James, but the funny art makes the task seem less onerous. Before leaving the men’s room, James is tempted by a mysterious screen that offers him the opportunity to exchange the infant for night-vision specs, electric guitars, or a chemistry set. The family leaves the dog behind with a service promising “Pet Care for Serving Soldiers.” The family moves, makes friends, and eventually returns home, where the dog, now grown, is waiting for our main character. They’ve grown as well and learned that their love for the dog, and the dog’s love for them, has only grown stronger. The book contains no names or dialogue but eloquently conveys a wide range of emotions and lessons through its spare prose and expressive digital illustrations that seem to shimmer off the page. It’s also a great primer for young readers about the unique challenges military families face. The main character and their family are brown-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An important lesson for young readers conveyed poetically with lots of heart. (author’s note) (Picture book 4-8)

SOMETIMES LOVE
Moore, Katrina
Illus. by Joy Hwang Ruiz
Dial Books (40 pp.)
$17.99 | July 12, 2022
978-0-593-32382-3

Life in a military family teaches a child to keep love alive through big changes.

One day, a toddler is presented with a gift: a droopy-eared puppy poking its head out of a picnic basket. The two grow up together, and scenes of playing with balls and rolling in grass are interspersed with the ruining of rugs that leads to exasperation, then forgiveness (“Love is firm. / Love can bend”). What might otherwise be a snapshot of new dog ownership takes a turn when the child’s parent, an active duty soldier, is deployed overseas. The shock and anger the child feels turns into sadness and acceptance when the family leaves the dog behind with a service promising “Pet Care for Serving Soldiers.” The family moves, makes friends, and eventually returns home, where the dog, now grown, is waiting for our main character. They’ve grown as well and learned that their love for the dog, and the dog’s love for them, has only grown stronger. The book contains no names or dialogue but eloquently conveys a wide range of emotions and lessons through its spare prose and expressive digital illustrations that seem to shimmer off the page. It’s also a great primer for young readers about the unique challenges military families face. The main character and their family are brown-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A classroom of children practice expressing preferences with their teacher and caregivers.

A bright yellow school bus drops off Jamie, who is light-skinned with reddish-brown hair, and their classmates for Family Day at a suburban school building. Jamie’s peers discuss the ways their caregivers misunderstand them. Jamie admires the unicorn shirt worn by Alicia, a blond, light-skinned child. Alicia replies, “My mom made me wear it,” and Jamie offers their green sweater to cover it up. Joey, a brown-skinned child with a tight Afro, complains, “My dad wants me to play soccer, but I want to go to art class with Jamie,” and Xavier, who has brown hair and light skin, wishes his uncle would not shame him for
“Math, travel, friendship, and ingenuity blend for a quirky, entertaining, and satisfying tale.”

**THE WORLD’S LONGEST LICORICE ROPE**

For the price of 5 cents, almost anything is possible!

Ben, a determined kid with light skin and spiky dark hair, finds and earns nickels to buy a treat at the fair. He doesn’t expect to find the world’s longest licorice rope for only 5 cents, but for that price, how can he refuse? Following the rope ends means to feel determined or excited.

The group is rounded out by Cynthia, who has light skin and a blue hijab, who longs to play with her food instead of focusing on manners. The children resolve their issues neatly and, with their teacher’s blessing, organize an art project to share their truths with their caregivers. Chunky black text is paired with illustrations filled with cheerful greens, calm blues, and warm browns. Though the story is well intentioned, it lacks verve; the children’s distress about gender norms and expected behavior feels less like a narrative and more like a laundry list of woes. Backmatter includes helpful notes about listening to and offering decision-making power to children whenever possible. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

An unentertaining presentation of complex topics. *(Picture book, 5-7)*

**EXPEDITION BACKYARD Exploring Nature From Country to City**

Morpurgo adapts his 1982 novel for a younger audience.

Albert and Joey, his red bay, are bonded “like brothers.” Joey responds to Albert’s calls, and together, they work on the family farm in Devon, plowing, sowing, and harvesting. When war breaks out in Europe, Albert’s father, in need of money for the farm, sells Joey to the military. Albert, devastated, vows to one day reunite with Joey. He angrily leaves home and enlists in the army, lying about his age. Ensuing spreads depict Albert training and, with their teacher’s blessing, organize an art project to share their truths with their caregivers. Chunky black text is paired with illustrations filled with cheerful greens, calm blues, and warm browns. Though the story is well intentioned, it lacks verve; the children’s distress about gender norms and expected behavior feels less like a narrative and more like a laundry list of woes. Backmatter includes helpful notes about listening to and offering decision-making power to children whenever possible. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

An unentertaining presentation of complex topics. *(Picture book, 5-7)*

**WAR HORSE PICTURE BOOK A Beloved Modern Classic Adapted for a New Generation of Readers**

Morpurgo adapts his 1982 novel for a younger audience.

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An unentertaining presentation of complex topics. *(Picture book, 5-7)*

**EXPEDITION BACKYARD Exploring Nature From Country to City**

Two animal friends learn about the great outdoors in the city and country and form the Adventurers Club.

Mole and Vole are opposites. Mole is tentative, cautious; Vole craves danger and adventures. But while the duo’s friendship will feel familiar to readers of Elephant and Piggie and Frog and Toad, it’s not as well developed as those others, the dialogue often feels forced, and the true facts shared about animals encountered can feel didactic. In five chapters, the two share adventures near their country homes, inside a human home on a rainy day, and in the city after Vole’s curiosity lands the two in a moving box. Large panels in each chapter allow those new to graphic novels to follow along, and a final double-page spread in most summarizes the adventure in Mole’s sketches. In between, an overhead view with a colored dotted line and multiple sightings of the adventurers, whose numbers swell to five club members, shows their route and the many things they spy. In the background is the subplot of a Black family’s move to the city and the initial loneliness and first friendship of their little girl. While body language and facial expressions are clear for most of the anthropomorphized animals, young children may have trouble with Vole’s heavy-lined eyebrows frequently make her look angry when she is meant to feel determined or excited.

Rather tame animal adventures for new graphic-novel readers. *(how-to’s: draw Mole and Vole, keep a nature journal, join a community garden, stop birds from hitting windows, be a good cat owner, compost at home; about the creators) (Graphic fiction, 5-9)*

**THE WORLD’S LONGEST LICORICE ROPE**

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Ben, a determined kid with light skin and spiky dark hair, finds and earns nickels to buy a treat at the fair. He doesn’t expect to find the world’s longest licorice rope for only 5 cents, but for that price, how can he refuse? Following the rope ends up being a journey around the world, and somehow, the entrepreneurial, light-skinned girl who sold him the rope is always there with what he needs (a boat, a lion-proof outfit, a pyramid tour, a hot air balloon, and more)—at the cost of 5 cents
"An enchanting treat perfect for Halloween."

**KIT AND CABOODLE**

Like every young werewolf, Riley Callahan awaits the first full moon of summer with anticipation. As a 12-year-old, she’s guaranteed to transform this year and find her prime pack, the four other wolves who are linked to her for life by magic. She dreams of following in the footsteps of her Mama C to become a great leader of their community. However, when Riley and four other tenderfoot pups remain stuck in human form, it’s clear that something has gone wrong and their entire pack might be in danger. At first, Riley battles insecurity, but as the fast-paced story unravels, she develops a deeper understanding of herself along with greater empathy and trust in others. Diary entries between chapters connect the past to the present conflict. Queer and trans representation flourishes in Riley’s werewolf community, including Riley’s mom, her transgender older sister, her nonbinary pack mate, and Riley herself, who awakens to feelings for her pack mate Lydia, who was raised by her uncles. Apart from Riley’s biracial cousin, whose dad is Black, and a pack mate who is cued as Latinx, most characters read as White. Unresolved mysteries will leave readers hungering for a sequel. Champion’s atmospheric black-and-white illustrations add to the suspense.

An easily devoured, chilling, and suspenseful adventure. (Fantasy. 8-12)

**THE DEVOURING WOLF**

Parker, Natalie C.
Illus. by Tyler Champion
Razorbill/Penguin (288 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-0-593-20395-8

When the Devouring Wolf, a vengeful monster of legend, breaks free from his secret prison, five tenderfoot pups in Kansas band together to save their pack.

Math, travel, friendship, and ingenuity blend for a quirky, entertaining, and satisfying tale. (Picture book. 3-8)

**MOUSE CALLS**

Face, Anne Marie
Illus. by Erin Kraan
Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-5344-5375-3

A mouse gathers everyone together to wait out a storm.

Dark clouds are rolling in across the waves. Mouse runs to tell Moose, setting off a chain of events that has all creatures scurrying. In a playful, rhythmic meter, the message is quickly passed along from one animal to the next. “Mouse calls Moose. // Moose calls Goose. // Goose calls Dog / and Hog / and Hare. // Hare calls Bat. // Bat calls Cat. // Cat calls Frog / and then calls Mare.” Although the verb of choice happens to be *call*, all of this communication happens face to face. (There are no phones in this forest!) Creatures big and small—a snail, a gnu, a skink, and a louse—heed the warning; every one gathers in a cave to weather the storm. Animals appear to be chosen based on rhyme rather than habitat (Kangaroo and Caribou likely aren’t neighbors), but the romp bounces along so nicely—and introduces many atypical animals—that geographical details don’t matter. Kraan’s vivid illustrations are layered with wood-grain textures and charming details. Eagle-eyed readers will delight in noticing what each animal brings to the cave to share with others. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A lively read-aloud centered on community. (Picture book. 3-6)
Sleep habits and much, much more about animals from around the world.

This Spanish import offers a lively look at 20 animal groups, each described on a double-page spread filled with information nuggets. An opening page offers advice about how to interpret these posterlike pages. Each includes similar facts: how close the animal is to human size, life expectancy, reproduction, habitat, geographical distribution, interesting facts, and, of course, when, where, and how long it sleeps. Similar icons are used throughout to indicate taxonomy, scientific name, habitat, conservation status, and diet. Some of these animals, such as ants, sharks, butterflies, and bears, represent large, diverse groups, so the information is quite generalized. Others, like tree frogs, flamingos, toucans, or gorillas, are quite specific. The iconography, stylized illustrations, and occasional highlighting may help the reader organize and retain information, and the facts are intriguing—for instance, ants nap for no more than a minute, but up to 250 times a day. Unfortunately, the text is sometimes awkward, and too many facts are oversimplified—the smallest shark is 6 to 8 inches rather than, as stated, 6 feet long, and the book refers to silverback as a “species of mature male” gorilla when in fact it is a life stage. (This book was reviewed digitally)

An attractive presentation marred by inaccuracies. (Nonfiction. 7-10)

HOW DOES AN OCTOPUS SLEEP?
Discover The Ways Your Favorite Animals Sleep and What Makes Them Special
Pintos, Octavio
Illus. by Martin Lamuzzi
Trans. by Howard Curtis
Orange Mosquito (48 pp.)
$16.95 | July 19, 2022
978-1-914519-26-0

A tasty overview of a popular dish.

In this history of the finger or knife-and-fork food, a bespectacled rat takes readers back in time to ancient Greece and Persia (where some say the food may have originated) and then forward to 19th-century Naples and a chef named Raffaele Esposito, who “was famous for making the best pizza in Naples.” Pizzoli notes that King Umberto and Queen Margherita heard about the pizza on a visit to Naples and that, according to lore, the queen requested it—an image of Esposito riding a horse with pizza boxes tied to it offers a whimsical depiction of what Pizzoli dubs “the first pizza delivery.” Italian immigration to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the return of U.S. soldiers from Italy after World War II contributed to the widespread demand for the pies. Not content with the typical recipes, chefs all over the world have added toppings ranging from peas (Brazil) to fish (Russia) to coconuts (Costa Rica) to mayo jaga (Japan). The simple recipe for toaster oven-style minipizzas at the end of the book is child-friendly, starting with English muffins and adding mozzarella and tomatoes. Flavoring the concise yet fun narrative is the deliciously inspired palette dominated by red, green, and white that evokes both the Italian flag and pizza itself. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Budding cooks, dedicated eaters, and culinary historians will relish the presentation. (Informational picture book. 4-8)

PIZZA!
A Slice of History
Pizzoli, Greg
Viking (56 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-0-593-38747-4

TALES TO KEEP YOU UP AT NIGHT
Poblocki, Dan
Illus. by Marie Bergeron
Penguin Workshop (272 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 16, 2022
978-0-593-18747-4

Can reading a story make it real?

After her grandmother has been missing for a year and is presumed dead, Amelia and her younger brother, Winter, go with their moms to clean out her house. In a dream, Grandmother appears to Amelia, leading her to the attic, where she discovers a weathered book called Tales To Keep You up At Night, complete with a spine label and due date card. Grandmother warns her not to read it, so Amelia returns it to the library and learns from the librarian that it isn’t part of their collection. Overcome by curiosity, she settles into a cozy corner to read the 13 stories with titles like “Baby Witch” and “Screamers.” As she finishes the final entry, she discovers she’s alone in the library—it’s been locked up for the night, and there’s no sign of Win or the librarian. A sense of disquieting horror settles over her. Could the stories Amelia was reading become reality?

Alternating between Amelia’s storyline and the contents of the book she’s reading, Poblocki’s delightfully constructed offering is somewhere between a literary matryoshka and an ouroboros as the vignettes twine perilously around each other, rewarding close readers and demanding rereads. It includes well-established genre tropes like creepy clowns and being buried alive, making it a fun distillation of elements from crowd pleasers by authors like R.L. Stine and Alvin Schwartz. Amelia and her family read White.

Grab a flashlight and a blanket—this lives up to its titular claim. (Horror. 8-12)
**THE BIG WORRY DAY**
Reynolds, K.A.
Illus. by Chloe Dominique
Viking (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-0-593-46563-9

A child expresses and mitigates their anxieties through their dog.

A light-skinned child narrator informs readers, “I have a dog named Bea. She worries. Like me.” Even though the only thing they have planned this weekend is going outside to play, the narrator states that Bea is worried about what might happen. While the text has the narrator heavily preparing in order to quell “Bea’s” apprehension, the illustrations—depicting the protagonist’s worried expressions and Bea’s joyful, ram-bunctious body language—make it clear what’s really going on. The narrator proposes bringing supplies (a sweater, a compass, and a map, and more); when that does not allay their fears, the child and pup turn to self-regulating exercises including breathing exercises, yoga, and group therapy with stuffed toys. Finally, the gentle urging of the narrator’s furry friend quiets their worries, providing a sense of safety to help face the day outdoors. Soft, muted illustrations pair well with the text to create a slow pace and tranquil atmosphere of mindfulness and comfort. The lack of adults in the narration gives space and opportunity for self-guided regulation mechanisms and acknowledges the power of companionship in helping to grapple with those fears. However, readers with similar issues will get the most out of this story if it’s shared with a trusted adult. In an author’s note, Reynolds discusses how she experienced anxiety from a very young age. (**This book was reviewed digitally.**) An exercise in self-awareness in the face of debilitating anxiety. (**Picture book. 4-7**)  

**LOLA FLIES ALONE**
Richardson, Bill
Illus. by Bill Pechet
Running the Goat (52 pp.)
$19.99 | Aug. 16, 2022
978-1-927917-83-1

An intrepid, outlandishly dressed child has a few unexpected hiccups on her first solo plane ride.

Author and illustrator duo Richardson and Pechet team up again to tell a whimsical story about Lola, who is about to fly unaccompanied to visit her grandma. Despite her mother’s anxieties about this unprecedented trip, Lola is unperturbed; equipped with mermaid leggings, a tutu, fairy wings, a unicorn baseball cap, and a magic wand, her confidence sparkles almost as brightly as her outfit. As Lola settles into seat 13A, she can scarcely get comfortable before a bubbly flight attendant named Arshbir makes a call on the intercom. An “emergency” has arisen that “only a mermaid can handle”—is there one on the plane? Lola happily accepts the challenge. More kooky obstacles ensue throughout the flight, requiring the assistance of any ballerina, fairy, and unicorn onboard (each serendipitously aligned with Lola’s clothing). The flight concludes after Lola successfully averts these oddball disasters, leaving the eccentric protagonist feeling calm when she meets up with Gran. In Pechet’s signature scribbly illustrations, Lola has pale skin, while Arshbir’s light-tan skin, sky-blue turban, full beard, and handlebar mustache code him as South Asian. Some young readers might enjoy this story’s absurd hijinks and bold characters, but others may find it long-winded, with images that seem both jarring and a bit flat. (**This book was reviewed digitally.**) Despite its zany plot and boisterous pictures, this tale doesn’t quite take off. (**Picture book 5-8**)  

**THE GOLDEN TWINE**
Rioux, Jo
First Second (128 pp.)
978-1-250-62535-9
978-1-250-62536-6 paper
Series: Cat’s Cradle 1

A plucky orphan embarks on an adventure crossing paths with imps, monsters, and other creatures.

Suri, an orphan, has stowed away in a traveling merchant camp that moves through the valley of Galatea. Galatea is located just below a mountain chain known as the Dragon’s Belt, which was split open 500 years ago by the Spider Witch, allowing monsters to enter through the gap. Suri’s true desire is to be a heroic monster tamer, but she spends her time doing odd jobs for the camp’s merchants, entertaining the other youth with scary tales of monsters, and evading the camp leader, Leon, who is constantly trying to chase her out of the camp. One night, she unwittingly comes into possession of some magical twine, which holds powers for a band of catisiths, catlike shape-shifters, who desperately want it back. In their pursuit, they separate Suri from the camp. Full of moxie, Suri has charmed her way into most of the camp merchants’ hearts, as is apparent when they have to pack up and leave without her. Though this book was originally published in 2012, Rioux has reillustrated it. Artwork full of energy and comedic timing brings this steampunk-esque, magical world together as it lays groundwork for what will become a trilogy. Journal pages at the end have more info on the kinds of monsters discussed. Suri has tan skin and dark hair; other characters are racially diverse.

A captivating series start that will have readers clamoring for more. (**Graphic fantasy. 8-14**)
“A sweet, self-esteem–building pas de deux.”

WHEN YOU ADOPT A PANDARINA

AM I A FROG?

Rockwell, Lizzy
Holiday House (32 pp.)
$15.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-0-8234-5078-7
Series: I Like To Read

A tadpole can hardly wait to grow up.
A frog’s life cycle is ably and appealingly presented in an early-reader format by an experienced science writer. As the tadpole grows, it continually asks its neighbor, a snail, the title question, the equivalent of “Are we there yet?” The snail patiently explains each growth stage: the egg, where the frog started; the tadpole stage, including its parts and what they are for; and the changes on the way in the future. Leaping forward, in the penultimate act, the nearly transformed frog emerges to see the sky and feel the air. It will return to the water until its tail has been absorbed and it can survive both in and out of water. The conversation between frog and snail is presented in two colors, allowing dual read-alouds. The words and sentences are simple, with plenty of repetition. Rockwell’s illustrations, created with watercolor washes and digital tools, support beginning readers and add further information. We see the frog’s changing shape and size, its environment, some of its neighbors, and even its new long tongue, catching a dragonfly prey. An illustration toward the end depicts the frog life cycle—a solid review of the material covered in the book. These simple illustrations are realistic and accurate, right down to the snail. Reading teachers will especially welcome this informative title. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A basic biological process presented appropriately for the beginning reader. (Informational early reader. 4-7)

WHEN YOU ADOPT A PANDARINA

Rose, Matilda
Illus. by Tim Budgen
Abrams Appleseed (32 pp.)
$12.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-4197-5731-0
Series: When You Adopt

Mrs. Paws’s Haven for Magical Pets comes through again. Having in previous outings—When You Adopt a Starwhal (2020) and When You Adopt a Pugicorn (2021)—paired animals with children in need of life lessons, the perceptive proprietor of Twinkleton-Under-Beanstalk’s pet emporium has just the right companion to help clumsy, pale-skinned Princess Skye find her dancing feet before light brown–skinned Queen Elsie’s Birthday Ball—to wit, a rainbow-eared panda kicked out in ballet shoes and a pink tutu. Despite the outfit, though, Pandarina proves a total klutz both in and out of dance class—at least at first. But as Skye watches the persistent panda pick herself up after each spill and keep practicing, her despair changes to a matching determination to do likewise, and by the time the ball rolls around, she’s feeling good enough about her efforts that she’s even able to take a tumble in stride. Rose’s twirly conclusion that “when you try your best and have fun, you’ll always be the star of the show” finds tonal equivalent in Budgen’s pastel-hued gatherings of cute magical creatures (including Starwhal and Pugicorn, in cameos) and ballet students who are not only racially diverse, but include a dancer who uses a wheelchair. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A sweet, self-esteem–building pas de deux. (Picture book. 6-8)

JOHN AUDUBON AND THE WORLD OF BIRDS FOR KIDS

His Life and Works, With 21 Activities

Ross, Michael Elsohn
Chicago Review Press (144 pp.)
$18.99 paper | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-64160-618-9
Series: For Kids

A detailed portrait of the great ornithologist, with select examples of his dramatic avian images.

The activities promised on the title page are definitely a weak link, as they run to perfunctory projects like conducting an “eggamination” by breaking an egg, looking at its contents, and then eating them—but otherwise Ross runs through the major, and many minor, events in Audubon’s well-documented life to trace his development as an artist and his character as an “active, adaptable, and showy” impresario for his renowned but fantastically costly magnum opus. If the author’s efforts to acknowledge that, yes, Audubon shot his models and, yes, he was a slaveholding “evildoer” sometimes come off as clumsy, still, he’s careful to give the painter’s wife, Lucy, and collaborators like George Lehman and Maria Martin fulsome credit for their substantial contributions to his life’s work. And, though the man himself appears only once, the illustrations offer not only dozens of birds in magnificent, sharply reproduced glory, but helpful juxtapositions, too, such as a painting of a golden eagle placed with both its subtly altered print version and the portrait of Napoleon that was said to have inspired it. Along with notes on the deplorable effects of rampant 19th-century egg and plume harvesting on bird populations, the narrative finishes off with a nod to Black American ornithologist J. Drew Lanham’s recent examination of Audubon’s racist views and practices.

Thorough and perceptive, even if the efforts to add nuance are laid on with a trowel. (timeline, sites to visit and organizations, endnotes, bibliography, index) (Biography. 12-15)
Repetitive patterning and striking compositions create loads of visual play, while the descriptive, minimal text—sometimes only a phrase per spread—sets the tone. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A stunning bedtime tale infused with a bit of suspense. *(Picture book. 4-7)*

Full of mystery and intrigue, a personified beam of moonlight is on the move as a child sleeps, wakes, wonders, and is reassured.

Solitary text on a dark page suggests that something is out there—awake, alive, and moving. It’s in a lush jungle, where a hushed tone pervades and gazelles bound away. It is slithering, tumbling, hiding, seemingly ready to pounce. When dense landscapes open to the sea, the mood lightens from ominous to adventurous. Something catches a plane, then a train and rides through mountain passes. But the relief is short-lived as readers quickly realize the something is coming closer, into their neighborhoods and rooms. At the height of suspense, a child awakens in a room with a toy plane and a framed picture of a gazelle—hints that what readers just witnessed were parts of a dream. Not fearful, the child longs for the moonlight to return. Savage uses linocuts in a limited palette of various hues of blue to create deceivingly simple, atmospheric illustrations with sophisticated depth. Bathed in blue, the child’s race is unclear. Repetitive patterning and striking compositions create loads of visual play, while the descriptive, minimal text—sometimes only a phrase per spread—sets the tone. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A little feline must contend with some big feelings.

A striking neon backdrop surrounds a striped orange kitten clad in blue pants and a purple shirt. As a parent offers the kitten a lollipop and asks for a smile, the youngster responds, “Why do I have to be happy?” Big text stretches across the next two pages exclaiming, “I want to be MAD for a while!” The parent watches as the kitty begins to identify their emotions (“I feel like a crocodile!”) and asks for their parent to not be afraid but instead to be patient as the kitten’s feelings naturally subside. The simple narrative guides readers through processing feelings, noting tools to move the emotions along. The kitten acknowledges that occasionally talking with their parent or creating art can alleviate the frustration but really emphasizes how alone time is often the key to let anger dissipate. Instead of focusing on the goal of quickly becoming happy again, Saltzberg provides a straightforward model for readers to embrace the natural flow of emotions through their bodies. The bright cartoon illustrations complement the message while adding a touch of humor. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**ORDER OF THE NIGHT JAY**

_Savan, Stephen_  
Neal Porter/Holiday House (32 pp.)  
$18.99 | Aug. 23, 2022  
978-0-8234-5084-8

Full of mystery and intrigue, a personified beam of moonlight is on the move as a child sleeps, wakes, wonders, and is reassured.

Solitary text on a dark page suggests that something is out there—awake, alive, and moving. It’s in a lush jungle, where a hushed tone pervades and gazelles bound away. It is slithering, tumbling, hiding, seemingly ready to pounce. When dense landscapes open to the sea, the mood lightens from ominous to adventurous. Something catches a plane, then a train and rides through mountain passes. But the relief is short-lived as readers quickly realize the something is coming closer, into their neighborhoods and rooms. At the height of suspense, a child awakens in a room with a toy plane and a framed picture of a gazelle—hints that what readers just witnessed were parts of a dream. Not fearful, the child longs for the moonlight to return. Savage uses linocuts in a limited palette of various hues of blue to create deceivingly simple, atmospheric illustrations with sophisticated depth. Bathed in blue, the child’s race is unclear. Repetitive patterning and striking compositions create loads of visual play, while the descriptive, minimal text—sometimes only a phrase per spread—sets the tone. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A stunning bedtime tale infused with a bit of suspense. *(Picture book. 4-7)*

Everything goes wrong on the Wildwood Elementary field trip.

This picture book features one not-so-wild kid and a school bus full of some pretty wild creatures: George the gorilla, Charlie the crocodile, and Mr. Grizzly, a bear, as the teacher. Mr. Grizzly takes the class into the woods, where the narrator, a light-skinned, bespectacled child, winds up covered in poison ivy, getting pooped on by a bird, and running from a mountain lion. In the end, the anti-nature kiddo manages to find some joy in the great outdoors and delightfully quips, “S’mores are my favorite part of the food chain.” Scharnhorst’s story—a follow-up to *My School Stinks!* (2021)—is effectively told through diary entries, which gives readers a sense of the narrator’s gripes and inner monologue. Ultimately finding the silver lining in the situation is a classic moral for a good reason. Patton’s illustrations include fine line detail, like Patricia the porcupine’s individual quills, the snail’s tiny tie, and the intricacies of the map. The narrator’s expressions and body language—conveying everything from misery to pride—complement the text. The look of the notebook paper backing the text combined with the illustrations sometimes makes for pages that appear busy. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A relatable tale that will bolster the spirits of readers dreading their own field trips. *(Picture book. 4-6)*

_Schmapp, Jonathan_  
Top Shelf Productions (160 pp.)  
$14.99 paper | July 26, 2022  
978-1-60309-510-5

Camp Jay Bird is alive with secrets... or is it? In his comics, Frank is the mighty Super Bear, who fears only three things: math, his dad, and summer camp. But in real life, shy and nervous Frank is about as unbearlike as a bear can be. Sent away to camp by his father, he’s sure that his summer is ruined; the only thing worse than the bullies are the bugs, and he’s the only bear there, to boot! At least with a friend by his side, Ricky, a
hyperexcitable raccoon, the ordeal has the potential to become an adventure...perhaps more of an adventure than either bargained for. In the (un)dead of night, Frank and Ricky soon discover that some secrets are better left undisturbed. Schnapp’s debut graphic novel doesn’t seem certain whether it’ll become a detective-duo heist, a moving and cautionary tale of friendship and openness prevailing against prejudice, or a chilling campfire yarn, but it somehow manages to be all three and more. Varying in size, palette, and intricacy, the panels are wonderfully dynamic and engaging. Hints of characterization come through both explicitly and in the easy-to-overlook details, and even minor characters are imbued with surprising depth. The first in a thrilling series, this one forgoes the cliffhanger entirely and plunges straight over the edge, leaving readers hungry for more.

**Something wicked this way comes...hopefully, a sequel in the making.** *(Graphic novel. 8-12)*

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**THREE STRIKE SUMMER**

Schrempp, Skyler

McElderry (320 pp.)

$17.99 | Aug. 30, 2022

978-1-5344-9914-0

Drought, failed crops, and loss take a toll on Gloria, but she holds on to her dream of playing baseball.

When her family is evicted from their farm in Balko, Oklahoma, just weeks after her baby brother’s death, Gloria Mae Willard pitches a fit—then pitches a rock through the bank man’s windshield. Pa is impressed with her throwing arm but shares some hard truths: They’re going to do migrant work in California until they earn enough to own land again.

The only thing Gloria wants as much as keeping their own farm, where Little Si is buried under the cottonwood, is to join a baseball team. The Balko boys never let girls play, but Gloria persists until she proves herself to the boys in their California shantytown. Narrated by Gloria in a conversational tone that brings the setting to life, readers feel her grief, outrage, and gritty determination. Descriptions of the Dust Bowl years and hard-scrabble life in the camps are searing, and Gloria matures as she learns about others’ struggles. While she organizes a ballgame, Pa organizes the peach orchard workers to strike for better conditions only to be betrayed. Pa is in danger of being clobbered by police until Gloria and her teammates intervene, illustrating the importance of hope, honor, and team spirit in combating hardship. An informative author’s note explains the historical context, including the reasons behind the all-White communities Gloria inhabits.

**Inspiring. (Further reading)** *(Historical fiction. 8-12)*

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**THE LEGEND OF THE LOST BOY**

Sedita, Francesco & Prescott Seraydarian

Illus. by Steve Hamaker

Viking (192 pp.)

$18.99 | $12.99 paper | Aug. 23, 2022

978-0-593-20619-5

978-0-593-20620-1 paper

Series: The Pathfinders Society, 3

Stranded in the past, the tenacious young Pathfinders—Kyle, Vic, Beth, Harry, and Nate—forge ahead in their final adventure for the fabled Windrose treasure.

Picking right up after The Curse of the Crystal Cavern’s (2021) thrilling face-off with the Creeper, the diverse team of intrepid explorers travel back in time and end up at Camp Pathfinder in the year 1962. The kids meet a young Mildred Merriweather, great-niece of eccentric founder Henry Merriweather, whose disastrous legacy occasionally draws ridicule from fellow campers. Together the Pathfinders uncover a hidden map that charts a path along a raging river toward a mysterious place called the Ringing Rocks. Led by a cantankerous former camper named Gideon, the young explorers successfully conquer the deadly Rockledge River only to end up at a mysterious ship called the Lost Boy. Unbeknownst to the Pathfinders, an unexpected host awaits on the Lost Boy alongside a discovery that disrupts the very fabric of time. With a grand dose of adventurous humor, Book 3 in the series concludes with a flourish. Though a tad more muted in scope than its predecessors, this latest installment nonetheless retains the same sense of magical weirdness and affection for historical know-how. The artwork also again remains a clear highlight, conveying an adventurous spirit that springs off the page.

**Followers of the series will be delighted to see it come to a satisfying close.** *(Graphic novel. 8-12)*

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**ON A GOLD-BLOOMING DAY**

Finding Fall Treasures

Silverman, Buffy

Millbrook/Lerner (32 pp.)

$29.32 PLB | Sept. 6, 2022

978-1-72844-298-3

Colorful photographs and short, rhyming phrases extol the glories of autumn in the Northeastern and Midwestern sections of the United States.

“On a gold-blooming...// bee-zooming.../ sun-dazzling day...” Each of those phrases is in a bold white font against a different vibrant photograph of, for instance, goldenrod, a bee on a purple coneflower, and an autumn landscape bright with red and orange maple leaves. These are followed by more eye-catching photographs accompanied by pairs of rhyming, two-word, noun-verb combinations (“Crickets chirp. / Butterflies slurp”). The clever poetry pattern repeats several times, with the final
page—still in two words—summing up the many parts. Excellent backmatter elaborates—in sequential order—on the various phrases, adding rudimentary scientific explanations of, for example, fall animal behaviors, photosynthesis, thunderstorms, and why breezes chill a human being’s skin. The book offers older students the opportunity to learn about word usage and try their hand at writing poetry that uses the text’s format. People appear in two photographs—in the first, a dark-haired, light-skinned family of four revels in apple-picking; in the second, which includes the poem’s penultimate line, a brown-skinned child hugs a dog in the midst of a pile of fallen leaves. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Sun-dazzling! (bibliography, glossary) (Informational picture book. 3-8)

DADAJI’S PAINTBRUSH
Sirdeshpande, Rashmi
Illus. by Ruchi Mhasane
Levine Querido (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-64614-172-2

What endures after someone is gone?
A boy in a village in India loves to paint, just like Dadaji, his grandfather and constant companion. Dadaji dies, leaving the boy his best paintbrush, but the boy puts it aside—it hurts too much to even look at it. Months go by, and a young girl comes knocking, asking the boy to teach her to paint (“like your dadaji taught my mummy”), spilling color back into his life. As the children look at Dadaji’s paintings, they’re inspired—and the boy finally finds solace. This story of familial love and the special bond between grandparents and grandchildren wraps readers in a tight hug. Illustrations are in soft focus, almost like a flashback in a film, and Mhasane’s use of color, which includes the poem’s penultimate line, a brown-skinned family of four revels in apple-picking; in the second, which includes the poem’s penultimate line, a brown-skinned child hugs a dog in the midst of a pile of fallen leaves. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A gentle, reassuring reminder that love lives on long after death. (Picture book. 4-8)

THE REPLAY
25 Greatest Moments in Sports
Skinner, Adam
Illus. by Mai Ly Degnan
Magic Cat (64 pp.)
$22.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-497-6023-5

Sequential panels offer accounts of select achievements and milestones in modern sports history.

Literally blow-by-blow only in the case of Muhammad Ali’s “Rumble in the Jungle” with George Foreman, each entry breaks down a memorable moment in a different sport or event—in the case of soccer, for instance, Brandi Chastain’s winning penalty kick in the 1999 Women’s World Cup final and Germany’s 7-1 demolition of Brazil in 2014’s Men’s World Cup semifinal. The featured athletes are a diverse lot, ranging from White ice dancers Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean to African American gymnast Simone Biles, Jamaican speedster Usain Bolt, Japanese wrestling legend Kaori Icho, and Australian Indigenous Olympic track star Cathy Freeman. Paralympics champion Jonnie Peacock and surfer Bethany Hamilton, who has one arm, make the roster, too. Degnan’s figures don’t always quite resemble their subjects, but she does tuck versions of iconic photos, like the raised fists of Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics, into her sets of freeze frames. In adrenalyzed prose (crediting Jesse Owens, for example, with “single-handedly crushing Hitler’s myth of white supremacy”), Skinner adds both historical context and descriptions of the action to each entry, then closes with a set of character card–style tributes. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

The art underperforms, but the descriptions of athletic feats admirably compensate. (glossary) (Sports history. 9-12)

WELLINGTON’S BIG DAY OUT
Small, Steve
Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-1-66592-255-5

A young elephant struggles with feeling too small on his birthday. Wellington’s “a whole year older” than yesterday. But while his parents at first pretend not to recognize the handsome gentleman who joins them at breakfast, their gift proves that their son is not quite as big as they thought (or he’d like); the jacket that’s just like Dad’s is way too big. So, he and Dad set off to visit the tailor and then Grandad. Wellington’s thrilled that he now needs a ticket (half-price) to ride the bus, and he’s awed at how big the city looks from atop his father’s shoulders. But when they find the tailor repeatedly out, their size differences are further highlighted as they try out a tuba at the music store (Wellington “could barely get it to make a sound”) and eat giant ice cream sundaes (Wellington can’t finish his). Giving up on the tailor, they head to Grandad’s, where the wise older pachyderm finds a way to show Wellington that he’s exactly the right size, and the three of them end the day on a high note; perhaps the jacket will fit on Wellington’s next birthday. White backgrounds keep the focus on the characters. Small really plays up the size difference between the elephants: Wellington is one-fifth the size of his enormous father, which can make it tough to see the tyke’s facial expressions unless
“Bold colors and flavors serve as a reminder to embrace your heritage and all its culinary glory.”

LUNCH FROM HOME

you’re up close or a lapsitter. This is a perennial topic, and this wordy take on it doesn’t quite stand out from the rest. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A sweet but familiar and predictable approach to the I’m-too-small conundrum. (Picture book: 3+)
“Inspiring examples for younger would-be world-changers.”

**KID TRAILBLAZERS**

**MY GRANDMA IS THE BEST!**
Steinberg, D.J.
Illus. by Ruth Hammond
Grosset & Dunlap (32 pp.)
$8.99 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-0-593-38713-9

A loving relationship between a grandmother and grandchild can take many forms.

Designed as a gift from a grandchild to a grandmother (one of the front endpapers is formatted as a nameplate with space to write both names), the book is made up of spreads, each with a short verse and an image depicting a grandmother spending quality time with grandchildren. What these grandmothers share with their grandchildren is as diverse as the grandmothers themselves. Some enjoy biking and fishing with their grandkids; others play checkers or help piece puzzles together. A grandmother can be a reading buddy and a snuggly lap for a nap. Still others are cheerleaders for their grandchildren and pretend patients and hair salon patrons. The text generally doesn’t scan well, though the sentiment is sweet—and clear. With the exception of the first and last spreads, the order of activities isn’t critical to a story arc, making the book a browsable dis ses. In the end, Red not only acknowledges and compliments his famous cousin.

**BECOMING BLUE**
Tarlow, Ellen
Illus. by Julien Chung
Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-1-66590-001-0

Blue is as blue does.

Shy Blue, a square, idolizes outgoing, brave, accomplished Red, a sphere. Blue is a square in more ways than one, while Red’s the color of a firetruck, fire itself, and, best of all, a stop sign. Fed up that Blue copies her, she demands that he “Go be Blue!” i.e., himself. Blue tries to find his essential blueness but can’t. As events unfold, however, Blue discovers marvelous, hitherto unknown talents that only someone blue can possess. In the end, Red not only acknowledges and compliments Blue’s specialness, but also adopts some qualities that make him unique. Better still, the pals discover that, when combining talents, something extraordinary happens. Being oneself is a great message to convey—as is joining forces with friends—and while this is a familiar, somewhat predictable tale, the author relays the idea mostly successfully, though the conclusion feels a little tacked-on. Capable, self-assured Red is occasionally haughty, though, admittedly, she relents by the end. Self-effacing Blue is presented as largely ineffectual and sometimes simpering. Though Blue’s heightened sense of self-worth develops late, readers will welcome it and appreciate Red’s respectful acknowledgment. The quirky digital illustrations are appealing; occasional colored typefaces and backgrounds enhance visual interest, as do the characters’ expressive faces, achieved through dots for eyes and simple lines for mouths. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

**KID TRAILBLAZERS: True Tales of Childhood From Changemakers and Leaders**
Stevenson, Robin
Illus. by Allison Steinfeld
Quirk Books (224 pp.)
$14.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-68369-301-7
Series: Kid Legends

Stevenson expands her 2019 roster of *Kid Activists* with profiles of 20 more advocates for political, social, and environmental causes.

Except for Benazir Bhutto, John Lewis, and Audre Lorde, all of the role models here are alive, and some, like environmental activist Greta Thunberg (born in 2003), #1000BlackGirlBooks founder Marley Dias (born in 2005), and Little Miss Flint Mari Copeny (born in 2007), are still relatively young. With some notable, if humanizing, exceptions—Al Gore’s memories of tossing water balloons off a hotel rooftop, for instance, or Shonda Rhimes’ petrifying first driving lesson—the 16 longer entries and four single-page spotlights are weighted toward childhood experiences that informed or directly led to later concerns and achievements, from Kamala Harris shouting “Freedom!” from her stroller at a civil rights demonstration to Ai Weiwei watching his father’s library burn on the orders of the Red Guard. All but four subjects are people of color, most are North American, and several, including trans actor Elliot Page, are queer. Steinfield’s nearly drawn illustrations include many scenes of smiling figures in forthright stances as well as some moments of difficulty and distress; Stevenson mentions instances of violence and bullying often enough to counter any false impressions that activism doesn’t have its risks.

**KING KONG’S COUSIN**
Teague, Mark
Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-1-66591-230-3

Junior, a young gorilla, grows up in the shadow of King Kong, his far more famous cousin.

The comparisons between the two are constant. King Kong is as big as a building; Junior is small enough to live in an apartment. While King Kong is as strong as four elephants, Junior is...
only about as strong as Bernice, his cat. Kong scales skyscrapers, Junior climbs up on the piano bench. And King Kong does “heroic things,” while Junior feeds his goldfish. Junior has grand dreams, though, so he eats his bamboo, does his exercises, and keeps track of his height on the wall to make sure he is growing big and strong, just like his famous cousin. When his beloved Bernice is in danger, Junior proves that heroism does not require massive strength but strength of character. Teague’s appealing grayscale acrylic illustrations and vintage New York City scenery recall the golden age of film in which King Kong was first made famous. This is a cozy family read to enjoy together and reiterates the vital lesson that even small people can do great things. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A timeless lesson combined with vintage vibes for a comforting read-along. (Picture book. 2-6)

BROWN IS WARM, BLACK IS BRIGHT
Thomson, Sarah L. Illus. by Keith Mallett
Little, Brown (40 pp.) $18.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-0-316-42419-6

A young brown-skinned child happily goes about their day, accompanied by a nurturing adult.

The child, who has an afro-puff ponytail framed by cornrow braids, plays in piles of leaves and water puddles, watches a bird soar in the sky, drinks tea with honey while reading about the actions of African American activists during the civil rights movement, and plays a stringed instrument before being tucked into bed with a kiss by their caregiver. Both the child and caregiver are Black. Simple text complements the illustrations and links the colors brown and black to both the actions depicted and the natural world: “Brown is crisp // ...crunch and crackle, / catch me as I fall”; “Black is flight... // inky wings / on wet watercolor clouds.” The verses are beautifully written (“Black is bright... // tender darkness / glowing between stars”; “Black is hope... // floating far / a flower hidden deep”). However, younger readers may need assistance teasing out the connection between the often complex text and the more accessible images. Illustrations, drawn and painted digitally, are soft, rich, and warm, evoking feelings of safety and calm. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A solid contribution that celebrates the everyday joy of Black children and their families. (Picture book. 3-8)

HOW TO BE A ROCK STAR
Tolin, Lisa Illus. by Daniel Duncan
Putnam (32 pp.) $17.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-984814-20-3

How do you become a rock star? It’s easier than you might think!

In this tongue-in-cheek tale, a raven-haired, olive-skinned child calmly offers suggestions from their own experience, such as using stuffed animals for backup vocals, and, when Mom won’t buy an electric guitar, riffing passionately on a broom. The suggestion that creates the most fodder for ironic text and sight gags is letting one’s little brother into the band. “Younger brothers are not ideal, but yours will have to do.” The child endures their brother’s toddler-babble, temper tantrums, and even a soiled diaper (slyly labeled “wardrobe malfunction”) while doggedly pursuing their dream. The text includes both simple statements by the protagonist and occasional speech balloons from olive-skinned Mom and light-skinned, red-bearded Dad. The art complements the lighthearted mood as the large-eyed, cartoonlike characters parade through the pages, sometimes rocking against stark white, sometimes shown against backgrounds with just enough detail to interest viewers without overwhelming them. There’s lots to laugh at: The narrator’s advice that aspiring rock stars start off by performing familiar songs is paired with an image of them crooning “The Wheels on the Bus”; Mom’s and Dad’s unwelcome suggestions for a band name are, respectively, “The Cuddle Monsters” and “The Not-So-Loud Band.” This one is well suited for a family read-aloud or for independent reading by good decoders. (This book was reviewed digitally)

This rocks! (Picture book. 4-8)

THE MIDNIGHTERS
Tooke, Hana Illus. by Ayesha L. Rubio
Viking (256 pp.) $16.99 | June 28, 2022
978-0-593-11696-8

An anxious child finds a friend, a secret circus, and a mystery to solve in 19th-century Prague.

Ema Vašková has been gifted with an education in the sciences by her 11 older siblings, has uncommon knacks for reading faces and entering rooms unnoticed, falls into fugue states when she’s thinking hard, and possesses the inner stuff to face her fears—given proper prodding. That prodding initially comes from mysterious and wild-spirited Silvie, a girl who leads her on a series of thrillingly daring nighttime adventures...and then disappears suddenly. Screwing her courage to the sticking place, Ema sets out alone to track her down and, after clever sleuthing, discovers a subterranean carnival of illusions and pseudoscientific
Warm illustrations give characters—depicted in various shades (Picture book. 5

Huerta’s childhood; Torres also provides details of Huerta’s

Huerta is imagined in this story of activism. Lola helps Mama
dows, and sets the dinner table—the only thing she can’t seem
dee yearning to be seen by her busy but, as it turns out, educable

parents. Ema leads a cast that largely presents White. Tooke’s

afterword suggests that her protagonist is, like herself, neurodi-

vergent; she demonstrates positive attributes that accompany a

label that is often framed in terms of difficulties.

Adventures beguilingly rich and strange beneath a series of

“full-ish” moons. (Adventure. 9-13)

LOLA OUT LOUD
Inspired by the Childhood of Activist Dolores Huerta
Torres, Jennifer
Illus. by Sara Palacios
Little, Brown (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-0-316-53012-5

“¡Si se puede!”

A day in the life of a young Dolores Huerta is imagined in this story of activism. Lola helps Mama run the Hotel Delano. She delivers fresh towels, washes windows, and sets the dinner table—the only thing she can’t seem to do is stop talking! Her grandfather calls her “Lolita Siete Lenguas” (“Little Lola, Seven Tongues, all fighting to be heard”) and tells her, “For now, you must be quiet” but adds, “Sometimes one strong voice is just what we need.” When Lola, looking out her window, spots a woman and a girl getting kicked off the cable car for being unable to pay, she knows she must act. Remembering her mother’s admonition to fix a problem when it arises rather than pretending it isn’t there, she races downstairs to welcome them into the hotel. Lola grows up to be a tireless advocate for farmworkers’ rights and uses her “seven tongues” to fight for social justice causes. This uncomplicated story will encourage readers to speak up when they see someone in need. Warm illustrations give characters—depicted in various shades of brown—a friendly tone. In an author’s note, Torres explains that while this incident was imagined, the story is inspired by Huerta’s childhood; Torres also provides details of Huerta’s iconic labor organizing work. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Kids can make a difference, which Lola proves with gusto. (Picture book. 5-8)

FRANCES AND THE MONSTER
Tama, Refe
Harper/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-0-06-308576-3

When her scientific experiment unleashes a monster, an 11-year-old Swiss girl’s extraordinary efforts to capture him reveal a surprising secret.

A solitary girl who likes tinkering with machines and wearing lab coats, Frances Stenzel has been raised by her famous scientist parents and a series of tutors inside her great-grandfather’s mansion in Bern. It’s August 1939, and she leads a quiet life, never going anywhere and rarely seeing anyone. When her parents depart for a symposium in Brussels, they leave Frances in the care of Hobbes, a mechanical man designed and programmed by her father to be her perfect tutor. Unhappy about being left with a machine, Frances explores the basement, discovering her great-grandfather’s journal and a secret lab with a frozen body. Deciphering the notes in the journal, she successfully animates the body, creating a massive monster. Immediately, Frances regrets what she has done and knows she must stop the monster as he flies into the center of Bern. Leaving home, Frances tracks the monster through the streets, across rooftops, along the river, and down into the city’s bear pit and sewers. Pursued by the police and aided by Hobbes, the chimpanzee her mother has been doing intelligence enhancing experiments on, and a boy who befriends her, Frances exhibits remarkable courage and resolve. Her memorable adventure, with strong echoes of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, plays out against a colorful background as she confronts who she is in a truly shocking finale.

A fast-paced and remarkably original tale. (Adventure. 9-12)

SOMETIMES I GRUMBLESQUINCH
Vail, Rachel
Illus. by Hyewon Yum
Orchard/Scholastic (40 pp.)
$18.99 | July 19, 2022
978-1-338-75116-1
Series: A Big Feelings Book

Katie is a girl who is always nice, polite, and agreeable—well, almost always.

Everyone says that Katie, who has straight dark hair, dot eyes, and a big curve of a smile, is a pleasure. She’s a good sport, helps with her little brother, Chuck, and makes her parents proud. But she has a secret: Sometimes she grumblesquinches. That’s when “my insides tighten and I think mean thoughts.” It’s when she wishes her brother didn’t wake her up or take her seat. It’s when she wishes she didn’t have a little brother at all. Even when Chuck puts his hand right into her bowl of cereal, she grumblesquinches her bad feelings down. Katie’s mother, who also has straight dark hair, and her father, who has a ruddy
complexion and brown hair, think Chuck is just being adorable. But when Chuck tries to hug her with his milky hands and buttery face, ruining her new rainbow shirt, her feelings cannot be grumblesquished any longer, and she explodes: “Chuck ruins everything!” Her pent-up anger pours out, and then Katie is scared. What if her parents don’t think she’s a pleasure anymore? Yum’s sweet colored-pencil illustrations perfectly convey Katie’s personality and emotional landscape and deftly work with the text to portray the complexities of her inner life. Readers who can relate will be reassured by the loving response from Katie’s mother. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Sensitive and emotionally true, a comforting portrayal of big emotions. (author’s and illustrator’s notes) (Picture book. 4-8)

NIL ARMSTRONG
Vegara, Maria Isabel Sánchez
Illus. by Christophe Jacques
Frances Lincoln (32 pp.)
$15.99 | July 12, 2022
978-0-7112-7103-6
Series: Little People, BIG DREAMS

Fame and accomplishment come easily to an astronaut.

During a childhood visit with his father to an airfield full of propeller planes, Armstrong was inspired. He knew that he wanted to fly and earned his pilot’s license at age 16. He fought during the Korean War, earning three Air Medals, and then became a test pilot and joined NASA, where he was selected for the first moon mission. In July 1969, he became the first person to walk on the surface of the moon (in a reference to Armstrong’s famous quote, the text reads, “It was one small step for a man but a giant leap for humankind”). The author concludes her brief, positive highlights of Armstrong’s life with an overview of the worldwide fame that followed the mission. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An easily accessible biography of a notable 20th-century American. (photos, biographical information) (Picture-book biography. 5-8)

WILDS OF THE UNITED STATES
The Animals’ Survival Field Guide
Vidal, Alexander
Chronicle Books (128 pp.)
$19.99 | July 5, 2022
978-1-4521-8449-4

How do animals survive—and thrive? Accessible yet packed with material, this book distills information on a variety of creatures in the United States and the regions they inhabit. With helpful maps and attractive, informative images, Vidal offers a solid introduction to the topic. Starting with the Eastern woodlands and moving south and west from there, this book highlights what animals can be found in each region and includes interesting facts (beavers can weigh up to 70 pounds, cicadas live for up to 17 years underground as larvae, and manatees’ closest relatives are elephants). Vidal uses icons—“merit badges”—to convey the animals’ survival skills; an image of a leaf and an acorn accompanies information on how animals find food, while a leaping hare indicates info on strength and agility. The book will especially appeal to reluctant readers, whether they want to read cover to cover or pick a random page to scour. The colorful art has a graphic, stylized feel, and the layout features bright outdoor scenes full of plants and animals, with text artfully grouped in brief paragraphs, which will make the book feel less intimidating. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An appealing, info-laden volume on wildlife. (index, author’s note) (Informational picture book. 7-12)

OUT OF THIS WORLD
Star-Studded Haiku
Walker, Sally M.
Illus. by Matthew Trueman
Candlewick (48 pp.)
$18.99 | April 12, 2022
978-1-5362-0356-1

A poetic tour of the galaxy. Walker divides this book into seven broad categories, from “Constellations and Astronomers” to “Asteroids, Comets, and Meteors.” She begins by addressing humans’ long fascination with the sky, invoking three examples: the constellation Orion, Galileo, and the Hubble Space Telescope. From there, several spreads describe the beginning of the universe (“one minuscule speck / grows into the universe / a mind-boggling birth”), then stars (“distant candles flare / light glimmers through time and space / past becomes present”), the sun, moons, and eclipses, and more. Trueman’s sweeping illustrations, many spanning two pages, emphasize the immensity of space. Swirling backgrounds layered with details—some realistic, some fanciful—invite readers to linger and wonder much longer than it takes to read Walker’s spare verses. Walker is challenged by haiku’s strict structure and the immensity of the subject. Some poems read more smoothly than others; many
While doing cartwheels one day, Amaya’s headscarf falls off, so Suri has her hair cut and made into a wig, which she detailed backmatter offers information on the topics alluded to other than that she’s happy to have received the wig and returns of affirming Amaya’s beauty, Suri and her mother visit a salon can still be beautiful inside and out without hair. But instead curls, hair has been a significant part of her identity. At the park, revealing that she doesn’t have any hair. Before Suri can return the scarf, Amaya runs away. Suri’s mother explains that hair loss hair donation is a good one and the graceful to the park wearing it, “feeling a boost of confidence, knowing that makes wigs from donated hair; Amaya is on a waiting list she befriends Amaya, a brown-skinned girl wearing a headscarf. For Suri, a bespectacled, brown-skinned girl with cascading hair has been a significant part of her identity. At the park, hair donation nonprofit). (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An attempt at empowerment that misses the mark. (Information on hair loss and hair donation; list of hair donation nonprofits) (Picture book 3–7)

HOW TO CATCH A WITCH
Wallace, Alice
Illus. by Andy Elkerton
Sourcebooks Wonderland (40 pp.)
$10.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-72821-035-3

Another holiday title (How To Catch the Easter Bunny by Adam Wallace, illustrated by Elkerton, 2017) sticks to the popular series’ formula. Rhyming four-line verses describe seven intrepid trick-or-treaters’ efforts to capture the witch haunting their Halloween. Rhyming roadblocks with toolbox is an acceptable stretch, but too often too many words or syllables in the lines throw off the cadence. Children familiar with earlier titles will recognize the traps set by the costume-clad kids—a pulley and box snare, a “Tunnel of Tricks.” Eventually they accept her invitation to “floss, bump, and boogie,” concluding “the dance party had hit the finale at last, / each dancing monster started to cheer! / There’s no doubt about it, we have to admit: / This witch threw the party of the year!” The kids are diverse, and their costumes are fanciful rather than scary—a unicorn, a dragon, a scarecrow, a red-haired child in a lab coat and bow tie, a wizard, and two space creatures. The monsters, goblins, ghosts, and jack-o’-lanterns, backgrounded by a turquoise and purple night sky, are sufficiently eerie. Still, there isn’t enough originality here to entice any but the most ardent fans of Halloween or the series. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Not enough tricks to make this a treat. (Picture book 4–7)
Alex realizes that there is a more sinister creature lurking in his dreams, and the only way out is by completing his unfinished scary stories. This follow-up to White’s Nightbooks (2018) takes place one year later, when Alex and Yasmin think they’ve seen the last of Natacha, the evil witch who held them captive in her New York City apartment. But when Alex finds himself in a strange graveyard during a nightmare, he’s faced with Natacha once again. She’s come to demand more scary stories from him, this time from the remains of his unfinished tales, each of which is buried beneath a different tombstone. After completing a story, a plant emerges from the earth; the more original the writing, the more unusual the flower it produces. Eventually, Alex realizes that there is a more sinister creature lurking in his dreams, one eager to possess the flowers and even more dangerous than Natacha. The book opens with a recap of the previous volume, but readers new to the series will be missing a few pieces, as White includes few returning character descriptions and little background context for Alex and Yasmin’s friendship. Nevertheless, they will appreciate the incredible concept behind this nightmarish setting. Alex’s embedded short stories are interesting and inventive; the novel is chilling but not out- right terrifying or gory. The courage, trust, and creativity of the book’s lead duo add depth and heighten reader investment.

A refreshing, imaginative take on supernatural evildoers. (Horror 9+12)

The Blanket Where Violet Sits
Wolf, Allan
Illus. by Lauren Tobia
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-0-7636-9665-8

Violet has the perfect vantage point for observing an array of celestial wonders.

A small family—a child with two adults, brown-skinned, warmly bundled in jackets and hats—spends a stargazing evening in a city park. “This is the blanket where Violet sits, / eating a sandwich, an apple, and chips.” Wolf’s cumulative rhyme begins here, then travels from the cozy red blanket to the wide universe. First, we see the full moon and the blue planet, red arrow indicating the West Coast of North America, where the sun is setting. “This is the yellow star orbited ‘round // by the small blue planet with moon so pretty / that shines on the park in the bustling city, / home to the blanket where Violet sits...” Stars shine in a deep blue sky; planets line up in bright colors. Then, “This is the galaxy, spiraling white...” Tobias’s perspectives shift from Violet and parents, gazing through a telescope, to an aerial view of their city, to the far reaches of the solar system, the galaxy, and beyond, and back again to Violet. The full-bleed illustrations picture deep space, pinwheels of stars, and distant galaxy clusters within the reach of a child’s imagination. The snack (“a sandwich, an apple, and chips”), the memorable rhyme, and the very big idea all affirm that the child is at this moment the center of the vast universe. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Stellar fuel for the heart and mind and an expansive story-time choice. (Picture book 3-7)

Meet the Family
Yeoman, John
Illus. by Quentin Blake
Andersen/Trafalgar (48 pp.)
$17.99 | July 1, 2022
978-1-83913-012-0

There’s nothing like family—especially this one.

What a remarkable, multitalented group the unseen narrator’s family is. Who wouldn’t want to meet this bunch? There’s a plethora of exceptional aunts, uncles, and cousins of varying ages who accomplish all sorts of marvelous feats, including performing magic tricks; fearlessly crawling and climbing everywhere; baking (and eating) delectable pastries; executing acrobatic hijinks in the supermarket; parading around in marvelous, inventive costumes; teaching mice to dance; and swaying among lush vegetation with wild abandon. The narrator of this quirky British import describes these fascinating relatives’ exploits in bouncy, witty verses that flow well (and include some British spellings and turns of phrase). Though the rather abrupt ending falls flat, still, Blake’s trademark loose, whimsical watercolors burst with humor, expressiveness, and dynamic exuberance. Characters have a range of skin tones. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Breezy family fun. (Picture book 5-8)

Giants Island
Tolen, Jane
Illus. by Doug Keith
Flashlight Press (32 pp.)
$18.95 | Aug. 1, 2022
978-1-947277-18-2

The wonder of childhood comes alive...literally.

When Ava and Mason and their dog, Cooper, visit Giant Island with their Grandpa, they can’t figure out how it got its name; it’s a tiny island where no giant could possibly live. But Grandpa says it’s always been called that, even back when he came there to fish with his own grandpa. As he fishes from the shore, the two children and their dog explore, finding a cave teeming with ocean life, stones “shiny as mirrors,” and a great
spot for swimming. As the kids round the island, observant readers will start to see what they haven't noticed yet: The whole island is a giant: the trees, hair; the cave, an ear; and the stones, eyes. Yolen and Keith could have stopped there—lots of islands are named after what they appear to be. But no, the magic of Giant Island is that this giant is alive and moving, their arms and fingers pointing, grasping, their facial expressions changing. And while Grandpa may pretend not to know what's going on, he and the giant share parting words and a wave: "Always good to see you, old friend." Keith's gouache and colored pencil illustrations wonderfully suit the seaweed tufts and tightly packed rocks of the island and the ocean life that surrounds it. Grandpa and Mason have light skin; Ava's is slightly darker. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Childhood magic shared with a new generation. (Picture book. 4-8)

GOBLIN MARKET
Zabler, Diane
Holiday House (256 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 16, 2022
978-0-8234-5081-7

A young girl must face scary situations in order to save her sister from a goblin posing as a man.

Elzbieta, who goes by Lizzie, enjoys her simple farm life and close bond with her older sister, Minka, despite their differences; Minka is outgoing whereas Lizzie is overwhelmed by social situations. One day, when Minka returns from the market after a day of selling bread and vegetables, Lizzie can sense something has changed. Minka has become smitten with a handsome new fruit seller named Emil. Soon after, however, she is struck down by a mysterious illness. As Lizzie tries to help her sister, she discovers that Emil is a zdusze, or goblin, and is responsible for Minka's state. With the assistance of neighbor boy Jakob, Lizzie enters treacherous Noc Forest to try to defeat Emil and save Minka. This broadly appealing, straightforward story reads like a folktale with its spooky, fantasy elements and uncomplicated, yet satisfying, good-overcomes-evil plot. The Polish-inspired setting is primarily noted through character names and foods, although the worldbuilding is light. Creepy imagery, like a bleeding tree and a carpet of snakes, will entice readers looking for some chills, while themes of sisterhood, love, and bravery make the story overall more likely to induce sentimentality than nightmares. Lizzie has synesthesia—sounds evoke colors for her—and is cued as neurodiverse. Characters are implied White.

Sisterly love triumphs in this endearing, somewhat spooky tale. (Fantasy. 9-13)

BRIDGES
Engineering Masterpieces
Zettwoch, Dan
First Second (128 pp.)
$12.99 paper | July 19, 2022
978-1-250-21690-8
Series: Science Comics

To unpack the equation “engineering = science + art,” a quartet of pontists survey and explain bridge design.

Taking a worldwide tour that goes from a fallen log across a stream in Kenya’s Aberdare National Park to the 164.8-kilometer-long Danyang-Kunshan Grand Bridge, the four guides point out salient features of dozens of bridges ancient and modern while pausing to explain loads and forces, analyze materials, give the nod to historical disasters like the Tay Bridge collapse (inviting young experimenters to test model bridges of their own), and, importantly, marvel at the beauty as well as the utility of well-designed, well-placed bridges. The cast is a diverse lot—ranging from Trudy, a light-skinned retired science teacher who zooms through the chapter on truss bridges on a tricycle, to Black-presenting fifth grader Spence, who hangs with suspension bridges—and their enthusiasm is so contagious that by the end readers willing to linger over Zettwoch’s exactly drawn structures will not only view bridges in their own locales with fresh appreciation, but have no trouble distinguishing a corbel arch from a Warren pony truss.

A solid, soaring survey. (glossary, bibliography) (Graphic nonfiction. 11-14)
A young bisexual man in East LA attempts to get over a long-term crush by pursuing other options. High school junior Enrique “Quique” Luna has had feelings for Saleem Kanazi for quite some time, but Mexican American Quique is pretty sure that Saleem is straight, and this crush isn’t doing him any favors. In order to move on with his life and finally get some experience with guys, he enlists the help of Fabiola, his Afro-Latina bisexual best friend, to make moves on some quality prospects who might become something more. There’s dynamic, wild Manny Zuniga; chilled-out (and well-endowed) Tyler Montana; and even sweet, confident class president Ziggy Jackson. But although Saleem is away with his family for the first part of the summer, he still preoccupies Quique’s thoughts. Complicating matters, Quique is dealing with the suicidal ideation that has been plaguing him; he’s grappled with his mental health since the end of eighth grade. Tight, fast-paced prose guides readers through Quique’s attempts to unpack complicated tangles of desire, sexuality, and depression while laugh-out-loud punchlines pop up on every page. Aceves’ debut novel honors queer kids of color with earnest, honest depictions of messy teenage life. The tender portrayal of Palestinian American Saleem and his struggles with his family’s displacement in the Nakba is particularly bold and notable.

An outstanding portrait of teenage longing, angst, and self-discovery. (Fiction. 14-18)
As summer vacation stretches ahead, teenagers—no matter how busy—will find these new and upcoming releases irresistible. From fresh, genre-bending storytelling to comfortingly familiar tales executed with exceptional skill, there is something here to tempt almost any reader.

*Generation Wonder: The New Age of Heroes* edited by Barry Lyga and illustrated by Colleen Doran (Amulet/Abrams, June 14) gathers the talents of 13 YA authors representing an array of voices who offer creative takes on classic superhero stories. From Danielle Paige to Joseph Bruchac, Anna-Marie McLemore, and Axie Oh, the contributors stretch boundaries and reimagine old tropes.

In *Jumper* by Melanie Crowder (Viking, June 21), readers meet a determined young woman who’s not going to let Type 1 diabetes stop her from pursuing her dream of fighting forest fires. Nineteen-year-old lesbian Blair navigates the predominantly male fire camp’s grueling training regimen and faces life-threatening risks in this gripping page-turner.

Sayyed Nizam is out on his own after his father discovers he’s gay in *The Loophole* by Naz Kutub (Bloomsbury, June 21). His ex-boyfriend, Farouk, is off traveling the world—but Sy’s fortuitous encounter with an eccentric young heiress (complete with private plane) may offer the boys a second chance in this heartfelt, joy-filled story.

Shveta Thakrar’s *The Dream Runners* (HarperTeen, June 28) is set in an exquisite, well-developed, Hindu mythology–inspired world where kidnapped young people harvest ordinary humans’ dreams for the amusement of the immortal nagas. Tanvi, now 17, was taken to Nagalok as a child, but now strange events are forcing her to confront frightening truths.

*Bad Things Happen Here* by Rebecca Barrow (McElderry, June 28) is an intense, multifaceted thriller set in an exclusive, largely White community plagued by a rumored curse that has claimed the lives of young women. Queer Black girl Luca lost first her best friend and then her sister; now she’s determined to find out the truth.

Elizabeth Kilcoyne debuts with an atmospheric Southern gothic horror novel, *Wake the Bones* (Wednesday Books, July 12), in which 19-year-old Laurel, who is able to “read” death stories in bones, is forced to confront her mother’s tragic passing. The rural Appalachian setting—a Kentucky tobacco farm surrounded by mysterious woods—forms an eerie backdrop.

Joanna Ruth Meyer’s latest, *Wind Daughter* (Page Street, July 12), is set in the world of 2019’s *Echo North* but works as a stand-alone novel. Fairy-tale lovers will lose themselves in the romantic, absorbing story of Satu, daughter of the North Wind: In love with Satu’s mother, he became a mortal, but this choice brings dire consequences.

*My Imaginary Mary* by Cynthia Hand, Brodi Ashton, and Jodi Meadows (HarperTeen, Aug. 2) marks another high-spirited outing for the trio responsible for witty, gleefully anachronistic takes on Charlotte Brontë, Mary, Queen of Scots, and other well-known figures. Here they turn their attention to Ada Lovelace and Mary Godwin, with hijinks involving Percy Shelley and Lord Byron.

Mystery fans will adore Karen M. McManus’ twisty, suspenseful *Nothing More To Tell* (Delacorte, Aug. 30). Brynn Gallagher’s former best friend, Tripp Talbot, lied—both to their classmates about her and to the police about the day he found Mr. Larkin’s body. Now Brynn is investigating the unsolved murder of her beloved teacher.

*Lord of the Fly Fest* by Goldy Moldavsky (Henry Holt, Aug. 30) combines the mayhem of a tropical island music festival gone wrong with social media influence culture and the popularity of true crime. In this hilariously over-the-top story, relentlessly determined teenage podcaster Rafi Francisco digs for the truth in her murder investigation.

Laura Simeon is a young readers’ editor.
The book opens slowly while the plot is set in place and the land itself—to avert the ominous Prediction and prevent another land-rendering Rupturing. He’s also Helos and Rora’s half brother. War soon separates the romantic pairs—Helos and Fin, Rora and Wes—as previously happy-go-lucky Helos serves as a battle medic, academic Wes serves as a soldier for newly crowned Queen Violet, and Rora infiltrates Eradain to restore magic, raze the prison, and confront Jol. In this somewhat pre-industrial, vaguely Northern Hemisphere setting, magic users are shunned or imprisoned, purged or forced underground (literally). Despite their service to the crown and royal connections, Helos and Rora fear persecution and prejudice if they reveal their ability to shift into three kinds of animal and other people; their powers offer endless escapes and undercover opportunities but also earn distrust. Becker includes a lot of issues—abandonment, discrimination, PTSD—that would have benefited from deeper development but shines at scenic descriptions. The Telyn royals read as White, while Helos and Rora have olive skin; secondary characters are diverse in skin tone.

Fans of the first volume may appreciate this duology closer.

(The Fantasy. 14-18)
Dahlin reimagines the French Revolution in all its complexity while sharpening the pace by compressing the timeline from years to months. The futuristic technology seems much like our own, but the parallels between the historic past and this future work well. The humanity of Dahlin’s characters, particularly Marie and Louis, shines, and the slow blossoming of the royal romance will break readers’ hearts. Even if they are not familiar with individuals such as the Princess de Lamballe or Robespierre, the characters are developed enough to feel like real people rather than just names from history. Cast members read as White by default.

**Intriguing and imaginative.** *(Fiction. 12-18)*

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**NO WAY HOME**

*Feldman, Jody*

Sourcebooks Fire (352 pp.)

$10.99 paper | Aug. 2, 2022

978-1-72825-426-5

Study abroad turns deadly.

Seventeen-year-old Tess Alessandro is thrilled to be selected for a foreign exchange program that jets her off to beautiful and exciting Rome. Tess plans on getting to know the language and culture of the city where Nonno, her beloved paternal grandfather, grew up. Her gorgeous Italian counterpart, Sofia Rossi, is equally thrilled to be staying in Washington, D.C. with Tess’s family. All seems well until one night when Tess discovers her host parents, Anjelica and Francesco Rossi—who suddenly turn out to be fluent English speakers—on a video chat with their daughter, who is wielding a knife over Tess’s sleeping parents. Anjelica and Francesco quickly reveal their intentions: She must do everything they say, committing a series of small crimes, or Tess’s parents will be killed. Robbed of her passport, credit cards, money, and phone, Tess is isolated in a foreign country and forced to do their criminal bidding. It’s a crackerjack premise that unfortunately never really takes off. The weak characterization leads to some confusion over who’s talking to whom at times, and Tess never manages to become a fully engaging protagonist. This novel never elevates the game in a meaningful enough way to get readers energized and/or keep them attentive.

*A promising concept squandered.* *(Thriller. 12-17)*

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**MOON DARK SMILE**

*Gratton, Tessa*

McElderry (432 pp.)

$19.99 | Aug. 30, 2022

978-1-5344-9815-0

Names hold utmost power throughout the empire; Raliel Dark-Smile, who chose her own, will come to know this better than any.

Raliel has forged herself into the ideal Heir, perfect and perfectly detached. She does not know who she is, but she knows what she wants: something she has earned on her own rather than things she has simply been given. She has an unbreakable, ineffable bond with Moon, the palace demon, and while she knows that her family chooses to remain bound to their roles, she wants Moon to have a choice, too. As Raliel sets out on her Heir’s Journey, accompanied only by Moon and Osian Redpop, a charming guard who is more than he seems, she comes to learn about not only her empire, but the true power—and danger—of a name. Identity, fluidity, and choice lie at the heart of this dense, darkly mystical companion to Gratton’s *Night Shine* (2020) that is best appreciated by those familiar with the earlier volume. It is a tapestry of self-discovery, redolent with vivid imagery: sometimes cloyingly ornate, sometimes breathlessly pithy. Some sections feel dreamlike, whereas others thrum with life. The plot, transparent through its manifold layers, takes a back seat to the forging of relationships between the characters and the (at times heavy-handed) dismantling of the dualities that bind characters to false versions of themselves. Most characters present some form of queer identity; they are diverse in appearance.

*Sensual and strange.* *(Fantasy. 14-18)*

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**BELLADONNA**

*Grace, Adalyn*

Little, Brown (416 pp.)

$18.99 | Aug. 23, 2022

978-0-316-15823-7

In this gothic fantasy, a girl must negotiate her relationship with Death.

Signa Farrow has spent 10 years pursued by Death, starting with her first party at the age of 2 months, at which every other guest drank poisoned wine and died. Death attempted to take Signa that night as well, but while she cannot die, she can see him. Now 20 and only months away from receiving her inheritance and taking her longed-for place in society, Signa deliberately poisons herself with belladonna in hopes of confronting Death. After a slow and confusing start—that poisoned party is never addressed again—Signa finds herself living with previously unknown relatives at the beautiful but haunted Thorn Grove, where one person has recently died and another lies in bed, mysteriously wasting away. Gothic trappings and a vaguely 19th-century pastiche of England provide atmosphere; Signa’s decision to discover the poisoner propels the often languid plot. Most of the action is between Signa and the two men who help her, Sylas, a mysterious stableboy, and Death, who turns out to contain surprises. Signa’s character arc—she goes from wanting to be a proper young lady to an independent, freethinker—is propelled largely by her burgeoning sexual desire. Secondary characters are mostly White with a few expressly stated exceptions among the well-to-do.

**Lots of mood, less substance.** *(Fantasy. 12-18)*
BEASTS OF RUIN
Gray, Ayana
Putnam (384 pp.)
$18.99 | July 26, 2022
978-0-593-40571-0

After a perilous adventure, a disgraced warrior and a newly minted daraja must face the consequences of their actions in this follow-up to Beasts of Prey (2021).

Ekon and Koffi return, each having experienced life-altering events that have caused them to reevaluate themselves and their futures. Koffi awakes in Thornkeep, a strange land belonging to Fedu, the god of death. After she freed the Shetani of her splendor, Fedu kidnapped Koffi and secreted her away with other darajas he holds captive for their skills at channeling energy from the earth. Realizing he plans to use her as his weapon, Koffi finds allyship with like-minded darajas who wish to escape: She promises to guide them through the treacherous forest, and in return, they will help her learn about her heritage. Ekon has been hiding in the city of Lkossa with Themba, Koffi’s estranged grandmother, since learning shocking truths. He and Themba search for leads as to where Fedu took Koffi, and as they leave Lkossa, they meet a group of spice merchants who agree to let them join their caravan. Ultimately, both Ekon and Koffi will need to rely on their newfound communities to overcome powerful forces. Readers will be entranced as themes of heritage, betrayal, and erasure are brought to life with vivid details in this riveting, fast-paced volume that lives up to its predecessor. All characters are Black.

An absorbing story with tantalizing hints of more to come. (map, list of orders) (Fantasy. 14-18)
“Effortlessly and entertainingly combines ‘Cinderella’, Frankenstein, and Hamilton.”

MY IMAGINARY MARY

Hand, Cynthia, Brodi Ashton & Jodi Meadows
HarperTeen (496 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-0-06-293007-1
Series: The Lady Janies

Ada Lovelace and Mary Godwin—better known today as Mary Shelley—combine forces to create a living automaton: a real boy.

It’s the year “18—mumble mumble,” the timeline smooshed together into an imagined year when both girls are in their late teens. Ada, the abandoned daughter of famous poet Lord Byron, is a mathematical genius who creates delicate clockwork automatons. Mary’s the daughter of the late, famed early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. She’s half in love with poet Percy Shelley, her father’s mentee, and wonders if she’ll ever succeed at writing. The girls become friends when their fae godmother arrives through a hidden door in the back of Mary’s wardrobe to school them both on powers they may have inherited. Lo and behold, with Mary’s help, Ada’s automaton becomes a living—and lovely—boy named Pan. When villains want something from the girls, they take off, along with Pan and Mary’s two half sisters, on a romp through Europe. The trio of authors responsible for this entertaining smashup series get better with every book they write. Readers don’t have to know the characters’ real-life backstories to enjoy this story; for those who do, the parallels are intriguing. The novel effortlessly and entertainingly combines “Cinderella,” Frankenstein, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, Pinocchio, and Hamilton, and the ending reminds readers not to underestimate quiet women.

Energetic, clever, and absorbing. (Historical fantasy. 12-18)

THE KING WILL KILL YOU

Henning, Sarah
Tor Teen (368 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-250-84103-2
Series: The Kingdoms of Sand and Sky, 3

Strong women rise and fall amid more pop-culture memes and references as the “smirking patriarchy” strikes back in this follow-up to 2021’s The Queen Will Betray You.

Aftershocks of the previous episode’s ending still resounding, tempestuous 16-year-old Queen Amarande calls fellow monarchs of Sand and Sky together to make a new “modern and exciting” alliance—only to have infuriatingly condescending challenges to her legitimacy threaten to rob her of throne, power, and even her heart’s companion and sword practice partner, Luca. Meanwhile, not only is her murderous mother still on the loose, but Renard, crown prince of Pyrene and the literally rotten ex-fiance she fatally knifed at the altar, has miraculously returned from the dead (shades of Jon Snow!) bent on vengeance. Fair doses of steamy snogging, savage combat during which there always seems to be time for tart exchanges—“Your black wolf is dead, boy and you will be, too!” (yes, even the dog dies)—and furious expostulations about misogynistic gender expectations later, Amarande leaves her more strategically astute but less idealistic foes spitted and has taken definitive action to “build the Sand and Sky back better than before”—clearing the decks for a final exchange of vows uninterrupted by knives or poisons. The cast is predominantly White.

A score-setting third volume that really sticks it to, and in, the man. (kingdom guide) (Fantasy. 14-18)

THE WITCHERY

Isabelle, S.
Scholastic (384 pp.)
$18.99 | July 26, 2022
978-1-338-75896-2

Six teens use witchery and myth to try to reverse a town’s legacy. As Halloween approaches, six young people’s paths converge in Haelsford, Florida: Logan Wyatt, a new witch student who still struggles to do basic spells; Jailah Simmons, Thalia Blackwood, and Iris Keaton-Foster, who form a clique of powerful witches dubbed the Red Three; and Trent Hogarth and Mathew Beaumont, two mundanes—those with no magical ability—who live in the cursed town of Haelsford and attend Hammersmitt School for Exceptional Young Men. Logan is relatively new at Mesmortes Coven Academy, but even newbies know of the entrancing Red Three and lust to be a part of their circle. To Logan’s surprise, she’s the one they’ve set their sights on, inviting her into their fold just a few weeks before Haelsford’s yearly hex brings deadly Wolves to its streets. Some readers may find the six perspectives jarring, while others will revel in the quick switches among different points of view as Haelsford’s central mystery unfolds. Necromancer Iris and greenwitch Thalia steal the show with spellbinding backstories and conflicts with others characters, while the rest feel less memorable by comparison. Most main characters are Black; Mathew and Logan are White. Trent and Jailah are queer.

A twisty and spooky debut. (Fantasy. 13-18)
DRAWING THE VOTE
A Graphic Novel History for Future Voters
Jenkins, Tommy
Illus. by Kati Lacker
Amulet/Abrams (240 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Aug. 30, 2022
978-1-4197-3999-6

A history of U.S. voting rights and the unrelenting barrage of challenges to them, with a chapter that updates the original 2020 edition.

Despite an occasional bobble (no, all the states did not send representatives to the Constitutional Convention, and the Shelby County vs. Holder decision, devastating as it was, was not responsible for “overturning” the Voting Rights Act), college professor Jenkins delivers a broadly comprehensive overview that takes readers from “No taxation without representation!” to the events of Jan. 6, 2021 and beyond, with updates covering the failure of the Arizona recount and the recent flurry of legislation designed to further depress our already chronically low levels of voter participation. The additions lend currency to the story, but apathetic readers are more likely to catch a spark from other histories, such as Susan Goldman Rubin’s Give Us the Vote! (2020). The graphic format does little to animate this account, as aside from some redrawn historical news photos, the drably duotone art runs to clumsily rendered portraits of figures in static poses stiffly restating talking points, uttering (in)famous quotes (“Why do we want all these people from shithole countries?”)—or in a running conceit, imitating game show announcers: “Congratulations! John Adams, you’ve won the presidency!” The color scheme also minimizes differences in skin color, and visual elements frequently look crammed in among the fulsome blocks of lecture-y narrative.

Broad, deep, and on a significant topic but more utilitarian than inspirational. (voting information, source notes) (Graphic nonfiction. 13-16)
Sometimes a person has to fall apart to find community, as seen in *Love Radio* (Simon & Schuster, May 31), the debut novel from Ebony LaDelle. A Black teen romance set in Detroit—LaDelle’s hometown—*Love Radio* follows the budding relationship between high school seniors Prince and Danielle, called Dani by friends and family. Prince, who is also a popular local DJ, has had a crush on Dani since they were in middle school, whereas Dani has her eyes (and heart) set on a life in New York City, where she plans to attend NYU and become a writer like her idols Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Maya Angelou. Yet Dani is also bogged down by past trauma—an assault that happened the previous summer at a house filled with college boys. The trauma is a barrier between Dani and Prince and between her and her friends and family, each of whom in their own way works to lovingly tear it down. Through this community of people who love her, Dani finds healing and a sense of self-love.

Kirkus spoke with LaDelle, a former marketing director in the publishing industry, via Zoom while she was traveling in California. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

*Love Radio* reads like a love letter to Detroit, a city that is rarely, if ever, the locale of romance novels. Why make it the setting for *Love Radio*?

When you think about Detroit, from music to cars, it holds so many stories. I realized there weren’t any love stories, especially YA stories, set in Detroit. I was just waiting for these stories. I was waiting for a book from a Detroit native, and it just wasn’t coming in. So why not write it yourself? When I started writing *Love Radio*, I was thinking about Prince being a love expert and what avenue he would take to give his advice. Immediately, the memory that kept coming back was me and my mother driving to work or to school and listening to Rickey Smiley, Mason & Starr, Donnie Simpson, and all those morning radio shows in Detroit. We would hear the pranks and the interviews and the love advice. And I was like, *Oh my God, that’s it!* I had this moment of clarity. It can’t be about radio and music and not be in your hometown. Also, Detroit is one of the Blackest cities in America, and there aren’t enough positive stories about it. I just wanted that representation.

*Your novel is a love story between Prince and Danielle, but it’s also a love story between best friends and between family. What drove you to depict different kinds of love in your book?*

It was important for me to show healthy love all around. You can’t really have a teenage love story without showing the love they’re receiving around them and how they’re influenced by that, especially because teens are so impressionable. Love can be hard to navigate, especially at a young age—it really forces you to grapple with some hard truths about yourself. So showing that you can have a healthy system of folks around you who care and can tell you about yourself and uplift you is really helpful. This book is about finding a community of people who love you and what that can do for you. Dani is a perfect example of someone who blossoms when she’s bringing that community back into her life.
Dani’s past trauma impacts all her relationships. Why did you include this trauma in the book, and what do you hope readers take away from Dani’s handling of it?

One in 6 women has experienced this type of trauma. It has impacted so many women and how they love. So much of it happens at that age or younger, and it has psychological effects for years to come. So that’s one thing. The other thing is that Black women don’t always get to be romantic leads, and we’re often misunderstood. Black girls don’t get to be annoying or messy or cold; we have to be together and powerful. I wanted to subvert the narratives that have been forced on Black girls and just show the nuance of it. That’s why sometimes Dani is unlikable. What I want readers to take away is, there is so much we experience as Black women that is unfair. We’ve had to love ourselves when the world didn’t. A lot of Dani’s journey is dealing with these things she’s experienced and coming into self-love.

Love Radio is unapologetically Black in how characters speak, the music Prince plays when DJing, and the movies Dani’s mom comfort-watches, among other things. Was it a challenge to realize this unapologetically Black vision in a publishing industry still greatly lacking in diversity?

I knew I wanted to create this type of art. One thing I refuse to compromise on is my art, and I was just not willing to publish if I had to. But I guess that’s why we stand on the shoulders of giants, right? There are so many wonderful Black books out that allowed me to get here and be able to write a book like this, and I’m so grateful for that because I was absolutely terrified when I went on submission. I was exposing myself and so much of my personality, my family, my friends. It was a pleasant surprise when the industry read it and loved it and it went to auction. And I’m published by the first place I worked at, so a lot of people I know, admire, and respect are there. So it really felt like, OK, it’s in the right hands and that everything happens for a reason and in the time it’s supposed to. I’m just happy for a first book to be able to finally show up as my full self. It’s liberating.

How did your work in the publishing industry inform your writing?

Working in marketing constantly keeps you on your toes because the audience is literally changing. Tastes are different, and the way you reach an audience is different. Teens will call you out online, which I appreciate. It really helped me in marketing other authors as well as made me confident in what I was writing. I was working on campaigns for Black books. If you bring the author to the right events and the right festivals, if you as a marketer are actually finding them that target audience, then they can be successful. In one week, there were four books by Black authors on the bestseller list, and three of the campaigns I worked on. That list is hard to get on. I went to a conference room and cried because it’s just one of those moments where you realize, I’m not crazy. Black people do buy books. It was nice to have that as proof. Even though the industry is slow to change, we are out here, and we’re hungry for this content.

The appeal of Love Radio goes beyond the YA market. Who do you hope finds this book, and what do you want them to get out of it?

I wrote this book for a Black teenager from Detroit, like me. That’s who I hope, first and foremost, finds this book. If nobody else reads this book but that type of reader, then my life is made. But my readers won’t be just Black teenage girls because love is a universal language. The goal for me as an author is to show this language from a different lens. I grew up watching movies like She’s All That and 10 Things I Hate About You and The Notebook, and these are completely different experiences for me. Black people have learned to watch these stories and relate. And we all relate through love, so why can’t we flip that? Why can’t other people watch stories about love that center us?

Gina Murrell is a Black queer librarian, writer, and copy editor in New York. Love Radio was reviewed in the March 15, 2022, issue.
“Hits all the right spots, with red herrings and twists galore.”

NOTHING MORE TO TELL

ASHFALL PROPHECY
Lore, Pittacus
Harper/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 16, 2022
978-0-06-284539-9

The fates of Earth and the intergalactic community alike come to hang in the balance amid visions of doom in this middle volume.

Picking up without a recap where Ashfall Legacy (2021) left off, half-human Syd and his multispecies squad of allies, reluctant and otherwise, flee but are ultimately forced to turn and face Capt. Reno and deaths and missing girls, her health crumbles in visceral, horrifying ways. Something doesn’t want her to learn Harrow’s secrets. Is it the house’s dark entity, expressed through misshapen monsters and ghostly figures? Or is it someone from her estranged family, whose members harbor grudges and grief?

Aided by her cousins, Desmond and Celia, and an aloof, enigmatic witch named Bryony, Helen makes a devastating discovery that threatens everything she knows. At times, the plot is as convoluted as Harrow’s shifting halls; readers will share Helen’s increasing disorientation. However, those with a taste for tough questions will find many to ponder in this creepy, poignant tale: What makes a family? Are people born evil? Helen and Bryony’s tentative romance lightens the gloom. Most characters are cued as White; Desmond is Black.

By turns bewildering, nightmarish, and heart-wrenching. (author’s note) (Paranormal suspense. 14-18)

NOTHING MORE TO TELL
McManus, Karen M.
Delacorte (368 pp.)
978-0-593-17590-3
978-0-593-17592-7 PLB

A budding reporter returns to her old school and reopens a cold case murder.

Four years ago in Sturgis, Massachusetts, three Saint Ambrose eighth grade students found the murdered body of Mr. Larkin, a beloved new English teacher, in the woods behind the prep school’s campus. The culprit was never caught, and the case remained unsolved. Soon after, Brynn Gallagher’s family moved to Chicago, but her father has been transferred back to their hometown, and now she’s going to finish up her senior year at Saint Ambrose. Brynn is a promising investigative journalist, and after she nabs an internship with a true-crime podcast, she decides to look into finally solving the murder of her favorite teacher—even if it means deceiving her peers. Tripp Talbot was Brynn’s best friend in middle school, but they became estranged after Tripp humiliated her in front of their classmates. He also happens to be one of the kids who found Mr. Larkin’s body, and the lies he told the police haunt him to this day. As secrets unravel in Brynn’s pursuit of the truth, Tripp and Brynn reconcile and become closer. This thrilling novel hits all the right spots, with red herrings and twists galore. Perspective shifts between Brynn and Tripp (with a couple of flashback breaks) tell a character-driven story with family drama, plenty of buried secrets, and lovely romantic vibes. Most characters are White.

An edge-of-your-seat page-turner; the strongest yet from a master of the genre. (Thriller. 14-18)

THESE FLEETING SHADOWS
Marshall, Kate Alice
Viking (336 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-0-593-40511-6

A teen battles mysterious forces upon returning to her childhood home.

Plagued by nightmares, visions, and strange events—and inexplicably detested by everyone she meets—17-year-old Helen Vaughan has been a pariah ever since she and her mother left Harrow, their ancestral home, 10 years ago. When her grandfather’s death compels her return, Helen is stunned to learn that she stands to inherit Harrow…if she can survive a year living in a house that seems to have a malevolent mind of its own. As Helen’s dreams of being buried intensify and she learns of Harrow’s troubling history of mysterious deaths and missing girls, her health crumbles in visceral, horrifying ways. Something doesn’t want her to learn Harrow’s secrets. Is it the house’s dark entity, expressed through misshapen monsters and ghostly figures? Or is it someone from...
IT SOUNDS LIKE THIS
Meriano, Anna
Viking (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-0-593-11690-6

A decision backfires, putting the marching band and Yasmin’s dreams in jeopardy.
Yasmin Treviño is a Type A personality, a Mexican American sophomore with high academic ambitions who is nothing if not determined. After her freshman year was ruined by Hurricane Humphrey, which hit her Texas town, Yasmin is sure that this will be the year when she turns everything around. Specifically, she aims to conquer what has been her main goal since fourth grade: moving beyond second chair flute to become first chair—even though her best friend, Sofia Palacios, has always held that spot. After Yasmin reports a bullying incident at a band camp party and, with it, the fact that there were minors drinking alcohol, everyone in the low brass section gets suspended, leaving the band’s chances of success in an upcoming competition in serious jeopardy. To help salvage things, Yasmin volunteers when their band director asks for people to switch instruments, but learning the sousaphone goes less than swimmingly. Although there are strengths to the narrative, in particular the exploration of online interactions, Yasmin is not sufficiently compelling as the book’s lead, and the slow pace may hinder engagement. The rivalry with her best friend is, in Sofia’s words, “way past cute,” and readers are not offered enough moments of Yasmin’s support of Sofia for their friendship to feel earned. A romantic subplot emerges later in the story, and through it, the book explores aromantic and asexual identities.
Lacking in heart. (Fiction. 13-18)

FILM MAKERS
15 Groundbreaking Women Directors
Miller-Lachmann, Lyn & Tanisia “Tee” Moore
Chicago Review Press (224 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 16, 2022
978-1-64160-610-3
Series: Women of Power, 5

A look at the challenges and triumphs of women who have found success in the U.S. film industry
This three-part tour of women’s recent contributions to the world of film traces the impact each generation has had on those who came next. “The Pioneer Generation” includes directors like Jane Campion, who began working in the 1970s and 1980s; “Striving for Diversity: Generation X Directors” moves on to talk about Ava DuVernay, Shonda Rimes, and their peers; and “Young Stars in a Global Film Industry” covers Mindy Kaling, Lulu Wang, Greta Gerwig, and other more recent arrivals. The profiles connect the subjects’ personal histories—including experiences with misogyny, homophobia, and racism—with their chosen projects. While this approach is powerful in illustrating both the myriad ways to build a film career and the importance of amplifying a diversity of voices, it also occasionally gives the impression that difficult or traumatic events are valuable primarily for the art they generate. The emphasis on personal context also brings motherhood to the fore, acknowledging when women sometimes prioritized family life, while the industry’s underlying hostility toward working mothers remains unexamined. Nuance is more present in discussions of controversies some of the filmmakers have encountered, and the change-making power of the arts is accentuated. Text boxes throughout introduce other women directors and actors, pivotal moments in film history, and social and historical context that help readers better understand this subject.
Engaging, impassioned, but incomplete. (selected filmography, endnotes) (Nonfiction. 12-18)
A heady round trip, heavy baggage and all, from heartbreak to healing.

FOUR FOR THE ROAD

LORD OF THE FLY FEST
Moldavsky, Goldy
Henry Holt (320 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-1-250-23012-6

Fyre Festival meets Lord of the Flies in this deliciously unhinged narrative.

Eighteen-year-old Rafi Francisco is proud to have her own podcast, Musical Mysteri
es, and will stop at nothing for a good true-crime story—including spending all her money on Fly Fest, a festival of nearly mythical proportions that has gone viral and promises to make headlines. Rafi isn't there for the partying, the supermodels, or the yachts, though. She's there for River Stone, one of the musical acts, hoping to uncover the real story behind what happened between him and his girlfriend, who disappeared years ago when both were 17. Rafi intends to prove that River is a murderer. When she arrives on the Caribbean island, though, she realizes no one from the festival is there to receive them. As it becomes increasingly obvious the whole event is a scam, Rafi's desperation grows: She's sure if they all stick around for longer, they will prove that River is a murderer.

A hilarious, page-turning take on influencers and true-crime fandom. (Humorous thriller. 12-18)

FOUR FOR THE ROAD
Reilly, K.J.
Atheneum (288 pp.)
$19.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-66590-228-1

Three New Jersey teens and a semi-

senile senior citizen, all grieving family

losses, take a road trip to Graceland.

All four are devastated, vulnerable, and looking for ways beyond therapy
groups to ease the pain. Henry seizes the chance to carry his beloved wife's ashes to Memphis, and Sloane comes along to steal and ride a Harley down Beale Street wearing her father's leather jacket. Will's motives are less defined: He plans to murder Grace's dad. (Though set up to be a victim, Grace turns out to be a redoubtable scene-stealer and one of the book's best surprises.) So overwhelming is the load of trauma they each carry that it's hard to see how their journey could end on a buoyant note, but Reilly pulls it off by developing rich friendships while artfully slipping in comical elements on the way to a climactic whirl of laughter, tears, budding romance, and well-placed insights. Not to mention references through-

to Kierkegaard, The Little Prince, stages of grief, and coping strategies like self-forgiveness. The cast presents White.

A heady round trip, heavy baggage and all, from heartbreak to healing. (Fiction. 13-17)

GETTING COMFORTABLE WITH UNCERTAINTY FOR TEENS
10 Tips To Overcome Anxiety, Fear, and Worry
Negreiros, Juliana & Katherine Martinez
Instant Help Books (200 pp.)
$18.95 paper | Aug. 1, 2022
978-1-68403-937-1
Series: Instant Help Solutions

This practical mental health text guides and reassures readers through a journey of understanding.

First, readers become aware of uncertainty, something the authors explain in the context of fear about negative, unknown outcomes of future events. Readers then learn how to stop struggling with this inevitable aspect of existence and instead create intentional space for uncertainty, even finding the positives in it. They are encouraged to build social support networks while pursuing their individual passions and taking calculated risks, ultimately coming to look forward to full lives that include moments of uncertainty. The authors, both practicing psychologists working with young people, make readers feel welcome through the use of affirming and inclusive language and encouragement to take their time with the text to effectively develop the skills presented. Each of the 10 chapters is structured similarly and includes an opening and closing check on readers' knowledge, research-based scientific context, helpful definitions, profiles of a diverse assortment of teens, concrete skill-building steps, sample tips, and summative takeaways. The text assumes the maturity of its readers and validates the difficulties inherent in being a teenager. It also honors the mental struggles brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. The authors normalize the act of seeking professional help when needed; they acknowledge that this text is only a starting point for those with more severe symptoms of anxiety.

A good resource for those with moderate anxieties. (Reference.) (Nonfiction. 12-18)
BLOODY FOOL FOR LOVE
A Spike Prequel
Ritter, William
Disney-Hyperion (256 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-368-07198-7

William the Bloody, aka Spike, plans a heist to steal a relic that he hopes will bring happiness to his love, Drusilla. This tale kicks off a new series of prequels about notable characters from TV’s Buffy the Vampire Slayer. It’s 1901, and vampires Spike, Drusilla, and Darla are back in London after Spike killed a vampire slayer in China and Angelus abandoned them yet again. Dru still often speaks of Angelus, but Spike wants her attention for himself and a future of being wicked together. When he learns of a relic that will help focus her thoughts, he makes plans to steal it. Problem is, a notorious demon nabs it first. Ritter introduces several charismatic new side characters and nails the fan favorites’ voices, from Spike’s wisecracks to Dru’s hilariously bizarre musings. The tone—a mashup of funny, dark, and thrilling—fits perfectly with the show. That said, there’s little heft to the story. Subplots that give readers access to the interior thoughts of Darla and werewolf Rieka have more emotional weight than the lead story of Spike’s heist, but they’re nevertheless sparse. Still, this entertaining story will please Buffy fans and is easily accessible to newcomers who appreciate charming paranormal baddies. Of the characters with human skin tones, most are assumed White; Rieka has deep-brown skin.

A diverting Buffyverse tale. (Paranormal. 12-adult)

YESTERDAY’S RAIN
Sigafus, Kim
7th Generation (110 pp.)
$9.95 paper | Aug. 30, 2022
978-1-939053-42-8
Series: Sydney’s Journey, 2

Friendships end for all types of reasons; sometimes they can even be mended.

In this sequel to Whisper to the Sky (2022), Sydney is still navigating the transition from being a bully at her old school on the reservation to being bullied by others in her new school in Minneapolis. She is being targeted less frequently, but her new friend, Finn, is not so fortunate. Finn is persecuted for being gay, and he reveals to Sydney how ringleader Jeremy was once his best friend, before he came out. When Jeremy, who is a football player, aims a punch at Finn but misses and instead hits Sydney, their whole world turns upside down. Sydney proposes that Jeremy’s punishment be helping her and her mother with household chores, something he agrees to reluctantly in order to save his future on the team. However, it gives them time to get to know one another outside of school. Sydney tries to forgive not only herself for her past actions, but her father and Jeremy for hurting her. This accessible title is engaging thanks to plenty of character development. Sydney has her faults and makes errors as she learns and grows, both in her relationships and in her understanding of herself, allowing the story to explore tough topics like homophobia. As in the previous book, Sigafus enriches the story with Ojibwa culture and vocabulary. Resources about bullying support the text.

A thoughtful story for reluctant readers about the power of forgiveness. (Fiction. 12-18)
Seventeen-year-old Hannah Klein rebuilds her life one year after a heart-breaking and reckless summer. Since she was little, Hannah has cherished a dream of following her beloved grandmother to Olympic glory. When, in rapid succession, her Bubbie succumbed to cancer and her soccer ambitions were snatched from her by a serious ankle injury, she spun out of control. Now, nearly a year later, she’s still struggling to rediscover her center. Hannah’s journey to a new normal is accompanied by the energetic staff at Bonanza, the local entertainment multiplex where she swings a summer job. There’s her brother, Joey; Patrick Cho, a distractingly handsome bad boy; Daisey Liu, a cool and collected young mom; and Brie Bradley, her former best friend and teammate. And, of course, there’s Ethan Alderman, Joey’s best friend, who Hannah can’t help but notice has grown very cute. The wealth of characters keeps the action moving even when the story stumbles: Frequent flashbacks interrupt the narrative to provide details of the previous summer, and substance abuse is touched upon but not deeply explored, with Hannah’s struggles being characterized as bad coping mechanisms more than debilitating addictions. Hannah and Ethan are both White and Jewish; their conversations are sprinkled with Yiddish words, and their lives include shared experiences and traditions. The supporting cast is broadly diverse.

A sweet, romantic summer tale with well-integrated representation. (Fiction. 13-17)
DEATH ON THE LINE
Amorosi, Carol
Gu Leor Publications (257 pp.)
978-1-73683-722-1

A debut novel sees a young Scotsman caught up in a series of murders while apprenticed to a surveying team in Colonial America.

The year is 1763, and Angus MacKay has sailed from England to America to assist two eminent surveyors tasked with redefining the disputed border between Maryland and Pennsylvania. As the work proceeds, Angus befriends Susquehannock Natives Running Bear and Gray Wolf and their sister, Little Hawk, as well as several first- and second-generation settlers. Angus soaks up his new experiences. He particularly enjoys the acceptance from the people he meets, which is unlike the hostility he knew growing up. Yet all is not well in the Colonies. There is talk of settlements being attacked by the Natives, and Angus himself is being shadowed by a mysterious one-armed man. Worse, several murders occur in proximity to the surveying. Angus discovers the bodies; each one has been shot through the chest with arrows. Angus cannot believe his Susquehannock friends are involved, but the law rests in the hands of a drunk, incompetent sheriff who is quick to condemn the tribespeople—and possibly Angus as well. What is the truth behind the killings? In this series opener, Amorosi writes in the third person, past tense, primarily from Angus’ point of view but with an occasional narrative omniscience that leans more toward history than mystery.

Angus is a well-drawn, likable character. He serves admirably to observe the world around him yet does little to influence it. (His development is mostly internal, and he doesn’t actively investigate the murders.) The author’s portrayal of 18th-century America is a delight. Through Angus’ eyes, readers feel the fresh wonder of early settlement—the hard work and boundless opportunities; the conflicts and injustices. Period-specific dialogue adds to the sense of time and place. Amorosi also provides food for thought through the comparisons that Angus makes between the vilification of Native Americans by settlers and the historical revilement of his own clan by the English. Events move at a gentle pace throughout, allowing readers to remain a step or two ahead of any tension or intrigue. The story contains few real surprises but will appeal nonetheless to those with a penchant for the past.

Redolent historical fiction with a tinge of mystery.
For many book lovers, summer vacations mean unwinding on an idyllic beach with yellow umbrellas and blue pedal boats and savoring a mystery novel. Inspired by Kenneth Branagh’s recent film, *Death on the Nile*, Agatha Christie fans might revisit her classics starring the brilliant Hercule Poirot. But mystery buffs may prefer other titles with indefatigable detectives. Kirkus Indie recently reviewed three novels about heinous murders and quirky sleuths.

Laura Giebfried and Stanley R. Wells’ *The Marlowe Murders*, set in 1955, features graduate student Alexandra Durant. She must figure out who killed John Marlowe, a psychology professor and the heir to a mansion and private island off Maine’s coast. The suspects include all 12 people on snowy Exeter Island. Alexandra needs to use her photographic memory to unmask the culprit. “A fun, inventive murder mystery set on a wintry Atlantic island,” our reviewer writes.

George Albert Brown’s *Who Killed Jerusalem?* focuses on a famous San Francisco poet and artist in 1977. Ickey Jerusalem lies dead in a first-class cabin’s bathroom on a 747. Insurance claims adjuster Dedalus “Ded” Smith, who is on the same plane, ends up helping the police detective assigned to the homicide case. Brown, a “lifelong devotee of William Blake,” based the mystery on Blake’s ideas and characters. Our critic calls the book “a zany, inventive, and multilayered fever dream of murder and mayhem.”

Private investigator Jim Guthrie navigates Kentucky’s Derby Week festivities as he searches for a killer in Rick Neumayer’s *Hotwalker*. Guatemalan immigrant Carlos Rojas, a Churchill Downs employee who walks horses after a race or workout, hires Guthrie to find out who murdered his father. The gumshoe teams up with the publisher of a racing newsletter. According to our reviewer, Neumayer offers “a delightful whodunit with a remarkable hero and sublime Southern setting.”

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Myra Forsberg is an Indie editor.

SWORD & SORCERY

*Frostfire*

*Avery, Ethan*

Stories by Storytellers (434 pp.)

$5.99 e-book | April 22, 2022

979-8-9856228-2-9

The lives of four young people entwine in this YA fantasy full of magic, escapades, and secrets that can change their world.

Growing up on the streets of Bogudos, Erevan learned a lot about life, survival, and loyalty. Now a budding mercenary alongside his adoptive father, Sir Lee, the teenager still carries guilt over a debt he owes to an old friend, who’s stuck in jail because of Erevan’s mistake. When Nya, a mysterious courier with a covert mission, offers to hire him and Sir Lee to guide and protect her on an unforgiving, dangerous route, Erevan is the first to say yes despite some misgivings. Meanwhile, in the country of Lanasall, Aireyal has been accepted into the prestigious Darr-Kamo magic school despite her big secret: She cannot perform magic yet. It is Aireyal’s greatest desire to follow in the footsteps of her mother, Grandmage June Ando, one of the most important people in the Senate of Mages. Aireyal is running out of time to ignite her powers before her sham is unveiled. When she befriends Zale, an apprentice apothecarist and fellow classmate, she doesn’t realize that she is getting enmeshed in a secret that involves two powerful mirrors, a mythical dragon egg, and the political fate of their world. Avery’s fantasy adventure follows Erevan’s and Aireyal’s parallel stories in an intertwined narrative that becomes richer and fuller with every new chapter. Both characters yearn for acceptance, hope for a better future, and struggle under the weight of pressures and expectations. Aireyal’s battles with anxiety and low self-esteem are particularly poignant. The storytelling deftly explores these characters’ inner lives while building a vivid world full of diverse people and magic. Little by little, Avery unveils the true scope of the tale. The story eventually encompasses history, politics, social unrest, and mythology as well as different perspectives on truth, trust, and power. The two main characters are 16 years old but often sound and act younger. This makes the tone of the narrative slightly incongruous but not enough to offset what is otherwise a superb start to a new series.

An intricate and enjoyable adventure with a striking cast.

Myra Forsberg is an Indie editor.
DADDIES AND DAUGHTERS STICK TOGETHER
Balde, Aissatou & Diariatou Sow
Illus. by Nandi L. Fernandez
Bird Upstairs Books (32 pp.)
$18.95 | May 10, 2022
978-1-954854-52-9

Young sisters spend the day at home with their father in Balde and Sow’s debut picture book.

When Mommy leaves early for work, Diari and Fatima spend the day with Daddy. Diari chronicles their activities, often repeating the phrase “When Mommy’s away, Daddies and daughters stick together.” She particularly notes instances of Daddy’s kindness and support, as when he helps them with their counting and reading skills. When they practice their French, Fula, and Spanish vocabulary, he says, “I am so proud of you, and I love you so much!” After other fun activities, such as dancing and yoga stretches, the sisters take a nap and later help Daddy cook dinner. Mommy comes home that evening and helps Diari and Fatima get ready for bed. Diari is thrilled: “I’m happy to say: Mommy, Daddy, and daughters stick together.” Balde and Sow effectively emphasize how children thrive in supportive, loving environments. Young readers and caregivers will enjoy the wholesome depiction of close family relationships, even if their own family structure or child care routine is different than the characters’. Artist Fernandez’s full-color illustrations, which depict a Black family, have a photographic, realistic quality; some feature textured, dimensional aspects such as floating bubbles above Diari’s bubble bath and a starry sky illuminated by the moon.

An uplifting family story that highlights the importance of positive parent-child bonds.

GODDESSES INC.
Bardot, Autumn
Flores Publishing (396 pp.)
March 10, 2021
978-1-73408-971-4

Four goddesses struggle with irrelevancy in the modern world in Bardot’s light supernatural romance.

Goddesses the world over are employed by Shee, the all-knowing CEO of a company called FEM (which stands for Female Energy Macrocosm). FEM is downsizing and eliminating the positions of some goddesses who are no longer worshipped or acknowledged. Mnemosyne, the Greek goddess of memory and history and mother to the nine Muses, didn’t expect to be one of them. Nor is she prepared for the additional penalty—she’s no longer immortal and will age like everyone else. Now that she has to find a new job, she wonders if her sexy boyfriend, Sen. Miguel Flores of California, will still find her interesting. What will she talk to her daughters about? Mnem isn’t alone, however. She has also fired Inna, the Nigerian goddess of bounty; Axtis, the Persian goddess of peace; and Phra Naret, the Thai goddess of good fortune. Can this newly mortal quartet move from superficial perfection to real-life relationships? Will they be able to find love, open a business, and maybe foil some art forgers in the process? Bardot presents a tale in which Clash of the Titans meets Sex and the City. The romance and sex in this frothy novel occur in a modern world where the Covid-19 pandemic never happened and financial woes that come with actual job loss are merely glossed over. However, its critique of social media is timely and deepens the story, as does the concept of the women’s startup, Goddesses Inc., an online store devoted to ethically sourced goods. The main characters here, while sometimes overly needy, aren’t emotionally stagnant, and their decisions—to expose a crime, among other things—all make clear sense. Although the conclusion is oddly rushed, it still packs a punch.

A fizzy romp best read while draped in a toga, cosmos in hand.

DO TREES HAVE MOTHERS?
Bongers, Charles
Douglas & McIntyre (32 pp.)
978-1-77162-325-4

Nuts the Squirrel explains how mother trees protect seedlings in this picture book. Like pigs, ducklings, dogs, and cats, trees have mothers—who protect their babies from insects, filter pollution, and provide water to saplings in times of scarcity. “Mother trees are easy to spot,” Nuts says, “they’re the tall ones in the middle of all their babies.” Forest ecosystems are not just about animal life. Bongers’ story offers a refreshing exploration of how plants “talk” to one another that is useful in part because of its simplicity and visual appeal. The author’s offbeat, digital art wavers between the cartoonish and the near psychedelic. Nuts has bulging eyes and a funky little smile, and he’s accompanied by silly props to illustrate the actions he describes. But the transfer of information and water between tree root systems appears as a subterranean, swirling network in contrasting, complementary colors. Information about the world appears as small white bubbles above Diari’s bubble bath and a starry sky illuminated by the moon.

An engaging, effectively illustrated introduction to a rarely covered nature subject for young readers.
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<td>THE DURBAR’S APPRENTICE</td>
<td>Remington Flagstaff</td>
<td>An elite warrior must investigate the death of an emissary in this historical novel set in 17th-century Nigeria. A subtle but powerful tale of political intrigue and honor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>AN EVERYDAY CULT</td>
<td>Gerette Buglion</td>
<td>&quot;A survivor’s account of the seductiveness of an ‘everyday cult.’” A hauntingly honest and revealing memoir.</td>
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<td>FLY SAFE</td>
<td>Vicki Cody</td>
<td>Cody recollects the terrifying year her husband—a U.S. Army helicopter pilot—was sent to war in the Middle East. A searchingly personal memoir that also provides a thrilling peek into the Gulf War.</td>
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<td>EQUALITY, LIBERTY’S LOST TWIN</td>
<td>Kenneth L. Penegar</td>
<td>A survey focuses on more than 200 years of political thought about equality. A political work that skillfully follows the threads that run from Rousseau to modern thinkers.</td>
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<td>MANTIS</td>
<td>Steve Zell</td>
<td>An investigative reporter and a forensic pathologist work together in this 1960s-set thriller. A fast-paced thriller with superb new and returning characters.</td>
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<td>CONTINUE BREATHING</td>
<td>Josh Greenfield</td>
<td>Greenfield’s novel is a harrowing, intimate account of a man living with mental illness. A clear-eyed, passionate, and authentic portrayal.</td>
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**THE NEW EUGENICS**

by Conrad B. Quintyn

“An impressively thorough survey of the development of biotechnology and the potential dangers it poses.”

A technically precise and philosophically thoughtful treatise.

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**CHARIOTS IN THE SKY**

by Larry A. Freeland

“A helicopter pilot serving in the Vietnam War struggles to survive a major offensive.”

Despite unspectacular writing, a worthwhile peek into the horrors of war.

---

**ANIMAL CANDY**

by James Owens

“A rebellious dropout rejects normalcy and finds himself immersed in the 1970s drug scene in this novel.”

A thoughtfully conceived and boldly described drug tale.

---

**THE GARDEN OF FLOWERS AND WEEDS**

by Matthew Juksan Sullivan

“A notated explication of an ancient Zen Buddhist text.”

An intriguing, challenging crash course in Zen Buddhism.

---

**THE SECRET WORLD OF YONDHAVEN**

by Irene H. Wellman

“Two children come to the rescue of a sanctuary world for Earth’s mistreated creatures in this debut middle-grade fantasy.”

An adventurous, entertaining fable that taps into longings for a cleaner Earth.

---

**THE WAY OF THE RIVER**

by Shan L. Spyker

“This debut middle-grade fantasy sees four young cousins enter an enchanted wood and become privy to the thoughts of animals.”

A safe yet magical adventure with plenty of heart.
**Mermaid Tears**
by Susan L. Read

“As she enters the sixth grade, a girl spirals downward and searches for answers in this debut middle-grade novel.”

An engaging and sympathetic exploration of a girl’s struggles with mental illness and recovery.

**The Champion**
by Wayne Rajah

“A boy who can fly undertakes an incredible journey to save his dying mother in this fantasy.”

An evocative, almost dreamlike mix of dark fantasy and moving reality.

**Ultimate Reality**
by Rodger Paul Shute

“A writer offers a critique of scientific materialism coupled with an argument in favor of an ultimate reality beyond empirical confirmation.”

A thoughtful and intriguing account of the relationship between science and spirituality.

**Bots**
by Anthony DiMaria

“In DiMaria’s debut SF novel, a nanotech-implant corporation faces the possibility of frightening, potentially fatal hacker attacks.”

An offbeat and refreshingly different cybercrime mystery.

**Last Train to Auschwitz**
by Sarah Federman

“A historical account of how the French national railway company collaborated with the Nazis and of its contentious journey toward atonement.”

A rare book that ably combines historical edification with a moving narrative.

**Utopia Project: Everyone Must Die**
by Billy Dering

“In Dering’s debut, a trilogy opener, a band of young adults near Long Beach Island find themselves survivors of a vast neutron-beam attack that wipes out Earth’s civilization.”

Planetwide casualties and careful pacing open this attention-grabbing SF trilogy.
**BEYOND DIVERSITY**
by Rohit Bhargava & Jennifer Brown

“A comprehensive guide focuses on how to increase diversity and inclusion in society.”

A useful, forcefully written, and wide-ranging study of inequities—and how to fix them.

---

**YOGA**
by Douglas W. Davis

“In this debut novel set in the late 1980s, a young Indian American, descended from a Buddhist saint, falls in love on his path to bringing enlightenment to the world.”

One man’s personal and spiritual adventure makes for a profound and intriguing tale.

---

**XANDON AND THE KING’S SCEPTER**
by Tyson Vonn Beck

“A middle-grade fantasy adventure story about a gifted boy who trains to be a knight and gets entangled in a murder mystery.”

A promising start for a planned fantasy series that capably handles both politics and magic.

---

**SIGNS OF LIFE**
edited by Sarah Sasson

“A collection of stories and essays about illness and caregiving.”

A rich and varied set of ailment-related works.

---

**THE MAYFLY**
by Ben Rogers

“A short fiction collection that delves into the unpredictable nature of human relationships.”

An eclectic set of tales often written with verve and sensitivity.
28 Great Indie Books Worth Discovering

[Sponsored]

**SISTER JANE**

by Irmgarde Brown

“In Brown’s debut novel, a seemingly miraculous gift upends an ordinary woman’s life.”

A wise, winning story of a modern-day miracle worker.

**RABBITHOLE**

by Melissa Rea

“A magic portal transports an overworked entrepreneur to a fantasyland in a loose, erotic spin on a classic tale.”

A creative and sensual novel that doesn’t disappoint.

**FINANCIAL DOMINANCE**

by Frank A. Molinar

“A financial planning guide for members of the armed services.”

Cleareyed, no-nonsense monetary advice for military personnel.

**THE MUSE OF KILL DEVIL HILLS**

by Mary K. Kaiser

“A Greek deity helps the Wright brothers invent the airplane in this debut fantasy.”

An airy, humorous aviation tale with appealing infusions of myth and history.
“Burns’ prose is sharp and, at times, poetically melancholic.”

THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT
Burns, Mary F.
Self (375 pp.)
$13.95 paper | $6.95 e-book
March 12, 2022
979-8-40239-809-2

In the fourth installment of Burns’ mystery series, famed painter John Singer Sargent and his childhood friend, the writer Violet Paget, investigate the death of a controversial antiques dealer.

In 1884, while in Paris, Sargent receives a parcel from Moses Wilhelm Shapira, a renowned antiques dealer who attempts to sell scrolls to the British Museum that he claims are an early version of the book of Deuteronomy from the Old Testament. The discovery, if authentic, would be an explosive one, as it contains a new, previously unknown commandment—one that potentially compels a radical revision of the Bible’s meaning. However, experts pronounce them forgeries, which results in the dealer’s being “driven out of town, scorned and abused as a fraud and an arrogant, over-reaching trickster.” When Sargent opens the parcel, he finds the controversial scrolls entrusted to him and a wary note, cryptically warning him of lurking danger. Shortly thereafter, Shapira is found dead, a bullet wound to his head, and although the authorities believe it was suicide, Sargent and his old friend Paget believe it was murder. Burns chronicles the pair’s decision to further investigate this peculiar case, which is revealed to be increasingly “perplexing and tragic” and full of compelling suspense and historical intrigue. She tells two parallel stories—the investigation conducted by the protagonists and the plight of the talented and ambitious Shapira—and this unusual structure results in occasional bouts of torpor, and, as a result, readers may wish that the novel was briefer. However, this remains a very thoughtful work that not only captures the complex contours of the period, but also provocatively raises questions about the Bible and its meaning as well as the stakes of its interpretation. Burns’ prose is sharp and, at times, poetically melancholic; it also admirably avoids providing easy answers to the questions it raises. Overall, it’s an exceedingly intelligent and entertaining novel.

A thrilling whodunit and an edifying work of historical fiction.

DEAR DANA
That Time I Went Crazy and Wrote All 580 of My Facebook Friends a Handwritten Letter
Daughters, Amy Weiland
She Writes Press (310 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $9.95 e-book | May 17, 2022
978-1-64742-900-3

An autobiographical work relates what happened when a woman wrote letters to all of her Facebook friends.

Daughters, a freelance writer and author of the novel You Cannot Mess This Up (2019), challenges readers to think about the meaning of concepts like friendship and communication in the age of social media. After a Facebook friend named Dana posted about her son’s fatal cancer, Daughters tried to write her a letter and realized she needed a mailing address. The author then decided to write letters to all of her 580 Facebook friends. Most of the people Daughters wrote to responded—some with letters and others with Facebook direct messages. The book is therefore structured around selections from all of the author’s letters and responses. She also includes a moving story of her reconnection with Dana, culminating in Daughters’ traveling to her friend’s home and finding herself the guest of honor at a luncheon. At the event, all the letters the author wrote to Dana were spread decoratively on a table. Throughout the volume, Daughters has much to say about old-fashioned forms of communication versus how people connect (or not) on social media, some of it insightful and some of it familiar. Overall, the book works best when the author reflects on the vagaries of personal communication and relationships or describes her own experiences. In contrast, the letters and responses can get a bit repetitive, especially the missives written to people Daughters worked with in the adult-beverage industry. And her frequent references to prayers and God’s love will mainly appeal to Christian readers. Still, this volume provides a captivating study regarding writing letters to friends and rethinking how people successfully bond in the modern world.

An intriguing and inspiring exploration of different forms of communication.

SEBASTIAN AND THE MIGHTY TOKEN
Day, Jonathan
Artists Gate Press (116 pp.)
$7.99 paper | March 11, 2022
979-8-98543-490-3

Two New York siblings find a magical object that might help them achieve their dreams in Day’s whimsical narrative for young readers.

Young Manhattanites Sebastian and Lilly Kemp have grown up knowing Central Park like their own backyard, exploring its expanses together on roller skates and
There is a thing. "Now, she 

"mighty token" brings both great success and serious responsi-

Bernstein helps him polish his game in hopes of defeating his 

New York subway token on a neck chain, which has interesting 

descriptions as "suit-job man" for a businessperson and Sebas-

for something." Though his mother and sister seem resigned to 

falls over the kids' happy explorations. Their father left the fam-

and Rathon's participation, Hettie sets out to make a name for 

and she soon figures out how to hold a conversation with the 

are called for. He gives Sebastian his prized possession, an old 

nent hopelessness, Mr. Bernstein decides that strong measures 

herself in the burgeoning spiritualism craze sweeping through 

indie 

- 

HETTIE SHARPE is now an orphan. Her English father and Irish mother were recently killed when the factory 

in the blast, but the scars on her head and hands were not the 

only things she received that day: "There is a thing, Hettie said inside her head, that followed me from the fire. There is a demon trailing my footsteps. There is a black cat on my doorstep." Now, she lives with her spiritualism-curious guardian, Mrs. Kemp, and her skeptical daughter, Eleanor, who keep Hettie well supplied with laudanum to dull her pain. When they take Hettie to see the respected medium Flora Forrester, Hettie learns that the psychic's performances aren't entirely sincere. Still, the teen's

HETTIE AND THE GHOST 
De La Rosa, Becca 
Cantrappress (414 pp.) 
$16.00 paper | $12.00 ebook | Dec. 4, 2021 
978-1-8383575-1-1 

A spirit haunts a traumatized Victo-

rian teen in this debut literary novel. 

Hettie Sharpe is now an orphan. Her English father and Irish mother were recently killed when the factory 

ow owned exploded. Hettie was injured in the blast, but the scars on her head and hands were not the 

only things she received that day: "There is a thing, Hettie said inside her head, that followed me from the fire. There is a demon trailing my footsteps. There is a black cat on my doorstep." Now, she lives with her spiritualism-curious guardian, Mrs. Kemp, and her skeptical daughter, Eleanor, who keep Hettie well supplied with laudanum to dull her pain. When they take Hettie to see the respected medium Flora Forrester, Hettie learns that the psychic’s performances aren’t entirely sincere. Still, the teen’s 

ghostly companion seems bent on communicating with Hettie, and she soon figures out how to hold a conversation with the 

entity, who goes by the name of Rathon. With Flora’s guidance 

and Rathon’s participation, Hettie sets out to make a name for 

herself in the burgeoning spiritualism craze sweeping through 

England. But who exactly is Rathon? And what will Hettie do when this haunting turns deadly? De La Rosa’s prose is styl-

ish and detailed, capturing the textures and psychologies of the 19th-century setting. Here, Hettie and Rathon trick some 

séance-goers: "At her final word, the two candles in the middle of the table shivered, then rocked slowly back and forth. The usual 

shrieks and whispers. Rathon twisted, a gesture like a grumpy 

snarl, and Hettie swallowed her grin." Despite her somewhat 

melodramatic backstory, Hettie is a captivating protagonist, 

and Rathon makes for an engagingly out-of-the-ordinary spirit. 

Best of all is the author’s reconstruction of the spiritualism 

scene, an enticing blend of hucksters, seekers, and stuffy aristocrats. At over 400 pages, the book is quite a bit longer than it needs to be, particularly given its sometimes lethargic pacing. Even so, the novel manages to be fun while creating the unset-

tering atmosphere of a spooky Henry James tale.

An imaginative take on the Victorian ghost story.
A gripping, twisty thriller with a strong protagonist.

WAYS TO DIE IN TOKYO
Garver, Thomas Ran
BookBaby (386 pp.)
$17.99 paper | $7.99 e-book | April 7, 2022
978-1-66782-224-2

A mixed martial arts fighter must flee gangsters and cops in this Tokyo-set novel. American expatriate Hank Fisher once dreamed about becoming a full-fledged MMA fighter and living a comfortable life with his family in Tokyo, but things have not quite worked out. Two years after his wife, Lisa, took off with their twin sons, Justin and James, following a bitter divorce, Fisher is still struggling to make ends meet, his career all but extinguished. The private investigator he hired to find his family needs more money, but Fisher doesn’t have it. So when a friend with connections to organized crime in Japan offers him an easy job as a bodyguard at a meeting between rivals (he just needs to look tough while sitting there), Fisher accepts the gig despite the bright red flags. All he wants is the money so he can prove to his family he is a changed man. Things go wrong when, during the meeting, Fisher accidentally hurts an important attendee and goes on the run. What follows is an escalating chain of events that include a robbery, murder, an enormous amount of money changing hands,
dangerous thugs and the police on Fisher’s trail, and the lives of his family and friends hanging in the balance. As the bodies pile up, Fisher will take any help he can get even if it means going to the one person he despises. Garver’s riveting thriller sees its main character walk a fine line between puppet and puppeteer. The tale skillfully explores Fisher’s lack of agency as events spiral completely out of his control, the bad decisions he makes, his anger management issues, and his inability to fully accept his culpability in the actions that led to his divorce. While on the run, Fisher faces his demons throughout the violent, high-stakes clashes with various players. Unfortunately, the tale’s other characters are not as well developed as the protagonist and become merely incidental to the narrative. In addition, the pacing is uneven, with a lull in the middle of the novel. But the main storyline and Fisher’s arc are deftly, tautly plotted.

A gripping, twisty thriller with a strong protagonist.

**ONE GUN**
Hansen, Vinnie
Misterio Press (290 pp.)
978-1-947287-25-9

A desperate search for a missing gun propels Hansen’s thriller about the aftermath of a botched home invasion. It’s the day before Thanksgiving in the fictional Californian town of Playa Maria, and 18-year-old Dwayne Williams has been arrested after fleeing the scene of a burglary. Homeowner Ben Russo and his wife, Vivi, caught him in the discharge at the climax. There are many moving parts to Hansen’s plot, and she deftly switches perspectives to delve into each character’s psychology while teasing out new information to keep the reader hooked. As Ben’s wife, for example, regards a childhood photo of Ben’s troubled son, Arthur, she ruminates, “It was heartbreaking to view innocent Art, a life of promise hanging before him, and to think of the coked-out man he’d become.” Readers may find a secret in Vivi’s past to be a bridge too far, but for the most part, Hansen doesn’t overplay her hand. Overall, she writes with a vivid sense of place and devotes credence to the motivations and dialogue for her diverse cast of characters.

A mostly well-calibrated and satisfying thriller.

**ALL THE SALT IN THE SEA**
Harrow, Tammy L.
Red Adept Publishing (308 pp.)
$13.99 paper | $0.99 e-book | Dec. 6, 2021
978-1-948051-82-8

In this debut novel, a woman embarks on a life-changing trip and confronts her abusive husband. Reeling from the discovery of a love child her husband, Alex, had with another woman, Abby Montgomery flies to Italy to track down her grandmother’s old friend Francesca. While there, Abby meets Francesca’s attractive photographer grandson, Daniel Quinn. Abby and Daniel immediately begin a romance, journeying to major European cities. During their travels, Abby learns more about Daniel, including that he tragically lost his wife and son in a car accident. Meanwhile, Abby receives manipulative emails from Alex in which he outlines how she will help raise the son he hid from her for years. Abby eventually returns home to Florida with the intention of ending things with Alex until her unplanned pregnancy and her teenage daughter’s sudden illness throw a wrench in her plans. Abby begins to question why the mother of Alex’s child gave up custody so willingly. And she starts to look at her husband’s toxic behavior in a darker light. Harrow’s novel is a bit of a hybrid. What starts off as a tale reminiscent of *Eat, Pray, Love* evolves into a story of a woman standing up to her abuser. Interspersed among the chapters are Abby’s past journal entries, highlighting Alex’s sinister qualities as she blames herself for his abuse. Abby has difficulty admitting that Alex is abusive because she initially equates the word with being hit: “I know he’s been cruel at times and consistently treating me badly—‘I’m not letting you go.’ And while the European adventures give Abby and Daniel quality time together, the spotlighting of different locations feels largely unnecessary. But despite these minor issues, Harrow presents an absorbing tale that is equal parts traumatic, hopeful, and sadly familiar.

An engrossing drama about a wife’s crucial transformation.
COMMUNITY KLEPTO

Hitchcock, Kelly I.
She Writes Press (240 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $9.95 e-book | June 21, 2022
978-1-64742-373-5

A socially awkward millennial and small-town criminal sees the error of her ways—but can she change them?

In a suburban Kansas community center health club, fanatical exerciser Ann Josephson is sweating it out six days a week early in 2016. She’s the sticky-fingered, mid-20s protagonist of Hitchcock’s devilishly fun second novel. While scavenging a woman’s unsecured belongings in the locker room, Ann, whose pessimistic interior monologue dominates much of the narrative, innocently remarks, “Anyone could just walk up and take it, but I actually do.” Ann steals at will, adding pilfered items to the ever expanding “junk mountain” kept at home. Apart from her rampant kleptomania, she struggles as a graphic designer while keeping up appearances for her affluent, well-meaning parents, who keep her financially afloat.

Her therapist prescribes regular doses of encouragement, particularly when a friendly fellow gym-goer named Joe invites her to join his dodgeball team. As the gym warns members about the thief among them, Ann becomes distracted by the possibilities of jump-starting her nonexistent personal life.

Joe’s offer hits Ann’s needy sweet spot, and soon they’re dating, but a twist near the end makes her rethink every aspect of her sociopathic side hustle. While an entertaining, contemporary psychological character study, the story also intelligently reflects upon society, anxiety, depression, and the implicitly competitive, body-conscious social dynamics of gym culture. Narrated by Ann, the novel initially doesn’t work quite hard enough to make its hero likable, but ultimately Ann’s attempts at self-reflection and corrective behavior draw readers closer to a woman with a warm heart behind all the chilly, snappish dissatisfaction with others. While the novel has humor, humanity, and pathos, perhaps its best quality lies in Hitchcock’s talent for making you care about whether a socially challenged, mean-spirited thief can become a self-aware, remorseful sweetheart thanks to a smitten cop.

A clever, endearing, and funny tale of one woman’s missteps and her efforts to atone.

BED OF ROSE AND THORNS

Hunt, Lee
Self (296 pp.)
$25.00 paper | $9.99 e-book | June 7, 2022
978-1-77797-343-8

In Hunt’s fantasy adventure, a queen with a secret sends away her most loyal warrior only for him to return years later. Eleven years ago, Sir Ezra, a knight, entered the Queen’s chambers after hearing her scream in terror. His protective instinct apparently caused him to unleash a secret power—one accompanied by “a sound like ringing thunder.” The Prince of Erle, who’s the Queen’s husband, and his knights were all killed during the incident, and the Queen, whose name is Rose, sent Ezra into exile. Now, in Province, he serves Lady Kristen while struggling to keep his obsession with the Queen in check.

Rachel, Lady Kristen’s 17-year-old daughter, is infatuated with Ezra; when she takes her flirtation to the next level, it again activates his hidden power. Ezra, it turns out, is an Elysonian Bell—a legendary figure who can broadcast his emotions outward, which affects others in unexpected ways. Lady Kristen decides to send Ezra back to the capital as her seneschal, or steward, so that he might see Rose and receive closure. There, the knight is greeted by a female knight named Sir Marigold, an old friend, but he also finds evidence of the Queen’s rocky rule. However, a bigger surprise awaits him. Hunt combines fairy-tale romance with appealingly ribald scenes in this unique medieval adventure. When Rachel dyes her hair blond, for instance, Ezra’s “bell-like tolling” sounds, which causes the young woman to literally rip her bodice, swept away with passion. The knight’s gift eventually summons other women to his bedchambers, including shopkeeper Danielle Stonehouse, and there are lively descriptions of carnal pleasure. Balancing these moments are threats to Ezra’s life and dream sequences with ethereal passages: “He dived down...to see how deep the clean, crystalline structure went and was amazed at the endless, vertiginous expanse of ice below him.” Moments of wisdom come from Sir Marigold, who tells the girls she’s training, “Don’t try to mimic your enemies and compete against their advantage. We must find our own advantages.” Rose’s revelation to Ezra provides fuel for a sequel.

An engaging medieval fantasy that’s also, at times, a refreshingly candid tale of desire.
IN HER DEFENSE
Impellizzeri, Amy
Wyatt-MacKenzie Publishing
(262 pp.)
978-1-954332-44-7

In this mystery, a former lawyer gets drawn back to the courtroom to defend her husband's mistress, accused of his murder.

Riversedge, New York, located four express train stops from Manhattan, is “an impostor of a small town.” Along with its posh setting, upscale mom-and-pop stores, and “enormous brick-face library,” the town is known for its attorneys. The best and brightest congregate at the members-only Riversedge Law Club. Ingrid DiLaurio, an ex-lawyer, is not a member. She is the host of Too Busy To Die, a nationally popular podcast that focuses on “streamlining the mess in all of our lives.” Messiness becomes her business after her husband is found dead and Opal Rowen is arrested. Opal is a former friend, single mother, ex-stripper, and Ingrid’s husband’s mistress. But it’s Ingrid that Opal calls from the police station. “You owe me, Ingrid,” she ominously demands. Ingrid agrees to take her case, but while there is no murder weapon or apparent homicide, she is cautioned by a Law Club member: “Don’t let this thing suck you in…the ending is not under your control.” Also out of her control: a suspect judge, a corrupt prosecutor, and a second death. A former colleague—one whom Ingrid blames for sabotaging her law career—resurfaces with an offer to help mentor her in exchange for a favor of her own. Almost as satisfying as a good whodunit is a good “What really happened?” mystery, along with the lines of Liane Moriarty’s Big Little Lies. Secrets are rife in Riversedge, and the characters clearly know more than they are letting on.

A gripping legal thriller that will grab readers from the get-go.

THERE’S NOTHING MICRO ABOUT A BILLION WOMEN
Making Finance Work for Women
Iskenderian, Mary Ellen
MIT Press (232 pp.)
$29.95 | $17.99 e-book | April 19, 2022
978-0-262-04644-2

A comprehensive look at how to bring more women into the global financial system.

In this debut nonfiction book, Iskenderian, the head of Women’s World Banking, a nonprofit focused on women’s access to the financial services around the world, offers insights into how the banking world can best adapt to the needs of women and what can be done to enable more women without bank accounts to access banks’ saving and borrowing functions. The author points out that a third of all adults are “unbanked.” The book explains why the ability to participate in the financial system matters, the specific barriers that keep women from establishing accounts and getting loans, and what interventions have made meaningful differences. It also addresses the profit-driven business case for greater inclusion in addition to the human rights rationale. Iskenderian looks at how developments in both mobile and in-person banking have offered new opportunities for inclusion, addresses the limitations of micro-financing, and shows that changes to banking access have wide-ranging impacts on families, communities, and regions. Policy wonks will appreciate the detailed and data-driven background; the author is both well informed and skilled at explaining such information in depth. Along the way, she offers policy recommendations supported by fully cited studies in a prose style that, while occasionally dry, is refreshingly free of jargon and minimizes complexity: “As long as women lack the ability to claim assets in their own names, they will be denied full financial inclusion.” The book’s holistic approach to financial inclusion—addressing insurance along with the ability to save and borrow and drawing connections between financial empowerment and gender-based violence—adds a valuable layer to the discussion and expands on the existing literature. The book concludes with concrete, plausible policy recommendations, suggestions for further research, and reminders about the importance of expanding access to banking. Readers with an interest in financial technology, women’s empowerment, and economic development are likely to find the book informative and enjoyable.

An engaging and wide-ranging look at new developments in banking access.
A dress recalls her life—from design to fashion show and museum—in this debut rhyming picture book.

After inviting readers on a journey through fashion, the narrator asserts: “I’m the little red dress, I’ll explain more with a rhyme.” The dress begins as a designer’s idea in a sketchbook. But she soon moves through all the stages of creation: finding the right fabric, getting dyed, and experimenting with dress forms and patterns until everything is just so. When the dress is worn by a model on the runway, the garment seems fit for success. But despite instant popularity, the dress soon lands in the archive. Then one day, she’s purchased for a museum as a vintage or lose their “residency cards” that give them discounts at local stores. Scott is a mere 10 years old in ’96 when he first lived in Ridgeport, Illinois, since 1986. An idyllic small American town may hide a seedy underbelly in this thriller. Scott Casey and his parents have lived in Ridgeport, Illinois, since 1986. It’s a veritable utopia, crime-free and abundant in neighbors who greet folks with a smile. That’s not by accident; residents must abide by copious rules lest they suffer fines or lose their “residency cards” that give them discounts at local stores. Scott is a mere 10 years old in ’96 when he first gets an inkling that Ridgeport isn’t so squeaky clean. While the town hasn’t seen any murders, a few people have mysteriously disappeared. When someone Scott knows vanishes unexpectedly, he and his best friend, Matt Norris, focus their suspicions on Matt’s mom, Sue Ellen. She created and heads the Neighborhood Watch Committee but may not be as stable as she appears in public. The boys desperately want to know what’s in her secret room in the basement—one so secure they’ll need to manipulate a fingerprint scanner to get inside. But neither friend can anticipate what lies beyond that door. Kenealy gradually builds suspense in a story that spans a couple of decades. The tale begins in the ’80s as Scott’s mother, Loretta, seems to fall under Sue Ellen’s spell. But the narrative teases the 2004 date of Ridgeport’s first homicide and works its way to that fateful year. The author’s largely unadorned prose aptly details the town’s century-long history as well as its fat “residency book” (required reading for newbies). Kenealy also wisely focuses on the cast. Young Scott’s rebellious acts form an enjoyable coming-of-age subplot that includes an episode in which he and his friends sneak alcoholic drinks at a wedding. But no character outshines Sue Ellen; even readers can’t be sure what the dubious woman has actually done. The revealing final act drops more than one surprise as it deftly cranks up the tension.

Superb characters headline this chilling, slow-burn crime tale.

**THE LITTLE RED DRESS**
**A Kids Book About Fashion**

**Joseph, Jonathan**
**Illus. by Silvan Borer**

Little Red Fashion (29 pp.)


A dress recalls her life—from design to fashion show and museum—in this debut rhyming picture book.

After inviting readers on a journey through fashion, the narrator asserts: “I’m the little red dress, I’ll explain more with a rhyme.” The dress begins as a designer’s idea in a sketchbook. But she soon moves through all the stages of creation: finding the right fabric, getting dyed, and experimenting with dress forms and patterns until everything is just so. When the dress is worn by a model on the runway, the garment seems fit for success. But despite instant popularity, the dress soon lands in the archive. Then one day, she’s purchased for a museum as a vintage dress. In this series opener, Joseph deftly navigates the fashion process in lively poetry, making each step feel personal and important. The dress’s dismay at being archived and subsequent joy at becoming a fashion icon in a museum create empathy for the reader. Though the majority are women, the diverse characters show the variety of people working in the fashion industry. Readers who appreciate biographies of fashion luminaries like Coco Chanel will enjoy this inventive spin.

A stunningly illustrated, realistic look at the fashion industry whimsically narrated by a dress.

**NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH**

**Kenealy, Kevin Patrick**

Bowker (392 pp.)


979-8-98520-980-8

An idyllic small American town may hide a seedy underbelly in this thriller. Scott Casey and his parents have lived in Ridgeport, Illinois, since 1986. It’s a veritable utopia, crime-free and abundant in neighbors who greet folks with a smile. That’s not by accident; residents must abide by copious rules lest they suffer fines or lose their “residency cards” that give them discounts at local stores. Scott is a mere 10 years old in ’96 when he first gets an inkling that Ridgeport isn’t so squeaky clean. While the town hasn’t seen any murders, a few people have mysteriously disappeared. When someone Scott knows vanishes years later, he and his best friend, Matt Norris, focus their suspicions on Matt’s mom, Sue Ellen. She created and heads the Neighborhood Watch Committee but may not be as stable as she appears in public. The boys desperately want to know what’s in her secret room in the basement—one so secure they’ll need to manipulate a fingerprint scanner to get inside. But neither friend can anticipate what lies beyond that door. Kenealy gradually builds suspense in a story that spans a couple of decades. The tale begins in the ’80s as Scott’s mother, Loretta, seems to fall under Sue Ellen’s spell. But the narrative teases the 2004 date of Ridgeport’s first homicide and works its way to that fateful year. The author’s largely unadorned prose aptly details the town’s century-long history as well as its fat “residency book” (required reading for newbies). Kenealy also wisely focuses on the cast. Young Scott’s rebellious acts form an enjoyable coming-of-age subplot that includes an episode in which he and his friends sneak alcoholic drinks at a wedding. But no character outshines Sue Ellen; even readers can’t be sure what the dubious woman has actually done. The revealing final act drops more than one surprise as it deftly cranks up the tension.

Superb characters headline this chilling, slow-burn crime tale.

**THE GENTLEMAN JACK EFFECT**

**Lessons in Breaking Rules and Living Out Loud**

**Lea, Janet**

Illus. by Vivian Swift

Self (354 pp.)


978-0-9621837-1-3

Lea’s debut nonfiction work explores the dedicated fan base of an offbeat TV character.

The author writes that she was not expecting to fall in love with the lesbian protagonist of the BBC and HBO drama Gentleman Jack, based on the life of a real 19th-century historical figure: “I was stupefied and embarrassed because Anne Lister was, after all, dead,” Lea writes. “But far more mortifying and unexpected was my morphing into a 70-something fangirl.” The series, created by Sally Wainwright and starring Suranne Jones as the eponymous businesswoman, traveler, diarist, and top-hat wearer, has won dedicated fans around the world, particularly among lesbian viewers. This book collects the experiences and reflections of these “Lister Sisters” (a group that includes more than a few men), detailing their attachment to the show and the fascinating person who inspired it. The series, the author says, not only provided welcome lesbian representation on television, but also catalyzed new levels of self-esteem among its fans, spawning daring sartorial choices, career changes, and pilgrimages to Lister’s hometown of Halifax in West Yorkshire, England. Lea interviews and profiles more than 60 of these fans; most hail from the United States or the United Kingdom, but there are dispatches from such far-flung locales as New Zealand, India, the Philippines, Belgium, Singapore, Portugal, Serbia, and Brazil. The fan base’s sense of the community...
“A finely observed portrait of the wellness industry in affluent Northern California.”

A rich, heartwarming homage to a groundbreaking series.

BRUDDERS LEARNS HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS
Leigh, K.A.
Illus. by Derek Roberts
Brudders’ Books (48 pp.)
$18.97 | Oct. 1, 2020
978-1-73479-830-2

Leigh’s debut picture book tells a story of first social interactions.

After waking from days of hibernation, Brudders, a bear, attempts to befriend other woodland animals, but his overeager approach is poorly received. For example, his splashing in a body of water scares off fish, and he’s stung after poking his head in a beehive. He wonders, “Why does it seem that nobody likes me?” On a sailboat trip, Brudders encounters white bird Zeke, who says he was “sent from above.” Zeke explains that animals have varying temperaments and that “it’s important to understand them, and your friendship will grow.” Brudders tries a gentler, more respectful approach, and other critters respond positively. For example, instead of peering into the beehive, Brudders says, “Am I really wearing black silk stay-ups, a very pretty, transparent black lace bra, and the skimpiest thong known to mankind?” Vera is a vibrant massage therapist living in San Francisco. Vera enters into a business partnership and an affair with her massage therapy instructor, Ernesto Archer. That Ernesto is married causes Vera to twinge of guilt, but her misgivings are swept away by world-shaking orgasms and shared erotic dreams that confirm that they were lovers in a past life in ancient Mongolia. Complicating things further are other women whom Ernesto has been involved with and who continue orbiting him, including rival masseuse Star Child. Almost blinded by Ernesto’s sexy charisma and praise for her empathic power to “transmute” feelings, Vera starts seeing cracks in his facade when his drinking escalates and he commits a professional betrayal. Almost everyone, especially her 14-year-old daughter, India, tells her to dump him. One woman who doesn’t is Ernesto’s wife, Jean, a shaman who remains outwardly cordial and plies Vera with essential oils. As Vera’s entanglement with Ernesto grows more fraught and annoying health problems erupt, she starts to suspect Jean’s potential for witchy malevolence. Lilienthal’s story is a finely observed portrait of the wellness industry in affluent Northern California, where virtually everyone has a retinue of massage therapists, astrologers, and doctors “of energetic medicine” to minister to their psyches. She winks at the excesses of this culture but takes seriously its metaphysical premises and healing aspirations, adding whispers of the occult to Vera’s experiences. The author’s sex scenes are lavish, but she keeps the novel grounded in comically tawdry concerns that play out in smart, zippy prose, whether Vera is mulling an assignation—“Am I really wearing black silk stay-ups, a very pretty, transparent black lace bra, and the skimpiest thong known to mankind in order to bring this married boss of mine a still-warm plate of chocolate chip cookies?”—or spoiling for a catfight. (“Instead of turning and skedaddling her big butt back down my pathway, she comes on in and closes the door behind her, thrusting her fake boobs out like a couple of headlights.”) Vera is a vibrant hoot of a hero as she wanders down the road to wisdom.

A raucous, entertaining, New Age erotic yarn, by turns funny and soulful.
ONCE IN A LIFETIME
Mattaboni, Suzanne
TouchPoint Press (347 pp.)
$4.99 e-book | March 25, 2022

In Mattaboni’s 1980s-set debut novel, an aspiring artist and her friends immerse themselves in the lifestyle of a funky resort town.

It’s 1984, and 20-year-old Jessica Addentro dreams of studying art in London. However, for this summer, she’ll have to settle for waitressing in New Hope, Pennsylvania, an artsy village on the Delaware River. She’s hoping to save up enough to spend her junior year in London, making multimedia art inspired by the city’s punk scene: “I want to recreate that shoulder-padded, safety-pinned, gelled-together world, through abstract shapes, swipes of color, and vivid bits of broken glass, and make it twice as beautiful on canvas. That’s not too much to ask, is it?” As she saves her pennies, she lives with three of her closest college friends from the University of Pittsburgh—plus a pet duck—in an area that proves to be full of countercultural types, including Matt “Whit” Whitlan, a bass player for a New Wave band whom she meets at a show in Philadelphia. Jess isn’t looking for a boyfriend—she and her college beau, Drew, are only “semi-dating” until she gets back to campus—but she’s about to have the kind of summer where nothing is off the table. Mattaboni’s prose is rich with sharp dialogue, musical references, and painterly details: “I’m a half-formed mosaic, dancing around in a world full of indecision and New Wave anarchy and the mystery terror of AIDS,” says Jess at one point. That said, the author has a habit of beating the reader over the head with the ‘80s-ness of the setting, and the narrator seems a bit too self-aware at times for someone who’s barely out of her teens. Still, the author has a talent for enlivening even minor characters with memorable personalities, and she manages to capture the very real magic of small bohemian towns. Overall, it’s as much a nostalgia trip as it is a bildungsroman, but the reader won’t have to have personally lived through the ‘80s to appreciate this ebullient and engaging story of youthful longing and independence.

An enjoyable, starry-eyed coming-of-age tale.

HIGHLAND JUSTICE
McCollum, Heather
Entangled: Amara (400 pp.)

A steamy romance set in the 16-century Scottish Highlands.

The third book in McCollum’s Sons of Sinclair series stars a chieftain under Scotland’s King James. Both brawny and brainy, Gideon Sinclair is one of four “Horsemen of the Apocalypse”; i.e., Gideon and his brothers were taught by their father to raise hell against enemies of the throne. Gideon, “Horseman of Justice,” must impose law and order. On one of his patrols, Gideon spies Cait MacKay dancing alone in the snowy woods, and he is instantly entranced. Gideon saves Cait’s sister, Willa, when she falls into an icy river, but Cait, a widow, resists to stealing from him to keep her children fed. She learns he is one of the formidable Horsemen of the Apocalypse and goes on a risky adventure to return what she stole. As Gideon grows increasingly passionate about Cait and becomes familiar with everyday people, he also learns to distinguish between judgment and justice. And as Cait begins to fall for Gideon, she heals from her previous abusive marriage. Cait and Gideon work together to organize the Christmas Hogmanay fest and deal with their past traumas, and all seems well, but sinister forces are plotting a dangerous political takeover. McCollum’s romance ably balances a suspenseful game of political chicken, the possibility of civil war, and skyrocketing sexual tension between Gideon and Cait. Along with their crackling chemistry, the couple build a deep respect for each other that involves the shedding of emotional and social barriers; Gideon says to Cait: “We convince ourselves that we’re something we’re not. We bend our world around that impersonation to protect ourselves from an ugly world that requires us to be something else.” Though filled with the genre’s common tropes, the novel also considers identity, gender equality, and the nature of justice. And we see some comic relief in the form of fraternal hijinks among the Sinclair brothers.

Hot, humorous, and well paced.

THE BALLOT BOY
Mellman, Larry
NineStar Press (383 pp.)

A historical fable of Venetian politics becomes a queer bildungsroman in this debut romance and series launch.

In the lush world of 14th-century Venice, Niccolò “Nico” Saltano is little more than a young peasant. That is, until the Venetian leadership fatefuly plucks the 14-year-old from his place in life to serve as the “ballot boy”—an attendant of sorts to the new doge and also the person in charge of counting the ballots in the doge’s election. One doge dies and another must take office, ushering Nico into the Doge’s Palace and his new life in the Venetian court, waiting to count ballots for the latest Venetian ruler. Unwilling to show up for the final tally, Andrea Contarini is the ultimate reluctant victor to be elected as new doge, and he and Nico form an unlikely bond and alliance as members of the palace brought against their will. The court politics and political intrigue are interesting, but they’re often relegated to the background as other, even more interesting, drama unfolds outside the palace walls. Behind the Venetian rules and niceties is a society that is cruel and homophobic—being gay is a capital offense. The heart of the novel is a coming-of-age story in period dress that follows Nico’s coming to terms with
his own sexuality—and the danger that it may bring him. Mellman’s tale shines when it interrogates the ways sex and gender impact the lives of ordinary people, as when the cast reflects on the public execution of a “sodomite” or when, in the very beginning of the book, a character named Alex reveals that she regularly wears male drag. Alex is one of the book’s most compelling characters—a figure from Nico’s past life in the streets of Venice whose class position and tendency to act like a “beggar boy” get her into trouble. If any fault could be had with the novel, it’s that Mellman leaves Alex’s fate ambiguous. Of course, readers will just have to come back for more.

Absorbing political machinations and sexual tension collide to hook readers.

**MY MUDDY PUDDLE**

Nearchou, Kristina  
Illus. by Tiffany Everett  
FriesenPress (24 pp.)  
Jan. 20, 2022  
978-1-03-910073-2  
978-1-03-910072-5 paper

A child struggles with the right timing for playing in a puddle in this humorous picture book.

A girl who appears to be in preschool or kindergarten is thrilled when the school sandbox is filled with water. “I want to jump in!” she cries. But she quickly realizes that cavorting in the tempting puddle would make her teachers and parents upset. The next day, the sandbox has dried out—the marvelous puddle is gone. Luckily, just as buses arrive, rain starts to fall, and when the girl asks permission to play in the new puddles, her parents provide boots, a raincoat, and an umbrella. For any child who has wanted to jump in a muddy puddle at school, the compulsion will be immediately recognizable. Using simple words and lines, with some rhymes in the text and repeated phrases, Nearchou creates a narrative at the perfect level for emergent readers. Everett’s digital cartoon illustrations have soft edges and child characters with huge eyes, warm expressions, and skin tones in many different hues. Much of the storytelling happens in the details the illustrator creates, including the girl’s vividly imagined scenes and the cloudy skies that roll in as kids play on swings. Young readers will use the images to help decipher the text or just fill in their own memories of playground escapades.

An accessible text and a desire for puddle adventures make this an outstanding preschool pick.

**THE VERY SMALL ADVENTURES OF ANNE KATRINE**

Newman, N.J.  
Illus. by C. Gadotti  
Apex Collaborative (164 pp.)  
$12.95 paper | June 30, 2022  
978-1-73629-460-4

A young girl befriends Danish elves and a charming snowy owl in this middle-grade fantasy debut and series opener.

Ten-year-old Anne Katrine loses one of her favorite people—her grandmother. Her parents settle the late woman’s estate in Denmark and leave their daughter in Pennsylvania for what was meant to be a temporary stay but becomes indefinite. Now she’s stuck with cruel relatives, like spiteful Aunt Jess and bullying cousin Neena. But things aren’t all bad. In the surrounding woods, Anne Katrine meets a couple of affable men—each no more than 5 inches tall. Yul and Nissa are Danish elves who offer her magic seeds so she can be elf-sized, too (or return to her regular size when necessary). They need her help retrieving Yul’s laptop, which Neena swiped, thinking the tiny object was a bracelet charm that Anne Katrine stole. Meanwhile, the elves hitch rides from warmhearted snowy owl Dumbert and sneak into Anne Katrine’s attic bedroom for late-night visits.

Ten and Nissa make Pennsylvania life so much better; unfortunately, they plan to travel to a faraway land to restock their magic seeds, and Anne Katrine, who misses her parents, will be lonely once again. Newman’s delightful story is reminiscent of “Snow White” and “Cinderella.” The appealing young hero radiates tenderness and perseveres despite horrid treatment, especially from Aunt Jess, who, it seems, hates her niece. Nissa stands out among the vibrant characters; he has an extensive vocabulary and likes a good pun (“Owl be right back”). Newman wisely keeps the plot uncomplicated, though there’s a lot left unresolved. The author has a series in the works and ends this book with the promise of even greater adventures awaiting Anne Katrine. Gadotti’s black-and-white sketches enliven the pages, from Anne Katrine’s bandaging Dumbert’s wound to the Pennsylvania woods.

Colorful characters headline this imaginative, witty tale.

**CIRCADIAN ALGORITHMS**

Night, Tom B.  
Self (242 pp.)  
$17.99 | $12.99 paper | $5.99 ebook  
Mar. 22, 2022  
978-8-40413-543-5  
978-8-40413-598-5 paper

In Night’s SF novel, an experimental surgery affecting sleep requirements turns a woman’s waking life into a nightmare.

It’s 2019, and Madeline Johnston has had trouble sleeping ever since she took up the reins as CEO
THE SUNKEN CITY

Noyes, Emma V. R.
Self (376 pp.)
979-8-78804-140-7

A teenage pirate discovers her true heritage in this fantasy. Amare Bellamy wants to run the family business. The orphaned daughter of the infamous pirate Jaguar James, she was brought up by her father's first mate, Uncle Omar, on the Moonbader. Growing up as the only girl in a crew of scallywags has allowed Amare to truly learn what it means to be a pirate, but her overprotective uncle has mostly kept her locked away from prying eyes—and land. But none of that matters because, at 17 years old, Amare is ready to prove her worth as a pirate and as the future, rightful captain of the Moonbader. But when a long-lost treasure chest is found, Amare unleashes a veritable Pandora's box by unlocking its secrets—starting with uncovering the truth about herself. Amare is not a pirate: She is the lost princess of the Sunken City, a kingdom of the sereia—an advanced civilization of underwater people—and her father, the king, has been alive all along. As her body adapts to her true nature, Amare must embrace her new life, especially when she finds herself at the center of an ancient prophecy that foretells that a lost princess will free a dangerous witch bent on the destruction of the human world. From its opening line to its cliffhanger ending, Noyes' series opener follows its protagonist's journey from pirate to princess in gripping, beautifully told fashion. Amare's voice carries the book in a first-person narrative that is smart, funny, and intimate. Amare tells of her adventures and her frustration with the expectations placed on her as a girl on the high seas versus the freedom she experiences in the more advanced underwater society. She grapples with the new identity that is shockingly thrust upon her. With a story full of secrets and twists, a dash of romance and danger, and lovely relationships between Amare and the friends she meets along the way, this novel presents an eloquent author and intriguing series to follow.

A treasure of a tale with a captivating hero.

DIEGO, THE GALÁPAGOS GIANT TORTOISE

Pattison, Darcy
Illus. by Amanda Zimmerman
Mims House (34 pp.)
$23.99 | $11.99 paper | June 14, 2022
978-1-62944-187-0
978-1-62944-188-7 paper

A species comes back from the brink of extinction with the help of human intervention in this beautifully painted nonfiction picture book.

Stretching from the late 1600s to the modern day, this book outlines the plight of the Española tortoise and its recovery. When pirates first visited Española Island, one of the Galápagos Islands, they found thousands of giant tortoises. Valued because they could be kept alive on very little food or water, the tortoises were captured as food sources for sailors on long journeys. Due to overhunting, the population dwindled to only three—and a clutch of eggs—counted by scientists in 1905. Diego hatched from those eggs and was later taken to the San Diego Zoo to live for 40 years. During that time, scientists realized the dire situation for the Española tortoises and started a breeding program. When it was discovered that Diego was an Española tortoise, he was brought to the breeding center to help repopulate the species. The program's success—as Pattison writes, "Sometimes, humans get it right"—led to thousands of tortoises, including Diego, once again inhabiting Española Island. Pattison offers this dramatic story in accessible prose, using the appropriate scientific vocabulary in an understandable context. Each two-page spread offers a substantial amount of information but never overwhelms, and Zimmerman's vibrant illustrations always illuminate the text. Pattison toggles between the greater story and Diego's more personal involvement, giving readers a central character to follow. Important ideas and numbers are consistently explained in a way that is both accessible and educational.
set apart in a larger font, making them good places for emergent readers to chime in. Zimmerman’s realistic paintings invite readers into the times and places described, animating the tortoises and their saga. Human features are less detailed than those of the tortoises, making it clear that the creatures are the heroes. Detailed endnotes provide more information about tortoises, stories about less successful species rescue attempts, notes on invasive species and the Galápagos Islands, and the names of conservation organizations readers can support.

This well-crafted success story of a species’ salvation will encourage budding environmentalists.

**THE NEW KINGS OF NEW YORK**

_Piore, Adam_  
The Real Deal (380 pp.)  
$26.96 | April 12, 2022  
978-1-73794-340-2

An insider looks at New York City’s commercial real estate business. In this business book, Piore profiles the dominant figures in large-scale real estate development in New York in the 1990s and 2000s and the ways in which their projects reshaped the city’s skyline and communities. The construction of Hudson Yards opens the work, which then jumps back in time to review the city’s physical decline in the ’70s and its ’90s renewal before returning the focus to the large developments of the last two decades. In addition to Hudson Yards, the volume examines the construction of commercial and residential spaces at Columbus Circle, the redevelopment of the World Trade Center, and the growth of high-rise condos selling for record-setting prices to international buyers whose identities are concealed by shell corporations. Developers Steve Ross, Harry Macklowe, and Kent Swig are the book’s main characters, with other developers, financiers, and real estate brokers playing smaller roles. The work is filled with juicy quotes and insider gossip, not only about the projects, but about the men’s personal lives as well, with Swig’s and Macklowe’s expensive divorces getting plenty of attention. Some anecdotes appear multiple times throughout the text, like Macklowe’s late-night demolition of a building, adding to the sprawling nature of the narrative. But on the whole, Piore does a good job of keeping the threads of the story clear as he moves from one project to another. The complex financial and regulatory aspects of real estate development are explained in sufficient detail, making the volume appropriate for nonspecialist readers. As the work is focused primarily on major deals and the people involved in them, the sociological implications of the resulting housing shortages and growing economic inequality are only briefly touched on. Still, the author does acknowledge the problems along with celebrating the audacity and success of the long-shot bets that have resulted in multibillion-dollar wins.

A solid and informative exploration of major New York real estate developments.

**STANDING AT WATER’S EDGE**

_A Cancer Nurse, Her Four-Year-Old Son and the Shifting Tides of Leukemia_  
Post-White, Janice  
Toplight Books (256 pp.)  
978-1-4766-8710-0

A nurse specializing in cancer treatment shares her experiences after her son was diagnosed with leukemia in this debut memoir. Post-White’s son, Brennan, was 4 years old when he became ill. The author began to worry after he started to experience leg and abdominal pains. After they visited a pediatricsian, blood tests showed concerning abnormalities. As an oncology nurse, Post-White was aware of the grave significance of her son’s low hemoglobin count and braced herself for bad news. “I was a cancer nurse, researcher, and educator… but I had no training as a cancer mom,” remarks the author in her preface. Her memoir charts each step on Brennan’s road to recovery after his leukemia diagnosis, offering the dual perspectives of a highly trained nurse and a loving mother. Post-White’s writing poses probing questions asked by many whose lives have been touched by cancer, such as “Why Cancer? Why Now? Why Us?” She also explores her young son’s coping process by sharing pictures Brennan drew to express his feelings throughout his treatment. As a medical professional, the author takes a philosophical approach to surviving and facing fears, asking: “Can we ever be prepared for death? Or cancer?” Post-White’s writing is sharply analytical and grounded in actuality: “The reality is that one in ten childhood cancer survivors will have heart disease by the time they are forty.” But the delivery of stark facts is delicately counterbalanced with a profound excavation of personal emotions: “Darkness is a part of life, as it is a part of every rotation of the earth. But some nights felt blacker than others.” The result is a skillfully well-rounded memoir in which the author draws on her own experiences, charts Brennan’s medical and emotional progress, and alludes to the struggles of patients she has treated. While some readers may recognize that several cancer treatments have changed since the late 1990s, when Brennan was first diagnosed, Post-White’s account remains relevant, as contemporary protocols “include many of the same medications, schedules and ‘road maps.’ ” In a marketplace crowded with similar titles, the author’s informative work shares rich layers of a valuable perspective—delivering concise medical explanations, a nurse’s experience and compassion, and tender maternal understanding—making this book stand out from the rest.

A multifaceted, thought-provoking, and learned exploration of a painful subject.
“A deeply reported and well-told account of a legendary day on the gridiron.”

REMEMBER THE ALAMO BOWL
Bram Kohlhausen’s Epic TCU Comeback
Reeves, Jim
Berkeley Place Books (149 pp.)
$12.95 paper | $8.99 e-book | April 1, 2022
978-1-892588-69-2

In his latest work of sports reportage, former Fort Worth Star-Telegram columnist Reeves recounts one of the greatest comebacks in the modern history of college football.

On Jan. 2, 2016, Texas Christian University’s powerhouse Horned Frogs football team was preparing to face the University of Oregon Ducks in the nationally televised Alamo Bowl. TCU’s chances were good: Their starting quarterback, Trevone Boykin, was one of the best in the school’s history and a Heisman Trophy candidate. Then, three days before the game, Boykin was arrested for punching a San Antonio cop during a brawl at the city’s River Walk. With Boykin suspended, the team had no choice but to turn to his backup, a walk-on senior named Bram Kohlhausen who hadn’t started a single game in his college career. The day of the bowl was cold and rainy, and by halftime, Oregon was beating TCU 31-0. Head coach Gary Patterson assembled the team—and his panicking quarterback—for a pep talk, but “the only thing on Bram’s mind at that moment was the dawning realization that his college career was over.” Little did Bram know that he was about to lead TCU in one of the most incredible comebacks in bowl history, forcing triple overtime and becoming a legend in the school’s storied football program. Reeves recounts the events in the gripping prose of a practiced storyteller, capturing the psychologies of the individuals involved as well as that of the audience at large: “It wasn’t until the Frogs’ offense trotted out for the first series of the second half that fans in the stands realized Bram Kohlhausen was still in at quarterback. There was an audible rumble as this realization sank into the collective consciousness. This guy again?” Reeves unspools the backstory of Bram—who interestingly, was named after Bram Stoker, the famed author of Dracula— which his mother was reading while pregnant with him—and recounts his unlikely rise to prominence. Even readers who have no affiliation with TCU will find themselves caught up in this tale of triumph.

A deeply reported and well-told account of a legendary day on the gridiron.

SEE THE DESERT AND DIE
Reh, Ann Saxton
Prospect Street Press (309 pp.)
978-0-9996259-2-7

An American ethnographer travels to Saudi Arabia to uncover the truth about her mother’s disappearance and encounters a complex political conspiracy in Reh’s thriller.

Layne Darius’ mother, Katherine, was a tough journalist renowned for her coverage of the roles that women played in the Algerian and Vietnam wars. Katherine mysteriously vanished while in Saudi Arabia in 1972. Eight years later, it’s a loss that Layne still can’t accept: “Why did her mother come to this place? She spent her life taking risks and surviving. Always for a purpose, a story that justified those risks. What was in this desert worth dying for?” When Layne is given an opportunity to accompany her stepbrother, Thomas, to Saudi Arabia to conduct an ethnological field study of Bedouins there—they’re both ethnographers—she leaps at the chance to search for clues to her mother’s disappearance, an investigation for which Thomas has no enthusiasm. Quickly, it becomes clear that Katherine may have been reporting on the dissident movement that’s organizing there and that her death may have been connected to that work. It also becomes clear that Layne’s curiosity may endanger her as well when someone attempts to shoot her in Riyadh. Along the way, she also finds herself unexpectedly attracted to David Markam, a political officer at the U.S. Consulate. With great sensitivity and nuance, Reh portrays 1980 Saudi Arabia as a kingdom of contradictions—a place of culture and sophistication but also intolerance, particularly regarding the status of women. Over the course of this thriller, the author deftly weaves political turmoil with emotional tumult, as Layne doggedly pursues the truth about not only her mother, but about her own self and the ways she’s tried to live up to an example she can never fully emulate. In addition, Reh’s prose style is almost journalistically straightforward, and this simplicity contributes to the story’s considerable power.

A historically compelling tale with plenty of emotional drama.

THE RESURRECTIONIST
Scheuring, Paul T.
One Light Road (328 pp.)
April 12, 2022
978-0-9984502-2-3

A man is offered a fortune to illegally excavate a body for scientific research in the second novel by screenwriter Scheuring (The Far Shore, 2017), who co-wrote the 2003 film A Man Apart.

In 1820, professional anatomists in England had a vexing problem: They had an intense desire to understand the human
body but a chronic undersupply of cadavers to autopsy. This created an unusual partnership between respectable physicians and unseemly grave robbers, euphemistically referred to as resurrectionists. Scheuring deftly captures its peculiar nature in an author’s note: “A more antithetical set of bedfellows I cannot imagine, especially in England, with its rigid class structures: the university-educated doctor of high station conspiring with the brutish, illiterate criminal of such compromised moral standing that he would breach hallowed convention, steal from the Lord’s own soil, and traffic in the sludge and decay of rotting corpses.” Job Mowatt is one such resurrectionist, desperately trying to build a better life for his daughter, Ivy, both beautiful and brilliant, her future sure to be stymied by the “trappings of station” if he can’t raise enough money for her education. Then, an opportunity arises: Job is offered an “astronomical” sum of money to unearth the body of Ella Beddoe, the wife of Marcus Beddoe, a powerful and dangerous man. The offer is made by Dr. Percival Quinn, “one of the most learned anatomists in all of London,” and not just out of thirst for scientific knowledge. His wife, Neva, pregnant but, due to prior illness, is unlikely to survive the delivery, and he hopes studying Ella’s body—she was pregnant at the time of her death—will provide the clues that he needs to raise enough money for her education. Then, a reanimation wrought by a science meant to elevate humanity to a higher plane of civilization.

A thrilling historical drama, thoughtful and emotionally poignant.
need not experience poverty, pain, or even death, while androids and artificial intelligences do all the work. The downside is that Sumpseris is all that remains of mankind after an asteroid strike in 2090 turned Earth into a wasteland. As it turns out, the effects of this catastrophe are at the heart of why Jacob and Emma were revived.

Segedy twists out a venerated SF trope: the “sleepers awakes” plot, in which a character contemporary with the reader is reanimated after induced hibernation and then beholds and comments upon a changed future society. Although the original, action-packed Buck Rogers serial used this gimmick, it’s typically a springboard for lengthy speculative discussions and philosophical discourse—heavier on thought-experimentation than on physicality. Readers here find wryly, wittily, and sometimes-spirited dialogues among Jacob, Emma, and their Sumpserian friends (including a few named for real-life figures, such as Carl Sagan and Ray Kurzweil) about what it means to be human, the nature of free will, the purpose of striving for life, and even the driving force of the universe. Segedy doesn’t break the setup’s mold here except to use a metametrical device early on, positioning a storyteller behind the scenes. (It’s a device that worked to similar effect in John Fowles’ The French Lieutenant’s Woman, not to mention the works of Lemony Snicket.) The hidden narrator, I, drops hints of being a superintelligent AI tasked by Sagan with transcribing a history of the human race using guesswork and materials at hand. It’s an interesting move, but it’s one that makes the attenuated novel’s epilogue feel like a choose-your-own-ending resolution. Still, despite the lofty intellectual atmosphere, Segedy can’t resist a reference to a former president of the United States with orange hair, small hands, and tiny genitals, among other less-philosophical gags.

A long and often heady SF tour of humanity that offers a good deal more engaging talk than phaser-fire action.

**THE SILVER STRANGER**

Sherrier, Daniel

Self (362 pp.)

$15.99 paper | $2.99 e-book  | Feb. 6, 2022

979-8-40144-724-1

In this SF sequel, a woman’s belief that superheroes do more harm than good takes a dark turn.

When Alyssa Henson arrives by taxi to the Pacific Coast city of Olympus, where she’s about to start a job as a dental hygienist, she’s annoyed by the reason traffic is at a standstill. Crowds are staring up at the sky, where superheroes Ultra Woman, Mr. Amazing, and Fantastic Man—collectively known as the Terrific Trio—are battling evil unicorns. The sight of a little girl, whose gawking parents are oblivious to their daughter’s precarious perch on a rail overlooking the ocean, just proves Alyssa’s sincere argument that showboating superheroes make the world more perilous, not less. And what if the increase in supervillainy is directly related to the rise of crime fighters with superpowers? (“No weird creatures ever bothered the Earth before superheroes became a thing,” she’s convinced.) Sherrier’s sequel to his creative YA SF novel The Flying Woman (2018) revisits an imaginative world where contemporary city life gets transformed by alternative dimensions and select human beings’ sudden acquisitions of random, unearthly powers. The author’s world is not only outrageously wacky (super-villain powers are reflected in such names as The Candelabra, The Fish Slayer, and The Looking Glass, and an upside-down dimension is peopled by sentient monkeys), but chillingly dark.
Alyssa’s estrangement from her parents is all too understandable; so is the fact that dreams unrealized have affected her and her best friend, Miranda. When Alyssa’s painful encounter with a zombie unicorn’s horn gives her the potential to eliminate superpowers from both villains and heroes, leading to a disturbing moral dilemma, she must wrestle with what she is in danger of becoming herself. In the end, how Alyssa fares comes in tandem with the explosive disappearance of a few main characters, a welcome hint that there is more to come for the inhabitants of Sherrier’s Olympus and beyond.

A relatable protagonist, a believable journey of self-discovery, and a wild SF world.

**THE DOOR-MAN**  
Wheelwright, Peter M.  
Fomite (388 pp.)  
978-1-953236-47-0

A historical novel that traces three generations of a New York family involved in a paleontological discovery.

In 1917, there was a great celebration to honor the opening of the Central Park Reservoir, which received its water from a dammed lake that flooded the Catskills village of Gilboa. Wheelwright’s novel begins in 1993, when the city is decommissioning that same reservoir. Piedmont Livingston Kinsolver III is studying the park from his perch as a doorman at the St. Urban, a luxurious apartment building on Central Park West. He took the position in order to observe the actions of two St. Urban families—the Van Pels and the DeAngeluses—and several employees at the nearby American Museum of Natural History, all of whom are historically connected to Gilboa. Kinsolver has some family secrets and scores to settle that are also connected to his Gilboa roots. The story rotates back and forth between the 1990s-set tale and the stories of two past generations of Kinsolver’s family. Running concurrent to the twisty tale of family sins is the complicated discussion of the fossils of the “Gilboa Tree,” remnants of an ancient forest believed to date back to the Devonian Period, 350 to 400 million years ago. There’s also an engaging subplot involving the amphibious lungfish—a creature that’s very similar to its Devonian ancestor—that has mysteriously appeared in the reservoir in the ’90s. Kinsolver is the first-person narrator of his own plotline and the third-person narrator of a historical saga that’s so complicated and full of characters and tangled relationships that readers will need great patience to keep track of them all despite the opening lineage chart. Overall, however, Wheelwright is a thoughtful, meticulous writer with a fondness for elegant, if rather lengthy, sentences, and his novel offers melancholic, philosophical musings on the frailties of one of Earth’s other successful species: *Homo sapiens*.

A scientifically intriguing, dramatic, and challenging read.

**THE IMPOSSIBLE GIRL**  
White, Ashley  
Monarch Educational Services (314 pp.)  
Aug. 9, 2022  
978-1-957656-00-7  
978-1-73767-389-7

This debut middle-grade fantasy sees a witch come into her powers while facing dangers and prejudice at a supernatural boarding school.

On the day she turns 13 years old, Ava Marie Jones runs away from her domineering adoptive mother and falls through an enchanted gateway into Xarcadia, an underground realm where the world’s magical creatures (“magites”) live safely isolated from humanity. Ava, it turns out, is a witch. She is also one of the Lost Ones—children who, because their parents disapprove of Xarcadia’s strict isolationist policy, are sent to spend their formative years beyond the gilded cage. Ava is thrilled and enchanted by her new home. But unlike the other Lost Ones, she does not find her birth mother and father waiting to greet her. Indeed, it seems likely that they are (or were) members of The Resistance movement that opposes the High Court and its ruling warlock. Ava is unique among Xarcadians in not having been surveillance tagged by The Registry—an omission that proves impossible to rectify. Ava is soon dubbed the Impossible Girl. She starts school alongside her new friends Tara (a witch) and Duncan (a vampire). But when Ava proves to have inherently strong magical abilities, she becomes a target of malicious rumormongering—especially when the murders start. Can Ava
prove her innocence and find acceptance in Xarcadia? In this series opener, White writes in the third person from Ava's point of view, presenting an easy mix of narrative descriptions, inner thoughts, and realistic, middle-grade dialogue. Ava is a likable character, good-hearted in spite of the hand she's been dealt. Her new friends are charismatic, and her archenemy's over-the-top spiteful. The setup has distinct Harry Potter vibes, but such is the depth of the author's imagination that the similarities don't come across as derivative or stale. At times, the prose is a little too exuberant for its own good, with words tumbling over themselves at a speed to match Ava's disorientation or excitement. While the story as a whole is gripping, the final showdown comes and goes with unseemly haste. Nonetheless, middle-grade readers will dive into Ava's adventures and find themselves carried along, railing at injustices and eagerly awaiting the next installment.

A fast, fun friendship tale full of magic and misfortune.

BLURRED FATES

Zadeik, Anastasia
She Writes Press (312 pp.)
978-1-64742-379-7

A woman's seemingly perfect life unravels in this debut novel that explores what happens when past traumas resurface.

Kate Whittier, nee Barton, lives in a “Southern California movie script”—a dream life with her wealthy husband, Jacob, and their two children, Becca and Logan. But tensions arise when Jacob comes home after a debauched evening unable to recollect exactly what happened but convinced that he and his wife should be tested for sexually transmitted infections. Kate's positive HPV result, after years of fidelity to her husband, seems to confirm the one-off affair. With her marriage now under serious pressure, Kate feels that her position in her haute social world is precarious. In a circle that focuses so much on pedigree, Kate's traumatic and abject past threatens to undo the life that she has built. Zadeik’s novel is not really about the strained relationship between Kate and Jacob. Rather, their knotty bond becomes a catalyst for Kate's coming to terms with her past and present. While her husband's infidelity sours their unity, that betrayal is not what haunts Kate in the form of waking nightmares and horrifying memories, or what will keep readers glued to the page. What troubles Kate are the unseemly characters of her past—her villainously cruel brother, Daniel, and their drunken father. Kate's past and present become like a Russian nesting doll of grief, where the glossy surface projects a beautiful, polished version of herself. But underneath are all the iterations of the protagonist and the various grotesque experiences she suffered at the hands of her brother and his loathsome friends. When Daniel reenters Kate's rocky life, the effect is truly riveting, and readers will be left wondering if she can ever truly escape her past. The author's tale is as chilling as it is affecting. With a cast that includes the intriguing and mysterious Ryan, who becomes Kate's main source of emotional support, the story will keep readers wanting to learn more about the protagonist’s past and her new possibilities (perhaps involving a new man?) for the future.

A hypnotic page-turner about the frightening haziness between past and present.
Nia DaCosta will direct a film adaptation of Ta-Nehisi Coates’ novel, The Water Dancer, Variety reports.

The feature will be the fourth full-length movie to be directed by DaCosta, who previously helmed Little Woods and Candyman. Her next film, The Marvels, is scheduled to be released in February 2023.

Coates’ debut novel, published in 2019 by One World, follows a young man, born into slavery, who possesses a supernatural power that leads to his escape from bondage. A critic for Kirkus praised the book’s merging of “magic, adventure, and antebellum intrigue” and said that “even [Coates’] most melodramatic effects are deepened by historical facts and contemporary urgency.”

The book was an instant bestseller and a pick for Oprah Winfrey’s influential book club. Winfrey had high praise for the novel, saying it was “one of the best books I have ever read in my entire life, right up there in the top five.”

Two influential production companies are behind the film adaptation: Winfrey’s Harpo Films and Plan B Entertainment, which is owned by Brad Pitt. Maceo-Lyn, a company co-founded by Coates, will also produce.

Coates’ work has been adapted for the screen before. His 2015 nonfiction book, Between the World and Me, formed the basis for a 2020 HBO television special directed by Kamilah Forbes. The special received positive reviews from critics, with David Rapp of Kirkus saying it “takes the idea of a staged reading to a more powerful, and personal, place” and “gets across all the power of Coates’ words, and more.”

Lilliam Rivera’s Never Look Back is headed to the big screen, Deadline reports.

Rivera’s young adult novel, published in 2020 by Bloomsbury, is a contemporary retelling of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth. The book follows Pheus and Eury, two teenagers in the South Bronx who fall for one another but must contend with supernatural forces in order to save their relationship.

A critic for Kirkus wrote of the novel, a Pura Belpré Honor recipient, “Rivera’s complex world is well realized, and the dialogue rings true....This fresh reworking of a Greek myth will resonate.”

The film will be directed by Zetna Fuentes, best known for her work on television shows including One Life To Live, Pretty Little Liars, and Jane the Virgin. The screenplay comes from Talia Rothenberg, who wrote episodes of #ThisIsCollege and MRS.

Singer/songwriter Romeo Santos will serve as executive producer and music supervisor along with Artie Pabon; Santos, a vocalist for the band Aventura, will also contribute a song to the movie.
That grandmothers enjoy a special relationship with their grandchildren is both a fact of life and a given of children’s literature. Consider the case of young Sophia, impossibly precocious beyond her six years, who inhabits a tiny island in the Baltic Sea with her grandmother, who, though ailing, is a font of adventure. Sophia’s mother has recently died—another trope of children’s literature—and her father, though glimpsed here and there, remains silent in Tove Jansson’s 1972 novel, *The Summer Book*, solemnly working (and occasionally drinking) in the background.

Grandmother is nearing the end of her life. Sophia is just at the beginning of hers, but they share many of the same delights and secret places. One is a grove of trees on the edge of their island, exposed to the bitter winds that blow off the cold sea until, falling one by one, they “formed a tangled mass of stubborn resignation.” This place, which they call the “magic forest,” pointedly illustrates the thin line between life and death, where “the balance between survival and extinction was so delicate that even the smallest change was unthinkable.”

Yet change comes. Nearby, a bulldozer grinds away at a living forest, “an enormous, infernal, bright yellow machine that thundered and roared and floundered through the woods with charging jaws.” Across a narrow channel with a broad view of an unspoiled mainland, a rich businessman builds an ostentatious house and, flouting the customs of the island, posts a “No Trespassing” sign. Grandmother, a born anarchist, snorts and breaks into the trophy house, an awed Sophia in tow.

Grandmother is also a born teacher. Sometimes she tires of Sophia, worn out by her endless questioning, but more often she is there with just the right lesson. When Sophia cuts a worm in two, it’s not enough to comfort her: Grandmother suggests instead that Sophia write a book, which Sophia calls *A Study of Angleworms That Have Come Apart*. When Grandmother ventures editorial changes, Sophia impatiently demands that she not interrupt, for she has come without prompting to the grown-up conclusion that for the two halves of the worm, “life would be quite different, but they didn’t know how.”

Life is different, just so, for Sophia without her mother. It won’t be long, Jansson lets us know, before Grandmother, frequently so tired that she has to rest midwalk, leaves the island, too. Hints abound: When Grandmother faces a dark staircase in the middle of the night, for instance, she notes that “the darkness was absolute.” She isn’t afraid, though, and for all its intimations of mortality, Jansson’s slender novel is joyful, celebrating love, learning, and family.

It’s tempting to think of Tove Jansson (1914-2001) as a grown-up Sophia, full of curiosity and adventure herself. The author of the beloved Moomin children’s book series, she summered with her life partner, the artist Ida Helmi Tuulikki Pietilä, on an island in the Gulf of Finland for many years. There, she wrote short stories, children’s books, a memoir, and several novels, including *The Summer Book*, available here in an English translation by Thomas Teal. It’s a story ripe with wisdom, resistance, and hope—and great summer reading 50 years on.

Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor.
THE Little Witch

Book 1

Written by Michael Pellico
Illustrated by Christina Berry

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“An entertaining spin on a classic message of kindness, sprinkled with a little magic that will entertain younger audiences.”
—Booklife Reviews

“...it delivers a powerful message about treating strangers with kindness.”
—Kirkus Reviews

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